

# AUSTRALIAN ACE ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN 2017 UPDATE

Scope and scale of adult and community  
education across Australia.

## FINAL REPORT



Adult  
Learning  
Australia

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<b>Executive summary .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Key findings .....	7
Enrichment.....	7
Foundation.....	8
Vocational .....	8
Conclusion .....	9
Report structure.....	9
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Where ACE came from .....	10
<b>ACE scope and scale.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Distinctive features of ACE .....	11
Individual learning needs.....	11
Inclusive learning.....	11
A learner-centred approach .....	11
Distinctive providers.....	12
Scope of ACE activities.....	13
Neighbourhood Houses and Centres .....	14
Community Men’s Sheds .....	14
Universities of the Third Age .....	15
ACE registered training organisations.....	15
ACE activity focus.....	15
ACE by jurisdiction.....	16
<b>ACE programs .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Personal enrichment learning.....</b>	<b>19</b>
Key features .....	19
Provider profile .....	19
Personal enrichment learning participants.....	19
Motivation factors .....	19
Participants in ACE personal enrichment learning.....	20
Significance of enrichment learning.....	21
Policy links.....	23
Sustainability challenges.....	23

<b>Adult basic education .....</b>	<b>24</b>
Key features .....	24
Non accredited adult basic education participants .....	24
Motivations and outcomes .....	25
Accredited adult basic education participants .....	25
Characteristics of students in accredited adult basic education .....	28
Outcomes .....	30
Policy links.....	30
Sustainability challenges.....	30
<b>Formal VET .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>A new additional focus for ACE providers .....</b>	<b>31</b>
Key features of ACE VET providers.....	32
Scale of ACE within total accredited VET.....	32
Scale of government funded ACE VET .....	32
ACE VET in all fields of education other than adult basic education .....	33
Outcomes .....	39
Sustainability challenges.....	42
<b>Pathways between learning programs .....</b>	<b>44</b>
Key features .....	44
Participants .....	46
Outcomes .....	46
Sustainability challenges.....	48
<b>Other findings.....</b>	<b>49</b>
The potential overall contribution of ACE.....	49
Example 1 .....	49
Example 2 .....	49
<b>Summary and conclusions.....</b>	<b>51</b>
Key findings .....	51
<b>References .....</b>	<b>53</b>

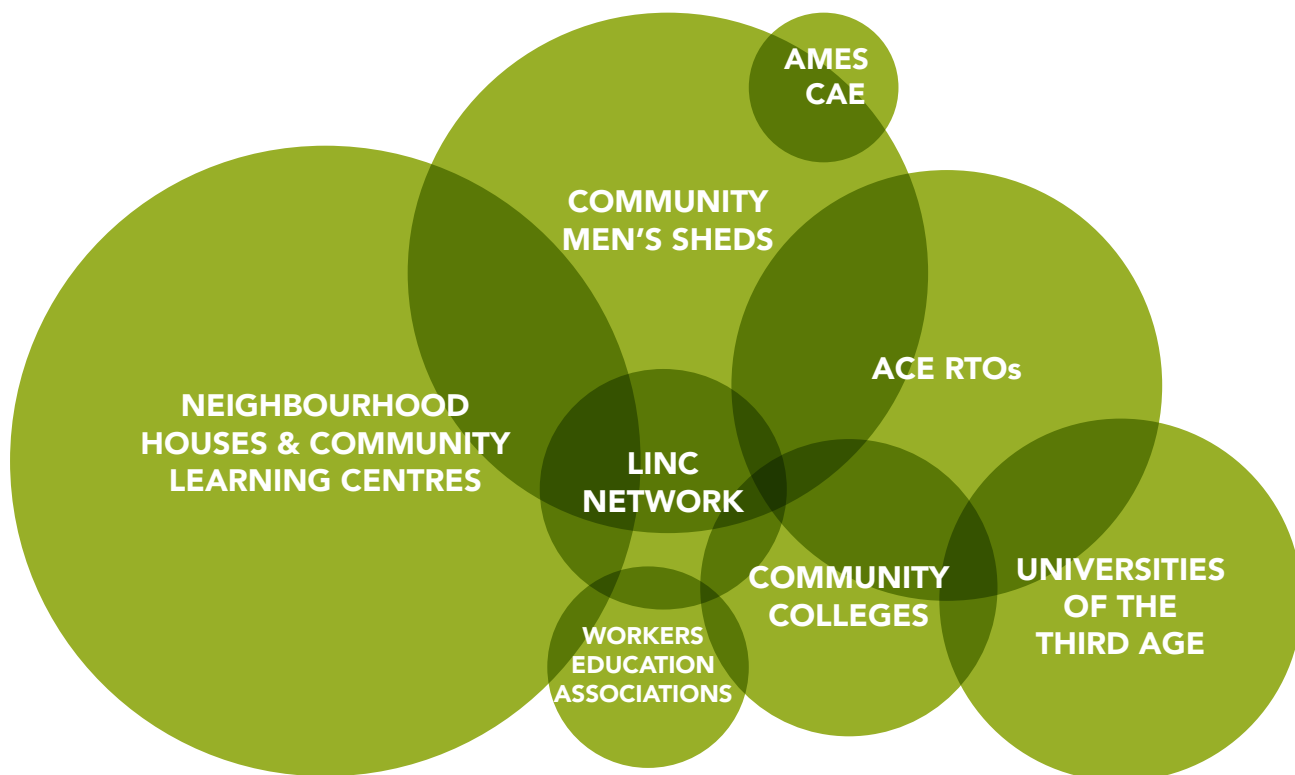
## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	The distinctive features of ACE .....	11
Table 2	The strengths of ACE as perceived by ACE providers and their students.....	12
Table 3	ACE providers who are also RTOs (i.e. accredited VET providers) of government funded VET .....	16
Table 4	Numbers of students involved in personal enrichment learning among ACE RTO providers in receipt of government funding for their VET activity (incomplete data as ACE RTO providers have been compelled to provide this data) .....	21
Table 5	Greatest benefits of Men's Sheds as perceived by their members .....	23
Table 6	Accredited adult basic education student numbers 2003–2014: a) in ACE VET providers b) in all VET providers c) % ACE students of total VET students .....	26
Table 6a	Government-funded* VET students in Mixed field programmes by provider type 2010–2015 .....	26
Table 7	Adult basic education students by AQF and non AQF in ACE VET and other VET providers .....	28
Table 8	Accredited adult basic education students: per cent of total in various equity groups in ACE VET providers compared to in all other VET providers.....	29
Table 9	Load pass rates (%) in accredited adult basic education in ACE providers and other VET providers 2003–2014 .....	30
Table 10	Students in specific fields of government funded VET a) in ACE VET providers b) in all providers and c) % ACE VET students of all students in all VET providers .....	34
Table 10a	Government-funded only* VET students in specific field programmes by provider type, 2010-2015 .....	34
Table 11	VET students in all fields of VET education other than adult basic education: percentage by AQF and non-AQF for ACE VET providers and all other VET providers .....	36
Table 12	ACE VET students (government funded) by field of education and level of education .....	37
Table 13	Percentage from various equity groups of ACE VET students in all fields of education other than adult basic education and for all other VET students .....	38
Table 14	Load pass rates for all fields of education other than adult basic education (i.e. mixed field) for ACE providers and for all other VET providers 2003–2014.....	39

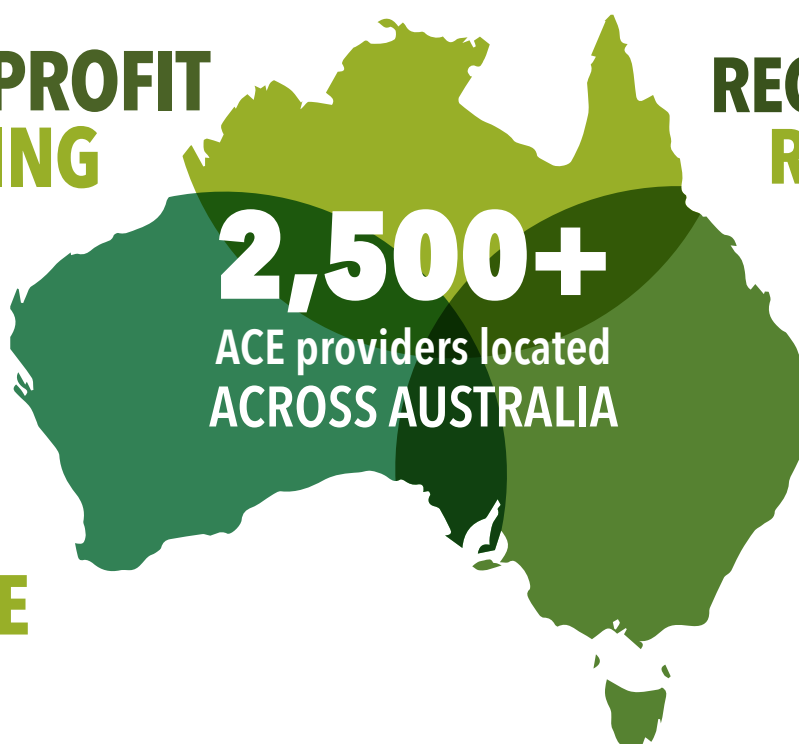
Table 15	Key outcomes for government-funded community education provider graduates and subject completers, five-year time series (%).....	40
Table 16	Government-funded VET students by providers type 2010–2015.....	40
Table 17	Participants in Victorian ACE VET providers compared to other VET providers.....	41
Table 18	Characteristics of ACE VET providers compared to private VET providers .....	41

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	The position of ACE within the overall Australian education landscape historically now .....	13
Figure 2	Contemporary roles of ACE providers	
Figure 3	Numbers of ACE RTOs at January 1 each year (2005–2016).....	13
Figure 4	Schematic view of scale of Australian ACE providers today by activity focus .....	16
Figure 5	Indicative proportional distributions of key types of ACE providers by jurisdiction .....	17
Figure 6	The four programs of Australian ACE today .....	18
Figure 7	Program logic of personal interest learning.....	20
Figure 8	Percentage of NH&C respondents reporting the demographic listed .....	20
Figure 9	Program logic of adult basic education .....	24
Figure 10	Trends in ACE accredited adult basic education student numbers, subject enrolments and training hours 2003–2014.....	27
Figure 11	Trends in scale of accredited adult basic education per ACE student 2003–2014 .....	27
Figure 12	Formal VET in ACE program logic.....	31
Figure 13	Total VET activity from all sources: proportions attributable to various provider types .....	33
Figure 14	Trends in ACE VET specific field of education student numbers, subject enrolments and training hours 2003–2014 .....	35
Figure 15	Trends in scale of ACE VET specific field of education provision per student 2003–2014.....	35
Figure 16	Index of educational opportunity for young people Australia.....	43
Figure 17	Learning pathways provision program logic .....	45
Figure 18	Australian ACE – a framework for reporting.....	45



**NOT FOR PROFIT**  
**WELCOMING**  
**LOCAL**  
**POSITIVE**  
**FLEXIBLE**  
**LEARNER**  
**CENTRED**  
**INCLUSIVE**



**REGIONAL**  
**REMOTE**  
**RURAL**  
**URBAN**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Adult Learning Australia advocates for equitable access to lifelong and lifewide learning for all Australians, and for the adult and community education (ACE) organisations that support this vision.

This report profiles Australian ACE in terms of its distinctive features, current scope and scale of providers and programs. For each ACE program, it outlines participants, outcomes achieved and key national policies supported. Trends in Australian ACE programs, participants and outcomes over the past five to ten years are also included to identify challenges facing their sustainability, where comparable data is available.

There is no single data source available on all of the work that Australian ACE does. This report provides a contemporary profile of Australian ACE through desktop research and analysis of extant data.

## Key findings

ACE is a discrete fourth sector of education in Australia. ACE organisations are not for profit community-based organisations committed to providing accessible learning opportunities for adults in local communities that meet their needs and support place-based community development.

There are at least 2500 ACE providers in Australia, all of which provide **personal enrichment learning**. Most provide **adult basic education** in language, literacy, numeracy and other foundation skills. A significant minority (300–500) provide formal **vocational education and training (VET)**. ACE providers who have extended into formal VET are concentrated in Victoria and NSW.

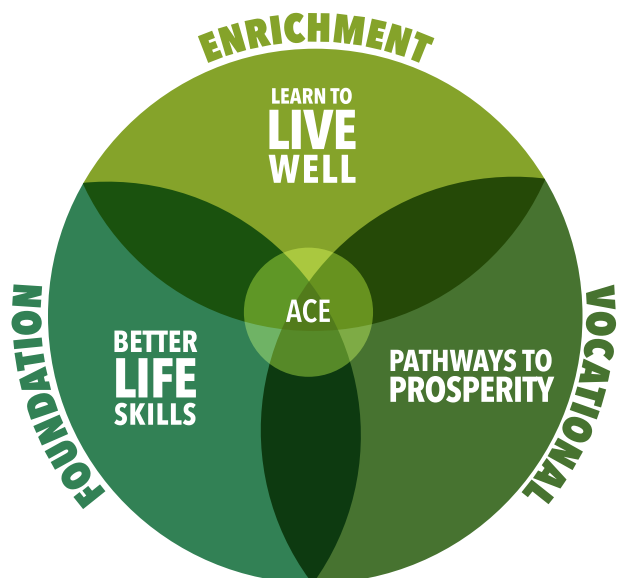
State and territory jurisdictions have primary responsibility for ACE. They define ACE and support ACE in different ways. Most jurisdictions recognise and support ACE as programs in informal and non-formal personal enrichment and adult basic education. Victoria and NSW support ACE as a sector of providers for all types of learning programs.

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

## Enrichment

For many adults, the pathway back into learning is through personal enrichment learning programs. Personal enrichment learning can promote social inclusion and impact positively on health and wellbeing. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1.4 million Australians participated in personal enrichment learning from all sources. It is estimated that at least 200,000 adults participate in personal enrichment learning programs through ACE each year, with many more in actuality (ABS 2013).

ACE personal enrichment learning can be viewed as promoting community wellbeing and as a preventative health and wellbeing measure. This is significant given successive government's policy focus on cost and demand pressures and on identifying efficiencies to improve our health and wellbeing. Healthy, productive ageing is also a key government policy that ACE personal enrichment programs contribute directly to. A significant challenge for ACE providers is funding personal enrichment learning, with many participants in the lowest income brackets.



## Foundation

The adult basic education programs in ACE are aimed at adults with limited formal education or English language skills. These programs cover language, literacy, numeracy, basic computing skills and other foundation skills such as communication, problem solving, presentation and self-management. Adult basic education programs are offered with a high level of support. They may be non-formal (non-accredited) or formal (accredited). There is currently no ongoing data collection of adults involved in non-accredited basic education programs delivered by ACE providers.

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

Accredited adult basic education programs delivered by ACE registered training organisations (RTOs) are reported within the National VET Provider Collection managed by the NCVER. In 2014, there were 12,585 students participating in accredited adult basic education programs at ACE RTOs receiving government funding for VET. These students made up 7.4% of all students participating in accredited adult basic education programs in 2014 at all providers receiving government funding for VET, and included many people from disadvantaged or equity groups.

Updated data provided by NCVER in 2017 reveals that with fee-for-service students removed from TAFE and ACE provider data, the proportion of total government funded only students in accredited adult basic education programs in ACE RTOs was 8.1% in 2014 and 9.1% in 2015. The amount of adult basic education each ACE VET student receives has increased significantly over the past ten years, from an average of 2.54 enrolments per student in 2003 to 8.07 in 2014, and from 128.59 training hours per student in 2003 to 389.60 in 2014.

The trend has also been towards full qualifications rather than part qualifications or subjects only training in adult basic education. Students have been completing successfully only between 50–60% of the total hours of training they signed up for. This rate of success is below that for students in accredited adult basic education in other VET providers, and by a margin of 9% or more.

There is a high literacy challenge in Australia that ACE providers are responding to. ACE providers require support to build the skills of their adult basic education practitioners to ensure that disadvantaged learners have access to foundation skills training.

Ensuring flexibility in foundation skills training is important. Not all adults want or need full qualifications in this area. They want training that fills gaps and is integrated with vocationally focussed subjects or qualifications delivery.

## Vocational

ACE registered training organisations (RTOs) serve a generic and value-adding role. The generic role of ACE is to offer VET to all adults. The value-adding role of ACE is to bring its distinctive qualities and unique delivery method that is strongly local, community-based, flexible, market-driven, learner-centred and targeted to assist disadvantaged students into and through the VET system.

In 2014, ACE VET students (95,400) accounted for 5.3% of total VET students and ACE VET delivery accounted for 3.3% of total hours delivered. The ACE VET students included 12,585 (13%) in adult basic education programs and 82,860 students (87%) in all other fields of education. These 82,860 students made up 5.1% of all students receiving government funding in specific fields at all providers receiving government funding for VET in 2014.

Updated NCVER data (2017) reveals that with fee for service students removed from the TAFE and ACE provider data, the proportion of total government funded only students in accredited VET specific fields training was 6.5% in 2014 and 6.2% in 2015.

