



NSW Adult Literacy & Numeracy Council

11 March, 2015

The Hon. Luke Foley MLC
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney, 2000

leader.opposition@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Foley,

I am writing on behalf of the NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council. We are the NSW professional peak body for adult literacy and numeracy. Our members include adult literacy and numeracy teachers and trainers in public and private educational providers and libraries, education policy managers, trainee teachers, teacher educators and researchers.

We are writing to you to seek your party's commitment, should you win the upcoming state election, to redress some serious issues that have surfaced since the implementation of the Smart and Skilled reforms that are affecting some of the most vulnerable groups of adults in NSW. We note your party is committed to abolishing the Smart and Skilled program and urge you to consider a replacement policy that provides for:

- quality free adult literacy and numeracy provision for 'second chance' learners who are seeking to re-engage in education and improve their life and work opportunities, after their unsuccessful experiences in the school system;
- quality free adult English language provision for adult migrants for whom the free Adult Migrant English Programme (AMEP) provision is insufficient to enable them to participate fully in the Australian community; and
- funding of English, language and literacy support for students and apprentices enrolled in Vocational Education and Training (VET programs). It is inequitable that students who require such support are required to pay under the Smart and Skilled program.

Whilst we fully support your party's election commitments related to abolishing the Smart and Skilled reforms, limiting the amount of NSW contestable VET funding and increasing apprenticeships, we note you have made no specific reference to improving provision of adult literacy, numeracy and English language provision. Prior to Smart and Skilled implementation most of these courses were fee free to TAFE NSW learners to support widespread take up. This recognised that for many potential students, imposing a fee put these courses out of reach. We note your policy to return TAFE fees to 2014 levels so would like assurance that this means removing fees for adult literacy, numeracy and English language courses if your party is elected.

NSW has been recognised nationally as a leader in the public provision of educational access and equity programs for adults through all of the types of provisions outlined above: Adult Basic Education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and VET learner support. This reputation is now at risk because, with a very few exceptions, learners have to pay to access these kinds of programs. Consequently, many of these programs have become financially unviable for many TAFE colleges and they have stopped offering them. Unless some urgent policy reversal is made, the access and opportunities to participation and success in further education and training and work afforded by these programs are put at risk for the most vulnerable members of NSW. The

risks extend to detrimental effects on these adults' health and well being, employment prospects, ability to support their children in their education, and active and responsible citizenship. The cost of these risks will be borne not only by the affected individuals and their families, but by the public health, law and justice and welfare systems.

Our organisation has recently received a telephone call from an adult learner who found that the adult literacy class that he was attending in a Sydney TAFE college was being discontinued. He rang us to help him locate another class because he was making progress in his literacy development - learning about 'different consonants and vowels' and gaining some control over his reading and writing when his class was cut. This is tragic, not only for the learner who called us, but also as a statement of the State's commitment to lifelong education.

The emphasis that Smart and Skilled places on learning exclusively for the job market ignores the much important additional benefits that come to individuals and the community from lifelong learning.

Free public provision of basic education for adults can be transformative for the lives of many people. We enclose a DVD that features four adult literacy/ numeracy classes in NSW. The learners in the DVD express the significance of these programs to their lives.

We seek your commitment in writing outlining what you and your party will do to redress the grave social injustice that will be the legacy of NSW's Smart and Skilled Policy without an urgent intervention. The Council will be very pleased to have input into what can be done.

Yours sincerely

Keiko Yasukawa,

NSWALNC President