



MINISTERIAL DECLARATION ON ADULT COMMUNITY EDUCATION



MINISTERIAL COUNCIL
FOR VOCATIONAL AND
TECHNICAL EDUCATION





© Ministerial Council for Vocational
and Technical Education
December 2008

ISBN 978-0-642-77811-6

Published by the Department of Education,
Employment and Workplace Relations
GPO Box 9880, Canberra, ACT 2601
<http://www.deewr.gov.au>

on behalf of the Ministerial Council for
Vocational and Technical Education
GPO Box 69, Brisbane, QLD 4001

Purpose

In July 2002, State, Territory and Australian Government Ministers, with responsibility for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, endorsed a Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education (ACE). This statement recognised the importance of ACE in providing pathways to further education and training for 'second chance' learners.

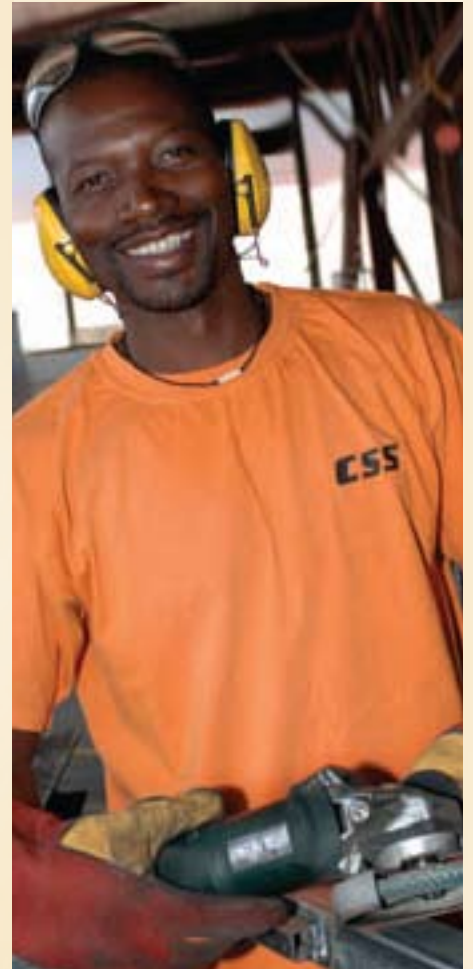
The commitments and values expressed in the 2002 Ministerial Declaration, particularly concerning the value of ACE in developing social capital, building community capacity, encouraging social participation and enhancing social cohesion, are reaffirmed by this statement. The new Declaration on Adult Community Education extends 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. It also identifies ACE as a key player in the response to the Australian Government *Social Inclusion* policy agenda.

The ACE sector in Australia is characterised by dynamism, diversity and responsiveness. Despite widely differing approaches to the definition and implementation of ACE, the responsible Ministers share a common appreciation of the value of ACE, and seek to work together to optimise the existing strengths of the sector to make a greater contribution towards achieving objectives of the COAG agenda and to address potential barriers facing the sector in this regard. In signing this Declaration, Ministers provide a national policy framework which supports a collaborative approach to ACE, particularly in relation to its role in the provision of vocationally focused education and training and fostering the development of skills required for individuals to participate fully in their communities and the economy. In doing so, Ministers recognise the unique value of non-accredited education and training which, for many struggling to engage, builds self-esteem and confidence and provides a viable pathway to move into further education and training or employment.

This Declaration acknowledges adult community education as a significant contributor to education and training provision and demonstrates the commitment of Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers to work collaboratively to maximise positive outcomes from this sector in Australia.

Principles

In implementing the goals and strategies set out in the Declaration, Ministers have agreed to adhere to the following principles:



one

A stewardship role is adopted at all levels, including governments working together and providing leadership to optimise the capacity of ACE through a national approach, with jurisdictions providing policy settings and developing practical strategies that will allow ACE to flourish.

two

Partnerships and auspicing arrangements are supported and promoted at all levels, particularly between accredited and non-accredited ACE programs and providers, to maximise vocational outcomes for students in ACE.



three

Collaboration is encouraged between providers as community stakeholders while acknowledging that providers also compete freely in the education and training market.

four

Increased provision of vocationally focussed programs by ACE is supported while its community and citizenship capacity building agenda continues.

Context

The workforce of Australia is ageing and international competition and new technologies are changing the face of Australian industries. As a result, Australian adults need to continually update their skills and knowledge to ensure these remain relevant to the changing needs of the workplace. This is particularly the case for older workers and for people from socially and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

Skills and knowledge are essential for individuals to succeed in the modern era. In the context of demographic and technological change and globalisation, an educated and skilled population also represents one of the strongest foundations for ensuring a strong and healthy economy and a socially inclusive society. Individuals who lack foundation skills, however, face serious limitations in their capacity to enter and survive in the modern workplace, let alone progress beyond low-skilled and low-paid employment.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has therefore agreed to substantial reform in the areas of skills and workforce development aimed at creating circumstances in which:

- all working aged Australians have the opportunity to develop the skills and qualifications needed, including through a responsive training system, to enable them to be effective participants in and contributors to the modern labour market;
- individuals are assisted to overcome barriers to education, training and employment, and are motivated to acquire and utilise new skills; and
- Australian industry and businesses develop, harness and utilise the skills and abilities of the workforce.

The outcomes to be achieved through this reform include:

- the working age population have gaps in foundation skills levels reduced to enable effective educational, labour market and social participation;
- the working age population has the depth and breadth of skills and capabilities required for the 21st century labour market;
- the supply of skills provided by the national training system responds to meet changing labour market demand; and
- skills are used effectively to increase labour market efficiency, productivity, innovation, and ensure increased utilisation of human capital.

