



| NSW Department of Education

# NSW Adult and Community Education



## Message from Minister Dr. Geoffrey Lee

Over the past decade the NSW workforce has needed to adapt to rapid social, cultural and economic changes.

We are now experiencing new challenges as we emerge from COVID-19, and it is more urgent than ever to be responsive to the training and skills needs of individuals and industry in NSW.

In 2019, as part of our ongoing efforts to align service delivery with current priorities and objectives, the NSW Government initiated a review of the Adult and Community Education (ACE) Program.

The program is delivered by contracted ACE colleges who are part of the NSW ACE network of over 250 training providers offering a range of education, training and community support services. The program allows the sector to help some of our least advantaged learners to gain the relevant skills they need to succeed in the workforce.

One of the recommendations of the program review was that the NSW Government should formulate a policy statement to articulate the value added to the community by the ACE sector.

As Minister, I am pleased to endorse this policy statement, which I trust will help focus attention on the importance of the ACE sector as a valued partner supporting vocational students in NSW on the pathway to life-long learning.

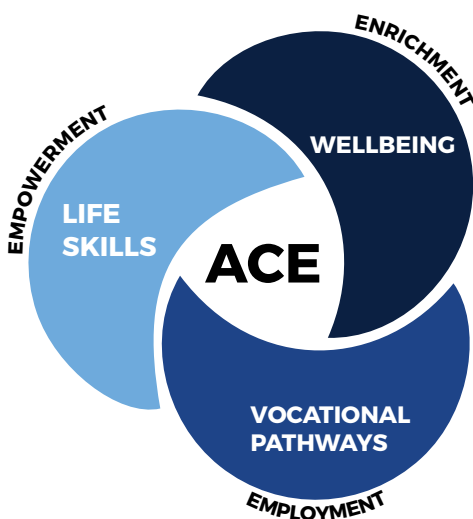
The statement has been a collaborative effort and I would also like to acknowledge the input and feedback of Community Colleges Australia, ACE providers and the NSW Skills Board.

**Dr Geoffrey Lee**  
**Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education**  
**July 2020**

## NSW Adult and Community Education (ACE)

ACE has long been a significant contributor to the education landscape of NSW, from the establishment of the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts in 1833, the evening college movement from 1864 and the Workers' Education Association (WEA) in 1913<sup>1</sup>. Since then, the NSW ACE sector has expanded to approximately 250 organisations offering a range of education, training and community support services.

Within the sector, a network of not-for-profit providers offer flexible and diverse programs to address the needs of their communities. Just under a quarter of these providers are also Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) delivering nationally recognised qualifications within the vocational education and training (VET) framework. These ACE RTOs are also known as ACE providers or ACE colleges. Some ACE providers also operate independent schools which provide a pathway from secondary education to employment or further training.



## The Policy Context

At the national level, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has adopted a shared vision for vocational education and training.

**“The vocational education and training sector is a responsive, dynamic and trusted sector that delivers an excellent standard of education and training. It provides strong economic and social outcomes, and supports millions of Australians to obtain the skills they need to participate and prosper in the modern economy.”<sup>2</sup>**

As part of this vision, the draft COAG VET Reform Roadmap outlines three priorities for the delivery of vocational education and training: relevance, quality and accessibility.

The NSW 2040 Economic Blueprint: investing in the state’s future, released in November 2019, charts the wave of change for the State over the next two decades<sup>3</sup>. The NSW Government’s key policy priorities to meet these challenges and opportunities are a strong economy and quality jobs, highest quality education, well-connected communities, customer-centred government and breaking the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage.

The public benefit of education and training cannot be underestimated for citizens of all backgrounds, ages, ambitions and abilities. It is essential in meeting current and emerging skills needs and supporting the social adjustment and cohesion necessary to sustain and strengthen the economy.

