

## **Achieving LLL with the Sustainable Development Goals: What is needed to get things done?**

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*The need for individual, community and institutional lifelong learning grows and changes with turbulent social, political and economic change. The national adult education non-government organisation (NGO), Adult Learning Australia, can influence the course of policy-making and ultimately the national culture through diverse activities within or started through #YOLL2018.*

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### **Changing words in a changing world<sup>1</sup>**

#### ***Words that change their meaning***

Adult Learning Australia, with perhaps a gentle humour rare among similar adult education bodies, and most politicians, takes as its symbol

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<sup>1</sup>This paper addresses issues that are global and generic but with the Australian context and an Australian readership particularly in mind.

the chameleon. This little fellow changes colour and appearance to camouflage itself – to appear different and if possible invisible to survive in different surroundings. Is that the way we behave in our own fast-changing and not always hospitable surroundings? Does this if so display a common-sense instinct for sustainability and survival; or do we detect a whiff of pragmatic cowardice, an echo of the Vicar of Bray<sup>2</sup>? Are we hard-nosed growth economists or soft-headed social reformers? Or maybe, and with consistency, both?

Like fashions that must change frequently to survive, many flavour of the year words come and go. More seriously, keywords change their ownership and meaning almost as fast. Being successful in lobbying and selling means using new buzz-words for new things, or finding attention-seeking new gimmicks. Maybe some become keywords for old things that abide and are long-lasting beneath the surface. Sometimes a really new understanding may follow. We need to run lifelong learning and sustainability through such tests as these. Both are twenty-teens flavours of the decade to be used with thoughtful care. Are they really new? Do these familiar terms carrying new more powerful meanings? Do they enable us as campaigners to ‘capture the narrative’ of policy-makers, the mass and social media and opinion leaders, enabling us as lobbyists to command attention and respect and to bring on action? There is a danger that by their familiarity they reassure rather than mobilise, allowing us to get on with business as usual.

### **LLL in Australia – from Ideal to Real?**

This paper is written as a response and a contribution to the ALA Year of Lifelong Learning (ALA 2018a) and its aspiration, as expressed in the invitation to the Summit on 17 April 2018, to celebrate ‘the power of people continuing to learn throughout their lives’; both ‘to join us in our planned activities or you might want to devise your own events or actions to highlight the benefits of lifelong learning’. The overall purpose and outcome was to devise a national Australian policy on lifelong learning and to put this to the federal government. As ALA completes this task, however, let us think a little about what that government can

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<sup>2</sup>A historical character who won attention if not notoriety in an earlier time of political and ideological-religious tension in England, by changing his Church affiliation as national power changed hands back and forth. Few local reputations have survived the centuries as robustly!

and will do: what moves it to action, and what can as well be kicked down the road?

#YOLL2018. Another Year of Lifelong Learning (LLL). The first such year that I remember was the European YOLL in 1996. Scanning the policy landscape and referring to the first global LLL conference held in Rome in 1994, the ALA Discussion Paper stated that ‘back then lifelong learning was equated with formal and institutional adult education’, before noting the wider meaning ascribed to it within OECD in 1996. Statutory advice in 2000 to the Australian Minister for Employment, Education and Training is then cited and described as ‘a broader view of lifelong learning that incorporated ‘economic as well as social and cultural considerations’. (ALA 2018b, p.5)

In fact that period saw precisely the opposite: a sharp narrowing down of the meaning LLL to become little more than what we often now call VET (Vocational Education and Training), in place of the far broader socio-cultural vision of the term in and from the early seventies. Back in 1973 an influential OECD publication was called *Recurrent education: A strategy for lifelong learning* (OECD 1973). This followed closely the visionary UNESCO Faure Report *Learning to be* (Faure, 1972). The meaning of LLL is often contested but there is agreement broadly that around 2000, reflecting the broader ideological consensus favouring neoliberal economics and competitive individualism, ‘second generation LLL’ emerged as a much narrower aspiration for skills and related attributes to support national and individual economic success.

