



12 June 2026 Submission to:

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Commissioner,
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ROYAL COMMISSION ON ANTISEMITISM AND SOCIAL COHESION

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Introduction

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion.

ALA is the national peak body for adult learning and community education in Australia. We represent organisational and individual members across all states and territories. For more than 66 years, we have worked to advance lifelong learning for all.

ALA has consistently condemned antisemitism and all forms of hatred and violence. Following the Bondi attack in December 2025, ALA issued a [public statement](#) expressing support for Jewish Australians and others impacted by the shootings, condemning violence and hate, and reaffirming our commitment to peace, unity, and compassion. We emphasised the role of learning and community in supporting healing and strengthening social cohesion.

Across Australia, adult and community education (ACE) organisations provide trusted, local spaces where people from diverse cultural, faith and social backgrounds come together for adult learning and community services. These settings help build relationships and community, they challenge stereotypes and strengthen social connection and belonging. They build connection and understanding about Australian values, civics and democracy.

Addressing antisemitism and racism requires both strong legal protections and sustained investment in education, dialogue and community development. ACE and Adult Learning

Australia play an important role in this broader prevention work by fostering intercultural understanding, critical thinking, democratic participation and inclusion.

ALA also highlights its participation in and support for related sector submissions, including those of Community Council Australia and the Coalition of 44 charities convened by the Australian Democracy Network.

Why lifelong learning matters

The UNESCO report 'Reimagining Our Futures Together' (2021) emphasised the need to rethink the vision of education to meet the changing needs of the world: education should play a vital role in reducing inequality and promoting justice. Education has a long-standing tradition of driving efforts to address inequity, foster intergenerational mobility and building social cohesion.

Lifelong learning education is essential in a rapidly changing world shaped by workforce transformation, climate change, social and political disruption, and demographic change.

Beyond skills development and economic participation, lifelong learning supports:

- civic engagement and democratic participation
- social inclusion and cohesion
- resilience, social connection and adaptability across communities.

It strengthens people's capacity to understand rights, responsibilities and democratic systems, particularly for those whose voices are often marginalised.

Supporting civic participation and human rights

Lifelong learning strengthens civic capabilities by:

- building understanding of rights, responsibilities and democratic systems
- enabling informed participation in community decision-making
- supporting advocacy, diversity, voice and inclusion for under-represented groups.

These capabilities are central to human rights, social justice and democratic resilience.

Human rights education and democracy

ALA supports stronger integration of human rights education, including education about racism and discrimination within the framework of lifelong learning. Embedding civic and human rights learning into adult education programs enables people to participate confidently in democratic life, understand difference and diversity and advocate for themselves and others. Central to this is building social cohesion using adult education programs that address radicalisation in Australian society

This approach aligns with:

- the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) mandate
- recommendations of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights (2025)
- UNESCO’s emphasis on education for human rights and civic participation
- Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) on inclusive and equitable quality education

The Parliamentary Joint Committee has recommended a federal Human Rights Act, alongside strengthened human rights education. ALA supports this direction and is one of over 150 civil society organisations involved in the Human Rights Act campaign.

Civil society, charities and civic space

Building on the importance of civic participation and human rights education, it is also essential to consider the role of civil society in sustaining democratic life.

ALA supports a strong and independent civil society as essential to social cohesion and democratic participation and notes its contribution to and support for the submission from the Coalition of 44 charities convened by the Australian Democracy Network to this Royal Commission. Charities play a vital role in delivering services, strengthening communities and contributing to public-interest advocacy.

Government funding and Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status should not be used to restrict or penalise organisations based on lawful advocacy, the speakers they host, or broad allegations of ‘facilitating’ harm, as this risks politicising funding decisions and narrowing civic space.

Existing regulatory frameworks, including the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) and current hate speech and anti-discrimination laws, already provide appropriate safeguards. These mechanisms are sufficient to address unlawful conduct without introducing additional or overlapping restrictions that may undermine democratic participation and social cohesion.

International evidence: adult learning and social cohesion

International research consistently shows that adult learning strengthens:

- social cohesion
- inclusion and belonging
- intercultural understanding
- civic and community participation

UNESCO’s [Global Report on Adult Learning and Education \(GRALE\)](#) highlights the role of adult learning in supporting migrants and marginalised groups and strengthening trust, participation and social connection:

OECD research also shows that lifelong learning reduces inequality and strengthens social inclusion while helping people adapt to social and economic change:

- OECD Adult Learning: <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/adult-learning.html>
- OECD (2025) What's Missing in Adult Learning and How Do We Fix It?: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/en/publications/what-s-missing-in-adult-learning-and-how-do-we-fix-it_58b9acfd-en.html

Together, this evidence shows that adult learning is not only about skills and employment, but also essential social infrastructure that builds trust, connection and cohesion in diverse societies.

Australian evidence: ACE and social cohesion

Australian research confirms that Adult and Community Education (ACE) is a key contributor to social capital, trust and community resilience.