While the number of ACE VET students in specific fields of education has decreased significantly over the past ten years, the reported training hours delivered have steadily increased. Therefore, the overall trend has been towards increasing quantities of training delivery per student, and also towards full VET qualifications among ACE VET students in specific fields of education, with 36% in full VET qualifications training in 2014. The same trend has occurred with other VET providers but the proportions are much higher at 90%.

ACE students in accredited VET in all fields of education, other than adult basic education, include people from disadvantaged or equity groups at higher levels than all other VET providers. Graduates' employment outcomes are almost equal all other VET providers and time series data



for 2011–2015 show relatively consistent outcomes in terms of numbers employed or in further study.

These are exceptionally good results, given the barriers that disadvantaged learners need to overcome with assistance from their ACE providers. Competitive funding models in VET have enabled ACE providers to enter the formal VET training market. However since 2009, these models have resulted in a shift in VET provision away from ACE RTOs and public VET RTOs (TAFEs) towards private RTOs. To reverse, the unintended adverse effects of competitive funding models on ACE providers and the vulnerable learners they serve, government should outline specific and complementary roles for the public TAFE system, not for profit community providers and private for profit providers. Some form of community social service obligation fund and quarantining of future Foundation Skills funding for ACE and TAFE providers may be necessary. This occurs in New South Wales at present where there is a community social service fund for VET ACE providers only. There are also ACE providers who are not RTOs but who assist with formal accredited VET delivery by entering into partnerships with RTOs that take responsibility for assuring the quality of assessments; making judgements about competence or outcomes achieved and issuing final VET awards. For example, in Victoria in 2014 nearly 50% of ACE providers (known as Learn Locals) who are not RTOs, partner with an RTO to give their learners access to accredited VET programs. In Queensland, ACE providers are recognised for their ability to provide tailored support services to disadvantaged learners that assists them to complete formal VET training with an RTO partner. Victoria is also fostering partnerships between ACE and other types of education providers in relation to early school leavers. Different types of provider partnering, rather than competing, is proving a useful model to achieve equity in VET.

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

The available data on actual transitions made by students at ACE providers from non-formal learning programs into formal VET reveal their high capacity to perform the pathways role.

Overall, the ACE sector achieves outcomes against multiple policy platforms. It achieves policy expectations of Education, Health, Human Services, Employment, Industry and Business and Community and Regional Development.

## Conclusion

This report provides a conceptual framework for reporting on the education programs in ACE in Australia and provides contemporary baseline data on the components of the framework against which future developments can be compared. The available data suggests ACE is playing an important role in educating many adult Australians; particularly the disadvantaged in learning but there is more primary research required to determine the full impacts of ACE, and ongoing support from governments is required to sustain and grow the ACE effort in education.

## Report structure

For this report, data has been drawn from extant research reports focussed on particular aspects of ACE and supplemented by NCVER data on ACE VET provision. Piecing together data from various sources is the only way that an overall profile of Australian ACE can be built as there is no single source on all of the work that ACE does. Gaps and/or discrepancies found in the data and information are highlighted as and where relevant.

The rest of the report is presented in four sections.

1. A descriptive overview of ACE in Australia in terms of its scope of activities and who provides them.
2. The scope and scale of ACE provision by Australian state and territory and the national strategic directions for ACE agreed to by all ministers across the nation with responsibility for ACE.
3. Details on the main types of programs that Australian ACE provides. For each program, information is presented on its key features and data on the participants and the outcomes achieved and the national policies supported.
4. An overall conceptual framework for Australian ACE from which to draw some conclusions on where to next for Australian ACE.

Trends in participant numbers and other key aspects of the learning programs over time are also presented where data is available and to help identify issues affecting program sustainability.

# INTRODUCTION

This report aims to raise awareness and understanding of ACE in Australia. It profiles the current scope and scale of ACE providers, programs, participants and outcomes and the national policies supported. Recent trends in these parameters are also identified as a means of determining challenges facing Australian ACE.

## Where ACE came from

ACE has a long history in Australia. Its beginnings span as far back as the late 1880s. ACE was established by visionaries who recognised the aspirations of ordinary men and women for some form of ongoing education and sought to meet that need. ACE organisations flourished that offered lectures, courses and books on a wide range of topics and disseminated new ideas and stimulated debate. They broadened people's horizons at a time when there were few other channels through which this could be done (SSCEET, 1991).

As education was established in Australia in a more systematic way, through formal schooling, vocational education and training and universities, ACE was relegated to the back seat. However, the work of those early visionaries continued albeit variously within each jurisdiction of Australia, which has primary responsibility for ACE. ACE developed alongside and outside of the three formal education sectors to provide informal learning for adults through their participation in social activities and also non-formal (pre- or non-accredited) structured learning programs of interest to adults and for personal development outcomes. Then, in the early 1990s the work of ACE began to receive national recognition and through the 'Come in Cinderella' report on ACE (SSCEET, 1991). The view expressed in 'Come in Cinderella' was that ACE had become a potent education and training network that needed to be capitalised on Australia wide and with adequate data on patterns of participation, provision and expenditures to be achieved (SSCEET, 1991, p. 157). Overarching national policy statements on ACE followed.

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

The early Declarations expressed commitments concerning the value of ACE in developing social capital, building community capacity, encouraging social participation and enhancing social cohesion. The later Declarations, reaffirmed this commitment and extended acknowledgement of the value of ACE beyond these areas to its potential to respond to changed industrial, demographic and technological circumstances, and encourages a collaborative approach to ACE to allow the sector to make a greater contribution to supporting the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) productivity agenda for skills and workforce development. They also identified ACE as a key player in the response to the Australian Government's social inclusion policy agenda.

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

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

# ACE SCOPE AND SCALE

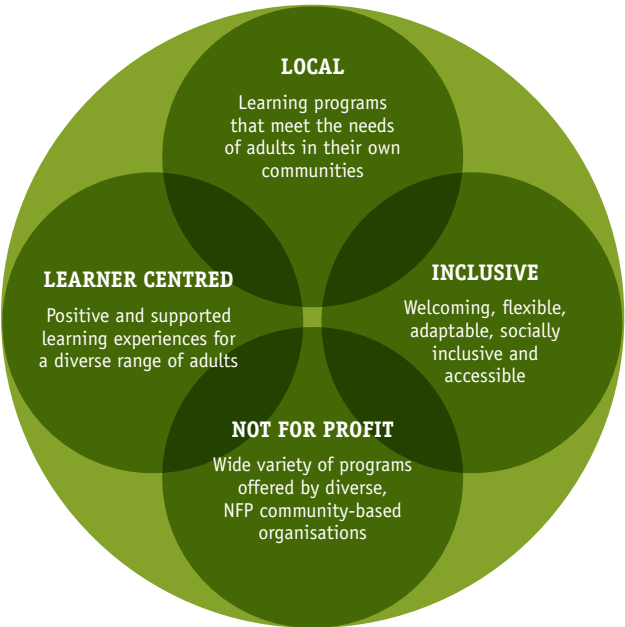
This section provides an overview of ACE in Australia and details its distinctive characteristics and activities. It also describes ACE by jurisdiction as it is supported differently in the various states and territories of Australia, albeit within overarching national Ministerial Declarations on ACE since 1992.

## Distinctive features of ACE

ACE has several defining features maintained throughout its long history and that make it the fourth sector of education (to schools, vocational education and training and university education). The theme of ‘ACE is different’ runs deep and strong through much of the literature on ACE in Australia.

Table 1 outlines the distinctive features of ACE as identified in many research reports. ACE has a distinctive focus, set of values and learning practice, and is delivered by a distinctive type of organisation.

Table 1: The distinctive features of ACE



## Individual learning needs

The ACE sector focusses on the needs of the adults in the particular community in which it operates. The starting point of ACE is each adult in the community and providing learning opportunities that meet their needs and build local capacity for community development. ACE takes a strong advocacy role to ensure local learning needs are met.

## Inclusive learning

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

## A learner-centred approach

ACE recognises that there is no ‘traditional student’, only a spectrum of learners with needs and preferences to be taken into account in learner-responsive pedagogical design. ACE is about learning approaches that engage adults in the process and foster personal, social and intellectual development.

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

## Distinctive providers

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

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

Through their partnerships, ACE providers access their clients and/or facilitate referrals for their clients to ensure appropriate support services are combined with their adult learning provision. Their partnerships strengthen the capacity of the local community to lead place based, community development. Volunteering is also an important activity for ACE providers because it aids low cost service provision. Involvement in volunteering can be a stepping stone to other work.

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

To illustrate this point, Table 2 provides the results obtained from 373 ACE VET students and also 69 ACE VET provider personnel in NSW, who were asked to rate the significance of various features commonly referred to as ‘strengths of ACE’. The magnitude of the percentages confirms the perceptions of these features as strengths (and hence advantages) of ACE.

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

The only notable difference between the responses of the students and providers was that students ranked the item ‘Able to provide wide range of teaching formats’ more highly than did providers.

The following summaries describe seek to explain the key features of ACE in Australia.

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

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

Table 2: The strengths of ACE as perceived by ACE providers and their students

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

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

## Scope of ACE activities

Australian ACE traditionally provided personal interest, enrichment and development learning activities. However, ACE has undergone significant change in its activities in the last few decades in response to community demand:

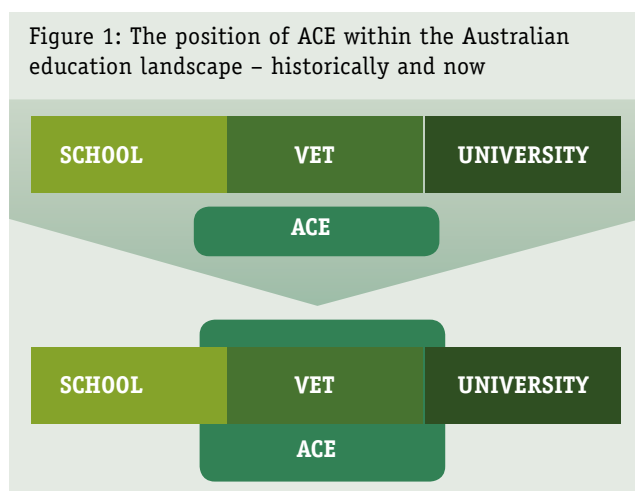
*'For many years, adult and community education primarily delivered courses for hobbies, and personal interest enrichment. This has changed in the past three [now four] decades. First came the introduction of adult basic education in ACE courses designed to provide basic language and living skills to help people participate in and contribute to society. As it became apparent that students were applying adult and community education skills to employment, the sector began to offer specific vocational education and training courses, creating "VET ACE"' (Walstab, Volkoff, & Teese, 2005, p. 17)*

Today Australian ACE collectively delivers in four key activity areas:

- 1 Personal enrichment informal and non-formal learning activities – the traditional focus of ACE
- 2 Adult basic education non-formal and formal – the new common focus
- 3 Formal vocational education and training (VET) – an additional focus for some ACE providers in line with the latest Ministerial Declaration on ACE of 2008
- 4 Pathways from one type of learning program to another, and importantly from non-formal learning to formal learning for vocational purposes – a focus in line with the latest Ministerial Declaration on ACE of 2008.

The position of ACE within the overall Australian education landscape has changed (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The position of ACE within the Australian education landscape – historically and now



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

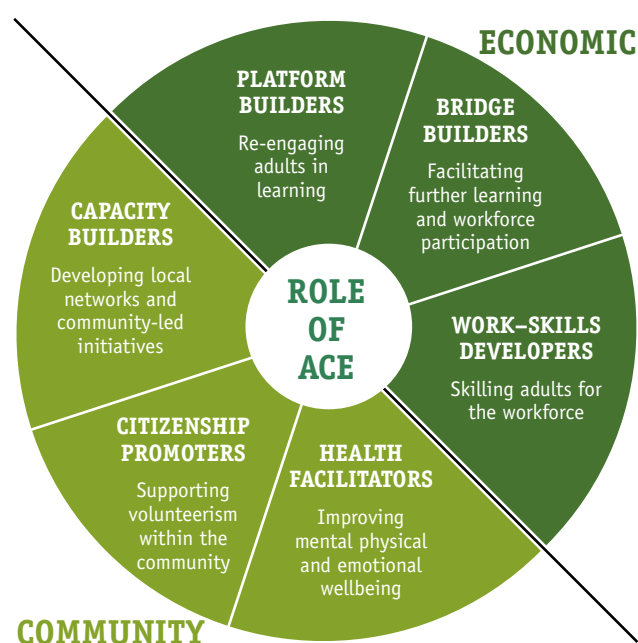
Australian ACE provides a nexus between adult education and community development and adult education and economic development.

ACE providers are:

- **platform builders** – re-engaging adults with basic education
- **bridge builders** – providing pathways into formal tertiary education and paid work
- **work-skills developers** – offering accredited vocational training in their own right as well as being Community capacity builders
- **promoters of citizenship**
- **facilitators of adult health** – mental, physical, emotional
- **community capacity builders** (see figure 2).

These six roles make ACE providers most valuable to multiple policy platforms (Bowman 2006). The focus of this report is on the three economic roles of ACE providers through education provision.

Figure 2 Contemporary roles of ACE providers  
Adapted from Bowman 2006 by Allen Consulting 2008





## Scale and focus

ACE providers are a disparate group that go by various names including: Neighbourhood House and Centre, community men's shed, University of the Third Age, Community College and various other names.

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

### Neighbourhood Houses and Centres

There are about 1200 Neighbourhood Houses and Centres nationally according to the results of the first national survey of Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres (NH&Cs) undertaken in late 2010/early 2011 (ANHCA 2011). The NH&Cs are located in metropolitan areas (47%), regional centres or large county towns (26%) and in rural/remote areas (27%).

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

- Information and referral was the most popular activity (92%) followed by community development projects (80%).

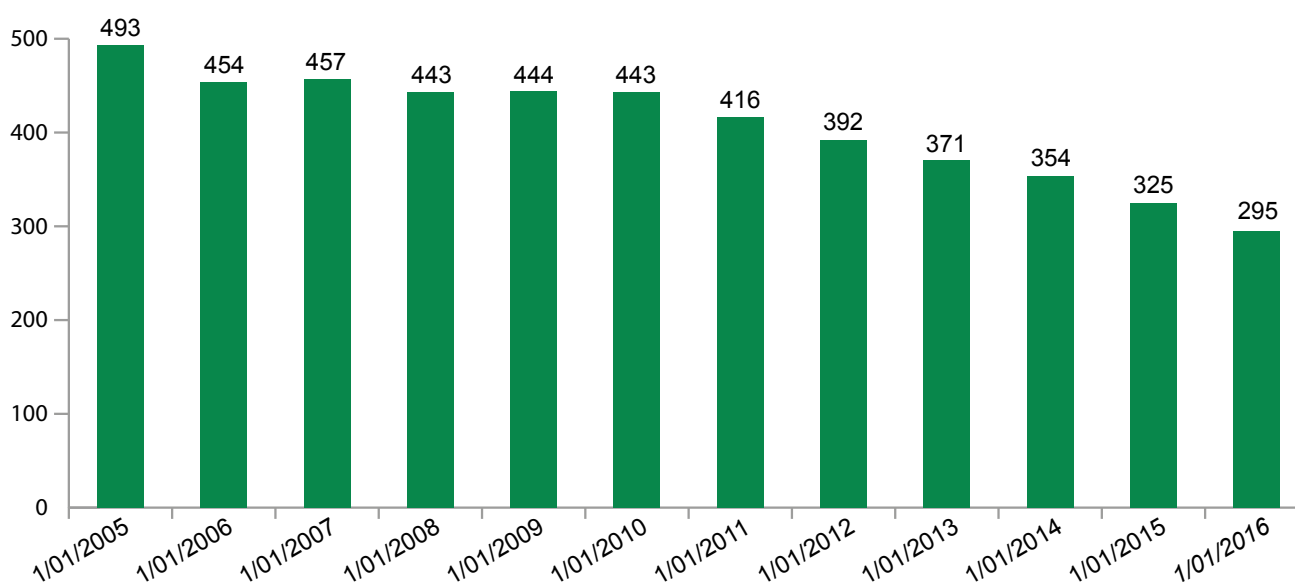
- Recreation and leisure, art and craft and health and wellbeing courses came in the next grouping (in the 70–80% range)
- Public computer/internet access, self-help groups, student work placements, personal development courses and volunteer community services were in the following 60–65% range.
- Pre-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

In summary, most NH&Cs remain focussed on personal enrichment learning. Many also provide adult basic education. A minority of NH&Cs have also extended into formal (VET) as well.

### Community Men's Sheds

The 2011 national survey of NH&Cs indicates that women are the predominant users of NH&Cs, with those aged between the ages of 45–64 most highly represented (ANHCA 2011 p. 11). However, the number of male participants in ACE has increased markedly in recent years. A stimulus to higher rates of male participation has been the offer by NH&Cs of computer classes, foundation skills classes and skills development classes. Skill development programs have been particularly valuable in boosting participation rates of males (SA Centre for Economic Studies, 2013).

