

Press Release.

Still no national plan for Lifelong Learning

ACDE Calls for Development of National Lifelong Learning Policy for Australia

The Australian Council of Deans of Education calls on the major parties to develop a National Lifelong Learning Policy for Australia. Australians have voted for lifelong learning but are still waiting for government leadership. TAFE enrolment growth is estimated at 6 per cent for next year, and Adult and Community Education is expanding at 7-8 per cent a year (NSW Board of Adult and Community Education 2000). The Commonwealth government, however, continues to wash its hands of responsibility for learning throughout life.

Unlike states such as the UK, we have no Minister for Lifelong Learning and no national framework for coordinating educational sectors. Every year the Commonwealth fights the states over TAFE funding, and the result is an underfunded sector. An estimated \$310 million per year extra is needed to provide for the expected growth in TAFE (Hewett 2001).

Adult and Community Education (ACE) is also growing rapidly, as more Australians desire to learn throughout their lives. Again, though, there is no national framework, and states are providing very different levels of education. Victoria and NSW, for instance, provide state-supported and coordinated ACE sectors, but the other states are, to varying degrees, less supportive. The Northern Territory government does not even recognise ACE per se, despite the existence of many programs there (Golding, Davies & Volkoff 2001: 40).

We must do better as a nation. Lifelong learning means not only supporting the TAFE and ACE sectors, but encouraging new developments in schools, homes and workplaces. The Commonwealth government needs to be leading this charge. We need schools which are open outside of usual hours, and which act as community centres where others can learn; we need more links between schools and TAFE providers, between universities and TAFEs, and between formal and informal education providers.

Learning Cities such as that established in Albury-Wodonga need to be expanded, so that barriers to learning are brought down and education is restored to communities. Older Australians must be encouraged to participate in ACE more, while at the other end of the spectrum, our preschool education sector is currently the worst-funded in the OECD.

Australia's median age will rise from 34 to 45 in the next fifty years (NCVER 2000: 18). Older Australians need to be encouraged to reskill and to learn throughout their lives, and younger Australians need to learn to enjoy learning. The ACDE calls on the major parties to create a national framework for lifelong learning, to increase funding for VET and ACE, and to promote innovative learning programs.