

Ballarat Lifelong Learning Profile

Introduction

Ballarat is Victoria's largest inland city: leading the way as a sustainable, innovative and inclusive community. The municipal district encompasses the City of Ballarat and the townships of Learmonth, Buninyong, Miners Rest and Cardigan Village. The local government area currently covers 740 square kilometres.

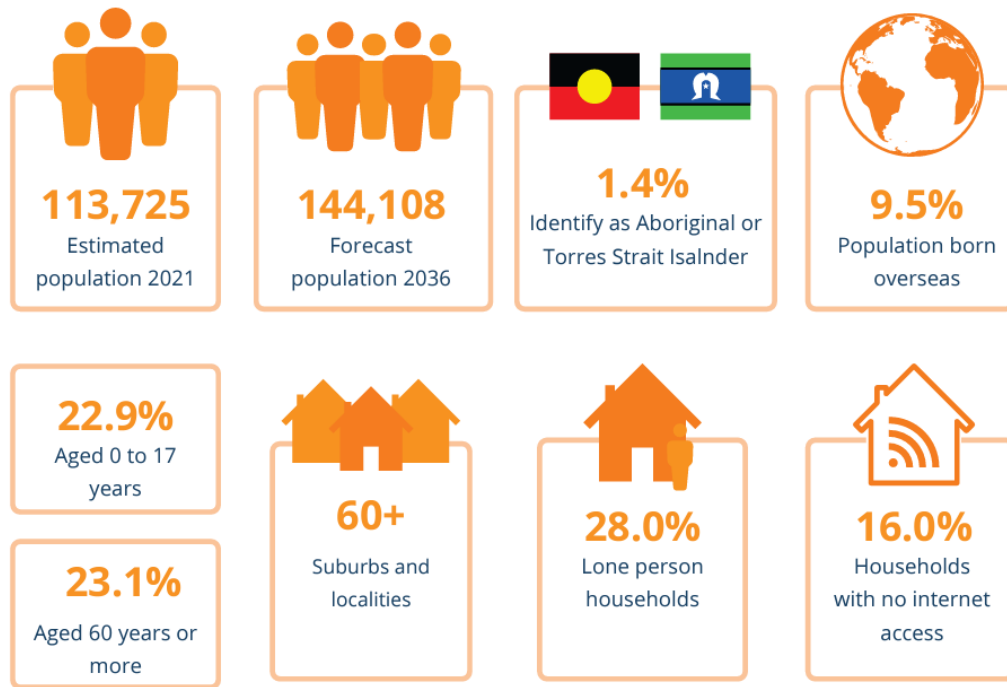
The city has a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and, today, has a very strong and active community. The City of Ballarat falls within the traditional boundaries of the Kulin Nation, with the Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung people being the Traditional Custodians. Ballarat is also renowned for its Gold Rush era history with a rich and unique heritage apparent in the architecture of the City.

As well as being a popular destination for Victorian, interstate and international tourists, the key industries include health care and social assistance, professional, scientific and technical services, education and training, construction and manufacturing.

Demographics

The City's population of 113,725 (2021) has grown by almost 20 per cent in the past 10 years and is forecast to grow by a further 27 per cent to more than 144,000 by 2036. Much of this population growth will be in the Ballarat West Growth Area, with forecast growth of over 20,000 people concentrated in Delacombe (an extra 7,200 people), Cardigan/ Lucas/Bunkers Hill (+6,700), Bonshaw/Smythes Creek (+4,000) and Alfredton (+3,900).

Notably, the City's population is characterised by the disparity in socio-economic status (SES), with some suburbs having relatively high levels of education, employment, and income, while others (e.g., Wendouree, Sebastopol, Redan) are among the 2.5 per cent most disadvantaged areas in the state – with low levels of employment, literacy, income, and wellbeing.



Education

In 2021 Ballarat had 2,470 people enrolled in a TAFE or vocational learning institution and 4,904 enrolled in university. The city has campuses of the Australian Catholic University, and Federation University and TAFE as well as The University of Melbourne Medical School's Rural Clinical School and other registered training and higher education providers. Around a quarter of the Ballarat population hold a bachelor's degree or above, around 14% have a Certificate III from TAFE or a vocational training provider and 13.3% have a Year 12 or equivalent certificate.

Despite having a range of higher education providers and many students living in the area, adult literacy and numeracy rates in Ballarat are lower than that state average. This is indicative of the socio-economic disparity within the LGA.

According to the Australian Digital Inclusion Index, Ballarat, like most regional areas, has lower than average digital access and digital ability scores, however these are improving.

Formal and Non-formal Learning Infrastructure

Ballarat is home to several education institutes that make it an attractive place to live for families and students. Along with many public and private early childhood centres, kindergartens, primary school, and secondary schools, Ballarat also has campuses of Federation University (including a large TAFE campus) and the Australian Catholic University. The University of Melbourne's Medical School also runs the Rural Clinical School out of Ballarat working closely with Ballarat Base Hospital (Grampians Health) and St. John of God hospital. Ballarat also hosts a wide range of Registered Training Organisations providing adult learning opportunities in a variety of vocational industries.

In addition to these formal learning institutes, the City offers short courses and informal learning programs through multiple community organizations. These range from short courses to one off programs and are offered at low or no cost. There are four neighbourhood houses which offer programs in areas such as adult literacy and numeracy, digital literacy, job ready skills and social connection and wellbeing.

