

ACE Aotearoa submission to:

Productivity Commission: New models of tertiary education

Overview

Our submission is from the perspective of adult and community education (ACE). That perspective emphasises the value of engaging in structured, proactive learning throughout life (lifelong learning) as a key tool in enhancing individual and community well-being, with positive social and economic benefits of reducing justice, health and welfare costs and increasing income and tax contributions.^{1 2}

ACE Aotearoa has the view that quality education / lifelong learning for all is central to our nation's economic and social progress- our productivity and well-being. We suggest that productivity can be described as "the proportion of adult citizens who are able to sustain satisfying, productive and prosperous livelihoods (that are meaningful to the person) who achieve their potential, and who extend their connecting links with the whānau, family and wider world" in an informed, constructive and inclusive manner.³

Education at all levels is a foundation stone to productivity, as described. The post 2015 United Nations' education goal is "Quality Education – Lifelong learning for all". We hold the view that quality education happens when the learning process is exciting, engaging and tailored to the individual student's learning needs and style and sets the learner on a course of meeting and overcoming challenges throughout their lives, also resulting in good quality of life, and reduced environmental impact through ongoing sharing of knowledge and learning.

A fundamental point which permeates each of the key sections in our submission is that adults take a legacy from the compulsory education system with them when they leave school. Those who have had a lack of success in their school education experience a burden of guilt and shame with at times total disengagement and feelings of hopelessness about trying again- they may not have learned relevant subject matter but they have learned they are "no good at learning" or "dumb". Part of the ACE sector (often taxpayer funded) is focused on helping those learners regain their confidence, and reach their potential as contributing adults. Most of the ACE Sector (user pays) is focused on enriching courses for successful, curious and high achieving adults (who experienced success in their school education) who wish to continue to grow, contribute and have satisfying lives and have the financial capacity to action this option for themselves.

Our submission is organised in the following sections:

- Adult and Community Education as part of the Tertiary Education System - relevant to issues paper Question 1;
- The Development of a Learner Portal- "aceplace"- addressing a gap for learners - relevant to issues paper Question 2;
- Satisfying livelihoods: full participation in society and work- the result of successful education – relevant to issues paper Question 30;
- Learner Centred Education- allowing all learners to reach potential- relevant to issues paper Question 48,

¹ Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2008, Economic evaluation of ACE Outcomes.

² Value of ACE- ACE Aotearoa 2013

³ This is ACE Aotearoa's own description, drawing on the goals for education (see footnote p5)

- Leave no-one behind- application of neuroscience in tertiary education- relevant to issues paper Question 57.

About ACE Aotearoa

Adult and Community Education (ACE) Aotearoa is the lead body for adult and community educators and a voice for adult learners. We actively promote and support the diversity of lifelong learning in Aotearoa New Zealand. In particular, we work across the sector and with government and communities to foster collaboration and cooperation so that educators, providers and adult learners are well supported. We are a membership organisation, and represent both our members and the wider sector – always with a focus on what works best for learners. We provide advice and direction for policy development and implementation. We work in partnership with government and have been funded in recent years to improve the accessibility, coherence and quality of learning for adults.

ACE Aotearoa consulted with its members and others involved in community and adult education to develop this submission.

SUBMISSION

Adult and Community Education (ACE) as part of the Tertiary Education System

This section relates particularly to Question 1: what are the advantages and disadvantages of administering multiple types of post-compulsory education as a single system?

The Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) 2014-2019 is the first to incorporate adult and community education (ACE) as an integral part of the tertiary education system⁴ with Priority 4 being “improving adult literacy and numeracy”. Importantly, ACE providers could also identify with at least three of the other priorities (specifically, Priority 1, Delivering skills for industry, Priority 2, Getting at-risk young people into a career, and Priority 3, Boosting achievement of Māori and Pasifika). In addition, as part of the global adult education network, the ACE sector has an important role related to Priority 5, Growing International Linkages. The approach taken in the TES 2014-19 suggests a focus on the outcomes or results of tertiary education rather than the method or system of delivery, which we support.

