

2 July 2020

Ms Jenny Macklin

Chair

Skills for Victoria Independent Review

Dear Ms Macklin

RE: SKILLS FOR VICTORIA'S GROWING ECONOMY ISSUES PAPER

Adult and Community Education (ACE) providers have much to offer as part of Victoria's socio-economic recovery. They are a significant community asset with the potential to be optimised to play a greater role in supporting adults and workplaces with their training needs, particularly in the current COVID19 crisis. ACE is also well placed in localised settings and therefore has the potential for Victorian adult learning projects that raise awareness of COVID 19 and for recognising ACE as a way to engage with a sustainable future.

Unlike other education sectors, ACE provides a unique and vital frontline service and is exceptionally well-placed to know what works to achieve a good outcome for their communities. ACE is experienced at providing flexible learning options in both accredited and non-accredited programs and wrap-around support to many Victorians who are disadvantaged, vulnerable and at risk. ACE also has a high satisfaction rate in terms of engaging with learners, as reported in your Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy Issues Paper.

In this uncertain and changing environment, ACE is on fragile ground. As not for profit organisations, largely managed by volunteer boards, they are reliant on limited funding streams. While Jobkeeper is currently helping to maintain many ACE workers in a job, there are growing concerns that come September when Jobkeeper expires, there will be significant impacts on both the workforce and the learners if there is no extension or alternative financial replacement.

It is particularly worrying, now that parts of Melbourne have returned to lockdown in some of the poorest suburbs, impacting learners' accessibility as well as ACE tutors, who were starting to re-engage in small face to face learning groups. The dropout rate of students and a decline in enrolments in these areas will deepen the increasing level of learner anxiety and the socio-economic divide.

ACE providers hold significant knowledge about their communities, have established networks in the knowledge industry and have relationships with other education and training providers such as TAFE and are experienced in navigating changing environments.

Adult Learning Australia agrees that there is a long way to go before the vision of an integrated post-secondary education and training sector can become a reality in Victoria. Developing a long term vision for the entire post-secondary sector requires a more equitable approach and distribution of resources than is currently the case. ACE has long been the underdog of post-secondary education, and in more recent years has been forced to compete with free TAFE courses.

ALA welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with government and other sectors to ensure that investment in maintaining and developing new skills assists Victorian business, industry and community to recover quickly and effectively from COVID-19 and take us into a prosperous future.



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lifewide learning
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Please find attached our response to the **Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy Issues Paper** which touches on some of the points raised in your report. ALA would welcome an opportunity to discuss these issues with you further or to participate in a collective consultation through the Victorian ACE Policy Network (VAPN), to strengthen the case for ACE in post-secondary education.

For further information, please contact me via email j.macaffer@ala.asn.au or mobile 0488 030 073.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jenny Macaffer".

Jenny Macaffer
CEO

Submission

Macklin Review: Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy

June 2020



*Lifelong and
lifewide learning
for all Australians*

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Recommendations

Adult Learning Australia makes the following recommendations regarding the inquiry's terms of reference.

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| Recommendation 1 | Conduct a comprehensive audit of the current provision of adult literacy education programs in Victoria (both accredited and non-accredited education programs). |
| Recommendation 2 | Identify and evaluate effective interventions in adult literacy education particularly those delivered in ACE settings. |
| Recommendation 3 | Address the skills shortage of qualified adult literacy educators and build the capacity of the workforce, including professionals and volunteers. |
| Recommendation 4 | Invest in non-accredited pathway and bridging programs such as ACE adult basic education programs, language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) programs and digital literacy programs. |
| Recommendation 5 | Optimise the ACE sector to play a much greater role in supporting adults and workplaces with their digital literacy skills and confidence; particularly disadvantaged adults with a disability, from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds or living in rural and regional locations. |
| Recommendation 6 | Resource the ACE sector to deliver workplace orientated digital skills gap training that meets the needs of modern workplaces |
| Recommendation 7 | Support access and affordability of internet services for low income and disadvantaged learners – removing cost as a prohibitive barrier |
| Recommendation 8 | Improve the capability and capacity of the pre-accredited VET sector by making a range of professional learning opportunities available to Learn Local providers. |
| Recommendation 9 | Fund high quality professional development designed by the sector for ACE educators that focusses on teaching and learning practice to improve outcomes for high needs cohorts. |
| Recommendation 10 | Optional and subsidised accredited training for eligible adult educators (for example, those located in designated priority areas) should also be considered. |
| Recommendation 11 | Fund 4 paid days of professional development for educators in ACE, that would make it equivalent to that of schoolteachers or some sort of equivalency |
| Recommendation 12 | Move to equal pay for Learn Local tutors in line with TAFE equivalent to ensure parity across sectors |
| Recommendation 13 | Mitigate increasing casualisation of the work force in the education sector by providing continuity of funding to providers so they can retain best practice tutors in ACE |

