Adult Learning Australia

ADULT COMMUNITY EDUCATION

AUSTRALIAN ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN 2020

Publisher Adult Learning Australia

ABN 78 533 061 672

ISBN: 978-0-9925407-3-9

Acknowledgements

This update of Adult Learning Australia's ACE Environmental Scan was completed by Catherine Devlin. The original report was produced by Adult Learning Australia and contributors Deb Parker (2014); Sally Brennan and Trish Curtis (2015) and Kaye Bowman (2016; 2017).

This report was initially produced with financial support from the Commonwealth Government. The Commonwealth Government also provided support for some NCVER data collection for this update.

CONTENTS

Figures

Tables

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ADULT COMMUNITY EDUCATION (ACE) IS A RECOGNISABLE EDUCATION SECTOR THAT OFFERS ACCESSIBLE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES THAT ARE LEARNER-CENTRED AND NEEDS BASED.

The Australian ACE scan profiles the sector in terms of its programs, features and provider types. The scan outlines ACE program participants, outcomes and the policy areas they support. It also explores the challenges facing the sector in terms of sustainability. This scan builds on the work completed in Adult Learning Australia's previous ACE scans (2014; 2015; 2016; 2017).

Comprehensive analysis of ACE is impacted by the lack of complete data on all of the work that ACE does. However, this report provides a contemporary profile of the sector through desktop research and analysis of existing data.

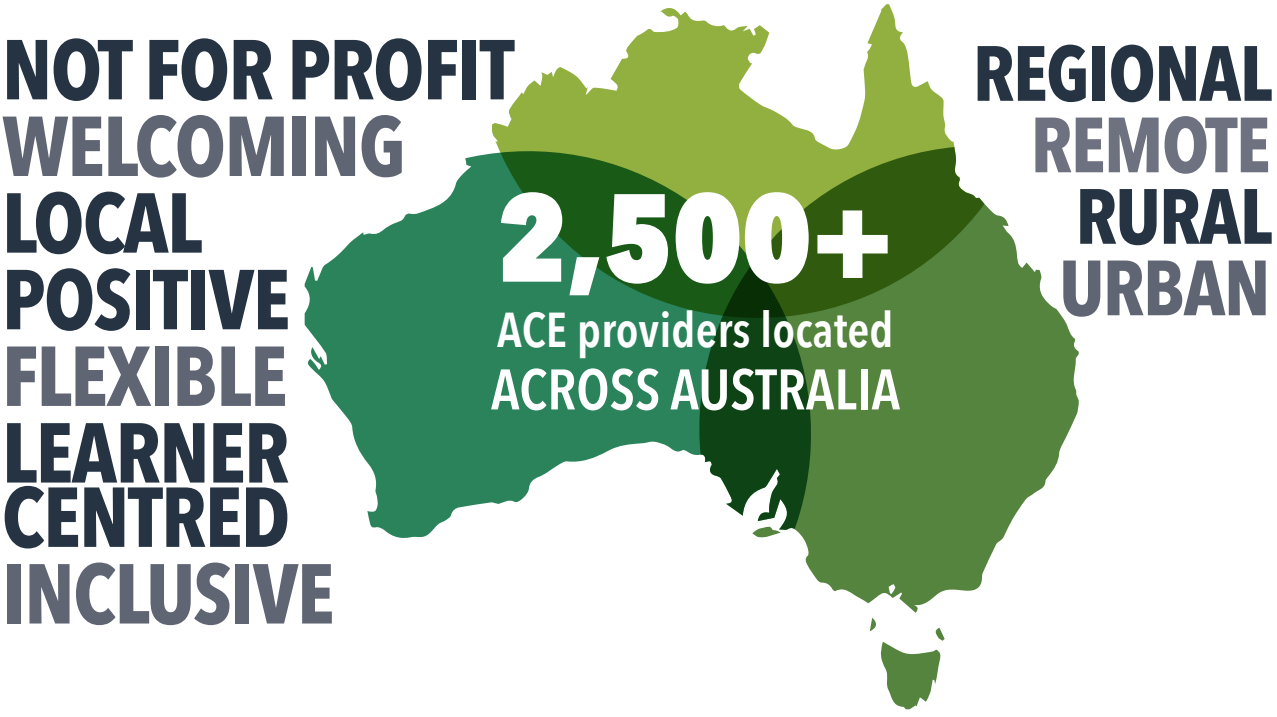
KEY FINDINGS

ACE organisations are not for profit providers of accessible learning opportunities for adults, which are both learner-centred and place based. Adult community education is a distinct sector in Australia's education system – providing vital links across educational settings, workplaces and communities.

There are roughly 2500 ACE providers in Australia (the exact number is unknown). All offer **personal enrichment/ interest learning**. Most offer **adult basic education** in language, literacy, numeracy, digital and other foundation skills. A significant number (between 250–400) also offer formal **vocational education and training** (VET). ACE providers that offer formal VET are largely concentrated in Victoria and NSW.

State and territory governments define and support ACE in different ways. Most recognise and support ACE as programs in informal and non-formal personal enrichment and adult basic education. In Victoria and NSW, ACE providers deliver all types of learning programs, including formal VET.

> The increased vocational orientation of ACE is supported nationally by all jurisdictions, particularly to assist disadvantaged or disengaged adults to pathway into learning for work-related outcomes or to keep them in the workforce.



ENRICHMENT

Personal enrichment programs offer many adults pathways back into learning by supporting social inclusion and impacting positively on health and wellbeing.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1.1 million Australians participated in structured personal interest learning from all sources. However, it is conservatively estimated that at least 200,000 adults participate in personal interest learning programs through ACE each year (ABS 2017).

ACE personal interest or enrichment learning includes learning new skills, as well as learning for enjoyment or personal development. It can be seen as a preventative health and wellbeing measure, which is significant given the focus of successive governments on efficiencies to improve our health and wellbeing. Healthy, productive ageing is a key government policy that ACE personal enrichment programs contribute to directly. Funding personal enrichment learning for low income learners is a major challenge for ACE providers.

FOUNDATION

ACE basic adult education programs are aimed at adults with limited formal education or English language skills. These programs cover language, literacy, numeracy, basic digital skills and enterprise skills such as communication, problem solving, presentation and self-management. These programs are offered with high levels of support. They may be non-formal (non-accredited) or formal (accredited).

Non-accredited

National data on adults participating in non-accredited adult basic education programs delivered by ACE providers is currently not collected, which presents a significant barrier to building a complete picture of ACE.

One study (Dymock, 2007) showed that thousands of Australian adults participate in non-accredited adult basic education programs to improve their self-confidence and capacity to interact with the wider community. This study also showed that improved literacy led to further training or employment outcomes. Dymock also identified strong continuing demand for non-accredited community-based language, literacy and numeracy courses, and suggested this should be acknowledged through funding support.

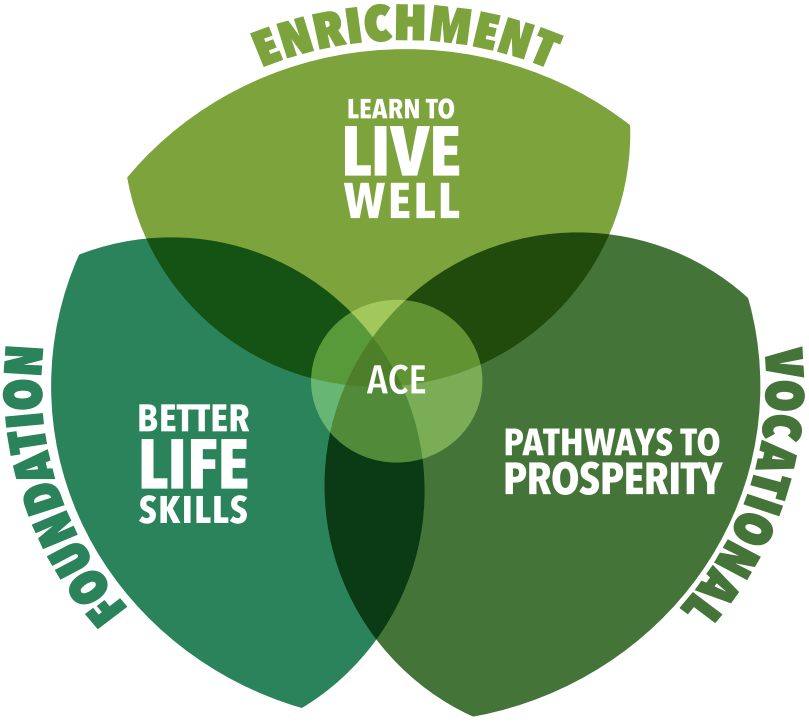
Accredited

VET outcomes are reported within the National VET Provider Collection managed by the NCVER. NCVER publish two VET outcomes datasets:

1. Government-funded VET
2. Total VET Activity (reported commenced 2015).

Government-funded VET reports outcomes on all VET activity delivered by government providers. However, TAFE outcomes include domestic fee for service but

Figure 1: ACE program areas



government-funded VET activity delivered by community education and private providers, does not include fee-for-service.

Total VET Activity (TVA) reports on government-funded VET and domestic fee for service VET at TAFE, university, community education providers (ACE) and private providers. There are also differences in the reporting scope between these two collections. Non-accredited training activity (which is a significant proportion of ACE provision in the government-funded collection) is out of scope in TVA, but included in the government-funded collection.

In 2018, there were 13,426 program enrolments in government-funded adult basic education programs at ACE RTOs / community education providers (identified using AVETMISS FOE 12 Mixed Field Programs). This accounts for 7.3% of program enrolments, and includes the highest percentage of enrolments by many equity groups including people who are unemployment, people with a disability or from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Over 15 years, (2003–2018), program enrolments in government-funded accredited basic adult education have halved. However, subject enrolments have increased by around 30%. Training hours have also increased by 13%. There is a continuing trend towards subject-only training in basic adult education. With the load pass rate at around 68% – showing an increase of 15% between 2003–2018. This is over 5% higher than the equivalent success rate in this area at other VET providers.

There were 19,241 TVA program enrolments in adult basic education programs at ACE RTOs in 2018, representing 8.8% of all TVA problem enrolments.

> ACE providers require increased support to respond to Australia's significant literacy challenge. Identifying effective interventions in adult literacy education for disadvantaged learners in ACE settings is an important first step.

Flexible delivery of foundation skills training is key for adults that do not want or need full qualifications in this area. Also, foundation skill gaps training integrated with vocationally focussed subjects or qualifications delivery.

VOCATIONAL

In 2018, 481,200 students were enrolled in nationally recognised training at ACE providers. Fifty-five per cent of program enrolments at ACE providers in government-funded VET were students from SEIFA quintile 1 (the most disadvantaged) and SEIFA quintile 2, which is around 10% higher than all other providers.

For government-funded ACE VET program enrolments in 2018 (where ACE providers often achieve equivalent or better outcomes):

- 36% were in regional and remote areas
- 46% were unemployed
- 21% had a disability
- 21% were from non-English speaking backgrounds.

According to NCVER, in 2018 there were 41,401 program enrolments in government-funded VET programs at ACE providers, accounting for 3.2% of the total enrolments – and 27,975 or 2.5% excluding basic adult education FOE12.

In 2018, there were 102,486 TVA program enrolments at ACE providers, accounting for 3.9% of total program enrolments – and 82,745 excluding basic adult education FOE 12, or 3.4%.

The number of government-funded ACE program enrolments in accredited VET, excluding adult basic education, has decreased substantially over the past fifteen years. Reported training hours delivered have increased by 8% showing a marginal trend towards increasing quantities of training delivery per enrolment.

The number of TVA ACE program enrolments has remained steady since reporting began in 2015. However, subject enrolments have increased by 90% and training hours delivered have increased by around 27% –showing a significant trend towards increased quantities of training delivery per enrolment.

Government-funded ACE program enrolments in accredited VET, other than adult basic education, include most equity groups at higher levels than other providers. Graduate student outcomes are comparatively equal with consistent outcomes (time series 2015–2019) when compared with other training providers.

According to the VET Student Outcomes 2019 report, students enrolled in VET at ACE providers account for the most significant shift from unemployment to employment after their training (16.7%), showing better results than all other providers. Students with ACE providers are also the most satisfied with the overall quality of their training. These are exceptional results, given the barriers that disadvantaged learners need to overcome with assistance from their ACE providers.

To reverse the unintended adverse effects of competitive funding models on ACE providers and the vulnerable learners they serve, government should outline specific and complementary roles for the public TAFE system, not for profit community providers and private for profit providers. A national community social service obligation

fund and quarantining of foundation skills funding for community and public providers may be necessary.

There are also ACE providers that are not RTOs but who assist with formal VET delivery by entering into partnerships with RTOs that take responsibility for assuring the quality of assessments; making judgements about competence or outcomes achieved and issuing awards.

> Partnering, rather than competing, is proving a useful model to achieve equity in VET.

ACE organisations provide strong pathways from non-formal learning programs into formal VET programs. Research suggests that supported learning pathways may be best for many Australians of working age; particularly those with low levels of formal education or poor experiences of formal education.

The available data on actual transitions made by students at ACE providers from non-formal learning programs into formal VET programs reveal their high capacity to perform a 'pathway' role. For example, in Victoria data from Deloittes (2017) shows that learners who attend an ACE RTO have higher transition rates than ACE organisations that are not RTOs. However, the number of ACE RTOs continues to decline in the face of policy shifts that undermine their viability.

Delivering VET programs in local community settings is advantageous for disadvantaged adult learners, so an effective strategy would be to increase the number of ACE RTOs or facilitate the provision of accredited programs in ACE environments.

> '[S]mall providers often see themselves as working with individuals not suited to a TAFE environment. This is especially true of higher-need learners, who require close support and attention.'
>
> (Lamb et al, 2018, p. 47).

More broadly, the ACE sector achieves strong outcomes in many policy areas beyond education; for example in health, human services, employment, industry and business and community and regional development.

REPORT STRUCTURE

This report builds on a framework developed in previous ACE scan's (ALA, 2017; 2018) for reporting on ACE education programs in Australia. However, the time series data in this report completely replaces previous ACE scans (ALA, 2017; 2018) due to NCVER's changing data extraction methodology. This update contains consistent time series data from two NCVER collections: government-funded and Total VET.

> ACE continues to plays an important role in educating many adult Australians; particularly disadvantaged adults. However, data on the impact of non-accredited ACE programs must be collected to develop a strong evidence base. The sector also needs ongoing support from state and federal governments to sustain its work and build on its potential.

In order to create a broader profile of ACE in Australia, data must be collected from various sources. This ACE scan update covers the following areas:

1. An overview of ACE in Australia in terms of its activities and providers
2. ACE provision by state, territory and national perspectives
3. ACE programs, including key features and data on the participants, outcomes and national policies supported
4. A new data framework to draw conclusions on where to next for Australian ACE
5. Trends over time to identify issues affecting the sustainability of ACE.

INTRODUCTION

THIS REPORT AIMS TO BUILD THE RECOGNITION OF ADULT COMMUNITY EDUCATION AS A DISTINCT EDUCATION SECTOR IN AUSTRALIA BY PROFILING THE DIVERSITY OF ACE PROVIDERS, PROGRAMS, PARTICIPANTS AND OUTCOMES.

HISTORY OF ACE

ACE can be traced back to the late 1880s, where it was established to provide education options that met the needs of ordinary Australians. ACE organisations, such as Mechanics Institutes, offered lectures, courses and books on a wide range of topics and disseminated new ideas and stimulated debate. They broadened people's horizons at a time when there were few other channels through which this could be done (SSCEET, 1991).

As formal education was established in Australia, through schooling, vocational education and training and universities, ACE education programs were largely sidelined. However, ACE developed alongside and outside of the three formal education sectors to provide informal learning for adults through their participation in social activities and through non-formal structured learning programs of interest to adults for personal development outcomes.

In the early 1990s the work of ACE received national recognition through the 'Come in Cinderella' report on ACE (SSCEET, 1991).

> The view expressed in 'Come in Cinderella' was that ACE had become a potent education and training network that needed to be capitalised on Australia wide and with adequate data on patterns of participation, provision and expenditures to be achieved
>
> (SSCEET, 1991, p. 157).

Overarching national policy statements on ACE followed. The Commonwealth, all state and territories and ministers with responsibility for education endorsed the first national Ministerial Declaration on ACE in 1993 (MCEETYA, 1993) and have endorsed updated statements in 1997 (MCEETYA, 1997), 2002 (MCEETYA, 2002) and 2008 (MCVTE, 2008) to accommodate changes in the education and training environment that had occurred.

The early Declarations expressed commitments concerning the value of ACE in developing social capital, building community capacity, encouraging social participation and enhancing social cohesion.

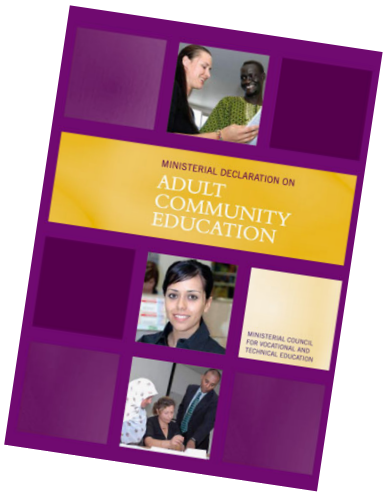
The later Declarations, reaffirmed this commitment and extended acknowledgement of the value of ACE beyond these areas to its potential to respond to changed industrial, demographic and technological circumstances.

The Declaration encouraged a collaborative approach to ACE to allow the sector to make a greater contribution to supporting the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) productivity agenda for skills and workforce development. It also identified ACE as a key player in the response to the Australian Government's social inclusion policy agenda.

The latest 2008 Ministerial Declaration called for ACE to become more vocationally oriented as ACE had already started to do in response to community demand. The idea was that ACE would serve a value-adding role in VET by bringing in its distinctive qualities; particularly to assist adults disadvantaged in learning into and through the VET system as well as serving a generic role of offering VET to all adults (Schofield & Associates, 1996).

> There have been significant changes in the education and training environment since 2008 but no updated national Ministerial Declaration on ACE.

The work and underpinning philosophy of ACE continues to this day largely through community centres, community colleges and neighbourhood houses – though differently structured in each state and territory.



ACE SCOPE AND SCALE

ACE IN AUSTRALIA HAS DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS AND FEATURES, OFFERING ACCESSIBLE, LEARNER CENTRED ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN LOCAL COMMUNITY SETTINGS.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF ACE

ACE has distinguishing features that have been maintained throughout its long history. The theme of 'ACE is different' runs deep and strong through much of the literature on ACE in Australia (refer Figure 2). It has a distinctive focus, set of values and learning practice, and is delivered by a distinctive type of organisation.

INDIVIDUAL AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING

The ACE sector focusses on the needs of the adults in the particular community in which it operates. ACE's starting point is providing learning opportunities that meet the needs of adults in local communities, and to build local capacity for community development. ACE takes a strong advocacy role to ensure local learning needs are met. The ACE sector is an enabler of inclusive learning.

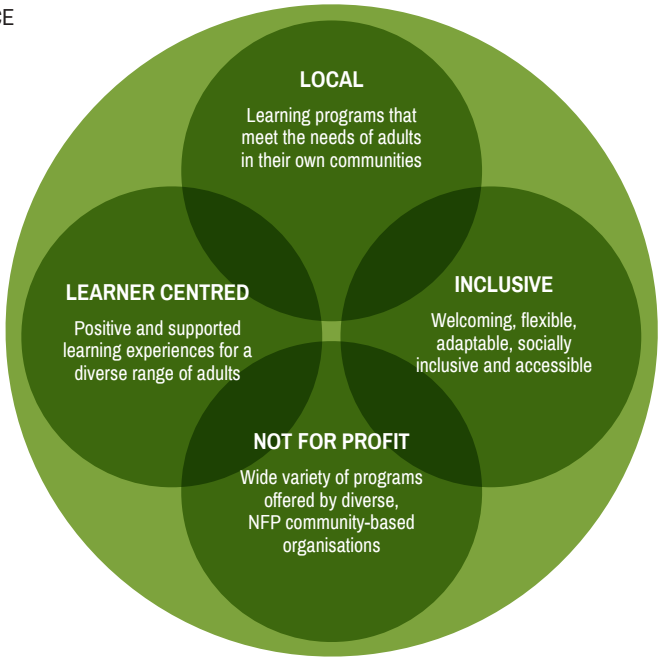
ACE has a welcoming, caring and non-judgmental culture to facilitate access by everybody and offers learning programs in friendly, community settings that cater for adults of varying abilities and backgrounds. ACE seeks to be a gateway for all adults to return to learning at any stage along the learning time line no matter their age, gender, culture, ability or previous educational experience or attainment. ACE starts where the learner is at, providing learning programs that build on their existing skills and knowledge and delivering desired new knowledge and skills and other outcomes, including motivation to go on to bigger and better things.

Townsend (2006) argued that ACE has the capacity to build and connect communities; decrease social isolation; extend community networks and build social capital. ACE is also recognised for its work with second chance and vulnerable learners using inclusive pedagogy and practice with learners who have had prior negative experience of learning (Ollis et al, 2017). In addition, ACE offers learning opportunities to learners across a lifespan including older adults (Ollis, et al, 2018).

A LEARNER-CENTRED APPROACH

ACE recognises that there is no 'traditional student', only a spectrum of learners with needs and preferences to be taken into account in learner-responsive pedagogical design. ACE is about learning approaches that engage

Figure 2: The distinctive features of ACE



adults in the process and foster personal, social and intellectual development.

ACE uses adult learning principles that encourage learners to take ownership of the learning process through active participation; hands-on learning and real-time demonstration of skills; co-learning through shared tasks and appraising their experiences and changes in their own perceptions, goals, confidences and motivations for learning in the future (Sanguinetti, Waterhouse, & Maunders, 2004).

COMMUNITY OWNED AND MANAGED

ACE providers are community owned and managed, not for profit organisations that have adult education as a primary focus. While there are numerous other community-owned and managed organisations that deliver some adult education within their primary service orientation – such as rural fire brigades, sporting clubs, churches and Landcare organisations, as well as health, migrant, women and aged care centre – these are not usually identified as ACE providers.

> ACE providers are highly networked within their local communities; particularly with human services providers.

Through their partnerships, ACE providers access their clients and/or facilitate referrals for their clients to ensure appropriate support services are combined with their adult learning provision. Their partnerships strengthen the capacity of the local community to lead place-based, community development.

Volunteering is also an important activity for ACE providers because it aids low cost service provision. Involvement in volunteering can be a stepping stone to other work.

> The distinctive features of ACE are recognised by ACE participants as key strengths.

To illustrate this point, Table 1 provides the results obtained from 373 ACE VET students and also 69 ACE VET provider personnel in NSW, who were asked to rate the significance of various features commonly referred to as 'strengths of ACE'. The magnitude of the percentages confirms the perceptions of these features as strengths (and hence advantages) of ACE.

Both the providers and students surveyed chose 'Informal, friendly and non-threatening environment' as the most important feature of ACE followed by 'Capacity to accommodate students with a wide range of needs, skills and backgrounds'.

The only notable difference between the responses of the students and providers was that students ranked the item 'Able to provide a wide range of learning formats' more highly than providers. The following summaries describe the key features of ACE in Australia.

Table 1: The strengths of ACE as perceived by ACE providers and their students

ACE providers rating / ACE students rating		
Feature nominated as a strength	%	%
Informal, friendly, non-threatening environment	96	88
Capacity to accommodate students with a wide range of needs, skills and backgrounds	86	80
Able to respond to special needs of students and employers	86	81
The trainer is a helper rather than a learning authority	86	82
Minimum of bureaucracy	85	77
Emphasis on mastering skills and knowledge rather than completing course in set time	83	83
Often locally managed	76	70
Students may enter and leave learning programs easily	74	72
Able to provide a wide range of learning formats	74	82
Good physical accessibility	65	80

(Source: Saunders, 2001, Table 9 & 10, pp. 30–31)

> 'ACE is held together in its diversity by its commitment to, and ownership by the community, as well as by its distinctive approaches to adult learning with a central focus on the learners and their needs. ACE is ... based around the learning needs of adults in local, neighbourhood or regional communities.'
>
> (Golding, Davies & Volkoff, 2001, p. 5)

> 'ACE learning can be simply summed up as comprising highly focussed programs, often short in length, aimed at providing learners with the desired knowledge and skills in a friendly, supportive environment.'
>
> (Saunders, 2001, p. 28)

UNTAPPED CAPACITY

Rooney (2011) found that ACE has the capability and freedom to 're-shape' while retaining particular values, offering a broad range of locally focussed adult education programs that have a significant impact on individuals and communities but not well 'captured by the mechanisms that report on adult community education'.

