

**PRESENTATION OF THE TASMANIAN QUALIFICATION
AUTHORITY'S HIGH ACHIEVERS AWARDS
BY
THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE - WEDNESDAY 6TH FEBRUARY 2013**

It is a great pleasure for my wife and me to welcome you all here this afternoon to this presentation of awards ceremony for the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority. Each of those who will receive an award this afternoon is a high achiever and obviously each of you understand the importance and value of study and learning and my wife and I congratulate on your achievements. You are all well and truly literate. However, I want to talk to you for just a few minutes about all those who have not managed to achieve your successes and who are functionally illiterate. What then is functional illiteracy? Now, as you know, if a person is illiterate it means that he or she is unable to read or write simple sentences in any language. But functional illiteracy means something slightly different. It means a bit more than just not being able to read and write and do simple maths. A person is said to be functionally illiterate if his or her reading and writing skills are inadequate "to manage daily living and employment tasks that require reading skills beyond a basic level."¹ E.g., can't properly understand and employ the printed information on a packet of prescription medicine; has difficulty in filling in a form to apply for a driver's licence; has only very rudimentary search skills

¹ [^](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0007/000770/077067eo.pdf) Giere, Ursula. (1987) ["<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0007/000770/077067eo.pdf> Functional Illiteracy and Literacy Provision in Developed Countries.]"

on the Internet and generally speaking, finds it difficult to achieve his or her goals and develop his or her knowledge and potential.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics in conjunction with a number of other developed countries conducted a functional literacy survey of Australians aged between 15 and 74 years. That survey discovered that here in Tasmania no less than 49% of our population - over 200,000 people - are not functionally literate. It's not just Tasmania. The figure for the whole of Australia is 47%; that is to say that 47% of all Australians between the ages of 15 and 74 are functionally illiterate.

Now you outstanding achievers are this country's most valuable asset and resource; more valuable than mines, forests, roads etc. because you are the literate and educated in our community and therefore you have the capacity to be productive, innovative, and creative. You can use your talents to generate wealth and to stimulate the creative arts. The functionally illiterate in our community are disabled by their illiteracy from doing any of those things. That is why you are such a valuable asset. But this afternoon I want to suggest to you young achievers that you can use your talents to help those disabled by their illiteracy and if you do so you will perform a great public service to improve your community.

I commend to you a brilliant initiative that was launched by the Premier and the Minister for Education in October last year called

26TEN - 26 for the letters of the alphabet and TEN for the first numbers. Through a network of coordinators this initiative is an adult literacy programme, delivered by volunteers who are willing to help someone who is willing to learn. These volunteers take a short course delivered by one of our educational institutions and then one of the coordinators will link the volunteer to a suitable learner and the process of learning to read and write, how to use technology, how to solve problems and so on begins. This programme is administered by the State Libraries or LINC as the centres are now called.

26TEN needs all the help it can get. You are the functionally literate ones in our community and I invite you to consider using your skills to help others who are not as skilled as you are. It won't take up a lot of your time. It's a one on one operation. The coordinators match you with a suitable person and you agree how many hours a week you can spare to help improve the functional skills of that person. As we celebrate your success this afternoon I invite you to consider using that success to help a less fortunate person. I think you will find that this public service is a rewarding thing to do and it will certainly help improve the prosperity and well-being of this State. Get on the Web for all the details and how you can improve this appallingly high functional illiteracy in our State and in our country: www.26TEN.gov.au. The Minister for Education, the Hon Mr McKim is here this afternoon and if you are interested in volunteering I'm sure he would be pleased to talk to you.

But for now we will concentrate on your achievements. As I have said my wife and I offer to all those who will receive an award this afternoon our warmest congratulations and extend those congratulations to include all your teachers and family members who are, no doubt, very proud of your success. Well done.