Appendix 3

Australian Prose Literacy data.

The Australian adult literacy data derived from an international project between the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (0ECD) and 40 member countries highlights the significant numbers of Australian adults with limited or low literacy skills.[12] It is called the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Literacy Skills (PIAAC). The research in 2013 was the third iteration of this data. It demonstrated that adult literacy skills had not changed across the previous 12-15 years in Australia. Further analysis has been processed and released in 2016 and 2019. In that time there have been no changes to the basic data. Plans are underway for the next version of this data in 2022-23.

The data was for adults from 16 years to 65 years. However, it did **not** include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, nor people in institutions. (Consider prisons, group homes, institutional care, hospitals, community residential services, mental health facilities, nursing homes). These individuals are known to have significantly poorer literacy than the participants identified in this research.

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[1] Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (2013, 2016, 2019) Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Literacy Skills. http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/

[2] Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) #4228. Programme for the International assessment of Adult Literacy Skills www.abs.gov.au

This data does not specifically include people with disability, including the Deaf community, people with an intellectual disability or an acquired disability such as following a head injury, stroke or with dementia. Nor does it specifically include people with mental illness. Participants in the study were placed in categories of 'below level 1' to 'level 5' based on their results of a wide range of day to day reading tasks.

The data indicates: -

- 44% of the adult Australian population do **not** have the literacy skills to manage a range of day to day reading tasks. This was 7.3 million Australian adults in 2013.[3]
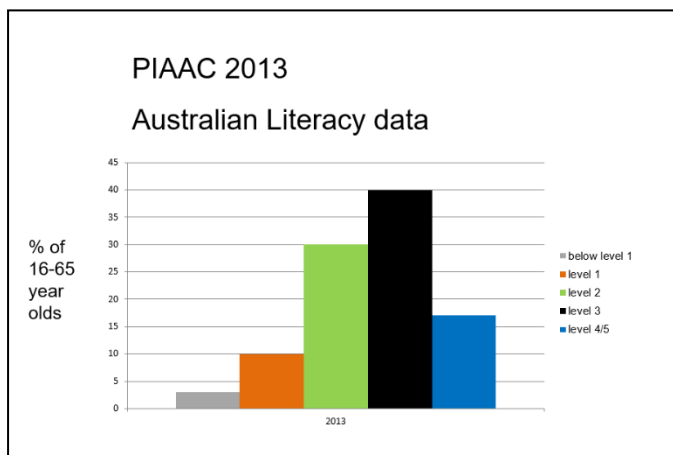 In the graph below this is
  - below level 1 (grey);
  - level 1 (orange);
  - level 2 (green);
- 56% of the adult Australian population can manage a range a day to day reading tasks. For these adults Plain Language is very useful.
  In the graph below this is
  - level 3 (black)
  - level 4/5 (blue).

The development and access to Easy English is so more of the 44% of the adult Australian population may have access to meaningful written information they can read, understand and relate to. The description of Proficiency of the PIAAC for Below Level 1 says

> "*Individuals at this level can read brief texts on familiar topics and locate a single piece of specific information identical in form to information in the question or*

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[3] ABS #4228

> *directive. They are not required to understand the structure of sentences to paragraphs and only a basic vocabulary knowledge is required." [4]*

When English is a second language, the data suggest up to 53% (10% higher) of these members of our community, do **not** have the literacy to manage a range of day to day reading tasks.

Numerical Literacy

Anything that includes numerical information, i.e. not just counting numbers, but knowing dates, distance, measurement, times and concepts such as before, after, less or more are less well developed than general prose literacy. IN the PIAAC data, for the general community this is at least 10% less well developed.[5] Therefore 53% (63% for people with English as a second language) of adult Australian population do **not** have the numerical literacy to manage a range of day to day reading tasks that include numerical content.

Workplace Literacy and Numeracy

The Australian Industry Group (AI Group), Survey Report Workforce Development Needs. Skilling: A National Imperative, 2018[6] identifies a range of issues in the workplace in the literacy skills of all employees. This is not limited to some people with disability only. It is across the workplace, in all workplaces with or without diagnosed disabilities. Of equal note, a diagnosis of disability does **not** automatically equate to low literacy skills.