ACE ACTIVITIES

ACE traditionally provided personal interest/enrichment activities. However, ACE has undergone significant change in its activities in the last few decades in response to community demand. For years, ACE primarily delivered hobby courses and personal enrichment learning programs. This changed around four decades ago.

> 'First came the introduction of adult basic education in ACE courses designed to provide basic language and living skills to help people participate in and contribute to society. As it became apparent that students were applying adult and community education skills to employment, the sector began to offer specific vocational education and training courses, creating "VET ACE"'
>
> (Walstab, Volkoff, & Teese, 2005, p. 17)

Today Australian ACE delivers in four key areas:

1 Personal enrichment informal and non-formal learning activities – the traditional focus of ACE

2 Adult basic education non-formal and formal – a common focus

3 Formal vocational education and training – an additional focus for some ACE providers in line with the latest Ministerial Declaration on ACE

4 Pathways from one type of learning program to another, and from non-formal learning to formal learning for vocational purposes – a focus in line with the latest Ministerial Declaration on ACE.

The position of ACE within the Australian education landscape has changed (see Figure 3).

Today ACE delivers formal training inside the VET sector (that includes the school aged) to contribute to work skills and economic development, as well as adult basic education for both life and work purposes and personal enrichment courses for personal development purposes.

Australian ACE provides a nexus between adult education and community development and adult education and economic development (see Figure 4).

ACE offers a bridge between social inclusion and workforce and productivity agendas. However, capability across providers varies (Bowman, 2011). This report primarily focusses on the three economic roles of ACE as providers of education:

1. Platform builders
2. Bridge builders
3. Work skills developers.

Figure 3: The position of ACE within the Australian education landscape – historically and now

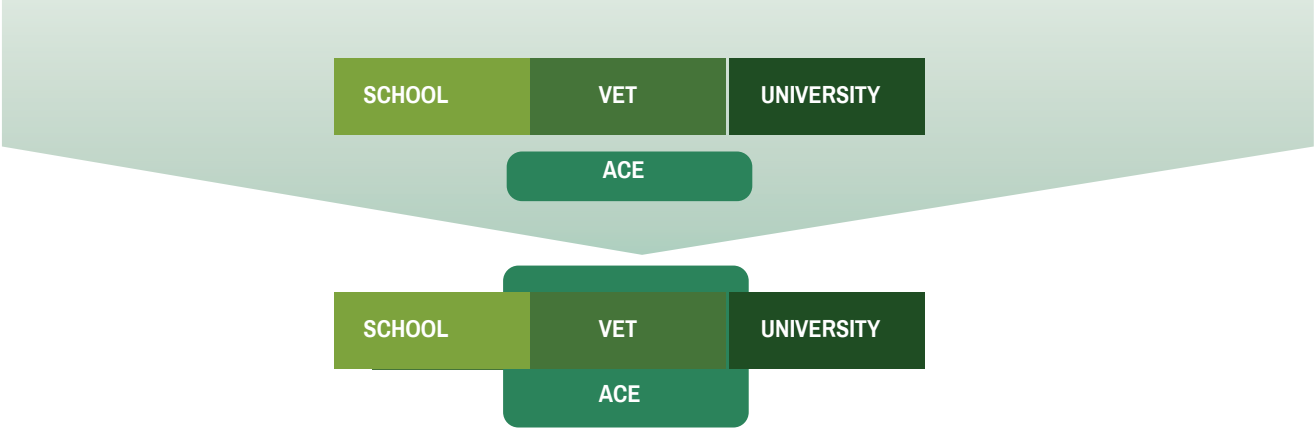
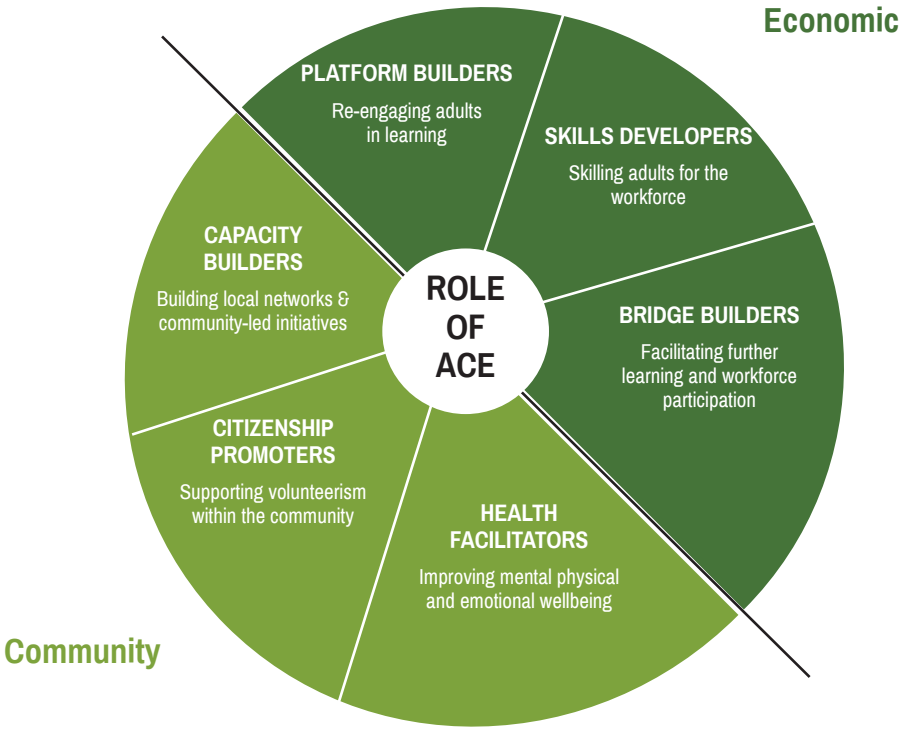


Figure 4: Contemporary roles of ACE providers



(Source: Adapted from Bowman 2006 by Allen Consulting)

ACE IS DIVERSE

ACE providers are a disparate group that go by various names including: neighbourhood house, community centre, community men's shed, university of the third age, community college and various other names.

We do not know precisely how many ACE providers there are in Australia as there is no single registration arrangement for ACE providers. We do know the ballpark number of ACE providers by the following key sub-types and the key activities of ACE they focus on.

NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES AND CENTRES

There are approximately 1000 Neighbourhood Houses and Centres nationally according to the results of the first national survey of Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres (NH&Cs) undertaken in late 2010/early 2011 (ANHCA 2011). The NH&Cs are located in metropolitan areas (47%), regional centres or large county towns (26%) and in rural/remote areas (27%).

The 2011 National NH&C Survey Report gives a breakdown of the range of programs and activities provided by NH&Cs in order of popularity. It shows that NH&Cs provide an extensive variety of services and activities in their communities:

- Information and referral were the most popular activities (92%) then community development (80%)
- Recreation and leisure, art and craft, health and wellbeing courses came in next (70–80%)
- Public computer/internet access, self-help groups, student work placements, personal development courses and volunteer community services (60–65%)
- Pre- or non-accredited adult education and training and literacy programs were a priority focus for between 40–45% of the NH&Cs
- Accredited training adult education and vocational training courses was also a focus for just under 30% (ANHCA, 2011, Table 4 p. 13).

NH&C's provide opportunities for social inclusion and learning through formal and informal education programs that are developed for people with diverse life experiences.

> 'Participants are generally on low incomes, socially isolated or at risk of social isolation, and with low levels of formal education. Consequently, the courses offered are widely varied, reflecting the demographics of the local community and local needs and interests.'
>
> (Ollis et al. 2017)

Most NH&Cs remain focussed on personal enrichment learning and adult basic education. With a minority extending into formal (VET) as well. The 2011 national survey of NH&Cs indicates that women are the predominant users of NH&Cs, with those aged between the ages of 45–64 most highly represented (ANHCA 2011 p. 11). However, the number of male participants in ACE has increased markedly in recent years. A stimulus to higher rates of male participation has been the offer by NH&Cs of computer classes, foundation skills classes and skills development classes. Skill development programs have been particularly valuable in boosting participation rates of males (SA Centre for Economic Studies, 2013).

ACE REGISTERED TRAINING ORGANISATIONS

Formal vocational education and training (VET) is an additional focus for some ACE providers including some NH&Cs, all Community Colleges (in NSW and Vic) and a segment of ACE providers (many of which are also Learn Local providers) in Victoria. To be a provider of formal VET, an organisation must meet the standards for RTOs. The number of RTOs with registration type 'community based adult education provider' as at the 1st of January 2019 was 245 according to training.gov.au – the official national register on VET in Australia and authoritative source of information on RTOs, training packages, qualifications, accredited courses, units of competency, skill sets, etc. Since 2005, the total number of ACE RTOs recorded by training.gov.au have significantly decreased by around 50%.

Figure 5 shows a sharp decline in ACE RTOs in 2006. The numbers stabilised until 2011 when there was another sharp decline and while reasons for this decline can only be speculated, the creation of the national quality assurance agency for VET – the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) around mid-2011 may have caused some attrition. Initial incorrect classification and then reclassification is another possible reason. Indeed an historical report on ACE RTOs (training.gov.au, 2016) shows 44 reclassifications from ACE RTOs to other categories of RTO. The earliest incidence of this happening was mid-2011.

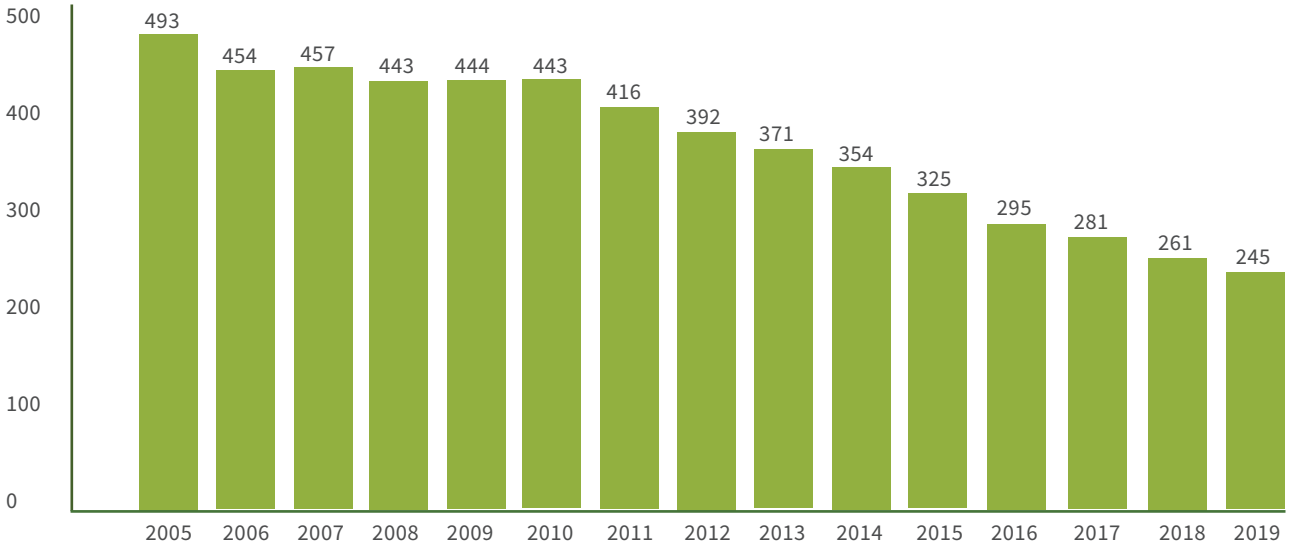
UNIVERSITIES OF THE THIRD AGE

U3A's offer non-formal, personal interest learning programs – academic, cultural, physical and social – to older Australians. These programs offer stimulation and development to people in active retirement. They meet the needs of their members through a peer-learning model. All tutors are volunteers who come from U3A groups across Australia. Learning is pursued without reference to criteria, qualifications, assessments or rewards. It is a climate free from discrimination and there are no exams. There are 297 national and 36 international sites (U3A Online website: U3A sites listed, November 2019). .

COMMUNITY MEN'S SHEDS

Men's Sheds originated in Australia in the 1990s to provide a space for constructive and social activity, informal and non-formal adult education, as well as offering a place to make friends and regain a sense of purpose. The Australian Men's Shed Association (AMSA) has approximately 950 member Sheds, but there are around 1000 Men's Sheds across Australia (Siggins Miller, 2016). Men's Sheds have boosted the number of males participating in ACE. Some Sheds are associated with NH&Cs while others are independent. A total of 55% of Shed members live in

Figure 5: Numbers of ACE RTOs at January 1 each year (2005–2019)



(Source: Data request training.gov.au 2019)

regional Australia (AMSA, 2011).

Also ACE RTOs have been amalgamating to adopt more sustainable business models in response to changes in VET policy and towards more competitive training markets in which all RTOs compete for the available government funds. For example, ACE RTOs in NSW, known as Community Colleges, have reduced from 70 over a decade ago to around 34 today through mergers, re-alignment of service focus and closures.

There are discrepancies that exist between the point-in-time numbers of ACE RTOs in the national register for VET (training.gov.au) and the numbers of ACE RTOs reported as delivering government-funded VET in any one year by the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER), who manage national VET data collections. For example, in 2018 according to training.gov.au there were 261 ACE RTOs (refer Figure 5) whereas the NCVER reported 357 ACE RTOs delivering government funded VET (refer Table 2).

Total VET activity from all funding sources reported by NCVER for the first time in 2015 indicates there were 282 ACE providers in 2015 (refer Table 3).

The definitions in the NCVER managed National VET Provider Collection specifications for the Training Organisation Type Identifiers are broad enough that organisations may identify themselves incorrectly, skewing the numbers (ALA, 2015, p. 6).

NCVER has indicated that there are two key reasons why ACE providers are higher in government-funded collection, compared to the total VET activity (TVA) collections.

1. There are differences in the reporting scope between the two collections. Non-RTOs and non-accredited training activity (which make up a significant proportion of the ACE providers in the government-funded collection) are out of scope for reporting in total VET activity, but included in the government-funded collection.
2. SA (up to 2016) and NSW have separate data submissions for ACE training in the government-funded collection. Training submitted by SA and NSW is reported as being delivered by community education providers, irrespective of the training provider identifier.

In summary the best we can say about the number of ACE providers that are also RTOs or formal VET providers, is that there are somewhere between 250–400 providers.

ACE ACTIVITY FOCUS

Overall, data suggests that there are at least 2500 ACE providers in Australia. All deliver personal enrichment/interest learning. Many also provide adult basic education. With a significant minority offering formal vocational education as well (see Figure 6).

Table 2 Government-funded VET training providers by reporting provider type 2010–2018

Provider type	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
	no.	**%**	**no.**	**%**	**no.**	**%**	**no.**	**%**	**no.**	**%**	**no.**	**%**	**no.**	**%**	**no.**	**%**	**no.**	**%**
TAFE	58	2.8	59	2.6	59	2.8	58	2.8	57	2.8	53	2.7	40	2.1	40	2.1	35	2.0
Other govt	12	0.6	13	0.6	14	0.7	12	0.6	14	0.7	14	0.7	13	0.7	10	0.5	10	0.6
ACE	477	22.7	492	21.9	311	14.8	424	20.3	420	20.3	387	19.6	379	19.6	358	19.1	357	20.4
Other RTOs	1627	77.4	1762	78.4	1810	86.1	1666	79.7	1646	79.5	1589	80.4	1560	80.8	1525	81.4	1403	80.3
Total	**2101**	**100**	**2248**	**100**	**2103**	**100**	**2091**	**100**	**2070**	**100**	**1977**	**100**	**1931**	**100**	**1874**	**100**	**1747**	**100**

(Source: National VET Provider Collection – NCVER data request 2019)

Totals are distinct counts. Some providers may be reported against multiple categories. Sum of numbers may not equal total. Percentages may sum to greater than 100%.

Table 3 Total VET training providers by provider types 2015–2018 (data only available since 2015).

Provider type	2015		2016		2017		2018	
	no.	**%**	**no.**	**%**	**no.**	**%**	**no.**	**%**
TAFE	53	1.3	41	1.0	41	1.0	36	0.9
Universities	15	0.4	15	0.4	13	0.3	13	0.3
Schools	437	10.8	418	10.3	396	10.0	393	10.3
ACE	282	7.0	263	6.5	246	6.2	237	6.2
Enterprise providers	193	4.8	170	4.2	146	3.7	142	3.7
Private training providers	3088	76.1	3150	77.8	3101	78.6	3009	78.6
Total	**4057**	**100**	**4051**	**100**	**3943**	**100**	**3830**	**100**

(Source NCVER Special data request 2019)

Totals are distinct counts. Some providers may be reported against multiple categories. Sum of numbers may not equal total. Percentages may sum to greater than 100%.

Figure 6: Schematic view of scale of Australian ACE providers today by activity focus

ACE JURISDICTIONS

AUSTRALIAN ACE PROVISION IS DIVERSE AND TAILORED TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY IN WHICH IT OPERATES. IT IS ALSO INFLUENCED BY STATE AND TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS WHO HAVE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACE. THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN HOW EACH JURISDICTION VIEWS AND FUNDS ACE.

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

In the ACT, ACE is funded through a grants program, which has been available since 1998. In 2019, new arrangements to the programs included two year funding agreements and an increase in the grant funding from $200,000 to $500,000. Eligible ACE providers can apply for grants of up to $50,000 for individual projects and $100,000 for joint projects.

The ACE Grants Program delivers accredited and non-accredited foundation skills learning programs that are focussed on 'individual empowerment and development' as well as pathway programs for participants who are 17 years of age and older.

The new ACT ACE Grants Program is designed to support sustainability; optimise capacity and to establish an evidence-base that shows the sector's contribution to education and training in the ACT. The revised grants program also seeks to 'maximise the vocational intent of non-accredited education and training' and 'outcomes sought by the National Partnership Agreement on Skilling Australians Fund.

(Source: skills.act.gov.au)

Numbers are indicative only due to incomplete and changing data sources.

NEW SOUTH WALES

NSW focusses its ACE funding on a network of ACE VET providers branded as 'Community Colleges' (including three original Workers Education Associations).

Community Colleges offer accredited and non-accredited vocational learning, along with a range of other learning opportunities, including lifestyle and cultural learning courses. These learning programs and activities work to build self-esteem, re-engage early school leavers or provide a social network for older or vulnerable people (CCA, 2014a). A significant percentage of Community Colleges in NSW are based in regional or rural communities.

There are around 34 organisations that use Community College branding in NSW that are members of Community Colleges Australia. However, the term 'community college' in Australia is not only associated with the community education and VET sectors. There are also other organisations, such as schools, that refer to themselves as community colleges.

As all approved ACE providers in NSW are RTOs, they can apply to deliver Smart and Skilled funded training in the same way as any other eligible RTO. In addition to this, Community Colleges and TAFE are the only organisations that can apply to deliver full foundation skills qualifications under the Smart and Skilled Entitlement Foundation Skills stream.

The NSW Government also provides ACE program funding to approved ACE providers to deliver training and support that 'cannot be effectively addressed through Smart and Skilled programs'. ACE program funding is for training up to and including Certificate III and targets disadvantaged cohorts, including those located in rural and regional areas. This funding can be used to 'provide intensive support' to eligible participants to help them pathway into further training and employment (training.nsw.gov.au/ace).

ACE program funding includes Tech Savvy For Small Business, which is subsidised accredited and non-accredited training in business, information technology and foundation skills in support of small business. Approved ACE program providers are largely Community Colleges, with the exception of the Deaf Society which is also a registered training organisation that delivers ACE programs.

Public libraries 371

Community centres & neighbourhood houses 250

Men's sheds 236

Community-based adult education RTOs 74

U3A 68

Numbers are indicative only due to incomplete and changing data sources.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

The Northern Territory is the only Australian state or territory to have no specific statement, policy or strategy for ACE or any direct application of government funding to the sector (ALA, 2013). There are examples of community-based adult learning and family literacy programs such as the Home Interaction Program for Parents & Youngsters (HIPPY) which exist across the Northern Territory in Indigenous community organisations, charitable organisations, public libraries, seniors centres, Working Women's Centres and U3As. The extent of this community education is not fully known nor reported.

The NT Government does offer Equity Training Grants targeted towards specific equity groups. The focus of these grants is to re-engage/engage Territorians in employment or further training programs.

Key equity groups targeted through this initiative include: people with a disability; parents returning to the workforce after an absence of five years or more; long-term unemployed migrants; refugees, mature-aged people; very long-term unemployed people, or those at risk of becoming very long-term unemployed.

Equity Training Grants are available to incorporated organisations, schools and RTOs.

Funding is also available for pre-employment training programs that develop practical skills to help participants get a job, apprenticeship or traineeship. This funding is available to:

1. training providers
2. industry associations
3. community groups.

Programs that lead to employment in skills shortage areas or hard to fill jobs are prioritised.

Aboriginal Employment Programs includes Aboriginal Workforce Grants to maximise employment outcomes and Aboriginal Responsive Skilling Grants for training that leads to job outcomes including VET programs that 'cannot be funded through any other source'. (Source: skillingterritorians.nt.gov.au).

Numbers are indicative only due to incomplete and changing data sources.

QUEENSLAND

In QLD, the Certificate 3 Guarantee (C3G) offers eligible people access to subsidised training places, 'up to and including their first post-school certificate III qualification' (desbt.qld.gov.au). Foundation skills and lower-level vocational qualifications may also be delivered as part of this intiative. Under C3G foundation skills training is an enabling program that can be delivered through a indvidual unit, a module or full qualifications in accordance with the learner's needs.

'Skilling Queenslanders for Work' (SQW) is a Dept of Employment, Small Business and Training initiative introduced in 2015–16, which has a total six year funding commitment of $420 million up until 2020–21, with $80 million available under Skilling Queenslanders for Work in 2019–20 period.

The SQW initiative includes tailored community-based and supported pathway programs for young and mature aged job seekers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability, women re-entering the workforce, Australian Defence Force veterans and ex-service members and people from culturally and linguistically diverse groups. SQW is supported by a regional network that works with and builds partnerships with community-based organisations and local employers to 'determine local skills and entry-level industry and labour needs' (DESBT, 2019). SQW funds:

- Community Work Skills including job preparation and foundation skills
- Work Skills Traineeships – paid work placements on projects where participants undertake a work skills traineeship that integrates with on-the-job skills
- Ready for Work – 6–8 week basic job preparation and employability skills courses for unemployed youth
- Get Set for Work – intensive employment and training assistance targeting early school leavers and disadvantaged young people
- Youth Skills – supports 15–24 year olds with Youth Justice Services or QLD Corrective Services
- Work Start incentives – employer incentives for partipants in other SQW programs
- First Start – subsidised traineeships for local government and community-base organisations

ACE programs in QLD are delivered by a wide variety of organisations including:

- community owned or operated RTOs
- TAFE QLD
- school based parent and citizen associations
- professional associations, libraries and senior citizens associations
- specialist literacy groups and computer clubs
- University of the Third Age
- English conversation groups
- parenting associations and sporting clubs
- adult education organisations, community and neighbourhood houses
- job placement organisations and workplace learning programs
- volunteering programs, churches and spiritual groups
- special interest and environmental groups
- university extension and local governments
- men's sheds and drop-in centres
- community service organisations.

(www.qld.gov.au)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

In South Australia, ACE programs are funded by the Department for Innovation and Skills. They are delivered through community centres, neighbourhood houses, a Workers Education Assocation, local government, libraries and other community-based organisations. Funded ACE programs in SA are place-based and support people to:

- develop life skills
- participate in further learning/training
- get a job
- pathway into formal learning settings.

ACE programs focus on the development of foundation skills including language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills. They also build employability skills for modern workplaces such as collaboration, problem-solving, self-management, learning and information and communication technology.

