



NSW Adult Literacy & Numeracy Council

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17 July, 2020

To whom it may concern,

Re: Submission to Productivity Commission's National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review on their Interim Report

The NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council is a membership-based peak-body of adult literacy and numeracy practitioners, teacher educators, program and curriculum managers and academic researchers in NSW. Our field is what the VET policy currently calls Foundation Skills, and which the Joyce Review calls LLND. We thank the opportunity to make submission on the Interim Report from the Commission's Review of the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development. We note that we did make a submission when the Review first commenced, and we also made a submission into the Joyce review (attached).

Our response to the Commission's recommendations and information requests are limited to only those most relevant to our field. One additional comment that we would like to make concerns the observation made in the Commission's Interim Report, but not addressed in the Recommendations, about the 'persistent concern' (Interim report, p. 13) about teacher quality and minimum qualification level (Certificate 4 TAE). The area of Foundation Skills or LLND serves some of the most vulnerable student groups and requires highly professional and well-qualified practitioners to address these students' needs. Although the need to integrate and embed LLN development for all learners in all VET courses has been recognised, the strategy of simply including an additional unit in the Certificate 4 TAE was misguided and is inadequate. This has been shown to be a retrograde step for the VET sector in general, as was argued by this Council¹ and many others at the time. Employment of specialist LLN teachers by VET providers not only assists those learners who struggle with the LLND demands of their course, but it can improve VET teachers' pedagogies, for example through modelling the design of learner-friendly student notes, assessment tasks and being attentive to learner needs.²

There is an urgent need for workforce renewal and growth, and incentives for people who want to work in the LLND area in VET to gain the appropriate postgraduate qualification. It is also important that the quality assurance process assures that every RTO offering VET qualifications up to

¹ NSW Adult Literacy & Numeracy Council 2018, 'Response to PwC's case for change in the TAE training package', <http://www.nswalnc.org.au/doc/Submission%20to%20PWC%20Skills%20for%20Australia_TAE_030418.pdf>.

² Ivanic, R., Edwards, R., Barton, D., Martin-Jones, M., Fowler, Z., Hughes, B., ... & Smith, J. (2009). *Improving learning in college: Rethinking literacies across the curriculum*. Routledge.
Black, S., & Yasukawa, K. (2013). Disturbing the pedagogical status quo: LLN and vocational teachers working together. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 8(1), 44-59.

Certificate 4 level has the capability within their organisation to address the LLND needs of students enrolled in VET courses; this is essential if the Australian VET sector is to mitigate against the risk of another VET fee-help like scandal. Related to this is the need for a regular and systematic collection of teacher qualification levels nationally.

We hope the issue raised above, and the feedback attached will be duly considered by the Commission in their final deliberations.

Yours sincerely

Dr Keiko Yasukawa, President

Interim findings, reform directions and information requests – *response from the NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council*

Progress against the NASWD

INFORMATION REQUEST — ROLE OF COMPETITION IN THE VET MARKET

- *What role should competition play in meeting users' needs, including the quantity, type and quality, and regional accessibility of VET services?*
- *How should the efficiency of the VET market be measured?*
- *What is the appropriate (and exclusive) role of public providers, and why?*
- *Are additional consumer protection arrangements required to support a well-functioning VET market? What are the costs and benefits of different models of consumer protection established by governments, including ombudsmans' offices?*

While competition may be a key principle in the current VET policy, it is important to note that courses designed to help adults improve their English language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills are not, and should not be subjected to the market-logic because as acknowledged by others in their December 2019 submissions (for example, Adult learning Australia³, Business Council of Australia⁴, The Tasmanian Government⁵), as well as the Joyce Review, LLND is an enabler for effective learning in VET courses and in the workplace. In order to succeed in VET and in the workplace, adults must have the LLND skills to negotiate the administrative and financial demands of being a student, the academic demands of learning the content of the courses, the assessment demands in the course, and the wide range of communication and numeracy demands in the workplace. When measuring 'efficiency' of the VET market, the effectiveness of necessary learner support that ensures not just timely completions, but quality completions must be considered.

³ https://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/248703/sub012-skills-workforce-agreement.pdf

⁴ https://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/248767/sub016-skills-workforce-agreement.pdf

⁵ https://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/248813/sub032-skills-workforce-agreement.pdf

One of the features of public VET providers (in particular, TAFE) that must be acknowledged is the pathway and the range of foundation courses and support services that are provided as an integral part of their social compact, for example:

Outreach to Foundation Skills to Certificate 1, 2, 3 courses to Certificate 4 & Diploma courses, supported by LLND learner support throughout as needed, as well as other student support services – counselling, disabilities consultants, Aboriginal student support, library, canteen

The above enables widening the participating in VET that many smaller or private providers can/ do not invest in. This means TAFE providers and other providers are not on a ‘level playing field’ in a competitive VET market.

Consumer protection in VET must include the provision of adequate and wrap-around support so that no student is left unsupported:

The start of a student’s transition into the institution commences with the provision of advice, guidance and support provided to the student during the enrolment process and commencement of their study program. Chittick (2017) observes that inadequate levels of support, together with uncertainty around the levels of academic preparedness during the enrolment and admission process, have a direct impact on feelings of competence and ability. The outcome of which is an almost immediate decline in engagement as students in this position are deterred from their learning.⁶

Whilst productive cooperation between providers may produce innovative approaches to provision in regional and sparsely populated areas, the promotion of a competitive training market serves to stifle such innovation. This is particularly so in the difficult area of LLND provision, with its need for flexibility and diversity.

INTERIM RECOMMENDATION 2.1 — INFORMATION ON VET SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

Australian, State and Territory governments should develop improved performance measures to provide a more complete picture of system performance. Any future sector-wide performance framework should better measure:

- total VET activity
- the contribution of VET to developing the foundation skills of Australians
- skills obtained through the VET system when students do not complete a course
- students’ longer-term labour market outcomes.

