

Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan



I. Message from the David Bartlett MP Premier and Minister for Education and Skills

All Tasmanians deserve an equal chance at making a good life for themselves. For many Tasmanians education and skills development are pathways to a better future.

Over time, the types of skills required to keep the Tasmanian economy strong have changed and we must keep up with that change with skills that ensure we indeed are clever, kind and connected.

There was a time when people could get by without a good level of literacy. Those times have passed; all Tasmanians must have at least basic literacy skills.

Too many Tasmanians are missing the opportunities brought about by a changing economy because too many Tasmanians lack basic literacy skills. These skills give us the confidence to participate in a growing economy, in our community, to study, to find a job, to change careers and to take up the challenges associated with changing technology.

Most importantly they give us self worth, and we pass that on to our children, as we read to them and teach them to read.

They are fundamental skills for life.

The Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan focuses on communities. It invests in people and programs to raise awareness and understanding of adult literacy. It provides support and programs for people to improve adult literacy in their workplace and in their community.

Through this Action Plan, adult literacy can be improved and more people can experience the benefits of a growing economy and a strong community.

Please join in the Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan.

David Bartlett, MP
Premier of Tasmania
Minister for Education and Skills



2. Summary of the Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan 2010-2015

2.1 Aim:

'For young people and adults to have the literacy skills they need to fully participate in their family life, the community, learning and employment'.

2.2 Strategies:

1. The establishment of an informal community and workplace network of adult literacy support.
2. The establishment of a state wide team of coordinators supported by a pool of trained volunteers to drive the Adult Literacy Network.
3. The development of key indicators to measure improvements in adult literacy support and outcomes.

2.3 Actions:

Over the next four years the Tasmanian Government will:

- Employ up to 16.5 additional full time equivalent Adult Literacy Coordinators to work across all Tasmanian communities. Supported by a team of trained literacy volunteers, they will work with the existing eight Adult Literacy Coordinators to provide literacy support and training to individuals, businesses and communities.
- Ensure that three of the Adult Literacy Coordinators are located in the Tasmania Prison Service to coordinate a team of volunteers to provide support and training to inmates pre and post release, and those serving community orders.
- Establish an Adult Literacy Investment Fund. This fund will provide \$1 million a year over four years to support the following initiatives in workplaces and communities:
 - Targeted literacy training programs to be run in communities by the Community Knowledge Network and other community and training organisations.
 - An Employer Pledge program, where employers who pledge to help improve the literacy skills of their employees and their families are provided with a grant to assist them in this aim.

- Establish a community of practice for adult literacy workers, including an online portal for sharing information and literacy tools.
- Extend the literacy and numeracy support provided to apprentices and trainees at the Tasmanian Skills Institute. This will include piloting an online literacy and numeracy program for apprentices and trainees in remote and regional areas.
- Develop a partnership with Government agencies and the community sector to invest \$350 000 in an adult literacy and life skills initiative incorporating community based awareness raising around adult literacy.
- Work with the Australian Government to collaborate on the provision of literacy support and training for job seekers.
- Use Government service provider outlets as promotion points for adult literacy support and train staff to better understand the barriers people face due to low levels of literacy. Staff will also be trained in how to assist individuals or refer appropriately to literacy support providers.
- Promote best practice examples of plain language in public documents across the State Service. Government and non government organisations will be assisted to deliver messages that are clear and simple.
- The Tasmanian Government will consistently and transparently measure progress on improving adult literacy against meaningful indicators.

3. Background

3.1 The importance of adult literacy

Literacy skills help people to make the most of opportunities in life and help in solving day to day problems. Literacy skills are important for participating in family life, the community, learning and employment, and to access essential services.

Without basic literacy skills everyday tasks are harder – whether reading a bus timetable, applying for a loan, filling in Centrelink forms, getting your driver's licence, reading the newspaper, enrolling in a course, taking medicine, applying for a job, or reading with your child. Not being able to do these important activities can add up to a person feeling less confident in themselves and their abilities. It can also lead to experiencing higher levels of social and economic disadvantage.

