ADULT & COMMUNITY
EDUCATION
IN AUSTRALIA

A snapshot of the status and role
of the not for profit Adult and
Community Education sector in 2015

**Adult
Learning
Australia**

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Introduction

The diversity of the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector in Australia could be described as both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness. The rich history of community-based organisations that respond to individual and community needs in diverse ways is, indeed, a strength. However, this diversity also makes it challenging for policy-makers to understand the sector and to create cohesive policies in relation to it.

This report is an attempt to quantify the size and characteristics of not-for-profit (NFP) ACE in 2015, drawing on a range of data sources. It builds on data presented in the State of ACE in Australia paper released by Adult Learning Australia in 2014.

Data is drawn from published accounts of and research into ACE, government department websites (state and Commonwealth), and qualitative and quantitative data provided by representatives of state government departments and peak bodies servicing an ACE member base. Some of this data was collected through conversations; the majority was collected through a questionnaire sent to the relevant state government departments and state peak bodies.

For the 2015 report, responses were sought to the following questions:

1. How does your government identify organisations as 'ACE organisations'?

2. What government policy/policies do ACE programs and organisations align with in your state?

3. How does your ACE-related policy align with the Commonwealth Ministerial Declaration on Adult and Community Education (MCEETYA, 2008)?

4. Is there a specific program within your Department that funds ACE organisations?

5. How many ACE organisations are registered in your state?

6. Is registration a requirement for an organisation to receive government funding through that program? If so, what are the guidelines and process to receive funding?

7. If funding is provided for programs, please identify program types.

8. Does the funding provided to ACE organisations include administrative support? What is the $ value and/or proportion of total funding?

9. Does the funding provided to ACE organisations include project funding? What is the $ value and/or proportion of total funding?

10. How are program outcomes measured for ACE funded programs in your state?

Governments fund only a proportion of the work of ACE providers and, as a result, only a small proportion of activity is captured by government data gathering. This lack of a research base has made it challenging for the sector's peak bodies to effectively advocate for the social and economic benefits of ACE (McGivney, 1999).

Feedback on the 2014 paper was sought from a number of ALA member organisations representing not-for-profit ACE providers, ensuring the discussion accurately reflected the work and role of the sector.

Background

The *Ministerial Declaration on Adult and Community Education* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008) defines the commitment of all Australian governments to the ACE sector.

ACE is defined differently in each state and territory of Australia. Some states support a sector of not-for-profit ACE providers, while others use the term ACE to refer to a set of non-formal programs. Both views of ACE have a strong focus on engaging socially and economically marginalised groups through learning. The 2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE (MCEETYA) sees the diversity of the sector as a strength, describing ACE as dynamic, diverse and responsive. However, as mentioned, the diversity creates challenges for quantifying ACE delivery and measuring the outcomes.

Education and Training Departments in Australia have responsibility for ACE policy, due to the role of ACE providers and programs in providing pathways to VET and Further Education; however, historically the sector has received funding in varying degrees from all three tiers of government across a range of portfolios. They also gather large proportions of their income through fee-for-service activities.

Despite their diversity, ACE providers have some or all of the following traits in common:

- Learning is part of their core business.
- Learning is place-based or locally focussed.
- They offer inclusive learning environments and practices.
- They provide opportunities for engagement/re-engagement in community life, learning and work through the delivery of programs and activities.
- They are not-for-profit, community based and community governed through volunteer boards.
- They provide formal, non formal and informal learning opportunities.
- They provide foundation skills learning.
- They provide opportunity for engagement in accredited vocational education and training modules or qualifications, either independently or in partnership with another training provider.
- They provide skills that enable health and wellbeing, engagement in recreational pursuits and increased civic participation as well as skills for work.

South Australia, Victoria and NSW provide program funding to the not-for-profit ACE sector. In addition to this, some states and territories support the ACE sector by providing:
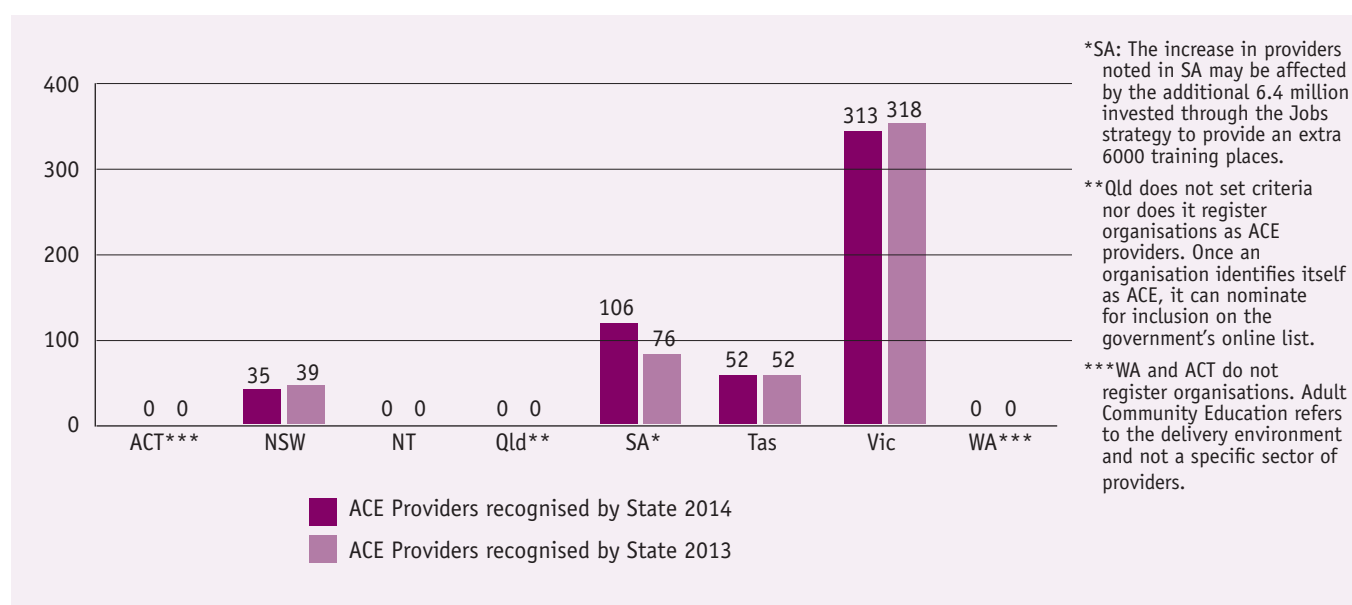
- peak body support
- central provider location services – website
- toolboxes, resources and quality frameworks
- organisational capacity building grants
- professional development for ACE staff and volunteers
- annual awards or celebrations
- Adult Learners' Week funding.

Types of ACE Organisations

State Recognised ACE Providers

Most states recognise not-for-profit ACE providers through registration, and fund them to deliver specific types of programs. Figure 1 compares the number of ACE providers recognised by each state in 2013 and 2014, as reported through the department website (2014 State of ACE Report, ALA) and questionnaires (2015 ACE Snapshot Report, ALA).

Figure 1: State recognised ACE providers 2013–2014

*SA: The increase in providers noted in SA may be affected by the additional 6.4 million invested through the Jobs strategy to provide an extra 6000 training places.

