



2018
YEAR OF
LIFELONG
LEARNING

NATIONAL
LIFELONG
LEARNING
SUMMIT

APRIL 2018

Learning changes lives



Adult
Learning
Australia



FROM IDEAL TO REAL

Towards a national lifelong learning policy for Australia

‘Every person, at every stage of their life should have lifelong learning opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to fulfil their aspirations and contribute to their societies.’

(UNESCO World Education Forum 2015)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The values inherent in lifelong learning have been widely embraced. However, lifelong learning is interpreted in a variety of ways.

For some, it is about encouraging people to learn throughout their lives, ... [emphasising] the intrinsic value of education and learning. For others, it is about adult participation in the formal education sector, or ... retraining in mature life for an alternative occupation. Other emphases include ... a focus on learners and flexibility of delivery, or promotion of a learning culture.

Karmel (2004)

It is a mark of success that many individuals, education institutions, businesses, community organisations and governments across a variety of sectors have contextualised and embedded lifelong learning values in their own unique ways. We must capitalise on these successes in order to develop an integrated system that provides opportunities for all Australians to adapt to the ever-changing economic and social landscape, and to continue to learn throughout their lives.

Adult Learning Australia is calling for an integrated lifelong learning policy that:

- provides a national vision of leadership that addresses this policy gap by taking a strategic, long-term, whole-of-government approach
- creates a centre piece for all education policies
- is comprehensive, inclusive and provides a guiding principle for all levels of government, and can be translated across sectors
- addresses learning in a range of spheres, and in all of its forms.

DEFINING LIFELONG LEARNING

Lifelong learning recognises that learning occurs continuously throughout life. It helps people deal with new challenges and respond to ever-changing cultural, social and economic circumstances by developing their skills, knowledge and capacity to think critically.

Lifelong learning is not limited to formal education and training but occurs in a range of contexts (home, community, workplaces and institutions) and settings (formal, non-formal and informal).

ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION

Adult learning and education is a core component of lifelong learning. The UNESCO Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (2016) highlighted its contribution across many sectors of society, and described it as:

- an indispensable component of education, and a fundamental and enabling human right
- an integral dimension of a balanced life course
- part of a holistic, inter-sectoral sustainable development agenda with the potential to offer multiple benefits and lasting impact.

In Australia, not for profit adult and community education is a discrete fourth sector of education that plays a vital role in lifelong learning by providing accessible learning opportunities for adults in local communities that meet their needs and support place-based community development.



WHY A LIFELONG LEARNING POLICY?

Australia does not have a formal lifelong learning policy. A lifelong learning policy would acknowledge learning beyond employment and re-skilling, and highlight its role in social mobility, community building and health and wellbeing.

A formal lifelong learning policy would support Australians to:

- reach their potential
- better anticipate transitions
- self-manage their health and wellbeing.

Resilient and inclusive communities are nourished by a culture of lifelong learning, which enables them to live peacefully in a diverse, multicultural society; enjoy the full benefits of citizenship and solve complex social and economic problems.

Overview

The 'links between education and economic growth, income distribution and poverty reduction' are well established' (UNESCO 2014). In many countries across the globe, lifelong learning is a policy priority for education and training because of its importance to national economic growth and human and social development.

Research shows that citizens who regularly acquire new knowledge, skills and attitudes in a wide range of contexts throughout their lives are better equipped to adapt to changes in their environment.

Australia does not have a formal national policy on lifelong learning. There has been complacency in this area from successive governments, a 'she'll be right' attitude that is extremely risky given the global challenges we are now facing.

To coincide with the 2018 Year of Lifelong Learning, Adult Learning Australia is calling on the Australian Government to adopt a formal policy on lifelong learning that understands it as 'the continuation of conscious learning throughout the life-span'.

Policy landscape

In 1994, the first global conference on lifelong learning was held in Rome. The European Commission produced a White Paper that emphasised an economic rationale for supporting lifelong learning. It highlighted education and training as key ways to transform society. Back then lifelong learning was equated with formal and institutional adult education. In 1996, OECD Education Ministers embraced Lifelong Learning for All as a policy framework and declared the value of:

- 1 All learning – formal, non-formal and informal
- 2 Foundation skills that enable people to find work or continue learning
- 3 Equitable access to quality learning opportunities throughout the lifecycle – with pre-school children and adults as priorities
- 4 Resources that support lifelong learning at appropriate times throughout life
- 5 Lifelong learning partnerships that also extend across government ministries.

In Australia the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) – a statutory body that provided independent advice to the then Minister for Employment, Education and Training – responded by acknowledging in policy terms a broader view of lifelong learning that incorporated ‘economic as well as social and cultural considerations’ (ALA 2000).

More recently, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs, joined 193 leaders and ministers from across the globe at the United Nations to endorse the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be met by 2030. Education and lifelong learning are central to this agenda, with SDG 4 aiming for equitable, inclusive and quality education and lifelong learning for all.

However, for some time now there has been a move from supply- to demand-side funding arrangements that are orientated almost entirely towards work-based skills. Government support for education is largely aimed at getting people back into paid work. This emphasis on education for current employment scenarios is made at the expense of building authentic and innovative lifelong learning communities that are capable of developing the type of engaged, flexible and adaptable learners that are needed for increased productivity and for Australia to thrive.

In 2017, the Business Council of Australia (BCA) report Future-proof: Protecting Australians through education and skills (2017) proposed a Lifelong Skills Account for all Australians to fund training throughout their lives and build qualifications for ‘the new world of work’. It also sought to highlight the role that business should play in creating a culture of lifelong learning.

