Adult, Community and Further Education

Victoria The Place To Be

Department of Planning and Community Development

AccessACE: clever uses of ICT in ACE

Lessons learned in blended learning – a guide for managing and teaching

Practical solutions to real problems

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Introduction

The *AccessACE* project was designed to encourage the uptake of alternative delivery models by ACE organisations and in doing so improve the capacity of ACE organisations to deliver a greater variety of programs to individuals and small groups in a highly flexible manner. The primary objective of this project was to identify and investigate sustainable models of blended delivery that support flexibility and access to education for priority learner groups in ACE[1] across Victoria.

This guide summarises the experiences of ten managers and ten teachers across ACE in Victoria who participated in the *AccessACE* project by trialling various blended learning strategies using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) within their ACFE funded courses. They were looking for practical solutions to real problems, for real learners.

The project aimed to answer the following two key research questions:

- What **does** a clever use of ICTs in ACE mean and look like?
- What **could** a clever use of ICTs in ACE mean and look like?

AccessACE defines **blended learning** as a combination of the best features of face-to-face teaching with the best features of ICT enabled learning in order to enhance the educational experience of learners.

The **blend** of traditional face-to-face instruction and ICT enabled instruction/support differed significantly across the ten organisations. The choices varied from completely online, i.e. no face-to-face, to completely face-to-face with online activities conducted in the classroom with the support of technology: i.e. computers, data shows, etc. The choice was dictated by the characteristics of the learner group and general organisational familiarity with and access to technology.

The teachers were knowledgeable, helpful and responsive, both online and/or face-to-face. They were passionate about their subject matter, interested in how technology could support and enhance their delivery, and above all, willing to take risks.

The contents of this guide is structured around the main issues facing ACE practitioners when integrating technology into mainstream delivery. It looks at change management, sustainability, cost effectiveness, funding models, accountability, professional development, IT infrastructure issues, program design as well as the issue of measuring success and learner outcomes.

By including project participants' observations, the project team has tried, wherever possible, to let the participants speak. The last two sections of the report, *Visions for the Future* and *Voices of Experience*, feature direct quotes. These were gathered through the innovative use of information and communication technologies during each of the design, delivery and data collection phases of the project.

If you would like to know more about the research framework and the data collection methods, see appendix 1: research framework and data gathering methodology.

This guide is part of a suite of tools available to ACE practitioners to support them in their planning. For more information, in-depth advice and information, visit the support site at www.acfe.vic.edu.au. A complete version of the report is also available online at this site www.accessacereport.acfe.vic.edu.au.

You can read it online or download the PDF version.

1. The ACFE specific learner groups are as follows: People between 40 - 64 years; men aged over 45 years, people with a disability; people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds; kooris and young people aged 16 and over.

Organisational snapshots

The following table provides a snapshot of the ten organisations that participated in the project. It lists the **learner** group, the course, the **technology** used as well as the **blend** (face-to-face/online).

If you are interested in more detailed information regarding each project, you will find links to their action plans at www.acfe.vic.edu.au/actionplans.

Organisation	Course and blended learning mix	E-learning project as a catalyst
Community College East Gippsland The power of partnerships in building e-learning alliances with rural organisations and local libraries.	**Accredited: Safe Food Handling** Fully online using Live Classroom, and online virtual classroom.	More information about the advantages and disadvantages of converting a face-to-face SFH course to delivering it as a fully online course.
Coonara House A strategic vision, management support and the power of the e-learning change agent within the organisation.	**Accredited: Community Services** Mainly face-to-face with a wiki as online support.	Find out if and how the use of the wiki encouraged and/assisted students to become self-directed learners.
Flemington Reading and Writing ICTs as an active force in supporting lifelong learning, reinvigorating a teaching program and actively aiding retention.	**Pre-accredited: IT and office skills** Mainly face-to- face with online tutorials as out of class support.	More information about how advanced CALD students who have many family commitments continued to attend classes through the support of online tutorials.
MADEC E-learning as manageable chunks.	**Accredited: Elective from the new CGEA** Elective delivered online through the use of a wiki.	Find out if the CGEA online can help meet the needs/goals of Level 3 students i.e., further study and employment or social contact and increased enjoyment and self confidence.
On Track Learning Wimmera E-learning as an essential tool in supporting ACE delivery across the tyranny of distance.	**Pre-accredited: Police Plus literacy and numeracy for the police entrance exam** Mainly online using the TAFE VC online delivery platform.	Find out if delivery via the web can reduce teacher hours and be a more attractive model of delivery than the current paper based distance model?
Preston Reservoir ACE Whole of community approach to integration of technology into delivery.	**Accredited : VCAL numeracy** Online in the classroom using data shows and a range of innovative practices that engaged the students.	Given the need to provide more engaging, practical, hands-on, relevant opportunities to learn and achieve accredited outcomes, catering for the different levels and needs of VCAL students, find out if and how a range of technological practices assisted the teacher and the students.
South West SEAL If you build it they will not necessarily come: working with CALD communities and mature aged learners.	**Accredited: Information Technology** Mainly face-to face with opportunities to experiment with online delivery in the class and out of class hours.	Find out if ICTs can contribute to the appeal of a course.
Upper Beaconsfield Community Centre The transformational effect of introducing e-learning on a small scale.	**Accredited: Aged Care** Mainly face-to-face with a wiki as online support.	More information about how the teachers made the introduction of ICT into accredited delivery non-threatening, comfortable, fun and easy.
Werribee Community Centre Investment in ACE workforce development: 10 years on … a force for change.	**Accredited: Certificate 1 in Work Education** Mainly face-to-face with a range of Web 2.0 tools as online support.	More information about how they integrated ICT into the Certificate 1 in Work Education Course to assist their students that have learning difficulties to better achieve their learning outcomes.
Yackandandah Community Education Network Personal, social, flexible: a tailor made program.	**Pre-accredited: Women returning to work.** Primarily face-to-face with the regional studyzone courseware as online support.	More information about how the use of e-learning was beneficial to the learners and the organisation.

Key messages

The project trials demonstrate that a clever use of ICT is highly contextualised and that a range of key factors impact on its success. Each of these following key factors is discussed in detail in the body of the report.

- **A clear understanding and shared strategic vision of the role of ICT** in educational delivery is crucial in defining and measuring organisational success.
- ACE needs to have the **underpinning infrastructure** in place, and needs to develop blended learning programs that work within the IT constraints of the organisation.
- There needs to be a recognition that the introduction of ICTs into established, more traditional practices is a **change management** issue; communication is they key to making it work.
- The integration of ICTs into ACE educational delivery and business practices is vital to future **sustainability**.
- Online delivery for **regional and remote** organisations is a very practical solution to their particular challenges around **geographical** spread and smaller class sizes.
- **Cost effectiveness** will come with subsequent delivery instances. As with any new program, there are up front costs. These can be significant when introducing ICTs.
- A broader definition of a student contact hour and advice on **accountabilities** for online components of a course would aid the integration process.
- **Professional development** (in-house, regional and state) needs to cater for mainstream adopters and will require diverse strategies and styles.
- There is a strong need for a **mentoring program**; just-in-time and just-for-me peer support.
- Effective **IT support** is crucial and often still lacking in the sector.
- Introducing ICTs extends the boundaries for learners and teachers outside the classroom and significantly extends the organisation's **potential educational reach**.
- **A good induction/orientation** process ensures successful learner outcomes.
- The embedding of ICTs in ACE program delivery can make a significant impact on **program design** through more learner centered teaching approaches.
- Participating organisations agreed that the key to success is to **start small**.
- There are many free, low cost, **easily accessible tools** available that can make a real difference in **supporting, engaging and retaining your learners**.

In terms of teacher **experience** with and **confidence** in technology, some could be described as early adopters, but the majority would fall into the category of mainstream users. Almost all are digital immigrants[2]. What they do have in common is their passion for teaching and learning and their commitment to learners in ACE.

The trials demonstrate that good teachers, even when relatively inexperienced in any particular online technology can deliver successfully if these key success factors are present and managed well. It demonstrates that although the size of the organisation impacts on access to resources, it does not necessarily guarantee success. Small organisations with limited resources also performed well.

2. A digital native is a person who has grown up with digital technology such as computers, the Internet, mobile phones and MP3. A digital immigrant is an individual who grew up without digital technology and adopted it later. A digital native might refer to their new "camera"; a digital immigrant might refer to their new "digital camera".
Source: Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_native. Accessed January 2008

Organisational capacity

The AccessACE project defined organisational capacity as an organisation's ability to initiate support, sustain and grow ICT initiatives across its program areas. The aim of this project was to support the development of organisational capacity in participating organisations and in doing so to enable them to trial a range of strategies to facilitate greater access to educational opportunities through ICT enabled teaching and learning for particular learner groups in their communities.

