Enterprising ACE

ACE organisations and workforce skills development in small and medium enterprises

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For some years there has been evidence that small and medium enterprises are seeking out ACE organisations to assist in their workforce development. These organisations have developed a capacity to work with enterprises through their adaptive and innovative approaches to training.

Yet this contribution remains a hidden one, underplayed in the 'ACE story'. Little is known about the way ACE organisations connect with small and medium enterprises and how they develop these client relationships. We also know little about the way ACE organisations perceive this business development in relation to their overall organisational philosophy and strategy.

ALA commissioned a modest study which had two objectives: first, to understand how ACE organisations are assisting local businesses to meet their workforce development priorities and second, to learn more about how ACE organisations are developing their capacity to deliver responsive training.

The research adopts an 'organisational capability' perspective that directs attention to how ACE providers are *innovating as organisations* as they position themselves to deliver a range of education and training services to their communities.

The case studies show there is a strategic engagement of these ACE organisations with small and medium enterprises. They give the highest priority to engaging with local business on the basis of their reputation as a quality training provider. Their capacity to deliver is a matter of single-minded business development, not a mere customisation of their conventional program. This strategic positioning involves strong linkages within local networks, a concern for reputation built through quality and rigour and participant-centred systems.

Engagement is adaptive, driven by a business imperative of sustainability achieved by diversifying their resource base, sometimes in a context of funding and policy pressures. Providers seek to expand their capacity to meet the needs of the community and reach new clients through partnership and networked delivery models. This strategic adaptation has been encouraged by the 'niche market' opportunities opened up by a maturing training system.

The study present evidence that there is a vigorous edge of educational innovation in the sector, evident in the sophistication of providers' business development models. It suggests that ACE makes a contribution beyond individual and social outcomes to a 'third domain' of economic development, one worthy of greater recognition in national policy. The study recommends that—

1. Research further explore the extent and character of innovation in enterprising ACE organisations

2. There be more analysis of the capability of enterprising ACE organisations, to inform and promote capacity building as envisaged by the Ministerial Declaration on ACE

3. Advocacy, policy and research should better acknowledge ACE's 'hidden contribution' to economic development through workforce skills development.

THE RESEARCH FOCUS

In September 2010, ALA commissioned a small study of the role ACE is playing in meeting the education and training needs of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Small and medium enterprises are usually defined by their number of employees—a small enterprise, from 5 to 19 employees and a medium enterprise, from 20 to 200 employees. The use of the term SME is meant to be broader than 'small business' and to acknowledge that ACE providers may also work with larger employers.

For some years there has been evidence that certain ACE organisations have become adept at meeting the skill development needs of small business, enjoying a market advantage through their flexible 'just in time' approach to training.

Evidence that ACE is performing this role comes to light in the form of the 'good news' stories about outstanding providers that are doing something out of the ordinary. There are both early research studies of ACE and small business (McIntyre et 1995) and more recent examples such as Mitchell's study of four NSW regional community colleges (Mitchell 2008) and the Otway Colac study in *The Economic Benefit of Investment in ACE in Victoria* (Allen Consulting 2008).

Yet we know little about the way ACE organisations make their initial connections with SMEs and what factors encourage stronger client relationships or the way ACE organisations see this kind of work in relation to their overall organisational philosophy and strategy.

The research therefore explored two objectives:

1. To understand how ACE organisations are assisting SMEs to meet their workforce skill development needs

2. To learn more about how ACE organisations have developed their capacity to deliver highly responsive training to local businesses

The first objective refers to workforce skills development and the learning needs of SMEs rather than a narrow view of their participation in formal training. This emphasis is entirely in accord with current vision of the mission of the VET sector to assist in workforce development (Skills Australia 2010).

This emphasis raises new issues regarding how education and training organisations are to work with enterprises. It is therefore timely to consider how ACE organisations are providing services to small and medium enterprises in a way that is innovative and responsive to their learning needs.

The second objective recognises that the current Ministerial Declaration on ACE emphasises the development of organisational capability. It is also true that the evolution of the national training system has encouraged a significant minority of ACE organisations to develop their training capacity and position themselves to advantage of new opportunities. Though funding uncertainty and a desire to ensure sustainability has been a factor in innovation, so has vigorous leadership in organisations with a vision of themselves as quality education providers.

This second objective recognises that organisational capacity building is a goal of the Ministerial Declaration on ACE. It is important to learn more about the factors

that promote the capacity of ACE providers to reach new clients, including the capacity to respond with high quality learning solutions to business clients. The research can explore the role of strategic vision and leadership, as well as those contextual factors that may be stimulating qualities of 'enterprise' in ACE organisations.

The evolution of the national training system has encouraged a significant minority of ACE organisations to develop their training capacity and position themselves to advantage of new opportunities. Though funding uncertainty and a desire to ensure sustainability has been a factor in innovation, so has vigorous leadership in organisations with a vision of themselves as quality education providers.

This second objective recognises that we have much to learn about the qualities of 'enterprise' in ACE organisations, the shaping of the capacity to respond with high quality learning solutions to organisational clients who have pressing workforce development issues.

To explore these objectives, the study developed a conceptual framework to guide the development of a number of case studies of innovative ACE organisations. Several issues were identified:

- *Context and demographic*: How do ACE providers understand the local business market for their skill development services? What factors drive local demand for training?
- *Capability:* How have ACE providers developed a capacity to meet the skill development needs of SMEs? What kinds of services are provided and how does this fit with their work as RTOs?
- *Customisation:* To what extent are ACE providers customising 'on-demand' training for SMEs? What training response models do they employ? How does this training relate to their general program or their VET provision?
- *Client relationships*: How do providers build relationships with clients?? How does this client group compare to other clients of ACE services?
- *Commercial information:* What are the main sources of information that ACE providers use to develop their capacity to meet the skill development needs of small business?
- *ACE as business organisations.* How do ACE organisations see themselves as small businesses and as social enterprises? How does this influence their work with SMEs?

The research adopts an 'organisational capability' perspective that directs attention to the ways that ACE providers develop as they adapt to challenging environments. The question is not only what ACE organisations are doing to meet small business needs in their locality but *how they are innovating and developing as organisations* in order to better deliver to small businesses and other clients in their communities.

The first aspect of the research was intended to identify examples of training or learning solutions adapted to the needs of small and medium sized businesses, and the second to uncover how some ACE providers are shaping their own organisational capability in order survive and prosper as sustainable social enterprises with a mission to deliver quality educational services—in other words, how they understand their own business development.

