

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into the progress and future direction of life-long learning

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NSW Adult Literacy & Numeracy Council



SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE ENQUIRY INTO LIFELONG LEARNING JUNE 2004

As the peak professional body representing teachers of adult literacy and numeracy in NSW, the Council wishes to make a submission to this enquiry. Unfortunately the timeline available is too short for us to make a detailed response, but we trust some brief points might be taken into consideration by the enquiry.

1. We strongly endorse the viewpoint that lifelong learning encompasses a wide variety of learning activities, formal and informal, in the pursuit of differing goals.
2. We also strongly endorse that lifelong learning is not merely about a pathway to an employment outcome. Whilst employment is an important goal for many individuals, and for the national economy in general, it is also vital to recognise that citizens develop and contribute to societies, communities, families, and nations in a wide variety of roles far beyond the workplace. We believe this is particularly true for adult literacy and numeracy.
3. We believe that the digital divide is still a reality for many learners of all ages, and that this must be addressed in a range of ways appropriate to a range of learner groups. Whilst online and e-learning may be accessible for some, and may be particularly useful in rural and remote areas, it is important to remember that many – older people, women, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, the financially disadvantaged – are still excluded from these forms of learning and participation in our society.
4. There is also a digital divide in the teaching profession which must be addressed. As the average age of a teacher is around 42 in NSW, and many of these are women, we believe that increased opportunities for skill development in e-learning technology must be made available to teachers in schools, TAFES, and other learning sites.

5. If our aging population is to be staying in work for longer, as proposed by the Federal Treasurer, then the workplace must be recognised as a significant site of learning for older Australians. However, we also believe that it is vital to keep a balance, so that workplace based learning is not the only option available to learners: as discussed in point 1 above, learning takes place in many ways in many locations.
6. It is becoming increasingly important to recognise the impact of the unregulated market on the lifelong needs of adults. The financial literacy and numeracy demands of dealing with the unregulated market for everyday items such as household utilities, home loans and telephone plans are enormous, and increasing rapidly.
7. Intergenerational literacy issues need to be recognised, and relevant policy developed on a whole-of-government basis. For example, recent Federal Government plans to introduce a voucher system for purchasing tutoring assistance for children with reading difficulties seems to be a poor solution to literacy issues in families. Money would be better spent on developing systemic long-term and community based solutions, such as developing the literacy and support skills of parents, so that they in turn are able to assist their children with reading.

We would be happy to provide further information on any of these brief points. Please contact our Executive Officer, Leslie Stein, on 9514 3973.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the enquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Jill Finch
Vice President
June 18, 2004