



Time to take action across Australia

Dear Committee members

Being literate is a life skill any society would want for all of its people and yet Australia falls well short. This has been the case for decades. The link between work skills and life skills, self esteem and confidence are well established and yet low literacy levels in adults in Australia remain.

The 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed that 49% of adult Tasmanians did not have the basic skills need to understand and use information from newspapers, magazines, books and brochures. These figures drove the Tasmanian Government to take action in a unique way as it recognized that improving literacy levels would require significant cultural change within the community. In 2012, the government took a collective impact approach (Ref: http://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact). Fundamental to that approach was recognition this 'wicked' problem belonged to the whole community and not just government. All Tasmanians need to take action to improve literacy levels. Building and supporting a network made up of business, community and government organisations as well as individuals that have good literacy skills, and individuals that have poor literacy skills, has been the focus of the State's strategy.

The 26TEN network is sponsored by the Tasmanian Government and recognises that the breath of the network will harness resources way beyond those the Government can provide. The network's philosophy is anchored in taking action and empowering all members to do so. Through taking this approach as a whole state there is some chance to abolish the stigma that comes with low literacy, and for adults to want to seek help and improve their literacy. Organisations and individuals have fostered this ethos and those that can help others are doing just that. This approach has captured people from all walks of life and slowly over time attitudes are changing. In 2020, we conducted a detailed evaluation of our progress. This evaluation demonstrates 26TEN is an effective model that is seeing people's lives change and productivity improve.

Attached is more detailed information on our work in Tasmania that is relevant to your Inquiry. We are most willing to participate in this Inquiry in any way that will help progress action in Australia to improve adult literacy across the country in both regional and urban areas.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Siobhan Gaskell'.

On behalf of the 26TEN Coalition
Siobhan Gaskell, Convenor
March 2021

26TEN Coalition – Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the importance of Adult Literacy

Summary

The Committee refer to the following 26TEN publications and their recommendations:

- [26TEN Progress Report: 26TEN in 2020: How far we've come as a state towards better adult literacy and numeracy in Tasmania and what we've learnt](#)
- [26TEN Strategy – The Socio-Economic Impact of Tasmania's investment in Adult Literacy and Numeracy \(July 2018 – June 2019\)](#)
- [Agricultural Language, Literacy and Numeracy in Tasmania.](#)

Along with [26TEN Strategy: Tasmania's Strategy for Adult Literacy and Numeracy 2016-2025](#), this uniquely Tasmanian approach and the recommendations contained in these reports are presented to the Committee for consideration nationally.

The Committee note 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 OECD Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).

The Committee consider alternative approaches to delivering adult literacy and numeracy programs in rural and regional Australia, similar to the 26TEN Communities: Local Literacy for Work and Life program.

The Committee note that adult literacy needs to be given the highest priority across a range of government portfolios as reading, writing, maths and digital literacy skills affect the health, legal, educational, social outcomes and civic participation of Australian citizens. That is, low literacy and numeracy has a significant impact on the economic and social well-being of Australian citizens. This is not just a migrant or First Nations issue, in Tasmania's experience the characteristics of individuals with low literacy and numeracy are much broader and exasperated by the requirement of a modern society.

Introduction

The 26TEN Strategy is a unique, long-term campaign to lift literacy and numeracy in Tasmanian adults.

- 26TEN refers to the 26 letters of the alphabet we use for reading and writing and the ten digits we use for counting.
- 26TEN is about individuals, business, community and government working together to improve adult literacy skills in Tasmania.

The 26TEN Coalition leads whole-of-community involvement in 26TEN. It provides advice to the Minister for Education and Training on progressing government initiatives to improve adult literacy in Tasmania. The Coalition works to establish 26TEN communities and industries where:

- everyone knows about adult literacy and 26TEN,
- everyone is supported to improve their skills and to help others, and
- everyone communicates clearly in plain English.

26TEN Coalition members seek to influence change within their sectors and across governments. To find out more about 26TEN and the Coalition go to: www.26TEN.tas.gov.au.

Key points

A whole state-wide approach

The problem is clear, too many adult Australian's right now how have trouble with:

- filling in forms
- reading safety signs
- using a calculator
- getting their driver's licence
- reading to their children
- using internet banking
- understanding medical instructions
- reading critical health information online or in paper form
- understanding legal documents or procedures.

Adult literacy is a wicked problem requiring everyone taking action to lifting the skills. In Tasmania, that is why, the 26TEN Strategy and Coalition take a whole state-wide approach to helping those Tasmanians who have low literacy and numeracy skills get the skills they need. It is building around a network of over 1000 organisations and people committed to improving adult literacy and numeracy in Tasmania - business, community, government and individuals are working together to make a difference.

Where is the current research and data?

In Tasmania, based on OECD data (2011) there are 182,000 Tasmanians below OECD level 3 for literacy and 217,968 for numeracy. The current baseline is 49.8 per cent literacy and 40.4 per cent numeracy.