The inclusion of ACE in the tertiary system is appropriate in that ACE provides all adults with ongoing opportunities for learning as part of a satisfying lifestyle. As part of that, it offers the acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills as a “way out of poverty” or a way to improve earning capability and well-informed self-determination for individuals, whānau/ families and communities. ACE is a means for adults of all ages to keep current with technology, and stay “in touch” with global, national and local developments. It differs from the welfare sector in that ACE is not primarily focused on resolution of a particular personal crisis or life issue; rather ACE provides pathways for all adults’ ongoing learning and development.⁵ The focus is on building the capacity to learn, self-improvement and providing good role models for our children as well as manifesting the value of inclusiveness within the community of learning, with people actively supported to participate.

⁴ For example, the previous TES (2011-2014) included a separate section on ACE, identifying the specific priority areas thereby making the distinction from the formal tertiary education system.

⁵ ACE Learner Pathways Discussion Document 2015, www.aceaotearoa.org.nz

The “New Models of Tertiary Education” issues paper has a strong focus on current modes or institutions of delivery. That is perhaps inevitable, given that Aotearoa administers, funds and considers education in terms of the delivering institutions or providers⁶.

The ACE Sector is generally agreed to include the community education providers which are shown under “Other Tertiary Providers” (p9 of Issues paper) and which have little or no profile throughout the remainder of the document. In much of the community provision, learners start from a very low level (previous lack of success in education or no previous exposure to education), and many of the courses are shorter, non-formal and non-assessed⁷. These enable learners have a valuable opportunity to engage with non-threatening structured learning and to achieve initial success, from which the learners grow in confidence and ability to progress to higher levels of learning.

There is some overlap in terms of course provision by some community providers and some institutes of technology and polytechnics, particularly in respect of foundational level programmes (basic literacy and numeracy) and some vocational training. In general, the Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics are not categorised as part of the ACE Sector.

The level of government funding for non-formal, non-assessed community based education provision is determined by the policy positions of the government and the affordability of that investment⁸.

Especially when resources are scarce, there is a very high likelihood that priority will be given to learners who are ready to enter formal institutions to undertake foundational level courses as these learners give a faster and higher “return on investment” than the learners who need support and time to develop the resilience to cope with institution based structured learning⁹.

That prioritisation discounts, or totally ignores, the social (e.g. health and justice) and economic (eg receipt of welfare and lack of tax contribution) costs associated with adults who do not achieve above level 2 qualifications¹⁰

Participation in tertiary education is generally expected to open doors for the graduate, leading to interesting employment with higher levels of remuneration, and associated with better health and higher living standards. The data from the Ministry of Education workshop support the view that those with level 4 or above qualifications earn more, contribute more and cost the taxpayer less through the course of their lives¹¹.

We submit that the primary advantage of including adult and community education (ACE) as an integral part of the tertiary education system is that the stigma of participating in ACE is diminished, with a secondary advantage being that the foundational level courses are available in formal tertiary institutions for those with sufficient skills and resilience (again reducing the stigma of low literacy or numeracy).

The primary disadvantage is that there is an overemphasis on the easy positive returns, and a lack of focus on the prevention of waste and associated costs. There is little or no recognition of the distinct challenges faced by those who have previously been unsuccessful in their education experience, or have not had previous exposure to education

⁶ New Models of Tertiary Education, 98-9, Figure 6; Productivity Commission 2016

⁷ Non-formal ACE courses are typically provided in a classroom or similar setting may have relatively short duration, and if completed successfully will receive an acknowledgement of achievement from the provider. Some may result in a level 1,2 or 3 qualification, or no formally recognised qualification.