A thorough review of ACE was conducted in South Australia in 2017. The review involved multiple stakeholders and resulted in increased government funding to the sector. This included the appointment of pathway coordinators located throughout the state to work with the sector on developing pathways for learners and promoting ACE more broadly. Funding priorities moved away from ACE programs with the change of government in 2018.

In the last quarter of 2019, Community Centres SA, the state peak body, was commissioned by the Department for Innovation and Skills to undertake a sector-wide engagement process with stakeholders with a view to informing the Sector and Workforce Development Plan. The Department of Innovation and Skills has recently proposed changes to ACE policy to focus adult education on getting people 'work-ready'.

SA ACE has an active fee-for-service delivery model alongside government funded ACE programs.

Community centres & neighbourhood houses 96

Public libraries 149

Community-based adult education RTOs 9

Men's sheds 61

U3A 24

Numbers are indicative only due to incomplete and changing data sources.

TASMANIA

The Tasmanian Government funds ACE through a range of organisations and programs. However, the term 'ACE' is not commonly used to define a particular sector in Tasmania. Libraries Tasmania offer and support a wide range of programs and activities through its 45 service points across the state. Informal and formal lifelong learning opportunities promote learning for enrichment, foundation and vocational reasons. This includes adult education classes, adult literacy and numeracy support, family literacy and digital literacy programs. Libraries Tasmania hosts 26TEN, a 10-year strategy to engage the broader community and private sector in improving adult literacy and numeracy in Tasmania.

Through its grant program, 26TEN funds employers and communities to contribute to lifting the literacy and numeracy skills of Tasmanians. These are delivered through a network of adult literacy providers, business and community organisations, and neighbourhood houses.

Independent community managed Online Access Centres, funded by a grants program, also exist across the state to support adults to navigate and use digital technology.

Other education programs are offered through Tasmania's neighbourhood house network but these are largely fee for service, auspiced programs or contingent upon the house securing ad-hoc small grant funding.

Skills Tasmania offers grants to endorsed RTOs through its Adult Learning Fund. The Adult Learning Fund supports pathways to employment programs including skillsets training through to accredited qualifications. The Adult Learning Fund includes Jobseeker and Pre-jobseeker streams. The Pre-jobseeker stream targets people with barriers that prevent them from accessing employment opportunities. These programs are delivered through employment providers and private RTOs as neighbourhood houses and community centres in Tasmania are not RTO and therefore do not offer accredited learning programs.

Community centres & neighbourhood houses 34

Public libraries 46

Community-based adult education RTOs 5

Men's sheds 38

U3A 14

Numbers are indicative only due to incomplete and changing data sources.

VICTORIA

The ACE sector in Victoria is the largest and oldest in Australia. In Victoria, the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board – a statutory authority under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 – funds ACE organisations (known as registered Learn Local providers) to deliver education and training programs that target people with limited prior access to education, including pre-accredited programs.

Pre-accredited programs are short modular courses that are primarily focussed on creating pathways for participants to further education and training or employment. Pre-accredited programs target:

- women seeking to re-enter the workforce or who have experienced or are experiencing family violence
- early school leavers, both mature and youth
- low skilled and vulnerable workers
- Indigenous people
- unemployed and underemployed people
- people from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- disengaged young people
- people with a disability.

Learn Local providers are governed by voluntary committees of management whose members are drawn from the local community. They offer programs ranging from basic adult education through to diploma-level qualifications. Learn Local providers are a diverse group that includes community centres, community learning centres, community colleges and neighbourhood houses.

They also include training centres managed by large not-for-profit organisations such as Yooralla, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Jesuit Social Services and Melbourne City Mission, and a number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) specialist providers such as Adult Multicultural Education Services. The Centre for Adult Education also receive Learn Local funding.

Through the ACFE Board, the Victorian Government funds Learn Local providers to deliver programs in adult basic education (both non-accredited and accredited) and Learn Local RTOs also have access to VET funding.

The Victorian Government introduced the Skills First Reform in 2017 to strength the government-funded VET system. Skills First's aim is to remove low quality providers, better align industry needs with training activity and make TAFE more sustainable.

In 2019, the Victorian Government introduced the Free TAFE initiative for priority and pre-apprenticeship courses in growth industries. The Free TAFE initiative impacted some Learn Local RTOs delivering VET programs in the nominated 'Free TAFE' priority areas as funding

Public libraries

303

Community centres & neighbourhood houses

380

Community-based adult education RTOs

95

Men's sheds

232

U3A

134

Numbers are indicative only due to incomplete and changing data sources.

was quarantined to TAFE. However, the Victorian ACE sector and Learn Local providers in particular have been positively acknowledged by the Victorian Government for the 'important role they play in the Victoria education and training landscape' (ACE sector statement, 2019).

Currently the ACFE Board is working within a strategic framework articulated in its 2020–25 Strategic Plan and the Future of Adult and Community Education in Victoria 2020–2025 Ministerial Statement, which recognises the integral role ACE plays within the post-secondary education system and its role in providing skills for work, further education and life.

Through its strategic plan, the ACFE Board has renewed its commitment to leading literacy, numeracy, English language, employability and digital skills education and training for adult learners in Victoria.

The Reconnect program is another aspect of the Skills First initiative. Reconnect supports learners with barriers to learning to help them transition into the workforce. The program targets long-term unemployed adults between the ages of 20–64 who have not completed high school and young people aged 17–19 who are early school leavers.

Learn Local RTOs delivering the Reconnect program must undertake outreach and engagement activities to identify and attract disengaged, high-needs learners and developed a learning plan to transition participants to further training or employment.

Participants have access to support services and are assigned a Reconnect coach who assists them to identify educational or employment opportunities. This funding is only available to TAFE and Learn Local RTOs.

Reconnect prioritises the following groups:

- parents returning to work
- Indigenous Australians
- people with a disability
- people with low literacy and numeracy
- people who are physically isolated
- young mothers
- highly marginalised groups such as offenders, drug and alcohol dependents or homeless

The ACFE Board also offers Capacity and Innovation Fund (CAIF) grants to Learn Local providers, which gives them the opportunity to develop and run learner-centred projects that increase participation and attainment in Learn Local pre-accredited training programs.

CAIF grants are available to registered Learn Local providers or Adult Education Institutions with a current ACFE approved Business and Governance Status assessment or 2019 Skills First contract.

Not all Victorian ACE organisations are Learn Local providers and the sector also has an active fee-for-service delivery model alongside other government funded ACE programs.

(Source: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/training/providers/learnlocal/Pages/funding.aspx)

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

In WA, ACE includes both accredited and non-accredited training, with accredited training focussed on providing pathways for re-engagement with education, training and employment, and non-accredited training having the broader aims of developing individuals' skills and knowledge and encouraging social participation.

Government-funded training is delivered by RTOs registered with the Department of Training and Workforce Development (DTWD) as 'preferred providers', who are eligible to apply for competitively allocated funding. To become a 'preferred provider', an RTO needs to demonstrate that they have the organisational (governance and financial) and operational capacity to meet the training needs of students and industry.

The state government also supports skills development through a $2 million Regional Traineeship Program, which supports Community Resource Centres (CRCs) and eligible local government authorities (LGAs) to provide training, skills and employment opportunities in their local area.

Grants of up to $30,000 are available to assist CRCs in the Western Australian Community Resource Centre Network. In addition, 22 smaller LGAs across regional WA that don't have a CRC within their municipality can apply for funding to support VET for their local communities.

Adult literacy and numeracy support is provided through Read Write Now (RWN), which is a volunteer mentoring program funded by DTWD and sponsored by North Metropolitan TAFE. RWN tutors complete four week of training so they can confidently assist adults. Over 600 volunteers work with RWN across metropolitan and regional WA.

Other ACE programs are funded on a case by case basis by individual LGAs and through a fee-for-service model. Funding for Linkwest, the state ACE peak body for 150 registered Community, Neighbourhood and Learning Centres ceased in 2015.

Public libraries 245

Community centres & neighbourhood houses 72

Community-based adult education RTOs 10

Men's sheds 69

U3A 14

Numbers are indicative only due to incomplete and changing data sources.

NATIONAL

The 2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE called for a stewardship role to be adopted at all levels, including:

> '[G]overnments working together and providing leadership to optimise the capacity of ACE through a national approach, with jurisdictions providing policy settings and developing practical strategies that will allow ACE to flourish.'
>
> (MCEETYA, 2008).

Currently the Commonwealth supports this stewardship role through support for Adult Learners Week activities. Selected ACE RTOs are preferred providers of the Commonwealth's Skills for Education and Employment, which support job seekers address language, literacy and numeracy barriers; as well as the Adult Migrant English Program.

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is the national peak body for adult and community education. Federal funding for ALA's core activities ceased in 2016. However, ALA continues to support the ACE sector through professional development, advocacy, its 60 year old, peer reviewed journal the Australian Journal of Adult Learning, and through Quest magazine, which highlights the grass roots work of the sector.

ALA maintains international relationships with the adult education sector through its membership of and participation in the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE) and the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic Adult Education (ASPBAE).

SUMMARY

ACE providers are spread across Australia making ACE accessible to a large number of Australians. Victoria has the largest and most diverse ACE sector in Australia. It also provides a useful model to optimise the sector for greater outcomes across Australia; particularly in rural and regional areas. ACE RTOs are largely concentrated in VIC and NSW – accounting for 70% of the ACE RTOs in the country.

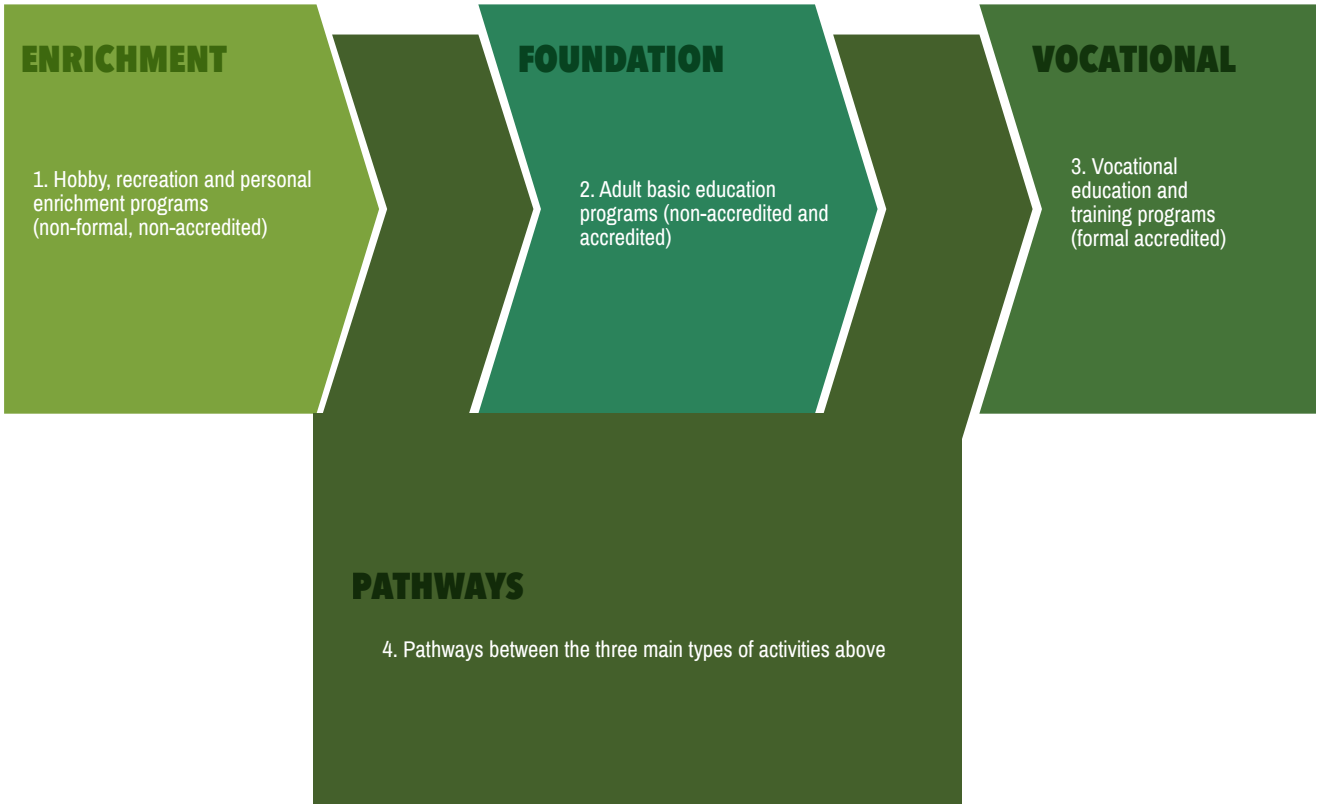
How an ACE provider in the Queenland outback supports its community and how an inner city Melbourne migrant community centre meets local needs may be different, but both types of organisations share a commitment to the provision of education and activities that:

- reduce social isolation
- increase pathways to work, community and social engagement.

ACE PROGRAMS

THERE ARE FOUR MAIN PROGRAMS OF ACE THAT PROVIDE A FRAMEWORK FOR DESCRIBING ALL OF THE WORK OF AUSTRALIAN ACE. THIS SECTION DETAILS THEIR KEY FEATURES, PROVIDERS, PARTICIPANTS AND CHARACTERISTICS, AND THE OUTCOMES ACHIEVED WITH TRENDS IN PERFORMANCE OVER RECENT YEARS.

Figure 7: The four programs of Australian ACE today



Personal enrichment learning

KEY FEATURES

Personal enrichment learning is a core service of ACE and its traditional focus.

ACE personal enrichment learning programs cover a range of topics: history, languages, politics, science, arts, crafts, health, personal development and many others. They are short, structured learning programs that do not lead directly to formal qualifications or awards.

They are fee for service, with government grants for particular policy agendas that enable fees to be reduced or waived for those who are financially disadvantaged. They are considered to be non-vocational, however, the intent of the learner may well be vocational.

Figure 8: Program logic of personal enrichment learning

PERSONAL ENRICHMENT LEARNING

All ACE providers offer personal enrichment learning. Indeed for some (generally the smaller providers) this is the only type of learning they provide. All adults may participate in ACE personal enrichment programs.

Estimates can only be provided on the numbers of adults participating in personal enrichment learning in ACE providers alone and some details on the characteristics of the participants. There is firmer data on the scale of all personal enrichment learning in Australia and the characteristics of the participants.

> '[M]any students who undertook courses commonly labelled as general interest, leisure, enrichment or personal development realised upon completion of their course that they could apply the knowledge and skills learned to their jobs.
>
> '[W]hile the ACE courses were not identified as vocational, they did have vocational application. [It] appears that many students are now enrolling in ACE courses not identified as "vocational" with the specific intention of learning vocationally applicable skills and knowledge.'
>
> (Saunders, 2001, p. 85)

WHO PARTICIPATES?

The ABS undertook a survey of participation in personal interest learning across Australia from all sources in 2016–7 (ABS, 2016–7). Personal interest or enrichment learning was defined as 'structured learning that does not lead to a recognised qualification and is not related to employment' and is therefore largely undertaken through self-motivation for a range of reasons including the pursuit of knowledge, personal development, interest and enjoyment'. The ABS estimated 1.1 million Australians (or 6.1% of all Australians) had participated in structured personal interest learning, which was a decrease of 2.3% from the 2013 ABS survey (ABS, 2013). A profile of the 1.1 million personal interest learners showed:

- more women (7.3%) than men (5.0%) participated and the gender difference was more marked in older age groups
- people aged 35–55 participate at the highest rate, with 6.7% in this age group participating
- 45–54 years and older people aged 65–74 years also participate in high numbers, with 6.4% in this age group participating.

The main reasons reported by respondents for participating was to learn and improve skills (36.6%) followed by enjoyment or interest (33.8%) and then personal development (25.5%).

Data found on participants in personal enrichment learning at ACE providers is piecemeal, and shown below by ACE provider type. The following ACE providers only offer personal enrichment learning so we can include all of their participants.

Community Sheds and U3As

There are about 175,000 men currently participating in community men's sheds most of whom are older men, with the mean age 69 years (median=70) and an age range from 23 to 100 years (AMSA, 2011). The only data found in the public domain on the numbers of participants in the U3As is in a report by Swindell et al (2010). The total membership base for U3As reported was 64,160 (for 62% of all U3As who responded). Scaling this up membership for all U3As comes to about 100,000 in 2008.

Neighbourhood Houses and Centres (NH&Cs)

All Neighbourhood Houses and Centres (NH&Cs) offer personal enrichment learning but participants in this learning were not separated from participants in other types of learning in their national survey of Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres (NH&Cs) undertaken in late 2010/early 2011. However, it may be fair to assume that most of the participants in NH&Cs are involved in personal enrichment learning.

The survey found that on average each week 320 people participate in activities at a Neighbourhood House or Centre. Nationally that equates to 320,000 people engaged in activities each week and converts to approximately 14,500,000 visits per year across the entire (NH&Cs) sector. Unique visits were not stated (ANHCA 2011). As to the characteristics of those involved, 98% of the NH&Cs reported engaging people on low incomes, socially isolated people or those at risk of social isolation and people with low levels of formal education and training (see Figure 9).

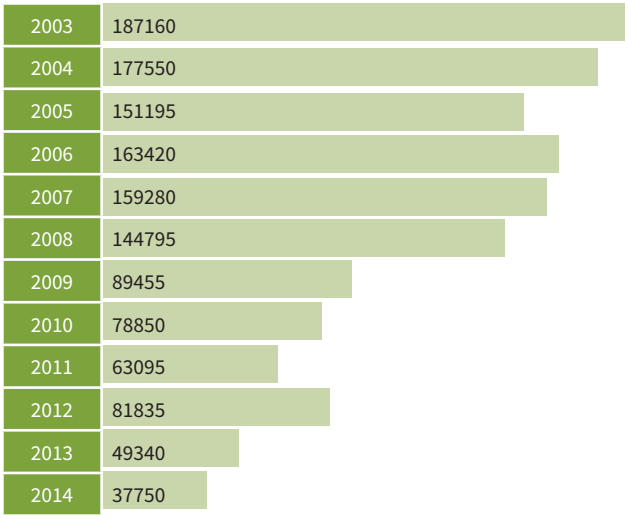
ACE registered training organisations

Data on personal enrichment learning from ACE RTOs delivering government-funded VET is available from the National VET Provider Collection. This data is not of interest to the VET sector and therefore removed from national VET reports by NCVER – also it is unclear how complete it is because ACE RTOs are not compelled to provide fee-for-service data. The 2004–2014 data shown in Table 4 provides ballpark figures. The substantial decrease over the period shown may, in fact, be due to a drop in data provision rather than representing an actual decrease.

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

Comparing the estimated 1.1 million Australians involved in personal enrichment learning in 2016–7 from all sources with estimates on participant numbers in personal enrichment learning in ACE organisations suggests that

Table 4: No. students involved in personal enrichment learning among ACE RTO providers receiving government funding for their VET activity



(Source: NCVER data request 2016. After 2014, ACE RTOs were notcompelled to provide this data post 2014.)

they are significant providers of all personal enrichment learning undertaken in Australia, with many of the participants from disadvantaged groups. We can add at least 175,000 men involved in men's sheds; at least 10,000 involved in U3As and at least 37,750 students involved in ACE VET as personal enrichment learning among ACE RTOs as these data sets do not overlap. There are also many adults involved in personal enrichment learning in NH&Cs.

Personal enrichment learning yields personal benefits that improve individual health and wellbeing. For example, a survey (Flood & Blair, 2013) conducted of the 1436 men's shed members found that social interaction is the main reason men join the sheds and is perceived as the greatest benefit – 45% of men's sheds members surveyed mentioned 'getting out and socialising' as the greatest benefit of the sheds and 41% mentioned 'making friends'. Learning or passing on skills is the next most often mentioned benefit (20%); including learning or passing on 'trade skills', 'computer skills', 'people skills' and 'learning about health issues'. Health benefits are not highly ranked by men's shed members but social interaction has significant impacts on personal health and wellbeing by combatting the effects of social isolation; providing men with a sense of purpose and self-esteem; improving physical health and mental wellbeing and increasing help seeking behaviour. This was shown when men's sheds members were compared with a similarly profiled non-shed sample who are less socially active. The shed members scored significantly higher physical functioning, physical roles, general health, vitality, mental health and mental wellbeing than non-shed members as measured by the Short Form (12) Health Survey (SF-12) and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) instruments (Flood & Blair, 2013) (Refer Table 5).

There is also strong international evidence showing that participation in adult education contributes to positive changes in health and attitudes. A recent review and update of research into the wider benefits of adult learning in the UK, focussed on studies with methodologies able to account for causality found that:

> '[T]he main wider benefits of adult learning show up in health, mental health and job-related outcomes. Both formal and informal types of learning tend to matter, suggesting that participation in learning in itself is important ...
>
> 'Adult learning has more than twice the impact on self-confidence than does being employed. This is an especially large effect and there are potential positive spillovers for a range of market and non-market outcomes from feeling better about oneself'.
>
> (Dolan, Fujiwara & Metcalfe, 2012, p. 8)

Good health is a fundamental for all and most important for our ageing population to keep them active members of the community and workforce. Healthy, productive ageing is a key government policy that personal enrichment programs contribute directly to but these programs also can increase motivation for further learning and be a gateway for participants into other learning activities.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

> The challenge for most ACE providers is how to keep funding their personal enrichment learning programs when they are not funded by government; particularly as many of their customers are in the lowest income brackets and these programs are an important gateway back to learning for many disadvantaged learners.

People who had wanted to participate in personal interest learning but did not, or who had participated but wanted to do more were asked about the main barriers to participation. The answers included: too much work or no time (44.7%); financial reasons (26.1%); personal reasons (10.9%) and course not available (5.7%).

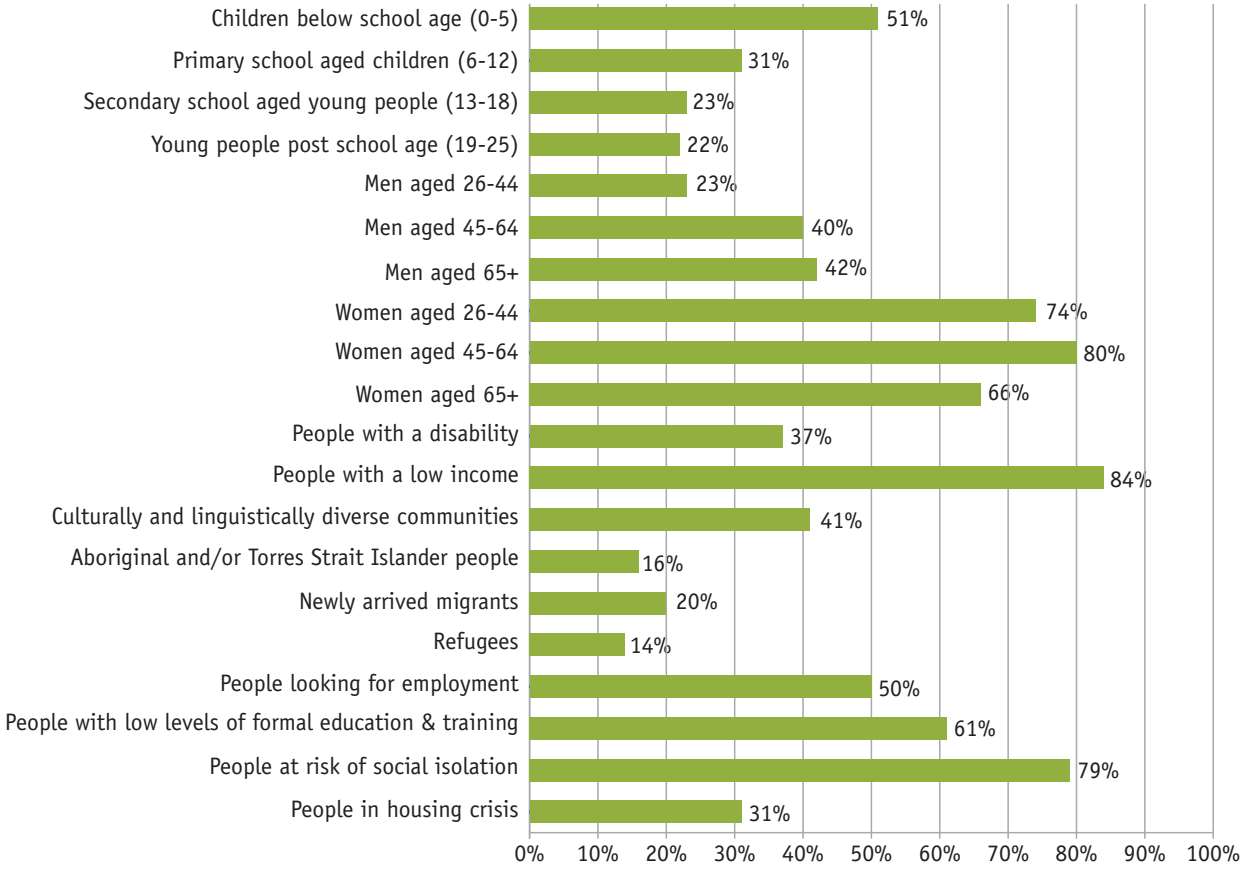
Two-thirds (65.5%) of those who participated in personal interest learning incurred costs for their most recent course, with 11.0% incurring costs between $1 and $99, 11.2% between $100 and $199 and 43.3% incurring costs of $200 or more.

