

## REPORT TO ACTA ON AMEP & SEE FORUM

Brisbane

Thursday-Friday 16-17 November 2017

Thank you to ACTA for asking me to represent the Council and our affiliates at this year's AMEP and SEE Forum. Based on this experience, I'd say that it's very important for ACTA to have a presence there. We should be pleased to have been invited and in future should ensure that someone can always attend on our behalf. We were the only voice there that wasn't either a Government official or someone contracted to the Department.

This Forum was well run and had a pleasant atmosphere. Aside from that, it was apparently very different from usual. I was told that normally it's dominated by 'good news' stories. This time the theme was almost entirely the implementation of the new (1 July 2017) AMEP & SEE contracts, which is anything but a good news story.

The PPs from presenters will be posted on the Govdex website (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Govdex>). ACTA is not eligible to access this site and it's unclear to what extent it's open to individual government employees (see <https://govdex.gov.au/apply>). I've asked if we can access these proceedings but I also strongly recommend individuals pursue the question of access through their provider/employer.

Significant speakers (in order of seniority) were:

- Karen Andrews, the Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Skills, whose portfolio includes the AMEP and SEE Program ([https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members/Parliamentarian?MPID=230886](https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Parliamentarian?MPID=230886)); she's a Queenslander; her office is at Varsity Lakes. (See last section below for why this is relevant.) She announced that competitive AMEP Innovation grants will shortly be (or are) open for applications (closing date 6<sup>th</sup> January!!). I *think* the Minister stated that the AMEP switch to the ACSF was recommended in the ACIL-Allen Review. If so, this is not only untrue but contrary to what was recommended – see below if you'd like the facts.
- Linda White, Branch Manager, Foundation Skills, DET
- Suzi Hewlett, Group Manager, Industry Skills and Quality Group, DET – outlined Departmental reorganisation whereby Foundation Skills, Policy Development and Program Delivery are being brought together
- Angela Tidmarsh, Director, AMEP, DET
- Bridgette Bergin, Director, AMEP, DET.

Interestingly, Linda White had taken over responsibility for both programs three days after the new contracts began. Angela Tidmarsh is also new in her role; not sure about Bridgette but that may be true too. Although this kind of "churn" is part of the long-term problem with these programs, in this case I suggest that ACTA (and providers) should attempt to capitalise on these incoming officials maintaining that they are very open to input and keen to try to put at least some things right. (Word around the Forum was that they are improvements on their predecessors.) DET has reviewed the contract implementation and invited input from providers, on which Tidmarsh and Bergin reported in some detail. It will be interesting to see if these PPs go up on the website. Bergin told me afterwards she'd consult with colleagues on the possibility of at least a summary being more widely available.

All the presentations were worthwhile but especially notable were:

- Evan Lewis, Group Manager, Settlement Support Services & Communities – informative; case management plans will now be for individuals (including babies), not families; later when I talked to his officials, they seemed completely unaware of the resourcing incentives that lead to schools enrolling refugee youth when they are unable to support them with appropriate programs;
- Nichols Beswick, TAFE NSW AMEP Regional Coordinator for Distance Learning – ditto; demonstrated a virtual classroom app.
- Colin Nalder (AMEP) & Mary Hobbs (SEE), TAFE Queensland TELLS – reported on their experience in implementing the new contracts and didn't gloss over problems (their reports became almost an exercise in black humour)
- Mary Wallace from Lynda Wise & Associates – on LWA's approach to Quality Assurance and the problems in the new contracts.

My presentation was based on the ACTA submission and supplementary submission to the Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes. These submissions and my Power Point presentation are on the ACTA website.

The Minister acknowledged and the others detailed at some length – and with admirable frankness – that the implementation (so-called) of the 1<sup>st</sup> July contracts is proving extremely problematic, especially in the AMEP. The most central problem identified is the AMEP switch to the ACSF (see ACTA submission to the Settlement Outcomes inquiry!) in conjunction with *no* management information system to support it. The consequent stress and workloads currently being experienced by teachers and managers, not to mention public servants (who really did take a beating in the Forum!), were described as “unprecedented”. The absurdity is that thousands and thousands (literally) of Excel sheets are now going to a Department that actually can’t process them.

From memory and my notes, other reported problems were:

- the impossibility of/time required to map CSWE and other accredited course outcomes to the ACSF (see last section below)
- lack of ACSF baseline data
- lack of provision for clients who had not exhausted their entitlements under the old contracts
- cut to SEE Program funding
- the SEE “notional budget”
- insufficient funding to meet demand for AMEP Extend
- loss of on-line resources for Home Tutors
- the requirement to keep almost minute-by-minute attendance records (13 minutes absence does not incur a financial penalty for providers but 14 minutes does!)
- clashes between the criteria for clientele who fit the description for the social English stream with Newstart requirements
- current impossibility of determining if clients have exceeded their entitled hours
- the widening gap preventing clients moving from the AMEP to the SEE Program (due to SEE KPIs)
- lack of knowledge in Jobsearch agencies that the AMEP is an approved activity
- the need to induct new providers into “the system” and to allow them time to adjust (!!).

