



**Adult  
Learning  
Australia**

*Lifelong and  
lifewide learning  
for all Australians*

## **Submission on Terms of Reference:**

Labor's National Inquiry into Post-Secondary Education

April 2018



*Learning changes lives*

**2018 YEAR OF LIFELONG LEARNING**



*Lifelong and  
lifewide learning  
for all Australians*

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**Adult Learning Australia**

Office 1  
45 Moreland Street  
FOOTSCRAY VIC 3011

**Ph.:** 03 9362 8894

**Web:** [ala.asn.au](http://ala.asn.au)

**Email:** [info@ala.asn.au](mailto:info@ala.asn.au)

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## Recommendations

Adult Learning Australia extends an offer to provide expert advice to the review panel on lifelong and adult learning, disadvantaged adult learners and Adult and Community Education (ACE) in Australia.

ALA also makes the following recommendations regarding the inquiry's terms of reference.

- Recommendation 1** The review should investigate the contribution of non-accredited pathway and bridging programs such as ACE adult basic education programs, language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) programs and digital literacy programs.
- Recommendation 2** The review should investigate the needs of disadvantaged cohorts, including those with low LLN, low formal education attainment, older learners, learners with disabilities and people from Indigenous or other cultural backgrounds.
- Recommendation 3** The review should investigate specific and complementary roles for ACE providers, the public TAFE system and for profit providers.
- Recommendation 4** The review should explore options for a systematic approach and partnerships between ACE and TAFE in order to reduce barriers to education and training, and promote a culture of lifelong and lifewide learning.
- Recommendation 5** The review should investigate the role of ACE organisations as significant community assets that have the potential to be optimised to play a much greater role in supporting disadvantaged adults across Australia; particularly in rural and regional locations.
- Recommendation 6** The review should seek to better understand the complex interactions between all post-secondary education contexts and environments rather than viewing learning as a simple linear process from school to TAFE or university then work.
- Recommendation 7** The review should seek to better understand the links between post-secondary education and work.
- Recommendation 8** The review should explore the capacity of ACE providers to deliver intensive adult learning programs that better meet the needs of the workforce and the competing demands of people's lifestyles.
- Recommendation 9** The review should investigate the option of a fundamental shift away from a limited competency-based training model to broader more efficient vocational streams.
- Recommendation 10** The review should include a process that incorporates its findings into a broader lifelong learning policy that promotes the economic value and wider contribution of learning to a civilised society.

## About

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is the largest national peak body for adult and community education (ACE). ALA's mission is for equitable access to lifelong and lifewide learning for all Australians.

ALA has members in all states and territories of Australia that reflect the diversity of sector; including neighbourhood houses, community learning centres, community colleges and adult education institutions located in urban, regional and remote areas.

ALA exists to provide leadership, communication, professional development and advocacy for adult and community education practitioners to advance quality services for all adult learners.

The learner is the central focus of our attention. We believe that learning occurs through informal and non-formal means, as well as through the formal education and training systems.

In 2018, ALA celebrates its 58th anniversary.

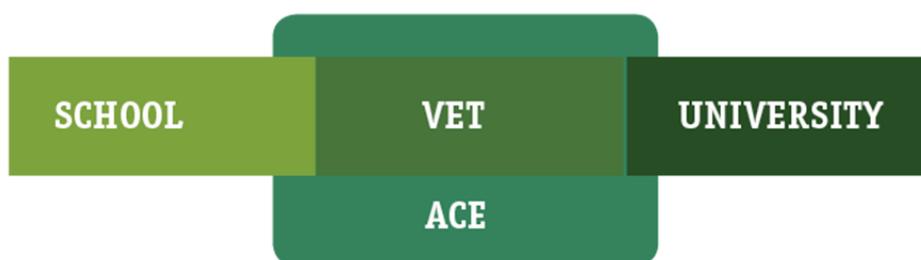
## Terms of reference

The ALP's Post-Secondary Education Inquiry must investigate options for all Australians to have access to high quality learning opportunities throughout their lives. This will give people the tools they need to adapt to changing social and economic circumstances, and the ever-changing job market.

Adult and community education is key to achieving this.

## ACE in Australia

ACE is a discrete and recognisable sector of education that provides accessible learning opportunities that are responsive to the needs of adults in local communities.



