

Adult Learning Australia welcomes Business Council's endorsement of lifelong learning

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) welcomed the plan released by the Business Council of Australia (BCA) for a system of lifelong education in Australia but says the plan does not go far enough.

The report, Future Proof, Protecting Australians through Education and Skills, proposes a new tertiary model enabling the Australian workforce to remain agile and competitive in the face of technological changes.

ALA CEO Jenny Macaffer said the report fails to factor in a crucial sector of the education system, adult and community education (ACE) and its role in retraining and reskilling Australians.

'Many adult Australians are under-prepared for vocational and higher education and 44% of Australians have low-level literacy which is a significant barrier to engaging in vocational education and higher education.'

'Adult and community education centres are an important place for people who have fallen through the cracks. For adults who have low level literacy and lack confidence about returning to education, ACE offers a supportive environment and a pathway to upgrade skills and help adults take the next step to further training or study.'

Over 2500 adult and community organisations around Australia such as Neighbourhood Houses, Community Colleges and local community centres offer a mix of informal and formal courses tailored to the needs of their local communities.

According to National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), ACE organisations in Australia currently enrol more than 9% of total VET students, and are acknowledged for their expertise in providing accessible learning opportunities in local communities.

The most recent NCVER data also indicates that the ACE sector has a higher level of success in graduates taking up employment after training (12.7 %) than all other providers TAFE (10%), private providers (6.1%) or Universities (2.9%).

ALA supports an increased focus on VET as a key economic driver in a competitive global market and in the face of rapid technological change. But the ACE sector's significant role in lifelong learning and VET service provision has been largely overlooked in policy terms.

ACE provides an ideal model for empowering adults who need intensive support to navigate their way to tertiary education.

ALA agrees that we need more focus on early school leavers and young people disengaged from learning.

‘ACE has a strong reputation for its ability to engage people disenchanted with mainstream education. For young people who have dropped out of school the idea of returning to study at a TAFE college or university is overwhelming. ACE can offer the intensive learner centred approach needed to help young people regain confidence and enter the job market. A learner centred environment in which local support services work closely with ACE providers to support disengaged learners should be given close attention under this plan.’

ALA said that a government commitment to a policy of lifelong learning would provide the ideal policy framework for such moves.

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