- Recommendation 14** Develop 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 15** Develop specific and complementary roles for ACE providers, the public TAFE system and for-profit providers.
- Recommendation 16** 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 17** Expand the Skills First Reconnect program for Learn Locals as a priority to support more learners that may experience a barrier to learning and transitioning to the workforce, particularly early school leavers.

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 2020, ALA celebrates its 60th anniversary.

Terms of reference

The focus of this review is on the development of a system that meets the needs of both industry and government, while supporting individual students to get the skills and education they need.

The ACE sector is key to achieving these outcomes and has much to offer in terms of building capacity and mitigating inequality, as part of Victoria's socio-economic recovery.

ACE in Victoria

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

The ACE sector in Victoria is the largest and oldest in Australia. In Victoria, the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board – a statutory authority under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 – funds ACE organisations (known as registered Learn Local providers) to deliver education and training programs that target people with limited prior access to education, including pre-accredited programs.

Pre-accredited programs are short modular courses that are primarily focussed on creating pathways for participants to further education and training or employment. Pre-accredited programs target:

- women seeking to re-enter the workforce or who have experienced or are experiencing family violence
- early school leavers, both mature and youth

- low skilled and vulnerable workers
- Indigenous people
- unemployed and underemployed people
- people from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- disengaged young people
- people with a disability.

Adult Learning Australia fully supports the Ministerial Statement: Future of Adult Community Education in Victoria 2020–25 and the ACFE Board’s Strategy Skills for Study, Work and Life 2020-25.

What are the education and training needs for jobs in Victoria over the next ten years?

What reforms are required to meet the skills and capability needs of industry and employers, government and the community over the next decade?

Adult literacy and numeracy

Victorians with low literacy, numeracy and digital skills are vulnerable to social isolation and unemployment as jobs disappear in the face of technological change, globalisation and COVID-19.

Effective planning and implementation of the COVID-19 recovery process is crucial for the state’s future. However, the recovery roadmap must recognise the economic and social value of higher levels of adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills (LLND); particularly for marginalised Australians.

All Victorians, regardless of their employment status, must be supported to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills in order to achieve productivity gains and ensure they can live healthy, autonomous and full lives. Adults need sufficient literacy to get job ready or to pursue further education and training. However, the OECD’s Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey, which measures key cognitive and workplace skills, found that around 44% of Australian adults lack the literacy skills required in everyday life.

PIAAC’s data identified that 1 in 7 Australians (14%) have very poor literacy skills and 1 in 3 (30%) have below-proficiency level literacy making them vulnerable to unemployment. Many more struggle with numeracy, with around 53% of the population at below proficiency levels. And while there has been much commentary on the scale of the problem, the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the urgency of urgently finding comprehensive solutions.

For many Victorians, the literacy they were taught in school is not enough to keep up with changes in the society we live in. For example, technological changes have affected workplaces and government services and place higher demands on an adult’s capacity to read, process and communicate information.

PIAAC data showed that:

- People aged 45+ have much lower literacy and numeracy than younger adults.
- Women performed poorly in numeracy relative to men.
- People outside the workforce had much poorer literacy and numeracy compared to those who were working or looking for work.
- Indigenous Australians; particularly in remote areas, have lower literacy levels than non-Indigenous Australians.

Educational experts agree that adults develop their literacy and numeracy skills for particular contexts and in order to get something done either in the workplace, the home or the community. But people with literacy problems can often be reluctant to seek help.