A question for ALA in 2018 is whether its policy paper adheres to this mainly economic focus, or whether it favours the emergent ‘third generation LLL’ vision which reverts to a wider socio-cultural ambition for a healthier society in a healthier environment: that is, something that matches the fine add-on, feel-good words of many LLL statements, and rebalances the economic with the social (see for example UNESCOs later key documents such as UNESCO UIL, 2010, UNESCO, 2015a and b, also Yang and Valdes-Cotera, 2011). This means supporting learning in all its forms for the many critical issues, ecological and environmental as well as social, civic and political, that run alongside technological change and enable people to gain new skills and new employment.

Put it another way: will ALA hitch its wagon to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and lobby for LLL in Australia to work for

all seventeen of the Goals (compare Hinzen & Schmitt, 2016)? Attaining the SDGs in Australia as part of a global vision for the amelioration of the predicaments of humankind may be a more robust platform for arguing that LLL is essential and must permeate all we do as a nation, than begging for more money for adult learning per se.

What can ALA do best to bring on a LLL reality in Australia? In an interconnected world, many things can at least be started in 2018. One example is practical campaigns with a LLL element woven in; ways of doing that demonstrate community as well as individual learning; supporting other causes where we see LLL as a key missing element. Different on-the-ground local activities may help nurture a culture receptive to LLL, which helps a White Paper to be taken seriously, rather than shelved.

### **How the world we know came about, and the reality now**

This ALA paper asks how the concept and practice of lifelong learning (LLL) relates to the formal education system to which it is shackled in policy terms. That formal system emerged with the modern national state, the essential element of modern governance to emerge from 19th century state-making (see Tandon, R., PIMA Bulletin, 2018), a period followed by a half century dominated and reshaped by two World Wars. The process of modern state-making continued through political decolonisation. Then for the wealthy world occupied by Australia and other OECD nations, there was the short-lived hedonistic growth of the third quarter of last century. From there we went off-piste into four subsequent decades of the disjuncting change and uncertainty that we know today.

The 19th century triumph of the nation state was curtailed by the creation of super-national political authorities: what we call international organisations or IGOs. The UN system, other clubs of nations like the OECD, and regional bodies such as the European Union (EU) are technically governed by the nations, as Member States. Mirroring and often powerfully influencing the IGOs have been the International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) where our AE and LLL leaders spend much time and energy trying to shape policy and exercise pressure on the Member States. These relationships are now increasingly often fraught and can end in deadlock; witness the era

of Donald Trump in the US, and of Brexit in Britain and Europe. Putin in Russia and Xi in China. How influential are the IGOs in steering their Member Governments, and specifically federal Australia? Do we as citizen activists look upward and pull down strength from UNESCO and others in the UN family of agencies; or mobilise petitioners and marchers to exert pressure from below; or both?

Nation states are further weakened by the power of international financial markets and the 'invisible private sector'. These exercise fiscal control and power over nations, behind and above the familiar company names that most citizens think of as the private sector. An unresolved and little acknowledged battle for control exists between States, IGOs, and big financial corporations, largely hidden from the eyes of active Jenny and John Citizens who want to make the world, or at least their corner of it, a better place to live. The citizen, individually and collectively as civil society, has been atomised by the competitive sink-or-get-rich world of individualism created by Reagan, Thatcher and their scriptwriters.

The civil society to which ALA and its sister NGOs like Germany's DVV and the now deceased and mourned United Kingdom's NIACE belong is both threatened and empowered by new information and communication technologies (ICT) in the form of Social Media and Big Data. One high-drama personal sob or glory story can move the political process faster than a dozen lobby groups, committees and commissions of inquiry. Well timed and well managed people's petitions make anxious opinion poll-watching politicians notice and act. In this complex ever-changing world, no longer neatly classifiable into Public, Private and Third sectors, 'lifelong learning' has become a buzzword de rigeur. It is like the sticker 'organic' that gets attached to every conceivable product. It is the world that the ALA chameleon inhabits, flicking out a sticky tongue to collect what it can. The productive and useful survival of LLL may best be secured through practising and preaching LLL attitudes, behaviours and policies that change that world for the better by influencing what happens in all Departments of State, and in industrial and civic activities. Some of this will require State support.

