

REPORT TO ACTA ON AMEP & SEE FORUM

Mercure Hotel, Brisbane

Thursday-Friday 16-17 November 2017

(Slightly revised from the version tabled at the Council meeting 23rd November 2017)

My thanks to ACTA for asking me to represent the Council and our affiliates at the 2017 AMEP and SEE Forum, hosted by the Department of Education and Training (DET). Based on this experience, I believe that that it is important for ACTA to have a presence in this Forum. We were the only voice there that did not come from either a Government official or someone contracted to DET. ACTA should be appreciative of further invitations to the Forum and should ensure that someone can always represent us there.

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

PPs from presentations have been posted on the Govdex website (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Govdex>). ACTA is not eligible to access this site and it is unclear to me whether individual AMEP and SEE teachers have access (see <https://govdex.gov.au/apply>). However, DET has kindly sent me a selection of PPs from Forum presentations, although those “specially developed for engagement between the department and our service providers and were not intended for an external audience” were not made available. Given that the latter PPs relate to the implementation of the current contracts since July 2017, I suggest that interested individuals seek access from their employers to them, especially the presentations by Angela Tidmarsh and Bridgette Bergin.

The following report is based on the PPS I have been sent, my notes and memory. Material based on the latter may not be entirely accurate or comprehensive.

SPEAKERS & PRESENTATIONS

Significant speakers (in order of seniority) were:

- **Karen Andrews, 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). Minister Andrews is a Queenslander and her office is at Varsity Lakes – see section below on “what should follow” for why this is relevant. The Minister announced that competitive AMEP Innovation grants would shortly be open for applications: closing date 6th January (!!). Minister also strongly implied that the AMEP switch to the ACSF was recommended in the ACIL-Allen Review. This is not only untrue but contrary to what that report recommended (– see last section below for the facts). There was no PP for her speech. I contacted her office several times requesting a link to the speech but so far received no reply. However, Lesley Cioccarelli, ACTA’s amazing electronic media whizz, has found this link: <https://ministers.education.gov.au/andrews/address-amep-and-see-provider-forum>
- **Linda White, Branch Manager, Foundation Skills, DET**. *PP unavailable through ACTA website.*
- **Suzi Hewlett, Group Manager, Industry Skills and Quality Group, DET**. *PP available through ACTA website: [Welcome to our Forum](#)*. The presentation outlined reorganisation within DET, including that Foundation Skills, Policy Development and Program Delivery are being brought together, and that contract managers will now be at State-level. The PP is worth looking at if you want a thumbnail picture of the AMEP and SEE, including their administration.

- **Angela Tidmarsh, Director, AMEP, DET.** *PP unavailable through ACTA website.* The presentation gave a refreshingly open and detailed account of the Department's review of the new 2017 AMEP contracts.
- **Bridgette Bergin, Director, AMEP, DET.** *PP unavailable through ACTA website.* The presentation gave a refreshingly open and detailed account of the Department's review of the new 2017 SEE contracts.

Interestingly, Linda White had taken over responsibility for both the AMEP and SEE Program three days after the 2017 contracts began (1st July 2017). She comes with wide experience of managing the VET sector, including apprenticeships. She said that her mission consisted of 3 E's: English, Education & Employment. It is a major shift that DET should include English as an explicit priority. Angela Tidmarsh is also new in her role, coming from Settlement Services. I don't remember if Bridgette is new too but it may be true too. Although this "churn" and concomitant loss of institutional memory (about which I asked a question) underpins long-term problems with these programs,¹ in this case I suggest that ACTA and providers should seek to capitalise on these particular incoming officials' apparently very earnest statements that they are 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.) Their experience in areas related to English language provision should also be useful, especially if they can use it to build pathways and facilitate links to these other areas.

All the presentations were worthwhile but especially notable were:

- **Evan Lewis, Group Manager, Settlement Support Services & Communities.** *PP available through ACTA website: [Settlement Services](#).* This presentation was very informative. It included the important information that case management plans will now be for *individuals* (including babies), not families. Later when I talked to Settlement Services 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. I touched on this problem in my presentation (*My PP is available through the ACTA website*).
- **Nichols Beswick, TAFE NSW AMEP Regional Coordinator for Distance Learning.** *PP available through the ACTA website: [Distance Learning and demonstration of the resources used](#).* This presentation focussed mainly on demonstrating a virtual classroom app. which may be of practical interest to members.
- **Colin Nalder (AMEP) and Mary Hobbs (SEE), TAFE Queensland TELLS.** *PP unavailable through ACTA website.* These managers reported on TELLS' experience in implementing the new contracts. They did not gloss over problems and their presentations elicited considerable black humour.
- **Mary Wallace from Lynda Wise & Associates (LWA).** *PP available through the ACTA website: [Quality Assurance Presentation](#).* The presentation outlined LWA's approach to Quality Assurance. The presentation but not the PP included some discussion of problems in the new contracts. Given that there is currently no information about the AMEP on the LWA website (<http://www.lwa.net.au/>), this PP would appear to be the best available for the moment.
- **Professor Robert Slonim, Director of Research, Behavioural Economics Team of Australia.** *PP available on ACTA website: [Behavioural Insights & BETA](#).* This Team works within the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet, researching various issues within government. Collaboration with DET is under consideration, possibly on issues re the AMEP and SEE Program, possibly on retention rates. Prof. Slonim is an economist and the presentation outlined his approach. Personally, I am sceptical of its dated and narrow pseudo-experimental/scientific/laboratory-derived focus (so favoured by some American researchers) that tests a hypothesis on a test and 'control' group. Further, in my view researching retention issues in the AMEP and SEE Program would be a massive waste of resources, given the considerable research that has already gone into this particular issue and the solid

