

# Submission to the Victorian Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's Inquiry into access to TAFE for learners with disability



October 2020



## **To the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee**

Adult and Community Education Victoria (ACEVic), Neighbourhood Houses Victoria (NHV) and Adult Learning Australia (ALA) welcome the opportunity to provide input into the *Inquiry into access to TAFE for learners with disability*. Collectively, we aim to strengthen the provision of adult and community education (ACE) in Victoria within an integrated post-secondary education system. We would be pleased to participate in any public hearings later this year, should we be invited.

### **Adult and Community Education Victoria**

ACEVic is the peak policy, advocacy and information body for the Adult Community Education (ACE) sector, representing Victoria's Learn Local (LL) organisations. ACEVic's purpose is to advocate for and support members to provide high-quality, innovative and responsive adult education programs that improve the educational, economic and social prosperity of individuals and communities.

### **Neighbourhood Houses Victoria**

NHV is the peak body for Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria. Over 400 Neighbourhood Houses are providing a range of community development and educational opportunities for communities throughout the State. There are more than 200,000 attendances at Victorian Neighbourhood Houses each week. Approximately 190 Neighbourhood Houses are Learn Local Organisations, providing pre-accredited adult education and approximately 40 of them are registered training organisations delivering nationally recognised accredited training.

### **Adult Learning Australia**

ALA has been operating for 60 years as the national peak body for adult and community education, with over 1,100 members located across every state and territory in urban, regional and remote communities. ALA's membership is diverse and includes organisations such as Community Colleges, Neighbourhood Houses, Learn Local Organisations, U3As, Aboriginal Learning Cooperatives, libraries, local government and individuals working in TAFE, university and other educational institutions.

### **Learn Local Organisations**

Learn Local (LL) providers are not-for-profit community-based education organisations. They are registered and funded by the Victorian Government, via the Adult and Community Further Education (ACFE) Board, to deliver pre-accredited training programs. There are 270 LL providers in Victoria. About 30 per cent of LL providers are also Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and deliver a range of accredited training programs. Learn Local providers assist vulnerable learners, including learners with disability, to transition into further education, training and employment.

## **Adult and Community Education**

Adult and Community Education is provided by a diverse range of organisations embedded in their local communities. ACE builds the skills, knowledge and abilities of Victorian individuals and communities by providing:

- informal learning opportunities alongside formal learning
- pathways to further education, training, and employment, including TAFE and LL RTOS
- pathways to employment
- welcoming and accepting learning environments
- flexible and learner-focused andragogy
- innovative programs designed in response to local needs
- interpersonal connections to build better and stronger communities
- awareness of diversity and promotion of connected communities
- essential training in adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills
- vocational pathway programs
- employability skill development
- personalised attention so that learners feel valued and are not lost within the broad education system.

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**Tamsin Rossiter, EO ACEVic and on behalf of Nicole Battle, CEO NHV and Jenny Macaffer, CEO ALA**

## **Executive summary**

Adult and community education (ACE) plays a pivotal role in the pathway to success for many learners with disability. ACE prepares learners with disability to transition into TAFE – and further, to succeed in accredited training and gain employment. Our submission into the *Inquiry into access for TAFE for learners with disability* seeks appropriate recognition of ACE and the necessary resources to strengthen partnerships and pathways between the public and community providers of adult education to support learners with a disability to thrive in education, work and life.

## **Background**

ACE plays an integral role in the Victorian post-secondary education system, supporting learners – including those with disability – to transition into further study and employment. This was recognised in the Ministerial Statement *The Future of Adult and Community Education 2020-2025*. Adult and community education is firmly positioned as one of the three post-compulsory education sectors in Victoria, along with TAFE and training, and university. ‘All three play complementary roles, focussing on different aspects of further and higher education. Victorians may engage in each sector at different points in their journey of lifelong learning, and not necessarily sequentially. They may also engage in more than one sector at once, such as with the adult and community education sector to support their successful attainment in TAFE and training.’<sup>i</sup>

The Ministerial Statement noted that ‘The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), in its 2003 report *Exploring the Social and Economic Impacts of Adult and Community Education*, found that more than half of learners undertaking adult and community education for vocational reasons had gone on to undertake additional adult and community education, to TAFE or university. Learners cited satisfaction and confidence as the most notable benefits of adult and community education.’<sup>ii</sup>