Table 5: Greatest benefits of men's sheds as perceived by their members

Theme	Percentage	Example quote
Socialising/getting out	45	Non-judgemental social interaction.
Making friends	41	The consistent companionship of coming to the Shed and getting to know a whole new 'set' of people from different backgrounds.
Learning or passing on skills	20	Social interaction, giving to the community and learning new skills.
For the community	13	To keep busy, giving back to local community, to share with others old and new.
Talking about issues	7	Companionship. Freedom to discuss a very broad range of issues without preplanning or bias. Helping others who are struggling.
For health	3	Personal satisfaction in its growth and seeing change in members' interests and personal health.

(Source: Flood & Blair, 2013, Table 1, p. 11.)

Figure 9: Percentage of NH&C respondents reporting the demographic listed



(Source: ANHCA, 2011, Table 3, p. 11)

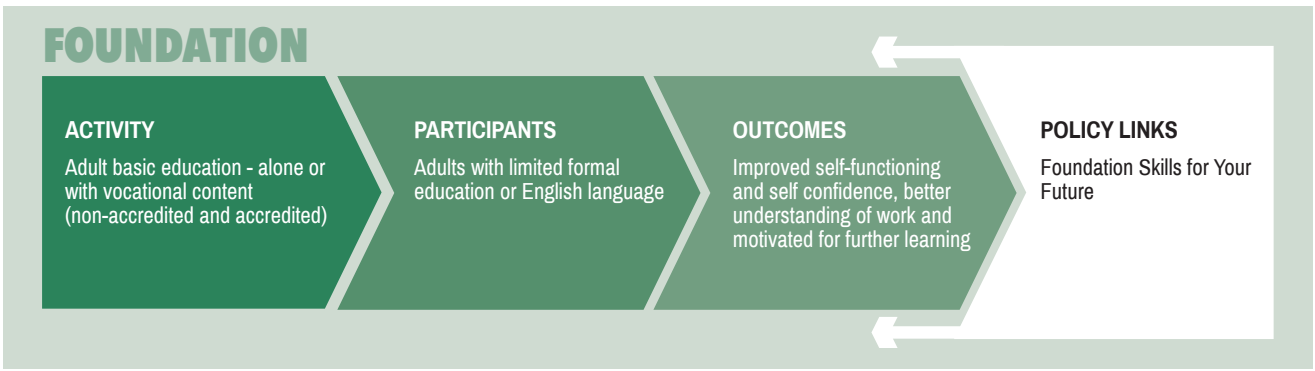
ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

KEY FEATURES

Many ACE organisations offer non-accredited and accredited adult basic education, in addition to recreation and personal enrichment programs. These programs include language, literacy, numeracy, basic computing skills and other foundation skills including communication, problem solving, self-presentation and time management. Accredited and non-accredited adult basic education programs are offered with high levels of support.

- **Non-accredited** literacy and numeracy programs may be standalone or embedded in other courses such as English through cooking, language of childbirth and healthy eating.
- **Accredited** programs may be standalone or integrated into a vocational area so that opportunities to explore the world of work and learning pathways to work are also provided. They may be full qualifications, subjects only and/or skill sets to fill gaps.

Figure 10: Program logic of adult basic education



NON-ACCREDITED ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Adult basic education programs are particularly for adults with limited formal education or English language skills. There is no data collection on Australian adults involved in non-accredited basic education programs delivered by ACE providers. We do know from a one-off study that thousands of Australian adults are involved (Dymock, 2007).

WHO PARTICIPATES?

Dymock (2007) attempted to gauge the extent of non-accredited literacy and numeracy training provision across Australia. Dymock's data includes courses and activities where students received a statement of attainment or participation, but not accredited qualifications, in:

- language, literacy or numeracy embedded in other courses
- adult English as a second language
- adult literacy for native speakers of English
- adult numeracy.

The way Dymock reports the data collected via a national survey makes it difficult to arrive at an accurate figure of the number of students who were receiving non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy help. However, there appeared to be around 4,000 students engaged with the 125 providers from across Australia, except the Northern Territory. The students in these courses were mostly aged between 30–49 years, with strong representation from cohorts between 20–29 and 50–59 years.

Providers in Dymock's (2007) research reported a range of reasons as to why adults participate in non-accredited adult basic education programs:

1. They want to learn English for everyday purposes.
2. They are looking for social contact and want to take more control over their lives.
3. They want to improve their self-confidence and capacity to interact with the wider community.
4. They would struggle with accredited adult basic education courses.

Around one-quarter of the study's program coordinators believed that students participated in non-accredited adult basic education primarily for employment-related reasons, and two-thirds of providers said they had partnerships, links and networks with training and employment organisations and agencies. Other data indicated that:

- 26% of respondents stated that up to 10% of their students went on to other training and 28% to work
- 22% of respondents stated that up to 25% of their students went on to other training and 21% to work
- 17% indicated that up to or about 50% of their students went on to other training and 13% to work
- 12% of respondents stated that up to 75% of their students went on to other training and 7% to work.

Figure 11: Dymock survey respondents' estimate of learner pathways

To other training	Estimated percentage of learners	To employment
Respondents (%)		Respondents (%)
2.5	None	6.9
26.4	Up to 10%	28.4
21.5	Up to 25%	20.7
10.7	Up to 50%	7.8
6.6	About 50%	5.2
11.6	Up to 75%	6.9
2.5	Up to 100%	1.7
18.2	Not known	22.4
100.0		**100.0**

(Source: Dymock, 2007a, Table 5, p. 19.)

A significant number of providers didn't know.

Overall, Dymock (2007) found strong continuing demand for non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy courses in Australia, and that many adults choose this form of assistance because they either do not need or would struggle with accredited courses.

> Dymock suggested that the contribution of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy courses to both personal development and social capital should receive greater attention and acknowledgement, particularly through funding support.
>
> (Dymock, 2007)

ACCREDITED ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Accredited adult basic education programs are delivered by ACE VET providers and reported within the mixed field programs category in the National VET Provider Collection managed by the NCVER. The Field of Education (FOE) Type 12: Mixed Field Programmes are made up of general education programs, social skills courses, employment skills courses and other mixed field programmes.

Current NCVER data on government-funded program enrolments in FOE 12: Mixed Field Programmes in ACE VET providers shows that in 2018 there were 13,426 ACE enrolments, which represents 7.3 per cent of total government-funded FOE 12 enrolments (refer Table 6).

Current NCVER data on total VET program enrolments in FOE 12: Mixed Field Programmes in ACE VET providers shows that in 2018 there were 19,741 ACE enrolments, representing 8.8 per cent of total VET FOE 12 enrolments (Refer Table 7).

Program enrolments in government-funded accredited adult basic education in ACE providers have significantly decreased over the past 15 years (refer Figure 12). However, subject enrolments have increased by around 30% and training hours have increased by around 14% in the period (refer Figure 13 & 14).

There have also been increases in the average subject enrolments per program in government-funded adult basic education at ACE VET providers from two (2) enrolments per program in 2003 to six (6) in 2018. Average training hours per program have increased from 96 in 2003 to 235 in 2018.

Total VET program enrolments, subject enrolments and

Table 6: Government-funded program enrolments in FOE 12 - Mixed field programmes by reporting provider type, 2003-2018

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
ACE 000	29.1	19.8	17.8	20.1	22.7	23.5	18.4	14.8	16.2	18.2	17.5	14.6	13.4	13.7	13.4	13.4
Total 000	209.6	201.2	206.6	236.0	254.9	252.2	268.7	270.7	283.3	347.4	376.2	241.3	176.7	169.7	177.6	185.1
%	13.9	9.8	8.6	8.5	8.9	9.3	6.8	5.5	5.7	5.3	4.6	6.1	7.6	8.1	7.6	7.3

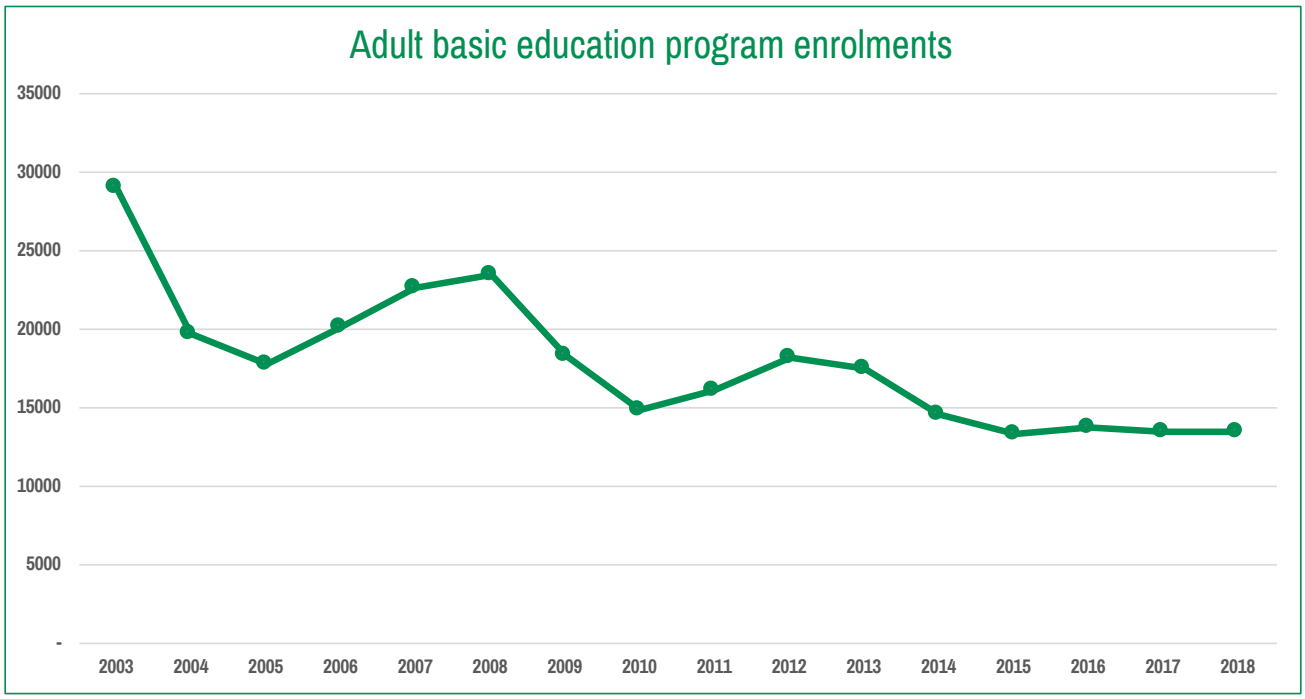
(Source: National VET Provider Collection)

Table 7: Total VET program enrolments in FOE 12 - Mixed field programmes by reporting provider type, 2015–2018

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018
ACE 000	19.2	17.5	20.2	19.7
Total 000	229.4	225.6	235.1	223.7
%	8.4	7.7	8.6	8.8

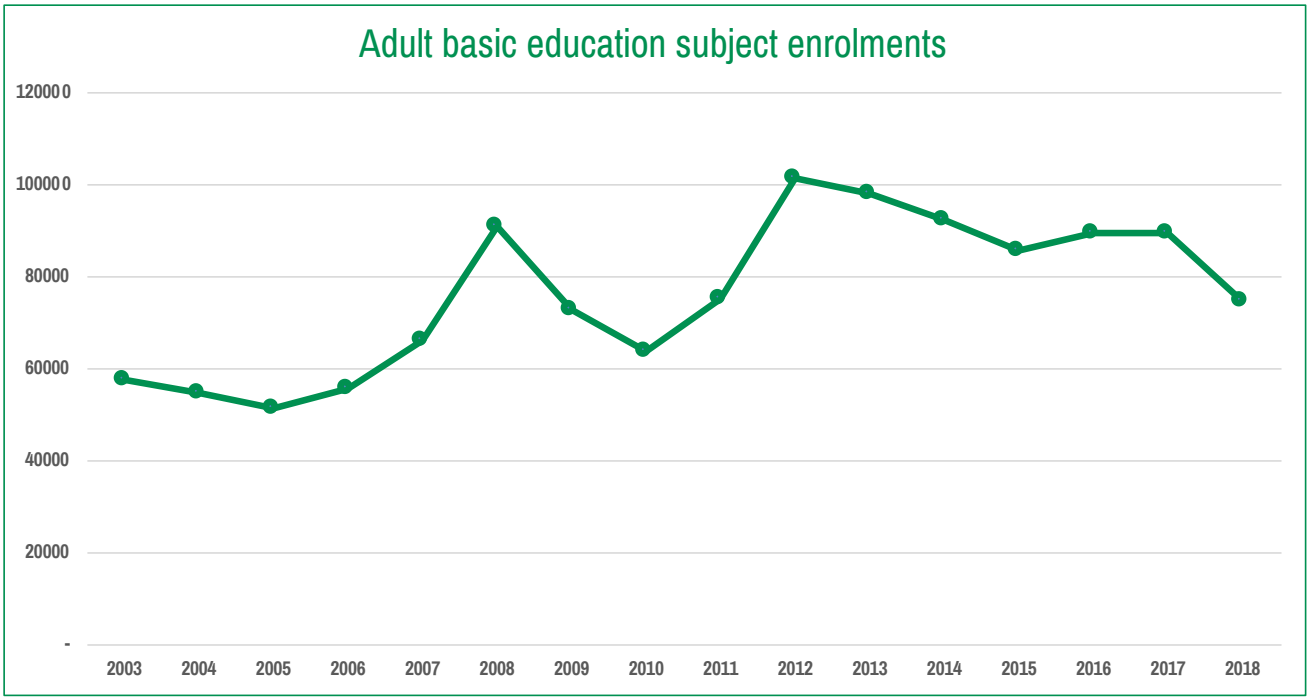
(Source: National VET Provider Collection; National VET in Schools Collection

Figure 12: Trends in government-funded ACE FOE 12 – Mixed fields program by program enrolments 2003–2018



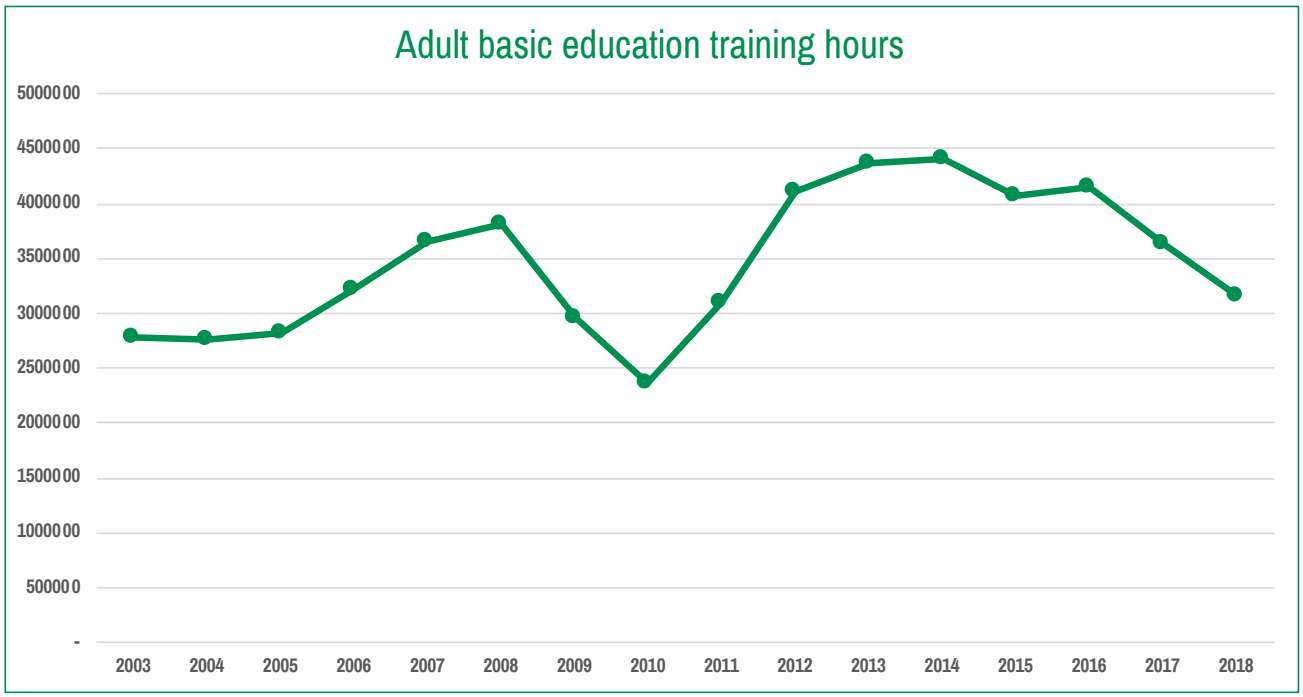
(Source: National VET provider collection

Figure 13: Trends in government-funded ACE FOE 12 – Mixed fields program by subject enrolments 2003–2018



(Source: National VET provider collection

Figure 14: Trends in government-funded ACE FOE 12 – Mixed fields program by training hours 2003–2018



(Source: National VET provider collection)

Table 8: Total VET program enrolments in ACE FOE 12 - Mixed field programmes by reporting provider type, 2015–2018

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018
ACE providers				
Program enrolments	19,241	17,467	20,209	19,741
Subject enrolments	139,436	130,936	144,623	130,366
Training hours	4,921,977	4,888,613	4,443,501	3,990,599
Subjects per enrolment	*7*	*7*	*7*	*7*
Training hours per program	*256*	*280*	*220*	*202*

(Source: National VET Provider Collection; National VET in Schools Collection)

Notes: FOE 12 - Mixed field programmes based on program field of education for all measures, including subject enrolments and hours.

training hours have remained steady between 2015 and 2018 (refer Table 8).

There has also been a trend towards AQF program enrolments in accredited adult basic education at ACE training providers – from 3.2% in 2010 to 5.1% in 2018 (refer Table 9).

AQF training is all Certificate I and above qualification courses.

Non-AQF training includes courses at secondary education level (Year 11 & 12), non-award courses, subject-only enrolments (i.e. not enrolled in a course), statements of attainment (part courses), and not elsewhere classified.

Total VET AQF program enrolments at ACE providers have remained consistent at around 7–8% between 2015–2018 (refer Table 10).

Table 9: Government-funded program enrolments in FOE 12 – Mixed fields program by provider type 2010–2018

Provider	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
	no. '000'	%	no. '000'	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
TAFE																		
AQF	85.5	31.6	104.1	36.8	163.9	47.2	180.5	48.0	113.2	46.9	81.5	46.1	79.8	47.0	86.4	48.6	82.4	44.5
Non-AQF	144.0	53.2	131.2	46.3	112.0	32.2	100.6	26.7	53.9	22.3	35.5	20.1	35.9	21.1	42.3	23.8	58.8	31.8
Total	229.4	84.8	235.3	83.1	275.9	79.4	281.1	74.7	167.1	69.2	117.0	66.2	115.6	68.1	128.7	72.5	141.2	76.3
OTHER GOVT																		
AQF	8.1	3.0	9.7	3.4	15.2	4.4	12.5	3.3	6.8	2.8	6.6	3.8	7.9	4.7	7.8	4.4	8.2	4.4
Non-AQF	6.6	2.4	8.1	2.9	4.8	1.4	3.4	0.9	2.2	0.9	2.4	1.4	2.5	1.5	2.1	1.2	2.8	1.5
Total	14.7	5.4	17.8	6.3	20.0	5.8	15.9	4.2	8.9	3.7	9.0	5.1	10.4	6.1	9.9	5.6	11.0	5.9
ACE																		
AQF	8.8	3.2	10.2	3.6	13.7	3.9	12.8	3.4	9.8	4.0	8.8	5.0	9.0	5.3	9.7	5.5	9.4	5.1
Non-AQF	6.1	2.2	6.0	2.1	4.6	1.3	4.7	1.3	4.9	2.0	4.5	2.6	4.7	2.8	3.7	2.1	4.1	2.2
Total	14.8	5.5	16.2	5.7	18.2	5.3	17.5	4.6	14.6	6.1	13.4	7.6	13.7	8.1	13.4	7.6	13.4	7.3
OTHER RTOs																		
AQF	7.7	2.9	9.0	3.2	27.0	7.8	57.9	15.4	45.2	18.7	31.0	17.5	23.7	14.0	21.7	12.2	16.5	8.9
Non-AQF	4.0	1.5	4.9	1.7	6.3	1.8	3.8	1.0	5.4	2.2	6.3	3.6	6.2	3.7	3.9	2.2	3.0	1.6
Total	11.7	4.3	13.9	4.9	33.3	9.6	61.7	16.4	50.7	21.0	37.3	21.1	30.0	17.7	25.6	14.4	19.5	10.6
TOTAL PROVIDERS																		
AQF	110.1	40.7	133.1	47.0	219.7	63.2	263.7	70.1	175.0	72.5	128.0	72.4	120.4	71.0	125.6	70.7	116.4	62.9
Non-AQF	160.6	59.3	150.2	53.0	127.7	36.8	112.5	29.9	66.3	27.5	48.7	27.6	49.2	29.0	52.0	29.3	68.6	37.1
Total	270.7	100	283.3	100	347.4	100	376.2	100	241.3	100	176.7	100	169.7	100	177.6	100	185.1	100

(Source: National VET Provider Collection, 2019.)

*AQF training is all Certificate I and above qualification courses. Non-AQF training includes courses at secondary education level (Year 11 & 12), non-award courses, subject-only enrolments (i.e. not enrolled in a course), statement of attainment courses, and 'not elsewhere classified'

Table 10: Total VET program enrolments in FOE 12 – Mixed fields program by provider type 2015–2018

Provider	2015		2016		2017		2018	
	no. '000'	%	no. '000'	%	no. '000'	%	no. '000'	%
TAFE								
AQF	102.8	44.8	97.0	43.0	101.3	43.1	93.7	41.9
Non-AQF	18.0	7.9	20.8	9.2	19.1	8.1	29.2	13.1
Total	120.8	53.7	117.9	52.3	120.5	51.2	122.9	55.0
UNIVERSITIES								
AQF	7.9	3.4	7.5	3.3	6.8	2.9	6.1	2.7
Non-AQF	.6	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.6	0.3
Total	8.5	3.7	8.1	3.6	7.2	3.0	6.7	3.0
SCHOOLS								
AQF	21.7	9.5	26.5	11.7	19.8	8.4	19.4	8.7
Non-AQF	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Total	21.9	9.6	26.7	11.9	19.9	8.5	19.5	8.7
ACE								
AQF	17.6	7.7	15.9	7.0	18.6	7.9	17.5	7.8
Non-AQF	1.6	0.7	1.6	0.7	1.6	0.7	2.3	1.0
Total	19.2	8.4	17.5	7.7	20.2	8.6	19.7	8.8
ENTERPRISE PROVIDERS								
AQF	5.0	2.2	4.0	1.8	5.2	2.2	4.8	2.2
Non-AQF	0.9	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.1	1.0	0.4
Total	5.8	2.5	4.3	1.9	5.5	2.4	5.8	2.6
PRIVATE TRAINING PROVIDERS								
AQF	46.9	20.4	43.5	19.3	55.7	23.7	44.7	20.0
Non-AQF	6.2	2.7	7.6	3.4	6.0	2.6	4.3	1.9
Total	53.1	23.1	51.1	22.6	61.8	26.3	49.0	21.9
TOTAL PROVIDERS								
AQF	201.9	88.0	194.4	86.2	207.5	88.3	186.2	83.3
Non-AQF	27.5	12.0	31.2	13.8	27.5	11.7	37.5	16.7
Total	229.4	100.0	225.6	100.0	235.1	100.0	223.7	100.0

(Source: National VET Provider Collection – NCVER data request 2019.)

