Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc.

Submission on the Draft Tasmanian Adult Learning Strategy 2019-2022

12 August 2019

TasCOSS

INTEGRITY
COMPASSION
INFLUENCE

About TasCOSS

TasCOSS is the peak body for the community services sector in Tasmania. Our membership includes individuals and organisations active in the provision of community services to low-income Tasmanians living in vulnerable and disadvantaged circumstances. TasCOSS represents the interests of its members and their clients to government, regulators, the media and the public. Through our advocacy and policy development, we draw attention to the causes of poverty and disadvantage, and promote the adoption of effective solutions to address these issues.

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Tasmanian Adult Learning Strategy 2019-2022.

TasCOSS advocates on behalf of low-income Tasmanians who often live in vulnerable and disadvantaged circumstances. We advocate for public policy that values and respects the diversity of Tasmanians and makes a real difference to the lives of people who are experiencing vulnerability. We work to ensure that the human rights of all Tasmanians are integrated into government consultation processes, policy approaches and budget allocations.

TasCOSS submissions and advocacy are strongly informed by the expertise of our members and the lived experiences of the Tasmanians we represent. In preparing this submission, we have drawn on the input of:

- 26TEN
- Chatter Matters
- Child and Family Centres
- Council On The Ageing
- Libraries Tasmania
- Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania
- The Salvation Army
- University of Tasmania

We have also drawn on the significant experience and insights through our work with families on educational engagement over the last few years. This includes a large scale consultation conducted in 2017 as part of a report for the Tasmanian Department of Education on links between disadvantage and access to education, and our current work, which began in 2018, talking with families about their experiences of accessing early years education for their children. Both projects also involved parents and carers discussing their learning experiences, including barriers and supports.

Our goals

A state where adult learning is seen as an essential component of the right to education, and all adults are encouraged and supported to engage in lifelong learning.

A state where adults with low literacy are supported to navigate life in a technology-rich world.

Context

The development of an Adult Learning Strategy for Tasmania comes at a crucial time for this state. Tasmania is experiencing historic levels of economic growth, yet many Tasmanians are not feeling the benefits. Unemployment and underemployment are high, more people are receiving Newstart than there were five years ago, our educational attainment across various measures has improved little over

the same period and other measures of wellbeing such as access to health services and housing are also trending down.[1]

Literacy and learning are key to participation, but for some people access to these can require additional enablers and supports. The development and implementation of an Adult Learning Strategy provides an opportunity to ensure that all Tasmanians have the opportunity to participate socially and economically as the strength of the Tasmanian economy continues to grow. This will require targeted, strategic and inclusive investment in a range of initiatives and acknowledgement of the many systems barriers that exist which prevent people taking up opportunities in their community.

Identifying and overcoming barriers to access and participation is critical. We have heard from our members and through consultations that these barriers include, among others:

a) Financial barriers

> "We are living day to day, week to week, month to month. Some of us are really quite good at budgeting but then you get hit with something."[2]

When money is tight, prioritisation is a necessity. In our consultations, many members named cost as being a major barrier to engagement in education. Upfront costs are a major deterrent for people under financial stress, especially when the choice might be between putting petrol in the car and feeding your family or paying for a course. We were also told that for many people who are experiencing financial hardship or disadvantage, even when assistance such as HELP loans are available, past negative experiences of debt can be a barrier to uptake. If your experience of debt is that of predatory payday loans or being caught by high interest and extra fees and charges on a credit card, it can be frightening to consider taking on more debt.

b) Transport and access barriers

> "[People] cannot get around to certain places or cannot get out of their suburbs which makes it hard for them to find employment, socialise, and study."[3]

Where you live and the transport options you have can make a big difference to your ability to reach learning opportunities. Owning and maintaining a car is expensive, and getting a license can be a struggle for many. Without private transport, reliance often shifts to public transport, but that can also be a barrier. Spending on public transport in Tasmania is the lowest per capita in Australia, conservatively calculated at $221.36 per person per year.[4] There is also a rural-metropolitan divide in

