



Adult Learning Australia response to draft Green Skills Implementation Plan, May 2010

1. How can our sector/organisation best contribute to the objectives of the Green Skills Agreement?

The Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector sits at the nexus between education and community development with a particular history and emphasis on supporting those who are disengaged from mainstream education and training. It also has a role in promoting “lifewide” learning i.e. learning for civil and community engagement and for management of one’s own health, wellbeing and productivity.

2. What are our particular strengths for this effort?

Given this history and expertise, the sector has the most to contribute to the fourth objective of the Green Skills Agreement. However, the ACE sector is also a significant provider of VET, alongside TAFE and Private Providers, particularly in NSW and Victoria. VET training in ACE organisations tends to be focussed on entry level qualifications, on single accredited units, on pathway programs and on English language and literacy education.

As a VET provider, ACE also has a stake in the first three Green Skills Agreement Goals. ACE RTO’s are increasingly working with small and medium enterprises because of their ability to offer short, inexpensive training solutions to immediate workplace needs. We also bring this strength to the task.

Finally, ACE providers are heavily represented in small regional and remote communities where they work in partnership with RTO’s from nearby regional towns. ACE providers are often the only post compulsory educational presence in very small towns, reliant on SME’s. There are opportunities in the Green Skills Implementation Plan to use these strengths to encourage partnerships between ACE and larger RTO’s and to reach out to remote and rural SME’s.

3. Who could our sector/organisation work with to use resources wisely and reach the greatest number of potential students in need of skills for sustainability awareness and training?

From an “adult learning” perspective there are two learning challenges in the Green Skills Agenda, one of supply and the other of demand. The goals of the Green Skills Agenda are firmly focused on the “supply side”, i.e. they focus on developing the

workforce to be able to supply sustainable goods and services to the Australian community.

The second learning challenge is to ensure that the Australian population has the skills and knowledge that they require to be informed consumers of sustainable goods and services. That is, without knowledge of the benefits of sustainable goods and services, consumers are unlikely to demand them, even if these goods and services are beneficial. While there may be policy levers besides education to stimulate demand, none is as effective as empowering the population through education.

The two learning challenges are, of course, interdependent. Informed consumers of sustainable goods and services are also likely to be active learners of new sustainable skills in their existing jobs and pursuers of new “green” jobs.

While the challenge is large, the response can be efficient. If short, sharp skills set training, targeted specifically to SME’s were part of the package, this would be a highly efficient way to deliver green skills to a large proportion of the population.

Similarly non-formal community based training is a very inexpensive way to build generic skills across the populace which provide a foundation for more formal green skills training.

4. What are the 3-5 most important actions for our sector/organisation to be focusing on in the next 12-18 months to help promote skills for sustainability training?
5. How would we see our sector/organisation implementing those actions?
6. What can we achieve within existing resources?
7. What is essential but will need its own funding?

Within existing resources, Adult Learning Australia could achieve the following on behalf of the ACE sector. These actions can be included in the Objective 1 Actions.

Actions	Action Responsibility	Timeframe
Disseminate case study examples of sustainable work practices and training being conducted by Adult and Community Education (ACE) providers.	Adult Learning Australia	2010
Develop case study examples of non-formal Green Skills programs offered in the ACE sector which pathway to formal training in sustainability or which stimulate community demand for new sustainability skills.	Adult Learning Australia	2010 – 2011

Within existing resources, Adult Learning Australia could achieve the following on behalf of the ACE Sector. These actions can be included in the Objective 2 Actions:

Actions	Action Responsibility	Timeframe
Develop a national Community of Practice for green skills champions working in Adult and Community Education to provide leadership to the rest of the sector.	Adult Learning Australia	2010

Within existing resources, Adult Learning Australia could achieve the following on behalf of the ACE Sector. These actions can be included in the Objective 3 Actions:

Actions	Action Responsibility	Timeframe
Disseminate information and updates throughout the ACE sector on sustainability knowledge, skills and principles in training packages.	Adult Learning Australia	2010

Within existing resources, Adult Learning Australia could achieve the following on behalf of the ACE Sector. These actions can be included in the Objective 4 Actions:

Actions	Action Responsibility	Timeframe
Publicise research and practice in community learning initiatives in communities with high concentrations of “vulnerable workers.”.	Adult Learning Australia	2010

With additional funding, and in conjunction with DEEWR, Adult Learning Australia could achieve the following on behalf of the ACE sector:

Actions	Action Responsibility	Timeframe
Conduct a national roll out of best practice examples	Adult Learning Australia DEEWR	2011 - 2012

of short, unit only formal Green Skills programs which provide urgent knowledge in sustainability for workers in small and medium enterprises and pathways into whole formal qualifications.		
Conduct a national roll out of best practice examples of courses which educate the community about green products and services and stimulate community demand for new sustainability skills.	Adult Learning Australia DEEWR	2011 – 2012
Provide baseline research into the learning challenge in communities with high concentrations of “vulnerable workers.”		
Develop materials and coordination for community based learning initiatives for communities with high concentrations of “vulnerable workers”		

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you have any concerns regarding the inclusion (in say, the AQTF) of RTO standards to reflect sustainability practices and training?

