

Adult education is the key to tackling some of Australia's major challenges

Digital transformation, an ageing population and growing inequality are urgent challenges in Australia that adult education can solve according to Adult Learning Australia, the national peak body for adult and community education.

'We are currently experiencing an unprecedented rate of change in our workplaces and in our lives. People need to work longer and they need to adapt to the impact of new technology. Adult education can play a major role in building a prosperous economy and a more inclusive society,' says Jenny Macaffer CEO of Adult Learning Australia.

Recent research by the OECD* indicates that low skilled adults are far less likely to seek out education and training than higher skilled adults. Older people, casual workers and the unemployed also lag behind.

'People can hesitate about the idea of returning to education because they think it means formal qualifications, tests and timetables. But there's no need to hesitate because there are so many non-threatening, engaging and fun ways to return to learning.'

'Continuous, flexible adult education, both formal and non-formal, is an integral part of lifelong learning. It gives people the opportunity to develop new skills, knowledge and attitudes, and helps them to better manage life transitions,' says Ms Macaffer.

Brian Weste was made redundant when Holden in South Australia closed its doors in 2017. Holden encouraged him to update his digital skills. And even though this wasn't something he had considered, he enrolled in a bootcamp at his local library.

'Once I started the course and my confidence began to improve, I realised how depressed I'd been. Doing the course really opened my eyes and it helped me get another job.'

For Sophie Bejok, a new arrival from Syria, swimming and safety education classes have helped her to adapt to life in Australia. Sophie has gone from strength to strength, graduating to an advanced class. Her goal is to become a lifeguard.

'I want to give back to the community here in Australia. I speak Arabic as well as English so I could really help other Arabic speaking people to understand water safety,' says Sophie.

'Sophie and Brian are great examples of why Adult Learners Week is such an important event. The Week gives us the opportunity to promote the many opportunities people have to engage in education here in Australia,' says Ms Macaffer.

'Adult education changes people's lives – whether it's building your digital literacy or engaging more in your community – it's all about encouraging people to get involved and opening up new opportunities for them,' says Ms Macaffer.'

Adult Learners' Week events and activities highlight the benefits of learning and the many adult learning options available for all Australians. It recognises achievements in adult learning and aims to encourage adults who are not currently engaged in community activities or learning to come and try something new.

To find out more about Adult Learners' Week or find an event, visit adultlearnersweek.org or check out Adult Learners Week on social media.

Adult Learners Week is coordinated by Adult Learning Australia, the national peak body for adult and community education. It is a UNESCO initiative supported in Australia by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business.

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**OECD (2019) Getting skills right: Future-ready adult learning systems*