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[1] https://www.tascoss.org.au/measuring-progress-in-tasmania/
[2] TasCOSS consultations: Good Life
[3] TasCOSS consultations: Transport
[4] Based on Tasmania's 2019-20 Transport spending and a population of 522,152 as of 2017 (ABS regional Statistics)

transport access and provision in Tasmania, with rural services having significantly restricted timetables and reach compared to metropolitan services. If you live in regional Tasmania where buses are infrequent or absent and you can't afford to run a car, or have no one to help you complete the hours required to get a license, it's easy to miss out on opportunities that others take for granted.

c) Cultural and language barriers

> "When I arrived here, I couldn't understand people. Their accent was very different. I didn't know a lot of words, sentences... and slang. It took me time to feel more confident, to learn and to understand well. And till today, I continue learning."[5]

Tasmania is becoming a more diverse state, with increasing numbers of people coming to Tasmania from interstate and overseas. Many of those who choose to make Tasmania home come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In 2016, 6.5% of Households in Tasmania spoke a language other than English at home, up from 5.8% in 2011.[6] That translates to an increase of 2,512 CALD households in just five years. This diversity brings to Tasmania a wealth of different experiences of learning. It can also bring challenges for learners in adapting to unfamiliar systems, and courses taught in what is often a second, third, or fourth language.

d) Literacy and numeracy barriers

> "There are so many people out there who the education system hasn't worked for; who can't read a flyer about a program, who can't complete an enrolment form, but who want to keep learning in some way or other."[7]

Not having the basic tools or support such as literacy can act as a major barrier in engaging in further learning. According to one measure, only 49.8% of adult Tasmanians have the literacy skills needed to navigate everyday life and work in today's technologically-rich world.[8] 50.3% of Tasmanians aged 20-64 have completed year 12, behind a national figure of 68.3%. For Tasmanians aged 50-54 this figure dives to just 30%.[9] The levels of literacy and numeracy required to maintain participation in work and learning in the 21st century are high. Many Tasmanians have not been able to get the skills and training they need to fully participate.

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[5] ABC, 2018. 'Australian English can be 'different' and 'shocking' for new migrants', 24 April, available: https://www.abc.net.au/education/learn-english/australian-english-different-and-shocking-for-new-migrants/9687206

[6] ABS, 2016. Quick Stats for Tasmania: 'People – Cultural and Language Diversity', Main language spoken at home (other than English), available: https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/6

[7] TasCOSS, 2019. Reflection on Working Together for 3 Year Olds family consultations

[8] 26TEN, 2016. *Tasmania's strategy for adult literacy and numeracy 2016-2025*, available: https://26ten.tas.gov.au/Pages/Strategy.aspx

[9] ABS, May 2018 Education and Work, Australia, Table 29, available: https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6227.0

e) Poor past experience of education

> "Generally speaking 'education' has been a failure for inmates and they have a negative concept of 'learning'."[10]

If you haven't felt safe and supported while learning previously, re-engaging can be hard. For many Tasmanians the education system has not been the supportive, inclusive place it should be. Some people report being placed in the 'too hard basket' by teachers, or seeing other teachers who preferred to work only with high achievers. For others, traditional academic approaches never held much joy and the system failed to recognise and encourage the curiosity and desire to learn in other forms. Education can also be a concept around which experience of punishment and shame, bullying by other students and sometime educators, and other events can cause lasting trauma. The whole concept of learning can be tarred by this brush, and when this occurs it is a significant hurdle to overcome. Our consultations indicated that this is particularly true of many prisoners – many of whom would benefit from more targeted literacy, numeracy and job or goal-focused training and support.

f) Undervaluing of adult learning

> "If we as a nation are serious about our economic and social justice goals, we must get serious about adult and community education."[11]

The importance and contribution of adult learning has been under-valued in public debate about education and learning in Tasmania, and Australia more broadly. Adult learning has often been viewed as the poor cousin of the education and training sector. It has also often been perceived narrowly, as simply a way to reskill for employment or, conversely, an unproductive luxury. Perceptions such as this, and the accompanying lack of focus and funding, cement major systemic barriers to participation. However, for many Tasmanians with poor or no prior experience of education and learning, or who had nobody in their life who could model successful participation in learning, adult and community education is a key connector between other forms of learning and with the community more broadly.

g) Barriers specific to Aboriginal Tasmanians

Aboriginal Tasmanians face particular barriers to accessing education and learning opportunities. These include lack of culturally appropriate learning and relevant support, stigma, generational disadvantage, transport, costs and home environments not conducive to school attendance. As a result, educational outcomes for Aboriginal Tasmanians are poorer than for non-Aboriginal Tasmanians:

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[10] TasCOSS consultation with prisoner support worker
[11] Senate of Australia, 1991. *Come in Cinderella: The emergence of adult and community education*. Report to the Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, Senate Printing Unit, Canberra.

