

Adult and Community Education (ACE) in Aotearoa New Zealand

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What is Adult and Community Education (ACE)

- Adult and Community Education (ACE) is a diverse and vibrant part of New Zealand's education system.
- It offers **non-formal and community-based learning opportunities** for adults.
- The focus is on **lifelong learning**, personal development, social inclusion, and community engagement.
- ACE helps people build confidence, develop skills, and engage more fully in society.
- ACE has evolved over 65 years as a response to social change – not just a space for learning, but a platform for empowerment, particularly for Māori and marginalised communities.



A Brief History of ACE in NZ

- ACE has roots in **19th-century workers' education**, **Māori wānanga**, and **faith based-run initiatives**.
- **1960s–70s**: Social movements (e.g. Māori rights, feminism, peace) influenced movement-based education; growth in lifelong learning.
- **1980s**: Māori education initiatives grew (e.g. Te Ataarangi), but ACE suffered under neoliberal cuts.
- **1990s–2000s**: ACE was absorbed into the broader "tertiary" sector; policy became more vocational and economically driven.
- **2010s–2020s**: Further marginalisation of non-formal ACE, exacerbated by funding cuts and digitisation. Covid-19 intensified inequalities but also opened new avenues for digital learning.

What Makes ACE Unique?

- **Learner-centred:** Often informal, tailored to learner needs and aspirations.
- **Community-based:** Delivered by a wide range of providers, including NGOs, iwi, schools, churches, and libraries.
- **Flexible and responsive:** Targets hard-to-reach learners, including Māori, Pacific peoples, refugees, and the elderly.
- Often offered **free or at low cost** to remove barriers to participation.



Who Delivers ACE?

- **Schools with adult and community education programmes**
- **Wānanga and PTEs** (Private Training Establishments)
- **Community organisations and NGOs**
- **Libraries and local councils**
- **Iwi and marae-based education providers**

These groups work in partnership with government agencies to deliver funded programmes.

Government Support and Policy

- Funded primarily through the **Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)**.
- The **ACE fund** supports learning aligned with government priorities like:
 - Literacy and numeracy
 - Community resilience
 - Māori and Pacific success
 - Pathways to further learning or employment
- Recent strategy: **Tertiary Education Strategy 2020–2025** prioritises lifelong learning and equity.

ACE Aotearoa – National Voice for ACE

- **ACE Aotearoa** is the **national umbrella organisation** for adult and community education.
- ACE Aotearoa was formed through successive sector reforms and activism, merging organisations like NZACCE and NRC. Its roots lie in a sector that resisted cuts and reasserted the social purpose of education
- Advocates for the sector, builds capability, shares best practice, and promotes the value of lifelong learning.
- Key roles:
 - **Policy advocacy** at national level
 - **Professional development** and training for ACE providers
 - Hosting **national hui and conferences**
 - Publishing research and sector news
 - Promoting **Te Tiriti o Waitangi** in education

Our work ensures that ACE remains **relevant, equitable, and innovative.**



Why ACE Matters

- Increases **social cohesion** and community wellbeing
- Improves **employment prospects** and readiness for further study
- Supports **intergenerational learning** and whānau development
- Reduces isolation and promotes **mental health and confidence**
- Vital for **digital inclusion** and helping people navigate a changing world

Looking Ahead

- **Challenges:**

- Limited funding
- Data and impact measurement
- Access for rural and marginalised communities

- **Opportunities:**

- Cross-sector collaboration
- Embracing digital learning
- Targeted support for underrepresented learners
- Strengthening Māori and Pacific-led education initiatives

ACE – Education for All, for Life

- ACE plays a crucial role in building an **inclusive, resilient, and empowered society**.
- It is a space where **education meets community development**.
- With organisations like **ACE Aotearoa** leading the way, the future of lifelong learning in Aotearoa has its challenges and many opportunities.

ACE stories

- The Hui – Maranga programme
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkXsFqnh_P0
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Questions