

# Improving ACE VET information

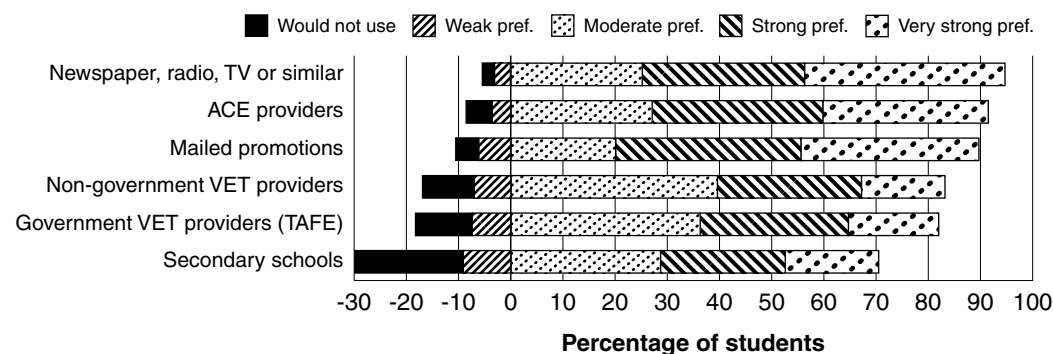
## Preferred information sources and formats

Having determined how ACE vocational course information actually reached its intended audience, this study also sought to determine how people thought the information should be provided. Students, providers and industry representatives were asked through questionnaire or interview to indicate their preferred sources and formats for such information.

### Student preferences

When students were asked to rate their preferences for various sources of information about ACE VET, their most common responses were print or electronic media, followed by direct receipt from ACE providers and mailed promotions. Detailed results, ranked in overall order of preference are given in figure 15.

**Figure 15: Sources of ACE vocational information preferred by students**



Interestingly, 20% of respondents indicated they *Would not use* secondary schools as an information source whereas only 2% to 11% of respondents said the same thing of the other sources. The most likely reason for this is that the ages and backgrounds of ACE students are such that they have little contact with secondary schools.

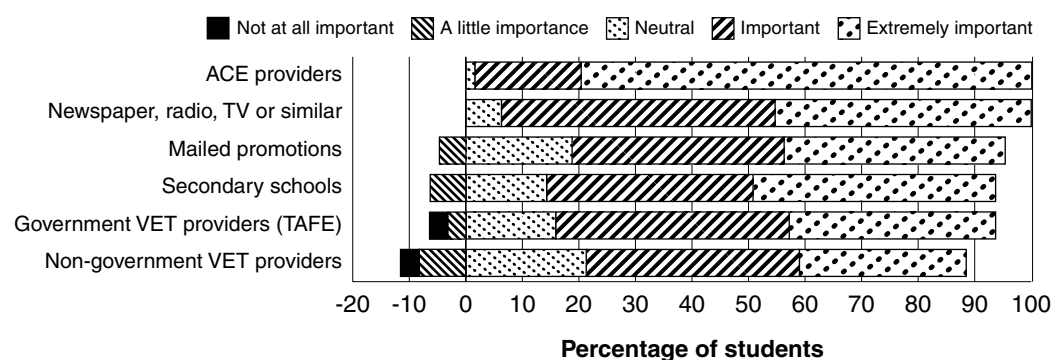
### Provider preferences

Providers also were asked to rate the importance of various organisations and other avenues as sources of information about ACE VET. Like the students, they gave their strongest ratings to print or electronic media, direct receipt from ACE providers and mailed promotions. Figure 16 depicts the pattern of results.

Comparing the provider rankings with those of the students, there was one notable difference: secondary schools were seen as a more important source of ACE vocational information by providers than by students. As noted above, most of the students surveyed were well out of secondary school by the time they were in ACE vocational courses and this probably affected their preference. However, it seems that providers see a need to inform secondary school students of the ACE VET option, even though few presently move straight from school to ACE. With the introduction of VET-in-Schools programs, there is likely to be

heightened school student interest in vocational learning, so ACE would be wise to consider raising awareness in the secondary sector of what ACE can offer—either by working collaboratively with schools or through other means.

**Figure 16: Provider ratings of importance of information sources**



Providers were also asked to nominate avenues, other than those listed in the question, through which ACE vocational course information might be disseminated. The five most noteworthy suggestions were:

- ❖ relevant ACE administrative/co-ordinating bodies (for example, BACE in NSW, Adult and Community Education Unit in SA)
- ❖ the Internet, which has the potential to be reached by increasing numbers of people in the community, including employees, employers and industry representatives
- ❖ district councils, which are often central sources of information to local communities
- ❖ industry bodies (such as ITABs and employer organisations)
- ❖ Centrelink, which, because of its role, could be in a position to pass on ACE vocational course information to individuals needing to recommence vocational study or prepare themselves for entry to the workforce, particularly those lacking the confidence and self-esteem needed to enter into mainstream study

## Industry body preferences

If ACE wishes to promote its vocational provision to industry for the benefit of industry and its employees, it should look closely at how it might direct vocational program information to industry bodies. The following is a summary of comments from industry representatives regarding preferred information channels and information content.

When asked to indicate the format in which they would prefer to receive ACE vocational information most industry respondents mentioned use of electronic media either in the form of email, or to a lesser extent websites. Electronic media was popular because information could be distributed to interested parties at the touch of a button, it could be put on a website for other people to access, and it is relatively cheap and easy to keep up to date.

The second most popular choice was paper-based information, including leaflets and other ACE publications, advertisements and inserts in the press, mailed information, and faxed information. However, one respondent noted that paper-based publications were best suited for basic information, and that where detailed information was required, electronic media was more useful.

A common theme of many responses was that the information be presented in a consolidated form; that is, covering all ACE providers, all courses and all locations (an electronically based document might be particularly appropriate). The consolidated approach was preferred because industry representatives did not want to be inundated with numerous documents

they would not have time to read. In the ACE system as it presently exists, consolidation on a State rather than national basis would seem to be the most logical approach.

Some respondents asked that communication should be supplied regularly, such as each semester or year, supplemented by *ad hoc* communications for specific purposes.

A number of industry respondents favoured a 'direct' approach, meaning person-to-person interaction. This could include individual personal contact in which an ACE representative met with someone from the organisation concerned, or information sessions in which a group of ACE representatives met with industry representatives. The direct approach was seen as a good way of gaining the attention of industry representatives and generally acquainting them with the philosophy of ACE and its overall range of vocational learning. It was also suggested that a 'face-to-face' approach would be particularly effective for contact with small businesses where it is necessary to deal directly with the employer and employees. Direct contact was also seen to have better potential for promoting a favourable image and establishing a working relationship.

The use of case studies was also mentioned by one respondent. This approach could be useful in that it could present examples of the ways ACE could assist employees and employers with a particular enterprise or industry.

An SA respondent suggested contact be made with business enterprise centres which have a strong network in the business community for provision of advice on learning programs and other assistance.

## **Improving promotion of ACE and its vocational courses**

Participants in this study offered a wide range of ideas on how ACE could improve promotion of its courses and its image as a vocational provider. The following is an extended compilation of strategies developed from their ideas. They have been grouped under four headings:

- ❖ Improving information and information access
- ❖ Improving promotion of ACE as an entity
- ❖ Improving ACE staff knowledge of ACE VET and linkages with mainstream VET
- ❖ Improving mainstream VET staff knowledge of ACE VET and credit transfer

### **Improving information and information access**

As illustrated in the first part of this section, questionnaire respondents and interviewees identified many ways in which they believed ACE vocational information provision needed to be improved. The following are some examples.

#### **Consolidated regular communications to industry bodies**

Regular communications on ACE VET to industry bodies such as employer associations, ITABs and unions were suggested. A consolidated format was preferred because industry commentators indicated they would be unlikely to read large numbers of communications from individual ACE providers. Annual or half yearly communication was commonly suggested.

#### **Use of electronic media**

There were numerous suggestions advocating the use of electronic media as a means of communicating information about ACE VET to the general public, to the educational sector and to industry. Internet websites could be developed for the ACE sector on a national, State, and individual provider basis. Whereas websites are passive, in the sense that they only provide information on demand, information could also be actively disseminated by email

where appropriate. As has been recommended elsewhere for other aspects of vocational provision, ACE should seek professional guidance in development of websites and other electronic means of information dissemination.

### Use of case studies

It was suggested that appropriate case studies be used in promotional materials as examples of the way in which ACE, through collaboration with industry bodies, enterprises and mainstream VET, can contribute to vocational training.

### Promotion of ACE VET to non-vocational students

For many people, initial knowledge of ACE VET comes through personal experience, either as a student in non-vocational courses, or through contact with someone who has been an ACE student. If ACE wishes to increase awareness of its vocational provision it should pursue opportunities to publicise its vocational courses through students undertaking general interest and other non-vocational courses. Many of these students may already be involved in industry either in an official capacity or as an employee, others may have family or friends who could benefit from ACE vocational study.

### Matching communication to nature of the enterprise

If ACE wishes to increase industry awareness of its vocational provision, it should target two types of business enterprises with two levels of communication. For the (generally) smaller enterprises, contact needs to be aimed directly at employers and employees who may have very little knowledge of training matters and awareness of ACE and who are unlikely to be familiar with training concepts and educational terminology. For larger enterprises the communication is likely to be with a designated human resources or personnel manager who often has training experience and qualifications and because of this, may even know something of ACE.

The image projected by an ACE organisation can also have an effect on its acceptance by industry. In dealing with small enterprises, for example, one provider found it a particularly successful strategy to portray their organisation as being similar to a small business, saying: 'Rather than appear to small businesses as a large organisation, we actually say "Listen, we are small business too, we know what your problems are"'.

### Participation in special initiatives and industry programs

Awareness of ACE VET can also be boosted significantly by participation in special initiatives and industry programs. In regional areas, for example, some ACE providers have become involved in FarmBis and Landcare programs. ACE should not overlook these opportunities for introducing ACE vocational training to new markets and generally promoting the image of ACE.

### Promotion of pathways, linkages and credit transfer

Responses from industry representatives suggested that industry generally has a poor understanding of the concepts of ACE-mainstream VET pathways, linkages and credit transfer and knows little about the options that exist. Because pathways, linkages and credit transfer can be so important to ACE vocational students, ACE providers should ensure these aspects are explained and promoted as part of ACE VET.

### Promotion to unions

Unions were said to be more concerned with training related to industrial matters such as OH&S and leadership than to the technical aspects of the work an employee performs. In promoting vocational provision to unions, therefore, ACE should draw attention to programs

focussing on leadership, communication, report-writing, negotiation skills, OH&S and other skills relevant to union interests.

### Promotion to re-deployed and redundant employees

People who, because of redeployment or redundancy, need further training (or even retraining for a different occupation) are often uncomfortable about returning to 'formal' study with mainstream VET. Many have not studied for some years and are afraid of being found unable to cope. ACE can offer these people an opportunity to re-enter vocational study in a friendly, supportive and relatively informal environment. When marketing vocational provision to the community and to the workforce, and particularly to groups likely to contain high proportions of redeployed and redundant individuals, ACE should ensure these characteristics are prominently featured.

### Improving promotion of ACE as an entity

Apart from a need to improve the content and quality of information about ACE vocational courses, many participants in this study also saw a need to improve and consolidate the image ACE presents as a provider of vocational learning. The following are some of the strategies suggested to develop and promote the image of ACE as a serious and capable vocational provider and highlight advantages and benefits of ACE VET.

### Need for ACE to be placed higher on political agendas

For ACE VET to be better recognised and accepted by industry and the general community it is important that it receive, and be seen to receive, endorsement by government. Comments received from interviewees and respondents suggest that ACE regional, State and national ACE bodies could help to achieve this through concerted lobbying for recognition (and resources).

*We need to get ACE on the federal political agenda. Until federal politicians realise what ACE is and how many people access ACE centres throughout the country, and what they achieve through ACE, it is very difficult to bring about any change.* (ACE principal, NSW)

However, to maximise the effectiveness of such a strategy it is important that the image projected by ACE through these bodies be one which is consistent and cohesive. With this in mind, ACE councils and other ACE bodies should look closely across the spectrum of ACE organisations at the way ACE is portrayed.

### Branding

In today's world, brand names, acronyms and logos are used to identify products, organisations and services. If they are well publicised and are identified with a particular product, body or service, they work well. In the field of vocational education, for example, most people in Australia know what TAFE signifies, even if they do not know what the acronym stands for. But if the significance of an acronym or logo is not publicised, its impact and value are lost (it was noted, incidentally, that in SA there was no reference to Adult and Community Education under the 'ACE' acronym in the telephone directory).

*People don't know we are ACE, most just know us as an evening college. The term ACE is little used by students, it's mainly used by the bureaucracy ... There are probably more people calling us TAFE than ACE.* (ACE principal, NSW)

Of course, a drawback of the ACE acronym is that it is commonly used in connection with a wide range of products and services, so if it were to be used to identify a particular type of vocational learning it would need to be strongly marketed.

A number of interviewees and questionnaire respondents advocated use of the title 'Adult and Community Education' and the ACE acronym in marketing—what some refer to as 'branding'.

*It would help to promote better awareness of ACE if all ACE providers began the name of their organisation with 'ACE', such as ACE SouthEast. This would be a branding exercise to promote a more uniform image.* (ACE principal, NSW)

*[As long as] we don't have ACE in our [organisation] name or have it stamped on our information material, awareness of us as ACE is going to take a long time to come. I think a title like:*

***SouthEast Suburbs College\****

*of Adult and Community Education*

*would be good. In it the local nature of the organisation and the fact that it is a college is highlighted in the upper part of the title, and the fact that it is an ACE organisation is indicated below.* (ACE principal, NSW)

(\*Name changed to preserve anonymity.)

## An ACE figurehead

In the context of promoting ACE VET, some commentators supported a suggestion that the services of a high-profile person be obtained to act as an ACE figurehead for promotional purposes on television, on radio, and in the print media. This could be undertaken on either a national or State basis by the relevant ACE bodies. A national or State promotion would seem preferable, since few individual providers would have the resources to effectively put the idea into practice and also because the rights to use the 'figurehead' would be owned by ACE and would therefore be a resource available to all ACE providers.

The person selected to act as a figurehead would need to be chosen carefully so as to appeal both to the vocational and non-vocational elements of the educational market catered for by ACE.

## Need for professional assistance in ACE promotion

One of the most obvious outcomes of this study was the significant variation in perceptions of what ACE was, and more specifically, what ACE VET was. Quite clearly, ACE has an 'image' problem. Many people are either unsure what ACE does or have misconceptions about it. Part of this results from the large variations in the nature of ACE providers and the learning they provide. What is needed is a consistent style of promotion which explains the various facets of ACE and presents the options available to learners. To achieve this there may need to be some revision of ACE promotional strategies.

To varying extents, all providers undertake their own promotion, producing brochures, conducting letter drops and visiting prospective organisations. Some providers essentially do it on their own, others are assisted by their representative ACE bodies. If ACE is to promote a more consistent image, there could be benefit in providers sharing their knowledge and experience in this context and being given access to professional training and advice on techniques of promotion. However, more may need to be done if an enhanced understanding of ACE and promotion of ACE learning is to be achieved on a Statewide or national basis.

Comments from various participants in this project suggested that if the ACE 'brand name' is to be promoted with maximum effectiveness it should be done professionally. The inference made from these comments was that, from an ACE 'image' perspective, a uniform professional promotion would be more effective on a Statewide or national basis than a conglomeration of promotions by individual providers. This is not to say that individual providers should not undertake their own promotional activities locally, but rather, that the image of ACE VET, and understanding of it, would best be served by a combination of broad-

based professional promotion of ACE vocational services coupled with local promotions by ACE providers, preferably with access to professional advice and assistance.

*I think ACE in NSW is poorly structured to market the products it offers. If you were to let ACE loose in NSW with a proper marketing effort, ACE would become a major player within VET in three years. I think ACE has got a big future if it can only develop its identity.*

(ITAB executive representative, NSW)

*We've put quite a bit of money into a PR or a 'branding' project in metropolitan regions. One of our findings from that was that providers don't understand the process—they don't understand how PR and branding actually works, they don't understand the techniques that are used. So if they don't see their college name up in lights, they don't see that it's got any value. There is an education issue there for us.*

(ACE administration representative, NSW)

## Promotion of ACE as a vocational provider

Even if ACE is well known as an educational provider in the community it may still not be associated with vocational education. Promotion of ACE in relation to vocational courses therefore should emphasise the vocational nature of ACE course provision and, where applicable, the fact that the ACE provider is a registered training organisation.

*More needs to be done to promote ACE vocational provision to the community. There is still a perception that ACE is yoga, ballroom dancing and calligraphy.*

(WEA executive representative, NSW)

*... perhaps ACE providers should mention in their brochures that they are RTOs and that they are part of the VET system.*

(ACE association representative, NSW)

*Whilst it is good that ACE is seen as a friendly, informal organisation, the down-side is that ACE still has to battle the image of a hobby course and evening course provider. ACE does not have a generic Australia-wide name like 'TAFE'. Instead the name [and image of ACE] varies across States. Some ACE organisations are finding that even a name change, such as dropping 'community' out of the title or using the [title] 'business training section' results in them accessing a different market—because people don't want to go to a community college. However, in other contexts, the word community is very valuable so it should not be lost.*

(ACE association representative, NSW)

## Central resources and responsibility in ACE promotion

Providers often commented that they alone did not have the resources to properly conduct promotion of vocational training. What was often suggested was some form of centralised general promotion that local providers could tap into or supplement.

