



UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA



Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia

RESEARCH CAPABILITIES STATEMENT

www.CRLRA.utas.edu.au

November 2002

The Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia (CRLRA)

The Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia (CRLRA) was established in January 1997 and is situated within the University of Tasmania. The Centre conducts research into the process and outcomes of learning in regional communities throughout Australia, including the social and economic implications of change for learners, trainers, industries, businesses, funding bodies, policy makers and local communities.

The Centre's mission is to consult widely to produce and disseminate high quality research into learning and development in regional Australia.

CRLRA's research falls into the following categories:

- Socio-economic Impacts on Regional Australia
- Community and Regional Development
- Social Capital and Trust
- Changing Nature of Work
- Small Business
- Schools and Communities in Regional Australia
- Access and Equity
- Literacy and Numeracy
- Leadership
- Youth
- Online Learning
- Adult Learning
- Informal Learning
- Vocational Education and Training in Regions and Communities
- Learning in Agriculture

The Centre:

- maintains a national web of strategic collaborators to identify needs and conduct research;
- operates within an interactive and collaborative research framework, aiming for best practice in its own right as a community-oriented, client-centred learning organisation;
- has a website for dissemination of its research.

CRLRA is widely recognised both nationally and internationally for its quality research into issues that affect regional Australia. Focusing on the broad concepts of social capital and learning, the Centre's research interests include a range of economic, community development, social and cultural issues. It has strong links with researchers throughout the country as well as with community organisations, government, business and industry bodies.

Sue Kilpatrick (CRLRA Director)

Dr Kilpatrick has researched extensively in the areas of farmer and rural community learning to manage change. She is also Chair of the Tasmanian FarmBis State Planning Group. She researches and publishes in the areas of vocational education and training, social capital and community change, learning and training, particularly for agriculture and small business, the role of schools in rural communities and the economics of education and training.

John Williamson

Professor John Williamson is Professor of Education at the University of Tasmania. He has conducted research for the OECD, the WA Department of Education and the WA Department of Training and has completed an ARC Large Grant project on teacher competencies. He has published in the areas of curriculum implementation and evaluation, training and professional development. Areas of Expertise: Professional development; initial vocational education, training and program evaluation.

Joan Abbott-Chapman

Dr Joan Abbott-Chapman is Associate Professor in Education at the University of Tasmania and Director of the Youth Studies Group. She has extensive research experience and publications in the areas of post-compulsory participation in education and training, youth studies and community development, and has acted as a researcher and consultant for a number of CRLRA projects.

Bill Mulford

Professor Bill Mulford is an internationally recognised educator with a deep interest in the areas of educational leadership, effective implementation of educational change and school effectiveness and improvement. He has had 30 years of successful applied research. He is an adviser to numerous state and national Departments of Education and a consultant to international organisations such as OECD, UNESCO and Asian Development Bank. He is a Professor and Director of the Leadership for Learning Research Group in the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania.

Susan Johns

Susan Johns is a Junior Research Fellow working with the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia and the Leadership for Learning Research Group, both located at the University of Tasmania. Her research interests include the development and sustainability of school and community partnerships, with a focus on rural partnerships. Susan has worked on a variety of projects relating to the delivery and outcomes of vocational education and training (VET) in rural and regional areas, with a specific focus on the community development role of VET partnerships.

Pat Millar

Pat Millar's research interests include adult literacy, lifelong learning, communication, community development, and social capital. She is currently working on a PhD thesis on literacy practices in a socio-economically disadvantaged community. Pat has worked on the evaluation of several community development projects.

Christine Owen

Dr Chris Owen is a full-time member of the Education Faculty at the University of Tasmania. Her doctoral research has examined the socio-technical and socio-cultural influences on workplace learning. The dissertation traces some of the recent technological changes that have been introduced into a high technology organisation and discusses the impact of these changes on the work of employees. Areas of Expertise: Organisational learning, development and change, changing nature of work, computer-mediated collaborative work.

