

# Media Release

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## Is Australia missing the point on adult education?

The president of Australia's peak adult learning body has today called for a reassessment of adult education in Australia.

At a time when Australians are dropping out of the workforce at unprecedented rates, one half of adults in paid work have completed no formal qualification since leaving school and one third of Australian adults remain functionally illiterate.<sup>1</sup>

With so many people lacking the basic skills to effectively take part in and contribute to society, Professor Barry Golding, President of Adult Learning Australia, is calling for industry and government to refocus on the wider role of adult education.

"A narrow, economic rationalist view of education and training has resulted in adult education being regarded by many policymakers as a commodity geared solely towards providing skills for jobs," says Professor Golding.

"This approach has resulted in less funding being made available to the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector, and cuts to TAFE further education and vocational courses. Increasingly adult education courses perceived as not being of direct benefit to industry are being marginalised or cut."

Professor Golding was talking at the launch of a new book, *Lifelong & Lifewide, stories of adults learning*, at Sydney Community College. Through interviews with ten adult learners from all states and territories, it maps a picture of adult community education in Australia and the role that adult education plays in building a stronger and more cohesive society.

"The unique value of Adult and Community Education is that it fosters skills that both include, and reach far beyond, skills for work," says Professor Golding.

"The ACE sector facilitates learning at any age, which is vital for adapting to the continually changing needs and demands of society, including parenting and ageing. It provides the soft skills and emotional intelligences such as creativity, design capability and self-management that employers increasingly seek.

"Adult education is about changing lives, building and sustaining communities, and ensuring that every Australian has the opportunity to develop, acquire new life skills, build confidence through knowledge and contribute to our diverse and rapidly changing society, lifelong and lifewide," concludes Professor Golding.

The stories in *Lifelong & Lifewide* span all ages and a great diversity of communities, including migrants and learners with a disability, Indigenous adult learning and adult literacy. They provide evidence about why Australia desperately needs a comprehensive and properly funded adult education policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Colebach T 'Workforce gives up and drops out', Age Businessday, 13 July 2012