As outlined in the project research framework[3], capacity or capability refers not only to technical capacity and size but also to organisational culture and complexity. Technical capacity covers matters such as computer hardware and software, access to broadband, server space, ICT staff and maintenance. Organisational culture embraces aspects such as leadership, committee of management commitment, teacher and learner readiness, a critical mass ready for change, policies, responsive pedagogies, depth and breadth of educational content and processes, resourcing and professional development.

All the lessons learned from the trails have been collated under these headings for ease of access.

The ACE organisations who participated in this project varied significantly in size. This was the single most important factor in determining their approach to blended learning and its successful integration into their course delivery. For example, bigger organisations did not necessarily find it easier to develop and implement larger, more ambitious projects. This is where other factors such as technical capacity and organisational culture and complexity proved to be significant factors.

A vision shared: defining and measuring organisational success

A "Flexible ACE[4] revisited" focus group session was conducted in April 2007 as part of this project, to determine if any significant changes had occurred in the past four years across ICT delivery in ACE. One of the most positive findings was that there is now a much more strategic approach to the integration of ICTs across educational delivery in ACE in Victoria.

This finding was confirmed by all ten organisations who took part in this project – **having a clear understanding and shared strategic vision of the role of ICT** in educational delivery is crucial in defining and measuring organisational success. They saw this as particularly important when working in partnership with other training providers / community organisations. Here is a sample of what they said:

- Ensure that you have a shared vision of e-learning and how the partnership can benefit organisations and learners.
- Measuring success is easier if it is a goal and part of the strategic plan.
- It is important to have a plan – you have to define what you want to achieve. Look at where you are starting from, where you want to get to and how you are going to get there. Conduct some dedicated meetings to discuss what you want to do and how to do it – regular meetings and communication is crucial.

This vision, coupled with a clear understanding of community needs, were the two key building blocks for success. The organisations differed in how they defined and measured success as this depended on their size and the staff capacity, but some **measures** were:

- Know your community – be adventurous and engender a culture between management, staff and students that supports innovation.
- Don't disappoint your partners. Be ready to meet the need when it is identified. Development time can take longer than expected.
- Look at achievable goals such as an increased percentage of student enrolments by students from remote locations.
- Positive learner outcomes will be the primary measure of success but how do we measure the unexpected outcomes when student engagement occurs?

3. www.acfe.vic.edu.au/Cleveruse
4. For more information on the TAFE Frontiers commissioned Flexible ACE report and the focus group outcomes, visit the AccessACE wiki site at accessace.acfe.vic.edu.au/flexible+ACE

- One of the key measures is increase in skills for the staff.
- The willingness of the participants to embrace the technology, i.e. their excitement and feedback, has been a great measure.
- The staff have been using it!
- From an AQTF point of view the homework aspect is being formalised and standardised. We now have reliable backup documentation for an audit.
- More efficient classes and much less time spent on catching up and repeating information. Everyone knows to check the wiki.
- We had excellent student retention – those who left only went because they found employment.
- We got a lot of good will out of the project, for a course that went all term.
- Several students wanted more training – we are looking at a pathway for them through TAFE.
- We gained a new volunteer for half a day a week.
- It helped with delivery of contracted SCH.
- It raised our profile in ACE as well as e-learning and is a great networking opportunity.

Many organisations mentioned the importance of having the **underpinning infrastructure** in place and developing blended learning programs that work within the IT constraints of the organisation. Here are some examples:

- You need to clearly define where you are going to start and make sure that you have the underpinning infrastructure right. The foundations need to be in place. For us it took 12 months to go through the exercise of determining the infrastructure that will underpin the delivery.
- Pick a goal that is basically a few steps ahead of where you are now – not a huge jump. The implementation stage always takes longer as there are always problems when implementing technology, and they can take long to fix.
- Keep it as small as possible – don't take on a full course – integrate technology slowly. By doing it slowly you can develop the skills in that area.

Having access to, or developing staff skills and knowledge was a very important measure of success for all the projects. Having the capacity to deliver impacts directly on what you can realistically achieve and the time commitment it will require, particularly if there is a significant online component. For example: developing a fully online course (as an alternative to a paper based distance model) is a long term **commitment**, particularly for small regional organisations. This is what was said:

- Ask yourself what value ICT will add. What am I going to get out of using ICT to deliver the program? Our goals were very definite – we had a specific research question. I had no problem defining it, it was well thought out, but measuring it was more difficult. I am planning to continue, so my advice would be that you have to be prepared to persevere – you will need more time than you have allowed. You have to be prepared to be in it for the long haul.

Change management: communication is the key

ACE organisations face many challenges, one of them being the sessional nature of the workforce they employ. Coupled with that is the fact that the workforce is also an ageing one. These two factors can make the introduction of change a challenge.

Embedding ICT across ACE delivery, i.e. not only into the traditional Information Technology training areas, is about much more than just giving teachers new technical skills. It's about shifting the mindsets of teachers who may be locked into the traditional ways they have always taught. Introducing technology into an essentially face-to-face delivery mode, especially if the teacher is not particularly ICT literate, is therefore a significant challenge. Many organisations who participated in the trials worked with teachers who had the basic ICT skills but who were very much still digital immigrants[5].

The trials demonstrate that, with the right support and processes in place, teachers were/are able to achieve excellent outcomes.

The organisations who participated in this project all agreed that **communication is the key**. Here are some key points they made:

- Changing people is hard and they need to be turned around slowly. Introduce the ideas as soon as possible so that they become gradually used to the idea of

5 A digital immigrant is an individual who grew up without digital technology and adopted it later. Source: Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_native. Accessed January 2008

introducing ICT into delivery. Make it non-threatening- a gradual introduction- and use practical applications.
- Talk to your teachers. You may find that some are less interested but are not resisting. Take them with you regarding your vision and goal for the organisation: explain the advantages.
- Don't push too hard. Support the passionate ones and win the others over by showcasing the successes.
- Make sure that you have good communication systems within the organisation – keep them up to date and make teachers aware of the systems in the organisation. Update staff via staff meetings and email newsletters.

Other strategies that worked well

When introducing a change, it is important that teachers know that they have management support. As one manager suggested: "This will mean that you may need to be a good sales person" if you are to convince other people of the wisdom of introducing ICTs to that particular course/unit.

Some other strategies that work are:

- Keep ICT on the meeting agenda – older staff can be very resistant.
- Make ICT part of the conversations with committee and staff.
- As a manager, join your organisation's next ICT project: this will give you the language to discuss issues and strategies with the Committee and will sustain its growth in the long term.
- Introduce ICTs into areas where the staff are interested and are IT savvy. Success breeds success. These passionate staff members can then become leaders and mentors.
- Negotiate an achievable goal with teachers and support them with professional development. One organisation is committed to at least every tutor making use of a wiki in the next 12 months.

Strategies that work well with **time-poor teachers** are:

- Always address the 'what's in it for me' (WIIFM) factor.
- Choose technologies with a wow factor – like digital storytelling.
- Take small steps – keep it easy, simple and do-able.
- Look at synergies with other projects/curriculum areas. Success breeds success.
- Reward your teachers who did put in more than they were funded. Acknowledge the extra effort of innovators in your team.
- Make sure your IT equipment is up to date and working well – teachers are not IT specialists!

Easily accessible technology for teachers

One organisation also pointed out that it was working hard to make technology more easily accessible for all the teachers in the centre, i.e. access to workstations with internet enabled computers. In doing so they were also making lesson preparation more comfortable for teachers who worked there.

Many organisations commented on the valuable work done over the years by national professional development initiatives, such as LearnScope, in providing teachers with professional development opportunities that allowed them to explore new tools and learn new skills. Such initiatives were a particularly effective 'bottom up' change management strategy, as they developed the critical mass of passionate individuals who became mentors and e-learning leaders, not only within their own organisations, but also in some instances on a state and national level.

Sustainability/cost effectiveness: money well spent

The ACE organisations who participated in this project are keenly aware of the issues around sustainability in ACE.

These are outlined in the *Building Sustainable Community Businesses: a strategy for success* document[6] which comments on some of the challenges and provides a framework for building sustainability.

The authors define sustainability as: the capacity of ACE organisations to obtain the necessary financial and non-financial resources to enable them to meet the needs of their communities now and in the future.

It is within this context that organisations were asked to provide the project team with some initial thoughts around the cost effectiveness of introducing and integrating

6 Adult, Community and Further Education Board, (2006). Building sustainable community businesses: a strategy for success. Melbourne, p4. This document may be found on the ACFE web site at: <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/ac....> (viewed January 2008)
7 Ibid, p4

ICTs into their program delivery. They were also asked if they thought it was a strategy that would support the sustainability of the organisation.