Helen Bound

Helen Bound's research interest is in workplace change, industry learning, networking and innovative regions. She has also had work published on training brokers in regional Australia, contractor alliances and online learning. Helen has extensive teaching experience with secondary students and adults. The latter includes working with clients on developing policy on occupational health and safety, delivering training on assertiveness, writing reports, and developing strategic plans.

John Guenther (Honorary Fellow)

John Guenther is a Visiting Research Fellow with CRLRA. He is an IT training consultant and has been involved in several projects relating to vocational education and training, community capacity, and literacy and numeracy. His areas of expertise are community capacity and trust profiling, and e-technology.

Selected CRLRA Projects

The following is a list of selected research projects, either completed or in progress.

Providing Client-focused Education and Training in Regional Australia

Due for completion in 2002, this year-long study is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Australia (AFFA). The project will identify successful strategies that education and training providers, industry and clients can use to ensure education products meet industry and client needs. It will collect and analyse data on the range of approaches used by providers of education and training in Australian agriculture through a quantitative survey and four detailed good-practice case studies. Results will be presented to a forum of stakeholders who will identify actions to improve the provision of client-focused education and training. These identified actions will form part of the project report. Clients are defined to include agricultural industries collectively, represented by farmer organisations, as well individual producers. The first stage of the research was a consultative workshop held in Melbourne where representatives from industry, training providers, researchers, government and farmers from around the country gathered to brainstorm ways in which education and training can be improved. The workshop aimed to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats arising from client-driven education and training in Australia, and to identify barriers to its implementation. The workshop discussion paved the way for the next stage of the research, a survey of providers of agricultural education and training in Australia. The information gathered in the workshop and survey contributed to the final research report in 2002. Added to the report are four case studies of successful approaches for providing client-driven education.

Social Capability Study for Victorian Department of NRE

CRLRA supported the Monash Region Australia project (MRAP) in this project to assist the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) to enhance the capability of people in the food and agriculture sector to manage and respond positively to change. It was envisaged that this would be achieved primarily by enhancing the capacity of change agents – notably but not exclusively from NRE – to support efforts to increase social capability. In order to achieve this aim, NRE and other change agents require a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of the changes occurring in the food and agriculture sector, the ways in which beneficial changes can be supported and the probable effects of introducing particular policies and programs to manage change. Drawing on published research, industry documentation and data, the project involved three main lines of inquiry: The first line of inquiry was the social capability and change requirements of the food, agriculture and natural resource management sectors. The second line was the current social capability of rural and regional communities and the capacity of change agents to effect change. The third line of inquiry focussed on processes to develop the social capability of rural communities and people involved in land management.

The Role of VET in Regional Australia

Commissioned by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), this major longitudinal study explored the contributions made by vocational education and training to lifelong learning and the social and economic well-being of regional Australia. Researchers from the Centre visited a total of 10 sites (seven in 1999 and an addition three in 2000) across Australia, in all States and the Northern Territory. Among the respondents were community members, leaders, business people and training providers. The investigation sought information such as respondents' experiences of

the vocational education and training system, their role in the community, their perceptions of change in the area, and what was needed in the future.

In early to mid-2002, a 2-volume consolidated report on the project will be available. Volume 1 provides a summary of results across all 10 sites and will include implications and issues arising out of the research. Volume 2 offers a detailed case study of each site with a review of outcomes of VET and identifies opportunities for improvement within each site. This consolidated report carries the title *Building Dynamic Learning Communities*. Findings from the first year of the study are to be found in *Managing Change through VET: The role of vocational education and training in regional Australia* (CRLRA 2000), available on the CRLRA website.

Implementing best practice in sustainable agriculture

CRLRA is evaluating this Natural Heritage Trust funded project on behalf of the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industry Water and Environment. The project uses an innovative process to assist farmers in the development and monitoring of environmental benchmarks in their district.