- The retention rate of ATSI students from years 7/8 to 12 is 58%, compared to 73% for Non-Indigenous students.[12]
- While 75.5% of Non-Indigenous Tasmanians have completed year 12 or equivalent or Certificate III or above, only 51% of ATSI Tasmanians have. [13]
- The gap persists into non-school education, where 56% of ATSI Tasmanians have a non-school qualification, behind 60% of Non-Indigenous Tasmanians. [14]
- The unemployment rate for ATSI Tasmanians (13%) is also almost double that of the rate for all Tasmanians (7%)[15].

Outcomes might be improved if Aboriginal communities in Tasmania are engaged in designing learning opportunities that meet the needs of Tasmanian Aboriginal communities.

The state of Adult Learning in Tasmania

Figures released in the Department of Education's annual reports show that from a low of 11,808 in 2013-14, the number of Tasmanians engaged in Adult education, training and literacy programs run by the Department and Libraries has been growing. However, 25% fewer were participating in 2017-18 than in 2010-11.[16] This is due in part to the implementation of a policy of full cost recovery for adult learning programs in August 2011 which increased upfront costs for learners.[17] This highlights the importance of the relationship between the cost of services and demand, and serves as a reminder that for those on low incomes rising costs are a major deterrent.

Partly in recognition of the State's literacy and educational barriers, Tasmania directed efforts at Adult Learning and Education for some time. According to Adult Learning Australia, Tasmania has a state-wide network of Adult and Community Education, sitting alongside VET and Higher education, including 87 physical service points through the Department of Education (Libraries) which provide learning and literacy programs, as well as programs offered through 34 community houses and other community services, including Universities of the Third Age (U3A) and Men's sheds.[18]

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[12] Productivity Commission, 2019. *Report on Government Services, Part B. 4A School Education*: 'Table 4A.28', available: https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2019/child-care-education-and-training

[13] ABS, 2017. *4714.0 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, Australia, 2014–15*, 'Table 21.3', available: https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4714.0Main+Features100022014-15?OpenDocument

[14] ABS, 2017. NATSISS 2014-15.

[15] ABS, 2018. *2016 Census: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples QuickStats*, available: https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/IQS6

[16] see Department of Education, 2016. *Department of Education 15/16 Annual Report*, October. 'LINC TASMANIA EXTERNALLY REPORTED KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS', p. 68. Available: https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/DoE-Annual-Report-2015-16.pdf and Department of Education, 2018. *Annual Report: 2017/2018,* October. 'Libraries Tasmania externally reported key performance indicators' p. 50. Available: https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/DoE-Annual-Report-2017-2018_Web.pdf

[17] DoE Annual report (2015-16)

[18] ALA, 2017. 'Australian ACE Environmental Scan 2017 update: Scope and scale of adult and community education across Australia', Adult Learning Australia.

26TEN has also been working on improving Tasmanians literacy since its establishment in 2012. A key part of this is Tasmania's Strategy for Adult Literacy and Numeracy 2016-2025. It aims to build on earlier work done to raise awareness of low literacy and numeracy in Tasmania and build support in the business and community sector. This Strategy's three aims are to ensure:

- Everyone knows about adult literacy and numeracy
- Everyone is supported to improve their skills and to help others
- Everyone communicates clearly[19]

The Department of Education has also recently released its Literacy Framework and Plan for Action which aims "for all learners to have the skills and confidence in literacy and numeracy to successfully participate in learning, life and work."[20]

The Adult Learning Strategy can extend efforts to encourage strategic and inclusive growth

This work on literacy is fundamental to ensuring all Tasmanians have the skills needed to navigate life and work. The Adult Learning Strategy is a chance to integrate with these and other strategies and deliver on the government's goal of strategic growth.

The Premier has stated that, as part of this commitment, "we must continue to break down the barriers to the greatest enabler of social inclusion - education, training and the opportunity of a good job."[21] The Adult Learning Strategy can be a tool to break down these barriers and ensure all Tasmanians are encouraged and supported to engage in lifelong learning.