ACE, SMALL BUSINESS AND TRAINING

To give some background to the research, several themes can be briefly explored around the question of ACE and its role in assisting workforce development in small and medium enterprises. These are:

1. The 'problem' of SMEs reluctance to train
2. The argument that ACE can provide flexible training solutions
3. The imperative to build organisational capacity in ACE
4. The need to acknowledge ACE's role in enterprise skills development

SMEs reluctance to train or inflexible VET providers?

It has been a longstanding complaint of VET policy that small and medium enterprises do not engage with the formal training system. Skills Australia's current discussion paper, 'Creating a Future Direction for Australian Vocational Education and Training' (2010) restates the theme of reluctance to engage. It states: 'While large organisations are significant users of public VET training to upskill their workforce, medium and small firms do not participate to the same extent but may be using private training providers for this purpose' (p.27).

This is an admission that Skills Australia is unclear how Australia's small and medium enterprises approach their workforce skills development. There is nothing in the Discussion Paper's pages on ACE (2010, 71-73) to suggest the community sector makes a contribution in this area. If ACE providers are indeed playing a role in meeting the skills development needs of small and medium enterprises, then this is contribution ought to be better acknowledged. This report aims to assist this process.

The 'reluctance to train' perspective persists. Mitchell's (2007) audit of small business training for the WA Department of Education and Training was asked to address the 'lack of up-take of training by small business'. He summed up the cause succinctly:

> Two core reasons for the lack of uptake of formal training … are the preference of small business to learn informally, on the job, and the tension between the time needed to undertake an accredited course and the preference of small business for just-in-time training to satisfy immediate needs. The comments from interviewees support these two core reasons and add some further clarification. For example, many small businesses are dissuaded from committing to formal, accredited training because of the need to attend conventional classes on a regular, routine basis, especially as some businesses have peak seasons of demand during the year. The rhythms of accredited training on the one hand and the way small businesses like to learn – just-in-time, just-for-me – on the other, are discordant.

Thus there is no mystery to the supposed reluctance of small business to take up formal training. In the context of a client-centred system, the problem might be better framed in terms of the difficulties that institutions have in meeting the conditions under which small business would prefer to learn. The problem may originate in the inflexibility of provider-centred delivery and the reluctance of

institutions to work collaboratively with small business on their workforce development issues.

Kearns' work (2002) on the importance of informal learning in small business skills development pointed to more flexible and accommodating skills formation approaches. Billet's (2003) study also found that the national training system has tended to harden institutional and systemic barriers to appropriate skills development:

> The central message of the research project is that, while short courses which develop specific kinds of skills are valuable and useful for small business operators, the VET sector needs to move beyond offering nationally accredited courses and adopt an approach that is facilitative and involves working collaboratively with small business to meet their learning needs. (Quoted in Mitchell 2007, 21).

Thus, the turn in national VET policy to enterprise skills development puts the onus on VET providers to adapt modes of provision to the learning needs of small and medium enterprises.

Dawe and Nguyen (2007) conducted the most recent systematic review of the evidence on small business and VET. They concluded:

> Strategies which fit with the way small business learns are clearly more successful than direct or formal training. Previous literature has shown that small business managers and employees 'learn through doing' and much of their learning is focused on current or real issues contextually embedded in their environment. Two other important aspects are learning from other business people through social networks and through critical reflection of their assumptions, knowledge and experiences—their own and those of business colleagues.

Dawe and Nguyen concluded that there were 'three essential elements' in strategies that are successful with a wide range of small businesses:

- a clear focus on business-specific needs
- a personal approach through a recognised local facilitator or business service organisation that is able to reach small business operators who may not be positive about training
- flexible provision which carefully individualises training information, content and delivery to the needs of each small business.

ACE's capacity to assist skills development in SMEs

There has been a thread in ACE research demonstrating the engagement of some community providers with local enterprise training, for example, in NSW (McIntyre, Foley, Morris and Tennant 1995; Kinnaird and Davis 1998). McIntyre et al showed that the training needs of local businesses were often provided through the general program, though a few city colleges had established special business training units and some had well developed customised or fee-for-service training programs. This was before the significant expansion of ACE into vocational education and training in the State.

Work commissioned by ALA in 2005 argued that ACE providers can contribute to developing 'human capital' in small businesses (Newton 2005). Their market advantages are flexibility and an adult learning focus that positions them to assist small enterprises to identify and meet their workforce development needs. The study drew on the Small Business Professional Development Programme.

The study outlined key messages for ACE providers wishing to strengthen their relationships with small business. It recommended that they—

- Build on their strengths by providing flexible, innovative, tailored, 'just-in-time' training
- Help identify needs and tailor delivery, providing quality, relevant training in small amounts and incorporating the recognition of prior learning
- Build relationships with small workplaces in the local area and actively promote ACE services to small business
- Become the 'bridge' between small enterprises and the formal training system, operating as a 'learning broker'
- Utilise knowledge and expertise from local networks to assist in identifying and addressing training gaps
- Assist small enterprises to engage with the formal training system, help to de-mystify processes and eliminate jargon
- Clearly demonstrate return on investment from training to owner-managers
- Interpret the rapid pace of change as an opportunity for ACE to assist small enterprises future-proof their business.

The study drew on Kearns' (2002) study of VET and small business that called for adaptation to the learning needs of SMEs rather than further criticism of their failure to engage in formal training. In reality, the contemporary business environment is driving learning in small and medium-size enterprises—the same 'drivers' that Kearns has cited as making lifelong learning a necessity. Chief among these are rapid changes in ICT and communications and their impact on business systems of and the increasing complexity of workforce change.

Mastering information and communications technology are said to pose significant 'learning challenges' for SMEs and create opportunities for flexible training providers to assist. Newton advances Kearns' view that there is an enhanced role for ACE as an intermediary and 'learning broker' in helping clients negotiate the system. As the focus shifts to the learner rather than the institution, ACE will become increasingly significant in building bridges between learners and providers.

The question arises as to what would motivate ACE providers to seek to develop strong client relationships with local businesses in the way that Newton and Kearns suggest.

Clearly, there are numerous factors in the policy and funding environment that are pressing ACE organisations to move wholeheartedly in this direction, and more in some jurisdictions than others. These include:

1. *Policy expectations*. In both NSW and Victoria, policy has stressed organisational capacity building through partnerships and linkages and the

development of viable community businesses (cf. Victorian Ministerial Statements, ACFE 2005 and 2009).

2. *Funding and sustainability*. In those States, the idea has been promoted that ACE organisations need to become sustainable social enterprises, supported by diversified funding sources and less reliant on government grants. Recent funding uncertainty in NSW culminating in the abolition of the Board has made this issue paramount for many community colleges. In Victoria, the new skills funding regime offers both risks and opportunities.