Enterprise providers are registered training organisations whose primary business is not the delivery of training and development.

Accredited adult basic education students include people from various equity groups. Table 11 shows that ACE organisations are significant providers of accredited adult basic education to key equity groups; for example:

- People with a disability and the unemployed are significantly more highly represented in accredited adult basic education at ACE providers than all other VET providers.
- Students from a non-English speaking-background (NESB) are also more highly represented in accredited adult basic education program enrolments at ACE providers.
- The percentage of students from outer regional, remote and very remote regions has been decreasing across all providers over the past 10 years. However, ACE providers showed an increase in program enrolment for this cohort from 2017 to 2018.

Table 11: Government-funded program enrolments in FOE12 – Mixed fields programmes by reporting provider type and equity group, % of total, 2003–2018

Equity group / Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Students with a disability (% of total)																
ACE providers	16.1	15.9	21.5	21.9	22.1	21.0	21.5	25.9	28.3	28.0	28.6	34.5	40.6	40.3	38.1	34.6
All other providers	16.3	16.2	16.5	16.8	16.1	16.2	15.8	16.3	16.5	15.1	13.9	16.0	15.7	16.0	14.8	14.4
Indigenous students (% of total)																
ACE providers	4.3	3.4	4.8	4.3	6.7	5.9	8.1	8.5	7.2	4.3	5.4	4.9	4.5	3.9	4.5	4.8
All other providers	10.1	10.2	10.2	9.6	9.3	10.2	10.3	10.8	9.4	7.5	6.2	7.4	8.5	8.7	8.7	8.5
Students from a non-English speaking-background (% of total)																
ACE providers	20.7	32.7	33.7	31.7	29.0	34.6	32.1	32.6	33.2	33.5	36.3	40.2	44.6	43.7	44.1	51.0
All other providers	20.6	21.9	23.1	22.7	28.2	28.1	26.8	27.7	27.7	29.2	31.1	38.7	43.9	44.6	45.8	43.9
Students from outer regional, remote and very remote regions (% of total)																
ACE providers	N/A	N/A	N/A	7.1	7.0	6.9	10.4	14.1	6.7	4.5	6.0	3.8	3.1	3.6	3.4	4.6
All other providers	N/A	N/A	N/A	16.5	17.4	18.1	18.5	19.2	14.6	12.1	10.6	10.1	10.2	9.8	9.8	9.2
Students who are unemployed (% of total)																
ACE providers	22.1	25.4	27.3	29.6	29.4	31.5	32.2	31.9	38.8	45.3	43.1	44.9	46.9	49.9	48.9	48.2
All other providers	27.2	26.5	25.6	25.4	25.5	25.3	26.6	28.9	29.0	29.9	32.8	33.1	31.3	29.7	27.6	25.0
Students not in the labour force (% of total)																
ACE providers	23.4	27.7	32.8	31.6	29.6	29.0	28.5	29.9	32.6	27.6	32.0	31.0	34.4	32.5	33.1	34.9
All other providers	24.7	24.2	24.0	24.1	27.1	27.3	27.6	27.8	26.7	25.0	23.5	28.0	32.1	35.1	38.4	37.3

(Source: National VET Provider Collection. Note: N/A not collected)

Total VET program enrolments tell a similar story (refer Table 12) showing that:

- People with a disability and the unemployed are more highly represented in accredited adult basic education at ACE providers than all other VET providers.

Successfully completed hours in accredited adult basic education in ACE VET providers and in other VET providers have been calculated and 'load pass rates' determined (Tables 13 and 14). A load pass rate is the ratio of hours studied by students who passed their subject(s) to the total hours committed to by all students who passed, failed or withdrew from the corresponding subject(s).

In other words, a load pass rate can be thought of as the ratio of 'profitable hours' to the total hours undertaken by students.

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

Table 13 shows that in 2018, students in government-funded accredited adult basic education at ACE providers have been successfully completing 67% of the total hours of training they signed up for. This rate of success is above that for students at all other VET providers by a margin of around 5%. Table 14 shows that in 2018, students in total VET accredited adult basic education at ACE providers have been successfully completing 72% of the total hours of training – a success rate that is 6% above that for students at all other VET providers.

Accredited adult basic education programs assist people to cope with the demands of everyday life. They boost the functioning, confidence, and self-esteem of educationally disadvantaged adults and can motivate them to do further study (Foster & Beddie 2005).

Table 12: Total VET program enrolments in FOE12 – Mixed fields programmes by reporting provider type and equity group, % of total, 2003–2018

Equity group / Year	2015	2016	2017	2018
Students with a disability (% of total)				
ACE providers	29.3	33.1	29.3	27.0
All other providers	12.0	12.2	11.7	11.2
Indigenous students as				
ACE providers	7.2	6.6	5.5	6.8
All other providers	7.0	7.6	7.7	7.4
Students from a non-English speaking-background (% of total)				
ACE providers	33.7	34.7	35.3	43.1
All other providers	43.3	44.2	48.0	48.0
Students from outer regional, remote and very remote regions (% of total)				
ACE providers	5.6	5.5	6.9	8.1
All other providers	10.9	10.5	9.8	9.2
Students who are unemployed (% of total)				
ACE providers	38.8	41.8	45.3	45.2
All other providers	25.4	24.5	24.3	22.4
Students not in the labour force (% of total)				
ACE providers	31.0	30.6	27.6	27.9
All other providers	29.3	29.4	32.7	32.7

(Source: National VET Provider Collection; National VET in Schools Collection.

Table 13: Government funded load pass rates (%) in FOE 12 – Mixed field programmes by reporting provider type, 2003–2018

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
ACE providers	52.0	53.4	52.0	51.7	47.3	46.0	46.7	51.9	50.8	56.8	56.3	57.7	62.4	65.0	64.1	66.7
Other providers	59.6	60.3	62.6	63.9	65.1	65.4	66.3	66.1	67.2	70.1	72.1	66.9	64.4	64.0	61.9	61.3
Total	**59.2**	**59.8**	**62.0**	**63.1**	**63.8**	**63.7**	**65.1**	**65.3**	**66.1**	**69.1**	**71.0**	**66.1**	**64.2**	**64.1**	**62.1**	**61.9**

(Source: National VET Provider Collection)

Table 14: Total VET load pass rates (%) in FOE 12 – Mixed field programmes by provider type, 2015–2018

	2015	2016	2017	2018
ACE providers	67.5	71.7	70.3	72.4
Other providers	67.4	69.3	67.5	66.7
Total	**67.4**	**69.5**	**67.8**	**67.3**

(Source: National VET Provider Collection)

Adult basic education programs can help people find and keep work, and when combined with vocational subjects they can offer a greater understanding of the world of work.

There is a high literacy challenge in Australia that ACE providers are responding to, in order to achieve social equity and inclusion. Almost half of Australia's adult population has literacy and numeracy skills levels below those required for effective functioning in the workplace and modern life in general (ABS, 2008 and OECD, 2013).

> There is a 'foundation learner type' who needs to further develop in key areas such as literacy, numeracy and interpersonal skills in order to undertake further study.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults is a ten-year framework for improving education and employment outcomes for working age Australians with low levels of language, literacy, numeracy and employability skills.

The Strategy recognises that literacy development is a lifelong activity with life-wide implications. Governments aim to have two thirds of working age Australians having the literacy and numeracy skills levels required to function effectively in workplaces and modern life generally by 2022. The Strategy acknowledges 'providers of adult education in community settings' as critical to providing diverse foundation skills programs for adults, including through pre-vocational and bridging programs' (SCOTESE, 2012, p. 12).

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

The contribution of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy courses for both personal development and social capital should receive greater attention and acknowledgement, particularly through funding support. Finding ways of assessing and acknowledging the full range of outcomes achieved from non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy courses may aid achievement of this support (Dymock & Billet, 2008).

Given the significant outcomes achieved in basic adult education by ACE providers, it's important to further investigate the capacity of the sector to lead in the delivery of foundation skills programs; particularly those aimed at key equity groups.

Ensuring flexibility in the delivery of basic adult education training is important. Not all adults need full qualifications training in this area, rather they want skills-gap training that can be standalone or integrated with vocationally focussed learning programs.

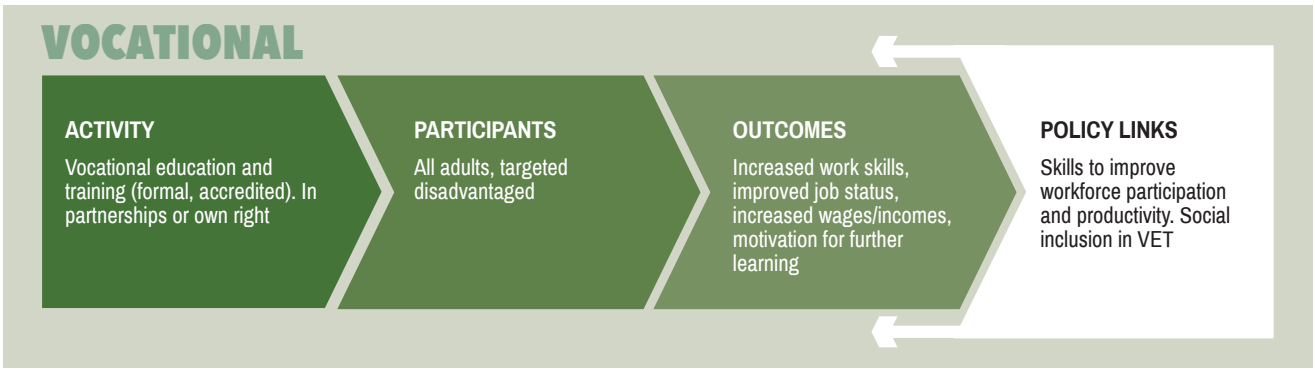
> ACE providers require support to build the skills of their adult basic education practitioners to ensure that disadvantaged learners have access to foundation skills.

FORMAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Some ACE organisations deliver formal vocational education and training as well as adult basic education and personal interest learning. These ACE providers have registered training organisation (RTO) status to deliver formal or accredited VET subjects, skill sets and whole qualifications, and issue recognised Australian VET qualifications and other awards.

There are also ACE providers that are not RTOs but who assist with formal accredited VET delivery by entering into partnerships with other RTOs that take responsibility for assuring the quality of assessments and judgements about competence or outcomes achieved and the issuing of the final VET awards.

Figure 15: Formal VET in ACE program logic



KEY FEATURES

ACE providers in the formal VET system serve a generic and a value-adding role (Schofield & Associates, 1996). The generic role of ACE in VET is to offer VET to all adults. The value-adding role of ACE is to bring in its distinctive qualities to VET, which are identified as strongly local, community-based, flexible, market-driven, learner-centred and focussed on assisting disadvantaged students into and through the VET system. It is the value-adding role that distinguishes ACE providers in VET and makes ACE VET both complementary and supplementary to the VET provision by other VET providers. For example, Harris & Simons (2007) compared data they collected on a sample of ACE providers (84) with a sample of other private RTOs (330). The data painted a picture of the sector's distinctiveness. It showed that ACE providers:

- were more embedded in their local communities, usually delivered in one state only
- offered markedly different programs
- were more socially oriented with high percentages of their courses in mixed field programs such as literacy and numeracy, information technology and in the fields of society and cultures, education and creative arts
- offered more pastoral care, education support and personal/career counselling services than private providers
- relied more heavily on government funding for their nationally accredited training and on part time and casual staff and so they 'skate on relatively thin ice'

(Harris & Simons 2007).

WHO PARTICIPATES?

In 2018, 4.1 million students were enrolled in nationally recognised VET programs. Of these:

- 2.9 million (71%) were enrolled at private providers
- 777,100 (19.1%) were enrolled at TAFE
- 481,200 (11.8%) were enrolled at ACE providers
- 116,600 (2.9%) were enrolled at enterprise providers
- 105,100 (2.6%) were enrolled in schools
- 69,200 (1.7%) were enrolled at university.

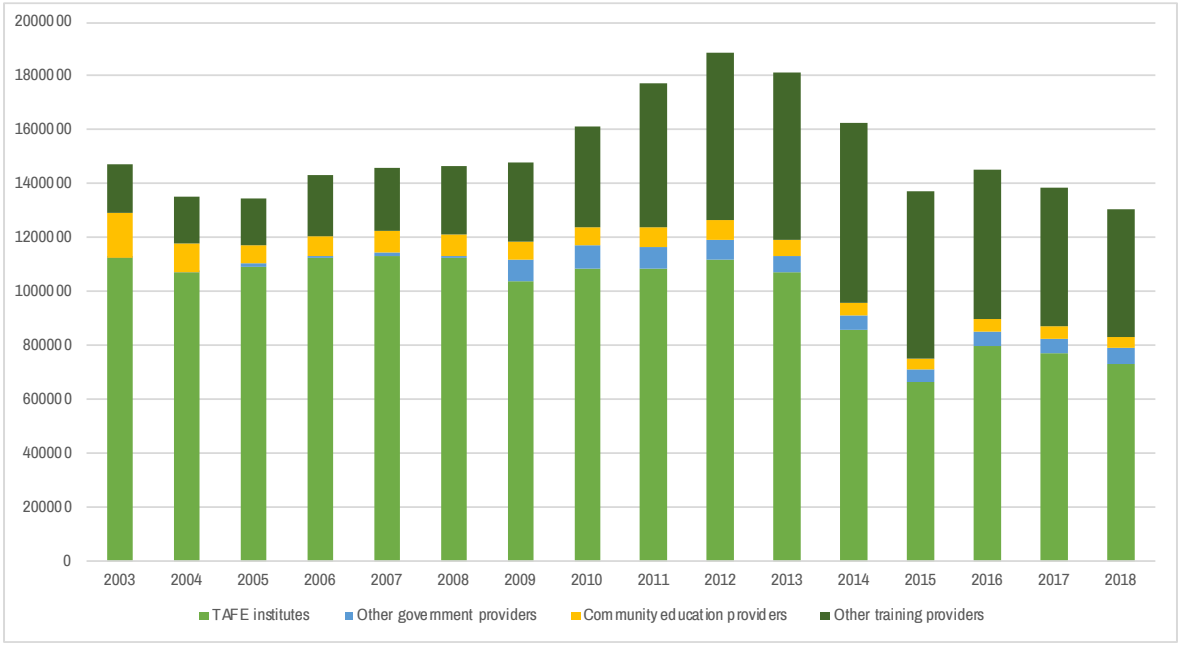
(NCVER, 2018, p. 12)

Government-funded VET

NCVER data on government-funded program enrolments in all VET shows that in 2018 there were 41,401 program enrolments at ACE providers, which accounts for 3.2% of the total, and shows a decrease of around 8% from 2003–2018 (refer Figure 16). In 2018, around 55% of these enrolments were students from SEIFA quintile 1 (the most disadvantaged) and SEIFA quintile 2, which is around 10% higher than all other providers (NCVER, 2018).

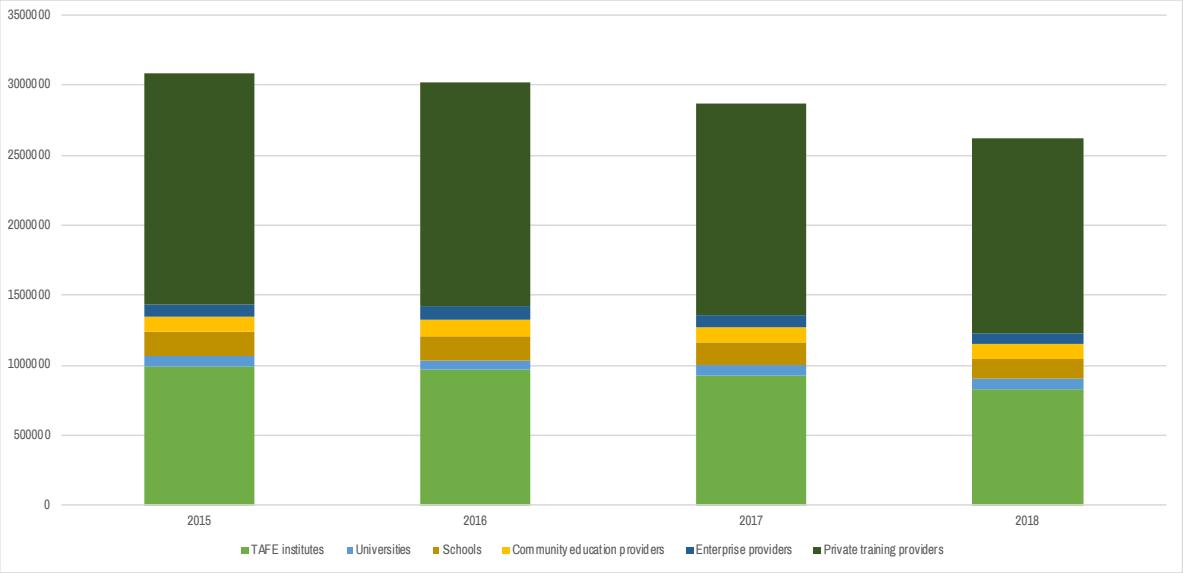
Thirty-six per cent of ACE enrolments were from students in regional and remote areas and just under 32% were 45 years and over (compared with around 16.5% for all other providers). Significantly 21% of enrolments were from people with a disability (compared with 7% for all other providers) (NCVER, 2018).

Figure 16: No. government-funded program enrolments by reporting provider type, 2003–2018



(Source: National VET Provider Collection, NCVER 2020)

Figure 17: Total VET program enrolments by reporting provider type, 2015–2018



(Source: National VET Provider Collection, NCVER 2020)

Total VET

Total VET data shows that in 2018 there were 102,486 program enrolments at ACE providers, which accounts for 3.9% of the total, and shows an increase of 0.6% from 2015 (refer Figure 17).

VET OTHER THAN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

NCVER data on ACE VET provision in all fields of education (other than FOE 12 adult basiceducation) shows that in 2018 there were 27,975 (or 2.5%) government-funded program enrolments at ACE VET providers (refer Table 15) and 82,745 (or 3.4%) of total VET program enrolments (refer Table 16).

Table 15: Government-funded program enrolments (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed field programmes) by reporting provider type, 2003–2018

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
ACE 000	138.0	84.6	50.3	51.7	55.5	52.1	48.9	48.7	52.4	54.0	38.2	34.2	27.6	28.4	28.8	28.0
Total 000	1266.5	1148.4	1137.4	1199.2	1204.0	1211.2	1213.7	1345.2	1492.4	1538.9	1436.5	1385.1	1194.5	1282.2	1209.9	1120.4
%	10.9	7.4	4.4	4.3	4.6	4.3	4.0	3.6	3.5	3.5	2.7	2.5	2.3	2.2	2.4	2.5

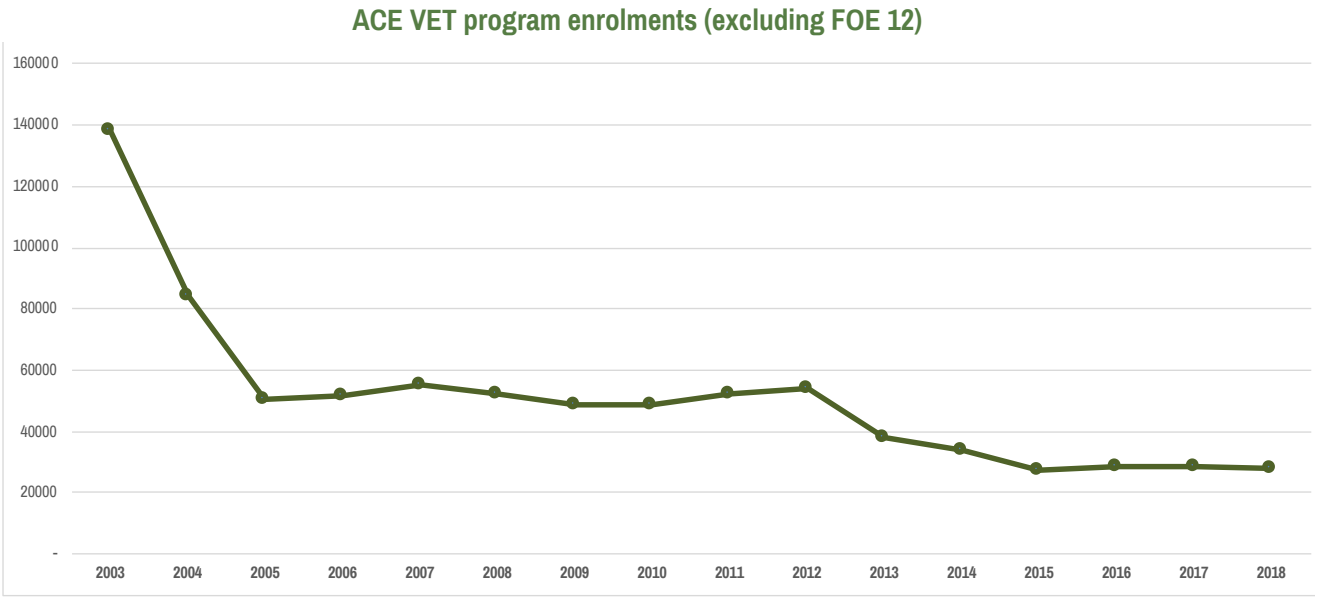
(Source: National VET Provider Collection, NCVER 2020)

Table 16: Total VET program enrolments (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed field programmes) by reporting provider type, 2015–2018

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018
ACE 000	82.4	101.5	87.1	82.7
Total 000	2850.6	2791.4	2633.4	2398.9
%	2.9	3.6	3.3	3.4

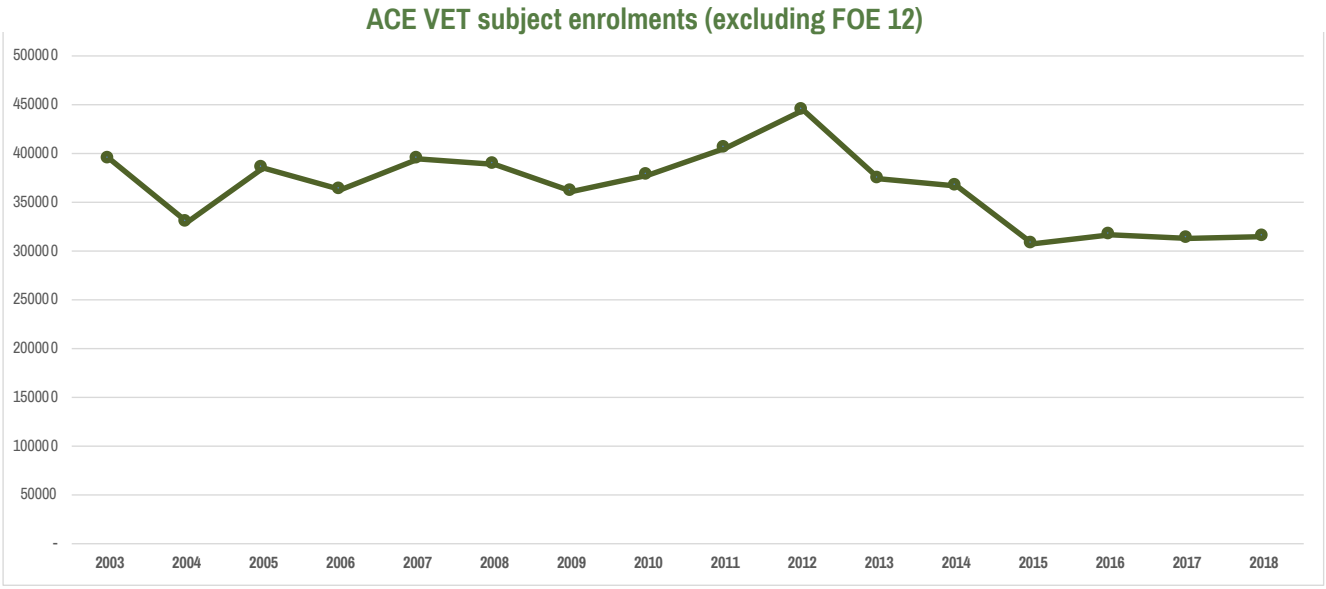
(Source: National VET Provider Collection; National VET in Schools Collection, NCVER 2020

Figure 18: Trends in government funded ACE VET program enrolments (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed fields program) 2003–2018



(Source: National VET provider collection

Figure 19: Trends in government funded ACE VET subject enrolments (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed fields program) 2003–2018



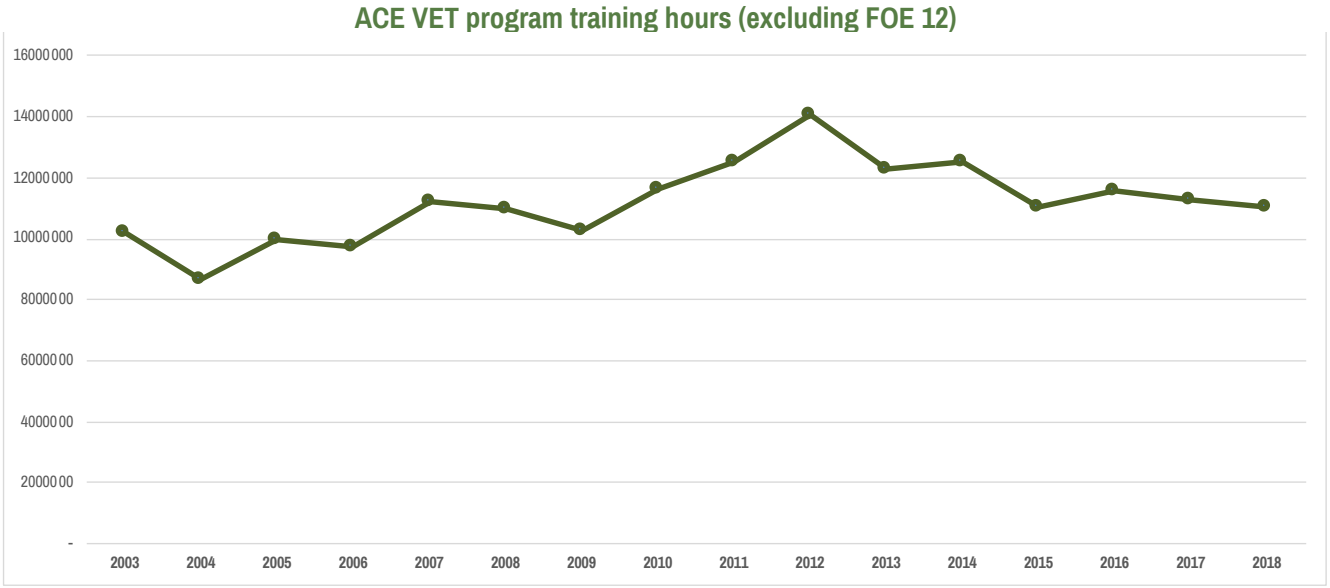
(Source: National VET provider collection

From 2003–2018, programs enrolments in government-funded VET at ACE providers (excluding FOE 12) have significantly decreased (refer Figure 18). Subject enrolments peaked in 2012 but have steadily decreased (refer Figure 19), and training hours have tapered off (refer Figure 20).

