

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
References Committee

## **Inquiry into the progress and future direction of life-long learning**

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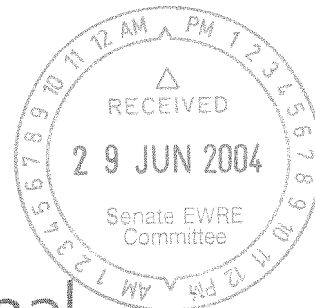
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## **Senate Inquiry into the Progress and Future of Lifelong Learning**

Submitted by Professor Judith Chapman and Dr Patricia Cartwright,  
Australian Catholic University

This submission is based on the project *Lifelong Learning, Adult and Community Education in Rural Victoria*, undertaken by the Centre for Lifelong Learning, ACU National, under the auspices of the Adult, Community and Further Education Board of Victoria.

This submission provides a brief overview of the aims of the project, a number of key lessons from the project, together with recommendations for future action. This study highlighted the many successful and exemplary practices that are evident in Adult and Community Education in Victoria. As we face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, in a context of:

- changing economic, social, technological and political conditions;
- changing approaches to learning and understanding knowledge;
- renewed emphasis on the importance of community; and
- a growing emphasis on lifelong learning and its linkage to regional development,

we believe that there now needs to develop an impetus for innovative and creative solutions to the problems of providing adult and community education, particularly for regional and rural Victoria. We need not just a clearer understanding of how adult education confers individual and social benefits, but more leadership and energy in communicating the message.

In view of the relative dearth of studies on how precisely adult and community education are sustaining and helping develop deprived communities, we believe that community development should be targeted as a goal, together with the mobilization of public/private, state/national/local resources to support communities in need and with the potential to overcome major social, cultural and economic difficulties. We also believe that greater encouragement and support be given to e-learning as a means of overcoming isolation and inadequate service delivery in the most remote, isolated and poorest communities in the state. Finally, it is our belief that the concept of 'networks' provide one approach to navigating our way through the issues associated with the operationalisation of lifelong learning, as they provide a new construct for conceiving of educational provision and a new vehicle for achieving change.

# LIFELONG LEARNING, ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN RURAL VICTORIA

## 1. Project Aims

The project, *Lifelong Learning, Adult and Community Education in Rural Victoria* was undertaken in 2002 by the Centre for Lifelong Learning, ACU National, under the auspices of the Adult, Community and further Education Board (ACFEB) of Victoria.

The project was designed to address:

- The ways in which adult and community education provision in rural Victoria is making a difference, to whom and how;
- The identification of barriers that impede access to lifelong learning and participation in Adult and Community Education (ACE) in rural Victoria;
- The identification of existing effective practices and practical, cost effective ways of providing opportunities to remove the barriers for lifelong learners within existing resources in Victoria;
- The identification of obstacles that exist to the development of cross-sector learning pathways in Adult and Community Education in rural Victoria; and
- The identification of approaches for measuring social capital and economic impacts and outputs of adult learning in ACE.

It was intended that the project would:

- Contribute to the development of an evidence based approach to policy and practice in adult and community education;
- Contribute to the development of a research culture in adult and community education;
- Contextualise adult and community education provision in the overall provision of lifelong learning;
- Help disseminate 'good practice' and assist providers to accept, adopt and implement the successful strategies that have been used to 'reach the unreached learner'; and
- Encourage 'unreached learners' to engage in learning from a range of providers.

The project was composed of the following elements:

- (a) A conceptual analysis
- (b) Three regional case studies:
  - Goulburn Ovens Murray Region;
  - Central Highlands Wimmera Region; and
  - Loddon Campaspe and Mallee Region
- (c) A study of best practice exemplars
- (d) A conference
- (e) Consultations on an 'Issues and Options' paper

