



**The Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL)
submission to the Minister for Housing and Assistant Treasurer
regarding priorities for the 2022-23 Budget.**

The Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) promotes adult literacy and numeracy policy and practice:

- we provide leadership in Australian debate on adult literacy and numeracy practices and policy;
- we build understanding of adult literacy and numeracy issues;
- we advocate on behalf of equitable adult literacy and numeracy provision for all Australians;
- we build links between organisations and the participants and stakeholders in the adult literacy and numeracy field; and
- we work with other organisations on issues of mutual concern.

ACAL recommends the following Budget priority action be funded at a national level:

Develop an Adult Literacy and Numeracy policy at the level of the Prime Ministerial office that is interdepartmental (ie - not in DESE) because adult literacy and numeracy underpins activity in all portfolios.

Principles underpinning the policy

1. To be literate and numerate is a human right.
2. The Australian Government accepts that free and equitable access to lifelong and life-wide basic literacy and numeracy education is a social responsibility and provides provision accordingly.
3. People's reading and writing needs encompass more than those required at work. They may involve supporting their children's education, participating in community activities, managing financial affairs, dealing with bureaucracy, and undertaking leisure activities.
4. Ongoing literacy and numeracy development opportunities are required to ensure and increase each Australian's ability to respond to events such as pandemics, natural disasters, economic impacts, and increased online demands. As

day-to-day demands change and increase, this assistance must be at all proficiency levels, not only at the most basic.

5. There is a requirement for a full range of literacy learning practices to be available post- school as a second chance at further learning.

Recommended content of an adult literacy and numeracy policy

1. **Access to training opportunities to develop all aspects of adult literacy and numeracy.** This includes literacy and numeracy in various contexts for various purposes, encompassing personal, social and community literacy and numeracy. This provision should be in addition to the expansion of literacy and numeracy for work.

Currently, the Australian Government funds two types of adult literacy and numeracy programs: one oriented to help the unemployed access work and the other to upgrade literacy and numeracy work skills. These programs should continue and be expanded to include provision at lower levels than currently on offer.

People also need to improve their literacy and numeracy skills for other purposes, and these require additional funding and programs.

Research demonstrates that social inclusion programs supporting literacy learning for life not only builds confidence, informed citizenship and better health but also strengthens individual economic opportunities, and benefits families, and the whole community. This provision has a wider economic benefit beyond productivity.

2. **A range of modes is required to ensure all aspects of adult literacy and numeracy need are addressed.** These modes include face-to-face classroom as well as distance and blended learning modes to address equity of access issues for those who cannot attend face to face classes. At all times literacy and numeracy should be led by experienced and qualified teachers. Individual assistance is also required and should be available in both educational institutions and in the community.

Research demonstrates that the attainment of post school qualifications at a range of levels is crucial. Early school leavers and those with poor results need a second chance to attain the literacy and numeracy skills required for a range of pathways, not only competency-based VET and workplace training.

Nationally, adult literacy and numeracy education and second chance school exit equivalence are mainly situated within VET. Public VET provision has always played an instrumental role in supporting marginalized learners but in recent years this has meant a move to competency-based training (CBT) which is not appropriate for most of these learners. The types of training methodology should fit the purpose, context and needs of the learners. This does not necessarily mean a move from VET being an integral part of LN provision but a recognition that CBT is not appropriate for the adult literacy learner or the early school leaver re-engaging in education to undertake further learning.

3. **The continuation of the Reading-Writing Hotline** to direct inquirers to available support and follow-up. The Reading Writing Hotline is a valuable service linking potential learners to teachers and mapping the availability of provision across Australia and the gaps that exist. This service needs to be continued.

4. **The renewal of the adult literacy and numeracy workforce that would support research-informed, contemporary design and delivery of programs that are responsive to the literacy and numeracy demands experienced by adults.**
This could involve a review and re-writing of TAE80113 by adult literacy experts, as well as the re-introduction of a range of undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications that support teacher initial training and retraining. Due to the increasing costs of education, the re-establishment of practitioner scholarships overseen by literacy experts would be appropriate. In the past, adult literacy practitioners and those supervising volunteers were required to hold specific qualifications in adult literacy and numeracy. These included qualifications offered by registered training organisations (RTOs) and universities. The knowledge base that an adult literacy and numeracy

practitioner requires includes a strong foundation in adult education theories, and contemporary understandings of literacy and numeracy, adult teaching methodologies, the policy contexts of adult literacy and numeracy provision, multi-literacies that recognise and incorporate ongoing changes in everyday needs such as digital, visual, and media literacies, and online and distance education good practice. There also needs to be funded opportunities for action learning among practitioners. In the light of universities opting out of this training area, it is necessary for the TAE80113 to be reviewed and re-developed or for university provision to be stimulated.

5. **A funded resource centre that collates new research in the field as well as good practice materials, publishes them** and, in the case of materials, makes them available free or for sale. A competitive educational environment is not conducive to best practice in adult literacy and numeracy. Practitioners require incentives and opportunities to share resources and instructional strategies. Currently in Australia, this role largely sits with volunteer peak bodies which are not funded to meet the demand. To future-proof the Australian adult literacy and numeracy workforce, which is aging and not being renewed sufficiently due to casualisation and lack of opportunity to gain higher education qualifications, a funded resource centre is required. A dedicated adult literacy and numeracy resource centre would benefit the field providing advice to government, teachers and industry. In addition, a national database of Australian best practice free materials should also be available for learners and teachers, in the style of BBC Skillswise.

6. **Updated research into the Australian field of adult literacy and numeracy is required.** Gaps in research should be addressed by funded projects, including reviews of evidence-based good pedagogical practice in adult literacy and numeracy across contexts; longitudinal studies of learner progress and what works; ethnographies of adult literacy learning through established good practice across contexts and types of provision; action research involving practitioners; and, evaluations of program funding that includes more than specified literacy and numeracy learning, such as important 'soft outcomes' that underpin lifelong learning.