Figure 3: Numbers of ACE RTOs at January 1 each year (2005–2016)



(Source: Data request from training.gov.au help desk March 2016)

The development of Men's Sheds has boosted male numbers in ACE as well. Men's Sheds originated in Australia in the 1990s to provide a self-directed space for constructive activity and social activities and a place to meet new friends and be socially connected and regain a sense of purpose.

Men's Sheds provide health information to their members. There are now about 1000 Men's Sheds across Australia, some of which are associated with NH&Cs while others are independent. A total of 55% of Shed members live in regional Australia (AMSA, 2011). In summary, community men's sheds offer informal and non-formal adult education only.

## Universities of the Third Age

U3A organisations are open to all mature Australians. U3As provide learning programs including academic, cultural, physical and social. These programs offer stimulation and development to people in active retirement. They meet the needs of their member base through a peer-learning model. All tutors are volunteers who come from the U3A groups that operate across Australia. Learning is pursued without reference to criteria, qualifications, assessments or rewards. It is a climate free from discrimination and there are no exams. There are 229 sites nationally (U3A Online website: U3A sites listed, 24 February 2016). In summary, U3As focus on non-formal personal interest learning.

## ACE registered training organisations

Provision of formal vocational education and training (VET) is an additional focus for some ACE providers. These include some NH&Cs, all Community Colleges (in NSW and Vic) and ACE providers that go by other names including Learn Locals in Victoria. To be a provider of formal VET, an organisation must meet the standards for RTOs. The number of RTOs with registration type 'community based adult education provider' as at the 1st of January 2016 was 295 according to training.gov.au – the official national register on VET in Australia and authoritative source of information on RTOs, training packages, qualifications, accredited courses, units of competency, skill sets, etc. This is considerably less than the numbers of ACE RTOs recorded as of 1 January in previous years on training.gov.au (see Figure 3).

The reasons for a drop in the number of ACE providers who are also RTOs or formal VET providers can only be speculated.

As Figure 3 shows, there has been a steady decline in ACE RTOs since 2011. The creation of the national quality

assurance agency for VET – the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) around mid-2011 may have caused some attrition of ACE RTOs.

Initial incorrect classification and then reclassification is another possible reason. Indeed an historical report on ACE RTOs (provided by training.gov.au help desk March 30 2016) shows that 44 have been reclassified from ACE RTOs to other categories of RTOs and that the earliest incidence of this happening was mid-2011.

Also ACE RTOs have been amalgamating to adopt more sustainable new business models in response to changes in VET policy and towards more competitive training markets in which all RTOs compete for the available government funds. For example, ACE RTO providers in NSW, known as Community Colleges, have reduced from 70 ten years ago to 35 today through mergers, re-alignment of service focus and closures (ALA, 2015, p. 13).

There are discrepancies that exist between the point-in-time numbers of ACE RTOs in the national register for VET (training.gov.au) and the numbers of ACE RTOs reported as delivering government funded VET in any one year by the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER), who manage national VET data collections. For example, in 2014 according to training.gov.au there were 354 ACE RTOs whereas the NCVER reported 426 ACE RTOs delivering government funded VET (NCVER, 2015a). For the same year 2014, NCVER reported total VET activity from all funding sources for the first time in 2014 and indicated there were 498 ACE providers (NCVER, 2015b). NCVER also reported for government funded VET activity, there were 423 ACE RTOs (see Table 3).

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

In summary the number of ACE providers who are also RTOs or formal VET providers, the best we can say is that there are at least 300 and may be as many as 500.

## ACE activity focus

Overall, the data suggests that there are at least 2500 ACE providers in Australia. All deliver personal enrichment learning and some only this type of learning. Many also provide adult basic education. A significant minority offer formal vocational education as well (see Figure 4).

Table 3 ACE providers who also are RTOs (formal VET providers) of government funded VET

Provider type	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
TAFE	58	2.8	59	2.6	59	2.8	58	2.8	57	2.8	53	2.7
Other Govt	12	0.6	13	0.6	14	0.7	12	0.6	14	0.7	14	0.7
ACE	480	22.8	494	22.0	313	14.9	427	20.4	423	20.4	389	19.7
Other RTOs	1624	77.3	1760	78.3	1808	86.0	1663	79.5	1643	79.4	1587	80.3
Total	2101	100	2248	100	2103	100	2091	100	2070	100	1977	100

Source NCVET Special data request 2017.

## ACE by jurisdiction

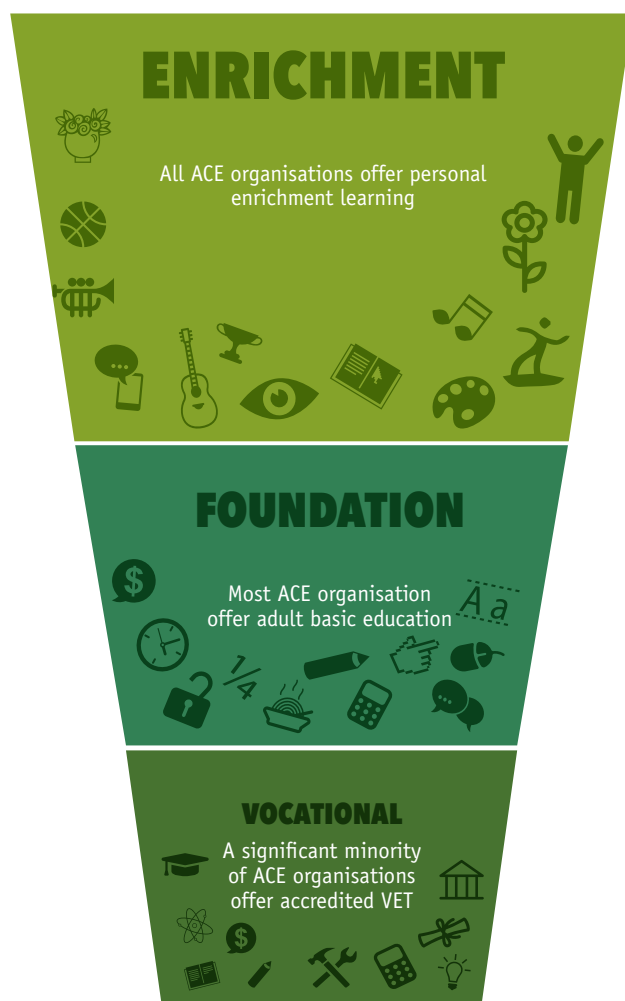
Australian ACE is complicated in part because of its own community needs focus that makes its learning provision diverse, tailored to the local community in which it operates. ACE is also complicated because it is influenced by state and territory governments who have primary responsibility for ACE. There are differences in how the jurisdictions view and fund ACE.

Contemporary descriptions of ACE by Australian state and territory have been compiled by Adult Learning Australia (2015). These have been compared with snapshot descriptions developed in 2000 by Borthwick, Knight, Bender and Loveder (2001) to reveal key changes. It was found that two states (NSW and Victoria) fund a network of not for profit community-based providers that deliver in all key activity areas of ACE described above and have been doing so for years.

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

Victoria brands funded ACE providers as 'Learn Locals'. Learn Locals are a diverse group that 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, and a number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) specialist providers. Victoria funds Learn Locals to deliver programs

Figure 4: Schematic view of scale of Australian ACE providers today by activity focus





in personal enrichment learning and adult basic education (non-accredited and accredited). ACE providers also have access to VET funding if they are RTOs. There are also two government owned Adult Education Institutions (AEIs): the Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) and the Centre for Adult Education (CAE).

SA and the ACT fund ACE personal enrichment learning programs and adult basic education (non-accredited and accredited) via community owned and managed not for profit organisations only. There was minimal central co-ordination of ACE in these two states in 2000 but central co-ordination has since improved.

SA funds ACE providers (neighbourhood houses and community centres, other not for profits and one large Workers Education Association).

The ACT funds Neighbourhood Houses and Centres.

Qld, Tas and WA fund ACE as personal enrichment learning programs and adult basic education (non-accredited and accredited) through various types of organisations including not for profit ACE organisations. This is a change on the 2001 situation when these three states recognised and funded ACE mainly as non-VET programs delivered through public VET providers or TAFEs.

TAS has a state-wide ACE network since 2001 – the LINC Tasmania network of libraries, ACE centres and online access centres with 87 physical service points providing community and personal learning and adult literacy programs and there is an association of 34 community houses providing literacy programs and other community programs.

QLD has a register of ACE providers listed with the Department of Education and has implemented the 'Skilling Queenslanders for Work' (SQW) initiative, which involves ACE providers exclusively providing tailored support services to disadvantaged learners to help them remain in and complete formal VET courses and qualifications with a VET provider.

In WA state funding ceased in 2015 for ACE via Linkwest, the peak body for 205 registered Community, Neighbourhood and Learning Centres.

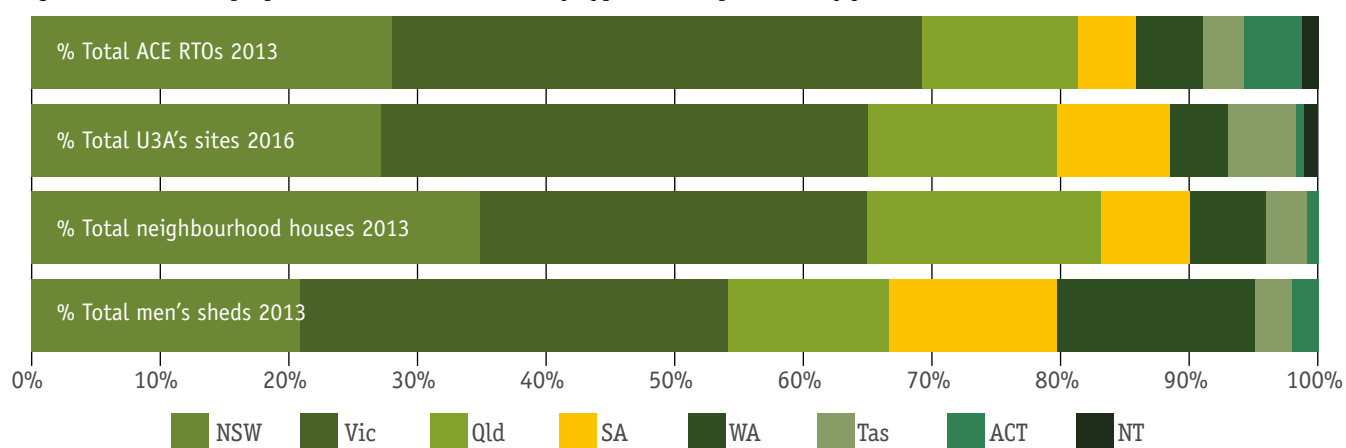
NT does not recognise ACE per se but has many examples of community based adult education provision (Ackehurst, Polvere & Windley 2007).

Overall, the level of jurisdictional recognition and support for ACE has improved since 2000. In 2000, Australia split more or less in half (4:4) in state/territory funding specifically for ACE (Borthwick et al 2001). Today seven of the eight jurisdictions fund ACE in various ways and to various degrees (ALA, 2015).

Figure 5 shows the percentage of each key types of ACE providers by jurisdiction. The data used to construct Figure 5 are not all for the same time period. It is indicative only of the proportional distribution of key types of ACE providers by Australian jurisdiction. It shows that:

- ACE providers are spread across Australia making ACE accessible to a large number of Australians.
- Victoria has the largest and most diverse ACE sector.
- ACE RTOs are concentrated in VIC and NSW. Together they account for 70% of total ACE VET providers in the country.

Figure 5: Indicative proportional distributions of key types of ACE providers by jurisdiction

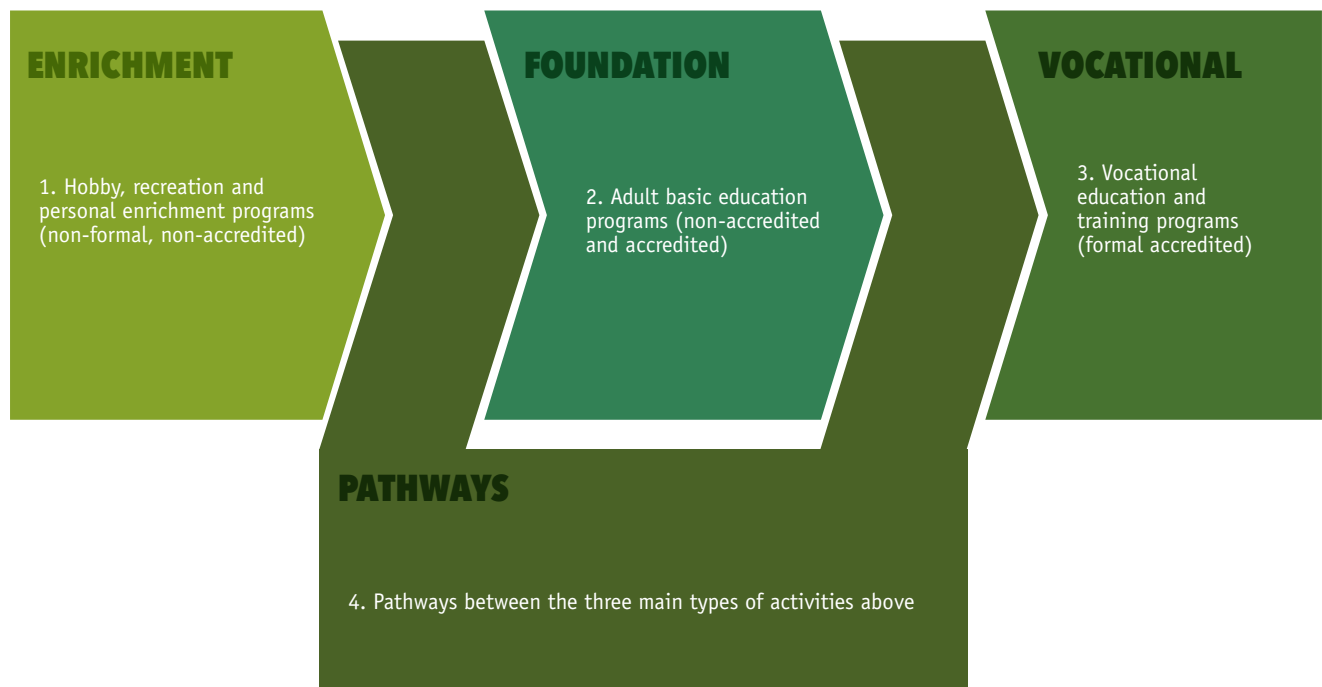


Sources: ACE RTO or VET providers was drawn from ALA report 2015 (2013 data). U3A data is from the U3A website (2016 data). Men's shed data was drawn from AMSA 2011 report. Data for neighbourhood houses was drawn from a 2011 report (ANHCA, 2011).

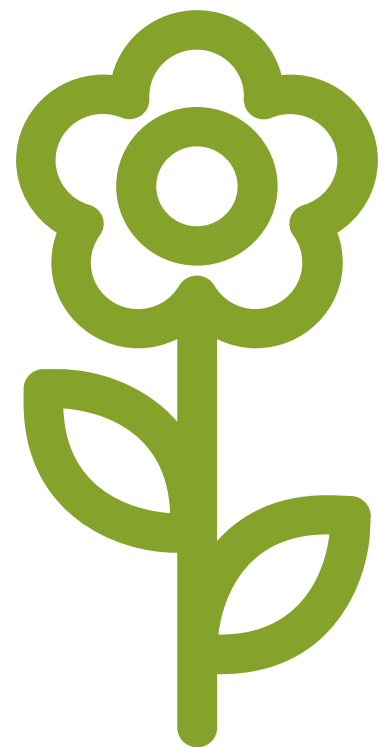
# ACE PROGRAMS

There are four main programs of ACE that provide a framework for describing all of the work of Australian ACE. This section details their key features, providers, participant numbers and characteristics, and the outcomes achieved with trends in performance over recent years.

Figure 6: The four programs of Australian ACE today



# PERSONAL ENRICHMENT LEARNING



Australian ACE started out offering and still offers as a core service leisure, recreation and personal enrichment programs and activities. Personal enrichment learning is the traditional focus of ACE.

## Key features

ACE hobby, recreation and personal enrichment learning programs have the following key features:

- They cover a range of topics: history, literature, languages, politics, philosophy, science, arts, crafts, health, personal development and many others.
- They are short structured learning programs that do not lead directly to attainment of a formal qualification or award (otherwise referred to as non-formal and non-accredited learning).
- They mainly operate on a user-pays system, with government grants sometimes for particular policy agendas that enable fees to be reduced or waived for individuals and those who are financially disadvantaged in particular.
- They are considered to be non-vocational, however, the intent of the learner may well be vocational:

*‘Information from interviewees indicated that many students who undertook courses commonly labelled as general interest, leisure, enrichment or personal development realised upon completion of their course that they could apply the knowledge and skills learned to their jobs. This suggested that while the ACE courses were not identified as vocational, they did have vocational application. Indeed, it appears that many students are now enrolling in ACE courses not identified as “vocational” with the specific intention of learning vocationally applicable skills and knowledge’ (Saunders, 2001, p. 85).*

## Provider profile

All ACE providers offer personal enrichment learning. Indeed for some (and generally smaller sized ACE providers) this is the only type of learning they provide.