This goal echoes others made at the international level. In 2015, UNESCO updated its Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education. Drawing on the concept of lifelong learning, the Recommendation states that the aim of Adult Learning and Education is "to equip people with the necessary capabilities to exercise and realize their rights and take control of their destinies." [22] It also notes that adult learning is "a crucial tool in alleviating poverty, improving health and well-being and contributing to sustainable learning societies."[23] UNESCO urges members to view and promote adult learning as "an essential component of the right to education and a key pillar in the education system."[24] This is a shift in perspective for many, who see the education system as schools and universities, and little besides.

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[19] 26TEN, 2016. Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

[20] DoE, 2019. 'Literacy Framework and Plan for Action', Department of Education available: https://www.education.tas.gov.au/about-us/projects/literacy-framework-plan-action/

[21] Hodgman, W., 2019. '2019 Tasmanian State of the State Address', available: http://www.premier.tas.gov.au/speeches/2019_state_of_the_state_address

[22] UNESCO, 2015. *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education, 2015*, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, page 8, para 8. Available: http://uil.unesco.org/adult-education/unesco-recommendation/unesco-recommendation-adult-learning-and-education-2015,

[23] UNESCO *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education*, page 8, para 8.

[24] UNESCO *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education*, page 9, para 13(a).

Continuous, flexible adult learning allows people to continue to learn and grow, to develop new skills and knowledge, and to adapt to change throughout their lives.[25] With widely noted advances in technology and structural changes in the economy, continued learning is increasingly becoming a necessity rather than a choice. If the Strategy is implemented successfully it could assist all Tasmanians to face these shifts and realise the potential for learning to be "the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world."[26]

Key Issues

TasCOSS strongly supports the goals of the Adult Learning Strategy and the guiding principles which underpin these goals. The broad principles and goals set the stage well for an approach to adult learning in Tasmania which recognises the value of lifelong learning for individuals, communities and the state.

We acknowledge that what is presented is a high-level strategy, but would welcome the inclusion of more concrete actions in order to achieve the stated goals. Many of the proposed actions involve 'exploring', 'investigating' or 'considering' an action, and many of these are pushed to Phase 2. TasCOSS would welcome the opportunity to comment in more detail on more specific actions.

Digital platforms bring equity challenges

Many proposed solutions and programs outlined in the Strategy involve digital components. Online learning is an understandably attractive proposition due to relatively low cost, and an ability to overcome delivery and access restraints over large distances. However, as also recognised in the Strategy, Tasmania has low levels of literacy, digital inclusion, and digital literacy. Tasmania is the 2nd most digitally disadvantaged state with an ADII score of 58.1.[27]

This means that care should be taken to ensure that online learning and other digital platforms do not become overly relied upon. Many Tasmanians simply have no access to the internet, so engaging digitally will be impossible for them. 17% of Tasmanians have no access to the internet at home, [28] and this figure reaches as high as 32% in towns and suburbs with higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage.[29] For others, low literacy and digital literacy levels, or other barriers such as vision impairment, mean that engagement with online learning are unable to serve their needs. Where online learning is used, great care should be taken to ensure it is as accessible as possible for all learners.

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[25] ALA, 2019. 'Recognising all types of learning', Fact Sheet, Adult Learning Australia. Available: https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Recognising-all-types-of-learning-compressed.pdf

[26] Freire, Paulo. (2000) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum

[27] Thomas, J, Barraket, J, Wilson, CK, Cook, K, Louie, YM & Holcombe-James, I, Ewing, S, MacDonald, T, 2018, *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2018*, RMIT University, Melbourne, available: https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/the-index-report/report/

[28] ABS 2018, *Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2016-17*, Table 2 Households, by internet access at home–2016-17. Available: https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/8146.02016-17,

[29] TasCOSS, 2019. Understanding Digitial Inclusion in Tasmania: Report on Research Findings. Tasmanian Council of Social Service

The principle of overcoming the systemic barriers to access and provision of learning which exist for too many in Tasmanian communities is fundamental to the success of the Strategy. However, more detail would be welcome on how the Strategy intends to deal with these barriers and target cohorts.