⁸ Adult and Community Education- the role of Government, ACE Aotearoa, 2014

⁹ In a time of Scarce Resources, Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2012

¹⁰ Ministry of Education workshop data, drawn from Integrated Data Initiative, 2014

¹¹ Ibid,

services. Their need to be supported into structured learning is under-estimated. Another, related disadvantage is that the vulnerable learners' rate of progress can be readily contrasted to learners in other parts of the education system (not just in tertiary) and they may be judged to be a poor investment- that is, not worthy of further education or effort. Associated with that is the risk that the ACE learner's low level of literacy/ numeracy and need for greater pastoral support can result in a generalised view that the person is lacking in a range of necessary qualities- and again the person is "written off".

An associated disadvantage is the discounting/ ignoring of the social and economic value of adults engaged in structured learning on a voluntary basis. The requirement that engagement is on a user pays basis means that many lower socio economic communities miss out on the benefits of adults engaged in ongoing structured knowledge and skills acquisition. The high cost to the taxpayer of adults with low or no qualifications over their lifetimes¹² raises the issue of whether a more proactive approach to encouraging adults to engage in education/ learning over their lives would be a more positive investment for the taxpayer.

The Development of a Learner Portal- "aceplace"- addressing a gap for learners

This section relates particularly to Question 2: Do prospective students have good enough education to enable them to make informed choices about providers and courses? What additional information should be provided? Who should provide it?

During 2015, ACE Aotearoa consulted with focus groups of ACE learners to seek their views on how the "system" worked for them. The focus groups included Maori, Pasifika, refugee and migrant learners, most of whom had low or no success in their education experience or, in some cases, had no previous exposure to general education.

Those face-to-face facilitated discussions were supplemented by online "hangouts". The strong consensus from all those consulted was that information about ACE courses was difficult to find and hard to access. Many of those for whom English was not their mother tongue had translation apps on their phones or devices, and even those with previous educational success in their home country reported that information was difficult to find and understand.

For ACE level courses provided through polytechnics or institutes of technology the information was "buried" in the wealth of information about all the other courses and programmes delivered by that institution. For community based ACE courses there was no "one stop shop" for learners to access and compare relative topics, structures or timetable options. Many ACE learners are confident "online surfers" and they described how extensive searching resulted in little or no meaningful information.

From that consultation, the notion of a learner portal (which was under consideration) was refined and further developed, making use of the identified eight adult learner profiles to structure a range of potential learning journeys¹³.

"ACEplace¹⁴" is a cloud-based system which, when fully operational, will be available to ACE providers to post (and keep updated) their courses and access details. Users will be able to search by region (geographical location), by topic/ subject area, and by provider. In addition, "ACEplace" is segmented into three key functional areas : 'learn', where learners can store (not time limited) their learning portfolio and personal learning related work in a private

¹² Ministry of Education workshop data; ibid

¹³ Learner Pathways Discussion Document; www.aceaotearoa.org.nz

¹⁴ "ACE place- learning happens here" is a catchy phrase promulgated by ACE Aotearoa during Adult Learners' Week/ He Tangata Matauranga 2014 which has been adopted by ACE providers and practitioners around the country.

space; 'share' where learners with common interests can set up communities of learners, or study groups and share information/ discussions between members of that shared space, and 'enjoy' where users/ learners can access (moderately addictive) 'negative thought buster'¹⁵ games, destroying negative thoughts against the clock and recorded on a competitive scoreboard. ACEplace is going to public release in April/May 2016.

Separating out ACE course information from other tertiary courses and programmes, and making the package which provides the details also the package where the learner can have their own space to record activities and progress, or share with others who have common interests is expected to facilitate finding the relevant information and then making use of it.

The enjoy section is expected to allow the user to build confidence and a positive attitude- possibly even before accessing or following up on course or related information.

The first year of implementation will provide feedback which will allow the learner portal application to be modified and improved (subject to funding).

Satisfying livelihoods: full participation in society and work- the result of successful education

This section relates particularly to Question 30: What is the best measure to determine whether the tertiary education system is working well?

Lifelong, intergenerational learning is essential for adults to maintain satisfying livelihoods and make positive contributions by acquiring new relevant information and skills as their own life circumstances and industry needs change.

