



**Australian Council**  
for **Adult Literacy**

# A Literate Australia

National Position Paper  
on the Future  
Adult Literacy and Numeracy  
Needs of Australia  
2001

Prepared by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy ©

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## Australian Council For Adult Literacy

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The Australian Council for Adult Literacy was established in 1976 to promote issues regarding Adult literacy and numeracy policy and practice.

### ***The ACAL Vision Statement***

*to lead Australia in the development and promotion of literacy practice and policy*

### ***What we do:***

- we provide leadership in Australian debate on adult literacy and numeracy practices and policy;
- we promote adult literacy and numeracy issues in the broader contexts of adult literacy and numeracy education;
- we advocate on behalf of equitable adult literacy and numeracy provision for all Australians;
- we represent and promote the views of our members;
- we build links between people, organisations and systems; the participants and stakeholders in the adult literacy and numeracy field; and
- we work with other organisations on issues of mutual concern.

### ***How we do it:***

- by providing a forum for debate on issues in adult literacy practice in Australia in the form of national forums and annual conferences;
- by providing information on current policies and services in adult literacy practice in Australia and promoting community awareness of adult literacy issues;
- by raising the awareness of government, industry and non-government peak bodies;
- by publishing position statements, a newsletter Literacy Link, and other occasional papers on adult literacy and numeracy issues;
- by promoting the recognition of adult literacy teaching as a profession;
- by promoting the broadening of equitable and accessible adult literacy provision;

- by promoting research into adult literacy to inform both policy and practice; and
- by collaborating with other professional bodies concerned with Australian language and literacy education

The ACAL Executive is elected annually and the membership includes a representative from each state and territory's adult literacy professional association.

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***In Australia today, one in five adults do not have the literacy skills to effectively participate in everyday life.***

***Literacy is both a policy and a policy management issue.***

International research draws a direct line of cause and effect between government policy and a nation's literacy capabilities.

Evidence is emerging that the co-ordination of policies over a range of different policy domains can have significant impact, directly and indirectly, over a nation's adult literacy and numeracy levels.

This paper, *A Literate Australia*, outlines some important issues associated with adult literacy and numeracy, as a set of concerns which need consideration in current policy processes. It discusses globalisation, new ways of defining literacy, the importance of literacy for the economy, society and individuals, and the impact of low level literacy in industrialised and technologically advanced societies.

The paper traces recent literacy and numeracy policy in Australia, as a basis for evaluating how and where the new formulations should occur. It puts this in an international context by outlining where other countries are placed in terms of literacy across different tasks. It calls for new policy to fill the void that rapid changes have brought about in Australia and scans other OECD members' progress in the past few years for possible models.

Finally, the paper indicates a need for a new national policy on adult literacy, building on successful efforts, and discusses specifically what aspects this policy should embrace.

Such a policy would provide a national framework for addressing the literacy and learning needs of the adult Australian population into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Key elements of the future policy agenda include:

- developing of a new national comprehensive whole-of-government adult literacy and numeracy policy;
- establishing an integrated national coordinating agency, the Australian Commission for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, to be responsible for the strategic implementation of the new comprehensive approach to literacy, numeracy and lifelong learning;
- holding of a national adult literacy and numeracy summit to assist in setting the future directions of the Australian Commission for Adult Literacy and Numeracy;

- funding for adult literacy and numeracy to be increased by 20 percent in real terms over the next three years;
- establishing a Learning for Life Strategy to develop a culture where people value learning;
- working to eliminate the digital divide;
- establishing a national adult literacy professional development strategy;
- implementing a rigorous evaluation, performance measurement, and accountability and reporting mechanisms.

## Introduction

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The latest report on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society* (OECD, 2001) tells us that literacy means more than knowing how to read, write or calculate.

As *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society* (OECD, 2001; <http://www.oecd.org>) suggests, the term "literacy" refers to particular skills, namely the ability to understand and use various forms of print and digital text in day-to-day activities at home, at work and in the community.

