

MEDIA RELEASE

ALA urges ACE funding to enhance Fee-Free TAFE completion rates

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is advocating for funding to bolster Fee-Free TAFE completion rates, by enhancing support for struggling students through adult and community education (ACE) providers. The ACE sector assists adults across Australia who are disadvantaged and marginalised to be able to return to study and work.

CEO Ms. Macaffer welcomed the expansion of the Fee-Free TAFE program but highlighted a missed opportunity to provide necessary support for students who struggle or are unable to complete TAFE courses due to insufficient literacy, numeracy, and digital skills to succeed in these programs. 'Some adults need help to read, write, and use technology before they even start these courses,' she said. This call for support comes in response to a major study revealing significant needs in these areas among TAFE students.

The [*State of our TAFE*](#) survey, recently released by the Australian Education Union (AEU) showed that 80 per cent of TAFE staff reported there are more students with additional literacy and numeracy needs, while 66 per cent said there were more students with additional digital skills needs among those responding to the fee-free TAFE program. The Commonwealth and State Governments agreed to fund Fee-Free TAFE places to encourage people to train in priority areas such as aged, child, health and disability care, technology and digital jobs, hospitality, and tourism.

ALA proposes directing specific funding towards the ACE sector, which could collaborate with or complement TAFEs to deliver tailored learning pathways and support programs. By leveraging the expertise and resources of both sectors, this partnership could address the diverse needs of learners, promote lifelong learning, significantly improve completion rates, and ultimately contribute to a highly skilled workforce.

'Many adult students needing to re-engage with learning, or to learn how to learn, would benefit from the wrap-around support and access to literacy, numeracy, and digital skills training provided by ACE providers,' said Ms Macaffer.

The AEU survey also indicated that the expansion of Fee-Free TAFE places is leading to TAFE educators grappling with excessive work hours. More than three-quarters of respondents noted that their capacity to allocate adequate time for student skill acquisition was hindered by overwhelming workloads.

Investing in ACE providers could alleviate the strain on TAFE educators by offering additional support services, thereby relieving the increasing burden on TAFE staff. This collaboration between TAFEs and ACE providers could enhance student outcomes and contribute to a highly skilled workforce.



'ACE workers and volunteers are doing everything they can with minimal resources to break down barriers for people to learn skills, undertake training, and enter the workforce. There needs to be a genuine shift in government thinking to value the ACE sector, its contribution, and its input in national policymaking. A collaboration between TAFEs and ACE would leverage the expertise and resources of both sectors to tailor programs that meet individual needs and promote lifelong learning,' Ms Macaffer said.

About Adult Learning Australia (ALA)

Adult Learning Australia, operating for 60+ years, is the national peak body for the nonprofit adult and community education (ACE) sector. Its membership encompasses both organisations and individuals from every state and territory, representing the sector's diversity.

About Adult and Community Education Providers (ACE)

ACE includes neighbourhood houses, community learning centres, learn locals, community colleges, not for profit community service providers, Aboriginal community cooperatives, social enterprises etc.

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