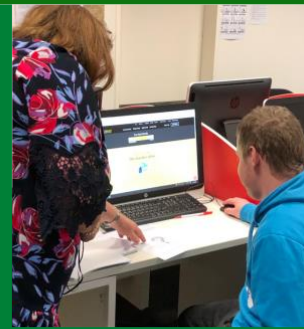




Adult
Learning
Australia

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2022



a better world is possible through
adult learning and community education

ADULT LEARNING AUSTRALIA

ACE NATIONAL PEAK BODY

CONTEXT

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) has been in operation for more than 62 years and is the largest national peak body for adult learning and community education in Australia.

ALA is a not-for-profit entity committed to ensuring that all Australians can access the benefits of lifelong and lifewide learning. ALA comprises organisational and individual members in all states and territories who reflect the diversity of ACE.

ALA exists to provide leadership and professional development that advances quality services for all adult learners 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 specific 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 to provide learning opportunities that meet the needs of adults in local communities, and to build local capacity for community development and resilience.

Ace organisations are often the only 'on the ground' providers of post-school education in local neighbourhoods and small rural locations. They exist in towns and communities with small populations that can't sustain a TAFE or university campus, or where the education market is too small to attract private for-profit operators. In larger communities, they supplement the work of a TAFE or university by offering non-accredited and accredited VET pathway programs and provide a range of VET courses to a range of adult learners.

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

ACE has a welcoming, caring and non-judgmental culture to facilitate access for everybody and provides 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 continuum no matter their age, gender, culture, ability or previous educational experience or attainment.

ACE starts where the learner is at, providing learning programs 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 opportunities.

ACE programs embrace the principles of best practice delivery of learning programs to 'difficult to reach cohorts', including:

- non-formal learning opportunities alongside formal learning
- pathways to further education, training, and employment, including TAFE and LL RTOS
- pathways to employment
- flexible and learner-focused andragogy
- innovative programs designed in response to local needs
- social connections to build better and stronger communities
- awareness of diversity and promotion of connected communities
- key training in adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills.

A LEARNER-CENTRED APPROACH

ACE recognises that there is no 'traditional student', only a spectrum of learners with needs and preferences to be considered a 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 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.

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

IMPACT OF COVID ON ACE PROVIDERS AND LEARNERS

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed ongoing fiscal and operational pressure on ACE. Extended lockdowns, border closures and the omicron variant have created challenges for vulnerable communities.

The sector has mobilised rapidly to support those in need using blended learning and innovative models to maintain connections with learners, but the sector is also under immense stress, with resourcing struggling to keep pace with demand, changing guidelines and staff experiencing burnout.

The ongoing state of 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). Increased reliance on the digital economy

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 emerging needs in disasters like flood and 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 and are currently consulting on the development of a NSW ACE strategy.

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 territories and the Commonwealth also need to recognise and support ACE as a legitimate education provider which offers learning opportunities for various equity groups including some of the most disadvantaged cohorts in our communities.

Parliamentary Inquiry into adult literacy

In 2021 The House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training called a parliamentary Inquiry into adult literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills in Australia. The outcome of the Inquiry is yet to be published

THE NATIONAL DECLARATION ON ADULT COMMUNITY EDUCATION

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 and community education is a valuable community asset that can offer a transformative base for adult learners, their families and wider communities

LANGUAGE, LITERACY, NUMERACY AND DIGITAL

A significant percentage of Australian adults have low¹ literacy (43%), numeracy (54%) and digital skills; impacting around 'threemillion 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 change or 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 with insufficient skills and vulnerable to social isolation, mental health issues and unemployment.

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

¹ 14.1% of the population have literacy levels at or below level 1 and another 30.1% have skills at level 2. For numeracy 21.8% are at or below level 1 and 32.5% are at level 2. 44.8% of the population are at level 1 for Problem solving in technology-rich environments. (Source: <http://multifangled.com.au>)

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 postCOVID-19.

Addressing the stigma and inequality associated with low levels of literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills will ensure a fairer and more productive Australia post COVID-19.

ADULT LEARNING AUSTRALIA

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recognise the role of ACE through a renewed Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education

We need to ensure 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. The ACE sector plays a significant role in this.

Government policy must recognise ACE as a crucial sector of the post-school education system, acknowledge its role in retraining and reskilling Australians, and in providing pathways to work and further learning and outline strategies and resources to support ACE organisations to implement the objectives; particularly small providers in rural and regional areas.

According to the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), in 2018, 481,200 students were enrolled in nationally recognised training at ACE providers. Fifty-five per cent of program enrolments at ACE providers in government-funded VET were students from SEIFA quintile 1 (the most disadvantaged) and SEIFA quintile 2, which is around 10% higher than all other providers.

