

ACE Providers and Online Learning: Observations and Survey Insights

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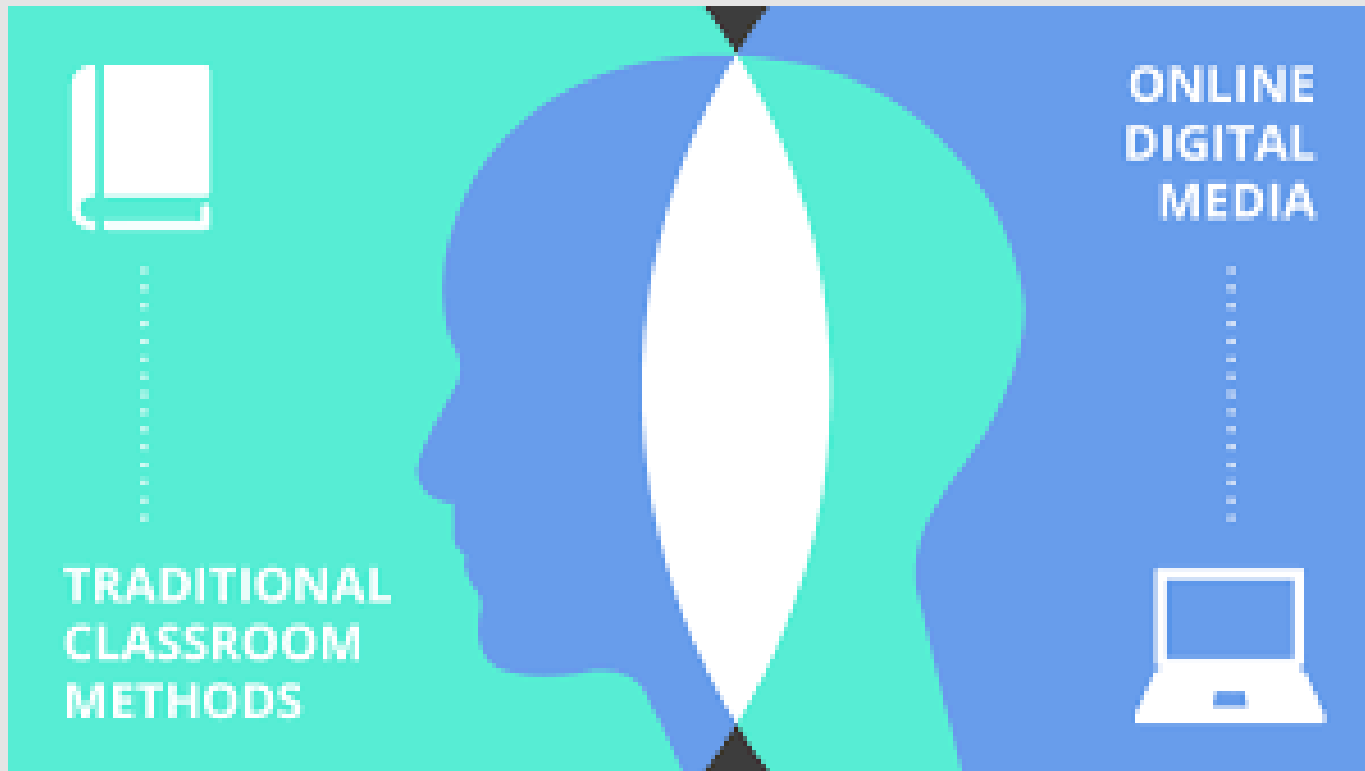
CCA Survey of members – findings

- importance of online learning
- engagement of students and staff
- experience of students
- capacity to deliver

Supplementary research

- Reading Writing Hotline
- TEQSA

Observations and insights



Online ? Blended? Face to
face?

Community Colleges Australia
(CCA) surveyed members as to
online experience.

What did we find?

Adult and Community
Education (ACE) - no one size
fits all.

Context

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in educational institutions being compelled to suddenly harness and utilise the suite of available technological tools to create content for remote learning for students.

Educators are experiencing new opportunities to do things differently and with greater flexibility resulting in potential benefits in accessibility to education for all sorts of learners.

