The state of ACE in Australia

Defining the status and role of the not for profit

Adult and Community Education sector

Acknowledgements

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INTRODUCTION

The paper is based on findings from published accounts of ACE and from government and sector websites. Additionally, conversations were held with representatives from State Government Departments responsible for ACE and a number of state based Peak Bodies servicing an ACE member base, which provided qualitative and quantitative data to support the report.

Finally feedback on this discussion paper was sought from a number of ALA Member organisations representing the not for profit ACE sector providers, ensuring the discussion was accurately reflecting the work and role of the sector.

Responses were sought to the following questions:

1. What are the different categories of ACE provider?
2. What is the estimated amount of providers?
3. What is the amount of reported VET delivery?
4. What is the estimated amount of other ACE delivery?
5. What is the level of state based administrative support to the sector?
6. What investment do the states and territories make in the sector?
7. Who are the learners accessing the sector?

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 sector peak bodies to effectively advocate for the social and economic benefits of ACE (McGiveney, 1999).

This paper is an attempt to draw on a range of data sources to identify the size and characteristics of the Not for Profit Adult and Community Education sector in 2014.

BACKGROUND

The *Ministerial Declaration on Adult and Community Education* (MCEETYA, 2008) defines the commitment of all Australian governments to the Adult and Community Education (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, 2008) sees the diversity of the sector as a strength, describing ACE as dynamic, diverse and responsive.

Education and Training Departments in Australia have responsibility for ACE Policy, due to the role of ACE 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. ACE Organisations rely heavily on volunteers. They also gather large proportions of their income through fee for service activities.

The ACE sector in Australia is diverse. However, ACE providers can be categorised as having some or all of these key traits in common:

- Learning as part of their core business
- Place-based or locally focussed
- Inclusive learning environments and practices
- Provide opportunities for engagement/re-engagement in community life, learning and work through the delivery of programs and activities
- Not-for-profit, community based and community governed through volunteer boards
- Provide formal, non-formal and in-formal learning
- Provide foundation skills learning
- Provide opportunity for engagement in accredited Vocational Education and Training modules or qualifications, either independently or in partnership with another training provider
- 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

NUMBER OF ACE ORGANISATIONS

- There are 531 not-for-profit organisations explicitly recognised and funded by state government education departments to provide ACE learning programs.
- In WA the peak body for Community, Neighbourhood and Learning Centres, Linkwest, offers further support to 70, not-for-profit, ACE member centres.
- There are 346 RTO providers with registrations by type *Community Based Adult Education Provider'* recorded on the National Register on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013).
- ALA maintains a database of 950 providers who self- identify as ACE organisations.
- There are just under 1200 Neighbourhood Houses and Centres in Australia. (ANHCA, 2011);
- There are now in excess of 1000 men's sheds across Australia. (AMSA, 2011).

Beyond this there are a broad range of organisations across Australia who have some of the features of ACE or who offer ACE programs.

TYPES OF ACE ORGANISATIONS

STATE RECOGNISED ACE PROVIDERS

A number of states register not for profit Adult and Community Education and fund them to deliver specific types of programs.
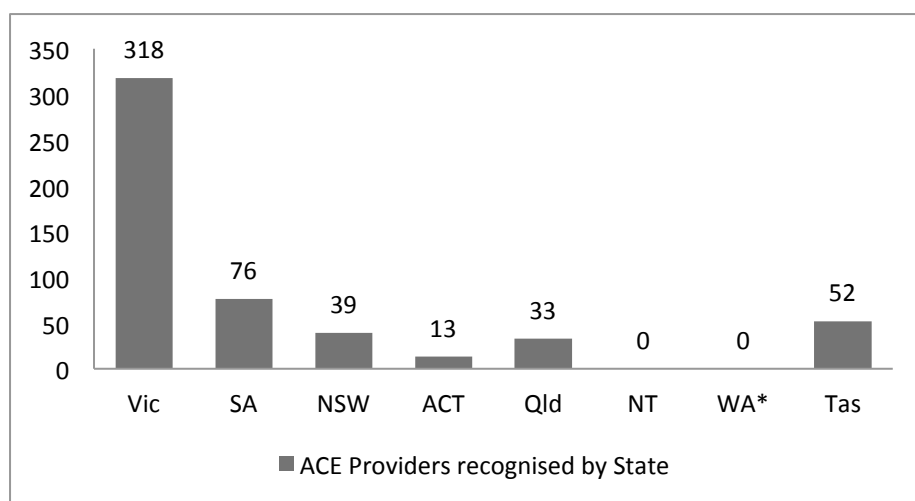
SOURCE: DEPARTMENTAL WEBSITES * WA does not fund ACE providers direct for training delivery it funds LinkWest (funding expiration 2015) to support ACE providers. Linkwest has 70 full member Centres eligible for ACE funding initiatives; 22 associate members; and 6 reciprocal members.