## Personal enrichment learning participants

All adults may participate in ACE personal enrichment learning programs, particularly those already keen to learn and others coaxed to ‘give it a go’. Estimates only can be provided on the numbers of adults participating in personal enrichment learning in ACE providers alone and some details on the characteristics of the participants.

There is firmer data on the scale of all personal enrichment learning Australia wide from all sources and the characteristics of the participants. This data is presented below to provide context for the estimates on participants in personal enrichment learning in ACE only.

## Motivation factors

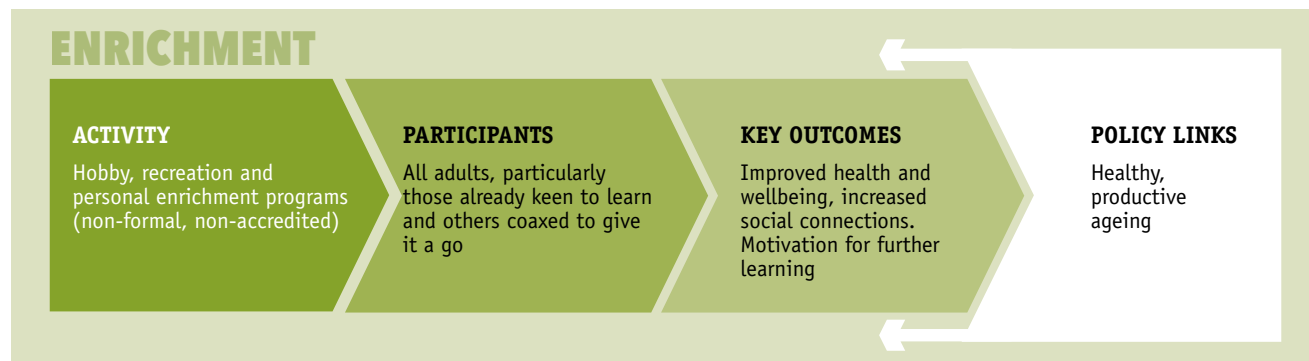
The ABS undertook a survey of personal interest learning across Australia from all sources in 2013 (ABS, 2013). Personal interest or enrichment learning was defined as ‘structured learning that does not lead to a recognised qualification and is not related to employment’ and is therefore largely undertaken through self-motivation for a range of reasons including the pursuit of knowledge, personal development, interest and enjoyment’.

The ABS estimated 1.4 million Australians (or 8.4% of all Australians) had participated in structured personal interest learning in the 12 months to April 2013 (ABS, 2013).

The demographic profile of the 1.4 million personal interest learners showed:

- more women participating in at least one course (10%) compared with for men (6.6%)
- people aged 15–19 participate at the highest rate, with 11% in this age group participating
- older people aged 65–74 years also participate in high numbers, with 8.7% in this age group participating

Figure 7: Program logic of personal enrichment learning



- participation is lower among people living in areas of relatively high socio-economic disadvantage (Quintile 1 of the Index of Socio-Economic Disadvantage) than among people living in areas where disadvantage is low (Quintile 5) (4.8% compared with 12%).

### Participants in ACE personal enrichment learning

The readily available data found on participants in personal enrichment learning at ACE providers is piecemeal, and shown below by ACE provider type.

#### Community Men's Sheds and U3As

As the following ACE providers only offer personal enrichment learning we can include all of their participants. There are about 175,000 men currently participating in community men's sheds most of whom are older men, with the mean age 69 years (median=70) and an age range from 23 to 100 years (AMSA, 2011).

The only data found in the public domain on the numbers of participants in the U3As is in a report by Swindell et al (2010). The total membership base for U3As reported was 64,160 (for 62% of all U3As who responded). Scaling this up membership for all U3As comes to about 100,000 in 2008.

#### Neighbourhood Houses and Centres (NH&Cs)

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

average each week 320 people participate in activities at a Neighbourhood House or Centre. Nationally that equates to 320,000 people engaged in activities each week and converts to approximately 14,500,000 visits per year across the entire (NH&Cs) sector. Unique visits were not stated (ANHCA 2011).

As to the characteristics of those involved, 98% of the NH&Cs reported engaging people on low incomes, socially isolated people or those at risk of social isolation and people with low levels of formal education and training (see Figure 8).

#### ACE registered training organisations

Some data on personal enrichment learning among ACE VET providers is available within the National VET Provider Collection managed by the NCVER and for those ACE RTOs in receipt of government VET funding. This data is not of core interest to the VET sector though and is removed from national reports on VET by the NCVER, and also because it is unclear how complete it is.

ACE RTOs are not compelled to provide their mainly fee-for-service personal enrichment learning data. The data for the years 2003 to 2014 are shown in Table 4. The point of including this data is to provide ballpark figures.

The shown decrease in student numbers in personal enrichment learning among ACE RTOs may be due to a drop in data provision over time rather than represent an actual decrease.

Table 4: Numbers of students involved in personal enrichment learning among ACE RTO providers receiving government funding for their VET activity

2003	187160
2004	177550
2005	151195
2006	163420
2007	159280
2008	144795
2009	89455
2010	78850
2011	63095
2012	81835
2013	49340
2014	37750

(Source: NCVET data request, March 2016 – recent data is incomplete as ACE RTO providers are no longer compelled to provide personal enrichment learning data.)

## Significance of enrichment learning

Comparing the estimated 1.4 million Australians involved in personal enrichment learning in 2014 from all sources with estimates on participant numbers in personal enrichment learning in ACE organisations suggests that they are significant providers of all personal enrichment



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

## Outcomes

Personal enrichment learning yields personal benefits that improve individual health and wellbeing. For example, a survey (Flood & Blair, 2013) conducted of the 1436 men's shed members found that:

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

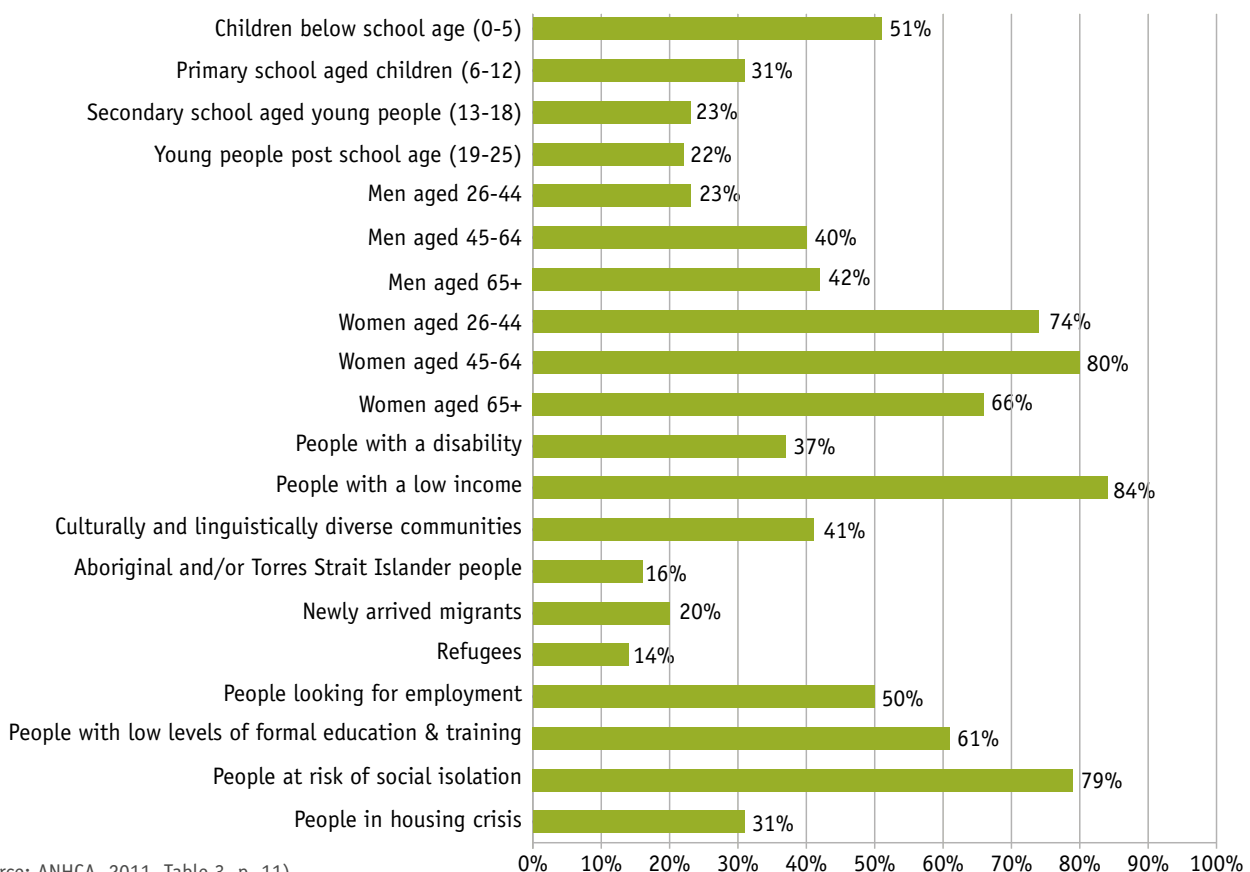
The benefits of men's sheds that members highlighted are outlined in Table 5.

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

*'... the main wider benefits of adult learning show up in health, mental health and job-related outcomes. The previous literature generally supports this. Both formal and informal types of learning tend to matter, suggesting that participation in learning in itself is important.*

*'The impact on self-confidence is worth a special and final mention. Adult learning has more than twice the impact on self-confidence than does being employed. This is an especially large effect and there are potential positive spillovers for a range of market and non-market outcomes from feeling better about oneself' (Dolan, Fujiwara & Metcalfe, 2012, p. 8).*

Figure 8: Percentage of NH&C respondents reporting the demographic listed



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



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

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

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

## Policy links

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

## Sustainability challenges

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

This challenge is confirmed by the ABS 2013 survey on personal interest learning. People who had wanted to participate in personal interest non-formal learning but did not, or who had participated but wanted to do more were asked by the ABS what the main barriers to participation were. The answers included: too much work or no time (48%); financial reasons (24%); personal reasons (12%) and course not available (5.4%). Of these reasons, financial reasons were more likely to be the main barrier to participation for people aged 15–24 years (31%) when compared with older people aged 55–64 years (19%) and 65–74 years (14%) and financial reasons were the main barrier to participation for unemployed people (44%) (ABS, 2013).





# ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Many Australian ACE organisations offer non-accredited and accredited adult basic education programs, in addition to leisure, recreation and personal enrichment programs.

## Key features

ACE adult basic education programs include language, literacy, numeracy, basic computing skills and other foundation skills including communication, problem solving, self-presentation and management. Adult basic education programs, both accredited and non-accredited, are offered with high levels of support.

- Non-accredited literacy and numeracy programs may be standalone or embedded in other courses such as English through cooking, language of childbirth and healthy eating
- Accredited programs may be standalone or integrated with an area of vocational interest to the learner so that opportunities to explore the world of work and learning pathways to work are also provided.
- Accredited programs may be at the full qualification level or at the level of subjects only and/or skill sets only to fill gaps in an adult's basic skills.

## Non accredited adult basic education participants

Adult basic education programs are particularly for adults with limited formal education or English language skills.

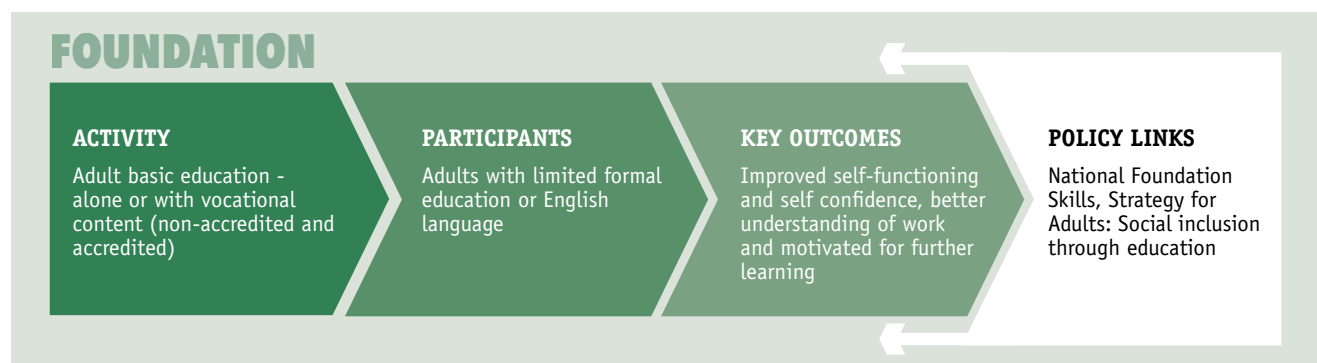
There is no data collection on Australian adults involved in non-accredited basic education programs delivered by ACE providers. We do know from a one-off study that thousands of Australian adults are involved (Dymock, 2007). The Dymock study was the first (and only known to the author) attempt to gauge the extent of non-accredited literacy and numeracy training provision across Australia.

Dymock's data includes courses and activities where students received a statement of attainment or participation, but not accredited qualifications, in the following areas:

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

The data Dymock collected via a national survey sent to providers was reported in a variety of ways that made it not possible to arrive at an accurate figure for the number of students who were receiving non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy help. However, there appeared to be around 4000 students engaged with the 125 providers who responded to the survey from across Australia, except the

Figure 9: Program logic of adult basic education





Northern Territory. The students in these courses mostly aged between 30–49 years, with strong representation from the 20–29 years and 50–59 years cohorts.

## Motivations and outcomes

Providers of non-accredited adult basic education report a range of reasons for adults' participation:

- To learn English for everyday purposes, is a major motivation
- For social contact and the desire to take more control over their lives, also a strong motivator
- To improve levels of self-confidence and capacity to interact with the wider community
- Because they do not need or would struggle with accredited adult basic education courses

(Dymock, 2007)

Only around one-quarter of the program coordinators believed that students participated in non-accredited adult basic education primarily for employment-related reasons but their perceptions were that improved literacy led to further training or employment outcomes in many instances:

- approximately 26% of respondents believed that up to 10% of their students went on to other education or training
- around 7% believed that up to 75% of their students went on to employment
- only a small number of providers believed that none of their students went onto other training or employment
- around one-fifth did not know the extent to which their students went on to other training or employment

(Dymock, 2007, Table 5, p. 19).

Overall, Dymock (2007) found strong continuing demand for non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy courses in Australia, and that many adults choose this form of assistance because they either do not need or would struggle with accredited courses. Dymock suggested that the contribution of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy courses to both personal development and social capital should receive greater attention and acknowledgement, particularly through funding support.

## Accredited adult basic education participants

Accredited adult basic education programs are delivered by ACE VET providers and reported within the mixed field programs category in the National VET Provider Collection managed by the NCVER. The Field of Education (FOE) Type 12: Mixed Field Programmes are made up of general education programs, social skills courses, employment skills courses and other mixed field programmes (NCVER communication 29 March 2016)

### Current participation levels

Based on NCVER provided statistics in 2016 on FOE 12: Mixed Field Programmes in ACE VET providers and in all other VET providers the following has been found.

In 2014, there were 12,585 students participating in accredited adult basic education programs in ACE VET providers receiving government funding for VET. These students made up 7.4% of all students participating in accredited adult basic education programs in 2014 at all VET providers receiving government funding. The percentage that ACE students are of all students in adult basic education programs in VET has ranged from 12.2% in 2003 to 7.4% in 2014 (see Table 6).

Updated data provided by NCVER in 2017 reveals that, with fee for service students removed from the TAFE and ACE provider data, the proportion of total government funded only students in accredited adult basic education programs in ACE RTOs was 8.1% in 2014 and 9.1% in 2015 (see Table 6a). Of note also from Table 6a is the rise in significance in accredited adult basic education of Other RTOs and correlating fall of TAFE providers.

### Trends in participation

Student numbers in accredited adult basic education in ACE VET providers have fluctuated over the past 10 years. Subject enrolments and supervised training hours have steadily increased to 2013 (see Figure 10).

These trends have given rise to overall steady increases in the average subject enrolments per student in adult basic education in ACE VET providers over the 2003–2014 period (from 2.54 enrolments per student in 2003 to 8.07 in 2014) and in the reported training hours per student (from 128.59 in 2003 to 389.60 in 2014 (see Figure 11). Overall, the trend in accredited adult basic education provision in ACE providers has been towards increasing quantities delivered per student per year.