**Qld does not set criteria nor does it register organisations as ACE providers. Once an organisation identifies itself as ACE, it can nominate for inclusion on the government's online list.

***WA and ACT do not register organisations. Adult Community Education refers to the delivery environment and not a specific sector of providers.

ACE Registered Training Organisations

ACE Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are not-for-profit organisations that are either registered with their state VET regulatory body (in Victoria and Western Australia only) or the national regulatory body, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). According to the National Register on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia, there are 314 RTOs that have self-selected the registration type 'Community Based Adult Education Provider' (training.gov.au, 2015).

According to the (NCVER, 2014a), a Community Based Adult Education provider is:

[a] not-for-profit, community-based organisation with a primary focus on adult education. Community-based adult education delivers courses relating to leisure, personal and community development, employment skills, preparation for VET and nationally recognised programs for study.

They may not necessarily be in receipt of state government funding or registered with a state government department as an ACE provider.

There are two training organisation type identifiers for not-for-profit training organisations:

- 'Community Based Adult Education Provider'
- 'Other – Not Elsewhere Classified'

The definitions in the VET Provider Collection specifications for the Training Organisation Type Identifiers are broad enough that organisations can identify themselves incorrectly, clearly skewing the numbers. For example, a large organisation such as Mission Australia, that is not based in a particular community, could still identify itself as a Community Based Adult Education Provider.

Figure 2 shows the national spread of these registrations. This data does not include the many ACE organisations that deliver VET in partnership with RTOs.

Figure 2: Registered Training Organisations 2013–2015 – Type Community Based Adult Education Provider

Source: www.training.gov.au
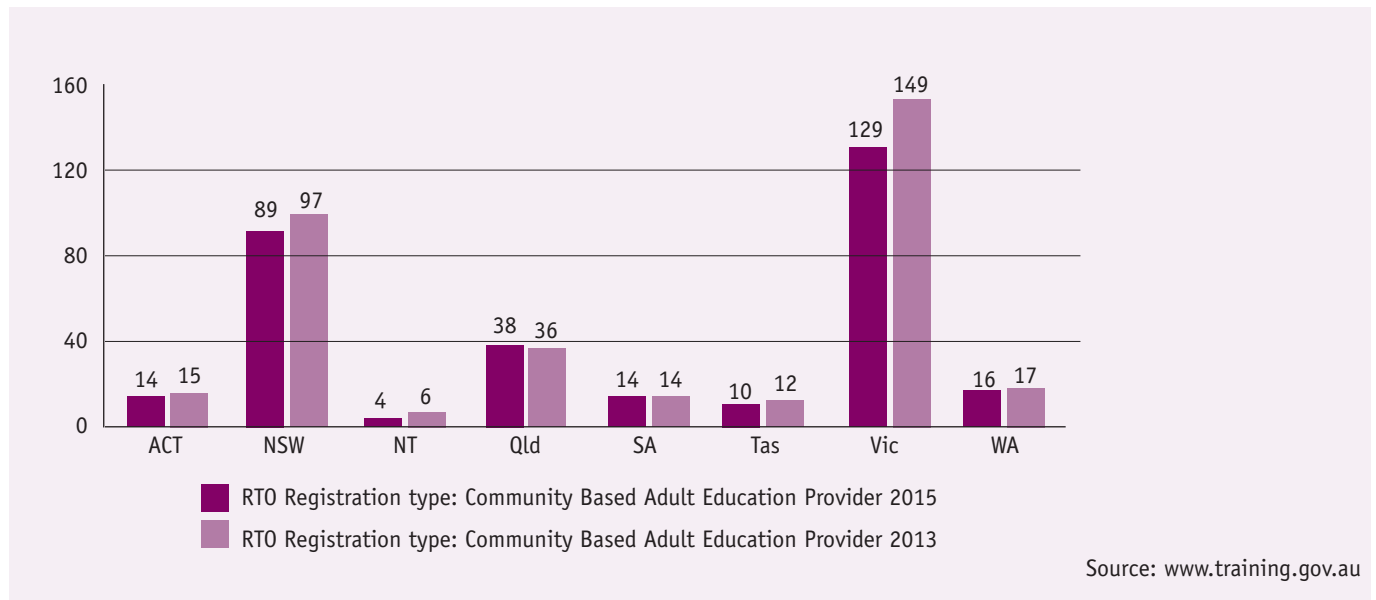
Adult Education Institutions (AEI)

There are two Adult Education Institutions in Victoria: Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) and the Centre for Adult Education (CAE) established under state legislation.

AMES specialises in settlement services, training and employment assistance to refugees and newly arrived migrants.

The CAE, operating in partnership with Box Hill Institute of TAFE, assists adults to complete their secondary education and begin or change their employment pathways (ACFE Board, 2014).

Both AMES and CAE are autonomous public provider Adult Education Institutions with an RTO registration by type 'Other–Not Classified Elsewhere' in the National Register on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia (training.gov.au, 2015).

AEIs deliver around nine per cent of total ACFE Board funded student contact hours in Victoria (ACFE Board, 2014).

Community Colleges

Community Colleges as a brand associated with adult community education originated in NSW. However, in recent years a number of larger Victorian ACE providers have also taken on the Community College branding and are members of the peak body Community Colleges Australia (CCA). 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). Just over 70 per cent of Community Colleges are based in regional or rural communities.

There are 44 organisations that use the Community Colleges branding and another 13 organisations that have a different name but are similar in size and scope to Community Colleges and are members of Community Colleges Australia (CCA, 2014a). However, the term 'community college' in Australia is not only associated with the community education and VET sectors. The name 'community college' does not belong exclusively to CCA or to any other peak body. There are also other organisations, such as schools, that refer to themselves as community colleges.

Continuing Education

Many universities across Australia, such as Australian National University (ANU) and the University of Queensland offer open access continuing education programs. The ANU's Continuing Education Centre describes their programs as:

> [S]hort courses guaranteed to motivate, expand and challenge your thinking. Our vision is to stimulate an appreciation for lifelong learning within the Canberra community.
>
> (ANU, 2015)

Workers Education Associations (WEA)

There are four Australian WEAs that have been serving their communities for over 100 years; three in New South Wales and one in South Australia. All WEAs are independent entities, however, they have a common ancestry with the English WEAs formed in 1906. WEAs were originally founded to promote the higher education of working men and women (WEA Sydney, 2015). They run skills and enrichment courses, pathways and foundation skills programs and accredited vocational education and training.

- WEA SA runs nearly 1500 short courses annually across 40 locations in Adelaide, with over 25,000 enrolments (WEA SA, 2015).
- In 2014 WEA Sydney had 15,418 enrolments in ACE learning programs covering a very broad scope including humanities, languages and arts, computer, business and vocational training, with a growth in enrolments in the core humanities programs (WEA Sydney, 2014).
- In 2012 WEA Illawarra delivered 931 ACE learning programs to its communities (WEA Illawarra, 2014).
- WEA Hunter offers between 250 and 350 courses per year. Based on 2012 student contact hours WEA Hunter is the 5th largest community based adult learning provider in NSW (WEA Hunter, 2015).

The three NSW WEAs are all part of the Community College Australia network.