¹ For a perceptive in-depth analysis of this problem across the whole of the public service, see Laura Tingle *Political Amnesia: How We Forgot to Govern*. Quarterly Essay, 60, 2015.

knowledge we already have about it. (See, for example, work done by Lynda Yates and the now defunct AMEP Research Centre and most recently *Building a New Life in Australia*: https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11_2017/17385_dss_-_bnla_report-web-v2.pdf.)² Nevertheless, the presentation slides are *definitely* worth looking at for their interesting and fruitful conceptual perspectives on the limitations of traditional economic approaches to researching policies and provision, and on how to include knowledge from other disciplines in research and policy development (see especially slides 6 & 7, 14-20).

Other PPs from presentations made available to ACTA and accessible through our website are:

- **Melbourne Polytechnic** [Cross cultural issues affecting student expectations, engagement and retention](#)
- **Mandy Juraev, AMEP NSW TAFE** [Improving Student Attachment & Outcomes](#)

My presentation: [Reforming English Language Provision for Adult Migrants & Refugee Youth from the Top Down – Some concrete proposals from the Bottom Up](#) was based on the ACTA submission and supplementary submission to the 2017 *Parliamentary Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes*. These submissions and my Power Point presentation are available on the ACTA website: [ACTA Media Room](#)

THE MAIN FOCUS OF DISCUSSIONS: THE NEW 2017 CONTRACTS

The Minister acknowledged and the others detailed at some length – and with admirable frankness – that the implementation of the 1st July contracts is proving extremely problematic, especially in the AMEP. The most central problem that was identified is the AMEP switch to the ACSF (see ACTA submission on the ACTA website to the 2017 *Parliamentary Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes*).³ However, even our most trenchant criticisms of management of the AMEP did not anticipate that this switch was mandated with *no* management information system to support it (an unbelievably dramatic example of the loss of institutional memory that now afflicts government in Australia – see footnote below). In consequence, providers are now sending literally thousands and thousands of Excel sheets to DET, which lacks capacity to process them. The stress and workloads currently being experienced by teachers and managers – *and* DET officials (who really did take a beating in the Forum!) – were described as “unprecedented”.

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
- cuts 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)

² *Building a New Life in Australia* Longitudinal Study Report the Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants looks into how humanitarian migrants settle into life in Australia and is the first long-term study of its kind. It is a long term project that follows the settlement of 1,509 humanitarian migrant families (2,399 individuals in total) who arrived in Australia or had their permanent visas granted in the six months between May and December 2013. The study follows participants as they settle into life in Australia and aims to increase the knowledge around the factors that support successful settlement and those that hinder it.

³ This Inquiry has now reported:

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Migration/settlementoutcomes/Report

- 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 that **accredited course teacher qualification requirements are too strict and are causing a teacher shortage**. The DET officials said that the Department would consider providers applications for exemptions. ***One to watch!!*** It was said at my table that teacher shortages are more likely the result of the current unattractiveness of teaching the AMEP and SEE Program, which is also causing teacher resignations.

We were told that DET is instituting some minor but welcome changes, including State-based contract managers, about which providers would be notified very soon. As I understood what was said, the Department could not promise that the new data management system would be in place even by mid-2018. I will not 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. ***It would be worthwhile asking program managers what these are if you are not already apprised of them.***

As someone who has observed and commented on the provision of English to adult migrants for many years, I felt ACTA’s recommendation to the Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes (see the supplementary submission) was completely justified that the AMEP and SEE programs should be entirely re-thought, re-focused 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 – from DET perspectives as explained to me – is better implementation procedures, as distinct from rethinking the whole process. (See Laura Tingle on the destruction of institutional memory!).

What should follow for ACTA?

I believe that the time is ripe for members of ACTA affiliates to work hard to bring the current situation in the AMEP and SEE Program to wider attention. 2018 will see the run-up to a federal election, including the parties formulating their policies. Likewise, in regard to the AMEP and SEE Program, DET officials clearly realise they have major problems on their hands with the current contracts. They have said they are willing to explore options.

It is only through professional associations that people can be protected if they speak up because they do not need to identify their employers and programs. In that regard, a number of people told me they welcomed my questions from the floor and the ACTA presentation because, despite the apparent frankness in the room, they and others were afraid to speak out.

ACTA needs to act now and use this golden opportunity for change. Here is my proposal:

- 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 parallel streams: **one for teachers of adults, the other for those in schools** (see problems detailed in the schools sections in the *ACTA submission on the ACTA website to the 2017 Parliamentary Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes*).
- **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 ACTA members to attend and speak their minds**.

- the meetings should be held as soon as possible and at a time when the federal Parliament is *not* sitting, so that local members can attend. The precise date and time should be negotiated with parliamentarians' local offices to ensure their availability.

RE USE OF THE ACSF IN THE AMEP (and the apparent claim that it follows from the ACIL-Allen Review)

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 page xi Recommendations 5 and 6

https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/see-amep_alignment_report.pdf page 25, section 4.6.
This 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 consistent misrepresentation of the ACIL-Allen recommendations by Government Ministers and officials. Instead of the recommended expert group doing this mapping work, teachers have been set to do it with no allowance for what is entailed.

Helen Moore

ACTA Representative at the AMEP & SEE Forum

helenmoore@tpg.com.au