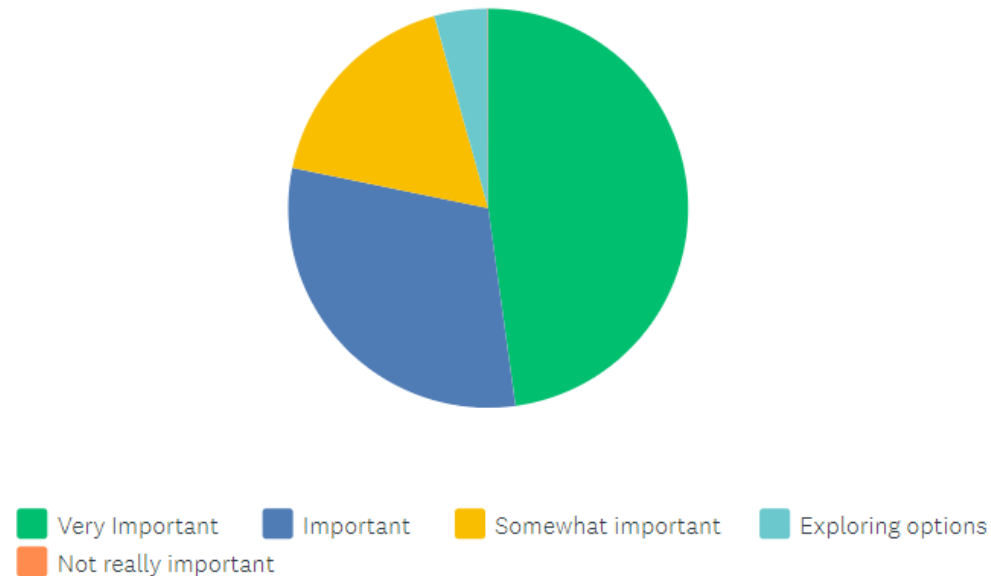
What happened to ACE providers during this period?

ACE providers are a unique group in that they deliver specifically for their communities and are particularly focussed on the vulnerable and disadvantaged. How have they responded? How did their learners fare? What are their views now?

The survey was comprehensive and was designed to obtain member views on online delivery and their experiences during and post covid.

Importance?

78% of respondents thought engaging with online learning was important or very important for their organisations.
All respondents thought it was relevant and of some importance.



‘Online learning offers an essential alternative not only during COVID but at all times; we need to be as flexible as possible in the choices we offer our students’

Respondent profile

- 56% regional providers
- 30% metro providers
- 14% both metro & regional provision

Government or Grant Support

Government or other funding support to assist with online capability during COVID-19

65% of respondents found government funding support to assist their capacity to deliver online

35% did not receive funding to assist with online training capacity.

For those that did receive funding this was **invaluable** in keeping businesses viable and in helping to fund the innovation needed.

Major mechanisms: Jobkeeper, ACE or ACFE support grants, ATO tax relief, State government business support grants.

- Distance based was often the most common form of delivery – this is less ‘hand off’ than online.
- Face to face remains the most constant or popular mode of delivery.
- In some places –access to place-based training in venues was denied – training essentially stopped until restrictions were relaxed.
- Social distancing imposes restricted training numbers and has threatened viability of delivery.
- With compliance training, more smaller classes required– trainer fatigue is a major issue.
- Sourcing skilled trainers is a major resourcing problem especially in regional areas and in particular industries, e.g aged and home care, trade areas.

All providers found a greater role for online learning in their delivery profile; mixed mode has increased.

The high proportion of disadvantaged learners engaging with colleges reinforced the relevance of face to face training, while illustrating the advantages of innovative web approaches and applications.

Learner Access to Technology

When asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 100, responses covered the full range.

When averaged, **49%** of students would have good access to relevant technologies to engage with online learning.

COVID conditions did bring into sharp relief the gap - socioeconomically and geographically between those who had both access and the capacity to use online technologies.

Young people were often not able to effectively use their technologies for learning purposes even when they had access. Distance learning was used to assist many learners.

Others who had started face to face were able to move to online or teacher led zoom or google classroom sessions and learnt as the teacher did. This was commented on time and time again. The circumstances allowed for greater risk experimentation.



Quality and Effective Online Delivery



68% of respondents said they could offer engaging online learning

32% of respondents said they could not

Is it suitable?

Our students have really amazed us in their ability to improve their digital literacy and engage in digital platforms (such as Zoom) that they otherwise wouldn't.



We assumed that many of students would not have the capacity and/or capability and therefore had it as a low priority but the positive response to the move to remote engagement has us thinking that many could handle more online.

We were very successful in virtual classroom platform and had great systems and processes in place to support the students. Over the time we have learned a lot about e-facilitation and we have improved significantly to support our students and clients.

Is it suitable? That depends...

Both online and self-paced learning failed our students who were locked down in remote and isolated areas. For our remote community students, COVID-19 restrictions only served to highlight the inequality of things like sub-standard infrastructure available on communities.

Even the most tech-savvy and motivated of students on communities were hindered by poor WI-FI or access to WI-FI, the lack of computers (IT hubs).

