



Adult Learners Week 2010

Adult Learners Week 2010 was celebrated in Neighbourhood Houses, Community Colleges, Libraries and other venues across Australia during the first week of September. At Narrabri Community College, seniors were offered free text messaging classes. At the CaFE Enfield Children's Centre, members of the community from a range of cultures took part in a Living Stories day. At the Mawson Centre in Salisbury, the Business Women's Network held a "Journey's in Small Business" day.

At the Darwin City Library, members of the community learnt how to use Facebook and Ebay. In Burnie, learning providers and potential adult learners met each other through a "speed networking" event. Plus many many more activities.

The week of activities was launched at the CAE, Melbourne, by Australian Cycling Team Member and CAE student, Lisa Jacobs, (pictured above). You can read more about Adult Learners Week 2010 at www.adultlearnersweek.org

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Editorial

Sally Thompson – CEO

This edition of Quest comes following another successful Adult Learners Week, with celebratory activities occurring across the country. During the week I was pleased to be interviewed on ABC Perth Radio and ABC Melbourne Radio as well as on community radio. There were articles about Adult Learning and the week featured in the Adelaide Advertiser, the Melbourne Age and dozens of community newspapers across Australia.

One of the exciting resources funded by DEEWR for Adult Learners Week is a website full of multilingual learning resources in emerging community languages, developed by the State Library of Victoria. I encourage you to take a look <http://www.lerni.net.au/node/2>

The year's theme was Your Learning Journey: Take the Next Step, celebrating the role of community education in encouraging learners, both the reluctant and the merely busy, to reengage with lifelong learning.

ALA operates under the banner of Lifelong and Lifewide Learning for All Australians, and as such, we celebrate continuing education for those in the community with a solid education as well as those who are yet to complete the education they need to be fully active and included in the Australian economy and society. In this edition of Quest, Dr John McIntyre reports on new research into the important role that Community Education plays for the latter group i.e. in providing pathways to further education, training and work. An additional article also reviews the history of ACE Pathways Research, much of it commissioned by ALA.

Finally, in the last edition of Quest, I welcomed a new Minister into the Australian Government portfolio responsible for ACE and in this edition, following the election, I warmly welcome the new Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations, Hon Chris Evans.



Briefs

ALA Nominated in Photo Competition



One of the photos that ALA commissioned for Adult Learners Week 2010 has been nominated for an award by Our Community. The photo of Chantelle Choueiri was taken at the East Reservoir Neighbourhood Centre, by photographer David Harradine. We need as many readers as possible to click on the link below and vote for Chantelle and Dave. This is a great opportunity to highlight Adult Learning in our communities.

[Read More](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/marketing/photobank/photo/?01992) (<http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/marketing/photobank/photo/?01992>)

A Gentle Reminder to Renew Your Membership

Renewing your membership of Adult Learning Australia is easy. You can join or renew now at www.ala.asn.au (<https://www.ala.asn.au/join.aspx>). Help us achieve our goal of ensuring Lifelong and Lifewide Learning for All Australians. Members receive copies of the internationally recognised Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL), reduced cost entry to our annual conference, information, resources and advocacy.

ALA Policy Statement

ALA Members took the following Policy Statement, "The Adult Learning Challenge" to the last election.

Take a moment to [read it here](http://www.ala.asn.au/docs/Adult Learning Australia Policy Statement.pdf) (<http://www.ala.asn.au/docs/Adult Learning Australia Policy Statement.pdf>), and send your comments to info@ala.asn.au.

New Literacy Coordinators for Tasmania

The Tasmanian Government is employing 13 new Literacy Coordinators across the state. Minister Lin Thorpe says "The Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan aims to improve literacy skills through a network of coordinators and volunteers, community and workplace support and the development of key indicators to measure improvements.

"Literacy coordinators will receive comprehensive training and meet regularly to build knowledge and skills and share experiences.

More information about the positions, including a statement of duties is available at: www.jobs.tas.gov.au.

ACE Provides Equity

The National VET Equity Council recently released a draft of its Blueprint for change 2011-2016 entitled Equal Futures: Achieving Potential through VET. ACE featured in the document as a lever for equity in the VET system due to its capacity to provide pathways to further education and training for disadvantaged adults.