In order to be able to assess whether the tertiary education system is working well it is first necessary to decide on the purpose of tertiary education. In our submission on the Education Act Update 2015 (which excluded the tertiary system), ACE Aotearoa endorsed the existing goals for the [compulsory] education system¹⁶, commenting that these goals are BHAGs¹⁷ - that is challenging but achievable. Our focus in that submission was on why, and how we should strive to achieve them.

The goals explicitly focus attention on the need for education to prepare learners to be "independent, contributing adults who are able to sustain satisfying, productive and prosperous livelihoods". Tertiary education was specifically excluded from that review, but it is considered the purpose of tertiary study is also intended to achieve that goal.

Because the tertiary education system provides higher learning for higher achieving school leavers, and also provides basic education opportunities for fresh start learning adults (those whose previous education experience has been unsuccessful or non-existent) - the most appropriate measure of the effectiveness of the tertiary education system is **"the proportion**

¹⁵ Negative thoughts are the common burden for many ACE learners and are the legacy of previous lack of success in education. Examples are: I am dumb, I cannot learn, Nothing I do works; I am useless.

¹⁶ The goals listed are: Goal 1: [early childhood and school education] should help grow young people who are confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners with a love of learning, (cf NZ Curriculum)

Goal 2: each learner will achieve his/her potential (cf Te Marautanga o Aotearoa);

Goal 3: the education environment will actively encourage intergenerational learning, where learners and their families affirm and extend their connecting links with the family and the wider world (cf Te Whāriki).

Goal 4: their education experience will equip school leavers to become independent, contributing adults who are able to sustain satisfying, productive and prosperous livelihoods.

¹⁷ Big Hairy Audacious Goals from Collins, J and Porras J., Built to Last: successful habits of visionary companies (Harper Business essentials) Paperback- June 2004

of adult citizens who are able to sustain satisfying, productive and prosperous livelihoods, who achieve their potential, and who extend their connecting links with the family and wider world”. ¹⁸

We currently “under achieve” against that measure.

The findings from the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) survey 2006 showed that around 43 percent of the New Zealand adult population have less than optimal literacy skills and 51 percent have less than optimal numeracy skills. That means that, at that time, there are up to one million adults with literacy and numeracy issues that stop them reaching their full potential. And the parallel data relating to school leavers show that between 10,000-20,000 per year leave school with low or no qualifications, meaning that in the decade since the reported ALL Survey, another 100-200,000 adults have joined the “under achievement” statistics.

The issue has been given more attention as the demographics across Aotearoa change and there is heightened awareness of inevitable changes in the nature of work opportunities. For example, the need for a greater proportion of Māori and Pasifika young people and adults to succeed and reach their potential as contributing adults acquired a new urgency and significance when the demographic modelling showed that up by 2020 to 40% of the working age population would be Māori or Pasifika. The statistics on the ageing population – with a growing proportion reaching retirement age, and more of those living longer has also fuelled the concerns about an economy dependent on low skilled and under-productive adults.

The ACE Aotearoa value set includes “Whakamanahia Te Tiriti o Waitangi; Enlivening Te Tiriti o Waitangi”. That means living in the spirit of true partnership. For decades there has been comment on the disproportionate representation of Tangata Whenua in the “negative statistics”- justice, welfare and education. The imminent demographic changes are making the need for real partnership more urgent. To become a truly productive sustainable economy and society we need to be a truly inclusive economy and society.

Then there is the complexity of what will be the nature of work in the future. There is general consensus that in the future, technology will continue to have a growing impact- but the only certainty is that both individual circumstances and industry needs will continue to change and adults need to be intellectually curious, agile and adaptable- they will need to learn new skills, acquire new knowledge, and maintain their information and skills in order to sustain satisfying and prosperous livelihoods.

