

Australian Council for Adult Literacy

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Adult literacy – a crucial part of the education revolution

A peak literacy group has urged Kevin Rudd, the newly-elected prime minister, not to forget adults in his education revolution.

In Rudd's Labor party campaign launch he proposed laptops for each high school student in years 9-12 and partial refunds of school fees for all pupils.

But the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) fears an international study out on Wednesday will show too many adult Australians have serious literacy and numeracy problems.

In 1996 when the Australian Bureau of Statistics last conducted this survey, it estimated that 6.2 million Australians—almost one half of the adult population—had problems with literacy and numeracy.

This situation costs Australia at individual, family, economic, political and social levels. The world is getting more complex and sophisticated every day. People need equally complex and sophisticated skills to keep up.

“If we are to begin a new page in Australia's history, as Mr Rudd said in his victory speech, then it must start with a literate and numerate population,” said Dave Tout, adult numeracy educator and member of the reference group for the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALLS) survey.

“Education, as well as skills development, is required for the health and wellbeing of Australian society. Current skills shortages will not be fixed with the call for higher level qualifications.

“If people do not have the core skills and knowledge to complete higher level qualifications, then we are doing them – and ourselves, a disservice to pursue such a path.”

Mr Tout said Australia needed to create opportunities for all adults to continue their learning in many different places – classrooms, workplaces, community activities and homes.

“Yes, we need to teach the 3-Rs,” he said.

“But we also need to teach the higher level skills that will enable people to read, understand and use all of the complex information that is required for active participation in a modern democracy.”

Problems affecting adult literacy and numeracy education are widespread: competitive funding, short term contracts, a casualised teaching workforce, the undermining of professional teaching standards and poor access to professional development.

“There needs to be a greater focus on resources to diversify the educational opportunities we offer to adults,” Mr Tout said.

“Australia needs to develop an approach to adult education that can be customised by individuals and communities to meet their current and future needs.”

Vive la revolution!

*****ENDS*****

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