[Read the draft blueprint and ALA's response](http://www.nveac.tvetaustralia.com.au/home/nveac_projects/equity_blueprint/submissions) (http://www.nveac.tvetaustralia.com.au/home/nveac_projects/equity_blueprint/submissions).

Research Shows ACE Creates Pathways

Dr John McIntyre

New research by Sandra Haukka at Queensland University of Technology has provided the first evidence on how ACE creates learning pathways since social inclusion has become the touchstone of the new Ministerial Declaration on ACE. John McIntyre gives an appreciation of the study and its implications for government.



Creating pathways for disadvantaged learners has long been part of the rhetoric of ACE (see ACE Pathways Research: The Background, later in this edition). Now the revised Ministerial Declaration on ACE (2007) has stated its chief goal is to build the capacity of ACE to deliver and has singled it out as a 'key player' in achieving social inclusion in Australia.

The priority is developing ACE's 'pathway and bridging' role. ACE is now charged with re-engaging disadvantaged Australians in learning and work through building enabling competencies and foundation skills.

But exactly what factors 'optimise their capacity' of ACE providers to deliver 'vocationally focused courses', as the Declaration urges? Some striking answers have come from research commissioned by ALA from Sandra Haukka at the Queensland University of Technology.

This study builds on significant work led by ALA in earlier years that has brought to the fore ACE's 'bridge building' role (Bowman 2006), established its significant vocational role nationally (Choy, Haukka and Keyes 2006) and highlighted how community providers can in different ways contribute to national participation and productivity goals (Bardon 2006).

Haukka's earlier work for ALA laid the foundation for the Bardon Report's recommendations regarding ACE's contribution to the human capital reform policies of the Council of Australian Government (COAG 2007). It needs to be appreciated that the current ACE Declaration is squarely located within the COAG 'human capital reform' framework..

Haukka surveyed over 120 providers drawn from ALA's national provider database, to establish how far they develop pathways from VET modules or non-credit courses to accredited VET programs. She also identified the characteristics of those providers who create pathways and those factors, such as awareness of the national training system, that enhance or inhibit pathways.

A few key findings emerge from the study and should now feed into the process of implementing the Declaration through the 'ACE Action Plan'-itself a significant step in making the Declaration work for the sector. The findings strengthen the case for further Federal infrastructure funding initiatives following the \$100m distributed in 2009. These findings include:

- Learners in non-accredited courses offered by ACE providers with RTO status are more likely to move into VET programs. As shown in Figure 1, the study found that 43.1% of learners who complete non-accredited courses with non-RTO ACE providers 'sometimes' move into VET programs compared to 58.1% of learners who complete non-accredited courses with ACE providers which have RTO status. This finding challenges the old refrain that pathways are mostly from ACE to TAFE. It strengthens the case for government to remove obstacles (existing in some States) to community providers becoming RTOs. It may encourage ACE providers to seek stronger relationships with existing RTOs, or perhaps join together in 'clusters' of smaller providers to gain registration.
- Tracking of learner movements. Some 30% non-RTO providers could not say how frequently their learners move from non-accredited courses into VET programs, and 18% of ACE providers with RTO status did not know how frequently their learners move from VET modules into VET programs. How can that be, one might ask, since knowing clients needs, intentions and destinations is crucial for ACE to demonstrate its strengths as a truly 'learner-centred' sector. Better knowledge of how clients are differentiated is just good marketing practice.

- Characteristics of providers creating pathways. These providers (1) work in rural and disadvantaged locations, (2) target clients including parents and long-term unemployed (3) focus on preparatory courses such as adult literacy and numeracy (4) are in New South Wales, Victoria or Tasmania. This finding implies that State governments should provide resources to ACE providers to broaden their offerings and target provision to 're-engage' particular clients groups in learning. Small, volunteer-based organisations were least likely to support pathways for learners into VET programs-these are Bardon's Tier 3 or 'participation' providers who create local participation in learning.
- Factors encouraging or inhibiting pathways. Good awareness of the VET system, strong linkages and networks, and an organisational commitment to learner pathways underpin success in developing pathways. This finding highlights the kind of professional development that is now required to support the new blueprint for ACE.