Goal 1 - Coordination

Common objectives and coordination for the Adult Learning sector are welcome

A clear theme which emerged from initial consultations with stakeholders was the fragmentation of the adult learning space, and the negative flow-on effects this has for adult learning in the state.

The Strategy clearly recognises this, with a vision of a sector which "has clear goals, takes coordinated action and provides clear information to learners". This is a welcome vision, particularly with the accompanying acknowledgement that the goal of this coordination is not about centralisation. It is crucial that this be honoured through implementation with clear actions.

New Zealand has the highest participation in adult learning in the OECD, with 68% of adults aged 25 to 64 engaged in some form of formal or non-formal education. Australia sits at 56% participation.[30]

In New Zealand, all post-school education is incorporated into the tertiary sector with common goals and objectives, but there is recognition of the specific role adult learning and education plays in the sector. This aligns with the UNESCO recommendation that adult learning be viewed as a key pillar in the education system, and ensures it is not viewed as the poor cousin of the education system. The below diagram shows how foundational and community education are seen as integral parts of an interconnected tertiary education sector:[31]
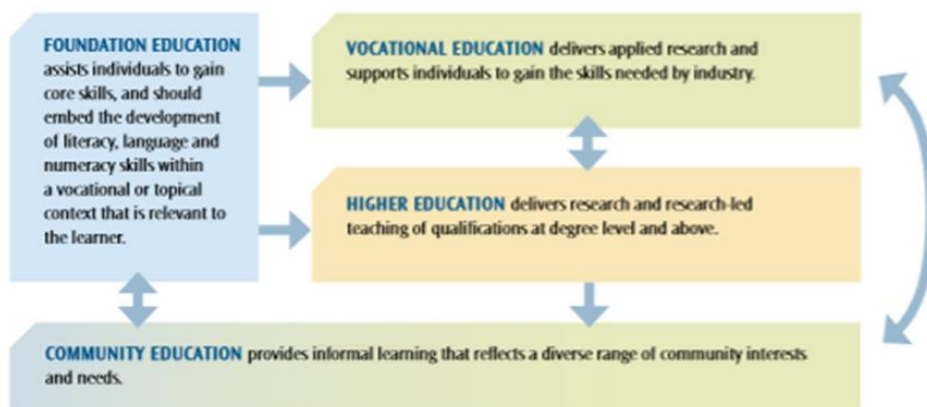
Implementation should be community-led and place-based

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[30] OECD, 2018. *Education at a Glance*, 2018: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris. Available: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2018_eag-2018-en

[31] MoE, 2014. *Tertiary education strategy 2014-19*, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. March. Available: http://www.education.govt.nz/further-education/policies-and-strategies/tertiary-education-strategy/

While adult learning in Tasmania will benefit from greater coordination, it is important to remember that it happens best where it remains place-based, autonomous and flexible, and delivered by and for the community.[32,33]

Adult learning is a whole-of-community issue which will require the involvement of communities. This should include, but not be limited to: local businesses and employers, education providers, voluntary and community sector organisations, unions, local councils and, crucially, individual members of local communities.

Working with community partners to ensure they are engaged and co-designing local solutions should be an underpinning priority for the Adult Learning Strategy.

Who are the key partners and what are the key policy interactions?

Despite the goal of coordination, the Strategy as it stands is lacking reference to and integration of some key partners and other relevant policies and strategies.

Key partners would broadly include those community members listed above. However, it is possible to identify other partners who would be involved across communities. Despite being identified by Adult Learning Australia as key community education providers[34], Universities of the Third Age are not mentioned in the Strategy. This is a key partner for the engagement of older Tasmanians in non-formal learning. Nor is there substantial mention of the University of Tasmania (UTAS). As the sole University in the state, UTAS is a significant provider of formal adult learning – with almost 29,000 current students.[35] Noting the Strategy's focus on those experiencing various forms of disadvantage, there is an opportunity to identify key partners and opportunities for further work with them to remove barriers to access for those experiencing disadvantage.

Key policy interactions should also be more clearly identified. Tasmania's Strategy for Adult Literacy and Numeracy 2016-2025 and the Department of Education's Literacy Framework and Literacy Plan for Action are mentioned in passing, and the interaction between these components are unclear. In fact, an entire list of 'Relevant policies and strategies' are listed from page 21, but no explanation is given to how or why they are relevant. The Strategy would benefit from a clearer explanation of where it sits in the Tasmanian, national and international context.