There were increases in average subject enrolments per program from three (3) per program in 2003 to eleven (11) in 2018. Average training hours per program have increased from 74 in 2003 to 395 in 2018 (Refer Table 17).

Total VET program enrolments have remained steady. Subject enrolments and training hours have increased substantially from 2015–2018. Subject per enrolment have increased from 10 to 19 and training hours have increased from 291 to 369 (refer Table 18).

Figure 20: Trends in government funded ACE VET training hours (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed fields program) 2003–2018



(Source: National VET provider collection)

Table 17: Government funded VET (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed field programmes) 2003–2018

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
ACE providers (000)																
Program enrolments	138	85	50	52	56	52	49	49	52	54	38	34	28	28	29	28
Subject enrolments	396	330	386	363	396	390	361	379	407	445	374	368	308	317	314	315
Training hours	10200	8650	9952	9734	11215	10960	10256	11653	12503	14066	12305	12548	11044	11548	11261	11052
Subjects per program	*3*	*4*	*8*	*7*	*7*	*7*	*7*	*8*	*8*	*8*	*10*	*11*	*11*	*11*	*11*	*11*
Training hours per program	*74*	*102*	*198*	*188*	*202*	*210*	*210*	*239*	*239*	*260*	*322*	*367*	*400*	*407*	*391*	*395*

(Source: National VET Provider Collection)

Table 18: Total ACE VET (excluding FOE 12 - Mixed field programmes) 2015–2018

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018
ACE providers				
Program enrolments	82,403	101,536	87,138	82,745
Subject enrolments	797,091	1,459,344	1,459,344	1,550,135
Training hours	23,996,381	30,077,397	32,142,771	30,551,352
Subjects per enrolment	*10*	*14*	*18*	*19*
Training hours per program	*291*	*296*	*369*	*369*

(Source: National VET Provider Collection; National VET in Schools Collection)

There has been a slight trend away from AQF program enrolments at ACE training providers – from 3.5% in 2010 to 2.2% in 2018 (refer Table 19), which is consistent across all providers. ACE AQF program enrolments in total VET have remained consistent at 2.8% (refer Table 20).

Table 19: Government-funded program enrolments (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed field programmes) by reporting provider type and level of education, 2010–2018

Provider	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
	no. '000'	%	no. '000'	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
TAFE																		
AQF	798.3	59.3	804.9	53.9	808.3	52.5	759.4	52.9	633.5	45.7	493.2	41.3	510.7	39.8	534.9	44.2	513.3	45.8
Non-AQF	57.3	4.3	47.2	3.2	36.3	2.4	34.7	2.4	55.9	4.0	52.0	4.4	174.1	13.6	108.9	9.0	79.8	7.1
Total	855.6	63.6	852.1	57.1	844.6	54.9	794.1	55.3	689.4	49.8	545.2	45.6	684.8	53.4	643.8	53.2	593.1	52.9
OTHER GOVT																		
AQF	72.3	5.4	63.2	4.2	53.3	3.5	42.6	3.0	44.7	3.2	42.0	3.5	42.3	3.3	44.8	3.7	44.2	3.9
Non-AQF	0.5	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.0			0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	1.3	0.1	1.1	0.1	3.1	0.3
Total	72.9	5.4	63.5	4.3	53.6	3.5	42.6	3.0	44.7	3.2	42.2	3.5	43.6	3.4	45.9	3.8	47.3	4.2
ACE																		
AQF	47.6	3.5	50.8	3.4	52.3	3.4	37.7	2.6	32.7	2.4	25.7	2.1	25.3	2.0	24.9	2.1	24.8	2.2
Non-AQF	1.1	0.1	1.6	0.1	1.7	0.1	0.5	0.0	1.5	0.1	1.9	0.2	3.0	0.2	3.9	0.3	3.2	0.3
Total	48.7	3.6	52.4	3.5	54.0	3.5	38.2	2.7	34.2	2.5	27.6	2.3	28.4	2.2	28.8	2.4	28.0	2.5
OTHER RTOs																		
AQF	365.3	27.2	522.1	35.0	584.5	38.0	559.3	38.9	614.6	44.4	576.6	48.3	521.2	40.6	485.4	40.1	440.9	39.4
Non-AQF	2.7	0.2	2.2	0.1	2.3	0.1	2.4	0.2	2.3	0.2	2.9	0.2	4.2	0.3	5.9	0.5	11.1	1.0
Total	368.0	27.4	524.3	35.1	586.7	38.1	561.7	39.1	616.8	44.5	579.5	48.5	525.4	41.0	491.3	40.6	452.0	40.3
TOTAL PROVIDERS																		
AQF	1283.5	95.4	1441.0	96.6	1498.4	97.4	1399.0	97.4	1325.4	95.7	1137.4	95.2	1099.5	85.7	1090.0	90.1	1023.2	91.3
Non-AQF	61.7	4.6	51.3	3.4	40.6	2.6	37.6	2.6	59.7	4.3	57.1	4.8	182.7	14.3	119.9	9.9	97.2	8.7
Total	1345.2	100.0	1492.4	100.0	1538.9	100.0	1436.5	100.0	1385.1	100.0	1194.5	100.0	1282.2	100.0	1209.9	100.0	1120.4	100.0

(Source: National VET Provider Collection – NCVER data request 2020.) *AQF training is all Certificate I and above qualification courses. Non-AQF training includes courses at secondary education level (Year 11 & 12), non-award courses, subject-only enrolments (i.e. not enrolled in a course), statement of attainment courses, and 'not elsewhere classified'.

Table 20: Total VET program enrolments (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed fields program) by provider type 2015–2018

Provider	2015		2016		2017		2018	
	no. '000'	%	no. '000'	%	no. '000'	%	no. '000'	%
TAFE								
AQF	832.3	29.2	799.3	28.6	776.7	29.5	690.9	28.8
Non-AQF	35.8	1.3	48.5	1.7	33.3	1.3	19.3	0.8
Total	868.1	30.5	847.8	30.4	810.0	30.8	710.2	29.6
UNIVERSITIES								
AQF	65.0	2.3	61.3	2.2	61.2	2.3	59.8	2.5
Non-AQF	1.2	0.0	0.6	0.0	1.0	0.0	1.1	0.0
Total	66.3	2.3	61.8	2.2	62.1	2.4	60.9	2.5
SCHOOLS								
AQF	154.2	5.4	144.5	5.2	138.5	5.3	124.5	5.2
Non-AQF	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.0
Total	154.3	5.4	144.7	5.2	138.7	5.3	124.6	5.2
ACE								
AQF	80.1	2.8	71.3	2.6	72.5	2.8	67.0	2.8
Non-AQF	2.3	0.1	30.2	1.1	14.6	0.6	15.7	0.7
Total	82.4	2.9	101.5	3.6	87.1	3.3	82.7	3.4
ENTERPRISE PROVIDERS								
AQF	62.0	2.2	76.3	2.7	72.5	2.8	64.0	2.7
Non-AQF	18.7	0.7	18.2	0.7	15.7	0.6	14.0	0.6
Total	80.7	2.8	94.5	3.4	88.2	3.4	78.0	3.3
PRIVATE TRAINING PROVIDERS								
AQF	1529.6	53.7	1459.0	52.3	1349.6	51.3	1227.0	51.2
Non-AQF	69.3	2.4	82.1	2.9	97.6	3.7	115.4	4.8
Total	1598.9	56.1	1541.1	55.2	1447.2	55.0	1342.4	56.0
TOTAL PROVIDERS								
AQF	2723.3	95.5	2611.7	93.6	2471.1	93.8	2233.2	93.1
Non-AQF	127.2	4.5	179.7	6.4	162.3	6.2	165.6	6.9
Total	2850.6	100.0	2791.4	100.0	2633.4	100.0	2398.8	100.0

(Source: National VET Provider Collection, NCVER 2020.)

Equity groups

In government-funded programs, 2018 NCVER data highlights ACE RTOs as significant providers of VET to key equity groups. Particularly significant is the percentage of unemployed people enrolled in VET programs at ACE providers, accounting for just over 40% of the total. ACE providers also work with higher percentages of people with disability (13.8%); and people from non-English speaking backgrounds (20.9%) (refer Table 21). These results are similar for total VET program enrolments (refer Table 22).

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

Successfully completed hours in VET (excluding FOE-12) at ACE providers and other providers have been calculated and 'load pass rates' determined (refer Tables 23 and 24). Table 23 shows that in 2018, students in government-funded VET at ACE providers have been successfully completing around 87% of the total hours of training they signed up. The rate of success is above that for students at other providers by around 3%. Table 24 shows that in 2018, students in total VET at ACE providers have been

Table 21: Government-funded ACE VETprogram enrolments (excluding FOE12 – Mixed fields programmes) by reporting provider type & equity group, % of total, 2003–2018

Equity group / Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Students with a disability (% of total)																
ACE providers	4.6	4.9	5.2	5.5	6.4	7.5	7.9	7.8	8.6	8.8	8.5	9.7	11.3	13.6	14.0	13.8
All other providers	5.5	5.8	6.0	6.2	6.1	5.9	6.0	6.2	6.3	6.5	6.5	7.1	7.2	8.1	8.2	8.6
Indigenous students as (%of total)																
ACE providers	1.9	2.5	4.2	4.6	6.5	6.5	6.6	8.0	7.5	5.5	6.0	7.1	6.6	8.0	7.8	8.5
All other providers	4.2	4.4	4.7	4.9	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.3	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.6	6.2	6.7	7.3	7.7
Students from a non-English speaking-background (% of total)																
ACE providers	9.0	9.2	12.7	12.0	11.9	12.6	8.2	9.5	10.5	12.8	15.9	17.1	22.6	20.3	21.8	20.9
All other providers	12.8	12.7	12.6	12.9	12.4	13.2	12.7	12.6	13.1	13.6	14.7	16.0	15.2	14.7	14.3	13.8
Students from outer regional, remote and very remote regions (% of total)																
ACE providers	N/A	N/A	N/A	13.9	26.2	27.4	33.8	32.3	23.8	17.2	20.3	18.0	14.7	16.1	12.0	11.3
All other providers	N/A	N/A	N/A	18.1	20.7	19.8	19.0	18.8	14.9	14.7	14.1	13.6	14.9	14.2	14.3	14.1
Students who are unemployed (% of total)																
ACE providers	10.9	14.9	17.9	19.3	21.5	24.8	27.4	29.6	28.8	29.6	28.3	36.2	39.0	38.8	43.3	40.2
All other providers	15.8	15.2	13.8	13.2	12.4	12.5	14.8	16.9	18.1	17.9	19.6	22.7	21.9	21.3	20.7	19.3
Students not in the labour force (% of total)																
All other providers	11.7	11.0	8.1	8.9	8.7	8.7	6.9	8.1	8.4	8.1	7.4	8.3	9.9	11.2	10.9	9.7
All other providers	9.3	9.3	8.8	9.1	9.1	9.1	9.0	9.3	8.9	9.0	9.1	8.8	9.0	9.9	10.9	11.1

(Source: National VET Provider Collection. Note: N/A not collected)

successfully completing 91% of the total hours of training – a success rate that is 6% above that for students at all other VET providers. Again, this is significant due to the equity cohorts that ACE providers are delivering programs to (refer Tables 21 & 22).

VET student outcomes are taken from the National Student Outcomes Survey (SOS). The SOS is an annual survey of VET graduates and subject completers. The SOS has gathered data on government-funded VET since 1999. From 2017, it also reported on all outcomes; including fee-for-service students. The SOS is undertaken in the year following training, meaning that respondents will have finished training between approximately 5 to 18 months prior to undertaking the survey.

SOS data relates to all VET students in mixed field programs, adult basic education programs and other VET fields of education. The 2019 SOS (refer Table 26) identifies a significant increase in employment outcomes for students at ACE VET providers. These results were considerably better than all other VET providers;

Table 22: Total ACE VET program enrolments (excluding FOE12 – Mixed fields programmes) by reporting provider type and equity group, % of total, 2003–2018

Equity group / Year	2015	2016	2017	2018
Students with a disability (% of total)				
ACE providers	7.9	7.9	9.5	9.7
All other providers	5.2	5.5	5.7	5.9
Indigenous students as				
ACE providers	6.6	5.7	6.2	6.7
All other providers	4.7	4.8	44.9	4.9
Students from a non-English speaking-background (% of total)				
ACE providers	14.7	11.8	14.5	15.1
All other providers	14.7	15.0	16.6	17.6
Students from outer regional, remote and very remote regions (% of total)				
ACE providers	16.6	14.0	13.5	12.8
All other providers	13.6	13.0	12.7	11.8
Students who are unemployed (% of total)				
ACE providers	26.9	22.6	27.2	26.7
All other providers	17.7	17.1	16.1	15.5
Students not in the labour force (% of total)				
All other providers	6.6	6.1	8.7	8.2
All other providers	7.7	8.0	8.6	8.9

(Source: National VET Provider Collection; National VET in Schools Collection.

particularly notable given that equity groups that ACE providers work with. Just under 17% of ACE VET training graduates moved from unemployment to employment as a result of their training – accounting for the most signficant shift. Compared with:

- 10.1% of TAFE graduates
- 9.5% of private for-profit training providers
- 7.9% of university VET providers.

The 2019 SOS also found that:

- 89% of graduates were satisfied with the overall quality of training at ACE providers
- 92% of graduates would recommend their provider
- 83% of employed graduates found that their training was relevant to their current job; the greatest percentage of all providers
- 62% of graduates had improved their employment status after their training.

Of the subject completers at ACE providers:

- 87% were employed after their training and 89% were employed or in further study after training
- 94% were satisfied with their teaching and 95% were satisfied with their assessment and the overall quality of their training
- 95% identified that they achieved their main reason for doing the training –the largest percentage of all providers
- 97% would recommend their providers and 81% found their training relevant – the largest percentage of all providers.

Table 23: Government funded load pass rates (%) (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed field programmes) by reporting provider type, 2003–2018

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
ACE providers																
AQF	79.5	82.7	79.8	79.1	78.3	78.5	83.8	84.2	88.4	87.5	85.9	85.7	85.3	86.4	88.4	89.1
Non-AQF	79.0	73.3	76.9	69.5	71.0	65.6	70.7	77.3	78.4	79.7	80.3	84.3	80.5	78.6	80.8	77.0
Total	79.4	81.2	79.5	78.2	77.5	77.2	82.6	83.3	87.3	86.7	85.1	85.6	84.8	85.4	87.7	87.2
Other providers																
AQF	79.1	79.6	80.1	80.3	80.6	81.6	81.8	82.4	84.1	84.4	84.7	85.0	85.2	84.5	84.6	84.5
Non-AQF	74.9	76.2	78.9	78.4	80.4	80.0	78.6	78.9	79.5	79.0	79.9	86.4	87.8	82.1	81.0	85.0
Total	78.9	79.4	80.0	80.2	80.6	81.5	81.7	82.3	84.0	84.3	84.6	85.1	85.2	84.3	84.4	84.5
Total providers																
AQF	79.1	79.6	80.1	80.3	80.6	81.5	81.8	82.4	84.2	84.3	84.8	85.1	85.2	84.5	84.7	84.7
Non--AQF	75.2	76.0	78.8	78.0	79.9	79.1	78.0	78.7	79.3	79.1	80.0	86.1	86.6	81.9	81.0	84.1
Total	78.9	79.4	80.0	80.1	80.5	81.4	81.7	82.3	84.1	84.1	84.7	85.1	85.2	84.4	84.5	84.6

(Source: National VET Provider Collection)

Table 24 Total VET load pass rates (%) (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed field programmes) by provider type, 2015–2018

	2015	2016	2017	2018
ACE providers				
AQF	87.0	88.6	89.2	88.8
Non-AQF	76.2	94.0	92.1	94.1
Total	85.0	90.5	90.3	91.0
Other providers				
AQF	81.1	80.1	81.9	83.3
Non-AQF	94.6	92.5	93.5	94.7
Total	82.4	81.6	83.5	85.0
Total providers				
AQF	81.2	80.4	82.2	83.5
Non-AQF	93.6	92.6	93.3	94.7
Total	82.5	82.0	83.7	85.3

(Source: Table 24 & 25 – National VET Provider Collection –These numbers include skill sets and other training where the program field of education is not assigned.)

ACE providers deliver predominantly mixed fields or adult basic education programs (refer Table 25, which shows ACE program and subject enrolments by field and level of education in 2018).

Table 25: ACE VET program enrolments by field of education and level of education –2018

Field of education by program enrolment	Govt funded no.	% Total	TVA no.	% Total
01 - Natural and physical sciences	50	1.0	305	2.5
02 - Information technology	705	3.0	1310	2.0
03 - Engineering and related technologies	610	0.3	1710	0.5
04 - Architecture and building	625	0.5	2605	1.2
05 - Agriculture, environmental and related studies	2065	5.1	3605	5.8
06 - Health	1020	1.7	15715	9.2
07 - Education	5240	6.7	7365	5.6
08 - Management and commerce	3510	2.0	12225	2.1
09 - Society and culture	10925	5.9	25740	5.9
10 - Creative arts	250	0.9	1160	1.7
11 - Food, hospitality and personal services	2025	1.8	8080	3.9
12 - Mixed field programmes	13425	7.3	19740	8.8
Not assigned	960		2935	
Program level of education by program enrolment	**Govt funded no.**	**% Total**	**TVA no.**	**% Total**
Diploma or above	2820	3.5	7540	1.8
Certificate IV	5560	4.9	12490	2.9
Certificate III	13100	4.7	32590	3.5
Certificate II	6275	5.5	21215	4.4
Certificate I	6390	10.7	10660	7.1
Statement of attainment			17995	8.9
Other recognised programs	5805	5.0		
Non-award programs	1455	5.0		
Total	**41405**		**102495**	
Field of education by subject enrolment	**Govt funded no.**	**% Total**	**TVA no.**	**% Total**
01 - Natural and physical sciences	880	1.6	3930	1.7
02 - Information technology	1935	11.4	1435	0.4
03 - Engineering and related technologies	6915	1.4	19795	0.6
04 - Architecture and building	2645	1.1	9285	0.7
05 - Agriculture, environmental and related studies	7495	9.1	16980	3.0
06 - Health	50730	8.3	999110	14.8
07 - Education	15290	19.4	24060	4.6
08 - Management and commerce	42935	5.5	117760	2.4
09 - Society and culture	87875	10.22	186790	5.3
10 - Creative arts	10070	20.89	21725	3.5
11 - Food, hospitality and personal services	15030	5.8	45595	3.0
12 - Mixed field programmes	147955	19.7	234030	6.9
Program level of education by subject enrolment	**Govt funded no.**	**% Total**	**TVA no.**	**% Total**
Diploma or above	31220	5.7	73080	1.9
Certificate IV	45975	6.6	93855	2.5
Certificate III	107710	5.0	253735	3.1
Certificate II	39160	7.9	133660	3.7
Certificate I	41365	30.2	62635	9.1
Statement of attainment			46255	
Subject not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program			1017290	
Other recognised programs	20475	33.3		
Non-award programs	4050	90.0		
No programs level	99800	51.1		
Total	**389755**		**1680510**	

(Source: National VET Provider Collection)

Table 26: Key findings for graduates and subject completers, by provider type 2018, (2019) (%)

