

MEDIA RELEASE

Improve literacy and numeracy skills for Australia's future

30 April 2014: The third annual National Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Conference, hosted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in Melbourne tomorrow, will bring together delegates from across the post-compulsory, vocational, adult and workplace education and training sectors to investigate the implications of key international surveys for Australian citizens and workers.

Results from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) reveal that large numbers of Australians have low foundational skills in literacy and numeracy, which have a negative impact on individuals, the economy and society.

“International assessment programs such as PISA and PIAAC enable governments to monitor educational outcomes within a common international framework. The data also provide rich information for countries to identify practices that do and do not improve learning opportunities for youth and adults, and to analyse the range of factors that influence performance,” said ACER Chief Executive, Professor Geoff Masters AO.

“It is vital that we bring together experts, researchers, practitioners and policy makers who have an interest in both compulsory and post-compulsory schooling to do exactly that,” he said.

“With the proportion of the population over 65 years expected to almost double to around 25 per cent over the next 40 years, there are clear individual, economic and social benefits to improving foundational skills.

“Adults with high proficiencies in literacy and numeracy are much more likely to report good health, be employed, have higher earnings, and have positive social dispositions.”

Mr David Tout, Senior Research Fellow and Manager of Corporate and Vocational Assessment Services at ACER, will tell delegates at the conference that the PIAAC and PISA results reveal that millions of Australians lack essential literacy and numeracy skills.

“PISA shows that in both literacy and numeracy, Australia's performance has significantly declined since 2000, but, equally as worrying, PIAAC shows a decline in adult numeracy and significantly weaker performance in numeracy compared to literacy.

“We need to prioritise numeracy through upskilling and training many more personnel involved in providing education and training in numeracy, and targeting adult numeracy and maths programs to women. We also need to conduct further research so we can understand much more about the teaching and learning of numeracy, for the good of all Australians and the future of Australia.”

Maja Rynko, Assistant Professor at the Educational Research Institute, Poland, Linda Shohet, Executive Director of the Centre for Literacy, Canada, and William Thorn, Senior Analyst, OECD, will join other plenary and panel speakers at the conference.

The third National Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Conference takes place at Rendezvous Grand Hotel, Melbourne, on Thursday 1 and Friday 2 May 2014. More details are available at <http://www.acer.edu.au/nallnac>

Mr David Tout is available for comment.

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