

Editorial



Letter from the CEO to members and stakeholders

I must say I am delighted to have this opportunity to work with what I believe to be the most undervalued sector of the Australian education system, adult learning. In my experience there has been no shortage of people who are excited about this sector but, despite this, its potential is yet to be realised. I thought you might like to hear a little of my thoughts on this challenge at the outset. I welcome your feedback especially if you think I've got it wrong; after all, I'm here as an adult learner

I was fortunate enough to play a significant role in the national 'you can too - Adult Learning in Australia' consultations. It was an eye opener for me. The first thing I learnt was how much time can be wasted in trying to define the terms 'adult learning', 'life long learning' and 'adult education'; the simple truth is that it means similar but different things in different parts of Australia. In my opinion, each 'locally understood' meaning is the best meaning but I'm not planning to spend time debating this here, instead I want to support providers in delivering learning through policy support and whatever other means I can.

The feedback from northern Australia from the 'you can too - Adult Learning in Australia' consultations was heavily weighted to literacy issues. A meeting of some sixty TAFE lecturers at Broome gave me many key messages, such things as the need to address the fundamentals – things like people being able to 'hear' before they could develop their literacy skills. I'd never thought about how you need to 'hear' even before you can address literacy problems. They stated categorically that unless students were fed, they couldn't learn and that learning wasn't just about gaining usable skills. They pointed out education needed to be holistic in every respect.

Down south, this message existed as well but it didn't seem as big an issue; down south, the issues were about delivery mechanisms and curriculum development. The migrant literacy issue was also important and, being born in a post war migrant camp in Bathurst, this was very close to my heart.

Adult learning is not exclusive of VET but the degree of overlap is not yet well understood. To build our case for stronger support of adult learning I am sure we need to identify our contribution as clearly as possible.

I personally suspect the overlap is considerable in three important ways:

- training carried out in institutions such as TAFEs.
- many informally taught subjects can later be recognised through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as part of a VET course.

Recently, I worked on a project with the team from Tocal College. We were undertaking a Recognition of Prior Learning exercise with Australia Government Natural Resource facilitators. All participants were very pleased to discover their strengths were greater than they had, at first, believed. They were able to identify the gaps in their skills sets and hence focus on these, their most significant training needs, in the future.

- adult learning provides the base tools of skills such as literacy and numeracy.

These allow individuals to undertake requisite further education and enable them to contribute to their own development and the development of the Australian community.

My favourite saying is that 'Learning is not essential but neither is survival!' Recent findings tell us that continuous learning can delay the onset of dementia and a vast array of statistics support the notion that learning enhances longevity.

Now what was I saying... oh yes, now I remember. To me, training is a very high priority subset within education, one, I suspect that relates to a broad based education and one that does not just relate to vocational outcomes for the community, although with an aging workforce keeping people active as workers and citizens is a key issue.

I have held the role of Chief Executive Officer of the three major industry groups - the South Australia Fishing Industry Council, the National Fishing Industry Council and the Pork Council of Australia. In these roles, it was always essential to identify the critical issues and focus on them. If we got these issues right, the rest would follow. I consider adult learning, an industry sector that delivers an array of educational services. We need to drive the issues we believe to be important with a high degree of commitment.

In these respects, I know that we are fortunate to have both a high calibre board to set the directions of ALA and the excellent support that Jim Davidson's team in DEST provides.

We must continually examine the issues, so I look to both hearing from you and meeting you face to face.

Peter Peterson (P^o)

Chief Executive Officer