

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION
2021

ADULT LEARNING AUSTRALIA



ADULT LEARNING AUSTRALIA AT A GLANCE

CONTEXT

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) has been in operation for more than 60 years and is the largest national peak body for adult learning and community education in Australia.

ALA exists to provide leadership and professional development that advances quality services for all adult learners.

ALA is a not-for-profit entity with both organisational and individual members in all states and territories who reflect the diversity of adult learning and community education, including community learning centres, community colleges, neighbourhood houses, TAFEs and other adult education institutions.

VALUES

ALA is a well regarded and trusted long-term leader in the field of adult learning and community education.

Our work is underpinned by our core values:

- Integrity
- Access and equity
- Diversity
- Collaboration
- Responsiveness
- Evidence based approach.

PRINCIPLES

- We believe in the power and potential of adult learning and community education to transform lives and to affect social and economic change.
- We value and promote the benefits of accredited and non-accredited learning in all of its forms.
- We are active advocates in state, territory, national and international communities supporting adult learning and community education.
- We recognise the benefits of place-based learning within our geographically and culturally diverse society.

PURPOSE

ALA serves its members by:

- promoting the value and provision of quality adult learning and community education
- influencing policy and planning based on sound evidence
- strengthening the capacity and capability of providers.

VISION

Our vision is for equitable access to learning for all Australians to support social cohesion and economic prosperity.

ADULT COMMUNITY EDUCATION AT A GLANCE

FEATURES

Adult Community Education (ACE) has distinguishing features that have been maintained throughout its long history. ACE has a distinctive focus, set of values and learning practice, and is delivered by a distinctive type of organisation.

VALUES

The ACE sector focusses on the needs of the adults in the particular community in which it operates. ACE's starting point is providing learning opportunities that meet the needs of adults in local communities, and to build local capacity for community development.

ACE takes a strong advocacy role to ensure local learning needs are met. The ACE sector is an enabler of inclusive learning.

ACE has a welcoming, caring and non-judgmental culture to facilitate access by everybody and offers learning programs in friendly, community settings that cater for adults of varying abilities and backgrounds.

ACE seeks to be a gateway for all adults to return to learning at any stage along the learning time line no matter their age, gender, culture, ability or previous educational experience or attainment.

ACE starts where the learner is at, providing learning programs that build on their existing skills and knowledge and delivering

desired new knowledge and skills and other outcomes, including motivation to go on to bigger and better things.

A LEARNER-CENTRED APPROACH

ACE recognises that there is no 'traditional student', only a spectrum of learners with needs and preferences to be taken into account in learner-responsive pedagogical design.

ACE is about learning approaches that engage adults in the process and foster personal, social and intellectual development.

ACE uses adult learning principles that encourage learners to take ownership of the learning process through active participation; hands-on learning and real-time demonstration of skills; co-learning through shared tasks and appraising their experiences and changes in their own perceptions, goals, confidences and motivations for learning in the future.

ACE providers are community owned and managed, not for profit organisations that have adult education as a primary focus. ACE providers are community owned and managed, not for profit organisations that have adult education as a primary focus.

ACE providers are highly networked within their local communities; particularly with human services providers.

(Source: Adult Community Education Environmental Scan)

ADULT COMMUNITY EDUCATION

COVID-19 has further entrenched existing social inequities; particularly for adult Australians with low formal education attainment and low levels of language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

Automation of workplaces is now expected to accelerate at an unprecedented rate, displacing many workers and disproportionately impacting 'older and low-skilled workers' (KPMG).

Inequality deeply affects access to and participation in education. Recently unemployed Australians need **immediate support** to avoid long-term unemployment and to gain access to meaningful work, especially young Australians who have suffered the greatest job losses in recent times with major disruptions to their education and entering a 'soft' labour market.

The responsiveness of adult community education (ACE) providers to COVID-19 and to emerging needs in bushfire affected communities, has been swift and significant. State governments across Australia have recognised the importance of adult community education in re-engaging people in learning; re-skilling workers and the unemployed; driving workforce participation; connecting communities; improving health and wellbeing and alleviating social disadvantage and isolation.

GROWING RECOGNITION

In 2019, the Victorian Government recognised the role of adult community education in providing accessible and tailored adult education opportunities through a Ministerial Statement and a six year reform agenda of the sector:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/training/providers/learnlocal/Pages/min-statement-adult-education.aspx>

In 2020, the NSW Government released an ACE Policy Statement that recognised the capacity of the ACE sector to break the cycle of disadvantage, foster inclusion and develop productive, well-connected and sustainable communities that support a robust economy:

https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/forms_documents/ace/nsw_ace_policy_statement.pdf

The Tasmanian Minister for Education and Training launched an Adult Learning Strategy 2020, which included input from across government, and the community and business sectors to provide a policy framework supported by \$4.36 million in targeted investment:

https://www.skills.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/272377/Adult_Learning_Strategy_2020-23.pdf.

Other states and the Commonwealth also need to act.

RENEW THE NATIONAL DECLARATION

Commonwealth and state and territory ministers with responsibility for education endorsed the first national Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education in 1993. Updated statements were subsequently endorsed in 1997, 2002 and finally in 2008.