Table 6: Accredited adult basic education student numbers 2003–2014: a) in ACE VET providers b) in all VET providers  
c) % ACE students of total VET students

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
ACE student numbers	20195	14285	11430	12615	13085	14320	14560	12945	14425	17615	21525	12585
Total students	166115	191365	192945	198435	193710	191240	192175	193265	181910	210530	227465	169675
% ACE students of all students	12.16%	7.46%	5.92%	6.36%	6.75%	7.49%	7.58%	6.70%	7.93%	8.37%	9.46%	7.42%

(Source: NCVER specific data 2016)

Table 6a Government-funded\* VET students in Mixed field programmes by provider type 2010–2015

	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
Provider type	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%

### TAFE

AQF	63535	46.8	68475	48.9	87795	52.2	92140	50.4	73405	50.21	56120	47.0
Non-AQF	47765	35.2	43245	30.9	36890	21.9	32295	17.7	18530	12.7	17395	14.6
Total	111,300	82.0	111,720	79.8	124,685	74.1	124,435	68.0	91,935	62.9	73,510	61.6

### ACE

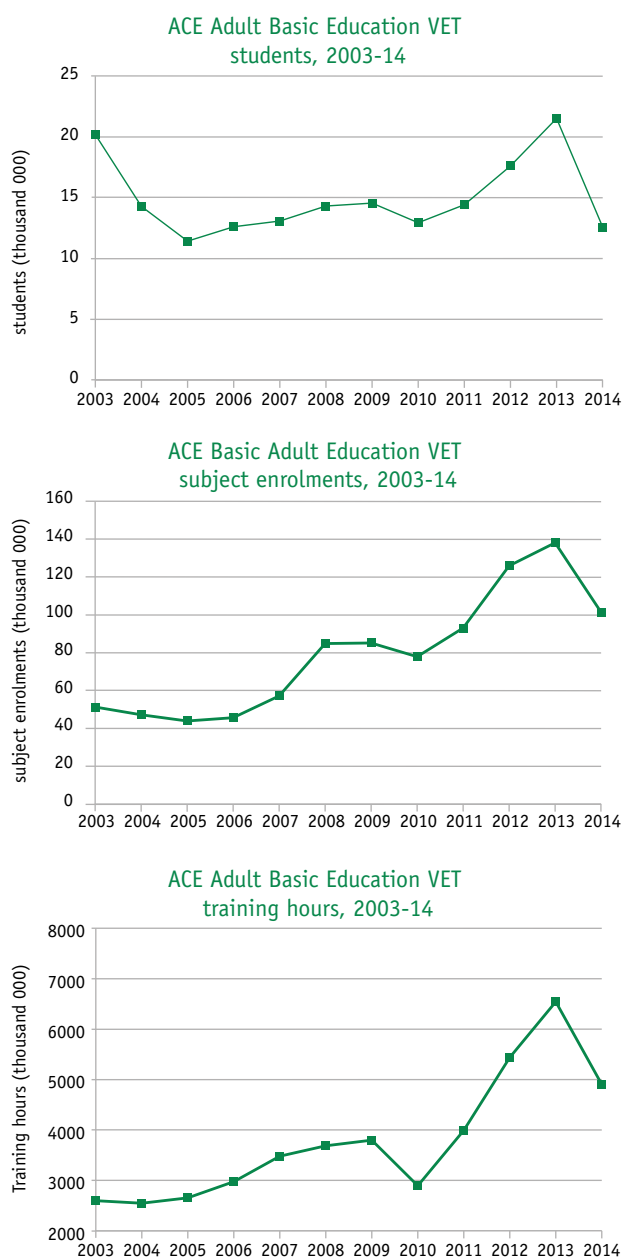
AQF	7110	5.2	8235	5.9	10820	6.4	10735	5.9	8910	6.1	8180	6.9
Non-AQF	3430	2.5	3330	2.4	2615	1.6	2745	1.5	2880	2.0	2625	2.2
Total	10535	7.8	11565	8.3	13435	8.0	13480	7.4	11790	8.1	10,805	9.1

### Other RTOs\*\*

AQF	5120	3.8	6240	4.5	17965	10.7	36220	19.8	32910	22.5	24880	20.8
Non-AQF	1715	1.3	3035	2.2	3840	2.3	1660	0.9	3515	2.4	4235	3.5
Total	6835	5.0	9280	6.6	21805	13.0	37880	20.7	36425	24.9	29120	24.4

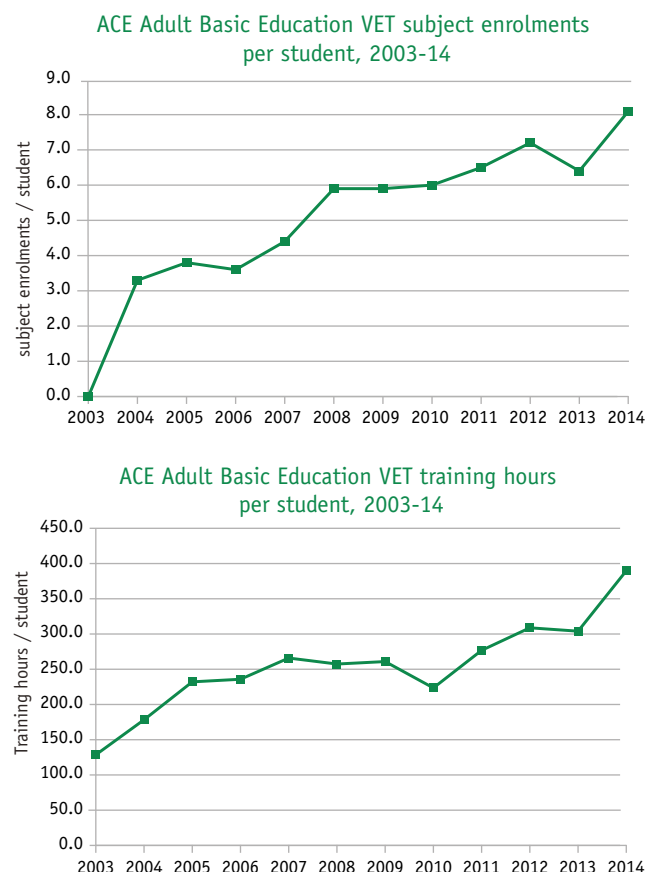
Source NCVER data request 2017\* Excluding fee for service VET in TAFEs that is in NCVER provided government-funded 2016 data included elsewhere in this report. \*\* Other RTOs includes private providers and excludes 'other gov't' providers and 'mixed' providers that each have relatively small student numbers ((and 4.9% collectively in 2015)

Figure 10: Trends in ACE accredited adult basic education student numbers, subject enrolments and training hours 2003–2014



(Source: NCVER specific data request 2016)

Figure 11: Trends in scale of accredited adult basic education per ACE student 2003–2014



(Source: NCVER specific data request 2016)

### Trends in the type of accredited adult basic education provided

The trend has also been significantly towards what NCVER refers to as AQF training in accredited adult basic education by students involved with ACE VET providers – from 37% in 2003 to 74% in 2014. The same trend has occurred in all other VET providers as well – from 47% in 2003 to 81% in 2014 (Table 7). AQF training is all Certificate I and above qualification courses. Non-AQF training includes courses at secondary education level (Year 11 & 12), non-award courses, subject-only enrolments (i.e. not enrolled in a course), statements of attainment (part courses), and not elsewhere classified. So the trend has been towards more full qualifications training in accredited adult basic education by students (or at least more enrolments therein) and less part qualifications or subjects only training.

Table 7: Adult basic education students by AQF and non AQF in ACE VET and other VET providers

Item/year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
ACE students	20195	14285	11430	12615	13085	14320	14560	12945	14425	17615	21525	12585
% AQF	37%	55%	76%	80%	79%	75%	78%	69%	66%	74%	82%	74%
%Non AQF	63%	45%	24%	20%	21%	25%	22%	31%	34%	26%	18%	26%
Other provider students	68680	73110	76715	68715	81055	79305	88010	88465	91825	124425	143535	127430
% AQF	47%	41%	42%	37%	45%	45%	50%	49%	55%	64%	70%	81%
%Non AQF	53	59	58	63	55	55	50	51	45	36	30	19

(Source: NCVET specific data request 2016. These data includes fee for service students in ACE VET providers as well as government funded students and in TAFES within 'other VET providers' data)

## Characteristics of students in accredited adult basic education

VET adult basic education students include people from various disadvantaged or equity groups as shown in Table 8 and for students in ACE VET compared to students in all other VET providers.

Table 8 shows that:

- People with a disability, the unemployed and people not in the labour force are more highly represented in accredited adult basic education at ACE VET providers than in accredited adult basic education in all other VET providers
- Students from a non-English speaking-background (NESB) are highly represented in accredited adult basic education at ACE VET providers and also in accredited adult basic education in all other VET providers
- Indigenous students are also significantly represented in accredited adult basic education at ACE VET providers but not as highly as they are among students in accredited adult basic education in all other VET providers
- Students from outer regional, remote and very remote regions are less well represented in accredited adult basic education at ACE VET providers compared to their representation in accredited adult basic education in all other VET providers.



Table 8: Accredited adult basic education students: per cent of total in various equity groups in ACE VET providers compared to in all other VET providers

Equity group / Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Students with a disability as</b>												
% Total ace VET students	13.6	14.8	19.3	20.5	20.1	20.3	19.2	21.8	24.0	24.4	20.2	36.5
% Total other VET providers	13.2	11.3	11.8	12.0	11.8	11.7	11.4	11.6	12.7	12.0	11.8	13.9
<b>Indigenous students as</b>												
% Total ace VET students	3.2	1.5	1.7	2.7	3.4	3.9	5.2	4.9	4.4	3.3	3.4	5.4
% Total other VET providers	8.0	7.0	7.1	6.8	7.1	7.7	7.9	8.4	8.0	6.9	6.1	6.7
<b>Students from a non-English speaking-background (NESB) as</b>												
% Total ace VET students	20.8	34.5	40.8	40.6	40.4	43.1	40.5	41.4	47.6	47.5	58.9	41.1
% Total other VET providers	21.2	19.8	21.2	22.9	28.0	28.5	29.9	31.2	31.6	33.6	35.1	47.6
<b>Students from outer regional, remote and very remote regions as</b>												
% Total ace VET students	14.5	8.9	5.5	7.7	7.7	7.5	8.0	11.3	5.3	3.7	3.5	3.7
% Total other VET providers	19.5	18.6	18.5	16.7	17.5	17.8	15.9	17.9	14.2	13.5	11.7	8.8
<b>Unemployed students as</b>												
% Total ace VET students	21.2	22.0	23.8	24.1	24.9	27.5	28.4	29.6	36.5	43.9	36.5	42.8
% Total other VET providers	22.9	20.1	19.4	19.4	20.3	20.4	22.4	22.8	25.1	27.1	31.6	33.0
<b>Students not in the labour force</b>												
% Total ace VET students	22.8	28.6	36.4	35.0	34.4	32.2	30.6	32.6	33.5	29.7	36.6	32.9
% Total other VET providers	23.2	20.8	20.6	20.8	23.9	24.1	26.6	25.9	26.1	26.3	24.9	32.1

(Source: NCVET specific data request 2016)

## Student success rates

Successfully completed hours in accredited adult basic education in ACE VET providers and in other VET providers have been calculated and 'load pass rates' determined (Table 9). A load pass rate is the ratio of hours studied by students who passed their subject(s) to the total hours committed to by all students who passed, failed or withdrew from the corresponding subject(s).

In other words, a load pass rate can be thought of as the ratio of 'profitable hours' to the total hours undertaken by students. Table 8 shows that over the years 2003–2014, students in accredited adult basic education in ACE VET providers have been completing successfully 50 to 60 per cent of the total hours of training they signed up for. This rate of success is below that for students in accredited adult basic education in other VET providers by a margin of 9% or more.

Table 9: Load pass rates (%) in accredited adult basic education in ACE providers and other VET providers 2003–2014

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
ACE providers	51.1	51.8	50.0	50.6	46.8	45.6	46.6	49.0	47.7	53.0	58.4	56.6
Other providers	59.6	60.0	62.1	63.2	64.9	65.1	65.5	65.1	67.1	69.6	71.0	65.8
Total	59.2	59.6	61.5	62.5	63.9	63.7	64.2	64.2	65.6	68.1	69.8	65.1

(Source: NCVER specific data request 2016)

## Outcomes

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

Adult basic education programs also enable participants to meet the requirements of the work they perform. When the development of these skills is combined with vocational subjects then the learner also attains a better understanding of the world of work.

## Policy links

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

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

In response, there is the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults endorsed by all governments in 2012 (SCOTese, 2012). The Strategy recognises that literacy development is a lifelong activity with life-wide implications, particularly in the modern context. Through the Strategy, governments aim to reach a target of two thirds of working age Australians having the literacy and numeracy skills levels required to function effectively in workplaces and modern life generally by 2022.

The Strategy acknowledges 'providers of adult education in community settings' as critical to providing diverse

foundation skills programs for adults, including through pre-vocational and bridging programs in the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults (SCOTese, 2012, p. 12).

## Sustainability challenges

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

With regard to accredited adult basic education, the noticeable decrease in student numbers in ACE VET providers between 2013 and 2014 requires investigating to determine if it is cause for alarm or part of the ongoing fluctuating pattern. The increasing focus on full qualifications (AQF) training may need review.

Ensuring flexibility in foundation skills training is important as not all adults need standalone full qualifications training in this area, rather they want training that fills gaps in their foundation skills and the gap training to be integrated with vocationally focussed subject or qualifications delivery (Bowman, 2015, unpublished).

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

# FORMAL VET

## A NEW ADDITIONAL FOCUS FOR ACE PROVIDERS



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

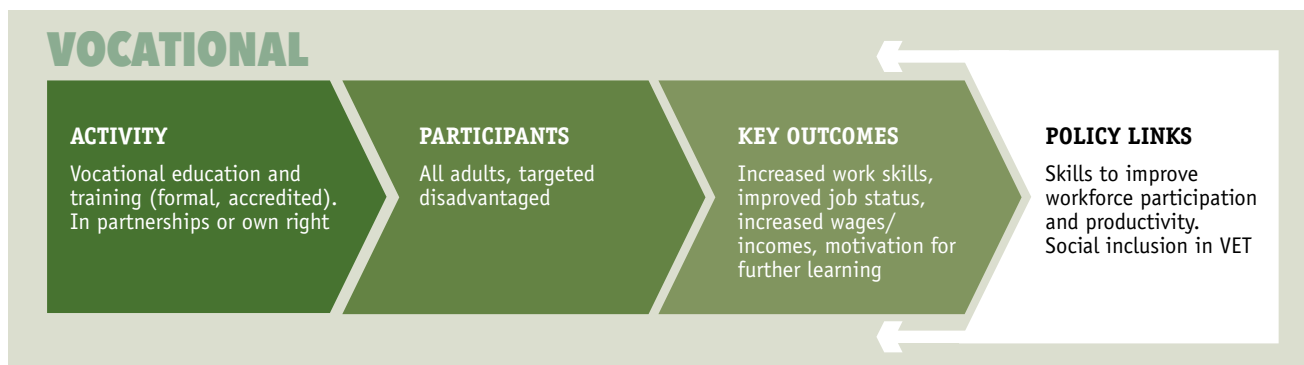
There are also ACE providers that are not RTOs but who assist with formal accredited VET delivery by entering into partnerships with RTO VET providers that take responsibility for assuring the quality of assessments and judgements about competence or outcomes achieved and the issuing of the final VET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

In Victoria, a survey completed by 125 ACE organisations – 40% of all state government funded ACE organisations – included 46% who were non RTO ACE providers (n=70), a similar proportion to the total ACE Vic organisations. Of

the non-RTOs, 46% were found to be partnering with RTOs to give access to accredited training programs. All non-RTO ACE provider respondents (100%) who partnered with RTOs indicated that they expected these arrangements to continue for the next 1 to 2 years. Further, 4% of them had plans to become an RTO themselves in the next 1 to 2 years (Adult Community and Further Education Board 2014, p. 28). There also is a relatively new Reconnect program involving partnerships between RTOs and Learn Locals and other community service providers to re-engage young people in learning and provide them with the supports they need.

In Queensland there has been a significant investment in a 'Skilling Queenslanders for Work' Initiative for the past few years that involves ACE providers exclusively providing tailored support services to disadvantaged adult learners to enable them to participate in formal VET programs in RTOs to the Certificate III level. Sometimes the RTO is the ACE provider but mostly the RTOs are TAFEs and other RTOs with whom non RTO ACE providers partner (<https://training.qld.gov.au/community-orgs/funded/sqw>).

Figure 12: Formal VET in ACE program logic





## Key features of ACE VET providers

ACE providers in the formal VET system serve a generic role and a value-adding role (Schofield & Associates, 1996).