Using automatic teller machines, the internet, e-mail, filling in taxation forms or understanding supermarket checkout procedures are just some of the day-to-day tasks that require people to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in diverse ways. These forms of literacies and numeracies are the new basic skills of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Literacy in the Information Age* (OECD, 2000; <http://www.oecd.org>) reveals that one in five Australians do not have the necessary literacy skills to effectively participate in daily life.

*Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society* (OECD, 2000) also suggests that a broad range of policy areas such as those related to youth, seniors, employment, human resource development, health, social welfare and crime prevention are involved when considering how to address adult literacy needs.

The results of the IALS show close correlation between employment status, earning capacity and literacy levels.

Higher income generated through improving literacy skills and enhanced productivity contribute to increased collective and individual wealth and government and corporate revenues.

Even a relatively small increase in national productivity through improved literacy can have a significant impact on public revenues. According to *Literacy Skills for a Knowledge Society* (OECD, 2000), a 2 percent increase in wages and earnings from improvements in national literacy could provide approximately a 1.8 percent increase in revenue.

## Definition of Literacy

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The IALS defined literacy as “the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community - to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.”

The Survey also identifies three domains of literacy skills:

**Prose literacy** - the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts including editorials, news stories, brochures and instruction manuals.

**Document literacy** – the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats, including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and charts.

**Quantitative literacy** – the knowledge and skills required to apply arithmetic operations, either alone or sequentially, to numbers embedded in printed materials, such as balancing a chequebook, figuring out a tip, completing an order form or determining the amount of interest on a loan from an advertisement.



## Measuring Literacy

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The IALS measured adult literacy standards and categorised them into five levels:

Level 1 – people with very poor skills, where the individual may, for example, be unable to determine the correct amount of medicine to give a child from information printed on the package.

Level 2 – respondents can deal only with material that is simple, clearly laid out, and in which the tasks involved are not too complex. It denotes a weak level of skill, but more hidden than Level 1. They may have developed coping skills to manage everyday literacy demands, but their low level of proficiency makes it difficult for them to face novel demands, such as learning new job skills.

Level 3 – is considered a suitable minimum for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society. It denotes roughly the skill level required for successful secondary school completion and college entry. Like higher levels, it requires the ability to integrate several sources of information and solve more complex problems.

Levels 4 and 5 – describe respondents who demonstrate command of higher-order information processing skills.

## The Effects of Change, Globalisation and the Information Age on Adult Literacy and Numeracy

Advances in information technologies and other effects of cultural and economic globalisation are bringing about remarkable changes in how people go about their daily working and personal lives and all of these changes have implications, at times not recognized, for adult literacy policy and provision.

Workers are required to be flexible about when, for whom, and how they work. They are increasingly being expected to present to employers with a portfolio of skills while often having limited access to education on the job.

Low skilled workers are disadvantaged in these contexts while OECD research shows that low skilled people are over-represented among the unemployed, particularly amongst the long-term unemployed.

Meanwhile active labour market programs have limited effectiveness when the great majority of people undertaking such programs end up in temporary, low-paid and usually part-time jobs, with many of them consequently being recycled back into training programs so that they can claim welfare benefits.

Australians are becoming familiar with a "digital divide" and the potential for division based on access to, and skills in, the use of, technology. This situation is exacerbated by geographic and social isolation and can lead to the creation of further poverty.

It follows that people with limited literacy skills could be potentially locked out of the future economy without adult education programs that include literacy and numeracy targeted at their requirements. A large proportion of the Australian population is at risk of being permanently in this state. Those at risk include Indigenous Australians; people from non-English speaking backgrounds as well as native speakers; people living in rural and remote areas of the country; people with physical and intellectual disabilities; some aged Australians as well as many young people.

A national system of lifelong learning can assist in addressing literacy needs through a focus on social equity and social cohesion as well as on the development of social capital.

Reports to date on lifelong learning in Australia however do not put up a convincing argument that our current approach will impact on social equity and cohesion.

Encouraging results are beginning to emerge from some OECD countries of whole of government approaches to these issues, although their policies and programs may well still need closer investigation to see whether they are offering much to low income people with limited literacy skills.

