



ACTA President Report 2024

My President's report summarises key ACTA achievements over the last year in relation to our core objectives and highlights some of the exciting opportunities as well as challenges that lie ahead.

1. Advocacy and consultancy

Two of ACTA's four core objectives are to ensure access to appropriate English language instruction for speakers of other languages and dialects, and to encourage implementation and delivery of quality professional programs at all levels, which demands that we respond to a seemingly endless cycle of government reviews and calls for submissions. However, this year was notable for the way in which ACTA has managed to position itself as a key stakeholder on EALD issues, thus increasingly able to act proactively to influence government agendas.

ACTA's advocacy and consultancy activities, particularly with the federal government and ACARA, have continued to expand this year through the energy and enthusiasm of our highly successful consultancy groups, see [Advocacy – Australian Council of TESOL Associations](#). Through this work we are continuing to build on the ability of ACTA to share what is happening in member states and territories, both achievements and challenges, and to advocate for improvements to policy and practice in relation to the provision of EALD in all sectors. Recent activities include the formation of a Refugee Youth Consultancy Group to support the development of a new pilot pathway to tertiary education for refugee students, the revitalisation of the Schools Consultancy Group and the ongoing active engagement of the Indigenous EALD Consultancy Group who are working together with ACARA on revising the EALD resource and elaborations. Despite the departure of its founding chair, Anne Keary, the Early Childhood Consultancy Group has also engaged with the various drafts of the Productivity Commission's report on Early Childhood Education and Care. The Adult ESOL Consultancy Group has also been active on a range of issues in adult ESL delivery, including representation on the Foundation Skills Advisory Group set up in 2022 by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), which led to ACTA being nominated as a key stakeholder in a significant consultation on developing a VET Workforce Blueprint. The Blueprint will recommend strategies and actions that will create stability and quality in the VET workforce. The Adult ESOL Consultancy Group also sponsored the participation of 20 AMEP, SEE Program and LLN teachers and managers across Australia in an on-line meeting that was held on 11 December, chaired by a senior DEWR official.

A watershed moment for ACTA, however, was the release of the Expert panel report *Improving Outcomes for All: The Report of the Independent Expert Panel's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System* (see [Expert Panel's Report - Department of](#)

[Education, Australian Government](#)), following ACTA's appointment to the Ministerial reference group and involvement in two meetings with key stakeholders last year. The Report was delivered to all Education Ministers on 31 October 2023, and published in December 2023. It highlights areas of reform focus for all levels of governments' consideration as they negotiate the next National Schools Reform Agreement (NSRA), including a number of recommendations central to ACTA's mission.

A representative group of ACTA Councillors had a very productive meeting about the next steps for this report with Dan Skehan, Senior Advisor to Federal Minister for Education, The Honourable Jason Clare, on Wednesday 20 December. ACTA, represented by the President E/Prof Chris Davison, Chair of the ACTA Schools Consultancy Group Dr Michael Michell, Co-Chair of the ACTA EAL/D First Nations Consultancy Group Liz Easton, NT councillor Fran Murray, and Vice-President Dr Helen Moore, commended the Expert panel recommendation 5C, which was drawn directly from ACTA's submission to the panel. The recommendation argues that to understand the progress of students and report on Australia's education goals, governments commit to revising the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia to ensure it collects essential data, including d) identifying and defining priority equity cohorts clearly, by replacing 'language background other than English' (LBOTE) with 'English as an additional language or dialect' (EAL/D). This recommendation is a policy lynchpin for EAL/D education at the national level, and will require collection and reporting of nationally consistent English language proficiency data based on a common English language proficiency measure. The 2027 timeline for identifying and defining the EAL/D cohort allows ample lead time to validate the English proficiency measure, support reliability of teacher assessment, and build systems' data capabilities. Implementation of this recommendation as part of the NSRA has value for state and territory jurisdictions as it provides a nationally comparable basis for assessment of EAL/D need, allocation of targeted resources, development of EAL/D teaching programs and tracking the English language progress of the EAL/D learner cohort. It strengthens systems' capacity to respond to the 200,000 EAL/D learners (additional to the current 600,000) projected to enrol in schools over the next four years as a result of Australia's increased and sustained immigration.

In addition, detailed information about previous failures in EAL/D policy in the NT were used by the ACTA group to show how increased funding alone does not necessarily lead to improved outcomes for learners. Although the Expert Panel's recommendations regarding First Nations Assistant Teachers (Recommendation 4B) identified the need for improved pay and training pathways which better recognise the prior learning of these educators, ACTA also highlighted that the overall failure to follow through on the recommendation to identify English language learners in the rest of the report provides *no* assurance that the agenda includes attention to supplying and equipping teachers to meet EAL/D learning needs. The response to ACTA's concerns was very positive and we were then invited to meet with the Departmental staff leading the negotiation of the next stage of the NSRA which resulted in us being invited to share with the Department our ideas for strengthening the systems for ensuring accountability for federal EALD funding in Australia and our concept of the best way to define EALD-ness for the purpose of resource allocation.

ACTA also continues to actively contribute to a range of other professional and educational organisations, including the Australian Educational Research Organisation (AERO) and the Australian Alliance of Associations in Education (AAAE), of which ACTA is a member. I was asked to talk about ACTA perspectives on our recent involvement in the Ministerial

Reference Group on the NSRA to AAAE in November to provide an update on our advocacy work which received lots of positive affirmation.

These invitations for ongoing collaboration with the federal government and other key organisations are very positive, but at the same time such work is stretching our resources, and we badly need more help from the wider membership to ensure we can make the most of these opportunities.

