

PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Don't take it as read

Inquiry into adult literacy and its importance

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training

March 2022
CANBERRA

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Chair's foreword

Too many Australians leave school with language, literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy (LLND) skills gaps that limit opportunities and life choices. At the same time, many older Australians are finding that the skills they have relied on in the past are not keeping pace with technology. This inquiry examined the importance of developing strong LLND skills, overcoming barriers to learning, and the ability of existing adult education programs and providers to meet demand.

Improving adult LLND skills in Australia will help individuals find meaningful employment, earn higher wages, and achieve personal fulfillment, and make Australia a more prosperous, competitive economy. In addition to these economic benefits, there are many other reasons why adults want to improve their LLND skills. Some may want to better support their children's education or better understand health advice to safeguard their individual and/or family's wellbeing. Others may want to become more involved in their communities, be able to access services that are increasingly available online or make more informed legal and financial choices.

The Committee found that poor education outcomes are strongly correlated with poverty and geographic isolation. There is a need to address factors that contribute to low LLND skills across all educational systems, at every stage of a person's life journey.

While Australia aspires to a world class school system, which provides universal access to quality education, the reality is that too many children are falling through the cracks. There are children in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who have no pathway to a meaningful secondary school education without leaving their families for boarding

school, and there are communities where schooling is only provided two days a week. Many children do not speak English outside of the classroom but are taught and then assessed as if they do. The experience of shame and stigma associated with students' perceived failures, acts as a barrier to seeking support, and engaging in school and in further education and training later in life.

There are currently a range of accredited programs available for adults to improve their LLND skills, including Australian Government programs focussed on employment readiness and vocational education and training. However, adults with low LLND do not necessarily want to sign up for accredited courses. Instead, working with a volunteer tutor or attending a small class at a neighbourhood centre can help build their skills and confidence, which may then lead to employment and further education and training opportunities. However, the adult and community education sector is significantly under-resourced and is currently unable to meet the high demand for adult LLND education. There is also a critical shortage of qualified adult literacy teachers in Australia.

The Committee agreed with the Productivity Commission that there needs to be a holistic national LLND strategy, which provides a broad range of adult educational offerings to meet varied needs and which clarifies jurisdictional responsibilities across the range of programs on offer.

The Committee has made 15 recommendations which address key areas of reform to improve adult LLND skills, including:

- support for whole of community and family LLND education programs for socially and economically marginalised Australians
- improved data collection to drive evidence-based policy and outcomes
- greater support for Australians with specific learning disabilities (SLDs) such as dyslexia
- campaigns to raise awareness of SLDs, the challenges people with low LLND skills face, and where people can access support
- recognition that English as an Additional Language or Dialect learners require the support of qualified Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) educators to maximise their educational achievement
- an increase in the number of specialist adult literacy teachers and TESOL educators
- support for measures that raise English LLND skills in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that are consistent with the National

Agreement on Closing the Gap, such as the Literacy for Life Foundation's delivery of Yes, I Can! adult literacy campaigns

- a range of measures to ensure Australians with low LLND skills can access vital services.

I would like to thank each of my parliamentary colleagues on the Standing Committee on Employment, Education, and Training, together with the secretariat staff. I also want to thank the individuals and organisations who contributed submissions and appeared at public hearings to inform this inquiry, particularly those who did so on a volunteer basis.

Mr Andrew Laming MP

Chair

Members

Chair

Mr Andrew Laming MP

Deputy Chair

Ms Lisa Chesters MP

Members

Ms Angie Bell MP

Mr Garth Hamilton MP (*from 23 February 2021*)

Ms Celia Hammond MP

Hon Steve Irons MP (*from 25 October 2021*)

Hon Barnaby Joyce MP (*to 22 June 2021*)

Ms Ged Kearney MP

Ms Joanne Ryan MP

Ms Rebekha Sharkie MP

Mr Terry Young MP

Committee secretariat

Greg Ward, Secretary

John White, Inquiry Secretary

Kevin Bodel, Senior Researcher

Cassie Davis, Researcher (*to 21 May 2021*)

Damian Mutton, Researcher (*from 29 November 2021*)

Cathy Rouland, Office Manager

Terms of reference

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training will inquire into and report on adult literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills in Australia, including but not limited to:

- the relationship between adult literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills and socio-demographic characteristics, particularly migrant status, First Nations status and individuals living in households that have experienced intergenerational unemployment
- the effect that literacy and numeracy skills have on an individual's labour force participation and wages
- links between literacy and social outcomes such as health, poverty, ability to care for other family members and participation in civic life
- the relationship between parents' literacy skills and their children's education and literacy skill development from birth to post-secondary education
- whether changes to schooling in 2020 as a result of COVID-19 will have a disproportionate impact on the skill development of those children of parents with lower literacy and numeracy levels, and, if yes, consideration of appropriate remediation programs which might address this
- the availability, impact and effectiveness of adult literacy and numeracy educational programs in Australia and internationally
- international comparisons of government policies and programs that may be adapted to the Australian experience.

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACAL	Australian Council for Adult Literacy
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACE	Adult and community education
ACEA	Australasian Corrections Education Association
ACECQA	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ACSF	Australian Core Skills Framework
ACSSO	Australian Council of State School Organisations
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ACTA	Australian Council of TESOL Associations
AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
AEU	Australian Education Union
AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
ASIC	Australian Securities and Investments Commission
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
ATESOLNT	Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Northern Territory
ATO	Australian Taxation Office

BAS	Business Activity Statement
BFA	Belém Framework for Action
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
CCS	Child Care Subsidy
CMEC	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
CONFINTEA	International Conferences on Adult Education
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
DDF	Dear Dyslexic Foundation
DESE	Department of Education, Skills and Employment
DI	Direct Instruction
DLSF	Digital Literacy Skills Framework
DPMC	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EAL/D	English as an Additional Language or Dialect
ESDC	Employment and Social Development Canada
FECCA	Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia
FSFYF	Foundation Skills for Your Future
GDP	Gross domestic product
GP	General practitioner
ICPA Australia	Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia
ICSEA	Index of community socio-educational advantage
ICT	Information and communication technology
LBOTE	Language background other than English
LLN	Language, literacy and numeracy
LLND	Language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy
LN	Literacy and numeracy
MBS	Medicare Benefits Schedule
MNCCLC	Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre

NACCHO	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NASWD	National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development
NCCD	Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability
NCOSS	NSW Council of Social Service
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NFSSA	National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults
NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
NSW	New South Wales
NSWALNC	NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council
NT	Northern Territory
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDD	Pervasive developmental disorder
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PSTRE	Problem solving in technology-rich environments
QLD	Queensland
RALE	Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education
RATE	Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education
RATEP	Remote Area Teacher Education Program
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SCOTese	Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment
SEE	Skills for Education and Employment
SLD	Specific learning disability
SRS	Schooling Resource Standard

TAE	Training and Education Training Package
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
UANP	Universal Access National Partnership
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VALBEC	Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council
VCOSS	Victorian Council of Social Service
VET	Vocational education and training
WA	Western Australia

List of recommendations

Recommendation 1

- 2.145 The Committee recommends that, by March 2023, the Australian Government resource effective whole of community and family language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) programs that target adults with low LLND skills including in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, and other socially and economically marginalised Australian communities.

Recommendation 2

- 2.154 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government immediately fund the broadening of data collection by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the 2022 Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey and ensure all subsequent PIAAC surveys are appropriately funded, to include:
- oversampling of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, including those living in very remote areas, and the immigrant populations
 - samples in sufficient numbers to provide statistically reliable results not only for Australia as a whole, but also for each state and territory
 - samples in sufficient numbers to provide statistically reliable results for all age groups, including extending collection to a younger cohort (15 years) and an older cohort (66-74 years).

- 2.155 The Coalition of Peaks and the National Indigenous Australians Agency must be consulted in considering how to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations in the PIAAC surveys.
- 2.156 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community workers must, where possible, be trained and resourced to conduct PIAAC interviews in their communities.

Recommendation 3

- 2.160 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide ongoing funding for a new Australian Adult Competencies Survey to be conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics at the mid-point of each Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) cycle, with consultation on development to begin by March 2023 and the first survey to be conducted in 2026.
- 2.161 The new Australian Adult Competencies Survey must be:
- comparable with the Committee's expectations for future PIAAC surveys and provide statistically reliable data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including those living in very remote areas, for the immigrant populations, by state and territory and for all age groups
 - developed in consultation with the Coalition of Peaks, the National Indigenous Australians Agency, other peak bodies including the Australian Council for Adult Literacy and Adult Learning Australia, and the states and territories.

Recommendation 4

- 3.171 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide subsidised assessment and treatment for specific learning disabilities under the Medicare Benefits Scheme by March 2023 for all Australians.

Recommendation 5

- 3.188 The Committee recommends that the Treasurer refer to the Productivity Commission an inquiry into the accessibility, affordability and sustainability of Australia's early childhood education and care system. The inquiry must consider the proposal to expand access to preschool by having children

attend preschool for two years before primary school, and report no later than March 2024.

Recommendation 6

- 3.194 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government commission an independent review of the student with disability loading to determine whether it adequately reflects the costs of providing a high quality education to all Australian school students with disability. The review must report no later than March 2023.

Recommendation 7

- 3.199 The Committee recommends that, as part of the new National School Reform Agreement, commencing in 2023, the Australian Government seek the agreement of the states and territories to ensure funding for schools is based on student enrolment rather than attendance.

Recommendation 8

- 3.208 The Committee recommends that, as part of the new National School Reform Agreement, commencing in 2023, the Australian Government seek the agreement of the states and territories to:
- require a proportionate number of qualified English as a second or additional language (TESOL) educators to be provided, on an ongoing basis, to the number of enrolled English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) learners in schools
 - undertake an appropriate and consistent EAL/D assessment for EAL/D learners in Australian schools, with the results of the EAL/D assessment, along with the number of qualified TESOL educators in schools, to be published alongside NAPLAN data on My School
 - implement a replacement to the language background other than English identifier in the index of community socio-educational advantage that better identifies EAL/D learners for the purposes of school resourcing.

Recommendation 9

- 3.219 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government deliver:

- in consultation with the Department of Health, a national campaign to raise awareness of specific learning disabilities (SLDs) among medical and education professionals, employers and the broader community that provides information and resources about the signs and symptoms of SLDs and where individuals and families can go for assessment and support
- in consultation with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, peak bodies and key stakeholders, a national campaign to destigmatise and raise awareness in the community about the challenges people with low language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) skills experience, the benefits of improving LLND skills, where people can receive support and the education options available to them.

Recommendation 10

4.223 The Committee recommends that, by March 2023, the Australian Government:

- ensure that all Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) participants are taught by specialist teachers with degree or post-graduate qualifications in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)
- commence an evaluation of the recent AMEP reforms that considers whether there have been any changes in learning outcomes for program participants since AMEP was split into two funding streams.

Recommendation 11

4.227 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- by March 2024, ensure that all Registered Training Organisations provide English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) learners with instruction from specialist teachers with degree or post-graduate qualifications in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)
- by March 2023, conduct a review of options for improving curriculum and assessment requirements for adult EAL/D learners in accredited courses, in consultation with the Australian Skills Quality Authority,

Adult Migrant English Program providers, and TESOL and adult education specialists

- by March 2023, update the Australian Core Skills Framework to include the Pre Level 1 supplement and incorporate the Digital Literacy Skills Framework to ensure users have a single reference document.

Recommendation 12

4.233 The Committee recommends that, by March 2023, the Australian Government establish a sustainable, ongoing funding model for the Literacy for Life Foundation to deliver Yes, I Can! campaigns in more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Recommendation 13

4.236 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with the state and territory governments to develop and implement a national strategy by March 2023, to renew the adult language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) education workforce.

4.237 The national workforce strategy must be developed with input from all sectors currently involved in the education and training of adult LLND educators and delivery of adult LLND education, and provide for:

- clear career pathways for aspiring LLND educators
- updates to the Standards for Registered Training Organisations to reflect best practice in LLND education and the Australian Government's renewed emphasis on systematic phonics instruction in schools
- the strengthening of existing specialist adult LLND and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) courses, and encouragement of vocational education and training (VET) providers and universities to offer these and other specialist courses
- scholarships and fee support for VET and university students to undertake specialist adult LLND and TESOL courses

- subsidised access to professional development and initial training programs with multiple entry points that build skills and knowledge, and support pathways to full qualifications, as appropriate.

Recommendation 14

4.243 The Committee recommends that, by March 2023, the Australian, state and territory governments jointly develop and, by March 2024, implement a national language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) strategy based on the model recommended by the Productivity Commission and the recommendations presented in this report, ensuring that:

- input from all sectors currently involved in the delivery of adult education guides the strategy
- a national adult LLND distance education scheme is established
- adult and community education is supported to meet demand in all jurisdictions, including by:
 - building the capability of the sector to deliver sustainable non-accredited LLND programs through ongoing professional development delivered by Adult Learning Australia
 - funding the sector to deliver sustainable non-accredited LLND programs
 - resourcing and supporting the sector and relevant peak bodies to work with industry and business to co-design and deliver customised workplace adult literacy programs
- there is consistency in the delivery of best practice pedagogy, assessment and data collection in corrections education
- the diversity of learner's starting points and needs is recognised and supported
- all programs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are developed and delivered in ways that are consistent with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- an adult LLND information hub is established to support the delivery of best practice LLND education across all sectors

- the strategy reflects a policy commitment by the Australian Government to inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning, in keeping with Sustainable Development Goal Four.

Recommendation 15

4.246 The Committee recommends that, by March 2023, the Australian Government ensure that:

- there are safeguards in place to ensure that mutual obligation requirements for the JobSeeker Payment do not penalise Australians with low language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) skills for being unable to navigate online systems
- all Australian Government forms and resources use a plain English approach that utilises Easy Read as set out in the Australian Government Style Manual
- all Australian Government agencies mandate the use of Australian Government guidelines in the design of all forms, and ensure that all digital forms meet the requirements of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines
- all Australian Government agencies provide telephone support lines for people who are unable to attend physical service centres
- the Australian Government establish funding for community organisations to assist Australians with low LLND skills with form filling and literacy mediation
- the Reading Writing Hotline is appropriately resourced to maintain a database of form filling and literacy mediation services, and to provide advice to Australians with low LLND skills on where they can access these services
- relevant Australian Government agencies provide proactive and accessible information about help that is available during disaster recovery
- adult and community education providers be supported to reconnect learners who have become disengaged due to pandemics and natural

disasters, such as floods and bushfires, particularly in rural and regional areas, through targeted community-based education programs and access to appropriate resources to cope with ongoing challenges.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 One in five adult Australians have low literacy and/or numeracy.¹ This means that around three million adults do not have the skills to meet the demands of work and life.²
- 1.2 Australian governments are committed to improving the literacy of adult Australians, particularly those with low levels of proficiency.³ This commitment highlights the contribution that literacy makes to the income and productivity of individuals and businesses, and to the Australian economy.
- 1.3 The response of Australian governments has largely been to provide programs and funding for adult literacy education to help people find employment and to raise income and productivity. While this perspective is important, there are other reasons why low levels of literacy must be

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Building Skills for All in Australia: Policy Insights from the Survey of Adult Skills*, 2017, page 9.

² This figure is the number of adults unable to reach Level 2 proficiency in literacy and/or numeracy. The 2011-12 Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey assessed literacy and numeracy skills on a 6-level scale, with Level 2 regarded as the level required to meet basic modern work and life demands. This is broadly equivalent to the minimum national benchmark for National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) Year 9. See: Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), *Submission 86*, page 4.

³ Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTESE), *National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults*, September 2012, page 2.

addressed, including to ensure all Australians are able to enjoy their basic economic, social, legal and political rights.⁴

- 1.4 In addition to funding employment-readiness programs, the Australian Government provides subsidised English language education to migrants to assist with good settlement outcomes.
- 1.5 Based on these areas of policy focus, it may be assumed that most adult Australians with low literacy are either from a non-English-speaking background, unemployed or both. This is not the case:
 - In 2011-12, 80 per cent of Australians with low literacy skills came from a household where English is spoken at home.⁵
 - Statistically the typical caller to the Reading Writing Hotline, Australia's national literacy and numeracy referral and advisory service, is an Australian-born male, aged 25 to 44 who left school before Year 10.⁶
 - Between 2005 to 2017, an average of 69 per cent of Reading Writing Hotline callers were either employed, self-employed or not looking for work, while the proportion of unemployed callers averaged 17 per cent.⁷
- 1.6 Nothing should therefore be 'taken as read' - that is, be accepted as true without seeking evidence or proof. In this inquiry, the Committee sought an evidence-based understanding of why so many Australian adults have low literacy, and what can be done about it.⁸

Scope and conduct of the inquiry

- 1.7 On 3 February 2021, the Committee adopted an inquiry referred by the Minister for Education and Youth, the Hon Alan Tudge MP, to inquire into and report on adult literacy and its importance.

⁴ Professor Bob Boughton, *Submission 26*, page 2.

⁵ ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013; DESE, *Submission 86*, page 4. This figure is based on the number of adults unable to reach Level 2 proficiency in literacy.

⁶ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 3.

⁷ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44.2*, page 2.

⁸ 'Don't take it as read' is the title of submission 89 from the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS). The Committee is grateful to VCOSS for their support in its use as the title of this report.

- 1.8 The terms of reference are set out at page xvii of this report.
- 1.9 The Committee initially called for submissions by 5 March 2021. The Committee put out a second call for submissions by 23 April 2021, with particular focus on the following areas:
 - the relationship between early childhood education and development, and adult literacy
 - the relationship between youth literacy training and adult literacy
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literacy
 - rural and regional literacy challenges.
- 1.10 The Committee also requested further submissions from stakeholders identified in responses to requests for information from state and territory governments by 25 June 2021.
- 1.11 The Committee received 111 submissions, 22 supplementary submissions and one exhibit, which are listed at Appendix A and B respectively.
- 1.12 The Committee held 10 public hearings. A list of those hearings and the witnesses and organisations that appeared at the hearings may be found at Appendix C.
- 1.13 As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the public hearings had to be held remotely via teleconference and/or videoconference, including hearings originally scheduled for Melbourne and Hobart. COVID-19 restrictions did allow the Committee to hold a hearing in Caboolture, Queensland on 19 July 2021 and a hearing focussing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literacy in Darwin on 29 July 2021.
- 1.14 The Committee appreciates the participation of dedicated and knowledgeable contributors to this inquiry, and notes that many of those who invested their time in writing submissions and appearing at hearings were doing so in a volunteer capacity. The Committee is grateful to the individuals and organisations who generously contributed their time and expertise to this inquiry.

Terminology

- 1.15 The Committee notes that literacy is commonly referred to in the context of a broader suite of related skills including language, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND). These skills are often referred to as 'foundation skills'.⁹
- 1.16 Several contributors urged the Committee to consider digital literacy as part of the current inquiry because of the increasing importance of technology in our everyday lives.¹⁰ For example, Swinburne University of Technology said that literacy today is about 'more than simply the ability to read and write at a basic level. Literacy is the possession of all skills needed to navigate information and mediums in our rapidly evolving culture and economy.'¹¹
- 1.17 For the purposes of the inquiry and this report, the Committee interpreted 'literacy' to encompass LLND.
- 1.18 The Committee is also aware many people with low literacy experience shame and stigma, and that this can deter them from seeking support to improve their skills.¹² In this context, the use of derogatory terms such as illiterate to describe people with low literacy is unhelpful.
- 1.19 Therefore, this report refers to adults with literacy gaps or low literacy. This is consistent with terminology used within the adult literacy field, and the Committee views this an important first step in recognising concerns around adult literacy.¹³

Recent reviews and policy context

- 1.20 Australian governments have sought to take steps to improve the education and employment outcomes of people with low LLND skills,¹⁴ including by commissioning several recent national reviews.

⁹ Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 28.

¹⁰ See, for instance: VCOSS, *Submission 89*, pages 7-8; Swinburne University of Technology, *Submission 33*, page [2]; TAFE Queensland, *Submission 39*, page 4.

¹¹ Swinburne University of Technology, *Submission 33*, page [2].

¹² See Chapter 3.

¹³ Australian Council for Adult Literacy, *Submission 66.1*, page [1].

¹⁴ SCOTese, *National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults*, September 2012, page 2.

International context

- 1.21 Australia is a signatory to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 and beyond. Goal Four is the education goal, which aims to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.’¹⁵
- 1.22 Australia is also a member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which has held International Conferences on Adult Education, known as ‘CONFINTEA’, every 12 years since 1949.¹⁶
- 1.23 At the most recent CONFINTEA in 2009, UNESCO member states adopted the Belém Framework for Action (BFA), which sets out a strategic guide for the global development of adult literacy and adult education within the context of lifelong learning. In relation to adult learning and education, the BFA calls on member states to develop policies and programs, improve governance, increase funding, improve quality, and promote participation, inclusion and equity.¹⁷
- 1.24 In 2015 the General Conference of UNESCO adopted a new Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE). This recommendation calls upon member states to take action in the areas already defined in the BFA and emphasises lifelong learning to ensure all adults can participate in society and work.¹⁸ The RALE states:

Literacy and adult learning and education contribute to the realization of the right to education that enables adults to exercise other economic, political, social and cultural rights, and which should meet the key criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability in conformity with General Comment No. 13 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (21st session)

¹⁵ United Nations, General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1, 25 September 2015.

¹⁶ The next conference will take place in the Kingdom of Morocco in 2022.

¹⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *CONFINTEA VI - Belém Framework for Action: Harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education for a viable future*, May 2010.

¹⁸ UNESCO, *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education 2015*, February 2016.

referring to Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ...¹⁹

- 1.25 Noting Australia's obligations under the RALE, Professor Bob Boughton said:

While Australia meets this obligation for the majority of its citizens, there remain a significant minority who do not enjoy this basic human right. In the case of First Nations peoples ... the number of adults who do not enjoy this most basic right, as a proportion of the total population, is comparable to some of the most disadvantaged countries of the Global South. Under international law, the rectification of this situation is considered a responsibility of the State i.e. the Commonwealth of Australia, which is the signatory to these instruments.²⁰

Closing the Gap

- 1.26 In July 2020, the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Closing the Gap Agreement) was released, which includes four Priority Reform targets and 17 socioeconomic targets to reduce the disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- 1.27 The Closing the Gap Agreement represents a partnership between the Australian Government, state and territory governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations (the Coalition of Peaks). The purpose is 'to overcome the entrenched inequality faced by too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so that their life outcomes are equal to all Australians.'²¹
- 1.28 The Committee heard from members of the Coalition of Peaks, who emphasised that policy responses to low LLND skills in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities must be in keeping with the principles of the Closing the Gap Agreement.²² For example, the Lowitja Institute

¹⁹ UNESCO, *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education 2015*, February 2016, Preamble, page 5.

²⁰ Professor Bob Boughton, *Submission 26*, page 2.

²¹ Commonwealth of Australia, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, July 2020, page 3.

²² Lowitja Institute, *Submission 49*, page 7; Ms Patricia Turner AM, Chief Executive Officer, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 25.

emphasised the following four priority reforms in the Closing the Gap Agreement:

- Building and strengthening structures that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress against Closing the Gap.
- Building formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors to deliver services to support Closing the Gap.
- Systemic and structural transformation of mainstream government organisations to improve accountability and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Shared access to location specific data and information.²³

1.29 Similarly, the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation said:

The national agreement commits this country to a new direction and is a pledge from all governments to fundamentally change the way they work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations across Australia. If we want to see real and sustained improvements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and improvements in their ability to participate fully in the education of their children, to contribute to the wellbeing of their communities, to experience better health outcomes and to improve social and emotional wellbeing, this is how it must be done.²⁴

National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults

1.30 In 2012, all Australian governments endorsed the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults (NFSSA). The NSFSSA is a 10 year framework with a ‘focus on improving outcomes for working age Australians (aged 15–64 years) with a view to moving more people to higher levels, but with a particular focus on those with low levels of foundation skill proficiency.’²⁵

1.31 The NFSSA defines foundation skills as the combination of:

- English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) – listening, speaking, reading, writing, digital literacy and use of mathematical ideas; and

²³ Lowitja Institute, *Submission 49*, pages 2-3. See also: Commonwealth of Australia, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, July 2020, pages 5-15.

²⁴ Ms Patricia Turner AM, NACCHO, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 25.

²⁵ SCOTese, *National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults*, September 2012, page 2.

- employability skills, such as collaboration, problem solving, self-management, learning and information and communication technology (ICT) skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.²⁶

1.32 The NFSSA sets 'an aspirational target ... that by 2022, two thirds of working age Australians will have literacy and numeracy skills at Level 3 or above.'²⁷

1.33 The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) said that a scoping study is currently underway to consider the currency of the NFSSA and commented:

It will look at the roles and responsibilities for delivery between the different levels of government. It will be pulling together data on need, demand and success and current funding, so that we have a more fulsome picture. Importantly, we'll be looking at gaps in availability of support for learners or where we have overlaps in support. We are also seeking through this scoping study any evidence of innovation from jurisdictions and best practice, and then issues and options to support the VET [vocational education and training] foundation skills workforce.²⁸

Joyce review

1.34 On 28 November 2018, an independent review of Australia's VET sector was announced, to be led by the Hon Steven Joyce. Mr Joyce delivered the final report, *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System* (Joyce review), in March 2019.

1.35 The Joyce review made 71 separate recommendations around a six-point plan for achieving change in the VET sector, including:

- strengthening quality assurance
- speeding up qualification development
- simpler funding and skills matching
- better careers information
- clearer secondary school pathways

²⁶ SCOTese, *National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults*, September 2012, page 2.

²⁷ SCOTese, *National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults*, September 2012, page 2.

²⁸ Ms Belinda Campbell, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Apprenticeships and Workforce Skills Division, DESE, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 February 2021, page 9.

- greater access for disadvantaged Australians.²⁹

1.36 Significantly, the Joyce review recommended that:

The Commonwealth and the States and Territories to commit, over time, to supporting fee-free foundation-level education for all Australians who need training to bring their language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy levels up to Level 2 in the Australian Core Skills Framework.³⁰

- 1.37 The Joyce review noted that the Australian Government offers dedicated programs to provide foundation skills training to certain cohorts, including the Adult Migrant English Program for migrants and humanitarian entrants and the Skills for Education and Employment program for eligible jobseekers. However, the Joyce review found that the Australian Government does not ‘offer this level of targeted support for employed Australians or those currently out of the workforce and not registered with Job Active providers for income support.’³¹
- 1.38 The Joyce review stated that ‘[c]learly, interventions that build people’s employability and productivity *before* they become redundant are in the best interests of government, employers and the affected individuals alike.’³²
- 1.39 On 2 April 2019, the Australian Government released its Delivering Skills for Today and Tomorrow package which responds to recommendations of the Joyce review.³³ The package included establishing the National Skills Commission and two new foundation skills programs: the Foundation Skills

²⁹ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia’s Vocational Education and Training System*, April 2019, page 2.

³⁰ DPMC, *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia’s Vocational Education and Training System*, April 2019, page 105. The Australian Core Skills Framework is a tool which assists English language, literacy and numeracy practitioners to describe an individual’s performance in the five core skills of learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy. See: DESE, ‘Australian Core Skills Framework’, www.dese.gov.au/skills-information-training-providers/australian-core-skills-framework, viewed 6 January 2022.

³¹ DPMC, *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia’s Vocational Education and Training System*, April 2019, page 104.

³² DPMC, *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia’s Vocational Education and Training System*, April 2019, page 104.

³³ Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Minister for Small and Family Business, Skills and Vocational Education, ‘Delivering a world class vocational education and training system’, *Media Release*, 2 April 2019.

for Your Future Program and the Foundation Skills for Your Future - Remote Communities Pilots program.³⁴

Review of senior secondary pathways

1.40 In June 2019 the Education Council commissioned a review, led by Professor Peter Shergold AC, to examine how students can be better supported to choose the best pathway into work, further education or training. The final report, *Looking to the Future: Report of the review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training*, was released by Education Council on 23 July 2020.³⁵ Education ministers agreed with all 20 of the report's recommendations.³⁶

1.41 The review found that literacy, numeracy and digital literacy should 'be recognised as essential skills for every student' and commented:

At a time of technological transformation, when the future of work is uncertain, these attributes are more important than ever. Students must be supported to attain capability in these areas before they finish school. Every young person who leaves without them is having their economic and social future short-changed.³⁷

National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development

1.42 In 2012, all Australian governments endorsed the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development (NASWD), which identifies the long-term objectives of the Australian Government and state and territory governments in the areas of skills and workforce development.³⁸

1.43 The NASWD is associated with the Skills and Workforce Development National Specific Purpose Payments where the Australian Government

³⁴ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 19.

³⁵ Education Council, *Looking to the Future: Report of the review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training*, June 2020.

³⁶ DESE, *Review of senior secondary pathways* (Fact Sheet), 5 May 2021, page [1].

³⁷ Education Council, *Looking to the Future: Report of the review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training*, June 2020, page 13.

³⁸ Council of Australian Governments, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development*, 2012.

provides funding of around \$1.5 billion annually to state and territory governments to support the delivery of VET services and training systems.³⁹

- 1.44 In 2020, all jurisdictions, including the Commonwealth, signed the Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform (Heads of Agreement), committing all governments to work together to develop a new National Skills Agreement to replace the NASWD from 1 January 2022.⁴⁰ Under the Heads of Agreement, all governments agreed to providing stronger support for foundation skills and ensuring access for all Australians with low levels of LLND skills as a priority.⁴¹
- 1.45 In November 2020, skills ministers of the Australian Government and state and territory governments requested a scoping study of the current environment for the delivery of foundation skills to adult learners in Australia. According to DESE, the findings of the study will help governments to better support access to training to improve LLND skills for those who need it most, and the report has been provided to skills ministers for consideration.⁴²

Productivity Commission review

- 1.46 On 15 November 2019, the Australian Government requested the Productivity Commission review the NASWD.⁴³
- 1.47 The Productivity Commission released its final report on the review of the NASWD in January 2021. Of relevance to this inquiry, the review considered

³⁹ DESE, 'National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development (NASWD)', www.dese.gov.au/skills-information-training-providers/national-agreement-skills-and-workforce-development, viewed 6 January 2022.

⁴⁰ Since signing the Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform the National Cabinet has tasked the Skills National Cabinet Reform Committee with developing the new National Skills Agreement, but it will not be finalised until the first half of 2022. See: DPMC, 'Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform', www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/domestic-policy/heads-agreement-skills-reform, viewed 6 January 2022.

⁴¹ DPMC, *Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform*, 5 August 2020.

⁴² DESE, 'Improving access to and support for Foundation Skills', www.dese.gov.au/skills-reform/skills-reform-overview/improving-access-and-support-foundation-skills, viewed 6 January 2022.

⁴³ The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP, Treasurer and Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, 'Productivity Commission to review National Skills and Workforce Agreement', *Media Release*, 15 November 2019.

the 'potential for future funding arrangements to achieve further targeted reforms', including extending LLND programs to all Australians and other relevant recommendations from the Joyce review.⁴⁴

- 1.48 The Productivity Commission suggested what it considered to be 'the first steps governments could take towards the aspirational goal of universal access to LLND skills',⁴⁵ and recommended that governments develop a new national LLND strategy covering schools, VET and adult education.⁴⁶

Inquiry into education in remote and complex environments

- 1.49 The Committee's previous inquiry into education in remote and complex environments (November 2020) examined how education meets the learning needs of students in regional, rural and remote communities and how barriers to education can be overcome. The Committee found that Australians growing up in regional and remote areas have lower educational attainment rates in school, in Year 12 and in tertiary education, compared to those living in metropolitan areas, and that a range of factors contribute to gaps in access and equity across a child's education journey.⁴⁷
- 1.50 These findings are relevant to the current inquiry because the gap between the educational attainment rates of students living in regional and remote areas, and those of their peers in the cities, suggests that similar gaps may exist in adult LLND skills according to geographic location.⁴⁸
- 1.51 The Committee made 14 recommendations to improve access to quality education and outcomes for students in regional, rural and remote communities, including:

⁴⁴ Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 376.

⁴⁵ Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 29.

⁴⁶ Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 53. The Productivity Commission's recommendations are considered further in Chapter 4.

⁴⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, pages 4-6.

⁴⁸ ABS published results for the 2011-12 PIAAC survey do not provide a distribution of LLND skills according to geographic remoteness. See: ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013.

- Ensuring all Australian students can access secondary school education, to a nationally-consistent minimum standard, regardless of their geographic location.
- Providing greater opportunities for families and communities to have more say in how schools apply the Australian Curriculum.
- Ensuring that the education available to children and young people with disability in regional, rural and remote locations is inclusive.
- Improving access to mental health treatment and support in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Improving access to quality early childhood education and care in regional, rural and remote communities.
- Providing up to 30 hours per week of subsidised early education and care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Supporting early learning programs provided through distance education, and providing greater flexibility and surety in funding for:
 - mobile early childhood education services
 - wrap-around models of early intervention, family support, early childhood education and health care in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Providing adult literacy campaigns in communities with low levels of adult English literacy.
- Improving access to English as an Additional Language or Dialect support and bilingual education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Supporting the development and professionalisation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workforce.
- Establishing trauma-informed, cultural induction and training programs for educators working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Enhancing the integration of Australia's VET and Higher Education sectors.⁴⁹

1.52 The Committee is concerned that more than 12 months have now passed since the report was presented to the House of Representatives without a response from the Australian Government. The Resolution of the House adopted on 29 September 2010 requires the government to present a response within six months. The Committee calls on the Australian

⁴⁹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, pages xvii-xx.

Government to respond to the report and reiterates the need for these important recommendations to be implemented.

Structure of the report

- 1.53 Chapter 2 examines the benefits of investing in adult LLND skills including helping Australia to become a more prosperous, competitive economy, and assisting Australians to:
- support their children's education
 - improve their health and wellbeing
 - participate fully in modern Australia and be better able to adapt to the technological and structural changes Australia may experience in the future
 - actively engage as informed citizens in Australia's democracy
 - better access public and private services
 - make informed legal and financial decisions.
- 1.54 Chapter 2 also examines evidence of significant LLND skills gaps in the Australian population. This data shows that:
- socioeconomic status is associated with LLND proficiency for both adults and school students
 - many Australians, who are not jobseekers, have LLND skills gaps
 - there is significant unmet demand for LLND support.
- 1.55 Concerns around the availability of data and research on adult LLND skills, particularly in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, are also examined.
- 1.56 Chapter 3 examines factors that contribute to LLND skills gaps among Australian adults, including individual's experiences of:
- specific learning disabilities and other forms of disability
 - early childhood education
 - school education
 - disengagement from school education, shame and stigma
 - the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.57 Finally, Chapter 4 examines the range of Australian, state and territory government and community-based adult LLND education programs and providers that are currently available, and their capacity to meet the demand and diverse needs of the community. It also considers options for a new national LLND strategy and examines the support that is available for

people with low LLND skills to engage with services, including government services, that may be inaccessible to them, particularly as most services move online.

2. Australia's language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy challenges

- 2.1 This chapter examines Australia's language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) challenges. It begins by examining evidence of the current status of LLND skills in Australia, including the most recent national data on adult LLND proficiency and the performance of school students.
- 2.2 The chapter also examines the benefits of addressing LLND skills gaps for individuals, and the broader Australian economy and society.
- 2.3 Concerns around the availability of recent data and research on adult LLND skills, particularly in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, are then examined.

Evidence of LLND skills gaps

- 2.4 The main sources of data on LLND skills proficiency suggest that Australia's skills are not keeping pace with the demands of work and life in the 21st century, and that proficiency declines with socioeconomic status.¹
- 2.5 The most recent national data available on adult LLND skills proficiency is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies

¹ Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), *Submission 43*, pages 14-15.

(PIAAC) survey.² The 2011-12 PIAAC survey measured the skill levels of Australians aged 15 to 74 years and found that:

- One in five Australians had low literacy and/or numeracy skills.³
- There was a significant gap between the most proficient and least proficient adults in literacy and in numeracy.⁴
- Numeracy represented a particular challenge in Australia and poor numeracy performance could be traced back to initial schooling.⁵
- Literacy and numeracy proficiency peaked in a person's early 30s and then declined with age. Older adults, particularly those aged 55 and over, had significantly lower-level skills.⁶
- There were only minor differences between men and women for literacy and problem solving in technology-rich environments (PSTRE),⁷ however the difference in numeracy proficiency was significant, with 49.4 per cent of males at Level 2 or below and 59 per cent of females at Level 2 or below.⁸
- While migrants had lower levels of literacy and numeracy than people born in Australia, the difference was among the lowest across

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013.

³ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Building Skills for All in Australia: Policy Insights from the Survey of Adult Skills*, 2017, page 9.

⁴ OECD, *Building Skills for All in Australia: Policy Insights from the Survey of Adult Skills*, 2017, page 9.

⁵ OECD, *Building Skills for All in Australia: Policy Insights from the Survey of Adult Skills*, 2017, page 9.

⁶ ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013; ACER, *Submission 43*, page 13.