Some disadvantaged students were provided with “donated laptops” around COVID-19, but unfortunately logistics and circumstances prohibited best use.

Our cohort’s digital skills are generally quite poor. Most can use a smartphone but few are able to use the technology in any other meaningful way for training. This means a lot of program design and pre-training preparation is needed.

Students have limited access to digital technology, equipment and Internet.

Online is not usually suitable for our key cohort of disadvantaged learners. Many are not confident, many require ongoing support, many do not have necessary technology and connectivity.

Is it suitable?

I would like to put the upside the past year. Our organisation had to put new systems in place, train existing staff in new skills, learn new resilience and teamwork at a new height.

Work from home uninterrupted and help a whole lot more people in need.

That has all been really promising for growth and it has all come from funding -small may it have been but really did make a huge difference to our community.

Delivery Mode

Online, mixed mode, face to face and distance-based delivery as of February 2021

- 10% online delivery
- 39% mixed mode
- 60% face to face
- 15% distance based

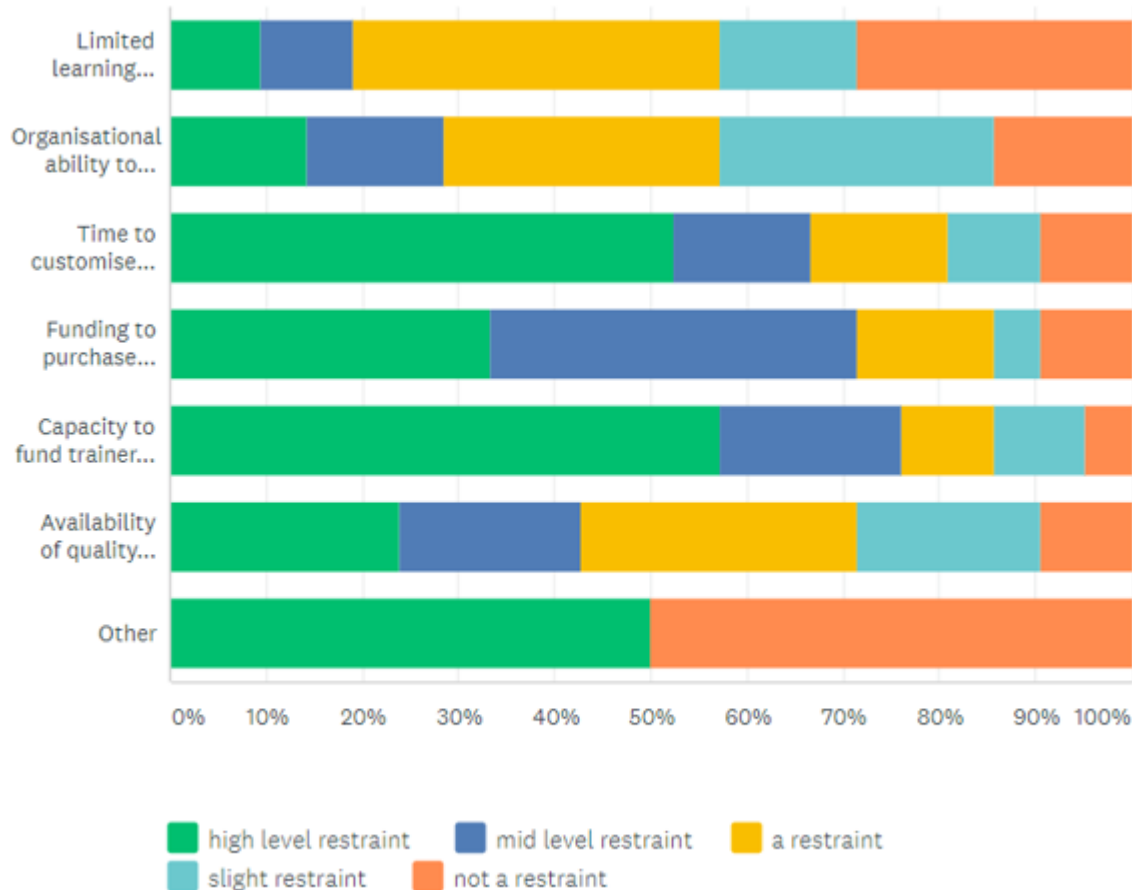
The responses varied widely across providers depending on their focus and cohort characteristics.

Most programs involve a proportion of face to face delivery. This is seen as necessary for learner engagement and to ensure learning capacity.

Making general assumptions was difficult. The profile of location and learner characteristics were the major determinant of delivery modes utilised. Where reliable digital service is unavailable, online or mixed mode delivery is not feasible.

