

Response to Australia's Draft National Statement of Commitment to Transform Education

Background

The United Nations Secretary-General is convening the Transforming Education Summit (TES) during the 77th UN General Assembly in New York, on 19 September 2022.

The Summit seeks to mobilise political ambition, action, solutions and solidarity to transform education: take stock of efforts to recover pandemic-related learning losses; reimagine education systems for the world of today and tomorrow, and revitalize national and global efforts to achieve [SDG-4](#).

The main expected outcomes of the Summit are:

- 1) National and international commitments to transform education;
- 2) Greater public engagement around and support for transforming education; and
- 3) Secretary General's Summary and Call to Action (summit outcome document), which will capture the knowledge/commitments generated by the Summit and its preparatory process, informing Summit follow-up including through the SDG4-Education 2030 High Level Steering Committee and the proposed intergovernmental Summit of the Future in 2023.

The [Department of Education](#) is seeking stakeholder views on Australia's National Statement of Commitment to Transform Education, as part of a national consultation on Australia's progress against the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4).

About ALA

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is the national not for profit peak body for adult and community education (ACE) with over 1,400 members representing all states and territories of Australia; the organisation has been operating for more than 62 years.

Membership includes adult and community learning centres; learn locals; community colleges; neighbourhood houses; TAFEs; Aboriginal health and community service agencies involved in education, skills and training; libraries and local governments, including UNESCO endorsed learning cities; and individual adult educators and academics.

ALA has worked alongside other not for profit networks, the Australian Council For International Development (ACFID) and the Australian Council of Education and Development (ACED), which are also making submissions to the Department of Education.

About ACE

The ACE sector plays a significant role in positively contributing to the socio-economic status of our communities and offers accessible lifelong learning opportunities that respond to the needs of adults within local communities. ACE provision includes formal vocational and education training (VET), adult basic education (foundation), as well as personal interest learning (enrichment).

ALA released its latest [Australian Adult Community Education Environmental scan](#) earlier this year. The scan profiles the sector in terms of its programs, features, provider types, participants, outcomes and supporting policy areas. It also explores the challenges facing the sector in terms of sustainability and provides a summary profile by state and territories.

Response to the draft National Statement of Commitment

ALA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft National Statement of Commitment to Transform Education. ALA provides the following points to inform the National Statement of Commitment:

1. Ensure an integrated government response

Responsibility and implementation of actions to realise SDG Goal 4: Access to quality education and lifelong learning fall across a number of Australian government departments. As SDG Goal 4 is an enabler for almost all other goals identified in the 2030 Agenda it requires an integrated government response.

2. Recognise adult learning and community education

The Statement must acknowledge adult learning and community education. Australia participated in the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII) held in Marrakech, Kingdom of Morocco in June this year.

The conference released the [Marrakech Framework for Action \(MFA\)](#) entitled 'Harnessing the transformational power of Adult Learning and Education' to realise lifelong learning, enhance governance and the quality of adult learning and education. As a member state of UNESCO, the Australian government has a responsibility to progress the Framework.

Furthermore, ALA endorses the [ICAE and Global Civil Society Manifesto 2022](#) Adult Learning and Education - because the future cannot wait, released at the CONFINTEA VII. We also call on the Australian government to renew the [Ministerial declaration on adult community education](#) to enable the continuity and longevity of ACE providers so that they will be well placed, not only to support Australians as part of lifelong learning but to help maximise the pandemic recovery process for Australia into the future.

3. Commit to developing and resourcing a national adult literacy strategy

SDG Goal 4.6 states that member states are to *ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.*

Last year ALA submitted to the House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training's Parliamentary Inquiry into Adult Literacy and was invited to present at an Inquiry hearing.

The Committee made 15 recommendations in their report '[Don't Take it As Read](#)' to improve adult language, literacy, numeracy and digital (LLND) skills, including implementing a national LLND strategy, building the capacity of the LLND workforce, funding the ACE sector to deliver sustainable non-accredited LLND programs, and expanding the roll out of the [Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies](#) (PIAAC).

4. Build the capacity of adult educators and the LLND workforce

Australia is suffering from a national skills shortage of educators that are qualified to support adults with low language, literacy numeracy, and digital (LLND) skills. The adult LLND workforce is largely casualised; therefore, adult educators need access to free high quality professional development that provides them with opportunities to learn in ways that apply to their work settings. They need access to free high quality professional development that provides them with opportunities to learn in ways that are applicable to their work settings.

Adult educators need networks, resources, and professional development that provide pathways into the field and give them access to initial training and ongoing professional development enabling them to provide the best experiences for the people in their programs.

5. Prioritise Lifelong learning for all

A lifelong learning policy must be a national priority and a centrepiece for all educational policies in order to unlock the true potential of all Australians.

Australia needs a long term approach to lifelong learning which recognises all learning and the relationship between informal, non-formal and formal learning using a whole of government approach, and which places the learner at the centre. Equitable access to learning requires a lifecycle perspective. Under-served groups must be a priority.

Equally important is the quality of opportunities – diverse learning methods, courses, and settings, particular community settings, that cater for multiple learning needs, and the appropriate resources to support them.

A lifelong learning policy should be developed and implemented as the centrepiece of all education policies in order to provide opportunities for Australians to adapt to the changing economic and social landscape. A lifelong learning policy would also acknowledge learning beyond employment and re-skilling and highlight ACE's role in social mobility, community building, and wellbeing.

In conclusion

To achieve the SDGs, we need a transparent and participatory policy making process that includes consultation with all stakeholders, including not for profits and civil society, to ensure that no one is left behind.

The Australian government should genuinely engage with the not-for-profit sector and civil society in the review and ongoing reporting on SDG4 Education and Lifelong Learning.

This is an important opportunity where Australia can show leadership and commit to an education sector that is flexible enough to meet everyone's needs and abilities and revitalize our efforts to achieve a healthy sustainable future.

Contact

Jenny Macaffer | Chief Executive Officer

Adult Learning Australia

45 Moreland St, FOOTSCRAY VIC 3011

P: (03) 9689 8623 | M: 0488030073

E: j.macaffer@ala.asn.au