In the graph (see next page)[7], it demonstrates 71% of workplaces indicate literacy and numeracy highly affect or moderately affect the workplace.[8] This is a significant percentage. It requires a re-think of how workplace information is written and provided to employees. Writing complex, corporate style content does not meet the needs of far more of the workforce, than a few people or only some people with disability. Workplaces need to be better at implementing policies of more accessible written information, such as Easy English to bridge the gap between what workers can read, and their job tasks.
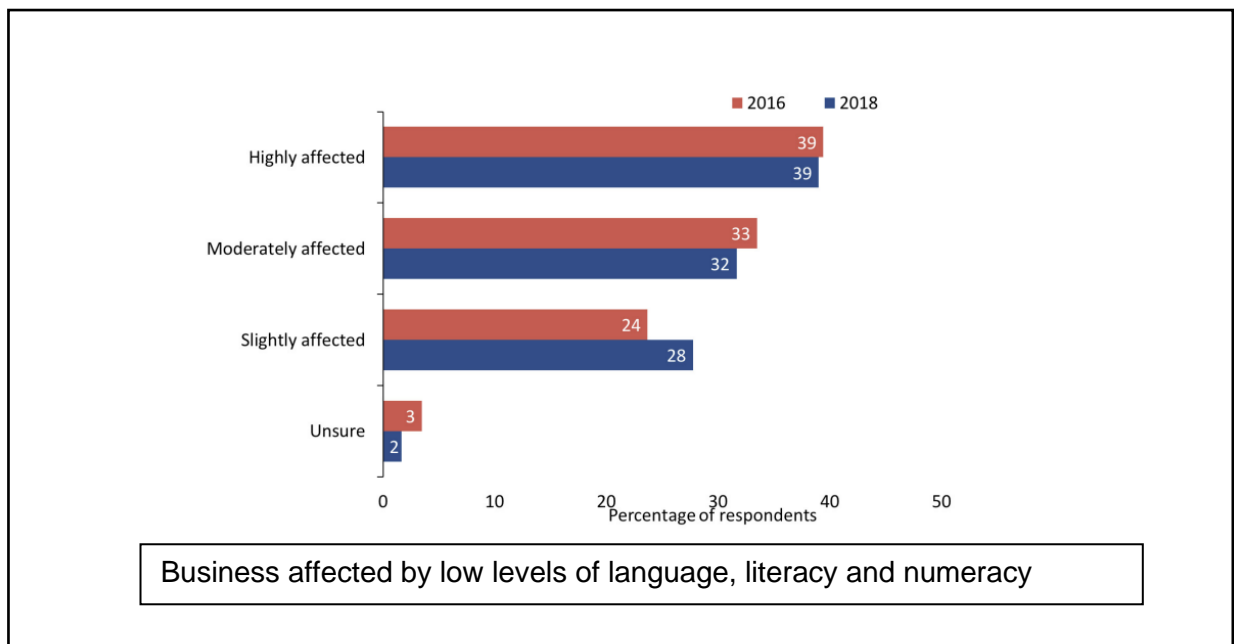
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[4] OECD, 2013 p67.

[5] OECD, 2013

[6] The Australian Industry Group (AI Group), Survey Report Workforce Development Needs. Skilling: A National Imperative (2018) https://cdn.aigroup.com.au/Reports/2018/Survey_Report_WFDNeeds_Skilling_Sept2018.pdf

[7] Ibid page 13.

[8] Ibid page 13.

Business affected by low levels of language, literacy and numeracy

Poor workplace literacy has effects on business such as,

- Poor completion of documents or reports – 55%
- Material wastage/errors/non-compliance of tasks – 31%
- Time wasting - 35%
- Recruitment difficulties – 33%
- Staff lack of confidence/ unwilling to take on new work – 40%
- Financial miscalculations – 25%
- Teamwork problems/communication problems – 50%
- Potential for workplace injuries of unsafe work practices – 26%.[9]

Many businesses identify they need to implement professional development in 2 critical areas of (1) communication skills development training, and (2) internal company training, (50% of businesses surveyed)[10] where they can align the literacy needs of their business with their workforce literacy skills.

In summary, the AI Group report identifies that '99 per cent of employers are affected in some way by low levels of literacy and numeracy in their workforce.'[11]

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[9] Ibid page 14.
[10] Ibid page 15
[11] Ibid page 4

Computer Literacy/Digital Literacy

This data is also from the PIAAC research, and further studies from the Australian Media and Communications Authority (ACMA) and CSIRO. Hard copy documents are not being distributed by the Federal Government on a regular basis for the public. Some business have a policy to be 'paper-less' in their communication with staff and the public. This policy leads to large percentages of staff and members of the public being excluded.

So, why is that important?

Firstly, the computer and use of the internet is based in literacy. Knowing that at least 44% of the adult Australian population do **not** have the literacy to manage a range of day to day reading tasks, this added element of using the internet makes this even more challenging for many people.