*In NSW at this stage every individual ACE college does its own promotion and marketing. It's a very expensive exercise—ours is \$100 000 a year, for example. The obvious thing is that the stuff that is designed to generally promote the image of ACE should not be done separately, while the individual colleges, with their knowledge of how to access their local populations, should be left to handle the local promotion. The general ACE image [promotion] should be done centrally because colleges don't have the time or the expertise to handle it—a lot of what is done [by colleges] is well intentioned amateurism.*

*... In the local paper, we can afford to put in a little advertisement. Right next to ours is almost a full page TAFE one. That's where the difference in resources shows. And they are advertising the same types of programs, side by side, one to one.*

(ACE principal, NSW)

*The BACE published an insert in the Sydney Morning Herald which listed all courses of all ACE colleges. The response was great, but it has not been done as a regular thing. Our (ACE) sector should do this regularly, say four times a year. Our local profile is very good as a result of our college's own efforts, but individual colleges can only do so much. ACE needs a Statewide or even Australia-wide identity. Our co-ordinating bodies should look at this.*

(ACE principal, NSW)

## Increased profile with local small business

Many people believe ACE makes a valuable contribution to the community by providing middle-level vocational education to local small businesses. The report *ACE and small business in New South Wales* (Kinnaird & Davis 1998) which looked at the interaction between ACE and small business indicates that in NSW, at least, quite a lot had already been accomplished in this area.

In the current study, providers were asked if ACE should pursue a goal of raising its profile with small business at the local level with a view to expanding this area of VET. A large majority (94%) indicated that it should. However, a number of respondents indicated that cost was an inhibiting factor—as much as they would like to pursue it, they could not afford to.

## Promotional assistance from industry

To promote its vocational learning provision effectively, ACE should consider seeking the assistance of industry groups or bodies who may be able to help in various ways; for example, by advising on the types of vocational education required, and therefore which should be promoted; by providing endorsement of the learning programs offered; and by assisting in the distribution of ACE vocational information. When providers and industry representatives were asked to suggest particular industry groups and bodies that should be approached for assistance, they favoured the following.

### ITABs

As the educational advisors to industry, ITABs were, not surprisingly, commonly suggested by interviewees as an important contact for ACE providers wishing to promote ACE VET to industry. ITABs could be expected to provide valuable advice concerning vocational learning required by industry as well as assisting in its promotion. One suggestion of interest, which came from an ITAB representative, was that ITABs might act as training brokers.

*The nature of the industry is very important. In a [manufacturing] industry as established and regulated as ours, being an area that is fairly heavily unionised with fairly set training patterns, the first port of call should be some sort of discussion with the ITABs, to see where ACE fits in. In our industry, most [learning] forms credit units towards wage increases and classification changes. If they are not recognised by the national competency system they don't get a look in. So if ACE is going to promote these sorts of programs it is going to have to first talk to the ITABs. Then it can next go to the unions and employer organisations.*

(Union representative, NSW)

*If ACE had something useful to offer, the ITAB would be happy to assist by distributing information through its networks. We have a website and I'm happy to put up anything useful on it.*

(ITAB executive representative, NSW)

One ITAB representative pointed out that because ITABs had limited resources they could not be expected to interpret and re-organise information supplied by ACE in order to disseminate it to industry. The inference was that, unless ACE provided information which accorded with training policies and was in a format that was readily useable, ITABs would not be likely to do much with it.

### Employer associations

Employer associations (such as Australian Business organisations, and Chambers of Commerce) were often cited as bodies which might be of assistance in promoting ACE VET to industry. Employers generally perceive vocational education as a TAFE role, so the assistance of these associations could be valuable in alerting employers to the existence of ACE, its expanded focus, the vocational learning available and the ability of ACE to provide flexible, needs-based training.

*Essentially all RTOs ... talk to us about [our association] promoting their services while we are out in the field ... Under our contractual obligations we have a policy of user choice for the employer. So the employer chooses the RTO it wants to go through. If an ACE provider makes itself known, then, where appropriate, it can be listed with all the other RTOs for the employer to choose from.*

(Employer association representative, NSW)

One interviewee noted that ACE colleges often belonged to their local business association. This would seem to be a worthwhile initiative if the assistance of such organisations is to be sought.

Although, strictly speaking, not employer associations, business enterprise centres (BECs) were also included in this category. BECs are organisations set up to foster the establishment and development of small businesses in the community, and as such, could be in a position to pass on information about ACE VET courses to businesses. Business management and the use of computer-based accounting programs would be obvious ACE VET offerings. However, any courses relevant to the sphere in which a particular business operates should be considered.

### *Employers*

Surprisingly, direct approaches to employers were not regarded as a high priority option by most industry interviewees—despite the fact that evidence gathered from other sources indicated that substantial contact already occurred between ACE providers and local small businesses. This inconsistency in the findings might arise from the fact that many of the interviewees were representatives of industry organisations which customarily deal with large highly industrialised employers who normally view vocational education as the province of TAFE and other mainstream VET providers.

One employer association representative made an interesting observation that the majority of businesses do not have anyone responsible for training and other human resource needs.

*You've got to draw a distinction when you talk about employers—between larger employers with human resource departments and smaller ones. South Australia is a small business State: about 80% of our members employ less than 20 employees, so by any definition, they are small business. There is probably another 15% (in rough terms) that employ between 20 and 100, and only about 5% of our members employ more than 100 employees. The relevance of this is that, certainly any organisation with less than 20 employees will not have a person skilled in HR, or personnel management, or training, or anything—it's all seat of your pants type stuff. SA is full of these companies ... And often, I think, things related to vocational education and credit transfers and pathways and opportunities for employees and whatever, is driven by the HR manager or the HR department.*

(Employer association representative, SA)

Combined with the other comments this suggests that if ACE wishes to make industry more aware of its vocational provision, it should keep in mind the need to target two types of businesses with two levels of communication. For the (generally) smaller businesses, contact needs to be aimed directly at employers and their employees who, in all probability, have very little knowledge of training matters and awareness of ACE. For larger businesses, the communication is likely to be with a designated human resources (HR) or personnel manager who often has training experience and qualifications and because of this, may even know something of ACE.

### *Unions*

There were mixed feelings about the ability of unions to assist in promotion of ACE VET. Unions were commonly seen as being most likely to assist if the learning could be linked to union-related activities, such as workplace leadership, communication and negotiation rather than technically oriented aspects of the job.

*ACE would get a good reception from the union—there'd be no barriers to it. At the moment we offer a whole range of training to members: communication skills, report writing, consultation,*

*negotiation, shop stewardship, industrial relations, workcover, all of which are free to our members. One of the things we were going to trial was résumé writing, that's a skill people need to have these days, particularly nowadays with job changes and things.* (Union representative, SA)

## Improving ACE staff knowledge of ACE VET and linkages with mainstream VET

If ACE staff are to assist students to benefit from ACE VET and its linkages with mainstream VET, they should be fully informed in this area. Providers were therefore asked to suggest ways in which ACE staff could be assisted to improve their knowledge of ACE VET, mainstream VET and credit transfer options. The suggestions they gave fell into three main categories: better quality information and better access to it; in-house (that is, ACE-based) training; and liaison and joint training with mainstream VET. The following is a summary of the suggestions received.

- ❖ Improved information and information access
  - Provide newsletters and printed information sheets (particularly to assist the large proportion of ACE staff who only work part-time and thus find it difficult to keep up with changes). Mail out information where necessary or use other means of distribution such as electronic media.
  - Develop a concise vocational course information manual—updated annually.
  - Develop information and support networks within ACE.
- ❖ ACE-based training
  - Encourage ACE staff to regularly update and improve their knowledge of mainstream VET provision—especially part-time staff.
  - Allocate time for professional development in regard to ACE VET, including in-house orientation for new ACE staff and information sessions for existing ACE staff. A requirement that ACE staff attend two or three update seminars each year was also suggested.
  - Hold regular local and regional ACE provider meetings or workshops covering updated information on availability of pathways, linkages, credit transfer, recognition of prior learning (RPL) and recognition of current competencies (RCC).
  - Provide training in RPL, RCC and credit transfer processes (so staff can assist ACE students to apply).
- ❖ Liaison and joint training
  - Hold joint professional development meetings and workshops on linkages between ACE and mainstream VET.
  - Improve liaison with mainstream VET personnel, including visits between sectors, co-operative and collaborative action on relevant tasks, and communication relating to course details and requirements.
  - Develop concise, reader friendly cross-sector newsletters specific to ACE–mainstream VET linkages.
  - Distribute relevant information about ACE provision to mainstream VET and relevant information about mainstream VET provision to ACE.

## Improving mainstream VET staff knowledge of ACE VET and credit transfer

One of the concerns identified by participants in this study in relation to linkages between ACE study and mainstream VET was the perceived lack, on the part of mainstream VET staff, of knowledge of ACE VET and ways it could be linked to mainstream VET. Provision of information to mainstream VET staff was therefore seen to be an important issue.

In the questionnaire, providers were asked to suggest ways in which mainstream VET staff might be assisted to improve their knowledge of ACE VET. The following summarises their responses:

- ❖ The majority of suggestions received were intended to encourage greater interaction and communication between the two sectors. Specific ideas proposed included:
  - liaison between staffs
  - visits to each other's campuses
  - attending each other's classes and interacting with the students
  - collaboration on programs
  - cross-provider meetings of key staff
  - joint reciprocal professional development opportunities
  - meetings in informal settings
  - networking
  - facilitation of phone and email contact
  - establishment of more direct links between respective members of staff in the same field
  - identification of mainstream VET personnel to whom ACE information can be forwarded
- ❖ Better information provision was also frequently suggested by respondents:
  - periodic information updating seminars (perhaps two or three times per year)
  - short, informal and reader friendly cross-sectoral information newsletters
  - a Statewide general handbook on ACE vocational courses
  - more and improved ACE promotional materials
  - ensuring ACE personnel are familiar with relevant national module numbers
  - regular updating of course information manuals (at least yearly)
  - generally improved ACE marketing strategies
  - ACE presence in mainstream VET information centres at enrolment times to provide ACE-related information and assistance when needed
- ❖ General ideas and comments included:
  - in NSW, a need for better knowledge and application of the *NSW ACE-TAFE Joint Strategic Plan* at local levels
  - a need for designated contact persons in mainstream VET to whom ACE can send relevant information. 'As an ACE provider, it is hard to know the best person or department to send information to', said one respondent
  - a need for mainstream VET recognition of ACE as a quality provider of VET
  - a need for more openness between the ACE and mainstream VET sectors—so ACE is not seen as a threat

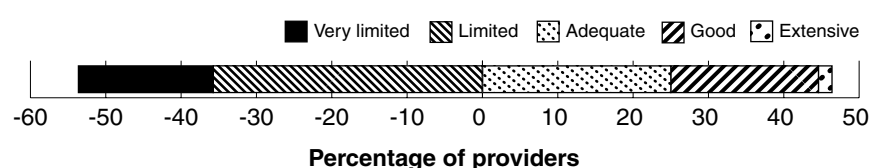
# ACE–mainstream VET interaction and linkages

## Linkages

### Availability of pathways and credit transfer

Credit transfer enables students who have completed ACE VET to have their learning credited as part of mainstream VET study. Providers were asked to rate the availability of credit transfer from ACE VET to mainstream VET. In their responses (in figure 17), just over half (54%) saw such availability as either *Limited* or *Very limited* and only a minority (21%) rated availability as *Good* or *Extensive*, at the other end of the scale. Although there were no significant rating differences between NSW and SA, analysis across respondent role categories showed that managers tended to see provision as more limited than co-ordinators who, in turn, saw it as more limited than trainers.

**Figure 17: Availability of ACE–mainstream VET pathways and credit transfer: Provider opinions**



Pathways and linkages may be presented by ACE as an option available to students who complete a particular course. In this way they can be important to the marketing of a course. The following comment from an ACE principal illustrates the importance of pathways and linkages to the ACE sector and highlights the need for more to be done to develop them.

*Pathways are very important to us. We see it as a marketing tool so that, when we are publicising courses, we can actually demonstrate the pathways that are connected to them. From my perspective, I need other people like private colleges, and TAFE in particular, to become serious about linking in with us and assisting that pathway process. Even though the strategic plan in NSW obviously calls for those sorts of co-operations and linkages, the reality on the ground is different because we are not funded to think about it. I believe that unless we start to look at what the pathways and linkages are, we will start to lose our market bases.* (ACE principal, NSW)

Providers were also asked to indicate whether there were any difficulties encountered in arranging credit transfer from ACE to mainstream VET. Just over half indicated there were at least some difficulties (30% indicating they encountered *some* difficulties and 24% indicating *many*). The remaining 46% indicated they were *not aware of any*.

When asked to specify the most serious difficulties encountered, two main categories could be identified:

- ❖ apparent reluctance of mainstream VET to:
  - participate in credit transfer processes
  - recognise ACE course credentials (even when ACE was offering essentially the same course, one commentator added)
  - recognise ACE as an RTO

- ❖ demands on time and funds brought about by the need to:
  - set up consultations
  - repeatedly justify the same ACE course outcome to mainstream VET providers with whom credit transfer was being pursued
  - unnecessarily engage in RPL as part of the linkage process
  - engage in excessive paperwork

The following comment from an ACE administrator illustrates how costs can inhibit linkage development by ACE providers:

*[Providers] are often resource strapped—they need disposable income to put somebody on board in order to [develop pathways and credit transfer] at a local level, so it tends to be done by the directorate in lieu of the providers.* (ACE administration representative, NSW)

BACE in NSW, recognising this problem, works at policy level endeavouring to formalise State-wide arrangements for pathways and credit transfer with TAFE. A series of *ACE–TAFE Joint Strategic Plans* developed in partnership with the NSW TAFE Commission and first implemented in 1993 has provided a policy framework for this.

At a local level, some ACE co-ordinators have qualified as workplace trainers and assessors so they can undertake their own RPL assessments and work from a sound basis on credit transfer issues.

Other issues identified included:

- ❖ the need to produce extensive evidence for RPL
- ❖ a lack of awareness, both in ACE and mainstream VET, of the other sector's programs
- ❖ a tendency of mainstream VET to award credit for ACE learning on the basis of module length (that is, time required to complete a module) rather than on module content

*Credit transfer into TAFE has been extremely difficult because ... the sort of comparisons they [TAFE] do are based on the length of the module ... if an ACE module is not as long as a TAFE module, they make an assumption that it only equates to part of the TAFE module. We have had to have some pretty heavy negotiations with them over some areas and feel that some of the ACE courses have been short-changed.* (ACE administration representative, NSW)

- ❖ a tendency of mainstream VET to award credit on the basis of certification rather than on completed competencies (due, it was said, to slow uptake of training packages in some areas of mainstream VET)

*With training packages we would be wanting to negotiate credit transfer on the basis of competencies—because we have a lot of providers who are delivering short courses for specific competencies. This is going to be difficult because, in NSW at least, TAFE is still [largely] module-based ... [and is] mapping the packages onto their modules. This does not facilitate credit transfer. We are about to go into a new round of credit transfer negotiations with TAFE. The framework will have to be different from that which we had before where we were looking at matches between accredited courses.* (ACE administration representative, NSW)

*The fact about competence is, it doesn't matter how you get there as long as you are competent. A lot of people miss that point, they think you must do an accredited course or a VET course to become competent. TAFE misses the point enormously when we are doing RPL or RCC—they are looking for qualifications rather than competence.* (ACE principal, NSW)

- ❖ a lack of consistency in credit decisions:

*Some students who did certificate II in a particular course would go to the local TAFE offering the diploma and would come back saying no recognition was given for the modules they had done. It seemed it depended on the TAFE person they dealt with; for example, two students did the same course at our [ACE] college, one was given credit, the other wasn't.* (ACE principal, NSW)

If links between ACE VET and mainstream VET are to be strengthened and better utilised it is important that the issues described above be addressed.

## Recognition of prior learning (RPL) and recognition of current competency (RCC)

When providers were asked if RPL (and RCC) played a role in linking ACE vocational study to mainstream VET, almost all (97%) said it did. Some of their accompanying comments have been paraphrased below.

- ❖ Credit transfer is difficult to achieve between ACE and mainstream VET. RPL can help overcome this difficulty.
- ❖ RPL provides a pathway from non-accredited courses to accredited courses.
- ❖ It is difficult for individual students to prepare their RPL case.

The comments suggest that RPL or RCC is commonly used to link ACE to mainstream VET, often because pathways have not been established and credit transfer is not available. The third comment suggests that, even in relation to RPL or RCC, students may benefit if they can be guided through the process. ACE should seek to help students by providing such guidance.

## Established or pre-determined pathways between ACE and mainstream VET

To determine ACE provider awareness of pathways, providers were asked if they were aware of any established pathways between ACE and mainstream VET. Just over half (54%) said they were. When asked if they were aware of pathways set up for special needs groups such as Aboriginal, non-English-speaking background or women in non-traditional occupations, few knew of any.

Providers were also asked how pathways were set up. Most commonly this was through meetings and other interactions between ACE and mainstream VET staff. For some this was at local institutional level, for others at peak body level (such as, in NSW, between BACE and TAFE NSW).

All of the providers who responded indicated there was a need for new pathways to be created and existing ones to be improved.

## Credit transfer for stream 1000 courses

It has been suggested that credit transfer arrangements for vocationally oriented stream 1000 courses offered by ACE should be investigated and developed. Even small amounts of credit gained this way would enable students to have relevant stream 1000 outcomes contribute towards mainstream VET study. More importantly, for some people it could be the catalyst that induces them to pursue VET study.

Almost all (95%) of providers thought credit transfer arrangements for stream 1000 courses with potential vocational application should be investigated. However, it was also pointed out that the vocational relevance of stream 1000 courses would normally be fairly limited (because if a stream 1000 course had too strong a vocational intent it would be reclassified into a higher stream).