A renewed national Ministerial Declaration would recognise ACE as a significant contributor in both accredited VET and non-accredited education that fosters the skills people need to engage and participate fully in their communities and the economy.

ADULT COMMUNITY EDUCATION **ENABLES ALL AUSTRALIANS TO IMPROVE THEIR FUTURE.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recognise the role of ACE through a renewed Ministerial Declaration.
- Support and resource ACE providers to implement the objectives of the renewed Ministerial Declaration; particularly small providers in rural and regional areas.
- Facilitate complementary partnerships and collaborations amongst post-secondary education providers and adult educators.
- Recognise the relationship between informal, non-formal and formal learning through a whole of government lifelong learning policy.
- Research effective community-based programs that respond to vulnerable early school leavers who are at risk of remaining disengaged unless they can access targeted wraparound services that support them back into education, training or employment.
- Support ACE providers to reconnect disengaged learners due to COVID-19 or other natural disasters such as bushfires through targeted community-based education programs.
- Resource Adult Learning Australia to conduct regularly updates of its ACE environmental scan.
- Resource Adult Learning Australia to provide ongoing professional development opportunities that support the operations of ACE providers and build the capability of practitioners to develop and deliver vocationally oriented pathways for learners.
- Continue federal support for the ACE sector through Adult Learners Week.

LANGUAGE, LITERACY, NUMERACY AND DIGITAL

A significant percentage of Australian adults have low¹ literacy (43%), numeracy (54%) and digital skills; impacting around 'three million or one-fifth of working aged Australians' (OECD, 2017).

The data on adult literacy and numeracy tells us that there is a mismatch between the literacy, numeracy and digital skills people have and those 'required for broad participation in work, education and training, and society' (The Conversation, 2021).

According to the Productivity Commission (2014):

- Higher literacy and numeracy skills are associated with better labour market outcomes (both employment and wages).
- An increase in literacy and numeracy by one skill level is associated with an increased likelihood of employment of 2.4 and 4.3 percentage points for men and women, respectively.
- An increase in literacy and numeracy skills is associated with a similar increase in the probability of employment.
- Up to 40% of the association between education and employment is attributable to literacy and numeracy skills.

Australians with low literacy, numeracy and digital skills face social isolation and unemployment as jobs disappear in the face of technological change, globalisation and COVID-19.

Effective planning and implementation of the COVID-19 recovery process is crucial and must recognise the economic value of higher levels of adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills; particularly for socially and economically marginalised Australians.

All Australians, regardless of their employment status, must be supported to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills in order to achieve productivity gains and ensure they can live healthy, autonomous and full lives.

Adults need sufficient literacy to comprehend health information, understand government information and services, get job ready and maintain a connection during this time of social distancing.

Unfortunately, these issues are compounded by a shortage of skilled adult LLND educators and in a largely casualised workforce there is a general lack of enthusiasm to undertake qualifications, without the assurance of full-time employment.

There has been much commentary on the scale of the adult LLND problem in Australia; however, the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the urgency of finding comprehensive solutions.

The Australian Government's Foundation Skills for Your Future Program, spurred on by the Joyce Review, should form part of an integrated National Adult Literacy Strategy; and must include solutions for vulnerable and disadvantaged cohorts as well as increased focus and investment in a qualified and highly skilled practitioner workforce, as Australia currently does not have enough skilled practitioners to meet the growing needs in this area.

Australia is a signatory to the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes SDG target 4.6 to ensure that 'all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy (UN, 2016). Getting the domestic policy settings right for foundation and LLND skills education and training in Australia is key to meeting this commitment.

Longitudinal data that tracks student progress over time through non-accredited and accredited foundation and LLND skills programs is key to effectively measuring outcomes.

Literacy is an investment in the future. Addressing literacy inequality will ensure a fairer and more productive Australia post COVID-19.

ADULT COMMUNITY EDUCATION **PROVIDES A SAFETY NET FOR VULNERABLE AUSTRALIANS.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop and resource an evidence-based National Adult Literacy Strategy as part of a COVID-19 Roadmap to Recovery that establishes a framework for increasing the level of adult literacy by 20% at PIAAC 2031/32.
- Commission a comprehensive audit of the current provision of adult language, literacy, numeracy and digital (LLND) education programs around Australia (both accredited and non-accredited education programs).
- Identify and evaluate effective interventions in adult LLND education including community-based programs and family literacy programs that target Indigenous, CALD and other socially and economically marginalised Australian communities.
- Use the audit and research findings to develop adult community education programs that support vulnerable members of the community who have been hard hit by COVID-19 and/or natural disasters such as bushfires; particularly those in rural and regional areas, through locally based foundation skills programs.
- Resource Adult Learning Australia to deliver high quality professional development that addresses the national skills shortage of qualified adult LLND educators and builds the capacity of the workforce, including both professionals and volunteers.
- Resource the ACE sector to deliver workplace orientated digital skills gap training that meets the needs of modern workplaces for vulnerable workers and the unemployed.
- Define universal adult LLND skills, targets and approaches across our adult and juvenile corrections jurisdictions.

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