



The Hon. Peter Hall, MLC
Minister for Higher Education and Skills
Level 1
2 Treasury Place
East Melbourne
Victoria, 3002

January 30, 2014

Dear Minister Hall,

The Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC), strongly object to the recent changes to subsidies of Foundation Skills funding. The cuts to the subsidies have seen many providers necessarily having to increase fees. This is a significant and an unfortunate result, which will be felt by many providers as they attempt to minimize the impact on learners who often are already facing financial hardship, as well as experiencing multiple and complex needs.

VALBEC members include many Learn Local organisations and individuals either working or volunteering in the area of Language, Literacy and Numeracy provision. Our members typically work with the most vulnerable people in society; those for whom education has 'not always been accessible and for whom access is once again being threatened. The 'Social Inclusion in Australia' report revealed that 5% of Australian adults experience three or more complex disadvantages that can limit their participation in society. In 2011, 75% of people aged 20 – 24 had a year 12 certificate but people living in the most disadvantaged areas are 20% less likely to finish year 12 or equivalent.¹

VALBEC members are committed to the basic premise that all Australians have the right to access education, and especially basic language, literacy and numeracy provision. Many studies have shown that increased literacy and numeracy skills are synonymous with higher rates of employment and meaningful participation in society. Even though the sector is committed to minimizing the impact of increased fees on learners in this field, these cuts have placed providers in an unsustainable position in this regard.

Many learners who attend Learn Local, TAFE, and other Registered Training Organisations have barriers to learning and may have had negative learning experiences in the past. Returning to study is already quite daunting and challenging. It is essential that adequate and appropriate funding is restored in order to provide relevant and accessible training and learning opportunities to those who most need them in both metropolitan and regional areas of Victoria.

¹ Social Inclusion Australia: How Australia is faring (2010).





“There is now extensive evidence of the value of having literacy and numeracy skills – our society values these skills and rewards them.”²

Member organisations have expressed strong concern that the result of the cuts to funding of foundation courses will:

- Adversely affect adult literacy and English as Additional Language learners, who are eligible for Victorian Training Guarantee funding by *increasing the amount the student must pay in fees*.
- Diminish support for students in these programs as providers try to find cost-saving measures.
- Cause Learn Local organisations to either cease to deliver these programs or to increase the fees, thereby further isolating already financially disadvantaged learners.
- Result in providers necessarily having to increase fees by as much as 18% to cover the cost of classes offered which will result in students being excluded and staff cutbacks.
- Result in fewer opportunities for staff professional development
- Increase the demand for learner fees to be covered by support agencies such as Job Service Agencies, resulting in fewer learners being supported by these agencies.
- Further penalize regional TAFEs, already affected by massive cuts to their sector.

VALBEC ask that you re-examine the funding of our sector and restore appropriate funding.

VALBEC would welcome an opportunity to discuss this with you in person.

Yours sincerely,

Linno Rhodes
VALBEC Co-President
On behalf of the committee.

² Tout D., Part 1: Lessons Learnt from International Assessments, in ***Fine Print***, vol 36, 2, 0
2013