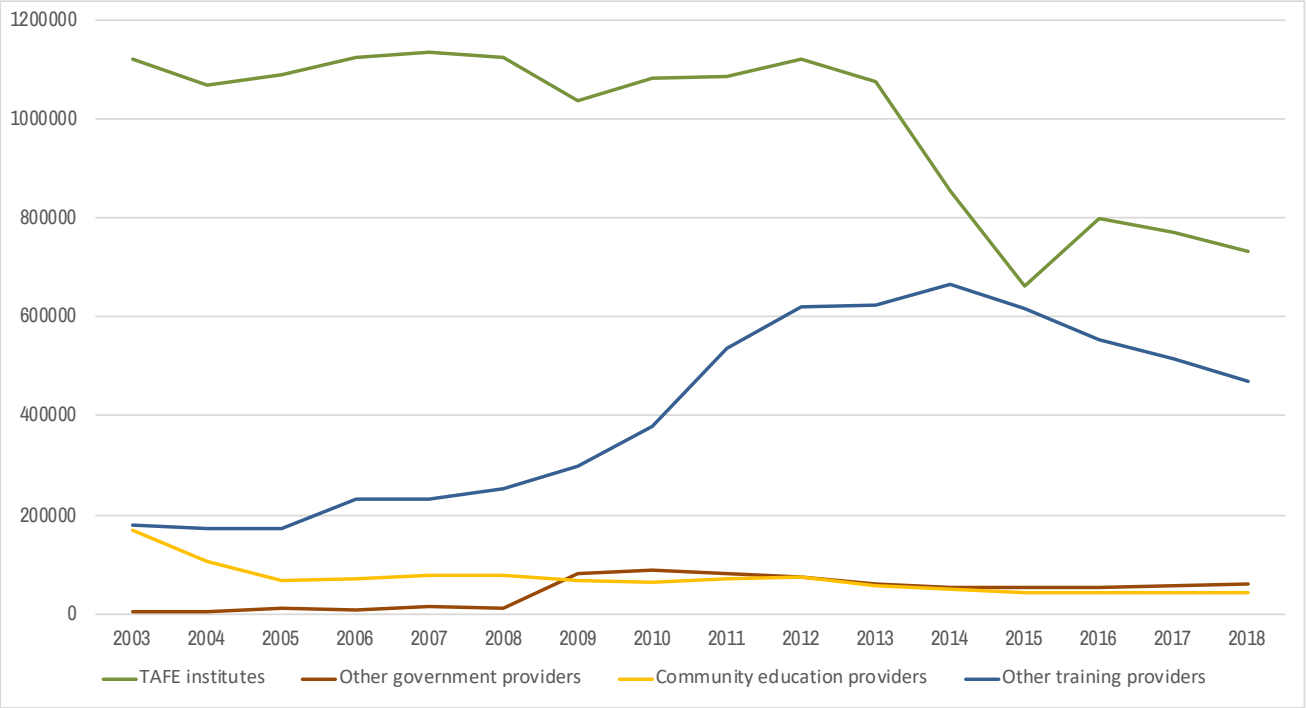
	TAFE institutes	Universities	ACE providers	Private providers	All students
Graduates					
Employed before training	61.2	65.4	53.6	70.8	66.7
Of these: Employed at a higher skill level after training	21.5	23.4	18.4	16.0	18.0
Of these: Better job after training	40.3	39.3	38.3	36.0	37.5
Not employed before training	38.8	34.6	46.4	29.2	33.3
Of these: Employed after training	40.5	39.8	47.5	52.0	46.8
Improved employment status after training	60.9	61.2	62.4	69.1	65.8
Employed after training	71.3	73.3	70.4	80.3	76.6
Employed or in further study after training	85.2	89.9	80.1	86.0	85.6
Enrolled in further study after training	36.3	45.3	29.8	26.1	30.3
Developed problem-solving skills	79.2	80.1	79.7	76.9	77.9
Improved writing skills	54.7	52.4	60.4	50.8	52.6
Improved numerical skills	50.1	46.6	46.2	42.9	45.6
Satisfied with teaching	86.8	84.0	87.9	87.0	86.9
Satisfied with assessment	88.9	86.3	90.4	89.4	89.2
Satisfied with the overall quality of training	88.3	86.9	89.4	88.0	88.1
Achieved main reason for doing the training	81.9	81.4	84.7	85.0	83.9
Recommend training	90.8	88.8	91.7	90.5	90.6
Recommend training provider	90.0	88.0	88.5	88.4	88.9
Of those employed after training:					
Found the training relevant to their current job	79.3	73.0	83.2	81.3	80.5
Received at least one job-related benefit	83.5	79.9	87.5	84.2	84.0
Subject completers					
Employed before training	69.7	68.8	84.6	81.9	81.0
Of these: Employed at a higher skill level after training	12.0	11.0	6.6	8.6	8.6
Of these: Better job after training	26.0	23.8	14.0	21.8	21.3
Not employed before training	30.3	31.2	15.4	18.1	19.0
Of these: Employed after training	36.1	36.2	40.3	47.7	45.2
Improved employment status after training	58.2	57.4	61.0	64.2	63.3
Employed after training	75.0	74.6	87.4	85.4	84.6
Employed or in further study after training	77.2	82.5	89.2	86.9	86.3
Enrolled in further study after training	6.9	22.8	8.0	7.7	7.8
Developed problem-solving skills	71.2	74.4	78.0	75.0	75.0
Improved writing skills	42.4	37.9	21.6	31.0	31.1
Improved numerical skills	39.2	34.5	17.9	28.0	28.1
Satisfied with teaching	83.2	80.8	93.5	90.3	90.0
Satisfied with assessment	85.2	83.5	94.6	91.9	91.6
Satisfied with the overall quality of training	81.9	83.3	95.0	92.1	91.4
Achieved main reason for doing the training	81.3	82.3	95.2	91.9	91.3
Recommend training	86.3	87.4	96.9	94.3	93.9
Recommend training provider	86.8	87.9	96.7	93.6	93.3
Of those employed after training:					
Found the training relevant to their current job	72.2	70.5	81.1	79.2	78.8
Received at least one job-related benefit	73.5	72.9	67.3	72.9	72.3

(Source: NCVER 2019a VET Student Outcomes))

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

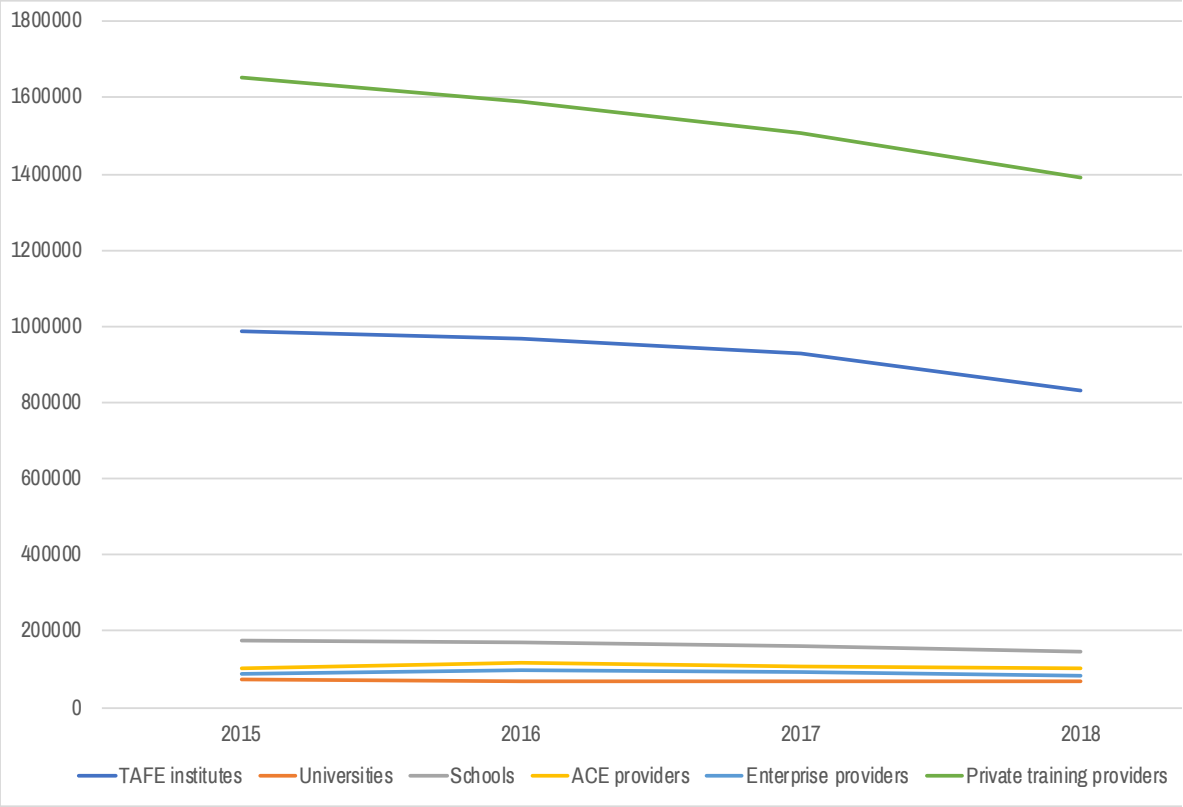
Competitive funding models in VET, particularly the student entitlement funding models introduced in 2009 resulted in a shift in VET provision away from ACE and public providers (TAFEs) and towards private RTOs (refer Figure 21). The percentage of ACE provider program enrolments was around 11% of the total in 2003 and this has dropped to 3.2% in 2018. The share of total VET program enrolments for ACE providers has remained fairly consistent between 2015 and 2018, and in 2018 was 3.9% of the total (Table 22). Some specific impact data on ACE of the demand-driven individual choice approach to VET was found for Victoria (in a 2014 briefing paper entitled 'Impact of skills reform on

Figure 21: Government-funded program enrolments by reporting provider type, 2003-2018



Source: National VET Provider Collection

Figure 22: Total VET program enrolments by provider type, 2015-2018



Source: National VET Provider Collection

adult and community education (ACE) providers' endorsed by several ACE peak organisations – ACEVic, ALA, CCA and NH Victoria). The briefing paper reveals that since Victoria's demand-driven individual choice in VET funding model was introduced in 2008, there has been a 27% drop in ACE providers delivering government-funded VET across the state and enrolments in pre-accredited pathways programs aimed at disadvantaged learners have dropped 25% (DECD, 2013). The briefing paper called for reconsideration of the question of how to accommodate disadvantaged students in VET within competitive VET funding models and to reverse the unintended adverse effects on its ACE providers and the vulnerable learners that these models are having. The paper suggested that governments:

1 Outline specifically the separate and complementary roles of the public TAFE system, not for profit community providers and private for profit providers; and in particular not to treat ACE RTOs the same as private providers as they have a fundamentally different model (refer Table 27).

2 Introduce some form of 'community social/service obligation' fund (other than the existing standard loadings for Indigenous/regional/disabled learners) for providers who work with students who require substantial additional educational time.

3 Quarantine future foundation skills funding applications for ACE and TAFE providers only.

4 Ensure that regional ACE providers are given additional funding that gives key local industries the opportunity to train their staff.

In 2019, the Victorian Government made a commitment to ACE through a Ministerial Statement that acknowledged its essential role and unique strengths in developing core foundation skills for work, further study and in enabling people to participate in society as valued citizens. The Statement outlines a plan for building the capacity and recognition of the sector as the third pillar of post-secondary education alongside TAFE and universities.

In NSW, the government has 'community social service obligation' funds for ACE providers and quarantined future foundation skills funding applications for ACE and TAFE providers only (Bowman & McKenna, 2016). However, this may change. VET funding models remain dynamic in all jurisdictions. For example, in 2020 the NSW state government foreshadowed that the private sector will play a bigger role in VET.

In 2018, the federal government announced an independent review of the VET sector, which resulted in Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System more commonly referred to as the Joyce Review. Amongst other recommendations, the Joyce Review proposed a 'regional study hubs' model for use by the VET sector, which would require collaboration between providers, external agencies and community networks to support the successful participation of students in regional and rural locations.

The ACE sector could play a strong role in this, particularly in providing increased support for people with low levels of education, language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills. A major initiative of the Joyce Review accepted by the federal government was the formation of the National Skills Commission to provide the statistical basis for Australian government funding decisions and the establishment of the National Careers Institute for career information and guidance. The federal government developed the Delivering Skills for Today and Tomorrow strategy and established a VET Stakeholder Committee, which includes ACE representation from Adult Learning Australia, and plans to expand ASQA's role to provide more education to the VET sector.

There is a high need to engage more young Australians in VET, with 1 in 4 not meeting important education and employment milestones. Figure 23 (Lamb et al, 2015) shows that young people who fall behind can recover. However, Lamb's data also shows that more advantaged learners are not only less likely to fall behind in the first place, they are more likely than their disadvantaged counterparts to catch up again if they do.

There also are many older Australians suffering job losses due to industry restructuring for whom the ACE approach to VET is well suited. Australia's manufacturing industry has a disproportionate share of retrenchments that have occurred (Murtough & Waite 2000) and are to continue to occur (Manufacturing Skills Australia, 2014). The manufacturing industry has high numbers of older and lesser skilled workers in need of tailored VET programs with support services (Callan & Bowman 2015).

> There will also be a significant need to train, upskill and educate our communities, particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and the newly unemployed as a result of the impact of COVID19.

The ACE sector as an enabler of inclusive learning allows the learner to re-engage, and re-connect with learning at any stage along the learning time line no matter their age, gender, culture, ability or previous educational experience. The existence of an ACE sector provides individuals with choice in where they can access their learning; how they will learn; what additional services they can tap into and finally how much they will need to pay for the learning. Government funding of a competitive community service grant (CSG) fund in VET to support disadvantaged learners in local contexts is an option worthy of consideration. Governments should articulate objectives for CSGs, and then invite selected providers to submit proposals. The

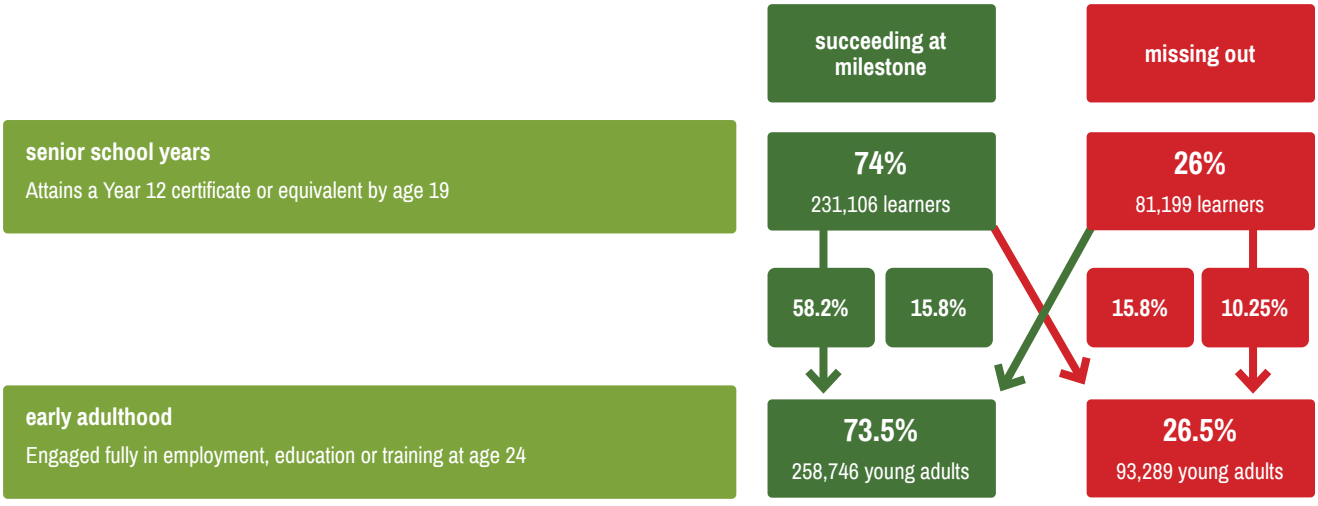
selected providers should be highly capable and possess the necessary expertise and breadth to support the students targeted and have a history of quality training and student support with vulnerable students. The CSGs must be cognisant of the fact that many of the providers catering for disadvantaged learners are small.

They are part of the long tail of small providers within the total VET providers in the Australian VET system (Korbel & Misko 2016). Small VET providers should not be discriminated against on the basis of administrative management costs. Their effectiveness and efficiency should be the key criteria.

Table 27: Characteristics of ACE VET providers compared to private VET providers

Private RTOs	ACE RTOs
Profit focussed and driven	Not for profit
Responsible to owners, directors, & shareholders	Responsible to a committee and a membership representing the local community
Targets niche training to large areas	Responds to local community needs
Industry focus – often specific industry	Learner focussed
High volume and formal training methodology	Flexible and accommodating to learner needs and issues
Access to private financing, equity and bank loans	Limited access to capital; especially if in council premises
Limited access to teachers, high level of self-paced and assessment only delivery	Small classes with committed teachers, additional learning and educational assistance provided face-to-face
Mostly capable students – often delivering to those in work and in industry settings	Mostly low socio-economic, retrenched, more mature, disabled, CALD, unemployed students
High percentage of income spent on marketing	Student recruitment through outreach and word of mouth
Accredited courses only	Pre-accredited (and entry level accredited)
Often deliver skills building and deepening courses	Mostly delivering foundation skills courses and entry level VET
VET delivery only	VET offered with a range of social supports & services (childcare, counselling, health & wellbeing courses, informal groups, a meeting place)

Figure 23: Index of educational opportunity for young people, Australia



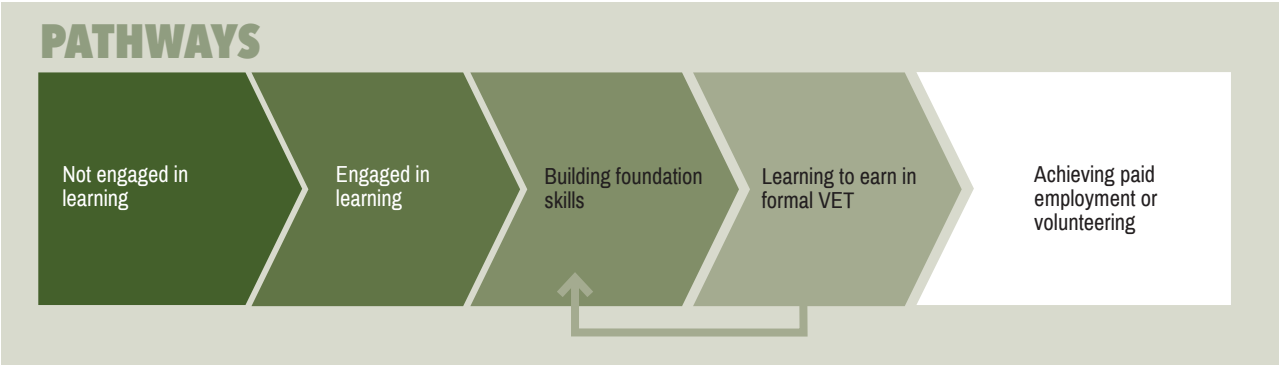
(Source: Lamb et al 2015)

Australian ACE is a recognisable fourth sector of education providing accessible 'lifelong and life-wide learning' opportunities responsive to the needs of adults within the local community it serves.

PATHWAYS PROGRAMS

The extension of ACE to include more vocationally orientated offerings and formal VET programs has increased opportunities for people to move from one type of learning program to another within the supportive learning environment that ACE offers. The program logic of learning pathways provision in ACE is to provide adults several learning experiences that each build on the previous experiences and step them through the four critical steps in the adult learning journey.

Figure 24: Learning pathways provision program logic



KEY FEATURES

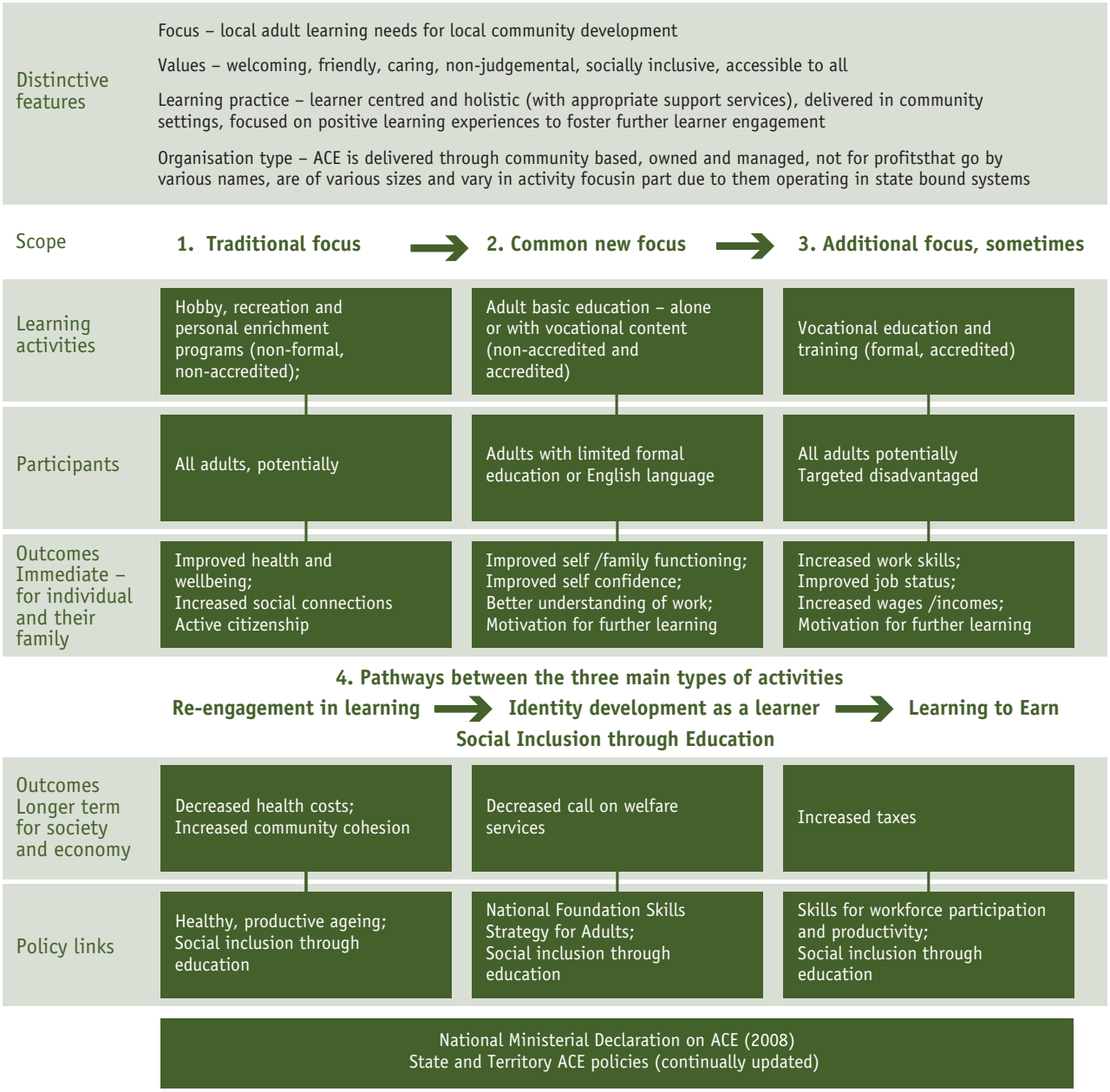
ACE focusses on learning opportunities that create the potential for further learning and skills development through a stepping stone approach to learning (refer to Figure 24).

PARTICIPANT PATHWAYS

Step one: Re-engage adults in learning

This requires activities that target an individual's personal interests and social needs. To be engaged in learning is a major milestone for some adults that can build confidence in learning and encourage adults to participate in further learning. For example, Kearns (2006) found from a review of research into the wider benefits of learning a recurring theme was that personal outcomes – confidence, self-esteem and the aspiration to engage in learning – are 'important and necessary stepping stones towards confident participation in VET provision'. Miller (2005) confirms that personal outcomes from VET act as the platform for the achievement of education outcomes and, in turn, for the attainment of employment and community-related outcomes.

Figure 25: Australian ACE – a framework for reporting educational programs



Step 2: Build foundation skills

This often is part of the process of building identity and confidence as a learner because gaps in these skills limit effective participation in formal vocational education, training and work. Palmeri (2007) overviewed many research studies focussed on disadvantaged learner groups and identified common factors for their successful engagement: motivating the learner – through negotiating learning that is of interest to them and relevant to their world; providing an informal learning environment to give a level of comfort given their lack of confidence; offering low intensity learning or training – at least at first – that is not assessed because assessment can be threatening; using quality teachers; and supporting the learner through peer learning and personalised support by tutors and mentors. Merit has also been found in re-joining the disadvantaged in learning through the delivery of preparatory vocational programs. These programs usually include literacy and numeracy, employment preparation activities and some basic vocational skills training.

Barnett and Spoehr (2008) found VET can assist the welfare-to-work transition if it addresses students' needs in a holistic way and that for most students this involves providing a preparatory pathway prior to engagement with 'mainstream' VET programs to ensure that effective training outcomes are achieved, therefore increasing the capacity to obtain high-quality employment.

Oliver and Karmel (2012) showed that pre-vocational programs are providing pathways into traineeships in the same way that pre-apprenticeship programs are an established route into apprenticeships in the traditional trades. Trainees in lower-skilled occupational categories such as sales workers, labourers, machinery operators and drivers are more likely to complete their training if they have completed a pre-vocational course beforehand.

Researchers have also found that it can take several engagements in basic adult education before an adult who has been disadvantaged in learning or a long time away from it may move to the third step (Dymock, 2007; Dawe 2004).

'[L]earners from disadvantaged backgrounds who enrol in VET are less likely to complete by comparison with their non-disadvantaged peers' (McVicar & Tabasso, 2016). However, despite the obvious success of its pathway and vocational programs for disadvantaged cohorts, ACE continues to be marginalised in terms of policy and resources.