Accessible and accurate guidance is key to enabling engagement with learning

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[32] Crawley, J., 2015. 'Adult education needs an urgent and radical rethink', The Conversation, March. Available: https://theconversation.com/adult-education-needs-an-urgent-and-radical-rethink-39391

[33] See also: McGivney, V, 2001 *Fixing or Changing the Pattern? Reflections on Widening Adult Participation in Learning,* National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester: UK. and Coare, P, and Rennie Johnston, eds. 2003. *Adult learning, citizenship and community voices: Exploring community-based practice.* National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester: UK.

[34] ALA, 2017 'ACE Environmental Scan', p.17

[35] Department of Education, 2018. *2018 First half year student summary tables*, Table (i)(c): Summary of student numbers(a) - List of Higher Education Institutions, first half year 2018. Available: https://docs.education.gov.au/node/51961

Another clear theme from consultations was the challenge that this fragmented adult learning space presents to learners who are trying to navigate what is available and appropriate for their needs. Key players have reported and the Strategy notes that very few know where they would go if they wanted help navigating the system or planning their learning pathways.

Actions 3, 4 and 16 pick up on this issue, presenting options for investigation. TasCOSS sees the potential to link these actions, and bring them forward to Phase 1. Pathways planning, as outlined in Action 16, would be a natural complement to the guidance and referral services of Actions 3 and 4. Given the system is repeatedly described as a confusing tangle, guidance, planning and referral services should be a priority step, not something to be investigated in phase 2.

The Adult Learning Portal could be accompanied by a triaging and referral service much like the Strong Families, Safe Kids initiative, which has seen an advice and referral line accompanied by an online service directory. This has led to the Department of Communities working with partners in the community sector to provide earlier intervention and referral for families and children before more acute responses are required.

Goal 2 – Learning for Work

As consistently identified, the rapidly changing nature of work will have a significant impact on society and individuals as they attempt to navigate future work and careers. Foundational skills and transferrable skills will become increasingly necessary, as will the ability to up- or re-skill. However, the onus should not be placed entirely on individuals to adapt – they must be supported to make these adaptations, and effective systems need to be designed which people can use to build upon their skills and make the transitions which suit them best.

Programs and actions should be based on evidence

An obvious start for Tasmania is improving on foundational skills. The state is consistently behind other states on measures of literacy, numeracy and digital inclusion. It's clear the system as it stands in Tasmania has not been working for many. In consultations, there was a strong desire to see wider implementation of evidence-based programs to target these foundational skills.

Chatter Matters drew attention to the need to consistently support evidence-based approaches in literacy programs. A phonemic awareness approach has been demonstrated as an effective approach to teaching literacy. [36] It starts with recognition that oral language is fundamental to literacy, as an individual's first exposure to and use of language is spoken. Ensuring such evidence-based practice was embedded in foundational skills programs would deliver better outcomes for Tasmanians and make the research project proposed at Action 9 of considerable value and interest within Australia and internationally.

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[36] Martin, R., 2015. *Sound Systems – A phonemically-based approach to adult literacy tutoring at the LINC*, Chatter Matters, February. Available: http://chattermatters.com.au/report/Sound%20Systems.pdf. See also Kilpatrick, David A. 2015, *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties,* John Wiley & Sons, Inc. New Jersey.

If Tasmania is serious about strengthening the ability for adults to be able to engage in lifelong learning, then we should be aiming to change systems to enable widespread and effective implementation of all programs, particularly those targeting foundational skills.

Need to avoid assumption of access and universality

The Jobs Action Package and Rapid Response Skills Initiative are mentioned as examples of training and employment support currently offered. It should be noted that these are not available universally. Many of the programs and resources offered in the adult learning space, particularly in training and skills, are offered on the basis of specific criteria. The Strategy should be careful to avoid assumptions of universality of opportunities, where lived experience is of a more patchwork nature. Many potential adult learners in Tasmania are not eligible for or receiving funded support through such programs, but are still experiencing layers of disadvantage which present barriers to participation. Even where a person may be eligible, barriers identified above such as transport, poor past experiences of education and low literacy levels can make accessing programs effectively impossible.