Successful adult literacy and numeracy interventions need to be practical, purposeful and designed with the individual’s needs in mind. Adult and community education (ACE) pre-accredited/non-formal literacy programs build literacy skills through authentic, learner-centred and relevant learning programs. The ACE learner-centred model offers engaging learning experiences that are designed to

change attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. The sector delivers strong outcomes for disadvantaged cohorts by responding to individual needs and preferences in a friendly, flexible and supportive environment.

ACE organisations also play a significant role in vocational educational training (VET) for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds or for people facing multiple barriers to learning. National NCVET (2019) data indicates that community providers have greater success rates for graduates attaining employment status after training than all other providers. We know under COVID19, that many lower skilled workers will lose their jobs and will need to learn new skills and knowledge to re-enter the workforce. The need for LLND, will become more important. and as a result, the role of ACE organisations will become even more critical. ACE offers the best chance for people to develop employability skills in tandem with foundation skills, as well as place- based and contextualised education and training to support ongoing employability.

Recommendations

- Conduct a comprehensive audit of the current provision of adult literacy education programs in Victoria (both accredited and non-accredited education programs).
- Identify and evaluate effective interventions in adult literacy education particularly those delivered in ACE settings.
- Address the skills shortage of qualified adult literacy educators and build the capacity of the workforce, including professionals and volunteers.
- Invest in non-accredited pathway and bridging programs such as ACE adult basic education programs, language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) programs and digital literacy programs.

Digital skills

The Committee for the Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) has reported that 40% of current jobs have a high probability of being replaced by automation in 10 to 15 years (CEDA, 2015). Similarly, PwC calculated that 5.1 million jobs, or 44%, were at risk of digital disruption and that the pace of technological change is a concern for growth according to Australian CEOs (PwC, 2015). While some occupations may cease to exist – another impact of technology on the workplace relates to the reshaping of tasks and activities that people perform within their roles (BCA, 2017; AlphaBeta 2015; OECD, 2016; FYA, 2017).

AlphaBeta (2015) reported on the uptake of automation and technology by Australia’s business sector and the likely impact this will have on productivity and employment. Their findings indicate that most jobs will change rather than disappear as a result of technology. Further, they reported that in the past 15 years Australian workers have reduced the amount of time they spend on ‘physical and routine’ tasks by around two hours.

As the use of technology and automation becomes more pervasive in workplaces in Victoria, there has also been a shift in the type of tasks that workers perform within their existing roles. According to AlphaBeta (2015, p. 7) the change isn’t coming from the loss of physical and routine jobs – it is coming from “workers switching to different tasks within the same jobs, as machines take over an increasing load of the repetitive routine work”.

Workplace automation does not selectively affect some workers – all workers are impacted. As technology displaces some traditional job skills, new work demands emerge (Dundon & Howcroft 2018). And there has been extensive growth in the proportion of jobs requiring digital literacy skills.

Ai Group (2018) reports that ‘increasing use of digital technologies at work is raising the demand for new skills’ and workers across occupations need generic digital skills in order to effectively use new technology in their daily work. For example, retail workers spending less time at the register and more time helping customers; bank employees spending less time counting banknotes and more time giving financial advice; teachers spending less time recording test scores and more time assisting students; factory workers spending less time on the assembly line and more time optimising production and training other workers (Alphabeta, 2015).

The World Economic Forum (WEF) has identified that ‘across nearly all industries, the impact of technological and other changes is shortening the shelf-life of employees’ existing skill sets’ (WEF, 2016, p. 3). And even if we accept that many jobs will be redefined rather than lost – a radical redefinition of a role may result in job losses anyway, as some workers will not have the new skillsets required for the role. 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 building digital literacy skills is required that caters for the needs of the workplace while supporting low skilled and entry-level staff to enter or remain in the workforce.

In Victoria, ACE organisations vary in size and in terms of the types of education programs they offer. Most offer personal interest learning programs and non-accredited learning programs. A smaller number of ACE organisations are registered training organisations and provide accredited training, offering a combination of accredited and non-accredited learning programs. Figure 1 below shows how many ACE providers in Victoria are registered training organisations.