Leadership, staff and financial capability also play a role in an organisational capacity to engage with online delivery.

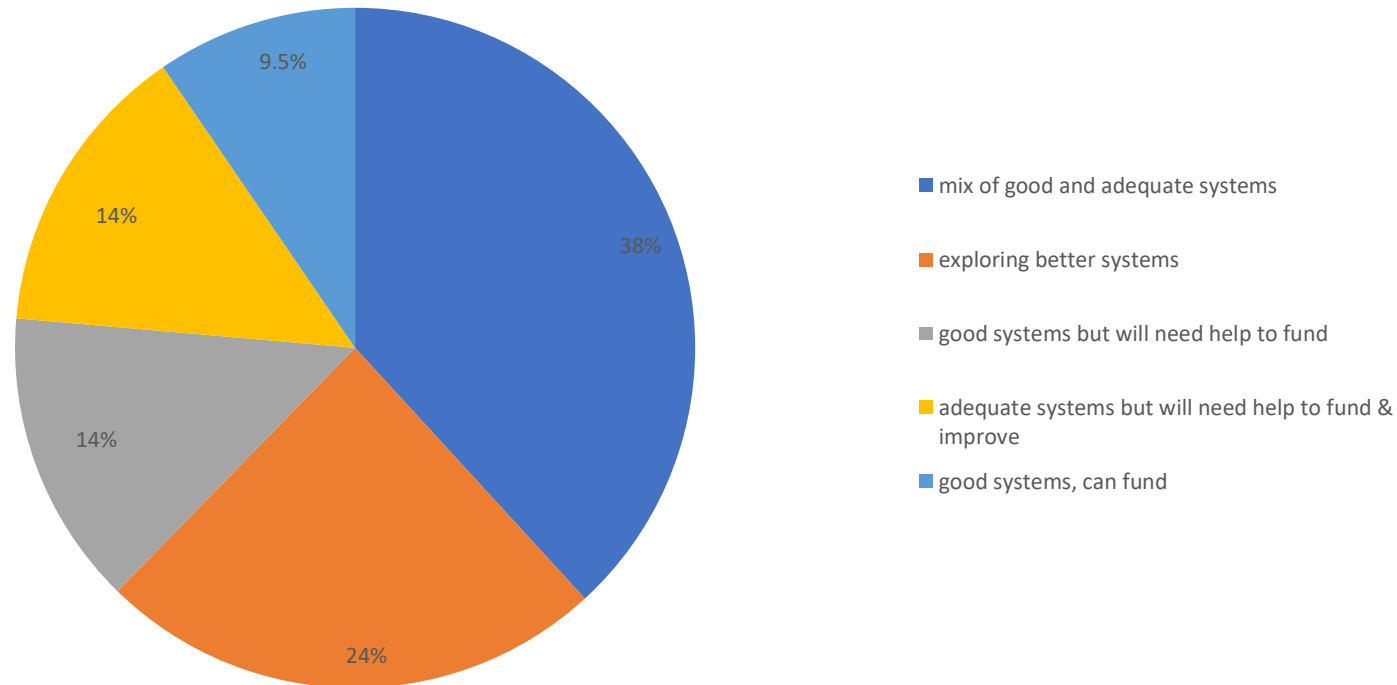
Organisational Constraints Around Resources



Dominant highest-level restraints (shown in green)

- capacity to fund trainers to customise resources
- time to customise resources and
- ‘other’ -this may be around
- ‘make do’ solutions that don’t really answer the needs but costs prohibit engaging with more robust solutions
- inability to afford learning management systems,
- trainers not skilled and TAE training in this area hard to access;
- funding to purchase resources.
- funding was the greatest restraint when combined with mid level restraint ratings

Systems and Capacity for Blended/Online Learning



Summary - 47.5% of providers have adequate to good systems they can keep funding, 28% need more funding to keep their online systems going. 24% are exploring how they can do it. So there are real issues around ongoing capacity.

- Mix of good and adequate systems 38%
- Exploring better systems - 24%
- Good systems but need funding to continue to support – 14%

Do you need additional resources to keep it up?



YES

- Additional quality trainers, IT & the funding to fund both
- Main issues are probably with trainers' capacity to create resources and understand
- Help with compliance, yes
- LMS crucial (to most)
- Student IT and learning support

Online learning and isolation report

The Reading Writing Hotline's [Online Learning and Digital Isolation during COVID-19](#) report concludes that with cessation of face-to-face classes, many learners were unable to continue their study, inequalities between learners increased, and it has become clear that many adults don't have the skills or access to technology to succeed in online study.