ACE REGISTERED TRAINING ORGANISATIONS

ACE Registered Training Organisations 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). These providers self-select the registration type 'Community based Adult Education Provider'. They may not necessarily be in receipt of state government funding or registered with a state government department as an ACE provider.

There are 346 RTO providers with registrations by type ' Community Based Adult Education Provider' recorded on the National Register on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013).

The following graph shows the national spread of these registrations. This data does not include the many ACE organisations who deliver VET in partnership with RTOs.
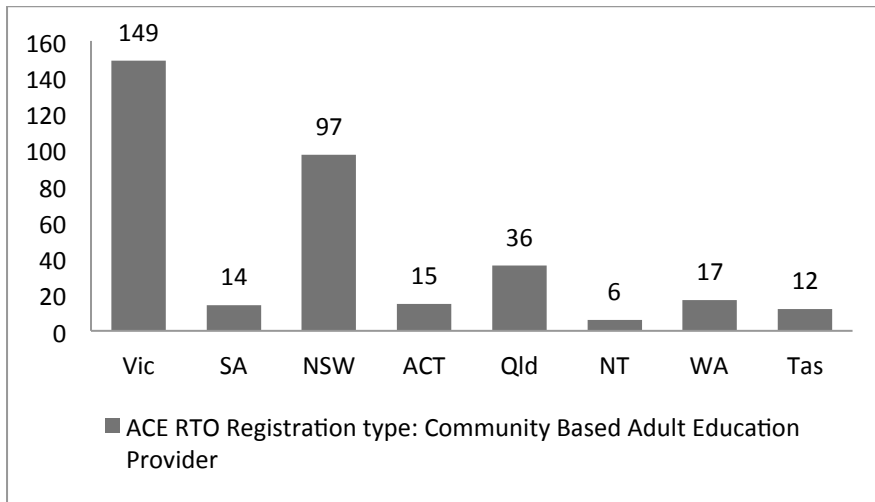
NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES

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 this sub sector 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 (ANCHA, 2011).

Neighbourhood Houses across Australia also go by the names:

- Community House
- Learning Centre
- Living and Learning Centre

- Neighbourhood Centre
- Community Centre
- Family Centre

The Vic ANHLC 2013 survey of engagement in Houses and Centres (ANHLC, 2013) listed more than 30 programs showing a broad program environment. Key to the success of the Neighbourhood House model of ACE is the core focus on the value of social engagement alongside community development, *"a triangular model of interrelated human, social and identity capitals"* (Rooney, 2011, p. 217).
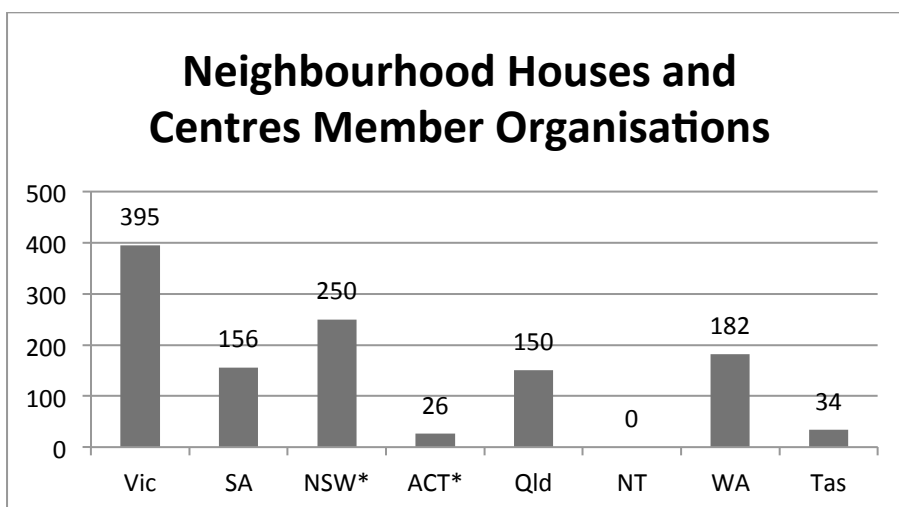
Source: State peak bodies *NSW AND ACT DATA (ANHCA, 2011)*

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 metalwork. 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.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Community Colleges 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 'missing' learners or provide a social network for older or vulnerable people (CCA, 2014a). Just over 70% 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, 2014b).