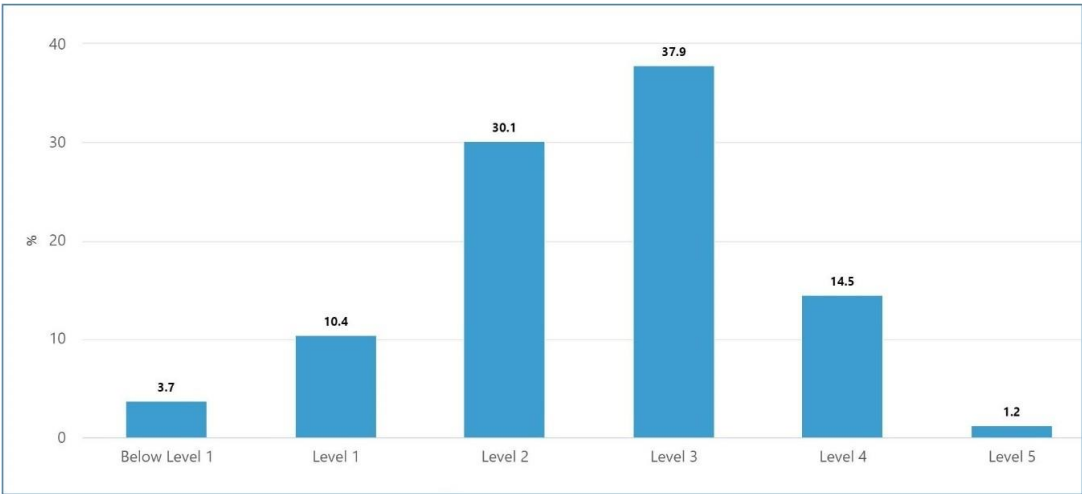
⁷ For PIAAC, problem solving in technology-rich environments (PSTRE) is defined as using digital technology, communication tools and networks to acquire and evaluate information, communicate with others and perform practical tasks. See: ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013.

⁸ ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013; ACER, *Submission 43*, page 13.

participating countries, and migrants in Australia had better skills than migrants in other countries.⁹

2.6 Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 provide the distribution of PIAAC survey respondent's skill levels in literacy, numeracy and PSTRE in 2011-12.

Figure 2.1 Proportion of adults at each literacy level, PIAAC 2011-12



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013

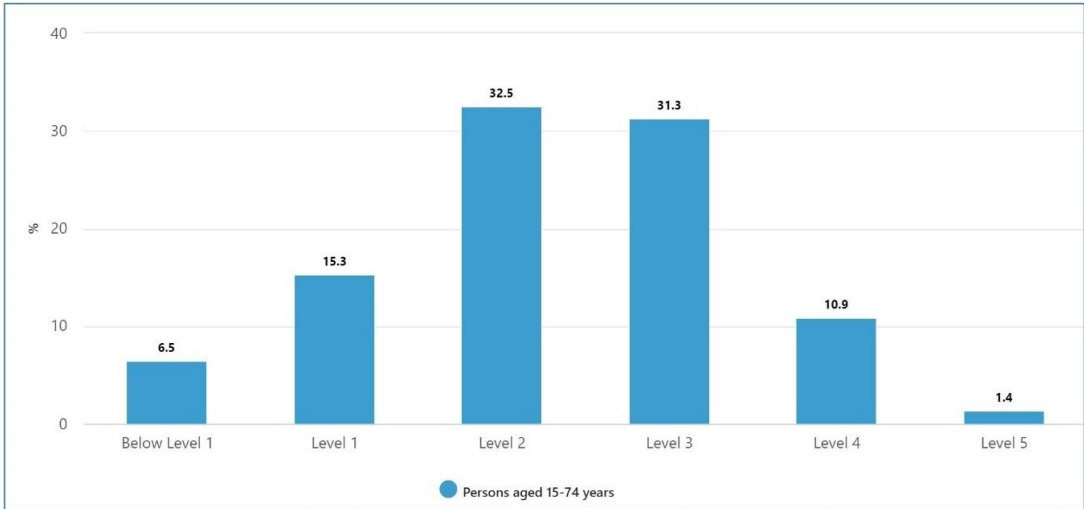
- 2.7 Level 2 literacy and numeracy, as defined by the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF), is considered as the level required to meet the basic demands of work and life. Level 2 literacy and numeracy in PIAAC is broadly equivalent to ACSF Level 2.¹⁰
- 2.8 Figure 2.1 shows that 3.7 per cent (620,000) of Australians aged 15 to 74 years had literacy skills at Below Level 1, 10 per cent (1.7 million) were at Level 1, 30 per cent (5 million) were at Level 2, 38 per cent (6.3 million) were at

⁹ OECD, *Building Skills for All in Australia: Policy Insights from the Survey of Adult Skills*, 2017, page 9; ACER, *Submission 43*, page 14.

¹⁰ Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 379; Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System*, April 2019, page 103.

Level 3, 14 per cent (2.4 million) were at Level 4, and 1.2 per cent (200,000) were at Level 5.¹¹

Figure 2.2 Proportion of adults at each numeracy level, PIAAC 2011-12



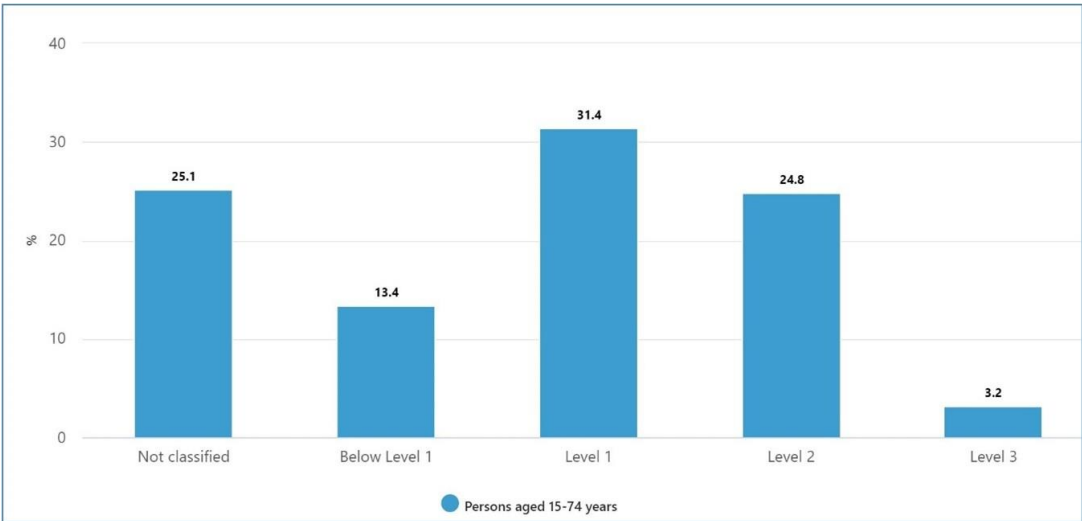
Source: ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments, October 2013*

2.9 Figure 2.2 shows that 6.5 per cent (1.1 million) of Australians had numeracy skills at Below Level 1, 15 per cent (2.5 million) were at Level 1, 32 per cent (5.4 million) were at Level 2, 31 per cent (5.2 million) were at Level 3, 11 per cent (1.8 million) were at Level 4, and 1.4 per cent (230,000) were at Level 5.¹²

¹¹ For literacy and numeracy, proficiency scores were grouped into six skill levels with Below Level 1 being the lowest and Level 5 the highest. For PSTRE, scores were grouped into four skill levels with Below Level 1 being the lowest level and Level 3 the highest. See: ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments, October 2013*.

¹² ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments, October 2013*.

Figure 2.3 Proportion of adults at each skill level for PSTRE, PIAAC 2011-12



Source: ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013

- 2.10 The use of PSTRE in the 2011-12 PIAAC survey was the first internationally comparable measure of digital literacy.¹³ At PSTRE Level 1, survey participants would be able to use widely available and familiar technology applications, such as email software or a web browser. At PSTRE Level 2, participants would be able to use generic and more specific technology applications, for example using a novel online form.¹⁴
- 2.11 Figure 2.3 shows that, for PSTRE, an estimated 25 per cent (4.2 million) of Australians aged 15 to 74 years were not classified.¹⁵ Just over 13 per cent

¹³ The Australian Government has developed a draft Digital Literacy Skills Framework (DLSF) for the Australian Core Skills Framework. However, the Productivity Commission said the relationship between PIAAC levels and the DLSF had not been established because data and measurement on the concept is still in its early stages. Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 384. See also: Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), *Foundation Skills for Your Future Program: Draft Digital Literacy Skills Framework*, April 2020.

¹⁴ ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013, Appendix – scores and skill levels.

¹⁵ For PSTRE, respondents who did not undertake information-processing tasks were included in the 'not classified' category which covered people who had 'no computer experience', 'opted out

(2.2 million) of Australians were assessed at Below Level 1 and 31 per cent (5.3 million) were assessed at Level 1. Around 25 per cent (4.1 million) had skills at Level 2, and 3.2 per cent (540,000) at Level 3.¹⁶

- 2.12 The PIAAC survey found there were small differences in proficiency in literacy, numeracy and PSTRE by state or territory, 'with the exception of the Australian Capital Territory, which had a larger proportion of people at higher levels'.¹⁷
- 2.13 Concerns were raised about adult LLND skills gaps in Tasmania. The Tasmanian Government noted that only half of Tasmania's adult population were found to have functional literacy and numeracy skills in 2006, and that this result was confirmed by the 2011-12 PIAAC survey.¹⁸ Tasmania's response to these survey findings and investment in raising adult literacy is examined in Chapter 4.
- 2.14 PIAAC did not sample adults living in very remote locations and ABS published results do not provide a distribution of adult LLND skills by geographic remoteness. However, evidence from the Committee's previous inquiry into education in remote and complex environments showed that Australians growing up in regional and remote areas have lower educational attainment rates in school, in Year 12 and in tertiary education, compared to those living in metropolitan areas. They are around 40 per cent less likely to gain a higher-level tertiary education qualification and less than half as likely to receive a bachelor and above qualification by the time they are 35 years old, compared to people from metropolitan areas. This gap is most pronounced in remote and very remote areas and at university level.¹⁹

of computer-based assessment' and 'failed information and communication technology core'. See: ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013.

¹⁶ ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013.

¹⁷ ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013.

¹⁸ Tasmanian Government, *Submission 82*, page 3.

¹⁹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 4. See also: Department of

- 2.15 Given individuals acquire LLND skills from early childhood, it is also important to look at the performance of Australian students to understand why so many adults have low LLND skills. There are two main national sources of data on the performance of Australian students:
- OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey
 - National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).
- 2.16 The 2018 PISA survey measured the performance of students aged 15 years in mathematics, science and reading, and found that the literacy and numeracy skills of Australian students had declined over the preceding 10 years.²⁰
- 2.17 In relation to NAPLAN data which assesses key literacy and numeracy skills in Australian students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) said the 'overall picture shows some improvements; however, data shows that achievement is not equal across sectors of society and NAPLAN results for students from low socio-economic areas remain below those of other students.'²¹
- 2.18 DESE also noted that NAPLAN data shows a 'substantial gap in student achievement in both reading and numeracy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students across all year levels.'²²

Socioeconomic status and LLND skills gaps

- 2.19 The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) noted that both the PIAAC and PISA surveys showed inequalities in the distribution of achievement in LLND:

In terms of socio-economic background, the pattern that emerges from the PIAAC survey is very clear and in line with the findings of previous surveys: adults from socio-economically advantaged backgrounds have higher scores on average than those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The effect of socio-economic background on education trajectories and the development of literacy and numeracy skills is well-documented. Evidence from the PISA also

Education, Regional Education Expert Advisory Group, *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy: Final Report*, August 2019, page 11.

²⁰ OECD, *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA): Results from PISA 2018 - Australia*, 2019, page 4; DESE, *Submission 86*, page 4.

²¹ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 5.

²² DESE, *Submission 86*, page 5.

reveals an association between socio-economic background and the performance of 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics and science across Australia.²³

- 2.20 The Australian Education Union (AEU) referred to this growing gap in education outcomes as ‘increasing residualisation’, in which ‘students from low socioeconomic status households are highly segregated from their more advantaged peers and up to three years behind them’.²⁴
- 2.21 While there is an association between socioeconomic status and LLND skills proficiency, it is important to recognise that LLND skills gaps are not limited to any particular group or socioeconomic status. The Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) said:
- ... while strong correlations have been drawn between limited literacy and numeracy skills and social disadvantage, unemployment—including intergenerational unemployment—and limited parental literacy and numeracy skills, these are not necessarily causative factors.²⁵

Employment status and LLND skills gaps

- 2.22 The PIAAC survey found that, in 2011-12, employed Australians generally had higher skills in all three domains (literacy, numeracy and PSTRE) than Australians who were unemployed or not in the labour force. Among employed people, 61 per cent had literacy skills at Level 3 or above, compared to 54 per cent for unemployed people and 40 per cent for people not in the labour force.²⁶
- 2.23 However, ACER noted that the proportion of Australian adults who are employed and are performing at lower levels is ‘quite significant’, with

²³ ACER, *Submission 43*, page 14. See also: Australian Education Union (AEU), *Submission 45*, page 5.

²⁴ Ms Susan Hopgood, Federal Secretary, AEU, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 15.

²⁵ Dr Ann Kelly, Queensland Representative, Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 38.

²⁶ ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013.

38.8 per cent of employed people at Level 2 or below for literacy and 48.9 per cent for numeracy.²⁷

- 2.24 The PIAAC survey found that skills in literacy, numeracy and PSTRE were highest for Australians working full-time, particularly those working in professional, scientific and technical services; education and training; public administration and safety; and information media and telecommunications. Scores were lower for Australians working in industries such as manufacturing; construction; and administrative and support services.²⁸

LLND skills gaps in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

- 2.25 Estimates of LLND skills proficiency in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities vary widely. The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) said 'it is estimated that 40 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults have minimal English literacy and that this figure can rise to as high as 70 per cent in remote communities.'²⁹
- 2.26 Professor Bob Boughton, an adjunct professor in the School of Education at the University of New England, advised that 68 per cent of adults reported low or very low literacy levels in eight New South Wales Aboriginal communities.³⁰
- 2.27 The Literacy for Life Foundation reported that up to 87 per cent of Northern Territory Aboriginal adults were below Level 3 in reading and writing and up to 94 per cent below Level 3 in numeracy.³¹
- 2.28 Ms Ruth Ratcliffe, who has been conducting research on adult literacy alongside the Literacy for Life Foundation as a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) candidate at the University of New England, commented:

²⁷ ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013; ACER, *Submission 43*, page 14.

²⁸ ABS, *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia: Statistics about the competencies of Australians in the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in technology-rich environments*, October 2013.

²⁹ National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), *Submission 80*, page [2].

³⁰ Professor Bob Boughton, *Submission 26*, page 5.

³¹ Literacy for Life Foundation, *Submission 75*, page 4.

Despite significant effort by governments, schools and communities, the aim to halve the gap in literacy and numeracy outcomes as called for in the Close the Gap initiative has not been achieved meaning that across all states and territories a significant and persistent 'gap' exists between the literacy and numeracy outcomes of First Nations students and their non-Indigenous peers. First Nations communities continue to be 'locked-in' to educational inequality and this inequality becomes more marked, the more 'remote' a community is ...³²

Demand for LLND support

- 2.29 The Reading Writing Hotline is the national referral and advisory service for adults seeking support with literacy and numeracy. It maintains a database of all current adult literacy and numeracy providers in Australia, and statistics on its callers, which provides an indicator of the availability of and demand for adult LLND services.³³
- 2.30 The Reading Writing Hotline reported that, in 2019-20, it received 4,200 calls from Australians seeking help with literacy and numeracy, including a 30 per cent increase in calls during COVID-19 lockdowns. Of these callers:
- 71 per cent were from an English-speaking background
 - 40 per cent were currently employed
 - 8 per cent were currently studying
 - 38 per cent were from regional and remote areas
 - 39 per cent left school before Year 9 or earlier.³⁴
- 2.31 The Reading Writing Hotline reported that there was significant unmet demand for LLND support. In 2019-20:
- there was no appropriate provision available for 13 per cent of callers
 - 81 per cent of callers were not eligible for a national adult literacy program because they were not jobseekers.³⁵
- 2.32 Appearing before the Committee, the Reading Writing Hotline said that '[i]n the past 25 years, we have gone from being a world leader in adult literacy to having a situation where many adults are unable to find classes', and

³² Ms Ruth Ratcliffe, *Submission 6*, page [2].

³³ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 2.

³⁴ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, Attachment 1, page [1].

³⁵ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, Attachment 1, page [1].

noted that '[o]ur specialist literacy and numeracy teaching workforce is also declining rapidly.'³⁶

- 2.33 The Productivity Commission estimated that 'every year up to 75,000 people arrive in Australia or leave school with low LLND' and that 'Commonwealth LLND programs and VET [vocational education and training] seem to help about 53,000 people to significantly improve their skills.'³⁷
- 2.34 ACAL said that '[c]urrently there is insufficient availability of different types of programs within Australia to meet demand.'³⁸ ACAL reported there was unmet need for LLND support during the COVID-19 pandemic particularly among parents of young children and older people. ACAL said that '[p]arents were very challenged during the pandemic shut down period when their children were learning remotely - this caused high levels of stress amongst the parents, the teachers, and the students.'³⁹
- 2.35 ACAL commented that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown people there is a need for 'a wider range of literacy skills to negotiate a world of online engagement which requires a greater variety and higher level of literacy than in previous years when many transactions were carried out face to face.'⁴⁰
- 2.36 The Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Northern Territory (ATESOLNT) said that '[i]n the few communities where adult education programs exist [in the Northern Territory], they are in demand.'⁴¹ ATESOLNT reported that the adult education centre at

³⁶ Ms Vanessa Iles, Manager, Reading Writing Hotline, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 24 March 2021, page 2.

³⁷ Dr Malcolm Roberts, Commissioner, Productivity Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 February 2021, page 2.

³⁸ ACAL, *Submission 66*, page 28.

³⁹ ACAL, *Submission 66*, page 26.

⁴⁰ ACAL, *Submission 66*, page 26.

⁴¹ Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Northern Territory (ATESOLNT), *Submission 105.1*, page 23.

Yuendumu received over 1,600 requests for informal language, literacy and numeracy support over an eight-month period in 2017.⁴²

Box 2.1 Impact of LLND skills gaps on Australians' lives

It was important for the Committee to understand how LLND skills gaps impact Australians' everyday lives. The Committee received a few submissions from people living with low LLND skills and appreciate the courage of those who came forward to tell their stories. The Committee is also grateful for the contributions of those who described the impact of low LLND skills on their family members, and the many volunteer tutors who described the challenges experienced by their students. These are some of their stories:

I had to stop helping out at the school that my children attended because the year one children wanted me to write on the bottom of their drawings that it was a picture of a Ballerina or an Astronaut or a firefighter or something that I could not spell. I was so embarrassed because I could not spell the words without looking it up in the dictionary first. That day I left my son[s] class room in tears and so embarrassed ... I have gone out of my way to make sure that my children did not have the same problems, which I have had to live with.⁴³

Having such a gap in my reading and writing made it hard to

- apply for jobs
- further training in hospitality
- first aid training courses
- reading work documents
- applying for Visas
- getting a driving licence
- pretty much anything to do with reading and writing I would try to avoid, just blame it on the course or say it's just too hard.⁴⁴

⁴² ATESOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 23. See: R Bauer, 'Adult Literacy and socio-cultural learning at Pina Pina Jarrinjaku (Yuendumu Learning Centre)', *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, Volume 58, Number 1, April 2018, page 136.

⁴³ Mrs Pauline Bruffer, *Submission 53*, pages [1-2].

⁴⁴ Mr Nicholas Deans, *Submission 21*, page [1].

Some of the daily living challenges my daughter faces and needs help with due to her poor literacy – completing forms at medical appointments, reading and understanding simple letters and forms that require a signature, reading bills and bank statements, reading agreements and contracts, reading emails, writing emails, reading medical advice, participating in therapy programs that require good literacy skills, managing medication and navigating the Centrelink system.⁴⁵

From finances to health, every facet of my husband's life, and that of our children, would be precarious if he did not have the ready assistance of a willing reader and scribe – me. Here are some tasks from the last few days that would be more difficult, or impossible, for my husband to perform alone:

- Baby wakes up sick – can you read the labels on the medicine bottles on the fridge to check the contraindications and the dosage?
- Baby needs a doctor's appointment – can you google local GPs [general practitioners], navigate to the booking page, register as a new patient and book an appointment for the right day?
- Toddler's teacher sends home a newsletter – can you read essential information about the new sickness policy, and see the part about a new teacher joining your toddler's room?
- Your workplace needs everyone to renew their responsible service of alcohol training – can you google an accredited course provider, sign up and complete the written exercises in the course?
- The morning news was talking about interest rates going down – can you search for banks' best offers and apply online? Can you read terms and conditions in the loan documents?
- You'd like to go away for the long weekend – can you book an Airbnb, where you might need to message back and forth with the owners?
- Soccer season has started – can you figure out how to register your child as a player online, and stay across all the team emails with requirements, match fixtures and banter?
- There are 20 new messages on your phone in your work team chat – can you get away with waiting until you get in to ask someone what has happened, instead of [trying] painstakingly to decipher them? Can you get away with responding as a voice message?

⁴⁵ Name withheld, *Submission 28*, page 4.

- The children want you to read them a story – is it one with pictures or one that you already know, or will you have to have to make it up?
- Older child needs help with their homework – can you read the instructions and help them write their short answers?
- There's an email from the ATO [Australian Taxation Office] in your inbox – or at least, it has the logo and looks official. Is it *really* the ATO, and if so, what do they want?⁴⁶

As a tutor, I get to hear the myriad reasons why an individual finally asks for assistance. These are always touching and often heart breaking. Struggles such as the inability to make sense of notes sent home from their child's school, migrants unable to shop effectively for their family, to be able to respond to communiqués from Centrelink and the consequences of not complying with those.⁴⁷

Benefits of addressing LLND skills gaps

- 2.37 LLND skills gaps limit the capacity of Australians to apply for jobs⁴⁸ and earn higher wages, and negatively impact the economy.⁴⁹ Conversely, improved LLND skills are associated with increased labour force participation and improved wages.⁵⁰
- 2.38 In addition to helping individuals secure employment and earn better wages, and Australia becoming a more prosperous, competitive economy, addressing LLND skills gaps will help Australians to:
- support their children's education
 - improve their health and wellbeing
 - participate fully in modern Australia and be better able to adapt to the technological and structural changes Australia may experience in the future
 - actively engage as informed citizens in Australia's democracy
 - better access public and private services

⁴⁶ Name withheld, *Submission 27*, page 2.

⁴⁷ Name withheld, *Submission 24*, page [1].

⁴⁸ Mr Nicholas Deans, *Submission 21*, page [1]; Name withheld, *Submission 56*, page [2].

⁴⁹ Associate Professor Shumi Akhtar and Dr Farida Akhtar, *Submission 91*, page 13; World Literacy Foundation, *Submission 11*, page [1].

⁵⁰ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 6.

- make informed legal and financial decisions.

A stronger economy

- 2.39 Investments in the LLND skills of Australians have economic benefits for individuals, through higher wages and increased employment, and for the nation through increased productivity and economic growth.⁵¹
- 2.40 The Productivity Commission reported that 'there is a lot of work that demonstrates the high returns, both public and private, to investment in lifting LLND skills'.⁵² The Productivity Commission said 'if you could lift the PIAAC level by one, you would improve the likelihood of employment and you would also find that it is associated with about a 10 per cent increase in wages.'⁵³
- 2.41 The Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance noted that the economic return on investment of improving LLND skills is significant, sustainable and cumulative, 'through not only increased productivity but also reducing costs in high public-spend areas such as health, justice and welfare.'⁵⁴
- 2.42 The World Literacy Foundation said that LLND skills gaps represent costs to national economies through 'welfare, unemployment, and social programs, as well as reduced government tax revenue, and productivity.'⁵⁵ The World Literacy Foundation commented:
- ... as the global economy moves more towards a knowledge economy, literacy is an essential skill for individuals and states to compete in the global economy. However, when a high proportion of the adult population has poor literacy proficiency, many positions remain vacant as insufficient individuals are adequately skilled to fulfil those roles. This results in slower GDP [gross domestic product] growth in the long term.⁵⁶

⁵¹ ACER, *Submission 43*, page 5.

⁵² Mr Jonathan Coppel, Commissioner, Productivity Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 February 2021, page 8.

⁵³ Mr Jonathan Coppel, Productivity Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 February 2021, page 8.

⁵⁴ Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance, *Submission 25*, page 1.

⁵⁵ World Literacy Foundation, *Submission 11*, page [1].

⁵⁶ World Literacy Foundation, *Submission 11*, page [1].

- 2.43 While acknowledging 'there is a well-established relationship between literacy and individual earning potentials, and between the average literacy levels of a community and its economic well-being', ACAL said this 'causal connection is complex and involves a range of factors other than literacy', including inter-generational poverty, unemployment, health, mental health, race and gender.⁵⁷ ACAL commented:

There is a strong argument that productivity and development of human capital should not be seen in a binary relationship to development of social and individual capital. Each reinforces the other in complex ways in development of adult literacy and basic education competence, and in developing the confidence to use newly acquired skills.⁵⁸

- 2.44 The Committee heard that modern workplaces require an increasing level of skills due to technological developments. For example, ACER stated that '[f]or many Australians the literacy they were taught in school is not enough to keep up with changes in the society we now live in.'⁵⁹

- 2.45 Professor Joseph Lo Bianco, a professor emeritus of language and literacy education at the University of Melbourne, said that 'we're facing a really historic moment with even what literacy is.'⁶⁰ He noted that technological developments such as cyber-physical systems and artificial intelligence are 'going to require much higher levels of literate comprehension and functioning than we've ever had for practically most of the population.'⁶¹

- 2.46 In its analysis of the 2011-12 PIAAC results, the OECD commented:

Taken together, although Australia's average results are not poor, the challenges presented by adults with low basic skills may lead to Australia being left behind in terms of innovation and economic growth by countries that have been more successfully investing in the skills of all their people.⁶²

- 2.47 The Committee is aware that this challenge is even more pressing as countries emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. Professor Lo Bianco said:

⁵⁷ ACAL, *Submission 66*, page 14.

⁵⁸ ACAL, *Submission 66*, page 14.

⁵⁹ ACER, *Submission 43*, page 9.

⁶⁰ Emeritus Professor Joseph Lo Bianco, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 1.

⁶¹ Emeritus Professor Joseph Lo Bianco, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 2.

⁶² OECD, *Building Skills for All in Australia: Policy Insights from the Survey of Adult Skills*, 2017, page 9.

... the exposure of our economy once everything opens up is going to be much greater because we're going to have to compete now in a system in which many countries are going to be trying to recover ground that they have lost.⁶³

Supporting children's education

2.48 The importance of adult literacy for children's education was raised, with evidence showing that children who are read to have improved educational outcomes,⁶⁴ particularly when it is their home or first language.⁶⁵

2.49 The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) reported that a strong predictor of children developing low literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills is where 'parents have not had an opportunity to develop an understanding of the value of education.'⁶⁶

2.50 ACER stated that '[i]ntergenerational literacy is strongly linked and improving foundation skills in both parents and children can reverse intergenerational patterns of low achievement.'⁶⁷

2.51 Civil Liberties Australia linked intergenerational patterns of low literacy to poverty and commented:

... unless there is corrective intervention to support both parents and children, the poorly educated parents raise poorly educated children who have children who lack opportunities to gain enhanced education in a vicious circle.⁶⁸

2.52 The NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council (NSWALNC) said that studies show 'it is common for children from highly literate family environments to engage in dialogic literacy practices with one or more of their parents/ caregivers through activities such as bedtime reading.'⁶⁹ These

⁶³ Emeritus Professor Joseph Lo Bianco, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 3.

⁶⁴ Australian Primary Principals Association, *Submission 74*, page [8]; National and State Libraries Australia, *Submission 34*, page 2.

⁶⁵ Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA), *Submission 85*, page 37.

⁶⁶ Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), *Submission 89*, page 8.

⁶⁷ ACER, *Submission 43*, page 5.

⁶⁸ Civil Liberties Australia, *Submission 17*, page 2.

⁶⁹ NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council (NSWALNC), *Submission 68.2*, page 2.

activities model 'the teaching practices that children would experience in the school classroom'.⁷⁰ NSWALNC commented:

Such dialogic literacy practices are limited when the adult members of the household have very poor literacy. On the other hand, children from highly literate family backgrounds start school with a level of familiarity with the discursive practices of the school classroom. Additionally, if the adult members have only had minimal experience of formal schooling, their spoken English may reflect a particular variety of English of their community that is not the 'standard English' valued and promoted in schools. These socio-cultural factors mean that children from households where adults have poor literacy themselves experience a discontinuity between language and literacy use in the school and at home, a discontinuity that is much less pronounced for children from highly literate family environments.⁷¹

- 2.53 ACAL acknowledged 'that parents and carers with low literacy can experience difficulties supporting education and providing a literacy-rich home environment.'⁷² However, ACAL stated:

... it must be acknowledged that many parents and carers who experience literacy barriers strive to provide an experience that allows their children to thrive, often to overcome the barriers their own literacy presents and to ensure it does not become an intergenerational issue.⁷³

- 2.54 The Settlement Council of Australia noted evidence showing that building a strong foundation in a child's home language first is the best way to support a child's learning and said that parents with low English language proficiency should be 'encouraged to take an active role in their children's learning by reading to, conversing with, and engaging children in the home language.'⁷⁴

- 2.55 The Committee heard that parents wanting to assist children with their education is a key reason why many adults seek LLND support. Tricia Bowen, who has worked in the field of adult literacy education, reported that adult literacy students:

⁷⁰ NSWALNC, *Submission 68.2*, page 2.

⁷¹ NSWALNC, *Submission 68.2*, pages 2-3.

⁷² ACAL, *Submission 66*, page 20.

⁷³ ACAL, *Submission 66*, page 20.

⁷⁴ Settlement Council of Australia, *Submission 70*, page 5.

... told me how books were not present in their childhood homes, that reading was not part of their formative years, and that they, and their parents, had limited levels of education. These same contributors described this as being a key factor in their decision to attend adult literacy classes. As they put it, they wanted their children's lives to be better.⁷⁵

2.56 Tricia Bowen continued:

Another of the contributors described attending adult literacy classes because she wanted to be able to read to her child. She wanted her child to see the value in reading. She wanted things to be different for her.⁷⁶

2.57 The Reading Writing Hotline reaffirmed the importance of adult literacy for children:

There is a lot of focus on children's literacy, but what is often forgotten is that without literate parents, kids can find reading and writing much harder. Not giving adults access to literacy classes, therefore, affects their children and their children's children.⁷⁷

2.58 However, the Reading Writing Hotline noted that '[t]he relationship between parents' and children's literacy is complex' and said '[i]t is important to provide a range of suitable supports rather than attributing blame to parents, teachers or schooling systems.'⁷⁸

2.59 The Reading Writing Hotline said that '[i]mproving children's literacy is not as simple as "reading to your kids"', noting that the 'Hotline receives many calls from parents desperate for help for their children. Many highly literate parents cannot find help for children with reading difficulties.'⁷⁹ The Reading Writing Hotline also reported:

- Some children need specialist support at school and cannot access this help. There is no national service to coordinate and advise.

⁷⁵ Tricia Bowen, *Submission 62*, page [1].

⁷⁶ Tricia Bowen, *Submission 62*, page [2].

⁷⁷ Ms Vanessa Iles, Reading Writing Hotline, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 24 March 2021, page 2.

⁷⁸ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 6.

⁷⁹ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 6.

- Parents need explicit examples of activities to improve children's early literacy.⁸⁰

2.60 ATESOLNT commented that the relationship between a parent and child's education 'goes both ways':

... children's experiences of schooling profoundly impact on adults' attitudes to *their own* learning of English and literacy as well as their perspectives on *their children's* learning in school. This inter-relationship is especially strong in small, close-knit communities such as very remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.⁸¹

Healthier individuals and families

2.61 Australians with strong LLND skills are more likely to maintain and enhance their own health and wellbeing and that of their family than those who may need support to improve their skills.⁸²

2.62 The 'capacity to acquire, understand, and use information in ways that promote and maintain good health' is referred to as health literacy.⁸³ Improved health literacy is associated with better health outcomes.⁸⁴

2.63 The Sydney Health Literacy Lab said that '[e]xtensive research shows that adults with limited health literacy skills are less able to engage in preventive health-care, are more likely to develop chronic illnesses ... , experience greater difficulties managing illnesses, and have higher rates of mortality.'⁸⁵

2.64 DESE noted research that established links between LLND skills and an individual's capacity 'to understand and use information relating to health issues such as drugs and alcohol, disease prevention and treatment, safety and accident prevention, first aid, emergencies and staying healthy.'⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 6.

⁸¹ ATESOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 13.

⁸² DESE, *Submission 86*, page 8.

⁸³ Sydney Health Literacy Lab, *Submission 67*, page 4.

⁸⁴ Sydney Health Literacy Lab, *Submission 67*, page 8; Family Planning NSW, *Submission 8*, page [6]; Lowitja Institute, *Submission 49*, page 4; NIAA, *Submission 80*, page [6]; Mr James Warren, *Submission 98*, pages [5-6]; Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 64*, page 11.

⁸⁵ Sydney Health Literacy Lab, *Submission 67*, page 4.

⁸⁶ DESE, *Submission 86*, pages 6-7.

2.65 Code Read Dyslexia Network Australia said that 'there are multiple detrimental impacts of poor literacy on health' including 'increased risk of depression, hospitalisation and the risks associated with not being able to understand and follow the correct use of prescription medications.'⁸⁷

2.66 AEU referred to the findings of a systematic review of over 600 papers, which 'found that hospital patients with low literacy had poorer health outcomes, including knowledge, intermediate disease markers, and measures of morbidity, general health status, and use of health resources.'⁸⁸ AEU reported that:

Patients with low literacy were generally 1.5 to 3 times more likely to experience a given poor outcome than those with adequate or high literacy levels. Low literacy levels have also been found to contribute to mental health issues, with multiple studies finding that anxieties surrounding reading failure can lead to anxiety and low mood.⁸⁹

2.67 The Committee heard that the COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the need for improved health literacy.⁹⁰ The World Literacy Foundation said:

During this time, many people were challenged in understanding and applying the health information provided by health professionals and the government. Adequate health literacy is important in ensuring that people are able to understand and correctly apply health information to prevent disease, and the failure to do so increases the risk for disease transmission.⁹¹

2.68 There was support for raising LLND skills as a way of improving health outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.⁹² The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) said that low LLND skills:

... makes it harder to navigate the health system—to understand what your medication is for, to ask questions of your doctors and other health providers,

⁸⁷ Code Read Dyslexia Network Australia, *Submission 30*, page 1.

⁸⁸ AEU, *Submission 45*, page 4. See: D DeWalt, N Berkman, S Sheridan et al, 'Literacy and Health Outcomes: A Systematic Review of the Literature', *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, Volume 19, Issue 12, December 2004, pages 1,228–39.

⁸⁹ AEU, *Submission 45*, pages 4-5.

⁹⁰ NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, page 9.

⁹¹ World Literacy Foundation, *Submission 11*, page [4].

⁹² Dr Ben Bartlett, *Submission 2*, page [1].

to provide informed consent if you need to go to hospital or have an operation and to access support services like the NDIS [National Disability Insurance Scheme] or aged care. It increases the risk of substance abuse. And all of this has profound impacts on the mental health and the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It makes it harder to participate in our communities and the broader Australian community.⁹³

- 2.69 NACCHO also reported that low LLND skills in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is making it difficult to address 'critical workforce shortages', stating that '[l]ow English literacy levels in our communities directly impacts our ability to recruit our people for local jobs. If we're going to build a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and care workforce, addressing English literacy levels is critical.'⁹⁴
- 2.70 The Central Australian Aboriginal Congress highlighted the importance of maternal health literacy stating that 'mothers who are literate may be more empowered and able to advocate on behalf of their own health and that of their children.'⁹⁵
- 2.71 Other contributors highlighted the relationship between low LLND skills and poor mental health.⁹⁶ A parent of a daughter with a specific learning disability said that her daughter's poor mental health began in primary school 'where she was never good enough, feeling constantly judged, considered a "problem" and a burden.'⁹⁷
- 2.72 Joanne Dickenson referred to research from Canada showing that 'people with learning issues are 2-3 times more likely to be diagnosed with high levels of anxiety and other mental health issues than are Canadians without learning disorders.'⁹⁸ Other research suggested 'correlations between

⁹³ Ms Patricia Turner AM, Chief Executive Officer, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 24.

⁹⁴ Ms Patricia Turner AM, NACCHO, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 25.

⁹⁵ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 64*, page 11.

⁹⁶ Mr Nicholas Deans, *Submission 21*, page [1]; Name withheld, *Submission 28*, page 2; Joanne Dickenson, *Submission 108*, page [13]; AEU, *Submission 45*, page 4; ACAL, *Submission 66*, page 24.

⁹⁷ Name withheld, *Submission 28*, page 2. The importance of reducing the stigma and shame associated with LLND skills gaps is examined in Chapter 3 of this report.

