ACE LONGITUDINAL STUDY

ACE makes a difference: building pathways, providing opportunities & creating outcomes

FINAL REPORT – STAGE 3 – 2006

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Responsibility for the presentation and interpretation of data in this report lies with the authors.

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings from a three-year longitudinal study of ACE learners. The project was commissioned by the ACFE Board and undertaken by the Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning (CPELL) at the University of Melbourne. The respondents were first surveyed in 2004 when they were undertaking a course at an ACE provider, and recontacted again in 2005 and then in 2006. The findings presented in this report relate to the 646 respondents who participated in all three years of the study, a sample of the 3,047 students who were surveyed in Stage 1.

2. Study pathways

2005 Course completion

Nearly half of the cohort had been studying in 2005 (314 respondents, 49% of the cohort): 64 per cent had completed their course by 2006; 26 per cent were continuing; and 10 per cent had left study without completing.

Completion rates:

- were slightly higher for female then male learners (65% compared to 60%) but males (28%) were more likely to be continuing in their course than females (25%);
- were higher amongst those from a language background other than English (LBOTE) (identified as those people who spoke a language other than English at home) than English language background people (75% and 62% respectively). However, LBOTE people were less likely to be continuing in their course than English language background people (22% and 26% respectively);
- varied by 2005 provider type: 68 per cent of those studying in an ACE course in 2005 had completed, while another 21 per cent were continuing. This compares to an equal proportion of learners completing and continuing in TAFE (43% completed and 43% continuing), and high completion rates amongst those in private training providers (73% completed and 20% continuing).

Non-completion rates were:

- higher amongst those who originally undertook their ACE course at a non-metropolitan provider, compared to a metropolitan provider although this varied substantially across the regions;
- higher for those who were unemployed in 2005 (29% of this group did not complete compared to 9% of those employed in 2005 and 8% for those not in the labour force).

2006 Study

- 29 per cent of the cohort was studying in 2006. Of these 57 per cent were studying in a new course, while 43 per cent were continuing their 2005 study.
- For those undertaking a new course, the level at which they were studying varied across all qualification levels: 34 per cent were undertaking a non award course, 17 per cent were doing a basic VET course (Certificates I & II), 28 per cent are enrolled in middle level VET (Certificates III & IV), and 17 per cent were enrolled at a diploma level or above. A very small proportion were studying a school level course. Provider type also varied: 55 per cent were studying at an ACE provider, 10 per cent at a TAFE institute, 16 per cent at a private provider, 13 per cent at a university and 6 per cent at school.

Motivations for study

- Overall the main motivations for those studying a new course in 2006 were: to 'improve well being and confidence' (93% agreement) and to 'meet new people and share a learning activity' (89% agreement), and to 'develop new interest or activity' (82% agreement).
- When we look back at the reasons given for studying the original 2004 ACE course, there are differences evident between those who continued to study in ACE, and those who subsequently undertook study in another sector. Those who moved out of the ACE sector were more likely to have enrolled in their original ACE course for economic and vocational reasons than those who stayed in ACE.

Study pathways 2004 – 2005 – 2006

Strong links were reported by those studying a new course in 2006 between that course and study they had undertaken in 2004 (at an ACE provider) and 2005 (at an ACE or other provider):

- 78 per cent said that their experiences of study in 2004/05 had encouraged them to apply for their new course;
- 75 per cent said that their 2006 course followed on from what they were studying in 2004/05;
- 68 per cent said that completing their 2004 or 2005 course had helped them to get into new course.

Decisions made about study options (and in particular where to study) in 2005, in general, filtered through to choices made in 2006:

- those who continued to study in the ACE sector in 2005, continued to study there in 2006 if they chose to undertake any study at all (43% continued to study in ACE in 2006, 6% undertook study in another sector and 51% did no study).
- conversely, those who moved out of the ACE sector to study in 2005 were more likely to continue to study outside the ACE sector

in 2006, again, if they chose to study at all (60% continued to study in a non-ACE course in 2006, 39% did not undertake any study at all, and less than one per cent returned to study in the ACE sector in 2006).

- 94 per cent of those not in study in 2005 were not in study in 2006.

Those taking the non-ACE study pathway were more likely to have originally enrolled in an award course at ACE than those who continued to study in ACE over the three years.

Not in study in 2006

Of those surveyed in 2006, seven in ten were not in any form of study (71%, 458 respondents) Two-thirds of this group were working either full-time or part-time. Time constraints were the main reason given for not being in study, with 66 per cent indicating that they 'don't have time' for study.

- 15 per cent of this group reported that they wanted to study in ACE but the course they wanted to study was not available.

3. Impact of learning

When reflecting on the impact of their learning (both their 2004 ACE study and 2005 study in ACE or elsewhere) over the duration of the longitudinal study, and in particular on the skills and competencies acquired.

- **Improved self confidence** was seen as a key benefit of study for everyone (86% agreement).
- **Better communication skills** were reported by 74 per cent of respondents as an outcome of their learning experiences.
- ***Gender*** differences were small: men were slightly more likely to report improved learning skills, while women gained qualifications and jobs.
- Larger differences were evident when responses were examined by ***language background***. LBOTE people were more positive and emphatic about their experiences on all items (particularly in reference to acquired study skills, with 78% of LBOTE people reporting that they learn and study better as a result of their study compared with 64% of English language background people; and 69% of LBOTE people noted improved literacy and numeracy compared with 42% of English language background people). The largest difference between the two groups was an improved understanding of 'the way Australians live and what they think', with 75 per cent of LBOTE people agreeing compared to 45% of English language background people.
- People in the middle ***socio-economic*** band were the most positive about their learning experiences.
- People who were ***unemployed*** in 2005 were most likely to say in 2006 that their study experiences had improved their confidence

(92% compared to 86% and 85% of those working and not in the labour force), and improved study skills: 77 per cent agreed that their course helped them to 'learn and study better' (65% for those working and 68% for those not working and not looking for work). Those unemployed were also most likely to report improved communication and socialisation skills.

4. Experience of ACE

Respondents also reported on their experience of ACE in terms of its learning environment, general experiences in ACE and ACE programs:

- Overall, respondents were extremely positive about their experiences of learning in ACE. There was strong endorsement of the ACE sector's learning environment by all students.
- However, 39 per cent of respondents felt that the 'course was too short for the content that had to be covered'.
- While most people reported that information about study pathways was available in terms of what level study came next and where they could do this (79% and 77% respectively), this still leaves one in five who reported that they were not able to gain this information from their ACE provider.
- Nearly one-quarter of respondents felt that there should have been links been their ACE course and the workplace (23%).
- Overall, respondents thought there was a good range of courses available in ACE (88% agreement) and that they were very affordable (84%).
- Half of our respondents commented that ACE courses should focus more on skills for job seeking.

Gender breakdown of responses revealed that when it comes to learning in ACE, men were more positive than women on nearly all items – although these differences were small. Men were more likely to say that they had access to study pathway information and also to formal certification. Women on the other hand were slightly more likely to say that they had access to advice and help if they had difficulties.

Language background. There were not large differences between English language background people and LBOTE people when it came to agreeing with the positive statements on learning in ACE. Both groups were extremely positive in this regard. However LBOTE people were much more likely to say that the course was too short for the content (55% compared to 36% of English language background people), that the course was harder than expected (33% compared to 26% English language background people), and that there were too many people in the class (20% compared to 10%). LBOTE people were also more likely to say that they wanted their ACE courses to have links with the workplace (34% compared to 21% of English language background people). And 19 per cent reported that their course finished before it was scheduled to,

compared to only 7 per cent of people from an English language background.

Those from the ***lowest socioeconomic status*** *(**SES**)* quintile (i.e., the poorest 20% of the population) were, in general, the least positive about the ACE learning context whereas those in the middle SES band were most positive about their ACE experience. Those from the lowest quintile SES were most likely to report that they would have liked their ACE course to have had links with the workplace.

Those who were ***unemployed in 2005*** were least likely (compared to workers and those not in the labour force) to be positive about their learning experiences in ACE and to report a lack of access to information about study pathways. One-third (33 per cent) would have liked to have seen links between their ACE course and the workplace (compared to 21% of workers and 23% of those not in the labour force). Those who were unemployed in 2005 were also most likely to report that their course was cut short (23% compared to only 9% of those not in the labour force and 6% of those employed). They were most likely however to have reported access to certification. Those who were unemployed emphasised that ACE courses should focus more on skills for job seeking (67% compared to 49% for those working).

5. Work & ACE

63 per cent of respondents were employed when they were surveyed in 2006, 9 per cent were looking for work and 28 per cent were not in the labour force. Those who were working saw strong connections between their 2004 ACE or 2005 study and their work:

- 73 per cent said that their study helped with tasks they do at work
- 61 per cent said it taught them skills to help them get a better job
- 47 per cent said that it helped them to get a job, and
- 26 per cent said that their study helped them to set up or run a business.

There were even stronger links made by those workers who had been ***unemployed in 2005***:

- 68 per cent of those who were unemployed in 2005 reported that their study had taught them skills to help them get a job, and
- 58 per cent said that their study had helped them to get a job.

LBOTE people were more emphatic than English language background people about the links between their study and work.

Those in the ***lowest SES*** band were least likely to find connections between study and work.

Over the duration of the longitudinal study:

- the proportion of workers employed full-time more than doubled from 13 per cent in 2004 to 28 per cent in 2006
- The unemployment rate declined to one-third, from 24 per cent in 2004 to only 8 per cent in 2006. Of those who had been unemployed in 2004, 52 per cent were working in 2005 and 63 per cent were working in 2006. Only 27 per cent remained unemployed in 2005, but this dropped to 19 per cent in 2006.
- The proportions working part-time and not in the labour force have remained fairly constant.

