

# A STRONG ACE PROGRAM FOR 2018/19 AND BEYOND

## THE UNIQUE ROLE OF THE ACE PROGRAM

The Adult Community Education (ACE) program is a significant contributor to the education and training sector and is also unique in who it serves, where it is delivered, and the extensive learning and whole of life support that is offered to participants.

ACE participants often face complex barriers to participation in learning or work, may be vulnerable, hard to reach and engage, or lack the skills to thrive in formal training settings.

ACE providers are located at the heart of where people live – community centres, neighbourhood houses, libraries and councils – with unparalleled potential to reach a broad range of people, from the long-term unemployed, disengaged young people and mature-aged South Australians, migrant populations and those with poor language, literacy and numeracy skills.

ACE programs are delivered in welcoming and supportive community-based environments. ACE tutors also have the

expertise to target courses to local needs, capture the interest of participants through engaging delivery, while underpinning all learning with quality foundation skills competencies.

In South Australia, there are currently 50 community organisations delivering ACE programs in 69 locations across the state. In 2015/16 some 156,000 student contact hours were delivered to 8,157 ACE participants (6,984 in non-accredited courses and 1,173 in accredited).

Often described as a ‘gateway’ or ‘first step’ on the training and work continuum, the ACE program is also a launching pad. With a firm grounding in literacy and numeracy, digital competency and the capacity to practice employability skills that are valued in the workplace, ACE unlocks the potential of participants to realise their aspirations.

The ACE program makes it possible for many thousands of South Australians, often those with the greatest hurdles, to develop the confidence and knowledge to navigate a path to volunteer roles, further training or to enter, or re-engage with, the world of work.

***ACE is an adult community education program, but it is also a mechanism to build the strength of our communities by ensuring participation is possible for all.***

Quotes from engagement for Section 1  
(Unique role of ACE):

“Moves people away from the edge of social dysfunction and vulnerability”

“Provides education to the most vulnerable people” and “builds confidence and personal growth.”

“An inclusive, welcoming and safe place to learn – no barriers to access”

“Creates learning aspirations”

“Gateway to social and economic inclusion”

“A program that makes a real difference.”

Quotes from engagement for section 2  
(Context):

“The ACE program future proofs and prepares for tomorrow”

“Opens doors to knowledge and life skills”

“We were all treated with so much dignity and respect. It was so amazing how well it was all presented, the communication and the support of the workers”

“I now know what the next step is for me and how to achieve it”

*What are some of the ACE participants doing now?*

“I now have a volunteer position at the Lyell McEwin Hospital as an Aged Carer for Dementia patients.”

“After completing the Pathways to Empowerment program, I have gone on to study Certificate II in Women’s Education at TAFE SA.”

“I have enrolled in Pathways to Children’s Services and hope that I can get a job to use my skills.”

“I have enrolled in the Certificate III in Education Support course at TAFE SA. Currently volunteering in a school.”

“Paid work in a home business.”

## CONTEXT

The ACE program has experienced significant transformation over the last decade. ACE has long been recognised as a vehicle for the delivery of non-accredited courses with far-reaching potential for individual empowerment and development. Importantly, these broad-based courses also teach participants how to engage in informal learning that makes formal training possible and future employment more likely.

Over the last few years, ACE program delivery has become targeted to the development of foundation skills, ensuring quality frameworks are applied to both accredited and non-accredited ACE courses.

In 2015/16 more than 650 community centre staff and volunteers received training through the Community Centres SA Workforce and Professional Development plan. This intensive professional development has skilled the ACE sector to deliver training and assessment in nationally recognised foundation skills.

In addition, partnerships between the Department of State Development, TAFE SA, and local, state and federal government agencies have been enhanced. Funding that was made available for the designated purpose of fostering transitions has enabled ACE providers to start devising flexible approaches suited to a diverse range of individuals and better pathway opportunities.

The ACE program has been successful in meeting the community-wide challenge of

addressing low rates of literacy and numeracy and assisting those not in the labour force to acquire the skills they need to enter training and employment. In 2015/16, more than 1,200 ACE participants went on to enroll in further training and 562 people reported that they were now working.

Recent research commissioned by the Training and Skills Commission has highlighted that ACE is cost effective, with significant benefits on participant wellbeing and employment potential, especially among learners who enhance their qualification level. The delivery of ACE accredited programs has a positive wage impact that indicates economic value over a 15-year period of up to 6.5 times the cost. For the 2015/16 program, this amounts to about \$8,610 per student and gross benefit of \$7.8 million for the entire program over the 15 years.