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 and funded to provide delivery of education and training programs to a broad range of Victorians (ACFE Board, 2013).

AMES has been operating for 60 years helping refugees and migrants to settle, through the provision of a broad range of humanitarian support and settlement services including ACE learning programs (AMES, 2014). AMES has a broad remit. In 2012, "*AMES received less that 1% of its total funding from the Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board* "(ACFE Board, 2013, p. 3).

CAE has been providing accredited and non-accredited ACE learning programs to the Victorian community for over 60 years. In 2013 CAE entered into new governance arrangement which now see CAE sit within the Box Hill Institute Group under the responsibility of Box Hill Institute of TAFE's Board (ACFE Board, 2013).

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 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013). AEI's deliver 9.1% of total ACFE Board funded student contact hours in Victoria (ACFE Board, 2013).

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 carry 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, 2014) They runs skills and enrichment courses, pathways and foundation skills programs and accredited vocational education and training.

- WEA SA runs over 1800 short courses annually across 40 locations in Adelaide, with over 30,000 enrolments (WEA SA, 2014).
- In 2012 WEA Sydney had 13,383 enrolments in ACE learning programs covering a very broad scope including humanities, languages and arts, computer, business and vocational training (WEA Sydney, 2013).
- 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, 2014).

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

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Many universities across Australia offer open access continuing education programs. In TAS, ACT and Qld university continuing education programs are funded under the state's and territory's ACE funding.

Continuing Education providers such as Australian National University "Centre for Continuing Education" offer continuing education programs, which are

> ... *informal, intellectually challenging classes encouraging students to pursue personal fulfilment and enjoyment through the discovery of new ideas, the pursuit of interests or the upgrading of skills.* (ANU, 2014)

UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE (U3A)

U3A organisations operate across Australia and are open to all mature Australians. Melbourne is home to the oldest U3A group in Australia, established in July 1984 (U3A Network Vic, 2014). U3A groups are governed through a committee of management meeting the needs of their member base. U3A has a peer-learning model. All tutors are volunteers who come from the group. Adult community 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: 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. ACE RTOs are responsible for 5.2% of overall VET delivery in Australia (NCVER, 2013).

2. Language, Literacy, Numeracy and Employability: education that allows individuals to participate effectively within their community and within the workplace. Australian governments have set a target that 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* 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.

LEARNERS IN ACE CENTRES

Neighbourhood and community targeted education is an established means of improving outcomes for those who are most disadvantaged (Grogan, et al., 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, et al., 2006). For example, compared to other VET providers, the typical VET learner in ACE RTOs is almost twice as likely to be Indigenous, and two and half times more likely to have a disability (NCVER, 2013).

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.

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.

Research conducted by ACER (Wyn, 2009) suggests the need for curriculum to include learning for life through '*situated identity construction work*' (p. 56) something the ACE environment can provide.

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 under 20% of total enrolment as opposed to 15.7% (NCVER, 2013) for other 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 in engaging communities in the development of learning programs. As a result, ACE is a popular choice for Indigenous learners. ACE RTOs enrol Indigenous learners at nearly twice the rate of other VET providers (NCVER, 2013).

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, et al., 2013).

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

PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

People with a disability enrol in ACE RTOs at two and a half times the rate of other providers of VET delivery (16.4% compared to 6.5% for other providers) (NCVER, 2013) 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 recent Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey indicated that around 1 in 7 Australians (14.1%) have very poor literacy skills (ABS, 2013). An additional 1 in 3 (30.3%) 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 important 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).

FUNDING TO THE ACE SECTOR

The ACE sector, receives funding from across government departments and across all three tiers of government. The figures below represent a best estimate based on publicly published information about state government funding allocated to the ACE sector as part of a formal ACE Strategy.

It doesn't include program funding from non-education departments such as health, community services or ageing, nor does it include fully contestable funding for accredited training delivery available to all public and/or private training providers, including community based training providers.