## Interaction between ACE and mainstream VET

### Sharing of resources, including ACE access to VET clearing houses

It was suggested in the reviewed literature that VET clearing houses should be established through which all providers, including ACE vocational providers, could view, assess, purchase or otherwise access training products (including Crown copyright and accredited

curriculum documents), or could themselves license and offer products they have produced. Almost all providers (92%) saw this idea as feasible.

Additional comments of interest were:

- ❖ ACE regional councils or the Adult Learning Australia (ALA) could play a part.
- ❖ The clearing house could be computer-based (for example, a website on the Internet).
- ❖ There could be a biannual catalogue of products.

## Co-ordination of ACE VET with mainstream VET

When providers were asked to rate how well ACE VET was co-ordinated with mainstream VET in their State, just over half (54%) rated it as *Adequate* or better. A comparison across States was not undertaken because the number of responses was small. The fact that nearly half of the respondents rated co-ordination as less than *Adequate* (that is, *Poor* or *Very poor*) gave cause for concern.

## Should ACE be complementary or competitive?

### Complement or compete? — survey questionnaire results

In the past, ACE VET has been largely complementary to mainstream VET, providing courses which tie in with mainstream VET offerings rather than duplicate them. With increasing emphasis on vocational learning, some ACE providers are now RTOs, offering accredited courses which are essentially the same as those offered by mainstream VET. In this respect, they are moving from a complementary role to a more competitive one. Providers and students were asked to indicate how complementary or competitive ACE should be in relation to mainstream VET. Almost three-quarters of providers (72%) and more than three-quarters of students (82%) thought ACE should be complementary.

The additional comments offered by providers also generally favoured a complementary role. Their comments commonly referred to waste of ACE funds, staff, facilities and other resources in order to compete. One provider made the interesting suggestion that 'TAFE should also be complementary to ACE', implying that TAFE, too, ought not stray too far from its traditional areas of learning provision.

While 82% of students indicated ACE should remain complementary, the relatively few comments they added were less favourable to a complementary role than were those of the providers. One of the few students commenting in favour of a complementary role said: 'Direct competition will probably reduce funding [leading to] centres being closed or merged and reduced [student] access'.

Comments from students in favour of increased competition were mostly based on the premise that competition provided greater choice for the student. However, it was also pointed out that, in small communities especially, competition leading to duplication of learning provision meant that resources which might be used to provide other needed programs would be lost. So in that sense, the variety of programs available to the community, and hence choice, would be reduced. Other comments in favour of increased competition were that: 'ACE may be able to offer courses which are more suitable for some people than the equivalent ones from TAFE', and the suggestion that competition would 'push up the standards of teachers and course content'.

### Complement or compete? — interview comments

The following comments extracted from interviews give insight into how personnel working in the ACE sector, representatives of industry, and others who have an interest in vocational learning perceived the issue of whether ACE should compete with, or complements, mainstream VET in relation to vocational learning provision.

### Mainstream VET sees ACE competing for students

Some commentators suggested that ACE is perceived by mainstream VET as a competitor rather than an ally. The following comments from two ACE managers illustrate this view:

*... there's a slight problem here in that TAFE is pretty anti-ACE because they see us as competition rather than as part of the chain. They would be reluctant [to co-operate] and would frown pretty strongly on us if we started to deliver the same modules as they do, which could potentially give students credit. What we've chosen to do is to target our courses at a Certificate II level whereas our [local] TAFE is at Certificate III. So ... no direct credit transfers [are possible]. We've really done this to appease TAFE because it sees any student that comes to ACE as one student less for them. I actually believe the opposite is the case—by coming to ACE it opens up opportunities for the students so that more go on to TAFE.*

(ACE manager, NSW)

*TAFE very much considers that we are a threat. Not so much in the city itself, but in the smaller communities where there are not many students to go round. If we get some money and are able to get a group going they see it as them not getting a group going because we have done so—rather than as us having identified a need and pursued it. There is that element, a lot of resistance, a lot of anger—that makes it hard. I've spoken to the institute director here and he doesn't want that to happen but [in effect] says that we are affecting the personal incomes [of their personnel].*

(ACE Manager, NSW)

The first comment is of interest for several reasons. It illustrates the concern this issue can cause and the lengths to which some providers will go to avoid confrontation, and it raises the point that, by starting with ACE, many students who lack the confidence to embark on a course with TAFE prepare themselves to move on to TAFE. Without ACE, TAFE would not see them.

### ACE sees mainstream VET as moving into competition

Some ACE commentators also saw mainstream VET moving into what was perceived to be the province of ACE. Increased competition between the two sectors, therefore, could be the result of shifts in focus in both educational sectors. One provider saw the move of mainstream VET towards ACE-style provision as having an impact on ACE's long-term survival.

*TAFE has tended to enrol students in full courses, whereas for ACE the tendency has always been towards enrolment in components of courses [individual modules]. More recently, however, in accordance with the training package concept, industry has shown increased preference for components of courses, so there has been a growing market for this type of training. Recognising this, TAFE is moving towards provision of components and so moving into competition with ACE.*

(ACE manager, NSW)

*TAFE is emulating the ACE model of flexibility, customer orientation, snappy courses, on time, on the client's premises, at a time the clients want it, with their TAFE Plus courses.*

(ACE principal, NSW)

*... in recent years ... TAFE [has set] up a commercial arm, TAFE Plus, which goes out to businesses and sets up units, modules and 'short courses', which are not accredited and do not provide a certificate. They are offered as fee-for-service. The courses are staffed by people from industry and casual staff, almost duplicating what ACE would call core business. There has been enormous growth in this area in TAFE—they see it as a money earner and there is pressure on them to become more entrepreneurial. TAFE business services has been formed which has completely separate enrolment systems with hot-lines and they advertise separately and now more frequently, the way ACE does. TAFE NSW, instead of just producing a handbook twice a year, now also advertises in the paper very heavily on a monthly basis, runs short courses and has continuous enrolments—all the sorts of flexible things that ACE was doing. ACE sees that as fairly aggressive competition.*

(ACE association representative, NSW)

*I think there is still a feeling in most of the [TAFE] institutes that they want to keep ACE and the [TAFE] vocational programs separate—certainly in the marketing of them. In this institute\* there*

*is probably almost an air of competition in that TAFE vocational programs are getting further and further into fee for service and this trend is going to happen more as they have to earn more of their own money. Looking at the programs we [ACE] do which are fairly heavily vocationally oriented and at the courses TAFE is picking up, which are similar to what we do, it is probable that, in the long term ACE will find it fairly difficult to survive.* (ACE education officer, SA)

(\* This ACE provider operated from a TAFE institute campus.)

## The general view: ACE should be complementary

Taken overall, comments from interviewees were in favour of ACE adopting a complementary rather than competitive role. However, there were differing views on what constituted complementarity. The different views expressed have been summarised under four headings:

### *Courses not offered by mainstream VET—niche markets*

Some respondents believed that ACE should offer courses which were different from, or not normally offered by, mainstream VET. These included non-traditional subjects, basic or core subjects, and subject areas which some saw mainstream VET to be moving away from such as level I and II vocational subjects. In a sense, these could be represented as niche markets for ACE.

### *Same course content but different delivery*

Others thought ACE could complement mainstream VET by offering the same course content, but in a different delivery mode. As one ACE principal put it: 'Our role should be offering what otherwise would not be available—because of lack of venue, wrong time or wrong type of delivery'.

### *Regional vocational provision*

Regional vocational provision was an area in which some respondents saw strong potential for ACE to complement mainstream VET. This could take the form of ACE acting in partnership with mainstream VET to provide local tutoring, mentoring or supervision for students undertaking mainstream VET courses, or ACE providing equivalent courses for students in areas not served by mainstream VET.

### *ACE as a provider of workplace training*

Another area seen by respondents as an area in which ACE could complement mainstream VET was in the provision of training in the workplace. Some ITAB representatives pointed out that the demand for training in the workplace, which is increasing with the advent of training packages, was not always being fully met by mainstream VET and that ACE with its flexibility and local presence might help fill the gap. As one ITAB representative pointed out, 'Employers are manufacturers not trainers, so they are looking to set up partnerships with trainers in their enterprises to provide training. Employers have the skilled people who can act as mentors while the registered training organisation provides all the generic training and backs them up with assessment and so forth'.

## Outcomes if ACE becomes more competitive with mainstream VET

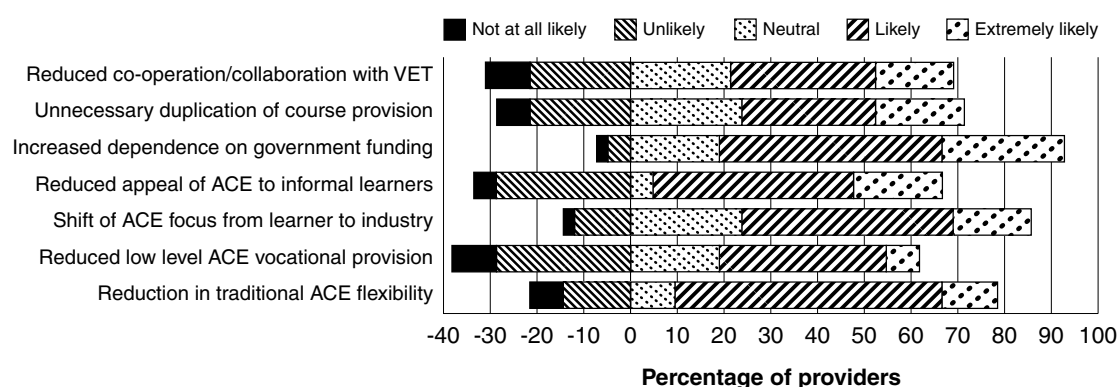
Some commentators warn that, if ACE providers do extend their curriculums to include the equivalent of mainstream VET programs (such as TAFE courses), thereby becoming competitive with mainstream VET, there could be undesirable outcomes for ACE. In order to quantify the perception of risks associated with ACE becoming more competitive, providers were asked to indicate on a five-point scale the likelihood of seven nominated outcomes should it do so. The seven outcomes, expressed in full, were:

- ❖ reduced co-operation or collaboration between ACE and mainstream VET providers

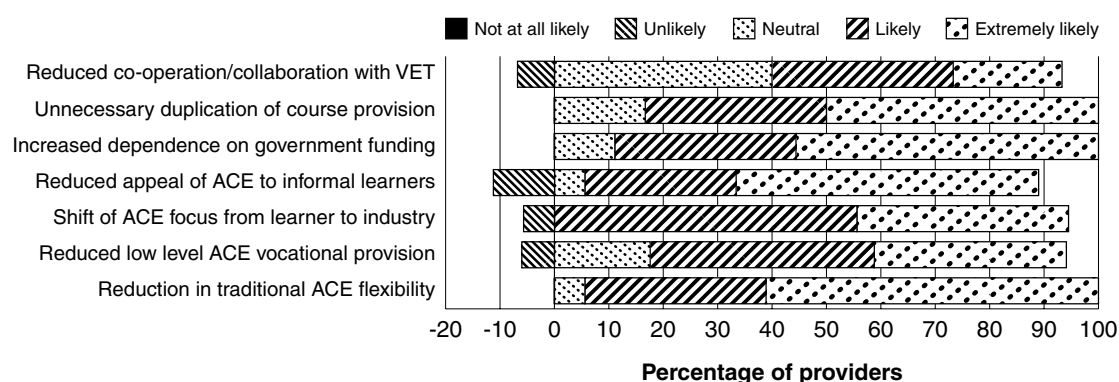
- ❖ unnecessary duplication of course provision
- ❖ loss of traditional ACE management freedom due to increased dependence on government funding
- ❖ reduction in the appeal of ACE to learners initially averse to formal study, due to ACE resembling mainstream VET
- ❖ shift of ACE vocational education focus from the needs of learners to the needs of industry
- ❖ reduction in existing low level ACE vocational education provision
- ❖ reduction in traditional ACE flexibility in order to conform to mainstream requirements

Response choices ranged from *Extremely likely* to *Not at all likely*. The results are shown for the two States separately in figures 18 and 19.

**Figure 18: Outcomes from increased ACE competition with mainstream VET: NSW (n=42)**



**Figure 19: Outcomes from increased ACE competition with mainstream VET: SA (n=18)**



The results indicated that providers generally saw all of the specified outcomes as likely to occur—SA more so than NSW. For SA, responses of *Extremely likely* or *Likely* represented 83% of the total number of responses for the seven items compared with a corresponding figure of 58% for NSW.

Combining the results for both States showed that for the two most likely outcomes, *Loss of traditional ACE management freedom due to increased dependence on government funding* (79% of respondents choosing *Extremely likely* or *Likely*) and *Reduction in traditional ACE flexibility in order to conform to mainstream requirements* (78%), there are common elements of loss of freedom or flexibility—qualities cherished both by ACE providers and their students. The

risk of losing these qualities probably contributes to the opposition to ACE becoming competitive with mainstream VET reported above.

One commentator made an interesting personal observation that ACE participation in VET may lead to reduced TAFE involvement in provision of industry training packages.

*I don't know what my board's feelings are about ACE being involved in vocational education. Personally, I have got reservations. In NSW, TAFE is [saying that it] has a role for the general community, not just industry, and needs to provide courses in language, literacy and numeracy, and for the unemployed. My fear is that if ACE gets too involved in industry it aids TAFE's argument that it can do less in industry. I've already been to meetings where TAFE has said it thinks it should pull out of industry training package stuff because ACE is not just providing adult and community education any more.* (ITAB executive representative, NSW)

## Co-operation and collaboration between ACE and mainstream VET

If ACE and mainstream VET are to work effectively together there will need to be co-operation and collaboration between the two sectors. This will especially be the case if the two sectors are to complement each other.

In their questionnaire, providers were asked if there was a need for greater co-operation and collaboration as a means of facilitating joint ACE–mainstream VET activities, such as strategic alliances, sharing and allocation of course provision responsibilities, joint provision of courses, and shared use of resources such as premises, teachers and equipment. Almost three-quarters (72%) of the providers who responded to the question, saw a need for greater co-operation and collaboration.

When students were asked if, in their experience, they saw a need for greater co-operation and collaboration between ACE and mainstream VET, almost the same proportion of respondents (74%) said there was.

Providers were also asked to rate the existing extent of collaboration and co-operation between ACE and mainstream VET. Nearly three-quarters (70%) felt it was less than adequate. In the eyes of ACE providers, it seems, much remains to be done towards achieving satisfactory levels of co-operation and collaboration between the two sectors.

It is generally agreed that ACE, because of the nature of its learning provision, is a significant initiator of 'lifelong learning' in the community—ACE starts many people on this path. Based on this premise, providers were asked as a follow-up question whether they thought greater collaboration and co-operation between ACE and mainstream VET could contribute to incorporation of the principles of lifelong learning and learner-centred adult education into mainstream VET. More than three-quarters (77%) felt that this could occur.

It was also conjectured there might be a reciprocal gain—perhaps, through greater co-operation and collaboration, ACE could derive benefit in the form of improvement to its teaching of vocational principles and practices. When providers were asked if this were likely, 88% felt that it was.

Finally, providers were invited to state what they thought were the most important actions that could be taken to achieve greater co-operation and collaboration. Of the 24 who responded, 17 provided relevant suggestions. These are summarised below:

- ❖ ten referred to a need for better communication
- ❖ four focussed on attitudinal change, referring to a need for inter-sectoral team-building skills to establish greater trust and remove fear of threat from the other sector; a need to work together and foster mutual respect; and a need for open mindedness
- ❖ two focussed on the need to share resources
- ❖ one proposed that there should be more co-ordination 'at the top'

## Comments from interviews about co-operation and collaboration

The issues surrounding co-operation and collaboration between ACE and mainstream VET were frequently highlighted by providers, administrators and industry representatives in their interviews. Typical comments covering a wide range of issues relating to ACE–mainstream VET interaction are reproduced below. A large number of comments has been presented to provide a comprehensive picture of respondents' views on these important issues.

In reading the comments it should be noted that the majority of ACE providers consulted in this research were located in metropolitan areas. Because these providers operate in a more competitive environment than those in regional areas, it is likely that the overall levels of co-operation and collaboration between the two sectors may be better than the comments generally imply.

Finally, it must be pointed out that while the comments respondents gave were often quite frank and sometimes critical of some aspects of ACE–mainstream VET interaction, it would be unfair to allow the criticisms to imply that there was any general antagonism between the two. In interviews, the critical comments were invariably only a small proportion of the views aired and it was clear they were almost always delivered in the hope that a particular issue could be resolved leading to better ACE–mainstream VET interaction.

### *Some examples of co-operative and collaborative relationships*

ACE respondents quoted many instances of co-operative and collaborative relationships with mainstream VET. The following are examples:

*We have a very good relationship with TAFE. For example, they seek brochures from us to distribute to interested people, we use the local TAFE college library facilities, [a scheme] specially arranged by the TAFE principal, and I have acted on interview panels for selection of TAFE staff.*  
(ACE principal, NSW)

*I have heard of examples in metropolitan Sydney where ACE principals have been having regular dialogue with TAFE institutes talking about the directions of the institute and the possibility of ACE being a part of that and even being on the institute board.*  
(ACE association representative, NSW)

*Students are apprehensive about going to a TAFE institution. The leader of [the ACE] group is organising for TAFE lecturers to come down to the centre and present some of the introductory TAFE lessons at the centre so that students and volunteer tutors don't feel so intimidated.*  
(ACE manager, SA)

Another ACE manager described how their tutors had familiarised themselves with mainstream VET course information and pathways so that they could conduct sessions for their completing ACE students on options for future study beyond ACE.

### *Greater incentive to co-operate and complement in regional areas*

It was apparent from some comments that co-operative relationships between ACE and mainstream VET were often stronger in regional areas where both ACE and the mainstream VET providers are located in a close-knit community. As the following comment illustrates, this high degree of co-operation and complementary activity can evolve from a need for the organisations to remain viable by catering efficiently for a limited market. This particular comment is interesting in that it also highlights the parochial outlook of the local providers which stems from the need to protect their viability.