⁶ Van der Bergh, C. & Secombe, K. (2020). Bridging the gap: an investigation into developing strategies to improve student engagement, retention and learning outcomes. *AVETRA April 2020*
https://www.avetra.org.au/data/Research_today_April_2020.pdf

On the contribution of VET to developing the foundation skills of Australians, we can say the following. VET has a critical role in developing the foundation skills of Australians. It has long been widely accepted that foundation skills are very often best developed in real-life contexts, with the VET context offering a particularly rich literacy and numeracy context. Moreover, many VET students enter their training with LLND skills that are not adequate or appropriate to that training. Therefore, VET offers a unique opportunity to contribute to the development of the foundation skills of Australians. However, this requires planning and investment. In the past, well-resourced and supported specialist LN teachers formed an integral part of many TAFE systems, but as funding has been progressively withdrawn, this provision has become in many places tokenistic. For most private VET providers, it is a financially insurmountable issue.

As well as contributing to the LLND skills development for successful VET course outcomes, LLND programs delivered through the VET system can lead to important social outcomes including employment, health, participation in the community and trust in others as indicated in the OECD commissioned paper on the links between low literacy and numeracy and social outcomes⁷. These are not only benefits for individuals but are public benefits that mean fewer people on welfare dependencies, greater social cohesion and a larger active citizenry. In the context where there are so many sources of information of variable authenticity and reliability, it is critical, especially in relation to health, scientific, financial and legal information that all adults have the LLND skills to be *media literate* to be able to critically appraise both the information they access and its source. There is a crucial role for public, lifelong and lifewide education in helping adults to know who they can trust and what they can do to check information from sources they are unsure of. The opportunities for adults to develop the LLND skills to more confidently seek information, assist children with their learning, volunteering in the community and exercising their legal rights (e.g. against domestic violence, discrimination) are important for individuals, their families and communities in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

While it is important to know that efforts in VET in this area are well spent, measuring the effectiveness is, of course, non-trivial. However, longitudinal study suggests the benefits from LLND learning may take up to 10 years to surface in employment outcomes or further study⁸. Moreover, in a volatile labour market some adults may need to undergo substantial retraining at some stage in their life; this may require developing new LLND skills or refreshing what they have learned but have not been using in practice.

As well as VET's contribution to foundation skills development, one should also consider the contributions foundation skills provision makes to VET and industry. Without the learner support provided in TAFE providers, many VET learners will not achieve outcomes. This is

⁷ Grotluschen, A., Mallows, D., Reder, S. & Sabatini, J. (2016). *Adults with low proficiency in literacy or numeracy*. OECD. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jm0v44bnmxx-en>

⁸ Reder, S. (2019). Developmental trajectories of adult education students: Implications for policy, research, and practice. In D. Perin (Ed.), *Wiley handbook of adult literacy* (pp. 429-450). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell.

acknowledged by industry as evidenced by submissions from the Australian Childcare Alliance⁹ and Hospitality NT¹⁰.

INFORMATION REQUEST – CAREER GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS

What changes could be made to ensure school students have appropriate career information and advice?

Based on the experiences of teachers working in the foundation skills area, it seems evident that there is a need to for effective alternatives for 15/16 year olds who now must stay at school until year 12 but who have disengaged from learning as it is not meeting their needs. We understand that often calls to the Reading Writing Hotline by teachers and community workers on behalf of groups of young adults disengaged from high school with no appropriate age appropriate literacy learning materials and who acknowledge that their low literacy is one of the main barriers to them participating in VET. Research suggests that:

More resourcing of careers advice in schools, particularly access to individualised advice; [and]

Exercise caution in out-sourcing employment services and apprenticeship intermediary services to for-profit companies, or at least institute additional monitoring activities.¹¹

A new agreement to guide policy

INTERIM RECOMMENDATION 2.2 — A NEW PRINCIPLES-BASED AGREEMENT

Australian, State and Territory governments should negotiate a new, principles-based intergovernmental agreement. Such an agreement should commit governments to developing an efficient, competitive market driven by the informed choices of students and employers. The agreement's principles should include:

- centring policy on the consumer, including information provision for informed choice
- equitable access
- recognition of fiscal sustainability and the stability of funding
- transparency about where funding is allocated, including detailed information on course subsidies, costs and the size and nature of funding to public providers
- efficient pricing and delivery
- designing incentives to increase the likelihood of eliciting training

⁹ https://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/248833/sub046-skills-workforce-agreement.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/248798/sub023-skills-workforce-agreement.pdf

¹¹ Smith, E., & Foley, A. (2020). Young futures: Education, training and employment decision-making in nonmetropolitan areas. *AVETRA April 2020* https://www.avetra.org.au/data/Research_today_April_2020.pdf

INTERIM RECOMMENDATION 2.2 — A NEW PRINCIPLES-BASED AGREEMENT

- competitive neutrality between public and private provision
- neutral, but not equivalent, treatment of the VET and higher education sectors.

Regarding equitable access and transparency about funding allocation, it is important that all levels of courses are always available. There has been a shrinkage of lower level courses, which means that learners who are not ready for the higher-level courses are denied access or set up to fail. It appears that learners in the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) programs are often inappropriately placed in Certificate III courses even when they are assessed to be ready for a Certificate I course, simply so that they can gain a subsidy. This is not a good use of public money, creates unnecessary stress for the learner and their teacher, and damages the integrity of the Certificate III qualification. If subsidies are to be tied to levels of qualifications, they need to ensure that it does not lead to the kind of practices just described.

Regarding incentives, it is crucial to consider who the incentives are paid to and the possible consequences and risks.

INFORMATION REQUEST — DESIGNING A NEW INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT

If a new principles-based agreement was negotiated in line with interim recommendation 2.2:

- *how should it consider other educational sectors, informal training and non-government funded training?*
- *what other mechanisms to facilitate reform and improve accountability would best complement an agreement?*

The importance of non-accredited or pre-accredited training has been well demonstrated. In their previous submission, Adult Learning Australia noted " ...research in Victoria shows that pathways from pre-accredited to industry level vocational training and jobs are actually stronger than from Certificate I and IIs" (ALA, 2019)."¹²

Having a range of entry points and avenues to them is important for those needing to access foundation skills programs. It is widely known that poor literacy and numeracy attract social stigma, and this in turns acts as a barrier for adults to seek help in improving their literacy¹³.