To succeed in the TAFE learning environment, learners must have the capacity to learn and the core skills to succeed. ACE literacy, numeracy, employability, and digital skills training – along with vocational preparatory courses – prepares learners with disability to pathway into TAFE. Importantly, ACE also provides a supportive, inclusive and accessible learning environment which builds learner confidence and enhances engagement and participation. Adults with disability are often drawn to ACE as they seek a positive, community-based and accessible setting in which to learn new skills and connect with others. ‘The Learn Local sector develops fulfilled and socially engaged citizens through adult community education and training, not as a second-best choice, but as a welcoming and accessible entry-point to post-compulsory education’<sup>iii</sup>

## **The social and economic benefits of improving access to TAFE for learners with disability**

There are strong parallels between adult and community education outcomes and the social and economic benefits of improving access to TAFE for learners with disability. The ACFE Board Strategy *2020-2025 Skills for Study, Work and Life* noted that 'Adult community and further education strengthens Victorian communities. It offers economic benefits through greater workforce participation, reduced welfare costs and improved mental health; and it contributes social benefits by strengthening the ability of all Victorians to participate fully as members of the community'<sup>iv</sup>

The social and economic benefits of improving employment outcomes and independence for people with disability are well documented. TAFE, as the preeminent provider of accredited training, has a critical role to play in providing truly accessible training to realise the potential economic and social gains for individuals and employers.

## **The experiences of learners with disability accessing and participating in TAFE programs**

Disability presents in many different forms and degrees of severity, therefore requiring a range of responses, settings and opportunities from educational providers. TAFE alone is limited in ways in which it can cater to disability access and inclusion for all learners. An integrated approach, with ACE and TAFE working alongside each other, will broaden educational opportunities for learners with disability.

*'Although we have participants with disabilities participating in our Learn Local, very rarely do we have a successful transition to TAFE, more common it is into smaller LL RTO's such as GenU and Diversitat. We have had a number of our Learn Local participants with disclosed disabilities apply for TAFE, but they have not been successful. This flags an issue about assistance or considerations being made regarding the processes involved in applying when you have a disability, when does the support start? On the other hand, we have had many TAFE learners with disabilities or challenges transition back to Learn Local for support and further study.'* **Regional Learn Local manager**

*'As a LL RTO who delivers a wide range of pre-accredited and accredited training programs for learners with disability, a significant barrier we have identified for learners with disability is the collapse of the scaffolding of entry level certificate courses such as Certificate II qualifications. Many students who require an alternative approach due to their disabilities need the scaffold approach to prepare them for future learning. With the decline of Certificate II qualifications, this opportunity for graduated building of skills and knowledge makes the leap from secondary or foundation education to accredited training at Certificate IV or Diploma level too great and sets people up for failure. These are learners who experience multiple barriers to participation in education, training and employment and*

*when faced with an educational environment not suited to their learning needs, their opportunities for success and full participation in society are markedly reduced, resulting in an inequitable education system.’ Metropolitan Learn Local RTO manager*

## **Barriers to learners with disability accessing TAFE and ideas for addressing these**

As noted in the Victorian Ministerial Statement, there are several features of ACE which attract learners. ‘Adult community education providers offer welcoming environments that engage learners and build confidence: the adult community education sector helps people shine by building their confidence and providing them with flexible entry points to study and work. At the most fundamental level, adult community education is place-based around the learner and builds social cohesion: providers are accessible, easy to get to, and reflective of the needs of learners, employers, and communities in specific towns, precincts and localities throughout Victoria’<sup>v</sup>

This accessibility is reflected in the high participation rate of people with a disability in ACE compared to other provider types.

### **Percentage of students with disability in Government funded Vocational Education and Training (VET)<sup>vi</sup>**

<b>Provider</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
TAFE institutes	9%	9%	9%
Other government providers	7%	7%	8%
Community education providers	25%	25%	24%
Private training providers	7%	7%	7%
Other training providers	8%	11%	10%

This same type of welcoming and inclusive learning environment is essential for learners with disability to transition into TAFE. This can be achieved by collaborative partnerships between LL providers and TAFE. Increasing awareness of adult and community education within the TAFE system will enhance understanding of the needs of vulnerable learners, including the importance of creating accessible, supportive and empowering learning environments.