The tables on the following three pages are sourced from the Hotline's Online Learning and Digital Isolation report

www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au/online-learning-digital-isolation-and-covid-19/



Students

ASSUMPTION	REALITY	RECOMMENDATION
Students		
Everyone has access to devices and reliable internet.	Not everyone has access to a device for learning. Mobile phones inadequate for study. Unreliable internet especially in regional/remote locations. Public libraries close so no Wi-Fi.	Resource or student infrastructure funding to ensure access regardless of disadvantage. Hard copy learning materials and phone support, or face to face classes. Loan devices/learning hub with librarian support to troubleshoot.
Everyone can afford data/Wi-Fi	Data can be expensive for platforms like Zoom. Students do not understand data limits and receive large bills.	Telcos to provide clear data plans Telcos to provide public RTOs with data for students.
Everyone has access to a safe/suitable place to learn	Many home environments not conducive to learning. Family /sharing devices. Online study needs a quiet room without distractions	Study hubs with devices and Wi-Fi. More locations available to access computers.

Online Learning

ASSUMPTION	REALITY	RECOMMENDATION
Online Learning		
Digital Literacy is a set of skills to operate technology	Digital literacy is about making meaning using digital devices etc	Definition of Digital literacy provided to policy makers
Everyone learns well online	<p>Those with beginner literacy, digital and learning skills require face to face learning to be successful.</p> <p>Learning via digital literacy overwhelming for beginners. Other students disengage when courses go online</p> <p>Building teacher/student relationship essential at early stages</p>	<p>Funding to support Digital Access esp. for Regions. i.e Digital Hubs offering WiFi & support re devices and learning platform. Additional funding for PD for teachers</p> <p>Face to face classes for students who require it</p> <p>Distance learning – mailing resources, phone support, AM/FM radio lessons</p> <p>More locations available to access computers.</p>

Teachers

ASSUMPTION	REALITY	RECOMMENDATION
Teachers		
Teachers can transition to online teaching	Many teachers have not been given PD in online learning. Some require much more support.	PD for teachers needing to provide online classes.
Teachers can run online classes the same as face to face classes	Teaching online requires significant IT support in addition to teaching of course content. Individual phone calls to provide support is not viable	IT support for classes. Small digital literacy classes available. Hard copy learning materials, phone support, face to face classes. Time for teachers to provide regular feedback
Teachers can show students how to operate learning platforms on a device	Variety of different devices used in each class. Difficult to follow along as demonstrated	Devices for loan same as teacher's. Loan for length of course not just 3 hr loan LMS that works across variety of devices

TEQSA - Student experience during Covid-19

University: The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) [released its report](#), *Foundations for good practice: The student experience of online learning in Australian higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic*, based on responses from 118 providers:

“A very large proportion of respondents ... commented that they did not like the experience of online learning and did not wish to ever experience it again.”

One “surprising and somewhat disturbing” issue raised was a reluctance by some students to use the video in Zoom because “they did not wish to show their colleagues the interiors of their homes because they were concerned about the physical contents and appearance and also the presence of family members.”

Observations



Adult and community education (ACE) providers are on a journey; COVID-19 has fast-tracked this. Most providers gained enormous insight and learned how online training can assist with many, but not all of their clients. Some providers not 'very' impacted by COVID-19 felt their original views - that face to face is the most suitable were as relevant as ever.

Trainers made choices, many engaged, gained skills and are happy to keep developing those skills.

Those who accessed funding did find it made huge difference to their stability, and their ability to trial new approaches in relative safety.

It is expensive, there are trainer shortages and access and time to engage is needed.

Regionally –

Network coverage – reliable internet coverage definitive

Digital exclusion is a HUGE factor.

Nature of learner cohorts - level of disadvantage or vulnerability.

The sophistication of the learning systems and tools

Organisational vision, leadership, culture - choosing to make the leap.

Sophistication of Online Approach and Learner Engagement



Considerations and Conclusions

- Where hybrid learning methods are used – which is the way most ACE providers engaging are moving – there can be great outcomes.
- Developing effective online systems, tools and expertise requires ongoing investment. Inclusive infrastructure must be a part of this.
- The learning journey to date is demonstrating that effective online teaching and learning need not be expensive, there are a range of options BUT skilled teachers and facilitators are required.
- The ecosystem needs to pay more attention to the quality of their professionals.
- There is fatigue in the sector - dampening the energy displayed.
- The socioeconomic divide is widening and digital inclusion is an important focus.



Considerations and Conclusions

We need to find ways to blend the physical and the digital and build forward better, creating a paradigm that is learner-centric, personalised, equitable and inclusive.

Thank you



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