Other Organisations that Deliver ACE Programs

There are a number of other organisations that are not necessarily registered as delivering Adult Community Education, but are broadly recognised as delivering ACE programs.

Neighbourhood Houses

Neighbourhood Houses are significant providers of ACE in Australia, offering accredited and non-accredited learning activities. Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association (ANHCA) is the national peak body for Neighbourhood Houses (NH), whose membership includes all NH state peak bodies, with the exception of the Northern Territory, which has no Neighbourhood House peak body or providers. In 2011, 320,000 people participated in activities each week in Neighbourhood Houses operating across Australia (ANHCA, 2011).

Neighbourhood Houses across Australia are also known as:
- Community Houses
- Learning Centres
- Living and Learning Centres
- Neighbourhood Centres
- Community Centres
- Family Centres

Neighbourhood Houses are driven by principles of social justice and community development. Lifelong learning is one of ten sector principles that guide the activities and values of Neighbourhood Houses.

Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Member Organisations

Source: State peak bodies (ANHCA, 2011)
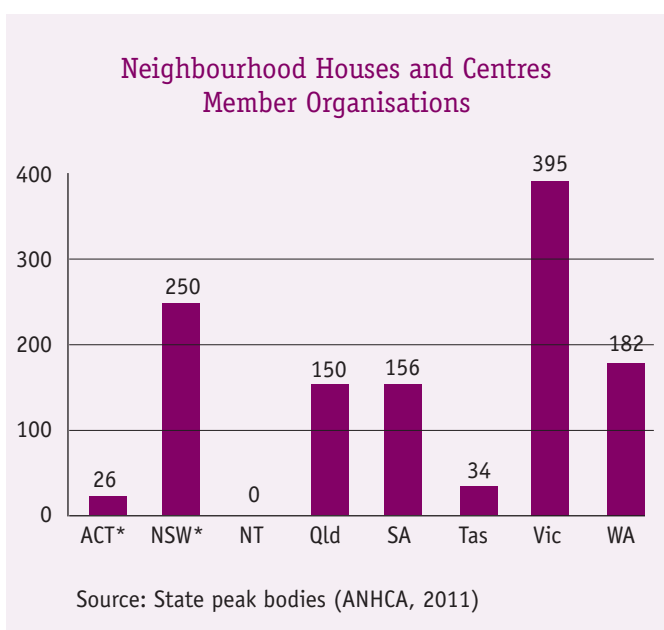
State and Territory member organisations include:

- Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres (ANHLC)
- Community Centres SA (CCSA, South Australia
- Queensland Families and Communities Association (QFCA Queensland)
- Linkwest (Western Australia)
- Local Community Services Association (LCSA NSW)
- Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania (NHT Tasmania)
- Tuggeranong Link (ACT)

Community Men's Sheds

Community Men's Sheds are organisations where men get together for social engagement and to learn practical skills such as woodwork and metal work. Through participation, men learn vital social, communication and employability skills (Holman & Flood, 2013).

Men's sheds work because they emphasise agency: what men can do, bring to the shed and contribute to the community. They do not treat men from a deficit model as students, clients, customers or patients. The learning is deliberately collaborative and informal.

(Golding, 2010)

There are now in excess of 1000 Men's Sheds across Australia engaging an estimated 175,000 men (AMSA, 2011). Some are attached to other community organisations such as Neighbourhood Houses or community health services and others are independent, voluntary run organisations. Community Men's Sheds are supported, at varying levels across Australia, by all three tiers of government.

University of the Third Age (U3A)

U3A is a worldwide organisation, open to anyone over retirement age. U3As are voluntary, locally based non-profit organisations that 'aim to offer older people low-cost education opportunities in a supportive social setting' (U3A Network NSW, 2015).

U3A organisations operate across Australia. Melbourne is home to the oldest U3A in Australia established in July 1984. Each U3A is governed through a committee of management meeting the needs of their member base, and has a peer-learning model. All tutors are volunteers. U3A's adult education programs cover a wide range of subjects including the humanities, social sciences, sciences, languages, art and music.

Program areas

The ACE sector delivers programs in three key educational areas:

1. Vocational Education and Training (VET): education that leads to the acquisition of skills and knowledge aligned with a specific vocation or career path. This includes whole nationally recognised qualifications, accredited units of competency and non-accredited pathway programs. ACE providers tend to offer VET at the entry level to disadvantaged learners; however, some providers also offer higher-level VET qualifications, including diploma level. ACE RTOs are responsible for 5.3 per cent of overall VET delivery in Australia (NCVER, 2014b).

2. Language, literacy, numeracy and employability (LLN&E): education that allows individuals to participate effectively within their community and within the workplace. Australian governments have set a target that at least two thirds of working age Australians will have literacy and numeracy skills at Level 3 or above by 2022. The National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults (SCOTESE, 2012) identifies the ACE sector as crucial to meeting this objective.

3. Life skills education: education that allows adults to be autonomous, to manage their health and wellbeing, to parent and grandparent and to be active citizens and community members. These programs have a tangential relationship with both national and state education policies. They are usually either fully fee for service, funded by local government or via a short-term grant attached to another policy agenda.

In terms of government funding, the vast majority goes to programs in the VET and LLN&E areas. For example, in Victoria, pre-accredited programs must have vocational outcomes, either directly or through planned and documented pathways.

Learners in ACE Centres

Neighbourhood and community targeted education is an established means of improving outcomes for those who are most disadvantaged (Grogan, Calvin, Rose, Morstyn, & Atkins, 2013).

Providers of adult education in community settings are critical to providing diverse foundation skills programs for adults, including through pre-vocational and bridging programs. The Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector provides flexible pathways to help learners build their skills and confidence and progress to further learning or employment (SCOTESE, 2012, p. 12).

The ACE sector provides educational, social and civic engagement opportunities aimed at removing disadvantage and improving opportunity (Choy, Haukka, & Keyes, 2006). For example, compared to other VET providers, the typical VET learner in ACE RTOs is almost twice as likely to have a disability (NCVER, 2014b).

Disengaged Youth

The ACE sector is highly regarded for its ability to engage young people in learning, providing them with pathways to further education or employment. ACE RTOs tend to have a lower percentage of young people than other RTO types particularly TAFE Institutes (NCVER, 2013). However, the young people who do engage in ACE are more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds with complex barriers to participation in VET.

There is extensive research available to support the place of young people in ACE. Of particular value is the community engagement and connectedness that occurs through participation in ACE, the value of which cannot be underestimated (Ellum & Longmuir, 2013).

In 2013 ACE providers working with youth reported that programs that work best are those with flexible approaches that support individual needs and preferences for learning while building a sense of self-worth and aspiration (Ellum & Longmuir, 2013) an approach the ACE sector is well positioned to deliver.

According to Bowman:

The majority of young clients in community colleges are highly disadvantaged youth … including those who are unemployed, underemployed, in the juvenile justice system, requiring year 10 or equivalent schooling, the homeless and early school leavers. They also often work with young Aboriginal people and young migrants.

(Bowman, 2011)

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)

ACE organisations attract high levels of adults from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds for English language and other programs. 'Community Based Adult Education Provider' RTOs support a higher percentage of CALD students averaging just over 20 per cent of total students as opposed to 17 per cent (NCVER, 2014b) for TAFE providers.