6. Community building & ACE

There was an increase in levels of community engagement by the cohort throughout the duration of the study, as measured by the proportion of the cohort engaged in volunteer work, from 27 per cent in 2004 to 37 per cent in 2006.

7. Conclusion

This longitudinal study has identified some key benefits of studying in ACE, as well as some challenges for the sector, over the three years of the project. Over the duration of the study, the contribution that ACE has made to the cohort as a whole – as well as for different groups – has become evident. We have seen that ACE:

- provides a platform for further study - offering encouragement, laying a foundation and assisting with entry to new and higher level courses, both within and beyond the ACE sector;
- creates connections with work – building employment related skills for workers and strongly supporting acquisition of jobs for unemployed people;
- expands involvement in leisure activities, particularly for people who are not in the labour force;
- strengthens understanding of Australian culture and values, particularly for LBOTE people;
- builds communication, social and life management skills, particularly for unemployed people.

The work and study pathways of respondents, revealed by this study, clearly demonstrate the powerful capacity of the ACE sector to engage learners and connect them to further study, employment and involvement in their local community.

1. Introduction

In 2004, the ACFE Board commissioned a 3 year longitudinal study of ACE learners

In 2004, the ACFE Board commissioned the Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning (CPELL) at the University of Melbourne to undertake a three-year longitudinal study of ACE learners. The project measures the ACE sector's impact, effectiveness and community reach by addressing the following broad questions:

- Does ACE make a difference (and, if so, how do we know?)
- For whom does ACE make a difference?
- What is it about ACE that makes a difference?

Stage 1 consisted of a classroom-based survey of over 3,000 ACE students

Stage 1 of the project, undertaken in 2004, took a 'community-studies' approach which took account of the defining qualities of the ACE sector – its localism, accessibility, responsiveness and community base. Stage 1 involved intensive work with five selected ACFE regions and over 40 ACE providers. A cross-section of 3,047 ACE participants in these providers undertook a classroom-based survey which aimed to establish demographic data, employment status, educational background, their expectations and rationale for being in ACE, the quality of their learning experience, and aspirations for the future. Surveying took place from May to September in 2004. Findings from Stage 1 were reported in *A community-studies approach to researching strategic issues in ACE* (Walstab and Teese, 2005).

Table 1. Survey responses, Stages 1 to 3, 2004 to 2006

Stage 1:	
ACE students surveyed in 2004	3047
Stage 1 (2004) respondents who agreed to be surveyed in 2005	1348 (44%)
Stage 2:	
Study respondents surveyed 2005 (of possible 1348)	846 (63%)
Unable to be contacted 2005	502 (37%)
Stage 2 (2005) respondents who agreed to be surveyed in 2006	803 (95%)
Stage 3:	
Study respondents surveyed 2006 (of possible 803)	646 (80%)
Unable to be contacted	157 (20%)
Stage 3 (2006) respondents who agreed to be surveyed again	594 (92%)

Stage 2 of the project involved follow-up telephone interviews with 846 of the participants who had been surveyed in Stage 1, approximately 12 months after the initial contact (May 2005). This represented 63 per cent of Stage 1 participants who had agreed to be re-contacted in 2005 (see Table 1 above). The 2005 re-contact yielded further data on the work and study status of the cohort (in ACE or elsewhere), the contribution of ACE, pathways identification, and the respondents' reflections on their experiences in ACE. Findings from Stage 2 were reported in *ACE Connects! Pathways to Education, Employment and Community* (Walstab, Volkoff and Teese, 2005).

A sample (846) of learners was recontacted 12 months later for Stage 2

This report presents the findings from Stage 3 of the longitudinal study. Participants were surveyed in May 2006, to further identify patterns of participation in relation to a range of socio-economic and demographic variables and to provide new data on learners in ACE and their experience of study. It aims to measure individual and community benefits which might accrue from participation in ACE over the longer term. In particular, Stage 3 aims to:

- identify patterns of participation in relation to a range of social and demographic variables;
- track student destinations, (including some of the priority learner groups identified in the Ministerial Statement on ACE, 2004); and
- identify long-term outcomes and benefits of participation in ACE.

By their very nature, longitudinal studies provide an opportunity to measure the impact of a learning experience over the longer term, as well as to track the study and work pathways. As such, the findings from this study can be used to inform the ACE community, for policy development as well as for provision planning purposes at the provider level. This study has become the subject of an ACE Circle of Professional Research Practice where using action research processes, provider staff build on the study to inform their own research practice.

The 2006 Survey Cohort

The 2006 cohort comprised 646 respondents who had been surveyed at 12 month intervals from 2004 to 2006. Their initial survey was completed when they were undertaking an ACE course in a provider located in one of five ACFE regions: Eastern Metropolitan, Northern Metropolitan, Western Metropolitan, Central Highlands Wimmera or Loddon Campaspe Mallee. The original 2004 sample was constructed to represent the regional distribution of students across these regions in Victoria. It has remained consistent across all three cohorts (see Table 2 below).

The findings from Stage 3 are presented in this report and are based on responses from 646 people

In 2006, 65 per cent of those surveyed had studied in metropolitan Melbourne, compared to 35 per cent who had undertaken their 2006 ACE study in the non-metropolitan regions.

Table 2. Regional distribution of the 2006, 2005 and 2004 survey cohorts

ACFE Region	*% 2006 Cohort*	*% 2005 Cohort*	*% 2004 Cohort*
Eastern	*35.1*	*35.0*	*35.1*
Northern	*9.9*	*9.5*	*9.9*
Central Western	*19.8*	*20.8*	*18.6*
Metropolitan	*64.9*	*65.2*	*63.6*
Central Highlands Wimmera	*18.4*	*18.1*	*20.3*
Loddon Campaspe Mallee	*16.7*	*16.7*	*16.1*
Non-metropolitan	*35.1*	*34.8*	*36.4*
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*

The cohorts remained generally consistent (in terms of characteristics) over the 3 years of the study

Table 3 below shows the gender distribution of the survey cohorts. In 2006, 80 per cent of those surveyed were female, a slightly higher proportion than the original cohort (76% female).

Table 3. Gender distribution of the 2006, 2005 and 2004 survey cohorts

Gender	*% 2006 Cohort*	*% 2005 Cohort*	*% 2004 Cohort*
Female	*79.3*	*77.5*	*75.9*
Male	*20.7*	*22.5*	*24.1*
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*

Two-thirds of those surveyed in 2006 were over 40 years of age, 12 per cent were aged between 15 and 24 years and 21 per cent aged between 25 and 39 years (see Table 4 below). A smaller proportion of young people were surveyed in 2006 compared to 2004. This is perhaps to be expected with greater mobility amongst younger age groups.

Table 4. Age distribution of the 2006, 2005 and 2004 survey cohorts

Age Group	*% 2006 Cohort*	*% 2005 Cohort*	*% 2004 Cohort*
15-24 years	*11.6*	*12.1*	*14.4*
25-39 years	*20.8*	*20.4*	*22.4*
40-49 years	*28.5*	*28.1*	*26.7*
50-64 years	*29.5*	*29.3*	*28.3*
65 years and over	*9.7*	*10.1*	*8.1*
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*

Another group that is less well represented in the 2006 cohort are people with a language background other than English (LBOTE) identified in this study as people who reported speaking a language other than English at home, (16% compared to 28.5% in 2004).

Table 5. Language spoken at home, proportion 2006, 2005 and 2004 survey cohorts

Language spoken at home	*% 2006 Cohort*	*% 2005 Cohort*	*% 2004 Cohort*
English only	*84.0*	*80.4*	*71.5*
English & other language/ Other language only	*16.0*	*19.6*	*28.5*
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*

One-quarter of those surveyed in 2006 were born overseas. Years of arrival in Australia reveal a steady rate of migration from 1947 to 2004. Of those born overseas, approximately 15 per cent were refugees who entered Australia through the Humanitarian program.

Table 6 below details the educational attainment of the 2006, 2005 and 2004 cohorts. We can see here that a small proportion of the 2006 cohort had completed primary school only (2.3%), 34 per cent had undertaken some secondary schooling (but not completed) while another 23 per cent had completed school, but had not undertaken any further study. Nearly 16 per cent had gained an AQF certificate, while 24 per cent had gained a higher education qualification.

Table 6. Highest level of schooling, prior to ACE enrolment, 2006, 2005 and 2004 cohorts

Highest Educational Level	*% 2006 Cohort*	*% 2005 Cohort*	*% 2004 Cohort*
Primary school only	*2.3*	*2.9*	*6.5*
Some secondary school	*34.3*	*34.4*	*32.9*
Completed secondary education	*23.1*	*22.2*	*23.0*
Special School	*0.0*	*0.0*	*0.7*
Apprenticeship	*3.4*	*3.5*	*3.4*
TAFE certificate	*12.4*	*12.4*	*11.3*
TAFE diploma	*8.2*	*8.2*	*7.3*
University degree	*16.0*	*16.5*	*15.0*
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*

The socio-economic breakdown of the cohorts is shown in Table 7 below. Nearly half of those surveyed in 2006 were from Victoria's lowest two socio-economic quintiles, (i.e., the poorest 40%) where SES is assigned according to the postcode of respondents' home address. One-quarter of the cohort was from the highest SES quintile (the wealthiest 20%).