LLL is a keyword in the political and possibly by now in the ordinary conversation of our time. Sustainability is becoming similarly familiar and well used, mainly because of global warming and other critical

ecological issues. The term has now extended out from the environment to sustainable survival of institutions and practices from health, industry and education to community, culture and indigenous wisdom.

## **The Sustainable Development Goals and education**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) succeeded the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015 (UNDP 2000). Both were products of the best planning efforts at their times of the totality of nations through the pinnacle IGOs, with the input and influence of a host of civic and private sector lobbyists. Each sought to make the world a better place: the MDGs for the years 2000 to 2015, the SDGs for the next fifteen years, to 2030.

Education featured rather weakly in the finally settled MDGs; adults' and lifelong learning were well-nigh invisible. The MDGs were not without achievement, but were none the less regarded as disappointing, no more so anywhere than apropos the education of adults which was eclipsed by schooling for all and efforts to reduce school exclusion and illiteracy. The learning needs of adults fared better in the lead-up to the SDGs, an achievement of well-organised global civil society lobbying led by NGOs like the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) and the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE), with their country-based member organisations operating in each nation state. The fourth SDG Goal is explicit about the need for lifelong learning for all: children, youth, and adults. Beyond Goal 4 there hovers, however, the question whether and how far LLL is essential to and therefore should permeate all the Goals. Can we achieve essential ecological and human society sustainability if LLL remains in its own box alongside sixteen other boxes?

LLL and sustainability are about more than just economic performance, growth and relative ranking position. What kind of life, society, and way of living is it really worth fighting to sustain? Which shade of LLL does our chameleon now choose?

The adoption, at any rate in principle, of a policy of compulsory primary education for all was rolled out across nations from the late 19th century on. It swept up into its mission in the later years of the 20th century an imperative for universal literacy, as newly created nations progressively gained independence. Literacy itself is a term in evolution,

changing in meaning and application as new needs and new information technologies arise.

This educational priority persisted into the MDGs and is still a main focus of education policy – and of the scope of what we consider to be the education system and sector. Sadly, the clear tough thinking needed to demand and help create a learning-for-all society is undermined when, as is so normal, lobbyists and politicians, and maybe too our own chameleon, shift language between ‘education’ and learning’, thereby losing the simple clarity that political leaders need. ‘Learning’ may sound nicer and more democratic than ‘education’ (instructional, didactic). But it carries risks: ‘You want learning? Fine, go away and do it.’ ‘You want education: oh that means teachers, schools, and real money ...’ Even today Lifelong Learning and Lifelong Education are used casually, interchangeably. The granddaddy of LLL journals still carries the name International Journal of Lifelong Education, in defiance of de-schooling advocates, the OECD insight of recurrent education, and Illich and Verne’s nightmare (Illich & Verne, 1976) of being imprisoned in a global classroom.

We must be clear in what we say and not fudge what we mean. If it is real money for real educational support like buildings and staff, make that clear and don’t mess with the words. If we can manage mainly by collaborating with others, so much the better.

### **From ‘former’ to future: the example of lifelong learning prospects in Macedonia**

Let us look at a country far from Australia and even remote to most of Europe in history, character and good fortune as well as geography, for an example of how events may conspire to bring a LLL policy from little more than fantasy to serious possibility, even probability. The landlocked Balkan State that its residents call Macedonia includes 22 per cent ethnic and linguistic Albanians and several other minorities: Greeks, Bulgarians, and Montenegrins; as well as the Macedonian-speaking majority. Its official name in UN parlance is still FYROM: the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, even though that might yet change following the political agreement with Greece. Its small size and differentness make it a nice microcosm for several important issues, easier to see than that which is close up and subsumes us. The SDGs

barely feature here, a reflection of the country's ambiguous status as a small poor country on a rich 'colonial-donor' continent, where (as in Australia) the SDGs tend to be seen as for other people, in an overseas aid context. The EU project TOR (terms of reference) came from another direction, not global UN development ambition but quest for European integration; yet the strategic policy issues and problems are essentially the same.