*In some areas there might be some competition to TAFE but I think most of the competition comes from the large number of private (for profit) providers in the area who are offering accredited programs, a situation which has been developing over the past 5 or 6 years. I think that, certainly in the country areas, most ACE and TAFE institutions have got their act together to provide a*

*network of pathways. So I would say that while there might be a couple of areas of competition, most of it would be co-operation. Because none of us has heaps of money, and because we've got private providers whipping in from Sydney, Melbourne and wherever to offer programs, it's in our interests to provide the best service to our community—so it's 'co-operate or die' I think.*

*My view is that, if [students] are looking for a non-TAFE provider, I would rather they picked us, as an ACE provider ... then at least it's being kept in the district and in the community.*

*(ACE manager, NSW)*

### *Benefits of operating from an integrated ACE–mainstream VET campus*

Several respondents from the ACE sector commented favourably on the benefits associated with operating from an integrated campus, particularly in regard to pathways between ACE and mainstream VET. The following account from an ACE provider located on the same campus as a TAFE institute provides a particularly interesting example:

*The main linkage with mainstream VET is because ACE is in the same building as TAFE and there are direct pathways for students. We have a lot of lecturers who teach across both Business Studies and ACE and that works really well. [The] lecturers who teach across both areas try and teach in a way that gives students access to pathways.*

*In some cases we teach the same modules but [without] assessment. The modules we are using, and have been using for a number of years with regular updating, are looked at by Business Studies and Computing studies and they sometimes end up using the same study guides as we do.*

*In some cases we have had students in our programs who have been doing 'Ticket to training' [a government initiative where money is given to small businesses to enable them to increase their skills through further study]. Generally, these people go through [TAFE] vocational programs but we have a situation in this institute, and I think in other institutes, where the programs they are wanting to go into are really popular and there are insufficient places. So, in a situation where we run the same or a similar program, and the lecturer teaches across both programs, the students come into the ACE program and are assessed for the TAFE course. The course on MYOB is a good example of this.*

*I think [our advertising] helps the rest of the [TAFE] institute, because we do a lot more advertising than the rest of the institute does and our brochures are circulated much more widely.*

*We have a process where the [TAFE VET] programs have their home rooms and they have first priority. Then the other TAFE vocational programs have second priority, and ACE has third priority. Normally this is not a problem except when TAFE has a fee-for-service class they have to fit in somewhere. Our times generally work in well with the vocational ones—we always try to take the down-time. We also run a lot of classes on Saturday.*

*(ACE education officer, SA)*

### *Co-operation and collaboration in language and literacy provision*

Language and literacy have long been areas in which both ACE and mainstream VET have had an interest. In recent times there have been positive steps taken towards developing a more effective co-operative approach to provision of these programs.

*There are a lot of good networking things in the literacy area—the associations between professionals working across providers [such as] the prison system, Adult Migrant Education Program and private organisations, and good field support from ACE to TAFE providers. Dialogue is going on. I even know of ANTA-type projects which are looking at language and literacy in training packages. And there are people from TAFE and the community services industries working together with specialist private providers and ACE on how they can integrate [language and literacy] into community services training packages. These are good models for how things should work together, but it has taken an enormous investment of money on everyone's part just to get to that point—I think other areas of ACE have got a long way to go.*

*(ACE association representative, NSW)*

### *Referrals as a form of co-operation*

There are several important reasons for referrals between ACE and mainstream VET:

- ❖ The particular course required may be unavailable from the provider initially approached.
- ❖ Places in a course are limited due to high demand and an equivalent or similar course may be available in the other sector.
- ❖ Equivalent or similar courses in the other sector may better suit a student's needs. For example, an ACE course may offer greater informality or more individual attention, or a mainstream VET course may be more structured or offer better access to technological equipment.

Co-operation, in the form of referrals between ACE and mainstream VET does occur, as the first comment below illustrates. However, not all respondents feel cross-sectoral referrals are working satisfactorily. The second comment highlights an instance of a need for referrals which was not being met.

*Probably about one-third of our referrals to other courses are to the TAFE information services, another third go to WEA, and the remaining third to other ACE providers in the region. The local TAFE college is quite good at referring people to us—either because students can't be accommodated or because ACE supplies the particular program needed.* (ACE principal, NSW)

*There needs to be an established process for people to be referred, but TAFE doesn't feel it can refer students directly or hasn't got the mechanism to do it. I know that in one of the [TAFE] colleges, 600 people were rejected last year from entering IT courses with nowhere else to go. Yet to try and get those 600 referred [to ACE] is almost impossible. We are trying to get some co-operation with TAFE—there are some individual TAFE principals who have approached us.*  
(ACE principal, NSW)

### *Co-operation and collaboration is dependent on personnel relationships*

The degree of co-operation and collaboration between ACE and mainstream VET organisations can be significantly affected by relationships between the personnel involved and, as the first commentator below points out, by prior experiences with the other sector.

*We don't hear too many good stories about co-operation with TAFE because they are seen as competitors rather than colleagues. What really happens is up to the individuals within the [ACE] colleges, and when these individuals change, all the goodwill and all the good work can fall down overnight. When I was running another ACE college we had a really good relationship with TAFE because [the TAFE director] had had a good experience somewhere else with ACE.*  
(ACE principal, NSW)

*The local TAFE college is quite good at referring people to us—either because students can't be accommodated or because ACE supplies the particular program needed. However, sometimes it depends on who in TAFE is involved in the contact with the student.* (ACE principal, NSW)

### *Political, industrial, budgetary and bureaucratic influences on co-operation and collaboration*

Co-operation and collaboration between ACE and mainstream VET can also be affected by political, industrial, budgetary and bureaucratic factors, as the following comments from ACE respondents illustrate.

*I've discussed the need for pathways with two TAFE principals. They would like to do it, but it is subject to approval from their institutes—and it's going to bog down in the process.*  
(ACE principal, NSW)

*What you will find, and it's fairly disappointing, is that our relationship with TAFE, the major formal provider in our region, is not good. I'm on the TAFE advisory council for the institute, but*

*it doesn't make a lot of difference, there's a fair amount of hostility, and it's [due] to ACE providing competition for TAFE. And, with TAFE being restructured in NSW, teachers think we are taking their jobs, which in some ways we might be, but it's not something we chose to do. We are just responding to government which said we want more opportunities and options for people—and that's all we're doing.*

(ACE regional council officer, NSW)

*If no funding is available to support development and maintenance of linkages, then TAFE colleges will not be willing to do anything towards them. Provision for time and personnel are necessary for this to happen.*

(ACE education officer, SA)

### *ACE co-operation and collaboration need not be restricted to TAFE*

Whilst the majority of comments regarding co-operation and collaboration between ACE and mainstream VET focussed on ACE–TAFE interaction, it can also extend to other mainstream VET providers. Indeed, as the following commentator points out, ACE and private mainstream VET providers have much in common regarding their styles of vocational provision.

*Private providers have approached me saying they could see possibilities of working with ACE to help provide broader [vocational] coverage—in country towns for example. This is something both ACE and the private providers could be interested in if they could find the resources and time to develop the necessary partnerships. The ACE entrepreneurial style is much closer to that of private providers than it is to TAFE.*

(ACE association representative, NSW)

### ACE–TAFE Joint Strategic Plan

An initiative designed to facilitate greater co-ordination, co-operation and collaboration across the ACE–TAFE interface in NSW is the *ACE–TAFE Joint Strategic Plan*. Initiated in 1993, and revised several times since, it is a joint endeavour of the NSW Board of Adult and Community Education and the Board of the NSW TAFE Commission. While not all participants in this study saw it as being completely successful, most viewed it positively and regarded it as a significant step in the development of effective linkages between ACE and mainstream VET. Certainly, many of the suggestions and ideas proposed by respondents in this report accord with the objectives and strategies contained in the plan—an indication that the plan has accurately identified issues to be addressed.

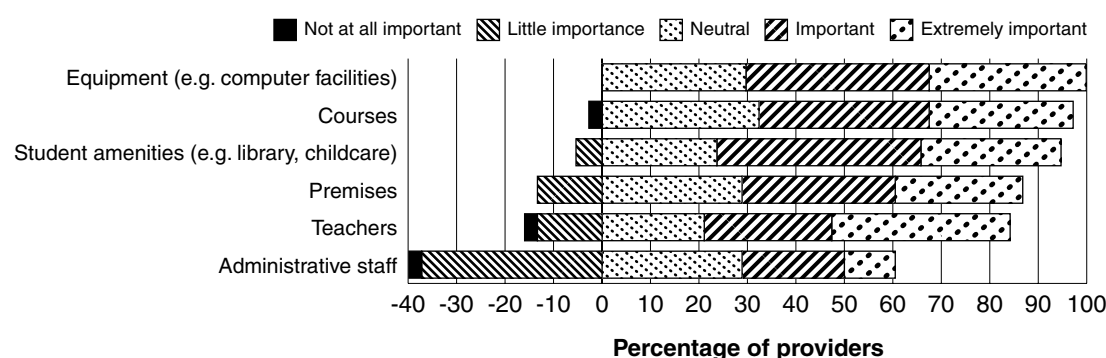
### Sharing of resources with mainstream VET

As reported earlier, almost three-quarters of providers believed that more co-operation and collaboration between ACE and mainstream VET should take place. One way in which this might occur is through the sharing of resources such as equipment, premises and staff. Potential benefits of resource sharing, both to ACE and mainstream VET, could include more effective utilisation of funds (through pooling) to provide a better range and quality of resources, and more efficient utilisation of the resources through less idle time.

Because the resources are shared in common with mainstream VET, an added benefit for ACE VET could be that ACE is more likely to be perceived as 'teaching to the same standards' as the mainstream. As a consequence, the outcomes may be more readily recognised by mainstream VET thereby enabling linkages between ACE and mainstream VET to be more easily achieved.

To explore the idea of sharing resources with mainstream VET, providers were asked to rate the importance of sharing each of six types of resources. The results are given in figure 20. There were no significant State differences in the ratings except for *Sharing of student amenities*, which NSW tended to see as being more important than SA.

**Figure 20: Provider opinion of importance of ACE sharing specified resources with mainstream VET**

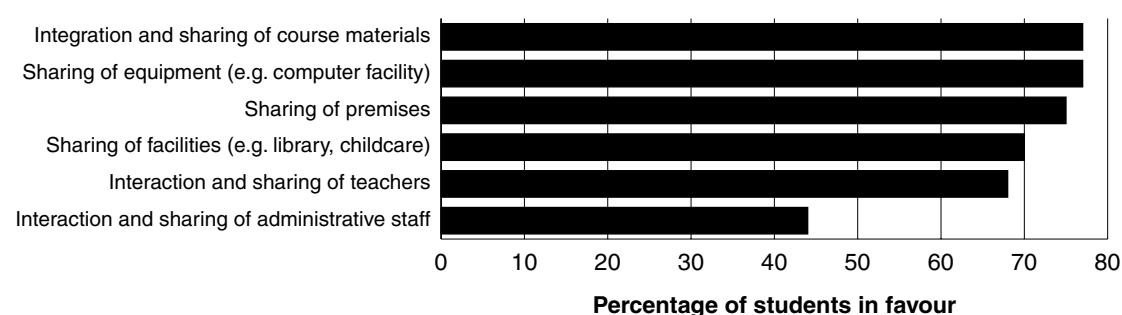


The high degree of importance attached to sharing equipment is understandable (although, as some comments showed, not everyone saw sharing of equipment as desirable). Mainstream VET has, through necessity, accumulated a huge amount of capital equipment for vocational teaching purposes. Much of this is very expensive to purchase and maintain and rapidly becomes obsolete. ACE will need access to up-to-date equipment if it is to move into highly technical areas of vocational provision; however, in the present circumstances it is not a financially viable option for ACE to purchase much of this equipment. The solution therefore must be either to share equipment with mainstream VET or gain access to it through industry (by teaching in the workplace, for example). Where ACE and TAFE providers share the same campus, sharing between ACE and mainstream VET is already occurring.

The low percentage in favour of sharing of administrative staff makes it the strong exception to the other choices. Examination of the results in detail showed that 39% rated sharing of administrative staff either as of *Little importance* or *Not at all important* and a further 29% were neutral on the issue. It seems ACE providers would prefer to use their own administrative staff.

To find out what students thought of sharing of resources they were also asked to identify from six listed areas where they thought there was scope for greater sharing between ACE and mainstream VET. Figure 21 shows the percentages of students responding to each choice. The results suggest that, like the providers, they were generally supportive of sharing in all areas listed except that of *Administrative staff*.

**Figure 21: Students in favour of sharing resources with mainstream VET**



In response to an invitation to nominate any other areas in which greater sharing should take place, students nominated: *Access to and sharing of information* (presumably implying interchange of information about programs and other matters of benefit to students) and *Sharing of advertising* (possibly with a view to accessing a wider audience and saving costs through greater efficiency).

## Difficulties that could arise from sharing resources with mainstream VET

A number of providers, students and interviewees in their responses commented on problems that could arise in relation to ACE sharing vocational teaching resources with mainstream VET. Potential problems they raised included the following.

### *Insufficient resources for sharing*

Some respondents saw problems arising from a lack of resources or high demand on resources.

*The practicality of sharing resources is the sticking point. Part of the ACE–TAFE Joint Strategic Plan was sharing of resources, TAFE to ACE, especially. The reality is that the demand on TAFE resources is so high and TAFE structures and red tape are so involved that they prevent it from happening. And there may be other organisations willing to pay to use the facilities. However, there may be better opportunities for sharing in rural areas.* (ACE principal, NSW)

### *Responsibility for damage and maintenance of equipment*

ACE providers were cautious about entering into sharing arrangements for equipment that carried a high risk of responsibility for damage and maintenance. This particularly applied to computer facilities.

### *Ownership of resource materials*

Ownership of resources was another complicating issue with respect to sharing of resources. This was of special concern to ACE providers because it is not uncommon for resources used in ACE teaching to be developed and owned by the teachers. Any sharing of such resources therefore would be subject to agreement of the teacher.

*One of the issues which is going to arise is ownership of the resource material. We are presently very much dependent on the initiative of our teachers who, basically, produce the goods. When they go, they take their materials with them. That undermines continuity. Inevitably, we will have to pay some fee to purchase the right to use certain materials so as to maintain continuity and use [common] materials.* (ACE principal, NSW)

### *Sharing could be one-sided*

Some providers noted that any sharing of resources with mainstream VET, particularly TAFE would almost inevitably be one-sided. As one put it: 'The barrier to share often appears to be one-sided—TAFE has bricks mortar and libraries, ACE doesn't. [It is an] unequal partnership from the beginning—TAFE doesn't see that ACE has anything of value to share'.

### *Sharing could undermine ACE identity*

Several students added cautionary comments to their questionnaires, saying that if sharing of resources is to occur, care should be taken to ensure that ACE retains its identity and does not get 'swallowed up by TAFE', as one put it. Another commented: 'Share too much and you lose the very thing that makes each [type of provider] unique ... which could end up being a tragedy for the students'.

# Improving ACE–mainstream VET interaction and linkages

---

The providers had most to say about changes for improvement in the area of interactions and linkages between ACE and mainstream VET. A wide range of issues was raised, including a need for better communication and greater trust between ACE and mainstream VET; a need for pathways and credit transfer options to be identified and information made available to students and industry; a suggestion that contact people to assist with linkage matters be identified in each sector; and a need for the establishment of additional pathways and linkages. These and other issues are reported in more detail below.

## Priorities for development of linkages

In order to evaluate the relative importance of strategies for developing linkages between ACE and mainstream VET, providers were asked to rank each of 17 listed strategies as *High*, *Medium* or *Low* in priority for action. They were also invited to suggest other strategies not included in the list. Figure 22 is a summary of their responses compared by State. The order in which the strategies are listed in figure 22 reflects the overall priorities based on the combined ratings for the two States.