Higher levels of literacy are associated with more skills, lower unemployment, better health, less reliance on welfare, lower crime and greater participation in the community.¹ Improving literacy can lead to a more rewarding personal life and can give the confidence needed to get a formal qualification or to participate in the workforce. It also builds the social capital of communities, leading to greater participation and community resilience.

There is also a relationship between parents' level of education and literacy and the literacy skills and school performance of their children. Parents with low literacy skills, particularly mothers, are more likely to positively influence their children's literacy and learning when they are able to improve their own literacy skills.²

Businesses can also benefit by improving the basic skills of their workforce, demonstrated through improvements in productivity, the confidence and communication skills of employees, and better health and safety.³ As more people gain qualifications and skills over time, businesses will also benefit through having access to more skilled workers.

What is adult literacy?

There is no single agreed way of defining the term 'adult literacy'. In this Action Plan the term means:

"The ability to communicate ideas and information in the right way at the right time, to use computers and other types of technology and to use mathematical and other problem solving techniques."

(South Australian Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, (2008). *Making literacy everybody's business – report and action plan.*)

This set of literacy skills is often referred to as essential skills, basic skills, generic skills, employability skills or life skills.

The range of literacy skills people need for everyday life and work changes over time and in different contexts. It is important to update and learn new literacy skills throughout our lives.

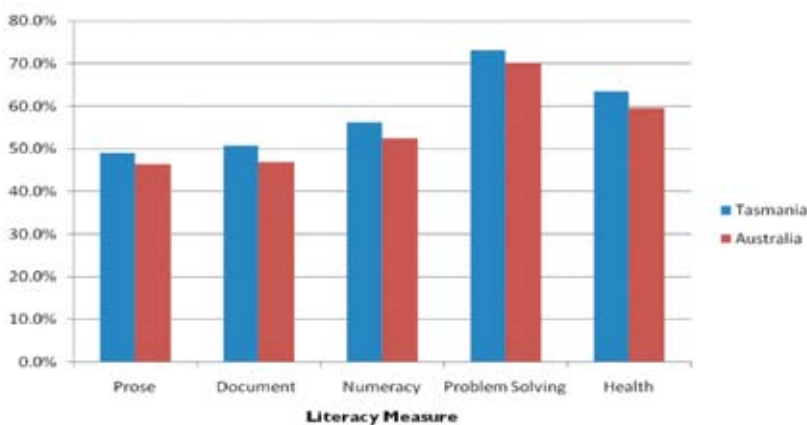
3.2 Adult literacy in Tasmania

The proportion of adult Tasmanians with low literacy skills is very high. The 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) found that around half of the Tasmanian population aged 15-74 years lack the literacy skills needed to cope with the demands of everyday life and work. For example 49% of adult Tasmanians, or approximately 174 000 people, do not have the basic skills needed to understand and use information from newspapers, magazines, books and brochures.⁴ Overall, Tasmania had the lowest level of adult literacy skills in the nation and there has been no improvement in adult literacy levels since they were last measured in 1996.

Figure 1 compares the proportion of people without functional literacy skills in Tasmania and in Australia. Figure 1 shows that at the time of the survey Tasmania had a higher proportion of people with insufficient literacy skills than for Australia overall in each of the following five measures of literacy:

- Prose literacy – able to read books, newspapers, magazines and brochures.
- Document literacy – obtaining information from bus timetables, charts and graphs.
- Numeracy – adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing and percentage.
- Problem solving – working through day to day challenges and their consequences.
- Health literacy – reading and interpreting medicine labels, information and advice.

Figure 1 – Proportion of Tasmanians without the literacy skills needed to cope with everyday life and work



Source: ABS 2006, Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey

Tasmania's levels of adult literacy are influenced by a range of factors including the higher prevalence of older persons in the population, and lower school retention rates and post-school qualifications. Recent information from the ABS also suggests that Tasmanians in regional municipalities tend to have lower literacy levels compared to those living in major metropolitan areas.⁵

4. Action Plan

The aim of the Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan is for young people and adults to have the literacy skills they need to fully participate in family and community life, learning and employment.