ACE should be acknowledged for their expertise in providing accessible learning opportunities in their local communities and for their ability to collaborate with other post-secondary education providers and local support services and networks.

2. Commit to investing in ACE to support Australia's most vulnerable and hard to reach communities

We call on the Australian government to invest in adult and community education as a crucial part of our national adult learning system. What's needed is a national approach because the reality is that adult and community education offers the best chance for people in need. It is now more important than ever in the face of COVID-19, rapid technological change, an ageing population and higher demands for literacy in the workplace that all Australians have equitable access to adult and community education.

- *Build the capacity and capability of the ACE sector*

The sustainability of the ACE sector is critical to continuing support for adult learners, especially those from vulnerable and disadvantaged cohorts.

Support ACE providers, educators, and volunteers to prevent a permanent loss of capability in the ACE workforce working with some of the most vulnerable in our community.

Resource Adult Learning Australia to deliver ongoing professional development opportunities including an online learning portal that supports the operations of ACE providers and builds the capability of the workforce to develop and deliver vocationally oriented pathways for learners

- *COVID-19 and natural disasters*

Effective planning and implementation of the COVID-19 recovery process must recognise the economic value of higher levels of adult education; particularly for socially and economically marginalised Australians.

ACE providers should be supported to reconnect disengaged learners due to COVID-19 or other natural disasters such as floods and bushfires, particularly in rural and regional areas, through targeted community-based education programs and ensure access to appropriate resources to cope with the ongoing changes.

- *Equity Groups*

ACE organisations can help to reduce recidivism by supporting incarcerated adults to build literacy, numeracy digital and employability skills through non-accredited education programs. Non-accredited training in prisons could be provided by ACE organisations, working alongside TAFE in the provision of accredited training. Outside of prison, ACE organisations could offer a range of tailored pre-accredited programs for prisoners exiting the system or who are on parole or serving community corrections orders.

Vulnerable early school leavers are at risk of remaining disengaged unless they can access targeted wrap around services that support them back into education, training or employment.

Provide resources to research effective community-based best practice programs that respond to equity groups and reduce barriers to education and training to promote a culture of lifelong learning.

- *Provide resources for ACE research*

Resource Adult Learning Australia to conduct further research to make regular updates of its ACE environmental scan, identify gaps and issues and make recommendations to maximise the benefits of ACE.

3. Develop a National Lifelong Learning Policy and Plan

Australia is one of 193 countries that has signed onto the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which identifies 17 goals to achieve a better and more sustainable future.

The SDGs are a call to action for partners across the globe to unite to end poverty, improve health and education, reduce inequality and tackle climate change. SDG 4 addresses inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all, both in Australia and across the region through Australia's aid investments.

A lifelong learning policy must be a national priority in order to unlock the true potential of all Australians. Australia needs a long term approach to lifelong learning which recognises the relationship between informal, non-formal and formal learning using a whole of government approach.

4. Produce a National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

All Australians, regardless of their employment status, must be supported to develop their LLND skills in order to achieve productivity gains and to ensure they can live healthy, autonomous and full lives. They also need sufficient literacy to comprehend health information, understand government information and services, get job ready and maintain social connections; which is particularly important now through COVID-19.

As a key pillar of a National Lifelong Learning Policy and Plan develop and resource a whole of government national adult LLND strategy, in collaboration with the states and territories and key stakeholders that is targeted and resourced, and which prioritises social and economically marginalised communities that establishes a framework for increasing the level of adult literacy by 20% at PIAAC 2031/32. The strategy should:

- Provide a comprehensive audit of the current provision of adult literacy education programs around Australia (both accredited and non-accredited education programs) that identifies and evaluates effective interventions in adult literacy education including community based programs. Map and update a database of adult community education providers, to fill the gap in LLND provision in Australia
- Identify and evaluate effective interventions in adult LLND education including community-based programs and family literacy programs that target whole of community, Indigenous, CALD and other socially and economically marginalised Australian communities to break cycles of low formal education and literacy.
- Commit to addressing the national skills shortage of qualified adult LLND educators and strengthening the capacity of the workforce, both professionals and volunteers.
- Implement a comprehensive marketing strategy that de-stigmatises adult literacy and numeracy issues in the community and influence national attitudes and behaviours

5. Reinstate workplace training

It is now more important than ever for industry to reap the benefits of alliances within the education sector, with TAFE and with registered training organisations (RTOs) including ACE providers. Many ACE providers deliver both pre-accredited and accredited English language, literacy and numeracy programs in local communities and have strong experience with disadvantaged learners.

Improving workers' language, literacy and numeracy skills on the job benefits employees and businesses through improved flexibility and productivity. The closure of the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program (WELL) by the Australian Government in 2014 has created a vacuum for working Australians who lack the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills to function competently in their jobs.

