

14 April 2020

Senator the Hon. Michaela Cash
Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business
PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator Cash,

ACE SOLUTIONS: A RESPONSE TO COVID 19

Australia, along with the rest of the world, has been totally disrupted by COVID-19. People are affected in their daily lives and afraid of the consequences for their health, education, jobs and well-being, for their families and broader communities.

The Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector can be part of the solution to help build community resilience and support the skills, capacity and capability of the nation. In partnership with government and community, ACE will step up to the challenge and help lead an education, skills and training recovery.

More than 2,500 ACE providers are embedded in communities in urban, regional, rural and remote areas. Much of the learning they traditionally offer is based on providing flexible, place-based education in local communities.

Frontline flexible learning options

Unlike other education sectors, ACE provides a unique and vital frontline service and is exceptionally well-placed to know what works to achieve a good outcome for their communities. They are experienced at providing flexible learning options and wrap-around support to many Australians who are disadvantaged, vulnerable and at risk.

Engagement with low skilled workers and people in need

With the impact of COVID19, many more low skilled workers will lose their jobs and will need to learn new skills and knowledge to re-enter the workforce. The need for language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills in particular, will become more important. As a result, the role of ACE organisations will become even more critical. ACE offers the best chance for people to develop employability skills in tandem with foundation skills, as well as place- based and contextualised education and training to support ongoing employability.

Place based approach embedded in local communities

ACE providers are located in cities, towns and regions all over Australia. They hold significant knowledge about their communities and have established networks in the knowledge industry, strong relationships with other education and training providers such as TAFE and are experienced

in offering educational and employment pathways. These pathways support building skilled workers in urban, regional and remote areas.

A record of collaboration

We can work with the government to identify solutions and rapid responses to the current environment. This includes partnering with TAFE and linking with small business operators and their staff in our communities who may need opportunities to upskill or build their confidence in learning. ACE can effectively build these relationships into long term opportunities for local tailor-made training.

Optimising support to the Government's response package

ACE is a significant community asset with the potential to be optimised to play a much greater role in supporting adults and workplaces with their training needs in the current COVID19 crisis.

ALA has identified a number of initiatives to support the Australian government's COVID-19 responses that we believe will value add to initiatives in recent stimulus package. We welcome the opportunity to further collaborate with government and other sectors to ensure that investment in maintaining and developing new skills will assist Australian business, industry and community to recover quickly and effectively.

1. ALA can develop a suite of specific professional development options for ACE organisations across Australia on delivering high quality learning pathway/bridging programs using flexible and mixed learning models
2. ALA can expand the existing 1300ILEARN telephone number (currently utilised for Adult Learners' Week) to collaborate with the ACE sector to support referrals to resources and new delivery options for small business operators and others in our communities who may need opportunities to upskill and match them to ACE education and employment pathways
3. ACE can work with industry and small business in local communities to provide cross mentoring programs to match expertise of business professionals with ACE organisations, sharing knowledge and expertise and providing options for operators to participate in relevant professional development options identified in #1 so they can further support learning for their employees
4. Government-funded ACE providers could be released from their narrow contractual obligations and enabled to respond as needed, particularly in relation to programs like the AMEP and SEE programs but also aspects of VET
5. Some ACE providers are experienced at providing Accidental Counsellor e-training for highly stressed work teams and could provide services to staff in Centrelink, JSAs/DESSs, Banks, Supermarkets, Pharmacies, Frontline Health & Human Services, Service Stations etc.) who need skills to cope with highly stressed customers across Australia
6. Potential for nationwide adult learning projects that raise awareness of COVID 19 and other potential crises and recognise ACE as a way to engage with a sustainable future
7. Use currently trained literacy tutors, ESL practitioners etc. across the country to contact learners online, use smartphone and printed resources etc designed to keep them learning and be ready for taking up further learning pathways.

ALA is open to dialogue about any new initiatives that could be implemented, as well as, ideas to augment initiatives already being undertaken within our sector and other sectors. ALA is committed to working proactively to maximise the impact of initiatives to address the current situation and

support recovery and regeneration of the Australian community and economy. ALA looks forward to your consideration of these suggestions and we hope to engage in more detailed discussions of how these measures might be applied across the adult learning sector and the communities they serve.

For further information, please contact our CEO, Jenny Macaffer, on mobile 0488 030 073 or via j.macaffer@ala.asn.au.

Yours faithfully,



Sue Howard
ALA President

cc The Hon. Steve Irons MP

Adult Learning Australia

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is the national peak body for adult and community education (ACE) providers. ALA has been operating for 60 years. Our national sector includes community learning centres, community colleges, neighbourhood houses, community resource centres and Aboriginal learning cooperatives. These community-based organisations offer personal enrichment learning programs and many also offer adult basic education in language, literacy, numeracy, digital and other foundation skills. Around 9% of registered training organisations (RTOs) delivering accredited vocational education training (VET) in Australia are ACE providers.