⁹⁸ Joanne Dickenson, *Submission 108*, page [13].

cognitive problems in childhood and poor mental health outcomes in later life.'⁹⁹

Participating fully in modern Australia

- 2.73 Strong LLND skills assist individuals to participate fully in modern Australia and make people more resilient and able to cope with technological and structural changes.¹⁰⁰
- 2.74 Conversely, people with low LLND skills may feel excluded from being able to participate fully. The Western Australian Adult Literacy Council reported:
- Many adult LN [literacy and numeracy] clients start a program with limited social confidence, trust in others and/or sense of self-worth. They are often reluctant to enter a public space (e.g. an exhibition, library, service centre) and they can doubt their ability to apply for a job or volunteer their skills. A commonly held belief is that 'these places and services are for others – not them.'¹⁰¹
- 2.75 NSWALNC noted that Australians now must negotiate an 'increasingly challenging social environment', including:
- ... the changing state of the pandemic; the widespread incidence of wage theft, particularly for the most vulnerable and low-paid workers; incidents of domestic violence and sexual assault in workplaces, families and communities; climate change and its health and economic impact on households; the increasing expectations of parents' involvement in their children's education; and the proliferation of misinformation and conspiracy theories, leading to a declining trust in public institutions.¹⁰²
- 2.76 NSWALNC said that adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy are 'vulnerable in multiple ways' and 'providing educational opportunities to improve their literacy so that they can learn about and negotiate these

⁹⁹ Joanne Dickenson, *Submission 108*, page [13].

¹⁰⁰ Mr Jonathan Coppel, Productivity Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 February 2021, page 8.

¹⁰¹ Western Australian Adult Literacy Council, *Submission 81*, page 8.

¹⁰² Dr Keiko Yasukawa, President, NSWALNC, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 24 March 2021, page 2.

critical social issues ... will afford them greater dignity, respect and wellbeing in their lives.’¹⁰³

- 2.77 Swinburne University of Technology said that digital literacy, in particular, is ‘required for full participation in modern life’ and commented:

Most written content that exists is online, with the vast majority of what is created never making it to physical publication. Thus, people with poor digital literacy miss out on many sources of news and other information, including dissemination of public health updates and emergency warnings. They are also excluded from many avenues for self-expression and communication.¹⁰⁴

Non-English speaking individuals

- 2.78 The Committee heard that improving the English language skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults¹⁰⁵ and migrants¹⁰⁶ from non-English-speaking backgrounds is a way of ensuring all Australians can realise their economic, social and political rights.
- 2.79 NIAA said that low rates of English literacy were a ‘significant barrier to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing jobs, assisting their children and being able to fully participate in social and economic life in Australia.’¹⁰⁷
- 2.80 NACCHO emphasised that English literacy enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to walk in two worlds:

... one that recognises our cultural connection to country, community, language, family, kinship, spirituality and our ancestors, and one that the wider Australian community also walks in. We need to be able to walk in both worlds to be effective in both. Good English literacy helps us do that.

Low literacy can exacerbate the impact of broader social determinants. Low literacy makes it difficult for our people to access education, training and employment, which entrenches cycles of poverty and disadvantage. It makes

¹⁰³ Dr Keiko Yasukawa, NSWALNC, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 24 March 2021, page 2.

¹⁰⁴ Swinburne University of Technology, *Submission 33*, page [3].

¹⁰⁵ Professor Bob Boughton, *Submission 26*, page 2; Emeritus Professor Tim Rowse, *Submission 1*, page [1]; Deborah Durnan, *Submission 14*, pages 2-3.

¹⁰⁶ Settlement Council of Australia, *Submission 70*, page 2; Mr David Wilden, First Assistant Secretary, Refugee, Humanitarian and Settlement, Department of Home Affairs, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 24 February 2021, page 1.

¹⁰⁷ NIAA, *Submission 80*, page [2].

it harder to navigate the health system—to understand what your medication is for, to ask questions of your doctors and other health providers, to provide informed consent if you need to go to hospital or have an operation and to access support services like the NDIS or aged care. It increases the risk of substance abuse. And all of this has profound impacts on the mental health and the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It makes it harder to participate in our communities and the broader Australian community.¹⁰⁸

- 2.81 While noting that effective governance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations was critical to achieving the Closing the Gap targets, Deborah Durnan who is a practitioner and researcher in Aboriginal adult education, said that it is 'difficult to direct a community organisation without a good level of English literacy.'¹⁰⁹ Deborah Durnan commented:

Common challenges faced by those without English literacy at Level 2 or higher include: following the corporation's Constitution, managing finances, assessing risk, negotiating fair and just agreements with the government and other agencies such as mining companies, ensuring accountability of staff, following good governance practices, understanding government policies, meeting legal requirements and oversighting contracts. Too often responsibility for decision-making falls to the non-Aboriginal senior staff or to one or two literate Aboriginal Directors or staff members. Invariably this means many Boards / Directors find it difficult to make decisions with confidence often resulting in a great deal of stress, conflict and sometimes non-compliance. Consequently, community control and self-determination are compromised from the outset with many communities missing out on having a real say in what works best for their community.¹¹⁰

- 2.82 The importance of English language proficiency for enabling migrants and refugees to participate fully in Australia's economy and society was also raised. For example, the Department of Home Affairs said:

English language proficiency is central to participation for new migrants in Australia's social and economic life. It facilitates access to education,

¹⁰⁸ Ms Patricia Turner AM, NACCHO, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 24.

¹⁰⁹ Deborah Durnan, *Submission 14*, page 2.

¹¹⁰ Deborah Durnan, *Submission 14*, page 2.

employment, health services, housing and government services. It also impacts community connection and sense of belonging.¹¹¹

2.83 The Settlement Council of Australia commented:

English language proficiency specifically is a critical part of good settlement outcomes for migrants and refugees. The ability to understand and speak English has a huge impact on whether migrants and refugees can find work, build social networks outside of their cultural communities and manage their day-to-day lives independently.¹¹²

2.84 The Settlement Council of Australia also stressed the importance of recognising that people who are not proficient in English may be highly literate in their mother-tongue and can still make valuable contributions to their communities.¹¹³

2.85 The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) recognised 'the important role of adult literacy in helping people to navigate Australian life, including transport, housing, employment and education, and the health and justice system.'¹¹⁴ However, FECCA also stated that 'knowledge of the English language does not determine someone's ability to be a good citizen or actively participate in Australian life.'¹¹⁵

2.86 Several contributors emphasised that learning literacy is not the same as learning English.¹¹⁶ For example, the Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) stated that learning literacy is a 'fundamental learning process' that can 'occur on the basis of *any* language. Being "literate" is *not* language-specific, although learning literacy is generally built, in the first instance, from oracy in a specific language.'¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Mr David Wilden, Department of Home Affairs, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 24 February 2021, page 1.

¹¹² Mrs Sandra Wright, Chief Executive Officer, Settlement Council of Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 6.

¹¹³ Settlement Council of Australia, *Submission 70*, page 1.

¹¹⁴ Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA), *Submission 79*, page 2.

¹¹⁵ FECCA, *Submission 79*, page 2.

¹¹⁶ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 16; ATESOLNT, *Submission 105*, page 1; Settlement Council of Australia, *Submission 70*, page 1.

¹¹⁷ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 16.

- 2.87 ATESOLNT said that it is important not to conflate the terms learning literacy and learning English 'when discussing the learning needs of diverse groups within Australian society.'¹¹⁸

Bilingualism

- 2.88 The Committee heard that, for people who grow up learning a language other than standard Australian English, proficiency in a home or first language assists in the learning of English.¹¹⁹ For example, ACTA commented:

Although literacy is non-language specific, research is unequivocal that literacy is normally best developed from a solid foundation in a language the learner can speak, just as occurs, for example, with mother tongue English (or German or Arabic) children who come to literacy on the basis of something like 10,000 hours of spoken language from infancy.¹²⁰

- 2.89 There was strong evidence about the need to recognise and support first languages, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. For example, NIAA commented:

Speaking traditional language has benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in learning contexts and is an asset in terms of employment prospects and income-generating opportunities, particularly in the fields of arts, crafts and cultural activities. The 2020 National Indigenous Languages Report found that throughout the early years of education, lessons delivered through a child's traditional Indigenous language, with a gradual and staged transition to English as a second language, has been demonstrated to improve access to education, as well as English literacy.¹²¹

- 2.90 The Djalkiri Foundation commented:

If we work from a constructivist viewpoint in education, which is essentially that you take concepts that someone already has and you put the new concept on top of that—it's almost like Lego pieces attaching. That's the predominant

¹¹⁸ ATESOLNT, *Submission 105*, page 1.

¹¹⁹ This reflects evidence to the Committee's previous inquiry into education in remote and complex environments. See: House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 85.

¹²⁰ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 17.

¹²¹ NIAA, *Submission 80*, page [4].

educational paradigm we work through. That's why bilingual both way schools work.¹²²

- 2.91 Evidence supporting the need for bilingual programs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, supported by appropriate English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) instruction, is examined further in Chapter 3.

Active citizenship

- 2.92 Strong LLND skills allow Australians to be active and informed participants in our democracy. Australia's system of government relies on an informed citizenry for its efficacy and legitimacy.¹²³
- 2.93 Macquarie Community College noted that LLND skills 'play a really critical role in participation in democracy, in economic and societal health', and remarked '[i]f you don't have basic literacy, you lack real opportunities to engage with democratic institutions, make choices and exercise your citizenship rights.'¹²⁴
- 2.94 NSWALNC provided the case study of one adult literacy student, who described becoming more politically engaged and aware of issues in her community through her education:

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.¹²⁵

- 2.95 Similarly, the Tasmanian Government provided the following example of how acquiring literacy had enabled an adult learner to vote for the first time:

We are lucky to live in a democracy, given that large numbers of the global population don't enjoy the same right to vote that we do. Yet, to exercise that right, you have to understand who and what you are voting for. Ian spent his

¹²² Mr Daniel Yore, Interim Project Manager, Djalkiri Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 17.

¹²³ Civics Expert Group, *Whereas the People: Civics and Citizenship Education*, 1994, pages 15-16.

¹²⁴ Ms Theresa Collignon, Group Chief Executive Officer, Macquarie Community College, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 32.

¹²⁵ NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, pages 10-11.

whole life donkey voting because he couldn't read what candidates were promising. After working with his tutor, for the first time in his life, Ian cast a valid vote at the federal election in 2019.¹²⁶

- 2.96 Tricia Bowen said that her 'work with adult literacy students, has demonstrated the clear link between improved literacy, health, wellbeing, and active participation in civic life', and recalled one student:

... describing finally being able to understand the processes of elections and voting, and for the first time, being able to make an informed decision as to her preferred candidate. Prior to her attendance in adult literacy classes, she had been denied the basic right to vote.¹²⁷

- 2.97 Deborah Durnan expressed concern that one of the reasons many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples do not exercise their right to vote is because of low English language literacy and a lack of citizenship education:

The majority of low literate people with whom I have worked do not have a working knowledge of the Australian 3 tier system of government. They struggle to read political party campaign material, AEC [Australian Electoral Commission] documents and newspaper analysis. But literacy goes beyond reading. Literacy enables one to develop critical thinking, the capacity to analyse and synthesise information to make choices and solve problems. Hence too often the low to very low literate are excluded from deciding who will best represent their interests.¹²⁸

- 2.98 Deborah Durnan also noted that English literacy gaps may limit the capacity of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to make informed decisions about the recognition of Indigenous Australians in the Constitution.¹²⁹

Accessing services

- 2.99 There is a level of LLND skills Australians require to access most services without the assistance of family and friends, community centres and interpreters.

¹²⁶ Tasmanian Government, *Submission 82*, Attachment C, page 72.

¹²⁷ Tricia Bowen, *Submission 62*, page [1].

¹²⁸ Deborah Durnan, *Submission 14*, page 3.

¹²⁹ Deborah Durnan, *Submission 14*, page 3.

2.100 For some Australians, reading a bill that arrives by mail may be a challenge, while others may be comfortable dealing with hard copy correspondence but find emails, mobile messaging and online interactions and systems challenging.

2.101 The Committee heard that people with LLND skills gaps have difficulty accessing government services,¹³⁰ particularly where forms are required to be filled in and submitted online.¹³¹ For example, the Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre (MNCCLC) said:

... there are a number of different processes and systems in play that make it really difficult for someone with low literacy to engage. Some of those things, like interactions with Centrelink around the disability support pension, for example, can be really difficult when there's been a move for people to engage with Centrelink online. If your literacy skills are limited or your access to the internet is limited, it can be very difficult to understand what's expected of you in that context.¹³²

2.102 The Central Australian Aboriginal Congress reported 'it is very common for Aboriginal families to not receive their entitlements due both to inflexible and inappropriate program rules and to low English literacy.'¹³³ The Central Australian Aboriginal Congress noted research conducted in a remote Aboriginal community found:

Most people do not have sufficient English language and literacy to independently fill in Centrelink forms, negotiate the MyGov website or handle over-the-phone interactions with Centrelink ... Those who report to Centrelink by phone often do not understand what is said to them; they often guess the answers, or say yes to obligations they cannot meet because they think it is the 'correct' answer.¹³⁴

2.103 The Literacy for Life Foundation said:

... many forms of support, government and otherwise, require people to fill out forms, often online. People with low literacy are effectively excluded from

¹³⁰ Name withheld, *Submission 4*, page [2]; Name withheld, *Submission 9*, page [1]; Name withheld, *Submission 24*, page [1]; Name withheld, *Submission 56*, page [2].

¹³¹ NSW Council of Social Service, *Submission 18*, Attachment 2, page 2.

¹³² Ms Melanie Kallmier, Co-ordinator and Solicitor, Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre (MNCCLC), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 48.

¹³³ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 64*, page 10.

¹³⁴ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 64*, page 10.

such support, due to their difficulty accessing and completing the required applications.¹³⁵

- 2.104 Charles Carroll, who has previously worked in drug and alcohol rehabilitation and provided language, literacy and numeracy assistance to his clients, noted that a person's inability to engage with Centrelink due to LLND skills gaps can result in punitive actions being taken against them.¹³⁶
- 2.105 During the Committee's previous inquiry into education in remote and complex environments, the Committee heard that there is a 'digital divide' between Australians who have access to the internet, computers and other devices, and those who do not. This gap in access is particularly acute for Australians on low incomes and those living in geographically isolated locations.¹³⁷
- 2.106 Evidence to this inquiry has reinforced the Committee's understanding that digital inclusion depends, to a certain extent, on your postcode and your income. A further understanding that has emerged is that many older Australians also find themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide.
- 2.107 VCOSS said that digital literacy 'should be taken into consideration in light of government's intentional shift to move to online service delivery and the experience of COVID-19 highlighting the importance of digital inclusion in enabling social and economic participation.'¹³⁸

Making informed legal and financial decisions

- 2.108 Strong LLND skills allow Australians to make informed legal and financial decisions. Conversely, low LLND skills make it difficult to navigate legal and financial issues and mean that many Australians may not be able to fully realise their rights.
- 2.109 Associate Professor Shumi Akhtar from the University of Sydney and Dr Farida Akhtar, a senior lecturer at Macquarie University, were concerned that Australians with low LLND skills are 'increasingly becoming victims of

¹³⁵ Literacy for Life Foundation, *Submission 75*, page 9.

¹³⁶ Charles Carroll, *Submission 50*, page [1].

¹³⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 36.

¹³⁸ VCOSS, *Submission 89*, pages 7-8.

financial frauds'.¹³⁹ They noted that financial literacy is 'hugely important' and said:

Given more than 75 per cent of Australians have a superannuation account, it is critical that our adult population is sufficiently educated to be able to make sensible decisions in relation to their current and future financial affairs for themselves and for their children.¹⁴⁰

- 2.110 NSWALNC noted that 'workers who do not have access to information about their rights or who do not have adequate literacy to exercise their rights' are vulnerable to wage theft and other forms of exploitation.¹⁴¹
- 2.111 MNCCLC noted that low literacy has a 'significant impact on individuals' ability to navigate and self-advocate within complex systems that operate in society' and noted that the 'legal system is one of these.'¹⁴² MNCCLC provided several case studies that 'highlight the ways in which people with low literacy levels are ordinarily excluded from participating in systems which operate in their lives.'¹⁴³
- 2.112 The need for greater support for Australians with LLND skills gaps, including literacy mediation, assistance with form filling, legal assistance, and financial counselling, is further examined in Chapter 4.

Limited data and research on adult LLND skills

- 2.113 There was support for greater provision of timely data in relation to adult LLND skill levels, particularly in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and for more research into adult LLND skills gaps to better inform future policy decisions. For example, the Lowitja Institute said there is a 'lack of data at a national level or local level available for planning and program development.'¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Associate Professor Shumi Akhtar and Dr Farida Akhtar, *Submission 91*, page 10.

¹⁴⁰ Associate Professor Shumi Akhtar and Dr Farida Akhtar, *Submission 91*, page 10.

¹⁴¹ NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, page 6.

¹⁴² MNCCLC, *Submission 99*, page [2].

¹⁴³ MNCCLC, *Submission 99*, page [3].

¹⁴⁴ Professor Bob Boughton, Researcher, Lowitja Institute, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 29.

2.114 The Reading Writing Hotline said '[t]here is a lack of Australian statistics and research on adult literacy issues' and noted that the PIAAC survey 'provides a snapshot but results are limited.'¹⁴⁵ The Reading Writing Hotline noted that '[s]tatistics are especially lacking for people in remote locations (predominantly First Nations people) as PIAAC does not cover these locations.'¹⁴⁶

2.115 ACTA said that the Committee's inquiry had 'exposed the lack of data necessary to guide policy-making and provision.'¹⁴⁷ ACTA commented:

The failure to collect and use these data follow directly from the tunnel vision that is preoccupied with outcomes irrespective of starting points. A major achievement by the Inquiry would be to identify important data gaps and make recommendations on how to fill them.¹⁴⁸

Concerns about PIAAC

2.116 There were concerns raised about the regularity of, and level of detail provided by the PIAAC survey. For example, DESE noted that:

While PIAAC provides a valuable picture at a national level, there is a long interval between surveys and PIAAC does not provide a full breakdown of the data by different cohorts. As a result of COVID-19 the next survey has been delayed with the results due to be published in 2024.¹⁴⁹

2.117 The Tasmanian Government was concerned that the Australian Government had decided to 'significantly cut participation and sample sizes in the 2022 PIAAC', which it said 'will make this survey statistically insignificant in Tasmania.'¹⁵⁰ The Tasmanian Government called on the Australian Government to 'consider re-engaging fully in the PIAAC survey to provide reliable data on the state of adult literacy in all states and territories in Australia.'¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁵ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 3.

¹⁴⁶ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 3.

¹⁴⁷ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 59.

¹⁴⁸ ACTA, *Submission 85*, pages 59-60.

¹⁴⁹ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 4.

¹⁵⁰ Tasmanian Government, *Submission 82*, page 6.

¹⁵¹ Tasmanian Government, *Submission 82*, page 6.

2.118 Similarly, the 26TEN Coalition said that ‘greater investment is required in data collection and research to support literacy and numeracy policy development, including full state by state results’ for the next PIAAC survey.¹⁵² The 26TEN Coalition reported that ‘[t]he Tasmanian sample was reduced from 625 participants in 2011 to 107 in 2022.’¹⁵³

2.119 ACER highlighted the importance of the PIAAC survey¹⁵⁴ and recommended:

... that Australia participates fully in the second cycle of PIAAC in order to see and review how Australian adults have performed in relation to adult literacy, numeracy and problem solving. This allows research to be undertaken based around the factors set out in the Terms of Reference of this Parliamentary Inquiry, and provides the evidence to reflect on the results from both a policy level in relation to adult education, but also in relation to how school education is preparing young people for the world as adults.¹⁵⁵

2.120 ACER went on to outline what is required in administering the next PIAAC survey:

Australia should make sure that the PIAAC Cycle 2 survey instruments are administered to a random representative sample across Australia including remote Indigenous adults and incarcerated adults, along with continuing to oversample to include a younger cohort (15 year-olds) and an older cohort (66-74) compared with the minimum international requirements. The oversampling enables state and territory performance to be compared.¹⁵⁶

2.121 When asked whether PIAAC was useful, FECCA told the Committee:

I think that [PIAAC] definitely provides us with some insights across this issue, but for FECCA every single issue we work with nearly comes down to inadequate data collected across the Australian level. The data that is currently collected for the multicultural communities in Australia, not just within this space but also in the health space—every facet at the federal and the state levels of data collection—doesn't adequately capture the multicultural nature of our country and then the specific issues relating to those populations.

¹⁵² 26TEN Coalition, *Submission 20*, page 2.

¹⁵³ Ms Siobhan Gaskell, Convenor, 26TEN Coalition, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 July 2021, page 2.

¹⁵⁴ ACER, *Submission 43*, page 6.

¹⁵⁵ ACER, *Submission 43*, page 26.

¹⁵⁶ ACER, *Submission 43*, page 26.

Without that cross-section of data across education, across these different areas, we lose some of the rich nature of the compounding impacts that affect these communities.¹⁵⁷

2.122 ABS reported that the next PIAAC survey, which is due to be rolled out in 2022, will be administered according to OECD standards and has been funded by DESE. ABS commented:

While the OECD commissions this piece of work, there is an international consortium run by a whole range of international organisations who have various specialties, and Australia, like the other 32 countries, needs to comply with any international requirements around sampling and survey standards. Obviously, the reason for that is that it's an international survey and the OECD wants to be able to compare across the 33 countries, and if everyone did their own thing, that wouldn't be possible.¹⁵⁸

2.123 ABS said:

We've implemented an overall design that meets their [OECD] requirements, but we've applied that to the Australian environment. We've worked together to develop a sample and a sample design that meets the objectives for providing national level reporting that's consistent with the other countries.¹⁵⁹

2.124 ABS confirmed that it will be collecting information from persons aged 16 to 65 years in the next PIAAC survey.¹⁶⁰

Lack of data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LLND skills

2.125 There was broad concern about the lack of data on the LLND skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, in particular that the sample size for the PIAAC survey was too small to identify the LLND characteristics of the adult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations.¹⁶¹ For example, ACER said that 'there is a scandalous lack of

¹⁵⁷ Ms Alexandra Raphael, Director of Policy and Advocacy, FECCA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 2.

¹⁵⁸ Mrs Michelle Ducat, Acting Program Manager, Education and Crime Statistics Branch, ABS, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 24 November 2021, page 1.

¹⁵⁹ Mr David Zago, Program Manager, Household Surveys Branch, ABS, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 24 November 2021, page 4.

¹⁶⁰ ABS, *Submission 111*, page 17.

¹⁶¹ Professor Bob Boughton, *Submission 26*, page 2; Ms Juliette Mendelovits, Research Director, Assessment and Reporting Research Program, ACER, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021,

current evidence-based information about the levels of literacy and numeracy among Indigenous adults.’¹⁶²

2.126 NACCHO commented:

The absence of data is compounded for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, many of whom are specifically excluded from the limited and intermittent data collection that does take place. This has echoes of the past, a time when our people weren't counted in the national census. I like to think we've come a long way since those days, and we deserve better than being expressly excluded from collection of this critical information about our communities. We must have robust data on adults' literacy levels—and children's, for that matter—so we can understand the depth and extent of the problem and begin to address it. This is important work and good data can help drive it.¹⁶³

2.127 NACCHO recommended the Australian Government fund ABS to ‘establish a data collection standard to determine adult literacy levels in both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the wider Australian community, which includes people living in remote and very remote areas.’¹⁶⁴

2.128 Similarly, the Lowitja Institute said:

The Commonwealth has not provided ABS with sufficient funding to produce any results on the level of adult literacy in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and this is the place, the area, of the greatest need. We think this is an extraordinary decision, and it could even be considered discriminatory, in fact. Given how this will be key data for determining policy and programs as needed in the future, there's a whole section of Australian society that aren't going to be included properly enough, and that's I think the work of this Committee.¹⁶⁵

2.129 ABS confirmed that ‘[t]here is no additional sampling for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population’ in PIAAC and stated ‘[w]e will pick up

page 11. See also: Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 408.

¹⁶² ACER, *Submission 43*, page 5.

¹⁶³ Ms Patricia Turner AM, NACCHO, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 24.

¹⁶⁴ NACCHO, *Submission 100*, page 3.

¹⁶⁵ Ms Patricia Anderson, Chairperson, Lowitja Institute, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 32.

some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a national sample, but there's no oversampling to get a representative sample.'¹⁶⁶

2.130 ABS also confirmed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in very remote and discrete communities would be excluded from the PIAAC survey.¹⁶⁷ ABS said that PIAAC would sample Australians living in urban, remote and rural areas, but not very remote areas, stating that it is 'a geographic sample; it's stratified by geography.'¹⁶⁸

2.131 Professor Boughton said that '[t]his problem could be rectified, if the Commonwealth provided the ABS with sufficient funding ... to include a more representative sample of First Nations adults' in the next PIAAC survey. Professor Boughton reported '[t]his was done for the last PIAAC survey in Canada, where the Aboriginal population was around 3 per cent of the total.'¹⁶⁹

2.132 For the 2011-12 PIAAC survey in Canada:

Samples were selected in sufficient numbers to provide statistically reliable results not only for Canada as a whole, but also for each province and territory. In addition, Indigenous peoples, immigrants, and official-language minority populations were oversampled to provide detailed information about these groups.¹⁷⁰

2.133 The website for PIAAC in Canada, stated:

The smaller sample sizes used by many countries only provide an understanding at the national level. In Canada, education policy is developed and decided at the provincial and territorial level, so a larger sample is required to obtain statistically reliable results within each jurisdiction.

¹⁶⁶ Mrs Michelle Ducat, ABS, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 24 November 2021, page 3.

¹⁶⁷ Mrs Michelle Ducat, ABS, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 24 November 2021, page 3.

¹⁶⁸ Mr David Zago, ABS, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 24 November 2021, page 3.

¹⁶⁹ Professor Bob Boughton, *Submission 26*, page 3.

¹⁷⁰ Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), and Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), 'PIAAC in Canada – Frequently Asked Questions', www.piaac.ca/590/FAQ.html, viewed 14 December 2021.

In addition, Canada oversampled Aboriginal peoples, immigrants, and official-language minorities to better understand skill levels within these populations.¹⁷¹

Directions for future research

2.134 In addition to the need for improved national statistics on adult LLND skills proficiency, contributors to the inquiry emphasised the importance of further research and data collection more broadly.

2.135 ACER was concerned that ABS 'analysis and available reports based on the PIAAC data is not fully utilised nor analysed by the ABS.'¹⁷² ACER said it 'would be willing to work with ABS to produce analyses and reports similar to those that ACER undertakes and publishes in relation to PISA.'¹⁷³

2.136 The Australasian Corrections Education Association (ACEA) said '[t]here is a paucity of research in Australia and worldwide into the literacy and numeracy needs of those in custody'.¹⁷⁴ ACEA explained 'this is exacerbated by the lack of uniform approaches to identify, report and review individual language, numeracy, employability and digital literacy skills across Australian jurisdictions.'¹⁷⁵

2.137 FECCA called for improved data and research on culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities:

FECCA suggests that for Government and its services to appropriately respond to CALD communities' needs effectively, they must first understand these communities through accurate and consistent administrative data. This is essential for evidence-based policy, resource allocation and service planning. Only with disaggregated, consistent, and comparable CALD data can Government ensure that services are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all people in Australia.

¹⁷¹ CMEC and ESDC, 'PIAAC in Canada – Frequently Asked Questions', www.piaac.ca/590/FAQ.html, viewed 14 December 2021.

¹⁷² ACER, *Submission 43*, page 26.

¹⁷³ ACER, *Submission 43*, page 26.

¹⁷⁴ Australasian Corrections Education Association (ACEA), *Submission 35*, page [1].

¹⁷⁵ ACEA, *Submission 35*, page [1]. Chapter 4 examines the benefits of providing quality LLND education to young Australians and adults in custody, and the need for greater consistency in the delivery of best practice pedagogy, assessments and data collection in corrections education.

A broader understanding of the underlying reasons for adult literacy gaps, unemployment and poverty can be reached by collecting appropriate and disaggregated data.¹⁷⁶

- 2.138 Professor Lo Bianco said that Australia needs to be conducting research on the skills required for the jobs of the future and suggested bringing business groups and the unions together 'to talk about the ability of workers to compete for the new jobs that will be created in the economy, as is being done very well in Germany'.¹⁷⁷
- 2.139 The Committee notes that the National Skills Commission was recently established to monitor, research and analyse employment dynamics across different demographic groups, industries, occupations and regions in Australia. It considers how changes in the labour market will impact jobs and how those changes will impact the economy's education and skills needs.¹⁷⁸
- 2.140 The creation of the National Skills Commission was one of the key recommendations from *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System* (Joyce review).¹⁷⁹ The Australian Government committed to the establishment of the National Skills Commission in the 2019-20 Budget as part of the Delivering Skills for Today and Tomorrow Skills package.¹⁸⁰

Conclusion

- 2.141 The available evidence on adult LLND skills shows there is a significant proportion of the Australian population who struggle with tasks that others

¹⁷⁶ FECCA, *Submission 79*, page 5.

¹⁷⁷ Emeritus Professor Joseph Lo Bianco, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 3.

¹⁷⁸ National Skills Commission, 'About the National Skills Commission', www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/about/about-national-skills-commission, viewed 14 January 2022.

¹⁷⁹ National Skills Commission, 'About the National Skills Commission', www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/about/about-national-skills-commission, viewed 14 January 2022. See also: DPMC, *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System*, April 2019, pages 73-74.

¹⁸⁰ National Skills Commission, 'About the National Skills Commission', www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/about/about-national-skills-commission, viewed 14 January 2022.

may find routine. For many older Australians, the skills they have relied on their whole lives do not allow them to participate fully as technology changes. This has consequences for the social and economic lives of individuals, and for Australia more broadly.

- 2.142 The evidence from this inquiry, and the Committee's previous inquiry into education in remote and complex environments shows that educational attainment is associated with socioeconomic status and geographic remoteness, and this trend is becoming more pronounced.
- 2.143 While estimates of LLND skills proficiency in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities vary widely, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults have low English LLND skills despite the efforts of governments to close the gap. This is particularly the case for those in remote communities.
- 2.144 The Committee notes that Australia is a signatory to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 and beyond. In particular, Goal Four emphasises the importance of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Family and intergenerational literacy programs are an effective way to develop and improve the LLND skills of parents and children, and foster wider benefits including self-esteem, civic participation, and the engagement of adults in further education and training.

Recommendation 1

- 2.145 **The Committee recommends that, by March 2023, the Australian Government resource effective whole of community and family language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) programs that target adults with low LLND skills including in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, and other socially and economically marginalised Australian communities.**
- 2.146 The Committee is concerned that there is currently inadequate, timely information being collected about adult LLND skills to inform policy development, and that Australia's participation in the next PIAAC survey, to be conducted in 2022, may represent a missed opportunity.
- 2.147 The next PIAAC survey could establish a meaningful baseline for measuring the impact of government policies aimed at increasing adult LLND skills,

including in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. PIAAC is only conducted once every 10 years and there is a real risk that if we do not get this right now, we must wait another decade to have a detailed picture of Australia's LLND skills challenges.

- 2.148 Under current arrangements, the 2022 PIAAC survey will not provide statistically reliable data about the LLND skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and does not sample individuals living in very remote locations. This is particularly concerning to the Committee, given that educational attainment decreases with remoteness, and that very low rates of English literacy have been reported in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Similarly, detailed data is required on the LLND skills of immigrants to inform policy development and planning.
- 2.149 The Committee acknowledges the concerns raised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been excluded from the PIAAC survey. It is the Committee's view that the absence of representative data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' LLND skills in this survey is incompatible with the Australian Government's commitment to Closing the Gap.
- 2.150 The Committee is also concerned that PIAAC does not provide statistically reliable data by state and territory. This is important considering that policies are developed and implemented by state and territory governments as well as the Australian Government, and the evidence heard of uneven LLND skills proficiency and outcomes across jurisdictions.
- 2.151 Evidence from ABS suggested that the need for PIAAC to provide comparable national level statistics that meet OECD requirements meant that there was limited scope to adapt the survey to meet Australia's requirements. By contrast, evidence shows that in the previous PIAAC survey in 2011-12, Canada oversampled Indigenous peoples, immigrants, and official-language minorities to better understand skill levels within these populations. Furthermore, Canada's PIAAC survey used a sample large enough to provide statistically reliable data for its provinces and territories.
- 2.152 There is clearly an urgent need, as well as both scope and precedent, for Australia to upgrade its participation in the next PIAAC survey in 2022, as well as all subsequent PIAAC surveys. However, it is critical that decisions about data planning, collection and use relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are undertaken with Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander peoples. This goes to the heart of the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

- 2.153 The Committee considers that the Australian Government should fund ABS to collect statistically reliable data for all age groups, including extending collection to a younger cohort (15 years) and an older cohort (66-74 years).

Recommendation 2

- 2.154 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government immediately fund the broadening of data collection by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the 2022 Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey and ensure all subsequent PIAAC surveys are appropriately funded, to include:**

- **oversampling of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, including those living in very remote areas, and the immigrant populations**
- **samples in sufficient numbers to provide statistically reliable results not only for Australia as a whole, but also for each state and territory**
- **samples in sufficient numbers to provide statistically reliable results for all age groups, including extending collection to a younger cohort (15 years) and an older cohort (66-74 years).**

- 2.155 The Coalition of Peaks and the National Indigenous Australians Agency must be consulted in considering how to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations in the PIAAC surveys.**

- 2.156 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community workers must, where possible, be trained and resourced to conduct PIAAC interviews in their communities.**

- 2.157 While the PIAAC survey provides an important snapshot of the LLND skills proficiency of Australian adults, the Committee is concerned about the survey's regularity.

- 2.158 The National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults (NFSSA) indicated in 2012 that Australian governments will explore options for measuring progress against the NFSSA, 'including the feasibility of a new Australian Adult Competencies Survey to be conducted at the mid-point of the

National Strategy in 2017.¹⁸¹ The NFSSA envisions this survey being comparable with PIAAC.¹⁸² The Committee is not aware of any progress on the development of this survey.

- 2.159 Given that PIAAC is only conducted once every 10 years, it is vital that a new Australian Adult Competencies Survey be conducted at the mid-point of each PIAAC cycle, so that detailed data on the LLND skills of Australians are available every five years. The survey should be comparable with the Committee's expectations for future PIAAC surveys reflected above and provide statistically reliable data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including those living in very remote areas, and the immigrant populations, by state and territory, and for all age groups.

Recommendation 3

- 2.160 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide ongoing funding for a new Australian Adult Competencies Survey to be conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics at the mid-point of each Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) cycle, with consultation on development to begin by March 2023 and the first survey to be conducted in 2026.**

- 2.161 The new Australian Adult Competencies Survey must be:**

- **comparable with the Committee's expectations for future PIAAC surveys and provide statistically reliable data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including those living in very remote areas, for the immigrant populations, by state and territory and for all age groups**
- **developed in consultation with the Coalition of Peaks, the National Indigenous Australians Agency, other peak bodies including the Australian Council for Adult Literacy and Adult Learning Australia, and the states and territories.**

¹⁸¹ Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTESE), *National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults*, September 2012, page 11.

¹⁸² SCOTESE, *National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults*, September 2012, page 11.

- 2.162 The Australian Government could consider incorporating the new Australian Adult Competencies Survey into existing ABS data collection programs, for example the ABS Work-Related Training and Adult Learning survey (a topic on the Multipurpose Household Survey), the National Health Survey or the Australian Census.
- 2.163 In addition to increasing the scope and regularity of national surveys, the Committee encourages further research to fully inform policy development regarding adult LLND skills, including:
- ACER working with ABS to produce analyses and reports on the PIAAC survey and the new Australian Adult Competencies Survey results, similar to those that ACER produces in relation to PISA
 - research into the LLND skills gaps of Australians in custody, and longitudinal research into the effectiveness of the education of Australians in custody in improving employment outcomes and reducing recidivism
 - completing an audit of the current provision of adult LLND education programs around Australia (both accredited and non-accredited)
 - commissioning research that includes longitudinal data that tracks student progress over time through non-accredited and accredited foundation and LLND skills programs to effectively measure outcomes.

3. Factors contributing to language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy gaps

- 3.1 There are a range of factors that contribute to language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) skills gaps among Australian adults. Evidence in Chapter 2 showed that socioeconomic status is associated with LLND skills attainment, and that children whose parents have strong skills or who value education, are more likely to develop strong LLND skills themselves.
- 3.2 The Committee's previous inquiry into education in remote and complex environments found that some of the greatest barriers to education are beyond the capacity of education systems to address, and include issues relating to geographic isolation, health challenges, and access to information and communications technology. Furthermore, a range of factors that impact on education attainment, such as limited access to formalised early childhood learning and allied and mental health services, increase as remoteness increases.¹
- 3.3 For there to be improvements in adult LLND skills attainment, factors that contribute to low LLND skills must be addressed across all educational systems, at every stage of a person's life course.²
- 3.4 The Committee heard that far too many Australian children fall through the cracks and disengage from education because their needs are not supported.

¹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 13.

² Australian Education Union (AEU), *Submission 45*, page 7.

Some have experienced disrupted schooling for any number of reasons and struggle to catch up, while others:

- have undiagnosed and unsupported dyslexia, a type of specific learning disability (SLD)
- have an intellectual or physical disability but do not receive the support they need to thrive at school
- do not speak English outside of the classroom but are taught and then assessed as if they do
- live in a remote community and have no pathway to a meaningful secondary school education without leaving their families and communities.

