

Pre-Budget Submission 2016–2017



Adult
Learning
Australia

Adult Learning Australia

Adult Learning Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Australian Government's 2016–2017 Budget.

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is the national peak body for adult and community education (ACE). We are a not-for-profit entity with both organisational and individual members in all states and territories who reflect the diversity of adult and community education.

The learner is the central focus of our attention, acknowledging that learning occurs through informal and non-formal means, as well as through the formal education and training systems.

In 2016, ALA celebrates its 56th anniversary.

Our vision

Lifelong and Lifewide Learning for all Australians

Executive summary

Adult and community education (ACE) is an undervalued community asset. Relatively small amounts of government investment in the sector produce significant and very positive outcomes for Australian governments. The sector is characterised by high levels of volunteerism, low overheads, strong community 'ownership' and a focus on the most disenfranchised and disadvantaged learners.

The 2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE acknowledged adult learning's unique capacity to adapt to a rapidly changing industrial, demographic and technological environment and the high value ACE has to engage, assist and support second chance learners with skills and workforce development.

The ACE sector is wonderfully diverse, innovative and resilient. It relies on the goodwill of thousands of volunteers, and committed community workers and adult educators. It transforms people and communities.

The achievements of the ACE sector have largely gone unheralded; however, with an increased focus from government could result in even stronger outcomes, particularly for socially and economically marginalised groups including in rural and regional Australia.

Recommendations summary

Adult Learning Australia proposes that in the 2016–17 Federal Budget the Commonwealth should:

- maintain and build on its existing oversight role of adult and community education by continuing to fund Adult Learning Australia and Adult Learners' Week on an annual and ongoing basis
- formalise the role played by ACE providers in attracting disengaged learners, including youth who have failed in mainstream schooling, in the next intergovernmental resourcing agreement for vocational education and training
- ensure that the next Commonwealth agreement with the States and Territories on skills and workforce development articulates a specific role for locally focussed not for profit ACE organisations
- support ACE sector innovation to encourage new programs that provide for increased provision in foundation skills that include digital literacy
- maintain and strengthen the Broadband for Seniors initiative by offering improved and targetted incentives for the program's community-based providers of digital literacy programs for seniors
- target a proportion of VET funding from current Commonwealth programs towards workers who are older than 45 and those with the lowest literacy

- invest in a national family literacy strategy focussed on targetting Indigenous and other socially and economically marginalised Australian communities
- ensure that every school with a large population or proportion of Indigenous students has an intergenerational (family) literacy program as part of its core functions
- ensure adults with barriers to learning are given the opportunity to develop the literacy and numeracy skills they need to build their confidence and contribute to our diverse and changing society and economy
- reinstate a revised literacy program incorporating SEE, AMEP and WELL outcomes into a single access program specifically targetted at adult and community education sector provision
- ensure that a community learning centre exists in every Australian community of more than 500 people more than 80 km from a university or TAFE campus, with the highest priority being for large and often remote Indigenous communities
- commission ALA to research the capacity of adult education in Australia to contribute to a 15 year plan to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and to provide recommendations to the Government on how adult education can be strategically developed and funded to make a significant contribution.

Engaging through learning



Adult and community education (ACE) is defined differently in each state and territory of Australia. Some states support a sector of not-for-profit ACE providers, other states use 'ACE' to describe a set of non-formal programs. ACE has a strong focus on engaging socially and economically marginalised groups through learning. It is at the nexus of education and community development. Funding for the sector comes from sources designed to fulfil both human capital and social inclusion agendas.

PROVIDING PATHWAYS

ACE is highly regarded for its ability to engage people in learning by providing them with pathways to further education or employment.

ACE provides an avenue through which disengaged **young people can re-engage in education**. The young people who enrol in ACE programs generally have no or few qualifications and, in many cases, have not completed school. They may be unemployed, under-employed or in low-paid or insecure jobs. Young people who take part in ACE programs are attracted by the quality of relationships between staff and students, flexibility in the mode of delivery and opportunities for personal autonomy.

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

ACE organisations attract adults from **culturally and linguistically diverse** (CALD) backgrounds for English language and other programs. ACE RTOs support a higher percentage of CALD students averaging just under 20% of total enrolments as opposed to 15.7% of VET students (NCVER 2013). ACE learning environments are attractive to CALD learners, with their specific focus on developing pathways to further study or employment.

ACE has the potential to be an important contributor to Closing the Gap between the educational outcomes of **Indigenous people** and those of the rest of the population. ACE RTOs enrol Indigenous learners at nearly twice the rate of other VET providers.

