



## Three ACE cards in Australia's pack

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The Senate has inquired into Adult and Community Education (ACE) twice. Both reports – *Come in Cinderella* and *Beyond Cinderella* – sidestep or fudge the definition of ACE. *Come in Cinderella* even said that ACE was a great fourth education sector but too hard to define so it wouldn't try – not very helpful if you're trying to argue a policy position to the Commonwealth Government.

ACE is defined differently by State and Territory Governments and by various ACE-related peak bodies at state and federal levels. I've lost count of the number of frustrating or bemusing conversations I've been in, where people all meant different things by 'ACE' but talked to each other all day as though the contradictions didn't matter.

The Federal ALP has brought 'ACE' and something it calls 'further education' into its national platform. Thus paragraphs 38 and 39 of the *Platform National Conference 2000* read:

38. *Labor supports the development of a truly national TAFE system, with improved resourcing and emphasis on further education and the quality of education provided. Labor will support TAFE in its dual roles of training provider and key access point for community education.*

39. *Labor regards adult and community education as an integral part of a learning society, and will encourage its expansion.*

What do they mean here by "community" and "further" and "adult and community education"? The Federal ALP might have a fair idea of some of the definitional nuances around the different use of these terms. But we can't be sure until they spell out implementation details.

In the interests of helping this process it's worth knowing the three things people most often mean when they refer to ACE.

1. *Community-owned ACE* means local adult learning centres, neighbourhood houses, u3as, Indigenous learning organisations that make provision for adults in their communities, and so on. They are local, independent from

government, incorporated, autonomous, and use democratic processes. They can be as big as mini-TAFEs with annual cash flows in the millions of dollars, or be run from someone's kitchen table. Only NSW and Victoria have legislation that provides secure funding for this kind of ACE as an important fourth sector of education. In those two states, many ACE agencies are Registered Training Organisations and run accredited vocational and foundation (further/general) education courses.

2. *TAFE ACE* is strongly hinted at in paragraph 38 in the ALP policy – "further" education might refer to foundation (general) education for adults offered by TAFEs through literacy, numeracy, ESL, bridging and preparatory courses. Maybe this is why the ALP identifies TAFES "as a key access point for community education"?

- SA and WA, for funding purposes, have defined ACE as all the non-vocational courses offered by TAFES.
- VIC and NSW specifically *exclude* TAFES from legislation defining ACE. They have TAFE ACE as well of course which puts them in the box seat.
- But in VIC, community-owned ACE plays a major role (50% of total effort) in provision of foundation education.
- In NSW, foundation education is almost all done by TAFES.
- QLD has a community-based adult literacy movement but doesn't fund community-owned ACE as such.

Confusing isn't it? You need a bit of butcher's paper to see it all in diagrammatic form.

3. *Universal ACE* means all adult learning in any community setting, including self-directed learning, libraries, museums, national parks and public education campaigns. It's usually the least helpful definition if you're pursuing policy directions with government because it's too amorphous.

Carry these three definitions in your head when you lobby politicians on behalf of ACE, teach them the difference, and lobby for each type of ACE separately. It will make a lot more policy sense to them.