Goal 3 – Learning for Life

There has been a tendency in many jurisdictions for the broad benefits of adult learning to be overlooked, being replaced by a narrow focus on the learning's economic ends: workforce participation, productivity and innovation.[37] TasCOSS welcomes this Strategy's acknowledgement of the more comprehensive benefits and opportunities that lifelong learning brings to individuals and communities, and hope this will be honoured in implementation.

Every engagement with learning should be equally valid

The title 'Second chance learners' in Action 16 seems to be based on a linear concept of education, one which carries assumptions of value and hierarchy. It implies a 'correct' pathway through primary and secondary schooling, VET and/or higher education, possibly followed by professional development or personal interest learning. This is not the reality for many learners. While some do follow this pathway, others have work opportunities arise earlier, before returning to study. Others might have family responsibilities which arise, or are faced with a lack of finances or access which means they need to reconsider further study. Many people work while studying. Others pursue personal interest or professional development while still engaged in study.

We should work towards recognising that many learning journeys involve an element of complexity or 'messiness', and that engagement at any point is a success, not just another go after previous failures.

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[37] Rizvi, F., 2017. *Globalisation and the neoliberal imaginary of educational reform,* Education Research and Foresight Working Paper Series, No 20. February. UNESCO. Available: http://repositorio.minedu.gob.pe/handle/MINEDU/5283

While noting the language should be changed, the idea itself is a good. As mentioned above, TasCOSS sees the potential to integrate this Action with Actions 3 and 4 in Goal 1 to address a large need in the community: to provide a comprehensive guidance and referral service for adult learners.

Peer learning and encouragement are good tools for engagement

TasCOSS would welcome the establishment of Adult Learning Ambassadors, as proposed in Action 23. Our consultations have indicated that peer-worker type arrangements are extremely successful in helping to connect people who aren't currently connected to learning, particularly where there might be intersecting barriers or layers of disadvantage. Many studies highlight the effectiveness of peer-led models for older learners in particular.[38]

This idea could be further explored and extended beyond medium and large employers, and in the community more broadly.

Recommendations

TasCOSS welcomes the Adult Learning Strategy and recommends that:

1. **Where digital tools or platforms are considered, care be taken to maintain accessibility for all learners, especially those with low levels of literacy and digital inclusion**

2. **The government work with community partners to co-design place-based solutions and actions under the Strategy**

3. **The Tasmanian Aboriginal community is consulted to ensure learning opportunities and relevant supports are accessible to their community and are culturally appropriate**

4. **Actions taken under the Strategy be evidence-based**

5. **The Strategy make reference to key current learning providers and possible future partners**

6. **The Strategy be clear about its place in the Tasmanian, national, and international policy context**

7. **The Adult Learning Portal (Action 3), guidance service (Action 16), and triaging and referral service (Action 4), be linked or integrated, and that these actions be brought forward to Phase 1 in order to deliver accessible and accurate guidance for learners sooner**

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[38] See Simson, S., Thompson, E. and Wilson, L.B., 2002. Who is teaching lifelong learners? A study of peer educators in Institutes for Learning in Retirement. *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education*, 22(1), pp.31-43. And Clark, F., Heller, A.F., Rafman, C. and Walker, J., 1997. Peer learning: A popular model for seniors education. *Educational Gerontology: An International Quarterly*, 23(8), pp.751-762.

8. **The Strategy encourage wider utilisation of peer-led learning**

9. **Ensure that the language used in the Strategy reflects the principles of the document and encourages each act of engagement with learning as a success**

Conclusion

The goals and principles of the Tasmanian Adult Learning Strategy 2019-2021 are sound. The benefits of promoting and assisting more adults to continue learning throughout life are clear. It is incumbent on the Tasmanian Government to ensure that the Strategy becomes something over which the whole community has ownership and oversight. Actions taken to achieve the goals should be evidence-based and formulated in response to needs and wants identified in and by communities across Tasmania.

Commitment to adult learning in Australia has been subject for too long to what Brown identifies as "mismatches between policy rhetoric and funding commitments… between rhetorical support for but neglect of adult education provision."[39] This Strategy is an opportunity to match rhetoric on adult learning with greater commitment to funding and provision.

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[39] Brown, T. 2018. 'Lifelong learning: An organising principle for reform', *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 56(3), pp 312-335.

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