¹² https://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/248703/sub012-skills-workforce-agreement.pdf

¹³ Presentation about the Reading Writing Hotline, 2020 at <http://www.nswalnc.org.au/ACAL%20Conf%20PDF/ilesACAL2019.pdf>;
Buddeberg, K. (2019) Supporters of low literate adults, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 38:4, 420-432, DOI: 10.1080/02601370.2019.1600059

Poor literacy can affect people in the quality of and independence in their everyday life¹⁴. Therefore, investment in foundation skills provision needs to involve ‘outreach’ to those who are reluctant to disclose their poor skills level. Many adults, especially those who have experienced ‘failure’ in education in the past, are likely to respond more positively to non-accredited courses which would be less high stakes. Non-accredited courses can also be more flexible in its approach and focus, thus better able to meet the specific needs of the most in need cohorts.

Trade apprenticeship and traineeship incentives

INFORMATION REQUEST — EMPLOYER INCENTIVES TARGETING DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

What are the benefits and costs of targeting disadvantaged groups for additional incentives at the Certificate II, and Certificate III and above qualification levels?

Targeting disadvantaged groups will lead to widening participating in VET. By providing good learner support and career guidance to all VET students, they could contribute productively in the labour market and lead more fulfilling lives.

Training package development

INFORMATION REQUEST — FLEXIBILITY ALLOWED BY TRAINING PACKAGES

How could the approach to developing training packages more effectively manage the trade-offs between consistency and flexibility?

Flexibility is necessary in foundation skills; however, the current FSK training package is not flexible enough for the diversity of contexts in which foundation skills are needed. There is a need for flexibility for RTOs to develop curriculum that is suitable for the needs of their students so that students for whom the FSK is not suitable can have their needs met. Learners should not be expected to fit their needs to the training package; curricula need to be designed to address the learners’ needs: this is a basic educational program design principle. While it is important that proficiency levels achieved through different curricula can be compared, this

¹⁴ Adkins, N. R., & Ozanne, J. L. (2005). Critical Consumer Education: Empowering the Low-Literate Consumer. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 25(2), 153–162.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146705280626>;

Easton, P., Entwistle, V. A., & Williams, B. (2013). How the stigma of low literacy can impair patient-professional spoken interactions and affect health: insights from a qualitative investigation. *BMC health services research*, 13(1), 319.

can be achieved if all curricula are benchmarked against relevant proficiency frameworks, for example the Australian Core Skills Framework or the ISLPR.

Investment in public provision

INFORMATION REQUEST — INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC PROVISION

In feedback on interim recommendation 6.3, the Commission requests information on:

- *the funding, monitoring and outcomes delivered under community service obligations*
- *any changes to funding models, or other actions, that governments should undertake to address any potential breach of competitive neutrality principles in relation to VET services*
- *the funding mechanism (for example, training subsidies or block funding) best suited to efficient and effective service delivery in ‘thin markets’*
- *how future funding arrangements to promote national consistency should incorporate any additional (non-subsidy) funding to public providers, if at all.*

We are not in a position to comment on the CSO allocation or use in all the different RTOs in NSW. We have been informed that TAFE NSW have CSO and can show its benefits and applications with many and varied vocational enrolments. They have clear guidelines on the use of CSO funding and track undertake financial tracking.

CSO funding provides TAFE NSW students with the support required to support pathway students to successful completion. It also ensures support for the most disengaged and disadvantaged students. The students supported by CSO fund are supported and managed by innovative initiatives developed by the body of professionally trained LLN teachers, Outreach coordinators, Disability Consultants, Counsellors, Aboriginal Engagement Coordinators and Multicultural Coordinators.

We receive anecdotal evidence of smaller RTOs without necessary professionals to support disadvantaged learners are enrolling VET students and reaching out to RTOs such as TAFE to provide support, often language, literacy and numeracy learner support. If the principle of competitive neutrality is to apply, then the capability of RTOs to provide support for disadvantaged learners must be confirmed before they are even allowed to be part of the ‘competition’. There is currently little transparency to learners about what they can expect in terms of support for disadvantaged learners.

New developments in the VET sector

INFORMATION REQUEST — THE CHALLENGES OF ONLINE DELIVERY

- *What is the scope to increase the use of fully online delivery of VET, with what advantages, risks and policy challenges?*

INFORMATION REQUEST — THE CHALLENGES OF ONLINE DELIVERY

- *How should subsidy arrangements be configured for payments across jurisdictions for online delivery of services?*
 - *What subsidy, pricing and costing approaches are appropriate for services that have high fixed costs and low incremental costs?*
 - *To what degree could accreditation be separated from training?*
 - *What types of training are most suited to innovative models of training?*
 - *What actions would governments need to take to maximise the potential for the adoption of innovative delivery of training or new types of training?*
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Innovative teaching is often associated with the use of digital delivery and/or online teaching and learning resources. While not denying the potential for digital delivery and materials to be effective and necessary (e.g. in the COVID situation), we caution against this very limited understanding of innovation in education and training. There are other aspects of teaching and learning that are innovative or waiting for innovation. In the foundation skills area, there innovation is needed in the instruments for and approach to programming. While the current FSK may be adequate as a framework for supporting work-oriented programs, it is not suitable for those students who are accessing literacy, numeracy and digital skills programs to increase their participation in their community and to overcome socio-cultural barriers to leading a healthy and independent life. As mentioned earlier, more informal/ non-accredited programs would be a worthy innovation in this area.