It also doesn't include funding for programs that enable the provision of low fee ACE programs, for example, neighbourhood house coordination funding, or one off grants provided to U3A's or Men's Sheds.

	Providers recognised	Program funding ($'000)	Grant Funding ($'000)	Admin/Peak support ($'000)	Total allocation ($'000)
NSW	39	15,940	0	250	16,190
Vic	318	15,370	5,280	0	20,650
Qld	33	12,200	0	0	12,200
WA	0	0	430	165	595
SA	76	2,500	0	232	2,732
Tas	52	700	1,000	0	1,700
NT*	0	0	0	0	0
ACT	13	0	250	0	250

Note: only funding to either (a) support the ACE sector for educational purposes or (b) fund ACE learning programs delivered by a community based ACE provider or consortium have been included.

*Note: the NT does not identify ACE separately, either as a sector or as a funding program.

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 (MCEETYA, 2008)

How an ACE provider in the QLD 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.

Victoria

The Education and Training Reform Act (Vic Government, 2006) confers a specific role on the ACE sector in the provision of adult learning. It defines ACE organisations as *"... a Community based organisation which is not a TAFE institute, a commercial provider or an industry provider;"* (p. 3)*.*

Victoria has 318 providers registered with the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board delivering adult community education across the state to more than 110,000 Victorians. Of these, approximately 138 providers are also Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), registered through either the state regulatory board, the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) or the national Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA).

> *The ACFE Board advises the Minister on the provision of education and training programs and services for adults in community based and Adult Education Institution settings. The focus is on building capability of individuals and the capacity of communities.* (DEECD, 2013c)

Through the Board, the Victorian Government provides funding to community based ACE organisations and two adult education institutions, the CAE and AMES. The funding is provided to support the delivery of education and training programs to learners; including young people, mature learners, learners with a disability or special learning needs and learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. Victoria's ACE providers deliver a broad range of programs, including vocational programs, employability skills development and adult literacy and numeracy training.

The term *'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 (DEECD, 2013c) to be registered, including: the need for education to be a key function of the organisation, for the organisation to be community owned and managed not-for-profit and to have strong business and governance structures in place.

The Victorian focus is on re-engaging those people with *"limited prior access to education"* with education as a means and pathway to further education and/or employment (DEECD, 2014a).

The work of the ACFE Board is supported by 8 Regional Council's with membership drawn from local communities. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) staff, located regionally, provides support to the eight Regional Councils and providers. Regional ACFE and Neighbourhood House networks are found across Victoria and exist to support providers.

Victoria has a strong policy direction in place, *Learn Local, Focusing on the Future* (DEECD, 2013a) and the state government has set a clear positioning of the ACE sector as an important part of lifelong learning for Victorians.

> *The Learn Local sector is critical to building an accessible and high-quality education and training system in Victoria. Learn Local organisations are recognised as having specialist knowledge and experience and strong community focus. This enables them to reach out and engage Victorians who face substantial barriers to accessing education and training and who might otherwise miss out on opportunities to improve their education, skills and prospects in life.* (DEECD, 2013a, p. 4)

The policy further supports a focus on developing a sustainable sector for the future and articulates three interconnected challenges and opportunities facing the sector for which the sector is receiving tools, professional development and financial support to address:

- *their community-based provision*
- *their geographic spread and provision of training in regional areas*
- *their focus on training for Victorians who face barriers to participation in education and training* (DEECD, 2013a, p. 9)

The state government has a strong commitment to entry-level pathways through pre-accredited training with $14m invested annually into program delivery. Learn Local providers are required to adhere to a pre-accredited Quality Framework, the' *A-Frame'* developed by the ACFE Board.

In the financial year 2012-2013 a total of $20.6m (ACFE Board, 2013, p. 64) was invested by the state through ACE funding, including Capacity and Innovation Grants of $5.28m (ACFE Board, 2013, p. 2)

to enhance the growth and capacity of the sector. Since it was established in 2010 a total of $15.56m has been invested by the state into Learn Local providers through the Capacity and Innovation Grants, allocated to 360 Learn Local organisations for 376 projects across the state.

In late 2013 a further $1m was provided for Capacity and Innovation Grants to promote partnerships (DEECD, 2013a, p. 7) and an additional $160k has also been allocated to *Digital Literacy for Older Victorians* for the delivery of community based digital literacy training programs for older learners (DEECD, 2014b).