By equipping individuals with the skills needed to participate effectively in the modern labour market, the COAG skilling and workforce agenda will play an important role in supporting the Australian Government policy to address social exclusion and ensure all Australians have the opportunity to play a full role in Australian life, in economic, social, psychological and political terms.

Many adults, however, have low qualifications and skills and are not participating in learning activities. In 2005, only about 60% of the working age population had a formal post-school qualification which means four million unqualified adult workers are in danger of being left behind as skills requirements increase¹. People who have only completed school level education have a much higher chance of being unemployed than people with post-school qualifications. In 2006, for example, the unemployment rate for people with a Bachelor degree or higher was 2.2%. This was less than half the unemployment rate for people whose highest level of education was Year 12 (4.7%) and between two and three times lower than people who had only completed Year 11 or below (5.6%)².



Furthermore, a 2007 international adult literacy survey found 48.7 per cent of working age Australian adults had literacy and numeracy levels too low to cope with the everyday demands of life and work in a complex and technologically advanced society. This survey also confirmed that people with low levels of literacy and numeracy are less likely to participate in job-related education and training³.

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.

Furthermore, within ACE, community-based education and training providers have responded to the rising demand for vocationally orientated training, and are already making a significant contribution to the provision of accredited vocational education and training (VET). In 2005, for example, community education and training providers provided accredited VET to 256,101 students, representing 15.6% of all VET students⁴.

Community education and training providers not only deliver generic outcomes against the objectives of the national training system, but they add value to vocational training through their strongly local, market-orientated, learner centred and flexible approaches to delivery⁵. This is demonstrated, for example, by their capacity to tailor education and training provision to meet the specific needs of local business and industry.

There is a clear connection between the COAG commitment to lifting the nation's productivity through skilling and workforce development and the capacity of the ACE sector both to reach segments of the adult population who do not currently use the formal training system and to increase provision of accredited VET. This connection provides an opportunity to work collaboratively to maximise these positive outcomes, and ultimately, strengthen access to, and choice in, training opportunities for all Australian adults, business and industry.

This Declaration provides a plan of action for a collaborative approach to ACE to support higher levels of delivery of both VET and non-accredited training with vocational intent and increasing vocational choices and employment opportunities, especially for people from socially excluded or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

¹ Shah, C., and Burke, G. (2006). *The Future Labour Market and Qualifications in Australia*. Report for the COAG Training Reform Taskforce.

² Linacre, S. (2007). *Australian Social Trends*, 2007. Australian Bureau of Statistics Catalogue No. 4102.0

³ ABS. (2007). *Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey: Summary Results Australia 2006*. ABS Cat 4228.0.

⁴ NCVER unpublished data cited in Bardon, B. (2006). *Community Education and National Reform Discussion Paper*. page. 5.

⁵ Sanders cited in Choy et al (2006) page. 35.

Goals

Ministers are committed to implementing the following goals:



one

Work together to strategically position ACE to deliver vocationally focused courses by optimising the contribution of community education and training providers towards increasing vocational education and training and employment outcomes.

two

Optimise the capacity of community education and training providers to deliver vocationally focused courses, leading to increased workforce participation and building personal, social and economic capital.



three

Extend the participation of individuals in vocationally focused courses in ACE, which will enable individuals to participate in the labour market and lead active and productive lives.

four

Demonstrate the quality of ACE outcomes in developing human and social capital.

Strategies

Each goal is supported by a suite of strategies for jurisdictions to consider, individually or collaboratively, taking account of local circumstances.

GOAL one

Work together to strategically position ACE to deliver vocationally focused courses by optimising the contribution of community education and training providers towards increasing vocational education and training and employment outcomes.

STRATEGIES

- Promote the significant role played by the ACE sector in developing pathways to further training and workforce participation.
- Facilitate auspicing and partnership arrangements which increase access by individuals to vocationally focused training.

GOAL two

Optimise the capacity of community education and training providers to deliver vocationally focussed courses, leading to increased workforce participation and building personal, social and economic capital.

STRATEGIES

- Review policy, regulatory and funding frameworks in all jurisdictions that impact on community education and training providers to ensure that the policy framework within which they are operating is consistent with the Ministers' agreed principles, recognises the already substantial contribution to the national education and training effort by the ACE sector and optimises outcomes.
- Examine opportunities to optimise capacity and promote examples of best practice among ACE providers.
- Promote and share resources for ACE providers to maximise the vocational intent of non-accredited education and training.
- Examine improved flexible learning options, for example, e-learning opportunities.



GOAL three

Extend the participation of individuals in vocationally focussed courses in ACE, which will enable individuals to participate in the labour market and lead active and productive lives.

STRATEGIES

- Develop an action plan to increase participation in ACE by socially excluded groups.
- Promote the development of a culture of continuous learning and opportunities available within ACE.
- Examine opportunities to strengthen the delivery of career development and employment services, recognition of prior learning, and skills assessment services within the ACE sector.

GOAL four

Demonstrate the quality of ACE in developing vocational skills and human and social capital.

STRATEGIES

- Develop a framework to establish a stronger evidence base for the contribution of the ACE sector to the national education and training effort.
- Leverage existing research effort to further explore key issues impacting on policy and practice, for example, addressing the barriers to participation in learning and work for socially excluded groups and issues relevant to service delivery for community education and training provider.