Another related innovation needed to address the LLND skills needs in the community (and to create a pathway into accredited VET programs) is in the area of community outreach. As already discussed, many adults with poor literacy are aware of the social stigma attached to poor literacy and will not themselves approach a VET provider for help. Many would prefer to hide their lack of reading and writing skills at the expense of their quality of life and are more likely to engage in informal and non-accredited or pre-accredited LN programs as an initial pathway to VET¹⁵ It follows that more accessible points of contact between adult literacy support services and adults in the community are needed. The ‘campaign’ model presented in the submission by the Literacy for Life submission¹⁶ is one model where a community organiser recruits community members to join a literacy class. This may be more suitable in smaller country towns. Another model is to have adult literacy officers working in the community as a literacy mediator/ broker/ intermediary¹⁷; that is, someone in the community who a person can go to for help in negotiating official documents (including digital documents). They could be located in, or rotate between neighbourhood houses, local shopping centres,

¹⁵ Iles, V. & Osmond, P. 2019, 'Ring, Ring. Who's still there? An analysis of callers to the Reading Writing Hotline', *Fine Print*, vol. 42, no. 2, pp. 3 - 7.

¹⁶ https://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/248820/sub037-skills-workforce-agreement.pdf

¹⁷ Papen, U. (2010). Literacy mediators, scribes or brokers? *Langage et société*, 133(3), 63–82.

Thompson, S. (2015). Literacy mediation in neighbourhood houses. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 55(3), 477–495.

public libraries, homeless shelters or public housing estates: somewhere that anyone needing help could feel comfortable visiting. These literacy mediators could be jointly funded by the local government, local LLND program providers, the state government and be expected not only to provide the literacy support but also to advise the people who come for help where they can develop their LLND skills to gain greater independence. For LLND, this kind of investment is needed if substantial impact is to be made.

INFORMATION REQUEST — IMPACTS OF COVID-19

- *What, if any, are the likely medium and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on skill formation and the market in the VET sector?*
 - *To the extent that some cohorts face enduring displacement from the labour market, particularly younger Australians, what role beyond current arrangements should VET play in augmenting their skills and employability?*
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Those with lower levels of literacy are locked out of the VET system if unable to access online education.

The Reading Writing Hotline has received calls during COVID from those who have lost their employment and are needing to reskill or who have identified the need to improve skills in their current job, parents of children having to home-school, and people currently enrolled in literacy and VET classes who are unable to complete their studies. The Hotline is sending out hardcopy learning resources and investing time to find tutors to work with them over the phone as there are no other alternatives. There is a need for short distance courses available to support adult learners, not just long FSK certificate courses.

A large percentage of those who accessed TAFE's free online COVID led recovery courses indicated they had LLN needs. These needs were not able to be met and may explain what has been reflected in the higher subject withdrawal rates and lower course completion rates seen in online delivery.¹⁸

There is an important role LLND education can play in the COVID recovery. However, diversity of provision types is key in improving the foundation/ LLND skills levels nationally. LLND programs based in VET, such as TAFE adult literacy programs, are important in acting as a conduit or pathway into further study in a broad range of VET programs. This dovetails effectively with LLND Learner Support programs in place to support students in vocational courses: learners are already connected with LLND teachers within the college.

But not all learners are ready to participate successfully in a formal VET context, so community based LLND is vital as a preparatory step – this can be in a variety of sites including neighbourhood centres, community colleges, public libraries, women's refuge among others.

¹⁸ Griffiths, T. (2020) Online delivery of VET qualifications: current use and outcomes. *AVETRA April 2020*
https://www.avetra.org.au/data/Research_today_April_2020.pdf

1. The Review will have regard to VET funding, policy and regulatory settings and how they can be optimised to support both school leavers and workers to maximise the achievement of relevant skills and employment outcomes from the VET sector.

Australia needs a lifelong education policy. The opportunities and right to access education and training throughout one's lifetime should be both promoted and made visible in policy in a society where rapid technological change and globalisation are requiring people to continually learn new knowledge and skills in order to contribute productively to the economy and in civic life. Adult literacy and numeracy is foundational to all forms and areas of learning, and therefore the field is in need of a supporting policy.

2. It will examine skills shortages in VET-related occupations, in particular any tension between VET outcomes and the needs of industries and employers, and what might be done to better align these.
3. It will consider expected changes in future work patterns and the impact of new technologies and how the VET sector can prepare Australians for those changes and the opportunities they will bring.

See point 8 regarding the need for a renewed workplace adult language, literacy and numeracy program.

4. The Review may consider the flexibility of qualification structures, particularly for mid-career workers, and for industries seeking rapid deployment of new skills.

As discussed under point 6, the need for flexibility of qualification structures in adult literacy and numeracy/ foundation skills is critical. Adult literacy and numeracy is not an industry and there is no 'one-size-fits-all' curriculum or training package that is appropriate for all of the diverse learners and their diverse needs. Over standardising the curriculum means that individual learners' needs will not be adequately met.

5. The Review may have regard to community perceptions of the effectiveness of the VET sector and the accessibility and utility of information about VET options and outcomes, both for employers and students, including information linking training options to employment outcomes.

It is crucial that governments – both Federal and states – do everything possible to restore public confidence in Australia's VET system. There are large numbers of young adults in Australia who, for a range of reasons did not finish secondary schooling or had an unsuccessful educational experience. There are also older adults who have a personal and/ or economic need to develop their English language, literacy and numeracy

in order to address changing demands and opportunities in their lives. These adults all deserve a quality post-secondary education system that they can trust and access.

6. It may review whether additional support is needed for vulnerable cohorts, including those currently unemployed and at risk of unemployment, or those with low literacy and numeracy skills.

