



Editorial

We are several months into the Chinese Year of the Goat and the predictions of turbulent times have certainly come true. In a world of flux, the ability to cope with constant and rapid change is paramount. Never have the principles of lifelong and lifewide learning been more relevant and yet adult and community education still did not rate adequate attention in either the Federal or various State budgets.

ALA's task is to keep emphasising to those who believe, as does the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson, that 'education is the defence of the nation', it is not enough to educate young people. To forget the adults who have left institutional learning behind can result in dangerous levels of ignorance. For example, a poll taken earlier in this year in the United States, found a majority of respondents thought that Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden were one and the same person.

As preparations for Adult Learners' Week gain momentum, we will be drawing attention to the critical role of literacy in coming to grips with today's complexities. The Week will put the spotlight on the serious problem of Australia's poor adult literacy rating (46% of Australians do not have adequate literacy skills) as well as promoting debate about the definition of literacy in the 21st century. To find out more, read Jane Speechley's article in this edition of *Quest*.

There are lots of ways for you to get involved in this year's ALW—through the Great Literacy Debate, Learn @ Work day, or the State and National Awards. Visit www.adultlearnersweek.org

The ALA national office is testing out the mantra about learning as a means to cope with change. We have just moved to premises in the city, which will lift our profile and make more accessible our valuable collection of resources on adult learning. Our new contact details are printed on the inside cover of the magazine.

You, too, are being asked to consider changes—changes designed to ensure best practice in the Association's management. You have recently received the draft of a new constitution and other papers. If you have not already done so, I urge you to cast your vote and send it back in the pre-paid envelope to the National Office. To be counted your postal vote must arrive no later than 16 July. The Special General Meeting will be held in Brisbane on Friday 25 July 2003.

We are also bringing you a new-look magazine, which has finally been given a name, *Quest*. We hope you like it. Our aim is to keep members informed about current trends in adult learning. We also want to give you an opportunity to tell others about what you are doing. We have been delighted by the growing number of contributions to "On the Ground," even though that makes our job of choosing which ones to run more difficult. To maximise your chances of publication, ensure that your items are short (circa 150 words) and focus on particular activities or innovative learning methodologies.

In addition, we hope the new format will increase the circulation of the magazine beyond the membership to others interested in education but less focussed than we'd like them to be on adult and community education.

Please tell us what you think of *Quest*—write a letter to the editor and help establish a new section in the magazine!—and be assured that the editorial team will take your comments on board to enhance the magazine's effectiveness in spreading the word about the importance of adult learning.

Francesca Beddie
ALA Executive Director