## **2. The Concept of Lifelong Learning**

In this project, participation in ACE was considered from a lifelong learning perspective. One approach to conceptualizing lifelong learning suggests that lifelong learning is primarily concerned with the promotion of skills and competencies necessary for the development of general capabilities and specific performance on given tasks. However, it is evident from the work of OECD, UNESCO, the European Parliament and The Nordic Council of Ministers that there are much broader and more multi-faceted ways of approaching the conceptualization of lifelong learning. Instead of seeing education as instrumental to the achievement of an extrinsic goal, such as the acquisition of job skills, education may also be perceived as an intrinsically valuable activity, something that is good in and of itself. From this viewpoint, the expansion of cognitive repertoire, and increasing one's skills and competencies is an undertaking that can – and indeed, must – continue throughout life, as a necessary part of growth and development as a human being, as a citizen in a participative democracy, and as a productive agent in a process of economic change and advance.

Lifelong learning refers to the whole of life, not only adulthood. This is part of the difficulty – the scope is enormous. The numerous reports and declarations that have been produced within the past decade and more, from varied sources within countries, and by international organizations, are beginning to address need and opportunity in comprehensive, strategic ways. But, while the number and scope of the reports and policy initiatives demonstrate rapidly growing interest, also level of concern, they also indicate just how much is to be done. One of the targets must be to extend the range of provision; another is to achieve firmer policy coherence, cooperation and a more cohesive strategic approach, drawing on all the facilities and resources for adult and community learning. There is opportunity and need for leadership as well as collaboration and closer integration of the separate parts of the education and training system as a whole.

## **3. Rationale: Why We Need Lifelong Learning for All**

The foundations of learning are in the home, family life, neighbourhood and school. As a minimum, successful completion of secondary education to year 12 or its equivalent is widely accepted as a necessary foundation for either effective entry into the labour market and continued employment, or continuing study through some form of post-secondary or tertiary education. Moreover, as countries grow in understanding of the value of a highly educated populace, continuing, post-compulsory, post-school, tertiary or adult education within a framework of lifelong learning into old age is therefore quite properly becoming the target. A further consideration is the ageing of the population. Combined with earlier retirement, and a great increase in part-time and contract work, this demographic change means that very large numbers of adults will need opportunities to continue developing, growing intellectually, socially and culturally into old age.

Of particular importance now and for the foreseeable future is raising the overall standard of computer literacy. This has been set as a national goal (in the Australian Government Action Plan articulating the education and training industry's response to the Government's Strategic Framework for the Information Economy). The plan extends to all parts of the education and training system including adult and continuing education and embraces review, monitoring, standard setting, research as well as direct training. Whereas for schools, colleges and universities there is a clear line of development visibly leading towards universal basic technological literacy, for adults who have not had these opportunities in the recent past, or do not have access now, there are clear targets yet to address. There are indeed many programs including well-subsidised short courses for beginning adults. E-learning is making rapid strides, notably in tertiary education institutions. However, short introductory courses, now so common, are but the beginning. For example, close attention is required to the professional skills of all teachers and tutors, in the field of adult education, not just a minority of specialists and enthusiasts.

#### **4. Key Lessons Emerging from the Project**

A number of Key Lessons emerged from the project, amongst which are the following:

##### ***Lesson 1: The Need for Clear, Firm and Inclusive Policies and Programs***

An analysis of existing policy in Victoria examined in the context of the broader international literature revealed:

- For adult, community and further education we do not have the comprehensive legislative and administrative frameworks and resource arrangements that have been put in place, over a long period of time, for primary, secondary and tertiary or higher education;
- Resources fall short of needs; there is a heavy reliance on volunteers and remuneration for professionals is often modest;
- Data are lacking on performance and outcomes; data covering all forms of adult education, formal and non-formal, are not adequately integrated for purposes of analysis;
- There is a paucity of research and scholarly analysis which only relatively recently in this country has begun to be addressed;
- Key terms, such as 'learning', 'learning communities', 'lifelong', are either not defined or used loosely; responsibility for them is often unclear;
- Policies affecting the education of adults are fragmented and public responsibilities are spread across different ministries, departments and jurisdictions, each with its own authority and frequently in competition with one another;
- Links between the informal or non-formal sector and the formal sector are uneven;
- Provision excludes large numbers of people and needs to become more efficient and equitable;