The modern economy and society have created new demands for foundation and life skills, including literacy, numeracy and digital capability. Technological advancement and globalisation have decreased the availability of low skilled jobs and increased the number of jobs that require high levels of information processing, digital and communication skills. Educationally disadvantaged adults are at even higher risk of being left behind.

Develop a workplace model that is based on a set of agreed objectives; one that reflects the feedback from workers, industry, TAFE and Adult and Community Education (ACE), and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), on how to improve outcomes for stakeholders and to ensure that we have a flexible and sustainable model that helps us create a clever and creative society.

6. Release the Parliamentary Inquiry Report into Adult Literacy

The House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training has conducted an inquiry into adult literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills in Australia and is currently preparing its report. Adult Learning Australia submitted along with a number of other agencies and appeared at a hearing in 2021. The findings of the Inquiry must be released to contributors and the public to help inform future decisions and input into the development of a National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

7. Maintain Australian international commitments

- Participate in CONFINTEA VII

The seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII) will be hosted by Morocco in June 2022. The conference will examine effective adult learning and education policies within a lifelong learning perspective and within the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Conference participants will develop a new framework for action on adult learning and education that will replace the [Belém Framework for Action](#) (BFA), adopted at [CONFINTEA VI](#) in 2009.

As a signatory to the Belém Framework for Action, the Australian Government should send a delegation to CONFINTEA VII (and resource two representatives of Australian civil society organisations (one being Adult Learning Australia) to participate in the Australian delegation.

- Support the Asia-Pacific Region

In the light of the impact of COVID-19 Pandemic and the increasing impact of Climate Change the Australian Government increase our investment into Adult Learning and Education across the Asia-Pacific region to strengthen and energise Australia's neighbours capacity to recover and rebuild.

CONCLUSION

Our adult learning system is inequitable and unfair. Public policy is almost exclusively focussed on universities and TAFE, and on skilling the labour force. Australians most in need are deprived of opportunities to re-engage in education, entrenching disadvantage and making them vulnerable to unemployment and social isolation.

ALA is committed to achieving effective learning outcomes for all Australians and would welcome the opportunity to further collaborate with government and other sectors to ensure all adults, especially disadvantaged adult learners and marginalised groups, gain access to better social and economic prospects.

Adult learning and community education is an investment in the future. If we are to truly 'leave no one behind' and ensure opportunities are both inclusive and equitable for all ages and stages of life then the 2022-23 Federal budget must have a strong focus on lifelong learning to improve our level of employment, education and training, and enhance our social and civic life.

We look forward to your consideration of our pre-budget submission and hope to engage in more detailed discussions on our suggested measures.

REFERENCES

- Australian Coalition for Education & Development. (2019). Spotlight on Australia's Progress on the Education Sustainable Development Goal –SDG 4. Retrieved from https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/ACED_Spotlight_Report_Final_14May19-compressed.pdf
- ACEVic and Adult Learning Australia. (2021). Submission to Inquiry into Victoria's criminal justice system. Retrieved from: <https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Inquiry-into-Victorias-Criminal-Justice-System-and-ACE.pdf>
- Adult Learning Australia. (2019). Adult Community Education Australia Environmental Scan. Retrieved from: <https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Australian-ACE-Report-2020.pdf>
- Adult Learning Australia. (2021). Submission to The House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training Inquiry into adult literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills in Australia. Retrieved from: <https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ALA-submission-into-Parliamentary-Inquiry-into-Adult-Literacy-2021.pdf>
- Ferguson, C., Merga, M.K. & Winn, S. (2021). Most government information on COVID-19 is too hard for the average Australian to understand. The conversation. Retrieved from: https://the-conversation.com/most-government-information-on-covid-19-is-too-hard-for-the-average-australian-to-understand-153878?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=bylinetwitterbutton
- KPMG. (2020). Predictions after COVID 19. Retrieved from: <https://home.kpmg/au/en/home/insights/2020/05/predictions-after-covid-19/rise-of-gig-worker-in-robot-century.html>
- OECD. (2017). Policy insights from the Survey of Adult Skills. Retrieved from: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/building-skills-for-all-in-australia_9789264281110-en#page4
- Productivity Commission (PC). (2014). Literacy and numeracy skills and labour market outcomes in Australia. Retrieved from: <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/supporting/literacy-numeracy-skills>
- Productivity Commission (PC). (2020). Climbing the jobs ladder slower: Young people in a weak labour market. Retrieved from: <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/supporting/jobs-ladder>

Contact:

j.macaffer@ala.asn.au

03 96898623

<https://ala.asn.au/>