Over the five years from 2008 to 2013 the Victorian ACE sector's total number of reported government subsidised enrolments moved down to a low point in 2010 and then recovered, with the total enrolments in 2013 being only marginally below those in 2008 (less than 0.5% lower) and 15 per cent above those in 2010. In the same period, public providers (TAFE and dual sector universities) have increased their total enrolments by 2.2% and there has been a 478% increase in government subsidised enrolments by private providers. This combination of factors means the 'percentage share' of enrolments with ACE providers has declined from 19% in 2008 to 11% in 2013. (DEECD, 2013b, pp. 6,7).

Learn Locals are a very diverse group, which include Community Houses, Learning Centres, Community Colleges and Neighbourhood Houses. ACFE funded programs are also run by 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) specific specialist providers.

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.

The decrease in the number of ACE RTOs has been attributed by many in the sector to the increase in competition and compliance costs that have accompanied the introduction of contestable VET funding in Victoria. The ACE sector has a model of small, local classes, personalised management and access to wrap around services targeted at learners with significant barriers to learning. The sector has struggled to compete using this model against for-profit RTOs and Industry Associations who target high volumes of learners with lower support needs using less labour intensive delivery models.

Statistical delivery data for the ACE sector in Victoria predominantly reflects the government funded accredited and pre-accredited delivery of providers registered with the ACFE Board. There is no compulsion for the provider to report fee for service delivery. For example the ACFE 2012 delivery data includes fee for service data from 48% of providers. The number of providers offering fee-for service programs is likely to be much higher than this. This data from the 48% of providers who did report all their delivery, showed that *"111,501 Learn Local learners trained in 150,874 course enrolments, generating 19.3 million student contact hours across the eight regions and the Adult Education Institutes"* (ACFE Board, 2013, p. 18)*.*

DEECD published delivery data in the state also excludes not for profit adult and community education providers who are not registered with the ACFE Board nor reporting their delivery, such as some Neighbourhood Houses, Men's Sheds and U3A's. For example, there are 395 Neighbourhood Houses (NH) or Learning Centres in Victoria, of which 370 are funded through the Neighbourhood House Coordination Program (NHCP) (DHS, 2011) all of which are active community education providers, a significant number of which are also ACFE Board registered. These providers are funded through diverse funding streams including Department of Human Services, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and Local Government. They also rely heavily on volunteer support.

Advanced data from the ANHLC 2013 survey shows that pre-accredited funded training represents only 8% of the program delivery within the houses, with funded VET delivery representing 8% and alternative schooling programs for youth representing only 2%. The remaining 82% 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).

TASMANIA

The Tasmanian government funds the coordination of a broad range of adult and community education including adult literacy programs through LINCs which combine 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.

The LINCs sit within the Department of Education which has 87 Service Points. 52 of these sites provide access to some form of non-accredited education or training program. The Department of Education largely funds this service from within its annual budget. Community Learning programs are divided into two areas:

Performance measure	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	Target 2012–13	% of Target reached
Number of people accessing education and training programs (number of unit enrolments)					
Work and Life Skills	6,754	9,095	9,619	8,250	117%
Leisure and Lifestyle[1]	15,080	5,413	3,319	11,000	30%

Source: Department of Education Annual Report 2012-2013 (DoE, 2013, p. 57)

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 (DoE, 2013). Recreational programs have been in decline since 2011 when the system changed to full cost recovery resulting in increased costs to participants. The decline in enrolment

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[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.*

numbers has also been attributed to broader economic impacts, market competition and changes to the way people learn, for example through online platforms such as YouTube.

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 supported the delivery of 63 projects engaging 1,006 participants in the 2012-2013 year. 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) .

The network has 23 literacy coordinators based at 16 LINCs across Tasmania and within Community Corrections state-wide and is supported by 520 volunteer tutors meeting the learning needs of nearly 1000 Tasmanians annually. The network receives funding support from the Adult Literacy Investment Fund of $1m each year (Skills Tasmania, 2013).

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 12 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 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013) many of whom access VET foundation skills funding.

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. 5 There are 5 U3A learning centres across the state.

NEW SOUTH WALES
NSW has a '*Community Education in NSW* ' (DET, 2012) statement on ACE. It describes the sector in this way:

Community education providers are embedded in local networks and are uniquely placed to link informal learning to formal training pathways. They play a key role in closing the gap between the skills-rich and skills-poor. (DET, 2012)

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 the ACE and Professional Development Unit, State Training Services of the NSW Department of Education and Communities. Unlike, Victoria or South Australia there is currently no registration process that would allow new organisations to be recognised as an ACE provider. There has been a reduction in the number of Community Colleges from 70 providers 10 years ago to 39 today; this has come about through mergers, realignment of service focus and closures.