A tertiary education system which welcomes and enables adults, (including older adults) to engage in lifelong learning, remaining independent and productive for longer is not only a high value asset for society, it is likely to become an essential component of improved productivity for that nation. The practice of simply importing workers to address local skill gaps is only sustainable when local people can be productively engaged in other roles. There are predictions¹⁹, that future work will be more sharply differentiated between a smaller number of high skill, high remuneration roles and a larger number of very low skill, very low remuneration roles with a collapse of much of the middle range roles that are currently sustaining the majority of the workforce. The associated social and economic transformations are likely to be costly to communities and society.

The common perception of the tertiary education system is that it is directed toward higher (level 4 and above) qualification study, including professional and trade qualifications. ACE

¹⁸ GDP, the usual measure of productivity, has inherent systemic and structural flaws, see *Against the Gods, The remarkable story of risk*, Peter L Bernstein, John Wiley, NY 1996

¹⁹ From the Future of Work Conference- 2016

Aotearoa accepts that is where the majority of the tertiary system is focused, and that the system has produced good graduates, world class scholars and well trained professionals and trades-people.

We submit that there is an urgent need to recognise that the tertiary system is much wider than that, and that it is essential to facilitate access for ongoing learning if we wish to maintain or increase productivity and well-being for New Zealanders into the future. More extensive engagement in ACE by adults, including older adults, can result not only increased/ longer participation in the workforce generating financial benefit for themselves and the wider economy, it can also result in reduced health-related costs (associated with delays in onset of dementia, avoidance of mental health issues, and social isolation) as well as improved social cohesion with intergenerational participation across a wider range of events, activities and occasions²⁰.

Learner Centred Education- allowing ALL learners to reach potential

This section relates particularly to Question 48 Are there other important types of new model that should be included within the scope of this inquiry?

In general, current focus on tertiary education tends to be on the “high end” of the system- level 4 qualifications and above, including quality research initiatives. That is, and has been, the largest part of the tertiary system. It is also where the greatest returns occur in terms of new developments and discoveries. The challenge when reviewing the system with a view to improving the outcomes from it is to consider how the product might be changed, rather than the “packaging” or mode of delivery.

Successful experience with ACE learners points to the possibility of a fundamentally different approach- learner centred education or structured learning.

Key to the learner centred approach is the individual tailoring of the material to be learned to that learner’s level and ability: first there is agreement reached on the goals of the learning, then the learner sets both the pace and the method of learning. There is also facility for the learner to be part of a group- whānau/ aiga/ family, intergenerational and/ or community. The educator is responsible for making relevant content accessible to the learner to expedite and facilitate the learning process.

Some examples include the acquisition of generic self-maintenance/ improvement skills, such facilitating the acquisition of the skill of learning (learning to learn), or developing the skills of problem solving, including analysis, assessment, collaboration, consultation and implementation either individually or as part of a group.

The learner centred approach is about supporting and facilitating each learner to reach the necessary standard of achievement- the intention is that no learner emerges from the experience believing (having learnt that) s/he is dumb, useless or cannot learn. That enables a more positive engagement in adult activities including achieving an independent, sustainable livelihood, the specific nature of which may change as the person matures.

One type of learner centred education is the Feurestein mediated learning method. That system was developed by Rueven Feurestein, a psychologist, post second world war to facilitate learning and achievement by the marginalised ethnicities and cultures in Europe (eg Jews, Gypsies, Slavs). It is a paper based system, where students are supported to develop pattern recognition, learning strategies analysis and critical thinking. Its efficacy relies on well trained professionals who are skilful in use of the resources and techniques,

²⁰ Value of ACE, ACE Aotearoa 2013.

with quality assurance delivered through a “supervision” type method. Notably, Feurestein gifted his method to the Kohanga reo movement when it was initiated as it has the same philosophy- every learner can succeed to the defined standard.

The results of such approaches in ACE non-formal non-assessed courses (often delivered in short courses) can be measured²¹ in terms of a change in the learner’s state (confidence and hope for the future) as well as in terms of skills and knowledge gains, and learning goals achieved.