Table 7. Sample socioeconomic status (SES) in quintiles

SEIFA level	*% 2006 Cohort*	*% 2005 Cohort*	*% 2004 Cohort*
Lowest 1	*22.6*	*23.4*	*26.6*
2	*25.3*	*25.2*	*22.8*
3	*13.8*	*14.2*	*14.7*
4	*12.9*	*12.7*	*12.1*
Highest 5	*25.4*	*24.4*	*23.9*
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*

While there are proportionally fewer men, young people and those speaking a language other than English at home in the 2006 survey group, the cohorts have remained generally consistent from 2004 to 2006. All data reported from this point forward refers to the 646 respondents surveyed in 2004, 2005 and 2006. The next section examines the study pathways taken by the 2006 cohort.

2. Study pathways

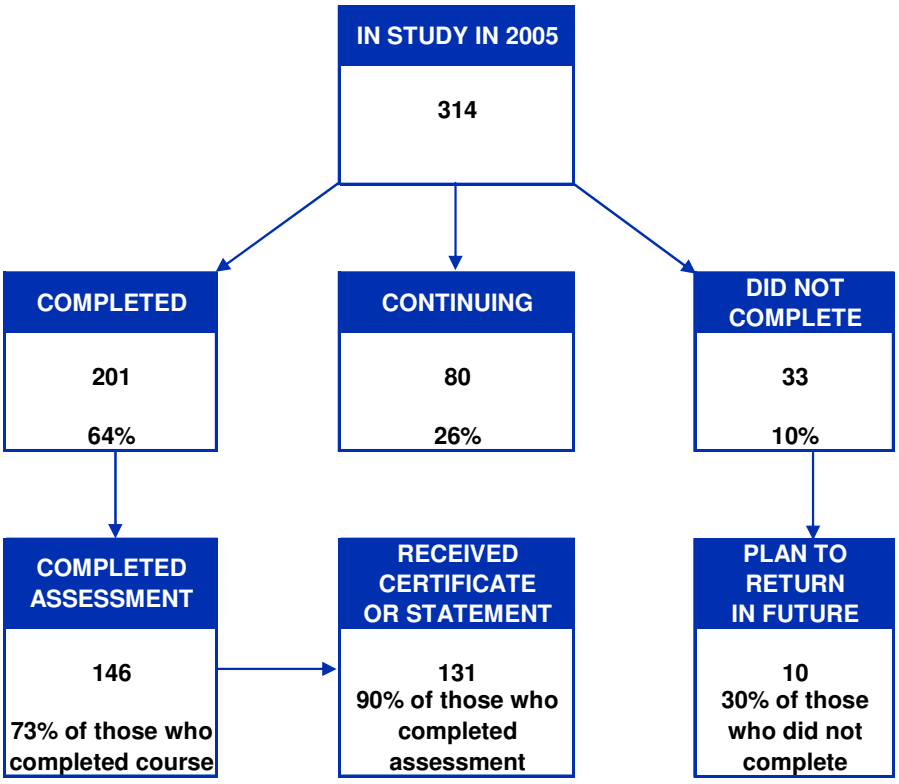
This section looks at the study pathways taken by the cohort, firstly from 2005 to 2006 and then through the duration of the three years of the longitudinal study.

2005 Course Completion

Course completion rates for the cohort were high

Nearly half of the cohort had been studying in 2005 (65% of study activity was in the ACE sector). Figure 1 below shows the completion patterns of this group. Of the 314 respondents studying in 2005, 64 per cent had completed their course by 2006, 26 per cent were continuing and 10 per cent had left without completing.

Figure 1. Study completions - 2004 and 2005 courses.



Nearly three-quarters (73%) of those who completed reported also having completed the formal assessment for their course (if it were available) and 90 per cent of this group received a certificate or statement of attainment.

Of the small group of non-completers, 30 per cent reported an intention to return to the course in the future.

Completion rates were slightly higher for women than men…

Completion by gender

Completion rates were slightly higher for female (65%) then male (60%) learners but males (28%) were more likely to be continuing in their course than females (25%).

Completion by region

There were higher rates of non-completion among those who originally undertook their ACE course at a non-metropolitan provider, compared to a metropolitan provider (12.3 per cent compared to 9.6 per cent). Although as we can see from Table 8, this varied substantially across the regions.

Table 8. Study completion rates for regions

	% Metropolitan				*% Non-metropolitan*		
	All Metro	*M1*	*M2*	*M3*	*All Non-metro*	*R1*	*R2*
Completed	*68.8*	*71.2*	*65.4*	*66.2*	*54.7*	*55.9*	*53.2*
Continuing	*21.6*	*19.8*	*26.9*	*22.5*	*33.0*	*37.3*	*27.7*
Did not complete	*9.6*	*9.0*	*7.7*	*11.3*	*12.3*	*6.8*	*19.1*
Total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*

Completion by language background

… and for LBOTE people

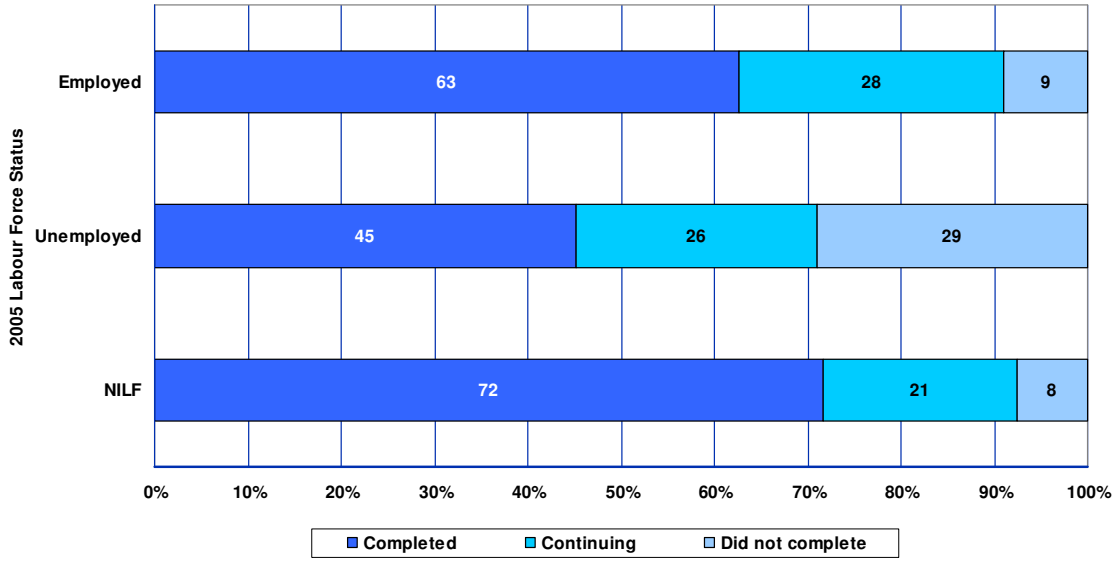
2006 respondents who were from a language background other than English (LBOTE) were much more likely to complete their course as English language background people (75.0% and 61.7% respectively). However, they were less likely to be continuing in their course than English language background people (21.7% and 26.1% respectively). It is important to note that this was not the case for 2005 respondents when LBOTE people reported being twice as likely to not complete their 2004 course as English language background people (15.8% and 7.5% respectively).

The group of people whose language background was other than English was very diverse. The languages they spoke, their prior education, years of residence in Australia and the courses they were studying varied. This would possibly have had an impact on course completion. For example, a new arrival studying in an English language course may discontinue their study as soon as they have sufficient English language proficiency to gain employment. The 2006 respondents who reported speaking a language other than English at home reported arrival in Australia fairly evenly between 1947 through to 2004.

Completion by labour force status in 2005

Figure 2 below shows the completion rates of the 2006 cohort by their labour force status in 2005. Just over six in ten respondents were working either full-time or part-time in 2005 (61%), 12 per cent were looking for work and 27 per cent were not in the labour force (see Chapter 5: Work & ACE). We can see from Figure 2 that completion status did vary by labour force status.

Figure 2. Completion by 2005 labour force status (%)



Those who were not working and not looking for work (i.e., not in the labour force) in 2005 were the group most likely to complete their course, with 72 per cent of this group having completed. Another 21 per cent were continuing their 2005 study in 2006 and 8 per cent did not complete.

Non-completion rates were also low amongst the workers. Only 9 per cent had left their course without completing, while 63 per cent had completed and another 28 per cent were continuing their 2005 study.

We can see from Figure 2 above that those who were unemployed in 2005 had the highest non-completion rates (29%), and were the least likely to have completed their course (45% had completed).

Those who were unemployed in 2005 had the highest non-completion rates

Completion by 2005 provider type

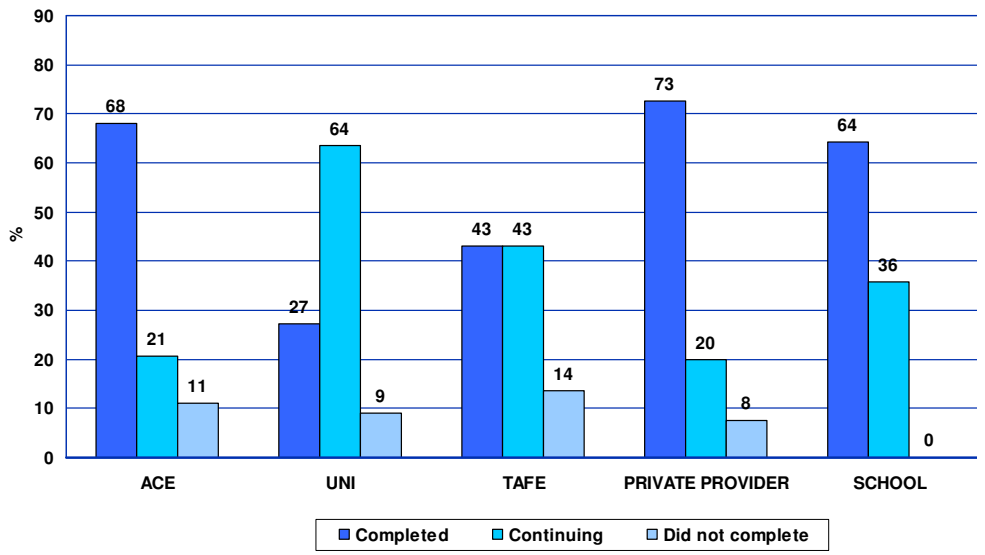
While a large proportion of 2005 study activity was undertaken in the ACE sector (65 per cent), another 14 per cent (44 students) were studying in the TAFE sector, 12.7 per cent at a private training provider (40 students), and a small proportion were each at university (3.5%) and school (4.4%).