The highly supportive ACE learning environment, with a clear focus on developing transition pathways to further study and/or employment is supported in research as being effective for engaging CALD learners (Golding, 2010, p. 25).

Indigenous Australians

The multiple disadvantages faced by Indigenous people impact on educational achievement. There is a strong research body that suggests that for learning to be effective in Indigenous communities, it has to be closely connected to community aspiration and the lived experience of the student (Fogarty & Scwab, 2012). The ACE sector is particularly effective at engaging communities in the development of learning programs. As a result, the sector has the potential to be an important contributor to closing the gap between the educational outcomes of Indigenous people and those of the rest of the population. The extent to which ACE lives up to this potential varies from provider to provider and state to state.

Later Life Learners

Australia has an ageing population and a growing need for adults to stay in the workplace longer and transition between jobs more frequently. The ACE sector plays an important role in supporting mature Australians to continue their learning in a supported environment providing the ability to extend working life through assisting in upgrading skills and supporting appropriate career transitions (Thompson, Griffin, & Bowman, 2013).

The Economic Potential of Senior Australians Advisory Panel to the Department of Treasury and Finance recommended lifelong learning in the community as part of the Australian Government's response to an ageing population (Australian Government, Treasury, 2011). Recommendation 20 reads:

The federal, state, territory and local governments invest in the expansion of community-based education for older people' … [with recognition that] lifelong learning is grounded at the community level, where people live and work.

(Australian Government, Treasury, 2011).

People with a Disability

People with a disability enrol in ACE RTOs at twice the rate of other providers of VET delivery (16.7 per cent compared to 8.4 per cent for Publicly Funded – TAFE) (NCVER, 2014b). There are also high proportions of people with a disability in non-accredited ACE programs. The sector has a strong ability to engage with disability networks and stakeholders to create positive pathways for students with a disability.

The ACE Disability Network (ACEDN) is a peak body that works in partnership with ALA to support the ACE sector to provide effectively for learners with a disability. ACEDN works closely with a range of disability services to ensure information provided to the sector reflects current knowledge on the impacts of disabilities on learning and appropriate practices in working with a student with a disability. This information is available online at www. acedisability.org.au.

Adults with Low Literacy and Numeracy

The 2011–12 Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey indicated that around 1 in 7 Australians have very poor literacy skills (ABS, 2013). An additional 1 in 3 Australians have literacy skills which are at a level that makes them vulnerable to unemployment and social exclusion in a modern knowledge-based economy and society (OECD, 2013). Many of these adults seek assistance through an ACE centre.

Thousands of adults each year receive non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy assistance in Australia in community settings. Many choose this form of assistance because they either do not need or would struggle with accredited courses (Golding, 2010, p. 33).

Most state and territory ACE strategies or policy statements recognise the importance of ACE in delivering language, literacy and numeracy.

Unemployed

The ACE sector is recognised for its ability to engage jobseekers in foundation and industry skills program as a 'soft point of entry' to VET, often working with the jobseeker to address a broad range of barriers impacting on employability (Thompson, 2014).

State and Territory Snapshots

Each state and territory in Australia has taken a different approach to the commitment made in the Ministerial Declaration on Adult and Community Education (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008).

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 and increase pathways to work, community and social engagement.

The following snapshots of state ACE delivery contain information from questionnaires completed by department representatives and peak bodies, annual reports, departmental reports and websites.

Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

The ACT does not register organisations as ACE providers. In the ACT, the term 'adult community education' refers to the delivery environment not a specific sector of providers. The ACT Education and Training Directorate, through its annual ACT Adult Community Education Grants Program, provides funding to a range of locally focused not-for-profit community-based organisations or to education providers working in partnership with a community-based organisation. With an annual budget in 2013–2014 of $250,000 grants of up to $15,000 were available for training initiatives that supported social inclusion, VET and employment pathways. The maximum amount available per project was $15,000, and no organisation was funded for more than two projects.

Thirteen providers were funded for 18 adult and community education projects for delivery in 2014. There are 14 RTO providers with registrations by type 'Community Based Adult Education Provider' recorded for ACT on the National Register on VET in Australia (training.gov.au). More broadly, there are 26 Neighbourhood Houses and Centres in the ACT (ANHCA, 2011). Tuggeranong Link receives funding

from the Community Services Program (CSP) to operate in a management relationship with five of the centres. U3A is also active in the ACT, with over 4000 members and running in excess of 200 courses throughout the year at sites located across ACT (U3A ACT, 2014).

The Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) (2015) provides some adult and community education under its core funding, which includes foundation skills programs and access programs to engage and create pathways. Recreational adult and community education and non-accredited courses are also available at CIT, the Australian National University (ANU, 2015)and some secondary colleges on a commercial basis.

New South Wales

Adult and Community Education (ACE) organisations are identified as being incorporated, community owned and not-for-profit, and deliver quality adult and community education programs and services in NSW to meet the learning needs of the local community or a community of interest.

NSW ACE is currently made up of a relatively homogenous group of providers that identify as Community Colleges. These organisations are independent but are supported through grants made by State Training Services.

From 1 July 2015, State Training Services transferred to the NSW Department of Industry, Skills and Regional Development. State Training Services will continue to prioritise vocational education and training and work in partnership with industry for skills development and employment outcomes.

There has been a reduction in the number of Community Colleges from 70 providers 10 years ago to 35 today (a reduction from 39 in 2014); this has come about through mergers, realignment of service focus and closures.

In 2013, there were 117,507 VET unit enrolments engaging students for 3,637,486 student contact hours delivered against a budget allocation of around $16 million. In 2014 there were 120,638 VET unit enrolments engaging students for 3,341,741 students contact hours against a budget allocation of around $16 million.

 In addition, in 2013 there were 808,270 non-VET student contact hours involving 72,288 enrolments and in 2014 there were 561,676 student contact hours involving 50,901 enrolments of non-VET delivery.

There have been major reforms in the NSW Vocational Education and Training system over the last two years with Smart and Skilled programs commencing on 1 January 2015. As all approved ACE providers in NSW are RTOs, they are able to apply to deliver Smart and Skilled funded training in the same way as any other eligible RTO. In addition to this, ACE and TAFE are the only organisations that can apply to deliver full foundation skills qualifications under the Foundation Skills Entitlement stream.

With the introduction of Smart and Skilled, the ACE Grants Program has been reconfigured as The Smart and Skilled Adult and Community Education Community Service Obligation Program (ACE CSO Program). Funding levels for the program in 2015 are similar to 2014 funding levels of around $16 million. For the 2015–16 funding round, approved ACE providers were invited to apply in a limited tender funding round. Under the current ACE contract to June 30 2016, there are 35 ACE providers delivering the CSO Program. Decisions for the future management of ACE grants have not yet been made but may consider the government priorities of diversity and competition. One of the priorities of Smart and Skilled is to give people the chance to gain the skills they need to get a job and advance their career. Some students need additional support to access training. The CSO Program supports disadvantaged learners and eligible students in regional and remote communities where Smart and Skilled entitlements cannot be effectively accessed.