3. *Strategic positioning within the VET system*. As the national training system has matured there have been increased opportunities for innovative ACE organisations to strategically position themselves to access new resources enabling them to fulfil a wider social and economic role.

To date there has been little interest in how innovative ACE organisations have taken advantage of new opportunities offered by this strategic environment. One notable contribution is Brown et al's (2007) study of adaptivity in NSW providers commissioned by the Board of ACE. Brown et al concluded that 'adaptivity involves finding or developing solutions that lie outside the current way the organisation operates'. As market-responsive organisations, 'ACE providers are adaptive because they wish to be sustainable'. This study saw four areas of organisational life where 'adaptive solutions' are developed—through knowledge and analysis of the environment, in a culture that is 'opportunity-driven', a compelling vision and strategy based on clear leadership and the mobilising of resources to these ends.

This study will reveal something of the environment that is both pressing some ACE organisations to become more enterprising and offering opportunities to develop in this way.

The context for organisational capacity-building in ACE

Claims about the 'flexibility' and 'adaptability' of ACE organisations are often taken at face value and rarely examined in terms of how these qualities translate into organisational capability that is necessary to deliver training to SMEs. What organisational systems and culture is required for ACE to play an intermediary and brokerage role?

Generalised claims about what ACE is and what it can achieve stand in stark contrast to the considerable diversity that is apparent in providers' organisational sophistication and business development. There is a need for clarity on this issue.

National ACE policy in the form of the revised Ministerial Declaration on ACE (2007) gives the highest priority to organisational capacity-building to meet national goals including those of social inclusion. The Declaration not only frequently affirms their broad vocational role but explicitly mentions the 'capacity to tailor education and training provision to meet the specific needs of local business and industry':

> Within ACE, community-based education and training providers have responded to the rising demand for vocationally orientated training, and are already making a significant contribution to the provision of accredited vocational education and training (VET) … Community education and training providers not only deliver generic outcomes against the objectives of the national training system, but they add value to vocational training through

> their strongly local, market-orientated, learner centred and flexible approaches to delivery. This is demonstrated, for example, by their capacity to tailor education and training provision to meet the specific needs of local business and industry.
>
> There is a clear connection between the COAG commitment to lifting the nation's productivity through skilling and workforce development and the capacity of the ACE sector both to reach segments of the adult population who do not currently use the formal training system and to increase provision of accredited VET. This connection provides an opportunity to work collaboratively to maximise these positive outcomes, and ultimately, strengthen access to, and choice in, training opportunities for all Australian adults, business and industry.

The Declaration reflects the thinking of the Bardon Report for DEST (Bardon 2006) which recommended a 'capability framework'. Bardon rightly argued that if government policy was to maximise ACE's contribution then it needed to address the great differences that are now evident in scale and diversity among ACE providers. The report classified organisations in three 'tiers' based on the scope and diversity of services offered—community learning providers, community participation providers and community VET providers.

The Bardon Report also suggested that different kinds of ACE providers serve different clienteles and compete in different markets according to the services they provide. This reflects a maturing of the national training system and a 'segmentation' of markets. In this maturation the TAFE systems are more oriented to larger enterprises dominated by industry advisory bodies, creating a niche for ACE providers attuned to the needs of their local communities to provide appropriate forms of training for particular clients.

This study highlights one group of 'community VET providers' that are exploiting such training opportunities while maintaining their traditional programs. The aim is to gain some insight into how they understand and how they have developed their capability. It is important, in terms of the goals of the Ministerial Declaration on ACE, to understand what assists an ACE provider to move beyond a 'community participation' capability, to expand into accredited training, register as an RTO and actively seek to work with local enterprises.

ACE's hidden contribution to small business development

In the conventional view of ACE, its 'flexibility and responsiveness' is understood mainly in terms of meeting the learning needs of individuals. There seems much less celebration of the same qualities applied to local enterprise skills development—that appears to be a hidden contribution. This may be so for several reasons:

1. *Policy priorities.* The Ministerial Declaration envisages ACE's main role as providing pathways to accredited training for less advantaged clients, a role that nearly all ACE providers can aspire to. Historically, the Declaration has focused on ACE developing pathways to TAFE rather than other functions of ACE in the training system. Worthy as this emphasis is, it underplays the achievements of Tier 3 'community VET providers' who are participating directly meeting the needs of specific client groups through accredited training.

2. *Advocacy by the sector.* Much ACE research is motivated by a need to demonstrate its legitimacy as an educational sector and establish its value (c.f. Allen Consulting 2008). Sector advocacy stresses its social contribution such as the strengthening of communities at the expense of its economic contribution. ACE's role in skilling local business may be less visible, less demonstrable or seen as less worthy of celebration. An ambitious recent attempt to estimate the economic benefit of ACE in Victoria (Allen Consulting, 2008) barely mentions small business and does not estimate the value of ACE's role in enterprise development at all.

3. *ACE's multiple functions*. The best attempts to theorise the functions of community education and establish the 'value of ACE' tend to subordinate small business development outcomes to other achievements. Bowman's widely accepted model (2006) identifies six sectors of individual and social benefit and among these, only the 'Work Skills Development' function that implies its role in small enterprise skills development. Other functions, especially ACE as 'platform builder' have received more prominence.

The problem is not that enterprise skills development is excluded from the scope of ACE outcomes but rather that some achievements are valorised at the expense of others. It is timely to recall that the respected typology of ACE Outcomes (Clemans et al 2003) defined three domains of individual, social and economic outcomes. The *third domain of economic development* identifies a rich field of activity for ACE organisations that seek to make a contribution to small and medium enterprises in their community (Figure 1, extracted from Clemans et al 2003:60).

Table 6: Economic development outcomes

Outcome	Indicators
Knowledge and understanding of economic life	Local businesses employ and train local people through ACE agency
	Participation in courses developing knowledge and understanding of local economy
	Participation in courses developing knowledge and understanding of economic life at all levels
	Referrals by ACE to local employers of potential employees
Skills to develop local economies	ACE provision of and participation in accredited and non-accredited training
An innovative and sustainable local economy	Savings on health costs due to constructive participation in ACE
	Monetary worth of voluntary hours given to ACE agency
	ACE-based business initiatives and business partnerships
A local economy that prospers by making the most of its diversity	Participation in local ESL and WELL courses
	Business involvement in ACE

Figure 1. The domain of Economic Development Outcomes (Clemans et al (2003)

THE STUDY AND ITS LIMITATIONS

The research is essentially a preliminary study generating some illustrative case studies of ACE's involvement with small and medium enterprises. It involved semi-structured interviews with the managers of selected ACE organisations identified as working with small business. The interviews were written up as case studies with the aim of highlighting the 'organisational story' of their involvement with small and medium enterprises. The providers were given an opportunity to comment on the accounts.