It is also important to note that some organisations have been involved in the integration of ICTs for some time, whilst others were quite new to it. Most of the trials were fairly short; some were conducted over a few weeks while others were as long as a term.

Sustainability

All the organisations who participated in the trials see the continued integration of ICTs into their educational delivery and business practices as crucial to their future sustainability. In fact, their responses can be categorised under two of the challenges articulated by the Sustainability Framework[7]:

1. The need to respond more effectively to the needs of particularly disadvantaged groups.
2. Increasing demand for individually tailored training programs and learner centered approaches.

Below is a summary of project participants' responses to the issue of sustainability. Their comments have been categorized under the two headings:

1. The need to respond more effectively to the needs of particularly disadvantaged groups.

- As a delivery option it needs to be sustainable – it will only grow in popularity. Schools are offering it and future students will demand it. Students who are motivated and have the literacy skills will demand it. I can see that the blend will be different for different student groups.
- It can be more cost effective because remote students can do the course for the same cost as if the students were in the centre.

2. Increasing demand for individually tailored training programs and learner centered approaches.

- We need to think about the time when traditional learning options may not be sustainable long term.
- Difficult to say – if we don't continue we will be left behind and the students may go elsewhere.
- We don't have much choice; we will have to go with ICT – we will be left behind and won't get enrolments which makes us less financially viable in the future. If other centres include IT and we don't, could it affect our sustainability long term? Currently students come to us because of the way we teach and we have a good connection with the nursing homes. The homes are interested in the calibre of the graduates – we want to continue that.

There were a number of organisations who could see **online** learning specifically as a **business opportunity** and although they were very aware of the significant cost involved in developing a course, they were prepared to invest time and money into the development of targeted courses:

- It is sustainable long term – it opens up business opportunities which are good for long term sustainability.
- The cost of development of the programs will be the biggest issue – we will have to assess if there is a need and target the course accordingly.
- Maybe we can try to use commercially based or freely accessible course content first. We will need to do an analysis of the market and the need before embarking on content development.
- We have already been approached through our website by a Sydney based firm looking for online delivery.
- Ultimately going online is an organisational decision. Consider if it is a natural extension of what you are already doing well and if it is something you would have done anyway.

Similarly, organisations in **regional** and **remote** locations see online delivery specifically as a sustainable necessity given their particular challenges around **geographical** spread and smaller class sizes. Some comments were:

- There is the tyranny of distance – online delivery is worthwhile because it alleviates the need for either the trainer or the students to travel.
- Online delivery is sustainable – we can have students spread over the region – and that makes for a good viable course, rather than trying to run face to face courses in a variety of locations.
- Small numbers can do it online. There is definite potential.
- Many regional ACE organisations see this as valuable and will put in funds to develop online anyway and will

7 Ibid, p4

continue to do this – but their bucket is limited and they cannot continue to rely on the good will of the staff – that is not sustainable.

Cost effectiveness

In terms of any tangible benefits produced by the money spent, the responses were many and varied, both in relation to the project itself (i.e. money spent by the ACFE Board on this project) and the trials conducted within the organisations themselves.

In relation to the *AccessACE* project itself, both as a model for delivery support and integration, comments were:

- We need to have a leader to lead this – it is crucial to have someone who continues to lead the enthusiasm that has been built up, otherwise it will lose momentum.
- Professional development is crucial in terms of sustainability. Unless you skill them up you will lose them.
- A mentoring project and professional development at a local level will be very cost effective – it needs to become part of ongoing work.

In relation to the cost effectiveness of the trial **within their own organisations**, comments were:

- When you introduce a new technology it is not going to be cost effective. It is the subsequent delivery instances that make it cost effective.
- If you have gone through the process of having it as a strategic goal for the organisation – then you need to create a budget to run it for the first time. Use your delivery support funds if necessary.
- You will need to take into account that it is going to cost time to develop, but that is the same for any new program you deliver.
- Cost effectiveness is not necessarily the issue as many organisations know it costs money. ACE is there to help students who are less fortunate and knowing that you are doing a good job and you are helping the disadvantaged is what is important. Many organisations fund their programs through additional Fee for Service projects.
- There is a large investment up front in putting the course online – the pay off is slow in coming. I am aiming for a two to three year return on investment for my distance students.
- We would not have been able to do this without the funding. The hard work has been done by setting it up. The next ones will not involve as much time. We have more experience and expertise. Once the tutor is trained and all the documentation is geared towards it, it will be sustainable relatively easily. It becomes easier for the tutor – clearer cut – and may save tutor time. I can see that it could accelerate the teaching time and students who do miss out have a way of finding out, so they are less disruptive.

The participating organisations agreed that cost effectiveness comes with subsequent delivery instances. As with any new program, there are up front costs.

Cost of replacement technology

Finally, the majority of the organisations who participated in the trials see the use of ICTs as part of a blended approach that is primarily classroom based. They feel that students will continue to need access to the equipment at their centres for a range of access and equity reasons. It is therefore no surprise that the **cost of replacement technology** was mentioned across the board:

- Sustainability in the IT classroom is an issue – hardware and software need regular updates and that is expensive, and usually depends on funds available.
- The cost of hardware, software and support is a huge expense. We have to maintain the level of technology and that continues to be a priority. Replacement and upgrades is an ongoing cost, built into our budget.
- The biggest cost is the replacement of technology. We have a 4 year replacement cycle. Not sure that providing this level of technology is cost effective – but you don't have an option. It is a necessity. A blended learning approach might well shift some of the cost.
- We will need to invest more money into PD and infrastructure – the up front cost will be greater than we anticipated.

Implementing innovation: funding and accountability

Each project that eventually participated in the AccessACE project was invited initially, as part of the application

process, to develop an expression of interest in which they were asked to:

1. Describe their community or a particular learner group within the community,
2. Articulate a particular challenge they had with this group,
3. Describe how they thought ICTs could assist in meeting the challenge, and
4. Nominate an ACFE funded course that they would be delivering in semester 2, 2007 as the vehicle for delivering this trial.

Each project received additional funding to develop and integrate a blended learning option into the delivery of the course. The project team was therefore interested in observations from managers on the issue of funding the integration of ICTs in to their ACFE funded courses. Discussions around sustainability and cost effectiveness naturally flowed into how successfully ICTs could be integrated under the current funding model. Closely related to this were questions about accountability, particularly in relation to the **online** components of ACFE funded blended courses.

The ACFE funding model and blended delivery

Essentially, organisations would like to see a more innovative definition of what constitutes a *student contact hour* (SCH). They feel the definition needs to be more holistic, creative and innovative, in other words – a broader definition.

Below is a summary of their observations. Some of these observations tend to indicate that there is not a common understanding of the detail within the funding guidelines. The comments have been categorized under two headings: funding models and accountability concerns:

Funding models

- SCH model – the current rate is low. There is no fat to allow for innovation. We tend to look for project money to pay for it, or combine multiple funding sources in the one classroom to allow for extra resourcing. The students from the different funding sources come with very different needs and that impact on student learning and teacher stress.
- In an ideal world it would be nice to see ACFE commit to funding us to do more of what we have been doing – funding for ICT on an ongoing basis -this might look like extra money in terms of the SCH to help contribute towards ICT delivery.
- ACE needs to be valued by government from an economic impact point of view. It could be a good time now to look at funding models for the new three year funding model, and build ICT support into that.
- In terms of ongoing funding – is this (blended or online delivery) a way we can effectively attract profile funding from ACFE?
- Eight years ago there were more project based learning opportunities – we could identify a learner need and structure a program around it. I would like more of that.

Accountability concerns

- What is acceptable proof for ACFE when delivering in a blended mode?
- What is a viable class? For us in regional Victoria it can be as low as 6 – for TAFE it is 15.
- The wiki gives documented evidence that students have spent time on the wiki. Will these wiki stats be sufficient evidence to claim SCHs – when online?
- Without access to a good online Learner Management System, it will be difficult to track students' online progress. TAFE VC allows for tracking and reporting in a way that should be acceptable.

Managers and teachers are acutely aware of the fact that, as they start using these new technologies to increase learner access and provide more flexible teaching and learning options in their ACFE funded classes, they are entering uncharted territory which may impact on their reporting and accountabilities.

As one manager remarked:

- What would be useful for providers is a checklist of what is needed and what evidence is acceptable when delivering with technology. Some indication around what we need to provide as sufficient evidence to claim SCHs when online will be very helpful.

Professional development: just-in-time & just-for-me

In a recent publication entitled *Innovate & Integrate*[8], commissioned by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, Marie Jasinski outlined a range of strategies for embedding innovation into Vocational Education and Training.

