

MEDIA RELEASE

National productivity linked to adult literacy and numeracy

03 May 2012: Investment in increasing adult literacy and numeracy levels may be the key to boosting Australia's productivity, delegates at the first national conference on adult language, literacy and numeracy assessment will be told tomorrow.

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) has convened the National Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Conference in response to increasing national and state interest in addressing and improving the language, literacy and numeracy skills of Australian youth and adults participating in the vocational, education and training (VET) sector and in Australia's workforce.

Speaking ahead of the conference, ACER Senior Research Fellow Mr David Tout said international studies have demonstrated that investment in increasing the literacy and numeracy skills of adults has a direct and positive impact on productivity and GDP per capita.

"Low adult literacy and numeracy costs Australia at individual, family, economic and social levels," said Mr Tout. "Investment in adult literacy and numeracy education can therefore benefit individuals and families as well as Australia's economy and society."

Australian Industry Group's Director – Education and Training, Ms Megan Lilly, will deliver the first keynote presentation of the conference, on the findings of the 2012 National Workforce Literacy Project report, *When Words Fail*. The report confirms employers overwhelmingly indicate that they are experiencing problems with literacy and numeracy skills in their workforce, resulting in reduced productivity.

"Addressing workforce literacy and numeracy issues is a shared responsibility between government, individuals, education authorities and employers," said Ms Lilly. "Yet while there is willingness on the part of employers to play a role in building workforce literacy and numeracy skills, only eight per cent of our survey respondents told us they have adequate capacity to do so."

The most recent adult literacy and numeracy survey, conducted in 2007, revealed that about half of Australia's adult population has insufficient literacy and numeracy skills to cope in modern society. Updated statistics will be available next year when the report on the 2011 OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) is released.

PIAAC is part of the OECD Skills Strategy, an initiative being launched this month that aims to optimise the use of skills in the workforce to promote economic growth and social inclusion. Together with ACER Research Director Ms Juliette Mendelovits, Mr Tout will present an overview of PIAAC at the conference, and will explain how such survey frameworks and instruments can inform teaching and assessment practices in workplace and VET contexts.

The National Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Conference will take place between 9am and 5pm on Friday 4 May at the William Angliss Institute Conference Centre in Melbourne. Further information including a full list of speakers and topics is available from <http://www.acer.edu.au/nallnac/>

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