But according to UNESCO, an authentic approach to lifelong learning requires:

[A] paradigm shift away from the ideas of teaching and training towards those of learning, from knowledge-conveying instruction to learning for personal development and from the acquisition of special skills to broader discovery and the releasing and harnessing of creative potential. This shift is needed at all levels of education and types of provision, whether formal, non-formal or informal.

(UNESCO Education Strategy 2014–2021)

Global and workforce challenges

Structural changes in the global economy have resulted in a growing demand for a highly skilled and adaptable workforce. Life changing technology is emerging at such a rate that it has become impossible to predict what the roles, skills and jobs of the tomorrow will look like. Governments, communities, businesses, individuals and society, more broadly, need to be prepared to take advantage of the opportunities that will arise in this complex and competitive environment. They must also take responsibility for ensuring that everyone has access to these opportunities, and to ensure fairness and equity.

A significant percentage of existing jobs across the globe are at risk of automation; particularly jobs that involve routine or repetitive tasks. According to PwC, prioritised employability skills relate to adaptability, innovation, design, problem solving, critical analysis, empathy and creativity. This is not a vision of the future. Automation is happening now in workplaces across Australia and governments need to act to address the impact; particularly in terms of the resulting unemployment.

Given that the landscape of work in the future is largely unknown and with new media, science and technology moving rapidly, a broader more holistic approach to learning is required. A policy approach that is solely focussed on the skills required by industry fails to recognise the importance of learning in helping adults to adapt to and manage changing roles at work, in families and in their communities.

Fair, equitable and inclusive learning

Fair, equitable and inclusive learning aims to encourage marginalised groups to participate in learning in a way that goes ‘beyond employment’ and towards enhancing ‘other capabilities’ that better meet their needs (Vargas 2017).

Research shows us that people who disengage from education are disproportionately disadvantaged. Currently 1 in 8 Australians students do not finish Year 12, and completion rates are worse for low socioeconomic status (SES) students in low SES communities. This places them at higher risk of being disengaged from full-time work, study or training for most of their lives.

In rural and regional areas, students have less access than their urban counterparts to education services. They are less likely to complete Year 12; less likely to go to university and more likely to drop out if they enrol.

There has been some improvement in terms of the Closing the Gap education targets for Indigenous people but the data is not disaggregated, which can effectively mask issues particularly in regional and remote locations.

Health, education and employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians continue to be worse than for non-Indigenous people. There is a close association between low levels of education and incarceration for Indigenous Australians. In fact, there are serious gaps between Indigenous Australians and the rest of the population in terms of incarceration, death by suicide, substance abuse and mental health.

High levels of psychological distress are associated with lower income, lower educational attainment and unemployment. Each year, 1 in 5 (20%) of Australians aged between 16 and 85 will experience a mental health condition. The economic cost of mental health conditions to Australia is significant, with estimates ranging up to \$40 billion a year.

Australians with a disability are more likely to be unemployed compared to those without a disability (10.0% compared with 5.3%). 36% of people with a disability aged 18–64 years have completed Year 12, compared with 60% for those without a disability. 45% of people with a disability in Australia are living either near or below the poverty line. This is more than double the OECD average of 22%.

Older Australians continue to miss out on the benefits of the digital economy and Internet tools that could help them manage their lives better and support them to overcome some of the physical, psychological and social barriers that accompany ageing. While the digital divide is narrowing in Australia, divisions persist for those who also experience other forms of social inequity, including vulnerable older people, who are poor, unemployed, have low educational attainment, have a disability, are Indigenous, were born in non-English speaking countries and/or live in rural and regional areas.

A formal lifelong learning policy has the potential for strong social returns in productivity, community participation, political awareness and active citizenry.

Discussion

Adult Learning Australia wants to initiate a discussion that will support the federal government to articulate an integrated and comprehensive lifelong policy developed in partnership with state and territory governments, industry, NGOs and unions. The policy should:

1. build and strengthen pathways to education, training and/or work
2. support disadvantaged cohorts to participate in learning throughout the lifecycle
3. build literacy in new technologies
4. develop, foster and sustain lifelong learning communities
5. integrate learning in the workplace
6. provide mechanisms for recognising informal learning
7. build collaborate networks through learning
8. create and enhance links with international partners
9. foster social cohesion and improve quality of life
10. strengthen links between learning and health and wellbeing
11. enhance Australia’s contribution towards sustainability and SDGs
12. show leadership on lifelong learning in all of its forms.



What's next?

Our summit, From ideal to real: Towards a national lifelong learning policy for Australia, is a forum for collaboration with key stakeholders in adult education, community, government and business in order to discuss and reach some consensus on what a formal lifelong learning policy might look like.

After the Summit, a survey will be distributed to participants and across sectors to gather feedback, and we will also be asking people to add their voice to our call for a national policy on lifelong learning.

Contributions from the Summit will be collated into a report that will be presented to the Commonwealth Government.

In November, Adult Learning Australia will also publish a special edition on lifelong learning in our academic publication Australian Journal on Adult Learning (AJAL). AJAL promotes critical thinking and research in the field of adult learning as well as the theory, research and practice of adult and community education.



Adult Learning Australia

Adult Learning Australia, is the longest running national not for profit peak body for adult and community education. Our mission is for lifelong and lifewide learning for all Australians.

Our members come from all state and territories of Australia and reflect the diversity of adult and community education. Membership comprises Neighbourhood Houses, Community Colleges, Community Learning Centres, Aboriginal community controlled education providers, Men's Sheds, Workers Education Associations, community based providers of adult learning in urban, rural, regional and remote areas, academics and ACE practitioners.

Our policy platform: <https://ala.asn.au/policy-representation/policy/>

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