

6 September 2022

Hon Dr Jim Chalmers
Federal Treasurer
The Australian Government
Parliament House
CANBERRA 2000

Dear Treasurer,

I am writing to thank you and your department for providing the opportunity to attend the National Jobs and Skills Summit on 1–2 September in Canberra.

Congratulations on bringing so many different interests together and for leading the way in creating a more unified and conciliatory focus on important issues like skills shortages, gender access and equality in the workforce.

It was a privilege to attend on behalf of adult learners across Australia, particularly those from disadvantaged cohorts, and to represent the adult community education (ACE) providers that support them to improve their opportunities in study, work and life.

Unfortunately, there was no time for Adult Learning Australia (ALA) to speak publicly at the Summit, although we did provide an earlier statement about adult community education, adult literacy and foundation skills to Minister O'Connor's office as requested.

The not-for-profit ACE sector works with disadvantaged cohorts, such as adults with low literacy and numeracy¹ to support them to:

- transition back into learning
- develop basic skills for work
- improve foundation skills
- pathway into formal learning programs.

Community providers are a key part of education and training and are embedded in our urban, regional, rural and remote communities. Its workforce and volunteers are largely women who contribute to the wellbeing of the adults they work with as well as their local communities.

¹ Parliament of Australia, House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, Inquiry into Adult literacy and its importance, Don't take it as read report 2022 - One in five adult Australians have low literacy and/or numeracy.¹ This means that around three million adults do not have the skills to meet the demands of work and life.² ABS PIAAC 2013

ALA welcomes the announcement of increased funding for TAFE and building a fit-for-purpose VET system. However, we know that for many adults returning to learning or work is a big step. Adults who have dropped out of school or have been unemployed for a long time often require local, flexible and individualised support to rebuild their confidence and their capacity to learn.

Some of the most successful initiatives for people who are hard-to-reach and disengaged are delivered through ACE. The sector is well placed to contribute to the success of free TAFE by supporting it to be more accessible and appropriate to disadvantaged cohorts.

Free TAFE assumes that the barriers are financial when in reality there are many issues that prevent disadvantaged adults from re-engaging in learning or reskilling.

The ACE sector can increase TAFE completion rates; provide safety nets for people not yet ready to learn or work and offer learning pathways and local partnerships that benefit all parties, including adult learners.

Support and development for ACE must be part of a national jobs and skills strategy along with recognition of its role in non-accredited education provision that prepares adults for study, training, work and life.

ALA looks forward to the roll out of the recommendations from the Jobs and Skills Summit and the inclusion of the adult community education sector. Please contact me should you have any queries or require further information.

Yours sincerely



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cc

The Hon Brendon O'Connor, Minister for Skills and Training
The Hon Tony Burke, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
The Hon Jason Clare, Minister for Education