Due to their small size and the complexity of their delivery, ACE RTO’s currently struggle to meet the requirements of the AQTF compared to TAFE’s (who have economies of scale due to their size) and private RTO’s (who tend to provide high volumes of training in niche program areas).

The ACE sector is highly responsive to the sustainability agenda; however changes to the AQTF around RTO standards would need to take into account the already hefty costs of compliance for small ACE RTO’s.

2. What criteria do you think would best identify ‘champions’ of skills for sustainability practice and training delivery?

Criteria based around the impact on the end user i.e. solving industry and community challenges rather than criteria that is of interest to the sector but irrelevant to those outside.

Criteria based around working in partnership with industry and community groups, rather than simply working within the training system.

QUESTIONS:

1. What specific additional knowledge and skills do you think VET instructors and teachers require to deliver and assess skills for sustainability?

The shift to a less carbon intensive future requires knowledge and attitudes alongside skills. In many instances the demand from the community for sustainable goods and services is outstripping the capacity of industry to supply them. In such a rapidly changing environment we can't assume that industry will lead the training system in changing practice. VET instructors and teachers will need to be ahead of industry in their knowledge of the drivers of change to a less carbon intensive future. (In much the same way that the training system was ahead of many industries in the shift to using computer technology and computer networks.)

2. Is there a need for any additional student learning infrastructure and support services to enable achievement of quality skills for sustainability learning outcomes?

There may be a need for capital infrastructure to allow the business practices of RTO's to match the business practices that appear in the updated training packages and to allow newly trained VET teachers and instructors to apply their skills. The capacity of ACE RTO's to raise capital for infrastructure is limited, particularly in regional and remote locations. In order to be part of the solution, ACE RTO's would need to be included in capital infrastructure considerations by government.

QUESTIONS:

1. Industry is increasingly indicating a greater demand for skillsets than for complete qualifications and that there is increasing workforce mobility across industry sectors and occupations. Given this, do you think:
 - a) skills for sustainability skillsets (and/or short accredited courses) should be available off-the-shelf for use by industry and training providers?
 - b) what generic and specific technical competencies should be included in any off-the-shelf skills for sustainability products?

Skillsets training is essential for small and medium enterprises for which cost and time make full qualifications prohibitive. Short skill sets training should include

knowledge about industry trends and macro- reform as well as specific industry skills.

Australia's capacity to move to a low carbon future will be as much about the capacity of the workforce to be resilient, adaptive and innovative as it will be about its capacity to use different materials and techniques. These sort of generic skills and "attitudes" don't fit neatly into competency based systems. They are best taught in non-formal training that engages hearts and minds, challenges thinking, overcomes fears and values the inherent creativity and ingenuity of all adult learners. We would like to see both formal and non-formal skills for sustainability products.

2. What do you think is the role/value of non-training package or unaccredited industry developed sustainability standards, practices and training (example: Housing Industry Association's (HIA) *Green Smart* program and Master Plumbers and Mechanical Servicers Association of Australia's (MPMSAA) *Green Plumbers* initiative?)

These are essential. Their development and roll-out should be financially supported. We would add to these the many non-formal training programs developed by community groups to build sustainable industries and communities eg the "Community Leadership for Transition" program of the Transition Towns movement, (www.transitiontowns.org) the Sustainable Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres Program and the Eden at Home program developed by Byron Community College, (see Quest, ALA E-Journal, April 2010).

QUESTIONS:

1. 'Vulnerable workers' may be defined as: *Those workers in carbon-intensive exposed industries directly transitioning to low-carbon, energy efficient and sustainable system of operation or are affected by competition from alternate or substitute products and services.* Broadly vulnerable workers include:
 - a) individuals and communities adversely affected by industry/economic shifts to sustainable practices;
 - b) equity groups targeted by COAG (e.g. Indigenous people, women, youth, existing mature-aged, low skills workers and others) affected by the transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy.Is this definition too wide? Please provide your views on what may constitute 'vulnerable workers'.

The initial definition above 1) is appropriate. We also welcome the acknowledgement in point a) that high numbers of the above workers are congregated in specific communities. We would also make the point that these communities are likely to have been negatively affected by previous structural adjustments in the past. Also, the broad point needs to be made that lack of skills generally and lack of qualifications increase the vulnerability of all workers to survive any industry adjustment, whether due to transition to a low carbon future, or other industry driver.

2. What do you see as the barriers to transitioning vulnerable workers to new green job opportunities?

There is currently no consensus in the Australian political elite about the need to transition to green job opportunities, much less amongst the most vulnerable workers in our community. This is particularly the case if workers have suffered unemployment, underemployment or other dislocation as a result of previous structural adjustments. A non-formal community learning approach is one way of allowing communities to sort through the information, knowledge and values required to make a shift to a lower carbon economy.

There is significant research to suggest that non-formal learning is particularly successful for engaging groups who are disengaged from or have had poor experiences of the mainstream education and training system (see Beddie 2008). Some examples of non-formal approaches include deliberative dialogue methods such as Community Wide Study Circles and Open Space forums as well as short courses and vocational taster programs. A combination of formal and non-formal learning opportunities, focussing on skills- sets alongside whole qualifications would assist in supporting vulnerable workers to transition to new green job opportunities.