Generating Jobs in Regional Tasmania: A social capital approach

Funded by the Department of Transport and Regional Services, this is a partnership project between the Tasmanian Employment Advisory Council (TEAC) and the Tasmanian Rural Industry Training Board (TRITB) and CRLRA. Small business is the major employer of Australians, especially in regional Australia. Many regional areas are experiencing high unemployment rates and/or declining populations. The project seeks to determine new ways of achieving the objectives of increasing participation in training and increasing employment, especially in small business, in ways that do not rely on centralised, top-down government support. The two Tasmanian areas selected for this research are Dorset and Circular Head. The first outcome of the project will be implementation of a strategy, transferable to other communities, that develops local skills to identify training needs of small businesses and youth in particular, and skills to negotiate for provision of suitable training. The strategy will draw on resources present in the community where appropriate. The second outcome of the project will be the strategy itself, which will be written up in a manual style for ease of transfer to other communities.

Measuring Trust and Community Capacity: Social capital for the common good

The results of this Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project have implications particularly for people in positions of civic leadership and those framing policies that affect rural communities. It demonstrated how the development of trust relationships across the broad spectrum of a community and the development of trust 'bridges' between communities is important for the sustainability of rural communities. Perhaps of greater significance is the restoration and development of links between civic and State / Federal leaders which were shown to have a significant impact on civic participation. The challenge for State and Federal political leaders is to initiate meaningful dialogue with rural communities in such a way that civic leaders (and their constituents) believe that their message is more than rhetoric for the sake of 'buying' votes at the next election. A further implication that arises from the study is that in order for trust to develop, community infrastructure must be retained and maintained. The loss of infrastructure was shown to be a key reason for a decline in morale and civic participation.

School Contribution to Rural Communities: Leadership issues

This 2-year investigation was funded by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC). The project stemmed from research into social capital in rural communities, which found that the nature and quantity of interactions between schools and community members influence the social and economic outcomes of those communities. The project comprised case studies of five very different rural communities in five Australian States. Rural school-community partnerships were found to deliver a variety of positive outcomes for youth and for the community, including the provision of training that meets both student and community needs, improved school

retention, increased retention of youth in rural communities, and positive environmental outcomes. There were also cultural and recreational benefits from sharing physical and human school resources, and economic outcomes in terms of the school as a key employer and consumer of local goods and services.

While these tangible outcomes are important to the sustainability of many small rural communities, the potentially more valuable outcome from school–community partnerships is the increased individual and community capacity to influence their own futures. In particular, the development of VET-in-schools programs in rural communities, and the community-wide benefits that flow from such programs, represent an important vehicle for building community capacity. The report, *More than an Education: Leadership for rural school–community partnerships*, by Sue Kilpatrick, Susan Johns, Bill Mulford, Ian Falk & Libby Prescott will soon be available. The report presents case studies of rural school–community partnerships in the five rural communities that participated in the project. Each case study outlines the nature and extent of the partnership, and analyses the influence of leadership and other factors on the development and sustainability of the partnership. Drawing on findings from the case studies, the report then develops a model of the leadership process for developing school–community partnerships, and identifies a number of indicators of effective school–community partnerships and effective leadership.

Leadership in Vocational Education and Training: Leadership by design, not by default

Funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), this study focuses on the process of leadership, including the characteristics of individual leaders. The study highlights the importance of context in identifying and specifying VET leadership process characteristics. Effective leadership was found to occur where there is a relationship between the internal organisational roles and responsibilities, the external environment involving students, communities, industry and other clients and attributes of the individual leader. Four interventions were examined in detail in their respective contexts. The study points to the crucial role for leadership as *designing* learning, social, community and organisational futures rather than simply *responding* to existing impacts or drivers. The report from this project will soon be published by NCVER.

Learning Online: Benefits and barriers in regional Australia

Funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), the purpose of this study is to investigate the extent of uptake of online delivery in regional areas compared to metropolitan areas and the benefits from online learning and barriers faced by those living in regional areas.

