

Submission to: The Australian Government White Paper, Employment Taskforce, Treasury



November 2022



Images: ALA Quest magazine 2016 - 2022 editions

endorsed by



White Paper Objectives

Provide a roadmap for Australia to build a bigger, better-trained and more productive workforce – to boost incomes and living standards and create more opportunities for more Australians.

Build on the outcomes of the Jobs and Skills Summit and have an overarching focus on the objectives of full employment and productivity growth for the benefit of all Australians, along with women’s economic participation and equality.

Explore issues, frameworks, and policy approaches relevant to the future of Australia’s labour market over the medium and long term and will consider a diverse range of perspectives from across Australia, including from representatives of civil society, unions, employers and governments.

White paper scope:

The White Paper will analyse the dynamics in the labour market and outline policy frameworks and actions consistent with the Government’s objectives.

Australian Coalition for Education and Development

The Australian Coalition for Education and Development (ACED) was established in 2008 and brought together 15 civil society organisations in Australia working in education and development in Australia and overseas, with a particular focus on contributing to the then Education for All movement. The purposes of ACED are:

- to develop a common advocacy agenda amongst members for education as a human right and as a tool for international development
- to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially as related to education and lifelong learning, and equity and access, and in particular SDGs 4 and 5
- to affiliate with the Global Campaign for Education (GCE).

All ACED members are committed to increasing Australian aid to education and training and supporting the education of disadvantaged children and adults in Australia and around the world. ACED member organisations are non-government and not for profit. ACED has been an active participant in a range of national, regional, and global consultations with the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic Adult Education

(ASPBAE) as well as both the Global Partnership for Education and the Global Campaign for Education on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In previous statements to the Australian Government, ACED has called for Lifelong Learning (LLL) to be recognised as a central component of Sustainable Development Goal 4 and that the Australian Government is responsible for ensuring lifelong learning opportunities for all. ACED therefore calls on the government to:

- Formalise Lifelong learning as a coherent overarching framework within Australia's institution of education, to enhance integration and articulation of the various education and training sectors and so flexible accessible learning pathways for all Australians.
- Develop a National Lifelong Learning Policy that highlights the need for all Australians to learn and continue learning throughout life to face the challenges of the twenty-first century.
- Develop, implement, and monitor nationally consistent policies and guidelines utilising an intersectional approach that embeds equity, inclusiveness, and diversity in each and all sectors of education and training, including gender equity.
- Ensure that the formal policy clearly outlines economic and social goals; integrates efficiency and equity; and sets out roles and responsibilities for community, business, and all levels of government. It must emphasise the life-skills required and the inter-connected pathways between learning opportunities.
- Renew the Ministerial Declaration on Adult and Community Education, and outline strategies to support Adult and Community Education organisations as they continue to deliver opportunities to many Australians, including disadvantaged learners.

ACED supports the following commitments to the lifelong learning intentions of the [Australian submission](#) to the Transforming Education Summit held in New York in October this year:

- Commitment to the SDG 4 through continuous improvement to meet and exceed all targets. That said, we also note that in the section relating to reporting and measurement on SDG4, comment about intentions does not extend beyond secondary schooling and adult literacy, thus substantially limiting the scope.
- Commitment to working with all domestic stakeholders.
- Acknowledgment of the need to address teacher workforce challenges.
- Commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Continued engagement with UNESCO and member states. Similarly, we urge continuing engagement with UNESCO's International centre for Technical and

Vocational Education and Training (UNEVOC) and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong learning (UIL).

- A particular focus on closing the gap between the educational outcomes of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and the non-Indigenous population.

Responses to the white paper themes identified in the consultation Terms of Reference.

- 1. Full employment and increasing labour productivity growth and incomes, including the approach to achieving these objectives.**

Measuring objective achievement

- OECD PIAAC and Australia's recent commitment to the Marrakesh Framework for Action (MFA) should also be included with NAPLAN as mechanisms for the Australian government to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Measuring progress for adults in Australia to meet the SDG4 targets is difficult as there are no measures available that are relevant to adult participation and outcomes.