Inspection of figure 22 shows that the strategy most highly favoured for action, with 86% of all respondents to the question rating it *high priority*, was:

- ❖ establishment of learning pathways by negotiation of credit transfer, articulation and RPL

Other strategies also highly ranked (each being rated *high priority* by around 60% of respondents) were:

- ❖ information-sharing between ACE and mainstream VET
- ❖ development of a clearly identifiable national ACE VET structure
- ❖ identification and co-ordination of current ACE VET at local, regional and State levels
- ❖ cross-representation on ACE and VET management bodies
- ❖ demonstration of ACE's contribution to VET through relevant data collection

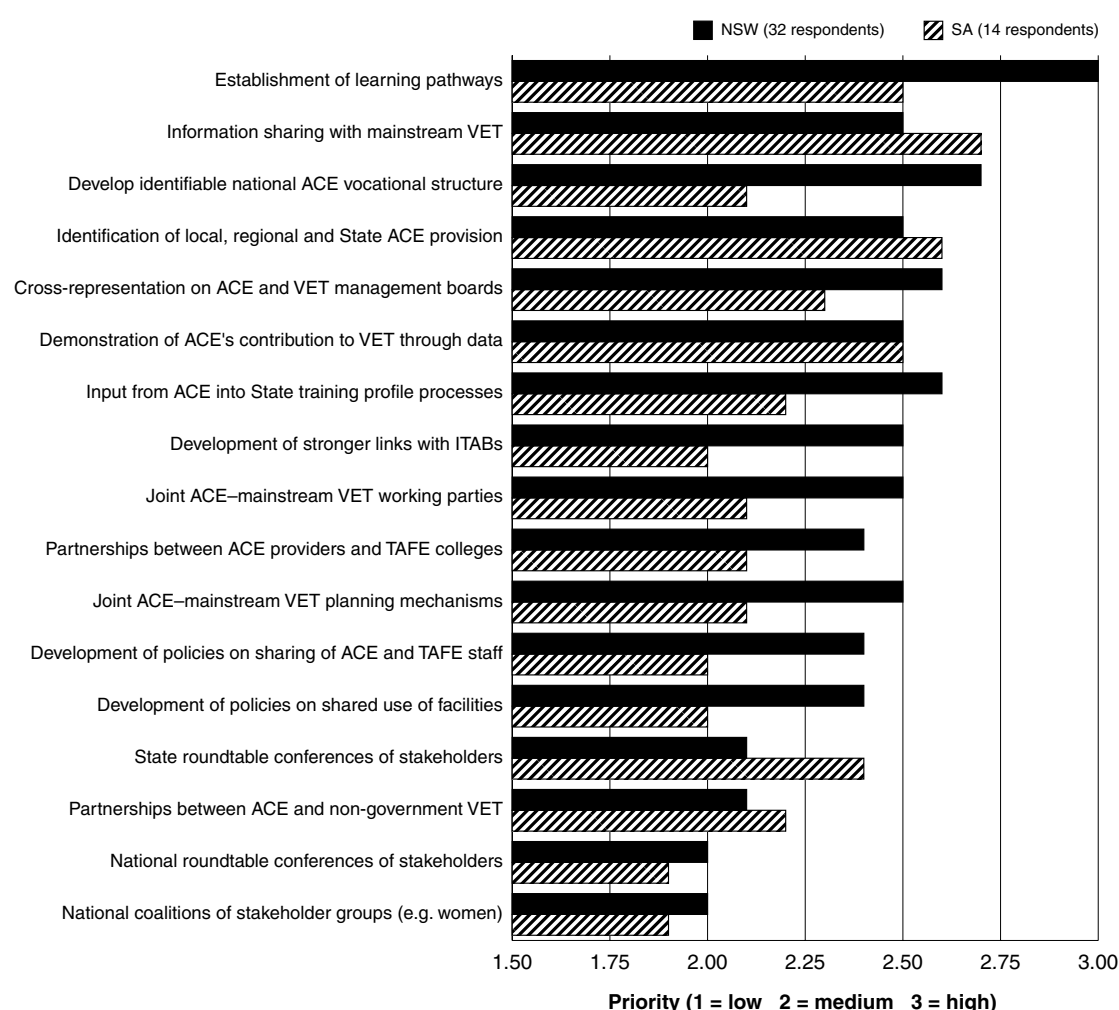
At the other end of the scale, providers were less in favour of:

- ❖ national coalitions of various stakeholder groups
- ❖ national roundtable conferences of stakeholders
- ❖ State roundtable conferences of stakeholders
- ❖ partnerships between ACE and non-government VET providers
- ❖ development of policies on sharing of ACE and TAFE staff
- ❖ development of policies on shared use of facilities

The response patterns suggested that NSW providers generally have greater interest in developing linkages between ACE VET and mainstream VET than do SA providers. Strategies for which this trend was especially evident were:

- ❖ development of a clearly identifiable national ACE VET structure
- ❖ development of stronger links with ITABs
- ❖ establishment of learning pathways by negotiation of credit transfer, articulation and RPL

**Figure 22: Provider ratings of strategies for development of linkages with mainstream VET**



Comparisons of results by respondent role (managers versus co-ordinators/teachers) showed only minor differences for most strategies. The most prominent differences were for:

- ❖ cross-representation on ACE and VET management bodies
- ❖ national roundtable conferences of stakeholders

Both of these were more highly favoured by co-ordinators and teachers than managers.

## Improving linkage co-ordination and information exchange with mainstream VET

Among the comments received from ACE and industry personnel were a number of suggested strategies for improving co-ordination of ACE–mainstream VET linkages and provision of linkage-related information. The following is a compilation of the most relevant suggestions.

- ❖ Employ personnel to co-ordinate ACE and mainstream VET program provision and facilitate development of linkages.
- ❖ Provide funding and other assistance to ACE providers to enable better mapping of ACE vocational courses, including non-accredited courses, against training packages and mainstream VET.

- ❖ Provide a register of all ACE centres which offer vocational courses and a regularly updated list of the courses available.
- ❖ Provide linkage information newsletters through ACE and mainstream VET peak bodies.
- ❖ Conduct joint ACE–mainstream VET workshops on linkages.
- ❖ Provide greater support for regional co-ordinators involved in establishing and facilitating linkages.

## Assisting students to use linkages

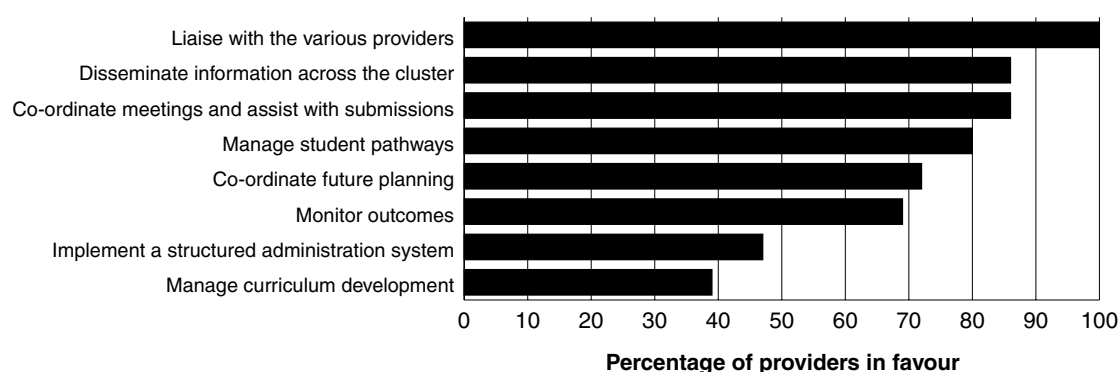
If faced with complicated procedures and a bewildering range of options regarding linking ACE course outcomes to mainstream VET study, students may not always make the best decision, or may give up altogether. When providers were asked to suggest ways in which students could be assisted to link their ACE course outcomes to mainstream VET study their suggestions included the following:

- ❖ Provide regularly updated information on linkages to staff and students.
- ❖ Develop simple guidelines to students and staff on options available and processes to be followed (rather than ‘hours of reading’, as one provider put it).
- ❖ Develop better communication between ACE and mainstream VET course co-ordinators on matters pertaining to linkages (including designation of linkage contact persons).
- ❖ Provide information and other assistance to relevant mainstream VET staff to enable them to inform enquirers at mainstream VET institutions of the options available regarding linked study.

## Co-ordinators acting between ACE and mainstream VET

In the literature, the concept of co-ordinators working with clusters of ACE and mainstream VET providers to co-ordinate activity across the interface between the two sectors was sometimes raised. When providers were asked their opinion of the idea, more than three-quarters (82%) thought it a viable proposition. When asked to indicate in which of eight listed areas the duties of co-ordinators should fall, the providers responded as depicted in figure 23. Percentages shown are the proportions of providers selecting each area.

**Figure 23: Provider preferences for duties of an ACE–mainstream VET co-ordinator**



Analysis of figure 23 shows ACE providers would prefer to see ACE–mainstream VET co-ordinators working across a cluster of providers to liaise with providers, disseminate information across the cluster, co-ordinate meetings, and prepare or assist providers with submissions.

Some NSW respondents indicated that ACE regional co-ordinators and ACE regional council officers were already performing a number of these functions.

*There are already co-ordinators [in the system]. BACE has personnel acting as co-ordinators, a lot of regional councils have VET officers and big ACE colleges have VET managers, part of whose duties would be to liaise with other VET providers.* (ACE principal, NSW)

In their accompanying comments respondents highlighted two important aspects of the role an ACE–mainstream VET co-ordinator might play:

- ❖ With suitable training and appropriate personal attributes, a co-ordinator may be better able to communicate and establish rapport across sectors, particularly, for example, where there was a risk that personality or philosophical differences between sector personnel could inhibit effective communication.
- ❖ A co-ordinator could help provide continuity in relationships between ACE and mainstream VET providers when there were changes in key ACE or mainstream VET personnel.

As an alternative to an individual person acting as a co-ordinator, it was suggested that the co-ordinating role could be undertaken on behalf of other providers by a ‘lead provider’ in a particular region.

A variation on the two concepts outlined above was the idea of providers or individuals specialising in a particular vocational area acting as regional or State co-ordinators in their specialty area.

Only one potentially negative issue was raised in connection with the role of an ACE–mainstream VET co-ordinator: it was suggested that if the co-ordinator were based with a particular provider, loyalty to the provider might create difficulties through conflict of interest.

## **Incentives for collaboration between ACE and mainstream VET**

To encourage greater co-operation and collaboration and the fostering of linkages between ACE and mainstream VET, it has been suggested that incentives might be employed. When providers were asked to nominate possible incentives their responses could be summarised as follows:

- ❖ more equitable funding between ACE and mainstream VET (the inference being that ACE with its lesser funding lacked status and the ability to interact effectively with mainstream VET)
- ❖ provision of funding designated specifically for collaboration and co-operation on linkages
- ❖ provision of joint-venture funding to enable ACE and mainstream VET to work together towards common educational goals
- ❖ promulgation of evidence of better outcomes for students achieved as a result of collaboration and co-operation (for example, publishing of linkage case studies)
- ❖ highlighting the likelihood of an enhanced public profile achievable as a result of collaboration and co-operation
- ❖ emphasising the likelihood of a gain in ACE vocational credibility both with industry and the general public

## **ACE as a regional training broker or co-ordinator**

Provision of vocational training to individuals and groups in outlying areas can be difficult if there is no suitable mainstream vocational provider in the area. In many such areas, there may be an ACE provider. While the ACE provider may not have the expertise or resources to actually teach the technical knowledge and skills, it may have the educational, organisational and entrepreneurial expertise to manage and co-ordinate learning in the workplace and the

community. As the following comment implies, ACE, through co-operative arrangements, might well be able to assist mainstream VET providers, who do not have a venue in a particular area, to provide vocational training to local students.

*ACE could have a role to play in managing, on behalf of regional communities, regionally based training programs that are auspiced or oversighted by a TAFE college. ACE could act as a broker or network agent. ACE should certainly establish relationships with local TAFE colleges or providers. I think the main thing is to keep it local and in a community context.*

(ITAB executive representative, SA)

## Strategies for sharing resources and funding with mainstream VET

It was suggested in the literature that sharing of resources and associated funding (including teachers, premises and equipment) between mainstream VET and ACE might assist ACE to provide vocational education to the standard required for satisfactory linking with training in the mainstream VET sector. Providers were asked to suggest ways in which sharing of resources or funding in this context could be facilitated. Their most noteworthy suggestions were:

- ❖ development of combined management committees (presumably with a brief to develop policies and procedures for sharing)
- ❖ appointment of regional co-ordinators to facilitate sharing
- ❖ establishment of a national register of accredited training personnel
- ❖ sharing which focussed on intellectual capital and ideas, professional development and student libraries rather than on teaching venues and equipment

## School–ACE–VET linkages

In interviews, some commentators identified interesting possibilities concerning the role of ACE in relation to secondary schools, vocational training and industry:

- ❖ An ACE principal suggested that where an ACE provider already had working relationships with workplaces and industry, this, plus its close affinity with the community, placed it in a strong position to act as a training provider across schools and industry.
- ❖ An ITAB representative saw regional ACE providers as having the potential to be important providers of vocational training to school students in country areas where ACE was quite often the only provider of vocational training in the area.
- ❖ A union representative saw ACE's role in relation to schools in a much broader context, that of helping students destined never to have full-time work to develop a productive role and achieve fulfilment in modern society.

# Conclusions

---

ACE personnel, ACE students and industry representatives who took part in this study drew attention to a wide range of issues concerning ACE VET and its relationship to mainstream VET. They praised areas which were working well, they criticised others which were not, and, more often than not, offered ideas and suggestions for improvement. The following conclusions have been drawn from the responses and comments of participants in this study.

## The nature of ACE

Taken overall, the results of this study suggest that ACE in NSW is more strongly vocationally oriented than in SA. In SA, ACE consists predominantly of small 'neighbourhood houses', while in NSW, many ACE providers are comparatively large 'colleges' which offer higher proportions of what are clearly vocational courses. The nearest equivalent to these ACE colleges in SA appeared to be TAFE-based ACE providers operating from TAFE institutes.

## Recognition of ACE VET

A topic that arose quite frequently in interviews with ACE providers and representatives from industry related to what constituted a 'vocational' course. 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. Some of the examples cited included floral art being undertaken by occupational therapists for their work with patients, Feng Shui being undertaken by architects, and public speaking/presentation techniques contributing to skills as a workplace trainer. It was also not uncommon for students completing these courses to be granted credit towards further vocational study.

There was a strong view amongst ACE providers and industry representatives that the concept of 'vocational' courses needed to be broadened to encompass the type of learning described above. For the benefit of ACE-mainstream VET linkages, ACE, mainstream VET and industry should consider working together to more clearly define policy in relation to recognition of vocational learning acquired in ACE courses.

## Strengths of ACE VET

In this study it became apparent that many of the features which distinguished ACE VET from mainstream VET were the reasons people chose to study with ACE. To many, they were the 'strengths' of ACE VET. Prominent amongst these strengths were flexibility (the ability to provide suitable course times, suitable course levels and adaptable delivery modes), friendliness, and lack of formality. In providing study opportunities which offer these features, ACE is clearly filling a special niche in VET. ACE should not overlook its strengths when planning vocational provision and associated promotional activities.

## Future directions for ACE VET

To determine how ACE could best capitalise on its strengths and serve vocational learners, students, providers and industry representatives were asked to indicate the areas of vocational learning they felt ACE should offer. Recurring themes in their responses were that ACE was particularly important to people who, because of previous unhappy study experiences or a long time away from study, would otherwise be unlikely to undertake vocational study, and that ACE courses often acted as a springboard from which people launched into vocational study in other educational sectors, including mainstream VET. Based on results obtained in this study, it is suggested that ACE pay particular attention to the following aspects of ACE provision.

### Courses for people affected by industry change

Provision of vocational learning to people affected by industry change is likely to be an increasingly important future role for ACE. With its ease of access and friendly, supportive learning environment, ACE is in a strong position to provide courses for people faced with changes in their work roles, or even redundancy because of decreased demand for their existing skills. In this context, there could also be benefit for all parties concerned if ACE worked closely with Centrelink.

### Segmented training

Some commentators noted there was an industry trend towards more segmented learning in which training was broken into series of short courses. Employees and employers were believed to prefer this kind of course because the courses could focus precisely on their needs and so increase the efficiency of training by minimising the time spent and cost. ACE, with its proven ability to provide short, focussed courses, and to design customised training, would be in a strong position to provide training of this nature. However, some industry representatives warned that ACE should ensure that this type of learning was not improperly used by employers and employees to obtain training which met their needs but did not meet industry standards.

### Training packages

Teaching of training packages should be considered by ACE as an opportunity to capitalise on some of its strengths. Coming from a background of modular-style training, and with its traditional close relationships with local employers, ACE could be well placed to provide this type of training.

### Customised training

ACE, with its recognised flexibility, its ability to work closely with local employers, and its ability to employ industry-based trainers with specialised knowledge, should not overlook the possibility of providing customised training to industry.

### Training partnerships

Taking into account the ability of ACE to develop close working relationships with local employers, its strong regional presence, its ability to recruit industry trainers with up-to-date knowledge and skills as trainers, and its established entrepreneurial skills, ACE providers should consider entering into training partnership arrangements with enterprises.

### Subject areas

Subject areas which ACE was said to be particularly well suited to provide were management, supervision, accounting, communication, report-writing, networking, conflict

resolution, office/business computer packages, and information technology. The value of these subject areas as a means of gaining the interest and confidence of industry in ACE VET should not be overlooked. Successful provision to enterprises in these areas could lead to extension of provision into other areas.

## **ACE VET information provision**

Evidence from this study suggested that individuals and organisations are disadvantaged by lack of information about the range of ACE VET and the possibility of linking it with mainstream VET. In addition, it is evident that linkages between ACE VET and mainstream VET are impeded by a lack of awareness and acceptance of ACE VET by mainstream VET.

If individuals and organisations are to be better informed of the existence of ACE VET and the vocational opportunities it can offer, and if linkages between ACE VET and mainstream VET (which contribute to the vocational opportunities) are to be effective, the extent and quality of ACE VET information provision to the community, industry and mainstream VET needs to be improved. Survey results and comments from project participants suggested a number of strategies which should be considered.

Consideration needs to be given to use of the popular media (for example, newspapers, local press, radio, TV), mail, and information provision by direct contact. The Internet, too, with its capacity to be reached by a wide range of potential recipients, is an increasingly important medium. ACE peak bodies, like BACE in NSW and the Adult and Community Education Unit in SA, have an important role to play, particularly where information is to be provided in consolidated form (that is, covering all ACE providers).

ITABs, employer peak bodies, business enterprise centres and unions have commonly indicated a low level of awareness of ACE VET. In view of the significant role they can play in making industry more aware of ACE VET, and their general willingness to do so, they should not be overlooked in any undertaking to improve industry awareness of what ACE can offer. Centrelink, too, which is in touch with large numbers of people who could benefit from ACE VET study, is another body which should not be overlooked. And, on the community front, local governments may be able to relay ACE VET information to their residents.

In presenting ACE VET information to industry and the community, ACE should also give consideration to the mode in which it is presented. For instance, when approaching enterprises, the role of the person contacted needs to be taken into account. In a small business it is likely to be the proprietor who may have only limited knowledge (and possibly interest) in VET, whereas in a large company it may be a training manager whose interest and work is focussed on VET.