The limited footprint of TAFE combined with inadequate public transport in some regional areas of Victoria contributes to the physical barrier to access to TAFE for learners with

disability. According to the Deloitte Access Economics (2017) report<sup>vii</sup>, some rural areas, including the Grampians and Loddon Mallee saw fewer learners' transition to TAFE than to ACE RTOs due to limited access to TAFE. Providing support for the development of partnerships with LL providers to enable the delivery of TAFE programs at LLs could overcome this issue.

## **Strategies to increase the participation of learners with disability in TAFE programs, including initiatives that have proven successful in Victoria and interstate**

The Victorian ACE sector provides both pre-accredited and accredited training programs specifically for learners with disability. Delivering programs in supportive and inclusive learning environments attract a range of learner cohorts, including those with disability.

'The adult and community education sector has a strong record in engaging adults with low prior education and helping them progress into further education, training and direct-entry jobs. In 2018, Victorian Government-funded adult community education training engaged people who otherwise could be excluded from the education system:

- 980 disengaged young people.
- 7,550 people without Year 12, Certificate II, or higher.
- 810 low-skilled and vulnerable workers; and
- 11,040 unemployed people.
- 580 Koorie people.
- **7,970 people with a disability;** and
- 14,090 people of culturally and linguistically diverse background.'<sup>viii</sup>

ACE providers consistently attract learners with a disability at higher rates than other sectors. The majority of ACE learners with disability participate in pre-accredited and/or foundation skills qualifications. There is scope to increase the rates transition into TAFE and further education and training. By contrast, 88% of training for TAFE students with disability was in training package qualifications (69%) or accredited qualifications (19%), the same measure for ACE students was 25% (11% and 14% respectively)<sup>ix</sup>. This highlights the complementary roles of the two sectors that can be further developed if sufficiently resourced with improved system integration.

The Deloitte Access Economics (2017) report<sup>x</sup> commissioned by the Victorian Department of Education and Training showed 64% of Learn Local pre-accredited learners with a disability engaged in further education or training, 31% transitioned to accredited training (both above the rate for all pre-accredited learners) and 23% completed accredited training (equal to the rate for all pre-accredited learners).

Building a more integrated post-secondary system and developing clear pathway options to transition from ACE to TAFE or TAFE to ACE is an effective strategy to increase participation in TAFE for learners with disability.

Initiatives such as the Skills First Reconnect Program and Transition to Work provide essential wrap around and individualised support for learners accessing the TAFE system.

### **Case study**

*Charles is a 32-year-old single parent who identified with a learning disability. Charles felt that he was not suited to the large institutional setting of TAFE so enrolled in a Certificate II in English as an Additional Language at a Learn Local provider. With support from a Skills First Reconnect mentor, Charles commenced forklift training and after obtaining his forklift license he gained employment which led to a warehouse/logistics traineeship and permanent employment.*

The Department of Education and Training's Learn Local Website showcases a range of achievements for learners with disability who have engaged in adult and community education at Learn Local providers. These achievements demonstrate how building learner's core skills, confidence and employability skills through pre-accredited training aids the transition to TAFE for learners with disability.

### **Further examples**

<https://learnlocal.org.au/story/i-wasnt-super-confident/>

<https://learnlocal.org.au/story/taking-pride-in-his-work/>

<https://learnlocal.org.au/story/learning-in-a-different-way/>

<https://prace.vic.edu.au/programs-people-intellectual-disability/>

<https://learnlocal.org.au/story/turning-life-around/>

[https://lcis.org.au/courses/our\\_courses/capacity-building/](https://lcis.org.au/courses/our_courses/capacity-building/)

## **The support learners with disability need to maximise their learning experience at TAFE**

Targeted support can help learners with disability to maximise their learning experience at TAFE. Adult and Further Education (ACFE) pre-accredited training programs are short courses that assist learners, including those with disability, to transition into further study and employment. Programs include literacy, numeracy, digital and employability skills, and vocational pathway programs. These courses can assist learners to transition to TAFE and

provide additional support for learners as they undertake TAFE accredited training, enhancing learner success and course completion rates.