- The generic role of ACE in VET is to offer VET to all adults.
- The value-adding role of ACE in VET is to bring in its distinctive qualities and unique delivery method:
  - » a strongly local, community-based, flexible, market-driven, learner-centred approach to delivery
  - » primarily to assist disadvantaged students into and through the VET system.
- It is the value-adding role that distinguishes much provision by ACE providers in VET and makes ACE-VET complementary and supplementary to VET provision by other VET providers; particularly private VET providers. For example, Harris & Simons (2007) have compared data they collected on a sample of ACE providers (84) with a sample of other private RTOs (330). The picture painted was the distinctiveness of ACE in a number of aspects:
  - » ACE providers were more embedded in their local communities than private providers.
  - » Most ACE providers delivering in one state only.
  - » ACE providers offered markedly different programs from private providers. ACE programs were markedly more socially oriented with dominantly high percentages of their courses relatively in mixed field programs such as literacy and numeracy, information technology and in the fields of society and cultures, education and creative arts.
  - » ACE providers offered more pastoral care, education supports and personal and career counselling services than private providers.
  - » ACE providers relied more heavily on government funding for their nationally accredited training and on part time and casual staff than did private providers and so 'skate on relatively thin ice'

(Harris & Simons 2007).

## Scale of ACE within total accredited VET

Data on 'Total VET activity' was collected for the first time in 2015, on 2014 training activity and in accordance with the November 2012 then COAG Standing Council on Tertiary Education Skills and Employment (SCOTESE) agreement to the introduction of mandatory reporting of all nationally recognised training activity from 2014 and onwards.

'Total VET activity' (TVA) includes all accredited VET provided from all funding sources and not just that provided through government funding.

Of the total VET activity reported in 2014, by 4601 training providers and that included training to 3.9 million students; 27.5 million subject enrolments; 818.2 million hours of training; 3.6 million programs and 815,600 completed AQF programs, ACE VET providers accounted for

- 11% of total providers
- 5% of total students
- 4% of total training hours received by all students
- 3% of total subject enrolments.

(NCVER 2015a see Figure 13)

It is important to note though that 2014 is a transition year in which a number of training providers were granted exemptions from reporting and others did not report their training activity.

## Scale of government funded ACE VET

NCVER reporting to 2016 on government-funded VET has included all VET activity delivered by public providers or TAFEs (including fee for service) and community education providers and government-funded only VET activity in other registered providers.

The national VET statistics for government-funded VET for 2014 show that there were 1.79 million students enrolled at a total of 2071 registered training organisations and to whom 546.9 million training hours were delivered. Of this government-funded VET:

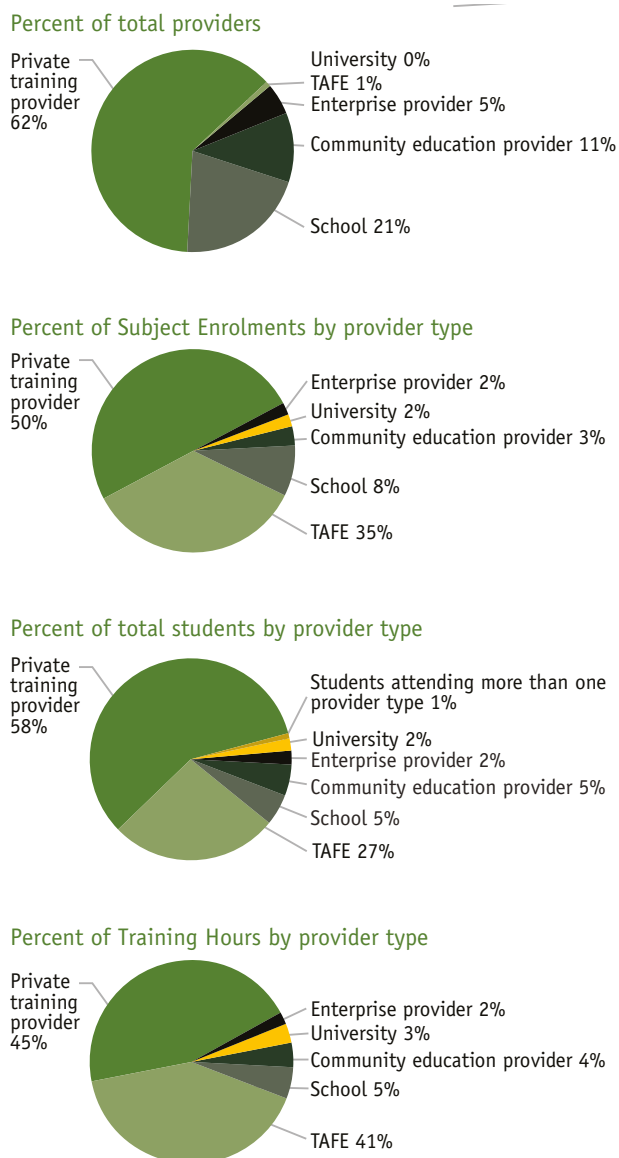
- ACE VET providers accounted for 426 or 20% of all providers
- ACE VET students (95,400) accounted for 5.3% of total students
- ACE VET delivery (18,018.300 hours) accounted for 3.3 % of total hours of delivery

(NCVER, 2015b, Table 11, p. 15)

To complete the picture on government-funded VET in 2014, 58 TAFE institutes and 13 other government providers had a combined 1.08 million students (60.6% of all students) and 341,709.900 hours of delivery (62.5% of total hours of delivery). Other registered providers included 1641 in number with 582,500 students (32.6%) and 187 198.300 hours of delivery or 34.2 % of total hours of delivery). Also 1500 or 1.5% of students attended more than one type of provider referred to as 'mixed provider' students (NCVER 2015b, Table 11, p. 15).



Figure 13: Total VET activity from all sources



(Source: Lovedar, 2016)

In 2014 of the 95,400 students in ACE VET providers, 12,585 (13%) were in mixed field programmes or adult basic education programs (already discussed in the previous section) and 82,860 students (87%) were in all other fields of VET education. From here on the focus in this section is on ACE VET in all fields of education other than adult basic education.

## ACE VET in all fields of education other than adult basic education

### Current level of participation

In 2014, there were 82,860 ACE VET students receiving government funding for VET specific fields of education. These students made up 5.1 per cent of all students receiving government funding in specific fields at all VET providers. The percentage that ACE VET students are of all students participating in specific education fields of VET with government funding has ranged from 11% in 2003 to 5.1% in 2014 (Table 10).

Updated data provided by NCVER in 2017 reveals that with fee for service students removed from the TAFE and ACE provider data the proportion of total government funded only students in accredited VET specific fields training in ACE RTO providers was 6.5% in 2014 and 6.2% in 2015 (Table 10b).

### Trends in participation

In ACE VET providers, the number of students participating in specific VET education fields with government funding has decreased significantly over the past decade while the associated subject enrolments have remained relatively steady and reported training hours have increased steadily (Figure 14).

These trends have given rise to a steady increase in the average:

- subject enrolments per student in all fields of VET other than adult basic education in ACE VET providers over the 2003–2014 period and from 2.22 enrolments per student in 2003 to 4.65 in 2014
- reported supervised training hours per student in all fields of VET other than adult basic education in ACE VET providers and that has tripled over the 2003–2014 period from 57.6 to 158.3 (see Figure 15).

Therefore, the overall trend over the past ten years with regard to ACE VET specific field of education provision has been towards increasing quantities of delivery per student.

The trend has also been towards more AQF or full VET qualifications training and less non AQF or part qualifications training by ACE VET providers in all fields of education other than adult basic education, and from 23% in AQF training in 2003 to 36% in 2014.

Table 10: Students in specific fields of government funded VET a) in ACE VET providers b) in all providers and c) % ACE VET students of all students in all VET providers

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
a) ACE student numbers	165930	122995	141365	114000	115395	109690	107990	96650	93790	78370	87145	82860
b) Total students	1503320	1380850	1410915	1438470	1435490	1476185	1485170	1579335	1678155	1713600	1626430	1619465
c) % ACE students of total students	11.04%	8.91%	10.02%	7.93%	8.04%	7.43%	7.27%	6.12%	5.59%	4.57%	5.36%	5.12%

(Source: NCVET specific data request 2016)

Table 10a: Government-funded only\* VET students in specific field programmes by provider type, 2010–2015

	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
Provider type	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%

### TAFE

AQF	678525	55.4	678835	50.6	680465	49.5	635955	48.9	542305	43.5	434995	39.4
Non-AQF	38235	3.1	27430	2.0	21635	1.6	19260	1.5	19765	1.6	26335	2.4
Total	716765	58.5	706265	52.7	702095	51.1	655220	50.4	562070	45.1	461330	41.7

### ACE

AQF	42410	3.5	44870	3.3	45230	3.3	33385	2.6	29315	2.4	23560	2.1
Non-AQF	52480	4.3	49905	3.7	35225	2.6	55215	4.2	52270	4.2	45000	4.1
Total	94890	7.8	94775	7.1	80450	5.9	88595	6.8	81585	6.5	68555	6.2

### Other RTOs\*\*

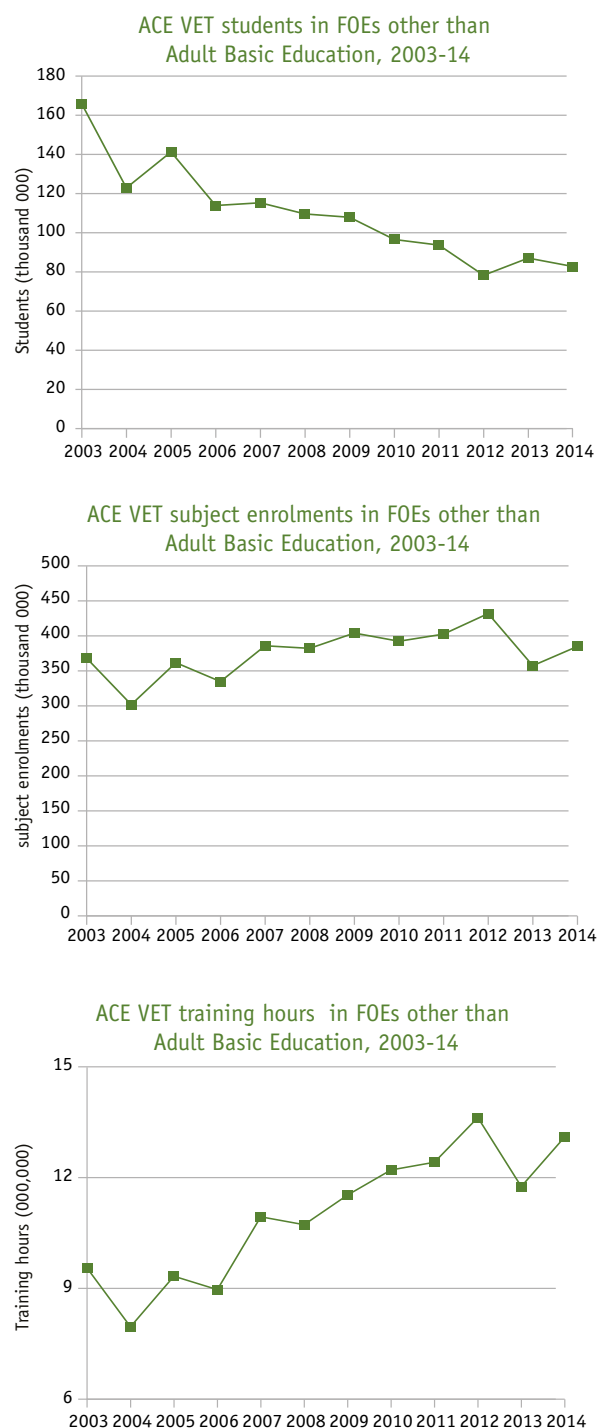
AQF	328545	26.8	459205	34.3	509165	37.0	484925	37.3	528785	42.4	506350	45.8
Non-AQF	12900	1.1	12245	0.9	19140	1.4	19615	1.5	19345	1.6	19655	1.8
Total	445	27.9	35.2	582305	38.4	540	38.8	44.0				47.6

(Source NCVET data request, 2017)

\*Excluding fee for service VET in TAFEs that is in NCVET provided government-funded 2016 data included elsewhere in this report.

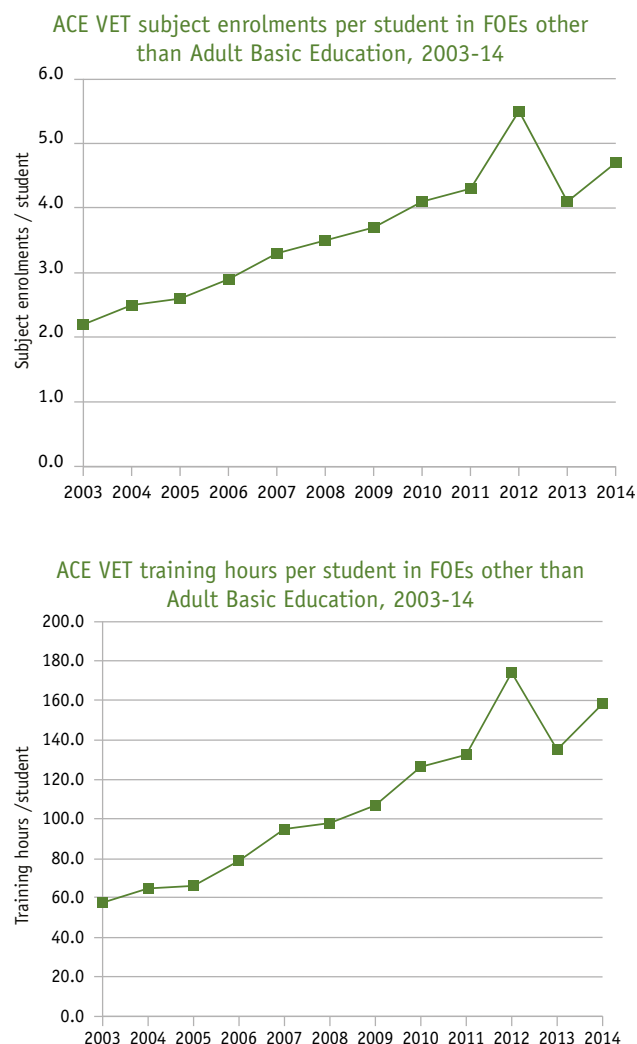
\*\* Other RTOs includes private providers and excludes 'other gov't' providers and 'mixed' providers that each have relatively small student numbers (and 4.9% collectively in 2015)

Figure 14: Trends in ACE VET specific field of education student numbers, subject enrolments and training hours 2003–2014



Source NCVER specific data request 2016

Figure 15: Trends in scale of ACE VET specific field of education provision per student 2003–2014



(Source: NCVER specific data request 2016)

Non-AQF training includes courses at secondary education level (Year 11 & 12), non-award courses, subject-only enrolments (i.e. not enrolled in a course), statement of attainment or skills sets enrolments, and 'not elsewhere classified'. This trend has also occurred in other VET providers but with the proportions of their specific fields of education students in qualifications level training being much higher and at 76% in 2003 and 89.89% in 2014 (Table 11).

Table 11: VET students in all fields of VET education other than adult basic education: percentage by AQF and non-AQF for ACE VET providers and all other VET providers

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
ACE students	165930	122995	141365	114000	115395	109690	107990	96650	93790	78370	87145	82860
%AQF	23.54	26.98	29.07	35.70	39.17	38.99	43.69	45.18	46.52	54.94	35.41	36.29
%Non AQF	76.46	73.02	70.93	64.30	60.83	61.01	56.31	54.83	53.48	45.06	64.59	63.71
Other provider students	1337390	1257855	1269555	1324470	1320090	1366495	1377180	1482680	1584365	1635230	1539280	1536605
% AQF	75.91	78.18	78.51	80.63	80.77	81.88	85.13	86.99	89.67	90.12	90.91	89.84
% Non-AQF	24.09	21.82	21.49	19.37	19.23	18.12	14.87	13.01	10.33	9.88	9.09	10.16

(Source: NCVER provided statistics from the National VET Provider Collection 2016)

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

### What ACE VET students are studying

Table 12 (top) shows the distribution of the total 95,400 ACE VET students (rounded) in 2014 by field of study in the top half of the table. Table 12 top half shows that:

- In 2014 of the 95,400 students in ACE VET providers, 12,585 (13%) were in mixed field programs or adult basic education programs, while a further 55% were in non-AQF subject only VET.
- Of the third approximately in AQF or full qualifications specific fields of education training, most were in the field of society and culture (14%) followed by in management and commerce (6%) and the rest were spread in smaller percentages across the other fields.

Table 12 (bottom) shows the total 95,400 ACE VET students in 2014 by AQF and non-AQF:

- In 2014 about 40% of total ACE VET students were in AQF or full VET qualifications training and with the largest numbers in Certificate III level courses (39.2%), the rest mainly spread across the other Certificate levels I, II and IV (at 17% each), and diploma and above level students accounting for the final 8% of students.