Countries that have taken this path have begun to incorporate adult literacy and numeracy as core components of a system of lifelong learning as well as recognise that these skills will need to be upgraded and renewed/sustained continually rather than be taught as short-term programs.

## Australia's Adult Literacy Policy Environment

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This year marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the introduction of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP) (DEETYA 1991) by the Federal Government of the day.

This policy dealt not only with the Government's position on language and literacy but also articulated its views on a range of economic, labour market, multicultural and social justice issues.

There has been no new comprehensive national policy framework for adult literacy since 1991.

In the early 1990s Australian national policies and strategies were the envy of the Western world. Through the ALLP, funding was provided to implement adult literacy programs, research, curriculum development, professional development and innovative projects that together formed an important plank in the strategy of the National Training Reform Agenda.

The most significant strategy employed for the implementation of the ALLP in the area of adult literacy was the National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy (NCAELLS, 1993) that provided a blueprint for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to work together with industry and the community sector to develop and deliver an integrated national literacy and language strategy.

Two initiatives that resulted directly from NCAELLS and have impacted significantly on how adult literacy provision has matured in Australia were the National Framework of Adult English Language Literacy and Numeracy Competence (1993) and the National Reporting System (1996).

The ALLP generated much activity at the grassroots level and new networks and collaborations between industry, government, researchers, universities and practitioners came into being. However, there were concerns that the new programs consolidated provision for those who already had well-established employment, and learning networks and had limited capacity to service the needs of the poor, homeless and welfare dependent.

Significant achievements of governments in this area over the last decade have included:

- ANTA's funding of several major projects to implement the inclusion of literacy and numeracy training into National Training Packages (NTPs); and
- Workplace English and Language and Literacy (WELL) programs in hundreds of workplaces throughout Australia.

However, there have been significant changes in the resourcing of adult literacy since 1996, generally driven by policy measures designed to meet other social policy objectives.

Existing labour market programs, for example were replaced by the Literacy and Numeracy Training (LANT) Program, part of the government's mutual obligation program, that initially made training, including literacy training available for long-term unemployed but was later expanded to encompass a broader potential client base. Outcomes of this program are affected by:

- few pathways to secure employment or further training and education;
- LANT programs are part-time, short-term and are often not easily accessed because of assessment and referral problems;
- inadequate funding of case managers located at Employment National centres or Jobs Network private and community-based agencies;
- ineffective processes for encouraging participation in literacy programs; and
- the effects of "Mutual Obligation".

Each of the states and territories deals with the provision of adult literacy through funding for the training system made available by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA).

It is difficult, however, to develop a clear picture of a nationally-cohesive response to adult literacy, including the critical issue of professional development of adult literacy providers.

## Australia's Adult Literacy and Numeracy Standards

Australia's adult literacy and numeracy standards are published in *Aspects of Literacy: Profiles and Perceptions*, May 1997 (ABS Cat. No 4226.0) and *Aspects of Literacy: Assessed Skill Levels*, September 1997 (ABS Cat No 4228.0).

On a five-point scale, Level 3 was deemed to be the level at which people could 'cope with many printed materials found in daily life and work though not always with a high level of proficiency'.

The distribution of skill levels from the survey found that:

- 6.6 million Australians had skills at Level 1 and 2, that is, they were likely to experience difficulty using every day printed materials;
- 4.8 million Australians are at Level 3 and deemed to have sufficient skills to cope; and
- 2.3 million are at Level 4 and 5 and are considered capable of managing the literacy demands of everyday life.

Important differences in the population distribution of literacy skills exist, both within and among countries.

The IALS, a large-scale cooperative effort by governments, national statistic agencies, research institutions and the OECD, was the world's first large-scale comparative assessment of adult literacy.

Low literacy skills are found in a significant proportion of the general adult population in all countries surveyed. At least 25% of adults in these countries fail to reach the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the five IALS Levels of literacy proficiency.

Table 1 below provides a summary of the ranking of literacy levels in 15 of the 20 countries.