The research sought out those providers said to be innovative in meeting the needs of small business through customised training or through a generally enterprising approach. It is important to note that the primary intention was not to capture innovation in reaching new client groups in general. The process of identifying suitable ACE organisations required some persistence:

- Inquiries were made to identify suitable candidates for interview from sources that included ALA, Community Colleges Australia, and ACE Services NSW and ACFE Victoria especially the regional officers, and individual ACE providers knowledgeable about the field.
- The interviews were concentrated in NSW and Victoria, though a spread of States was sought at the outset. It appears that small enterprise training is a specialised activity and niche market. The capacity to work with business, and to do it competitively requires RTO status and scope for training and access to funding, limiting providers in some States.
- It appeared that there were limitations in the available knowledge about ACE organisations working with small business at the peak body or agency level, and even among providers in the field. This may be because providers are wary of sharing strategic information, or simply because there is no well developed source of information about ACE provider profiles and capacity.
- The case studies are intended as illustrative and inevitably they are selective. They are not intended as a definitive statement of innovation in ACE or best practice in meeting the needs of small business.
- It was felt important to include organisations whose stories had not been told before, and to exclude organisations whose organisational innovation has been documented in other research.

The case studies at the end of the report are accounts of interviews that the respondents have given, and they reflect the interest of the study in bringing into sharper focus the theme of organisational capacity building in ACE.

FINDINGS

The research objectives were to establish how ACE organisations are working with small and medium enterprises and how these organisations understand and develop the capability to perform this role.

In general, the research confirms that certain ACE providers are very active in assisting SMEs with their workforce skills development.

How ACE organisations are engaging with small and medium enterprises

The case studies show that the engagement of ACE with small business does not come about simply as a result of the perceived 'flexibility and responsiveness' of organisations. Success in delivering the training they need to local business is likely to be the result of arduous strategic work positioning the organisation to seize new opportunities as they arise.

To do justice to the case studies, this must be expressed more strongly. Most of the organisations *attach high strategic importance to engaging with local business and developing a leading reputation as a quality training provider*. In some cases, where the viability of the organisation has been threatened, or it has stagnated or even collapsed, there has been clear mission to 're-invent' the organisation as one that can deliver on new terms.

The argument is that the ACE organisations represented are delivering to small business because they have developed the capacity to do so *as a matter of single-minded business development*, not as an accidental customisation of their conventional program. Further, the organisation has taken this strategic direction as an adaptive response to an environment and developed its organisational systems and culture to achieve this end. It may be a case of particular organisations choosing to develop and work in this way, and point to the emergence of a group of providers that share a common philosophy or ethos.

There are a range of factors underpinning the success that providers themselves report, in meeting the SME training market where other VET providers appear less successful. The providers emphasise:

- Building credibility and repute as a quality training provider to whom local business will turn as a first resort
- Designing and delivering training in ways that meet the clients needs, in terms of venues, content, mode of teaching and learning, cost-effectiveness and quality
- Embedding the ACE organisation in local networks, including business circles, gaining good intelligence about learning needs and promoting the training capacity of the organisation
- Finding and rewarding quality staff who can assure the quality of design, delivery and assessment and perceived rigour (as well as appropriateness) of the training
- Conceptualising and promoting educational services in terms of the adult learning needs of participants and their satisfaction with the process as a learning experience

- The informality of the learning experience does not rank as a major consideration, while quality and rigour are valued qualities.

It may be stating the obvious, but *achieving RTO status is a pre-requisite for developing the capacity to deliver to small business*—yet this needs to be understood as a means by which the ACE provider can warrant the quality of training, not especially because SMEs require qualifications. It is about being perceived as a credible training provider within the training system, capable of meeting an employer's needs for particular skills sets.

What kinds of training are providers delivering? It is clear that compliance training (e.g. First Aid and the Responsible Service of Alcohol certificates) is a leading driver together with skills in office software and systems. Compliance also includes industry expectations regarding a minimum qualification, such as the aged care industry, where a Certificate 3 is becoming mandatory. There is evidence of depth of training provided beyond AQTF levels of Certificate 3 and 4 to Diploma and beyond with some specialisation in a particular area such as Business Services or sometimes a deliberate breadth of scope across several fields of education.

This question points to the need for much better information about exactly what the Tier 3 community VET providers are delivering and to whom, in order to draw conclusions about their training capacity and the client groups they are reaching. This requires further research.

How ACE providers perceive their organisational development

The second research question examines how ACE providers are developing themselves as enterprises as they work with local businesses and how they perceive this work in relation to their overall philosophy and strategic direction.

To emphasise what has been said earlier, these providers see themselves as adapting in a highly strategic way to their operating environment and community context. In this 'strategic adaptation' there are a number of dynamics that drive and support the capacity to deliver to local business:

- *Sustainability*. There is a business imperative to grow and develop as viable community organisations, and this leads to the identification of new business and the diversification of income streams. The organisation may have undergone a crisis leading to transformation or revitalisation, crossing a threshold to business innovation and development as a quality provider of educational services.
- *Community needs*. There is a broad view taken of community education and training needs in the community that includes a range of clients including local businesses and their employees. Broadening the range of services and the client base has a high priority.
- *Conscious capacity-building.* The capacity to deliver is developed in a strategic way, so that the organisation does not overreach itself. The organisation may resist opportunistic growth in favour of developing strengths and specialisation over time. This is highly dependent on available resources.
- *Partnership and collaboration*. Strategic networking is a defining characteristic of enterprising ACE organisations. Providers seek to be embedded in local networks to build credibility and obtain commercial intelligence. They strengthen their capacity and 'reach' through strategic collaboration with like-

minded organisations. There is an emergence of 'networked provision' across communities, strengthening capacity through better structures and more sophisticated business models. This most notable in the NSW cases.

There is an important caveat to be noted in projecting the success of ACE organisations in delivering to small and medium enterprises. Most of the organisations have faced and recovered from some kind of crisis in the last decade. Their present success is highly dependent on individuals providing outstanding leadership, supported by effective boards of management. Community agencies are contingent entities—they are successful so long as there is good management, and vulnerable to failure when effective leaders move on without succession planning. The thin resource base of community agencies, compared to public sector institutions, makes this a critical factor in organisational capacity building.