Current = 38%
Non-current = 18%
Cancelled = 8% (voluntarily)
Never registered = 36%

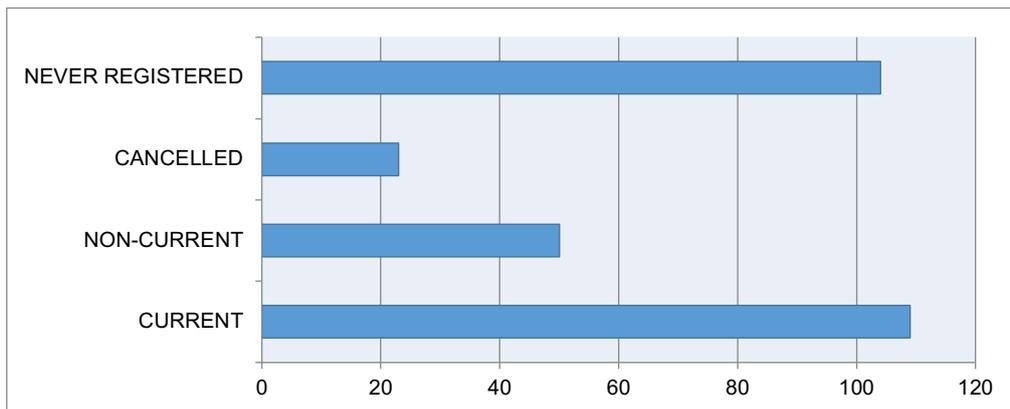


Figure 1: RTO status of ACE providers in Victoria. (Source: training.gov.au – 2018)

According to an Australian Bureau of Statistic (ABS) framework that measures remoteness by postcode, ACE providers delivering Learn Local programs are largely concentrated in the Melbourne area. However, 102 (36%) providers are located in rural, regional and remote areas across Victoria (refer below). In some communities, the ACE sector represents the only ‘on-the-ground’ providers of post-compulsory education and is therefore critically important in terms of addressing access and equity beyond urban centres. (ALA, 2018)

Melbourne area = 64%
Inner regional = 26%
Outer regional = 9%
Remote = 1%

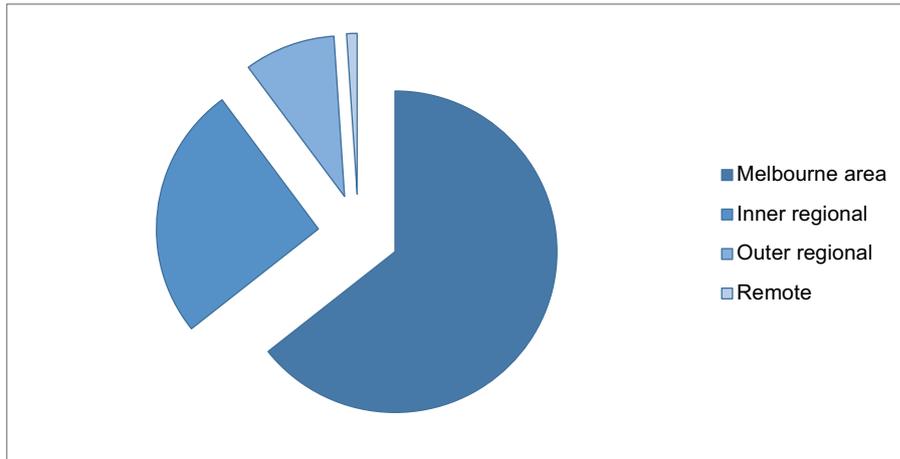


Figure 2: ACE providers by ABS remoteness indicators.

Recommendations:

- Optimise the ACE sector to play a much greater role in supporting adults and workplaces with their digital literacy skills and confidence; particularly disadvantaged adults with a disability, from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds or living in rural and regional locations.
- Resource the ACE sector to deliver workplace orientated digital skills gap training that meets the needs of modern workplaces
- Support access and affordability of internet services for low income and disadvantaged learners – removing cost as a prohibitive barrier
- Improve the capability and capacity of the pre-accredited VET sector by making a range of professional learning opportunities available to Learn Local providers.