As part of this research she looked at the technology chasm, and the different characteristics of various groups (early adopters, mainstream adopters) as they adopt technology into their teaching practices. She says:

"Mainstream adopters need qualitatively different support than early adopters, yet support systems are set up for early adopters. Mainstream adopter support includes shared decision making, peer support, a focus on teaching and learning, and highly 'adoptable' use of technology. As mainstream adopters are not so enamoured with the technology and are looking for practical solutions to real problems…"

One of Jasinski's most significant findings in terms of the AccessACE project is the observation that *embedding innovative practice requires diverse strategies and styles*[9]. This was particularly evident when speaking to the managers and teachers who participated in this project. Their suggestions and comments were very diverse and wide ranging and outlined strategies that demonstrated a wide range of approaches to suit the individual teacher in line with the organisation's capacity to support their professional development needs.

Jasinski outlines the following strategies that work well with mainstream adopters:

1. *Exploring* (discovering new perspectives, assumptions, and uncharted territory);
2. *Visioning* (developing a clear sense of long-term purpose, with bold, ideal solutions to achieve it);
3. *Experimenting* (combining and testing existing elements in novel combinations);
4. *Modifying* (building on and optimising past and present achievements).

Responses received from the organisations involved in the *AccessACE* project can be linked to these strategies.

Consider the following comments:

1. Exploring

- The LearnScope model over the last few years has been exactly the right way to do this. It provides opportunity to explore and try a range of tools and allows teachers to select what might work for us. It was exactly the right model.

2. Visioning

- Talk to other people who are further along a mentoring model. Pick a technology that you think will provide opportunities for the organisation and the learners and push it to its limits.
- New mangers need to take time to understand the computer programs at your centre – especially if this is a relatively new area for you. They tend to take up a hefty slice of your budget.
- Empower your teachers: give them autonomy.
- Choose your PD very carefully – target and plan it carefully.
- Funding like LearnScope works better as you have goals within a particular framework.

3. Experimenting

- PD should just be learning experiences to learn about different types of technology and how it can be used... it is really important.

4. Modifying

- The AccessACE PD sessions were very good – I learned a lot from that. I need that same training for all staff. We will need a good core of people with the right knowledge.
- We need a suite of essential PD activities, things like online facilitation, and the type of PD we received in the *AccessACE* project.

Just-in-time & just-for-me

As mentioned earlier, Jasinski outlined the specific support needs of mainstream adopters as requiring *peer support, a focus on teaching and learning, and highly 'adoptable' use of technology*. This was also very evident in the responses received by participating organisations with comments like:

8 Jasinski. M.2007. Innovate and Integrate. AFLF. http://innovateandintegrate.flexiblelearning.net.au/html/executive_summary.html#keyFindings Accessed January 2008.
9 Key finding 6.

- I should have started to build my own course the day after the TAFE VC training. My advice would be don't wait too long to implement this kind of training. Plan it more carefully. You need to implement what you have learned in the training, to reinforce it. Timing is paramount.
- One-to-one support at the right time is ideal. It can work well to support individuals but it has to be at the right time.
- Mentoring is a really clever way to go and often the best PD you can get. For this we need local people who are available when we need it!
- I was lucky that you *(the project manager)* came up and gave me some hands on direct support. In future I will organise hands-on support in my own environment. It was much more valuable than any training day. It was very important to my finishing the project.

These comments clearly show that good in-house support, particularly when moving into **online delivery**, is crucial. There was no suggestion of a one-size-fits-all solution in terms of how effective professional development should or could be delivered. The distinctive benefits of in-house, regional and statewide initiatives were all articulated.

Good support is worth plenty! IT planning and support

As previously outlined in the sections on change management and sustainability, good IT planning and support is fundamental to embedding ICTs into program delivery.

The AccessACE project team was particularly interested in identifying any unexpected insights or problems that the trial highlighted for both teachers and managers. Yet again, participants' responses indicate that size matters. Smaller organisations struggled under the lack of paid IT support and were mindful of their reliance on volunteers. Conversely, being part of a larger IT infrastructure did not necessarily make things any easier for the teachers at the coalface, both in planning and delivering the trial. Firewalls often prohibited access to web 2.0 tools, chat programs and online virtual classrooms. Their tips and insights on IT planning and support have been categorised under the following headings:

1. Equipment
2. Access to Broadband
3. Support for managers and teachers

1. Equipment

- The datashow and laptop funding from ACFE has made a difference in getting technology into the classroom.
- You need a critical mass regarding equipment: a laptop and data projector to take into each classroom.
- Implementing a hardware / software change can be a real issue. Even anticipating the problems does not necessarily ensure a smooth changeover. Anticipate staff reluctance.
- There are traps around ageing computers – they need to be able to perform the requisite tasks. Make sure you check the computers – don't just assume an older computer will be able to handle a media rich CD ROM.
- You need good hardware and spread it across the organisation.
- Purchase your own small bank of wireless laptops to take out into the community and use in-house. It provides much greater flexibility and access.
- Access to ACFE grants and Commonwealth equipment grants for the last 3 years has made a difference to improving our technology.
- Research and test your online tools.

2. Access to Broadband

Access to fast, reliable low-cost broadband is an ongoing issue for both metropolitan and regional centres, for very different reasons. As one metropolitan manager remarked:

- Broadband is a big issue. Our Korean and Japanese students complain about the speed of the internet.
- ACE organisations can't afford access to faster broadband, it is too expensive – access to publicly funded broadband will make a great difference.

Regional providers grapple with differing speeds and particularly upload speeds when developing their online courses:

- We will need to give students information about what computers and internet speed they need to access the Learner Management System (LMS). Fortunately we have

an LMS that is responsive to different levels of internet access.

Another small rural provider found that he did not have sufficient upload capacity in order to prepare his online course. Uploading materials was slow and time consuming. Upgrading his plan would involve a significant cost for the organisation.

3. IT support for managers and teachers

- IT support is crucial: we have been lucky to have some key people in the organisation and access to volunteers for IT support it would have been financially impossible without them.
- You do need an IT person on hand to help solve problems whether it is face-to-face or online.
- An enormous amount of time goes into IT planning and implementation – many IT support people in our sector volunteer their time over and above what they get paid for.
- Your IT support person needs to be a good communicator.
- You will need good support from management.
- Encourage **teachers** to use the available equipment and support them to integrate ICTs into their courses.
- Timetable regular access to a computer lab for your class well ahead of time.
- Be ready to improvise: some things can work at home but not at work!

Competing demands: as one manager pointed out, *"it is a continual balancing act when, organisationally, you need to manage what the technician says is possible and safe, and what the teachers need and want. The key is to get individuals to meet regularly and discuss their concerns"*. Some smaller providers also expressed the need for a more co-operative model of IT support.

And finally, a very salient piece of advice:

- You can't wait until you are fully set up. At some stage you need to jump in and try something!

Educational reach

For the *AccessACE* project educational reach is closely related to the concept of community and more specifically, to the learners ACE organisations engage with. The project research framework defines *community* as follows:

'community' means different things to different people. Communities can be geographical, (based on place) and/or cultural (based on values and identity), can be based on common interests and/or can be united by a common cause. People can be physically present or connected virtually. Communities can be ad-hoc and short-term or enduring and long-term. They are united, and hence comm/unity, by something they share in common – a locality, a partnership, a network.

The project team wanted to explore with the participating organisations the possibility that the use of technology, including online technologies, **could** and **did** in fact extend their educational reach beyond their immediate (more local) community. In this context we discussed the concept of learner reach, leaner outcomes and program design, specifically in relation to the introduction of technology into an already established ACFE course.

No boundaries: learner reach

Many managers and teachers interviewed shared the following view: *don't be surprised who you will reach and how… moving into blended learning increases the scope of people you are likely to engage in adult learning.*

Not surprisingly, the engagement happened both within the organisations and further afield. One organisation mentioned an example of a student with an intellectual disability. Although the project had not worked for her on the level of independent study, she was much more engaged in the classroom interaction through the use of technology. Her overall level of engagement increased even though she could not participate outside the classroom (in the online activities).

Another organisation who worked with a group of disengaged young students commented as follows:

- Don't underestimate the reach and the value. Also the change that it will engender, students will want to be part of it. The reach and value can be quite phenomenal.

Extending the learning experience

Perhaps the greatest success, though, has been in engaging students outside the classroom, in broadening and extending their learning experiences. The teachers gained great satisfaction in seeing how it permeated to other parts of their students' lives.

Teachers reported that students were more conscious of the fact that they could take their learning with them wherever they were and that they could get online and initiate their learning and share ideas at a time and place that suited them. In one case, due to the nature and the structure of the course as well as the online tools (wiki) used to facilitate this, students worked more collaboratively. This greater freedom and flexibility encouraged some students to explore doing the Training and Assessment (TAA) course: it has opened up whole new pathway for them as potential trainers.