3.5 In each of these cases, the experience of shame and stigma associated with students' perceived failures acts as a barrier to seeking support and engaging in school and in further education and training later in life.

3.6 The Committee heard concerning evidence about the impacts of COVID-19, including that individuals and families with low digital literacy and poor access to the internet and internet-enabled devices experienced poorer educational outcomes than other Australians, and had difficulty accessing vital services and online education and training.

Specific learning disabilities

3.7 SLDs include dyslexia and dyscalculia, and a range of other speech, language and communication disabilities.³ Many individuals with SLDs struggle throughout their lives with literacy and numeracy and this presents a significant challenge for families, educators and the community.⁴ Individuals with SLDs are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicide and feelings of shame,⁵ disengage from school, and interact with the juvenile justice system than other Australians.⁶

³ Dear Dyslexic Foundation (DDF), *Submission 78*, pages 2-3. Dyslexia can significantly impact an individual's ability to learn, and how to decode and read words, while dyscalculia impairs core numerical tasks.

⁴ DDF, *Submission 78*, page 4.

⁵ DDF, *Submission 78*, page 4.

⁶ Speech Pathology Australia, *Submission 94*, page 5.

- 3.8 Dear Dyslexic Foundation (DDF) noted that individuals with SLDs ‘can bring many strengths to the workplace such as creativity, analytical and critical thinking, innovation, big picture thinking, strong problem solving, high emotional intelligence and are stronger leaders and social influencers’.⁷ However, ‘these strengths are generally overshadowed by the day-to-day challenges of their disability.’⁸
- 3.9 Code Read Dyslexia Network Australia (Code Read) reported that ‘approximately 10 per cent of Australians may have dyslexia, however, only an estimated 4 per cent on the continuum are severe, requiring longer term remediation.’⁹
- 3.10 The Committee heard that there is low awareness in the Australian community, among teachers¹⁰ and in the medical profession about SLDs.¹¹ DDF said ‘there’s still an awful lot of ignorance about dyslexia’ and, as a result, ‘many young adults and children fall off the radar and end up in incarceration or in youth detention.’¹² DDF commented:
- You’ve got to train teachers. You’ve got to train educators. You’ve got to train trainers and employers about what dyslexia is. Without that knowledge, people are ignorant, and, unfortunately, the child or the young adult does not get the positive attention that it requires and ends up in a negative situation.¹³
- 3.11 DDF also suggested that general practitioners, health centres and community nurses could be educated in the signs and symptoms of SLDs so they know what to look out for.¹⁴

⁷ DDF, *Submission 78*, page 5.

⁸ DDF, *Submission 78*, page 5.

⁹ Code Read Dyslexia Network Australia (Code Read), *Submission 30*, page 1.

¹⁰ Joanne Dickenson, *Submission 108*, pages [1-3].

¹¹ Dr Judith Hudson, Non-Executive Director, DDF, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 49.

¹² Dr Judith Hudson, DDF, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 47.

¹³ Dr Judith Hudson, DDF, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 47.

¹⁴ Dr Judith Hudson, DDF, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 49.

Early intervention

- 3.12 Many Australians are disadvantaged in education, from their earliest days of schooling, because their SLDs are undiagnosed, and their needs are unsupported.¹⁵ Addressing barriers to learning early in a child's life is critical for their long-term educational development,¹⁶ particularly if they have a SLD.¹⁷
- 3.13 This Committee's previous inquiry found that children in regional, rural and remote areas, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable and have less access to screening and early intervention than their peers in metropolitan areas.¹⁸
- 3.14 These issues were again raised in evidence to this inquiry. For example, the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (ICPA Australia) reported that many children with specific education needs in geographically isolated regions have little or no access to screening and early intervention services.¹⁹

Screening and assessments

- 3.15 There was support for children to be screened for SLDs and for improved access to assessments so that children's learning can be appropriately supported.
- 3.16 The partner of an individual whose learning difficulties were not identified early called for standardised screening, prepared by remedial reading specialists, for early primary school aged children.²⁰

¹⁵ Speech Pathology Australia, *Submission 94*, page 5.

¹⁶ Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), *Submission 36*, page 3; Ms Emma King, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 23; Speech Pathology Australia, *Submission 94*, page 2; World Literacy Foundation, *Submission 11*, page [5].

¹⁷ Ms Amelia Jones, Founding Member, Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance and Chair, Square Pegs Dyslexia Support and Advocacy Inc, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 July 2021, page 9; Code Read, *Submission 30*, page 1.

¹⁸ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 20.

¹⁹ Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (ICPA Australia), *Submission 95*, page 3.

²⁰ Name withheld, *Submission 54*, page [1].

- 3.17 Ms Amelia Jones, Founding Member of the Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance and Chair of Square Pegs Dyslexia Support and Advocacy Inc, advocated for children to be screened for learning disabilities from the age of three. Ms Jones suggested that interactions with child health nurses and preschool programs could be opportunities for screening to occur.²¹
- 3.18 The Committee heard that cost is a factor prohibiting individuals and families seeking assessments for learning disabilities and support. The Community Adult Literacy Foundation reported that ‘a standard assessment for dyslexia costs approximately \$1,800 which is out of reach for too many.’²²
- 3.19 To address the cost barrier to receiving an assessment, DDF advocated for dyslexia to be added to the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS).²³
- 3.20 The Committee notes that while the MBS does not subsidise SLDs, MBS items 82000 to 82035 provide Medicare-rebates for allied health services to children with autism or any other pervasive developmental disorder (PDD), and to children with an eligible disability.²⁴

Early childhood education and care

- 3.21 Early childhood education and care is important in the context of this inquiry because it gives children the best chance for success in education and can free up time for parents to undertake study or training to improve their own LLND skills.
- 3.22 In Australia, early childhood education includes:
- child care services, which provide education and care to children up to age 13.
 - preschool services, which involve structured, play-based learning programs delivered by qualified teachers to children in the year or two before they start full-time schooling.

²¹ Ms Amelia Jones, Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance and Square Pegs Dyslexia Support and Advocacy Inc, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 July 2021, page 9.

²² Community Adult Literacy Foundation, *Submission 19*, page [2].

²³ Ms Shae Wissell, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, DDF, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 47.

²⁴ Department of Health, ‘Medicare Benefits Schedule - Note MN.10.1’, 20 December 2021, www.mbsonline.gov.au, viewed 6 January 2022.

- 3.23 The Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is the main way the Australian Government helps families with child care fees. The CCS is paid to approved providers who pass it on to families as a fee reduction. Families pay the difference between the provider's fee and the subsidy amount, and there are rules about what fees providers can charge.²⁵
- 3.24 The current CCS was established in July 2017 in response to reforms recommended by the Productivity Commission in its 2014 inquiry into childcare and early childhood learning.²⁶
- 3.25 Families must meet certain requirements and parents need to be undertaking a recognised activity to be eligible for the CCS. Recognised activities include employment/self-employment, looking for work, volunteering, being on leave/maternity leave, or undertaking study or training.²⁷ This provides an incentive for parents to improve their LLND skills while their children are in early childhood education and care.
- 3.26 The level of CCS a family receives depends on their combined annual family income, activity level, and type of child care used. Additional assistance for vulnerable and disadvantaged families is available through the Child Care Safety Net.²⁸
- 3.27 The Australian Government funds state and territory governments to provide preschool programs through the Universal Access National Partnership (UANP). The states and territories are responsible for the provision of preschool or kindergarten in their jurisdictions.²⁹
- 3.28 The aim of the UANP is to ensure every child can participate in a quality preschool program 15 hours per week (or 600 hours per year) in the year before school. Under the UANP, preschool programs should be delivered in accordance with the National Quality Framework and the Early Years

²⁵ Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), 'Child Care Subsidy', www.dese.gov.au/child-care-subsidy, viewed 7 January 2022.

²⁶ The Hon Scott Morrison MP, Minister for Social Services, 'Jobs for Families child care package delivers choice for families', *Media Release*, 10 May 2015; Productivity Commission, *Childcare and Early Childhood Learning: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report*, Number 73, 31 October 2014.

²⁷ DESE, 'Child Care Subsidy', www.dese.gov.au/child-care-subsidy, viewed 7 January 2022.

²⁸ DESE, 'Child Care Subsidy', www.dese.gov.au/child-care-subsidy, viewed 7 January 2022.

²⁹ DESE, 'Universal Access National Partnership', www.dese.gov.au/preschool/universal-access-national-partnership, viewed 7 January 2022.

Learning Framework in a form that meets the needs of children, parents and the community, and be affordable.³⁰

- 3.29 The Australian Government committed \$452.3 million to extend the UANP until the end of 2021. A new \$2 billion, four-year national reform commitment will be established to strengthen the delivery of preschool and better prepare children to start school, through to the end of the 2025 calendar year.³¹

Importance

- 3.30 The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) said that the Committee's previous report on education in remote and complex environments documented the 'clear and well-established evidence that quality early childhood education is probably the most effective foundation for on-going educational attainment across all sectors of the population.'³²
- 3.31 The Committee again received compelling evidence on the importance of early childhood education to the development of strong LLND skills in adulthood.³³ For example, the World Literacy Foundation referred to research suggesting that quality early childhood programs have a 13 per cent rate of return on investment per annum because of improved education, health, social and economic outcomes.³⁴
- 3.32 The Australian Education Union (AEU) said that quality early childhood education is 'a fundamentally important contributor to a child's school readiness. It provides the knowledge and skills that enable children to succeed at school, and throughout their lives.'³⁵

³⁰ DESE, 'Universal Access National Partnership', www.dese.gov.au/preschool/universal-access-national-partnership, viewed 7 January 2022.

³¹ DESE, 'Universal Access National Partnership', www.dese.gov.au/preschool/universal-access-national-partnership, viewed 7 January 2022.

³² Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA), *Submission 85*, page 41.

³³ Civil Liberties Australia, *Submission 17*, page [1]; World Literacy Foundation, *Submission 11*, page [5]; AEU, *Submission 45*, pages 8-11; NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council (NSWALNC), *Submission 68*, page 7; ACTA *Submission 85*, page 41.

³⁴ World Literacy Foundation, *Submission 11*, page [5].

³⁵ AEU, *Submission 45*, page 8.

- 3.33 The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) said '[i]t is vital to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to get the best start in life through culturally appropriate and trauma-informed programs delivered by community-controlled organisations.'³⁶
- 3.34 NACCHO advocated for improved linkages between early childhood centres and Aboriginal community-controlled health services. This would help ensure that neurological and other childhood milestones are monitored and supported in a coordinated, culturally respectful and safe setting for those children.³⁷

Access, equity and workforce issues

- 3.35 There is strong evidence showing that families in Australia have variable access to quality early childhood education, depending on their location and circumstances. The Committee's previous inquiry into education in remote and complex environments found that:

- children in regional, rural and remote communities are less likely to access early childhood education and are more likely to experience disadvantage and developmental vulnerability than children in cities
- the quality of early childhood education in regional, rural and remote areas is lower than in metropolitan areas
- early childhood education providers in regional, rural and remote locations struggle to recruit and retain quality staff.³⁸

- 3.36 These findings are consistent with evidence to this inquiry.³⁹ For example, ICPA Australia commented:

For geographically isolated families who live in rural and remote parts of Australia, access to consistent, adequate and affordable early childhood education services is marred by a myriad of challenges which impede fulfillment of the National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education recommended 600 hours of early childhood education

³⁶ National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), *Submission 100.1*, page 2.

³⁷ Ms Patricia Turner AM, Chief Executive Officer, NACCHO, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 27.

³⁸ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 59.

³⁹ ICPA Australia, *Submission 95*, page 2.

the year before full-time school. These challenges include staff shortages and high out of pocket costs exceeding the family budget, resulting in a lack of services as Early Childhood centres struggle to remain viable in rural and remote areas.⁴⁰

- 3.37 Concerns were raised about the affordability of child care for many Australian families. For example, Civil Liberties Australia commented:

Presently, in Australia child care centres are fee-paying and many are run by for-profit organisations. Many families are unable to afford the fees. The consequences are that many families where the primary carer wishes to work cannot afford to do so because the cost of attendance exceeds the income from employment. These early years for the child/children are also the most challenging for families, often times of the main income earner being in the early years of employment and the early years of paying off housing through mortgage or rent.⁴¹

- 3.38 Civil Liberties Australia also noted that '[r]emuneration for staff at child care centres is low and a disincentive for people to enter the workforce. In the event of expansion of childcare/early learning, recruitment and training will be a major issue.'⁴²

- 3.39 ACTA was concerned that the early childhood education and care system did not make the distinction between learning English and learning literacy.⁴³ ACTA said that '[s]pecial attention is needed to promote and ensure access for children from homes where the home language and/or informal educational and literacy practices do not provide a clear preparation for formal schooling.'⁴⁴

- 3.40 ACTA also reported that a lack of access to early childhood education and care impacts on parents' ability 'to pursue positive settlement outcomes in regard to learning English, undertaking training and gaining employment.'⁴⁵

⁴⁰ ICPA Australia, *Submission 95*, page 2.

⁴¹ Civil Liberties Australia, *Submission 17*, page 6.

⁴² Civil Liberties Australia, *Submission 17*, page 6.

⁴³ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 5.

⁴⁴ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 41.

⁴⁵ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 42.

- 3.41 The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) provides childcare for school age children while their parents are in class.⁴⁶ ACTA said that similar arrangements are not available for adults enrolled in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) classes and training programs, and the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program.⁴⁷ The Committee notes that Australians who are enrolled in TAFE or participating in SEE meet the activity test for the CCS, and are eligible for subsidised child care so long as they satisfy the other CCS requirements.
- 3.42 There was support for expanding access to preschool to children from the age of three. AEU recommended the Australian Government 'guarantee ongoing funding to preschool for four year olds and extend this offering to three year olds nationally to further increase participation in early childhood education and, to give children the best start in education.'⁴⁸

School education

- 3.43 State and territory governments are responsible for delivering school education in their jurisdictions. The Australian Government contributes funding and helps shape national education policy by setting a vision for Australian school education and seeking agreement for common commitments and national standards.⁴⁹
- 3.44 Funding responsibility for school education is shared between the Australian Government and state and territory governments, and national education policy is decided by all governments working together through the National Cabinet.⁵⁰
- 3.45 In Chapter 2 the Committee concluded that educational attainment is associated with socioeconomic status and geographic remoteness, and this trend is becoming more pronounced. Chapter 2 also showed that:

⁴⁶ Department of Home Affairs, *Child care in the Adult Migrant English Program*, 7 December 2020, page [1].

⁴⁷ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 42.

⁴⁸ AEU, *Submission 45*, page 22.

⁴⁹ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 10.

⁵⁰ DESE, *How are schools funded in Australia?*, June 2021, page [1].

- the literacy and numeracy skills of Australian students aged 15 years have been declining⁵¹
- there is a substantial gap in student achievement in both reading and numeracy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students across all year levels.⁵²

3.46 A number of issues relating to the school system were raised that may contribute to the significant proportion of Australians leaving school with low LLND skills. These include:

- concerns relating to school resourcing
- concerns about approaches to the teaching of English literacy
- concerns about levels of support for learners of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D)
- the need for more specialist teachers, including those qualified in the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)
- the need for greater support for bilingual education in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools
- concerns about the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)
- the need for a better measure of proficiency for EAL/D learners and improved indicators to ensure that funding for EAL/D learners are better targeted.

School resourcing

3.47 There are different arrangements for the funding of public and independent sector schools. States and territories are the majority public funder of public schools, while the Australian Government has historically been the majority public funder of the independent sector, which includes Catholic and independent schools.⁵³ On average, around three quarters of funding for Catholic schools and less than one half of funding for independent schools is from public sources.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA): Results from PISA 2018 - Australia*, 2019, page 4; DESE, *Submission 86*, page 4.

⁵² DESE, *Submission 86*, page 5.

⁵³ DESE, *How are schools funded in Australia?*, June 2021, page [1].

⁵⁴ DESE, *How are schools funded in Australia?*, June 2021, page [2].

- 3.48 In 2018, the Australian Government introduced a funding model based on the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), which is a measure of the amount of public funding needed by schools to meet the educational needs of their students.⁵⁵
- 3.49 The Australian Government is moving towards consistently funding 20 per cent of the total SRS for government systems and 80 per cent of the total SRS for non-government schools and systems.⁵⁶ Schools currently funded below their target Australian Government share of the SRS will transition to the target by 2023, while schools that are currently funded above their target Australian Government share will transition to it by 2029 at the latest.⁵⁷
- 3.50 States and territories must meet minimum funding contribution requirements for both government and non-government sectors as a condition of receiving Commonwealth funding under section 22A of the *Australian Education Act 2013*. Minimum state and territory funding requirements from 2018 to 2023 are outlined in bilateral reform agreements which commenced on 1 January 2019.⁵⁸
- 3.51 The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) said that '[t]he schooling system recognises the relationship between adult parental literacy and engagement and school funding' and explained:

The school funding arrangements have a number of student loadings which recognise parental disadvantage. There are two in particular which are of relevance. One is the parents who have English as a second language and the second loading is what is called socio-educational advantage. So it's those student who have parents who have low educational attainment themselves. That information is collected across the system. It's pooled by our assessment agency, ACARA [Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority], and they then use that information to assist with how we fund schools. So, at a really fundamental level in the system, we pay more per student for states to deliver education for students who come from a family

⁵⁵ DESE, *How are schools funded in Australia?*, June 2021, page [2].

⁵⁶ DESE, *How are schools funded in Australia?*, June 2021, page [3].

⁵⁷ DESE, *How are schools funded in Australia?*, June 2021, page [3].

⁵⁸ DESE, *How are schools funded in Australia?*, June 2021, page [3].

that's disadvantaged ... That's quite a significant amount of money. It's about \$30 billion for that particular loading.⁵⁹

- 3.52 Concerns were raised about public school funding. AEU said there was a shortfall in funding for public schools to the minimum mandated SRS of \$4.75 billion, or more than \$1,700 per student per year.⁶⁰
- 3.53 AEU were also concerned the current model of school funding distribution 'fails students who struggle with literacy and numeracy, who are overwhelmingly disadvantaged in one or more ways, and who overwhelmingly attend chronically underfunded schools.'⁶¹
- 3.54 AEU recommended that public schools be funded to 100 per cent of the SRS and that the Australian Government lift its 'arbitrary' 20 per cent cap on contributions to public schools.⁶²
- 3.55 The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) said that the COVID -19 pandemic caused the largest disruption in the history of Australia's education system and that, before the pandemic, Australia was already facing formidable challenges in the delivery of quality school education outcomes.⁶³ ACSSO called on the Australian Government to increase funding to public schools and address inequities in school funding, stating this will help Australia to respond to current and future challenges. ACSSO said the Australian Government should 'focus on access, equality, equity of outcomes and inclusion at all levels of the system.'⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ms Maria Jolly, First Assistant Secretary, DESE, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 February 2021, page 3.

⁶⁰ AEU, *Submission 45*, page 12.

⁶¹ AEU, *Submission 45*, page 11.

⁶² AEU, *Submission 45*, page 22.

⁶³ ACSSO, *Submission 36*, page 3.

⁶⁴ ACSSO, *Submission 36*, pages 3-4.

Support for students with disability

- 3.56 Students with disability require adjustments to be made in their schooling so that they can participate in a way that suits their abilities.⁶⁵ The majority of Australian students with disability are enrolled in the public school system.⁶⁶
- 3.57 Students with disability are provided additional funding for their schooling through the SRS student with disability loading. The student with disability loading is based on the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD). The NCCD groups school students with disability by the level of support they need to access and participate in learning.⁶⁷
- 3.58 Students with disability who are counted in the top 3 levels of the NCCD (supplementary, substantial and extensive) attract additional funding through the student with disability loading. The amount of the loading reflects the level of support students with disability need to participate fully in school, with higher funding for those who need higher levels of support.⁶⁸
- 3.59 The Australian Government is increasing school funding for students with disability through the SRS student with disability loading by, on average, 5.7 per cent each year until 2029. This represents an investment of an estimated \$30 billion between 2018 and 2029.⁶⁹
- 3.60 Despite this, the Committee heard that many Australians with SLDs and other disability are not receiving sufficient support in school to develop strong LLND skills.⁷⁰ AEU said that there has been serious deficiencies in resourcing for students with disability over the past two decades and that, despite changes to funding, there has not been any improvement.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Speech Pathology Australia, *Submission 94*, page 5; ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 43.

⁶⁶ AEU, *Submission 45*, page 13.

⁶⁷ DESE, *What is the Australian Government doing to support students with disability in schools?*, May 2021, page [2].

⁶⁸ DESE, *What is the Australian Government doing to support students with disability in schools?*, May 2021, page [2].

⁶⁹ DESE, *What is the Australian Government doing to support students with disability in schools?*, May 2021, page [1].

⁷⁰ DDF, *Submission 78*, page 4.

⁷¹ AEU, *Submission 45*, page 12.

- 3.61 AEU said that ‘changes to disability loading categories in recent years have left many students without any support, or with inadequate support’, and provided the following statistics on gaps in access:
- In 2018, over half of all children with disability who attended school accessed support or a special arrangement, around one third accessed special tuition and one quarter accessed a counsellor or special support person. Of those children who received support or special arrangements, over one third reported that they needed more support than they received.⁷²
 - In 2019, there were approximately 359,000 students with disability in public schools in Australia. At least 150,000 of these students were not in receipt of any loading.⁷³
- 3.62 AEU made several recommendations about ensuring students with disability are provided with the resources they need to learn at their best, including adjustments to pedagogy, staff training, funding certainty, and appropriate staff allocations. AEU also recommended that a review of loading mechanisms for students with disability should be undertaken to ensure that resources are appropriately deployed.⁷⁴

Secondary school provision for remote communities

- 3.63 In its inquiry into education in remote and complex environments, the Committee found that there are many Australian children who cannot access secondary school education in, or at a reasonable distance from, their home communities, and that boarding school education may not be a desirable alternative for a range of reasons. The Committee heard that there is a strong preference among families living in geographically isolated areas and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for access to locally accessible, quality education at all levels.⁷⁵
- 3.64 The Committee noted that, in the Northern Territory, students in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who wish to continue

⁷² AEU, *Submission 45*, page 12.

⁷³ AEU, *Submission 45*, page 13.

⁷⁴ AEU, *Submission 45*, page 13.

⁷⁵ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 68.

with their schooling after Year 7 must either leave their homes to take up a place at a boarding school or be offered a limited curriculum at their local primary school.⁷⁶ Concerns were raised that:

- boarding is too difficult for some students to adjust to, which may then result in students disengaging from school
- boarding schools lacked the cultural competency and the additional support that is needed to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students thrive.⁷⁷

- 3.65 These findings were reinforced by evidence to this inquiry. For example, the Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Northern Territory (ATESOLNT) reported that secondary schooling pathways for students in very remote communities are increasingly limited, which acts as a disincentive for students to succeed academically and fosters a sense of alienation among students and their families from formal schooling.⁷⁸
- 3.66 Associate Professor John Guenther, Research Leader, Education and Training at the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, reported that students on remote homelands were provided only two days of schooling per week. He said, '[t]he teacher flies in in the morning and starts classes at 10 o'clock, stays overnight and flies out at 2 o'clock the next afternoon. That's not a quality education.'⁷⁹ This may mean that the Northern Territory Government is not meeting its legislated minimum requirements for school provision.⁸⁰
- 3.67 ATESOLNT said that the increase in students from remote communities attending boarding schools had led to concerns in Aboriginal and Torres

⁷⁶ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 67. See also: Northern Territory Government, 'Remote secondary school choices', www.nt.gov.au/learning/primary-and-secondary-students/remote-students-and-parents/remote-secondary-school-choices, viewed 13 January 2022.

⁷⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, pages 92, 96-97.

⁷⁸ Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Northern Territory (ATESOLNT), *Submission 105.1*, page 33.

⁷⁹ Associate Professor John Guenther, Research Leader, Education and Training, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 28.

⁸⁰ Associate Professor John Guenther, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 30.

Strait Islander communities about increased suicide rates among young people.⁸¹ ATESOLNT also reported that remote students who return from boarding schools can experience low self-esteem and depression⁸² and that there is evidence of some former students ending up in the youth justice system.⁸³

3.68 ATESOLNT was concerned that there 'is no data saying that boarding schools are good. There's no data that tracks the students who are currently in boarding school. There's no tracking of how students go when they return to community.'⁸⁴

3.69 The Northern Territory Government said that every child in a remote community is interviewed in Year 6 'from the point of view of what their parents want in terms of a full-blown secondary education', and reported:

For about a third of those kids, the parents don't want them educated in their community. They want them outside of that community and they want to pursue a full boarding education, and we support that. In fact, we support about 1,000 kids a year across the Territory to go to boarding schools all over Australia. We case-manage those kids very heavily and we keep them on that pathway.⁸⁵

3.70 ATESOLNT was concerned about the quality of education provided for those children who did not choose to go to boarding school and who instead stayed in their communities. It reported that the employment pathways program was 'abruptly cancelled' in 2020 and that students who had completed units had nothing to show for three to four years of study because the employment pathways program ceased to be an accredited course.⁸⁶ According to ATESOLNT, this change meant that 537 students

⁸¹ ATESOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 34; Ms Elizabeth Easton, President, ATESOLNT, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 24.

⁸² Ms Elizabeth Easton, ATESOLNT, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 24.

⁸³ Mrs Carmel Lawrence, Secretary, ATESOLNT, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 24.

⁸⁴ Ms Elizabeth Easton, ATESOLNT, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 24.

⁸⁵ Mr Tony Considine, Acting Executive Director, Early Years and Education Services, Northern Territory Department of Education, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 5.

⁸⁶ ATESOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, note 37, page 33.

across 32 remote schools were no longer 'taught from a recognised curriculum.'⁸⁷

Funding for remote schools in the Northern Territory

- 3.71 Chapter 2 showed there are significant LLND skills gaps in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and that skills attainment decreases with remoteness. The reasons for this are diverse and complex. Evidence to this inquiry suggests that poverty, experiences of trauma, poor health, a lack of access to services, and education systems that may not adequately serve the needs of communities all play a part.
- 3.72 Concerns were raised that inadequate funding and the way the Northern Territory administers school funding negatively affects staffing and school attendance in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools.⁸⁸ ATESOLNT said this has eroded the ability of remote schools to retain staff and offer effective programs and that a 'vicious cycle has been created that results directly in reduced student attendance.'⁸⁹
- 3.73 ATESOLNT cited evidence that, by 2023, Northern Territory public schools will be underfunded by 20 per cent, which amounts to \$6,000 per student and is triple that of the other lowest performing jurisdiction.⁹⁰ ATESOLNT reported that very remote schools have lost up to 50 per cent of their budgets since 2011 and most remote schools have lost teaching positions.⁹¹
- 3.74 ATESOLNT also reported that the percentage of students attending school four days a week in very remote communities dropped from 19 per cent in 2016 to 14 per cent in 2019.⁹²
- 3.75 The Djalkiri Foundation explained that, in the Northern Territory:

⁸⁷ ATESOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 33.

⁸⁸ ATSEOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, pages 16-17; Mr Daniel Yore, Interim Project Manager, Djalkiri Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 17.

⁸⁹ ATSEOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 16.

⁹⁰ ATSEOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 16. See also: A Rorris, *The School Resourcing Standard in Australia: Impacts on Public Schools*, September 2020, pages 5, 11.

⁹¹ ATSEOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 17.

⁹² ATSEOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 17. See also: J Guenther, 'Evidence on what doesn't work for very remote schools (attendance strategies) and what does', *Australian Association for Research in Education*, December 2019, www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=4797, viewed 10 January 2022.

Schools only get money for the kids that are coming to school. So, you can imagine that, if there's some kind of event where there's a big funeral and students haven't come to school, attendance drops off and money gets taken away or there's a gradual disengagement. Money is actually taken away from the school, whereas in other jurisdictions money is given to those schools through extra loadings to re-engage those students.⁹³

- 3.76 Associate Professor Guenther said that the reason why some remote schools were only able to operate two days a week on a fly-in-fly-out basis was because of attendance-based funding.⁹⁴
- 3.77 In addition to expressing concerns about attendance-based funding, ATESOLNT said that one-line global school budgets provide little accountability in how schools spend money and means there is a lack of coherence and focus on the professional development of staff because schools decide how to allocate money for professional learning.⁹⁵
- 3.78 ATESOLNT made nine recommendations in relation to school funding for remote schools, including that Australian Government funding for remote schools should be:
- allocated based on enrolment, not attendance data
 - contingent on transparent data from the Northern Territory Government around school funding, enrolment and attendance, and the employment status and qualifications of teachers working in remote schools.⁹⁶

Evidence-based literacy instruction and teacher training

- 3.79 Prevailing theories around best practice in the teaching of English literacy have varied considerably over time. There has long been a debate around the extent to which students should learn to sound out words, referred to as systematic phonics, or focus on the meaning of words as they appear in stories, referred to as whole language approaches to teaching. Both

⁹³ Mr Daniel Yore, Djalkiri Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 17.

⁹⁴ Associate Professor John Guenther, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 31.

⁹⁵ ATSEOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 17.

⁹⁶ ATSEOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, pages 18-19. ATESOLNT's other recommendations are matters for the Northern Territory Government.

approaches feature, to greater or lesser extents, in Australian schools and adult education settings.

- 3.80 The Committee heard that, over the past 50 years, 'whole language' approaches and strategies to teaching reading have been prioritised both in Australia and internationally. These strategies did not teach students systematic phonics.⁹⁷
- 3.81 The Committee was interested whether the move away from a focus on teaching systematic phonics was a contributing factor to low literacy among Australian adults. Ms Jones said that a focus on phonics instruction had declined in favour of whole language approaches to literacy, so that 'undergraduate teachers are not taught how to teach reading.'⁹⁸
- 3.82 Ms Jones said that there is increasing recognition of phonics-based approaches to the teaching of reading, including in the Tasmanian Government's literacy framework. Ms Jones reported that change is happening slowly, at the moment, it is 'pot luck whether you get a school or a teacher who has those skills and is willing to implement them.'⁹⁹
- 3.83 Speech Pathology Australia said that evidence supports strategies focusing on explicit systematic instruction including phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary and language structure,¹⁰⁰ and called for a national early language and literacy strategy that prioritised phonics-based instruction.¹⁰¹
- 3.84 Similarly, Code Read called for Australian schools to be mandated to use evidence-based instruction for the teaching of reading, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.¹⁰²
- 3.85 The Australian Government does not specify the course content of initial teacher education programs. Course offerings are a decision for universities. Under the Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia:

⁹⁷ Ms Andrea McMahon, *Submission 13*, page [1].

⁹⁸ Ms Amelia Jones, Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance and Square Pegs Dyslexia Support and Advocacy Inc, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 July 2021, page 8.

⁹⁹ Ms Amelia Jones, Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance and Square Pegs Dyslexia Support and Advocacy Inc, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 July 2021, page 8.

¹⁰⁰ Speech Pathology Australia, *Submission 94*, page 5.

¹⁰¹ Ms Jane Delaney, Senior Adviser, Early Childhood and Education, Speech Pathology Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 34.

¹⁰² Code Read, *Submission 30*, page 2.

Standards and Procedures (the Accreditation) the quality of initial teacher education programs can be set and improved through changes agreed by all education ministers.¹⁰³

- 3.86 Graduates are required to meet the requirements of the graduate career stage of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Standards), which requires a knowledge and understanding of literacy and numeracy teaching strategies and their application.¹⁰⁴
- 3.87 In combination, the Accreditation and Standards provide a framework for ensuring the quality of teacher training in Australia. According to DESE, this also allows higher education providers and schools the flexibility to design and deliver teacher training in ways that meet the needs and circumstances of local communities.¹⁰⁵
- 3.88 The Australian Government recognises that high quality teaching has a powerful influence on a student's education and is working with the states and territories on a range of reforms to improve teacher education and quality.¹⁰⁶
- 3.89 In December 2019, all education ministers amended the Accreditation to add explicit requirements for reading instruction, including phonics, and to increase the time spent on English and literacy in training primary teachers. DESE said this decision was taken 'in response to national and international evidence suggesting that one of the critical ways of teaching children to learn to read is through phonics'.¹⁰⁷
- 3.90 DESE described a range of other reforms in initial teacher education including:
- more rigorous selection requirements for entry into initial teacher education programs
 - the testing of trainee teachers to ensure they are in the top 30 per cent of the Australian adult population for literacy and numeracy skills before they can teach

¹⁰³ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 13.

¹⁰⁴ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 14.

¹⁰⁵ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 14.

¹⁰⁶ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 13.

¹⁰⁷ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 14.

- the development of a final-year teaching performance assessment to ensure graduate teachers are 'classroom ready'.¹⁰⁸

Teaching English as a second or other language

- 3.91 EAL/D learners begin their education from a different starting point to students whose first language is English and their education needs are therefore different.¹⁰⁹ To learn effectively, EAL/D learners require evidenced-based TESOL instruction provided by suitably qualified, specialist teachers. Where EAL/D learners' educational needs are not supported in school in this way, they may become fluent in spoken English but still have literacy challenges when they leave school.¹¹⁰
- 3.92 In Australia, teachers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and migrant-background EAL/D learners are not uniformly required to hold specialist TESOL qualifications. ACTA said this 'is a major issue in schools, where no requirements, accountability or even data collection on TESOL teacher qualifications occurs regarding teachers in special-purpose programs for English language learners.'¹¹¹
- 3.93 ATESOLNT expressed concern that, in the Northern Territory, school-based EAL/D specialist positions and EAL/D professional learning for teachers are no longer managed by the Northern Territory Department of Education.¹¹² This change means that the Department has fewer levers to influence teaching and learning, and has little control over the method and quality of EAL/D data, including assessments, that are provided by each school.¹¹³ ATESOLNT recommended that all remote school budgets should be allocated earmarked funding for EAL/D specialist positions.¹¹⁴
- 3.94 AEU advocated for systemic support for public schools to meet student needs including more permanent positions for specialist literacy and

¹⁰⁸ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 14.

¹⁰⁹ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 16; ATESOLNT, *Submission 105*, page 1; Settlement Council of Australia, *Submission 70*, page 1.

¹¹⁰ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 31.

¹¹¹ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 18.

¹¹² ATSEOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 18.

¹¹³ ATSEOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 18.

¹¹⁴ ATSEOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 19.

numeracy teachers in schools, rather than being brought in as an occasional or temporary resource.¹¹⁵

- 3.95 ACTA advocated for all Australian schools to be required to provide and report on specialist tuition and support for EAL/D learners, and for a national approach to assessing English proficiency levels that is appropriate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and migrant EAL/D learners. ACTA said these assessments should form the basis for policies and programs to address the learning needs of EAL/D students and agreements on educational funding between the Australian, state and territory governments.¹¹⁶

Use of literacy interventions developed overseas in remote schools

- 3.96 Concerns were raised about the use of commercial remedial literacy products from overseas, including Direct Instruction (United States of America) and Read Write Inc (United Kingdom), to teach EAL/D learners in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools.¹¹⁷ Both of these products are structured, phonics-based programs.
- 3.97 ATESOLNT said that, in the Northern Territory, Direct Instruction (DI) ‘relied on American coaches being flown into remote communities several times a year to assess student learning’ and was inappropriate for use in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts because it:
- required lock-step, scripted teaching
 - focused on student errors and testing
 - held students back from beginning ‘DI literacy’ until they had mastered the scripted oral English component of the program, which in some communities meant students were not reading or writing for years
 - made little sense to students and made them feel like failures.¹¹⁸
- 3.98 ATESOLNT said that the Northern Territory Government replaced DI with Read Write Inc in 2017, which it said is also unsuitable, particularly in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools, because it:

¹¹⁵ AEU, *Submission 45*, pages 11-12.

¹¹⁶ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 43.

¹¹⁷ ATESOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, pages 20-21. See also: AEU, *Submission 45*, page 18.

¹¹⁸ ATESOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, pages 20-21.

- is designed for British students in remedial literacy classes and assumes English is the learner's mother tongue
- teaches decoding skills using nonsense words, which are mystifying for English language learners
- assumes England as the school context.¹¹⁹

- 3.99 The Northern Territory Government said that Read Write Inc is an intervention approach that provides 'a strong explicit phonics component to support the teaching of reading, writing and speaking of primary and middle years students', and reported that training had been provided to 371 Northern Territory educators across 78 schools in the Read Write Inc phonics program in 2020.¹²⁰
- 3.100 DESE reported that the Australian Government allocated \$5.8 million in the October 2020 Budget for a pilot program in 10 remote schools for Good to Great Schools, a Cairns-based not for profit organisation founded by Mr Noel Pearson, to expand their DI literacy model to include numeracy and science.¹²¹

Bilingual education

- 3.101 Following the colonisation of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and knowledge systems were treated as inferior and primitive, and have historically been, to greater and lesser degrees, excluded from education systems.¹²²
- 3.102 In the Northern Territory, bilingual education was provided in up to 25 remote Aboriginal schools¹²³ from the 1970s to the 1990s when it was

¹¹⁹ ATESOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 21.

¹²⁰ Northern Territory Government, *Submission 90*, page 5.

¹²¹ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 16. For more information on the Good to Great Schools approach, see: Good to Great Schools Australia, *About Direct Instruction*, 2015.

¹²² Djalkiri Foundation, *Submission 104*, page [1].