Where 'modern' Australian settler history spans two centuries, what we call Macedonia claims a legacy of over two millennia. Alexander the Great is celebrated in the name of the airport and the airport-city highway, and by means of gigantic statues of both him and his father in the central square of Skopje. All this is likely about to change as 2018 dies away. The 'other Macedonia' comprises roughly the northern half of Greece, a proudly nationalistic country which asserts its exclusive ownership and legacy of the great Alexander, and of the name of Macedonia. Many Greeks deeply resent the rival claim. New less assertively nationalist governments in both countries now open the prospect of albeit grudging and contested reconciliation over an agreed name (Northern Macedonia). Passions run high. There is no sign that civic education equips ordinary citizens to favour and support wise and long-sighted decisions. There have been mass protests against the settlement in both countries, despite the damage of the twenty-year stand-off; for Macedonia until Greece ceases to veto a name, this newly independent neighbour cannot join the United Nations or the European Union (EU), something the new country is desperately keen to do after the turmoil of the Balkan wars. If this sounds just too remote to be relevant, pause and reflect on and compare Brexit in the UK at this same time.

How does this all connect with a possible LLL policy? Macedonia is on the EU list of Members-in-waiting. It provides such nations significant funds to reach benchmarks for EU membership. Macedonia for the past two years has been one such beneficiary generously supported by grants to develop an education system fit for EU Member standards. One element of this is a LLL policy and strategy, which looms large among EU criteria. With likely Greek–Macedonian *détente*, EU (and also NATO) membership suddenly come within reach, counterbalancing the worrying rise of Russian influence in the region. Thus, in the world of macro-politics, and following two national elections, what might never have entered the imagining becomes a possibility.



How do these political circumstances compare with the Australian policy and cultural environment of ALA? What external factors and internal events might conspire to make the remote look probable: a change of federal government for example, and strong profiling of SDGs as a subject vital to Australian as well as global good health? Do the writ of UNESCO and the OECD, along with those of other regional and global IGOs and even INGOs bodies carry force in Canberra? Or is the Australian environment one where grassroots lobbying, social media campaigning and street rallies carry more weight?

The EU engaged an intermediary in 2016–17 to support Macedonia to reach the required standard in policy and planning with respect to the LLL accession prerequisite. This occurred rather later in the piece (EU & FYROM, 2017b). Being a token afterthought is familiar if not comfortable to adult educators. The task of developing an LLL policy fell to Heribert Hinzen with myself. When it began, much time had been spent developing other more mainstream policy documents: one on technical education, another, oddly perhaps, for adult education, and for us most significantly, a central one for a Comprehensive Education Strategy (CES) for the whole education sector and system (EU & FYROM, 2017a). By the time we got to Skopje and got started, early drafts of these documents were all available. Some were already receiving their final revision and polish.

After testing the water and getting to know better what was done and what might be possible (Heribert was not new to the country but this was my first acquaintance), we lighted on what proved to be a well-judged gamble. Instead of focussing on a separate and stand-alone further, Lifelong Learning strategy we took up and deconstructed the CES. We showed how the philosophy, understanding and practice of LLL had to be woven and embedded into all levels and parts of the already familiar structure of life stages and school-based system. Rather than propose a separate and competitive structure for scarce resources, when in any event there would not be the resources to create another strand or slice even of formal education, we set about colonising, informing, enriching and re-channelling the efforts of the age-based elements already in place.

We made no bones about LLL needing resources, policy commitment and legislative underpinnings. But we took as the starting point that

all effort labelled education must be part of a national LLL system, with articulation between the elements and age stages. This at once moved the debate beyond arguing for small crumbs for the years after compulsory and formal education and training in college, workplace and university, to see the curriculum, resources and learning methods as part of a connected continuum. Instead of fighting to take funds off other sectors we were enriching what each established sector might and should aspire to achieve.

Lessons for championing LLL in Australia are obvious. If however by LLL we really do mean education and learning opportunities for adults, let us be honest in saying so, and win such arguments and allies as this strong and growing age-sectoral interest attracts. We will however risk being dragged back into familiar tired and unproductive clichés such as how valuable flower-arranging and creative writing for the elderly can be. There are very compelling arguments for supporting U3A and other provision for ‘third- and fourth-agers’ on all kinds of grounds, including, increasingly and compellingly, fiscal and economic (EU Education & Culture DG. Lifelong Learning Programme, 2014). If however we are to champion LLL rather than just some skill retraining for employment and some leisure-time learning activities to keep old people alert and active, we must play the full education field, not just a small-change tag-on sector.