One larger ACE organisation discovered that their reach was indeed global:

- Be prepared to get queries way beyond your immediate area – word of mouth is very powerful and therefore your reach can be very significant. The website can also help you to advertise your training. We have had enquiries from overseas. It shows your reach can be unlimited.

Fundamentally, it depends on your learner profile. Some learners will take to it and some won't. What many teachers found, though, is that there is no particular group that can be excluded. Often it depends on the technology used, and how it is introduced. Even literacy students can surprise. Technology can make them feel more competent and capable. One teacher commented on a student who did not want to read anything paper based but was quite happy to engage with text on screen.

Perhaps this final comment sums it up:

- It showed that there are no boundaries as to who you will reach and how. Think of it as just another tool. Technology can make a difference outside the classroom.

Planning: the key to successful learner outcomes

When introducing ICTs to a course, especially an established one, it is important to know what outcomes you want, especially for the learners. In the majority of the trials, students and teachers were asked to engage with something new. In some cases something that had not been part of their usual repertoire of teaching and learning tools. The project team was therefore interested in student and teacher reaction to this and, particularly, in the learner outcomes and how they were measured.

There is a growing body of evidence that indicates that mature aged learners need to be very clear about the reasons for and benefits of learning. E-learning or the introduction of ICTs into the course is no exception and, as some trials discovered, an ad hoc approach can lead to unsatisfactory outcomes.

Induction

The most important success factor identified during the discussions was the importance of a good **orientation/induction** process for the learner. Planning was seen as very important. How well this was achieved differed

from organisation to organisation. Here are some of their observations:

- Planning is important – survey students at the start. You can't change tack half way through. Manuals and handouts need to be checked as they might not be suitable for independent learning. Profile your students and understand their needs.
- Check enrolment procedures – make students aware of what they are enrolling in. Have a good induction process – make sure they understand. Students may not be happy to move to off campus education, as it does not suit all students.
- It is really important to include the learners in defining and measuring the outcomes. Discuss their expectations and measure where they are at before and after.
- Also find out what the tutor expectations are.
- You need to be aware of students' skills and confidence and you need to bring them with you. Use a questionnaire to assess their knowledge. Incorporate the questionnaire in the pre-training interview.
- It is important to have a significant degree of autonomy in the design and development of your blended learning course – particularly as the teacher. Because of this we have had excellent outcomes for this project. Don't fall into the trap of letting others decide for you! The key is the fact that all the learners fully participated in discussions and were quite involved in the process, and therefore their learning.
- Offering a short taster is an excellent way of raising awareness.

Learner Outcomes

All the organisations reported good outcomes in relation to:

- Increased retention
- Employment outcomes
- New pathways
- Course completion for younger learners.

In fact, it is with this learner group in particular, that there were many unexpected positive outcomes. Here is a sample:

- A lot of the outcomes have been ones that we did not expect. We often look at outcomes as being only curriculum based. In fact, a lot of the outcomes we have seen are things such as students communicating better with their parents and interacting better with each other and other areas in the community centre, outcomes that were not expected but just as important.
- It has been great to see the way that students have grown. We could not have anticipated the degree to which it did happen – independence, team work, self confidence and communications skills. The students are now more aware of employment outcomes – they see it as a real possibility now, they have gained in confidence. People from other classes want to be involved as well. Students are self selecting as they can see the practical skills that they can gain from it.

One organisation reported that introducing technology into the educational delivery had administrative benefits. By putting all the information up on an easily accessible wiki, students could check changes to schedules, homework tasks etc before coming to class which streamlined processes on the day. As a result, there was a flow on effect in that other teachers were interested in using wikis in their classes.

A word on the use of technology in data collection

There was consensus amongst all the projects about the need for accurate data to inform planning when introducing a significant change like ICTs. Accurate data around learner uptake and levels of satisfaction is invaluable in helping managers make a case for more funding – to committee and funding bodies. They agreed that both qualitative and quantitative data were equally important.

The most prevalent **quantitative data collection** method is still surveys. Very few organisations, however, had investigated the use of online surveys. Those who did use some of the free tools available found them invaluable, particularly when working with younger students. They found the immediate access to, and automatic analysis of, the learner data and feedback invaluable in planning their courses.

The most common and arguably the most effective form of **qualitative data collection** is still the informal discussion over a cup of coffee. Many organisations still do that whenever possible. Others have moved to more formal focus group discussions, whilst some are starting to use

accessible web 2.0 technologies, such as wikis as a very effective tool in gathering ongoing and timely feedback from students, during and after the course.

Data collection in the classroom is still largely informal, ad hoc, and paper based, mainly because it competes with the many demands on the teacher's time in the classroom. Some teachers commented on the fact that if it is to be done well and consistently, it will require additional resources. There are many free, easily accessible online survey tools available that can help support time-poor teachers and managers alike. See *Further reading*, for links to websites.

Program design

It is in the area of program design that both managers and teachers see the greatest need for change but, conversely, also the greatest opportunities for innovation. These words express this view well:

"Organisationally we need to move away from the assumption when you are planning programs, that the learning is only in the classroom environment. It is no longer just a room, a teacher and a timetable. We need to look at different ways of programming, and use new planning tool, as the delivery is no longer necessarily in the room with the teacher. It is not only about a list of courses – you need to also think about how, where, when, what tools etc… It is far richer experience and program as a result. It is very exciting."

The willingness to take risks and show leadership in innovative program design bodes well for ACE organisations that are continually looking for strategies to build their long term sustainability as outlined on page 16 of this guide. The *Sustainability Framework* lists increasing demand for *individually tailored learning programs and learner centered approaches to program delivery* as one of the challenges facing ACE organisations. It is promising to find that the ACE organisations interviewed see technology as having a vital role to play in facilitating more learner centered approaches to delivery.

The benefits of this strategy was particularly evident with one group, who, through using technology in the classroom with a mixed group of adults with a mild intellectual disability and youth at risk, achieved excellent results through a focused use of technology, based on a learner centered, project based methodology. As one interviewee remarked:

"Project based learning is the way to go! It is so much more real – and part of that realness is the use of ICT. We also set the programs up so that they become a pathway in to other courses. Employment and employability skills are an integral part of the program design – most of the students want a job – only a few want to go on to further study. They need confidence in the workplace".

ACE organisations are also beginning to see a future (and possibly a market) for informal, fully online learning opportunities:

"learners could learn online without enrolment using a CD or just access to online course notes."

Empower the teacher

As outlined in the preceding sections of this report, support for the teacher was seen as essential to the successful integration of ICT. Here is a typical comment:

"It is important to have a significant degree of autonomy in the design and development of your blended learning course, particularly as the teacher. It is because of this that we have had excellent outcomes for this project. Don't fall in to the trap of letting others decide for you! With other projects there is often a directive about what you are going to do. In this project I had complete control over the program design. It made a big difference. This control over the program design translated into 100% retention. This, together with a realistic and achievable goal within the time frame, made all the difference."

This sentiment was supported by others in comments like:

"empower your staff. I leave the planning and design up to the teachers as they have the knowledge and experience. They have a lot of autonomy."

The teachers contributed a range of very practical tips all of which have been articulated in other sections of this reports or in the companion document to this report, entitled *Tips for Teachers*. The tips cover the following areas:

1. Planning and preparation
2. Working with ACE learners and teachers
3. Using technology.

If you are interested in downloading a copy, visit the project companion site at www.acfe.vic.edu.au.

Learner feedback: what did the learners think?

The *AccessACE* project commissioned the national 2007 E-learning Benchmarking Project[10] to conduct a separate e-learning survey using their standard benchmarking survey. This enabled us to gather data around students satisfaction with the ICTs offered in their ACE courses, and also compare this to a set of national VET benchmarks.

Below is a summary of the findings. You can access the full report on the AccessACE website at www.acfe.vic.edu.au.

Confidence and skills in using computers

The survey responses indicate that the project had a significant impact on the ACE students' confidence and skills in using computers. Only 40% of students surveyed said that before the project they were confident in using computers and technology and had good computer skills. By participating in the project 80% said that they had increased their confidence and skills in using computers, and 70% said that the project had led them to use computers and technology more in other areas of their life. This pattern of response showing increased confidence and skills was similar to that for VET students generally in the 2007 benchmarking survey, although more pronounced for this group of ACE students (i.e. 40% and 80% for ACE students vs 75% and 60% for all VET students).

Employment outcomes

The students were generally positive about the impact of the course on their current employment situation or the prospect of getting a better job, with 65% saying that they thought participating in the project would in the future help them to get a better job or more responsibility in their current job. These findings were similar to or slightly more positive than those for all VET students, particularly against the question about enjoyment of work. Fifty five percent of students said they enjoyed their work more because of the technology in the project, compared with 42% in the 2007 national benchmarking survey.