More detailed analysis of the six organisation case studies of Part 2 was not contemplated by the research brief. However, it is helpful to identify those organisational characteristics that could form the basis for a closer comparison of cases. These characteristics might include:

1. *Engagement*: Engaging with local business is a strategic priority
2. *Capability*: Expanding training scope and capacity is a strategic priority
3. *Adaptivity*: Innovative organisational systems are developed
4. *Partnership*: Collaboration, cluster or networked provision is a strategy
5. *Reputation*: Seeking to develop profile as a quality training provider
6. *Flexibility*: Training is adapted to enterprise training needs
7. *Intelligence*: Management is embedded in local business networks
8. *Renewal*: Organisational renewal has motivated innovation

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This preliminary research indicates that innovative business development may be an important factor in capacity building in ACE that will contribute to the national goals of the Ministerial Declaration on ACE. The nature of enterprise in ACE organisations presents a fertile field worthy of further investigation. It is recommended that—

1. Further research investigate organisational innovation in enterprising ACE organisations, its extent and character
2. There be more analysis of the capability of ACE organisations, especially those that are adaptive and enterprising, in order to inform the goals for capacity building of the Ministerial Declaration on ACE
3. Advocacy, policy and research aim to redress the neglect of the 'third domain' ACE's contribution to economic development

Recommendation 1. Further exploration of the characteristics of enterprising ACE organisations.

There should be further research to establish how widespread is innovative business development in ACE organisations and what factors are facilitating qualities of enterprise

The research has uncovered a vigorous edge of educational innovation in the sector, evident in the degree of sophistication of business development models among the selected providers. The case studies provides a fresh view of ACE as an adaptive community agency, showing ACE organisations of a certain capacity responding to a mix of funding, policy and strategic constraints while also making their own business opportunities. Most would be identified in terns of the Bardon Report capability framework as Tier 3 'community VET providers' though they are medium sized rather than large enterprises.

To again summarise the qualities of 'enterprising ACE' organisations, they are RTOs who give a high strategic priority to meeting local business needs; they are embedded in local networks and have good intelligence about emerging community needs; they are innovative in building organisational capacity and they strengthen this capacity through strategic partnerships and networked provision with other ACE providers and agencies. Yet unspoken in their success is that 'enterprise' is highly dependent on effective leadership by individuals and boards of management.

It is timely to acknowledge this entrepreneurial streak in the sector and the value of some 'hard-headed' organisational qualities usually associated with a business development ethos—yet those very qualities are seen as key to delivering high quality educational services. Advocacy of ACE does not always have to appeal to the value of informality and friendliness in dealing with adult learners.

It may be that the case studies depict an emerging 'type' of ACE provider, one that is likely be found identifying with the 'community college' concept, but by no means exclusively so. It is suggested that the maturation of the national training system is encouraging and amplifying this tendency to organisational variety in ACE.

Recommendation 2. Better knowledge of the factors that expand capability in ACE organisations.

Future research should aim to further develop a capability framework for community education by giving attention to factors that develop training capacity that meets the workforce skill needs of small and medium enterprises

Continuing attention needs to be given to the question of how capability is to be developed in ACE organisations, following through on the framework developed by Bardon in support of the revised Ministerial Declaration on ACE. More work is needed to analyse the varying roles and capabilities of different kinds of ACE organisations, if we are to understand capacity building in the sector. We still lack good information about the profiles, roles and capabilities to be found both within jurisdictions and across the States and Territories.

The research suggests it would be useful to further investigate the diversification of types of ACE providers and the extent that there are widely differing organisational cultures and degrees of business sophistication. It seems very possible that the maturing of the national training system has actually increased the diversity to be found among providers since the first Ministerial Declaration on ACE.

Research could focus on the strategies that ACE organisations adopt to enhance their capacity to deliver appropriate training. The case studies show that enterprising ACE providers seek opportunities for strategic co-operation with other community agencies and other ACE providers as well as their local TAFE institutes. Indeed, an emerging feature of the 'enterprising ACE' is networked provision, where individual providers join together in consortia, and more sophisticated forms of networking that involve brokerage of services across a region.

A further implication of this study of organisations is the need for further development of a national database of ACE providers. A high priority should be given to the refinement of Adult Learning Australia's national database since this has been an important platform for both research and advocacy for the ACE sector, as witnessed by its citation in the recent Skills Australia 'Future Directions' discussion paper. There are manifest limitations of the NTIS database of registered training organisations and it is to be hoped that the NTIS in its new incarnation will become a more reliable source of information about the scope of ACE provision and the range of ACE organisations.

Recommendation 3. Investigating ACE's contribution to economic development outcomes.

Further research should give greater attention to ACE's contribution to economic development outcomes, and in particular its role in local workforce skills development in small and medium enterprises

The study concludes that ACE is playing a potentially significant role in workforce skills development in small and medium enterprises but that this is a 'hidden contribution' not sufficiently acknowledged in advocacy, policy and research.

Advocacy of the sector needs to move beyond the widely accepted view that ACE's contributions are principally individual and social—the first and second domains of the Clemans et al typology of ACE outcomes. As the Skills Australia 'Future Directions' paper illustrates, there is a tendency to 'pigeon-hole' ACE as second-chance education despite the evidence that the sector contributes to economic development, the 'third domain' of ACE outcomes, through its VET effort.

It may be timely to broaden the discussion beyond the long-running narrative of ACE's role in building the 'social capital' of communities. The danger in over-playing the 'social capital' argument is that real achievements in the economic domain are de-valued—witness the Allen Consulting report's neglect of this benefit of government investing in ACE.

It may be time to re-value ACE's contribution to economic development and to give this domain more research and policy attention. The starting point, as recommended above, might be a comprehensive analysis of the diverse capabilities

of ACE organisations, particularly the Bardon Report Tier 3 organisations who have developed a significant training capacity as RTOs.

The research challenges another prevailing view of ACE—that to achieve substantial vocational outcomes, the sector needs to work in partnership with TAFE. The evidence of this study is quite contrary—the ACE providers succeed on their own terms as preferred training providers in the local economy. They have exploited the opportunities in the training market created by the absence of appropriate training on the part of TAFE.

This present research recommends a more balanced view of ACE be taken when developing national policy on VET. This would need to acknowledge the great organisation diversity of the sector and acknowledge its different role, functions and achievements.