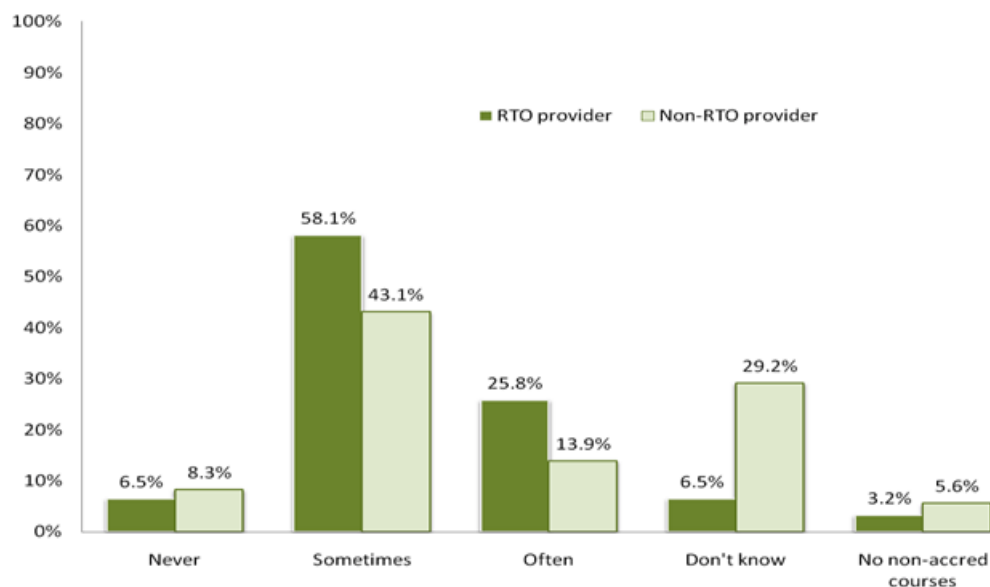


Figure 1. Frequency of movements from non-accredited courses into VET programs by RTO status of ACE providers

Recommendations: building ACE pathway capacity

Focus strategies on the organisational features of ACE providers that facilitate learner pathways, including targeting certain types of providers with infrastructure funding and incentives to develop programs.

Move to a more learner-centred provision of ACE-identify client groups with different needs and circumstances ('market segments') and strengthen advice and assessment services.

Support ACE providers to develop partnerships and linkages –that enhance their capacity to provide pathways, including linkages between ACE programs and learner support networks or organisations.

Increase provider awareness of the 2008 Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education and provide professional development opportunities that equip organisations with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to support vocationally oriented pathways for learners.

Focus marketing initiatives designed to increase provider awareness of the Australia VET System on those elements that are most likely to influence the extent of pathways e.g. fee-for-service VET, user choice, and recognition of prior learning.

There is no doubt that this report will inform strategies designed to achieve the goals in the 2008 Ministerial Declaration through the ACE Action Plan. The following table summarises some key areas for action recommended by the report.

References

- Bowman, K. 2006. *The value of ACE providers: A guide to the evidence base*. Canberra: Adult Learning Australia.
- Bowman, K. 2009. *Implementing the Ministerial Declaration on ACE*. Canberra: Adult Learning Australia
- Haukka, S. 2010. *Enhancing pathways for ACE learners: Building the capacity of Adult and Community Education (ACE) providers to offer non-accredited courses and VET modules with pathways into VET programs*. Canberra: Adult learning Australia.

Note

That ACE creates pathways to further education and work was first given prominence in the 'Nation of Learners' report for AAACE (ALA's forerunner), a claim amplified by the first Senate Inquiry (Aulich Report, 1991) which asked for better evidence. This led to the early Outcomes and Pathways research managed by ACFE in 1995 and later the second Senate Report (1996), which were both equivocal about the pathway evidence.

A stream of reports continued to assert but rarely to substantiate the claim. In the 1990s, NSW studies showed significant vocational outcomes in ACE but little evidence of pathways to TAFE or university. Since Golding et al.'s (2001) review of research, policy and funding pressures especially in NSW and Victoria have emphasised vocational outcomes.

Virtually all NSW recognised providers are RTOs, most reported ACE activity is vocational and ACE operates as an alternative not rather than a pathway to TAFE. Recent credible Victorian research (see Walstab, Volkoff and Teese 2006) has established the incidence of pathways in that State's large and diverse sector. A fair conclusion seems to be that, since the Aulich report, the jurisdictions have significantly diverged in their approach.