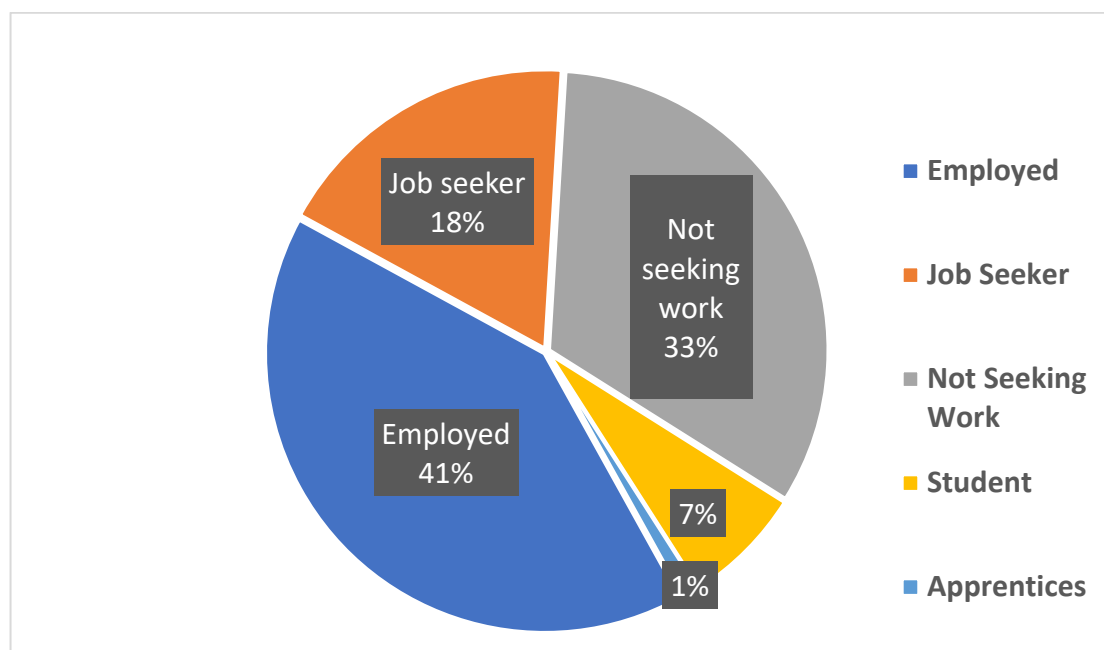
There is no question that additional support is needed for vulnerable cohorts, including those currently unemployed and at risk of unemployment, or those with low literacy and numeracy skills.

Historically, very little information has been collated concerning the clients (and potential clients) of language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia. However, statistics collected on the callers to the Reading Writing Hotline provide some important background information in considering the needs of such adults¹. The Reading Writing Hotline is a national, Commonwealth funded phone service for adults who are seeking information related to adult literacy. The Hotline's statistics therefore represent a national sample of adults who feel that their literacy and numeracy skills are not adequate for their everyday functioning in the personal, social and/or work domains and who are therefore seeking appropriate LLN services. The Hotline has collected demographic information on its callers since its inception in 1974, and has demonstrated patterns that have remained very consistent in many important aspects, such as gender (predominantly male), age (predominantly 25-40 yrs) and language background (predominantly English speaking background).

The following statistic in particular is relevant to the argument the NSWALNC has made concerning the gap in provision.

¹ Iles, V. *Working together to improve literacy: Reading Writing Hotline and libraries*, Conference presentation, ACAL, 2018, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jJPqEPyDjmsGyLCY8jsmFsoVrSeO20DH/view>

Employment Status of callers (2016- 17 reporting period)



The graph shows that only 18% of callers are jobseekers who can be referred to a SEE program. While there is insufficient funded provision available other than the SEE program for jobseekers, 33% of callers are not seeking work and a further 41% are already employed. There is a paucity of programs to which the Hotline can refer such callers.

Adults with low literacy and numeracy proficiencies

A further important statistic is related to the ratio between callers from an English as the first language (L1), and English as an additional language background. In the period reported, 81% of callers were from an English as L1 background, showing that there is a significant number of adults whose literacy and numeracy needs are not explained by their first language.

Another statistical source of information about the state of adult literacy and numeracy is the results of Australia's performance in the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (SAS). Most of the media and industry reports have focussed on how Australia was placed in the international league tables (5th in literacy and 15th in numeracy among the 34 participating countries)². However, what has attracted less focus and which is arguably of equal if not greater significance, is what the SAS results can tell us about the social outcomes of the not insignificant proportion of those surveyed who demonstrated low literacy and numeracy proficiencies³.

² OECD, 2016, Skills Matter: Further Results from the Survey of Adult Skills, viewed 8 December 2018 at http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Skills_Matter_Further_Results_from_the_Survey_of_Adult_Skills.pdf

³ 'Some 12.6% of adults in Australia attain only Level 1 or below in literacy proficiency ... and 20.1% attain Level 1 or below in numeracy At Level 1 in literacy, adults can read brief texts on familiar topics and locate a

Analysis undertaken by international researchers on the self-reported data of SAS participants who were assessed as having low proficiencies found that:

*Although, they are more likely than the rest of the population to exhibit certain characteristics, such as lower levels of educational attainment, lower rates of employment or more disadvantaged backgrounds, adults with low literacy are found among all socio-demographic groups and in all walks of life. For most outcomes, levels of engagement in literacy practices appear to be as strong predictors as proficiency, indicating the importance of encouraging more intense use of these skills both in and outside of work. Adults with low proficiency are considerably less likely than their more proficient peers to participate in formal or non-formal adult education or training programmes, which is mostly due to the socio-demographic and employment characteristics of this population. However **the lower participation rates among the low proficient adults does not appear to be a consequence of their lack of motivation as much as of the presence of various obstacles to participation, such as lack of time and the cost of training.** ⁴ (emphasis added)*

In this study, Australia was found to be among the three top countries where the variation in the degree of participation in adult education and training (both formal and informal) between those with higher literacy proficiencies and those with lower proficiency was the greatest – suggesting that those most in need are not accessing and participating in education and training. In addition to participation in education and training, literacy and numeracy proficiencies have been found to be correlated to other important social outcomes:

The link between higher literacy and such social outcomes as trust in others, participation in volunteer and associative activities, belief that an individual can have an impact on the political process, and better health is stronger in Australia than in most other countries⁵.

Thus access to adult education and training, and in particular literacy and numeracy development not only affords benefits to those individuals whose literacy and numeracy proficiencies improve, but have critical implications for social cohesion and democracy in Australia.