## Education landscape

There are approximately 2,500 ACE organisations located across Australia. However, the states where ACE providers are formally registered with government to receive funding, and supported with coordination and professional development, are more robust and able to adapt to deliver on a government's agenda.



More investigation and research is required to understand the full cost–benefit analysis of investment in ACE and the relevant economic, social and human capital gains at a national level. However, the following information provides an introductory overview for the inquiry.

ACE organisations have a strong presence in rural and regional communities (refer table B2), where they tend to offer a broad range of programs and services alone or in partnership with other agencies.

**Table B2 Number of providers by remoteness, 2014**

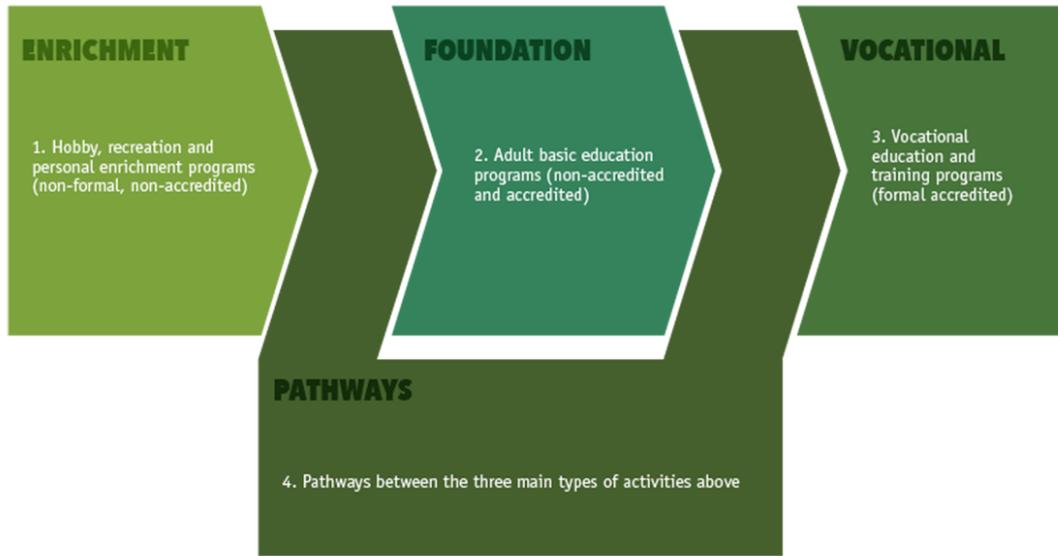
	Major cities	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote	Very remote	Unknown	Total
Schools	550	238	135	18	10	10	961
TAFE	28	17	8	3	1	6	63
Universities	6	6	1	1	0	2	16
Enterprise	155	20	14	2	0	23	214
Community	275	153	53	7	1	17	506
Private	1 974	345	143	14	5	119	2 600
Associations	170	31	12	1	1	12	227
Other	52	11	14	3	0	7	87
<b>Total</b>	<b>3 210</b>	<b>821</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>4 674</b>

Note: Providers can report under multiple types and remoteness categories and in this case they are counted under each category they appear, so the number of providers listed may differ from other publications.

Source: Korbel, P. & Misko, J. (2016)

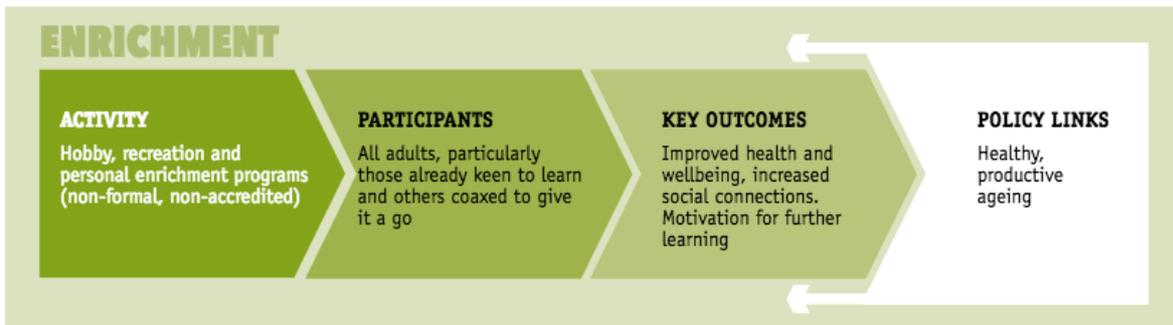
ACE organisations offer all or some of the following services:

1. Personal enrichment learning and pathway programs
2. Adult basic education in language, literacy, numeracy and other foundation skills (both accredited and non-accredited)
3. Formal vocational education and training (VET)



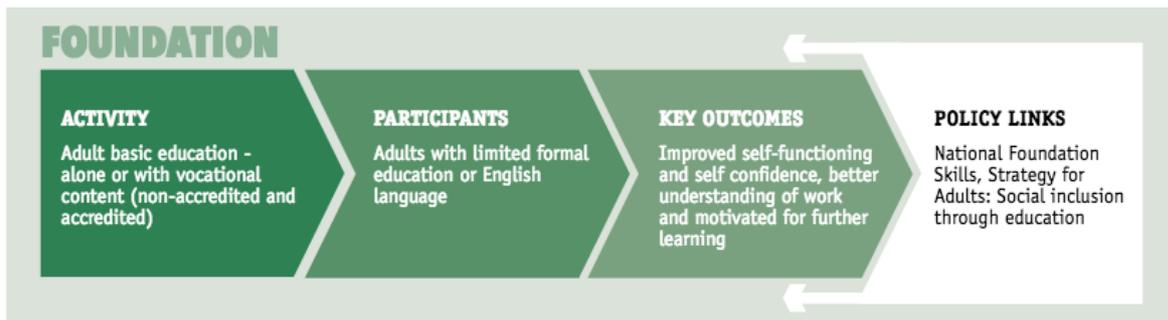
### Personal enrichment and pathway learning

ACE organisations are significant providers of all personal enrichment learning undertaken in Australia with many participants from disadvantaged groups. Personal enrichment programs are often a gateway back into learning for disadvantaged adult learners to improve their health and wellbeing and to keep them active members of the community and workforce.



### Adult basic education

ACE organisations support many adults to improve basic foundation skills by offering both non-accredited and accredited adult basic education programs. These programs offer pathways to further vocational learning. Around 9% of all adults participating in government-funded accredited adult basic education programs do so at ACE VET providers.



The following table shows:

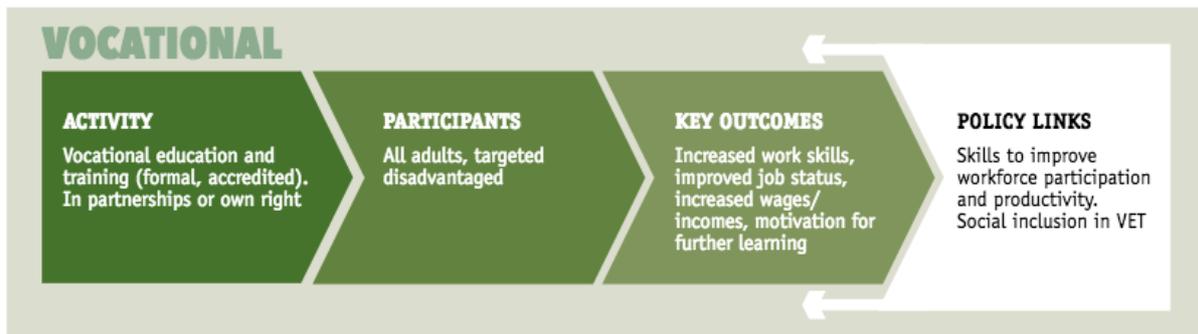
- People with a disability, the unemployed and people not in the labour force are more highly represented in accredited adult basic education at ACE VET providers than in accredited adult basic education in all other VET providers.
- People from a non-English speaking-background (NESB) are highly represented in accredited adult basic education at ACE VET providers.
- Indigenous students are also significantly represented in accredited adult basic education at ACE 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

## Formal VET

The proportion of total government funded only students in accredited VET training at ACE RTOs is around 6%. ACE organisations offer access to foundation skills and provide pathways into further learning, community participation and work.



The following table shows that all of the equity groups are more highly represented at ACE VET than for all other VET providers:

- People with a disability are more highly represented at ACE VET providers than at all other VET providers (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 slightly more at ACE VET providers than at all other VET providers (4.9% compared to 4.8% in 2014)
- Students from a non-English speaking-background (NESB) are also represented more highly at ACE VET providers than all other VET providers (17.4% compared to 15.3% 2014).