The Action Plan has been developed in response to the *Tasmanian Skills Strategy* and *A Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania*. Increasing opportunities for Tasmanians to fully participate in society and economic activity are major drivers for both these strategies. Improving adult literacy, with its economic and social benefits, will help achieve the objectives of both strategies.

The Action Plan builds on the Government's existing investment to improve the literacy skills of Tasmanians. For instance investments have been made in literacy for pre-school and school education, which are now yielding significant results. Opportunities are also provided for second chance learning through the rollout of Learning and Information Network Centres (LINC)s. The network of Adult Literacy Coordinators and the valuable work of volunteer tutors is already helping many Tasmanians with their literacy.

Improving adult literacy skills takes time and requires governments, communities, businesses and individuals to each contribute and work together. This Action Plan brings together actions that will strengthen the collaboration and coordination of adult literacy services in Tasmania. It also addresses identified gaps in the provision of adult literacy services so more people that need literacy support can access it.

This Plan sets out actions in relation to three Strategies for improving the literacy skills of Tasmanians:

1. The establishment of an informal community and workplace network of adult literacy support.
2. The establishment of a state wide team of coordinators supported by a pool of trained volunteers to drive the Adult Literacy Network.
3. The development of key indicators to measure improvements in adult literacy support and outcomes.

5. Strategies

Strategy 1. The establishment of an informal community and workplace network of adult literacy support

Currently there is a range of existing government, community and business organisations providing literacy support to adults in Tasmania albeit in a fragmented, uncoordinated way. The Action Plan recognises the benefits that can be gained from a more systematic approach to partnerships across the sector and encouraging greater collaboration including:

- a more sustainable adult literacy sector,
- developing shared objectives,
- reducing duplication in service delivery,
- sharing best practice approaches to adult literacy support,
- sharing information, resources and tools,
- sharing professional learning opportunities, and
- partnering to deliver specific adult literacy programs.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to providing literacy support. If we are to meet the different needs and aspirations of people wanting to improve their literacy skills, support must be provided in a range of community, formal and informal education and workplace settings.

Tasmania has a growing network of social infrastructure including the Tasmanian Polytechnic, Tasmanian Skills Institute, Tasmanian Academy, Learning and Information Network Centres (LINC's), Community Houses, Libraries, Online Access Centres and the soon to be established Child and Family Centres. The Adult Literacy Action Plan will create linkages with this social infrastructure, and engage with employers to create a state wide network of access points for literacy support.

This network will enable Tasmanians to access literacy support in an environment in which they feel comfortable and are familiar with, and in a context that is meaningful. This is important because it can be very difficult to encourage people to join adult literacy programs. People are more likely to access support to improve their literacy skills if they can see how it will help them to achieve immediate goals in their life. These goals might be to do a course, get a job, pursue a hobby, socialise, send an email or text message, or read to their child.

Formal education is rarely the best way to improve adult literacy. If a person has had a poor experience of schooling or does not have basic literacy skills, then starting a formal training course can be too big a first step to take in their pathway into learning.

Informal, non-accredited and community or workplace based programs are therefore a very important part of the Government's approach to improving adult literacy skills. These types of programs can build people's confidence in their ability to learn, can help people achieve immediate goals and can also be starting points on pathways into further learning or employment.

There are significant numbers of people with low literacy skills already in the workforce. Employers can take a leadership role in recognising the benefits to their business and their employees from improved literacy, and support staff to access literacy training.

There are a range of literacy needs within the Tasmanian community. Encouraging people to recognise their literacy needs and to get help to improve their literacy is often difficult because of the stigma associated with low literacy; a poor understanding of the benefits of improving literacy; and not knowing how and where to get help.

The Action Plan recognises the need to raise the awareness of individuals, the community and business of the benefits to be gained by improving literacy at all stages in life.