In addition, the vast input of volunteer hours by tutors to the ACE program is conservatively estimated at contributing equivalent to 20 per cent of funded costs. This volunteer input is an in-kind investment that means students receive more effective tuition and support, which in turn enhances the individual and economic outcomes of the ACE program.

ACE is in a strong position in terms of its professional capacity and capability to further expand its service delivery and impact. The ACE sector is ideally placed within communities to contribute more directly to skills and workforce development projects to meet identified areas of growing employment demand. Many people who are long-term unemployed are unlikely to find employment without intensive and targeted assistance; something that the ACE sector has the proven capacity to deliver.

## ACE participants

Our engagement with ACE participants confirmed that the ACE program empowers participants and inspires them to contribute to the community and realise their training and work aspirations.

*What participants said had changed for them since attending an ACE course:*

**“More aware of better choices”**

**“Improvement in writing and more confidence in communicating”**

**“I have learnt so much about how the computer works”**

**“Learnt many things about job interviews”**

**“I have gained clear direction in my life and my confidence has grown immensely. I am now confident enough to commit to further study.”**

**“I now have a sense of pride”**

**“My support network has grown with new friendships”**

**“I am now searching to give back to the community and find volunteer work to enrich my life”**

**“I see the world differently”**

**“It has given me wings”**

**We seek the agreement of our engagement partners that our new vision and six proposed goals reflect the key areas needing to be strengthened in the ACE program so that we can further develop the strategies that will be put in place to meet them.**

## **DESIGNING A STRENGTHENED ACE PROGRAM WITH OUR STAKEHOLDERS**

In order to strengthen the ACE program for 2018/19 and beyond, the Department of State Development and Community Centres SA jointly invited ACE providers, tutors, participants, other training bodies and peak organisations to partner in co-design of the future ACE program.

This unique and extensive engagement process has meant working alongside those who deliver and benefit from ACE programs in the decision-making process.

Experienced ACE tutors have met with participants to discover, through the sharing of stories and experiences, how ACE has impacted their lives. This valuable input has informed our new ACE vision and will guide program changes.

We have also engaged more broadly with the public through the Government's YourSAy online engagement facility, with 22 interested members of the public providing input.

By harnessing the insights of our engagement partners, including organisations that can help to strengthen outcomes for participants, we can be confident that the Goals identified and the strategies being developed to strengthen the ACE program will capitalise on its achievements and potential.

## **OUR COMMITMENT**

Following a regular forum held with ACE providers in July 2016, we have also held engagement sessions with:

- 41 existing ACE providers (64 individuals)
- 7 potential new ACE providers (9 individuals)
- 10 ACE tutors
- 52 ACE participants (with 30 per cent of respondents to the survey from non-English speaking backgrounds)
- 9 peak bodies involved in the Human Services Partnership Forum (representing organisations such as Multicultural Communities Council SA, Carers SA, Lutheran Community Care SA, Community Centres SA, Community Housing Council of SA, South Australian Financial Counsellors Association, Multicultural Youth SA, SA Council of Social Services).
- Attorney General's Department, the Department for Communities and Social Inclusion, the Department for Education and Child Development, the Commonwealth Department of Employment, TAFE SA and two Registered Training Organisations.

## ENGAGEMENT ASPIRATIONS

**Predictable, long-term funding**

**Valuing the professionalism of the sector and the expertise of providers**

**Better data capturing all of the outcomes achieved through the program**

**Reaching those with multiple barriers to participation and more support to target individual need**

**Greater recognition of the complexity of needs among ACE participants**

**Need for “seamless” pathways for participants**

**Stronger collaboration between services, referral partners, TAFE SA and employers**

**Greater program flexibility and adaptability to meet needs**

**Linking to employment needs especially those that will be upcoming in SA**

**Greater profile for ACE in the community, VET sector, government, business**

**Elevation of the ACE as a credible, innovative and flexible part of the training continuum**

**Reducing red tape and ease of reporting**

## OUR COMMITMENT

By giving thorough consideration to all of the feedback provided by our engagement partners, six new goals have been developed in a co-design process with Community Centres SA, which will enable us to meet our shared vision for the ACE program.

These proposed goals reflect the aspirations expressed during consultation and also seek to respond directly to areas that were identified as needing improvement in the ACE program.