SUPPORTIVE AND FLEXIBLE

ACE supports **older learners** to extend working life through assisting in upgrading skills and supporting appropriate career transitions. ACE also assists seniors to maintain their health and wellbeing.

People with a disability enrol in ACE RTOs at two and a half times the rate of other providers of VET delivery. There are also high proportions of people with a disability in non-accredited ACE programs.

Many adults each year receive **language, literacy and numeracy** assistance in ACE settings. They choose these settings because they either do not need, or would struggle with, formal accredited courses.

ACE is widely recognised for its ability to engage jobseekers in foundation and industry skills program as a 'soft point of entry' to VET, often working with the jobseeker to address a broad range of barriers impacting on employability.

GOVERNMENT PRIORITY AREAS

There are opportunities for a renewed focus on pathways and vocational education and training.

- Support for Vulnerable Job Seekers – Youth Employment Strategy in the 2015–16 Budget
- 2015–16 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook focus on jobs and growth
- National Innovation and Science Agenda – Dec 2015
- Employment Outlook to November 2019

RECOMMENDATIONS

Adult Learning Australia urges the Commonwealth to:

- maintain and build on its existing oversight role of adult and community education by continuing to fund Adult Learning Australia and Adult Learners' Week on an annual and ongoing basis
- formalise the role played by ACE providers in attracting disengaged learners, including youth who have failed in mainstream schooling, in the next intergovernmental resourcing agreement for vocational education and training
- ensure that the next Commonwealth agreement with the States and Territories on skills and workforce development articulates a specific role for locally focussed not for profit ACE organisations
- support ACE sector innovation to encourage new programs that provide for increased provision in foundation skills that include digital literacy.

INVESTMENT

\$6M over 3 years

Promoting later life learning



Older people have the skills, knowledge and experience to boost productivity and improve community life. To fully realise this potential, they need to be encouraged to remain in the workforce longer and to be healthy, active and independent in retirement. Lifelong learning and supporting older Australians to build their digital literacy are key drivers in terms of achieving this potential.

OLDER AUSTRALIANS AND WORK

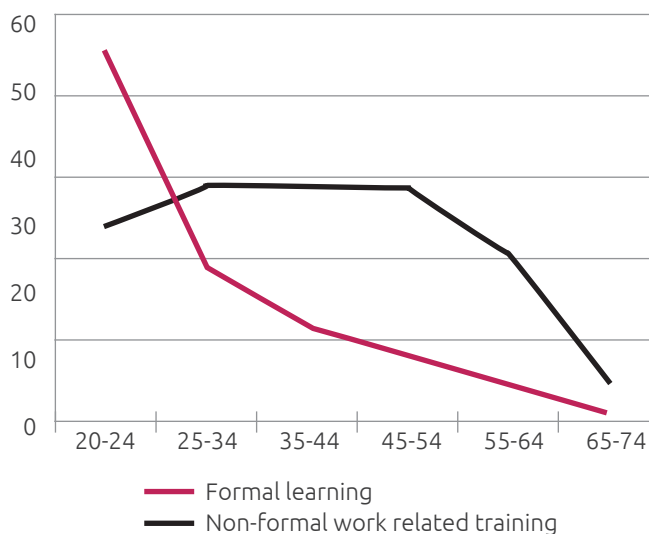
According to the ABS, there is a significant decline in labour force participation from 55 years of age, and by the age of 70 years few people remain in paid employment. Australia's workforce participation rate amongst older Australians is increasing (57%). However, it is still low compared to New Zealand (72%), Japan (66%) and the USA (62%)

Reasons for involuntary 'early exit' from the workforce include poor health and age discrimination. Also, the industries that are most suitable for older workers (e.g. clerical, administrative, managers and professionals) are also fields that require higher levels of literacy, numeracy and computer skills, and overall literacy, numeracy and computer skills levels are lower amongst older Australians.

Lifelong learning is critical to enabling senior Australians to remain adaptive and resilient; to better anticipate transitions and to self-manage health and wellbeing. Participation in learning reduces social isolation therefore leading to better health. There is some evidence that community-based learning can reduce the costs of care in aged care facilities. Learning activities provide 'bridging social capital', that is, social interaction with people from diverse cultures, religions and backgrounds, leading to more cohesive communities.

LEARNING AND TECHNOLOGY

Advances in technology are significant drivers of the need for continual learning. Seventy nine per cent of all Australians use the Internet but only 37% of people aged over 65 use the internet. To remain in or re-enter the modern workforce, Australians need to be able to access and use new technologies. In addition, the Internet is becoming an increasingly important tool for social inclusion.