Under current arrangements the NSW government funds the Community Colleges to run both accredited and non-accredited VET focussed on reducing barriers to educational achievement for disadvantaged learners and creating pathways to further training or employment. Community Colleges also have access to broader VET funding supporting the delivery of VET programs to the general community.

A disadvantaged learner is defined within the 2014 ACE Program Funding Guidelines (DEC, 2013) as follows:

Disadvantaged learners may include:

- Aboriginal people
- young people (15-24 years of age) who are at risk of not making a successful transition from school to further training or work or are unemployed or underemployed
- people with a disability who are unemployed or underemployed
- migrants who are unemployed or underemployed
- refugees
- mature aged workers (45 years and over) who need to re-skill to remain in the workforce and those planning to return to the workforce
- other unemployed people (DEC, 2013, p. 11)

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 addition colleges delivered 808,270 student contact hours of non VET activity involving 72,288 enrolments.

ACE in NSW is in transition, on the verge of skills reform to be implemented in Jan 2015. This reform will create many changes, challenges and opportunities for the ACE sector. Under the new *Smart and Skilled* policy (DEC, 2014b) ACE organisations will continue to receive funding for accredited and non-accredited vocational programs targeted at high needs learners. ACE organisations must be RTOs that are community owned and managed. The sector is still waiting to see whether this means the ACE Program will remain focused on the 39 existing Community Colleges or whether, over time, other RTOs that fit this community provider criterion and can service the needs of local communities will be included.

There are currently 97 RTO providers who have registered by type '*Community Based Adult Education Provider*' operating in NSW on the National Register on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia, these include the 39 Community Colleges (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013). Some of these are included on the NSW Training Approved Provider list delivering VET programs within their communities.

Under the *Smart and Skilled reform* Foundation Skills programs will be delivered by TAFE and ACE providers. Approved ACE providers are also eligible to apply for ACE Community Services Obligation funding to undertake vocational delivery to disadvantaged learners and in regional and remote communities. All other VET programs will be contestable and eligible ACE providers will also be able to deliver these programs (DEC, 2014b).

Some commentators have suggested that increased online learning is impacting on NSW Community Colleges traditional activities, causing them to reconsider the way they do business. Higher competition for lifestyle and leisure programs through online options such as YouTube and MOOCs and the rise in niche providers of food, health and wellbeing programs has seen the Community Colleges face greater competition in a market space that historically they have had considerable investment in. As noted by the CEO of Community Colleges Australia (CCA) Kate Davidson *"...if swimming can be taught on YouTube instead of at the local pool then education providers need to consider carefully the programs they will offer in the future".*

Some challenges facing the sector identified by CCA are:

1. slim markets and competition both from other providers and from technology
2. the changing face of learning and the historical perception of adult community education as being free or very low cost education
3. the pace of life, a time poor clientele

The sector has a strong entrepreneurial spirit with revenue streams that include fee for service, philanthropic sponsorship and corporate programs. Some Community Colleges have diversified into independent schools, child care centres, cafes and disability networks.

In working towards preparing providers to address the changing place of ACE, DEC provides $250k towards professional development for the sector. Alongside this professional development is an online repository of information and tools, *Netfirst* providing online support. Providers also meet in Regional Networks to provide support to the sector. Small additional grants are distributed through the networks to enable regional spread of programs such as the Green Army.

DEC 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 3,700 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 (DEC, 2014a).

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 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013). 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, 2014).

As identified by Sue Outhwaite, R/Manager Adult Community Education and Professional Development, DEC

> *"The major strength of the sector is its ability to work with disadvantaged clients, enabling pathways to further study and employment. Community Colleges in their delivery of the ACE Program demonstrate consistently their ability to have success with clients who require additional supports or need assistance to engage with training."*

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) recognises that community organisations play a role in providing pathways to further education and training for 'second chance' learners while "improving the social fabric of Canberra" (Directorate, 2014a). In the ACT the term 'adult and community education' refers to the delivery environment not a specific sector of providers.

The ACT Education and Training Directorate (the 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 $250k grants of up to $15k are available for training initiatives that support social inclusion, VET and employment pathways.

