

Editorial



Welcome to another engaging and challenging year. I'm sure, that you, as I do, find engagement and challenges are often the stepping stones to opportunities. In our business of adult learning there are certainly plenty of the former and hopefully some of the latter, although probably never enough. Adult Learning Australia (ALA) in 2005 has geared up for all of the above.

Throughout the latter part of 2004 and the beginning of 2005 there have been a number of staff changes for personal and professional reasons. Regrettably Margaret Bates is amongst those who for personal reasons will be leaving around the time you receive this issue. Margaret has been drawn to the lifestyle of the NSW South Coast. We wish Margaret and other former staff members that have taken up new career or lifestyle opportunities all the very best for the future and thank them on your behalf for their contribution to ALA over the years.

In the context of staff movements I would like to announce the appointment of Mary Hannan to the position of Assistant Executive Director (Innovative Projects) following an internal restructure. Mary's responsibilities within the Innovative Projects portfolio will remain the same as before, although some new tasks have been added in her new role.

As a result of these movements your national office has become much leaner, but we also believe we have, by necessity, become that much more focussed, with an agenda that will continue to have benefits for our members working directly in the field and elsewhere.

With the demise of ANTA and the transition of its many project responsibilities to DEST your national office has been working energetically with federal government representatives and others to ensure funding continuity for ALA so we can continue our valuable lifelong learning research agenda.

We believe that we manage a process that adds value to knowledge in this field and contributes professional value to you as a member and ultimately to the wider community.

Some aspects of that contribution form the basis of this first issue of QUEST for 2005. Of particular interest in this edition is the ACE/VET interface. Over 1.2 million persons undertake VET through ACE and around 1.8 million through TAFE. This is significant from whatever way you choose to look at it.

We have an informative interview with Rita Bennink (immediate past Vice-President and current Board member of ALA) who has been serving as a voice for ACE on FLAG over the past three years, plus an article on New Practices in Flexible Learning which we think will interest those of you at the ACE/VET interface.

Lorelie Ball reports on the successful 44th Annual National Conference for those unable to attend. The success of the conference in no small way was due to the efforts of Lorelie and the South Australian Committee.

The 2004 National Conference has raised the bar for the National Office which is charged with organising the 2005 event to be held here in Canberra commencing on the 24th November. The theme and other details will be appearing on the ALA website shortly.

Following the tragic tsunami on Boxing Day and a subsequent joint ALA/ASPBAE fund-raising initiative, we have devoted a number of articles in this edition to ASPBAE. ALA has been involved with, and a member of, ASPBAE for forty-one years, this year. Roger Morris provides a succinct history of the origins of the organisation in his article.

If you or your organisation would like to make a donation it will still be gratefully received. While the incident itself is over, the pain and suffering aren't. A CD (the file is too big to email) which has a brief 'on the ground' needs assessment undertaken by members of the ASPBAE Executive, some of whom lost family and friends is available upon request.

ALA believes we should provide assistance over the long haul or until an adult learning infrastructure is up and running again in the affected countries. We have been instrumental in gaining initial support for an international coalition of adult learning peak bodies that are willing to help achieve this goal. Judging from your feedback,

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members see this as a constructive way to provide targeted assistance.

Many of you would be aware that ALA's inaugural Visiting Research Fellow, Peter Kearns, Managing Director of Global Learning Services, is undertaking research on our behalf to identify future directions for lifelong learning in Australia. As part of that process Peter has instituted a National Conversation on Lifelong Learning on the ALA website, in addition to the Consultation Paper developed to trigger discussion around this important issue. You are invited to contribute to both. Details of the key discussion areas are available on page 17. For those of you who are not familiar with Peter's work you can go to his website at www.gls.netspeed.com.au or the NCVER website at www.ncver.edu.au

ALA has been successful in having the opportunity to manage a Flexible Learning Network project on Community Engagement. This project aims to create sustainable

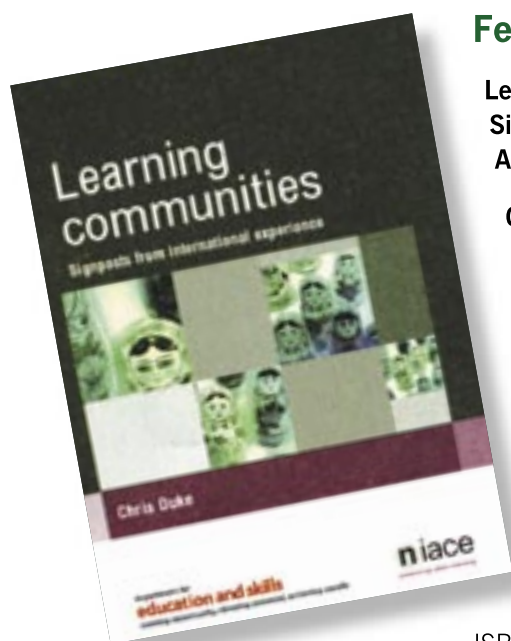
demand for, and use of, e-learning in communities, to foster both learning in the communities, and through learning, economic and regional development for the communities themselves. For more information see page 8.

In the next few weeks Dr John McIntyre and Dr Barry Golding will also be joining us as ALA Visiting Research Fellows in various ACE research capacities, as will Kris Newton. Kris will be working on how the ACE Sector can enhance its role in the dialogue with small business, other vocational providers and business, enterprise and industry groups. Outcomes from these projects will be reported back to you in due course through one or more of our publications on the ALA website.

Wishing you a great start to 2005.

Read and enjoy what your organisation is achieving through your membership and support.

Ron Anderson
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Feature Publication

Learning Communities
Signposts from international experience
A NIACE briefing paper

Chris Duke

Learning cities, learning regions, and especially learning communities have become widely used terms and ideas. They are attractive to policy-makers and much argued over among academics. This briefing paper explores the language and context of learning communities. In response to the concept of the learning community as a possible approach to increasing educational participation, it reviews developments and experiences around this and related initiatives and ideas. Based on comparison with approaches in other parts of the world, it identifies key issues that need to be considered as we continue to explore ways of treating community as a more positive and effective part of attempts to become an active learning society.

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Available from NIACE. Visit <http://www.ala.asn.au> and follow the link to the NIACE publications page.