Figure 3 below shows the completion pattern for these students by their 2005 provider type. To some extent, these patterns reflect the nature of each sector. For example, those studying at university are most likely to be continuing, but this would be expected due to the nature and length of degree courses offered in higher education.

68% of ACE students had completed their 2005 course compared to 43% of TAFE students. However another 43% of TAFE students were continuing through to 2006 compared to 21% of ACE students

Two-thirds of those in ACE had completed their course, while another 21 per cent were continuing. This compares to an equal proportion of learners completing and continuing in TAFE (43% each), and high completion rates amongst those in private training providers (73% completed and 20% continuing). It is important to keep in mind the different numbers that make up each of these groups.

Figure 3. Completion by 2005 provider type (%)

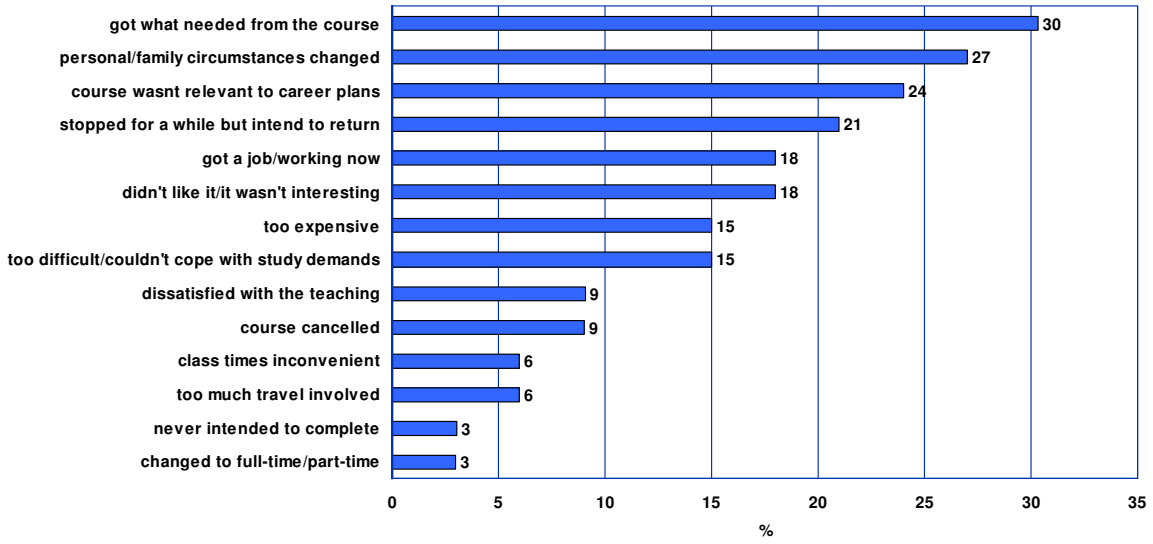


Non-completion

As was shown in Figure 1, only a very small proportion of the cohort that was studying in 2005 left their course without completing (10%, 33 people). The reasons for not completing for this group are shown in Figure 4 below.

The non-completion rate was low

Figure 4. Reasons for not completing 2005 course (% agreeing)



The most common reason given for not completing was that they had 'got what they needed from the course' (30%). Over a quarter (27%) cited changing personal and family circumstances as the reason for having left their course.

Two other reasons were employment related: 24 per cent said that the course was not relevant to their career plans, while 18 per cent reported having found a job as a reason for discontinuing their study.

The main reasons for leaving were personal – not having enough time and changing circumstances

For 15 per cent of non-completers, the course in which they were enrolled was too expensive and/or too hard. Another 9 per cent cited poor teaching as a reason for leaving. However, it is important to note the numbers here: 9 per cent represents only 3 people.

Just over one-fifth (21%) of those who had dropped out indicated that they intend to return to that course in the future.

Study in 2006

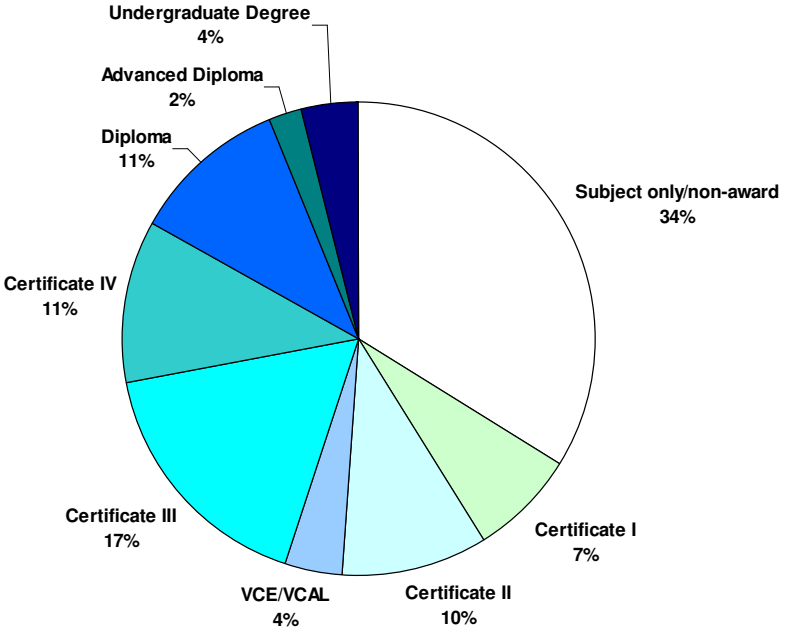
This section examines the study status of the cohort when they were surveyed in 2006, 2 years after their original ACE study. As we can see from Table 9 below, 29 per cent of the cohort was studying in 2006. Of these, 57 per cent were studying a new course, while 43 per cent were continuing their 2005 study.

29% of the 2006 cohort was in study

Table 9. Study status 2006

Study status 2006	*n*	*%*
In Study	187	28.9
in new course	107	16.6
continuing 2004 or 2005 course	80	12.4
Not in study	459	71.1
TOTAL	646	100

Figure 5. 2006 study in new course, by level (n=107)



Two-thirds of those in a new course were doing an award level course

Figure 5 shows the level of study for those doing a new course in 2006. Of these, 34 per cent were undertaking a non award course, 17 per cent were doing a basic VET course (7% in Certificate I and 10% in Certificate II), 28 per cent were enrolled in middle level VET (17% in Certificate III, 11% in Certificate IV), and 17 per cent were enrolled at a diploma level or above (11% in diploma, 2% in advanced diploma and 4% in undergraduate degree). A small proportion was studying a school level course (4% VCE or VCAL).

Providers of 2006 new courses

For those studying a new course in 2006, 55 per cent were studying at an ACE provider (see Figure 6 below). Ten per cent were undertaking their course at a TAFE institute, 16 per cent at a private provider, and 13 per cent at a university. A small proportion (6%) was studying at school.

55% of those in a new course were in ACE

Figure 6. 2006 study in new course, by provider type (n=107)

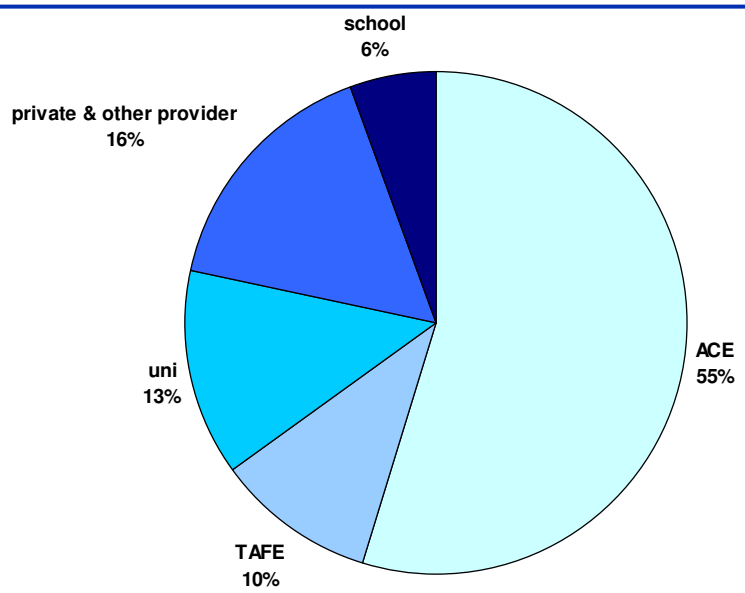
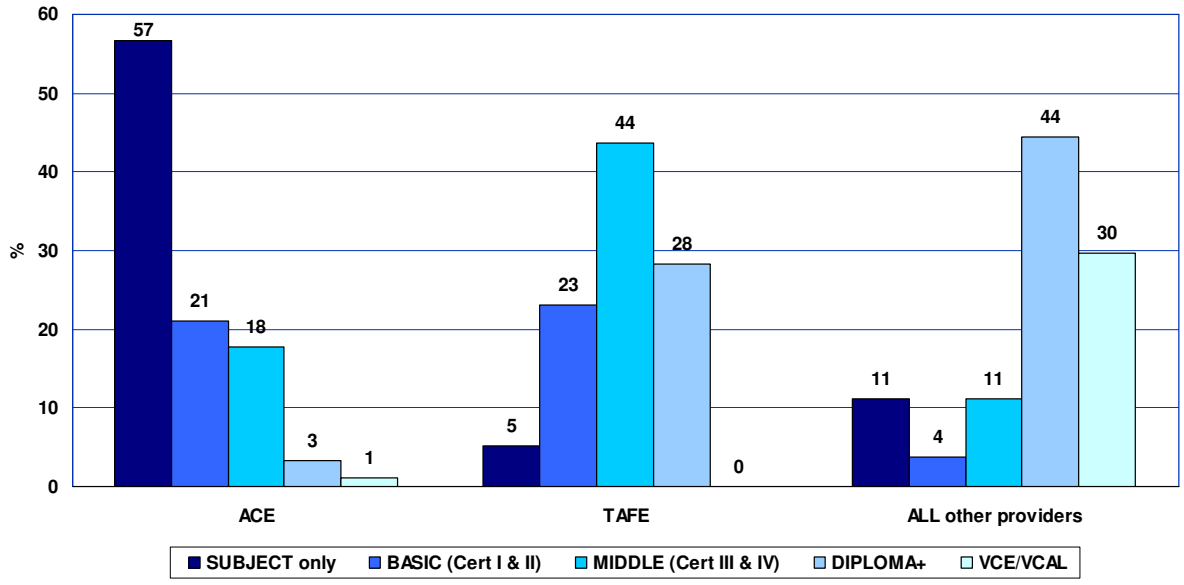