Impact of COVID Pandemic

- Once interrupted many learners, both young people and adults, have dropped away and may never return to their learning pathway. This will continue to have an impact on educational providers, skill shortages for the workforce and the ability of many adults to manage the changes meet the needs of future work and active citizenship.
- Across the ACED networks education for adults was severely diminished during the COVID lockdowns and has not recovered.
- Workplaces are struggling to maintain sufficient workforce with limited ability to provide workplace learning.
- Anecdotally ACED members estimate that the possible progress towards lifelong learning targets for adults has stalled or gone backwards over the past two years.

2. The future of work and labour market implications of structural change, with a focus on:

- In 2019 ACED called for greater attention to provide education for 21st century life skills such as critical analytical skills, problem solving, conflict resolution, communication, and community building.
- In the ACED Spotlight Report it was proposed that “these skills need to be incorporated into training for employment programs and that the latter need to be more realistic in relation to the actual jobs available in the market in each partner country” (ACED, 2019).
- ACED suggest that these learning and training programs “should be pitched to the large majority of youth and adults that are currently not enrolled in TVET programs” (ACED, 2019).

2.1 Building a sustainable care economy in the context of an ageing population and other drivers of demand for care services.

- ACE organisations in particular have an important role to play in Australian aged care workforce training as they often work with some of the most disadvantaged learners. They make up 13 per cent of the nation’s aged care government-funded vocational education and training (VET) aged care students, 2019 (NCVER 2020). Many ACE providers specialise in delivering the Certificate III Individual Support, which is the most popular training package for ACE provider students nationally.

2.2 The energy transition and tackling climate change to achieve net zero.

- As a signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals the Australian Government should develop a National Strategy for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (including funding commitments and targets)
- There is an urgency to mitigate the climate crises and eco-literacy is essential for leaders and adult educators to create eco-literate populations. Education must itself be a form of action and solution. We need everyone to become ecologically literate to build connections of respect, go beyond established patterns of production and consumption and forge new ways of living, support real-world problem solving, social innovation and societal transformation.

2.3 The transformation associated with digitalisation and emerging technologies.

- ACED would like to express our concern with the strong emphasis on digital learning as a solution for access to education. Digital transformation can exacerbate existing inequalities.
- Inequalities in access to online communication opportunities, including the Internet, prevented many adults from continuing to learn throughout the lockdowns and highlighted the lack of skills many adults had in using this technology.
- Not all communities have equal access to the internet or digital technologies. Some remote communities rely on the satellite phone and have limited access to the web; during natural disasters as with the floods and fires on the east coast, the internet was not accessible as lines and towers were impacted; and during COVID lockdown in Melbourne – the people in high-rise public housing blocks had difficulty accessing online education and services. Everyone should be able to get low cost, good internet and that is why we recommend that priority must be given to the development of not-for-profit alternatives that can be rolled out in places such as public housing estates and rural and remote communities where many people stand to benefit from more cost-effective options.
- Internet companies and governments need to set minimum quality standards to ensure that the internet works for everyone. Internet/NBN costs need to reflect that many people use mobile data when the NBN fails. More research must focus more on how people access the internet, not just on whether they access the internet or not and at what cost. Internet companies and governments must work together to create a product offering that provides low-cost options that do not force people to sacrifice quality or reliability.

2.4 Building more resilient supply chains in a changing geopolitical landscape.

- Ongoing staffing issues and uncertainty over availability to attend the workplace continue to create an unstable and uncertain environment. Institutions must build resilience into their education delivery plans. This might be in the form of planning for under-study or backup cover for teaching staff, staff making lesson plans well in advance and sharing them with colleagues so they can be used if the staff member is unexpectedly absent or automated processes to shift learners to alternative delivery modes at short notice.

2.5 The adaptability of our workforce to meet the needs of emerging industries and areas of traditional economic strength.