The use of case studies to demonstrate how ACE VET can help may prove to be an effective tool in some situations. Other promotional tools which should be considered are 'branding' and the employment of an ACE 'figurehead'. In branding, the 'ACE' acronym would always appear with any ACE VET promotion so that an association between ACE and VET is developed. Furthermore, the acronym and the words 'Adult and Vocational Education' would be incorporated in the enterprise name of any ACE provider to draw attention to the fact that it is ACE. Employment of an ACE 'figurehead'—a high profile person well known to the public—to feature in ACE promotions and become identified with ACE would give ACE a more friendly and recognisable identity.

## **Pathways, linkages and credit transfer**

Pathways and linkages between ACE and mainstream VET are important in that they enable students to move between the two sectors to pursue study paths which are more advantageous to them than study restricted to one sector. However, in their responses and comments, participants in this study indicated there was a number of issues which needed to

be addressed. For example, more than half of the providers responding saw availability of linkages and credit transfer as being very limited, some saw mainstream VET as being reluctant to participate to any large extent in linkage processes, and some complained of the demands that linkage processes placed on their time and resources. More than half of providers responding indicated that they had encountered difficulties in arranging credit transfer from ACE to mainstream VET.

The limitations in availability of linkages and associated credit transfer need to be dealt with on several fronts. The concept of linkages needs to be better explained and promoted in both sectors; the ability of ACE to provide vocational training needs to be recognised by mainstream VET; ACE providers need to establish and publicise their status as RTOs (where applicable), and linkage processes need to be streamlined through closer collaboration and better communication between ACE and mainstream VET.

Resolution of many of these matters can be assisted by ACE and mainstream VET peak bodies working together, particularly at policy level. This is taking place to some extent already (for example, BACE and TAFE in NSW have developed the *ACE-TAFE Joint Strategic Plan*) but more needs to be done to make it work effectively.

## **ACE should complement mainstream VET**

When students, providers and industry representatives were asked whether ACE should maintain a complementary role to that of mainstream VET as opposed to a competitive role in which it offered much the same courses and outcomes, general opinion was that ACE should remain complementary. If ACE were to become more competitive, it would risk reduced co-operation from mainstream VET, changes to the special nature of ACE VET that presently makes it so attractive, and reduced traditional ACE management freedom by being more dependent on government funding and more tightly bound by the needs of industry.

To maintain its complementarity, ACE needs to look at niche markets not accommodated by mainstream VET (a task that is likely to become more difficult as mainstream VET establishes its own ACE-like arms providing short focussed courses for industry). One area in which this could be done is through provision of vocational training in regional areas which mainstream VET finds difficult to service. Either ACE could be the sole provider of particular courses or it could act in partnership with mainstream VET to provide local tutoring, mentoring or supervision for students undertaking mainstream VET courses. ACE might also consider focussing on provision of training in the workplace, an area some commentators felt mainstream VET (particularly TAFE) was not fully covering at present.

To remain complementary, ACE should also endeavour to maintain and enhance its distinctive and attractive styles of delivery which set it apart from mainstream VET.

## **ACE-mainstream VET co-operation and collaboration**

Linkages between courses offered by ACE and mainstream VET depend on a number of factors, such as credit transfer, recognition of prior learning and recognition of current competency, but as much as anything, they depend on co-operation and collaboration between ACE and mainstream VET. The more interaction between the two sectors, the easier it becomes to relate courses offered by one sector to those of the other. If linkages between ACE and mainstream VET courses are to be developed and strengthened, there must be greater co-operation and collaboration between the two.

At sector management level, there can be cross-representation on the respective management bodies to assist in development of policies and strategies. At regional level, there can be meetings and workshops between relevant staff from each sector during which information about courses can be exchanged, local policy and strategies on linkages and linking procedures can be discussed and developed, and through closer association and familiarity, greater trust and goodwill fostered.

At provider level, selected personnel can be designated as linkage contact persons for their organisation, or even for a particular course area to enable personnel or students from the other sectors to contact them for advice and assistance

At all levels, interaction can be initiated between relevant personnel to develop co-ordinated approaches to course provision to minimise unnecessary overlap and maximise opportunities for linking, to develop linkages and linkage procedures, and to develop guidelines for students and provider personnel wishing to access linkages.

Consideration should be given to creating regional co-ordinators operating across clusters of ACE and mainstream VET providers to liaise with providers, disseminate information, co-ordinate meetings and assist with submissions, manage pathways and perform other cross-sectoral duties related to linked courses. With the appropriate personal attributes and training, a co-ordinator could assist in the improvement of communication and rapport across the sectors and provide better continuity in cross-sectoral relationships when staff changes occur.

As part of a co-ordinated approach, a cross-sectoral referral system should be developed in which students who fail to gain entry to a course in one sector (either because classes are full or because the course they apply for is unsuited to their needs or abilities) can be automatically referred to an appropriate course in the other sector.

Consideration should be given to the concept of advertising courses together, particularly where the courses are likely to be complementary. Joint advertising would give better information access to students and in some circumstances might lower costs.

In view of the success of some schemes in which mainstream VET and ACE providers operate from the same campus—particularly in terms of ease of accessing linkages, development of linkages and more co-ordinated course provision—there may be some situations where co-location of ACE and mainstream VET providers on one campus should be investigated.

## **Concluding remarks**

Evidence gained from this research suggests that ACE VET offers a number of features which distinguish it from mainstream VET. One of the most significant is a relaxed and friendly environment that encourages people who are apprehensive about study (and therefore often unlikely to enrol in mainstream VET) to embark on vocational learning. Others include the flexibility of ACE that enables providers to adapt to the needs of enterprises and individuals, and the fact that ACE providers, through local management, are more in touch with the needs of local enterprises and their community.

For ACE vocational study to be of greatest benefit to individuals (and the industries in which they work) it should enable students to move on to further study in other sectors. However, despite the fact that many ACE courses are of a level and standard that should allow students to receive credit towards study in mainstream VET, this does not always happen—students are often unaware of the existence of linkages recognising the compatibility of the courses, linkages may not have been established, or linkages which have been established are not fully acknowledged.

This study has demonstrated that, for the potential benefits of ACE vocational study to be realised, it is important that linkages between ACE and mainstream VET are fully explored and developed, and once established, are recognised by all providers in the two sectors. It is also important that all concerned, especially students, prospective students, provider personnel and industry personnel, are adequately informed of the existence of ACE VET, its scope, its special qualities, and the fact that it can be linked to mainstream VET. To achieve these outcomes, there must be improvement in the promotion of ACE VET and increased interaction between the ACE and mainstream VET sectors.

# Bibliography

---

- Adams, C 1996, *ACE sector accreditation: A report on accredited course provision within adult and community education*, Institute of Adult Education, Department of Vocational Education and Training, Tasmania.
- Adelaide Central Mission 1997, 'From "outside" to "inside" VET for the disadvantaged', in *Demonstrating best practice in VET: Workshop manual*, Adelaide Central Mission, Adelaide.
- Anderson, D 1999, 'Reintegrating ACE and TAFE: A lost opportunity', *Australian Journal of Adult and Community Education*, vol.39, no.1, April 1999.
- Angwin, J 1997, 'The shifting boundaries of adult and vocational education', *Changing Education*, vol.3/4, 1997.
- Barnett, K & Wilson, S 1994, *Challenges and choices: A study of four providers of adult community education*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide.
- Bennink, R & Blackwell, P 1995, *Access for all in adult community education—Overcoming barriers to participation: Provider handbook*, Department for Employment, Training and Further Education, Adult Community Education Unit, Adelaide.
- Curtin, P & Campbell, A (eds) 1999, *ACE—some issues*, NCVER, Adelaide.
- Centre for Research, Planning and Development, Wodonga Institute of TAFE 1999, *Innovative approaches to entry level vocational education and training*, Wodonga Institute of TAFE, Wodonga.
- Clemans, A & Rushbrook, P 1998, 'Pathways between ACE and VET: Creating illusions and shattering myths', in *Speaking back again: Report of 1997 ACFE Research Forum*, pp.41–2.
- 1997, *Forging pathways: Good practice in community-based adult education*, Adult Community and Further Education Board, Melbourne.
- Crombie, A 1996, 'Learning sovereignty and the role of the adult and community education sector in VET', in *Training together: 2<sup>nd</sup> National Conference on Vocational Education and Training*, Australian National Training Authority, July 1996, Adelaide.
- 1995, *Review of the ANTA Agreement*, submission from the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education Inc., Canberra.
- Dalton, M 1995, 'ACE–TAFE cooperation in New South Wales', *Training Agenda*, vol.3, no.2, p.9, May 1995.
- Dickie, M 1999, 'Lifelong learning for all. Australian attitudes to lifelong learning', *Adult Learning Australia*, no.4, pp.16–20, August 1999.
- Kaye Schofield & Associates 1996, *The role of adult and community education in the implementation of a national system for vocational education and training: A discussion paper*, Kaye Schofield & Associates, Bewong.
- 1996, *Think local and compete: An analysis of the role of adult and community education in the implementation of a national system for vocational education and training: Report to the MCEETYA Taskforce*, ANTA, Brisbane.
- Kearns, P 1999, *Lifelong learning: Implications for VET—A discussion paper*, published on behalf of University of Technology, Sydney by NCVER, Adelaide.
- Kinnaird, R & Davis, P 1998, *ACE and small business in New South Wales*, NCVER, Adelaide.
- McIntyre, J 1995, 'Has the Australian Community College a future as well as a past?', paper, *National Conference on the Regional Implications of Training Reform*, School of Adult Education, University of Technology, Sydney, September 1995.
- McIntyre, J, Foley, G, Morris, R & Tennant, M 1995, *ACE works: The vocational outcomes of adult and community education courses in New South Wales*, NSW Board of Adult and Community Education, Sydney.
- McIntyre, J, Morris, R & Tennant, M 1993, *The vocational scope of ACE*, NSW Board of Adult and Community Education, Sydney.

- Moore, A 1998, 'ACE and adding value to the training market', in *Market for vocational education and training: Who pays and who profits*, NCVER, Adelaide.
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research 1999, *Australian personal enrichment education & training programs 1997: An overview*, NCVER, Adelaide.
- NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training 1994, *Planning for tomorrow in vocational education and training*, national conference NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training, Sydney.
- NSW Board of Adult and Community Education 1996, 'ACE-VET: Is it delivering?: An evaluation of vocational education and training in NSW adult and community education, 1992-1995', NSW Board of Adult and Community Education, Darlinghurst.
- NSW TAFE Commission & NSW Board of Adult and Community Education 1999, *ACE-TAFE Joint Strategic Plan 1999-2000*, NSW TAFE Commission & NSW Board of Adult and Community Education, Sydney.
- Randell, S 1993, *After the crystal ball is over*, First Annual International Conference on Post-compulsory Education and Training, December 1993, Brisbane.
- Robinson, C & Arthy, K 1999, *Lifelong learning: Developing a training culture*, NCVER, Adelaide.
- Rushbrook, P 1996, 'Riding the tiger: ACE and accreditation', *Multiple choice*, no.3, pp.4-5, Autumn 1996.
- Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee 1997, *Beyond Cinderella: Towards a learning society*, Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee, Canberra.
- Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee 1999, 'Vocational, adult and community education', in *Report of the inquiry into the GST and a new tax system*, Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, March 1999.
- Sharpe, T & Robertson, R 1996, 'Adult community education pathways to vocational education and training', issues paper, ANTA, Brisbane.
- Thomas, S & Moore, A 1995, 'Recognition in the adult and community education sector', *Training Agenda*; vol.3, no.4, pp.5-6, November 1995.
- Thompson, C, Noble, D & MacFarlan, B 1995, *Evaluation of the Hawthorn Cluster*, Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council of Adult, Community and Further Education, Box Hill.
- Volkoff, V, Golding, B & Jenkin, J 1999, *The vocational essence of ACE: The delivery of VET programs by adult and community education providers*, NCVER, Adelaide.

# Appendix A

---

## **ACE vocational education provider questionnaire**

# ACE-VET LINKAGES

## QUESTIONNAIRE: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROVIDER PERSONNEL

### ABOUT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

For many years, the Adult Community Education (ACE) sector mainly offered courses for hobbies and personal enrichment. Over the past few decades the range of learning offered has expanded to include English for migrants, literacy, numeracy, basic food preparation and other general living skills, many of which may be applied in the workplace.

In recent years this trend towards work oriented learning has continued with ACE now teaching job-related skills through courses in a variety of fields such as computing, business management and retailing. Many of these courses have the potential to be linked with vocational qualifications and with courses offered by mainstream Vocational Education and Training providers such as TAFE and non-government vocational colleges.

This questionnaire is part of a research study to investigate ways in which people could benefit from better linking of Adult Community Education learning with mainstream Vocational Education and Training (VET). By contributing to the study you will be helping shape ACE based vocational learning for the future.

We would be very grateful if you would complete this questionnaire and return it to us in the reply-paid envelope as soon as you can. Should you misplace your reply-paid envelope, you may still return the completed questionnaire at no cost by placing it in a plain envelope addressed to:

Reply Paid 5  
NCVER  
PO Box 115  
KENSINGTON PARK SA 5068 (no stamp required)

### Please note:

1. All information provided in your answers will be treated confidentially and used only for the purpose of this survey.
2. Where a set of squares (☐) are shown, only one square is to be ticked, but where a set of circles (☐) are shown, as many as apply may be ticked.
3. Because this survey is designed for a wide range of respondents you may find that some questions are not relevant to your situation. Where this is the case, just leave them blank.

### In this questionnaire...

**VET** stands for *Vocational Education and Training*, which is learning undertaken to acquire skills and knowledge needed to perform work. Some examples of VET courses are: accounting, hairdressing, welding, and bar service. VET courses are mainly provided by TAFE colleges, non-government vocational colleges, skill centres, and some large employers.

**Mainstream VET providers** are organisations which traditionally provide vocational education and training, such as TAFE colleges, non-government vocational colleges, skill centres, and some employers.

**ACE** stands for *Adult and Community Education*, which is learning provided by community based organisations such as neighbourhood centres and community colleges. Some TAFE colleges also offer ACE. ACE courses used to focus predominantly on hobbies and personal development (like wine appreciation and stress management) and basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. However, in recent years, ACE has increasingly provided work-oriented learning such as word processing, retailing and food preparation as well. Organisations which provide adult and community education are referred to as **ACE providers**.

**ACE vocational education** is learning provided by ACE organisations that could have some application in the workplace or could relate to mainstream vocational education and training. ACE vocational education may include accredited courses.

## Respondent details

1. Name: .....

2. Position: .....

## Organisation details

3. Name of organisation  
.....

4. Primary nature of organisation
- ☐ Adult community education provider
  - ☐ Provider of non-accredited vocational education
  - ☐ Government funded vocational provider
  - ☐ Non-government vocational provider

Comment: .....  
.....  
.....

## 5. Type of learning offered

(please tick as many as apply)

- a ☐ General non-vocational (eg Internet for seniors, amateur astronomy, public speaking, aromatherapy)
- b ☐ Basic skills (eg English as a second language, literacy, numeracy, communication)
- c ☐ Non accredited vocationally oriented learning (eg keyboard skills, small business operation, food preparation for invalids)
- d ☐ Accredited vocational learning (eg first aid, bookkeeping, airline ticketing, supervision, hairdressing, pastry cook, electrical mechanic)

Comment: .....  
.....  
.....

## Student and community needs

### 6. What do you think are the main reasons students undertake vocational education with ACE?

(please tick as many as apply)

- a ☐ Option of bridging to a mainstream VET course
- b ☐ Course is at the student's ability level
- c ☐ Need to acquire basic employment skills
- d ☐ To learn skills for current employment
- e ☐ To comply with employer requirement
- f ☐ As a step towards self-employment
- g ☐ To get a qualification
- h ☐ Need to test ability to undertake VET
- i ☐ Fill-in study until sure of study goals
- j ☐ More suitable course times
- k ☐ Better access to course venue
- l ☐ Preferred style of teaching
- m ☐ Smaller class size
- n ☐ Access to childcare
- o ☐ More friendly, less formal organisation
- p ☐ More social contact
- q ☐ Other (please specify) .....

.....

### 7. What do you think are the outcomes students most commonly gain from ACE vocational study?

(please tick as many as apply)

- a ☐ Gain in basic skills (English language, arithmetic, etc)
- b ☐ Gain in work related skills and knowledge
- c ☐ Improved prospects of finding employment
- d ☐ Changes in employment (find/switch employment, promotion, new responsibilities, higher pay, etc)
- e ☐ Improvement in personal attributes (confidence, communication skills, etc)
- f ☐ Bridging to further study with a mainstream VET provider
- g ☐ Other (please specify) .....

.....

8. Briefly describe changes in any of the following which you feel could make ACE vocational education more valuable to students:

a ACE course information:

.....  
 .....  
 .....

b Venue in which ACE course is presented:

.....  
 .....  
 .....

c ACE learning facilities (equipment, etc):

.....  
 .....  
 .....

d Student facilities (eg childcare, cafeteria):

.....  
 .....  
 .....

e ACE course hours:

.....  
 .....  
 .....

f ACE course content:

.....  
 .....  
 .....

g ACE course presentation:

.....  
 .....  
 .....

h Linkages between ACE study and mainstream VET, such as TAFE study:

.....  
 .....  
 .....

i Assistance in linking ACE course outcomes with mainstream VET:

.....  
 .....  
 .....

j Other:

.....  
 .....  
 .....

## Cross-sectoral information about ACE and mainstream VET

9. For the benefit of students it can be helpful if mainstream VET staff have knowledge of local ACE providers and ACE courses.

a How would you rate the knowledge of relevant **mainstream VET staff** about ACE vocational courses and associated credit transfer options?

