

## SACOSS Fact Sheet No. 5: Social Infrastructure

In the lead-up to the 2010 South Australian state election, political parties, independent candidates and interest groups are all constructing their policy platforms in an attempt to entice you: the voter. SACOSS asks that you use your position of power to Help Create a Better State – find out the facts, read beyond the headlines, and make *people* the foundation of policy in South Australia.

Social infrastructure is like two sides of the same coin – on one side, we have the buildings and systems that enable society to function (like schools and hospitals), and on the other we have the education, training programs and employment opportunities that build the skills and capability of individuals. Neither can exist without the other, and together they enable South Australians to contribute to the economy and prosperity of the State. Social infrastructure requires government funding, and this investment is vital for the long-term sustainability of our State.

### The Current State...

**1. Higher unemployment** — The unemployment rate in SA is 5.8%, compared with 5.4% in Australia. The percentage of people participating in the workforce in SA is 63.6%, compared to 65.5% across the nation (April 2009).

**2. Fewer post-school qualifications** — SA will need 337,000 accredited university and VET graduates over the next seven years. However, South Australians are less likely to have post-school qualifications: 50.7% compared to the Australian average of 53.9%

**3. Leader in 'green' industries** — SA already leads the nation in renewable energy and other 'green' industries. To maintain this lead, skills for these industries will need to be taught through universities and the VET system.

**4. 'Brain drain'** — South Australia suffers from a 'brain drain' which occurs as young, highly-educated people move to the eastern states in search of more employment options and better conditions.

**5. Older population** — Because South Australia has an older population than the rest of Australia, we also have larger numbers of older people in our workforce. We therefore must spend more time and resources educating and training our workforce to ensure we can cope with new technologies and different ways of working.

**6. Services industry** — 40 years ago, 28.3% of South Australians were employed in the manufacturing industry. This has now dropped to 12.5%. The top employers are now community and business services (20.1% of the workforce), trade, commerce, finance and property (a combined 31.1% of the workforce), and entertainment, accommodation and restaurants, accounting for 11.6% of the workforce.

### ...a Better State

**1. Social participation** — Unemployed people who lose contact with the job market have less chance of gaining employment in the future, and long-term unemployment can also lead to social exclusion. To prevent these outcomes, *the provision of funded education*

and training opportunities to the long-term unemployed, with relevant support structures, should accompany policies and funding for recently retrenched workers.

**2. Workforce participation** — A concerted effort needs to be made to increase the participation rates of under-represented groups in the South Australian workforce. A *dedicated and targeted approach is needed to bring SA up to the national workforce participation rate.*

**3. Access to training** — Access to vocational education and training needs to be improved in order to counter the worst effects of the global financial crisis and to prepare SA for economic recovery. *It is crucial that SA ensures equity in access to training in rural/remote and metropolitan areas.*

**4. Counter-cyclical funding** — Counter-cyclical funding measures such as the SA Government's increased spending on physical infrastructure fail to take into account the need to build social infrastructure at the same time. *Training and education linked to social participation should be one of the main goals of counter-cyclical infrastructure spending.*

**5. Rural and regional areas** — *Rural and regional communities across South Australia need additional infrastructure funding and better planning, to enable them to cope with changing conditions.* For example, rural areas will be more heavily impacted by climactic and economic changes rendering traditional jobs untenable. Rural and regional South Australia would also benefit from a more equitable and integrated public transport system.

**6. Sustainability** — *Sustainability, as well as sustainable industry and infrastructure, should be the main consideration when deciding where and how to spend public money.*

**(You can) Help create a better State**

- Get up to speed – read the SACOSS Social Infrastructure Principles Paper.
- Ask your local MP about social infrastructure, and tell them what you think.
- Ask your local candidates what their election policies will include, and tell them what you think.
- Read about the positions of a range of interest groups, and contact them for further information.

**REMEMBER** that political parties and candidates respond to public opinion – it is our strongest weapon to ensure progressive and equitable policies!