The City of Ballarat Libraries run learning programs at all three branches and at outreach locations focusing on digital literacy, health literacy, financial literacy, media and information literacy, as well as creative, social connection and wellbeing programs.

The City of Ballarat also support community learning through other teams such as Ageing Well, Youth Services, Family and Children’s Services, Economic Development, the Art Gallery. and the Eureka Centre which has a specialist research hub to assist people with family and local history.

Other informal learning opportunities are offered through community groups such as the Men’s Shed, Hackers Space, the Tool Library, Ballarat Regional Multicultural Centre, U3A, Food is Free Inc., and many more.

Learning City Developments

In 2022, Ballarat Libraries launched its new Libraries and Learning Strategy 2022-2027. This key document, aligned with the broader Council Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals, emphasized the importance of literacy, lifelong learning, digital inclusion, and wellbeing.

Specific learning related actions from the strategy include:

- Develop and deliver, in partnership with aligned community partners, lifelong learning programs and resources to improve skills in adult literacies, digital literacies, financial literacies, health literacies and information literacies.
- Investigate the City of Ballarat becoming a UNESCO Learning City.
- Complete the refurbishment of the current Ballarat Library – which will include a range of dedicated learning spaces.

2023 saw significant steps taken in achieving each of these actions. Learning programs offered through the library have diversified and expanded. With a strong focus on digital literacy and online safety, particularly for at-risk groups like older people, the library has provided one on one and small group learning programs to help bridge the digital divide and empower the community to fully participate in the online world, safely and confidently. Partnerships have been established with NBN Co., Ballarat Hackers’ Space, the Brainerly and others to deliver programs in new areas such as creative technology, coding and robotics, Smart Homes and more.

Together with Services Victoria and Services Australia the libraries have facilitated financial literacy courses for young people as they enter the workforce and independent living situations as well as older people preparing for retirement. Jobs Victoria advocates have been regular visitors to all three library branches offering job readiness and employment application advice and services.

A Vic Health grant has seen the beginnings of a community garden and associated learning program in partnership with Food is Free Inc. This program will be developed further in 2024. Other health and

wellbeing learning programs included The Art of Bonsai, Turning Sleep into Wellbeing and Wellbeing through Storytelling and Creativity.

New areas of learning programs in 2023 also included Civic Literacy with a well-attended and informative event aimed at demystifying the referendum process. This was delivered by the Ballarat Reconciliation Action Group with the support of Ballarat Community Health, Childrens and Family Services (CAFS), Ballarat Libraries, and The Eureka Centre.

In October, Ballarat Libraries recognized International Media Literacy Week with a series of events. Think U Know presented to parents and carers on tools to help young people use the internet and social media safely, RMIT FactLab discussed their work and how everyone can spot online scams, mis and dis-information and Van Badham took audiences on a whirlwind tour of online conspiracy theories and cults based on her research for book Qanon And On: A Short and Shocking History on Internet Conspiracy Cults.

Learning programs for Children have long been a strength of the Libraries and Lifelong Learning team and this continues to grow and develop each year. Early literacy development is well supported through regular, age-specific storytime and reading programs. A highlight of this has been the enormously successful and impactful Bulldogs Read program support by Ballarat Libraries and the Western Bulldogs Football Club (AFL) with ten local primary schools participating. This program is in its 5th year and has grown significantly in that time. STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Maths) programs are also regular features of the After 3pm and School holiday programs. Successes in this space include Code Club and MoonHack, Young Einsteins Science Club, LEGO Club, Ghost Writers creative writing program for teens, and digital art courses using ProCreate. Most recently, the teams have introduced dance/movement and music classes for pre-schoolers in partnership with several local social enterprises, the Wendouree Neighbourhood House and the Eureka Centre.

Other work conducted in 2023 has included the beginnings of a City of Ballarat Learning Network. The Network will include the Libraries and Lifelong Learning team, Economic Development and Visitor Economy team, The Art Gallery of Ballarat, The Eureka Centre, Intercultural Services, Children and Family Services, Youth Services, Aging Well, Creative Cities, Arts and Events and the Community Inclusion team. While still in the very early stages, it is hoped the various internal stakeholders will continue to collaborate and partner in learning programs offered to the Ballarat Community.

The Libraries and Lifelong Learning team also met with external stakeholders and have fostered ongoing and productive partnerships with all four neighborhood houses and the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council. These partnerships assist in meeting the learning needs of culturally and geographically diverse groups within Ballarat and provide a more effective way of engaging with disadvantaged and hard to reach cohorts within Ballarat.

Key Priorities for future development

- Opening of a newly refurbished and expanded Ballarat Library with dedicated learning spaces
- Opening and activation of Community Hubs in Lucas (already operating), Ballymanus (early 2024), Sebastopol (late 2024), and Buninyong (2025/6). These will offer low-cost learning programs in a diverse range of areas as well as co-locating with kindergartens, Maternal Child Health, senior citizen clubs and others.
- Continued development of both internal and external learning networks

- Further investigation of UNESCO Learning City and participating in the Australian Learning Communities Network (ALCN)
- Deliver our first Learning Festival – possibly in August 2024.

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