

Media release

Lifelong learning and community education create a fairer Australia

Australia's modern economy and society have created new demands for high levels of literacy and numeracy. Technological advancement and globalisation have decreased the availability of low skills jobs and increased the number of jobs that require high levels of information processing, digital and communication skills.

In the lead up to the federal election, Adult Learning Australia and its partners are calling for a national lifelong learning policy that includes an adult literacy strategy, in order to create a fairer and more equitable Australia.

Australia has a significant problem with adult literacy and numeracy. Results from the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) indicate that many Australians have literacy skills that are at a level that makes them vulnerable to unemployment and social exclusion.

'Adults need new skills to remain employed, to access services and to participate effectively in the community,' said Jenny Macaffer, CEO Adult Learning Australia.

'Cuts to adult literacy programs, such as the closure of the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program, have had devastating impacts on the ability of thousands of adult Australians to access literacy programs that give them the skills they need to participate in the economy and society more broadly.'

Adult Learning Australia is also calling on the major parties to invest in adult and community education (ACE) as a crucial part of our post secondary education system. The ACE sector plays an important role in catering to the needs of people who do not complete traditional schooling – many of whom live in regional, rural or remote parts of Australia, areas of socio-economic disadvantage or are from Indigenous backgrounds.

A recent report by the OECD, *Getting Skills Right: Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems*, emphasised the importance of up-scaling and upgrading the adult learning system to ensure all Australians are ready for the future of work.

Community-based approaches to adult education build a bridge between adults with low skills and learning opportunities. They support unemployed young people who did not finish high school to re-engage with education. They provide new migrants with English language skills. They cater to older learners and volunteers who want to continue learning and stay active. They offer vital support to the 1 in 5 Australians whose literacy skills prevent them from completing everyday tasks. However, adult and community education is severely under-resourced, under valued and availability varies enormously from state to state.

'We need to make sure everyone has access to high quality learning opportunities throughout their lives to ensure they can adapt to changing social and economic circumstances, and to the ever-



evolving job market. Adult and community education plays a significant role in transforming lives and communities,' says Ms. Macaffer.

'A lifelong learning policy must be a national priority in order to unlock the true potential of all Australians.'

Partner statement and media release

Go to: <https://ala.asn.au/media-release-lifelong-learning-and-community-education-create-a-fairer-australia/>

ALA 2019 election campaign

#MakeItFair
#InvestInACE

Go to: <https://ala.asn.au/federal-election-2019/>

Facts and figures

- 3.3 million Australian adults leave school at Year 10 or earlier (ABS).
- Unemployment rates vary according to education level, ranging from 3.2% for people holding a bachelor degree (or higher) to 10.8% for people with Year 10 or less (Mitchell Institute).
- 60% of young people from low socio economic backgrounds don't complete high school (Mitchell Institute).
- 1 in 3 Australians struggles to find and keep work because of low literacy (PIAAC).
- More than 40% of Aboriginal adults have low literacy (Literacy for Life Foundation).
- 23% of low skilled Australians are engaged in adult education, compared to 48% of all adults (OECD).
- Unemployed adults are 19% less likely to participate in adult education than employed adults (OECD).
- In South Australia, adult and community education is expected to provide an economic benefit of up to 6.5 times the investment (SA Govt).

About ALA

Adult Learning Australia is the national peak body for adult and community education with over 1,000 members representing all states and territories of Australia.

Media contact

Visit www.ala.asn.au or call 03 9689 8623 for more information

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