There is a range of training available under the CSO Program. Providers can deliver part qualifications (including from the foundation skills list) and some full qualifications for disadvantaged learners at any level up to and including Certificate III. Non-accredited training can be included with no more than 20 per cent of subsidised module enrolments being non-accredited. ACE providers need to assess each learner's barrier to entitlement training, which may include very low literacy, language and/or numeracy skill level or limited employability skills. Disadvantaged learners are given access to other student support strategies to help them achieve successful training outcomes such as language, literacy and numeracy, mentoring, work experience, career advice and case management.

State Training Services also provides funding for other projects/programs that reflect government priorities and may be a 'one off'. The proportion of funds for projects is much less; for example, in 2015 the ACE Teaching and Leadership Program funded six organisations for a total of $304,450. The purpose of the Teaching and

Leadership Program is to help build capability in teaching and leadership to ensure there is quality training under Smart and Skilled Programs. For the CSO funding round, organisations had to be registered with State Training Services as an approved ACE provider. To be registered as an approved ACE provider an organisation had to demonstrate that it met all of the following criteria:

Education

- Is a registered training organisation (RTO)
- Identifies education and training as a key function in its constitution/articles of association
- Has a business plan that incorporates adult community educational goals and objectives and demonstrates how these are integral to the whole of organisation objectives
- Can deliver quality adult and community education programs and services to meet the learning needs of the local community or a community of interest

Community

- Has a governing body that draws the majority of its members from the community or community of interest it serves
- Or where this is not the case can provide evidence of an effective consultation mechanism to ensure local needs are met in the community for which the organisation is seeking ACE funding
- Engages with and responds to its community or community of interest
- Partners with other organisations
- Provides programs that are accessible to the general community

Business and governance

- Is incorporated as a community owned and managed not-for-profit incorporated association, cooperative or company, registered with the Australian Taxation Office for the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and has an Australian Business Number (ABN)
- Delivers adult and community education programs in NSW to NSW residents and workers or where a provider is not NSW based but operates in border communities, the organisation must have a history of servicing NSW students
- Is a not-for-profit organisation with rules that prevent remuneration or material and property benefits from being distributed to individual members:

- including members of its governing body, or

- with rules that provide for reasonable reimbursement of expenses; directors sitting fees or fees for services performed outside the scope of their role as director. The ACE provider must have clear policies and procedures in place related to any financial payment to Directors that limit any actual payment above reasonable or market costs and sitting fees

- Is governed by appropriate policies, operational guidelines and quality procedures that allow it to meet its legal requirements as an incorporated body and its business and community obligations.

Previous experience

- Has been funded under the NSW Department of Education and Communities 2014 ACE Program; or
- Is offered a contract under Smart and Skilled; or
- Meets the same organisational capacity and eligibility criteria that are required by the Smart and Skilled application process.

The Department of Education also provides $8m annually to approved not-for-profit, community-based organisations and local government authorities to operate Links to Learning projects across NSW, with 54 partnerships providing 80 targeted programs supporting approximately 3700 youth at risk of disengaging from education. While not recognised within the State as an ACE program this is clearly community education in action across NSW (Department of Education & Communities, 2014).

AMES NSW is an agency of the NSW State Government and it supports the development of foundation skills through the provision of English courses. AMES NSW is registered by type 'Enterprise – Government' in the National Register on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia. Established in 1951, NSW AMES has taught English to over 1.5 million people in the classroom, in the workplace, online and via distance education. AMES NSW also supports over 500 institutions nationally with English curriculum, resources and tools (AMES NSW, 2014).

In addition to those ACE organisations formally funded under the NSW Government's ACE Program there are a number of other ACE providers. These include 250 Neighbourhood Houses and Centres delivering ACE learning and engagement programs across NSW (ANHCA, 2011) supported by their state peak body, the Local Community Services Association (LCSA, 2014), alongside Men's Sheds and an active U3A movement operating from 53 sites (U3A Network NSW, 2015).

Northern Territory

The Northern Territory (NT) is the only Australian state or territory to have no statement, policy or strategy for ACE or any direct application of government funding to the sector (ALA, 2013). However, examples of community-based adult learning exist across the Northern Territory in Seniors Centres, Indigenous Communities, Working Women's Centres and U3As. The extent of this community education is not fully known nor reported.

Some training programs run by the Department of Business – Training NT (Department of Business, 2015) that support adult learning, include:

- Adult Learners' Week grants of up to $5k (4 per annum) to hold adult learning activities.
- Equity Training Grants with an annual budget of approximately $300,000, targeted at equity groups with a focus to re-engage/engage Territorians in employment or further training programs. These programs usually include a component of accredited training ensuring skills learnt are transferrable and recognised and create a strong pathway and are available to not-for-profit organisations, schools and RTOs.
- An Indigenous specific training program with an annual budget of $2.5m allocated for the delivery of accredited and non-accredited training that links to work readiness, community development opportunities or employment on site in Indigenous communities. Indigenous communities can access funding at any time throughout the year. The community identifies the training needs and chooses the RTO/community organisation to support the learning.

The NT has an active U3A network. The people of NT have access to four RTOs that identify themselves as 'Community Based Adult Education Provider' (Department of Industry, 2015a) who can access funding for Pre-Employment training and VET delivery funding that is available to other RTOs.

Queensland

The Queensland Government recognises and acknowledges the role of ACE in Queensland as crucial in addressing social isolation, and more specifically that Adult and Community Education can:

[P]lay a critical role in providing diverse foundation skills, pre vocational and bridging programs and creating skilling pathways for adults. These pathways enable a wider cross section of the population to participate in learning and employment.

(Department of Education and Training QLD, 2015c)

In Queensland, the state does not set criteria nor does it register organisations as ACE providers. Once an organisation identifies itself as ACE, it can nominate for inclusion on the government's online list. There are currently 38 ACE providers listed on the Department of Education and Training website (Department of Education and Training, 2015d). The providers come from diverse organisational environments and include not-for-profit community organisations, university, TAFE, industry associations, community groups and the more traditional Neighbourhood House and Learning Centres. Many are members of the ACE peak body Lifelong Learning Council Queensland (LLCQ).

Policies changes occurred following the change of government in early 2015, and a realignment of program funding occurred on 30 June 2015 with the reinstatement of the Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative (Department of Education and Training, 2015) under the Working Queensland Policy. The Government allocated $240m over four years to support this initiative, with $60m available in 2015–16 through a contestable application process. Of the six programs that form Skilling Queenslanders for Work, four are community based with a combined budget of $52.5 million: Community Work Skills ($42.46m), Get Set for Work ($7m), Ready for Work ($1.28) and Youth Skills ($1.75m), and are all funded on a project based delivery model.

Not-for-profit community organisations, including ACE organisations, are eligible to apply for funding under Community Work Skills, Get Set for Work, Ready for Work, and Youth Skills. Funding is available for the tailored or integrated learning support that must accompany the delivery of training within a community based setting. Community organisations are required to partner with a RTO as the training and assessment services delivered under Skilling Queenslanders for Work are funded under the Certificate III Guarantee.

While ACE organisations are also eligible to apply for funds to deliver training and assessment services under the

Certificate III Guarantee, they are required to be an RTO with pre-qualified supplier (PQS) status (Department of Education and Training, 2015a).