You need to be able to know about the keyboard, and location of letters on the keyboard, to be able to spell or at least copy letters into the address menu when searching the internet. When you land on a website there are significant skills required to navigate and locate what you may be looking for. It is common to have no phone number readily available, (or available at all) instead a chat box or email is the primary means to access that service, which relies on literacy once again. This is discriminatory.

It may appear to professionals who use computers daily, that computer access, use of them and the internet is well developed through all our communities. The data below demonstrates this is certainly **not** the case. The Federal Government policies and processes must address this in how information is disseminated and provided to the community.

A 2015 CSIRO[12] investigation is one of a number of pieces of data on use of the internet and computers in Australian households. One in five households do **not** have access to computers. Where are these households likely to be? Low socio-economic groups, institutions and other congregate care including nursing homes.

In the work I do with clients providing Speech Pathology services in community residential units (group homes) it is rare to see a computer available to clients there. During the

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[12] Campbell, S., Mason, C. M., Griffith, C., Dane, S. K., Reeson, A., O'Brien-McInally, B. A., Kimber, J. D. (2013) Broadband Impact and Challenges: Realising the benefits from the digital economy, Australian Centre for Broadband Innovation, CSIRO EP1312215.

pandemic state governments recognised this considerable need, issued laptops and dongles to many families for remote learning. However, being given a laptop and dongle does not equal having digital literacy.

The OECD/PIAAC (2013, 2016,2019)[13] data investigated problem solving in a technology rich (computer) environment. See graph on next page as you read this data. In summary,

- 21% of participants opted out or were unable to complete the basic elements of using a computer, such as moving the mouse on the screen or opening a word document or browser. This is in-line with the 2015 CSIRO data above;
- Another 9% at Below Level 1, were able to use only one generic feature of the computer to find out information;
- 29% at Level 1 in digital use could locate and problem solve basic information, only being able to use widely available and familiar technology applications, such as e-mail software or a web browser. It required a minimal number of operations to find the information needed.
- That leaves only 38% who were able to interact at Level 2 or Level 3, meaning they could use the internet to explore one or two websites (Level 2) or multiple websites and additional applications (Level 3) to read and problem solve to get an answer. Note: there are no higher levels registered.
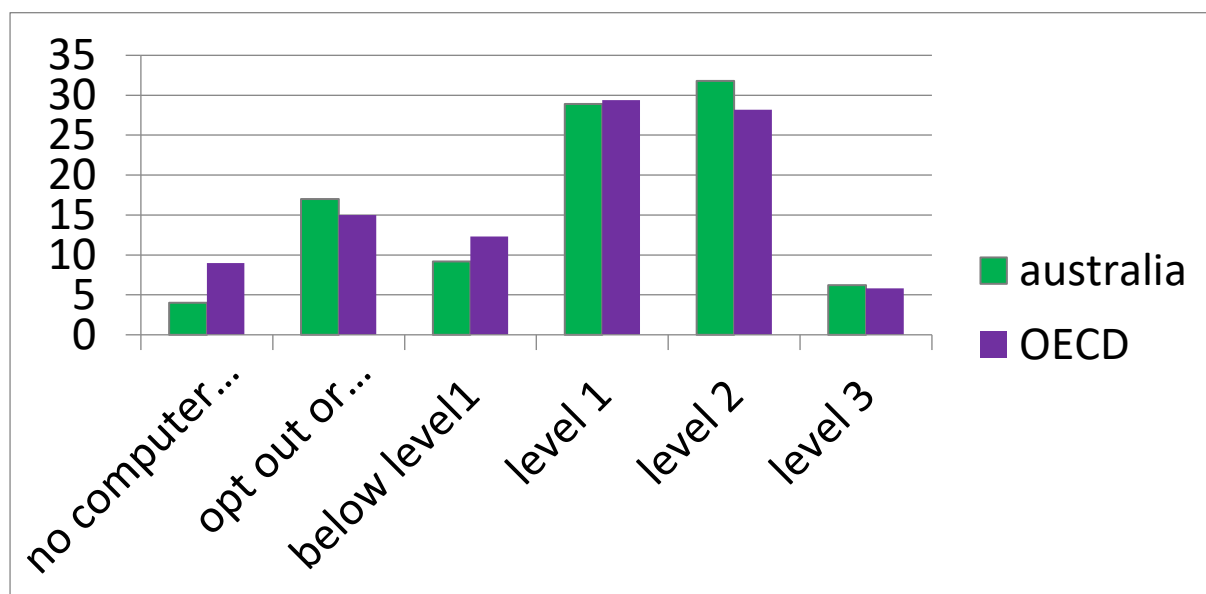
This suggests only two in five people (Level 2 and 3) are able to use the internet at a level of competency to find and locate information, to then use it to work out what they need to do in their workplace.