Underpinning these six goals are the following key principles:

- Ongoing, longer-term funding is vital to supporting the ACE program;
- Both non-accredited and accredited courses are valued components in the overall role and success of the ACE program;
- All outcomes and achievements of this unique and multifaceted program need to be acknowledged and accounted for, from engagement through to foundation skills development and transitions to further training, volunteering and employment;
- The significant expertise within this sector and its strong and thriving volunteer contribution, as the foundation on which the ACE program is built, deserves greater promotion and enhanced support.

## NEW ACE VISION

**The unique contribution of the ACE program to the education and training sector is that it empowers and unlocks the potential of individuals facing complex barriers to participation in learning, training and work. This is achieved through quality foundation skills training that is locally designed and delivered in accessible and inclusive community settings.**

### Goals to meet our vision

#### **GOAL 1: Strengthen the profile of the ACE program and promote its unique strengths**

We have listened to our engagement partners and plan to strengthen the profile of the ACE program with a promotional strategy that recognises its diverse strengths and the unique role it plays within the education and training sector.

A greater profile and recognition of the sector is required to attract groups that are under represented in accessing ACE. Awareness of the program also needs to be raised amongst training organisations, support service partners and employers.

Engagement feedback also confirmed that Adult Learners' Week should remain a key part of achieving this goal, with a view to exploring how it can be leveraged for further impact and year-round promotional activity.

#### **GOAL 2: Recognise and build the capability of the ACE workforce**

We want to develop a new workforce development model based on a thorough investigation of individual and broader workforce skills needs in the sector, including tutor development and potential pathways.

This model will also need to strengthen connections between ACE providers, ensuring exchange of skills and best-practise insights to enhance delivery. A focus should also be strengthened connections with the Department of State Development (DSD) skills and employment stakeholder networks to ensure courses are planned with the most up-to-date information on skills requirements.

With the support of Community Centres SA, we aim to harness and better support the unique capability of the ACE workforce, its tutors, coordinators and volunteers to address complex and multiple barriers to participation in ACE and strengthen professional and quality standards.

#### **GOAL 3: Create a framework that supports seamless pathways for individuals within and beyond the ACE program**

To create seamless pathways for participants, we will need to formalise connections with the vocational education and training (VET) providers, organisations and employers to enable better support, more information and clearer pathways to further training and employment.

Referral and exchange of students between registered training organisations (RTOs) and TAFE SA will be examined with a view to establishing protocols that make sure students are in the most appropriate learning environment.

To encourage better sharing of information on employment needs, we will also need to connect the ACE program with DSD's Career Services and establish rotational visits between TAFE, RTOs, universities and ACE providers.

We also want to identify leading ACE providers who demonstrate exceptional collaboration with the VET sector and employers to pilot approaches that connect with specific Jobs First Employment Projects (JFEP) and to share their experience with other providers.

#### **GOAL 4: Formalise connections between ACE providers and other programs and services**

We want to enhance collaboration with service partners and programs that can support ACE participants and believe that this needs to occur at the highest levels of government. We will look to establish a cross-government mechanism to align support systems and strengthen referral processes.

To support this, we will undertake a broad mapping exercise to identify any gaps in local services and where connections between the ACE program and partners need to be strengthened. ACE provider network forums provide an excellent platform to use as a basis for greater collaboration with ACE program partners and service providers.

#### **GOAL 5: An improved ACE Program Model**

Underpinning all of our goals is the need identified through the engagement for a new ACE program model that supports greater flexibility, recognises the vast

expertise in this sector and seeks to reduce red tape.

We are looking at ways to better align funding application timelines and simplify reporting, aiming for greater flexibility for ACE providers, within a stable, long-term funding model.

There is significant support within the sector for maintenance of funding caps on ACE courses, with further modelling being undertaken to create an optimal cap level for both accredited and non-accredited courses.

The costs required to manage and operate the ACE program by ACE providers are also being further examined.

#### **Goal 6: Capture all measures of success**

We also want to strengthen the program framework so that data collection is improved to ensure more accurate measurement of all measures of success in the program. The outcomes of the Results Based Accountability reporting approach are being considered, along with ways that current data collection within DSD can be enhanced to better demonstrate the full range of achievements of the ACE program.

Existing research and reviews of the ACE program have identified the need for greater engagement of young people (17-25) and workers in transition. It is proposed that these two individual target groups be prioritised from 2018/19. Current funding priority given to digital literacy, an equitable metro/non-metro split and targeting of areas with low levels of educational attainment and high levels of unemployment, will remain priorities.