Additionally, the Certificate III Guarantee (C3G) provides access for individuals without a qualification at this level to fully funded training in a targeted industry area. This is available to eligible learners once only, and can include access to foundation skills and lower-level qualifications (Department of Education and Training, 2015b). The C3G budget allocation for 2015–16 is $231.6 million.

DET is also providing access to professional development resources to the ACE sector through the Inclusive Learning Framework Professional Development (Department of Education and Training, 2015c). The Framework has been developed to provide professional development for all education sectors on inclusive work practices that will enable cross-sectoral pathways to be developed improving opportunities for VET outcomes based on learner needs and the rights of all Queenslanders to access appropriate learning environments.

There are 36 U3A groups operating across Queensland with an estimated 20,000 members (U3A Network Qld, 2015). The Queensland Families and Communities Association supports more than 150 funded and unfunded organisations working with communities, families and individuals including Community Centres, Neighbourhood Centres and Family Support services education (QFCA, 2015).

While men's sheds came relatively late (around 2009) to Queensland, the rapid grassroots spread of men's sheds since is perhaps an indication of previously unmet demand for opportunities in the community for men not in paid work.

South Australia

South Australia (SA) has a strong and established ACE sector, and clearly articulated ACE policy statements, historically through the Skills for All strategy and now through the recently established WorkReady policy.

The ACE Program sits within the Skills and Employment Division of the newly formed Department of State Development, a Department created since the recent state elections through a merge of the Department of Manufacturing, Innovation, Trade Resources and Energy (DMITRE) and the former Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST). Community Centres SA has raised concern that the structure of the new

Department potentially increases the vulnerability of ACE due to a limited understanding of the sector.

In November 2013, the then Minister for Employment, Higher Education and Skills approved the implementation of triennial funding for the ACE Foundation Skills Grants program for 2014–15 to 2016–17. In 2014, there were 106 listed ACE providers with the Department of State Development. The State Government has also committed $11.7m from 2010–2016 for ACE, with an additional $6.4m invested through the Jobs Strategy to provide an extra 6000 training places.

In 2014–15, the South Australian Government allocated approximately $2.3m in funding to 57 ACE providers across the state to deliver foundation skills training. ACE Foundation Skills Grants funding is allocated for 6372 training places specifically targeting reading, writing, numeracy and computer skills.

Sixty per cent of funding for the ACE Foundation Skills Grants has been committed to organisations approved through triennial agreements to deliver accredited and non-accredited foundation skills training. The remaining 40 per cent is released through an annual contestable application process, and not all organisations apply. All listed ACE providers in South Australia are eligible to apply for the Department of State Development, ACE Foundation Skills Grants.

The Department of State Development offers ACE Foundation Skills grants for non-accredited training up to $25,000 for individual applications or up to $50,000 for joint applications; and grants for accredited training of up to $50,000 for individual applications or up to $100,000 for joint applications.

The funding is aimed at improving the skill levels for learners who face economic and social barriers that have prevented them from advancing their learning and limited their employability. ACE organisations are required to manage their administrative requirements within this funding range.

There are a number of listed ACE providers that are also in receipt of Department for Communities and Social Inclusion (DCSI) funding.

In SA, the ACE sector is made up of community centres, local council organisations, neighbourhood houses, libraries and other not-for-profit organisations. These Centres service 42,800 people each week, resulting in

2.05 million visits to ACE providers per annum. The sector is heavily supported by volunteers with between 4500 and 5600 volunteers providing 28,452 volunteer hours of work each week to the sector (SACES, 2013).

Most SA ACE providers are not RTOs; rather they work in partnership with RTO providers under auspice arrangements (predominantly with TAFESA) to meet the needs of their community for accredited training. VET funding through the Department of State Development is only accessible to RTOs for accredited training; however, foundation skills funding is available to both the ACE provider and the RTO to deliver accredited foundation skills training.

Fourteen RTO providers with registrations by type 'Community Based Adult Education Provider' are recorded for SA on the National Register on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia (training.gov.au).

As with other states, SA ACE has an active fee-for-service delivery model alongside funding from a diverse range of government departments.

Funded non-accredited and accredited foundation skills learning is based on the Certificate I in Education and Skills Development curriculum. These programs target a broad range of learners including:

- women
- young people
- Aboriginal people
- mature aged 45+
- people with a disability
- people with a low income
- culturally and linguistically diverse
- newly arrived migrants
- people with low levels of formal education
- people at risk of social isolation.

University of the Third Age (Alliance in SA) is the peak body through which the State Government supports 19 University of the Third Age (U3A) community-based organisations. The State government committed $232,000 over four years from 2014–15 to 2017–18 to support community based learning by providing annual grant funding to U3As.

South Australia is the site of some of the earliest Men's Shed experimentation but the sector is less organised at a state level. Men's Sheds provide important opportunities for men, including in rural areas of South Australia but

have yet to get significant support from the SA state government.

The Economic and Social Impact Study: Community and Neighbourhood Centres Sector (SACES, 2013) report, commissioned by the SA ACE sector peak body, Community Centres SA provides an evidence-based advocacy platform for continued investment by the state in the sector, through a clear articulation of the economic and social contribution that the sector makes to the SA economy.

The economic contribution of the network of community centres is significant. These include, inter alia, enabling people to engage in further learning and work through volunteering, foundation skills courses and breaking down barriers to participation such as through literacy and numeracy and the provision of childcare that enables engagement and participation. (SACES, 2013, p. 7)

Tasmania

The Tasmanian government funds the coordination of a broad range of adult and community education including adult literacy programs through LINC Tasmania, which combines the services of the State Library of Tasmania, the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office (TAHO), adult education and online access centres. The term 'ACE' is not commonly used to define a sector in Tasmania.

LINC Tasmania sits within the Department of Education. The Department largely funds this service from within its annual budget.

LINC Tasmania's statewide network comprises an online service channel (www.linc.tas.gov.au), and 86 physical service points, located in libraries and online access centres (LINCs) in 69 communities across the state (Department of Education, 2014, p. 60). The network offers integrated access to library and information services, adult literacy support, community learning programs, online access and archive and heritage services. In response to community need, LINC Tasmania now has a stronger focus on supporting people to access and use information to improve their skills and employability. LINC Tasmania continues to grow its social media presence, providing more options for connection with Tasmanians and fostering community engagement.

Community Learning Programs are divided into two areas:
- Work and Life Skills
- Leisure and Lifestyle

Number of people accessing education and training programs (number of enrolments)

Performance measure	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013-2014	Target 2013–14	% of Target reached
Work and Life Skills	6,754	9,095	9,619	8,438	8,740	96%
Leisure and Lifestyle1	15,080	5,413	3,319	1,491	4,000	37%

Source: Department of Education Annual Reports 2012–2013 and 2013–2014 (2013, p. 66; 2014)

LINC Tasmania contributes to the Department of Education's Learners First Purposeful Pathways priority through its adult literacy support and community learning programs. Extending services to more Tasmanians – particularly those who need greater information and access, skills and support to participate in work and community life – was a key focus for LINC Tasmania in 2013–14. LINCs offer a range of formal, informal and recreational courses and activities to encourage adults, particularly those who are marginalised, to reconnect with education, build their confidence and skills and participate more fully in community life and employment.