Adapted from ABS 4234.0 - Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, Apr 2013.

Qualifications acquired later in life have as good, and in some cases, better, pay-off in terms of employment-to-population rates for older age groups. But opportunities for work-related learning and formal education reduce significantly beyond age 55, potentially leaving older workers vulnerable to early exit from the workplace.

Many older people are more interested in acquiring skills than qualifications. The ACE sector focusses on digital literacy and promoting the joy of learning. Its model of small, local, informal and accessible classes is ideally placed to meet these needs.

GOVERNMENT PRIORITY AREAS

- Treasury's 2015 Intergenerational Report focus on providing services online
- 2015 Budget Reforms aimed at boosting the workforce and building digital literacy of seniors

RECOMMENDATIONS

Adult Learning Australia urges the Commonwealth to:

- maintain and strengthen the Broadband for Seniors initiative by offering improved and targetted incentives for the program's community-based providers of digital literacy programs for seniors
- target a proportion of VET funding from current Commonwealth programs towards workers who are older than 45 and those with the lowest literacy.

INVESTMENT

\$10M over 3 years

Supporting literacy and family learning



Results from the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) and the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicate that many Australians have literacy skills that are at a level that makes them vulnerable to unemployment and social exclusion.

Today there is increased demand for high levels of literacy and numeracy. Technological advancement and globalisation have decreased the number of low skills jobs and increased the number of jobs that require high levels of information processing, digital and communication skills. Technological change means adults need to build new skills in order to remain employed, access services and productively engage in Australian social life.

Adults develop most of their literacy and numeracy skills in context, in order to get something done, either in the workplace, the home or the community. For adult literacy and numeracy programs to be successful, they should be practical, purposeful and customised to individual and community needs.

HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO LITERACY

Literacy and attitudes to learning are intergenerational. The skills of one generation strongly impact the next. It is difficult for adults with low literacy to support their children and grandchildren with literacy development. It is also difficult for adults with poor experiences of learning to model lifelong learning behaviours with their children and grandchildren.

Most learning occurs outside of the school system and most English language literacy is developed through 'home literacy practices'. The role of parents and extended families as mentors and 'first teachers' needs to be understood and supported.

Family literacy and learning approaches are important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families because texts and the social practices that support them might not feature in the social and cultural practices of the home and family. Further, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents may have had negative experiences of schooling and may feel alienated from the culture of the school.

PATHWAY OUT OF POVERTY

Literacy is an essential step on the pathway out of poverty. A concerted commitment is needed to build the literacy and numeracy levels of both adults and children in low socio-economic status (SES) communities.

Research into international and national family learning and literacy programs indicates that the most effective models have the following features.

- They involve partnerships between schools and community-based adult education providers.
- They offer opportunities for adults to develop their own skills as well as to support their children.
- They are culturally appropriate including the involvement of grandparents and other extended family carers.

Cuts to programs, such as to the Skills for Education and Employment program (SEE) and the Adult English Migrant Program (AMEP), along with the defunding of the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program will have devastating impacts on the ability of thousands of adult Australians to access literacy programs that give them the skills that they need to participate in the economy and society more broadly.

GOVERNMENT PRIORITY AREAS

- Commonwealth Government's Department of Education and Training focus on parent engagement, whole-of-family and whole-of-community approach to literacy and learning
- Flexible Literacy Learning for Remote Primary Schools

RECOMMENDATIONS

Adult Learning Australia urges the Commonwealth to:

- invest in a national family literacy strategy focussed on socially and economically marginalised Australian communities
- ensure that every school with a large population or proportion of Indigenous students has an intergenerational (family) literacy program as part of its core functions
- ensure adults with barriers to learning are given the opportunity to develop the literacy and numeracy skills they need to build their confidence and contribute to our diverse and changing society and economy
- reinstate a revised literacy program incorporating SEE, AMEP and WELL outcomes into a single access program specifically targeted at adult and community education sector provision.

INVESTMENT

\$18M over 3 years

Learning in regional and rural Australia



Australia is one of the most urbanised countries in the world, with over two-thirds of the population living in major cities. However, the population in regional Australia is growing and is predicted to continue to grow. This growth is inconsistent across the country, with population decline in many remote inland areas and rapid growth in satellite cities and coastal areas.

RURAL AND REGIONAL DISADVANTAGE

Eighteen of the 20 electorates in Australia with the lowest household incomes are outside the capital cities. Further, many regional and rural communities have particular features that can leave people stuck in a cycle of poverty and disadvantage. These features include reduced access to employment and health services, transport difficulties, inadequate local infrastructure, and vulnerability to natural hazards.