Ensuring learners with disability have access to these critical learner supports requires investment in a systematic approach to building suitable partnerships between ACE and TAFE. An integrated post-secondary system would ensure learners with disability can maximise their learning experience by accessing pathway programs and learner support through ACE while transitioning to and participating in TAFE.

### **The training and practical, policy and curriculum support TAFE teachers need to maximise the learning experiences of learners with disability**

TAFE teachers can benefit from specialised practical training and curriculum support from working alongside Learn Local providers. For example: if learner(s) with disability require study support, employability, digital skills, literacy, and numeracy skill development, this can be provided by tailored ACFE programs delivered either at TAFE or within place-based community Learn Local Organisations.

We support increased investment in workforce development for TAFE teachers, front line staff and student support services to improve the provision of education and training for learners with disability. TAFE should have the capacity to tailor the curriculum for learners with disability when required.

### **The effectiveness of current government and TAFE policies and programs in supporting learners with disability and suggestions for improvement.**

A government policy which supports the development of collaborative partnerships between Learn Local Organisations and TAFE throughout Victoria would maximise the development and maintenance of sustainable relationships between ACE and TAFE. The policy would meet the outcomes of the Ministerial Statement and ACFE Board Strategy to the benefit of learners with disability and to enhance the equitable provision of education and training for all Victorians.

A government policy which supports Learn Local workforce development and builds the capacity of educators, including those with disability to develop defined pathways for learners with disability into TAFE will help increase accessibility to TAFE for learners with disability. The ACE sector requires explicit resources to develop and maintain collaborative partnerships with TAFE.

## Case Study

*Patrick, a mature aged student with dyslexia, requires assistance for his reading and writing and disclosed this on his enrolment form at TAFE this year but received no follow up. When Patrick asked for support from his TAFE teachers, they told him to organise assistive material himself by going to the TAFE student HQ. From there, he was directed to go online to get the assistance needed. However, his dyslexia makes this impossible. Patrick returned to HQ and told them again about his difficulties and he was directed to their HQ online chat service. Patrick found this process stressful and eventually gave up asking for help and relied on other people around him to provide the assistance he needed.*

*Patrick has previously attended several education institutions throughout his career and working life, including completing multiple traineeships and apprenticeships and the related coursework. Patrick indicates that in previous enrolments, they provided him with a wide range of assistance to support his needs. Patrick believes that TAFE's current inability to respond adequately to his needs is due to the increase in demand brought about by free TAFE.*

## Conclusion

ACE is different from formal education institutions as it offers small classes in friendly community settings and the flexibility to develop courses and classes that meet the needs of its community. It is especially relevant for more vulnerable groups who require strong connections with other human service providers in the local community that enables them to accommodate and support students with particular needs.

ACE must be recognised for its position within the post-secondary education system and be sufficiently resourced to ensure it can sustain and enhance its role in supporting learners with a disability to access and complete accredited training.

This inquiry must consider how best to use the strength of Learn Local providers within an integrated post-secondary system to effectively build learning pathways that provide the best outcomes for learners with disability.

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<sup>i</sup> *The Future of Adult and Community Education in Victorian 2020-2025 Ministerial Statement*

<sup>ii</sup> *The Future of Adult and Community Education in Victorian 2020-2025 Ministerial Statement*

<sup>iii</sup> *Adult, Community and Further Education Board Strategy 2020-2025 Skills for Study, Work and Life*

<sup>iv</sup> *Adult, Community and Further Education Board Strategy 2020-2025 Skills for Study, Work and Life*

<sup>v</sup> *The Future of Adult and Community Education in Victorian 2020-2025 Ministerial Statement*

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/all-data/government-funded-student-outcomes-2019-data-slicer>

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<sup>vii</sup> *Deloitte Access Economics. (2017). Participation, training outcomes and patterns in the Victorian pre-accredited sector: Final report. Dept of Education and Training*

<sup>viii</sup> *The Future of Adult and Community Education in Victorian 2020-2025 Ministerial Statement*

<sup>ix</sup> <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>

<sup>x</sup> *Deloitte Access Economics. (2017). Participation, training outcomes and patterns in the Victorian pre-accredited sector: Final report. Dept of Education and Training*