¹²³ Dr Michele Willsher, Public Officer and Treasurer, ATESOLNT, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 18.

wound back and effectively dismantled in 2009 by a policy that mandated the teaching of English for the first four hours of a school day.¹²⁴

- 3.103 More recently, the Northern Territory Government has been supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to engage in local decision-making agreements about their children's education, and nine remote schools now have some form of bilingual program.¹²⁵ These schools are in Lajamanu, Maningrida, Galiwin'ku, Yirrkala, Milingimbi, Numbulwar, Yuendumu, Willowra and Areyonga.¹²⁶
- 3.104 The Northern Territory Government reported that in 2020, it had 3,886 students studying in Indigenous languages and cultures programs across 46 schools and 26 language groups. There were 1,643 students in bilingual programs.¹²⁷
- 3.105 According to the Northern Territory Government 'there's been a significant move into that space' and '[c]ommunities make decisions on whether they're going to take it up, but they take it up at the level that their community thinks they're ready for.'¹²⁸
- 3.106 The Northern Territory Government reported that it is working with local communities to develop bilingual programs in four schools in the Groote Archipelago. According to the Northern Territory Government, the aim is to strengthen the bilingual programs in those schools and build understanding.¹²⁹
- 3.107 The Northern Territory Government considered the development of bilingual programs to be a long-term investment that requires significant

¹²⁴ J Simpson, J Caffery and P McConvell, 'Gaps in Australia's Indigenous Language Policy: Dismantling bilingual education in the Northern Territory', *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies*, Discussion Paper Number 24, January 2009, pages 10, 15-16.

¹²⁵ Mr Tony Considine, Northern Territory Department of Education, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 10.

¹²⁶ Mr Tony Considine, Northern Territory Department of Education, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 10.

¹²⁷ Mr Tony Considine, Northern Territory Department of Education, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 10.

¹²⁸ Mr Tony Considine, Northern Territory Department of Education, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 10.

¹²⁹ Mr Tony Considine, Northern Territory Department of Education, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 8.

capacity building. However, it said this work is important because it is 'genuinely being driven by community, not by government, which is the turnaround that's needed in this, because that changes the motivation.'¹³⁰

3.108 Other stakeholders disagreed with the Northern Territory's evidence that nine schools were fully bilingual, with ATSEOLNT describing four schools as having 'operational' bilingual programs, and another four having 'nominal' bilingual programs.¹³¹ ACTA said that only three of the schools in the Northern Territory could be described as currently having truly bilingual practice: Yirrkala, Areyonga and Yuendumu.¹³²

3.109 There was support for greater access to quality bilingual education programs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.¹³³ The Committee heard that bilingual education is backed up by international and local research and evidence of success.¹³⁴ This research shows that building a child's skills in a first or home language can provide the best foundation for the learning of English language and literacy.¹³⁵

3.110 The effectiveness and importance of bilingual programs were examined and supported by this Committee in the report of its previous inquiry into education in remote and complex environments,¹³⁶ and by the former House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in its 2012 report, *Our Land, Our Languages: Language Learning in Indigenous Communities*.¹³⁷

¹³⁰ Mr Tony Considine, Northern Territory Department of Education, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 8.

¹³¹ ATSEOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 51.

¹³² Ms Frances Murray, Northern Territory Councillor, ACTA, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 22.

¹³³ Ms Susan Hopgood, Federal Secretary, AEU, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 15; ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 43.

¹³⁴ ACTA, *Submission 85*, pages 35, 37.

¹³⁵ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 37.

¹³⁶ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, pages 87-89, 133, 135.

¹³⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Our Land, Our Languages: Language Learning in Indigenous Communities*, September 2012, pages 110, 113-20.

- 3.111 The importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages is now recognised and embedded in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Closing the Gap Agreement), which has a target to achieve a sustained increase in the number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken by 2031.¹³⁸
- 3.112 The Committee notes that the Closing the Gap Agreement represents a commitment by the Australian, state and territory governments 'to listen to the voices and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and change the way we work in response.'¹³⁹
- 3.113 The Committee also recognises that programs and policies are more likely to be successful if they are co-designed to reflect the needs of the communities they serve.
- 3.114 However, there is evidence that the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages is currently not being recognised by widespread policy and funding support.¹⁴⁰ ATESOLNT said that governments need to 'address the current disadvantage of students not being taught to read and write in their home language ... This disadvantage is currently evident across all educational jurisdictions in the NT [Northern Territory].'¹⁴¹
- 3.115 Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of local literacy production centres to the success of bilingual education programs so that teaching resources can be developed in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.¹⁴²
- 3.116 ATESOLNT recommended that '[a]ll remote schools should be funded to run local literacy production centres to enable these schools to generate their own resources to support bilingual and English language and literacy teaching and learning.'¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Commonwealth of Australia, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, July 2020, page 35.

¹³⁹ Commonwealth of Australia, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, July 2020, page 4.

¹⁴⁰ Djalkiri Foundation, *Submission 104*, page [1].

¹⁴¹ ATESOLNT, *Submission 105*, page 8.

¹⁴² Dr Helen Moore, Vice-President, ACTA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, pages 13-14. See also: House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Our Land, Our Languages: Language Learning in Indigenous Communities*, September 2012, pages 147-51.

¹⁴³ ATSEOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 19.

Need for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers

- 3.117 In its previous inquiry into education in remote and complex environments, the Committee heard that there is a shortage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and a need to provide meaningful pathways for existing or aspiring local school staff to receive training and accreditation as teachers. The presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching staff has a positive influence on school attendance rates, student outcomes, and connections between schools and their communities.¹⁴⁴ Similar themes were raised during this inquiry.
- 3.118 ATESOLNT was concerned that that school funding arrangements have led to a loss of permanent positions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and assistant teachers, noting evidence showing that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in very remote schools have 'the biggest effect on attendance.'¹⁴⁵ ATESOLNT recommended that all remote school budgets should be allocated earmarked funding for Aboriginal assistant teacher positions.¹⁴⁶
- 3.119 The Djalkiri Foundation reported that, currently, organisations such as remote schools are being asked to train staff while at the same time delivering education. Mr Daniel Yore, Interim Project Manager for the Foundation and a teacher at Yirrkala school said:
- As a teacher at a bilingual school, my job is not only to deliver a bilingual education with the Yolŋu teacher in the room but also to mentor and train her up. In terms of the substantive opportunity to do that, I haven't got the time to do that.¹⁴⁷
- 3.120 The Committee heard that the Northern Territory Government has re-established the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) program,¹⁴⁸ which provides support for existing and aspiring Aboriginal educators to progress their learning and careers while living and working in their

¹⁴⁴ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, pages 104-06.

¹⁴⁵ ATSEOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 17.

¹⁴⁶ ATSEOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 19.

¹⁴⁷ Mr Daniel Yore, Djalkiri Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 17.

¹⁴⁸ Mr Daniel Yore, Djalkiri Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 17.

communities.¹⁴⁹ According to the Northern Territory Government, 'RATE provides participants with education career pathway opportunities with entry and exit points that lead to meaningful employment in schools and early childhood education and care settings.'¹⁵⁰

- 3.121 A pilot of the RATE program commenced in Galiwin'ku, Yuendumu, Mililingimbi and Angurugu in 2021 and will be rolled out in additional sites in 2022.¹⁵¹
- 3.122 The Djalkiri Foundation reported that the new RATE program has had mixed results but noted that 'it was purring back in the day in the eighties and nineties.'¹⁵²
- 3.123 A similar program to RATE is available in Queensland. The Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP) offers locally based teacher education programs so that participants can remain in their communities while they study. RATEP enables teacher aides and other school employees to study part-time for their Certificate IV and Diploma of Education (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) through TAFE Queensland.¹⁵³

NAPLAN

- 3.124 Each year, all Australian students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 sit a NAPLAN test, which is part of Australia's National Assessment Program. NAPLAN tests

¹⁴⁹ Northern Territory Department of Education, 'Aboriginal Educator Workforce Initiatives', www.education.nt.gov.au/careers-in-education/aboriginal-educator-workforce-initiatives, viewed 24 January 2022.

¹⁵⁰ Northern Territory Department of Education, 'Aboriginal Educator Workforce Initiatives', www.education.nt.gov.au/careers-in-education/aboriginal-educator-workforce-initiatives, viewed 24 January 2022.

¹⁵¹ Northern Territory Department of Education, 'Aboriginal Educator Workforce Initiatives', www.education.nt.gov.au/careers-in-education/aboriginal-educator-workforce-initiatives, viewed 24 January 2022.

¹⁵² Mr Daniel Yore, Djalkiri Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 17. See also: House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 106.

¹⁵³ Queensland Government, 'Teach Queensland: Study options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders', www.teach.qld.gov.au/become-a-teacher/steps-to-become-a-teacher/study-options-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islanders, viewed 24 January 2022.

students' ability in three areas of literacy: reading, writing and language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation), and numeracy.¹⁵⁴

- 3.125 The purpose of NAPLAN is to monitor and report on student achievement in a comparable and consistent way. NAPLAN is the only current test that provides nationally comparable data about literacy and numeracy achievement in schools across the country.¹⁵⁵
- 3.126 AEU raised several systemic concerns about the use and influence of NAPLAN within Australia's school education system.¹⁵⁶ AEU reported that the vast majority of principals and teachers are opposed to NAPLAN and that it is seen as 'ineffective for diagnosis and comparison, as a major contributor to student stress and anxiety, not benefitting student outcomes, increasing workload and distracting educators from their core purpose.'¹⁵⁷
- 3.127 AEU recommended that NAPLAN be replaced, and a new comprehensive assessment framework be developed that 'restores teachers' professional judgement of student learning as the prime consideration in its design'.¹⁵⁸

The need for a better measure of proficiency for EAL/D learners

- 3.128 According to ACTA, NAPLAN is a poor measure of the performance of EAL/D learners because:
- it is an English literacy measure, not a measure of proficiency in learning EAL/D
 - NAPLAN data is disaggregated and includes problematic identifiers such as language background other than English (LBOTE)
 - students with low English proficiency are discouraged from or avoid sitting NAPLAN tests.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ DESE, 'National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy', www.dese.gov.au/national-assessment-program/national-assessment-program-literacy-and-numeracy, viewed 10 January 2022.

¹⁵⁵ DESE, 'National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy', www.dese.gov.au/national-assessment-program/national-assessment-program-literacy-and-numeracy, viewed 10 January 2022.

¹⁵⁶ AEU, *Submission 45*, page 22.

¹⁵⁷ AEU, *Submission 45*, page 22.

¹⁵⁸ AEU, *Submission 45*, page 22.

¹⁵⁹ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 34.

- 3.129 ATESOLNT said that ‘NAPLAN data is wrongly used to inform system wide targets for Indigenous EAL/D learners and to determine both policies and pedagogies for these learners.’¹⁶⁰ According to ATESOLNT, NAPLAN targets position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners as failures and this negatively affects students, communities, teachers, school leadership and the culture of education departments.¹⁶¹
- 3.130 ATESOLNT advocated for revised assessment policies and practices that acknowledge most English language learners:
- can take up to two years to develop social interaction skills in English
 - can take up to seven years to achieve English proficiency that will support real academic achievement
 - depend on rigorous, professional EAL/D teaching and support to achieve these timelines.¹⁶²
- 3.131 ATESOLNT said that twice yearly EAL/D learner assessments should be made publicly available for schools supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.¹⁶³

The language background other than English identifier

- 3.132 The index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) is a scale of socio-educational advantage that is calculated for each Australian school. ICSEA allows visitors to My School¹⁶⁴ to make meaningful comparisons of NAPLAN achievement by students in schools across Australia. ICSEA is calculated using a range of variables including parental education levels, whether a school is in a metropolitan, regional or remote area, and the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students with a LBOTE.
- 3.133 The Committee heard that the current LBOTE identifier in ICSEA does not provide useful information about the proportion of EAL/D learners in

¹⁶⁰ ATESOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 40.

¹⁶¹ ATESOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 40.

¹⁶² ATESOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 42.

¹⁶³ ATESOLNT, *Submission 105.1*, page 42.

¹⁶⁴ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), ‘My School’, www.myschool.edu.au, viewed 21 January 2022.

schools and because of this there is no national evidence base regarding EAL/D learners in Australian schools.¹⁶⁵

- 3.134 Since 2012, governments have been aware of the need to develop an alternative identifier to LBOTE that better identifies students whose language background has a measurable effect on their outcomes.¹⁶⁶
- 3.135 In 2013, a New South Wales Department of Education and Communities study found that a new national proxy indicator of English language proficiency was needed and said that the LBOTE identifier should not be used because it 'did not identify the right students' and 'bore little relationship to the size of the cohort needing support.'¹⁶⁷
- 3.136 It was reported that there has been some movement in replacing the LBOTE identifier in recent years, however, there has yet to be any real progress.¹⁶⁸ According to ACTA, ACARA has now proposed that further work be put on hold because of a 'lack of a policy incentive to resolve the difficulties associated with jurisdictional differences in collecting data about learners of English as an additional language or dialect.'¹⁶⁹
- 3.137 ACTA advocated for this work to be brought to a productive conclusion to ensure that funding for EAL/D learners is better targeted and so that qualified TESOL teachers can be appropriately deployed.¹⁷⁰

Disengagement from education, shame and stigma

- 3.138 Children with SLDs or other disability, and children from homes where a language other than English is spoken and/or whose first language is not English, may disengage from education if their education needs are not adequately supported.
- 3.139 There are many reasons why other students disengage from education. These include illness, undiagnosed eyesight or hearing problems, disrupted

¹⁶⁵ ACTA, *Submission 85*, pages 17, 34-35.

¹⁶⁶ ACARA, *Data Standards Manual: Student Background Characteristics*, Sixth edition, October 2012, page 9.

¹⁶⁷ New South Wales Department of Education and Communities, *Improvements and Alternatives to the Disadvantaged LBOTE Measure*, 2 April 2013, page 38.

¹⁶⁸ ACTA, *Submission 85*, pages 35-36.

¹⁶⁹ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 36.

¹⁷⁰ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 37.

schooling due to constant relocation, the experience of bullying and exclusionary behaviours, or the need to support family members or family businesses (for example, on a farm).¹⁷¹

- 3.140 Students who experience barriers to their learning often talk about the absence of appropriate learning support to help them overcome these challenges, which can be a source of regret. The NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council said a common statement is '[i]f only I had had some extra help when I was young.'¹⁷² Other students describe the experience of falling through the cracks and of not being able to catch up to their peers in school.¹⁷³
- 3.141 Experiences of shame and stigma around SLDs and LLND skills gaps are commonly reported.¹⁷⁴ These experiences deter many Australians from seeking support and reengaging with education after leaving school.¹⁷⁵
- 3.142 The importance of providing safe, non-threatening and welcoming learning environments for adults was emphasised as way of engaging learners who had previously experienced shame and stigma in education for their LLND skills gaps.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ NSWALNC, *Submission 68.2*, page 3.

¹⁷² NSWALNC, *Submission 68.2*, page 3.

¹⁷³ NSWALNC, *Submission 68.2*, page 3.

¹⁷⁴ Mrs Pauline Bruffer, *Submission 53*, page [1]; Mr Nicholas Deans, *Submission 21*, page [1]; Ms Jenny Macaffer, Chief Executive Officer, Adult Learning Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 8; NSWALNC, *Submission 68.2*, page 3; Ms Christine MacJouvelet, Chair, DDF, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 47; Dr Judith Hudson, DDF, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 49; Ms Amelia Jones, Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance and Square Pegs Dyslexia Support and Advocacy Inc, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 July 2021, pages 6-7; Ms Marcia Barclay, Manager, Read Write Now, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 28 July 2021, page 11; Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 6.

¹⁷⁵ Community Adult Literacy Foundation, *Submission 19*, page [2]; NSWALNC, *Submission 68.2*, page 3; Ms Marcia Barclay, Read Write Now, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 28 July 2021, page 11; 26TEN Coalition, *Submission 20*, page 3; Rural Business Tasmania, *Submission 38*, page 2; Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, pages 3, 5; Ms Amelia Jones, Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance and Square Pegs Dyslexia Support and Advocacy Inc, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 July 2021, page 6.

¹⁷⁶ Ms Deborah Fewster, Manager, Advocacy and Engagement, VCOSS, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 24; Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy, *Submission 55*, page 10.

Raising awareness

- 3.143 Some of the ways to break down the shame and stigma that many people with LLND skills gaps experience are to normalise speaking respectfully about literacy gaps, to communicate the benefits of improving LLND skills, and to let people know where they can get support.
- 3.144 The 26TEN Coalition in Tasmania has a focus on raising awareness of the benefits of improving literacy. The Tasmanian Government said that a review of 26TEN found 'there has been a measurable increase in awareness of the issue, the campaign and the positive outcomes that have been—and continue to be—achieved for individuals.'¹⁷⁷
- 3.145 Libraries Tasmania reported that the communications campaign of the 26TEN Coalition has evolved from raising awareness to having what they call a 26TEN chat, which can involve directly talking about the subject of 'low literacy and numeracy with their neighbour or the person who comes into the doctor's office or wherever it might be.'¹⁷⁸
- 3.146 The Reading Writing Hotline said that Australia needs a national public awareness campaign to reduce the shame and stigma experienced by people with low LLND skills and to provide information about where they can get help.¹⁷⁹ However, the Reading Writing Hotline also noted that there was little point raising people's expectations if they were unlikely to receive support due to gaps in service provision.¹⁸⁰
- 3.147 As previously noted, there is support for raising awareness in the community, and among education and medical professionals, of the signs and symptoms of SLDs, how these impact learning, and where families can receive assessments and support. Increasing public awareness of SLDs will assist in reducing the shame and stigma experienced by Australians with SLDs.

¹⁷⁷ Tasmanian Government, *Submission 82*, page 5.

¹⁷⁸ Ms Elizabeth Jack, Executive Director, Libraries Tasmania, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 July 2021, page 18.

¹⁷⁹ Ms Vanessa Iles, Manager, Reading Writing Hotline, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 28 July 2021, page 2.

¹⁸⁰ Ms Vanessa Iles, Reading Writing Hotline, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 28 July 2021, page 2.

- 3.148 Family Planning NSW advocated for medical professionals to be provided with training and resources that raise awareness of the needs of people with low literacy.¹⁸¹
- 3.149 The Productivity Commission reported that a range of factors including stigma, social isolation and self-doubt can deter people from seeking help with LLND skills gaps and said that ‘training providers will need to deliver effective community outreach to attract and retain students.’¹⁸² It said that ‘[i]mproving foundation skills is a long-term task which will require strong engagement with students.’¹⁸³

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

- 3.150 The COVID-19 pandemic continues to significantly disrupt the lives of Australians in 2022 and has exposed the vulnerabilities of people with low LLND skills who may have difficulties accessing and interpreting health information to keep themselves and others safe and may not be able to recognise misinformation.¹⁸⁴
- 3.151 More Australians have had to engage with services online, including government services, during the pandemic because offices and shopfronts were closed. Navigating online systems requires a certain level of LLND competency and many Australians were not able to access vital services as a result. These issues are discussed further in the Chapter 4.

School students

- 3.152 In its previous inquiry into education in remote and complex environments, the Committee found that the COVID-19 pandemic had significantly disrupted the education of Australian school students in 2020 and placed

¹⁸¹ Ms Caecilia Roth, Senior Education Officer, Family Planning NSW, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, pages 44-45.

¹⁸² Dr Malcolm Roberts, Commissioner, Productivity Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 February 2021, page 2.

¹⁸³ Dr Malcolm Roberts, Productivity Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 February 2021, page 2.

¹⁸⁴ NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, pages 7, 9; World Literacy Foundation, *Submission 11*, page [4].

strain on the capacity of education systems, schools, and teachers to deliver education outside of classrooms.¹⁸⁵

- 3.153 Many students were disadvantaged by the shift to online learning, particularly vulnerable children and those in their early years of schooling. Home learning also exposed the digital divide between families with access to the internet and internet-enabled devices, and those without. This experience suggested that while online education has the potential to bridge gaps in education access, it is no substitute for in-classroom teaching.¹⁸⁶
- 3.154 Similar issues were raised in this inquiry. The Committee heard that while COVID-19 disproportionately affected schools in low socioeconomic areas, these inequalities existed prior to the pandemic and were simply exacerbated as a result.¹⁸⁷
- 3.155 ACSSO commented, 'COVID-19 has made social inequalities such as disability, employment status, income, language, and social status – more visible and piercing.'¹⁸⁸
- 3.156 There was strong evidence that children of parents with low LLND skills were disadvantaged compared to children of parents with strong LLND skills.¹⁸⁹ For example, the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council said that the shift to home learning disproportionately affected children in households with lower levels of LLND skills, which demonstrates the critical importance of adult literacy for children's education.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 135.

¹⁸⁶ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, pages 135-46. See also pages 114-21.

¹⁸⁷ Ms Susan Hopgood, AEU, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 15.

¹⁸⁸ ACSSO, *Submission 36*, page 4.

¹⁸⁹ Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC), *Submission 73*, page [9]; Australian Council for Educational Research, *Submission 43*, pages 19, 29. Associate Professor Shumi Akhtar and Dr Farida Akhtar, *Submission 91*, page 9; ICPA Australia, *Submission 95*, page 4; Mr James Warren, *Submission 98*, page [8].

¹⁹⁰ VALBEC, *Submission 73*, page [9].

- 3.157 Many parents with low LLND skills were worried that they would have to assist their children during lockdown periods,¹⁹¹ and many reached out to support services for assistance.¹⁹² In some cases, children were able to help their parents improve their digital literacy skills. AMES Australia reported:

We had a lot of our students with very limited English trying to support their children, who were also studying at home. There were quite a significant amount of issues there in not being able to support and help their children with their studies from home because of their limited levels of English. Having said that, their children, though, were able to support the parents with their own studies. We found that there was an increased level in digital literacy as a result of the lockdown because they did have more support from home, from their own children, which allowed them to also participate and continue to develop their language skills from home, which was a positive outcome for us.¹⁹³

Adult LLND learners

- 3.158 COVID-19 disadvantaged many adult LLND learners because the shift to online modes of education delivery required both a certain level of digital literacy proficiency and access to technology.¹⁹⁴ Existing social inequalities have also deeply affected access to and participation in adult education during the pandemic.¹⁹⁵
- 3.159 The Reading Writing Hotline reported that it experienced a 30 per cent increase in calls for assistance during lockdown periods. It noted that some workers were unable to cope with working from home due to struggles with isolation and low digital literacy. Other Australians who had lost their jobs were unable to re-enter the workforce due to limited LLND skills or were

¹⁹¹ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 7; Ms Mary Finfinis, Teacher, AMES Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 45; Ms Evelyn Goodwin, Manager, Policy and Projects, Community Colleges Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 36.

¹⁹² Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 7; Ms Mary Finfinis, AMES Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 45.

¹⁹³ Ms Mary Finfinis, AMES Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 45.

¹⁹⁴ AMES Australia, *Submission 42*, page 7; Ms Catherine Scarth, Chief Executive Officer, AMES Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 44.

¹⁹⁵ ACSSO, *Submission 36*, page 4.

unable to take advantage of having more time and study opportunities due to literacy barriers.¹⁹⁶

- 3.160 The Committee heard that the shift to online learning exposed a gap between Australians with strong digital literacy and access to technology and those without the relevant skills or resources.¹⁹⁷ This gap was experienced acutely by Australians working or learning from remote locations with poor internet access, those who could not afford digital devices, or who only had access to digital devices outside of their home, such as at learning centres, libraries, or work.¹⁹⁸ The Settlement Council of Australia said this affected many refugees and migrants, where access to digital technology was difficult, and learning English from a distance posed a significant challenge.¹⁹⁹
- 3.161 In some cases, households only had access to one digital device, which may have been a mobile phone. Furthermore, access to sufficient internet or wi-fi access varied significantly across Australia, especially in rural or remote areas.²⁰⁰ Other individuals and families did not have access to a digital device at all, and some did not have internet access.²⁰¹ For families who only had access to a single computer during this time, parents had limited opportunity to use it during the day if their children had online learning commitments.²⁰²
- 3.162 The Committee heard that online education for adults in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is not currently a practical or

¹⁹⁶ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 4.

¹⁹⁷ Swinburne University of Technology, *Submission 33*, page [4]; TAFE Queensland, *Submission 39*, page 4; ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 45.

¹⁹⁸ Ms Susan Hopgood, AEU, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 15; Dr Marguerite Cullity, *Submission 63*, page 10; VCOSS, *Submission 89*, page 17.

¹⁹⁹ Mrs Sandra Wright, Chief Executive Officer, Settlement Council of Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 8.

²⁰⁰ Ms Susan Hopgood, AEU, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 15; Mrs Sharon Healy, President, ACSSO, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 28; Ms Theresa Collignon, Group Chief Executive Officer, Macquarie Community College, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 35; Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 64*, page 12.

²⁰¹ Mrs Sharon Healy, ACSSO, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 28.

²⁰² Ms Theresa Collignon, Macquarie Community College, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 35.

effective mode of delivery because of gaps in digital literacy and access to technology. Associate Professor Guenther said:

... access to the internet is patchy, people don't have devices to access the internet, it's too costly or it's unaffordable. That inhibits many adults from being able to access online courses. They just don't have the tools. They don't have the access. The infrastructure isn't there. In some of the more remote places that I work in, the internet is so patchy because it's dependent on satellite connectivity, and there's a very limited amount of downloads you can do. That means you can't really do online learning in a meaningful way. The moment there's a bit of cloud cover or rain, the satellite dish doesn't work properly, and that's it for the internet for the day.²⁰³

- 3.163 COVID-19 affected not just adult learners, but also organisations' ability to deliver education. For example, the Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group stated their ability to deliver support had been diminished during the pandemic due to tutors either leaving or taking a break.²⁰⁴
- 3.164 AMEP moved to online delivery in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department of Home Affairs said that '[d]espite the many challenges imposed by COVID-19, significant innovation, flexibility and COVID-safe benefits were realised through these alternative delivery arrangements.'²⁰⁵

Conclusion

- 3.165 There are a range of reasons why many Australian adults have LLND skills gaps that relate to an individual's experience of education and the capacity of education systems to address their needs. It is the Committee's view that factors contributing to adult LLND skills gaps can be addressed through early intervention to identify and remediate learning vulnerabilities, and the development of education policies and systems that better respond to students' needs.

²⁰³ Associate Professor John Guenther, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 28.

²⁰⁴ Mr Merv Gardner, President, Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group, *Committee Hansard*, Caboolture, 19 July 2021, pages 3-4.

²⁰⁵ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 46*, page 11.

Identifying and supporting individuals with specific learning disabilities

- 3.166 Individuals with SLDs need additional support to acquire strong LLND skills. Ideally, SLDs should be identified and remediated early in life. The Committee heard that the cost of getting an assessment is out of reach for many families, that many individuals with SLDs do not receive the support they need at school or later in life, and that there is a low level of awareness and recognition of SLDs in the Australian community.
- 3.167 The best outcomes for children with SLDs are likely to result from early identification through screening, preferably from age three or at a child's point of entry into early childhood education, and improved access to assessments and treatment.
- 3.168 Early intervention for children with SLDs is an area of public investment where there is clear evidence of return, both for individuals and the nation. There is strong evidence to support increasing access to assessments and treatment for SLDs and improving public awareness of SLDs.
- 3.169 The Committee notes that the cost of assessment and treatment for SLDs is out of reach for too many Australians because SLDs are not subsidised by the MBS. Children with autism, PDDs or certain other disabilities qualify for MBS subsidised treatment, while children with SLDs do not.
- 3.170 It is the Committee's view that Medicare rebates should be available to individuals with SLDs to access assessment and treatment from allied health services. This would enable individuals with SLDs to receive the same support as individuals with other conditions that have a significant impact on the ability of children to learn in the classroom.

Recommendation 4

- 3.171 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide subsidised assessment and treatment for specific learning disabilities under the Medicare Benefits Scheme by March 2023 for all Australians.**
- 3.172 It is unclear whether a program of universal subsidised screening for children with SLDs is feasible or cost effective. There may be merit in conducting a feasibility study to further investigate the provision of universal screening of children for SLDs.

- 3.173 Early interventions in children's education, such as assessment and treatment for SLDs, are difficult to access outside of the major cities. The Committee continues to support measures that improve access to allied health services in geographically isolated locations.²⁰⁶

Ensuring access, affordability, quality and sustainability in early childhood education

- 3.174 Early childhood education is the foundation on which success in education is built. Quality early childhood education is important for all children, particularly those who are experiencing disadvantage or are developmentally vulnerable.
- 3.175 There are a range of concerns around access and affordability in early childhood education, particularly for disadvantaged families and those located outside of the major cities, and evidence that providers struggle to recruit and retain quality staff.
- 3.176 The Committee continues to support amending the activity test in the CCS to provide up to 30 hours per week of subsidised early education and care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.²⁰⁷
- 3.177 The Committee acknowledges the importance of community-controlled service provision in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as a key element of the Closing the Gap Agreement. The Committee continues to support the provision of flexibility and surety in funding for integrated, wrap-around models of early intervention, family support, early childhood education and health care in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities,²⁰⁸ and for mobile early childhood education in remote areas.²⁰⁹
- 3.178 The Committee continues to support measures that improve the cultural competency of staff working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and the development and professionalisation of the

²⁰⁶ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 41.

²⁰⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 62.

²⁰⁸ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 61.

²⁰⁹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 62.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care workforce.²¹⁰

- 3.179 The provision of first language early childhood education should be encouraged in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where English is not a child's first language.
- 3.180 The Committee is aware that all Australian education ministers have endorsed a new National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy (2022-2031), which supports the recruitment, retention, sustainability and quality of the sector workforce.²¹¹ Governments and sector stakeholders are now working to co-design implementation and evaluation plans to achieve the strategy's objectives.²¹²
- 3.181 The Australian Government is committed to providing financial support to families to access affordable and high quality early childhood education and care. Under current Australian Government policy, the CCS is set at a rate that was deemed affordable by the Productivity Commission. Families receive additional support through the Child Care Safety Net if they are disadvantaged or located in a regional or remote community.
- 3.182 Parents who are undertaking work, study, training, or who are looking for work satisfy the CCS activity test and may be eligible to receive the CCS. This provides an incentive for many parents to improve their LLND skills and enter the workforce. Additional child care assistance is provided to participants in AMEP, which is discussed in the following chapter.
- 3.183 The Australian Government also funds the provision of preschool programs by state and territory governments through the UANP.
- 3.184 There was some support for expanding access to preschool to children from the age of three. The Committee notes that this would be similar to the policy the Australian Labor Party took to the last election, which was estimated to cost \$1.75 billion. Under that proposal, children would have

²¹⁰ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 60.

²¹¹ Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), *Shaping Our Future: A ten-year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high-quality children's education and care workforce 2022–2031*, September 2021.

²¹² ACECQA, 'National Workforce Strategy', www.acecqa.gov.au/national-workforce-strategy, viewed 24 January 2022.

been able to access 15 hours a week of education in the two years before going to primary school.

- 3.185 As Australia emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, governments will need to carefully balance spending priorities with budget sustainability over the long term.
- 3.186 While the Committee recognises there is evidence of returns on investment in early childhood education, there was inconclusive evidence on whether subsidising an additional year of preschool education would tangibly improve educational outcomes and result in more parents choosing to undertake work, study or training. A deeper analysis of the proposal, including the likely cost is required to fully inform policy debates and guide any new policy development.
- 3.187 The Committee is aware that circumstances may have changed considerably since the Productivity Commission reported on its influential inquiry into childcare and early childhood learning in 2014, and that it would be prudent and timely to again review access, affordability and sustainability in early childhood education and care to better inform policy development as Australia recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation 5

- 3.188 The Committee recommends that the Treasurer refer to the Productivity Commission an inquiry into the accessibility, affordability and sustainability of Australia's early childhood education and care system. The inquiry must consider the proposal to expand access to preschool by having children attend preschool for two years before primary school, and report no later than March 2024.**

Improving the capacity of school education to address the needs of all students

- 3.189 The Committee is concerned by evidence that Australia's school education system may not adequately address the needs of all students, in particular children with disability and EAL/D learners, including children from migrant backgrounds and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- 3.190 The Australian Government addresses socioeconomic barriers in education through school funding and more resources are allocated to disadvantaged

students. The Australian Government is increasing school funding from \$18.7 billion in 2018 to \$32.7 billion in 2029, which represents a 4 per cent increase in funding for each student each year over this period.²¹³ School funding arrangements are tied to reforms in the National School Reform Agreement, in which Australian, state and territory governments are committed to lifting student outcomes.

- 3.191 By 2029, the Australian Government will consistently fund 20 per cent of the total SRS for government systems and 80 per cent of the total SRS for non-government schools and systems. Schools currently funded below their target Australian Government share of the SRS will meet that funding target by 2023, while schools that are currently funded above their target will transition to it by 2029.
- 3.192 The Committee recognises that the Australian Government is also increasing school funding for students with disability by, on average, 5.7 per cent each year until 2029.
- 3.193 Despite this, there was concerning evidence that many students with disability do not receive the support that is required to enable them to learn at their best. The Committee is concerned that the SRS student with disability loading may not factor in the real costs of ensuring students with disability receive a high quality education. As such, it would be prudent to undertake an independent review of the student with disability loading to ensure it is fit for purpose.

Recommendation 6

- 3.194 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government commission an independent review of the student with disability loading to determine whether it adequately reflects the costs of providing a high quality education to all Australian school students with disability. The review must report no later than March 2023.**
- 3.195 The Committee is concerned that not all Australian school students have access to secondary school at a nationally consistent minimum standard, and notes that students from remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

²¹³ From a 2017 base. DESE, 'Quality Schools Package', www.dese.gov.au/quality-schools-package, viewed 24 January 2022.

communities in the Northern Territory must either go to boarding school or be offered a limited program at their local primary school.

- 3.196 While the management of school systems is a matter for the states and territories, the Committee has significant concerns about several other issues relating to the provision of education in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Committee heard that education systems where funding is provided based on attendance rather than enrolment, or where funding is provided to schools as a one-line budget have a negative impact on school attendance, staffing and staff training. As signatories to the Closing the Gap Agreement, all jurisdictions have an obligation to ensure that their education policies are working to achieve a sustained improvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.
- 3.197 In its previous inquiry report into education in remote and complex environments, the Committee recommended the Minister for Education develop, for inclusion in the new National School Reform Agreement, commencing in 2023, a proposal that ensures that all Australian students can access secondary school education, to a nationally consistent minimum standard, regardless of their geographic location.²¹⁴
- 3.198 Given the evidence to this inquiry about the negative impacts of attendance-based funding on student attendance and outcomes, including that some students are only receiving two out of five days of instruction, the Committee believes that further safeguards must be put in place to ensure universal access to quality education, especially in remote communities with significant LLND skills gaps.

Recommendation 7

- 3.199 **The Committee recommends that, as part of the new National School Reform Agreement, commencing in 2023, the Australian Government seek the agreement of the states and territories to ensure funding for schools is based on student enrolment rather than attendance.**
- 3.200 There is strong evidence supporting teaching strategies that focus on the explicit teaching of reading through systematic phonics and this is being recognised by the Australian Government through a range of reforms such

²¹⁴ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 133.

as explicit requirements for reading instruction, including phonics, in teacher training. Given these new policies will take some years to produce tangible change, the Committee does not see the need for an additional national strategy that prioritises phonics-based instruction at this time.

- 3.201 It is now well recognised that students from non-English speaking backgrounds require explicit EAL/D pedagogy delivered by qualified TESOL educators to develop strong English literacy.
- 3.202 With respect to EAL/D learners, the guiding principle for Australian education policy should be that linguistically different learners have different starting points and therefore they have different needs. The Committee considered how this principle could be more effectively embedded in school education policy and concludes that change needs to be driven through the assessments and funding framework.
- 3.203 The Committee has found that under current arrangements:
- there is little requirement for schools to ensure that EAL/D learners are provided with instruction from qualified TESOL educators and a lack of uniform data collection on the support provided to those students by schools
 - the learning progression of EAL/D learners is not being appropriately assessed
 - school funding is not being targeted in the most effective way because the indicator used to resource schools for EAL/D learners is flawed.
- 3.204 Schools must be required to have qualified TESOL educators on staff to address the needs of EAL/D learners.
- 3.205 NAPLAN is ill suited for EAL/D learners and it should not be a measure of their success. However, the Committee is not convinced that NAPLAN should be replaced.
- 3.206 Instead, EAL/D learners should be assessed using an appropriate EAL/D assessment that should be a key part of the National Assessment Program. EAL/D learner assessment results should be published alongside NAPLAN data. To do otherwise is unfair and counterproductive.
- 3.207 Governments have long been aware of the need to develop an alternative identifier to LBOTE that better identifies EAL/D learners, however, there has yet to be any real progress on this issue. The Committee understands that this work is currently sitting with ACARA. This work should now be finalised.

Recommendation 8

3.208 The Committee recommends that, as part of the new National School Reform Agreement, commencing in 2023, the Australian Government seek the agreement of the states and territories to:

- **require a proportionate number of qualified English as a second or additional language (TESOL) educators to be provided, on an ongoing basis, to the number of enrolled English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) learners in schools**
- **undertake an appropriate and consistent EAL/D assessment for EAL/D learners in Australian schools, with the results of the EAL/D assessment, along with the number of qualified TESOL educators in schools, to be published alongside NAPLAN data on My School**
- **implement a replacement to the language background other than English identifier in the index of community socio-educational advantage that better identifies EAL/D learners for the purposes of school resourcing.**

3.209 Reforms to the way that Australia assesses and resources EAL/D learners in school is also necessary to help prevent those students from experiencing the shame and stigma of failure, and from disengaging from education.