Leave no-one behind- application of neuro-science in tertiary education

This section relates particularly to Question 57: What measures have been successful in improving access, participation, achievement and outcomes for people with disabilities? What measures have been less successful? Why?

This section of our submission will focus on adults with learning disabilities. Learning disabilities or disorders are a very broad category of issues which are strongly ‘individual’ in how they manifest, and an affected individual may have one or multiple issues (e.g. dyslexia and audio processing disorder; low muscle tone and memory impairments, autism spectrum; aspergers). The critical point in considering this issue is that these disabilities continue into adulthood.

The experience of ACE practitioners is that the young person with a learning disorder typically under-achieves in the compulsory school system. Many such learners are of average or better than average intelligence and are motivated or highly motivated and enrol in ACE courses to remedy their low achievements. It is thought that the percentage of all learning disabled students in ‘second chance’ adult education classes may exceed the percentage in the population as a whole, with some estimates as high as 80%.²²

However, repetition of educational practices which have not worked for them in the past only reinforces their sense of failure and creates further barriers to ongoing learning. Remedial services which are available to children and young people are not available (subsidised) for adults. There is an urgent need for remediation services that are effective and which can result in the adult learning disabled achieving the necessary skills and qualifications to lead independent, satisfying and prosperous lives.

The following is an excerpt from our submission to the Select Committee Education and Science: Inquiry into the identification and supports for students with the significant challenges of dyslexia, dyspraxia and autism spectrum disorders in primary and secondary schools:

“ACE Aotearoa works closely with the wider education sector. In recent years members of the ACE sector have followed research and presentations both in New Zealand and overseas about advances in neuroscience, and in particular the idea that what we now know about brain plasticity offers learners – including adult learners - new chances to ‘fix’ the blocks they have experienced to previous education. As advances in diagnostic techniques help us understand the causes of disorders, learners can get the remediation programmes best suited for them. ACE Aotearoa members are not experts in brain function or scientists, but the reported findings are consistent with what we see in our own work as educators.

Most recently ACE Aotearoa members attended the Education Leaders Forum in Auckland (aimed at leaders and aspiring leaders across the learning spectrum from early childhood to tertiary education and education stakeholders). This conference

²¹ ACE Learner Outcomes Tool

²² Seattle-King County Private Industry Council, *Learning Disabilities Project*, (2000).

focused on recent research and innovative learning practices for boosting student achievement. The conference was told that “There are important implications for all learners, not just those with disabilities, in a better understanding by all educators of new neuroscience and the general principles and specific practices of brain plasticity which assist learners strengthen weak cognitive capacities underlying learning dysfunctions through a programme of specific cognitive exercises”²³. This has huge potential for adult learners.

For some time our response to a diagnosis of learning disorder, both for school and adult educators, has been to ‘scaffold’ around the learner, providing additional support, such as reader/writer or resource teacher of learning and behaviour (RTLB) time or providing a more carefully structured learning process, such as that offered by the Feuerstein programme²⁴. These approaches have yielded results and continue to be part of best practice.

However, there are limitations to these approaches. The provision of direct support, such as a reader/writer for dyslexic learners, can support them through the formal school system, but does not support a transition to independence and self reliance, with poor outcomes for these learners after school or formal education. By contrast, the Feuerstein method has a strong focus on supporting students to ‘learn to learn’ and has been the gold standard where learning difficulties have their basis in emotional, psychological and social disabilities.

What we have observed as adult educators is that there is a core of adult learners who do not benefit even from the best that we have been able to bring to them using these approaches. As an example, Christchurch Polytechnic has developed programmes to ‘fast track’ discouraged adult learners, mainly into trade training programmes. The great majority of those who start the course are able to progress through four levels of foundation learning fast, using the current ‘best practice’ methods. However, a core of around 70 learners has not experienced any benefit from these interventions, despite their high levels of motivation and average or above intelligence levels.