THE CASE STUDIES

Camden Haven Adult and Community Education (NSW)

Griffith Adult Learning Association (NSW)

Tamworth Community College (NSW)

Southern Grampians Adult Education (Victoria)

Meadow Heights Learning Shop (Victoria)

Caboolture Adult Literacy Group (Queensland)

Camden Haven Community College (New South Wales)

Camden Haven Community College (chace.org.au) is a story of transformation from a largely volunteer-run community learning centre to an enterprising training organisation that has built a new business model on servicing a wider catchment and networking provision with other community providers in other centres.

Camden Haven is a small town on the NSW mid-north coast, a retirement destination whose residents on average are among the oldest in the State. Aged care is an industry, together with tourism and hospitality, and there is peaking construction activity due to extensive highway works. There is a steady demand for compliance training from service clubs (responsible service of alcohol) and aged care where Cert 3 is becoming a standard qualification for work in nursing homes. The area attracts people buying small businesses to run in retirement who find they have some learning to do.

Some years ago, the centre's viability was being squeezed by uncertainty over government funding and the limited revenues from a small local enrolment base. The director, with the support of the MC decided to take a strategic leap in the dark, adopt a 'bigger perspective on the sector' and be more innovative and entrepreneurial by creating 'a more interesting and different kind of business'. This involved a reincarnation as a an RTO with a wide scope of registration that could serve other ACE providers through a strong administrative base for extending VET provision. More than 20 qualifications are offered across the wider catchment through the collegial providers, whose role it is to organise the course while CHACE provides the administrative support. There was a long period of transition in securing registration and in setting up the collaborative arrangements. The organisational shift is reflected in new premises.

The community college advertises breadth: 'Courses, training and assessment are available at the college, at other training sites or workplaces, on-line and by distance education' (home page). The college also is the trust manager for the Pilot Station facility, which it maintains and rents out for holidays and events and runs environmental education, heritage and sustainability courses (camdenheadpilotststion.org.au).

CHACE's value proposition is to provide a flexible alternative over a range of courses in a flexible way to fulfil a need—with smaller groups if necessary, and appropriate assessment and venues—rather than try and compete with bigger providers (such as TAFE). The small business clientele is a distinct segment differing in its needs and preferred learning modes from learners from local community courses and the wider training community served by the network.

Trust is the first principle of the CHACE philosophy—assessing the trustworthiness of the client so that worthwhile outcomes contribute to the reputation of the organisation, since promotion is mainly through word of mouth recommendation. Training queries are met with a quick budget and quote as a first step, with response systems and procedures now well-developed, with precedents to follow. Otherwise, the approach to client relationships is quite unsystematic in that any opportunity is assessed on its merits.

Capacity building at CHACE gives the highest value to retaining quality trainers, rewarding and supporting them, so they feel they are valued by the organisation and want to contribute to the enterprise. The relationship with other providers is

based more on ongoing agreements than a formal partnership model—a division of responsibilities that is reviewed and developed. Networking with these collaborating agencies (who identify training needs and organise the provision) is an important source of training intelligence, though CHACE is wary of being 'covetous of intelligence' since business model is based on confidence in the strategy, trust in the working arrangements and being prepared to share information.

CHACE exemplifies the socially enterprising community provider that has met difficult resource challenges through organisational innovation— engaging in robust capacity building based on an innovative business model centred on providing strong administrative services to other community providers, enabling it to extend its reach and raise its reputation in a catchment well beyond its local community.

Griffith Adult Learning Association (New South Wales)

Griffith Adult Learning Association (GALA, www.gala.nsw.edu.au) has had a history as a successful and innovative rural provider, for many years operating out of a former band-hall in the main street. Griffith is the centre for an extensive viticulture industry dependent on Murrumbidgee River irrigation and dominated by the big wine producers, though there is also large poultry meat production. There are numerous small businesses and service industries. Historically its population included a large southern Italian community, though now there is a much greater ethnic and linguistic diversity in the local workforce. Griffith is one of those communities directly affected by water policy in the Murray Darling Basin Authority.

In recent years the Association has been hard pressed by uncertainty in State government support and limited revenues from its lifestyle and its long-standing LLN provision. By 2004 it appeared 'near collapse' so that its Board of Management undertook a fundamental reframing of its 'core business aim' as meeting vocational needs. The organisation had to 'redefine itself in the community', moving out of the band-hall and projecting a more professional image. At the time of writing, GALA was changing its name to Northern Riverina Community College to reflect this wider role.

GALA overhauled its approach to business development. It found that 'one-on-one' conversations about unmet training needs with local employers were more effective than general promotion through 'business information' events. This was the key to credibility. There were areas that were not a high priority for TAFE whose main market was trainees and apprentices and who were not driven by the same 'survival imperative'. The new charter was to provide a broad range of quality courses that meet the needs of the community and thereby contribute to its development.

Griffith has been able to position itself as the 'go-to provider' for First Aid and other compliance training and for IT skills, generating their main income stream. Turnover is now three times what it was in 2000. Enrolments are more sustained, with each client generating another three enrolments. Lifestyle courses are now less than 10% of the revenue stream.

The organisation takes a tailored approach, sets out to identify the training goal and design a pathway to achieve it. The quality of the trainer is critical—they must

have an appreciation of active learning, be sensitive to the peer learning that adults generate in groups and the generic outcomes that become significant in learner perceptions and potent in word of mouth recommendations leading to further enrolments.

Customisation of IT skills involves analysing how the client business uses software in the office—for example, Excel may be a reporting format and becomes a foundation concept to be understood and developed in its many applications. Having available the best teaching and learning resources in modular form licensed from a publishing firm allows the VET manager to concentrate on training needs analysis and quality design. Client relationships are developed by maintaining quality services to existing clients, 'keeping the door open' and developing trust in the organisation 's ability to deliver—there is the snowball effect generated around initially small innovations. Encouraged by State committee priorities, partnerships have been developed with other organisations, including tailored training for disabled clients in IT skills and customer service— a post-school options transition course for young adults involving work placements and a range of vocational abilities and aspirations.

So GALA sees itself as a quality community training provider— one focussed on its core business of delivering courses that are learner-centred, responding to both expressed and latent needs (what learners don't know they really need). It is a community enterprise whose modus operandi and competitive edge is in tune with the new AQTF requirements for a client-centred system.

Tamworth Community College (New South Wales)

Tamworth is the centre one of the largest inland cities in NSW with over 40,000 residents and nearer to 200,000 in the New England region for which it is the main service centre. It has diverse industry base with significant retail, manufacturing and health services and is a centre for the aviation and equine industries. It has a large TAFE institute and numerous private providers of education and training for adults.