Figure 7 below shows the level of study by sector for all those in study in 2006 (new and continuing courses). More than half the activity in ACE was at the subject only or non-award level (57%), 21 per cent was in a Certificate I or II course, and another 18 per cent at Certificate III or IV.

Figure 7. Level of study in new and continuing courses by sector



in

Nearly all activity undertaken at a TAFE institute was at an award level, with the greatest proportion of study being undertaken at a Certificate III or IV level (44% of TAFE activity). Diploma or above accounts for 28 per cent of activity and Certificates I and II for 23 per cent.

Motivations for study

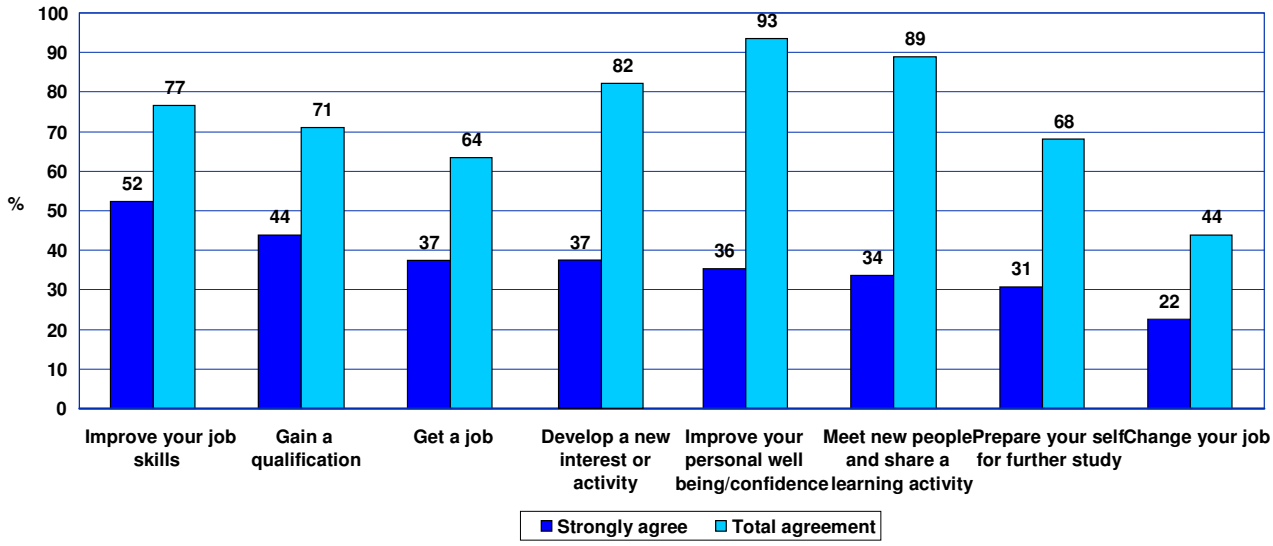
All those enrolling in a new course in 2006 were asked about their motivations for doing so. Figure 8 presents the responses, showing separately the proportion 'strongly agreeing', and total agreement.

Improving self confidence is a main motivation for study

We can see here that overall, there were two main motivations for study in a new course, both involving enriching personal experience: to improve well being and confidence (93% agreement) and to 'meet new people and share a learning activity' (89% agreement). In addition, 82 per cent of those doing a new course noted that they were doing so to develop a new interest or activity.

When we look at only those who strongly agreed with a statement, more particular motivations emerge. These were to improve job skills (52% strongly agreeing), gain a qualification (44% strongly agreeing) and to gain work (37% strongly agreeing).

Figure 8. Motivations for study in new course



Sector of 2006 study and motivations in 2004

Already we are seeing two groups emerging here: those who have stayed in study in the ACE sector, and those moving to other providers. Figure 9 below shows the motivations that these two groups reported, when they enrolled in their initial ACE course in 2004 (55% of those doing a new course are still in the ACE sector).

We can see here that two motivations were important for everyone, regardless of the sector they moved into: 'to gain particular skills or knowledge' (89% agreement for the ACE group, 88% agreement for the non-ACE); and 'to explore a new interest or activity' (89% ACE, 85% non ACE).

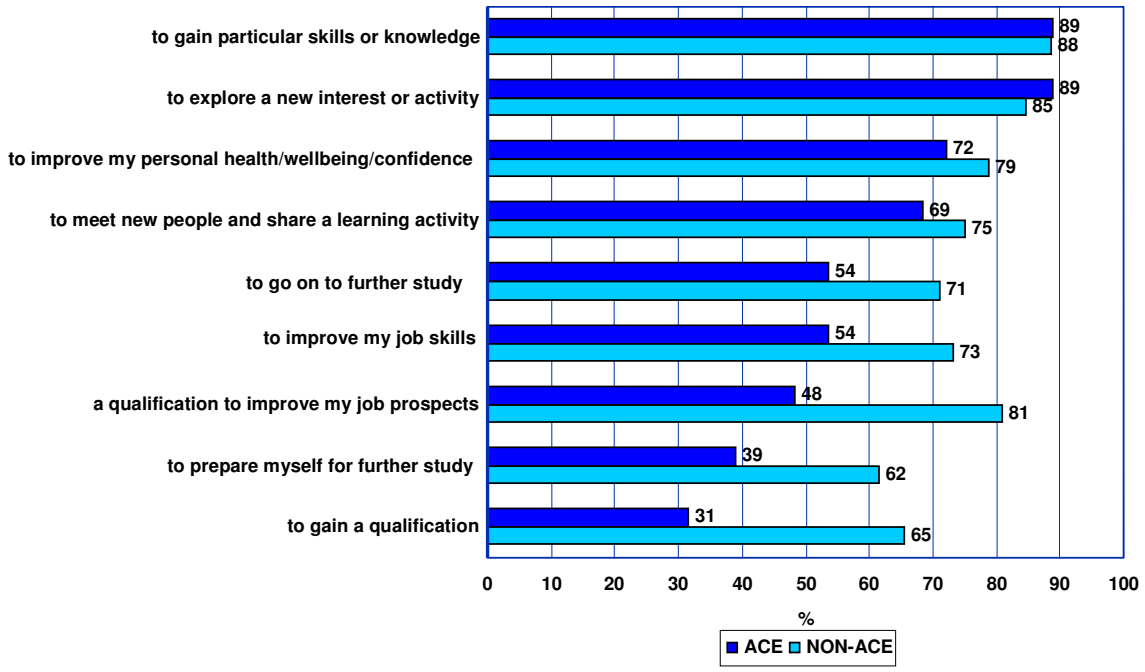
In 2004 everyone wanted to do their ACE course to gain skills and explore a new interest

We then see small differences between items referring to socialisation and personal improvement: 'to improve personal health, wellbeing, confidence' (72% agreement for ACE group, 79% non ACE); and 'to meet new people and share a learning activity' (69% ACE, 75% non ACE).

Larger differences however exist for the more vocational and economic motivations. Those who have moved out of the ACE sector were more likely to have enrolled in their original ACE course: 'to gain a qualification to improve job prospects' (81% of the non-ACE group agreeing compared to 48% of the ACE group agreeing); 'to prepare for further study' (62% agreement for non ACE, 39% for ACE); 'to gain a qualification' (65% of the non ACE group agreeing compared to 31% of the ACE group); 'to go on to further study' (non-ACE 71%, ACE 54%); and 'to improve job skills' (non-ACE 73% agreement compared to ACE 54%).

Those who were studying outside of the ACE sector in 2006 were more likely to have had economic and vocational motivations when enrolling in their 2004 ACE study

Figure 9. Motivations for 2004 ACE study by sector of 2006 study



Connections between 2004 ACE study, 2005 study and 2006 study:

Those studying a new course said that their previous study experiences impacted on their 2006 study options in a positive way

Strong links were made by those studying a new course in 2006 between that study and previous study undertaken in 2004 (at an ACE provider) and 2005 (at an ACE or other provider).