18 adult and community education projects have been funded for delivery in 2014 by 13 providers. As the grants program is acquitted on a program basis and not an enrolment or student contact hour basis, data about the number of enrolments is not available.

There are 15 RTO providers with registrations by type '*Community Based Adult Education Provider*' recorded for ACT on the National Register on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013) some of whom would access these funds and deliver programs that are very close in nature to those offered by ACE RTOs around the country.

Looking 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 5 of the centres. U3A is also active in the ACT, with over 4000 members across 8 sites, running in excess of 200 courses throughout the year (U3A ACT, 2014).

The Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) (CSC, 2013) 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) (ANU, 2013) and some Secondary Colleges on a commercial basis.

QUEENSLAND

The Qld Government recognises and acknowledges the role of ACE in Qld as crucial in addressing social isolation and more specifically that ACE can:

> *... play 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.* (DETE, 2013a)

In Queensland (Qld) there is currently no funding specifically allocated to the ACE sector. Historically ACE funding was provided to Qld TAFE's to deliver ACE programs, which included recreation and lifeskills programs and employment skills taster programs.

There are 33 ACE providers listed on a Directory on the Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE, 2013a) website. 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).

DETE funds a Community Learning Program (CLP) which in 2014-15 will offer nationally recognised training for over 4,000 disadvantaged learners through the investment by state of $47m over five years. The Community Learning Program targets Queenslanders who previously would or could have fallen through gaps in funded education provision which may have put them at a disadvantage, such as Queenslanders who may not be in receipt of benefits but are underemployed or seeking work.

Only RTOs can deliver the training under this program but they need to join with a community organisation in order to do so (DETE, 2013c). These programs include accredited training delivery up to an AQF Level III and Foundation Skills training. DETE recognises Foundation Skills training "*as core capabilities required for effective workplace and community participation, including language, literacy, numeracy and employability skills*" (DETE, 2014a, p. 14)

This year 49 projects will be run across Qld under the CLP managed by 23 organisations[2], targeting 3,937 participants. The majority of programs, (95%), have a Community Organisation managing the project, including some Neighbourhood Houses.

DETE is also providing access to professional development resources to the ACE Sector through the Inclusive Learning Framework Professional Development (DETE, 2013d) . The Framework has been developed to provide professional development for all education sectors on inclusive work practices

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[2] *Includes (2) for-profit education providers and (1) TAFE provider managing complete projects*

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.

Lorraine Yabsley, A/Director, Employment and Skills Pathways, DETE spoke to the value of the community based learning:

> *"Community Learning provides nationally recognised skills and training in a supportive community-based environment. Training delivered within a community-based setting can be specifically tailored to the learner's individual circumstances and abilities, work ambitions, and local activities. A community-based setting for the delivery of training presents a supportive environment in a less restrictive setting for those who have had a less than successful experience in government schools or institutional settings."*

There are 33 U3A groups operating across Qld with an estimated 20,000 members (U3A Network Qld, 2014). The Queensland Families and Communities Association (QFCA, Queensland) (CCFSNAQ, 2012) supports more than 150 funded and unfunded organisations working with communities, families and individuals including Community Centres, Neighbourhood Centres and Family Support services education.

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 Senior Centres, in Indigenous Communities, Working Women's Centres and U3A's. The extent of this community education is not fully known nor reported.

Some training program run by the Department of Business - Training NT (2014) 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 $300k, 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, and the community identifies the training need and chooses the RTO/community organisation to support the learning.

The NT has an active U3A network. The people of NT have access to 6 RTOs that identify themselves as Community Based Adult Education Providers (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013) who can access funding for Pre-Employment training and VET delivery funding that is available to other RTOs.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

South Australia (SA) has a mature, well developed ACE sector and a clearly articulated ACE policy statement (DFEEST, 2013a). The *Skills for All* strategy from the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST) sets a 6 year commitment of $1m for 1000 learners per annum and offers providers triennial funding, a first for Australia. ACE providers must apply to be listed as an approved provider to deliver accredited and non-accredited training programs funded through the ACE Foundation Skills Grant (DFEEST, 2012).

In 2013 DFEEST supported 76 registered ACE providers to deliver regional learning programs across the state, covering all 12 state government regions. 56 of these were approved to deliver non-accredited training programs, investing $1.3m into the sector with a target of engaging 4640 learners. In addition, 20 VET ACE programs were funded at a cost of $1.2 m. The VET ACE programs targeted 1666 participants to engage in foundation skills training as a pathway to further training or employment.