This has led the ACE sector to explore emerging ideas about the application of neuroscience to overcoming learning disabilities²⁵. What we have found is that there is evidence that intensive retraining of those parts of the brain affected in learning disorders can change both brain structure and brain functioning²⁶. This offers the possibility of offering learners programmes to remediate the disorders experienced, rather than building supports around them. Examples of this approach are Fast forWord[®]²⁷, Cogmed²⁸ and the Arrowsmith Programme²⁹. These programmes are used in some New Zealand schools now, and their use is being considered in the tertiary sector.

Our view is that where these new approaches are proved effective, they should be offered to adult learners as well as those in the school system. It is unlikely that there will ever be a significant number of experts able to diagnose these conditions with precision, or of teachers skilled in the interventions available following diagnosis. We

²³ <http://www.smartnet.co.nz/events/ELF/2015.htm>

²⁴ <http://www.icelp.info/>

²⁵ An overview in : U Frith, D Bishop, C Blakemore, S Blakemore, B Butterworth, U Goswami Neuroscience: implications for education and lifelong learning, Integrating Science and Practice Vol.3 No.1 May 2013

²⁶ For instance: Pare´-Blagoev J. The neural correlates of reading disorder: functional magnetic resonance imaging. In Fischer KW, Bernstein JH, and Immordino-Yang MH (Eds), Mind, Brain, and Education in Reading Disorders. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 148–167.

²⁷ <http://www.scilearn.com/products/fast-forward>

²⁸ <http://www.cogmed.com/program>

²⁹ <http://www.arrowsmithschool.org/arrowsmithprogram-background/neuroplasticity.html>

would like to see those scarce skills located where they can be shared across the whole education system.”

At the present time, adult learners can access user-pays participation in Arrowsmith in Auckland and in Christchurch. The Christchurch programme is administered through Seven Oaks (private school). The Auckland programme is a trial “Arrowsmith in ACE” programme, administered at Te Whare Awhina (community house) and provided through ACE Aotearoa. We chose to trial the Arrowsmith programme because the fees paid cover the infrastructure (including learner assessment and teacher professional development) and quality assurance which is provided through electronic links from the national center in Toronto. In addition to the anecdotal evidence of success given by learners, independent university research (including from University of British Columbia, and University of Southern Illinois) is beginning to be published which shows the brain function changes associated with the Arrowsmith exercises³⁰. The issue of affordability for adult learners remains a barrier – where children may be supported by parents, most adults need to finance their own participation. In the absence of more systemic support, such as disability related course/ intervention funding, the approach will be to gradually amass evidence of success then seek philanthropic or industry sponsorship for future adult candidates.

Conclusion

Adult and Community Education is an integral and essential part of the tertiary education system. It provides a wide range of educational services, from basic education (level 1 literacy and numeracy) through to advanced courses across a range of subjects and areas.

Importantly, it champions the United Nations goal of Quality Education – Lifelong learning for all, looking to provide opportunities to all adult/ whanau and community learners who wish to engage in ongoing upskilling and development.

Participation in ongoing structured learning has positive value for the individual, for the whanau/aiga/ family, and for the community/ society with a reduction in costs (justice, welfare and health) to the taxpayer and an increase in social participation and cohesion, increased economic contributions and engagement.

Taxpayer funding for community based ACE courses varies from decade to decade. Current policy parameters for funding are set to assist learners who have low or no qualifications, with priority areas being literacy, numeracy, English language (particularly as a second language), Te Reo and Sign. The evidence of “market demand” for ongoing adult education is evidenced in the number of user pays courses available (often in the more affluent suburbs), and in the volume of community based learning initiatives (such as Menz Sheds).

We submit that lifelong and intergenerational learning are essential for acquiring and maintaining relevant skills and knowledge as personal circumstances and industry/ society’s needs change if we are to achieve ongoing improvement in the wellbeing of New Zealanders.

³⁰ Arrowsmith Research Initiatives Report, November 2015; access via www.arrowsmithschool.org