Tamworth Community College has developed a training scope specialising in the provision of Business Services and working to this strength. The city has hundreds of small businesses, with a strong demand from solicitors, accountants and others for small office business training (for example, using Microsoft Office). This is an area where TCC has been able to win a market share through its speed of response, cost-effectiveness and ability to deliver to employees needs. Clients have also included large employers such as the government departments (Health), Tamworth Regional Council (local government, a large employer) DET office staff and the food processing industry and management training for nursing home staff. TAFE and Central West Community College are larger providers competing in a different industry sectors and the market is big enough for that diversity of provision.

Thanks to Federal infrastructure funding, the College has been able to relocate to new premises in a heritage building, an old flour mill, raising it profile significantly. The College has made itself a trusted name in delivering business services training with a reputation of' being here for the community'. It is well embedded within local networks , with the Director sitting on many committees and active in Chamber of Commerce events such as business breakfasts, which are large scale. This gives the

College the edge over larger providers who are not grounded in local networks, won't trouble to deliver to small groups flexibly and sometimes are from out of region and therefore don't inspire client confidence. Any inquiry gets immediate attention and training is customised by talking first to the supervisors and then to the participants themselves to ascertain their real needs. So satisfaction is high, there is an ethos of responsiveness where the College is 'only one step away' and small business appears to be overcoming its legendary reluctance to train. There is an increased tendency for people to go on with further formal training they engage successfully in accredited units. The College uses radio to promote its courses.

As for many other colleges, compliance training (RSA, RSG, First Aid, traffic control) is a big driver of training, and this comprises a good part of the cash flow and the overall business. Front line management training, and Cert 4 in training and assessment and business services lead provision. There is continuous tendering for accredited training of existing workers by the College through the Approved Provider program (APL) and the VET program is not regarded as separate from this activity. State training identifies skills in demand skills and there is local discretionary funding of training often in a local workforce development context though rarely full qualifications. In this way TCC is well-positioned in the regional training picture. General courses are now a small part of the total business and they usually struggle to make a surplus.

Tamworth is meshed into its local education and training context in other ways. Its local networking has led it to develop synergies with two private RTOs who provide training while the College provides the organisational and administrative support on a fee-for-service basis. Tamworth has also supported in an innovative experiment in provider collaboration that grew out of the former Northern Inland provider cluster but has since expanded to include several north coast ACE organisations—Co-operative Learning Ltd—an innovative regional collaboration across the entire north of the State. This registered company services its organisational members to achieve economies of scale in administration, promote joint business development in the region, which closely corresponds to State regions, and co-ordinate provision in literacy. Joining forces allowed the consortium to employ a co-ordinator to implement joint strategies and activities.

The future lies in expanding the scope of provision to include more Diploma and Cert 4 qualifications in business management, community services and the training and assessment certificate, building on its higher profile and reputation for quality training and willingness to innovate as an organisation.

Southern Grampians Adult Education (Victoria)

Southern Grampians Adult Education is a not-profit community based adult education centre serving the town of Hamilton and smaller centres in this area of south-western Victoria. SGAE offers a range of adult, community and further education programs and has a leading reputation for educational innovation and was recognised as the Victorian Outstanding ACE provider in 2008 and runner up in 2009. Like many ACE providers it has had its moments of crisis. It arose from the ashes of an older adult education organisation that declined to be part of a new ACFE funding regime in the 1990s.

The area around Hamilton (district population about 17,000) was once described as the 'wool capital of the world'. Changing economic times have seen a diversification into cattle farming, hardwood timber plantation and more recently mineral sands processing by Iluka and significant wind farm developments. There has been considerable development in smaller service industries. Structural adjustment from the wool monoculture economy has taken time, and SGAE has worked with TAFE and other partners in a Community Learning Partnership to 'educate the community into learning' and develop the changing skills required in the changing economy.

SGAE has seen the importance of informing people about industry changes and developments planned for the area, participating in business networks to sell the message of the value of investing in learning. They have had to counter the dearth of information about opportunities for school leavers, taking editorial space to contribute to an informed perspective.

There has never been a desire to compete with the industrial scope of TAFE and SGAE has tended to focus on meeting widespread general literacy and information technology needs. This had been a core role from the beginning and there is a well-developed subcontractor role with TAFE, for example, to deliver the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning for a mainly school-age client group with a strong pathway to TAFE. The new funding rules for VET in Victoria will unfortunately have an impact on this working relationship.

More recently SGAE has tailored training for small and medium enterprises needing to upskill their workforce in areas of challenge from new technologies, increasingly with a numeracy focus. A truck transport company required its drivers to report using Excel spreadsheets. Iluka mining, as part of a Cert IV Mining qualification wanted specific help with upgrading mathematics for mining for its managers. Such developments are good publicity for the college and employed to promote tailored training.

The approach has been to provide 'a different environment' from more formal training, to emphasise ways to strengthen more adult-centred teaching and learning, for example in the way that adult literacy is framed towards life skills and lifelong learning competencies. SGAE is an RTO with a scope of registration emphasising Financial Services, Information Technology, Retail and Hospitality and Training and Assessment, Work Education, Transition Education and General Education for Adults and Vocational Preparation. This has been the base for a range of innovations and being able to tailor outcomes to different clients.

SGAE has branched out with programs for hard to reach learners, stimulated by the CLP to 'delve into new things'. One program is based in a primary school with a focus on parent participation and involvement in the school. SGAE's sees its role in this way as to respond to needs that no-one else is meeting and do it cheaply and effectively. It has ways of operating through networks in the Shire that assist this, including the Southern Grampians Education Group. Again, there is involvement with a disaffected youth and alternative provision. There is also a South-West ACE providers network and some joint projects are occurring mong the active partners. SGAE is also among those ACE providers that as 'like-minded organisations' have joined Community Colleges Victoria.

SGAE was one of some 30 Victorian providers to receive a grant under the Teaching and Learning Capital Fund to refurbish and reconfigure its facilities.

Meadow Heights Learning Shop (Victoria)

Meadow Heights Learning Shop (MHLS, www.mhls.com.au) is modestly named given its achievements as an ACE provider serving one of the most disadvantaged areas of Melbourne's north. Meadow Heights is a recent residential development north of Broadmeadows (index of relative socio-economic disadvantage index, 800, Meadow Heights, 854). Broadmeadows was home to the Ford motor assembly plant and associated automotive companies from the 1950s. With the closure of the automotive industry, unemployment is high, especially among youth and immigrants groups, though there is still significant manufacturing (a Visy plant). Retail shopping complexes now offer the greatest employment opportunities. There is a youth disengagement of youth and some ethnic tensions arising from a great degree of cultural diversity. To address issues of urban revitalisation and employment growth, the Victorian government is redeveloping Broadmeadows as one of six 'central activities districts' or regional CBDs to make it 'Melbourne's capital of the north'.