In a 2005 environmental scan of adult literacy in Tasmania, the Department of Education identified word-of-mouth as the method most people used to find out about adult literacy services and support.⁶ A community based awareness campaign, driven from within an informal community and workplace network, to promote avenues of adult literacy support is therefore likely to be an effective way to attract more adults to learn to read.

As well as promoting the benefits of and supporting people to improve their literacy skills it is also important that information is communicated effectively to the community in plain language, avoiding the use of jargon and taking into account the literacy needs of the audience. The Action Plan will promote the use of plain language in written information produced by the State Government.

Other spheres of government, community and business organisations are also encouraged to use plain language in their communication material.

Strategy 2. The establishment of a state wide team of coordinators supported by a pool of trained volunteers to drive the Adult Literacy Network

A small team of Adult Literacy Coordinators was established through the Community Knowledge Network (CKN) in 2009. These coordinators have worked in urban communities and in the Huon Valley to recruit volunteers and provide literacy support. The benefits of this small network are already being seen through preliminary data and case studies demonstrating positive outcomes from matching volunteers with individuals wishing to improve their literacy.

We know this model of adult literacy support works. The Action Plan will build on it to extend the team of coordinators state wide, and to dramatically increase the number of volunteers available to provide support in each community.

Tasmania has a rapidly ageing population and by 2014, there will be more people aged over 65 than those between the ages of zero and 14 years. This will have significant impacts on our workforce. Many people who have retired from the workforce hold valuable skills, knowledge and experience and are looking for ways to give back to the community through volunteer work. The numbers of people looking for opportunities to volunteer are set to rise exponentially as the population ages.

The Action Plan capitalises on Tasmania's ageing population by providing another avenue for people to volunteer; to assist people in their community to improve their literacy skills. Volunteer tutor training will be provided free of charge for those wishing to participate and Adult Literacy Coordinators will ensure each volunteer tutor is matched appropriately with community members.

Strategy 3. The development of key indicators to measure improvements in adult literacy support and outcomes.

The provision of adult literacy support and improvements in adult literacy skills are difficult to quantify and very difficult to report on. However large initiatives such as the Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan require measurement, benchmarks and targets to ensure success.

The Tasmanian community has set a target in relation to improvements in adult literacy through Tasmania Together and this Action Plan strives to meet that target. However, we recognise that this is not enough to measure our success. Engaging people in literacy support is central to this Action Plan. We therefore need to measure the number of people receiving support and the impacts this support is having on self esteem, confidence and ability to move into further training or employment.

To achieve this, a framework has been developed for gathering data and reporting on the provision of adult literacy support. This framework, which includes indicators such as the numbers of volunteer tutors trained and the numbers of clients receiving support will measure the impact of all programs funded through the Action Plan. Each year a report will be compiled detailing results against these indicators and progress towards the 2020 Tasmania Together target.

See section 7. Monitoring and Review for details of framework.

6. Summary of Actions

Strategy	Action	Description	How
I	1.1	An Adult Literacy Investment Fund will be established. This fund will provide \$1 million a year over four years to fund programs in workplaces and communities	The Government will provide \$1 million a year over four years to support adult literacy training through the Community Knowledge Network (CKN), other registered training organisations (RTOs), community organisations and in workplaces
	1.2	Establish a Community of Practice for adult literacy workers and volunteers	A Project Officer will develop a community of practice including an online portal to share information and resources
	1.3	Provide additional literacy support to apprentices and trainees	The current literacy and numeracy support program at the Tasmanian Skills Institute will be extended. It will include the pilot of an online literacy and numeracy program to support apprentices and trainees in remote and regional areas
	1.4	Further collaboration with the Australian Government on Adult Literacy	Work will begin with the Australian Government to collaborate on the provision of literacy support and training for job seekers
	1.5	Provide diversity training for frontline service staff	
	1.6	Raise community awareness of adult literacy	The Social Inclusion Unit will partner with Government agencies and the community sector to invest in an adult literacy and life skills initiative incorporating community based awareness raising around adult literacy