Table 1: Prose Literacy Levels of OECD Countries

<b>Country</b>	<b>Level 1 Skills (prose)</b>	<b>Level 4/5 Skills (prose)</b>
Sweden	7.5%	32.4%
Norway	8.5	17.6
Denmark	9.6	6.5
Finland	10.4	22.4
Netherlands	10.5	15.3
Germany	14.4	13.1
Czech Republic	15.7	8.4
Canada	16.6	22.7
<b>Australia</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>18.9</b>
Switzerland	17.6	10.0
Belgium	18.4	14.3
New Zealand	18.4	19.2
USA	20.7	21.1
UK	21.8	16.6

Table 1 shows how each of the countries performed at Level 1 (the lowest level) and at Levels 4/5 which is considered to be the level required for effective participation in the knowledge societies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It can be seen that Australia has a particular challenge with almost 20% of the adult population performing at the lowest level across types of literacy and numeracy (quantitative).

Even more concerning is that less than 20% have the level of functionality deemed as appropriate for the new knowledge-based economy.

This extrapolates to more than 4 in 5 people who may not be performing adequately for their work, family or community life in Australia today. Even in the Nordic countries, which are ranked top in the list, literacy is still an issue for at least 8% of the adult population.

More importantly for *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society* (OECD 2001), most change in national literacy profiles over time is driven by the difference in skill level between those entering and those retiring from the labor force.

Thus, the existence of large inequalities in youth literacy in some countries is troubling as it suggests that the large differences in literacy skill currently observed among countries will continue to manifest themselves for the foreseeable future.

Australia has indeed a challenge here, as do others OECD countries.

Table 2: Australian Distribution of Literacy and Numeracy Skills (Percentage)

Literacy Scales	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Prose	19.7	27.5	35.3	15.5	2.0
Document	19.5	28.3	36.1	14.2	1.9
Quantitative	19.2	27.2	36.0	15.2	2.4

Table 2 shows the proportions of the Australian population performing in relation to determined levels for the Information Age. Those at Level 3 are struggling to keep up, while those at Levels 4 and 5 can participate.

This clearly shows that in excess of 46 percent of Australians are in the lowest two levels.

It also clearly demonstrates the need for adult literacy to be given great emphasis at all political, policy and economic levels.

Over recent times a number of OECD member countries have placed adult literacy high on their political, policy and economic agendas.

Australia, to date, has not responded with the same level of emphasis and drive, resulting in Australia no longer enjoying its vanguard position in adult literacy policy initiatives.



## International Adult Literacy and Numeracy Policy Developments

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A significant characteristic of initiatives in a number of OECD countries is the recognition being given to the interrelatedness of literacy with broader social and economic targets.

The US coalition that produced the report *From the Margins to the Mainstream* (National Literacy Summit 2000, <http://www.nifl.gov>) for example, includes membership from the American Medical Association who have identified "health literacy" as a key issue, while the UK strategy also brings together a focus on healthcare, the criminal justice and financial systems.

The New Zealand Government's strategy notes that "[p]oor literacy is strongly correlated with a greater likelihood of unemployment, lower pay when in work, poor health, less likelihood of owning a home, and poorer basic skills for children living with adults with poor literacy". (The Ministry of Education Tertiary Education Policy, 2001)

There are clear moves in these countries to a more cohesive, whole of government approach that frames the addressing of adult literacy concerns within more holistic, broader-based solutions.

Sweden, the United States, the United Kingdom and Spain, in particular, provide comparative data on the general challenge of addressing literacy as part of lifelong learning. There is among all these advances a spirit for creating a culture of adult learning that embraces literacy as an essential foundation.

The progress in the US and UK in particular has relevance for Australia as these countries are English-speaking with similar historical, cultural, political and economic histories. Sweden is outlined because of that country's top performance in the IALS and the interest this has created in Australia. Spain has a particular framework that embraces a lifelong commitment to ideas, discussion and access opportunities for people who are not literate.

### **United Kingdom**

The UK *National Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills* (Department for Education and Employment, 2001) has been supported with an injection of funding into this area.