- ACED does support the skills agenda, but it is important to situate this not solely on narrow skills and competencies, but also to link this to broader and more cross-cutting reflection and analytical skills to help to ensure that all adults can engage with the debates around vaccination, etc.
- It has become apparent through the pandemic that a new set of core knowledge, skills and attitudes that need to be developed in all learners. This new set re-emphasizes skills for resilience, coping with change, confidence to adapt and to develop abilities to innovate.
- ACED recommends that the VET Sector should not continue to gravitate to a narrow focus on skills but be broadened to include broad based learning to facilitate informed and active citizens.
- Variety in educational delivery needs to be maintained to meet the different learning styles of all young people and adults. Relying on online delivery as a cheap alternative has been shown to exacerbate inequity of both access and learning outcomes.
- The literacy divide remains and has widened as young people and adults have lost opportunities to build their language, literacy, and numeracy skills. A national policy for LLN is required that addresses how Australian young people and adults will be prepared for 21st Century work and life.
- Access to workplace learning for adults needs to be strengthened as this has been a casualty of the pandemic and may take some time to recover with the diminishing workforce in Australia due to illness and lack of migration
- 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, change careers and maintain social connections, which is particularly important now.

What compounds adult LLND issues in Australia is the lack of sufficiently skilled practitioners/educators to meet growing needs. The adult LLND workforce is largely casualised or volunteer-based so there is a general lack of enthusiasm to undertake full qualifications without the assurance of full-time employment or to even consider it a variable career option.

- With an ageing workforce, it is more important than ever to create education and training pathways for people to enter the adult LLND profession and

enhance the profile and status of the profession, in order to replace retiring practitioners. It is also important to build the capability of the existing adult LLND workforce in light of an expanding range of teaching methods, new technologies, emerging literacies and a diverse range of delivery contexts.

Qualified adult LLND educators have been largely drawn from the school sector and may have no experience in teaching adults with LLND issues in a vocational or workplace context. Furthermore, embedding LLND within vocational qualifications has resulted in a strong need for expertise and specialist adult LLND training for VET teachers.

3. Job security, fair pay and conditions, including the role of workplace relations.

- As stated by ALA in their [submission](#) to the Transforming Education Summit consultation, 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.
- This has led to a persistent lack of workforce across industries, and this has direct impact on workplace learning and development. This has been exacerbated by the recognised ‘crisis’ in the VET sector, well overdue for reform.
- The MFA also details commitments to professionalise the education workforce and teacher training continues to be an issue for the ALE sector in Australia.

4. Pay equity, including the gender pay gap, equal opportunities for women and the benefits of a more inclusive workforce.

- Specific mention of women needs also to be included “*Australia’s development investments are strongly committed to learning for all, particularly for women, girls and children with disability within the Indo-Pacific region.*”

5. Labour force participation, labour supply and improving employment opportunities.

5.1 Reducing barriers and disincentives to work, including the role of childcare, social security settings and employment services.

- The impact of the pandemic on mental health is emerging as a major issue, including that connected with social isolation, loss of work and education/learning routines and income.

5.2 Improving labour market outcomes for those who face challenges in employment, including First Nations people, those

who live in rural and remote areas, younger and older Australians, people with disability, and those who may experience discrimination.

- The pandemic also highlighted the extra strain and burden on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable Australians in relation to education services.
- We note the heavy impact of the pandemic on young people and on women, with the latter also impacted by increased care burdens, home schooling of children, increased safety issues and loss of employment. Many Australians employed in casualised, temporary &/or insecure work including the gig economy fell through the emergency safety nets established by the Government/s. COVID-19 has highlighted the flaws in existing education and training systems, including links between welfare, work and training, apprenticeships and traineeships, and training pathways in the caring and feminised industries (many of which include frontline workers).

5.3 Skills, education and training, upskilling and reskilling, including in transitioning sectors and regions.

- Children, young people and disadvantaged groups are important but if we are committed to Lifelong Learning then all levels of government must include the whole spectrum of learners, including adults *and therefore all sectors of education.*
- The Australian Government's response to COVID-19 had an immediate impact on domestic education and training, international students, and educational aid through lock outs and lock downs over an extended period. This has led to learning losses for adults who were participating or intending to participate in the wide spectrum of learning opportunities such as ACE, VET, Higher Education, workplace and professional learning and non-formal learning opportunities.
- The pandemic also highlighted flaws in our existing education and training systems. These have the potential for valuable learning & correction.
- UNESCO has acknowledged that the "COVID-19 crisis has disrupted education provision all over the world, including adult learning and education (ALE). In August 2020, a United Nations Policy Brief, Education during COVID-19 and beyond, indicated that an estimated 40 per cent of the poorest countries failed to support learners at risk during the COVID-19 crisis.