A significant proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in regional and rural Australia and, in many very remote communities, they make up the majority of the population. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples generally have poorer health, education and life expectancy than the rest of the population.

EDUCATION IN RURAL AND REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

School students in regional and rural Australia are on average almost two years behind their metropolitan peers in mathematical and reading literacy and almost a year and half behind their peers in scientific literacy.

Young people and adults outside of the major cities are less likely to finish high school or to attend university, but they are more likely to complete a vocational education and training (VET) qualification.

ACE IN RURAL AND REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

Of the 938 adult and community education centres registered with ALA, one half are in rural and regional Australia. These centres vary in size from large community colleges, which offer entry level VET and pre-accredited programs through to small volunteer-run community education programs.

Not-for-profit ACE organisations are significant contributors to the economies of regional and rural communities. They exist in towns whose populations couldn't justify the existence of a fully operational TAFE or university campus and where the education market is too small to attract private for profit operators. They supplement the work of TAFE and university in other communities.

ACE organisations in rural and regional communities tend to offer a broad range of programs and services alone or in partnership with other agencies. Along with lifelong learning, services offered include childcare, job services, emergency relief and support for community interest groups. An increasing number of ACE organisations operate social enterprises such as coffee shops, recycling services and second hand clothing stores.

GOVERNMENT PRIORITY AREAS

- Commonwealth Government's Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development – Building Stronger Regional Communities focus on ensuring regional students from disadvantaged backgrounds can access higher education

RECOMMENDATION

Adult Learning Australia urges the Commonwealth to:

- ensure that a community learning centre exists in every Australian community of more than 500 people more than 80 km from a university or TAFE campus, with the highest priority being for large and often remote Indigenous communities.

INVESTMENT

\$15M over 3 years

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals



In September 2015, 193 UN member organisations agreed to adopt the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that succeeded the Millennium Development Goals. Australia was an active contributor to the ideas and discussions and the Australian people, through the Australian Government, have made a commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved in Australia and globally by 2030.

Adult Learning Australia participated through regional and international forums and holds the belief that education is the key strategy that will build individual, community and societal capacity within Australia. Adult education can contribute to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030:

Goal 1: Adult education can provide the skills base to lift families out of economic hardship through jobs and improved career prospects.

Goal 2: Adult education can build knowledge and understanding of sustainable food production systems and resilient agriculture practices for Australia and to provide export to other countries.

Goal 3: Adult education can build the knowledge and focus of community members to reduce chronic disease, substance abuse, traffic accidents and build mental health and well-being for all Australians.

Goal 4: Adult education is a key part of the goal for lifelong learning and supports the achievement of learning across the Australian community including children and young people.

Goal 5: Adult education for women builds their capacity for confident leadership and opens up opportunities for rewarding work and family lives for women, girls and all Australians.

Goal 6: Adult education can support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water use and management in Australia.

Goal 7: Adult education can build the knowledge and skills for individuals, families and communities to reduce energy use and to implement renewable energy strategies in Australia.

Goal 8: Adult education will help to achieve full and

productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities in Australia.

Goal 9: Adult education can assist with building technological and science skills that will encourage innovation and research in Australia.

Goal 10: Adult education through the Australian aid budget provides the opportunity to reduce inequality by equipping individuals and communities with the skills and knowledge to build their in country capacity and economy.

Goal 11: Adult education is supported and promoted through the Learning Cities, Learning Towns and Learning Regions movement and will strengthen efforts to meet this goal in our growing Australian cities and towns.

Goal 12: Adult education will build community information and awareness of sustainable development in order that Australian lifestyles will be in harmony with nature.

Goal 13: Adult education will improve awareness and build human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, impact reduction and early warning in Australia.

Goal 14: Adult education can help prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution in Australia's seas and surrounding oceans.

Goal 15: Adult education can improve community awareness and encourage action that will focus on the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems in Australia.

Goal 16: Adult education can help change violent behaviour, provide access to information to protect fundamental freedoms and promote responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels in Australia.

Goal 17: Adult education can provide information and awareness raising to Australian citizens on the global imperative for change and encourage their actions to meet the sustainable development goals.

RECOMMENDATION

Adult Learning Australia urges the Commonwealth to:

- commission ALA to research the capacity of adult education in Australia to contribute to a 15 year plan to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and to provide recommendations to the Government on how adult education can be strategically developed and funded to make a significant contribution.

INVESTMENT

\$1.5M over 3 years

References

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