Some 1.3 billion pounds has been committed over the next three years. This includes a focus on research, increased funding to community literacy programs, increased access to new technologies and training and overall a greater attention to addressing the 'learning to learn' skills of the population.

ACAL commends the UK policy for highlighting adult literacy needs in relation to lifelong learning and resourcing a range of programs and functions to support these initiatives. These issues have created a climate of healthy debate where all stakeholders are engaged in furthering the goals of the 'Learning Age' in the UK.

The UK package of programs includes:

- *The National Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills;*
- The National Grid for Learning – a network which connects all sectors of education;
- Individual Learning Accounts;
- Basic Skills Agency – policy, research and materials development agency focusing on literacy and numeracy; and
- The University for Industry – a huge virtual university incorporating *LearnDirect, Learning Materials, Learning Centres, Learning Centre Hubs.*

## **United States**

The US policy has legislation underpinning the democratic importance of providing mass literacy programs and a culture of adult learning:

- National Literacy Act 1990 increased funds from \$14.5 million to \$150 million within the decade;
- The Workforce Investment Act 1998 consolidated a diverse range of provision;
- The Equipped for the Future Framework for work, community and family life;
- National Institute for Literacy;
- National Literacy Summit organised by major stakeholders committing to stretch goals; and
- Action Agenda for Literacy – *From the Margins to the Mainstream*

Despite this decade of consolidation and vision, the results of the IALS for the US indicates 50% of Americans are below functionality for the Information Age.

Access remains a major hurdle with only 8% of adults with low skills taking up basic education, with standards and accountability processes further exacerbating the relationship of alienation of teachers and learners.

The US has initiatives not unlike those of the UK, however, in the US there is an emphasis on the individual's contribution in the context of the concerns of all stakeholders in the community.

## **Sweden**

There is a long and successful tradition of adult education in the Nordic countries with a popularly based system of decentralised education and course activities for popular education and love of learning.

This, in part, explains the strong performance of Sweden in the IALS. The Swedes have a similar educational ethos as Australia though their system is funded at much higher levels.

In fact, adult education has a higher level of funding than the higher education sector. Features of the Swedish provision include:

- Study Associations – diverse areas of interest, self directed, learning through discussion as a bridge to further education;
- Folk High Schools – local autonomy, free and available to adults who live on site for the duration of their study; and
- Study Circles – 200,000 circles for 1.5 million Swedes originally established for social cohesion and well-being, self-paced, collaborative and critical, operating for over 100 years.

The success of the Swedish education system is in large measure due to policy and funding commitments by government over a long period of time, particularly in the past decade.

## **Spain**

Since the 1970s there has been a renewed interest in adult education in Spain. Even so, Spain performs at a very low level in the IALS with 50% of the population not attaining post primary school qualifications.

An adult education innovation from an inclusive participatory perspective is the recent and popular literary study circles where diverse participants learn to read classical literature through a process of dialogue.

In the past 20 years, community education has flourished. It encourages those participants with no formal education to take control of their learning, develop active networks of engagement and allows for participation in political and social activities.

## **Canada**

Work is underway in Canada on the development of a national adult literacy strategy.

Canada has a well-established system of provincial and federal support for adult literacy initiatives and includes a research centre in adult literacy that hosts one of the world's largest databases on adult literacy.

Additionally, there are many innovative programs and a desire within the field there to collaborate with scholars around the globe. More recently initiatives to link literacy with job training have sparked concern regarding the narrow development of employment training for clients whose capacity to gain employment is severely limited by factors far beyond their literacy and numeracy skills.

## **New Zealand**

New Zealand released its adult literacy strategy, *More Than Words* (Office of the Ministry of Education, 2001) this year.

This initiative builds on previous work done in the education and training area, much of which was modelled on Australian systems. The literacy strategy acknowledges that progress in vocational education and training cannot occur without addressing the foundation skills of literacy and numeracy.