Flexibility and choice

The project provided ACE students with some choice in when, where and how they undertook their learning, with around 60% to 70% saying the computer part of the project enabled them to choose:

- When they did their study (e.g. the time of day)
- Where they did their study (e.g. home, workplace, campus)
- How they did their learning activities (e.g. face to face, using technology).

These results were generally the same or slightly more positive about the flexibility involved in using technologies than the overall VET student population (who had positive responses in the 50% to 60% range for the equivalent questions).

Overall enjoyment and satisfaction

Aside from the significant impact of the project on increasing ACE students confidence and skills in using computers and technology, the main finding from the survey was students' high level of overall satisfaction with their participation in the project.

Seventy six percent of students from the project who responded to the e-learning benchmarking survey said that the use of computers had increased their learning skills. Eighty percent said the use of computers had increased their enjoyment of learning. These responses were much higher than in the overall 2007 VET student survey.

"E-learn has enhanced my training ability. It has provided me with a fascinating look into a new world of technology."
"I enrolled in a Digital Story-Telling class and as part of this course I have done a film about a Chinese traditional instrument called 'Guqin'. It helps me improve my knowledge in multimedia and it was fun, interesting and convenient."

10 http://e-learningindicators.flexiblelearning.net.au/

"I learnt far more than I imagined I would."
"The course was fun and it has erased many of my fears about computers."

When asked if they would recommend the use of computers in learning to their friends 90% of respondents said they would, compared with 62% for all VET students. This indicates a very high level of overall satisfaction with the project experience, even though there were some students who did not fully enjoy their time.

E-business services

The survey also asked ACE students about their use and experience of using e-business services offered by their training provider (e.g. online access to information on courses and policies, online enrolment and payments, online library services, online access to results). Very few students had used any of these services (less than 20%), although **some indicated that if the services were available they would use them**.

Clever use of ICT in ACE – visions for the future

The *AccessACE* project team would like to thank the following ACE organisations for their participation in and valuable contribution to developing a range of strategies around blended learning in ACE, all of which are very practical solutions to real problems.

In this final section they share their organisation's vision for the future, giving their own very unique perspective on what a clever use of ICT **will** and **could** look like in their community.

Community College East Gippsland

A clever use of ICTs in our organisation will mean a closer interaction with the smaller ACFE providers in the remote locations, through formal and informal partnerships.

A clever use of ICTs in our organisation could mean:

- Increased training opportunities for people in remote locations
- Enhanced delivery in the classroom and
- An effective means of communication between learners and trainers.

Coonara House

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **will** mean that we offer our students a blended mode of delivery across the full range of our programs accredited and non- accredited.

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **could** mean that we can reach students beyond the local geographic community and in doing so could increase our financial viability (sustainability).

Flemington Reading and Writing

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **will** mean that we will be able to teach programming languages to our CALD students in the near future by employing another teacher and that we will therefore be able to offer more computer classes.

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **could** mean that every student could have a computer to support their learning, and that we continue to provide high quality support to community members to become developers, designers and programmers aiming to develop these skills to an industry standard.

MADEC

From now on, a clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **will** mean greater sustainability. It will allow us to continue to meet learner needs and deliver quality outcomes. It will meet the strategic goals of the organisation particularly around meeting training needs in the remote areas where transport is a huge issue.

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **could** mean the introduction of high end technologies such as online classrooms and video conferencing in a profitable and sustainable way.

On Track Learning Wimmera

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **will** mean that we think about how ICTs can provide additional support. We will consider ways in which ICT can support and enhance current delivery.

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **could** mean that we look for add-on's in the courses we are delivering, and that we make more materials available online for students.

Preston Reservoir ACE (PRACE)

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **will** mean that we will be even better resourced to support teachers more strongly, by introducing in 2008 an induction kit for teachers and learners to prepare them for flexible learning at PRACE. Fundamentally, access needs to be transparent and assumed.

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **could** mean:

- Continuing to integrate technology in a blended way into a range of different curricula,
- Provide technology and connected communications in an easily understood, everyday way,
- Making sure gadgets are available as required (projector, camera, MP3 players etc)
- Extending our reach through increasing the online communication capacity of blended courses,
- Perhaps expanding into fee-for-service, supporting local organisations and networks.

South West SEAL

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **will** mean that we will be able to put more resource materials on our

system for students to access, as our range of what we deliver increases with access to online technologies.

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **could** mean that we will be able to meet the needs of different groups of people and meet the diversity in their educational needs. The students across our educational delivery will be able to access information that pertains to their course delivery much more confidently. We will also be able to partner with the smaller community houses.

Upper Beaconsfield Community Centre

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **will** mean that each new aged care class will have a wiki at the start of their course for the duration of the course. Training and support will be provided at the start of the course and will be ongoing.

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **could** mean a wiki for each accredited class.

Werribee Community Centre

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **will** mean that we won't stop what we have started; we will continue to build on this foundation. Some next steps:

- Professional development for staff,
- Develop some guidelines for a consistent approach organisationally to what spaces we are going to use and how,
- Trial particular blended learning options to all staff members in the organisation,
- Showcase and extend AccessACE project outcomes to all staff,
- Review our IT needs.

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **could** mean the beginning of all sorts of possibilities particularly with online courses. We can investigate the possibility of offering some fee-for-service online courses to develop a funding stream for supporting our core work (literacy ESL etc). This will increase our organisational capacity.

Yackandandah Community Education Network

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **will** mean that most computer and multimedia courses will involve blended learning.

A clever use of ICTs for/in our organisation **could** mean a lot more online course materials for our students to access.

Conclusion

The *AccessACE* project set out to answer the following two key research questions:

- What **does** a clever use of ICTs in ACE mean and look like?
- What **could** a clever use of ICTs in ACE mean and look like?

The *Visions for the future* section of the guide outlines a diverse range of clever uses of ICTs in ACE. It demonstrates quite clearly that a clever use of ICT is highly contextualised and that a range of key factors impact on its success. They are:

- Teacher skills, knowledge and confidence
- Organisational capacity and
- Teacher support
- In-depth knowledge and understanding of the characteristics of the learner group
- An understanding of the technology or tool that will best support the delivery.

The trials demonstrate that good teachers, even when relatively inexperienced in any particular online technology can deliver successfully if these key success factors are present and managed well. It demonstrates that although the size of the organisation impacts on access to resources, it does not necessarily guarantee success. Small organisations with limited resources also performed well.

So, what could a clever use of ICT mean and look like?

If we focus on a clever use of ICT in terms of the **tool** or **technology**, and factor in all the other key success factors as outlined above, clever use indicates a trend towards free or low cost, easily accessible tools. 80% of the organisations who participated in the trials used a Web 2.0 tool to support their trial, either as a vehicle for content delivery, or to support face-to-face and online activities, with wikis as the most popular tool.

Web 2.0 tools allow for easy and effective collaboration – they do not require additional equipment, and they did not require elaborate and expensive technical support. Most of the tools are small, free and can be set up online resulting in immediate access.

The recently published 2008 Horizon Report[11], which aims to "identify and describe emerging technologies likely to have a large impact on teaching, learning, or creative expression within learning-focused organizations", comments that web 2.0 and social networking tools are increasingly being adopted for educational use, and "that the way we work, collaborate, and communicate is evolving as boundaries become more fluid and globalization increases".

The findings of the AccessACE project confirm this trend, as the participating ACE organisations are extremely positive about the future and the tremendous potential for ICT enabled learning – particularly in extending their educational reach.

In a recent interview for the Campus Review[12] magazine, Greg Black, the CEO of Education.au discusses the ICT imperative in the context of predictions about the future training needs of industry and individual learners. Black mentions predictions that student knowledge gained in the first year of their training is likely to be out of date by their third year.

He reminds us that the "only sustainable approach… will be to find the learning and teaching strategies that will ensure that people embrace attitudes and behaviours anchored in lifelong learning". He goes onto say that in order to "stimulate these new attitudes and behaviours in students, learning has to get more stimulating, flexible and personally relevant than ever before. In future, more learning will be informal, both in terms of study topics and the environments in which they take place".

Clever uses of ICT in ACE **can** and **will** make this happen.

11 New Media Consortium. 2008. The Horizon report. p6. http://www.nmc.org/pdf/2008-Horizon-Report.pdf accessed January 2008.
12 Mitchell, J. Inside VET. Campus review. 15/10/07 p12

Voices of experience: messages from managers and teachers

Jan Roberts

Training Manager, Community College East Gippsland

Participating in this project has been a really valuable experience from an organisational point of view because it provided that impetus for change – it made us do something. We will continue to develop. We certainly need lots more training but we can't see any real barriers.