Circle one shaded number using this scale

Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very poor
5	4	3	2	1

b How could these staff be assisted to improve their knowledge of ACE vocational courses and credit transfer options?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

c Are there any important information gaps that should receive high priority?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

10. In order to inform and assist ACE students, **ACE personnel** need to know how the mainstream VET sector operates and who to contact regarding credit transfer and other matters.

a How would you rate the knowledge of relevant **ACE staff** about mainstream VET and associated credit transfer options?

Circle one shaded number using this scale

Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very poor
5	4	3	2	1

b How could these staff be assisted to improve their knowledge of mainstream VET courses and credit transfer options?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

c Are there any important information gaps that should receive high priority?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**11. Regarding provision of ACE vocational course information in your organisation:**

a What information is provided?

(please tick as many as apply)

- ☐ Course listings
- ☐ Time-tabling
- ☐ Course content
- ☐ Credit transfer options and procedures
- ☐ Other (please specify).....
- .....
- ☐ Little or nothing

b Who provides the information, and in what form (leaflets, in person, telephone, etc)?

.....

.....

.....

.....

**12. Please rate how important a role you think each of the following should play in providing information about ACE vocational education.**

Circle one shaded number for each item using this scale

Extremely important	Important	Neutral	Little importance	Not at all important
5	4	3	2	1

a Government funded mainstream training providers (eg TAFE)

5 4 3 2 1

b Non-government funded mainstream training providers

5 4 3 2 1

c ACE providers

5 4 3 2 1

d Media (newspapers, local press, radio, TV)

5 4 3 2 1

e Mailed promotions

5 4 3 2 1

f Secondary schools

5 4 3 2 1

g Other (please specify)

5 4 3 2 1

Comment:.....

.....

.....

.....

**13. Many employers have only a limited awareness of vocational education offered through ACE providers. How important is it that employers should be familiar with ACE vocational education? (eg to guide employees and gauge competence of job applicants)**

Circle one shaded number using this scale

Extremely important	Important	Neutral	Little importance	Not at all important
5	4	3	2	1

Comment:.....

.....

.....

## Features of ACE vocational education

14. Using the scale provided, please indicate how significant each of the following are as strengths of ACE vocational education which distinguish it from mainstream VET.

Circle one shaded number for each item using this scale

Extremely significant	Very significant	Significant	Minor significance	Not at all significant
5	4	3	2	1

- a Good physical accessibility.

5 4 3 2 1

- b Informal, friendly, non-threatening environment.

5 4 3 2 1

- c Minimum of bureaucracy.

5 4 3 2 1

- d Often locally managed.

5 4 3 2 1

- e Students may enter and leave learning programs easily.

5 4 3 2 1

- f Capacity to accommodate students with a wide range of skills needs and backgrounds.

5 4 3 2 1

- g Able to respond to special needs of individual students and employers.

5 4 3 2 1

- h Able to provide wide range of teaching formats.

5 4 3 2 1

- i The trainer is a helper rather than a learning authority.

5 4 3 2 1

- j Emphasis on mastering skills and knowledge rather than completing course in a set time.

5 4 3 2 1

- k Other (please specify) .....

5 4 3 2 1

Comment: .....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## Student access issues

15. Some students, such as parents with dependent children and individuals already employed, are unable to match their study schedules to mainstream VET provider programs. It has been said that ACE can sometimes better meet their needs.

- a How does flexibility of ACE vocational education provision compare with that of mainstream VET provision?

Circle one shaded number using this scale

ACE much more flexible	ACE more flexible	About the same	ACE less flexible	ACE much less flexible
5	4	3	2	1

- b Should this feature of ACE be extended and promoted as an ACE benefit?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

16. Postcode analysis shows that businesses and other organisations which pay for people to attend ACE courses are mostly local. Should ACE place a high priority on servicing the needs of individuals and businesses in local communities?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

Comment .....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## Pathways and credit transfer

17. Credit transfer enables students who have completed ACE vocational education to have their learning credited as part of mainstream VET study.

- a How would you rate the availability of credit transfer from ACE vocational education to mainstream VET?

Circle one shaded number using this scale

Extensive	Good	Adequate	Limited	Very limited
5	4	3	2	1

- b Are any difficulties being encountered in arranging credit transfer between ACE vocational education and mainstream VET?

☐ Many ☐ Some ☐ Not aware of any

If so, please specify the most serious ones:

.....

.....

.....

.....

- c Can you suggest any areas in which credit transfer between ACE Stream 1000 courses and mainstream VET could be of benefit to students?

.....

.....

.....

.....

- d Does RPL have any part to play in linking ACE vocational study to mainstream VET?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

If Yes, please briefly explain how:

.....

.....

.....

.....

18. **Pathways** are established or pre-determined links between ACE vocational education and mainstream VET which enable students to continue their studies from one sector to the other.

- a Are you aware of any recognised pathways which enable students to move between ACE vocational education and mainstream VET?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

If Yes, please give examples:

.....

.....

.....

.....

- b By what process were the pathways developed?

.....

.....

.....

.....

- c Have any pathways been specially created for particular groups?

☐ Non English speaking background

☐ Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

☐ Disabled

☐ Women – non-traditional occupations

☐ Other: .....

If so, please briefly describe one example:

.....

.....

.....

.....

- d What future action on pathways is needed?

☐ Create more and/or improve existing ones

☐ No action needed ☐ Can't say

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

## ACE contribution to key competencies

19. When asked about training needs, employers often mention key competencies like collecting/analysing information, communication, planning/organising work, problem solving and working with others. How well does ACE compare with mainstream VET in teaching key competencies?

Circle one shaded number using this scale

Ace very much better	ACE better	ACE about the same	ACE worse	ACE very much worse
5	4	3	2	1

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

## ACE curriculum

20. Please indicate how important it is that ACE should offer each type of course content listed below.

Circle one number only for each item using this scale

Extremely important	Important	Neutral	Little importance	Not at all important
5	4	3	2	1

- a General (non-vocational) education such as literacy, English as a second language, and general living skills.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- b Generic vocational education, covering skills and knowledge broadly applicable in the workplace, such as communication, report writing, teamwork, workplace culture and technological understanding.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- c Industry-specific vocational education such as word processing, airline ticketing, bookkeeping, food preparation and landscaping.
- 5 4 3 2 1

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

21. Should consideration be given to developing credit transfer arrangements for ACE-provided Stream 1000 courses which have vocational application?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

22. In terms of certification, to what level do you think ACE vocational education should extend?

- ☐ Only below certificate level
- ☐ Certificate
- ☐ Advanced certificate
- ☐ Diploma ☐ Can't say

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

23. It has been suggested that ACE providers should extend their curriculums to include mainstream VET programs (eg TAFE courses). How likely are the following outcomes if ACE becomes competitive with mainstream VET in this way?

Circle one shaded number for each item using this scale

Extremely likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Not at all likely
5	4	3	2	1

- a Reduction in traditional ACE flexibility due to need to conform to mainstream requirements.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- b Reduction in existing low level ACE vocational education provision.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- c Shift of ACE vocational education focus from needs of learners to needs of industry.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- d Reduction in appeal of ACE to learners who are initially averse to formal study.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- e Increased dependence of ACE on government funding with consequent loss of management freedom.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- f Unnecessary duplication of course provision.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- g Reduced cooperation/collaboration between ACE and mainstream VET providers.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- h Other (please specify).

5 4 3 2 1

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

24. Taking your previous answers into account, please rate how complementary or competitive you think ACE should be in relation to mainstream VET.

Circle one shaded number using this scale

Strongly complementary	Moderately complementary	Neutral	Moderately competitive	Strongly competitive
5	4	3	2	1

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

25. Do you know of any mainstream VET (eg TAFE) programs already offered through ACE organisations? (Please give examples)

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

.....

.....

.....

.....

26. Some industries (eg primary industry) would like more flexible training (eg flexibility in course structure, timetabling, delivery format, venue). Should ACE consider targeting these industry needs?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

27. Please indicate how appropriate it is for ACE to offer each of the following forms of training.

Circle one number only for each item using this scale

Extremely appropriate	Appropriate	Neutral	Not very appropriate	Not at all appropriate
5	4	3	2	1

- a Training under contract to government (eg traineeships, training for Centrelink).

5 4 3 2 1

- b General industry funded training.

5 4 3 2 1

- c Customised training under contract to individual companies.

5 4 3 2 1

- d Customised training to meet individual student needs.

5 4 3 2 1

- e Training at the place of employment – but not on the job.

5 4 3 2 1

- f Training on the job.

5 4 3 2 1

- g Shared training with mainstream VET providers (eg TAFE college).

5 4 3 2 1

- h Is there any other form of provision that should be offered? (please specify)

5 4 3 2 1

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

## ACE vocational education target groups

28. ACE study (including ACE vocational education) traditionally benefits special needs groups (eg low language/literacy skills, low level of schooling, women, indigenous, disabled, unemployed). This benefit can translate into the removal of barriers to VET study.

- a How important is it that ACE make special provision for VET oriented study for these groups?

Circle one shaded number using this scale

Extremely important	Important	Neutral	Little importance	Not at all important
5	4	3	2	1

- b Are there any groups that should be targeted for special attention? (please specify)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

29. In providing government-funded VET, some ACE providers have focussed on catering for individualised learning for placement and self-referral students from Centrelink and employment agencies which use a case management approach. Should this be a significant focus of the ACE sector?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

30. In order for ACE to focus on middle level vocational education it has been suggested that it should raise its profile with small business at local levels. Do you feel this is a goal ACE should pursue?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

31. ACE already provides language, literacy and similar learning to **apprentices** who voluntarily seek assistance. Are there any ways in which ACE providers should extend into more formal training for apprentices?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

## Coordination and cooperation between ACE and mainstream VET

32. In some states mechanisms exist to coordinate ACE and mainstream VET across the various providers.

- a Briefly state how, and by which organisation, ACE vocational provision is coordinated in your State.

.....

.....

.....

.....

- b How would you rate existing **coordination** in your state/territory?

Circle one shaded number using this scale

Very good	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very poor
5	4	3	2	1

- c How could it be improved?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

33. It has been said that there is need for greater **cooperation and collaboration** between providers of ACE and mainstream VET, including strategic alliances, sharing and allocation of course provision responsibilities, joint provision of courses, and joint use of resources such as premises, teachers and equipment:

- a Do you agree with this view?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

- b Could greater collaboration contribute to incorporation of the principles of lifelong learning and learner-centred adult education into mainstream VET?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

- c Could greater collaboration help ACE improve its teaching of vocational principles and practices?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

- d If you answered Yes to any of the above, what are the most important actions that should be taken to achieve greater cooperation and collaboration?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- e Overall, how would you rate the extent of existing cooperation and collaboration between providers in your locality?

Circle one shaded number using this scale

Very large amount	A large amount	Adequate	A small amount	Hardly any
5	4	3	2	1

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

34. If greater cooperation and collaboration involves sharing of resources, how would you rate the importance of sharing of each of the following?

Circle one number only for each item using this scale

Extremely important	Important	Neutral	Little importance	Not at all important
5	4	3	2	1

- a Premises.  
5 4 3 2 1
- b Student amenities (eg cafeteria, library, childcare).  
5 4 3 2 1
- c Equipment (eg computer facilities).  
5 4 3 2 1
- d Teachers.  
5 4 3 2 1
- e Administrative staff.  
5 4 3 2 1
- f Courses.  
5 4 3 2 1
- g Other (please specify).  
.....  
5 4 3 2 1

Comment:.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### Provider performance and quality

35. An important issue for the VET sector is how effectively ACE performs as a vocational education provider. Using the scale provided, please give an overall rating of each of the following.

Circle one number only for each item using this scale

Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very poor
5	4	3	2	1

- a Standard of ACE vocational course content.  
5 4 3 2 1
- b Standard of ACE vocational teaching.  
5 4 3 2 1

Comment:.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

36. The VET system is moving towards greater focus on quality systems and standards as a means of regulation and registration of trainers.

a Do ACE providers need to be assisted to understand and meet the standards?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

b Should ACE providers be invited to participate in developing or revising future quality systems and standards?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

Comment:.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### Professional development

37. Using the scale provided, please indicate the need for ACE vocational education staff to receive professional training in each of the following areas:

Circle one shaded number for each item using this scale

Very high need	High need	Average need	Low need	Hardly any need
5	4	3	2	1

- a Teaching practices  
5 4 3 2 1
- b Technical subject knowledge  
5 4 3 2 1
- c Information dissemination  
5 4 3 2 1
- d Educational management  
5 4 3 2 1
- e Competency based training  
5 4 3 2 1
- f Assessment design  
5 4 3 2 1
- g Working with enterprises  
5 4 3 2 1
- h Understanding local labour markets  
5 4 3 2 1
- i Other (please specify)  
.....  
5 4 3 2 1
- j Other (please specify)  
.....  
5 4 3 2 1

Comment:.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## Monitoring and reporting of ACE vocational education activity

It has been suggested that establishment of ACE vocational education could be assisted by accurate and consistent reporting of ACE vocational education activity.

38. Taken overall, how would you rate the existing system of collecting and reporting of statistical data on ACE vocational course provision?

Circle one shaded number using this scale

Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very poor
5	4	3	2	1

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

39. Should a nationally consistent approach to identifying and specifying programs delivered by ACE providers under national VET system arrangements be developed?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

40. To what bodies or sectors should ACE vocational education provision be reported?

(please tick as many as apply)

- a ☐ Australian National Training Authority
- b ☐ ACE system (please specify)
- .....
- c ☐ Mainstream VET system (please specify)
- .....
- d ☐ State/Territory government bodies (please specify)
- .....
- e ☐ Federal government bodies (please specify)
- .....
- f ☐ Other (please specify)
- .....

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

41. What should be reported?

(please tick as many as apply)

- a ☐ Quantitative data on ACE vocational education course provision and enrolments
- b ☐ Developments in pathways between ACE and mainstream VET
- c ☐ Developments in cross-sectoral course provision
- d ☐ Developments in strategic alliances between ACE and mainstream VET providers
- f ☐ Other (please specify)

.....

.....

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

42. Should consistent national usage of terms such as: *ACE provider*, *ACE sector* and *ACE vocational education* be adopted?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

## Strategies for ACE vocational education management and provision

43. Please indicate below whether the following groups or bodies should either be on an ACE vocational education and training board of management or be consulted by the board.

- |   | On the board          | Consult only          |  |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|
| a | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Peak Adult Community Education bodies    |
| b | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Regional Adult Education bodies          |
| c | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Vocational Education and Training boards |
| d | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | VET Accreditation boards                 |
| e | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Industry Training Advisory bodies        |
| f | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Regional TAFE institutions               |
| g | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Non-government mainstream VET providers  |
| h | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | ACE providers                            |
| i | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | ACE student representatives              |
| j | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Industry associations                    |
| k | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Employer associations                    |
| l | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Unions                                   |
| m | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | General community representatives        |
| n | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Other (please specify)<br>.....          |
| o | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Other (please specify)<br>.....          |

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

44. What priority (high, medium or low) should be allocated to each of the following strategies for developing linkages between ACE and mainstream VET?

- |   | High                     | Med                      | Low                      |   |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| a | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Cross representation on ACE and VET sector boards of management   |
| b | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Joint ACE-mainstream VET planning mechanisms  |
| c | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Joint ACE-mainstream VET working parties  |
| d | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | National round-table conferences of stakeholders  |
| e | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | State round-table conferences of stakeholders   |
| f | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Development of stronger links with Industry Training Advisory Bodies  |
| g | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Input from ACE into state training profile processes.   |
| h | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Identification and coordination of current ACE vocational education provision at local, regional and State levels             |
| i | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Development of a clearly identifiable national ACE vocational education structure.  |
| j | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Demonstration of ACE's contribution to VET through relevant data collection   |
| k | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | National coalitions of various stakeholder groups (eg Aboriginal groups, women's groups, unemployed, University of Third Age) |
| l | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Information sharing between ACE and mainstream VET  |
| m | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Establishment of learning pathways by negotiation of credit transfer, articulation and RPL                                    |
| n | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Development of policies on shared use of facilities   |
| o | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Development of policies on sharing of ACE and TAFE staff  |
| p | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Partnerships between ACE providers and TAFE colleges  |
| q | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Partnerships between ACE and non-government VET providers   |
| r | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please specify)<br>.....   |
| s | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please specify)<br>.....   |

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

45. Management of ACE vocational education provision:

- a How should ACE vocational education provision be primarily managed?

(Choose one)

- ☐ Nationally uniform system?  
☐ State/Territory uniform system?  
☐ Locally based system?

- b Some specific aspects of the relationship between ACE vocational education and the VET system may be best handled at a particular level (national, state/territory level or local). Please specify the aspects and their levels.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

46. It has been suggested that designated coordinators could work with clusters of ACE and mainstream providers to coordinate activity across the interface between ACE and mainstream VET. Do you agree with this idea?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

If you answered Yes, please indicate which of the following should be part of the duties of a coordinator.

(please tick as many as apply)

- a ☐ Liaise with the various providers  
b ☐ Implement a structured administration system  
c ☐ Coordinate meetings and submission writing  
d ☐ Disseminate information about course provision and other activities across the cluster  
e ☐ Coordinate future planning  
f ☐ Manage curriculum development  
g ☐ Manage student pathways  
h ☐ Monitor outcomes  
i ☐ Other (please specify)  
.....  
j ☐ Other (please specify)..  
.....