## A Literate Australia: A Future Adult Literacy and Numeracy Policy Agenda

An examination of Australia's adult literacy and numeracy standards, our existing national policy framework and the impact change, globalisation and the information age demonstrates that there is clear urgent need for a new approach.

Failure to recognise and act on this need places not just Australia's literacy and numeracy levels at further risk, but will have dramatic detrimental effects on Australia's and Australian's economic, employment, social and health well-being and competitiveness.

A comprehensive approach to lifelong learning and adult literacy and numeracy would incorporate:

- a collaborative and consultative process with key stakeholders;
- coordinating policies and activities across all sector to ensure there is a coherent national policy on literacy and learning from childhood to adulthood;
- involving key stakeholders in related fields such as health, welfare, criminal justice and employment; and
- analysing global trends in adult literacy and lifelong learning policy development.

The Australian Council for Adult Literacy therefore calls for the development of a new comprehensive whole-of-government national policy agenda to make and ensure we develop *A Literate Australia*.

*A Literate Australia* incorporates the following 9-point policy agenda:

### **Australian Commission for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ACALN)**

Adult literacy and numeracy issues must be embedded in an overall framework of lifelong learning that addresses social inclusion and community capacity building. This framework can build on existing and proposed initiatives in this area.

Australia needs a new integrated national co-ordinating agency, the Australian Commission for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, to oversee the cross sectoral activity in the area of adult education and provide networking capacities such as a central data base where the products of research activities are accessible; where the range of provision available throughout Australia is clearly documented; where coherent policy directions can be accessed; where examples of effective practice can be accessed; and which acts as a co-ordinating agency for policy development across the whole of government.

The Australian Commission for Adult Literacy and Numeracy should be located with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet with the Commission head reporting directly to the Prime Minister on Australia's adult literacy and numeracy effort and outcomes. It must be appropriately resourced and supported.

The Commission should also be responsible for the strategic implementation of the new comprehensive approach to adult literacy, numeracy and lifelong learning.

Such an agency would ensure that lifelong learning and adult literacy is supported across all sectors.

### **Whole-of-Government Approach**

As in other OECD member countries facing rapid and unrelenting change in all sectors of industry, business, regional priorities and educational sectors, it is our belief that nothing short of a whole-of-government approach is capable of meeting the challenges and turning those challenges into opportunities for innovation and national capability.

Given Australia's Federal system the whole-of-government approach must be incorporated across all levels of government. This will require a demonstrable commitment from the Commonwealth, states, territory and local governments, and again should build on existing initiatives to bring governments and local communities closer together.

### **National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Summit**

To assist with the establishment and setting the future directions of the Australian Commission for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, we propose a National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Summit be held in 2002.

The Summit will provide an opportunity for citizens from all walks of life and communities to bring to a common table data and examples about the dimensions of change that have implications for adult literacy and numeracy and the solutions which are already in place in Australia, or are desirable.

International as well as Australian research should be presented to the Summit. OECD models should be discussed for relevance to the Australian requirements. Multimedia, video, radio and print should inform and gain popular interest in the Summit and its messages.

The objectives of the Summit should be to:

- develop a formal commitment to a set of national adult literacy and numeracy goals;
- explore the possible inter-government structures to support a whole-of-government approach to adult literacy and numeracy to reach national goals;
- establish a national lead agency to co-ordinate and monitor progress towards national goals;
- map current infrastructure support and effective programs and identify gaps and priorities;
- examine the role of business and community as partners in reaching these national goals;
- place lifelong learning as a high priority on the educational agenda;
- explore initiatives to build capacity in business industry and community through IT investment schemes for workers;
- prioritise people and communities experiencing economic, cultural and geographical isolation.

The Summit should consider international and Australian research in its deliberations and recommend specific strategies to meet identified targets.

### **A New National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Policy**

Following the Summit, there needs to be the development of new truly coordinated National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Policy.

The National Policy on Adult Literacy and Numeracy must take a whole-of-government approach that recognizes the broader economic, employment, social and health related aspects of literacy, numeracy and lifelong learning and be relevant for the knowledge economy and the "learning age".