An example in Macedonia was to unhitch the idea that ‘non-formal’ and ‘informal’ apply to adults, while formal is for little and bigger kids and young people. In giving strong support to early years as a vital high priority foundation for lifelong learning we pointed out that informal modes of learning play a major part in the early years; and indeed that these two other modes of learning needed recognising and supporting through all the formal stages of the education system.

Hinzen and I found the Macedonian project absorbing and challenging, a rich example of learning by immersion in doing. Let us consider a few points that may resonate with ALA ambition for #YOLL2018.

So far as time permitted we set out to meet and get to know as many of the key people as possible in relevant departments other instrumentalities of the government, and others in the NGO sector and universities. We held wider-reach one-day seminars in the capital Skopje and in a town far away from the capital. This is a small

relatively impoverished country, where local attitudes and histories differ, although it is a unitary country, not a federal system like in Australia. Influence-leaders and decision-makers tend to be accessible in Skopje. We made it our business to engage with the key Prime Minister's department, and not restrict ourselves to those in the box of administration called education or training.

We sought to throw discussion wide, and to connect what we were doing with the full gamut of social issues, not only the (economic) aims of education. Given the key role of the EU in our project, and in the country's aspiration for its future, we drew heavily on EU documents and arguments for a LLL strategy. At the same time we trod carefully around some narrowness in the EU policy position. Despite kind words about social issues this is heavily weighted to what is now called second generation LLL: the reductionist LLL education-and-training meaning adopted in the 1990s in place of the more visionary ambition of the UNESCO Faure and Delors reports (Faure 1972, Delors 1996). We looked for and sought to build on and build up the sadly neglected remnants of a quite robust system of local AE centres (people's universities) that had withered away after the Tito years.

The final meeting of the whole EU project for a Macedonian education system came together for adoption in November 2017. Whether the LLL Strategy grows roots, and flowers productively still remains to be seen. The auspices so far are good. With the change of government a more receptive air blew in and the Strategy went to Parliament where its reception was favourable. We then left the scene so did not remain to remind and cajole, nor are we ongoing stakeholders in the outcome. In these senses ALA is on firmer ground, so long as it gets its ideas and its words straight, and its campaign is well sustained.

The Macedonian intervention was one promising step in a tough environment: a case study of a small, new, somewhat embattled state struggling for national identity. It will take decades to establish the foundations for and fact of self-confidence so as to operate as a stable, secure and healthy democracy where people learn collectively and individually and their wise and collective voice is heard and heeded.

Australia is much further down that road after two centuries rather than decades, with a simpler and easier present and future – but no guarantee for that future. There are lessons here. Australia's failure still to come to

tenable terms with its indigenous people is an Achilles heel. Its relaxed attitude to the need for an well-informed and active citizenry, and a penchant for short-termism shared by most western democracies, show the distance there is to travel before it has a clear and viable identity, and with that maybe a firm clear lifelong learning strategy and system.

## **How to get things done: Bringing about a change in national policy in Australia**

### ***Some key prerequisites***

A few focal points remind us what we should know and build from.

1. To win political interest and public support we should concentrate on issues vital to and felt to be important by many or most people: the things that really concern people; not just national and personal wealth, but security and confidence in their future; maybe family and neighbourhood more than national. Good health, the capacity to enjoy life with confidence and to see a good and stable future not haunted by threats from other people and, increasingly worrisome, from climate change and its already seen effects; these and other social issues to do with access and affordability to what most matters will command attention. These are not confined to economic matters to do with one's own and children's job security and future. They straddle the SDGs. Goal 4 alone is not enough.
2. ALA should embrace all seventeen SDGs and campaign to promotion the SDGs attaching the strong case for LLL. Insist that SDGs are about and for us all, not just an item in the overseas development portfolio for poor people in poorer countries. Rather than hone in on SDG4 take up also the other sixteen and campaign for these with the essential LLL kernel lodged at the heart of each.
3. LLL as the key to a successful education system will have stronger impact than a special plea for another sector added on to the existing and competing age- and function-focussed set: early years and pre-school; primary; secondary; tertiary or higher; and add-on adult education with its unresolved general or academic and vocational tension of job-skills and competencies versus civic know-how, self-confidence in identity, and public versus private provision. LLL can be promoted as a touchstone or 'impact indicator' for all aspects

of education, and more broadly of learning provision and support, throughout the curriculum in a full sense. Recognising that learning at all ages – 3, 13, 23 or 73 – uses what we call formal, non-formal and informal methods: this will assist school and college planning, assessment and quality assurance.