Of those studying in a new course:

- 78 per cent said that their experiences of study in ACE in 2004 or study in 2005 had encouraged them to apply for the new course
- 75 per cent said that their 2006 course followed on from what they were studying in 2005 or in ACE in 2004
- 68 per cent said that completing their previous ACE course or study in 2005 had helped them to get into the new course.

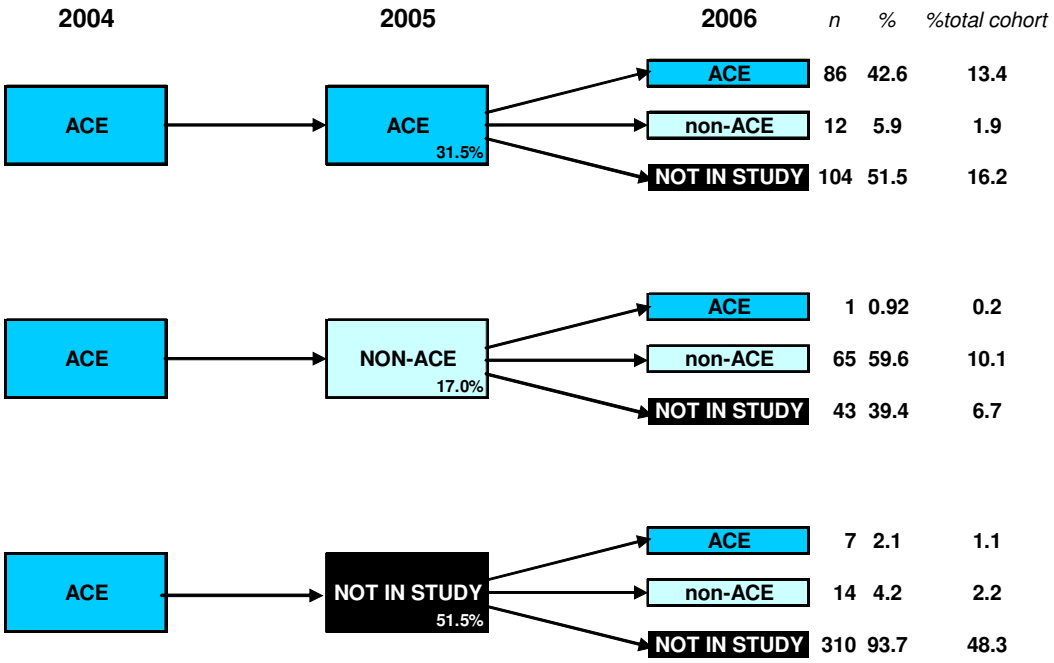
Study Pathways 2004, 2005, 2006

This section examines the study pathways taken by the cohort over the three years of this longitudinal study. Figure 10 below summarises the movement of all respondents from their ACE study in 2004 to either: further study in another ACE course in 2005 and 2006; to study in another sector; or to no further study.

Decisions about where and whether study was undertaken in 2005 were reflected in the choices made in 2006

We can see from this diagram that decisions made about study options in 2005, in general, filtered through to choices made in 2006. Those who continued to study in the ACE sector in 2005, for example, continued to study there in 2006 (if they chose to undertake any study at all). More specifically, of the 31.5 per cent of the cohort who undertook another ACE course in 2005, 43 per cent continued to study in ACE in 2006. Only 6 per cent of this group undertook study in another sector and 51 per cent did no study at all in 2006.

Figure 10. ACE/non-ACE Study pathways 2004-2006



On the other hand, those who moved out of the ACE sector to study elsewhere in 2005 were more likely to continue to study outside the ACE sector (again, if they chose to study at all). We can see from Figure 10 that 17 per cent of the cohort went from studying an ACE course in 2004 to studying a non-ACE course in 2005. Of these, 60 per cent continued to study in a non-ACE course in 2006 and 39 per cent did not undertake any study at all in 2006. Less than one per cent returned to study in the ACE sector.

Only 6 per cent of those who did not study in 2005 returned in 2006

Nearly all of those who did not take up any study in 2005, also did no study in 2006 (94% of those not in study in 2005 were also not in study in 2006).

Characteristics of different pathway groups

Tables 10 to 12 below detail the characteristics of three different pathway groups: those who stayed in ACE over the three years of the study; those who moved from ACE to continue to study in another sector; and those who moved out of study in 2005 and did not return in 2006.

Table 10 below shows the course levels for each group for both 2004 and 2006. Here we can see that the qualification profiles for the ACE group in 2004 and 2006 were similar, except with a higher proportion in Certificate III or IV courses in 2006 compared to 2004 (19% and 12% respectively) and lower proportion in Certificate I or II courses (21% and 30% respectively).

Those taking the non-ACE pathway were more likely to have originally enrolled in an award course at ACE than those on the ACE pathway (66% in 2004 compared to 45% ACE group). The 2006 distribution for this group also favours the higher level qualifications (with 26% in a Certificate III or IV course and 35% in Diploma or above in 2006).

Table 10. Course level 2004 and 2006 by pathway group

	ACE study pathway				*NON-ACE study pathway*				*NO STUDY pathway*	
	Course level 2004		*Course level 2006*		*Course level 2004*		*Course level 2006*		*Course level 2004*	
	N	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Subject Only	*47*	*54.7*	*48*	*55.8*	*22*	*33.8*	*7*	*10.8*	*162*	52.3
Certificate I/II	*26*	*30.2*	*18*	*20.9*	*27*	*41.5*	*11*	*16.9*	*82*	26.5
VCE/VCAL	*3*	*3.5*	*1*	*1.2*	*1*	*1.5*	*7*	*10.8*	*0*	0.0
Certificate III/IV	*10*	*11.6*	*16*	*18.6*	*15*	*23.1*	*17*	*26.2*	*66*	21.3
Diploma+	*0*	*0.0*	*3*	*3.5*	*0*	*0.0*	*23*	*35.4*	*0*	0.0
Total	*86*	*100.0*	*86*	*100.0*	*65*	*100.0*	*65*	*100.0*	*310*	*100.0*

Gender

Men were under-represented in the ACE study pathway group

Table 11 below gives the gender distribution of each group. Men were most likely to be moving from 2004 ACE study to no further study (males made up 26% of those in the 'no study pathway') and least likely to have remained in ACE over the three years (making up 13% of this group). Women were most highly represented in the ACE pathway group.

Table 11. Pathway group by gender

	ACE study pathway (%)	*NON-ACE study pathway (%)*	*NO STUDY pathway (%)*
Male	*12.9*	*15.4*	*25.5*
Female	*87.1*	*84.6*	*74.5*
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*

Socio-economic status

Table 12 below details the socio-economic distribution of each group. The lowest SES quintile group is under represented in the non-ACE study pathway group but over represented in the no study group. However if we take the lowest two quintiles together, the distribution is fairly even (highest proportions are in the no study pathway).

Table 12. Pathway group SES quintiles

SES quintiles	*ACE study pathway (%)*	*NON-ACE study pathway (%)*	*NO STUDY pathway (%)*
lowest	*22.4*	*10.9*	*27.2*
2	*21.2*	*39.1*	*22.0*
3	*14.1*	*12.5*	*14.4*
4	*14.1*	*7.8*	*11.5*
highest	*28.2*	*29.7*	*24.9*

Language background

LBOTE people were most highly represented in the ACE pathway group

Table 13 below shows the distribution of each group by language spoken at home. 21 per cent of those staying in ACE over the three year period were LBOTE people, compared to 15 per cent of the non-ACE study pathway and 13 per cent of the no further study pathway.

Table 13. Pathway group by language spoken at home

Language background	ACE study pathway (%)	NON-ACE study pathway (%)	NO STUDY pathway (%)
English	77.9	84.6	87.0
Other than English	20.9	15.4	13.0

Labour force status

If we look at the 2006 labour force status of the different groups (this is examined in more detail in Chapter 4), we can see that 16 per cent of those in the ACE study pathway were employed full-time, compared to 28 per cent in the non-ACE study group and 35 per cent in the 'no study' group.

The no study pathway group had the highest proportion of full-time workers

The lowest unemployment rate was found amongst those in ACE, although the differences were small (5% ACE, 8% non-ACE and 6% no study). A large proportion of those who stayed in ACE were not in the labour force (42% compared to 22% in the non-ACE group and 24% in the no study group).