ALA describes ACE as a 'fourth sector' of education that strengthens:

- community capacity and participation
- engagement of marginalised learners who face barriers to participation
- local networks and social capital
- inclusion through place-based learning

ALA ACE overview: <https://ala.asn.au/adult-community-education/>

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) research shows ACE delivers outcomes beyond skills, including stronger community connection, participation and wellbeing:

- <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/ace-outcomes>
- <https://ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/exploring-the-social-and-economic-impacts-of-adult-and-community-education>

In the context of rising antisemitism, racism and social division, ACE provides trusted local spaces where people come together, rebuild relationships and strengthen shared belonging.

The role of community learning in practice

Community-based providers such as neighbourhood houses, community learning centres, community colleges, Aboriginal learning cooperatives, libraries and other community spaces are central to this work.

For example, Sydney East Community College (Bondi Junction) has served its community since 1952. It provides a welcoming place for people from all backgrounds to learn, build skills, and pursue interests through high-quality education. The College works in partnership with community organisations, local councils, schools and other organisations, extending its reach and celebrating cultural and linguistic diversity.

It provides accessible education including language, work skills, health and wellbeing programs, and mentoring pathways into employment.

Following the Bondi incident, the College community was directly affected, with heightened fear and uncertainty across the local area. Members of both Jewish and Muslim communities reported distress and concern, and some were hesitant to return to shared spaces. While some people have now begun to return, others are still in the process of recovering from the trauma and uncertainty.

In response, the College has played an important role in restoring confidence and encouraging people back into trusted learning environments. These settings provide more than education as they offer safety, belonging and reconnection. Its students come from many parts of the world and engage in language programs, work skills training, health and wellbeing courses, mentoring and pathways into further education. Through initiatives such as its Mentor Program, which links skilled migrants and refugees with professional mentors to support pathways into employment, the College helps rebuild confidence, connection and opportunity.

In this way, community learning centres such as Sydney East Community College are more than education providers. They are vital spaces where social networks are formed, confidence is rebuilt, and social, human and cultural capital is created, shared and celebrated.

Conclusion

Antisemitism, racism and social division cannot be addressed through enforcement alone. They also require sustained investment in the social and community infrastructure that builds trust, connection and shared understanding.

Adult and community education plays a vital, but often overlooked, role in strengthening social cohesion. It creates inclusive spaces that celebrate diversity, where people learn together, build relationships, and participate in community and democratic life.

Together, these elements form the foundation of a cohesive, peaceful and resilient society where diversity is respected, participation is enabled, and social trust is strengthened. Strengthening lifelong learning is therefore not only an education priority but also a vital strategy for building social cohesion, inclusion and belonging.

Recommendations

1. Adopt a National Human Rights Act, supported by sustained investment in human rights, civic education and democracy literacy across lifelong learning systems.
2. Strengthen investment in Adult and Community Education (ACE) as core social infrastructure for inclusion, cohesion and participation.
3. Embed civic, intercultural and human rights education within adult learning programs to support informed participation in democratic and community life.

4. Recognise and support ACE providers and place-based community learning centres (including neighbourhood houses, community colleges and community learning centres) as trusted civic spaces that foster belonging, connection and social cohesion, and as key partners in national strategies addressing antisemitism, racism and social division.
5. Enable structured engagement with the ACE sector, including formal opportunities for Adult Learning Australia (ALA) to provide evidence, advice and direct input to the Commission.
6. Protect community-based organisations by ensuring that charitable status, DGR eligibility and government funding are not used to penalise lawful advocacy or public-interest speech, with existing ACNC and legal frameworks as the primary safeguards.

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About Adult Learning Australia

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is the national peak body for adult learning and community education, representing both organisational and individual members across all Australian states and territories. For more than 66 years, ALA has provided leadership, advocacy and professional development to advance quality learning opportunities for adult learners throughout Australia.

Our members reflect the diversity of the adult learning and community education sector, including community learning centres, community colleges, neighbourhood houses, TAFEs, universities and other adult education providers.

Over the decades, ALA has played a pivotal role in supporting adult and community education as a pathway to personal growth, stronger communities, social inclusion, employment and further learning. Our work is grounded in the belief that lifelong learning is fundamental to individual empowerment, social cohesion and national prosperity.

ALA is a trusted and respected leader in the field. Our vision is for all Australians to have equitable access to lifelong learning opportunities that strengthen communities, support social cohesion and contribute to economic prosperity.

About ACE

Adult and Community Education (ACE) focuses on meeting the learning needs of adults within their local communities while strengthening community capacity, resilience and social inclusion. Delivered through community-owned, not-for-profit organisations such as neighbourhood houses, community learning centres, community colleges, Aboriginal cooperatives and other community-based education providers, ACE provides accessible lifelong learning opportunities that empower individuals, support community development and respond to local needs and aspirations.

ACE contributes significantly to the social and economic wellbeing of communities through a broad range of programs, including vocational education and training (VET), foundation skills, literacy and numeracy, digital inclusion, and personal enrichment learning. ACE providers play a particularly important role in supporting the one in seven Australians whose literacy skills limit their ability to participate fully in everyday life.

At the heart of ACE is a learner-centred approach that actively engages adults in their own learning. Through practical, participatory and strengths-based methods, learners build skills, confidence, aspirations and pathways to further education, employment and community participation. Strong connections with local organisations and support services enable ACE providers to offer trusted, holistic support to learners, particularly those experiencing disadvantage or exclusion.