3.210 Quality TESOL education involves teaching materials that are tailored to students' cultural and linguist needs. Therefore, it is concerning that various 'off the shelf', commercial literacy interventions have been imported from overseas and rolled out in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools.

3.211 Applying the same education policies to students who are culturally and linguistically diverse does not result in equitable outcomes for those students and their communities. Rather, it is setting those students up to fail. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, this means that many current policies are widening the gap, not closing it.

3.212 The Committee is concerned that there has been a lack of government support for bilingual education in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where English is not the first language. Bilingual education is supported by international and local evidence, and many Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander communities have been strongly advocating for bilingual provision in their schools for years.

- 3.213 Closing the Gap requires governments to change how they approach policy-making and service delivery. This means supporting approaches to education that better suit the wishes and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Committee welcomes the Northern Territory Government's increased focus on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to engage in local decision-making agreements about their children's education, which has resulted in bilingual education programs in several schools. However, there is much more work to be done, including the further development of local literacy production centres in bilingual schools.
- 3.214 The Committee again calls on the Australian Government, as part of its policy commitments to Closing the Gap, to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can access bilingual education where English is not the first language spoken, or where school communities have expressed a desire for this to occur.²¹⁵
- 3.215 The presence of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in remote schools has a positive influence on student attendance, engagement and the connection between families and their schools, and teaching provides a great career for local people who want to stay and contribute to their communities. Furthermore, local language-speaking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers are vital to the success of bilingual education programs in remote communities.
- 3.216 The Committee again calls for the Australian Government, as part of its Closing the Gap commitments, to establish programs that support the development and professionalisation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workforce.²¹⁶

Addressing student disengagement, shame and stigma

- 3.217 Many Australian students disengage from education, or drop out, because their education needs are not met. These students experience significant

²¹⁵ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 135.

²¹⁶ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, November 2020, page 135.

shame and stigma at school about their LLND skills gaps, and for many this experience continues throughout their life and deters them from seeking support and reengaging with education after leaving school.

- 3.218 There is a need for improving the understanding of SLDs among educators and medical professionals, and for greater awareness of the impact of LLND skills gaps on individuals and where Australians with LLND skills gaps can receive support.

Recommendation 9

- 3.219 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government deliver:**

- **in consultation with the Department of Health, a national campaign to raise awareness of specific learning disabilities (SLDs) among medical and education professionals, employers and the broader community that provides information and resources about the signs and symptoms of SLDs and where individuals and families can go for assessment and support**
- **in consultation with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, peak bodies and key stakeholders, a national campaign to destigmatise and raise awareness in the community about the challenges people with low language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) skills experience, the benefits of improving LLND skills, where people can receive support and the education options available to them.**

Supporting education during pandemics

- 3.220 The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted the education of Australian students since 2020 and has strained the capacity of education systems, schools and teachers to deliver education outside of classrooms.
- 3.221 The shift to online learning disadvantaged many students in preschool, school and adult education and training, and exposed the digital divide between individuals and families with access to the internet and internet-enabled devices, and those without.
- 3.222 Parents had to juggle work or study with supporting their children's learning from home for extended periods of time. Lockdowns had a

significant impact on the lives of children and adults, including parents, with low LLND skills, who did not have access to the internet or devices, or who shared devices with other members of their family.

- 3.223 Adults had reduced access to study and training to improve their LLND skills if they had low digital literacy and were unable to navigate online platforms.
- 3.224 The Committee remains concerned that many school students and adult learners may have disengaged from education during the remote learning period and is aware that further work will be required to assess and address this disengagement.
- 3.225 While health advice will guide whether children and adults are able to continue receiving face-to-face instruction in the coming months, the Committee remains convinced that jurisdictions should prioritise the safe delivery of in-classroom teaching over home-based learning across all education systems. This is critical to ensure that students remain engaged with their education and that Australians with low LLND skills, particularly digital literacy, have equitable access to a quality education.
- 3.226 The Committee recognises there is scope for a thorough inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Australia's education systems, including the disengagement of students, and the capacity of education systems to respond to future pandemics.

4. Programs supporting adults with language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills gaps

- 4.1 The Committee is aware that a significant part of the challenge of improving adult language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) skills in Australia lies on the supply side. As noted in Chapter 2, there is evidence of significant unmet demand for existing programs. The Reading Writing Hotline reported that, in 2019-20, there was no appropriate provision available for 13 per cent of callers.¹
- 4.2 The Reading Writing Hotline said that some Australians ‘may wait 15 years to find the courage to ask for help, only to be told that there's actually no help available. This happens far too often, despite the best efforts of the hotline staff to support our callers.’²
- 4.3 The availability of programs supporting adult LLND skills development varies by region. For example, it was reported that the Reading Writing Hotline is often unable to identify suitable access to programs for individuals in the Northern Territory.³

¹ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, Attachment 1, page [1].

² Ms Vanessa Iles, Manager, Reading Writing Hotline, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 24 March 2021, page 2.

³ Ms Lorraine Sushames, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 29 July 2021, page 32.

- 4.4 This chapter examines the range of Australian, state and territory government and community-based adult LLND education programs that are currently available and the reasons why there are gaps in provision.
- 4.5 The Committee heard that many adults with low LLND skills need assistance to realise their civic, legal and financial rights. This chapter also examines the capacity of community services to meet demand for assistance with literacy mediation, form filling, legal advice and financial counselling.

Programs supporting adult LLND skills development

- 4.6 Governments fund a range of training and education services to develop and improve adult LLND skills, including through:
- programs that develop the skills of the Australian workforce and encourage strong settlement outcomes for migrants and refugees
 - accredited courses in the vocational education and training (VET) system
 - accredited and non-accredited courses in community-based education programs, referred to as adult and community education (ACE), and in public libraries
 - education programs delivered to young people and adults in custody
 - community-wide campaigns.
- 4.7 This range of services reflects the diverse needs and backgrounds of adults with LLND skills gaps in the community.⁴

Australian Government programs

- 4.8 As noted in Chapter 1, the focus of Australian Government programs supporting adult LLND skills development are employment readiness and promoting good migrant settlement outcomes. The main Australian Government programs are:
- Foundation Skills for Your Future (FSFYF)
 - Skills for Education and Employment (SEE)
 - JobTrainer
 - Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).
- 4.9 The Australian Government also funds the Reading Writing Hotline.

⁴ Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 386.

Foundation Skills for Your Future and Remote Community Pilots

- 4.10 In response to *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System* (the Joyce review), in 2019 the Australian Government announced FSFYF. Under FSFYF, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) deliver contextualised LLND training to employees either in a traditional VET or workplace setting.⁵
- 4.11 Those eligible to participate in FSFYF are Australian citizens or permanent residents aged 15 and over who are finished with secondary school education, currently employed or recently unemployed, and not currently registered with an Australian Government employment service provider or enrolled in a similar program.⁶
- 4.12 Estimated funding for FSFYF is \$14.3 million over 2021-22, decreasing to \$7.1 million in 2022-23.⁷
- 4.13 The 2019-20 Budget included the Foundation Skills for Your Future - Remote Community Pilots (FSFYF Remote Community Pilots) initiative to deliver LLND skills assessment and training in four remote communities, one in each of the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and Northern Queensland. Residents of remote communities are eligible to participate if they are aged 15 years and over and have left secondary school education.⁸
- 4.14 The FSFYF Remote Community Pilots aim to:
- improve community members' LLND skills
 - identify and develop systemic approaches to LLND skills training delivery in remote communities
 - inform future program delivery, new funding arrangements and changes to existing programs.⁹
- 4.15 The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) stated:

⁵ Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), *Submission 86*, page 27.

⁶ DESE, 'Foundation Skills for Your Future', www.dese.gov.au/foundation-skills-your-future-program, viewed 19 January 2022.

⁷ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 27.

⁸ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 28.

⁹ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 28.

Each Pilot will also aim to respond to local community needs and aspirations by co-designing Pilot content and operations with community stakeholders. Four distinct models for delivering training will be trialled to improve the LLND skills of individuals and across participating communities and inform foundation skills policies and programs.¹⁰

- 4.16 AMES Australia noted that since FSFYF is a new program, there is not yet any publicly available data or evidence concerning its effectiveness.¹¹
- 4.17 The Reading Writing Hotline said that workplace literacy could be strengthened by expanding FSFYF, using incentives such as funding employers to release individuals for LLND courses during working hours, and funding employers to provide local classes for potential Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in remote communities who require higher LLND skill levels.¹²

Skills for Education and Employment program

- 4.18 SEE delivers language, literacy and numeracy assessment and training of up to 650 hours to eligible jobseekers with the aim of improving their ability to participate in further training and the workforce. To gain access to the program, jobseekers are referred from Services Australia or by providers of jobactive, the disability employment program, the Community Development Program, Transition to Work or ParentsNext.¹³
- 4.19 There are 20 RTOs who deliver SEE across the country. Training can be undertaken either full-time or part-time, depending on the jobseeker's needs and requirements.¹⁴
- 4.20 To be eligible for SEE, participants must be:
- aged between 15 years and Age Pension age
 - registered as a jobseeker, including as a volunteer jobseeker

¹⁰ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 28.

¹¹ AMES Australia, *Submission 42*, page 7.

¹² Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 12.

¹³ Ms Brigitte Bergin, Acting Assistant Secretary, Foundation Skills Branch, Apprenticeships and Workforce Skills Division, DESE, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 February 2021, pages 5-6. See also: DESE, *Submission 86*, page 23.

¹⁴ Ms Brigitte Bergin, DESE, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 February 2021, page 6.

- deemed suitable for training without any barriers that would prevent successful participation
- either an Australian citizen or permanent resident or have working rights in Australia.¹⁵

4.21 In terms of training, DESE said:

... jobseekers are enrolled in an accredited training course. Training courses tend to be language, literacy and numeracy focused. Specific courses are the Foundation Skills Training Package or certificates in spoken and written English. On commencement of the program, jobseekers are assessed and their language, literacy and numeracy needs identified, and then they're placed in a course that is appropriate for them.¹⁶

4.22 DESE reported that, for every 200 hours a SEE participant attends training, they undertake another assessment to measure language, literacy and numeracy progress against the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF).¹⁷ DESE reported:

- in 2019-20, 96 per cent of assessed SEE participants increased one or more levels on the ACSF
- in 2019-20, 6,497 participants completed SEE, meaning that they found employment, undertook further training or completed 650 hours
- in 2019, the average participant spent 340 hours or 8 months in the program.¹⁸

4.23 DESE indicated that funding for SEE was about \$117 million in 2020-21 and will increase over the forward estimates to approximately \$125 million in 2023-24.¹⁹

4.24 The 2021-22 Budget included \$16.6 million to expand eligibility and uncap the number of hours jobseekers are able to access within SEE.²⁰

¹⁵ DESE, *Summary of eligibility criteria for the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program*, November 2021, page [1].

¹⁶ Ms Brigitte Bergin, DESE, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 February 2021, page 6.

¹⁷ Ms Brigitte Bergin, DESE, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 February 2021, page 6.

¹⁸ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 24.

¹⁹ DESE, *Submission 86*, pages 24-25.

²⁰ DESE, *Budget 2021-22: Portfolio Budget Statements 2021-22 - Education, Skills and Employment Portfolio*, Paper Number 1.4, May 2021, page 16.

- 4.25 According to AMES Australia, while many now access this program, newly arrived migrants and refugees are not an identified SEE priority group.²¹
- 4.26 The Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) said that while SEE initially had a number of objectives, it currently appears to meet only one partial objective, that is a pathway to work. ACAL considered that SEE does not provide a range of choices tailored to meet the goals of the participants nor does it provide alternative pathways to further training. It does however, provide a pathway to VET. According to ACAL, there is no publicly available data to indicate its effectiveness.²²

JobTrainer

- 4.27 In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government announced the JobTrainer program in 2020, which provides free or low fee training for jobseekers and young people, including school leavers, to upskill or reskill in areas of identified need as the economy recovers from COVID-19.²³
- 4.28 The Australian Government has committed \$500 million in 2020–21 for JobTrainer, contingent on matched contributions from the states and territories.²⁴ The JobTrainer fund includes some literacy and numeracy training provision.²⁵

Adult Migrant English Program

- 4.29 AMEP was established soon after World War II (1948) and has been the flagship program, amongst a range of government services, aimed at assisting new migrants and humanitarian entrants to learn English language and literacy skills to enable them to participate socially and economically in Australia. The Australian Government has committed \$1 billion to AMEP over the forward estimates.²⁶

²¹ AMES Australia, *Submission 42*, page 6.

²² Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL), *Submission 66*, page 28.

²³ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 19.

²⁴ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 32.

²⁵ Ms Belinda Campbell, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Apprenticeships and Workforce Skills Division, DESE, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 February 2021, page 3.

²⁶ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 46*, page 7.

- 4.30 AMEP is administered by the Department of Home Affairs and is delivered by 13 providers at around 300 locations across Australia, in major cities as well as rural and regional areas. The program offers different attendance options such as full-time, part-time, evening and weekend classes. There are also a range of delivery types, including face-to-face, online and virtual classes. In locations with no AMEP site, a distance learning option is available. Free child care is available to AMEP students with children under school age.²⁷
- 4.31 As the Australian Government's largest migrant settlement program, AMEP caters to a diverse range of students with varying levels of education and employment status who have different goals in relation to their English language, such as undertaking basic transactions, talking to their child's teacher, pursuing further education and/or finding employment.²⁸
- 4.32 According to the Department of Home Affairs, AMEP students have highly varied prior levels of exposure to English and classroom learning. Some students will have had many years of education in their country of origin and may have some degree of English proficiency. They may be qualified and ready to learn vocational English. Others, however, may have had little or no exposure to English or opportunities to undertake schooling, and may have no literacy in their own or other languages. Additionally, their main language may have no written tradition.²⁹
- 4.33 The majority of migrants begin AMEP at a low or very low level of English language proficiency, with approximately 80 per cent of students entering AMEP below ACSF Level 1.³⁰ While initial assessment of AMEP students shows low levels of proficiency, over 90 per cent of students show improvement upon exiting the program.³¹

Recent reforms

- 4.34 In August 2020, the Australian Government announced significant reforms to AMEP to allow students to remain in the program for as long as they need

²⁷ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 46*, pages 7-8.

²⁸ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 46*, page 8.

²⁹ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 46*, page 8.

³⁰ Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) Level 2 is the level of literacy and numeracy required to meet the basic demands of work and life. See Chapter 2.

³¹ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 46*, page 8.

in order to reach vocational English. The *Immigration (Education) Amendment (Expanding Access to English Tuition) Act 2020*, which enabled these reforms, came into effect on 19 April 2021. The reforms in the Act included:

- removing a cap that limits government-funded English tuition to 510 hours to provide unlimited hours of tuition. Previously, AMEP participants were entitled to up to 510 hours of tuition but this is insufficient for most participants. Closer to 2,000 hours was considered to be required for the majority of participants who entered the program at very low levels of English;
- raising the language threshold from functional to vocational English. The previous legislation provided for tuition up to functional English. A person with functional English is generally considered to be able to take part in informal conversations and handle routine activity that is not linguistically demanding. This level of proficiency is insufficient for participation in Vocational Education and Training beyond the Certificate I/II level and considered by many employers as too low for employment. Extending eligibility to vocational English focussed AMEP on vocational pathways; and
- removing time limits on enrolling, commencing and completing AMEP tuition for those already in Australia as at 1 October 2020. To participate in the AMEP, migrants generally have to: register with an AMEP service provider within six months of arrival in Australia (or 12 months if they are under 18 years of age); commence tuition within 12 months; and complete tuition within five years. There are cohorts who have been in Australia for more than 10 years who, for various reasons, have not commenced or have not completed English tuition. Removing the time limits for registration, commencement and completion of English tuition for permanent visa holders or eligible temporary visa holders with a visa commencement day on or before 1 October 2020 provides an opportunity for these people to re-engage in language learning.³²

4.35 Prior to the legislated changes that came into effect on 19 April 2021, the Australian Government implemented a new business model for AMEP in July 2017.³³ The new business model established two AMEP service streams: social English and pre-employment English. Pre-employment stream classes are funded at a higher level. Teachers of those classes are required to have a degree and postgraduate qualifications in Teaching English to Speakers of

³² Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 46*, pages 10-11.

³³ Department of Home Affairs, *Evaluation of the Adult Migrant English Program New Business Model*, August 2019, page xi.

Other Languages (TESOL). Social stream classes are funded at a lower level and can be taught by unqualified teachers.³⁴

4.36 The Australian Education Union (AEU) expressed concern that this has created a two-tier system of English language delivery where those learning English for non-employment related reasons are potentially getting second-class tuition.³⁵

4.37 According to AEU, the implications of these changes have been damaging both for migrant English learning and achieving positive settlement outcomes. AMEP students require English language and literacy in order to participate in society at all levels. Employment, while an important milestone in the settlement journey of many migrants, is only one domain of communication.³⁶

4.38 This concern was echoed by the Settlement Council of Australia, which cautioned against an over-emphasis on employment skills in AMEP:

For many participants, employment will be their primary personal goal, and their settlement goal. However, there will also be participants who are not of working age, or who have health, social or other settlement goals as their more immediate focus. An over-emphasis on employment can undermine other legitimate goals.

Further, putting too strong an emphasis on job-seeking too early in a person's settlement journey can be counter-productive to employment outcomes. This approach often limits progress in learning to speak English as well as limiting their potential to acquire a job to match their skills and aspirations. They may instead become stuck in low-skilled and low-income jobs, and consequently experience poorer social outcomes. The goals of the program should remain firmly in the achievement of English language proficiency, literacy skills, and good settlement outcomes.³⁷

4.39 The reforms to AMEP have also drawn criticism for their proposed funding model. The initially proposed funding model for AMEP was based on attendance. The Victorian Council of Social Service pointed out that this model does not take into account the ongoing fixed costs of running the

³⁴ Australian Education Union (AEU), *Submission 45*, page 20.

³⁵ AEU, *Submission 45*, page 20.

³⁶ AEU, *Submission 45*, page 20.

³⁷ Settlement Council of Australia, *Submission 70*, page 3.

program, or factor in that students will at times be unwell or unable to attend due to caring responsibilities.³⁸

4.40 The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) was particularly unhappy with this funding model³⁹ and proposed a funding model that instead included:

- Set up costs based on an analysis of data from previous contracts.
- On-going payments that are a fixed per capita amount per term based on the number of students enrolled and attending in the first week of the term. These payments should be made monthly to maintain cash flow.
- An agreement of what constitutes an 'exit' from the program, so that providers continue to receive payments if a student misses a class.
- A cap on payments with regard to class sizes (no more than 20 students).⁴⁰

4.41 To address concerns about the initially proposed funding model, the Department of Home Affairs developed a revised funding model, released in December 2021. The revised funding model proposed an AMEP initial assessment payment, being a one-off payment made when a student completes their registration and initial assessment.⁴¹

4.42 The Department of Home Affairs is also proposing the unit of competency payment be provided in several portions that are dependent on a student's progress, to address concerns regarding service provider viability and cash flow. Payments would be made when a student:

- commences and attends a class in a unit of competency (termed a *unit commencement payment*; 10% of the total unit price);
- completes 50% of a unit's nominal hours (termed a *unit milestone payment* and equal to 40% of the total unit price); and either
- completes a unit of competency without meeting all criteria required to pass (termed an *unsuccessful unit completion payment*; 30% of the total unit price); or

³⁸ Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), *Submission 89*, pages 16-17.

³⁹ Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA), *Submission 85*, page 45.

⁴⁰ ACTA, *Submission 85.1*, pages 25-26. See also: Settlement Council of Australia, *Submission 70*, pages 2-3.

⁴¹ Department of Home Affairs, *AMEP Consultation and Funding Model Comparison Report*, December 2021, page 7.

- successfully completes a unit of competency (termed a *successful unit completion payment*; 50% of the total unit price).⁴²

4.43 Finally, the proposed funding model provides for a pre-certificate tuition payment. The Department of Home Affairs stated that:

Stakeholders raised concerns that students at this level can take time to establish appropriate learning strategies and may take longer to complete units of competency. Under the revised business model, the pre-certificate tuition payment would be made for every 10 hours of training students complete in EAL [English as an Additional Language] Framework courses.⁴³

Reading Writing Hotline

4.44 The Reading Writing Hotline has been funded by the Australian Government and managed by TAFE NSW for 25 years.⁴⁴ It maintains a database of all current adult literacy and numeracy providers, and can offer advice on courses, teachers and tutors that are in a caller's local area, as well as a range of other resources and workbooks. The hotline receives more than 4,000 calls each year.⁴⁵

4.45 The Reading Writing Hotline receives program funding of \$638,000 annually.⁴⁶ The Australian Government provided the hotline with an additional \$3 million in the 2021-22 Budget to support its national services and research to improve foundation skills delivery.⁴⁷

4.46 There was support for the work of, and continued funding for, the Reading Writing Hotline.⁴⁸ For example, ACAL said the hotline 'is a valuable service

⁴² Department of Home Affairs, *AMEP Consultation and Funding Model Comparison Report*, December 2021, page 7.

⁴³ Department of Home Affairs, *AMEP Consultation and Funding Model Comparison Report*, December 2021, page 7.

⁴⁴ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 2.

⁴⁵ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 2; Reading Writing Hotline, 'Reading Writing Hotline', www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au/, viewed 19 January 2022.

⁴⁶ DESE, *Submission 86*, page 31.

⁴⁷ DESE, 'Improving access to and support for Foundation Skills', www.dese.gov.au/skills-reform/skills-reform-overview/improving-access-and-support-foundation-skills, viewed 19 January 2022.

⁴⁸ Mr Merv Gardner, President, Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group, *Committee Hansard*, Caboolture, 19 July 2021, page 2.

linking potential learners to teachers and mapping the availability of provision across Australia and the gaps that exist. This service needs to be continued.⁴⁹

State and territory government programs

- 4.47 State and territory governments primarily support LLND skills training by subsidising accredited and pre-vocational courses offered in the VET system, in partnership with the Australian Government.
- 4.48 State and territory governments also provide targeted subsidies to make training more affordable and concessions available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, people with disability and recipients of certain government payments. The Productivity Commission reported that the size of the discount to full fees varies but is substantial.⁵⁰
- 4.49 State and territory governments provide varying levels of support for the ACE sector, which includes a range of community based, not-for-profit organisations that offer both accredited qualifications and non-accredited or pre-accredited, introductory LLND education programs and courses.⁵¹
- 4.50 In addition, state and territory funded public libraries and correctional institutions support adult LLND skills development.

Vocational education and training

- 4.51 Australia's VET system is a joint responsibility of Australian, state and territory governments and is delivered by RTOs, which can be commercial or not-for-profit organisations, or government supported Technical and Further Education (TAFE) providers.
- 4.52 As noted in Chapter 1, the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development (NASWD) defines the framework for intergovernmental collaboration in VET, and identifies the long-term objectives of the Australian Government and state and territory governments in the areas of

⁴⁹ ACAL, *Submission 66*, page 4.

⁵⁰ Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 388.

⁵¹ Ms Theresa Collignon, Group Chief Executive Officer, Macquarie Community College, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 32.

skills and workforce development.⁵² All governments have committed to working together to develop a new National Skills Agreement to replace the NASWD in the first half of 2022, to provide stronger support for foundation skills and ensure access for all Australians with low levels of LLND skills as a priority.⁵³

- 4.53 VET is regulated by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). ASQA is responsible for the registration of RTOs and monitoring their compliance with national VET standards.⁵⁴
- 4.54 VET qualifications are developed in accordance with the Australian Qualifications Framework.
- 4.55 In 2018, 197,000 students were undertaking nationally recognised VET courses or qualifications designed to teach LLND skills. According to the Productivity Commission, the data suggested that LLND courses delivered through the VET system reach a diverse cohort, although they acknowledged access in remote locations is difficult. For example:
- students who did not complete Year 12 comprised half of the students undertaking LLND skills training in VET in 2018
 - half of the students studying LLND in the VET system are from non-English-speaking backgrounds
 - 8 per cent of students studying LLND skills identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in 2018
 - 88 per cent of students undertaking LLND skills training in 2018 came from the cities or inner regional areas.⁵⁵

⁵² Council of Australian Governments, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development*, 2012.

⁵³ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), *Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform*, 5 August 2020.

⁵⁴ DESE, 'National Regulatory Framework', www.dese.gov.au/national-regulatory-framework, viewed 1 February 2022.

⁵⁵ Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, pages 388-89.

- 4.56 TAFE Queensland said 'we've got serious LLND skills gaps with a lot of our students' and reported that about 40 per cent of its students had literacy levels at below Level 1 on the ACSF.⁵⁶
- 4.57 In 2019, governments spent about \$6.4 billion on VET. In addition, the Australian Government provided about \$500 million in VET student loans and trade support loans. The Productivity Commission found that, while total real funding has remained stable in recent years, this largely coincided with lower training activity, such that funding per student has increased and is broadly comparable to funding per student in both higher education and schools.⁵⁷
- 4.58 AEU said that TAFE had a long history of supporting foundation skills education in Australia, but this had been damaged by the privatisation of the VET system.⁵⁸ AEU reported that, since 2012, there has been a reduction in funding to TAFE, which has resulted in fewer foundation skills education enrolments, fewer courses and larger class sizes.⁵⁹
- 4.59 The Central Australian Aboriginal Congress reported that VET course completion rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are low across Australia, particularly in very remote areas (17 per cent, compared to 33 per cent in major cities). It noted that completion rates are lowest for Certificate I and II courses and that, in remote areas of the Northern Territory, around two-thirds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples do not have the skills to complete these courses.⁶⁰ The Central Australian Aboriginal Congress said '[c]ommunity-based adult literacy programs ... are therefore essential, not just for the direct literacy and social benefits they bring, but also to ensure Aboriginal people, especially in remote areas, have the skills to undertake and successfully complete VET courses.'⁶¹

⁵⁶ Ms Jane Storr, Manager, Education Services, English Language and Literacy Services, TAFE Queensland, *Committee Hansard*, Caboolture, 19 July 2022, page 14.

⁵⁷ Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 4.

⁵⁸ AEU, *Submission 45*, page 19.

⁵⁹ Ms Darcel Russell, Federal Aboriginal Education Officer, AEU, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, pages 15-16. See also: AEU, *Submission 45*, page 19.

⁶⁰ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 64*, page 8.

⁶¹ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 64*, page 9.

Adult and community education

- 4.60 ACE providers are community owned and managed, not-for-profit organisations that have adult education as a primary focus.⁶² ACE programs are primarily supported by state and territory governments and are community-focussed and non-formal; however, a significant minority of community education providers are also RTOs.⁶³
- 4.61 Pre-accredited training addresses the needs of adults who may have experienced barriers to education in the past and require an initial, non-assessed entry or re-entry into learning.⁶⁴
- 4.62 The ACE sector enables inclusive learning and facilitates access by offering learning programs in friendly, community settings that cater for adults of varying abilities and backgrounds.⁶⁵
- 4.63 ACE providers are highly networked within their local communities and with local non-government organisations, government agencies, social services and employers.⁶⁶ ACE providers have a long history of helping their communities and responding to the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged Australians. They do this through small class sizes, focussing on personal support and connecting with key government agencies, services and employers.⁶⁷
- 4.64 Adult Learning Australia commented:
- ACE is a gateway for all adults to return to learning at any stage along the learning time line, no matter their age, gender, culture, ability or previous educational experience or attainment. The sector recognises that there is no 'traditional student', only a spectrum of learners with their own needs and preferences to be taken into account.⁶⁸

⁶² Community Colleges Australia, *Submission 76*, page 2; Adult Learning Australia, *Submission 77*, page 8.

⁶³ Adult Learning Australia, *Submission 77*, page 6.

⁶⁴ AMES Australia, *Submission 42*, page 5.

⁶⁵ Adult Learning Australia, *Submission 77*, page 8.

⁶⁶ Community Colleges Australia, *Submission 76*, page 2; Adult Learning Australia, *Submission 77*, page 8.

⁶⁷ Community Colleges Australia, *Submission 76*, page 2.

⁶⁸ Adult Learning Australia, *Submission 77*, page 8.

- 4.65 Adult Learning Australia argued that ACE providers have strong expertise in delivering basic adult LLND programs that offer pathways into further learning and work, as well as providing essential life skills.⁶⁹
- 4.66 Community Colleges Australia said that ACE providers offer courses that reengage 'missing' learners, especially those with low LLND skills, and create and sustain social and community networks.⁷⁰ According to Community Colleges Australia:
- Our sector's history permits our members to be strategic and innovative in their flexibility to employ a wide range of tools. ACE providers play a strategic role because they have the freedom to take considered risks. They are not bound by government structures in the way that TAFEs are, nor are they beholden to private shareholders to supply cash returns in the way of for-profit private providers.⁷¹
- 4.67 Community Colleges Australia reported that, in 2018, Australians with disability enrolled in ACE courses (16 per cent) twice as often as VET courses (8 per cent). In addition, more adults from low socioeconomic backgrounds and adults aged over 45 years were enrolled in ACE courses compared to VET (34.6 per cent compared to 28.2 per cent, and 25.3 per cent compared to 15.9 per cent, respectively).⁷²
- 4.68 The ACE sector is also important for providing LLND tuition, settlement support, and vocational training and employment services to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.⁷³
- 4.69 For example, courses offered by AMES Australia range from short one to two-week intensive courses to longer 10 week courses, predominantly addressing contextualised LLND skills development and career pathway orientation for migrants and refugees.⁷⁴
- 4.70 Adult Learning Australia called for greater recognition of the contribution of the ACE sector to LLND education by renewing the national Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education. The Declaration provided a

⁶⁹ Adult Learning Australia, *Submission 77*, page 8.

⁷⁰ Community Colleges Australia, *Submission 76*, page 2.

⁷¹ Community Colleges Australia, *Submission 76*, page 2.

⁷² Community Colleges Australia, *Submission 76*, page 10.

⁷³ AMES Australia, *Submission 42*, page 1.

⁷⁴ AMES Australia, *Submission 42*, page 6.

national policy framework that supports a collaborative approach to ACE, particularly in relation to its role in the provision of vocationally focused education and training and fostering the development of skills required for individuals to participate fully in their communities and the economy.⁷⁵

- 4.71 The Committee heard that support for ACE varies by state and territory. For example, in Victoria the Adult, Community and Further Education Board funds pre-accredited training delivered by ACE providers.⁷⁶ This funding allows eligible providers to design and deliver programs that provide a stepping stone into future education, training and employment.⁷⁷
- 4.72 Conversely, the Committee heard that there is no ACE sector in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory Stakeholder Group said this means ‘there is nothing available for anyone not already enrolled in a VET course, or who is unable to meet eligibility requirements for Commonwealth funded programs.’⁷⁸
- 4.73 The Committee heard that some existing ACE providers are surviving on little or no government funding. For example, the Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group reported that it currently receives no government funding, noting that there previously was Queensland government funding available through a community adult literacy program from the early 1990s until 2012 in Queensland.⁷⁹
- 4.74 The Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group explained that it survived on donations and the fund raising of volunteers: ‘We make jams, pickles and chilli sauce. Some of our ladies crochet and knit. Twice a month we go to the Bribie Island markets ... Yesterday we sold 110 jars of jam!’⁸⁰
- 4.75 Another challenge for many ACE providers is that they rely on volunteers to provide tutoring and other services. In South Australia, each week 35,000

⁷⁵ Adult Learning Australia, *Submission 77*, page 9.

⁷⁶ AMES Australia, *Submission 42*, page 5.

⁷⁷ AMES Australia, *Submission 42*, page 8.

⁷⁸ Northern Territory Stakeholder Group, *Submission 65*, page 5.

⁷⁹ Mr Merv Gardner, Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group, *Committee Hansard*, Caboolture, 19 July 2021, page 4.

⁸⁰ Mr Merv Gardner, Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group, *Committee Hansard*, Caboolture, 19 July 2021, page 4.

people are in contact with community centres and this demand is supported by 20,000 hours of volunteer labour.⁸¹

- 4.76 The challenge of having enough volunteers to keep up with demand for LLND skills support in the ACE sector has been exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸²
- 4.77 However, as the experience of volunteers in the Read Write Now program illustrates, volunteer tutoring can be personally enriching and rewarding for volunteers, and life changing for those who are learning.

Read Write Now

- 4.78 Read Write Now is a Western Australian program that relies on volunteer tutors who work one-on-one with over 600 adults each year.⁸³ The program is funded by the Western Australian Government who fund three and a half staff members that work with 400 to 600 volunteer tutors.⁸⁴ In Western Australia, the main source of adult literacy support is the Read Write Now program.⁸⁵
- 4.79 Read Write Now provides free tutoring for students who have difficulties reading and writing. The student decides what they wish to focus on, such as filling out forms, or reading aloud to their children. The program supports students to, for example, complete Centrelink forms and navigate the myGov website.⁸⁶
- 4.80 The support provided by Read Write Now volunteers varies to suit the needs of those seeking support, for example some tutors worked in the Broome women's prison, while another learned braille to teach a blind student to read, and a tutor in Kalgoorlie helped a stroke victim to keep his job.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Community Centres SA, *Submission 102*, page 1.

⁸² Mr Merv Gardner, Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group, *Committee Hansard*, Caboolture, 19 July 2021, pages 3-4.

⁸³ Ms Marcia Barclay, *Submission 48*, page [1].

⁸⁴ Mrs Ann Boyer, *Submission 60*, page [1].

⁸⁵ Community Adult Literacy Foundation, *Submission 19*, page [3].

⁸⁶ Read Write Now Albany, Western Australia, *Submission 12*, page [1].

⁸⁷ Mrs Ann Boyer, *Submission 60*, page [1].

- 4.81 The Read Write Now program began in the 1970s to assist TAFE-apprenticed mechanics with written tests of their competence. The program focused primarily on Australian-born adult students, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, but also provided tutoring for migrant students. This was organised by a paid head office in Perth city, volunteer coordinators in regional areas of the city and state-wide, and volunteer personal tutors who were mostly retirees.⁸⁸
- 4.82 The program's funding discriminates in favour of people from an English-speaking background who have fallen through the cracks in the school system.⁸⁹ However, as some of the accounts in Box 4.1 show, many adults with migrant backgrounds are strongly supported by Read Write Now volunteer tutors.

Box 4.1 Selected comments from Read Write Now volunteers

The following selection of comments from Read Write Now volunteers demonstrates the importance of the flexible and personalised support provided by adult LLND volunteer educators in Australia:

I have been B's tutor for four months. B is 50 years old and been resident in Australia 25 years from a country in Africa. Last year she was channelled to Read Write Now ... through a job agency because she was unemployable due to illiteracy. She has raised six children (four of whom have, or are studying a university degree, and two are in high school). Until fairly recently, B has rarely ventured out of her house other than to shop close-by, supervise her children at recreation activities and to drop and collect her children from school.

...

B had felt disinclined to leave her house for many years, other than for essential purposes because of her illiteracy. With knowledge that she has support, and her growing confidence, B wants to assert her independence and pursue engagement in activities she had previously suppressed. This has greatly improved her mental wellbeing.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Neil Macdonald, *Submission 3*, page [1].

⁸⁹ Ms Marcia Barclay, Manager, Read Right Now, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 24 March 2021, page 2.

⁹⁰ Name withheld, *Submission 4*, page [2].

Some of the people I have assisted [include] ... a student who left a domestic situation in which there was abuse, which had eroded the student's self-esteem. The student needed to find employment to pay for child support. The individual's aim was to complete further education and get a better job. I was able to assist the student in building self confidence relating to learning abilities. The individual was awarded a TAFE prize on completion of a certificate.⁹¹

[Name withheld] is a young man from [Country withheld] who is a trained chef. He wants to repay the country that has welcomed him by working in the community. He is currently training as an aged care nurse as this is where he sees the greatest need, but he is having difficulty with the course due to poor reading and writing skills. He has attended an English course at TAFE but says the class was very large and made up of people from many different countries, so learning was difficult. [Name withheld] gets up at 4.20 am every week day to do his cleaning job, then goes straight to the aged care training for 5 hours and then back to his cleaning job for another 4 hours.⁹²

A few years ago, I decided to get some help not just in my mental health but also to finally work on my reading and writing. I found it hard to find someone that would tutor an adult and the lack of direction on where to get help and lack of advertising made this challenging. I would start to get help then it would all become too hard again. This would definitely put some people off seeking help and sticking with it. But after a few tries I found an amazing organisation called Read Write Now in Perth WA [Western Australia]. I have been seeing my tutor for over 8 months and have made improvements and I'm looking at starting my certificate three in Community Services sometime this year once I feel my writing is up for the challenge. I have always felt supported by my tutor and he goes above and beyond to help me, often paying for supplies out of his own pocket.⁹³

My training with Read Write Now enabled me to help [my first student] learn after a few months of lessons, to identify the whole alphabet, write his address, read, and recognise sight words, spell words and complete forms. He even learned the confidence to read a book out loud. Due to his inability to read, he was unemployed and lamented the fact of not being able to earn money by having a job. After 8 months of tutoring my student became confident enough that he applied for a job at Woolworths and then started

⁹¹ Name withheld, *Submission 7*, page [1].