The Work and Life Skills programs support foundation skills development, create links with RTOs and provide learning opportunities that improve life skills and create pathways to employment and further study (Department of Education, 2013). Leisure and Lifestyle programs (described as adult education) have been in decline since 2011 when the system changed to full cost recovery resulting in increased costs to participants. The decline in enrolment numbers has also been attributed to broader economic impacts, changing demographics, competition from low cost and other providers, a difficult financial climate and increased fees (Department of Education, 2014).

In 2013–14, a number of LINC volunteers were trained as Volunteer Learning Guides as part of a pilot program involving LINCs, the Tasmanian Association of Community Houses (TACH), TasTAFE and UTAS. Initiated by the University, the program trained volunteers to provide community members with information about learning opportunities, learning guidance and support.

The LINC departmental staff members are supported by the work of volunteers. In the financial year ending 2013,

19,000 volunteer hours were provided for literacy support with 80,000 volunteer hours supporting distance learners.

Additionally the LINC Tasmania's Literacy Skills Development Program provides tailored one-to-one and group adult literacy and numeracy support. The network has 23 literacy coordinators based at 16 LINCS across Tasmania and within Community Corrections state-wide, and is supported by 680 volunteer tutors meeting the learning needs of nearly 2000 Tasmanians annually. The network is funded from LINC Tasmania recurrent funding. The $300,000 Literacy Skills Development Program also supports the network, funding the delivery of 63 projects engaging 1,006 participants in the 2012–2013 year.

In 2013–14, Skills Tasmania and LINC Tasmania are jointly responsible for the implementation of the Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan 2010–15, which has seen the launch of 26TEN '... a network of organisations and individuals working together to improve adult literacy in Tasmania' (Tasmanian Government, 2014), and a grants program to help communities and employers provide literacy support within their organisations. From 2014–15, LINC Tasmania will have sole responsibility for implementation of the plan, including management of these grants.

The LINCs provide many enabling programs that carry direct articulation into more formal studies, including:

- Computing for Me programs
- First step, Get ready for work and Financial Literacy preparation and pathway programs
- Pathway to University program in partnership with University of Tasmania
- IT training program in partnership with TasTAFE

There are 10 RTO providers with registrations by type 'Community Based Adult Education Provider' recorded for Tasmania on the National Register on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia (training.gov.au), many of whom access VET foundation skills funding. In 2013–14 there were 2220 unit enrolments in accredited courses across the LINC network (Skills Tasmania, 2014)

Work began early in 2014 to begin the development of the new Tasmanian Training and Workforce Development Strategy Investing in Skills for Growth, which will be used to guide the government investment to focus on skills development in relation to job opportunities and skills retention. The priorities for training and workforce development in Tasmania have been enshrined in the Training and Workforce Development Act 2013, which provides for all components of Tasmania's public sector VET system to work towards common goals.

From 1 July 2014, Skills Tasmania became a business unit within the Department of State Growth.

Under the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform, Tasmania agreed to the implementation of a national training entitlement. An entitlement has been in place in Tasmania for many years, as part of the National Partnership a formal entitlement model was implemented in January 2014. Under the entitlement, all working aged Tasmanians have access to a subsidised training place for at least their first Certificate III qualification, including those qualifications that lead to the Certificate III.

In 2014, the entitlement was accessible at TasTAFE and through Tasmanian Endorsed RTOs funded for User Choice, Skills Fund and Career Start programs.

The Tasmanian Community Fund provides recurring funding to the Tasmanian Association of Community Houses Inc. (TACH) to provide literacy activities. TACH represents 34 Community and Neighbourhood Houses, 33 of which are funded by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Disability and Community Services Division to '... engage in community development work in disadvantaged or socially isolated communities' (TACH, 2014, p. 3).

Neighbourhood House based Men's and Community Sheds are located in 10 sites across Tasmania. There are five U3A learning centres across the state.

Victoria

The ACE sector in Victoria is the largest and oldest in Australia, with 313 providers registered in 2014 with the Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE Board). One hundred and thirty eight providers are also registered as Registered Training Organisations with either the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) or the national Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA).

Learn Local is a brand used to identify ACE providers registered with the ACFE Board. Providers must meet a range of eligibility and assessment requirements outlined in the Guidelines and Criteria for Registration to be registered, with the defining characteristics of:

- education as a principal purpose
- community owned and managed
- not for profit.

Learn Locals are a very diverse group, which includes Community Houses, Learning Centres, Community Colleges and Neighbourhood Houses. They also include training centres managed by major not-for-profit organisations such as Yooralla, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Jesuit Social Services and Melbourne City Mission. There are also a number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) specialist providers.

The Victorian focus prioritises subsidised education and training for people who are at an educational disadvantage including:

- people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds and those who require assistance with English as an additional language
- learners facing adult literacy and numeracy challenges to participation
- people who have been marginalised and have not accessed education, training and employment
- people who have experienced barriers to education in the past
- people who live in remote and rural areas or who have limited access to learning opportunities
- people whose education and employment opportunities can be enhanced by improved digital literacy.

(ACFE Board, 2014, p. 13)

The work of the ACFE Board is supported by eight Regional Councils, with membership drawn from local communities.

Currently the ACFE Board is working within a strategic framework articulated in its 2013–15 Strategic Plan and the statement Learn Local: Focusing on the Future, released in 2013.

The ACFE Board subsidises pre-accredited training programs to support learners to return to study, improve their literacy and numeracy skills, broaden their employment options and learn new skills. These courses offer initial vocational training and a pathway to accredited training and qualifications. Pre-accredited courses are quality assured by the ACFE Board and designed for learners to gain confidence and skills through programs of study of at least 20 hours.

Pre-accredited training is one of the distinguishing features of the Victorian Learn Local sector and accounts for 50 per cent of government-subsidised Learn Local course enrolments. The remaining 50 per cent of government-subsidised Learn Local course enrolments are in accredited training. Accredited training includes a range of courses that are delivered under the Victorian Training Guarantee (VTG).

Over 300 Learn Local organisations were contracted by the ACFE Board in 2013 to deliver pre-accredited training. These organisations delivered 1.9 million student contact hours of subsidised pre-accredited training. In 2013, 24,500 students participated in these pre-accredited courses – up three per cent from 2010.

Learn Local organisations delivered 11% of the 649,900 enrolments supported in Victoria from all government sources including the ACFE Board (ACFE Board, 2013, p. 2).

Professional development and building the capacity of organisations is also a priority of the ACFE Board. In 2013–14, the ACFE Board continued to support professional development for Learn Local organisations through the VET Development Centre (VDC). Additional investment was made for Learn Local organisations to access places in activities on the VDC's Professional Learning Calendar. Workshops attended by Learn Local practitioners covered recognition of prior learning; skills for supervisors; designing and validating assessment programs and specialist skills for training particular learner groups, including refugees and asylum seekers.

The ACFE Board also invested in customised professional development for Learn Local organisations delivered by the VDC to support the Capacity and Innovation Fund (CAIF). Workshops in grant writing and project management are assisting Learn Local organisations to further develop and manage quality projects to support their learners. In March 2014, the ACFE Board implemented changes to CAIF that aligned projects to the objectives of the strategy, including a funding stream designed to support Communities of Practice for Quality – networks of Learn Local organisations and other community partners who regularly share good practices and collaborate on innovative approaches to delivering pre-accredited and accredited training.