What reforms are required to ensure relevant, high quality teaching and VET courses that produce job-ready graduates at all stages of their career?

In our submission to the Future Opportunities for Adult Learners in Victoria, we identified that countries with the highest levels of adult literacy and numeracy require higher professional skills or qualifications for educators delivering formal adult and vocational education qualifications (ALA & NHVic, 2019).

LLND educators in ACE settings regardless of their level of expertise have strongly expressed the need for professional development and exchange that improves their practice. Paring the least experienced or trained person with someone with the lowest level of literacy is problematic. Ongoing, high quality, contextualised and structured professional development is needed to build the skills and knowledge of adult educators in literacy and numeracy teaching and learning, andragogic principles, learner engagement and retention; workplace literacy and numeracy and learning and assessment design, etc.

Recommendations:

- Fund high quality professional development designed by the sector for ACE educators that focusses on teaching and learning practice to improve outcomes for high needs cohorts.
- Optional and subsidised accredited training for eligible adult educators (for example, those located in designated priority areas) should also be considered.
- Fund 4 paid days of professional development for educators in ACE, that would make it equivalent to that of schoolteachers or some sort of equivalency
- Move to equal pay for Learn Local tutors in line with TAFE equivalent to ensure parity across sectors
- Mitigate increasing casualisation of the work force in the education sector by providing continuity of funding to providers so they can retain best practice tutors in ACE

What reforms are required to improve access to Higher Education and VET for students that are entering the workforce, and those seeking to reskill or upskill later in life, no matter their background?

The role of the ACE sector is the key to Victoria's workforce development. VET and Higher Education are demand-driven systems. There is a need to stimulate demand amongst disengaged cohorts; including those with negative experiences of learning as well those who just don't see the value of participating in post school education for a range of reasons. The ACE sector's combinations of non-formal and formal learning, and its emphasis on the development of social and human capital makes the sector key to stimulating demand in areas and with groups where workplace participation is low.

The sector's integration with other civil society functions and its use of volunteers makes it a cost-effective option in a period when costs of participation in education are increasing. Importantly, ACE can operate in thin markets, such as small remote towns, which is an important feature as the VET system becomes more marketised.

What reforms are required to improve pathways, and connections, between TAFE and other VET providers, adult and community education providers, universities and other non-university higher education providers, school and employers, so students can easily understand and navigate the post-secondary system and update their skills throughout their careers?

According to a Deloitte's report (2017) into Victoria's ACE funded pre-accredited training delivered through the Learn Local network, participants were 'almost exclusively' learners in ACE's priority cohorts:

- 64% female
- 52% early school leavers
- 46% unemployed or underemployed
- 42% CALD learners

The report also found that ACE providers achieved good outcomes for these cohorts with:

- 57% of pre-accredited learners engaging in further education
- 29% transitioning into an accredited program
- a high proportion (23%) attaining an accredited qualification, which is 'equivalent to a 79% attainment rate for those that transition (noting that they may enrol in multiple accredited qualifications before completing a qualification)' (Deloitte, 2017).

The Deloitte's report (2017) identified the potential of 'further leveraging the strengths of pre-accredited training in re-engaging individuals who are not in education and work and preparing them for further training (in the accredited space)' and/or equipping them with the skills they need for the changing nature of work.

The ACE Board has emphasised the importance of partnerships to the Learn Local sector. Learn Local organisations have been encouraged to innovate by offering more services that increase opportunities for Victorians to access personalised and lifelong education opportunities; especially in regional and rural areas where other education options may be less readily available (ACFE Board, 2015).

ACE providers can work with the government to identify solutions and rapid responses to the current environment. This includes partnering with TAFE and linking with small business and industry operators and their staff in our communities who may need opportunities to upskill or build their confidence in learning. ACE can effectively build these relationships into long term opportunities for local tailor-made training.

Recommendations

- Develop 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.
- Develop specific and complementary roles for ACE providers, the public TAFE system and for-profit providers.
- 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.
- Expand the Skills First Reconnect program for Learn Locals as a priority to support more learners that may experience a barrier to learning and transitioning to the workforce, particularly early school leavers

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