2. Research and publications

In terms of our objective to promote the study, research and development of TESOL at local, regional, national and international levels, ACTA initiated what was hoped to be an annual research grant round last year to encourage research to support its objectives. Sadly, given budget constraints this round might be the first and last for a while, but I am delighted to announce that the successful applicants for the inaugural ACTA research project are ACTA councillors Toni Dobinson, Julian Chen and colleagues at Curtin together with Michel Michell and Marg Turnbull and colleagues in ATESOL NSW. They will conduct a wide-ranging study which will examine EALD teacher education and teacher experience in Australian schools. Full details are available on our website. In addition ACTA again participated in the selection panel for the Penny McKay Award 2023, won by Dr **Leonard Freeman** (University of Melbourne), for his thesis entitled *Fair vs. useful: Evaluating the fairness and validity of interpretations and uses of remote Aboriginal students' national reading test performances*. Many thanks to Julian Chen who was ACTA representative on the Selection Panel. More details about the award are available at [Who we are – Australian Council of TESOL Associations](#).

In terms of publications, our journal *TESOL in Context*, see www.tesolincontext.org.au, continues to go from strength to strength with the successful recruitment of Fiona Tang as a replacement for Skye Playsted as the TiC Coordinator in January and the ongoing work of our team of editors. We have just seen the release of Vol 32, No 1 (2023), a special issue on teaching English language learners across the curriculum. The upcoming 2024 Vol 32 No 2 general issue will be published in May and the second issue - 2024 Vol 33 No 1 general issue will be published in November or December 2024. A special issue on EAL/D in Initial Teacher Education- 2025 Vol 33 No 2 special issue is also in the pipeline with a Call for Abstracts to be finalised by the guest editorial team Julie Choi and Mei French by early May 2024. Fiona has also expanded the pool of reviewers with the recruitment of 31 scholars/experts across the world (Australia, New Zealand, UK, USA, Turkey, Iran, etc.) – this should improve turnaround times but we still need more quality submissions and a higher journal ranking to attract more submissions. ACTA is also considering commissioning a number of background papers on current “hot” topics such as EALD learners and the science of reading.

I would like to thank Fiona for her great start this year and Skye for her impressive contribution over the last couple of years. I would also like to pay special thanks to Shem Macdonald who was a founding member of the TIC working Party and was instrumental in moving TiC to an online format several years ago, and before that in ensuring its ongoing

viability. Shem's contribution to TiC specifically and to ACTA more generally over the past few years has been immense and I thank him again for his vision and commitment.

3. Publicity and dissemination

One of my key priorities when I was co-opted was to update our website, see tesol.org.au, and reactivate our social media, including Facebook, Linked-in, and X (formerly Twitter) after a 12 month hiatus, as our online presence was declining. The reconstructed Website and Social Media Working Party will be focusing on identifying further improvements in this area. We have also finally consolidated our web and domain hosting and support with the one company, and updated our records so that it is easier to transition to new providers if needed in the future. I would like to acknowledge the incredibly hard work of our recently appointed Consultancy Support officer Susanne Stanyer who has helped streamline our processes for documenting and disseminating the activities of our consultancy groups and with Caitlyn Fenn, our website coordinator, has done a huge amount of work updating and extending our website and social media networks.

We can do more though, to publicise state and territory association events, especially online professional development opportunities, so do send any details though to us as soon as possible.

4. Governance and internal organisation

The past year has been marked by a focus on developing clearer governance structures and processes within ACTA to ensure greater transparency and accessibility of information and clearer principles for operation and succession planning. We have overhauled and consolidated our Googledrive and reorganised and streamlined our record keeping processes to enable easier transitions between executive members. The ACTA Constitution and Protocols Working Party was also revived and has started to identify a number of improvements to our Constitution as well as a set of required working rules and protocols. Several proposed changes to the Constitution are to be presented for discussion to the AGM tonight, the most critical one being an increase in each state and territory's base number of councillors from one to two – this is vital to build in proper succession planning, ensure greater representation of different sectors on ACTA, and halt the decline in the number of councillors available to support ACTA at a time when our policy and advocacy work is expanding exponentially.

At the same time we have revised our budgetary processes so we have a clearer idea of our longer term goals and budgetary constraints. Unfortunately, due to the long gap between ACTA conferences (last one in Brisbane in 2022 and next one not until at least 2026), partly due to COVID, partly due to stretched resources, ACTA has no funds other than its capitation revenue – consequently we are running a deficit budget so we need to be careful with our expenditure going forward.

5. Final acknowledgments and thanks

I would like to thank the ACTA team who have made my return to the role of ACTA President after 35 years such an easy transition, in particular the current members of the executive

Marg Turnbull, Helen Moore and Jennifer Mayers. Jennifer is stepping down from the Treasurer role but is happy to mentor and support the new Treasurer – her involvement over the last few months has been critical to ACTA’s effective functioning. I would like to welcome our new ACTA Councillors, including Toni Dobinson and Bahar Khaterivayeghan and Cindy Valdez from ATESOL NSW, with more nominees to come. Finally I would like to thank outgoing ACTA councillors, including Pippa Beetson, Naomi Kitching and Sharon Steiner, and the previous executive members from VicTESOL– Anne Keary, Adam Quayle and Marg Corrigan. As some of you may know VicTESOL has decided to withdraw from ACTA without any discussion or explanation (see attached letter), but we will continue to do our best to represent the needs and interests of Victorian EAL teachers and teacher educators through our other networks.

I look forward to a busy but productive year ahead!

Chris Davison

ACTA President

21 March 2024