

Victorian Skills Plan



Co-authored by ACEVic and NHVic
November 2021



In partnership with:



Thank you for the opportunity to respond to questions relating to an existing evidence base on the economic outlook and skills needs required to inform the Victorian Skills Plan.

This response is submitted jointly by the Victorian peak bodies: Neighbourhood Houses Victoria (NHVic) and Adult and Community Education Victoria (ACEVic). Collectively NHVic and ACEVic represent approximately eighty percent of Victorian adult and community education (ACE) providers. It should be noted that this response is also supported by the two national peak bodies: Adult Learning Australia (ALA) and Community Colleges Australia (CCA).

This joint ACEVic and NHVic response focuses on the final two questions, which are most relevant to the Victorian sector:

- How can the education and training system better support communities and industries meet current and future workforce needs?
- What barriers exist for individuals in understanding the skills they need and accessing the required education?

How can the education and training system better support communities and industries meet current and future workforce needs?

To better support communities and industries to meet current and future workforce needs, the education and training system must be more integrated and united. The training system needs to be more connected, and this cannot be led by the ACE sector. It requires a unified approach across the whole training system. To deliver real and lasting benefit, the commitment by government to rebuild the TAFE system must include partnering and resource sharing with ACE providers.

Collaboration between TAFE and ACE providers will assist communities to meet their local industry workforce needs. As place-based providers immersed in their local communities, ACE providers can play a critical role linking industry to training providers such as TAFE. Together, TAFE and ACE providers can work collaboratively with industry to co-design pathway programs to TAFE and deliver employability and vocational skills programs in the workplace.

This approach will be most effective when founded in a strong evidence base. More research needs to be undertaken and/or made publicly available to ensure the relationship between learner choices and pathways into employment across the VET

system, particularly from pre-accredited training, is well understood. Data from such research will position the training system to support individuals and communities to meet workforce needs.

Pre-accredited training programs are designed to prepare learners to transition into further education, training and employment. The system needs data to identify barriers to learner transition, to assess what is working in the current system and to assist learners to understand the skills and support they may require to access education.

Publicly available data and qualitative and quantitative research is needed on:

- transitions from pre-accredited training to accredited training from the individual pre-accredited training categories: Language, Literacy and Numeracy, Vocational and Employability and Digital
- transitions from pre-accredited training directly to employment
- transitions from pre-accredited training into further pre-accredited training
- concurrent participation in accredited and pre-accredited education and training that supports successful accredited outcomes e.g., language, literacy and numeracy support
- successful industry-specific pre-accredited pathway courses
- student demographic data
- ACEVic regional data.

Adult and community education providers are increasingly working with industry. This is particularly the case with larger providers, who are able to recruit specialised industry engagement and business development staff and so are better positioned to develop effective industry partnerships. Support and skills development for less resourced, smaller ACE providers and Neighborhood Houses would strengthen their capacity to work with industry to identify workforce needs and design tailored industry pathway programs. This would have direct benefit for industry and for learners and job seekers, by providing access to local, informed, place-based training providers with capacity to engage directly with communities.

Recommendations

Recommendation One: Engage independent link workers to develop better pathways for learners between ACE providers, TAFE and industry. Link workers to be place-based across Victoria, with a view to cultivating stronger relationships between all relevant local stakeholders.

Recommendation Two: Support learners in communities without local access to TAFE by supporting the delivery of TAFE courses within local ACE providers/Learn Locals.

Recommendation Three: Improve the transition of more vulnerable learners by supporting the delivery of pre-accredited training by ACE providers within TAFE and/or local industry.

Recommendation Four: Improve the quality and accessibility of transition data by investigating the use of a 'Unique Student Identifier' (or similar) across both the TAFE and ACE systems.

Recommendation Five: Ensure that any data that is collected by the VSA is made readily available to all relevant stakeholders, including ACE peaks. Data to be made available in a timely and transparent manner to ensure that providers are well-placed to offer courses that will meet the current and future needs of local learners and industries.

What barriers exist for individuals in understanding the skills they need and accessing the required education?

A key barrier for individuals in understanding the skills they need and accessing the required information is the lack of research. Data on why learners are engaged in education and training and is critical to identifying if they have been supported to make informed choices to undertake further education and training. Documentation forms from the Pre-accredited Quality Framework A Frame capture learners' study and career goals and aspirations. This is a potentially rich data source, interpretation of which will provide evidence of key factors that drive learners thinking and awareness of further study and employment options.

The adult and community education sector is well placed to provide evidence of barriers learners experience in understanding skills required to access education. Pre-accredited training supports learners who commonly face multiple and complex barriers to participation in education, employment and life. Low language, literacy and numeracy levels in addition to deficits in confidence, self-esteem and perceived self-efficacy all contribute to learners struggling to understand the skills and knowledge required to succeed in education and training.ⁱ ACE providers know their cohort and can provide valuable insights to addressing these barriers.

Indeed, strengthening the role of pre-accredited and foundation skills training is central to improving outcomes for people experiencing disadvantage in the training and labour markets. For many disadvantaged learners, Learn Local pre-accredited training increases the likelihood of a successful VET course completion to 64 per cent compared to the average of 47 per cent (Department of Education and Training, 2018).

An additional barrier for many learners comes from the introduction of online enrolment processes. Issues navigating online information and low digital skills lead to an increased risk of learners not being fully informed of study and employment options. Face-to-face information sessions and advice from careers counsellors can strengthen appropriate course selection.

A further avenue to strengthen support for learners to make informed decisions and transition to appropriate further study is through the development of partnerships between the ACE sector and Skills and Jobs Centres. Currently, Skills and Jobs Centre are aligned strongly to the TAFE sector. There would be clear benefits from Skills and Jobs Centres working more collaboratively with the ACE sector, by expanding reach

to a broader range of learners and increasing accessibility to career advice. This is another example of the importance of greater integration and unity across the training system, with stronger connections between TAFE and ACE. A more integrated and united training system will increase support and provide varied training options as well as enhance learners' skills, understanding of and participation in education and training.

Lack of knowledge is also a barrier. Pre-accredited training plays a critical role in supporting learners to transition into and succeed in further education and training. This is not well understood either across the training system or in the broader community. There is a pressing need to build awareness throughout the training system, among learners and industry of the opportunities and additional support available to learners from the ACE sector while they undertake accredited training. For example, a student with low language, literacy, numeracy or digital skills may not see education as accessible if they are not aware of support mechanisms such as undertaking a pre-accredited literacy program while completing an accredited qualification. Successful participation delivers benefits for both learners and industry.

Overall, the VSA must help to facilitate the development of a more integrated system that includes a distinct and more clearly defined role in properly assessing and preparing people for success in accredited VET education.

Recommendations

Recommendation Six: Support the provision of face-to-face information sessions for learners with low digital literacy to ensure that they are not excluded from local learning pathways

Recommendation Seven: Improve screening mechanisms for learners looking to access TAFE. Learners with low literacy, numeracy and/or digital skills to be referred to ACE providers for additional support through participation in relevant pre-accredited training and/or other wrap-around programs/services.

Recommendation Eight: Development of a pre-accredited course that enables learners without a clear idea of what they want to pursue, to explore their own skills and interest, whilst increasing their aptitude and confidence for further study.

Recommendation Nine: Develop and support more positive messaging around pre-accredited training and the ACE sector so that it is seen as an equal and legitimate partner to TAFE.

Recommendation Ten: Independent link workers to be tasked with improving connections between the ACE sector and Skills and Job Centres.

ⁱ Deloitte 2017, Participation, training outcomes and patterns in the Victorian pre-accredited sector