Hume City is an innovative Council committed to the Hume Global Learning Village concept, a wide network of agencies working together 'to improve learning opportunities for the entire Hume community.' It encompasses council libraries, neighbourhood houses and learning centres, education institutions, employment agencies and local businesses. MHLS is a partner and its promotion by Hume Global Learning Village has been vital to its success. The network is 'committed to enhancing life experiences, employment opportunities and contributions to the community by inspiring and facilitating the participation in lifelong learning to reduce disadvantage and improve quality of life in our community' (Hume City Council, 2010).

The mission of the MHLS is outreach, social inclusion and educational support—'creating opportunities, opening doors'. This it strives to achieve through diversified programs built around its core language, literacy and numeracy program (LLN) funded through the Adult Migrant Education Service. MHLS has multiple registrations and identities among them, a neighbourhood house and the Visy Cares Learning Centre. Its core funding also underwrites its outreach activities, including computing and information technology which is regarded as integral to literacy and offered as part of its ESL classes. The 'digital divide' is very apparent among disadvantaged clients who may never have touched a computer—so there is a strong push to have people 'keep up with technology'. MHLS has participated in the 'Broadband for Seniors' and 'My Connected Community' programs. Because of clients limited incomes, courses have to be free to attract them.

MHLS is an RTO with a varied scope of registration that includes beauty courses a (Certificate III Beauty Services and Diploma in Beauty Therapy), retail and business studies including book-keeping software such as Mind Your Own Business (MYOB). Beauty courses are an important stepping stone to employment outcomes which are the focus of all activities.

The Learning Shop strives to connect to other service providers to improve delivery of educational services. There are well-established networks with some nine Neighbourhood Houses in an ACE consortium, delivering accredited Aged Care qualifications in those centres. The Learning Shop provides the accredited training where the NH has identified the local need.

The organisation also works with a small business clientele, delivering short courses on a fee-for-service basis. This has included developing office software and project management skills for City of Hume Council staff. There is a continuing demands for basic food handling and first aid from service and sporting clubs and sometimes Neighbourhood Houses. Modules are selected by businesses. This service provision has been growing by word-of-mouth recommendation and client satisfaction and cost-e3ffectiveness. MHLS strives for rigour in the programs and a focus on 'hands-on' experiential learning and student interaction. A key factor in the success of the program is looking after staff and ensuring they feel valued and rewarded. MHLS 'can't compete on pay-rates' but can provide support and other benefits.

The business approach of MHLS is to provide quality programs as cheaply as possible to as many people as possible. They try to be cost-competitive and to match other providers while maintaining quality and rigour, achieved through placing a high value on delivery and assessment. Only those who are 'truly competent' succeed, but there is as lot of support provided through mentoring and counselling by volunteers, an important dimension of the organisation's work.

The Learning Shop has expanded well beyond its first 'shop front' philosophy top operate in three locations with a scope of 24 courses, seven core staff and 24 tutors and many volunteers. 'Meeting the needs of the community' will continue to be the focus of its work and the Shop is identifying and expanding into 'hidden areas of need'—one notable area is training in education support workers assisting people with a disability. Another is English as a Second Language program held in schools for parents with children enrolled there.

Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group

Caboolture is a semi-rural community some 50 km north of Brisbane, with transport links to the Sunshine Coast to the east and west to Kilcoy. Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group (CCALG) stands out as an established community literacy provider whose development over 20 years have been documented in other case studies notably by Gelade and Dymock.* The organisation also operates under the name of Caboolture Community Learning Centre.

While CCALG has a leading role in core literacy provision, there has been some significant organisational development built on this foundation. The history of the organisation reflects the vicissitudes of adult literacy in the State and the status of ACE in Queensland. It began with non-formal volunteer literacy tutoring under the auspices of TAFE and 'operating out of a dungeon in the memorial hall'. Later the withdrawal of TAFE brought the organisation to the brink of disaster, until a few determined people stepped forward and sought alternative State funding for programs oriented to employment outcomes.

Though it early registered as a training organisation to assist in funding applications, the group soon relinquished its RTO status, burdened by what it felt were excessive quality management and compliance demands. Only in 2002 did CCALG again register in order to access a new ACE-VET program that offered broader opportunities in adult literacy and numeracy and information technology. Over the period there has been some development of infrastructure, and the organisation moved into new premises supported by the Shire Council and has

subsequently seen new premises built with funding from the Community Renewal program (a ten year, whole-of-government approach to developing community engagement in some 24 disadvantaged areas in Queensland). The centre now has a complex of buildings.

CCALG is the now the lead organisation of a cluster of neighbourhood centres and funded by the State Department of Education and Training for and providing administrative support and professional development. Its strength has been built on its accredited Course in Volunteer Community Adult Literacy Tutoring, first accredited in 1998, the core business developed by the co-ordinator and his partner since the early years. From this base, it has been able to offer professional development to many community organisations well beyond its local area. It also auspices those organisations wishing to attract Stare training authority funding to offer adult literacy, including those offering it without credit.

Besides accreditation, a further step was to integrate computer literacy into programs and reach new clienteles, such as mothers returning to the workforce where computing literacy is expected. The Centre receives funding for a ‘Back to Work’ program that is mostly computer training, offered in a range of centres, a course that can be joined at any time. The 'Back to Work' programme is specifically designed to break the unemployment cycle and is aimed at the 45 plus age group.

CCALG’s core business is professional development of literacy tutors and this service is provided well beyond the Shire boundaries and includes Department of Education staff. Though CALG is not experiencing high demand from small business, the organisation’s IT training capacity is occasionally called upon with government is emerging as a client. Recently, fourteen agencies collectively sought website development skills.

The organisation is not seeking to expand quickly, but rather to grow organically when there is the capacity to do so. This limits the extent to which the centre can extend its ability to identify and meet community needs. The future is perceived as somewhat uncertain, since the Queensland government is not seen to support community providers to provide ACE but rather counts TAFE non-credit courses as ACE to the detriment of bona-fide community organisations. The Group will continue to work with other agencies and not-for-profit social enterprises developing community infrastructure.

The group states that its philosophy ‘has remained the same throughout the last three decades, to provide non-threatening, non –institutional community based education. To this end hospitality and friendliness are the cornerstones of our success’.

* These earlier case studies can be found in Gelade et al (2003) and Dymock (2007).

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