

MEDIA RELEASE

June 22, 2026

Adult Learners Week 2026: Follow Your Compass

Adult Learners Week 2026 (ALW) will run from **1 – 8 September**, inviting Australians to **Follow Your Compass** during this national celebration of lifelong learning.

Coordinated by national peak body [Adult Learning Australia](#) (ALA) and supported by the Australian Government, ALW showcases the transformative power of adult learning in changing lives, opening new possibilities, and strengthening communities.

The 2026 theme - **Follow Your Compass: Learning for Life** - evokes ideas of direction, purpose, self-discovery, and personal journey. It encourages people to reflect on where they are, where they want to go, and the values and aspirations that guide them.

ALA President John Sheen says the theme captures the spirit of the sector and the diversity of learning taking place across the country:

“During Adult Learners Week, adult education providers across Australia will be celebrating the many and varied ways people learn together, whether in community settings, workplaces, or through informal learning pathways.”

“This national celebration of learning is a chance to recognise that learning is lifelong, accessible, and deeply connected to opportunity and participation.”

The compass in our theme is a powerful metaphor for learning. Used for thousands of years across cultures, it represents guidance, exploration, and agency. Just as there are many types of compasses, there are many pathways and opportunities for learning.

Adult Learners Week 2026 will be launched at MTC FutureReady Cabramatta in western Sydney at 11am on Tuesday 1 September, celebrating the area’s cultural diversity and highlighting how adult learning helps build social cohesion, connection, and shared opportunity across communities.

ALW 2026 will share inspiring stories of adult learners who have transformed their lives through learning, as they *follow their compass* through education and new opportunities.

Follow Your Compass communicates several key ideas for Adult Learners Week:

- Learning opens pathways and leads to new horizons
- Education helps people navigate change

- Everyone can chart a new direction at any stage of life
- Learning can help people find their “true north”

For adult learners, the theme affirms their capacity to discover what drives them and use that insight to navigate learning, career change, and personal growth. It also recognises the importance of being able to change direction when needed.

The compass metaphor further aligns with broader capability development, including literacy and numeracy, geospatial awareness, spatial reasoning, digital navigation, and problem-solving across physical, digital, and everyday life contexts.

The importance of adult learning in Australia today is underscored by the following statistics:

- 44% of adult Australians aged 15-74 have very low literacy skills and 54% have very low numeracy skills¹
- 9.2% of Australians are highly digitally excluded, particularly people over 75 years of age, remote First Nations people, public housing residents and those who did not complete secondary school²

However, progress is being made:

- More than 3.2 million Australians aged 15-74 years are currently learning, with some 25% studying at adult education or training institutions³
- 84% of people who finished a non-school qualification in 2024 were employed in 2025⁴
- 80% of people with non-school qualifications are employed, compared to 58% without⁵
- The National Foundation Skills Strategy 2025–2035 is working to enhance the lives of people who struggle with reading, writing, maths, or digital skills⁶
- A national study is underway to better understand Australia’s adult literacy, numeracy, and digital skills needs.⁷

ADULT LEARNERS WEEK - BACKGROUND

Adult Learners Week is coordinated by Adult Learning Australia, the national peak body for adult and community education.

ALW is a UNESCO initiative, supported by the Australian Government, celebrated annually in the first week of September in Australia since 1995.

¹ [Senate inquiry into adult literacy and its importance 2021](#)

² [Australian Digital Inclusion index 2025](#)

³ [Education and Work Australia 2025](#)

⁴ [Education and Work Australia 2025](#)

⁵ Ibid

⁶ [National Foundation Skills Strategy 2025-35](#)

⁷ [Jobs and Skills Foundation Study](#)

Hundreds of events and activities are held around Australia and online each year to promote the benefits of adult education and lifelong learning.

Any adult education and training organisation can get involved in Adult Learners Week including neighbourhood houses, community centres, libraries, training organisations, local governments, Aboriginal learning cooperatives, employers, not-for-profits, workplaces, men's or women's sheds, U3As, community colleges, TAFEs and universities.

Every year, ALW scholarships are awarded to outstanding adult learners to enable them to either take a new learning pathway or continue an existing one. Adult learning providers are invited to nominate adult learners who are changing the trajectory of their lives through adult learning.

Visit www.adultlearnersweek.org for more information.

#ALW2026 #FollowYourCompass #FindYourTrueNorth #ChartYourCourse

MEDIA INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES & CONTACTS

The following are available for interview:

- John Sheen - President of Adult Learning Australia (based in Victoria)
- Isabel Osuna-Gatty - Vice President (based in South Australia)
- Dr Tracey Ollis - Board member (based in Victoria)
- Jenny Macaffer - CEO of Adult Learning Australia (based in Victoria)
- Adult learners from around Australia

To arrange an interview or for more information, please contact Rachel Demarco on 0406 002 084 or rachel@goodtalent.com.au

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