1. <https://cca.edu.au/who-we-are/communityeducation>

2. <https://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/communique/vet-vision.pdf>

3. <https://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/nsw-economy/nsw-2040-economic-blueprint>

ACE providers complement but provide different educational programs from schools, TAFE, universities and other community and for-profit training providers. Being learner centric with a solid foundation in local service delivery, the ACE sector is well placed to support these priorities and respond to both shorter-term disruptive and longer-term transformational needs which will impact communities across the state.

## NSW Government's Support for ACE

The NSW Government supports the work of the ACE sector by subsidising the delivery of VET through the Smart and Skilled and NSW ACE Programs. Some non-accredited training is also subsidised under the NSW ACE Program to transition and support disadvantaged learners to gain skills sets and qualifications for work.

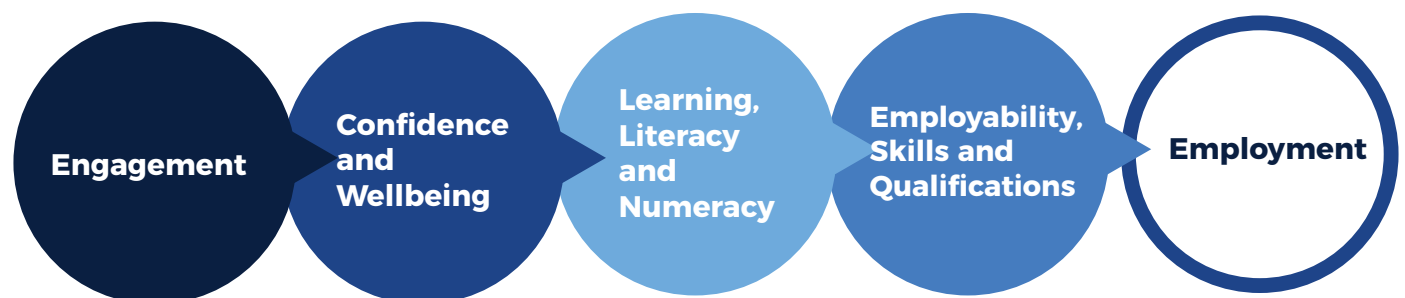
NSW ACE providers support the Government's priorities. They are well known and strongly represented in regional, rural and remote areas. In Greater Sydney they operate in all five districts under the Greater Sydney Commission's A Metropolis of Three Cities<sup>4</sup> master plan.

Their programs contribute to breaking the cycle of disadvantage through inclusive and affordable quality training and education, helping to develop adaptable and resilient learning communities, opportunities for life-long learning, building a skilled workforce that contributes to regional economic development.

The NSW ACE Program provides learning opportunities for disadvantaged people who have barriers to participate fully in mainstream vocational education and training which in turn limits their participation in the workforce.

It assists contracted ACE providers to tailor training to meet workplace needs for individuals and business by providing English language, literacy, numeracy, digital literacy and broader foundational skills including transferable "soft skills" which are often a precursor to VET qualifications.

ACE providers are able to bridge program and service gaps with 'wrap around' services that improve client outcomes and/or experience, particularly for those needing additional support into, or reintegration back to, work or community life.



4. <https://www.greater.sydney/metropolis-of-three-cities>

NCVER data demonstrates the greater extent to which community education providers in NSW, relative to other providers, deliver government-funded VET to a proportionally higher number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, learners over the age of 45, people with disabilities, regional and rural students and disadvantaged citizens<sup>5</sup>.

Government training subsidies and grants provide only a portion of the diverse income of ACE colleges operating in NSW. Their ability to partner and collaborate with other organisations to identify and meet needs in their communities enables them to offer a variety of courses and develop other income streams.

NSW ACE providers are a significant institutional resource operating to overcome disadvantage through education and training with their broad reach, flexible and agile service delivery model. They do so with a high degree of established credibility and trust.

The NSW Government will continue to partner with the ACE sector to break the cycle of disadvantage, foster inclusive, productive, well-connected and sustainable communities and support and strengthen the priorities of a robust economy.

5. <http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/512839>