⁹² Name withheld, *Submission 15*, page [1].

⁹³ Mr Nicholas Deans, *Submission 21*, page [1].

working. Not only has he landed himself a job, but he also learnt basic literacy and numeracy skills. This to me implied a huge success with the Read Write Now programme.⁹⁴

Public libraries

- 4.83 Public libraries in Australia provide informal learning opportunities that are free, local, at convenient times, provided at an entry level, in community languages, and designed around the needs of library users. The community literacy programs for adults offered by libraries are typically small and unthreatening, focusing on supporting individuals' needs and starting them on the path to re-engaging with learning.⁹⁵
- 4.84 The Australian Library and Information Association provided several examples of local programs run by Australian libraries to support people's LLND skills:
- Tech Savvy Seniors is a Telstra program run to improve digital literacy skills for older members of the community, hosted by public libraries in NSW [New South Wales], QLD [Queensland] and Victoria.
 - Libraries Tasmania has 23 Literacy Coordinators located around the state, supported by 26TEN, Tasmania's strategy for adult literacy and numeracy.
 - In 2015, the State Library of Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria published *Reading for All: Adult Literacy*, with six recommendations in terms of strategy, service, partnerships, capacity building, representation and aggregation.
 - Libraries ACT discovered a lack of literacy support for English speaking adults in Canberra and has developed a volunteer adult literacy program. This program matches a volunteer tutor with a literacy learner and targets links their literacy learning to their individual needs and motivations.⁹⁶
- 4.85 National and State Libraries Australia described libraries as ideal providers of adult literacy programs because they are unthreatening, public and informal spaces for learning, which has been demonstrated by long-running

⁹⁴ Nanette Weiler, *Submission 31*, page [1].

⁹⁵ Libraries ACT, *Submission 37*, page [2].

⁹⁶ Australian Library and Information Association, *Submission 32*, pages 2-3.

English conversation classes in Australian libraries and Tasmania's 26TEN program.⁹⁷

- 4.86 Libraries ACT supports adults to improve their literacy skills through English conversation classes and adult literacy tutoring. These programs are supported by an adult literacy collection, including simple texts, dictionaries, and workbooks.⁹⁸
- 4.87 Libraries ACT developed a tutoring program for adults from English-speaking backgrounds to improve their literacy skills. The program aims to provide support that is sensitive to the difficulty adults face in admitting they need help to read and write the language they can speak. The program works with local community services and ACT Government agencies who refer adults to learn one-on-one with a tutor from the library. Tutoring sessions are designed around each learner's personal goals and needs. Libraries ACT said that the non-formal learning context enables the program to be flexible and responsive to each learner.⁹⁹
- 4.88 Libraries ACT reported that participants in the tutoring program have learned to read text messages, pass their drivers' license test, share story books with their children, and developed the skills and confidence to go on to formal study.¹⁰⁰

Education in correctional settings

- 4.89 State and territory governments provide education and training to Australians in prisons and other corrections institutions. In addition to preparing Australians in custody for the workforce and for life back in the community upon their release, research indicates that focused and informed literacy and numeracy programs may result in a reduction in offending behaviours.¹⁰¹ For many offenders, corrections education may be their first opportunity to learn and build their skills.¹⁰²
- 4.90 Paul Barnes, a corrections educator from Western Australia, said:

⁹⁷ National and State Libraries Australia, *Submission 34*, page 3.

⁹⁸ Libraries ACT, *Submission 37*, page [1].

⁹⁹ Libraries ACT, *Submission 37*, page [1].

¹⁰⁰ Libraries ACT, *Submission 37*, page [2].

¹⁰¹ Australasian Corrections Education Association (ACEA), *Submission 35*, page [2].

¹⁰² Tasmanian Government, *Submission 82*, Attachment A, page 16.

The ultimate aim is for the learners, when they are released from prison, to have the knowledge and skills so that they can:

- Secure a job;
- Find accommodation; and
- Network with others.

These outcomes and behaviours reduce the likelihood of re-offending and incarceration.¹⁰³

- 4.91 However, adults with low literacy may be less likely to engage with and learn from criminogenic programs while in prison. These programs aim to address the reasons behind offending behaviour.¹⁰⁴
- 4.92 In 2007, it was estimated that approximately 62 percent of Australians in prisons had less than functional literacy. Evidence suggested this may be closer to 70 per cent in Tasmania due to that state's historically lower literacy rate.¹⁰⁵ It was reported that up to 80 per cent of inmates at Tasmania's Risdon prison do not have functional skills in one or more of the domains of reading, writing or numeracy.¹⁰⁶
- 4.93 Prisoners are less likely to have finished school or completed further education, and are more likely to have attended under-resourced schools, experienced punitive school discipline, and been exposed to crime and violence. These challenges diminish individuals' opportunities for educational and economic mobility.¹⁰⁷
- 4.94 Research shows that children and youths in contact with the criminal justice system have significantly higher rates of severe language impairment than in the general population, which also indicates low literacy.¹⁰⁸
- 4.95 A Western Australian study found that 9 out of 10 youth in custodial care in Perth 'had some form of neuro-disability which affected their executive functioning, memory, motor skills, cognition, attention, social skills and

¹⁰³ Paul Barnes, *Submission 83*, page 4.

¹⁰⁴ Tasmanian Government, *Submission 82*, Attachment A, page 16.

¹⁰⁵ Tasmanian Government, *Submission 82*, Attachment A, page 12.

¹⁰⁶ Tasmanian Government, *Submission 82*, Attachment A, pages 14-15.

¹⁰⁷ Tasmanian Government, *Submission 82*, Attachment A, page 15.

¹⁰⁸ Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance, *Submission 25*, page 7.

adaptive behaviour.¹⁰⁹ Prior to the study, only 2 of the 99 young people assessed had been identified as having cognitive weaknesses and some had been labelled as 'just naughty'.¹¹⁰

- 4.96 The Committee heard that 54 per cent of prisoners exit prison into homelessness and 78 per cent will be unemployed. Low LLND skills form part of a cycle of entrenched disadvantage in which 58.3 per cent of youth involved in the justice system will be under supervision again within 12 months. The Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance said '[l]iteracy skills are a protective factor against these disadvantages.'¹¹¹
- 4.97 Evidence in Chapter 2 showed that there is a lack of research into the LLND needs of Australians in custody and this is exacerbated by the lack of uniform approaches to identify, report and review individual LLND skills across Australian jurisdictions.¹¹² There was support for uniform approaches to identify, report and review the LLND skills gaps, and record participation in education and training of Australians in custody.¹¹³
- 4.98 Corrections education is not uniformly available and may not always involve evidence-based pedagogy.¹¹⁴ There is little preservice training for educators delivering LLND, VET or higher education courses in custodial settings. Furthermore, the basic qualification of those employed through TAFE or RTO providers to deliver education in custodial settings is a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, which does not prepare students to teach in custodial settings.¹¹⁵
- 4.99 The Australasian Corrections Education Association called for better planning and investment in the corrections education workforce so that literacy and numeracy programs for adult and youth offenders suit the varied needs of learners, and are delivered by qualified and experienced practitioners.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁹ Joanne Dickenson, *Submission 108*, page [13].

¹¹⁰ Joanne Dickenson, *Submission 108*, page [13].

¹¹¹ Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance, *Submission 25*, page 7.

¹¹² ACEA, *Submission 35*, page [1].

¹¹³ ACEA, *Submission 35*, page [3]; Paul Barnes, *Submission 83*, page 4.

¹¹⁴ Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance, *Submission 25*, page 7.

¹¹⁵ ACEA, *Submission 35*, page [4].

¹¹⁶ ACEA, *Submission 35*, pages [1, 4].

- 4.100 Paul Barnes said English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) learners must be supported in their oral language skills as well as literacy, and that approaches to teaching and assessment need to be culturally appropriate, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners in custody.¹¹⁷

Other approaches

- 4.101 Other approaches to adult LLND education mobilise communities and/or employers, and government and non-government services to improve LLND skills in those communities:
- Literacy for Life Foundation's 'Yes, I Can!' program teaches English language literacy skills within and in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
 - Tasmania's 26TEN is a state-wide effort to involve all Tasmanians in raising LLND skills.

Literacy for Life Foundation

- 4.102 The Literacy for Life Foundation is an Aboriginal not-for-profit organisation teaching basic English language literacy skills to Aboriginal adults. The organisation uses a community-wide 'campaign' approach, called 'Yes, I Can!', which involves engaging and training local Aboriginal staff, and working at the direction of local Aboriginal community leadership. According to the Literacy for Life Foundation, this approach 'is community-driven and place-based, adapted to suit local conditions and requirements. It is also scalable and replicable, as illustrated by consistent results achieved since it was first piloted in 2012.'¹¹⁸
- 4.103 The Literacy for Life Foundation reported that the Yes, I Can! campaign's 'average retention rate is at least four times higher than available comparisons for equivalent programs in the same, or similar, regions.'¹¹⁹ The campaign has operated in 13 communities: Boggabilla, Bourke, Brewarrina, Campbelltown, Collarenebri, Enngonia, Ltyentye Apurte, Tennant Creek, Toomelah, Walgett, Weilmoringle, Wilcannia and Yarrabah. It has employed

¹¹⁷ Paul Barnes, *Submission 83*, pages 2-5.

¹¹⁸ Literacy for Life Foundation, *Submission 75*, page 3.

¹¹⁹ Literacy for Life Foundation, *Submission 75*, page 3.

and trained over 50 local Aboriginal staff, and 258 students have graduated with improved literacy skills.¹²⁰

- 4.104 Government support for the Literacy for Life Foundation has been drawn from a 'patchwork' of sources that currently includes one-off funding under the FSFYF Remote Community Pilots program.¹²¹
- 4.105 The Literacy for Life Foundation applies rigour and transparency to their work, and undertakes an independent assessment of learners against the ACSF during each campaign at entry and exit. Analyses of results from 2012-18 found that 73 per cent of participants improved their baseline literacy by at least one ACSF level on at least one indicator. This figure rose to 85 per cent for men, and 100 per cent for participants who had baseline literacy at Pre Level 1, the lowest level on the ACSF. These results are contrasted with evaluations of the SEE program where it was reported that 15 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants improved their literacy.¹²²
- 4.106 The Lowitja Institute provided initial funding for the pilot of the Yes, I Can! approach in 2012. Support was extended following the promising early results that included a graduation rate five times higher than existing programs, and a range of benefits across the community.¹²³
- 4.107 The Lowitja Institute also helped the Literacy for Life Foundation design and carry out a longitudinal study of individual and community impacts, which measured changes to people's lives in areas such as health, education and community safety.¹²⁴
- 4.108 In evaluating its Yes, I Can! campaign, the Literacy for Life Foundation found the following positive impacts on communities from improved literacy:
 - Positive employment and further study outcomes for participants.
 - Increased interactions by parents, grandparents and other significant relations in their children's schooling.

¹²⁰ Literacy for Life Foundation, *Submission 75*, page 3.

¹²¹ Literacy for Life Foundation, *Submission 75*, page 13.

¹²² Literacy for Life Foundation, *Submission 75*, page 12.

¹²³ Lowitja Institute, *Submission 49*, page 6.

¹²⁴ Lowitja Institute, *Submission 49*, page 6.

- Participants being better able to manage existing health issues, including more regular attendance at clinics and improved medication management.
- Graduates making healthier lifestyle choices, including reduced alcohol and/or drug consumption, and healthier eating.
- A reduction by more than half of the total number of serious offences following participation.
- Improved management by graduates of their housing, and greater understanding of tenancy rights and responsibilities.
- Empowerment of individuals and communities, for example more graduates than non-graduates reported having the confidence to speak up in Local Aboriginal Land Council meetings (78 per cent compared to 22 per cent).¹²⁵

4.109 Deborah Durnan, a researcher and adult education practitioner who worked with the Literacy for Life Foundation on its campaign in Wilcannia, said that the campaign approach works because:

- it is owned and controlled by the local Aboriginal community at all stages, and the community co-designs parts of the curriculum to suit their development priorities
- it employs local Aboriginal people in key roles who are provided with intensive training before and during the campaign
- it employs a qualified professional educator to train and support local staff, and ensure quality of delivery and student assessment
- it is flexible and adaptable to each local context
- it uses an action-reflection process whereby staff and students continuously examine their own practice, progress and problem-solve issues
- it uses a concurrent participatory action research methodology which involves students, community members, staff and funders independently evaluating the campaign's implementation, and the results being used to resolve problems and identify and share best practice strategies.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Literacy for Life Foundation, *Submission 75*, pages 6-8.

¹²⁶ Deborah Durnan, *Submission 14*, page 4.

- 4.110 There was strong support for the work of the Literacy for Life Foundation.¹²⁷ For example, the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress recommended:

The Australian Government funds the extension of community controlled adult literacy campaigns (such as the Yes I Can! program delivered by the Literacy for Life Foundation) across Australia to improve adult literacy, support literacy practices in families, build a culture that values learning amongst adults and children, and address multiple targets of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.¹²⁸

- 4.111 Multiplex, a partner of the Literacy for Life Foundation, said the Yes, I Can! campaign's success is:

... built on empowering communities to be self-sufficient, with local Aboriginal staff recruited and trained to run the literacy campaigns in their own communities.

We know that this has immense flow on effects for health, education, the justice system and employment, with over 50 per cent of Literacy for Life graduates moving on to work, further study or volunteer roles.¹²⁹

- 4.112 Multiplex said that the work of the Literacy for Life Foundation is vital in opening up opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work in construction and that significant change can be achieved by investing in adult literacy.¹³⁰
- 4.113 The NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council (NSWALNC) said that one of the strengths of the Yes, I Can! model is its method of community outreach where a local organiser recruits community members to join a literacy class, noting this may be more suitable to smaller country towns.¹³¹
- 4.114 However, the Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation reported that a Yes, I Can! campaign had been successfully run in Campbelltown, New South Wales in

¹²⁷ National Indigenous Australians Agency, *Submission 80*, page [8]; Ms Ruth Ratcliffe, *Submission 6*, pages [3-5]; Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 64*, pages 2-3, 12-15; Multiplex, *Submission 23*, page [2]; Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 84*, pages 3-9.

¹²⁸ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 64*, page 2.

¹²⁹ Multiplex, *Submission 23*, page [2].

¹³⁰ Multiplex, *Submission 23*, page [2].

¹³¹ NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council (NSWALNC), *Submission 68*, page 10.

2019, which was the first time the campaign had been rolled out in an urban setting.¹³²

26TEN

- 4.115 26TEN is an initiative that involves individuals, business, community and government working together to improve adult literacy skills in Tasmania. The 26TEN Coalition leads whole-of-community involvement in the initiative, and provides advice to the Tasmanian Minister for Education and Training on progressing government initiatives to improve adult literacy in Tasmania. The name '26TEN' refers to the 26 letters of the alphabet and the 10 digits we use for counting.¹³³
- 4.116 26TEN draws on elements of mass campaign approaches to adult literacy, including extensive awareness-raising, and mobilising local community resources and volunteers to tutor people with low literacy in non-formal settings.¹³⁴
- 4.117 26TEN works to establish communities and industries where:
- everyone knows about adult literacy and 26TEN
 - everyone is supported to improve their skills and to help others
 - everyone communicates clearly in plain English.¹³⁵
- 4.118 The approach draws on experience and research on collective impact models and place-based approaches, which have been shown to work but require long-term investment in order to raise LLND skills.¹³⁶
- 4.119 In 2018-19, independent research into the return on investment of 26TEN was conducted, which found that at least \$5.20 of benefit was generated for every dollar spent on 26TEN adult literacy. It estimated that the value created by 26TEN, was worth at least \$27.2 million, including \$22.3 million of productivity benefits for employers and \$4.9 million worth of civic benefits for individuals. The research also found that:

¹³² Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 84*, pages 3-9.

¹³³ 26TEN Coalition, *Submission 20*, page 2.

¹³⁴ Professor Bob Boughton, *Submission 26*, page 7.

¹³⁵ 26TEN Coalition, *Submission 20*, page 2.

¹³⁶ 26TEN Coalition, *Submission 20*, page 4.

- In 2018-19, 860 adult Tasmanians were directly supported by 26TEN grants and the Libraries Tasmania literacy service to improve their literacy.
- Libraries Tasmania literacy clients completed an average of 50 literacy sessions. Many observed that each goal they achieved led to new aspirational targets.
- Over 80 per cent of Libraries Tasmania literacy clients surveyed said that their opportunities for employment and further education had improved as their level of literacy improved.
- Over 90 per cent of Libraries Tasmania literacy clients reported that their lives had improved because of improved functional literacy.¹³⁷

Factors contributing to gaps in provision

4.120 A range of factors contribute to gaps in the provision of adult LLND education in Australia. The Committee heard:

- there is an unevenness in the diversity of courses and programs being offered across Australia that suit people's different education needs and goals
- there is currently limited capacity in the adult education workforce to meet demand for LLND education
- there is a scope for Australian, state and territory governments to jointly develop a new coordinated approach to reducing the number of adults with low LLND skills through diverse providers, programs and courses.

Capacity of current providers to meet demand and the diverse needs of the community

4.121 Many Australians with low LLND skills may not want to sign up to a formal course, even if that course was fee free or low fee. For some, the shame and stigma they experienced both during and after leaving school may make them unlikely to undertake an accredited SEE or VET course. For these individuals, an unaccredited course at a local community centre may be a better fit. Some may want to pursue accredited courses once they start developing their LLND skills and see how their choices and opportunities in life are broadened.

¹³⁷ Institute of Project Management, *26TEN Strategy: The Socio-Economic Impact of Tasmania's Investment in Adult Literacy and Numeracy, July 2018 - June 2019, 2020*, pages 4-5.

- 4.122 RTOs are limited in their capacity to deliver pre-accredited or non-accredited courses because of their funding and compliance arrangements. This means that RTOs would be unable to deliver programs like the Literacy for Life Foundation's Yes, I Can! campaigns. The Lowitja Institute said that the VET system 'has a huge amount of bureaucracy around it, if you like, that makes it almost impossible for an RTO to do this kind of work.'¹³⁸
- 4.123 The Committee heard that the Yes, I Can! campaign model should be seen as complementary to VET provision, since one of the main outcomes of a campaign is that a significant number of people who graduate are then able to go on to undertake and complete VET courses.¹³⁹
- 4.124 The Lowitja Institute supported the Yes, I Can! approach to raising LLND skills in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and said that it is 'vital that Aboriginal community-controlled organisations lead the design and implementation of initiatives to promote literacy and numeracy among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.'¹⁴⁰
- 4.125 The Lowitja Institute did not support the use of mainstream models, such as outreach by TAFE or VET in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, but they also did not view Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned RTOs as the best solution.¹⁴¹
- 4.126 NSWALNC said that the ACE sector is able to address diverse community needs for LLND education but requires more support than it currently receives:

It is in the areas of community-based adult basic education programs and community outreach that urgent policy support is required. The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated not only the health impacts but also the serious societal impact of adults not being able to access or properly interpret information about symptoms and precautionary steps they needed to take. Programs that address issues that matter to adults such as health literacy, understanding the Australian school system and what their children are learning, tenants' rights, and workers' rights would have benefits not only to

¹³⁸ Professor Bob Boughton, Researcher, Lowitja Institute, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 32.

¹³⁹ Professor Bob Boughton, Lowitja Institute, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 12 July 2021, page 32; Professor Bob Boughton, *Submission 26*, page 10.

¹⁴⁰ Lowitja Institute, *Submission 49*, page 6.

¹⁴¹ Lowitja Institute, *Submission 49*, page 6.

the adult learners but to their family, community and society at large. Such programs need to be designed organically in response to identified needs, and do not all need to be subjected to the resource-intensive accreditation processes for most other programs in VET. This reduces the administrative burden needed for design and delivery, while increasing the relevance and value for the adult learners.¹⁴²

4.127 Similarly, the Reading Writing Hotline said that diversity of provision should be supported, and called for the Australian Government to:

- Ensure funding and curriculum addresses both accredited and non-accredited, formal and non-formal training, and the needs of non-jobseekers, including part time and evening classes.
- Review SEE guidelines to enable greater flexibility in attendance and progress, more support for those with 'no capacity to benefit' including funding for non-accredited courses.
- Focus on development of pathway courses that build literacy and numeracy skills for those unable to access VET courses.¹⁴³

4.128 The Reading Writing Hotline said that the Australian Government should establish a program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners that embraces the principles of 'Indigenous voice co-design, "bothways learning", and bilingualism where appropriate.'¹⁴⁴

4.129 The Reading Writing Hotline also supported establishing a national distance adult literacy scheme in which an established not-for-profit RTO was engaged to provide distance education consistently in all states and territories. To ensure the scheme is accessible to all, they said paper-based programs should be provided at all levels in addition to online learning.¹⁴⁵

4.130 The NSWALC similarly noted that not all communities will be able to sustain an adult education provider that meets their needs and called for a nationally designed and coordinated distance education program.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, Attachment 1, pages 9-10.

¹⁴³ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 12.

¹⁴⁴ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 12.

¹⁴⁵ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 12.

¹⁴⁶ NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, Attachment 1, page 10.

Shortage of qualified adult literacy teachers

- 4.131 The capacity of the existing adult education workforce to support demand for LLND education and training is a key area of concern. The Committee heard there is a currently a critical shortage of qualified adult literacy teachers in Australia, and only two adult literacy training courses.¹⁴⁷
- 4.132 In Western Australia, the Community Adult Literacy Foundation reported that '[t]eacher training for those who specialise in adult literacy is virtually non-existent and there is no longer a career path in this field.'¹⁴⁸
- 4.133 The Committee heard that the existing LLND workforce is ageing, predominately female, and engaged in casualised or insecure work. LLND education is not seen as a viable employment pathway, which has reduced demand for courses offering specialist qualifications.¹⁴⁹ Aspiring adult educators need clear educational pathways, and for existing qualifications to be more accessible and affordable.¹⁵⁰
- 4.134 The number of university-based undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications specifically designed for adult literacy and numeracy practitioners has declined since the mid-1990s.¹⁵¹ There are currently two available relevant qualifications:
- TAE80113 - Graduate Diploma of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice
 - TAE80213 - Graduate Diploma of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Leadership.¹⁵²
- 4.135 The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) reported that the 'take up of the TAE80113 over recent years has been minimal across Australia', and the number of VET professionals completing the more

¹⁴⁷ See, for example: Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44.1*, page [1]; NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, Attachment 1, page 11.

¹⁴⁸ Community Adult Literacy Foundation, *Submission 19*, page [3].

¹⁴⁹ Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), *Submission 43*, pages 24-25; Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy, *Submission 55*, page 5; NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, Attachment 1, page 11.

¹⁵⁰ Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy, *Submission 55*, page 5.

¹⁵¹ ACER, *Submission 43*, pages 24-25. See also: NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, Attachment 1, page 11.

¹⁵² ACER, *Submission 43*, page 25.

popular TAE80113 was 25 in 2016, 20 in 2017 and 20 in 2018.¹⁵³ At present, there are only five providers of TAE80113 and two providers of TAE80213.¹⁵⁴ ACER said this 'data indicates quite clearly that the professional learning opportunities and the career pathways for adult LLND teachers and trainers is stagnating.'¹⁵⁵

4.136 NSWALNC noted that, as postgraduate qualifications, the TAE80113 and TAE80213 courses are full fee paying courses and there are no Australian Government supported places.¹⁵⁶

4.137 ACER expressed concern that the Australian Government discontinued a scholarship program supporting students to gain these qualifications.¹⁵⁷

4.138 The requirement for qualifications to teach adult LLND skills is uneven and not all those in the current workforce may have the required skillset as a result. The qualifications and experience of teachers varies across the variety of providers available, including government programs, VET, libraries and ACE.¹⁵⁸

4.139 The Reading Writing Hotline was concerned that a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is all that is needed to teach literacy as part of the major Australian Government funded literacy programs like SEE. They stated:

Apart from having no experience in managing a classroom, they have no background in language and no background in psychology and learning. They have no understanding of grammar; they don't know what a noun or a verb is. They've got no understanding of learning theory, of how people acquire language in the first place; no knowledge of specific learning disabilities or cultural factors; not a clue about maths, in most instances. They're just not equipped to teach people to read and write.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ ACER, *Submission 43*, page 25.

¹⁵⁴ ACER, *Submission 43*, page 25.

¹⁵⁵ ACER, *Submission 43*, page 25.

¹⁵⁶ Dr Keiko Yasukawa, President, NSWALNC, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 24 March 2021, page 3.

¹⁵⁷ ACER, *Submission 43*, page 25.

¹⁵⁸ Ms Lucy Whitehead, President, Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 July 2021, page 10.

¹⁵⁹ Ms Jill Finch, Project Officer, Reading Writing Hotline, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 28 July 2021, page 5.

4.140 ACAL reported that '[i]n the past, adult literacy practitioners and those supervising volunteers were required to hold specific qualifications in adult literacy and numeracy.'¹⁶⁰ ACAL commented:

The knowledge base that an adult literacy and numeracy practitioner requires includes a strong foundation in adult education theories, and contemporary understandings of literacy and numeracy, adult teaching methodologies, the policy contexts of adult literacy and numeracy provision, multi-literacies that recognise and incorporate ongoing changes in everyday needs such as digital, visual, and media literacies, and online and distance good practice. There also needs to be funded opportunities for action learning among practitioners. In the light of universities opting out of this training area, it is necessary for the TAE80113 [Graduate Diploma of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice] to be reviewed and re-developed or for university provision to be stimulated.¹⁶¹

4.141 Similarly, NSWALNC said adult LLND educators require more knowledge than current training and education package qualifications deliver because these are designed for the VET sector. As teaching contexts vary between ACE and VET delivery, teachers are required to adapt content and pedagogy to suit learners' needs.¹⁶²

4.142 The Reading Writing Hotline recommended a plan be developed and implemented to build the teaching workforce, and provide enough lead-time to allow universities to plan and re-establish programs. It called for the Australian Government to:

- Mandate specialist graduate-level qualifications for all Commonwealth funded programs including SEE
- Reintroduce mandated specialist graduate-level qualifications for teaching Foundation Studies Training Package curriculum
- Build capacity in regional and remote areas through a range of strategies including scholarships, mentoring, and pathway qualifications
- Support the research and design of national Professional Development programs (both accredited and unaccredited) to support upskilling of

¹⁶⁰ ACAL, *Submission 66*, page 4.

¹⁶¹ ACAL, *Submission 66*, page 4.

¹⁶² NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, Attachment 1, page 11.

current teachers to meet new higher standard and to update their professional practice

- Make scholarships available for specialist postgraduate qualifications
- Restore specialist qualifications such as TAE80113 to VET student loans list.¹⁶³

4.143 While there is strong demand for LLND education from adult EAL/D learners from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and migrant or refugee backgrounds, there is a shortage of qualified TESOL educators and lack of consistency in qualifications required by programs that support EAL/D learners.

4.144 NSWALNC commented:

... where once the field primarily served learners for whom English was their mother tongue, a much larger group of adult literacy and numeracy learners are multilingual. There are extra complexities and cultural sensitivities when working with speakers of Aboriginal English, or with Indigenous learners who speak English as an additional language, yet are not served by 'migrant' English programs. Teachers must be afforded the benefit of contemporary understandings of multilingualism and pedagogies that draw on the strengths of multilingual learners.¹⁶⁴

4.145 TAFE Queensland said that overcoming the shortage of qualified TESOL teachers, particularly in rural and regional communities and for AMEP, where many teachers will be leaving the workforce in coming years, 'needs significant investment.'¹⁶⁵

4.146 ACTA argued '[w]here teacher shortages exist, the Government should offer incentives for gaining recognised quality TESOL and adult literacy specialist qualifications, for example, full or partial fee waivers.'¹⁶⁶

4.147 Evidence in Chapter 3 showed that EAL/D learners require qualified TESOL instruction in order to learn effectively. As is the case in the school system, there is no consistent requirement for adult EAL/D learners to receive tuition from a qualified TESOL educator. For example, AMEP currently requires teachers to hold degree or postgraduate qualifications in TESOL for the pre-

¹⁶³ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 11.

¹⁶⁴ NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, Attachment 1, pages 11-12.

¹⁶⁵ Ms Sharon Kendall, Director of Faculty, English Language and Migrant Education, TAFE Queensland, *Committee Hansard*, Caboolture, 19 July 2021, page 16.

¹⁶⁶ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 11.

employment stream but not for the social stream. This is symptomatic of the unevenness of quality TESOL education provision across the variety of programs and courses available.

- 4.148 ACTA advocated for all adult literacy teachers to hold equivalent qualifications in teaching adult literacy, and for all teachers of EAL/D learners to have additional qualifications and experience.¹⁶⁷
- 4.149 TAFE Queensland discontinued its Graduate Certificate in TESOL, which would qualify somebody to work in AMEP's pre-employment stream.¹⁶⁸ One of the reasons for the discontinuation of the course was because of low demand. TAFE Queensland described the situation as 'crazy' because demand for qualified teachers is very high. TAFE Queensland called for investment in attracting and retaining people in the adult TESOL workforce.¹⁶⁹

Approaches to teaching and assessment

- 4.150 Chapter 3 examined debates around whether school students should be taught using systematic phonics or whole language approaches, and concerns that many EAL/D learners do not receive instruction from qualified TESOL educators. Similar concerns were raised in relation to adult LLND education and training.
- 4.151 Adult educators employed by RTOs must meet the qualification requirements set by the Standards for RTOs (2015), which were endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments Industry and Skills Council in 2014.¹⁷⁰
- 4.152 The Committee heard that adult LLND education has largely become a professionalised field and most well-established providers require their literacy and numeracy teachers to have specialist postgraduate qualifications.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 11.

¹⁶⁸ TAFE Queensland, *Submission 39*, page 2.

¹⁶⁹ Ms Sharon Kendall, TAFE Queensland, *Committee Hansard*, Caboolture, 19 July 2021, page 16.

¹⁷⁰ Australian Skills Quality Authority, 'Standards for RTOs 2015', www.asqa.gov.au/about/asqa/key-legislation/standards-rtos, viewed 2 February 2022.

¹⁷¹ NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, Attachment 1, page 11.

4.153 According to Ms Andrea McMahon, an adult literacy practitioner who is currently in a senior position with responsibility for leading literacy professional learning in the sector, there is a large body of peer-reviewed research that supports the five elements required for literacy, which include phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. These five elements are underpinned by oral language skills. According to Ms McMahon, many resources, including those provided by the Reading Writing Hotline, instead instruct students to guess at unfamiliar words.¹⁷²

4.154 The Reading Writing Hotline commented:

We find that teachers who are university qualified are very familiar with the need for explicit instruction when teaching phonics, phonological awareness, spelling, oracy, vocabulary, as well as the importance of ensuring adult learners have developed comprehension, writing and an understanding of the context and purpose of what they are reading.

Given the huge variety of contexts in which adult literacy is taught and the many levels and needs of learners and their lived experience, teachers need to draw from an enormous range of teaching strategies to suit the learner cohort in question. A one-size-fits-all approach cannot work in adult education.¹⁷³

4.155 The Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy said there is a need to ensure that that 'national and international research findings on how to teach reading, writing, spelling, and maths are incorporated in the qualifications and promoted and supported to existing practitioners.'¹⁷⁴

4.156 ACTA emphasised that different learners had different starting points that require different learning pathways. ACTA said that, as is currently the case in the school system, there is a lack of a nationally agreed approach to measuring adult English proficiency levels, which means that many EAL/D students are not receiving the support they need and are being assessed as if English was their first language.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Ms Andrea McMahon, *Submission 13*, page [1]. See also: Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance, *Submission 25*, page 9.

¹⁷³ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44.1*, page [1].

¹⁷⁴ Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy, *Submission 55*, page 5.

¹⁷⁵ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 6.

4.157 ACTA reported that ASQA curriculum requirements in the VET sector are inappropriate for EAL/D learners, and the teacher qualification requirements are too low because they assume trade-related teaching and are at Certificate IV level.¹⁷⁶

Australian Core Skills Framework

4.158 The ACSF provides a framework:

- for measuring and assessing the language, literacy and numeracy skills of individuals
- for identifying the requirements of typical tasks carried out in the workplace, in the community and within education settings
- on which education professionals can base their knowledge and skills, and identify any professional development gaps.¹⁷⁷

4.159 SEE and AMEP programs use the ACSF to assess the progress of participants. The ACSF is also widely used in the VET and ACE sectors.¹⁷⁸

4.160 Concerns were raised about the currency and adequacy of the ACSF, including that it may not be appropriate for EAL/D learners.

4.161 The ACSF was first developed in 2006. The 2012 version of the ACSF described five core skills (learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy) at five levels, where Level 1 was the lowest and Level 5 was the highest.¹⁷⁹

4.162 In 2017, a 'Pre Level 1' was added to the ACSF to describe the skill levels of learners in the VET sector who had skill levels below ACSF Level 1. The addition of the Pre Level 1 allowed for funding to be allocated for development at this level and for learners' progress to be recognised. The Pre Level 1 currently exists as a supplement to the main ACSF.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 6.

¹⁷⁷ Philippa McLean and Jenni Oldfield, *Submission 40*, page [1]; DESE, 'Australian Core Skills Framework', www.dese.gov.au/skills-information-training-providers/australian-core-skills-framework, viewed 1 February 2022.

¹⁷⁸ Philippa McLean and Jenni Oldfield, *Submission 40*, page [1].

¹⁷⁹ Philippa McLean and Jenni Oldfield, *Submission 40*, page [1]. See also: Deborah Durnan, *Submission 14*, page 1.

¹⁸⁰ Philippa McLean and Jenni Oldfield, *Submission 40*, pages [1-2].

- 4.163 In 2020, a draft Digital Literacy Skills Framework (DLSF) was developed to provide a framework to describe and benchmark digital literacy skills. The framework mirrors the layout of the other skills in the ACSF and incorporates levels from Pre Level 1 to Level 3. The current DLSF draft has been released to allow for trialling.¹⁸¹
- 4.164 According to Philippa McLean and Jenni Oldfield, adult language, literacy and numeracy specialists who have worked in the LLND and VET sectors for many years, the ACSF is in need of an update to incorporate the Pre Level 1 supplement and the DLSF into one document to provide users with a complete framework for benchmarking learners' skills.¹⁸²
- 4.165 ACTA said that the ACSF 'provides invalid and unreliable assessments of English language learning, because it is predicated on learning literacy by a mother tongue English speaker, and also specifies learning competencies (i.e. outcomes) to the point of absurdity'.¹⁸³
- 4.166 ACTA reported that the implementation of the ACSF in AMEP 'was chief among the factors that almost destroyed the Program. Qualified and experienced teachers resigned in numbers and enrolments declined.'¹⁸⁴
- 4.167 ACTA said that a better model of a common curriculum and assessment framework for EAL/D learners is the TAFE NSW Certificate in Spoken and Written English and recommended this be adopted for use in AMEP instead.¹⁸⁵

A new national strategy required

- 4.168 The Committee heard that there is a need for a new national strategy or agreement to raise adult LLND skills. Governments have three options:
- revise the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults (NFSSA) (2012)¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Philippa McLean and Jenni Oldfield, *Submission 40*, page [2].

¹⁸² Philippa McLean and Jenni Oldfield, *Submission 40*, page [2].

¹⁸³ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 6.

¹⁸⁴ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 6.

¹⁸⁵ ACTA, *Submission 85*, pages 45-46.

¹⁸⁶ Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment (SCOTESE), *National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults*, September 2012.

- develop a new national agreement, as proposed by the Joyce review (2019), to serve as the foundation for inter-jurisdictional cooperation in the VET sector¹⁸⁷
- develop a new national LLND strategy covering schools, VET, workplace programs and adult education, as recommended by the Productivity Commission.¹⁸⁸

Option 1: Revise the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults

4.169 The NFSSA aimed to ‘create a nationally consistent framework in which Australian, state and territory governments could improve the foundation skills of Australian adults through four priority areas for action:

- raising awareness and commitment to action
- providing high quality learning opportunities and outcomes for adult learners
- strengthening foundation skills in the workplace
- building the capacity of the education and training workforces to deliver foundation skills.¹⁸⁹

4.170 The Productivity Commission said that the NFSSA did not provide additional funding and was unlikely to have had ‘a significant impact on the number of people with low levels of literacy and numeracy.’¹⁹⁰

4.171 It was broadly recognised that if the NFSSA was to be extended it would require substantial revision.¹⁹¹ For example, TAFE Queensland called for the NFSSA to be ‘extended and reviewed to support all age groups, and to incorporate the Productivity Commission and Joyce Review recommendations.’¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ DPMC, *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia’s Vocational Education and Training System*, April 2019, page 76.

¹⁸⁸ Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 53.

¹⁸⁹ SCOTese, *National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults*, September 2012, page 3.

¹⁹⁰ Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 376.

¹⁹¹ ACER, *Submission 43*, page 6; Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy, *Submission 55*, page 2; TAFE Queensland, *Submission 39*, page, 12.

¹⁹² TAFE Queensland, *Submission 39*, page, 12.