- This and previous ABS data provided the impetus for a trip artisan approach to addressing Adult Literacy in Tasmania.
- There is new OECD data expected in 2023 but the Australian Government has not investment in this survey to the same extent, leaving it up to each State to fund equally comparable sample sizes. Without this data, how will Australia future policy development be informed.
- Across Australia, OECD survey results are not much dissimilar yet there is a vacuum in data and research to inform policy development around improving the foundations skills of Australians.
- 26TEN has undertaken some research into the importance of Adult literacy on peoples' lives.
- We have found that what is holding them back is the stigma and shame associated with low literacy and numeracy.

More needs to be done at the national level, particularly in meeting the demand of help required in rural and regional locations within communities (and the industries that reside here) around Australia.

For example, combined with expert knowledge and qualifications, consideration should be given to volunteer led literacy skills programs. Further, adopting best practice delivery methods to lift skills is also important and this is best influenced by policy makers and researchers.

A new program response: 26TEN Communities: Local Literacy for Work and Life

Led by the 26TEN Coalition, a new approach has been developed through community feedback, what has been learned from the original eight 26TEN Communities, and what has been identified through the 2020 Five-Year Progress Report of 26TEN Tasmania. Because we know that it takes time to improve a person's skills.

26TEN Communities is a long-term investment in building literacy and numeracy skills in adult Tasmanians. This targeted place-based approach will have a measurable impact on literacy and numeracy in Tasmania. It builds on the foundational work of the original eight 26TEN Communities¹.

Combined with this evidence-based research, the approach also draws from experience and research on collective impact models and place-based approaches. Research shows that a collective placed based approach requires long-term investment in order to have the time necessary to lay a strong foundation, build capacities, networks and adapt strategies.²

What is the goal?

Tasmanian communities take action to lift literacy and numeracy skills locally.

- Communities across Tasmania will be supported so that individuals will be able to get the literacy support they need in their local community.
- The initiative will seek to train locals and local organisations to take action. This will generate sustainable, community-led change, shifting from short-term grants to longer-term place-based funding.

26TEN Communities will give priority to building the literacy and numeracy skills of residents, facilitated by 26TEN Local Engagement Officers (Engagement Officers) in target communities. Their role will be to lift literacy and numeracy skills by mobilising new and existing local government, business and community resources. Shifting the model from short-term grants to longer term place-based funding will allow for the change to be sustainable over time and an adequate timeframe to measure the impact of the program.

The new model will be owned and driven by local communities, facilitated by 26TEN as representative of Government, and supported by business and industry. It will operate close to the point of delivery, providing targeted support that lifts the skills of people in the specific local area.

In 26TEN Communities, the Engagement Officers will identify the local literacy and numeracy needs and opportunities at a community level, mobilising new and existing resources in a strategic way. For example, the Engagement Officer may work with TasTAFE to ensure their literacy and numeracy training is relevant to the needs of local community members. The focus will be on local job seekers and those already in work who need to lift their literacy and numeracy skills. They will play a role in brokering 26TEN employer grant support for key businesses in their regions. They will do this by building relationships with local organisations, local government, business and industry. By having a stronger local collective, the Engagement Officer will be able to lift the skills of the community.

The Engagement Officer will build a new workforce within the community so that client demand can be met where the client lives. This will be done by training more local community tutors to support those who need help. To support this, the Engagement Officer will draw from the following Tasmanian Adult Learning Strategy initiatives:

- Growing and strengthening Tasmania's adult literacy and numeracy workforce
- Expanding the TasTAFE online literacy and numeracy volunteers training program for the business and community sector.

¹ Break O'Day, Burnie, Circular Head, Derwent Valley, Devonport, Glenorchy, Huon Valley, Launceston.

² Schmitz, P. *Funding the Long Game in Collective Impact*

<https://www.collectiveimpactforum.org/sites/default/files/Funding%20the%20Long%20Game%20in%20Collective%20Impact.pdf>

References;

[Adult Learning Strategy 2020-23.pdf \(skills.tas.gov.au\)](#)

26TEN Coalition Budget proposal: 26TEN Communities for Work and Life (DOC/20/22608)

26TEN Strategy – The Socio-Economic Impact of Tasmania’s investment in Adult Literacy and Numeracy (July 2018 – June 2019)

26TEN Progress Report: *26TEN in 2020: How far we’ve come as a state towards better adult literacy and numeracy in Tasmania and what we’ve learnt*

26TEN Tasmania: Tasmania’s Plan for adult literacy 2016-2025: [26TEN Strategy](#)

26TEN Tasmania Strategy Action Plan 2018-2020: 26ten.tas.gov.au/resources/old/Documents/action-plan.html

Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan 2010-15: [Tasmanian-Adult-Literacy-Action-Plan](#)

Dymock, D, National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2007, *Community adult language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia: diverse approaches and outcomes*, NCVET, Adelaide, viewed 30 Apr 2020, <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/publications/all-publications/community-adult-language,-literacy-and-numeracy-provision-in-australia-diverse-approaches-and-outcomes>>.

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