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[13] OECD/PIAAC 2013, 2016, 2019 http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/

There is some evidence from ACMA that households with older people (65+) have changed some of their access and use of the internet over the previous 6 months (to May 2021) during the pandemic.[14] This includes

- 93% of older Australians have an internet connection at home in 2021, compared with 68% in 2017;
- activities in the previous 6 months
  - video conference/calling - started to use 34%; increased use 41%
  - telehealth – started to use 50%; increased their use 29%;
  - using legal, financial type services online – started to use 15%; increased use 15%;
  - watching video content – started to use 4%; increased use 27%.
- an uptake of use of the internet, but at a lower rate than younger population groups;

Note the activities the majority of older people do **not** do include:

- accessing government services;
- accessing health information.

The report notes the uptake in internet use has mostly been in the categories of entertaining (streaming) and staying connected. It also notes many negative feelings by this age group in using the internet.

Although the ACMA data above on older people and digital use has increased during the pandemic, this does not equate to using the internet for a multitude of tasks including navigating a complex website to locate content they need.

A third study from ACMA, the adult (18+) Australian Digital Inclusion Index, 2020[15] reflects much of this data also. This index weights aspects such as access, affordability (in relation to income) and digital ability to find what you need, to do what you want on the technology.

The average Australian Digital Inclusion Index in the report at March 2020 was 63 (out of 100). A Digital Inclusion Index of less than 53 (out of 100) was considered to be a low Digital

[14] Australian Communications and Media Authority (2021) Communications and media in Australia. The digital lives of older Australianshttps://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2021-05/apo-nid312412.pdf

[15] Australian Communications and Media Authority (2020) Measuring Australia's Digital Divide. Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2020. https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/TLS_ADII_Report-2020_WebU.pdf

Inclusion Index. Across the previous 7 years the average index had increased from 53 to 63, so 10 points in 7 years.

Below is a summary of their findings, which were released in March 2020, as the early stages of the pandemic reached Australia.
- People who were offline – more than 2.5 million people;
- People with a mobile only – limits data availability – 4 million people.

These are more likely to be people who are marginalised and be a significant part of vulnerable communities.

This is the list of groups with a Digital Inclusion Index of **less than** 53.
- House hold income Q5 (under $35k)
- Aged 65 +
- Less than secondary education
- Disability
- Household income Q4 ($35K- $60K).

Other marginalised groups just over the threshold of 53 on the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) were
- Not in labour force (ADII score 54.3);
- Indigenous Australians (ADII score 55.1).

A new report of the adult (18+) Australian Digital Inclusion Index (2021)[16] based on data collection during 2020 and early 2021 during the pandemic has identified some changes.

Firstly, this 2021 data does **not** include data from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, nor does it include any data from the Northern Territory.

It appears the average Australian Digital Inclusion Index has increased to 67. However, further investigation of the data shows those who were already considered to have a high or very high Digital Inclusion Index have increased further. This can be seen in increased skills for these people in working remotely, although there are many who still have challenges.

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[16] Australian Communications and Media Authority (2021) Measuring Australia's Digital Divide. Australian Digital Inclusion Index https://h3e6r2c4.rocketcdn.me/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ADII_2021_Summary-report_V1.pdf

Those who previously had low Digital Inclusion Indexes continue to score low on their Digital Inclusion Index. The gap between those who do and can, and those who can**no**t and do **not** have good Digital Inclusion continues to widened.

There is one exception, which is the parent who was trying to assist their children with remote learning. Of note though, this is only in the very discrete area of using the remote learning tools for their child's engagement in school. It does not assume concurrent development and increased digital literacy in other parts of their life.

In Summary

The OECD/ABS data shows 44% (7.3 million) of the adult Australian population do **not** have the literacy to manage a range of day to day reading tasks. This is worse when it is about numerical information, like is used throughout the day in many workplaces. This is not just one specific group of people in our community, but covers diverse populations from all parts of our communities. Content in Plain Language addresses only part of this need.

Only 30% of adult Australians have the digital literacy to navigate complex websites such as all the Federal Government websites. The Australian Digital Inclusion Index reinforces that this continues up to and including the current years of the pandemic of 2020 and 2021.

The AI Group Survey results re-emphasise the business issues of low and very low workplace literacy and numeracy as significant in running their businesses. The Federal Government needs to develop specific and clear policies for workplaces to more successfully engage with their employees, the employer, Board and committees.

Easy English must be included in any suit of publications for workplaces. Planning and implementation of processes for large numbers of people with low digital inclusion must be included in this access to information policy.

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