Our worst fear was that the community would not share the vision – that did not happen. Our best hope was that it would in fact work and it did work, the teacher and learners are all very positive and excited. It has been very successful. All our expectations have been met. If others are debating to put their toe in the water – jump in feet first. Remember, it is a journey...

Leanne Fitzgerald

Team leader, Coonara Community House

In general if you wait until you have planned the whole process- it will pass you by.

At some stage you have to jump in and get on with it. Even if your tutors are not experts, they can start sharing with the learners and learn together. You need to take a certain amount of risk, especially in technology. Many (managers and teachers) are still too risk averse.

Manrico Moro

IT coordinator, FRWP

You need to have the capacity to deliver. Because of this the project was a success and it has flowed on to other parts of the organisation. We learned something from each of the other people we met in the project. If we were not as knowledgeable, we may not have learned as much.

David Zacher

Training Manager, MADEC

It has been a really good learning experience. It has been frustrating along the way. I have now only realised how big a task this is. It is very different from a classroom based model and the project ended up being very much smaller than we initially envisaged. So, start small. Our teacher will be a very valuable asset in changing the attitudes of teachers in other departments. We are all very pleased with what we have learned.

Maggie Clarke

Manager, PRACE

Projects such as this -whilst they are small amounts they are fantastic to offer PD to staff around a particular issue / learner need. It ensures commitment and also means that ICT and the blended learning models continue to stay on our agenda.

Martin Bride

On Track Learning

This has been a good project and a great way of introducing e-learning ideas into a very small organisation. Working together in a group has been great as they were all at different levels and working on different courses. It is great to find out what others are doing.

The mentoring assistance was invaluable, and a high quality part of the project: the support on the phone and the visit. This is money well spent, for someone to come to a regional provider to assist them in their own organisation. I am aware of the expense but it was very valuable. It would have been easy to become disheartened if the support was not there.

Michael Chalk

e-learning coordinator, PRACE

It is great that the Board is starting to realise the potential effectiveness of using other kinds of communication and teaching technologies. The idea of giving people money to trial something is great to support what is already happening, it gives providers opportunity to branch out. Often passionate individuals are doing things but if it is not supported and connected in, so the knowledge stays with that person / organisation.

Peter Hautot

IT tutor, South West SEAL

This has been one of the best projects I have been engaged with for quite a while in the sense of having to learn things and then put them in to place. I embarked on the learning journey with the learners and have learned with them.

It has been a very positive experience for my personal professional development and, as a learning experience, it has been right up there.

Jennie Barrera

Manager, Werribee Community Centre

It has been a fabulous process, and we were lucky to have both AccessACE and LearnScope so it has been a wonderful opportunity. The staff and students have benefitted tremendously.

Personally it has been great to see teachers and learners involved in these projects. We did have a profile a few years ago – and it went by the wayside. I feel that we are back on track and that is satisfying. For the young people it had been terrific and it has value added to their learning experience.

Dennis Bell

EO, South West SEAL

If we hadn't already started in going down the path with having the infrastructure we may not have committed to it. It is a fine line. Anyone that has not started along the track would have found it difficult to meet the required outcomes.

Liz Grigg

IT trainer, Upper Beaconsfield Community Centre

I think it has potential to extended reach and retention, but keep it do-able. It has been great to help us grow our skills and knowledge – it has added a new dimension. If we had not used ICT in this way in this course, we would still have had happy learners and good carers – now we all have an extra tool to go on and learn more. The students can be better informed carers. For example, they can use their IT skills for further pathways to go on to nursing studies which some of them do.

Wayne Burrell

Teacher Werribee

I have learned so much from having the opportunity to explore Web 2.0 technologies and having the opportunity to integrate some in my teaching – it has been revolutionary and changed my thinking as to how I teach.

Gail Harrison

Manager, Yackandandah Education Network

This is the most enjoyable project I've have been in – all went so well and the learners enjoyed it so much. There was a lot of support all through, for example in the use of Live Classroom. Also, having the money to be able to attend the meetings in Melbourne, i.e. not being out of pocket was great.

We now have new course materials we can use again. I am now more confident that tutors can do things like the wiki themselves, so a significant increase in the organisation's capacity to deliver.

Where to from here? Some practical next steps

Now that you have read the comments of the teachers and managers involved in the project, you may have questions about program design, delivery, teacher support or advice on how you can get started. Below are a few suggested strategies:

1. The project support website

The best place to start in the project support site, is the ACFE wiki at www.acfe.vic.edu.au.

Each project has developed an action plan, which you can access through this website.

You will see that each page allows for discussions, so apply to become a member which will give you access to the site, and pose your questions to the project team.

2. State wide professional development

The AccessACE project designed and delivered an extensive program of face-to-face and online professional development activities for project participants. Both teachers and managers met at the beginning, middle and end of the project. The sessions were designed as full day sessions to maximise opportunities for information gathering, networking, and very practical hands-on skills sessions in the computer room. Participants had many opportunities to workshop their e-learning proposals, discuss issues with colleagues and get an in-depth look at various e-learning designs, facilitated by Clint Smith from e-Works and the Australian Flexible Learning Framework's[13] e-learning coordinator. The project participants also had opportunities to tap in to online professional development particularly centered on the use of online virtual classrooms, delivered through the Victorian state-managed Live Classroom.

Delia Bradshaw, our educational mentor, facilitated sessions around action learning, the project research framework, and the final project presentations.

3. Mentoring, coaching and 1:1 support

One of the key features of the project was its 1:1 mentoring and support. This consisted of email, telephone, site visits and online support. The online support was mainly conducted using free software such as Skype or Live Classroom. The project team also conducted site visits to spend time working with teachers and managers at their organisations, looking at issues specific to their situation: just-in time and just -for-them.

If you would like more information about the professional development program or the mentoring support, please contact Josie Rose at the SMR ACFE regional office on 97869466 or email josie.rose@dpcd.vic.gov.au

4. Explore & Experiment!

If you learn through exploring and experimenting, you may find it easier to just get in and start playing with some of the tools to explore their potential usefulness for your organisation or subject area. You can:

- Set up your own wiki to support classroom delivery. The project support wiki site allows us to create as many wikis as we like for ACE organisations to help support their educational delivery. If you are interested in setting up and wiki for your organisation, contact Josie Rose. You will have full access to a site free of advertising and fully protected.
- Run or participate in an online meeting or class using Live Classroom. Live Classroom is virtual classroom software that combines state-of-the-art interactive technologies such as voice, application sharing, polling and whiteboards. It enables teachers to add greater interaction to their online delivery and to foster better communication with students. Organisations can also use it for online meetings, briefing sessions, presentations, conference sessions and professional development events.

13 For more information, visit the website at: http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/flx/go/home/VIC

ACFE have purchased two rooms for registered ACE organisations to use in 2008. If you would like to find out how ACE providers used it in 2007, visit learnscope.acfe.vic.edu.au/live_classroom.

For more information, contact Josie Rose.

5. Peer support

If you would much prefer to consult with a colleague, you may want to speak to a project participant. You can find their contact details on the project support site. Each project has set up their own wiki as an action plan, and they have provided contact details for follow up discussions.

Below is a list of the organisations and their project action plan wikis:

Organisation	Project action plan wiki
Preston Reservoir ACE	prace.acfe.vic.edu.au
Community College East Gippsland	cceg.acfe.vic.edu.au
Yackandandah Community Education Network	ycen.acfe.vic.edu.au
South West SEAL Warrnambool	seal.acfe.vic.edu.au
MADEC Mildura	madec.acfe.vic.edu.au
Werribee Community Centre	werribee.acfe.vic.edu.au
Upper Beaconsfield Community Centre	ubcc.acfe.vic.edu.au
Coonara Community House	coonara.acfe.vic.edu.au
ON Track learning Wimmera	ontrack.acfe.vic.edu.au
Flemington Reading and Writing Program	fsnlc.acfe.vic.edu.au

6. A list of educational mentors

The *AccessACE* project had the support of a range of very talented educational mentors with expertise in specific areas of blended learning. They all have experience in managing and delivering national and local e-learning initiatives. They have consented to being contacted if you would like to engage their services for professional development or any other consultancy activity:

Clint Smith, e-Works

Email: clint.smith@eworks.edu.au

Victorian Framework e-learning coordinator.

Delia Bradshaw, Educational mentor

Email: deliad@bigpond.com

Delia has extensive experience in ACE and has a particular interest in teacher training. Delia has worked as a mentor on a range of national e-learning projects ranging from virtual worlds to podcasting and strategies for engaging youth.

Michael Chalk, PRACE

Email: ace@michalk.id.au

ACE practitioner experienced in the integration of ICTs in language and literacy. Online facilitator for the Framework's Community Engagement project.

