

Name of organization: Adult Learning Australia Inc

Type of organization: Peak Body

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## About Us

Adult Learning Australia is the peak body for Adult and Community Education (ACE) in Australia with both individual and organizational members in every state and territory of Australia. Our mission is to achieve access to Lifelong and Lifewide Learning for All Australians.

ALA's 380 members include approximately 80 not for profit RTO's. These RTO's are based in all states of Australia and in the Northern Territory, however the vast majority are in NSW and Victoria. In these states Community Colleges, Neighborhood Houses, and Community Learning Centres have a strong history of providing predominantly entry-level accredited courses and programs to disadvantaged learners.

A significant body of research exists to suggest that the ACE sector plays a role in the Australian VET sector that is not replicated by either the TAFE system or private for profit VET providers i.e. they:

- Offer small class sizes and informal venues that appeal to learners with poor previous experiences of institutional learning,
- Operate in even the smallest communities where thin markets make delivery by institutions like TAFE difficult and where there is no financial incentive to attract private providers
- Provide non-formal and informal learning, volunteer support and other opportunities to develop skills amongst Australians who would otherwise struggle in mainstream VET,
- Provide other community services alongside adult education providing a wrap around service for learners with high needs. (see Bowman 2006)

## Response

ALA supports and welcomes the following features of Option 3 as outlined in the paper:

1. Its emphasis on teaching and assessing as the core of "quality" with business indicators existing in order to meet this core purpose.
2. Its mechanisms to protect vulnerable learners from unscrupulous business practices.
3. The suggestion that established high quality providers won't have the same

compliance burdens as new entrants.

4. The \$1500 minimum fee protection standard. We think this is a good balance between protecting students and creating an additional compliance burden for providers.
5. The emphasis on minimum training and assessment competency requirements of trainers / teachers and assessors. ALA's long held policy position is that a comprehensive adult education system should provide opportunities for all Australians to access formal learning through the VET and Higher Education systems but also informal and non-formal learning through work and community engagement. While informal and non-formal learning can and will engage teachers, trainers and facilitators of diverse abilities and qualifications, education within the formal system should be delivered by highly trained and qualified teachers.

ALA has some concerns about:

1. The escalating costs of registration of VET providers and courses and its impact on small ACE RTO's working predominantly in the LLN field, with disadvantaged learners and in small communities. We appreciate the statement that "The scale of these costs will differ depending on each individual provider" and take that to mean that providers playing a vital niche role in VET won't be priced out.
2. The assumption that small providers who exit the system will be able to partner easily with larger LTO's. There is little evidence that "hub and spoke" models are able to effectively provide accredited training into small and remote communities with thin markets in the same way that, for example, the Victorian or NSW networks of small ACE RTO's has been able to. There are different types of small providers, some of whom are small because their communities are small. This needs to be thought through in more detail and the role of state based ACFE Boards, or similar governance arrangements taken into account.

## Reference

Bowman, Kaye, 2006, *The Value of ACE Providers*, Adult Learning Australia, Canberra