Step 3: Directed formal VET learning

With gaps in basic skills filled, the learner may then move on to undertake study for specific job-related outcomes (formal vocational learning) and towards achieving the fourth step.

Step 4: Achieving an employment outcome

This may be achieved through volunteering in the ACE organisation or elsewhere to gain work experience (Bowman, 2007).

Overall, research evidence suggests that a supported learning pathways approach may be best for many working aged Australians; particularly those with low levels of formal educational attainment and/or poor previous experiences in formal education. Pathways provision has the potential to aid disadvantaged learners to make the transition from informal learning for leisure and self-improvement to more formal learning to build basic or foundation skills and vocational skills, steps they may not have contemplated previously through lack of confidence in their ability to cope with formal study.

ACE providers start with the needs of the learner and provide learning programs that build on their existing skills and knowledge and actively engage them in the development of their own future learning directions. They engage people who are socially and educationally disadvantaged, providing opportunities to access pathways to formal education, training and/or jobs.

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

The SOS report for ACE providers 2019 shows that:

- 30% of 2018 ACE VET graduates were enrolled in further study after training. This is the same for all VET graduates (30%)
- 80% of ACE VET graduates were employed or in further study after training
- 89% of ACE VET subject completers were employed or in further study after training
- 85% of ACE VET graduates and 95% of subject completers reported that they had achieved their main reason for training – better results than all other training providers.

A longitudinal study of ACE students in Victoria followed up 846 participants first surveyed in 2004 when they were enrolled in a course at an ACE provider. The study demonstrates the high capacity of its ACE providers to engage adults in foundation education and provide pathways to formal vocational education and work.

- Of the 846 respondents in the 2005 survey cohort, 36 per cent (302 respondents) were engaged in study in 2005. Of these, 57 per cent of respondents who were studying in a new course remained in the ACE sector. However, an additional 8 per cent had returned to

school, 19 per cent were studying in TAFE, 10 per cent with private providers and 6 per cent had entered university.

- The 201 respondents studying in the ACE sector in 2005 comprised 83 learners continuing their 2004 course and 118 who had enrolled in a new course. Learners staying in the ACE sector strongly endorsed their 2004 ACE study, with 88 per cent reporting that their experiences in their 2004 course encouraged them to apply for a new course. Those moving into the TAFE sector also valued their 2004 ACE study highly with 79 per cent reporting this link, as did 55 per cent of those who moved into a private provider.

The study pathways of those who stayed in ACE showed a progression in the level of study for a substantial proportion of the cohort. For example:

- 43% of subject only students in 2004 continuing in study were doing so at a full qualification or award level
- 74% of Certificate I graduates continuing in study had progressed into Certificate II or above
- 59% of Certificate II graduates continuing in study had progressed into Certificate III or above
- 53% of Certificate III graduates continuing in study had progressed into Certificate IV or above

(Walstab et al, 2005)

A study by Teese et al (2013) on the reach of Victorian ACE provider pre-accredited courses into the community and their impacts found pre-accredited courses offer a pathway to reverse the disadvantages of limited education and precariousness in the labour market:

- Pre-accredited courses drew disproportionately on groups who are economically vulnerable.
- Every third completer of a pre-accredited course went on to further study, but workforce-vulnerable learners were much more likely to do so (40–47%). This finding is important because it shows that high-need groups build on their pre-accredited course participation and that a pathway is being used to improve location in the workforce.
- Pre-accredited courses offer a pathway to reverse the disadvantages of limited education and precariousness in the labour market.

Victorian research conducted by Deloitte Access Economics (2017) shows:

- Participation in pre-accredited (non-formal) learning significantly increases completion rates for those transitioning to accredited training where 64% directly attain a qualification with a further 14% indirectly attaining a qualification. This compares to the average Victorian VET completion rate of 47.3%. Given that 90% of pre-accredited learners in Victoria experience multiple instances of disadvantage, the result is all the more significant.

Other one-off studies on learning pathways by disadvantaged students into and through VET at all provider types include:

- The Phan and Ball (2001) report on VET enabling courses or lower-level preparatory or pre-vocational courses that have a large proportion of students from disadvantaged groups. They found positive outcomes for most students who completed enabling courses. Over 20% of the enabling course graduates went on to enrol in a VET course the following year. Of these graduates, a third enrolled in a course at a higher level of qualification, less than a tenth in a lower level qualification while almost half of these graduates had enrolled at the same level of qualification as their previous course.
- Dawe (2004) followed up the work of Phan and Ball and investigated the reasons why some students remain at the same level of qualification or re-enrol in the same enabling course in following years. Overall Dawe found that the return of students to enabling courses was a positive outcome. It is just that students who lack self-esteem or maturity may take longer to find their area of interest and so try several enabling courses before achieving the self- confidence or motivation to continue with studies for a higher-level VET qualification.

Recent case studies of adult learning in Neighbourhood Houses in the regions of Geelong and South Western Victoria provide qualitative data on second chance learners and their transition pathways to higher education, such as TAFE and University, and also on later life learners engaging with personal enrichment learning for social and community connection.

The interviews reveal the transformative nature of the participants' engagement with the Neighbourhood Houses. Participants speak about their changed relationships in their families and friendship groups and importantly with themselves.

Participants no longer see themselves as 'silly' or as struggling learners. They speak of what they have learned about the world in which they live and their ongoing relationships with the centres, with the people in them and with learning. Many participants speak of taking on administrative and organisational roles, both volunteer and paid, within the centres and about joining committees

of management, giving the distinct impression that these particular skills will carry over into engagement with other community organisations (Ollis et al, 2016).

Policy links

The 2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE encourages ACE to offer a pathways approach to VET:

> 'ACE offers highly supportive pathways into learning, further education and training, and work and, as a result, is well-placed to engage those with low levels of educational attainment.
>
> 'Participation in non-accredited education and training for example, can serve to build the self-esteem, motivation and confidence many struggling to engage require to move into further education and training or employment. The non-threatening adult environment also makes ACE an attractive option to those marginalised from the more formal education system, and provides opportunities for the development of the foundation skills that are critical for effective educational, labour market, and social participation.
>
> 'This capacity of ACE to support the re-engagement of Australians from disadvantaged backgrounds in learning and work is the key to its crucial role in supporting the Australian Government's social inclusion agenda.''
>
> (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 3)

The work of the former National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) through its Good Practice project of 2010 also identified examples of programs and initiatives that are achieving positive outcomes for disadvantaged learners and that learning pathways is one of them. Indeed, embedding pathways planning into the VET system is a recommended key reform area (no. 5) of the National VET Equity Blueprint 2011–2016 prepared by NVEAC (NVEAC, 2011).

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

For a learning pathways approach to work the supply line of students from non-formal (non-accredited) programs needs to be maintained to allow student passage into formal learning. Increased government investment in non-formal ACE personal learning and adult basic education is required especially for the many customers of ACE who are in the lowest income brackets.

In addition, and once they have built their foundation skills and confidence, there needs to be formal VET opportunities available for these learners to enter either within ACE providers or through ACE–VET partnerships that need to be encouraged. In addition, and to help justify a learning pathways approach, ACE needs to track its learners' success in the particular ACE program they are on and the transition they make afterwards using measures that show progress for the individual.

> There is a need is to recognise and acknowledge small transitions and improved quality of life as important milestones for learners with low level initial skills. For those who experience disadvantage in VET these may be personal or social in nature in the early programs undertaken rather than or in addition to work related and economic in nature.
>
> NVEAC (2010)

One approach being taken to improve reporting on outcomes in pre-accredited ACE is Results Based Accountability (RBA). Community and neighbourhood centres in cooperation with Community Centres SA are sharing, learning and improving their practice using the RBA framework. They are also supporting collaborative approaches to RBA with other services providers to their adult learners to achieve effective collective impact approaches that can assist government to use cross-sector community and service organisation's power to bring about measurable results in a community setting and progress in programs through a focus on results (Adult Learning Australia, 2016).

OTHER FINDINGS

> '[D]isadvantaged people turn to adult learning as a means of overcoming the consequences of significant social, industrial and economic change in their communities, [but] some sites for adult learning are somewhat less visible.'
>
> (Rooney, 2003)

Learning in the ACE sector is associated with a range of positive outcomes for individuals and their families as has been discussed in this report. These outcomes cascade to positive impacts for the Australian society and the economy as a whole and that include:

- Income gains for the individual and tax revenues to government and community
- Improvements in health and wellbeing for the individual (Hartley & Horne, 2006)
- Decreasing calls on welfare services and significant cost savings in these services
- Lifting of the overall workforce participation rate and productivity (see Figure 25)

The wider and full value that flows to the community as a whole from Australian ACE is less researched but two examples were found as follows.

EXAMPLE 1

Economic value of the ACE sector in Victoria.

Victoria, has, as explained earlier, the largest, most diverse ACE sector in Australia that has been well funded over many years and delivers in all four program areas of ACE.

A 2008 report describes and quantifies the economic benefits resulting from all ACE activity then in Victoria to assist the Victorian Government to evaluate the contribution of ACE to the achievement of policy objectives and to the economies of local communities, regions and Victoria as a whole.

The benefit categories of the model included 'market benefits' that are traded in the market economy that result from the additional productivity of Victorians who have increased their human capital by participating in ACE.

The other category was non-market benefits that are not traded in the market economy, such as benefits to the health and wellbeing of ACE participants, that while not as readily quantifiable, are real and substantial, and should not be overlooked when estimating the value of ACE.

- The market benefits were estimated to amount to an increase in GSP of $16 billion, and tax benefits of $21.7 million over the period 2007 to 2031 in then net present value terms.
- The non-market benefits were suggested to be of at least a similar magnitude. These benefits are achieved relative to a Victorian Government investment of $741 million over twenty-five years (in discounted terms)

(Allen Consulting 2008)

EXAMPLE 2

Economic value of ACE in South Australia.

South Australia provides an example of an ACE sector with a more traditional focus – on personal interest informal and non-formal learning activities, and adult basic education non-formal and formal – and also facilitating pathways to formal VET.

An impact Study of the Community and Neighbourhood/ Community Centres Sector of SA was conducted in 2013 (SA Centre for Economic Studies, 2013). The principal objective of this study was to provide evidence as to the overall impacts of community centres.

The interest was particularly in assessing the following outcomes:

- employment, participation in education (including accredited and non-accredited courses), volunteering pathways, return to work, skills transference
- social inclusion especially for people with a disability, new arrivals, the older demographic including retirees
- health and wellbeing, family resilience
- the scale of volunteering and participation in centre's activities.

The research found that:

- the number of visitations to centres is over 2 million per annum
- the value of the volunteer contribution is between $32 million and $43 million
- crèche services provided either free or for a very small donation are valued (conservatively) at $1.3 million
- the conduct of ACE programs have a positive wage/ income impact and a value in delivery of up to 4 times their cost
- the ability of centres to leverage up other funds is 3.5 times what they are provided but the cost of grant applications some for very small amounts is quite high, estimated conservatively because it does not include cost of acquittal to be between $231,000 to $385,000

(SA Centre for Economic Studies, 2013, Table E.2 p. iii).

SUMMARY

A DISTINCT AND RECOGNISABLE SECTOR

Australian ACE is a recognisable education sector that offers accessible lifelong learning opportunities that respond to the needs of adults within local communities. The scope of ACE in Australia includes personal enrichment learning that all ACE providers deliver. Most ACE providers also offer adult basic education (foundation skills) programs and a significant minority offer formal vocational education.

SUPPORTING HEALTH, WELLBEING AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

ACE providers are significant providers of all personal enrichment learning undertaken in Australia offering adults pathways back into learning by supporting social inclusion and impacting positively on health and wellbeing.

BUILDING FOUNDATION SKILLS

ACE providers support many adults to improve basic foundation skills and provide pathways into work or further vocational learning. In 2018, ACE providers accounted for 7.3 % of all program enrolments in government-funded and 8.8% of total VET accredited adult basic education programs.

ACE organisations are significant providers of accredited adult basic education to key equity groups; such as, people with a disability and the unemployed. These cohorts are significantly more highly represented at ACE providers than all other VET providers of adult basic education. Also students in accredited adult basic education at ACE providers have a rate of success above that for students at all other VET providers.

SUPPORTING KEY EQUITY GROUPS

In 2018, 481,200 students were enrolled in nationally recognised training at ACE providers.

55% of program enrolments at ACE providers in government-funded VET were students from SEIFA quintile 1 (the most disadvantaged) and SEIFA quintile 2, which is around 10% higher than all other providers. For government-funded ACE VET program enrolments in 2018, where ACE providers often achieve equivalent or better outcomes:

- 36% were in regional and remote areas
- 46% were unemployed
- 21% were people with disability
- 21% were people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

ACE VET enrolments account for the most significant shift from unemployment to employment after their training, showing better results than all other providers. Students at ACE providers are also the most satisfied with the qualty of their training.

ACHIEVING ACROSS POLICY AREAS

The ACE sector achieves outcomes against multiple policy areas including education, health, human services, employment, industry and business, and community and regional development. The sector plays an important role educating many adult Australians; particularly the disadvantaged, in learning but needs increased and ongoing support from all tiers of government to sustain and grow the sector's efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ACE education in all of its diversity remains the single most efficient and effective way to address educational deficiencies which increasingly deny employment opportunities and negatively impact the lives of many adult Australians. Ongoing government support for ACE is necessary to fulfil this role.

Further research is required to determine exactly how many ACE providers there are in Australia and the extent of their service provision. National data should be collected on adults participating in ACE personal enrichment learning and non-accredited foundation skills programs to form a more complete picture of their impact. ACE partnerships with RTOs and the adults supported by these arrangements should also be mapped.

REFERENCES

Adult Learning Australia. (2014). The state of ACE in Australia: Defining the status and role of the not for profit ACE sector. Melbourne. Retrieved from: https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/The-state-of-ACE-2014.pdf

Adult Learning Australia. (2015). ACE in Australia: A snapshot of the status and role of the not for profit adult and community education sector in 2015. Melbourne. Retrieved from: https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/State-of-Ace__Final.pdf

Adult Learning Australia. (2016). Australian ACE environmental scan research project 2016. Final report. Melbourne. Retrieved from: https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Australian-ACE-Report-2016-Final.compressed.pdf

Adult Learning Australia. (2016a). The ACE Sector and Results-Based Accountability: an exploratory study. Melbourne.

Adult Learning Australia. (2017). Australian ACE Environmental Scan: 2017 Update. Retrieved from: https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Australian-ACE-Report-2017_WEB.pdf

Allen Consulting. (2008). The Economic Benefit of Investment in Adult Community Education in Victoria: Report to the Department of Planning and Community Development and the Adult, Community and Further Education Board. Melbourne: Allen Consulting.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2008). Adult literacy and life skills survey: summary results Australia 2006. Cat. no.4228.0. Canberra: ABS (2006 reissued).

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2017). Work-related training and adult learning, Australia: Participation in personal interest learning, 2016–17 4234.0.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).(2013a). Labour Mobility, Australia, February 2013, Cat No. 6209, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

Australian Men's Shed Association (AMSA). (2011). What is AMSA? Retrieved from http://www.mensshed.org/who-is-amsa/.aspx2011.

Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association (ANHCA). (2011). Strengthening local communities – who we are and what we do. Mt Waverley: ANHCA.

Australian Parliament Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (SSCEET). (1991). Come in Cinderella: the emergence of adult and community education. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Barnett, K., & Spoehr, J. (2008). Complex not simple: The vocational education and training pathway from welfare to work. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

Bowman, K. (2007). Recognising the diversity of adult learners in performance measurement, in Engagement and participation in a learner-centred system: four papers. Canberra: Adult Learning Australia.

Bowman, K. (2011). Framework for the development of an ACE social inclusion strategy: Final report January 2011. ACE Unit NSW.

Bowman, K., & McKenna, S. (2016). Jurisdictional approaches to student training entitlements: commonalities and differences. Adelaide: NCVER.

Brennan, S. & Curtis, T. (2015). ACE in Australia: a snapshot of the status and role of the not for profit adult and community education sector in 2015. Melbourne. Adult Learning Australia. Retrieved from: https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/State-of-Ace__Final.pdf

Callan & Bowman, K. (2015). Industry restructuring and job loss: helping older workers get back into employment. Adelaide, NCVER.

Clemans, A., Hartley, R., & Macrae, H. (2003). ACE outcomes, Adelaide: NCVER.

Dawe, S. (2004). Moving on from enabling courses: Why some students remain in enabling courses? Adelaide: NCVER.

Deloitte Access Economics. (2017). Participation, training outcomes and patterns in the Victorian pre-accredited sector: Final report. Dept of Education and Training.

Department of Education and Child Development (DECD). (2013). Victorian training market quarterly report 2013. Retrieved from http://www.education.vic.gov.au/training/providers/market/Pages/reports.aspx.

Dolan, P., Fujiwara, D., & Metcalfe, R. (2012). Review and update of research into the wider benefits of adult learning. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/34671/12-1243-review-wider-benefits-of-adult-learning.pdf.

Dymock, D. (2007). Engaging adult learners: the role of non-accredited learning in language, literacy and numeracy. Canberra: Adult Learning Australia.

Dymock, D. (2007a). Community adult language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia. Diverse approaches and outcomes. Retrieved from: https://www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/file/0022/4684/nr5l04.pdf

Dymock D., & Billet, S. (2008). Assessing and acknowledging learning through non-accredited community adult language, literacy and numeracy programs. Adelaide: NCVER.

Flood, P., & Blair, S. (2013). Men's Sheds in Australia: effects on physical health and wellbeing. Melbourne and Sydney: UltraFeedback.

Foster, S. & Beddie, F. (2005). Adult literacy and numeracy: At a glance, Adelaide: NCVER.

Golding, B., Davies, M., & Volkoff, V. (2001). A consolidation of ACE research 1990−2000: review of research. Adelaide: NCVER.

Harris R., & Simons M. (2007). Adult learning communities: researching registered providers of adult and community education in Australia. University of South Australia paper presented at 37th annual SCUTREA conference Northern Ireland.

Hartley, R., & Horne, J. (2006). Social and economic benefits of improved adult literacy: towards a better understanding. Adelaide: NCVER.

Kaye Schofield & Associates. (1996). Think local and compete: an analysis of the role of adult and community education in the implementation of a national system for vocational education and training: a report to the MCEETYA ACE Taskforce. Brisbane: Australian National Training Authority

Kearns, P. (2006). Equity in Adult Learning: Integrating Social Justice and Economic Success. Canberra: Adult Learning Australia.

Korbel, P. & Misko, J. (2016). VET provider market structures: History, growth and change. NCVER.

Lamb, S, Jackson, J, Walstab, A & Huo, S (2015), Educational opportunity in Australia 2015: Who succeeds and who misses out, Centre for International Research on Education Systems, for the Mitchell Institute, Melbourne: Mitchell Institute.

Lamb, S.Maire, Q.Walstab, A. Newman, G.Doecke, E. & Davies, M.(2018). Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners, NCVER, Adelaide.

Lovedar, P. (2016). TAFEs contribution to total VET activity. Presentation to the 2016 AEU National TAFE Council AGM. Adelaide: NCVER.

Manufacturing Skills Australia. (2014). Environmental Scan, North Sydney.

McVicar, D & Tabasso, D (2016)The impact of disadvantage on VET completion and employment gaps, NCVER, Adelaide

Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). (1993). National policy: adult community education. East Melbourne: Department of Education and Training.

Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). (1997). National policy: adult community education. East Melbourne: Department of Education and Training.

Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). (2002). National policy: adult community education. East Melbourne: Department of Education and Training.

Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE). (2008). Ministerial declaration on adult community education, Canberra: DEEWR.

Miller, C. (2005). Aspects of training that meet Indigenous Australian's aspirations; a systematic review of research. Adelaide: NCVER.

Murtough, G & Waite, M. (2000). Unemployment and reemployment of displaced workers'. Staff research paper, Productivity Commission, Commonwealth of Australia

National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC). (2010). Good practice in equity in VET. Melbourne: TVET Australia.

National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC). (2011). Equity blueprint 2011–2016 creating futures: achieving potential through VET, Melbourne: TVET Australia.

NCVER. (2018). Government-funded students and courses 2018 data slicer.

NCVER. (2018a). Total VET activity students and courses 2018 data slicer.

NCVER. (2019). Total VET students and courses 2019. Retrieved from: https://www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0031/6925090/Total-VET-students-and-courses-2018.pdf

NCVER. (2019a). VET student outcomes 2019. Retrieved from: https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/vet-student-outcomes-2019

OECD. (2013). Skilled for life? Key findings of the survey of adult skills. Paris: OECD.

Oliver, D. & Karmel, T., (2012). Lower level qualifications as a stepping stone for young people. Adelaide: NCVER.

Ollis, T., Starr,K., Ryan, C., Angwin, J., & Harrison U. (2016). Every day you learn something: Learning for life? Neighbourhood houses, adult learning and transitions to higher education. Arena Printing and Publishing Pty Ltd, Fitzroy, Victoria.

Ollis T, Starr K, Ryan C, Angwin J, Harrison U, (2017). Second Chance Learning in Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria. Australian Journal of Adult Learning 57(1)

Ollis, T, Starr, K, Ryan C, Harrison, U (2018). Learning across the lifespan: Lifelong learning in Neighbourhood Houses in Australia. Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 58(3).

Ollis, T, Starr, K, Ryan C, Harrison, U (2018). "Nothing to lose, everything to gain": Neighbourhood Houses and Later Life Learners. Studies in the Education of Adults.

Palmieri, P. (2007). An environmental scan research paper to inform the 2007 project: e-learning – mature aged workers Canberra: DEST.

Parker, D. (2014). The state of ACE in Australia: Defining the status and role of the not for profit Adult and Community Education sector. Melbourne. Adult Learning Australia. Retrieved from: https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/The-state-of-ACE-2014.pdf

Phan, O. & Ball, K. (2001). Outcomes from enabling courses. Adelaide: NCVER.

Rooney, D. (2004) 'Cinderella has balls?: Other sites for adult community education' in Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 44(2), 143–157.

Rooney, D. (2011). 'Centres "Down Under": Mapping Australia's neighbourhood centres and learning' in Australian Journal of Adult Learning 51(2), 203–225.

SA Centre for Economic Studies. (2013). Economic and social impact study: Community and Neighbourhood Centres Sector SA. Adelaide: Adelaide University and Flinders University.

Saunders J. (2001). Linkages between ACE vocational provision and mainstream VET. Adelaide: NCVER.

Sanguinetti, J., Waterhouse, P., & Maunders, D. (2004). The ACE experience: pedagogies for life and employability. Melbourne: Victoria University.

Schofield & Associates. (1996). Think local and compete: an analysis of the role of adult and community education in the implementation of a national system for vocational education and training: a report to the MCEETYA ACE Taskforce. Brisbane: Australian National Training Authority.

SSCEET. (1991). Active citizenship revisited : A report by the Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training.

SCOTESE. (2012). National foundation skills strategy for adults. Retrieved from http://www.industry.gov.au/AboutUs/Documents/COAG-Industry-and-Skills-Council/Former-SCOTESE/National-Foundation-Skills-Strategy-for-Adults.pdf.

Siggins Miller. (2016). Final report: AMSA evaluation survey. https://mensshed.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/AMSA-EVALUATION-SUMMARY-REPORT-FINAL.pdf

Swindell R., Vassella, K., Morgan, L., & Sayer, T. (2010). University of the Third Age in Australia and New Zealand: capitalising on the cognitive resources of older volunteers. University of the Third Age.

Teese, R., Klepetko, R. & Lai, A. (2013). Learners in pre-accredited courses: a labour force perspective on students, their motives and the benefits they gain: a research report for the Adult, Community and Further Education Board of Victoria; Melbourne. Centre for Research on Education Systems University of Melbourne.

Townsend, R. (2006). 'Adult, community and public education as primary sites for the development of social capital' in Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 46(2), 153–173.

Walker R. (2016). Community Education Providers' involvement in work based learning and foundation skills. Sydney, Community Colleges Australia.

Walstab, A., Volkoff, V., & Teese, R. (2005). ACE connects: building pathways to education, employment and community engagement, ACE longitudinal study survey 2005. Melbourne: Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Melbourne.


Adult
Learning
Australia