" For many young people and adults, the cumulative impact of the closing down of schools, universities, TAFE colleges or adult and community learning centres that impacted on their on-going learning was compounded by the financial hardship caused by shutdowns and subsequent loss of jobs, income, and economic and social support. For women, the double care burden aggravated this even further.

- The OECD in March 2021 estimated the loss in on-the-job learning by adults due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "Participation in informal learning due to widespread shutdowns of economic activities is estimated to have decreased by 25%. In the case of non-formal learning the estimate corresponds to 18%. This represents a notable amount of lost learning, and one which may not be easily recovered."
- The continued "crisis mode" we've all become accustomed to has reduced our capacity for life broad learning, not only in the healthcare sector.
- Adaptations during the pandemic were introduced at pace and they may not be optimised for ongoing delivery.
- COVID-19 set the precedent for adaptable, flexible programs which focused on the essential learning graduates required. It should be clear that this was a threshold minimum standard.
- Students have a right to expect enhanced learning and teaching in the post-pandemic environment. That said, there are indications that students want to maintain the flexibility of choosing to study parts of their program virtually. Institutions face the challenge of delivering this alongside standard and fully online provision.
- Recommendations from the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training's Inquiry report into adult literacy and its importance, '*Don't take it as read*' must be implemented. The findings of the report highlighted that Adults with low LLND skills are more likely to engage in community education programs that build their skills and confidence. The Inquiry also highlighted the need to build the capability of the sector to deliver sustainable non-accredited LLND programs and acknowledged ALA's role in professional development.

6. The role of collaborative partnerships between governments, industry, unions, civil society groups and communities, including place-based approaches.

- The growing role of Learning Cities (such as Hume, Melton, and Wyndham) could be a mechanism to expand the remit of learning beyond the schools across the community.
- Business and industry need to take up their responsibilities for the training and continued learning of young people and adults in our society.
- Australia has many successful models where education provision has been developed with or by local communities. Engagement of local communities can bring more shoulders to the wheel.
- We propose that when referring to the education and training system reference include the extensive non-formal learning and education system that

complements this formal system - especially community-based organisations such as local neighborhood houses, U3A, community colleges, et al.

6.1.1 Other relevant topics and approaches

- Care needs to be made in focusing solely on the economic response to the crises. ACED recommends that the Australian government consider and make explicit how they will balance emerging needs and different priorities, particularly the needs of young people and adults.
- Consideration must be given to the need to build the confidence of young people and adult learners if future educational programs are to be successful.
- This more inclusive and equitable approach is even more relevant given that 140 countries, including Australia, attended the 7th International Conference on Adult Education ([CONFINTEA VII](#)), and ratified the [Marrakesh Framework for Action \(MFA\)](#). According to the [UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning](#), through the MFA, *"states will work to realize a right to lifelong learning, enhancing governance and quality of adult learning and education, backed by increased investment. They committed to placing inclusion at the heart of these endeavours to ensure that those most often left behind benefit from lifelong learning."*
- Furthermore, this is also consistent with the commitment to SDG 4 of the [Transforming Education Summit \(TES\)](#) to *"mobilize political ambition, action, solutions and solidarity to transform education: to take stock of efforts to recover pandemic-related learning losses; to reimagine education systems for the world of today and tomorrow; and to revitalize national and global efforts to achieve SDG-4" and in consideration of Australia's National Statement of Commitment.*
- Regional and remote students in Higher Education. From 2021, regional and remote students will be included in the distribution of access and equity funding, alongside low SES (socio-economic status) and Indigenous students.
- There is a lack of resources available for funding the adult learning and education sector particularly regarding pathway learning in Australia. The Victorian government's Adult Community and Further Education program funds Learn Locals and provides pre- accredited or non-accredited learning opportunities for many disadvantaged adult learners - this model could provide a starting point for a national approach.

Prepared by Members of the Australian Coalition of Education and Development

- Adult Learning Australia
- Women in Adult and Vocational Education
- RMIT University
- Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education
- PASCAL International Member Association

Contact: Dorothy Lucardie dorothy.lucardie@bigpond.com.au