Table 12: ACE VET students (government funded) by field of education and level of education

Program field of education	Number	%Total	
01 - Natural and physical sciences	570	0.6	=100%
02 - Information technology	960	1.0	
03 - Engineering and related technologies	410	0.4	
04 - Architecture and building	2175	2.2	
05 - Agriculture, environmental and related studies	1125	1.2	
06 - Health	3100	3.2	
07 - Education	5700	6.0	
08 - Management and commerce	13365	14.0	
09 - Society and culture	395	0.4	
10 - Creative arts	3045	3.2	
11 - Food, hospitality and personal services	12585	13.2	
12 - Mixed field programmes	52015	55.5	
Subject only activity - not enrolled in a program			
Program level of education		% all AQF	
Diploma or higher	3280	8.3	=100%
Certificate IV	6950	17.6	
Certificate III	15480	39.2	
Certificate II	6780	17.2	
Certificate I	6945	17.6	
AQF sub-total	39440		
Secondary education	1125		
Non-award courses	1130		
Other education	1835		
Subject only activity - not enrolled in a program	51920		
Non-AQF sub-total	56010		
Total students	95445		

(Source: NCVET provided statistics from the National VET Provider Collection)

A 2016 report looked into the involvement in work-based learning of community VET providers in New South Wales. The report shows that 9% provide apprenticeships, 42% provide traineeships, 48% provide training to business clients in their workplace, 33% provide training in a RTO managed work-based learning centre, 64% provide courses with a mandatory work-based learning component, and 74% provide work placement opportunities.

Community VET providers support the workforce development needs of local business and contribute to the productivity agenda.

(Walker, 2016)

### Characteristics of students in ACE VET fields other than adult basic education:

The local people that community providers train for local jobs in accredited VET in all fields of education other than adult basic education include people from various disadvantaged or equity groups and generally at higher levels for students in all other VET providers. As shown in Table 13:

- People with a disability are more highly represented at ACE VET providers than at all other VET providers (e.g. 13.7 % compared to 6.2% in 2014).
- Students from outer regional, remote and very remote regions are represented more in ACE VET providers compared to all other VET providers (19% compared to 14% in 2014).
- The unemployed are more highly represented at ACE VET providers than in all other VET providers (26% compared to 20% in 2014). People not in the labour force are most highly represented in ACE VET providers compared to all other VET providers 19% compared to 8% in 2014)
- Indigenous people are represented equally at ACE VET providers as at all other VET providers (4.9% in 2014)
- Students from a non-English speaking-background (NESB) are also represented about equally at ACE VET providers and all other VET providers

Table 13: Percentage from various equity groups of ACE VET students in all fields of education other than adult basic education and for all other VET students

Equity group	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Students with a disability as</b>												
% Total ace VET students	6.0	6.9	6.4	6.8	9.3	8.6	8.2	8.7	9.1	7.5	11.8	13.7
% Total other VET providers	4.4	4.7	4.9	5.1	5.0	4.7	4.9	5.1	5.3	5.5	5.6	6.2
<b>Indigenous students as</b>												
% Total ace VET students	1.3	1.5	2.1	2.4	3.3	3.5	3.5	4.1	4.6	4.6	3.9	4.9
% Total other VET providers	3.3	3.4	3.7	3.9	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.5	4.8
<b>Students from a non-English speaking-background (NESB) as</b>												
% Total ace VET students	9.0	9.4	9.8	10.5	11.1	11.0	10.5	12.3	12.4	10.2	14.2	17.4
% Total other VET providers	11.1	11.1	11.2	11.8	12.0	12.9	13.1	13.2	13.5	13.7	14.5	15.3
<b>Students from outer regional, remote and very remote regions as</b>												
% Total ace VET students	17.3	16.8	18.9	20.9	21.6	20.3	21.0	23.1	18.1	20.1	18.9	19.2
% Total other VET providers	19.8	19.8	20.3	20.5	20.4	19.9	19.6	19.1	15.3	15.1	14.7	14.3
<b>Unemployed students as</b>												
% Total ace VET students	10.6	13.4	12.3	13.8	15.8	17.0	19.2	21.7	22.6	22.7	23.0	26.7
% Total other VET providers	12.4	12.0	11.3	11.1	10.6	10.7	13.5	14.9	15.8	16.1	17.7	20.0
<b>Students not in the labour force</b>												
% Total ace VET students	15.3	16.3	15.0	14.8	16.4	16.4	14.0	14.3	14.7	11.6	18.6	18.9
% Total other VET providers	8.0	7.8	7.4	7.7	7.4	7.4	7.7	8.2	8.0	8.3	8.5	8.7

(Source: NCVER specific data request 2016)

## Student success rates

Successfully completed hours as a proportion of total hours committed to by all students who passed, failed or withdrew from the corresponding subject(s) in accredited VET in all fields of education other than adult basic education in ACE VET providers and in other VET providers have been calculated with the resultant 'load pass rates' shown in Table 14. Table 14 shows that students in specific fields of education provision in ACE VET providers complete successfully about the same proportion of the total hours of training they signed up for as do students in other VET providers, and with that being about 84 per cent in 2014.

Table 14: Load pass rates for all fields of education other than adult basic education (i.e. mixed field) for ACE providers and for all other VET providers 2003–2014

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
ACE AQF	78.7	83.6	79.8	79.1	77.7	76.9	81.2	81.6	86.0	85.1	82.6	84.9
ACE non AQF	78.9	72.7	76.7	69.4	70.8	65.4	70.1	76.8	78.2	78.9	81.0	83.9
ACE total	78.8	81.7	79.4	78.1	77.0	75.7	80.2	81.0	85.1	84.4	82.3	84.8
Other providers AQF	80.2	80.6	81.1	81.3	81.5	82.4	82.8	82.9	84.5	84.7	84.9	84.8
Other non AQF	79.8	80.4	82.0	81.8	83.6	83.1	82.0	81.4	82.7	82.3	82.8	88.9
Total	80.2	80.6	81.1	81.3	81.6	82.5	82.7	82.8	84.5	84.6	84.8	84.9

(Source: NCVER specific data request 2016)

## Outcomes

Outcomes achieved by VET students whose training was government funded are collected by the NCVER through the annual student outcomes survey (SOS). The SOS is undertaken in the year following training, meaning that respondents will have finished training between approximately 5 to 18 months prior to undertaking the survey. Note the following SOS data relates to all VET students (that is, students in mixed field programs or adult basic education programs as well as in all other VET fields of education).

### Employment outcomes

The VET student outcomes survey of 2015 (NCVER, 2015c) provides some comparisons of outcomes for students by provider type. The survey found:

- 70.0% of ACE VET students in AQF or full qualifications training were employed after training. By comparison, 72.3% of AQF trained TAFE students were employed after training; and 74.5% of students at private training providers
- 65.6% of VET subjects only completers (i.e. in non-AQF) in ACE providers were employed after training. By comparison, 64.8% of VET subjects only completers in TAFEs and other government providers were employed after training and a higher proportion (71%) were employed after training at private providers

(NCVER, 2015c, Table 1)

In summary, employment outcomes for students at ACE VET providers are almost as good as employment outcomes for students at all other VET providers, even though there are higher proportions of students from equity groups in ACE VET providers and many are there for personal reasons only.

## Satisfaction with the quality of the training

The VET student outcomes survey of 2015 (NCVER, 2015c) also found that

- Of students whose full qualifications training was government funded some 88% were satisfied with the overall quality of training at ACE providers. By comparison, a similar proportion (87.7%) was satisfied with the overall quality of training at TAFEs and other government providers and a lower proportion (85.3%) at private training providers.
- As for subject only completers, 84.7 % were satisfied with the overall quality of training at ACE providers. By comparison, a similar proportion were satisfied with the overall quality of training at in TAFEs and other government providers; and similar proportion were satisfied (80.6 %) with the overall quality of training at private training providers

(NCVER, 2015c, Table 2.)

In summary, students at ACE VET providers are as satisfied with the overall quality of training as are students at all other VET providers. Further, time series data for 2011 to 2015 for students of ACE VET providers show relatively consistent levels of outcomes in terms of numbers employed or in further study after training (Table 15).

Table 15: Key outcomes for government-funded community education provider graduates and subject completers, five-year time series (%)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Graduates</b>					
Employee after training	75.0	68.2	75.7	74.2	70.0
Employed or in further Study after training	83.6	78.8	84.5	86.0	81.4
Enrolled in further study after training	33.6	32.3	32.7	35.4	31.7
<b>Subject completers</b>					
Employed after training	68.3	67.6	71.0	68.1	65.6
Employed or in further study after training	69.5	68.5	72.2	69.1	65.9
Enrolled in further study after training	3.0*	4.0	4.9	3.0*	2.1*

\*The element has a relative standard error greater than or equal to 25% and should be treated with caution.

(Source: NCVER, 2015d, Table 8)

Table 16: Government funded VET students by provider type 2010–2015

	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
Provider type	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
TAFE	828065	60.9	817980	55.3	826780	53.6	779655	52.6	654010	46.9	534840	43.7
Other govt	63685	4.7	58125	3.9	55270	3.6	44320	3.0	39875	2.9	40685	3.3
ACE	105425	7.8	106340	7.2	93890	6.1	102075	6.9	93370	6.7	79360	6.5
Other RTOs	348280	25.6	480725	32.5	550110	35.7	542420	36.6	584555	42.0	555125	45.3
Mixed providers	14600	1.1	17175	1.2	16750	1.1	14135	1.0	21375	1.5	14715	1.2
Total	1360060	100.0	1480350	100.0	1542800	100.0	1482610	100.0	1393185	100.0	1224730	100.0

Source: NCVER 2017, specific data request, with TAFE and ACE provider fee for service VET students excluded.)



Table 17: Participants in Victorian ACE VET providers compared to other VET providers

TAFE learners	Private RTOs learners	ACE learners
21% unemployed	28% unemployed	32% unemployed
14% not in the labour force	5% not in the labour force	29% not in the labour force
8% with a disability	6% with a disability	22% with a disability
33% did not complete Year 12 or equivalent VET study	34% did not complete Year 12 or equivalent VET study	48% did not complete Year 12 or equivalent VET study

From Table 1.16: Government subsidised enrolments(AQF1+), summary of selected characteristics within provider type, VTM Qtrly Rpt, Q2, 2013)

Table 18: Characteristics of ACE VET providers compared to private VET providers

Private RTOs	ACE RTOs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Profit focussed and driven</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not for profit</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible to owners, directors, &amp; shareholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible to a committee and a membership representing the local community</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targets niche training to large areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responds to local community needs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry focus – often specific industry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learner focussed</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High volume and formal training methodology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible and accommodating to learner needs and issues</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to private financing, equity and bank loans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited access to capital; especially if in council premises</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited access to teachers, high level of self-paced and assessment only delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small classes with committed teachers, additional learning and educational assistance provided face-to-face</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mostly capable students – often delivering to those in work and in industry settings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mostly low socio-economic, retrenched, more mature, disabled, CALD, unemployed students</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High percentage of income spent on marketing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student recruitment through outreach and word of mouth</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accredited courses only</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-accredited (and entry level accredited)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often deliver skills building and deepening courses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mostly delivering foundation skills courses and entry level VET</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VET delivery only</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VET offered with a range of social supports &amp; services (childcare, counselling, health &amp; wellbeing courses, informal groups, a meeting place)</li> </ul>

## Sustainability challenges

Competitive funding models in VET, particularly the student entitlement funding models introduced since 2009, have resulted in a shift in VET provision away from ACE RTO providers and also public RTOs (TAFEs) and towards other private registered providers as the time series data in Table 16 illustrates. Between 2010 and 2015 the share of total VET government funded students in VET dropped for ACE RTOs from 7.8% to 6.5% and for TAFE providers from 60.9% to 43.9%, while it increased for other private RTOs from 25.6% to 45.3%. To note is that in Table 16 students in ACE and TAFE providers exclude fee for service students whereas they are included in earlier tables.

Some specific impact data on ACE of the demand-driven individual choice approach to VET was found for Victoria (in an undated but apparently 2014 briefing paper entitled 'Impact of skills reform on adult and community education (ACE) providers' endorsed by several ACE peak organisations – ACEVic, Adult Learning Australia, Community Colleges Australia and Neighbourhood Houses Victoria). The briefing paper reveals that since Victoria's demand-driven individual choice in VET funding model was introduced in 2008, there has been a 27% drop in ACE providers delivering government-funded VET across the state and enrolments in pre-accredited pathways programs aimed at disadvantaged learners have dropped 25% (DECD, 2013). The briefing paper calls for reconsideration of the question of how to accommodate disadvantaged students in VET within competitive VET funding models and to reverse the unintended adverse effects on its ACE providers and the vulnerable learners that these models are having. The paper suggests governments:

- 1 Outline specifically the separate and complementary roles of the public TAFE system, not for profit community providers and private for profit providers; and in particular not to treat ACE RTOs the same as private providers as they have a fundamentally different model with Table 15 and 16 included to illustrate this point.
- 2 Introduce some form of 'community social/service obligation' fund (other than the existing standard loadings for Indigenous/regional/disabled learners) for providers who work with students who require substantial additional educational time.
- 3 Quarantine future foundation skills funding applications for ACE and TAFE providers only.

- 4 Ensure that in regional 'in situ' ACE providers are given additional funding where key industries are those that receive extremely low student contact hour fees to assist the local employers and industries to have the opportunities to train their staff.

In NSW, the government has 'community social service obligation' funds for ACE providers and quarantined future foundation skills funding applications for ACE and TAFE providers only (Bowman and McKenna 2015). However, this may change. VET funding models remain dynamic in all jurisdictions.

From June 2017 the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform includes the Commonwealth 'Skilling Australians Fund' announced in the latest federal government budget. This fund is in the order of \$1.5 billion over four years, if and 'when matched with funding from the States'. The Fund will be targeted at 'priority occupations and growth industries. These include but are not limited to key industries right across Australia, like tourism and hospitality, health and ageing, agriculture, engineering, manufacturing, building and construction, and the digital technologies. The Fund puts the spotlight firmly on apprenticeships and traineeships and will support up to 300,000 more apprentices, trainees, and higher level skilled Australians over the next four years. This presents an opportunity for ACE VET providers to expand their work-based learning delivery with local businesses and for all in their communities seeking such opportunities.

There is a high need to engage more young Australians in VET, with 1 in 4 not currently meeting important education and employment milestones (see Figure 16).

There also are many older Australians suffering job loss due to industry restructuring for whom the ACE approach to VET is well suited. For instance, out of a total workforce of 11.5 million, approximately 355,000 Australian workers were displaced in the year to February 2013 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013). Displaced workers are those who are retrenched or cease employment as their employer ceases to operate as a business or reduces its business operations and no longer needs anyone to do the job previously held by the worker. Australia's manufacturing industry has a disproportionate share of retrenchments that have occurred (Murtough & Waite 2000) and are to continue to occur (Manufacturing Skills Australia 2014a). The manufacturing industry has high numbers of older and lesser skilled workers in need of tailored VET programs with support services (Callan & Bowman 2015).

The ACE sector as an enabler of inclusive learning allows the learner to re-engage, and re-connect with learning at any stage along the learning time line no matter their age, gender, culture, ability or previous educational experience.

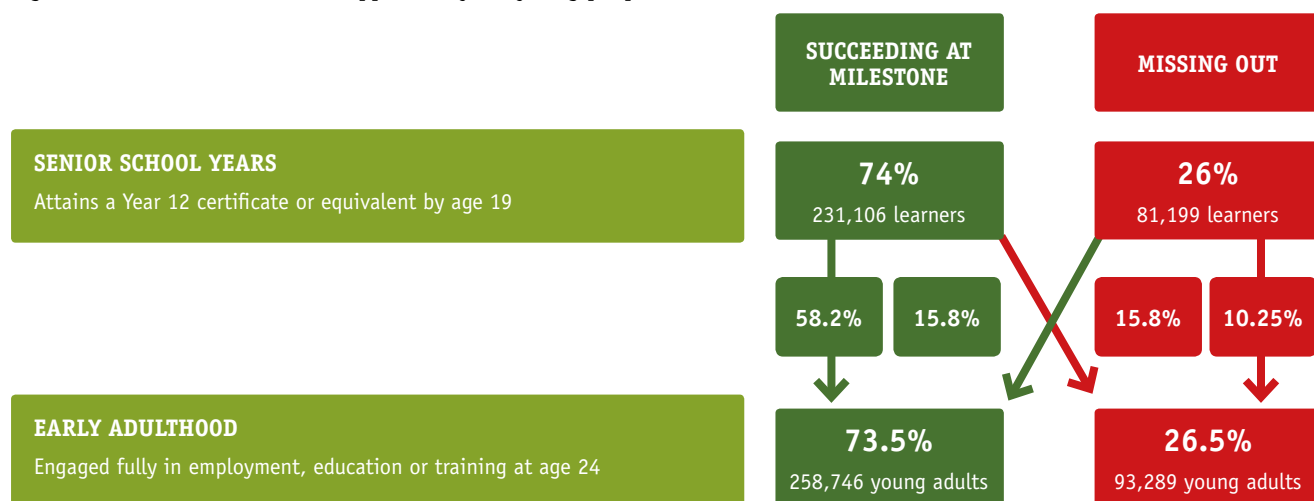
The existence of an ACE sector provides individuals with choice, choice in not only where they can access their learning but also choice in how they will learn, what additional services they can tap into and finally how much they will need to pay for the learning.