Eight Learn Local organisations and one of the Adult Education Institutions have been granted a total of $675,904 to create new Communities of Practice for Quality.

CAIF provides funds to individual organisations or consortia where business growth, organisational capacity or innovation for learners has been identified. Funding of $5.28m is available statewide, and is distributed in an annual funding round upon application. The Fund has four project streams:

- Stream 1: Engaging Learners on Pathways for Achievement
- Stream 2: Communities of Practice for Quality
- Stream 3: Partnerships for Access
- Stream 4: Strengthening Learn Local Provision

In 2014, 70 CAIF programs were funded, and funding for these ranged from $5000 for an individual project to $200,000 for consortia. Between 2010 and 2013 a total of $15.56m has been allocated to 360 Learn Local providers for 376 projects across the state.

An additional $160,000 has also been allocated to Digital Literacy for Older Victorians for the delivery of community-based digital literacy training programs for older learners (Department of Education and Training, 2014b).

In recent years there has been a slight decrease in both the overall number of ACE providers registered with the ACFE Board and the number of ACE RTOs. Many providers have sought out more sustainable business models such as partnerships, shared services, co-location and auspicing arrangements.

ACE organisations in Victoria have representation from three peak bodies (excluding ALA): one national peak (Community Colleges Australia) and two state-based bodies (the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres and ACEVic). All three note the growing compliance burden faced by Learn Local organisations as a major challenge, and cite the expense, the complexity and the inflexibility of the prevailing systems as principal reasons for the decrease in the number of organisations. The peaks have unified to form an ACE Peaks group that meets each month, the purpose of which is to provide a consistent and strong advocacy position to government. The ACE Sector Statement, which was produced in 2014 following consultation with the ACE sector organisations, is an example of this collaboration.

Data from the ANHLC 2013 survey shows that pre-accredited funded training represents only eight per cent of the program delivery within Victorian neighbourhood houses, with funded VET delivery representing eight per cent and alternative schooling programs for youth representing only two per cent. The remaining 82 per cent of programs delivered by the houses and centres cover a broad range of education and social engagement activities.

Victoria is one of the few states that provide funding support to Men's Sheds. Victoria also has an active U3A network with member organisations found across the state (U3A Network Vic, 2014).

Western Australia

The State Government of Western Australia (WA):

> [R]ecognises the crucial role ACE plays in contributing to the growth of social and economic capital across Western Australia'

> (Department of Education and Training, 2009, p. 5).

In WA, ACE refers to a set of programs delivered by a broad range of organisations including: State Training Providers (STP) formerly TAFE colleges, private RTOs, local government, telecentres, community learning and neighbourhood centres, churches, migrant resource centres, adult education centres, seniors' education associations and Aboriginal community organisations.

Community Learning in Focus (2009–2018) is the WA Government's policy document that outlines the ongoing strategy for ACE in Western Australia. Under the strategy, ACE is defined as community-focussed learning, which responds to the needs and aspirations of people and communities, rather than the needs of industry, government or any particular enterprise. 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.

All publicly funded training is delivered by a Registered Training Organisation, and only RTOs registered with the Department of Training and Workforce Development as a Preferred Provider are eligible to apply for competitively allocated funding to deliver accredited ACE. 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.

In 2014, approximately $49.8m was allocated by the Department of Training and Workforce Development to State Training Providers and private RTOs to deliver accredited ACE courses in English language, literacy and numeracy, and employability skills; as well as other community-based programs (Linkwest and Read Write Now).

The Department of Training and Workforce Development's budget for the 2014–2015 financial year was allocated as follows:

- Linkwest – $165,000, to support Neighbourhood and Learning Centres, by building their capacity to deliver ACE by producing and supplying teaching resources and providing professional development to the centres
- Read Write Now program – $430,000 to provide informal, non-accredited literacy and numeracy tuition to adults on a one-to-one basis

- State Training Providers (STPs – $46.8m through their Delivery and Performance Agreements for accredited ACE delivery
- Private training providers and STPs – $3.22m for competitively allocated funding for accredited ACE delivery

Only accredited training delivered by RTOs is funded. There are 16 RTO providers with registrations by type 'Community Based Adult Education Provider' recorded for WA on the National Register on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia (training.gov.au).

Funding provided to Linkwest, the peak body for Community, Neighbourhood and Learning Centres in Western Australia to support the delivery of ACE programs is due to cease in 2015, and will result in a 40 per cent cut to their budget (Linkwest, 2015).

U3As and Men's Sheds are also active across WA. Research by Linkwest has identified 205 registered Centres in WA, many of which provide ACE community-based learning as part of their community service.

In recent times, the State Library of WA (SLWA) has worked to promote libraries as valued partners in literacy services, through the development of a Literacy Framework. Once completed, the Framework will identify the unique role and contribution of the SLWA and public libraries in enhancing literacy throughout Western Australia and inform future SLWA strategies in the literacy area.

National

Principle 1 of the 2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE reads:

A stewardship role is adopted at all levels, including governments 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).

The Commonwealth has undertaken this stewardship role through support for Adult Learners' Week activities, hosting of the ACE Action Group and through the implementation of initiatives such as the Tap Into Learning Today website.

The Commonwealth Government also provides funding to Adult Learning Australia to provide policy advice for and on behalf of the ACE sector, to produce research reports and publications, and to offer professional development. This includes support for the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, ALA's 53 year old, A-rated peer reviewed journal and *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).

Conclusion

Whilst every Australian State and Territory is a signatory to the MCEETYA (2008), there remains significant diversity in how this manifests itself in terms of support for ACE delivery. Regardless, the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector remains a network of independent, locally based organisations that combine volunteer support, user fees and relatively small amounts of government investment to achieve significant social and economic outcomes.

ACE is widely recognised for reaching adults with low skills who may experience barriers to participation in the formal VET system. It provides an accessible point of entry to VET and Higher Education for these learners.

The Adult and Community Education sector has the potential to contribute even more to many of Australia's significant social and economic challenges by:

- ensuring that our ageing population remains healthy and productive, able to continue longer in the paid workforce and to contribute as volunteers, carers and community members after retirement

- closing the gap between the educational, economic and health status of First Australians and the rest of the Australian community

- ensuring that regional and rural communities can take advantage of new technologies to reach VET and Higher Education opportunities based in the major cities.

In the parts of Australia where ACE is supported in policy and funded by governments, the return on investment is strong. A renewed nationwide commitment would further strengthen the sector and produce even better outcomes.

Contributors

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Australian Capital Territory

Education and Training Directorate

New South Wales

Department of Industry

New South Wales / Victoria

Community Colleges Australia

Northern Territory

Department of Business, Training NT

Queensland

Department of Education and Training

South Australia

Department of State Development Department for Communities and Social Inclusion
Community Centres South Australia Incorporated

Tasmainia

Department of Education

Victoria

Department of Education and Training, ACFE
Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres

Western Australia

Department of Training and Workforce Development
Linkwest

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(Footnotes)

1 The Leisure and Lifestyle program commenced operating on a full cost-recovery basis from 20 August 2011. The 2012–13 Target reflects the number of enrolments required to achieve full cost-recovery.