The picture is confused by the Bardon Report's focus on a broader class of 'community education and training provider' as embracing kinds of not-for-profit RTOs that are not usually thought of as ACE, and it might be argued this re-scoping has inflated the vocational quantum (said to be 15% nationally) of the collective ACE sector. The new Ministerial Declaration on ACE's has moved closer to defining community education in Bardon's terms of primary purpose community-based provision for their localities by not-for-profit organisations and hence given the highest priority to capacity building in organisations.

ACE Pathways Research : The Background

The claim that ACE creates pathways to further education and work was first given prominence in the 'Nation of Learners' report for the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education (Evans, 1987) and later acknowledged by the first Senate Inquiry ('Come in Cinderella', 1991) which recommended further research.

This led to a cross-State survey, the 'Outcomes and Pathways' report (ABS 1995) now forgotten, possibly because it was equivocal about the pathway evidence, as was the subsequent Senate inquiry (1996). The first Ministerial Declaration on ACE in 1993 defined as a goal, 'creating learner pathways' and this has remained a dominant theme for ACE ever since.

The pathway claim is easily advanced in terms of 'warm and compelling stories' of individuals (Tuckett) but harder to substantiate in large scale surveys - which in NSW found significant vocational outcomes from ACE though little evidence of transfer to TAFE or university (McIntyre et al 1993). Since Golding et al.'s (2001) review of research, policy and funding pressures have exalted the vocational focus, especially in NSW and Victoria.

Virtually all NSW recognised providers are RTOs, most reported ACE activity is vocational and ACE operates as an alternative not rather than a pathway to TAFE. Recent credible Victorian research (Walstab, Volkoff and Teese 2006) has furnished longitudinal data on pathways in that State's large and diverse sector (see Kimberley's comparison of Victorian outcomes research, 2003).

In other States, there may be various models of pathway development and it is common for pathways to mean a transition from a non-formal course in a community provider to an accredited VET program in TAFE (or from non-formal learning in TAFE).

Against this background, it is right that the latest Ministerial Declaration makes 'front and centre' the goal of capacity building to support pathway development.

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References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1995. Outcomes and pathways in adult and community education Melbourne: ACFE Board.
- Evans, MDR. 1987. A Nation of Learners. Report to the Department of Employment, Education and Training. Research School of Social Sciences. Canberra: Australian National University.
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- Kimberley, H. 2008. ACE outcomes 'following suit'? Paper presented to the AVETRA Conference, Adelaide.
- McIntyre, J, Morris, R and Tennant, M 1993. The Vocational Scope of ACE. NSW Board of Adult and Community Education.
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- Senate 1991. T Aulich, (Chair). Come In Cinderella, The Emergence of Adult and Community Education. Report of Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training. Canberra: Australian Government.



ALA 50th Anniversary Conference Update



Thursday 11th - Saturday 13th November

It's not too late to [register for ALA's 50th Anniversary Conference](http://www.ala.asn.au/c427/+About+ALA+50th+National+Conference+2010.aspx) (<http://www.ala.asn.au/c427/+About+ALA+50th+National+Conference+2010.aspx>).

Conference Speakers and Panellists



Jose Roberto (Robbie) Guevara, PhD

Robbie Guevara is a passionate popular environmental educator who is committed to participatory, creative and experiential learning methodologies within the context of sustainability. He is the President of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) a regional network of more than 200 NGOs dedicated to advancing equitable access to relevant, quality and empowering education and learning opportunities for all people, especially the most marginalised groups. He is currently a Senior Lecturer in the School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning at RMIT University in Melbourne. His research and writing have focused on community environmental education and more recently he has branched out to examine the nature of learning partnerships for sustainability and global citizenship.

Dr Peter Ellyard B.Sc. Agr, MS. Ph.D.

Peter is currently Chairman of the Preferred Futures institute and the Preferred Futures Group, which he founded in 1991. He also chairs the Sustainable Prosperity Foundation and two start up environmental companies. Peter is a futurist, strategist, leading international conference speaker and author of several best-selling books. He is an enlightening, challenging, thought-provoking and inspirational keynote speaker and workshop presenter.