Government funding of a competitive community service grant (CSG) fund in VET to support disadvantaged learners in local contexts is an option worthy of consideration. Such a grant fund is pragmatic as a competitive training market is expected to be continued. It recognises that providers have and need to specialise in a competitive market. Governments should articulate objectives for CSGs, and then invite selected providers to submit proposals. The selected providers should be highly capable and possess the necessary expertise and breadth to support the students targeted and have a history of quality training and student support with vulnerable students. The

Community Service Grants (CSGs) must be cognisant of the fact that many of the providers catering for disadvantaged learners are small. They are part of the long tail of small providers within the total 4,200 VET providers in the Australian VET system (Korbel & Misko 2016). Small VET providers should not be discriminated against on the basis of administrative management costs. Their effectiveness and efficiency should be the key criteria.

The effectiveness of ACE providers in delivering support services to enable disadvantaged learners to recommence learning and develop skills, gain qualifications and enter and stay in the workforce is recognised in Queensland through the Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative that involves an investment over four years of \$240 million. This initiative offers seven programs that deliver training to improve skills and employment opportunities for struggling young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability, mature-age job seekers, women re-entering the workforce and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The programs are delivered across the state by community-based organisations and also local councils, Parents and Citizens' and Parents and Friends associations and in partnerships with RTOs as required. This is another model worth of consideration in other parts of Australia.

Figure 16: Index of educational opportunity for young people, Australia



(Source: Lamb et al 2015)

# PATHWAYS BETWEEN LEARNING PROGRAMS



The extension of ACE to include more vocationally orientated offerings and formal VET programs has increased opportunities for people to move from one type of learning program to another within the supportive learning environment that ACE offers. The program logic of learning pathways provision in ACE is to provide adults several learning experiences that each build on the previous experiences and step them through the four critical steps in the adult learning journey, as depicted in the Figure 17.

## Key features

ACE focusses on learning opportunities that create the potential for further learning and skills development through a stepping stone approach to learning, as depicted in Figure 17:

- **Step one: Re-engage adults in learning**  
This requires activities that target an individual's personal interests and social needs. To be engaged in learning is a major milestone for some adults that can build confidence in learning and encourage adults to participate in further learning. For example, Kearns (2006) found from a review of research into the wider benefits of learning a recurring theme was that personal outcomes – confidence, self-esteem and the aspiration to engage in learning – are 'important and necessary stepping stones towards confident participation in VET provision'. Miller (2005) confirms that personal outcomes from VET act as the platform for the achievement of education outcomes and, in turn, for the attainment of employment and community-related outcomes.
- **Step 2: Build foundation skills**  
This often is part of the process of building identity and confidence as a learner because gaps in these skills limit effective participation in formal vocational education, training and work. Palmeri (2007) overviewed many research studies focussed

on disadvantaged learner groups and found that they all echoed as positive factors for their successful engagement: motivating the learner – through negotiating learning that is of interest to them and relevant to their world; providing an informal learning environment to give a level of comfort given their lack of confidence; offering low intensity learning or training – at least at first – that is not to be assessed because assessment is threatening; using quality teachers; and supporting the learner through peer learning and personalised support by tutors and mentors. Merit has also been found in re-joining the disadvantaged in learning through the delivery of preparatory vocational programs. These programs usually include literacy and numeracy, employment preparation activities and some basic vocational skills training.

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

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

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

Figure 17: Learning pathways provision program logic

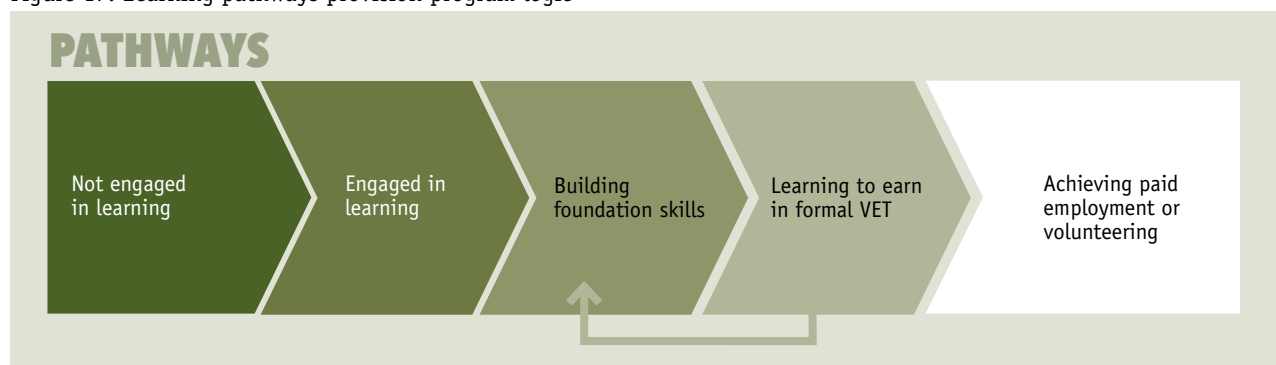
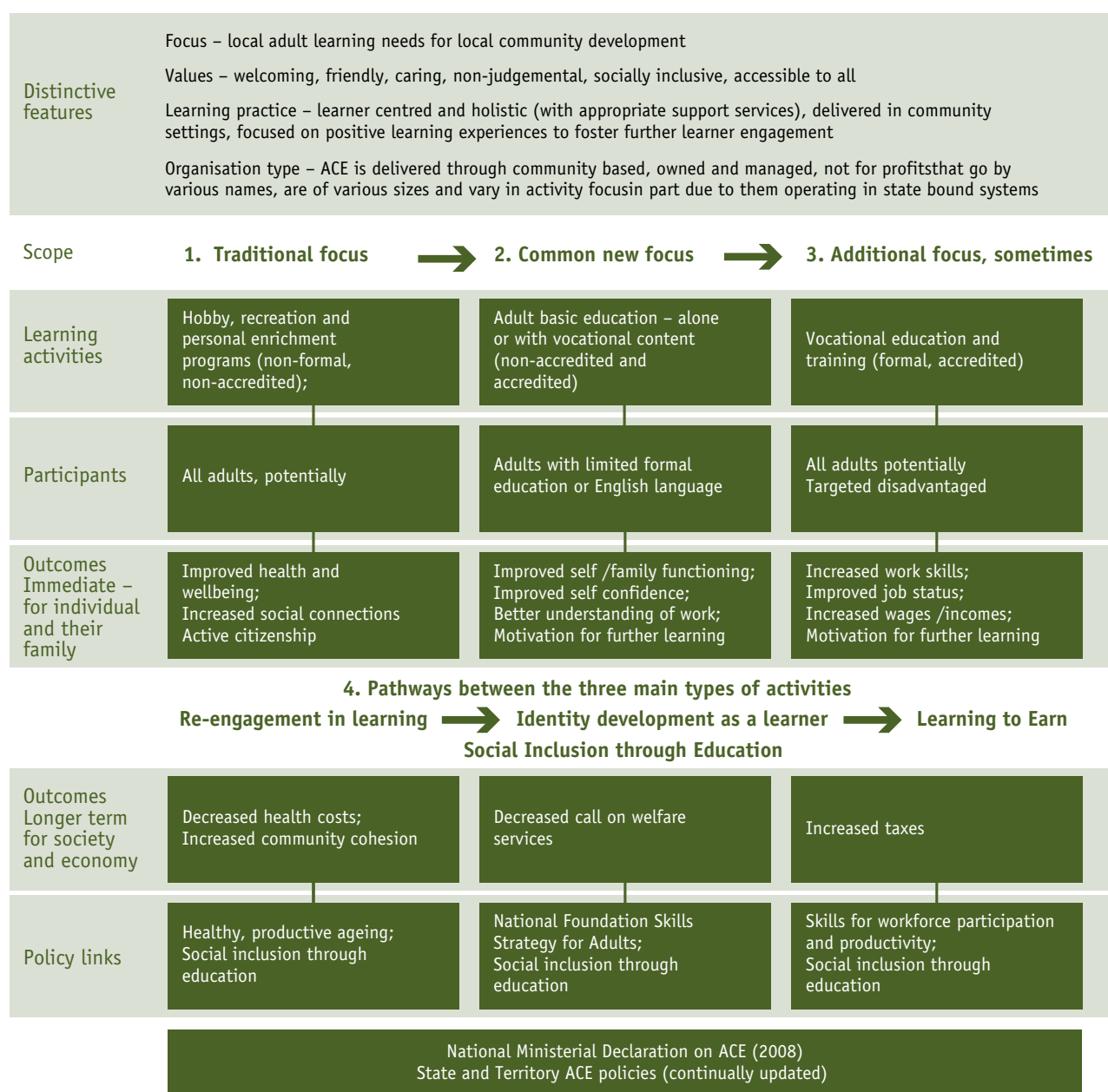


Figure 18: Australian ACE – a framework for reporting educational programs





- **Step 3: Directed formal VET learning**

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

- **Step 4: Achieving an employment outcomes**

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

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

## Participants

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

## Outcomes

### Student transitions from accredited VET

The NCVER government funded VET student outcomes report for community education providers of 2015 (NCVER, 2015d) shows that:

- 31.7% of 2014 ACE VET graduates were enrolled in further study after training. This is about the same per cent as for all graduates of VET (32.6%)
- 81.4% of ACE VET graduates were employed or in further study after training, and noting that 15% of the graduates had undertaken their training mainly for personal development reasons and not employment-related reasons
- 65.9% of ACE VET subject completers were employed or in further study after training, noting that 35% of subject completers had undertaken their training mainly for personal development reasons and not employment related reasons
- 82.0% of ACE VET graduates and 84.8% of subject completers reported that they had fully or partly achieved their main reason for training.

### Time series data

Time series data for 2011–2015 for students of ACE VET providers show relatively consistent outcomes in terms of numbers employed or in further study after training (NCVER, 2015d, Key findings for government-funded community education provider graduates and subject completers, five-year time series, p. 38).



## Other data on transitions

This appears to be confined to longitudinal studies of ACE students in the state of Victoria. For example, a 2005 Victorian ACE longitudinal study followed up 846 participants first surveyed in 2004 when they were enrolled in a course at an ACE provider. The study demonstrates the high capacity of its ACE providers to engage adults in foundation education and provide pathways to formal vocational education and work.

- Of the 846 respondents in the 2005 survey cohort, 36 per cent (302 respondents) were engaged in study in 2005. Of these, 57 per cent of respondents who were studying in a new course remained in the ACE sector. However, an additional 8 per cent had returned to school, 19 per cent were studying in TAFE, 10 per cent with private providers and 6 per cent had entered university.
- The 201 respondents studying in the ACE sector in 2005 comprised 83 learners continuing their 2004 course and 118 who had enrolled in a new course. Learners staying in the ACE sector strongly endorsed their 2004 ACE study, with 88 per cent reporting that their experiences in their 2004 course encouraged them to apply for a new course. Those moving into the TAFE sector also valued their 2004 ACE study highly with 79 per cent reporting this link, as did 55 per cent of those who moved into a private provider.

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

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

(Walstab et al, 2005)

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

- Pre-accredited courses drew disproportionately on groups who are economically vulnerable.

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

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

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

Recent case studies of adult learning in Neighbourhood Houses in the regions of Geelong and South Western Victoria provide rich qualitative data on second chance learners and their transition pathways to higher education, such as TAFE and University, and also on later life learners engaging with personal enrichment learning for social and community connection. The stories reveal vividly the transformative nature of the participants' engagement with the Neighbourhood Houses. Participants speak about their changed relationships in their families and friendship groups and importantly with themselves. Participants no longer see themselves as 'silly' or as struggling learners. They speak as well of what they have learned about the world in which they live and their





ongoing relationships with the centres, with the people in them and with learning. Many participants speak of taking on administrative and organisational roles, both volunteer and paid, within the centres and about joining committees of management, giving the distinct impression that these particular skills will carry over into engagement with other community organisations (Ollis et al, 2016).

## Policy links

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

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

(MCEETYA, 2008, p. 3)

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

## Sustainability challenges

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

In addition, and once they have built their foundation skills and confidence, there needs to be formal VET opportunities available for these learners to enter either within ACE providers or through ACE–VET partnerships that need to be encouraged. In addition, and to help justify a learning pathways approach, ACE needs to track its learners' success in the particular ACE program they are on and the transition they make afterwards using measures that show progress for the individual. As the former National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC 2010) explains, the need is to recognise and acknowledge small transitions and improved quality of life as important milestones for learners with low level initial skills. For those who experience disadvantage in VET these may be personal or social in nature in the early programs undertaken rather than or in addition to work related and economic in nature.

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

## OTHER FINDINGS

Learning in the ACE sector is associated with a range of positive outcomes for individuals and their families.

### The potential overall contribution of ACE

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

- Income gains for the individual and tax revenues to government and community
- Improvements in health and wellbeing for the individual (Hartley & Horne, 2006)
- Decreasing calls on welfare services and significant cost savings in these services
- Lifting of the overall workforce participation rate and productivity (see Figure 18)

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

#### Example 1

##### **The overall economic value of the ACE sector in Victoria.**

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

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

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

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

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

(Allen Consulting 2008)

#### Example 2

##### **The economic value of ACE in South Australia.**

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

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

The interest was particularly in assessing the following outcomes:

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

The research found that:

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

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



# SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This report has profiled the work of Australian ACE to raise awareness and understanding of this community based not for profit education sector. The existing evidence base has been scanned and the available data and information presented to demonstrate the contribution of Australian ACE to the overall national education effort and social and human capital development policies.

The framework developed in this report for profiling and reporting on education in Australian ACE providers is presented in full in Figure 18 and the key findings are summarised and some conclusions drawn.

## Key findings

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

The scope of Australian ACE includes personal enrichment learning that all ACE providers, in the vicinity of 2500, deliver and some provide only this type of learning but most also provide adult basic education as well. A significant minority (300–500) also offer formal vocational education.

ACE providers are significant providers of all personal enrichment learning undertaken in Australia and many of the participants are from disadvantaged groups. The challenge is how to keep funding the personal enrichment learning programs they run, when they are not funded by government and many of their customers are in the lowest income brackets, and given the importance of these programs as a gateway back into learning for many disadvantaged learners to improve individual health and wellbeing and keep them active members of the community and workforce.

ACE providers are also assisting many adults to improve their basic foundation skills and as a platform for further vocational learning with 8.1 % of all adults participating in government funded accredited adult basic education programs in 2014 doing so in ACE VET providers and 9.1% in 2015. In accredited specific VET fields training the ACE RTO provider contribution was 6.5% of all government funded students in 2014 and 6.2% in 2015.

The current scale of the total direct VET effort in ACE providers is a minimum of 5.3% in student terms and 3.3% of total hours of VET delivered. Although this is small, the students involved include significant numbers from various equity groups for whom ACE VET is their preferred choice.

There also is the indirect VET effort that ACE providers provide through entering partnerships with registered training organisations (RTOs). Limited data was found on the extent of the formal accredited VET delivery ACE providers help to deliver through these partnerships but the available data suggests it is quite significant.

Overall, the ACE sector achieves outcomes against multiple policy platforms. It achieves policy expectations of Education, Health, Human Services, Employment, Industry and Business and Community and Regional Development.

## Conclusions

Overall, this report provides a conceptual framework for reporting on education in ACE providers in Australia in its totality, and is the first such framework. The report also provides contemporary baseline data on components of the framework against which future developments can be compared.

**The available data suggests ACE is playing an important role in educating many adult Australians and particularly the disadvantaged in learning but ongoing support from governments is required to sustain and grow the ACE effort.**

It is time for the dual mandate in education of ACE providers to be re-invigorated. The first part of the dual mandate is to provide education to all for pleasure and/or the workplace.



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The second part is to provide second chances for those who have not succeeded in institutional education settings. ACE education in all of its diversity remains the only chance to address educational deficiencies which increasingly block off employment opportunities and infect the entirety of the life experience for many adult Australians. There is a need for ongoing government support for ACE to fulfil these dual roles.

There is more primary research required to fill in all gaps in the evidence data on some components of the framework to determine the full impacts of ACE in education.

This further research includes to determine:

- full impacts on ACE RTOs of competitive VET funding models and how to avoid negative impacts through alternative funding models
- full extent and impacts of the learning pathways approach of ACE providers through better data collection and updated analysis of the full benefits of education in ACE to Australia's economy and society.
- precisely how many ACE providers there are in Australia
- total numbers of adults participating in personal enrichment learning delivered by ACE providers
- total numbers involved in non-accredited basic education programs delivered by ACE providers
- number of ACE providers who assist with formal accredited VET delivery through entering partnerships with RTO VET providers and numbers of VET students aided by these ACE providers

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