- While there is a utilitarian need for instruction, in literacy, numeracy, vocational training, and technology – wider needs must be met, for social, civic, cultural development in individuals and communities;
- The purposes and values of adult and community education need to be clarified in the context of widespread social, economic, cultural, educational and technological change;

### ***Lesson 2: The Vital Role of ACE in Strengthening Regional and Rural Victoria***

In Victoria, as in the other Australian states and territories, there are major policy initiatives and active steps under way to sustain and strengthen rural and regional economies, to encourage more people to live and live well in regional areas and to ensure adequate provision of a wide range of services. Adult and community education can and does play significant roles in the overall economic and social sustainability of regions and rural towns. What is at issue is not whether there is an educational role but how it might be most effectively performed, who is responsible for resourcing it and how adequate and widespread is public knowledge of the impact of policies and programs.

Regional development on any scale necessarily requires strong, central government support, a point that has been underlined in one of the world's major regional strategies, that of the European Union. Key indicators of disparity, policy targets and statewide, national and local strategies designed to meet the targets and to address the priorities need to be at the forefront of discussion and action, at state level and in the regions themselves. At the same time, we should be prepared to reflect frankly on evidence of the impact of the policies and strategies. Spatial distribution strategies, in the form of public policies and government intervention have to come to terms with the powerful economic, social and cultural forces that underpin the constant shift of population in Australia toward capital cities and the seaboard. The international context of well researched policy and good practice, insofar as there is a sound understanding of and broad agreement of these matters, is a source of knowledge and can be used for benchmarking.

### ***Lesson 3: Developing Strategies for Targeting Adults who are not Accessing ACE***

Targeting requires the identification of specific groups and highly focused activities to address their circumstances and needs. The following constitute those categories of adults who are not accessing lifelong learning and who need to be targeted in the development of policies and programs:

- Those who lack/believe themselves to lack fundamental learning competence;
- Those who don't participate in any form of organized, structured learning because they have no expressed desire or interest;
- Those who have a desire to participate but are inhibited for personal reasons (sense of inadequacy, lack of basic information);
- Those who have a desire to participate but are constrained by family/work commitments, responsibilities, etc;
- Those who have a desire to participate but are constrained by financial, geographic or other barriers;
- Those who do participate initially but, finding the learning environment, or the conditions unsuitable for whatever reason, drop out; and

- Those who participate in some initial learning activity but are unable to unwilling to proceed along a learning pathway.

#### ***Lesson 4: Overcoming Barriers that Impede Access to ACE***

There are any indications of ways in which adult and community education in rural Victoria is currently making a difference. There are examples of engagement in relevant programs by members of rural communities, for example, single parents, men, women, ethnic groups, aborigines and mature aged persons. In some instances, there is sharing of expertise by newcomers to the community, as well as long-term residents, to bring about community cohesion and advance regional development. Despite these achievements the investigation has revealed that the overwhelming majority of the 15+ age group in rural Victoria is not reached by the ACFE or TAFE systems. In short, ACE provision could reach many more people.

In order to expand participation and access, a number of barriers that impede access to lifelong learning and participation need to be overcome. Such barriers fall into three broad categories of:

- Personal and Societal
- Barriers confronted by providing agencies; and
- Barriers confronted by the ACE sector as a whole

These barriers, however, are not one dimensional. Barriers confronted by participants or potential participants do not exist in isolation. They often interact with one another to create complexly interlocked patterns. Rural isolation from ACE programs, for instance, cannot simply be reduced by providing better transport facilities. Redressing the situation may require changing people's attitudes towards themselves and their fellow citizens and structuring opportunities for them to work together on matters of both community and rural significance.

#### ***Lesson 5: Understanding and Promoting Conditions under which Adults Participate and Learn***

This project has highlighted that:

- People differ widely in their interests, motivation, needs, ways of learning; there is no single way and no royal road to lifelong learning;
- Learning is a defining, fundamental condition of human growth and development, not an optional or incidental function of life;
- There are qualitative differences in forms and types of learning, calling for different kinds of judgments about conditioning factors effectiveness, value, significance and so forth; and
- Learning is affected by a variety of physical and social factors and by policies (resourcing, facilities etc) but equally, or even more, by the immediate 'lifeworld' or environments, its stimuli, 'feel', 'tone', feedback, challenges and rewards.

