



AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF TESOL ASSOCIATIONS

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An Opportunity Lost – Adult Migrant English Teachers ask: “When Will The Truth Be Told?”

“We are sadly disappointed”, said Emeritus Professor Chris Davison, President of the Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA), the peak association for teachers of English to speakers of other languages, responding to the report from Parliamentary [Inquiry into the Contract Management Frameworks Operated by Commonwealth Entities](#) (released Friday 21 March 2025). This Inquiry followed from highly critical audits of five Commonwealth Government contracts, including for the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).

“The Inquiry report accurately describes parts of our submission, for which we are grateful.” said Professor Davison. “But the report is inward-looking, focussing on internal bureaucratic issues. ACTA asked that it examine the root cause of the problems the auditor identified – the model of contracting itself.”

ACTA’s submission provided evidence that the current short-term competitive contracting model for the AMEP:

- disrupts and lowers participation in the AMEP
- encourages wastefulness
- incentivises shifting and disguising costs
- undermines effectiveness
- destroys trust at all levels.

Further evidence was given that competition for AMEP contracts and superficial, easily measurable, gameable Key Performance Indicators undermine quality, and that the award of contracts lacks transparency and disregards existing provider track records, whether good or bad. The submission proposed increasing transparency by evaluating provider performance against comprehensive Standards and rewarding high quality providers with stability.

Professor Davison continued: “The fact that only two of the submissions to the Inquiry on the AMEP were not ‘names withheld’ is *prima facie* evidence that the iron curtain of secrecy around this system is impenetrable. Commercial-in-confidence and the absence of channels for teachers and managers to reveal what goes on means that even a Parliamentary Inquiry cannot penetrate the secrecy and fear that has protected the system from scrutiny, much less reform. A fundamental cause of the problems the auditor identified was a conflict of interest. ACTA described this in our submission but the Inquiry gave it no attention.”

“Even if the Inquiry had just pointed to the need to examine contracting for the AMEP in greater depth, and proposed a pathway to do this, we would have been delighted,” said Professor Davison. “A tiny opening exists in the Inquiry’s recommendation that Home Affairs report back to the Committee on ‘the progress and outcomes’ of the new contracts. It is essential that ACTA be included in this review. As this Inquiry has shown, ACTA is the only body that is outside the system and is therefore free to tell the truth.”

Professor Davison concluded: “Our simple questions are these. When will the truth be told that short-term competitive contracting for the AMEP is grossly wasteful, inefficient and lacking in transparency? When will genuine evidence be sought to determine a contracting system that will promote quality AMEP provision?”

For further information, contact:

Professor Chris Davison, ACTA President, 0478 826 985 president@tesol.org.au

or

Dr Helen Moore, AM, Co-convenor, ACTA Consultancy Group on English for Adult Learners, 0410 708 975 helenmoore@tpg.com.au