The non-ACE pathway group had the highest proportion of part-time workers

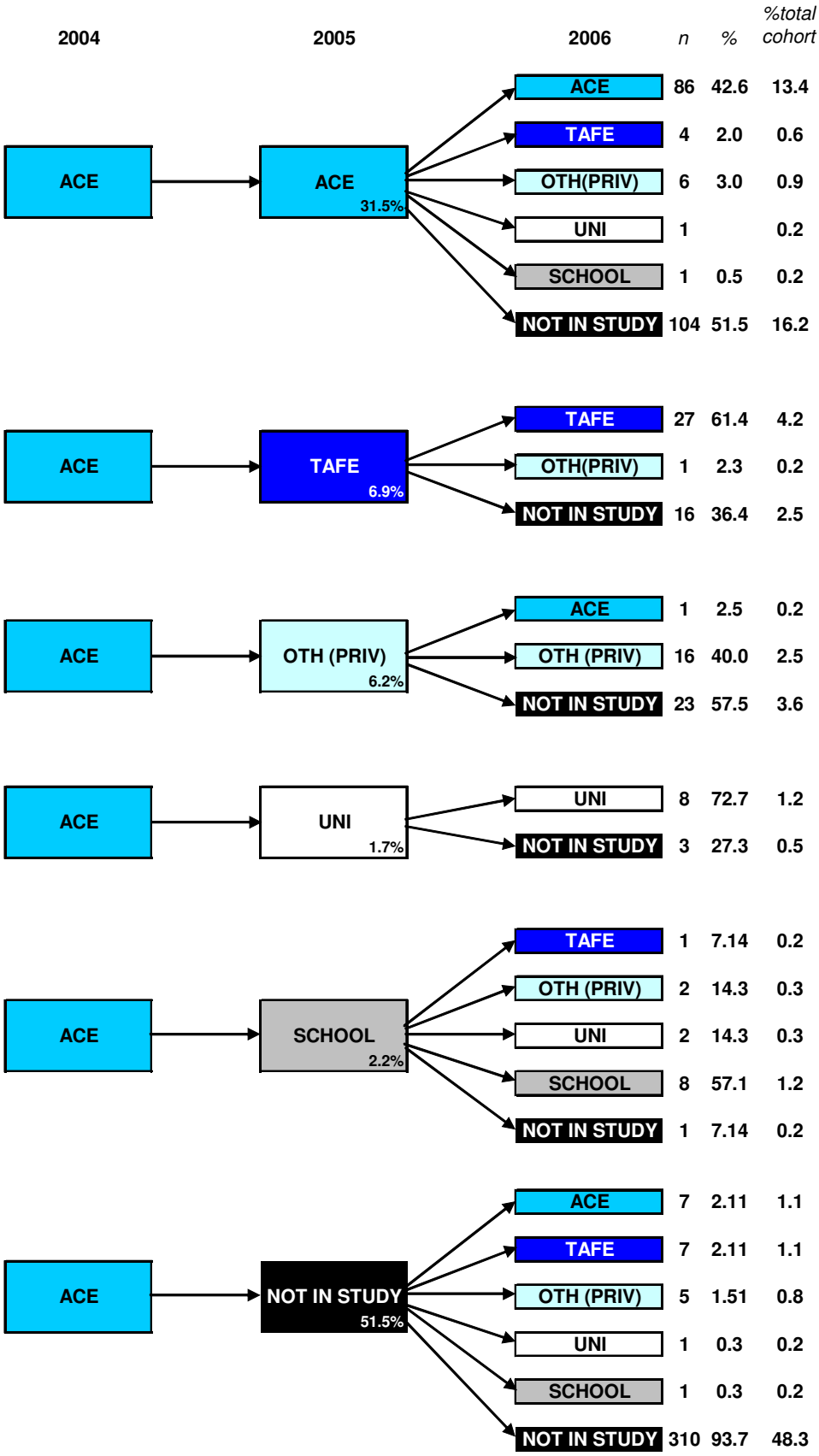
The ACE study group had the highest proportion not in the labour force

Table 14. Pathway group by 2006 labour force status

Work Status 2006	ACE pathway (%)	NON-ACE pathway (%)	NO STUDY pathway (%)
Employed Full-time	16.3	27.7	35.3
Employed Part-time	37.2	43.1	34.3
Unemployed	4.7	7.7	6.1
Not in the Labour Force	41.9	21.5	24.3

Figure 11 below shows the study pathways taken by the cohort in more detail (by provider type).

Figure 11. Study pathways by provider type



Not in Study in 2006

71% of the cohort was not studying in 2006….

Of those surveyed in 2006, seven in ten were not in any form of study (71%, 458 respondents). The reasons reported for not undertaking any study are shown in Figure 12 below.

… mainly because they didn't have time

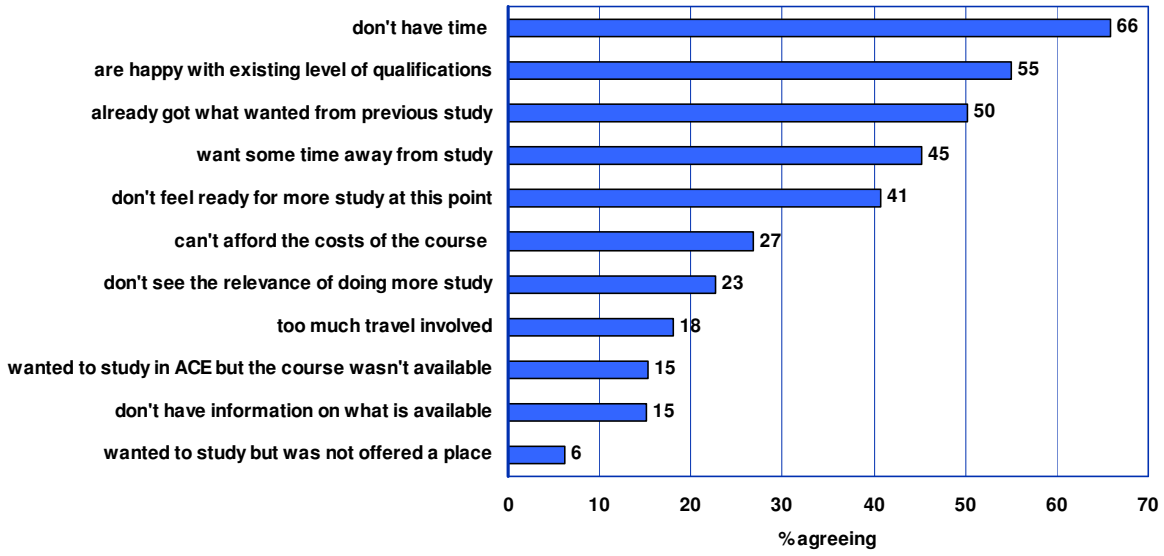
Time was an issue for two-thirds of this group, with 66 per cent indicating that they 'don't have time' for study. More than half were satisfied with existing qualifications (55%) or reported that they had already gained what they wanted from previous study (50%).

Some respondents reported wanting some time out from study (45% 'want some time away from study', and 41% 'don't feel ready').

Over one-quarter of people (27%) noted financial issues, saying they 'can't afford the costs of the course' and 15 per cent also said that they 'didn't have information on what is available'.

One ACE-specific reason was chosen by 15 per cent of this sizable group, indicating that they 'wanted to study in ACE but the course they wanted to study was not available'.

Figure 12. Reasons why not studying in 2006



When asked if there were any interventions from their provider that could have helped facilitate further study, most respondents indicated that there were none (see Table 15 below).

Table 15. Interventions to facilitate study (for 458 people not in study)

Responses	*n*	*%*
no	*405*	*88*
better teaching, learning support, responsiveness	*25*	*5*
don't know	*9*	*2*
course availability	*8*	*2*
better information about courses	*6*	*1*
support for financial issues	*3*	*1*
child care availability	*3*	*1*

3. Impact of learning

In this chapter, we explore the responses we received when we asked the cohort to reflect on the impact of their learning experiences over the duration of the longitudinal study. For just under half of the respondents this related to their 2004 ACE study (48% of the cohort did not take up any subsequent study). Others would have been able to draw on their learning experiences in 2005 as well (in ACE and elsewhere). Chapter 4 focuses on the experience of learning specifically in ACE.

Here we examine the responses for the cohort as a whole and for different groups (gender, language background, SES, labour force status). Two different sets of indicators are used: skill development and capacities.

Skills developed through study in ACE and in any other provider 2004-2005

The 2006 survey cohort was asked about the skills they felt they had developed through their study experiences. The responses are shown in Figure 13 below. We see here a large proportion of the cohort pointing to improved self confidence (86% agreed that their study had helped them to 'feel more confident').

Improved self confidence was reported to be a main benefit of study….

Study skills also rated highly. Two-thirds of the cohort reported that their study had helped them to 'learn and study better' (66% agreement), and 46 per cent felt that their literacy and numeracy skills had improved. Over half (54%) said that they had gained a qualification.

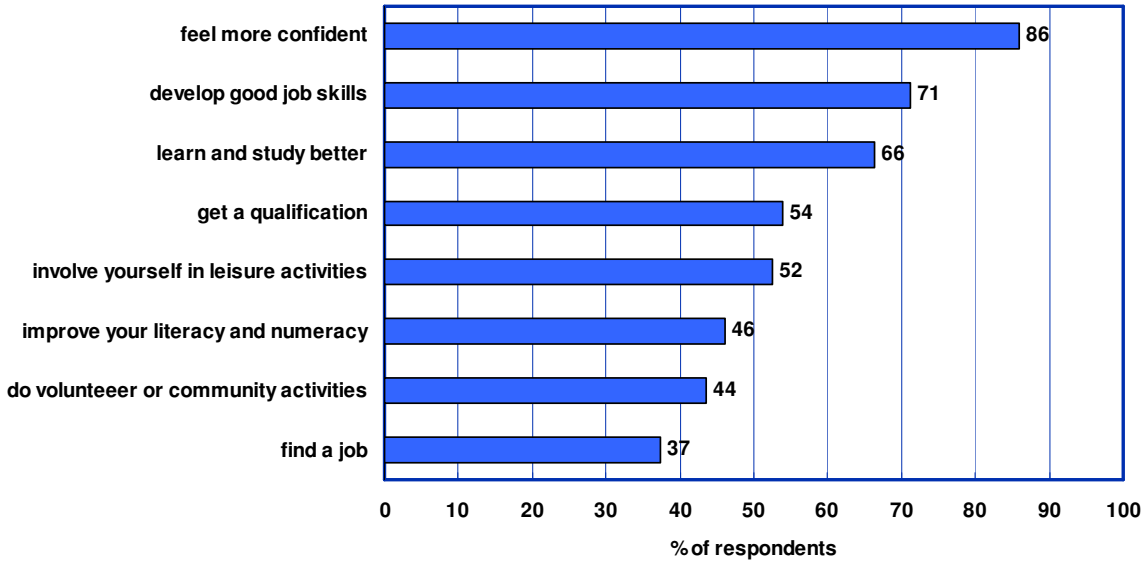
… as were improved study skills…

Improved capacity to work was a major benefit, with 71 per cent of respondents reporting that their study had enabled them to 'develop good job skills', and 37 per cent reporting that it had helped them to find work.