### ***Lesson 6: Further Research***

Our study has led us to believe that the area of lifelong learning, adult and community education is currently under-researched. In the interest of developing a research culture in ACE, we believe ACFEB should give priority to a round of action learning/research projects, including:

- Commissioning a needs analysis of the professional development needs of those working in ACE;
- Trialling the application of networks in ACE; and
- Trialling and evaluating the use of portfolio assessment in ACE.

## **5. Conclusions**

The major findings emanating from this project highlight a number of priority areas for the development of policy and practice, as follows:

- The need for an integrated ‘whole’ community approach to regional development and lifelong learning;
- Networks as a reform strategy in the operationalisation of lifelong learning; and
- The need for coherence and clarity in the articulation and implementation of a vision for adult and community education in the overall provision of lifelong learning.

## **6. Recommendations and Proposals for Action**

A number of recommendations and proposals for actions emerged from the project, amongst which are the following:

- Declare commitment to a broader and deep concept of lifelong learning for all. Promote it actively through publications and other means. Draw upon the growing body of evidence and experience relating to lifelong learning from multiple sources in strategies for the continuing development and support of adult and continuing education in Victoria.
- In view of the relative dearth of studies on how precisely adult and community education are sustaining and helping develop deprived communities, target community development as a goal and mobilize public/private, state/national/local resources to support communities in need and with the potential to overcome major social, cultural and economic difficulties.
- Become more involved in state-wide curriculum development projects, drawing on the experience and expertise of the field, on the uses of information technology, and learning to the creation of more ‘model’ programs and learning resources.
- Provide systematic professional development of ACE tutors in rural Victoria to encourage adoption of the teaching and learning approaches identified as ‘good practice’ in this study.



- Extend the opportunities for access such as through the current ACFEB Mobile IT project.
- Extend opportunities for regionalized mobile teaching services.
- Develop an action learning project to address the issue of the relationship between the impacts and outcomes of ACE and its potential contribution to the social capital of rural Victoria.
- Test and trial through a pilot program how networks can design and deliver ACE more effectively and efficiently in rural Victoria.
- Identify effective working models of networks across sectors.

## **7. Networks as a Reform Strategy in the Operationalisation of Lifelong Learning**

Arising from this project we believe that serious consideration be given to the extension of current cluster and network arrangements in the provision of lifelong learning and adult and community education. The notion of 'network' stresses the idea of 'community' as the common element and principle of connection between institutions, organisations, agencies and people. In this approach, learning providers are not talked of simply as 'clusters', which connotes geographical proximity, nor 'groups'. Rather they are seen as being overtly associated with each other in forms of inter-connection and relationship that are deliberately established and worked upon in the pursuit of a community of interests, concerns and goals.

- Networks offer a means of assisting in the policy implementation process especially in a time of changed centralization/decentralization arrangements. Networks provide a new construct for conceiving of educational provision and a new vehicle for achieving change;
- Networks also provide a process for cultural and attitudinal change, embedding reform in the interactions, actions and behaviour of a range of different stakeholders in education and the community;
- Networks provide for an opportunity for shared and dispersed leadership and responsibility, drawing on resources in the community beyond members of the education profession. In so going they can provide a more cost effective, community—based reform strategy; and
- Networks have the potential to bring together the policy, resource and practice dimension of educational reform together. If networks are successful they hold the possibility of changing the environment in which policy makers operate. They provide the opportunity for the environment and the system to become 'recultured' in ways that are more cooperative, interconnected, and multi-agency. They have a capacity for evolutionary transformation and renewal in changing aspirations, ways of working together, and providing learning opportunities. The commitment to working together that underpins networks incorporates the notion of working together at all levels, including government. In this way networks provide an opportunity for more effective policy development and implementation at all levels through a wide array of agencies in the community.