Dr Anne Morrison

Dr Anne Morrison is interested in the learning that adults undertake willingly and voluntarily due to interest. Her PhD focused on interest-driven language learning, where adults learn for personal challenge or for pleasure rather than for academic or

vocational reasons.

Jenny McCormick

Commencing her career as a secondary maths teacher, Jenny has since collected a wealth of experience in adult learning, holding a number of senior positions in both the ACE and TAFE sectors. She now runs her own consulting company, Movers & Shakers, specialising in education accreditation and compliance, strategic planning and facilitation.

Dr Roger Harris

Dr Roger Harris is a Professor in the School of Education at the University of South Australia. He has had extensive experience in adult and vocational teacher education and in research focusing on national training reform. He is currently national editor for the Australian Journal of Adult Learning, a Fellow of the Australian College of Educators, and has just completed a three-month Visiting Research Fellowship at the Institute for Adult Learning in Singapore.

David Helmers

With an extensive background in management and business, the coordination of 'sheds' has been a natural progression for Mr David Helmers. He has dedicated the past two years to the development of the Australian Men's Shed Association, one of the largest Men's associations in Australia. David is an advocate and active lobbyist for AMSA at all levels of Government, recently securing \$3m over four years for AMSA, as part of the National Male Health Policy.

Jan Simmons

Jan is the CEO of Morrisons, one of the largest ACE providers in Victoria, where she has worked for 30 years. Her knowledge and experience spans education, community development and social enterprise and she is well known for her work in community planning and civic engagement , implementing projects from different sector streams. Jan is the current chairperson of the Victorian Learning Communities Network and Chair of the National Learning Communities Network.

Facilitator Q&A and Panel

MC Conference Dinner

Amanda Blair

A woman built of 40% charisma, 40% wit, 35% sass and 39% intelligence, what Ms Amanda Blair lacks in mathematics skills, she more than makes up for with personality. Following an extensive background in career choices, she began with radio in 1997, winning an MO Award for the best live show in Australia in 2003. She was a member of the Social Inclusion Board, is a board member of the Adelaide Festival and has raised over \$1million for charity.

ACE Policy in Australia Sally Thompson



Recently I was asked by our colleagues at ACE Aotearoa in New Zealand to comment on the impact of the recent federal election on ACE policy. Having gone through a major policy development phase and taken it the recent election, it is useful for ALA members and stakeholders to reflect on where we move to next in the context of a new federal government. The article is, therefore, reprinted here:

Australia's government, like that of many Western countries, has for some time viewed adult education largely through the prism of economic productivity. Whether in Universities, VET, or Community Education there is little appetite in either major party for a human right's view of adult education or for a perspective that sees the pursuit of knowledge by all as inherently valuable and worth supporting financially in its own right. Some of the policy outcomes of a "productivity" or "human capital" approach to education include:

- a focus on "investing" government funding in adults of working age, (rather than in all adults),
- a focus on skills that prepare people for work or upskill workers in particular industries, (rather than in education that has wellbeing, social or community outcomes)
- a view that governments have an obligation to train adults enough to get them active in the labour market, after which they can self fund any continuing education.
- A throughput model of learning that focuses on the relationship between the teaching or training process and individual outcomes, rather than learning as a form of community engagement that works across generations.

In contrast to these perspectives, Adult Learning Australia operates under the tagline of "Lifelong and Lifewide Learning for All Australians". In other words, we view adult education as inherently valuable. We believe learning should be supported in diverse communities of practice, throughout the entire life journey, for all adults, both in the paid workforce or out of it. We also believe that Australians not only need to learn how to work smarter and build our economy, they also need to learn how to be effective parents and grandparents, active citizens in a vibrant democracy and to tackle complex issues facing our society in a peaceful and cohesive way.

Common Agendas

In the lead up to the 2010 Australian federal election, the ALA staff and Board worked with ALA members to develop an ACE policy platform. The Platform sought to build a bridge between our human rights view of adult learning and the productivity and

human capital agenda of both major parties. We sought to find areas of shared interest and common ground. Also, instead of focussing on what the sector wanted from government, our Platform focused on what the next Australian government needed to achieve and how the sector could facilitate this.