The appendix contains two case studies that provide a human face for these statistics. The first is a story selected and abridged from a collection

single piece of specific information identical in form to information in the question or directive. In numeracy, adults at Level 1 can perform basic mathematical processes in common, concrete contexts, for example, one-step or simple processes involving counting, sorting, basic arithmetic operations and understanding simple percentages'. From OECD, 2013, *Australia: Country Note – Survey of Adult Skills First Results* accessed 8 December 2018 at https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Country%20note%20-%20Australia_final.pdf.

⁴ Grotlüschen, A. et al. (2016), *Adults with Low Proficiency in Literacy or Numeracy*, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 131. Accessed 8 December, 2018 at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jm0v44bnmxx-en>

⁵ OECD, 2013, *Australia: Country Note – Survey of Adult Skills First Results* accessed 8 December 2018 at https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Country%20note%20-%20Australia_final.pdf.

of such student stories published by the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC)⁶. The second is a story written by an adult literacy learner on the theme of 'educational journeys'.⁷

Other priority areas

In addition to ensuring that the needs of those with the lowest literacy and numeracy proficiencies are met, there are other types of needs that require urgent attention. These include the needs of adults in 'low skilled' jobs who may have completed secondary or higher education but whose skills levels have declined as a result of lack of use. This group of workers is identified as being at high risk of unemployment when their jobs become redundant due to technological changes or overseas outsourcing. Another area of need is critical literacy and numeracy among workers in precarious employment or underemployment, or in workplaces where there are no worker representatives to educate workers about their rights and how to exercise them. It is clearly not enough to help people find employment if workers are not supported in continuing to develop skills in response to changing needs and forms of work. There are ways to involve workers in the identification and planning of workplace training and education. A new approach to workplace literacy and numeracy provision is needed.

Greater understanding and suitable program options are needed for young early school leavers who have dis-engaged from mainstream schooling for diverse reasons. Partnerships between VET providers with schools and social service providers can ensure that young adults' welfare as well as further education and training are supported through appropriate educational and social services, without the common social stigma attached to young people who do not complete their schooling.

7. [The Review may seek out case studies of best practice in VET, and consider whether specific trials should be undertaken to test innovative approaches likely to deliver better outcomes.](#)

There are many cases of 'best practice' in adult literacy and numeracy delivery in NSW and in other Australian states. We list below references to some of the research of literacy and numeracy programs undertaken in the last decade that have analysed the salient features that make these case studies of 'best practice'. The programs that are discussed include: accredited programs in TAFE; community based adult literacy programs in Aboriginal communities; non-accredited community based programs for refugee women; young urban Aboriginal learners re-engaging with the school curriculum in a community centre; ESL learners in a labour market

⁶ Bowen, T. 2011, *A Fuller Sense of Self*, Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council, Springvale South.

⁷ NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council 2004, NSW adult literacy students write - Blue Sky Bicycle and other journeys, NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council, Sydney.

program; and integrated literacy and numeracy provision in vocational courses. Although the programs are varied in contexts, what they all illustrate about successful engagement and outcomes in adult literacy and numeracy programs include:

- The ability of the teachers to build connections with the learners and among the learners;
- Programs that can be tailored in outcomes, content and pedagogical approach so that the learners themselves can see and make connections with the particular demands for literacy and numeracy development in their life contexts;
- Programs where learners have ready access to a range of services (counselling, health, accessibility, career advice, childcare) and resources (library, canteens);
- Teachers who have both pedagogical and disciplinary knowledge and expertise to teach literacy and numeracy to adults;
- Teaching and learning contexts that encourage and support teachers to exercise agency and risk-taking in order to address their learners' diverse needs and contexts.

NSW case studies

Balatti, J., & Black, S. (2011). Constructing learners as members of networks. In *Vocational Learning* (pp. 63-76). Springer, Dordrecht.

Boughton, B., Chee, D. A., Beetson, J., Durnan, D., & LeBlanch, J. C. (2013). An Aboriginal adult literacy campaign pilot study in Australia using Yes I can. *Literacy and Numeracy Studies*, 21(1), 5-32.

Chodkiewicz, A., Widin, J., & Yasukawa, K. (2010). Making Connections to Re-engage Young People in Learning: dimensions of practice. *Literacy and Numeracy Studies*, 18(1), 35-51.

Ollerhead, S. (2012). Checkmate or stalemate? Teacher and learner positioning in the adult ESL literacy classroom. *TESOL in Context* 5, 3, 1-13.

Widin, J., Yasukawa, K., & Chodkiewicz, A. (2012). Teaching Practice in the Making: Shaping and Reshaping the Field of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Teaching. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 52(1), 9-38.

Other Australian case studies

Bauer, R. (2018). Adult literacy and socio-cultural learning at Pina Pina Jarrinjaku (Yuendumu learning centre). *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 58(1), 125.

Black, S., & Yasukawa, K. (2011). Shared delivery: integrating ELT in Australian vocational education. *ELT journal*, 66(3), 347-355.

Choi, J., & Najar, U. (2017). Immigrant and refugee women's resourcefulness in English language classrooms: Emerging possibilities through plurilingualism. *Literacy and Numeracy Studies*, 25(1), 20.

McHugh, M. (2011). Crossing the academic-vocational divide. *Fine Print*, 34(1), 12-16.

Skewes, J., Bat, M., Guenther, J., Boughton, B., Williamson, F., Woollorton, S., ... & Stephens, A. (2017). Case Studies of Training Advantage for Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Learners. Support Document. *National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)*.

8. The Review should have regard to the scope and outcomes from any previous or forthcoming reviews, consultation to date, and inputs made by industry and peak groups.