When	Indicators for Implementation	Cost over 4 years
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of projects funded • Number of clients receiving literacy support • Number of clients increasing one level on the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) • Number of trained literacy volunteers registered with CKN • Number of literacy clients moving on to other education and training programs within three months of receiving support • Number of literacy clients gaining employment within three months of receiving support • Number of clients demonstrating increased confidence and self esteem 	\$4 000 000
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Officer employed • Website established 	\$370 000
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of apprentices and trainees at the Tasmanian Skills Institute accessing additional literacy and numeracy support 	\$700 000
2010	To be agreed	To be agreed
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of state service employees delivering frontline services who have undertaken diversity training 	Cost included in extension of the Adult Literacy Coordinator Network
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of community based awareness raising programs funded 	\$350 000

Strategy	Action	Description	How
	1.7	Plain language will be promoted	Best practice examples of language in public documents will be promoted across the State Service. Government and non government organisations will be assisted to deliver messages that are clear and simple
2	2.1	Extend the Adult Literacy Coordinator Network throughout the state	Up to 16.5 full time equivalent (FTE) additional Adult Literacy Coordinators will be employed by CKN to work across all Tasmanian communities. They will be supported by a team of trained adult literacy volunteers
	2.2	Increase literacy support available to inmates of the Tasmania Prison Service	Three Adult Literacy Coordinators will be located in Tasmania Prison Service to coordinate a team of volunteers to provide support and training to inmates pre and post release, and those serving community orders
3	3.1	Consistently and transparently measure progress on improving adult literacy against meaningful indicators	Skills Tasmania will report on all adult literacy projects funded through the Action Plan against a set of indicators developed by the Community Knowledge Network. These indicators include the numbers of people accessing support and the numbers of people reporting improvements in self esteem and or moving on to further training or employment

When	Indicators for Implementation	Cost over 4 years
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of best practice examples of public language that are promoted throughout the state service 	N/A
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of trained literacy volunteers registered with CKN • Number of clients receiving literacy support • Number of clients increasing one level on the ACSF • Number of trained literacy volunteers registered with CKN • Number of literacy clients moving on to other education and training programs within 3 months of receiving support • Number of literacy clients gaining employment within 3 months of receiving support • Number of clients demonstrating increased confidence and self esteem 	\$6 626 000
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of clients receiving literacy support • Number of clients increasing one level on the ACSF • Number of trained literacy volunteers registered with CKN • Number of literacy clients moving on to other education and training programs within 3 months of receiving support • Number of clients demonstrating increased confidence and self esteem 	Cost included in extension of the Adult Literacy Coordinator Network
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of clients receiving literacy support • Number of clients increasing one level on the ACSF • Number of trained literacy volunteers registered with CKN • Number of literacy clients moving on to other education and training programs within 3 months of receiving support • Number of clients demonstrating increased confidence and self esteem • The proportion of 15-74 year old Tasmanians with level 3 or above Literacy Skills (Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey) 	N/A

7. Monitoring and Review

This section describes how improvements in adult literacy skills in Tasmania will be measured, and how the implementation and success of the Action Plan will be monitored.

7.1 An Adult Literacy Coalition

An Adult Literacy Coalition will be convened to monitor the implementation of the Adult Literacy Action Plan. The Coalition will be comprised of independent peak interest groups for adult literacy representing community, industry and employers. The Coalition will be supported by Skills Tasmania and will meet annually to monitor progress.

7.2 Reporting on progress

An annual report on the Government's progress towards implementing the Action Plan will be published each year. The report will include an update on the status of each action and progress towards key performance measures and targets.

An evaluation of the effectiveness of the Action Plan's key initiatives – the expanded Adult Literacy Coordinator Network and the Adult Literacy Investment Fund – will be undertaken 12 months after their commencement.

7.3 Performance Measures and Targets

The outcomes of improved literacy levels of Tasmanians as well as participation in adult literacy support will be monitored to measure the success of the Action Plan.