Mary Schooneveldt

Email: schoonedingley@ozemail.com.au

ACE practitioner. Mary has a long history in working with technology in ACE, particularly around the implementation of the TAA online and digital storytelling. For the past three years she has also managed the national Inclusive e-learning project, and is particularly conversant with the online needs of people with a disability and mature aged learners.

Lynne Gibb, Coonara House

Email: jaclynnegg@yahoo.com.au

Lynne has extensive experience in the introduction of wikis to support accredited ACE delivery.

Further reading: references

Adult, Community and Further Education Board, (2006). *Building sustainable community businesses: a strategy for success*. Melbourne, p4. This document may be found on the ACFE web site at www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/ac....>

Jasinski. M.2007. Innovate and Integrate. AFLF. innovateandintegrate.flexiblelearning.net.au/html/executive_summary.html#keyFindings

Mitchell, J. Inside VET. Campus review. 15/10/07 p12.

New Media Consortium. 2008. The Horizon Report p6. www.nmc.org/pdf/2008-Horizon-Report.pdf accessed January 2008.

Philips, I. 2007. Victorian ACE benchmarking Survey Report. Accessed at accessacereport.acfe.vic.edu.au/learnersurvey

Rose, J. Schooneveldt, M. 2004. Flexible ACE Report; More than just technology. A report into the current practices in flexible teaching and learning in Adult Community and Further Education, Victoria. TAFE Frontiers. Accessed at accessace.acfe.vic.edu.au/flexible+ACE

Websites: Planning Checklists

Media on the Move

This website features a case study of an ACE organisation interested in moving into online casting. You can read more about it by visiting the website at mediaonthemove.flexiblelearning.net.au/mm/casestudies/Coonara/index.htm

Or, you can download a checklist (Word document) that will help you map your organisation in terms of readiness to take on an ICT initiative at mediaonthemove.flexiblelearning.net.au/mm/casestudies/Coonara/Coonara_Wherereyou_Final.doc

Innovate and Integrate

If you are interested in what it takes to embed innovation in teaching practice, visit the innovate and integrate website at innovateandintegrate.flexiblelearning.net.au/html/home.html

This site also provides a range of checklists to help with planning. You can access them at innovateandintegrate.flexiblelearning.net.au/html/tools.html

Community Engagement

During 2005 – 2007 the Australian Flexible Learning Framework funded the community engagement project, aimed to develop e-learning capacity in communities across Australia. ACE in Victoria has benefitted from this funding through a range of projects. If you are interested in reading more about these projects and their outcomes, visit www.flexiblelearning.net.au/flx/go/home/projects/2007/communityengagement/pid/353

The project team has also produced arrange of resources for community organisations who are interested in developing e-learning capacity. You can access the website at creativecommunity.flexiblelearning.net.au/

You can also download the companion work book at www.flexiblelearning.net.au/flx/webdav/site/flxsite/users/mhannan/public/BCEP%20Workbook.pdf

The following ACE regions and ACE organisations in Victoria have participated in the Community Engagement project:

- SMR ACFE – the Edge Project www.flexiblelearning.net.au/flx/webdav/site/flxsite/shared/CommunityEngagementcase%20studies%202006/The_Edge_Project_casestudy.pdf
- Hume ACFE – Harnessing rural skills www.flexiblelearning.net.au/flx/webdav/site/flxsite/shared/CommunityEngagement/case%20studies%202006/Harnessing_Rural_Skills_casestudy.pdf

- Community College East Gippsland – Building online communities in East Gippsland
  http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/flx/go/home/projects/2007/communityengagement/pid/407

- Men's North East E-Learning Precinct, Wodonga, and the Leongatha Education Precinct, Gippsland.
  http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/flx/webdav/site/flxsite/shared/CommunityEngagement/case%20studies%202020 05/2005_Case%20Studies.pdf

- Designing e-learning
  If you are interested in finding out about the why and how of designing e-learning, visit the website at designing.flexiblelearning.net.au/
  You may be particularly interested in the ACE exemplar at designing.flexiblelearning.net.au/learning_design/sequences/TAS/index.htm

- Inclusive e-learning
  Another national project funded by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, with an extensive collection of resources that outline the e-learning needs of youth, people with disabilities and mature aged learners.
  http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/flx/go/home/projects/pid/278

- BECTA readiness matrix
  If you are interested in what is happening overseas, in the IK in particular, you can register with BECTA to use any one of their readiness matrices at matrix.becta.org.uk/

Online survey tools

There are a range of free online survey tools available. Survey monkey allows for up to 10 free questions, and after that they require modest monthly fee. An excellent tool available at www.surveymonkey.com/

A Google search will bring up a range of choices, or, you can try these freeonlinesurveys.com/ or coolsurveys.com/

Newsletters

Keep in touch with what is happening in your state and nationally by subscribing to Flex-e-news at www.flexiblelearning.net.au/flx/go/home/news

Appendix

Research framework

The *AccessACE* project team had the benefit of working with a project reference group and a working party which had extensive experience in ACE, community capacity building, pedagogy, program design, e-learning, online delivery platforms and the needs of priority learner groups in ACE. It was with the advice and input from this group that the project team developed the research questions and framework that guided project activities and the project trials themselves.

The trials aimed to answer the following two key research questions:

- What **does** a clever use of ICTs in ACE mean and look like?
- What **could** a clever use of ICTs in ACE mean and look like?

Learner groups		
Dependent		Independent
One off course		Pathways
Community reach		
Local	Regional	Global/Virtual
Community readiness		
Low interest		High interest
Teacher capacity/readiness		
Fearful/Resistant		Passionate/Adventurous
Novices		Confident/Capable
Organisational capacity/commitment/readiness		
Small		Large
Isolated individuals		COM Support
Educational content		
Learner generated		Pre-packaged
Curriculum		
Non-accredited		Accredited
Programs/Courses		
Face to face		Online
Relatively fixed		Constantly changing
Technology		
Low tech		High tech
Your competition		
Don't know		Organisational plans in place

The two research questions were informed by ten perspectives, as outlined in the previous diagram.

These perspectives were used by the participating organisations as a planning guide. By using this tool to map an organisation's readiness for 'blended learning', the ACE organisations involved were able to plot where they were situated before and after the trial. These snapshots were a handy reference point for both planning and evaluation. By locating themselves on each perspective spectrum, organisations were able to place themselves, in their own settings, in relation to the two research project questions. It is from within this framework that this guide and the project action plans evolved.

You can view copies of each of the participating organisation's 'perspectives' document on their individual project websites which can be accessed from www.acfe.vic.edu.au/actionplans

Data gathering methods

The project used the following data gathering methods:

- Face-to-face workshops
- Action research techniques supported by a project wiki
- Proformas, i.e. the perspectives documents (before and after) and a delivery map
- A digital story
- Recorded interviews with project managers and teachers through *Live Classroom*.

The project interviews were all conducted in *Live Classroom*, an online virtual classroom available to ACE organisations in Victoria for a small fee. It allows for live, synchronous interaction between individuals using voice, text, a whiteboard, and a range other tools.

The interviewer designed a set of questions which were constructed using the polling tool. This meant that both the interviewer and the respondents could be actively involved in discussing the questions and making notes.

The conversations were recorded and archived for later reference.

This data gathering methodology has enriched the report. Throughout the report, you will find quotes from participants, in other words,- authentic voices of experience. Many managers were completely new to this technology. Most of them were helped by a teacher or a technician. Everyone enjoyed the experience and there were minimal technical hiccups.

This data collection method for research purposes is a good example of how an ICT enabled teaching tool supported time poor practitioners in delivering on their project aims and outcomes!

The best tool for the task

The *AccessACE* project team, like ACE organisations Victoria-wide, has access to a plethora of ICT tools, both free and state funded, to support delivery. Often the challenge lies in choosing the best tool for the task. The project team was faced with the same dilemma. In the end, the tools and technologies chosen to assist the project participants were selected with the following aims in mind:

- To demonstrate the potential of the tools in administering and delivering training: use of a wiki as well as a range of other Web 2.0 tools[14].
- To market the project to regions and providers and any other interested stakeholders: use of a blog.
- To experiment with high end online tools such as virtual classrooms and content management systems to see if they could be used for research, administration and project management purposes: use of Live Classroom and TAFE VC.

A practical demonstration of the Web 2.0 tools utilised to support the projects is available on the project support wiki at accessace.acfe.vic.edu.au.

14 The phrase "Web 2.0" hints at an improved form of the World Wide Web. Technologies such as weblogs (blogs), social bookmarking, wikis, podcasts, and other forms of many-to-many publishing, which provide enhancements over read-only websites. The programs allow users to interact and share data with other users. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2. Accesses 18/01/08