This policy development, implementation and monitoring will be the responsibility of the Australian Commission for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

## **Funding Commitment**

As evidenced in other OECD countries, the successful implementation of comprehensive national policies requires a commitment to increased funding and resources.

The establishment of the Australian Commission for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, the National Summit and the consequential implementation of National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Policy will require a significant injection of additional funding.

ACAL estimates that funding for these areas should increase by up to 20 percent in real terms over the next three years.

Additional funding and support needs to target sections of the community who are identified with lower levels of literacy and numeracy as well as those who do not ordinarily participate in further learning. A range of pathway options should be available to adults who may be reluctant or lack the confidence to return to formal learning.

Specifically, funding should increase in the following areas:

- Research

Further research on how adult literacy and numeracy issues impact on all aspects of life is required. Such research would also focus on adult learning and teaching strategies and new ways of developing a learning culture in this country.

- Programs

A range of adult education programs involving cross-sectoral, inter-agency coordination should be available to encourage access and participation of reluctant learners. Formal and informal pathways must be available. Programs that build on existing practice and which connect people with their communities, are considered essential in the OECD countries mentioned in this paper.

- Community Support

A range of programs to demonstrate a commitment to developing a learning culture by conducting a community campaign where Australia's achievements are celebrated and a positive perspective presented for our potential to develop a learning culture. Such a culture must be inclusive of all the different groups in this country. ACAL has a pivotal role to play in this regard.

## **Learning for Life Strategy**



Learning from the UK experience in particular, it is clear Australia needs to take as a starting point, how and why people learn and current examples of effective programs.

Such work would build on the work already undertaken by ANTA in its *Strategy for Lifelong Learning* (ANTA, 1998) which states that a 'passion for learning' must be created.

It is our belief that developing a culture where people value learning and continue to learn throughout life is policy sensitive and fundamental to a knowledge society.

This calls for a deeper appreciation of how people build up a picture of themselves as learners over time that will, in turn, help educators meet economic and social needs and the demands of the new economy.

The Learning for Life Strategy should encompass a renewed effort to determine these needs and a national community program to promote and encourage the importance of lifelong learning.

### **Eliminating the Digital Divide Program**

Many of the new literacies for the 21st century are related to the use of computers.

The digital divide will become greater unless there is a coordinated approach to ensure that those who are excluded from using new technologies either by educational aptitude, economic, social or geographic circumstances, are given the opportunity to learn how to use computers.

Comprehensive provision of training in information and communication technologies in tandem with foundational literacy and numeracy skills is one strategy towards breaking down the digital divide by equipping people to move across it.

Such a program would need to consider the formal and informal learning needs of a diverse population.

### **National Professional Development Strategy**

A national strategy for professional development, which highlights new literacies needed for the 21st century, is urgently required, as is professional development around the broader theme of lifelong learning and alternative pathways to achieving such ends.

Professional development in the area of computer literacies is vital. Vocational education and training (VET) teachers and adult literacy practitioners have been increasingly exposed to casualisation and this has

had severe impact on the professional development needed to support change in VET.

Professional development in this sector is limited and does not address the needs of sessional workers who require professional development that covers hours spent in attendance as well as the costs of attending the activity. OECD research has identified that lack of IT skills in the teaching profession is a major barrier to effective programs across all sectors.

### **Evaluation and Performance Measurement, Accountability and Reporting**

Regular evaluation, performance measurement and explicit accountability and reporting mechanisms are essential if this new national approach is to be successful.

To ensure Australia's adult literacy and numeracy standards are improving and our lifelong learning participation rates are increasing there needs to be an ongoing evaluation of our effort.

ACAL proposes that nationwide extensive evaluation and performance measurements be put in place examining in detail the funding effort, policy implementation, programs, professional development and outcomes.

In addition, the Australian Commission for Adult Literacy and Numeracy should be required to report annually to Federal Parliament on the *A Literate Australia* agenda and all its elements, including the National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Policy, funding levels, adult literacy and numeracy standards, lifelong learning participation, best practice and program outcomes.