4.172 Australia is unique in its relatively recent embrace of the term 'foundation skills' and the Committee heard that no other country specifically includes employability skills in their comparable policy documents.¹⁹³ There was support for moving away from the term foundation skills and returning to a focus on language, literacy, and numeracy.¹⁹⁴

Option 2: Develop a new national agreement focussed on delivery by Registered Training Organisations

4.173 The Joyce review recommended that Australian, state and territory governments develop a new national agreement to provide for the three main delivery models of LLND training:

- standard RTO delivery of foundation-level VET courses
- intensive literacy and numeracy short courses (such as AMEP)
- dedicated workplace delivered LLND skills programs in partnership between employers and RTOs.¹⁹⁵

4.174 The Joyce review recommended that governments commit, over time, to providing fee free foundation-level education for all Australians who need training to bring their LLND skills up to ACSF Level 2.¹⁹⁶ The Committee heard there is support for this recommendation,¹⁹⁷ but that there are concerns the Joyce review focussed only on the provision of adult LLND education by RTOs through the VET system.

4.175 NSWALNC said that while it welcomed the Joyce review recommendations for LLND skills provision, 'it has been difficult to find spaces to raise those issues and possibilities outside the VET policy framework.'¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy, *Submission 55*, page 2.

¹⁹⁴ Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy, *Submission 55*, page 2.

¹⁹⁵ DPMC, *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System*, April 2019, pages 105-06.

¹⁹⁶ DPMC, *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System*, April 2019, page 105.

¹⁹⁷ TAFE Queensland, *Submission 39*, pages 12, 15; National Centre for Vocational Education Research, *Submission 41*, page 2; ACER, *Submission 43*, pages 6, 27.

¹⁹⁸ NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, page 13.

4.176 The Literacy for Life Foundation noted that the Joyce review recommended the development of more RTOs that are owned and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to raise LLND skills, and commented:

While such providers can and do improve outcomes for higher level VET qualifications, the low numbers enrolling in and completing Foundation Skills VET courses with such RTOs will not lead to any significant reduction in the incidence of low to very low English literacy in communities.¹⁹⁹

Option 3: Develop a new national LLND strategy that supports diversity of provision

4.177 The Productivity Commission found that current policy arrangements do not adequately address the funding and coordination of LLND skills education outside of the VET system, and are complex because the Australian, state and territory governments all fund LLND programs. The Productivity Commission said this creates ‘a patchwork of eligibility conditions, performance indicators and reporting requirements that make delivery more difficult for service providers and navigation more difficult for students.’²⁰⁰

4.178 The Productivity Commission recommended that Australian, state and territory governments jointly develop a strategy to reduce the number of people with low LLND skills (below ACSF Level 2), covering schools, VET, workplace programs and adult education. Specifically, the LLND strategy should:

- recognise the varied circumstances of people with low LLND skills
- cover the range of LLND training programs across schools, the VET system, workplace programs and community adult education providers
- guide and coordinate policies in these areas to improve LLND outcomes
- facilitate a staged approach to expanding access to LLND training, using evaluations to inform where the greatest improvements can be achieved at lowest cost.

¹⁹⁹ Literacy for Life Foundation, *Submission 75*, page 10.

²⁰⁰ Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 376.

The strategy should draw on the scoping study into foundation skills commissioned by Skills and Training Ministers in November 2020.²⁰¹

4.179 The Productivity Commission explained:

The national strategy would define the divisional responsibilities between the Commonwealth, states and territories. It would help coordinate service delivery and it would ensure accountability through clear goals and public reporting. Separate intergovernmental agreements would provide the detail on how governments would implement the national strategy in each sector. In the case of VET, we've suggested this would be a schedule to the next intergovernmental agreement, replacing the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development. We think a staged approach should be used to expand access to LLND, drawing on evaluations which identify how to tailor service to diverse student groups.²⁰²

4.180 A staged approach to expanding access to LLND education is required because, according to the Productivity Commission, there is a 'lack of information about the performance and cost of programs and potential bottlenecks, such as the need to build capability in specialist teaching.'²⁰³

4.181 The Productivity Commission also recommended:

As part of the new LLND strategy, governments should identify the VET-specific, high-level objectives and outcomes relating to LLND skills for inclusion in the new intergovernmental agreement on skills. A schedule to the new agreement should contain the following key elements:

- governments' roles and responsibilities, in relation to the different programs
- the relationship between jointly-funded programs and programs funded by a single level of government
- LLND funding arrangements through both the skills Specific Purpose Payment and any National Partnership Payments with per-student funding retained as the main funding mechanism for most activity

²⁰¹ Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 53.

²⁰² Dr Malcolm Roberts, Commissioner, Productivity Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 February 2021, page 2.

²⁰³ Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 375.

delivered through the VET system, but block funding considered for organisations tackling more difficult-to-reach students

- reporting and accountability arrangements with respect to these programs, including a performance reporting framework.²⁰⁴

4.182 There was support for a new national LLND approach that ensures the diverse starting points of adult learners and their individual needs are recognised and met by diverse providers, programs and courses.²⁰⁵ For example, ACTA supported the Productivity Commission's recommendations as long as a national strategy does not mean a 'one-size-fits-all' policy.²⁰⁶

4.183 The Reading Writing Hotline said a national policy must be developed that:

- draws on the expertise of a broad-based advisory group
- ensures policy addresses the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- ensures policy addresses the needs of Australians with disability
- re-establishes an adult literacy information office to provide resources, advice to government, industry and the literacy sector, and professional development for teachers.²⁰⁷

4.184 NSWALNC said:

A national policy is needed to acknowledge the full range of these categories of programs and ensure funding is available to support them; adults with literacy and numeracy needs should not be caught in the middle of funding policy struggles between the different jurisdictions.²⁰⁸

4.185 NSWALNC called for a national policy that enshrines 'the principle of literacy and numeracy as a basic human right, and access to free and equitable provision of lifelong and lifewide literacy education as a social responsibility.'²⁰⁹ NSWALNC said the priorities of the policy should be:

²⁰⁴ Productivity Commission, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review: Productivity Commission Study Report*, December 2020, page 53.

²⁰⁵ Adult Learning Australia, *Submission 77*, page 6.

²⁰⁶ ACTA, *Submission 85*, page 12.

²⁰⁷ Reading Writing Hotline, *Submission 44*, page 11.

²⁰⁸ NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, Attachment 1, page 8.

²⁰⁹ NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, Attachment 1, page 3.

- 1 the renewal of the specialist qualified adult literacy and numeracy workforce that would support research-informed, contemporary design and delivery of programs that are responsive to the literacy and numeracy demands experienced by adults; and
- 2 a stable and sustainable intergovernmental funding commitment.²¹⁰

Support for individuals with LLND skills gaps

- 4.186 Evidence in Chapter 2 showed that many Australians with LLND skills gaps have difficulty accessing government services, particularly where forms are required to be filled in and submitted online. Chapter 3 found that the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted this issue and that the shift to online modes of service delivery has disadvantaged many Australians with low LLND skills.
- 4.187 TAFE Queensland expressed concern '[w]ith the recommencement of mutual obligation requirements and a move to online service provision, jobseekers are required to self-manage.'²¹¹ It noted that jobseekers with limited LLND skills have difficulty complying with requirements that demand a certain level of LLND skills, and this 'reduces the individual's ability to effectively report on their activities, leaving them more vulnerable to financial penalties.'²¹²
- 4.188 TAFE Queensland recommended that '[c]ompliance requirements for jobseekers need to adequately take into consideration ... LLND skills to ensure that individuals with low levels of LLND [skills] aren't being penalised because they are unable to navigate online systems.'²¹³
- 4.189 The Committee heard that it is vital to ensure that all government websites and printed materials use plain language that is accessible to individuals with low LLND skills,²¹⁴ and that adequate services are available to support

²¹⁰ NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, Attachment 1, page 3.

²¹¹ TAFE Queensland, *Submission 39*, page 13. Mutual obligation requirements were suspended in some areas due to COVID-19 but have now resumed in all states and territories. See: Services Australia, 'What your commitments are', www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/what-your-commitments-are-to-get-jobseeker-payment?context=51411#a1, viewed 9 February 2022.

²¹² TAFE Queensland, *Submission 39*, page 13.

²¹³ TAFE Queensland, *Submission 39*, page 14.

²¹⁴ Mrs Joanne Medlin, President, ACAL, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 37.

demand for form filling and literacy mediation, legal assistance, and financial counselling.

Literacy mediation and form filling

- 4.190 Many Australians need assistance to understand the purpose of forms, interpret the instructions, accurately complete all fields, access supporting material, and to scan and upload supporting documentation.²¹⁵
- 4.191 The Committee heard that community organisations fill a service gap between people with low LLND skills and government agencies whose services may be inaccessible to them. However, these organisations are not funded to do this important work meaning that many Australians go without support, or the resources of those organisations are diverted away from their core purposes (for example, providing disability advocacy or legal support).²¹⁶
- 4.192 The impacts of COVID-19 and recent bushfires, floods and droughts have increased demand for literacy mediation and support to fill in forms.²¹⁷ The Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre (MNCCLC) reported:
- For people with low literacy levels, particularly for those in rural or remote areas, efforts to provide in-person access to services are an important strategy in helping recovery from disaster. A physical presence means that where literacy is a barrier, we are able to ensure that people are aware of their rights in relation to insurance, tenancy and financial hardship. However, this approach does place strain on our service as it comes in addition to our normal service delivery providing civil law help to disadvantaged members of our communities.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS), *Submission 18*, Attachment 2, page 2.

²¹⁶ VCOSS, *Submission 89*, page 15; Ms Melanie Kallmier, Co-ordinator and Solicitor, Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre (MNCCLC), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 49.

²¹⁷ NCOSS, *Submission 18*, page [1]; NCOSS, *Submission 18*, Attachment 2, page 2; MNCCLC, *Submission 99*, page [4].

²¹⁸ MNCCLC, *Submission 99*, page [4].

- 4.193 MNCCLC recommended that funding be available for proactive, in-person communication by key service providers about help that is available during disaster recovery.²¹⁹
- 4.194 The NSW Council of Social Service provided a copy of a report it released in partnership with the Reading Writing Hotline, *Helping Clients Fill in Forms*.²²⁰ The report found that many Australians are effectively excluded from accessing services via online forms, particularly in rural and remote locations, because they have no access to home computers, do not have an email address, cannot afford data, have limited access to public computers due to the closure of public libraries during COVID-19, or have low digital literacy skills.²²¹
- 4.195 The report recommended that:
- all government forms and resources be accessible for all members of the community using a plain English approach that utilises Easy Read,²²² as set out in the Australian Government Style Manual
 - all government agencies should mandate the use of Australian Government or relevant state-based guidelines in the design of all forms, and ensure that all digital forms meet the requirements of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.²²³
- 4.196 The report also suggested agencies provide phone support lines for people who are unable to attend service centres for support in filling in forms.²²⁴
- 4.197 The 26TEN Coalition advocated for all government services to use accessible, plain language in their communications with Australians:
- Many people struggle to use things like Services Australia and myGov, yet these things are critical to them working through their lives and their various life events. I think that whole area of clear communication is fundamentally

²¹⁹ MNCCLC, *Submission 99*, page [4].

²²⁰ NCOSS, *Submission 18*, Attachment 2, page 2.

²²¹ NCOSS, *Submission 18*, Attachment 2, page 2.

²²² Easy Read refers to the presentation of text in an accessible, easy to understand format. See: Australian Government, 'Easy Read', www.stylemanual.gov.au/content-types/easy-read, viewed 1 November 2021.

²²³ NCOSS, *Submission 18*, Attachment 2, page 5.

²²⁴ NCOSS, *Submission 18*, Attachment 2, page 5.

critical, and again I would ask that we mandate the use of plain and easy English to help all Australian citizens to actually participate in their society.²²⁵

- 4.198 Similarly, MNCCLC recommended the '[i]ncreased use of "simple English", pictograms and other strategies for engaging people with low literacy in civic projects and opportunities.'²²⁶
- 4.199 MNCCLC also recommended '[f]inancial support for programs in the community which help people to complete forms required by Government and to engage in civic processes.'²²⁷
- 4.200 NSWALNC advocated for a nationwide adult LLND mediation service to be established that complements the Reading Writing Hotline referral and information services with 'local, on-the-ground community outreach undertaken by adult literacy and numeracy professionals who can mediate and act as an intermediary for individual adults to access the support they need'.²²⁸

Legal advice and financial counselling

- 4.201 Evidence in Chapter 2 showed that low LLND skills make it difficult to navigate legal and financial issues and mean that many Australians may not be able to fully realise their rights.
- 4.202 The Committee heard the importance of providing face-to-face support for people with LLND skills gaps who are experiencing legal and financial difficulties. For example, MNCCLC noted that 'there is a lot of jargon and language that goes into a document that can be considered part of a legal process', and commented:

But there's very little opportunity to translate those unless you have somebody face to face, like a community legal centre or a person with knowledge of the system, who can translate effectively between what the form and the process require and what someone actually needs to do. So it's that translation role, I think, that is really vital and is best done face to face, because, while there are telephone systems that might support somebody's access to literacy programs,

²²⁵ Ms Siobhan Gaskell, Convenor, 26TEN Coalition, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 July 2021, page 2.

²²⁶ MNCCLC, *Submission 99*, pages [4-5].

²²⁷ MNCCLC, *Submission 99*, page [4].

²²⁸ NSWALNC, *Submission 68*, Attachment 1, page 5.

for example, that doesn't help them with the immediate need they've got and their immediate requirement to engage with the system.²²⁹

4.203 MNCCLC said:

... the best kinds of legal assistance for people experiencing disadvantage involve wraparound services where legal services try to involve other professionals to support their clients. This can be done either through in-house, nonlegal community workers or through referring to other support services in the community.²³⁰

4.204 Rural Business Tasmania reported that many primary producers have LLND skills gaps that make it difficult to run their businesses:

If they don't have good literacy, they cannot read and understand the documents, the contracts, the insurances, the loan agreements and other undertakings that they may have to give in terms of the operation of their enterprise. Most certainly, if their financial literacy is below par, the same applies to their ability to understand the finances of managing their enterprise. In many cases, we're talking about even small farmers having \$2 million, \$3 million, \$4 million or \$5 million worth of equity or investment in their primary production enterprise. So it's substantial and it's concerning.²³¹

4.205 Rural Business Tasmania referred to its rural financial counselling program, which assists primary producers with their business literacy:

We get referrals from banks, particularly where there are people in debt hardship. We are able to support them in looking at how they build their skills. But we don't have the funding to be able to provide in-depth and intensive support to go through and show them how to do their BAS [Business Activity Statement] ... and how to understand a cash flow.²³²

4.206 Dear Dyslexic Foundation (DDF) referred to its financial literacy course '\$'s & Sense', which is 'designed to help people understand money and how it works in our society'.²³³ The course is structured around the Australian

²²⁹ Ms Melanie Kallmier, MNCCLC, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 48.

²³⁰ Ms Melanie Kallmier, MNCCLC, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 August 2021, page 47.

²³¹ Mr Geoff Fader, Emeritus Chair, Rural Business Tasmania, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 July 2021, page 21.

²³² Ms Elizabeth Skirving, Chief Executive Officer, Rural Business Tasmania, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 13 July 2021, page 22.

²³³ Dear Dyslexic Foundation (DDF), *Submission 78*, page 10.

Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) Money Smart online resource,²³⁴ and covers 'earning, spending, budgeting, saving, different types of credit, managing debt, insurances, investing, and superannuation.'²³⁵

- 4.207 DDF suggested the Be Moneysmart course for teachers and adult educators 'to gain a greater insight on how to use the resources in their setting.'²³⁶

Conclusion

- 4.208 There is currently a range of options available for adults to improve their LLND skills, but these are not keeping up with demand in all areas. Various Australian, state and territory government policies and programs have developed in a piecemeal way, often as adjuncts to existing administrative frameworks such as VET. There has been some effort to knit these policies and programs together for the purposes of consistency in service delivery and the measurement of outcomes, for example in the NFSSA, but the effect has been to create a fractured mosaic of services that many people are ineligible to access and may not suit their needs. A range of smaller programs, some government funded, some provided by libraries, some run by the community sector and some entirely reliant on volunteers and donations, have grown to fill the gaps.
- 4.209 There has been some success in government programs supporting adult LLND education in eligible cohorts, in particular AMEP, and the smaller programs have been innovative in delivering a range of workable adult education models but are constrained by resourcing and workforce shortages.
- 4.210 In order to overcome gaps in provision, there are three key elements that need addressing. There needs to be:
- a wide range of programs supporting adult LLND education reflecting people's different starting points and varied needs
 - a renewal of the adult LLND education workforce so there is enough qualified, specialist adult educators to meet current and future demand

²³⁴ Australian Securities and Investments Commission, 'Money Smart', www.moneysmart.gov.au, viewed 1 November 2021.

²³⁵ DDF, *Submission 78*, page 10.

²³⁶ DDF, *Submission 78*, page 12.

- a nationally funded LLND policy that clarifies Australian, state and territory government responsibilities across the range of LLND programs available.²³⁷

A wide range of programs to suit people's needs

- 4.211 Adults with LLND skills gaps have a broad variety of skill levels, goals, backgrounds and needs, which means that a wide range of programs are required to raise adult LLND skill levels across Australia.
- 4.212 Some adult learners may be ready to undertake a fee free or low fee VET course, while others may need to build their skills and confidence in a small class or with a volunteer tutor. Some may want to improve their LLND skills so they can get a job. Others may see it as a pathway to further education and training with a career as an end goal. Many others may want to read to their children and help them with their homework, better understand health advice during the COVID-19 pandemic, do their shopping, fill in forms to access government services, or overcome any number of lifelong challenges. English may be the first language for some learners, while others do not speak English fluently, if at all, and need specialist TESOL instruction to effectively develop their LLND skills. Others may live in geographically isolated locations and require evidence-based distance education provision.
- 4.213 Current Australian Government programs are mainly focussed on raising people's LLND skills for the purposes of employment, and this focus is embedded in the national policy framework through the NFSSA. While these programs may be effective for eligible cohorts, they may not be appropriate or desirable for all LLND learners, particularly those with very low skills.
- 4.214 The Australian Government should examine data on the demand for, and outcomes of, the FSFYF, SEE and JobTrainer programs before any decision is taken to extend or expand them.
- 4.215 The Australian Government should use the evaluation of the FSFYF Remote Community Pilots to establish best practice for ongoing and sustainable funding models that build LLND skills in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

²³⁷ Ms Vanessa Iles, Reading Writing Hotline, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 24 March 2021, page 2.

- 4.216 The Committee encourages DESE to consider the four priority reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Closing the Gap Agreement)²³⁸ carefully in the development of agreements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities if the Australian Government considers there is merit in expanding the FSFYF Remote Community Pilots.
- 4.217 The Committee welcomes many of the significant reforms to AMEP, including removing the cap on tuition hours, and widening access to migrants and refugees who have been in the country for a while but have not yet learned functional or vocational English language and literacy skills. Furthermore, the provision of child care by AMEP is a powerful incentive for many parents to participate in the program.
- 4.218 The Committee notes that the Australian Government has addressed many stakeholder concerns through its revised business model but should be receptive to further feedback on the implementation of recent reforms. Given the size of AMEP, and the significance of the recent changes, it would be prudent to carefully evaluate the effects of the recent reforms in a year's time.
- 4.219 While the decision to raise the language threshold from functional to vocational English literacy may ensure a better quality education for some, differentiating between the quality of teaching and funding for the two program streams, depending on a person's goals for their education, may not be in the best interests of all AMEP participants. This policy is again indicative of the Australian Government's overemphasis on employment outcomes when it comes to resolving LLND skills gaps.
- 4.220 For those migrants and refugees who participate in AMEP for the sole purpose of gaining skills for employment, AMEP may be a stepping stone to employment, employment-focussed programs and VET participation once their skills as EAL/D learners are further developed.
- 4.221 Regardless of whether there need to be two program streams serving different policy goals, the Committee considers that specialist TESOL qualifications should be required to teach both streams. This may mean that funding for social stream participants needs to be increased.

²³⁸ Commonwealth of Australia, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, July 2020, pages 5-15.

- 4.222 An evaluation should consider whether there has been any change in EAL/D learning progression for program participants since AMEP was split into two streams.

Recommendation 10

- 4.223 **The Committee recommends that, by March 2023, the Australian Government:**

- **ensure that all Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) participants are taught by specialist teachers with degree or post-graduate qualifications in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)**
- **commence an evaluation of the recent AMEP reforms that considers whether there have been any changes in learning outcomes for program participants since AMEP was split into two funding streams.**

- 4.224 The Committee has considered the needs of EAL/D learners more broadly, which vary according to an individual's education and literacy skills in their first language. Many adult educators are ill-equipped to identify these different starting points and then bring out the best in individual adult EAL/D learners. While there should be a requirement that all RTOs provide EAL/D learners with specialist TESOL instruction, this should be phased in to allow for the workforce to be developed sufficiently to meet increased demand.
- 4.225 The Committee is concerned that ASQA curriculum requirements for VET and the ACSF may not be appropriate for EAL/D learners in AMEP and other accredited courses. It may be the case that other models such as the TAFE NSW Certificate in Spoken and Written English should be adopted for EAL/D learners instead. The Australian Government should consult with ASQA, AMEP providers, and TESOL and adult education specialists on options for improving curriculum and assessment requirements for adult EAL/D learners in accredited courses.
- 4.226 The Committee is also concerned that the adult education workforce does not currently have a single consolidated document to use for benchmarking LLND levels. The ACSF should be updated to include the Pre Level 1 supplement and incorporate the DLSF.

Recommendation 11

4.227 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- by March 2024, ensure that all Registered Training Organisations provide English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) learners with instruction from specialist teachers with degree or post-graduate qualifications in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)
- by March 2023, conduct a review of options for improving curriculum and assessment requirements for adult EAL/D learners in accredited courses, in consultation with the Australian Skills Quality Authority, Adult Migrant English Program providers, and TESOL and adult education specialists
- by March 2023, update the Australian Core Skills Framework to include the Pre Level 1 supplement and incorporate the Digital Literacy Skills Framework to ensure users have a single reference document.

4.228 The Committee strongly supports the ongoing work of the Reading Writing Hotline and welcomes the provision of additional funding by the Australian Government in the 2021-22 Budget.

4.229 The Committee recognises the importance of both the VET and ACE sectors in delivering accredited education and training that supports learning and employment across the Australian economy. However, there are gaps in provision across Australia for accredited LLND courses, particularly outside of the major cities.

4.230 Demand for informal, unaccredited and entry level LLND education is not currently being met, again this is particularly a problem in regional and remote locations. At the same time, there are community organisations delivering vital adult LLND education programs and courses and are receiving no government funding at all. The Committee believes we can do better as a nation than to rely so heavily on the fundraising and benevolence of volunteers, and calls for the ACE sector to be supported consistently in all jurisdictions.

- 4.231 The Committee recognises the benefits of providing quality LLND education to young Australians and adults in custody, and sees a need for greater consistency in the delivery of best practice pedagogy, assessments and data collection in corrections education.
- 4.232 The Literacy for Life Foundation is an outstanding success story, and the Committee considers that sustainable, ongoing funding should be provided to the Literacy for Life Foundation to deliver Yes, I Can! campaigns in more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Recommendation 12

- 4.233 The Committee recommends that, by March 2023, the Australian Government establish a sustainable, ongoing funding model for the Literacy for Life Foundation to deliver Yes, I Can! campaigns in more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.**

Renewing the adult LLND education workforce

- 4.234 There is currently limited capacity to support demand for LLND education and this must be addressed if access to is to be widened. There is a shortage of qualified adult LLND teachers because of a lack of suitable courses in some areas; limited career pathways for adult LLND teachers; and a lack of support for aspiring specialist teachers to receive a postgraduate adult education qualification through scholarships and Australian Government supported VET and university places.
- 4.235 The shortage of adult LLND teachers, including TESOL specialists has compounding negative effects on the Australian economy. Every TESOL specialist that is missing from the workforce disadvantages many EAL/D learners. As a consequence, these learners may not progress their English to the point where they can get a job or undertake further education and training. The Committee therefore recommends a range of measures be urgently deployed to renew the adult LLND education workforce.

Recommendation 13

- 4.236 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with the state and territory governments to develop and implement a national strategy by March 2023, to renew the adult language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) education workforce.**

4.237 The national workforce strategy must be developed with input from all sectors currently involved in the education and training of adult LLND educators and delivery of adult LLND education, and provide for:

- **clear career pathways for aspiring LLND educators**
- **updates to the Standards for Registered Training Organisations to reflect best practice in LLND education and the Australian Government's renewed emphasis on systematic phonics instruction in schools**
- **the strengthening of existing specialist adult LLND and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) courses, and encouragement of vocational education and training (VET) providers and universities to offer these and other specialist courses**
- **scholarships and fee support for VET and university students to undertake specialist adult LLND and TESOL courses**
- **subsidised access to professional development and initial training programs with multiple entry points that build skills and knowledge, and support pathways to full qualifications, as appropriate.**

Developing a national LLND strategy

4.238 A national strategy for raising adult LLND skills needs to be developed, dealing with low LLND skills as a specific issue, rather than as an adjunct to other policy frameworks. A national strategy needs to go beyond renewing the existing NFSSA and implementing the recommendations of the Joyce review to meet the diverse needs of the community. The input of all sectors currently providing adult LLND education should guide the strategy.

4.239 In progressing a national strategy, there is a need to leverage the successes of initiatives with a strong evidence base and community support. In particular, the Committee recognises that the Literacy for Life Foundation's Yes, I Can! approach works because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are partners in the delivery of the literacy campaigns.

4.240 Similarly, 26TEN brings together government, community and business to improve LLND skills in Tasmania and has a focus on raising awareness and

reducing stigma. In Chapter 3, the Committee recommended there be a national campaign to raise awareness in the community about the challenges people with low LLND skills experience, the benefits of improving LLND skills, where people can receive support and the education options available to them. This should form a key part of the national strategy.

4.241 A national strategy must also:

- Establish a national adult LLND distance education scheme.
- Ensure there is consistency in the delivery of best practice pedagogy, assessment and data collection in corrections education.
- Ensure all programs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are developed and delivered in ways that are consistent with the Closing the Gap Agreement.
- Recognise that linguistically diverse learners have different starting points and therefore have different needs. EAL/D learners require explicit EAL/D pedagogy delivered by qualified TESOL educators to develop strong English literacy. Consistency in applying culturally and linguistically appropriate, evidence-based curriculum, pedagogy and assessments for EAL/D learners will ensure the best outcomes for all adults from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and migrant and refugee backgrounds.

4.242 Presently, several organisations such as the Reading Writing Hotline are providing resources and advice on approaches to LLND delivery. The Committee sees merit in establishing an adult LLND information hub to improve the dissemination of best practice resources, to advise government, employers, RTOs and ACE providers, and to provide professional development for teachers and volunteers.

Recommendation 14

4.243 The Committee recommends that, by March 2023, the Australian, state and territory governments jointly develop and, by March 2024, implement a national language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) strategy based on the model recommended by the Productivity Commission and the recommendations presented in this report, ensuring that:

- **input from all sectors currently involved in the delivery of adult education guides the strategy**
- **a national adult LLND distance education scheme is established**

- **adult and community education is supported to meet demand in all jurisdictions, including by:**
 - **building the capability of the sector to deliver sustainable non-accredited LLND programs through ongoing professional development delivered by Adult Learning Australia**
 - **funding the sector to deliver sustainable non-accredited LLND programs**
 - **resourcing and supporting the sector and relevant peak bodies to work with industry and business to co-design and deliver customised workplace adult literacy programs**
- **there is consistency in the delivery of best practice pedagogy, assessment and data collection in corrections education**
- **the diversity of learner's starting points and needs is recognised and supported**
- **all programs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are developed and delivered in ways that are consistent with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap**
- **an adult LLND information hub is established to support the delivery of best practice LLND education across all sectors**
- **the strategy reflects a policy commitment by the Australian Government to inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning, in keeping with Sustainable Development Goal Four.**

Supporting individuals with LLND skills gaps

4.244 The Committee is concerned that community organisations, such as community legal centres, are filling a gap that exists between government agencies and Australians with low LLND skills for whom many services are inaccessible. These organisations are inadequately funded to address community need for support with literacy mediation and form filling. The result is that many Australians go without key services, or the resources of community organisation are diverted away from their core purposes.

4.245 To better enable Australians with LLND skills gaps to access key services, there needs to be:

- Safeguards in place to ensure that mutual obligation requirements for the JobSeeker Payment do not penalise Australians with low LLND skills for being unable to navigate online systems.
- A focus on providing information in plain, easy to read formats, and telephone numbers that people can ring if they cannot attend a physical service centre.
- Funding for organisations to provide literacy mediation and support with form filling. The Reading Writing Hotline is well placed to maintain a database of these services and to provide advice to Australians on where they can get help.
- Proactive and accessible information provided by Australian Government agencies about help that is available during disaster recovery. Funding for in-person communication may be required for particular cohorts.

Recommendation 15

4.246 The Committee recommends that, by March 2023, the Australian Government ensure that:

- **there are safeguards in place to ensure that mutual obligation requirements for the JobSeeker Payment do not penalise Australians with low language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) skills for being unable to navigate online systems**
- **all Australian Government forms and resources use a plain English approach that utilises Easy Read as set out in the Australian Government Style Manual**
- **all Australian Government agencies mandate the use of Australian Government guidelines in the design of all forms, and ensure that all digital forms meet the requirements of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines**
- **all Australian Government agencies provide telephone support lines for people who are unable to attend physical service centres**
- **the Australian Government establish funding for community organisations to assist Australians with low LLND skills with form filling and literacy mediation**
- **the Reading Writing Hotline is appropriately resourced to maintain a database of form filling and literacy mediation services, and to provide advice to Australians with low LLND skills on where they can access these services**
- **relevant Australian Government agencies provide proactive and accessible information about help that is available during disaster recovery**
- **adult and community education providers be supported to reconnect learners who have become disengaged due to pandemics and natural disasters, such as floods and bushfires, particularly in rural and regional areas, through targeted community-based education**

programs and access to appropriate resources to cope with ongoing challenges.

4.247 The Committee notes that, while many adult LLND educators may not be trained in financial counselling, they can still assist clients with their financial literacy using ASIC's Money Smart online resource, including the Be Moneysmart resource.

Mr Andrew Laming MP

Chair

16 March 2022

A. Submissions

- 1 Emeritus Professor Tim Rowse
- 2 Dr Ben Bartlett
- 3 Neil Macdonald
- 4 Name withheld
- 4.1 Name withheld (supplementary)
- 5 Name withheld
- 6 Ms Ruth Ratcliffe
- 7 Name withheld
- 8 Family Planning NSW
- 8.1 Family Planning NSW (supplementary)
- 9 Name withheld
- 10 Dr Cath Ferguson
- 11 World Literacy Foundation
- 12 Read Write Now Albany, Western Australia
- 13 Ms Andrea McMahon
- 13.1 Ms Andrea McMahon (supplementary)
- 14 Deborah Durnan
- 15 Name withheld
- 16 Armadale Read Write Now Group
- 17 Civil Liberties Australia

-
- 18 NSW Council of Social Service
 - 19 Community Adult Literacy Foundation
 - 20 26TEN Coalition
 - 21 Mr Nicholas Deans
 - 22 Mrs Magdalen Purcell
 - 23 Multiplex
 - 24 Name withheld
 - 25 Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance
 - 26 Professor Bob Boughton
 - 27 Name withheld
 - 28 Name withheld
 - 29 Name withheld
 - 30 Code Read Dyslexia Network Australia
 - 31 Nanette Weiler
 - 32 Australian Library and Information Association
 - 33 Swinburne University of Technology
 - 34 National and State Libraries Australia
 - 35 Australasian Corrections Education Association
 - 36 Australian Council of State School Organisations
 - 37 Libraries ACT
 - 38 Rural Business Tasmania
 - 39 TAFE Queensland
 - 40 Philippa McLean and Jenni Oldfield
 - 41 National Centre for Vocational Education Research
 - 42 AMES Australia
 - 43 Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)
 - 43.1 ACER (supplementary)
 - 43.2 ACER (supplementary)
 - 44 Reading Writing Hotline

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- 44.1 Reading Writing Hotline (supplementary)
 - 44.2 Reading Writing Hotline (supplementary)
 - 45 Australian Education Union
 - 46 Department of Home Affairs
 - 47 Name withheld
 - 48 Ms Marcia Barclay
 - 49 Lowitja Institute
 - 49.1 Lowitja Institute (supplementary)
 - 50 Charles Carroll
 - 51 Victoria Markwick-Smith
 - 52 Dr John Byron
 - 53 Mrs Pauline Bruffer
 - 54 Name withheld
 - 55 Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy
 - 56 Name withheld
 - 57 National Council of Women Australia
 - 58 Mr David Chapman
 - 59 Graeme Hunt
 - 60 Mrs Ann Boyer
 - 61 Maureen Wright
 - 62 Tricia Bowen
 - 63 Dr Marguerite Cullity
 - 63.1 Dr Marguerite Cullity (supplementary)
 - 64 Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
 - 65 Northern Territory Stakeholder Group
 - 66 Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL)
 - 66.1 ACAL (supplementary)
 - 67 Sydney Health Literacy Lab
 - 68 NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council (NSWALNC)

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- 68.1 NSWALNC (supplementary)
 - 68.2 NSWALNC (supplementary)
 - 69 University of New England
 - 70 Settlement Council of Australia
 - 71 Applied Linguistics Association of Australia
 - 72 Central Land Council
 - 73 Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council
 - 74 Australian Primary Principals Association
 - 75 Literacy for Life Foundation
 - 75.1 Literacy for Life Foundation (supplementary)
 - 76 Community Colleges Australia
 - 77 Adult Learning Australia
 - 77.1 Adult Learning Australia (supplementary)
 - 78 Dear Dyslexic Foundation
 - 79 Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA)
 - 79.1 FECCA (supplementary)
 - 80 National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)
 - 80.1 NIAA (supplementary)
 - 80.2 NIAA (supplementary)
 - 81 Western Australian Adult Literacy Council
 - 82 Tasmanian Government
 - 83 Paul Barnes
 - 84 Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation
 - 85 Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA)
 - 85.1 ACTA (supplementary)
 - 86 Department of Education, Skills and Employment
 - 87 Just Reinvest NSW
 - 88 Australian Coalition for Education and Development
 - 89 Victorian Council of Social Service

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- 90 Northern Territory Government
- 91 Associate Professor Shumi Akhtar and Dr Farida Akhtar
- 92 Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group
- 93 The Information Access Group
- 94 Speech Pathology Australia
- 95 Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia
- 96 South West TAFE
- 97 Dominic Wy Kanak
- 98 Mr James Warren
- 99 Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre
- 100 National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)
- 100.1 NACCHO (supplementary)
- 101 Dr Adam Heaton
- 102 Community Centres SA
- 103 Tasmanian Small Business Council
- 103.1 Tasmanian Small Business Council (supplementary)
- 104 Djalkiri Foundation
- 105 Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Northern Territory (ATESOLNT)
- 105.1 ATESOLNT (supplementary)
- 106 Associate Professor John Guenther
- 107 Satya Saurabh Khosla
- 108 Joanne Dickenson
- 109 Western Australian Government
- 110 Tasmanian Government
- 111 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
- 111.1 ABS (supplementary)

B. Exhibit

- 1 Caboolture Neighbourhood Centre, *CEO/Community Support Program Annual Report, July 2020 to June 2021*

C. Hearings and witnesses

Wednesday, 17 February 2021

Canberra

Department of Education, Skills and Employment

Productivity Commission

Wednesday, 24 February 2021

Canberra

Department of Home Affairs

National Indigenous Australians Agency

Wednesday, 24 March 2021

Canberra (via teleconference)

Community Adult Literacy Foundation

Dr Marguerite Cullity

NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council

Reading Writing Hotline

Read Write Now

Western Australian Adult Literacy Council

Monday, 12 July 2021

Canberra (via teleconference/videoconference)

Adult Learning Australia

AMES Australia

Australasian Corrections Education Association

Australian Council for Educational Research

Australian Education Union

Dear Dyslexic Foundation

Emeritus Professor Joseph Lo Bianco

Lowitja Institute

Ms Jenni Oldfield

National and State Libraries Australia

Speech Pathology Australia

Victorian Council of Social Service

Tuesday, 13 July 2021

Canberra (via teleconference/videoconference)

26TEN Coalition

Libraries Tasmania

Ms Amelia Jones

Ms Andrea McMahon

Rural Business Tasmania

Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy

Monday, 19 July 2021

Caboolture (via teleconference/videoconference)

Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group

Caboolture Neighbourhood Centre

TAFE Queensland

Wednesday, 28 July 2021

Canberra (via videoconference)

Community Adult Literacy Foundation

Dr Marguerite Cullity

NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council

Reading Writing Hotline

Read Write Now

Western Australian Adult Literacy Council

Thursday, 29 July 2021

Darwin

Associate Professor John Guenther

Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Northern Territory

Djalkiri Foundation

Mrs Wendy Kennedy

Ms Frances Murray

Ms Lorraine Sushames

Northern Territory Department of Education

Northern Territory Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade

Thursday, 19 August 2021

Canberra (via teleconference/videoconference)

Australian Council for Adult Literacy

Australian Council of State School Organisations

Australian Council of TESOL Associations

Australian Primary Principals Association

Community Colleges Australia

Family Planning NSW

Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

Literacy for Life Foundation

Macquarie Community College

Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre

National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

Settlement Council of Australia

Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation

Wednesday, 24 November 2021

Canberra (via teleconference/videoconference)

Australian Bureau of Statistics