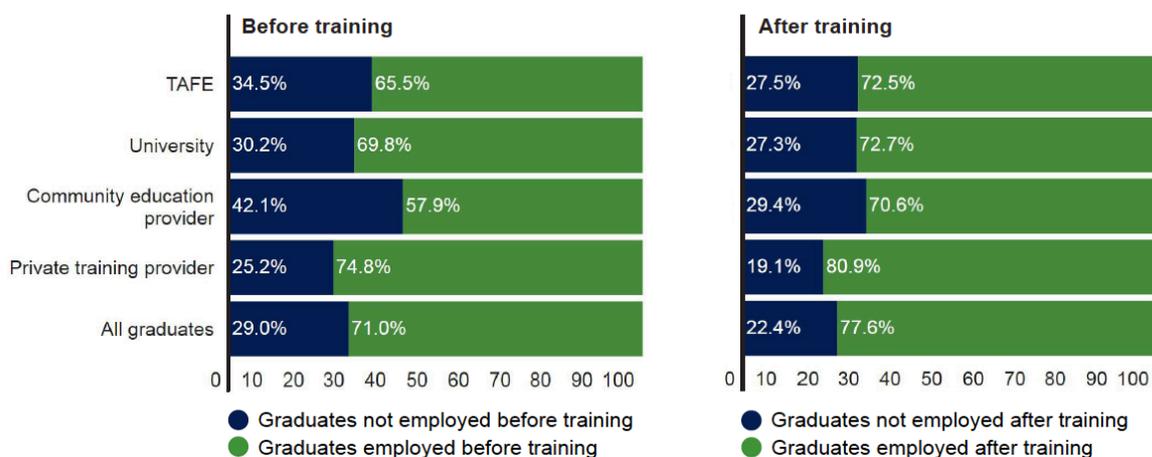
Table 13: Percentage from various equity groups of ACE VET students in all fields of education other than adult basic education and for all other VET students

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: NCVET specific data request 2016)

The following graphic shows the employment status of graduates who completed their vocational education and training (VET) in 2015 and were awarded a qualification. Community educator providers have a significantly higher percentage of graduates that were not employed before the training (42.1%) and still achieve a high percentage of graduates employed after training (70.6%).

### Employment status by VET provider type



## The role of lifelong learning

The 'links between education and economic growth, income distribution and poverty reduction' are well established' (UNESCO 2014). In many countries across the globe, lifelong learning is a policy priority for education and training because of its importance to national economic growth and human and social development.

Research shows that citizens who regularly acquire new knowledge, skills and attitudes in a wide range of contexts throughout their lives are better equipped to adapt to changes in their environment.

Australia needs a genuine commitment to current and future generations for a formal national policy on lifelong learning. There has been complacency and a lack of leadership in this area from successive governments, a 'she'll be right' attitude that is extremely risky given the global challenges we are now facing.

## Global and workforce challenges

Structural changes in the global economy have resulted in a growing demand for a highly skilled and adaptable workforce. Life changing technology is emerging at such a rate that it has become impossible to predict what the roles, skills and jobs of the tomorrow will look like.

Governments, communities, businesses, individuals and society, more broadly, need to be prepared to take advantage of the opportunities that will arise in this complex and competitive environment. They must also take responsibility for ensuring that everyone has access to these opportunities, and to ensure fairness and equity.

A significant percentage of existing jobs across the globe are at risk of automation; particularly jobs that involve routine or repetitive tasks. According to PwC, prioritised employability skills relate to adaptability, innovation, design, problem solving, critical analysis, empathy and creativity. This is not a vision of the future. Automation is happening now in workplaces across Australia and governments need to act to address the impact; particularly in terms of the resulting unemployment.

Given that the landscape of work in the future is largely unknown and with new media, science and technology moving rapidly, a broader more holistic approach to learning is required. A policy approach that is solely focussed on the skills required by industry fails to recognise the importance of learning in helping adults to adapt to and manage changing roles at work, in families and in their communities.

Australia needs a formal lifelong learning policy that is learner centred and sets out the roles and responsibilities of community, business and all levels of government. It should facilitate access to learning opportunities, track progress and work to mitigate against deep and persistent disadvantage. It should be responsive to the growing rate of change in our society and bring about strong social returns in terms of productivity, community participation, political awareness and active citizenry. It should contribute to building the capacity of individuals and communities and promote future prosperity in the equality of opportunity it brings.

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