4. Education itself – even ‘education and training’ – is just another box in a world of policy and administrative boxes where special interests plead and compete. Reference is too often inward to the interests that manage and occupy the box. Universities are most exposed as self-seekers driven by individual and institutional ambitions rather than meeting community needs. For LLL to become a way of life it must avoid being trapped in a fact or perception of being self-serving. It is a delicate matter of judgement how to identify and justify a call for more resources for LLL as a specific new element across the age-based sectors of the education system. A new competitor alongside these will be seen as a call for more funds for AE; all too easily that becomes the leisure and pleasure mainly of retired mainly comfy-off articular middle class people.
5. We can still demand what is required for full recognition of the learning support needed (formal or direct or through other modes) for that much longer age sector of the population past the years of compulsory initial education: a golden triangle of policy, legislation and finance such as other sector age bands properly enjoy. One proposed Macedonian arrangement was for a national Lifelong Learning Council comprising a full spectrum of interested parties outside the education sector and with education members also on the Council. Such a device may work in one country but not in another.
6. Australia’s demographic profile does not make ageing and the economic imbalance of the school–work–retirement phases as alarming as in many economies in Europe and East Asia; but it is a present or approaching issue here as elsewhere. Lobbying from this perspective proper, but it would be wise to do this from a wider perspective that questions the categories themselves and builds the case for LLL into this, also making gender assumptions central. What will we mean by work, and retirement, and by leisure and pleasure, in the AI near future? Why ‘retire’ and stop work, for some other life, at a set and even-gendered age that is either arbitrary or set by short-vision ‘human

resource' economics? LLL can be championed as sitting at the centre of these big questions coming to Australia and all other societies, including especially the impact of robotics and other technological innovations changing the nature of work. How about taking up and promoting post-VET-only 'Third Generation Lifelong Learning'?

7. A fuller and richer understanding of LLL is needed. Global neoliberalism favours nice words but few deeds follow, since 'the market knows best'. The strength and cultural wealth of this most multicultural of countries, must be central. Australia must come to terms with its own past, including both bad and good in its abiding present, grasping the identity that gender-neutral mate-ship at its best implies. It means restarting and sustaining the start-stop process of reconciliation badly halted with the Government's blunt and discourteous rejection of the Uluru Statement (Pearson, 2017). For this sustained civic learning nation-wide is required, of the kind of experiential learning that over time led a narrowly nationalist-minded former Prime Minister to redefine Vietnamese boat refugees as his mates.
8. Pushing the SDGs is a good thing for Australia in any event. If LLL is riding that barrow its chances are better. If instead it rolls its own education sub-sector barrel its prospects are more dim. Ultimately it is about what identity and what future we subscribe to and want to work for Australia.

### **Making it real and getting things done**

ALA has set its sights on a national LLL policy. The role of national politics remains inescapable, despite its many failures of leadership and mixed performance. Australia's several states, and the federal government in particular, wield power and can enable, reject and ignore, calls for a 'national lifelong learning policy'. Aboriginal citizens are painfully aware of the power to ignore the work and the will of their people.

Populist causes are easily amplified by modern print and social media as well as Australian style broadcasting. Governments and the media are easily swayed by, embellish, and fear the more earthy, blunt and exciting events and subjects. Politics favour quick wins over long-term leadership that tackles tricky things like climate change. Educating an active and therefore troublesome citizenry is thankless and hard work.