The objectives are to:

- Map the extent of uptake of online learning delivered by providers in regional and metropolitan areas of four States.
- Investigate the benefits of online learning for individuals and communities in regional areas.
- Investigate the barriers to effective use of online learning by those living in regional areas.
- Report on and make recommendations about overcoming barriers and promoting online learning opportunities in regional areas.

The study will be completed in late 2002.

Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC)

The Centre engages in a number of activities in its role as the Tasmanian branch of the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC). During 2000 two major projects took place, one on the relationship between literacy/numeracy and workplace training, and the second an anthology of case studies, written by practitioners and training coordinators, on coming to terms with integrated literacy and numeracy in training packages. In March 2001, the Centre conducted a professional development forum entitled *Tasmanian Adult Literacy and Numeracy: Research and Practice Partnership Forum*, bringing together policy-makers,

representatives from industry, and practitioners involved in literacy, numeracy and training packages.

Outcomes of VET-in-schools Programs for Rural Youth and Communities: Skills acquisition, destinations and retention of youth

Funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), this study examines VET-in-schools programs and is due for completion in late 2002. VET-in-schools programs are still relatively new within Australia. There is an identified need for further research into the specific medium- to longer-term outcomes of these programs, and ways of measuring outcomes. At the same time, in rural areas in particular, there is growing recognition that vocational education and training can and does play an important role in economic and social development and sustainability, as affirmed in a recent Senate Inquiry. Again, further research into this linkage is needed. The purpose of this study is to identify and measure the individual and community outcomes of VET-in-schools programs in rural communities. A total of approximately 2400 young people who undertook their senior secondary schooling in rural communities in 1998 will be surveyed. Participating communities are from NSW, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia.

Participation Rates in Post-school Education and Training

Commissioned by the Tasmanian State Government's Office of Post-compulsory Education and Training, this study investigates participation rates in post-school education and training. The primary objective of the project is to quantify, as a percentage of the age cohort group, a participation rate in vocational education and training and university for Tasmanian teenagers (15 to 19 year olds) and the balance of young Tasmanians (20 to 24 year olds) that is accepted as appropriate by stakeholders. The scope of the study covers all participation in accredited vocational education and training and university in Tasmanian institutions by 15 to 19 year olds and 20 to 24 year olds living permanently in the State for the 2002 to 2007 period. The project will consider relevant Tasmania Together targets. An outcome of the project will be improved planning of vocational education and training and university in Tasmania, thereby ensuring Tasmania has the skilled workforce it requires. Due for completion May 2002.

Seniors Online:

Learning outcomes from Internet access

Funded by Telstra Research, this project examined learning via the Internet by persons over 55 who have not grown up with computers and are at risk of being marginalised in a technological society. Overall findings revealed that family and friends had the most influence on both use of computers and connection to the Internet. Age was not a factor in influencing Internet access for the participants in this study, nor was health, education background or pre-retirement work experience. In general, successful learning outcomes for seniors online are those which match the life stages, needs, aspirations and physical, social and economic circumstances.

CRLRA Resources

CRLRA has a variety of quality University of Tasmania support services at its disposal. It uses the University Central Social Science Research Laboratory with technical facilities for the collection and processing of social science research data. These include an optical scanner for reading survey forms, telephone survey equipment, and appropriate computer hardware and software for data processing and analysis. Library facilities are those of the University of Tasmania which has a comprehensive range of relevant research material including electronic databases.

CRLRA Management

Board

Chair Professor Andrew Glenn, Pro Vice-Chancellor Research, University of Tasmania
The 12-member CRLRA Board of Directors comprises representatives from the University, CRLRA and its partners, industry groups and stakeholders.

CRLRA Contacts

Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia
University of Tasmania
Locked Bag 1-313
Launceston 7250
Tasmania
Australia

Telephone +61 (03) 6324 3142
Facsimile +61 (03) 6324 3040

Email Sue.Kilpatrick@utas.edu.au
Web <http://www.crlra.utas.edu.au>