A “problem” raised from the floor by two people, one of whom was from MAX Solutions was accredited course teacher qualification requirements that are causing a teacher shortage. The DET officials said that DET would consider providers applications for exemptions. **One to watch!!** As was said at my table, maybe the problem is not teacher shortages but teacher resignations and the current unattractiveness of teaching the AMEP and SEE Program.

We were told that DET is instituting some minor but welcome changes, about which providers will be notified very soon. One is that contract managers will now be State/Territory (not Canberra) based. As I understood it, the Department couldn’t promise that the new data management system would be in place even by mid-2018 – maybe I got that wrong, so please check. I won’t attempt to describe other changes because I didn’t fully understand them. The audience response was that these changes would bring some relief but not nearly enough. **So watch that space!**

For myself as someone who has observed this area for many years, I felt 100% justified in ACTA’s recommendation that the AMEP and SEE programs should be entirely re-thought, re-focussed and simplified. The wasteful duplications and unnecessary inconsistencies between the two programs were repeatedly evidenced in presentations, as was the *truly massive but hidden* waste entailed in the current contracting system, not only in preparing tenders and losing quality providers but also in getting new providers up and running. The solution – in DET eyes, as put forward to me, – is better implementation procedures, as distinct from rethinking the whole process.

### **What should follow?**

I believe that the time is ripe for ACTA affiliates to work hard to bring the current situation in the AMEP and SEE Program to the attention of their local politicians. Clearly, things are on the brink in federal politics. Likewise, the bureaucrats know they must deal with major problems and claim they are willing to explore options. It is only through their professional associations that people are protected if they speak up. In that context they don’t need to

identify their employer. In that regard, a number of people told me they welcomed my questions from the floor and presentation because, despite the apparent frankness in the room, they and others were afraid to say anything.

ACTA needs to act now and use this golden opportunity for change. My proposal is as follows.

- Each State/Territory ACTA affiliate should call an emergency meeting entitled something like “The Current Crisis in English Language Provision for Migrants”
- If desired, the meeting could be broken into two streams that run parallel: one for teachers of adults, the other for those in schools.
- Local federal House of Reps members and Senators (interested in education) and State/Territory Parliament members from both the Government and Labor Party (maybe even the Greens) should be invited to attend this meeting, not give their own talk, but to listen and respond to our members’ reports on what is happening in the AMEP, SEE, TAFE/HE and schools. Where the local member is a Government Education minister (see above re Karen Andrews), Labor Shadow Minister or Greens Spokesperson, a special effort should be made to get them to attend.
- A big effort should go into encouraging our members to attend and speak their minds.
- The meetings should be held before Christmas if at all possible and at a time when the federal Parliament is not sitting.

### **Re use of the ACSF in the AMEP**

For what the ACIL-Allen Report said, go to

[https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/amep\\_evaluation\\_report\\_-\\_for\\_public\\_release.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/amep_evaluation_report_-_for_public_release.pdf) page xi Recommendations 5 and 6

[https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/see-amep\\_alignment\\_report.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/see-amep_alignment_report.pdf) page 25, section 4.6. The 2015 AMEP-SEE Alignment Report states:

*It is understood that the Department has commissioned a consortium of national experts to undertake formal mapping of the ACSF to the ISLPR and the CSWE curriculum framework. Subject to the outcomes of this research, consideration should be given to formally adopting the mapping framework to facilitate greater continuity between the instruments and benchmarks used in the AMEP with other training programmes and the tertiary education sector more broadly. The government will also then be in a position to consider the extent to which other Training Package units, such as the Foundation Skills Training Package which are already mapped to the ACSF could be used alongside the CSWE curriculum. (p. 26)*

This recommendation (6) follows:

*Building on the recent research mapping the ACSF to the ISLPR and the CSWE curriculum framework, the Australian Government should consider formally adopting the mapping framework to facilitate greater pathways between the AMEP and other training programmes, and the tertiary education sector more broadly. Similarly, the Australian Government should consider the extent to which other Training Package units which are already mapped to the ACSF could be used alongside the CSWE curriculum framework. (p. 26)*

In my view, providers and teachers can be justifiably angry at the misrepresentation of the ACIL Allen recommendations: instead of the recommended expert group doing this work, they have been set to do it with no allowance for what is entailed.

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