But popular culture and folk memory are also resilient and strong: stronger in some ways because Australia is still a new young post-colonial country seeking identity. Gender-freed ‘mate-ship’ may seem trite, yet it could be the bedrock for the LLL culture change we seek, if words are well chosen and well understood. Indigenous culture is far from new; but it still sits outside mainstream culture and politics, an incomprehensible mystery kept on the margins. Tapping the deeper instincts of diverse communities for doing good, for doing well by others as well as oneself; uncovering and bringing together Australia’s multitudinous communities to lobby politicians and administrations and pressure the federal government: ALA might formulate and test a clear mission to achieve this. Maybe take one each year of a community, place or sector is not getting a fair LLL go, and make that a task for the year.

This paper has given one example of how in a less privileged country adopting a LLL policy may prove to be attainable through top-down political-administrative action. Here it was by a combination of external and IGO influences and local will. The work of consultation and consensus-building might then have been shelved but an election and a lucky change of government gave it a fairer wind. With hard work and sympathetic administrative and intellectual local leaders a new policy may have been won. Sadly change at the top may equally have an opposite effect.

*Achieving a national LLL policy* is only one important form of action open to ALA however. Several other forms of action are open to move Australia towards becoming more of a learning society comprising learning organisations, communities, and individuals. Together they may create the shared impact that a single approach might not achieve.

*Local celebratory events.* Another form of action is local and highly participatory in mode, involving many people and creating local awareness and new energy. If well conducted this medium can be a powerful message. The celebratory and festival dimension of civic life brings together people in localities, maybe across culturally diverse communities cohabiting the same space, who learn to learn from one another while they enjoy partying together. Alan Tuckett, long-serving Director of NIACE England and Wales and co-creator of what became the global phenomenon of Adult Learners’ Week, referred to these special convivial events as party-frock days. Today Cork in Ireland is a lighthouse example of such city-wide events.

*Learn with and from others.* A third idea: Australia and ALA are not alone. Many communities in many countries have the same desire to push national government towards a legally grounded LLL Policy. Another #YOLL2018 and ongoing project could be systematically to scan, sift and propagate examples of good practice elsewhere that might enrich those involved, moving the Victorian States and the nation toward LLL practice grounded in legally enforceable policy.

Not everything done well elsewhere would work well here. A ‘not invented here’ mentality however does not help us to learn and do better. If the old North does not seem alive and interesting, neighbouring Asia, especially economically and demographically advanced East Asia, may prove more fruitful. ALA’s membership of a host of IGOs and INGOs, and its partnership with national civil society bodies around the world, also using the power to inform of the Internet, make this a rewarding quick-win task for a person or team who share and support ALA’s purpose. A further step could be to borrow or share one new idea from abroad every year, road-test it, and assess its relevance and use in Australia.

*Not either–or:* There is no necessary dichotomy between lobbying government to make and change laws and doing good and fun things locally. One can showcase and advance the other. Local Members find it useful to show their faces at events, to demonstrate that they are themselves listening and learning.

*Make use of new tools.* Populism is easily amplified by the modern print and social media. But popular culture and folk memory are resilient and strong too, perhaps stronger in some ways because Australia is still a new and young country seeking its identity. Far from new, Indigenous culture sits outside mainstream culture and politics, an incomprehensible mystery kept at the margins. If the national adult learner body can inspire and mobilise all its members and all their communities to embrace, promote and model LLL it will release energy and voluntary civil society effort where governments cannot.

*Build on strong foundations.* Victoria, the current HQ of ALA, has a proud history of community action: witness the early Neighbourhood Centres and now the many Community Learning Centres, UIL-recognised ‘Learning Cities’, as well as a socially innovative record of Australian State administration that facilitates government–community collaboration.



Let us come back to the chameleon's core proposition for #YOLL2018. All of the above can contribute to creating a climate and a steady drip-drip of influence, using all available means, especially good news and tough luck stories and petitions on the social media. If governments are worked on and worn down, and if popularity seems to lie with LLL collaboration and action, an indifferent national environment may quickly look different.

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### **About the author**

**Chris Duke** trained as a historian, educator and sociologist at the Universities of Cambridge and London. He has worked in UK, Australian and New Zealand universities as an adult/continuing educator and professor of LLL. Currently Secretary-General of PIMA, he has been a lifelong NGO networker and local activist. He writes frequently on practical and philosophical matters relevant to this article, as well as on the role and social responsibilities of higher education.

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