7.3.1 Literacy Outcomes

Increase the proportion of persons (15-74 years) who are considered to be functionally literate.
(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2008. Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, Summary Results, 2006, Catalogue Number 4228.0)

Baseline (2006):	51.0% prose literacy
	49.3% document literacy
	43.8% numeracy
	26.9% problem solving
	36.6% health literacy

Targets:

Prose Literacy (Tasmania Together)

2010	53.5%
2015	56.0%
2020	58.5%

Document Literacy (Tasmania Together)

2010	53.5%
2015	56.0%
2020	58.5%

Numeracy, problem solving and health literacy targets are still to be established.

7.3.2 Working towards the Tasmania Together target

The Community Knowledge Network estimates that a network of 23 Adult Literacy Coordinators can support up to 15 000 Tasmanians to improve their literacy skills between 2010 and 2020. This effort, combined with improvements gained through workplace programs, the training system and other community literacy programs, means Tasmania will move positively towards the target of 58.5% of 15-74 year olds assessed as functionally literate.

7.3.3 Participation in adult literacy support data and reporting framework

The following indicators will be used to measure the effectiveness of the Action Plans Key Initiatives

Outcome	Measure
1. Increased number of adult Tasmanians receiving one-to-one literacy support within their communities	Number of clients receiving literacy support
2. Increased number of adult literacy projects funded	Number of projects funded
3. Improved literacy levels of program participants	Number of clients increasing one level on the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)
4. Increased levels of participation in education and training by program participants	Number of clients moving on to other education and training programs within three months of receiving support
5. Increased employment outcomes for program participants	Number of clients gaining employment within three months of receiving support
6. Improvement in confidence and self esteem levels of literacy program participants	Number of literacy program participants demonstrating increased confidence and self esteem
7. Increased number of trained volunteers with the capacity to provide literacy support to adult Tasmanians	Number of trained literacy volunteers registered with CKN
8. Increased number of apprentices and trainees are assisted with literacy and numeracy support	Number of apprentice and trainees accessing additional literacy and numeracy support
9. Three Adult Literacy Coordinators working in the Tasmanian Prison Service to coordinate a team of volunteers to provide support and training to inmates pre and post release, and those serving community orders	Number of clients receiving literacy support
10. State service employees delivering frontline services are trained to better understand the barriers people face due to low literacy and how to assist them	Number of state service employees delivering frontline services who have undertaken diversity training
11. Improvement in the use of plain language in public documents	Number of best practice examples of plain language that are promoted throughout the state service

The baselines for these measures will be established after the first year of operation and appropriate growth targets will also be established when appropriate data is available.

8. How to get involved

To find out more about adult literacy programs and support services, the following national and state services can help:

Reading Writing Hotline – Free call 1300 655 506 to locate your nearest service.

Centrelink – eligible jobseekers can ask about Language, Literacy and Numeracy Training at their local Centrelink office.

Community Knowledge Network – (03) 6233 7511 to find out about the Adult Literacy Coordinator Network, or to become an Adult Literacy Volunteer Tutor

Skills Tasmania – Free call 1800 655 846 to find out more about the Adult Literacy Action Plan, associated funding programs and the Adult Literacy Coalition.

8.1 References

- ¹ Hartley & Horne 2006. *Social and economic benefits of improved adult literacy: towards a better understanding*. Australian Council for Adult Literacy, NCVET.
- ² Office of Educational Research and Improvement, United States Department of Education. 1993. Research Report: Parents' Literacy and Their Children's Success in School: Recent Research, Promising Practices and Research Implications. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/OR/ResearchRpts/parlit.html>
- ³ Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) 2006. *Review of Literature: Workplace English Language and Literacy*.
- ⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2008. *Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, Summary Results, 2006*. Catalogue Number 4228.0
- ⁵ ABS 2008. *Experimental Estimates of Adult Literacy for Local Government Areas*. Cat No. 1352.0.55.094.
- ⁶ Department of Education 2005. *Adult literacy provision in Tasmania 2004/05*.