Of direct relevance to this Review are the recommendations from the recent OECD report: ***Building skills for all in Australia: policy insights from the survey of adult skills***⁸. The report made eight key recommendations to strengthen Australian adults' 'basic skills':

1. Increase participation of women in STEM fields by breaking down gender stereotypes and encouraging women to enter these fields.
2. Strengthen the focus on mathematics throughout secondary education.
3. Identify students in post-secondary VET who are at risk of low basic skills and provide targeted initiatives to support them.
4. Ensure that literacy and numeracy skills are part of the quality criteria in post-secondary VET.
5. Encourage post-secondary VET providers to address weak literacy and numeracy skills.
6. Reach out to disconnected youth and prevent dropout at earlier stages of education.
7. Use pre-apprenticeships to help NEETs re-enter education and training, and to find employment.
8. Improve access to childcare facilities for young mothers. (pp. 10-11)

While recommendations 1 and 2 go to issues beyond what VET alone can address, they highlight the criticality of how VET is positioned. VET options, including 'second chance' education for early school leavers, is not well known nor understood by many schools. There is a need for government initiatives to more effectively shift public perception of VET so that VET is seen as an integral part of Australia's commitment to lifelong education. This would be imperative in being able to address recommendations 3, 6 and 7.

⁸ OECD (2017), *Building Skills for All in Australia: Policy Insights from the Survey of Adult Skills*, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264281110-en>

Recommendations 4, 5 and 6 are significant in ensuring quality pathways and support for people needing to further develop their literacy and numeracy to succeed in VET qualifications and to participate more effectively and fully in civic life. There is a need for deliberations involving a range of stakeholders (VET learners, classroom teachers, managers, professional peak body representatives, and researchers) to review and deliberate on what should be 'quality criteria' in VET. Quality is important in different ways for different stakeholders, but currently they do not sufficiently attend to what matters for learners and the capacity to support them in achieving a broad range of outcomes that VET ought to be able to help them achieve. As mentioned earlier, quality teachers are necessary for quality educational experiences and outcomes. Although teacher education programs for school teachers have undergone a major reform⁹, and university teaching standards have been tightened¹⁰, quality of teaching in VET continues to be undermined by the minimalist requirements in pedagogical knowledge and expertise (Cert IV in TAE). Investment in the learning of teachers is a necessary investment in order to achieve quality teaching and learning. Graduate entry adult literacy and numeracy teaching qualifications are not viable as full-fee paying programs as long as teachers in the field continue to be engaged as casual teachers. The teaching workforce in the field is currently heavily reliant on teachers who were qualified when the cost of their adult literacy and numeracy teaching qualification was subsidised through CSPs, the state provider (eg TAFE) or through the more recent (but now discontinued) scholarship initiative for adult LLN practitioners. Without renewal of the workforce with recently qualified teachers, the field will fail to be informed by new knowledge and empirical studies that are needed for continuous improvement.

Recommendation 8 as well as the need for provision of other services (health, financial and library) should be considered as minimum requirements for all VET providers.

The adult literacy and numeracy field has been dismayed by the elimination of a source of targeted Commonwealth funding for workplace literacy and numeracy improvements. The Australian Industry Group has been advocating for a restoration of the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) programme funding, echoing concerns of their own members about the impact of workers' low literacy and numeracy levels on productivity. As workplaces demand new skills and work practices, the need for targeting workplace literacy and numeracy funding will continue

⁹ E.g. the establishment of AITSL, and new guidelines for the accreditation of teacher education programs in Australia, encompassing different levels of teacher standards from Graduates Teachers to Lead Teachers, supervised practicums and a final year Teaching Performance Assessment.

<https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/standards>

¹⁰ Refer to TEQSA Higher Education standards. <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/higher-education-standards-framework-2015>

to exist. The report from the former Centre for Literacy in Canada ***Embedding literacy and essential skills in workplace learning: breaking the solitudes***¹¹ provides a useful framework to review the previous WELL program and to commence discussions about a new model. Of particular importance is the 'situated-expansive model' of workplace programs that affords workplace innovation by engaging both the employers and the workers in the design of programs.

An area that has been long neglected is a strong state and Commonwealth policy framework for adult education provision in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The current Australia Research Council funded project **Adult literacy and Aboriginal community well-being in western NSW**¹² is providing evidence of the connections between improved literacy and numeracy and improved social outcomes, particularly health. The program researched in this project and other program initiatives in Australian Indigenous communities are documented in the report ***Enhancing training advantage for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners***. This report concludes with the identification of very unambiguous need for policy action:

Beyond the Skills for Education and Employment program, the absence of an adult literacy and numeracy policy or facilitating structures in most jurisdictions adds another layer of difficulty to achieving community-based outcomes for adult learning. At the present time programs designed to build English language literacy and numeracy (outside VET or employment targets) for remote Aboriginal people simply do not fit in an existing policy or program area. (Guenther et al 2017, p. 33)

The report ***Aboriginal adult English language literacy and numeracy in the Northern Territory: a statistical overview***¹³ provides further evidence of the need for action, and clear and specific policy recommendations.

¹¹ Derrick, J, 2012, Embedding literacy and essential skills in workplace learning: breaking the solitudes, Centre for Literacy, Montreal, viewed 18 Jan 2019, <http://www.centreforliteracy.qc.ca/sites/default/files/Embed_LES_J_Derrick.pdf>.

¹² Guenther, J., Bat, M., Stephens, A., Skewes, J., Boughton, B., Williamson, F., Woollorton, S., Marshall, M. and Dwyer, A. (2017). *Enhancing training advantage for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners*. Adelaide: NCVET.

¹³ Shalley, F., & Stewart, A. (2017). *Aboriginal adult English language literacy and numeracy in the Northern Territory: a statistical overview*. Charles Darwin University.

Appendix: Adult learners' stories

Sue's Story

I was born in the Mallee and I grew up in the area around Hamilton. I hated school. Looking back, sometimes it feels like I never went to school. It's almost like there was no school experience for me. It's all so very blurry. It was just hard for me to take a lot in. I didn't care either. I didn't think it was worth knowing. What I did learn, I think I probably blocked out. Even today I surprise myself with things that come out of my head. I wonder, where did that come from or how did I know that.

I got put into a home for girls as an uncontrollable child because I wouldn't stay at school. They had a school set up at the home but as long as you could add up, do long division, and write your name, in their view you had completed your schooling. I certainly wasn't educated. I wasn't given books. None of that was encouraged.

