

# Editorial



**Since the election of the Rudd Government last November, the adult and community education sector has felt buoyed by the hope brought about by the promise of the policies of social inclusion. The challenge for ALA as the national leader for this sector is to drive the promise into reality.**

The need is real as graphically portrayed through the ALLS (in full) survey which shows that overall there has been no significant change in 10 years in literacy and that more than half of all Australians don't have adequate competencies in problem solving skills. New Zealand results showed a marked improvement and this might be attributed to a strong ACE sector that delivers flexible low cost community learning that is supported by Government (they even have a Minister for ACE).

Most alarming was the reported fall in literacies for young adults (15-25) the area that we would hope would be growing most strongly. It is interesting that it was that Canada who experienced similar outcomes to Australia there was a strong and immediate reaction to remedy the situation. What is happening here, we've yet to find out.

As members would have noted there is a discussion paper on the LLN? and we have surveyed our members' views to present a case that literacy funding from DEEWR must extend to community education providers. I hope you have all made the most of this opportunity, our response will be published on our website before 11 July.

A Federal Social Inclusion Board (Page 17) and Social Inclusion Unit have been established, these will support the Rudd Government intent to:

- tackle the social exclusion of individuals and communities and
- invest in the human capital of all our people, especially the most disadvantaged\*

We need to make sure that not only do these things happen but that the ACE sector ceases to be the Cinderella in education. The conclusions of two Senate Inquiries and a Ministerial Round Table have not led to any vast improvement. (Quest Issue 01/Autumn 2008)

It seems inconsistent with these intent that the Australian submission to CONFINTEA VI was completed in a seemingly rushed manner with very little stakeholder consultation? Still it is pleasing that a strong interest in CONFINTEA is being reported to this office. We have not had any advice regarding Government attendance that the regional pre CONFINTEA meeting in Korea. At this time we will be represented by our President

Greg Peart as a civil society only we hope that the Government will attend also and lend support to these critical meetings.

To make the most of this opportunity our sector must use our many differences and work most effectively as a significant lobby. This will give us our rightful place as a key player at the national Social Inclusion Table.

ALA has itself been encouraged to focus tightly on 'skilling' Australia. We are concerned that at this time this strong focus may result in the wealth of our and other research being overlooked. Research stresses that adult and community education is the first, and therefore one of the most important, steps to re-engage individuals who, for whatever reason, have been marginalised and hence is a critical part of the Social Inclusion agenda.

Our Conference this year is in WA, a state which has often felt 'disengaged' from the rest of the country because of the tyranny of distance. The state represents a microcosm of Australia's adult education needs.

This Conference can be a turning point in many aspects of the utilisation of community learning. We need to spend the year doing what we have not done before. We need to work at a grass roots level – all our members have to understand the problem, see their members of parliament and say what the sector does. We need to write letters and lobby for the spot ACE deserves in the social agenda (including resourcing).

We need to take a single message to parliament that, to use Kaye Bowman's words, shows how:

- ACE providers are significant economic development players.
- **Who contribute** to the national human capital reform agenda.
- **who aid** the building of community capacity
- **and address** key economic and social priorities of Australian communities and their governments and – contribute to the social and community welfare and development agenda.\*\*

The message is a simple one. To achieve social inclusion and skilling Australia, we need to engage the disengaged in lifelong learning – it is ACE who can do this most successfully.

**\*Australian Labor Party: An Australian Social Inclusion Agenda.** Julia Gillard's speech to the ACOSS National Annual Conference 22 November 2007

**\*\* BOWMAN, Kaye, The value of ACE providers A guide to the evidence base** Adult Learning Australia Oct 2006

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