Comment: .....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

47. Can you suggest any incentives to encourage collaboration and cooperation between ACE and VET?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Accreditation of courses and registration of providers**

48. In what ways, if any, do accredited VET courses delivered by ACE providers differ from accredited VET courses delivered by mainstream providers of VET?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

49. If your organisation is an ACE provider, does it offer:

- a Accredited VET courses?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

- b Non-accredited VET courses?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

50. Should ACE providers of VET be required to be registered as VET providers?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

Comment: .....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Resources and funding**

51. Funding is allocated to individual ACE vocational education providers on the traditional basis of cost per student contact hour. As a measure it is said to have the effect of restricting flexibility in ACE vocational education, particularly in relation to innovative delivery approaches, RPL, assessment, on-site training, and on-the-job training. Can you suggest a better way of determining and allocating funds for ACE vocational education?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

52. If government funding were available for ACE vocational education (eg from ANTA), what level of importance (high, medium or low) would you attach to funding for each of the following areas?

High Med Low

- a ☐ ☐ ☐ Delivery of accredited courses
- b ☐ ☐ ☐ Delivery of non-accredited courses
- c ☐ ☐ ☐ Development of curriculum
- d ☐ ☐ ☐ Obtaining of accredited curriculum on licence
- e ☐ ☐ ☐ Costs of provider registration
- f ☐ ☐ ☐ Costs of course accreditation
- g ☐ ☐ ☐ Costs of credit transfer arrangements and RPL
- h ☐ ☐ ☐ ACE vocational education management and administration
- i ☐ ☐ ☐ ACE vocational education research and development
- j ☐ ☐ ☐ Professional development of ACE vocational teaching staff
- k ☐ ☐ ☐ ACE vocational education quality assurance
- l ☐ ☐ ☐ Provision of childcare for ACE vocational students
- m ☐ ☐ ☐ Dedicated VET facilities and equipment
- n ☐ ☐ ☐ Administration staff for ACE vocational education
- o ☐ ☐ ☐ VET-qualified staff
- p ☐ ☐ ☐ Implementation of lifelong learning principles in relation to VET
- q ☐ ☐ ☐ Special funding for equity target groups (eg women, NESB, limited literacy, unemployed, Aboriginals, rural and remote communities)

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

53. Applying for project funds and developing tenders and submissions for service provision, accreditation of courses, and registration as VET providers is time consuming, expensive and taxing on the limited resources of ACE providers. Apart from allocation of funds for these purposes, how else could ACE providers be assisted with these tasks?

.....

.....

.....

.....

54. It is suggested there is a need for increased use of modern learning technologies (such as computer assisted learning and video-conferencing) in rural and remote communities (where ACE plays an important access role). Should there be special allocation of funds to assist ACE staff to learn and implement these technologies?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

Comment: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

55. Sharing of VET resources and funding (including teachers, premises and equipment) could help ACE provide vocational education and training to the standard required for satisfactory linking with training in mainstream VET. How might this sharing of resources or funding be facilitated?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

56. It has been suggested that VET clearing houses be established through which all VET providers, including ACE vocational education providers, can view, assess, purchase or otherwise access curriculum products (including Crown copyright and accredited curriculum documents); or can themselves license and offer products they have produced.

a Do you think this is a workable idea?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

b If Yes, how might it be done?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

If you would like to add any final comments about the relationship between ACE learning and mainstream VET please use the space below or attach extra sheets.

[illegible]

Thank you for answering these questions. It is hoped the results of this survey can be used for the benefit of students and learning providers in the future. Your contribution is gratefully appreciated.

**Please note that this information will be kept strictly confidential and used only as a means of contacting you for the purpose described.**

Please note that this information will be kept strictly confidential and used only as a means of contacting you for the purpose described.

Given name (so we know who to ask for): .....

Family name (optional): .....

Telephone number: (.....) .....

Best days and times to telephone you:(more than one may be ticked)

Days:    ☐ Sun        ☐ Mon        ☐ Tue        ☐ Wed        ☐ Thu        ☐ Fri        ☐ Sat

Times:    .....        .....        .....        .....        .....        .....

email: [johns@ncver.edu.au](mailto:johns@ncver.edu.au)

# Appendix B

---

**ACE vocational education student questionnaire**

# ACE-VET LINKAGES

## STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE: ACE

### ABOUT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

For many years, the Adult Community Education (ACE) sector mainly offered courses for hobbies and personal enrichment. Over the past few decades the range of learning offered has expanded to include English for migrants, literacy, numeracy, basic food preparation and other general living skills, many of which may be applied in the workplace.

In recent years this trend towards work oriented learning has continued with ACE now teaching job-related skills through courses in a variety of fields such as computing, business management and retailing. Many of these courses have the potential to be linked with vocational qualifications and with courses offered by mainstream Vocational Education and Training providers such as TAFE and non-government vocational colleges.

This questionnaire is part of a research study to investigate ways in which people could benefit from better linking of Adult Community Education learning with mainstream Vocational Education and Training (VET). By contributing to the study you will be helping shape ACE based vocational learning for the future.

We would be very grateful if you would complete this questionnaire and return it to us in the reply-paid envelope as soon as you can. Should you misplace your reply-paid envelope, you may still return the completed questionnaire at no cost by placing it in a plain envelope addressed to:

Reply Paid 5  
NCVER  
PO Box 115  
KENSINGTON PARK SA 5068 (no stamp required)

#### Please note:

1. **all information provided in your answers will be treated confidentially and used only for the purpose of this survey,**
2. **where a set of squares (☐) are shown, only one square is to be ticked, but where a set of circles (☐) are shown, as many as apply may be ticked.**
3. **Because this survey is designed for a wide range of respondents you may find that some questions are not relevant to your situation. Where this is the case, just leave them blank.**

#### In this questionnaire...

**VET** stands for *Vocational Education and Training*, which is learning you undertake to acquire skills and knowledge needed to perform work. Some examples of VET courses are: accounting, hairdressing, welding, and bar service. VET courses are mainly provided by TAFE colleges, non-government vocational colleges, skill centres, and some large employers.

**Mainstream VET providers** are organisations which traditionally provide vocational education and training, such as TAFE colleges, non-government vocational colleges, skill centres, and some employers.

**ACE** stands for *Adult and Community Education*, which is learning provided by community based organisations such as neighbourhood centres and community colleges. Some TAFE colleges also offer ACE. ACE courses used to focus predominantly on hobbies and personal development (like wine appreciation and stress management) and basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. However, in recent years, ACE has increasingly provided work-oriented learning such as computing, retailing and food preparation as well. Organisations which provide adult and community education are referred to as **ACE providers**.

**ACE vocational education** is learning provided by ACE organisations that could have some application in the workplace or could relate to mainstream vocational education and training such as that offered by TAFE.

## About you and your previous study

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age:  
☐ 15-20 yrs ☐ 21-30 yrs ☐ 31-40 yrs  
☐ 41-50 yrs ☐ more than 50 yrs
3. Postcode where you live: .....
4. Language you mostly speak at home:  
☐ English ☐ Other (please specify)  
.....
5. Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent?  
☐ Yes ☐ No
6. Do you have a disability, which may affect your ability to work?  
☐ Yes ☐ No
7. Highest level of previous study completed:  
☐ Below Year 11 ☐ Certificate  
☐ Year 11 ☐ Diploma  
☐ Year 12 ☐ Degree or higher
8. Have you previously studied at either of the following?  
(please tick as many as apply)  
a ☐ Adult Community Education Centre, Neighbourhood House, WEA or similar:  
Organisation: .....  
Course: .....  
Level: .....  
b ☐ TAFE college or similar:  
Organisation: .....  
Course: .....  
Level: .....
9. Your employment:  
a If currently employed, are you employed:  
☐ under 15 hr/wk ☐ 15 hr/wk or more  
Occupation: .....  
b If not currently employed, have you:  
☐ never had regular employment  
☐ previously had regular employment

## About your course

We would like to obtain your views about vocational education undertaken through courses offered by Adult and Community Education (ACE) organisations such as Neighbourhood Centres, Workers Education Associations and community colleges. To do this we are asking you to answer the following questions about an ACE course through which you feel you have gained knowledge and skills applicable to work. The course can be one you are currently undertaking or one that you have recently completed.

10. Name of course:  
.....
11. How far have you progressed through this course?  
☐ Completed course 19.....(year)  
☐ Currently undertaking course  
☐ Commenced but did not continue
12. How do you study this course?  
☐ By attending classes  
☐ By other means (please specify)  
.....  
.....
13. What is the length of the whole course:  
☐ Less than 20 hrs ☐ 21-50 hrs  
☐ 51-100 hrs ☐ More than 100 hrs
14. Is the course an accredited VET course?  
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
15. Name of organisation providing the course:  
.....  
.....
16. Is the course provider a registered VET provider?  
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

Please go on to next page

17. How did you find out about the course?

(please tick as many as apply)

- a ☐ Friend or relative  
b ☐ Secondary school  
c ☐ Career adviser (please name organisation)  
.....  
d ☐ VET provider (please name organisation)  
.....  
e ☐ Centrelink/Job network  
f ☐ Newspaper, radio, TV or similar  
g ☐ Other (please specify)  
.....

Comments:.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

18. What influenced you to enrol in a course with an Adult and Community Education provider?

(please tick as many as apply)

- a ☐ I wanted to get into a higher level course  
b ☐ I felt the course was the right level for me  
c ☐ I needed to acquire basic employment skills  
d ☐ I needed to learn skills for my current job  
e ☐ My employer wanted me to study  
f ☐ It could help me become self employed  
g ☐ It will help me obtain a qualification  
h ☐ To test my ability to cope with VET study  
i ☐ To do some study while deciding what to do next  
j ☐ The course times suit me  
k ☐ The ACE venue provides better access  
l ☐ ACE has a better style of teaching  
m ☐ ACE has smaller class sizes  
n ☐ ACE provides better access to childcare  
o ☐ ACE is a more friendly, less formal organisation  
p ☐ ACE provides more social contact  
q ☐ Other (please specify).....  
.....

Comments:.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

19. What (if any) are the disadvantages to studying in ACE vocational courses?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

20. When you enrolled in this course, what did you **hope** the course would achieve for you? (Note: in the next question you will be asked what it **will** achieve.)

(please tick as many as apply)

- a ☐ Gain in basic skills (English language, arithmetic, etc)  
b ☐ Gain in work related skills and knowledge  
c ☐ Changes in employment (find/switch employment, promotion, new responsibilities, higher pay, etc)  
d ☐ Improvement in personal attributes (confidence, communication skills, etc)  
e ☐ Bridging to further study with a mainstream VET provider (eg TAFE)  
f ☐ Other (please specify).....  
.....  
.....

21. Having now studied in the course, what do you think the course will actually achieve for you?

(please tick as many as apply)

- a ☐ Useful gain in basic skills (English language, arithmetic, etc)  
b ☐ Useful gain in work related skills and knowledge  
c ☐ Changes in my employment (find/switch jobs, promotion, new responsibilities, higher pay, etc)  
d ☐ Improvement in my personal skills (confidence, communication skills, etc)  
e ☐ Access to further study with a TAFE or other mainstream VET provider  
f ☐ Other (please specify).....  
.....  
.....



26. Credit transfer arrangements between ACE and mainstream VET providers (eg TAFE) enable students to have appropriate ACE study credited towards mainstream VET.
- a Were you aware of the existence of credit transfer provisions before you enrolled in ACE study?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say
- b Does availability of credit transfer influence you to study with ACE?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

Comments: .....

.....

.....

### Strengths of ACE vocational education

27. Sometimes, when ACE programs are provided in a different educational setting to TAFE or other mainstream VET, students perceive the ACE presentation as possessing particular strengths. If your ACE study is provided in a different educational setting, please indicate how important you feel each of the following are as strengths of **ACE vocational study** which distinguish it from mainstream VET.

Circle one shaded number for each item using this scale

Extremely important	Important	Neutral	Little importance	Not at all important
5	4	3	2	1

- a Good physical accessibility.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- b Informal, friendly, non-threatening environment.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- c Minimum of bureaucracy.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- d Often locally managed.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- e Students may enter and leave learning programs easily.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- f Capacity to accommodate students with a wide range of skills needs and backgrounds.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- g Able to respond to special needs of individual students and employers.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- h Able to provide wide range of teaching formats.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- i The trainer is a helper rather than a learning authority.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- j Emphasis on mastering skills and knowledge rather than completing course in a set time.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- k Other (please specify) .....
- 5 4 3 2 1

Comments: .....

.....

.....

### Student access

28. Flexibility of timetabling and other aspects of course provision enable students to integrate their studies with other commitments. If you can, please compare the flexibility of ACE study with that of mainstream VET (eg TAFE).

Circle one shaded number using this scale

ACE much more flexible	ACE more flexible	ACE about the same	ACE less flexible	ACE much less flexible
5	4	3	2	1

Comments: .....

.....

.....

### What programs should ACE offer?

29. Please indicate how important you think it is that ACE should offer each type of course content listed below.

Circle one shaded number for each item using this scale

Extremely important	Important	Neutral	Little importance	Not at all important
5	4	3	2	1

- a General (non-vocational) education such as literacy, English as a second language, and general living skills.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- b Generic vocational education, covering knowledge and skills broadly applicable in the workplace, such as communication, report writing, teamwork, workplace culture and technological understanding.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- c Industry-specific vocational education. For example: knowledge and skills in computing, customer services, mechanical technology, and agriculture.
- 5 4 3 2 1
- d Specially designed vocational courses for groups with special needs, such as unemployed people, women, indigenous groups, people with disabilities and people with low levels of language, literacy or schooling).
- 5 4 3 2 1

Can you suggest any other groups?

.....

.....

.....

Comments: .....

.....

.....

30. If you feel ACE should be providing **vocational education**, to what level do you think it should extend?

- ☐ Only below certificate level  
☐ Certificate  
☐ Advanced certificate  
☐ Diploma ☐ Can't say

Comments:.....  
 .....  
 .....

31. Please indicate how appropriate you think it is for ACE to offer each of the following forms of training.

Circle one shaded number for each item using this scale

Extremely appropriate	Appropriate	Neutral	Not very appropriate	Not at all appropriate
5	4	3	2	1

- a Training under contract to government (eg traineeships, training for Centrelink).  
 5 4 3 2 1
- b General industry funded training.  
 5 4 3 2 1
- c Customised training under contract to individual companies.  
 5 4 3 2 1
- d Customised training to meet individual student needs.  
 5 4 3 2 1
- e Training in the workplace.  
 5 4 3 2 1
- f ACE training in a mainstream VET provider venue (eg TAFE college).  
 5 4 3 2 1
- g ACE training in dedicated ACE venues.  
 5 4 3 2 1
- h Are there any other forms of provision that should be offered? (please specify)  
 .....

Comments:.....  
 .....  
 .....

### ACE vocational education and training for apprentices

32. ACE already provides language, literacy and similar learning to apprentices who voluntarily seek assistance. Are there any ways in which ACE providers should extend into more formal training for apprentices?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

### Future development of ACE

33. From your experience of ACE vocational education, how important is it that additional funds should be spent on each of the following?

Circle one shaded number for each item using this scale

Extremely important	Important	Neutral	Little importance	Not at all important
5	4	3	2	1

- a Better qualified teaching staff  
 5 4 3 2 1
- b Better classrooms/workshops  
 5 4 3 2 1
- c Better equipment  
 5 4 3 2 1
- d Better student facilities  
 5 4 3 2 1
- e Better information provision  
 5 4 3 2 1
- f Other (please specify).....  
 5 4 3 2 1

Comments:.....  
 .....  
 .....

### Relationship between ACE and mainstream vocational education and training providers

34. The extent of cooperation and collaboration between ACE and mainstream VET (eg TAFE) is dependent on various factors including regional availability of facilities, regional student needs, state policies, and the goodwill of the parties concerned.

- a From your experience, do you feel there is any need for greater cooperation and collaboration between ACE and mainstream VET than presently exists?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't say

- b If you answered Yes: in which of the following do you feel there is scope for more cooperation and collaboration?

(more than one may be ticked)

- ☐ sharing of premises  
☐ sharing of facilities (eg cafeteria, library, childcare)  
☐ sharing of equipment (eg computer facilities)  
☐ interaction and sharing of teachers  
☐ interaction and sharing of administrative staff  
☐ integration and sharing of course materials  
☐ other (please specify)  
 .....

Comments:.....  
 .....  
 .....

Please go on to next page

35. Many people feel ACE vocational education presently complements mainstream VET by supplying training which links with, or otherwise supports it. Others feel that ACE should also be directly competing with mainstream VET providers such as TAFE by supplying the same or equivalent courses. Should ACE remain complementary or compete directly with mainstream VET?

☐ Remain complementary

☐ Compete directly

☐ Can't say

Comments: .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

36. Please use the space below to add further comments you may have about issues raised in this questionnaire.

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

### Thank you

Thank you for answering these questions. It is hoped the results of this survey can be used for the benefit of students in the future. Your contribution is gratefully appreciated.

As stated previously, your responses will be kept confidential. However, to round out our information I would like to speak informally with some of our respondents for a few minutes on the telephone. If you would be willing to allow me to telephone you at a convenient time (day or evening) I would be most appreciative if you would complete the following.

Please note that this information will be kept strictly confidential and used only as a means of contacting you for the purpose described.

Your given name (so we know who to ask for): .....							
Telephone number: (.....) .....							
Best days and times to telephone you: (more than one may be ticked)							
Days:	<input type="radio"/> Sun	<input type="radio"/> Mon	<input type="radio"/> Tue	<input type="radio"/> Wed	<input type="radio"/> Thu	<input type="radio"/> Fri	<input type="radio"/> Sat
Times:	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....

John Saunders  
 Research Associate  
 NCVER

Telephone: (08) 8333 8483

Fax: (08) 8331 9211

email: [johns@ncver.edu.au](mailto:johns@ncver.edu.au)



The National Centre for Vocational Education Research is Australia's primary research and development organisation in the field of vocational education and training.

NCVER undertakes and manages research programs and monitors the performance of Australia's training system.

NCVER provides a range of information aimed at improving the quality of training at all levels.

ISBN 0 87397 739 4 print edition

ISBN 0 87397 740 8 web edition