When I finally left there, I went downhill in terms of my mental health. Finally, a friend broke through the barrier I had created and got me help and I was encouraged to go to Southern Grampians Adult Education (SGAE). Initially, I didn't want to do it. I thought I would be a failure. I was sure I would be ridiculed because of my age. I didn't have any idea that I knew quite as much as I do know.

When I first started, as the tutors remind me, I would sit with my head bowed down. I wouldn't look at anyone. I was too scared to answer questions, for fear of being wrong. I was so frightened. I remember the first day very clearly. They needed to work out where I was, in terms of my reading and writing, so they got me to write the word CAT. I remember I shook so much you would look at that writing and think that a small child had written it. When I started I shook, and I shook, and I shook. I sat there the whole time with my head down.

I have been coming to SGAE for a few years now. I even went out and bought a computer. I am still learning how to use it. It has opened up such a new world for me. I think improvement has happened for me through a lot of encouragement from the staff. I had been told all my life that I was stupid. I was scared of failure. I had made the choice to withdraw and I convinced myself that I didn't know any better.

I suppose I have always wanted encouragement. It's interesting, just when I think I might be unable to learn anymore, I do learn more. You are never too old. The learning is endless. I absorb so much. Sometimes I wish I could go to school every day. It seems so easy to learn. It's fun too.

When you find some success in learning, you can be more open and involved in the community. Say for example with the election and voting. I

had never voted before, never, up until five years ago, which is precisely the time that I started coming here. Learning gave me the confidence to want to vote, and to be interested in doing it. Suddenly I took note of what was going on and why it was going on.

There was one activity that we did in class where we were encouraged to write a list of some of the issues that we thought our local Council should look into. So I started writing about people in wheelchairs because my Dad was in a wheelchair and my Mum is on a walker. From there, I started looking at different issues around town that should be dealt with. Before I came here I wouldn't have even thought about those issues. My mind has been opened. Previously, I could not even read the newspaper. Now I can't wait to get it. I read it as I'm having my breakfast. I can be a bit of an ogre if I'm interrupted while reading the newspaper.

I want to do further education. I would love to do my HSC. It probably sounds silly at my age but I would like to try. There is still a little part of me that is scared of looking into it because I am fearful that I won't be able to do it. But it's something I've always wanted to do. It always seems to be there in the back of my head. Maybe it's time I moved it to the front of my head, and put the steps in motion.

I would just love to see more people take that step and come to places like SGAE. You just don't know what doors can be opened for you. I know with me, when I took that first step I never dreamed I would still be here, that I would still be learning. I am a different person now. I am happy. I love to learn. I look forward to coming. I suppose over time I felt I could trust the people here. I felt safe. I had never had that. It means I have come out of myself. I can't explain it. The teachers are fantastic and that makes learning so much easier. There is a great atmosphere in the class. Now I will go home and get straight on the computer, and think to myself, I know how to do this. Sometimes I wish I could go to school every day. It seems so easy to learn. It's fun too.

A personal journey towards education

Every time I see one of those ads on the TV of someone who has won some money on a scratchy, I think of the time when I had won and lost \$50,000 because I could not read.

It was a Tuesday like any other Tuesday. I was just walking around with nowhere to go, just looking at the world go by. As I was walking I was thinking it would be a good idea to buy a scratchy. I am a superstitious person so I started to think where I should buy it, and when. But I was looking for a job, so I put my mind on that for a minute, then, I thought it was too good a day to worry about it. As I was walking along, I saw a newsagent, so I decided to go and buy a scratchy and a paper. I went in

and stood at the counter and looked at all the scratchies. The man behind the counter came over to me.

'Can I help you?'

'Yes', I said. He looked at me.

He said 'Do you want a Lotto?'

'No', I said, 'I'd like a scratchy'.

He grabbed at the one dollar ones.

'No', I said, 'I'd like a five dollar one.'

With an expressionless look on his face, 'Which one? There are four types so would you like one of each type?' he said with a painted smile on his face. Feeling a little silly, I said:

'Can I have one of the pyramid ones?' I had seen it on the TV. He ripped one off and handed it to me. I gave him the five dollars and went outside to scratch it. This is when I got into trouble. At this time of my life I had not started at TAFE, so I couldn't read what to do. I looked at the scratchy and felt like a fool. I walked out of the shop. I started to walk down the road and then I said to myself 'go back to the shop and ask the newsagent to show you how to do it'.

Feeling good, I went back to the shop. When I got there the newsagent was arguing with an old lady. I stood there and waited. It seemed to be going on forever. Someone else came into the newsagent. And in between arguing with the old lady, he served the man. I was still standing there waiting. All the time I was thinking 'why can't I read how to scratch it?'

So I went to the bench to look at it. I looked at it. I looked at the wall. I looked at my feet. The newsagent was arguing with the old lady again. It was too much for me. I lost it! All the years of not being able to read got to me at that one time. I went back to the counter. The newsagent was serving everyone but me. I was invisible to him at the counter. I went back to the bench. I looked at the scratchy in my hand. I looked at the people at the bus stop, hoping one of them would come in and help me. I felt like I was in a hole with no way out. It got too much for me. I just had to scratch it and be rid of it.

What happened next I will never forget. I just started scratching and before I knew what had happened, I had scratched all the squares off. On my scratchy, there were three \$50 000 squares! Yes! I had won \$50 000! Goodbye work. Hello holidays. There was a man standing beside me, and

in my euphoria, I said to him, 'I've got a winner!', then I swaggered back to the counter to show my winning ticket. I handed it to the newsagent. As I waited for him to say 'congratulations', my whole world seemed to stop as he said, 'You had \$50 000, now you haven't. You've scratched too many squares.' With a smirking smile across his face, he now explained to me how I should have played the game. I had blown it by scratching too many squares, even though it was a winning ticket.

I felt like I wanted to go into a crack in the footpath and hide. The newsagent just went on serving people. I folder the ticket in half and left the shop. Then I remembered the ad I had seen on TV for adult literacy. So here I am. No richer for the scratchy. But since I have been coming to TAFE, I have found myself with other riches – of friendship and knowledge.

Story by Mark