

Tips for visiting politicians

(courtesy of the AEU Lobbying Guide:
<http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Tafe/LobGuid.pdf>)

Remember – politicians are there to represent *you*. They're meant to be working *for* you. You're exercising your democratic right by visiting your MP.

1. Be prepared

- Check out the MPs website; have they said anything about education at any stage (assuming they won't have said anything about adult literacy and numeracy)?
- Know what you want to say (see over for some ideas); do your reading about the ALLS survey; know the size of the problem; know what's happening nationally; know your local situation; predict the curly questions and have clear responses worked out; imagine arguing your case with the least supportive person you know and prepare answers accordingly (Why can't people read and write? Teachers aren't doing their jobs properly. What about phonics? We should go back to the basics. ...). Know about the changing demands of literacy and numeracy. Try to avoid jargon. Know what you want the politician to do.
- Go with someone (someone sensible, not someone who's going to rave on). Perhaps go with a student.

2. Contact the politician

- Write a letter stating the issue you want to discuss (this will help get it clear in your head too.)
- Follow up with a phone call.
- Confirm the appointment and give the names of the people visiting.

3. The meeting

- Keep it as brief as possible. Stick to the point. Don't argue. State clearly what you want the politician to do. Thank them for their time.

4. Follow up

- Follow up with any requests for information; send any material that may be of interest.
- Leave your contact details.
- Stay in touch.

Some things you might talk about:

- The importance of adult literacy and numeracy to Australia's social and economic well-being
- Good literacy, numeracy and language skills build self-confidence, resulting in increased participation in community activities which builds social capital
- People in all occupations need to continually increase their knowledge and skills to meet the demands of an increasingly knowledge-based world and workplace
- Employees with good literacy and numeracy skills adapt more easily to new technology and new processes
- Imminent release of the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills survey (ALLS) which will provide rich data about Australia's literacy and numeracy problems – an opportunity for policy development
- Importance of a strong public education sector that can offer a range of programs in a range of contexts. Note the current threats to privatise TAFE (the largest provider of adult literacy and numeracy programs [in NSW]) from the Minister for Vocational and Further Education, Andrew Robb. Also the possibility that literacy and numeracy may be transferred from TAFE to the community sector which does not have the infrastructure or resources to provide a similar, quality service. If this were to happen then it would need to be adequately resourced – but why set up another system?
- Importance of qualified professionals to deliver literacy and numeracy education in a range of contexts – not under-trained personnel working for below award conditions with little job security.
- Impact of an ageing teaching workforce with little succession planning – no career path; short term contracts; reduction in university training courses.
- Importance of a strong research base to inform policy and practice. Note the cutting of \$500,000 adult literacy and numeracy research funds to NCVER. This needs to be re-instated.
- Importance of long term solutions rather than short term contracts. Literacy skills take time to acquire, particularly at beginner level.
- Importance of a whole-of-government approach – partnerships in action, not just on paper.

Contact:

Federal MPs

<http://apps.aec.gov.au/eseach>

<http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/senators/>

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/index.htm>