

Response to Measuring What Matters Framework 2024

About Adult Learning Australia

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is the largest national peak body for adult and community education. ALA is a not-for-profit entity that has been in operation for more than 60 years, with both organisational and individual members in all states and territories who reflect the diversity of adult and community education (ACE)

ALA advocates life long and life wide learning is an essential feature of a healthy, active democracy.

ALA believes providing access to lifelong learning opportunities allows people to overcome barriers and change their lives for the better whilst then contributing to healthy, prosperous, inclusive, cohesive, sustainable and secure communities.

Accordingly, ALA's advocates all political parties in Australia to adopt and prioritise the importance of adult and community education, adult literacy, lifelong learning communities, inclusive learning culture and educating for sustainable development in all aspects of government social, community and economic development strategies.

ALA position on Measuring What Matters framework

ALA welcomes the federal government commitment to broaden the range of measures beyond traditional economic measures relating to the health, prosperity, inclusiveness, cohesion, sustainability and security of Australian societies and communities.

ALA acknowledges the importance of establishing essential measures which drive policy, practice, accountability and communication at, and within, all levels of society focusing on individual and community health, prosperity, inclusiveness, cohesion, sustainability and security. ALA also recognises the importance of measuring the right measures at the right level (Jim Collins, 2006).¹

As Sir Ken Robinson (2022)ⁱ stated, the core purposes of education are:

- Personal - directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms
- Cultural - to help students understand their own cultures, to understand other cultures, and to promote a sense of cultural tolerance and coexistence. The lives of all communities can be hugely enriched by celebrating their own cultures and the practices and traditions of other cultures.
- Economic - should enable students to become economically responsible and independent; and

¹ Jim Collins, Good to Great in the Social Sector, 2006.

- Social - For a democratic society to function, it depends upon most of its people to be active within the democratic process. As John Dewey observed, “Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife.”

However, ALA notes that the only specific adult and community education references within the Measuring What Matters framework appear within the economic prosperity domain of the framework. Whilst this is a vital component of the overall function of education, ALA advocates the importance of the broader function of adult and community education supporting and facilitating the following areas: social cohesion; community security and safety; environment and community sustainability; and cultural celebration and inclusion.

Function of ACE in Australian communities

ALA argues Adult and Community Education plays an important social inclusion, workforce participation and productivity role in urban, regional, rural and remote communities across Australia. Adult education is critical in supporting, reaffirming and contributing to the unique features of life in these diverse communities whilst also connecting individuals and communities with national and statewide education and training and employment strategies (Adult Learning Australia, 2011).

Bowman asserted ACE providers provide six critical roles supporting social and community cohesion. These roles are: **platform builders** (re-engaging adults with learning who have limited previous education and giving them a new start at obtaining basic education skills, for life and work purposes); **bridge builders** (providing pathways for learning-engaged adults into formal tertiary education and paid work and so helping to upskill Australians to keep pace with the increasingly skills rich nature of much of the available work nowadays); **work-skills developers** (offering vocational training in their own right and across the full spectrum of VET qualifications and fields of educational study, including in the trades areas and at diploma levels where there are identified skills shortages across the country); **facilitators of adult health** (improving mental, physical and emotional well-being, that is a growing issue in Australia, given the ageing of our population among other reasons); **promoters of citizenship** (achieving adults active as volunteers in community activities, and thereby contributing to social cohesion and unity); and **community capacity builders** (facilitating local networks and community-led developments in line with current government policies advocating self-help local development) (Bowman, 2006).

In addition, ACE provides support for those adults and youth disengaged from the formal education sectors across Australia and disengaged from active positive community focused living. For example, this disengagement at all levels is evident in those with a criminal records or trying to adjust to life after custody, where poor literacy, numeracy, language, employability and digital skills make rehabilitation and reintegration into community challenging experiences. In its response to House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (Committee) inquiry into and report on adult literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills, the Australasian Corrections Education Association (ACEA) noted there are no national standards or consistent supported strategies across all Australian jurisdictions to address these needs. However there are ACE providers in communities in each state and territory supporting transitioning offenders with those skills and community connections to ease this complex and difficult path to active community reintegration (Wilson, 2021).

ALA asserts ACE provides critical support to communities and individuals within those communities across all domains of the wellbeing spectrum outlined in the Measuring What Matters Framework.

Key ALA messages

ALA is concerned the sole alignment of education with economic related measures may distract attention from the significant function of ACE within the broader social and community cohesion and individual and community health strategies across regional rural and metropolitan Australian communities.

To ensure effective recognition and effective adult community education policy development and deployment, ALA seeks to be further involved in discussing the structuring of education related measures within each of the domains

Conclusion

ALA is committed to contributing to the further development of effective measures which promote constructive and disciplined dialogue with all levels of government, enterprises, community agencies and individuals regarding the critical role ACE plays in facilitating and supporting wellbeing as outlined in the wellbeing framework.

ALA would welcome involvement in contributing to the effective cascading of the wellbeing measures to ensure representation of education related measures are noted at appropriate levels across all domains.

ⁱ <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/602762/imagine-if---by-sir-ken-robinson-phd-and-kate-robinson/2022>