For example, Australia's poor literacy levels as indicated by the 2006/7 Literacy and Lifeskills Survey suggested that a narrow approach to skills training had failed to deliver the generic skills and abilities that industry continually claimed that they needed. Also, that a worryingly large group of Australians lacked the functional literacies, including health literacy, that they needed to operate effectively in a modern economy as well as in everyday life. This is both a human rights and a productivity issue.

The ALL survey also threw up some interesting data about the interface between literacy levels and participation in non-formal learning. In short, those with the highest skills and the highest qualifications reported accessing large amounts of non-formal learning. Non-formal learning was an enabler of increased skills and qualifications, yet it was reported as absent from the lives of the most socially excluded Australians, particularly the unemployed. This is both a human rights and a productivity issue.

Australia has an aging population and a culture of not viewing older workers favourably. The challenge of turning an aging workforce from a "problem to be solved" to a valuable resource to be drawn on is both a human rights and a productivity issue.

The above three issues; leadership and investment in adult literacy, support for non-formal "pathway" learning and the provision of learning for older Australians, all formed part of our policy platform.

Bigger Policy Challenges

While there is much common ground between the agenda of ALA's members and the agenda of both major parties, our platform also included areas of high priority for the incoming Australian government; where there is a strong research base to indicate that a significantly different approach is needed.

For example, there is a renewed interest by both major parties in Australia (and by the private sector) in the education of Indigenous children, as a way out of their poverty and disadvantage. Unfortunately much of the early policy indicators seem to tackle the education of Indigenous children in isolation to that of their families and communities. There is an overwhelming body of research which indicates that literacy is largely a social practice that needs to be tackled in an intergenerational way combining informal and non-formal learning opportunities alongside formal education. Our platform calls for the latter approach to education within Indigenous communities.

During the 2010 Australian election campaign, many of us watched with despair, the spectacle of both major parties pursuing shallow, populist policies on immigration and asylum seekers, in order to assuage the fears of some parts of the population, who clearly felt disengaged from the political process and unable to cope in a diverse, rapidly changing, globalised world. Our Platform calls for a renewed investment in learning that reinforces adults abilities to be active citizens, meaningfully engaged in the decisions that impact on their lives. It calls on government to view education as a tool of social inclusion and community cohesion, and to recognise that an engaged and informed populace is a prerequisite to harmoniously tackling major issues of national importance like the move to a lower carbon future, properly engaging with immigrants or refugees or contemplating an increased Australian population.

The latter two policy positions; a shift to highly localised, intergenerational, Indigenous literacy and a focus on learning as a tool of community cohesion and active democracy, are both quite distant from the current policy agendas of either major party. However, ALA believes that both represent areas of such significant national importance that radical shifts in approach are needed.

And the Winner is....

The 2010 Australian election resulted in a hung Parliament, after which the Australian Labour Party formed a government with the support of a Greens Party member and three rural Independents. In addition, the Greens Party will hold the balance of power in the Senate, with the ability to more actively negotiate amendments to government legislation. Already we're seeing the Labour government rethinking policy positions in collaboration with their new "partners".

This new political paradigm brings with it both challenges and opportunities that will be familiar to New Zealanders but quite a new experience to those attempting to influence public policy in Australia. On the one hand some of the Greens' and Independent's policies on adult education align closely with those of Adult Learning Australia, providing opportunities for them to positively influence policy outcomes.

However, the new government partners also bring with them a range of new policy agendas with the potential to crowd out ALP initiatives with which we tend to agree. In Australia, where much of the policy around ACE is determined at the state level, it may be even more difficult for the Australian government to provide the national leadership and funding that we have been advocating for, and a temptation to leave it with the states. The difficulty is that while some states do much in adult education, some do almost nothing beyond policy rhetoric.

Here in Australia we look to our friends across the Tasman for good ideas, and like you, are guided and informed by what happens across 'the ditch'. With some close similarities of culture and history, this is an important time for us to work together and learn from our similarities and differences, our successes and mistakes, particularly in adult and community education.

[The ACE Policy Statement can be viewed here](http://www.ala.asn.au/docs/Adult Learning Australia Policy Statement.pdf) (<http://www.ala.asn.au/docs/Adult Learning Australia Policy Statement.pdf>).