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 2.05m visits to ACE providers per annum. The sector is heavily supported by volunteers with between 4,500 and 5,600 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 with RTO providers or under auspice arrangements, predominantly with TAFESA, to meet the needs of their community for accredited training. As VET funding through DFEEST is only accessible to RTOs for accredited training, and foundation skills' funding is available to both the ACE sector and the RTO sector, strong partnerships and pathways are being developed by the sectors. 14 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 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013).

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 learning is based on an education and skills development curriculum which has been mapped to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF Council, 2013) and includes Language Literacy and Numeracy, Digital Literacy, Employability Skills, Foundation work skills. (DFEEST, 2013b). These programs target a broad range of learners including:

- *women;*
- *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; and*
- *people at risk of social isolation* (SACES, 2013, p. 14)

The department works closely with Community Centres South Australia Incorporated (Community Centres SA). In the period from 2006-2013 DFEEST has provided $1.86m to Community Centres SA to deliver workforce development to the ACE sector through the ACE Sector Workforce Development Plan. Additionally DFEEST draws on the sectors knowledge with Community Centres SA sitting on the Foundation Skills Steering Group supporting ACE engagement in Foundation Skills delivery. Community Centres SA also holds a seat representing the sector on the DoI/DFEEST Foundation Skills Subcommittee providing leadership and fostering collaboration between industry and education providers in the development and delivery of the Foundation Skills programs.

U3A is active in SA supported by the Office for the Ageing and SA Department of Health (U3A Alliance SA, 2009). Men's Sheds are also active in the state.

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)

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The State Government of Western Australia (WA) "... *recognises the crucial role ACE plays in contributing to the growth of social and economic capital across Western Australia*" (DET, 2009, p. 5) In WA, ACE refers to a set of programs delivered by a broad range of organisation including: State Training Providers (STP) formally 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.

Its ACE strategy '*Community learning in focus: A strategy for Adult and Community, Education in Western Australia (2009-2018)*' defines ACE as:

> *... community focused learning delivered through a diverse range of programs and activities. It encompasses learning activities that are non-accredited and non-formal in nature and which contribute to the development of a person's skills and knowledge, and encourage social participation. From 2009, it also encompasses a range of accredited formal courses for*

those looking for a pathway to re-enter or re-engage with education, training and employment. (DET, 2009, p. 2)

The Vocational Education and Training Act 1996 (Western Australia Government, 2009) supports a legislated requirement for public training providers to deliver adult and community education. In 2013, 35 RTOs were funded by the Department of Training and Workforce Development to deliver accredited ACE in WA resulting in approximately 21,000 enrolments. This investment by government included $39.5m to STPs and $3.8m to private training providers for accredited ACE delivery. There are however only 17 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 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013).

Although the WA government recognises the value of non-accredited adult and community education, specifically that *"different learning programs and experiences, including formal, informal and non-formal learning, are needed by individuals at different stages of life ... [and] ... can lead to different outcomes for different people "* (DET, 2009, p. 4) only accredited training delivered by RTOs is funded within WA.

The WA government through the Department of Training and Workforce Development provides funding of $165k to Linkwest, the peak body for Community, Neighbourhood and Learning Centres in Western Australia. This funding is however due to cease in 2015. Linkwest has allocated $30k to the development of three Learning Hubs as an alternative sustainable approach to delivery of non-accredited adult and community education. The Hubs were a Linkwest initiative developed with the aim to increase the community use of Centres delivering adult and community education in WA and encourage partnerships between Centres and other ACE providers.

The WA government also provides funding of $430k for non-accredited literacy and numeracy education through the volunteer managed Read Write Now program, which has been running in WA for 37 years and is also due to end in 2015. In-kind support is provided to the program by Central Institute of Technology, Northbridge Campus and the Community Adult Literacy Foundation Inc (CALF).

U3A's and Mens 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.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ACT	Education and Training Directorate
NSW	Department of Education and Training
NSW/Vic	Community Colleges Australia
NT	Department of Business, Training NT
Qld	Department of Education, Training and Employment
Qld	Lifelong Learning Council Queensland Inc
SA	Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology
SA	Community Centres South Australia Incorporated
TAS	Department of Education
Vic	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Vic	Adult Community Education Victoria
Vic	Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres
WA	Department of Training and Workforce Development
WA	LinkWest

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