… and good job skills

Other skills of a less vocational nature included participation in leisure activities (52% agreed). Community strengthening was also important to a sizable number of respondents, with 44 per cent reporting that their study had helped them to undertake volunteer or community activities.

Figure 13. Impact of 2004 ACE study and any 2005 study

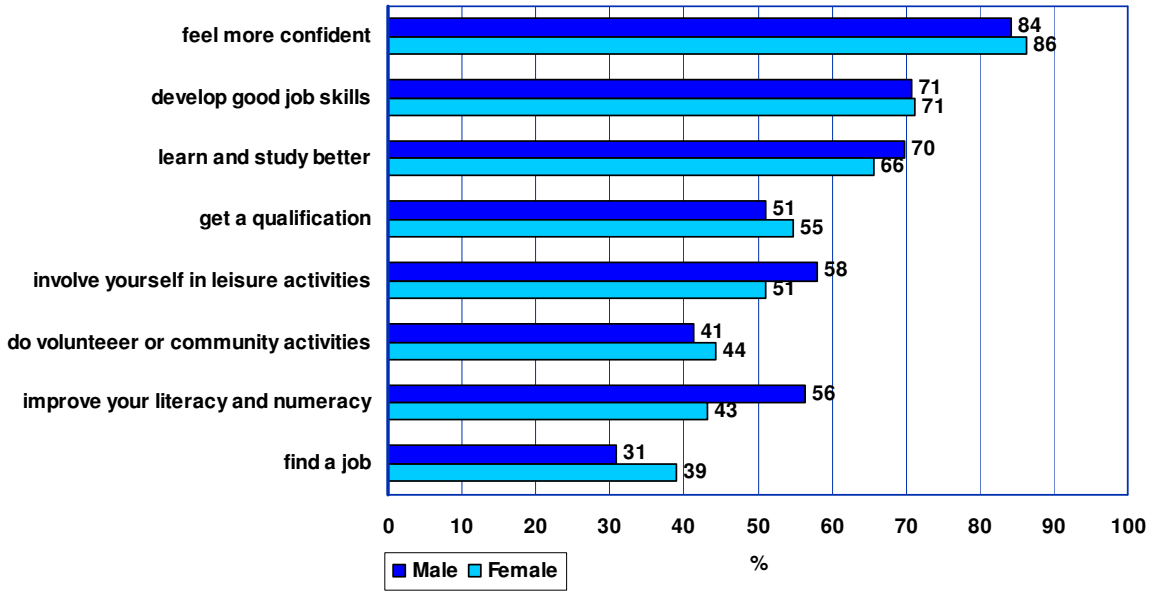


Gender

Men reported improved study skills and women gained qualifications and jobs

Figure 14 reveals the differences in responses given by men and women in the cohort. We can see here that overall differences are small. However, men were slightly more likely to comment on their improved study skills (70% of men compared to 66% of women agreed they could now 'learn and study better') and considerably more likely to say they had improved numeracy and literacy (56% of men compared to 43% of women). Women, on the other hand, were slightly more likely to say they had gained a qualification (55% compared to 51% of men) and found a job (39% compared to 31% of men). So, while gaining confidence was important for all respondents, men were more likely to report gaining learning skills, while women were more likely to report gains of qualifications and jobs.

Figure 14. Impact of 2004 ACE study and any 2005 study by gender



Language background

LBOTE people were more positive than English language background people about what they had gained from study

Much greater differences are revealed when we look at the responses of LBOTE people and English language background people. While both groups reported that their study had helped them to develop good job skills (71% for English language background and for LBOTE people), on all other items LBOTE people were more emphatic about their experiences (see Figure 15 below).

This is particularly true for items relating to study skills, with 78 per cent of LBOTE people reporting that they learn and study better (compared to 64% of English language background people). Perhaps unsurprisingly, 69 per cent of LBOTE people noted improved literacy and numeracy skills (compared with 42% of English language background people).

LBOTE people were also more likely to report that they have gained not only qualifications (63% LBOTE people compared to 53% English language background people) but also that their study has helped them to find a job (46% LBOTE people compared to 36% English language background people). Other non-vocational aspects also included: involvement in leisure activities (63% LBOTE people compared to 50% English language background people) and community engagement (53% LBOTE people compared to 42% English language background people).

Figure 15. Impact of 2004 ACE study and any 2005 study by language background.

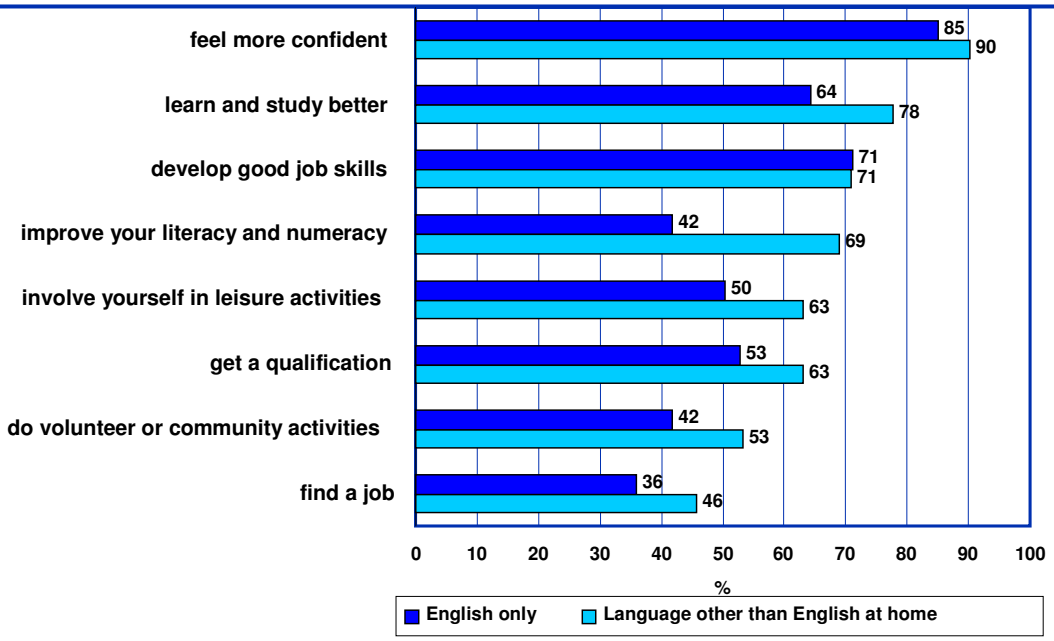
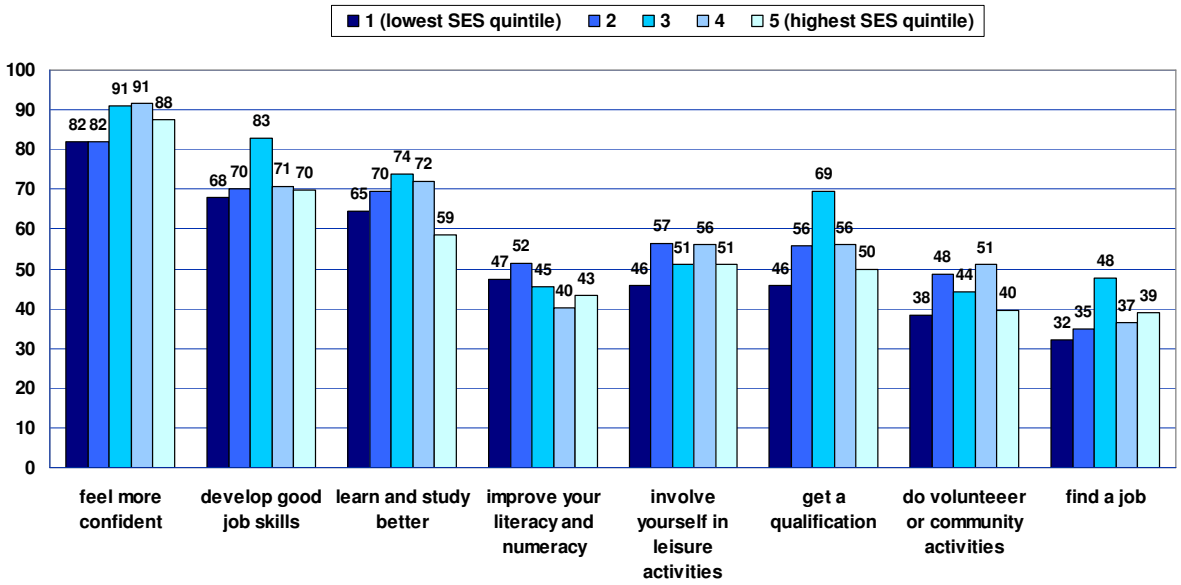


Figure 16. Impact of 2004 ACE study and any 2005 study by SES.



Socio-economic status

Figure 16 above shows the responses of the cohort broken down by SES quintiles. We can see from this chart that it is the middle group of the SES bands that are the most positive about their learning experiences.

Labour force status 2005

Another perspective is provided in Figure 17 below. Some interesting findings are revealed when we compare the responses given by those who were employed in 2005, by those who were unemployed and those who were not in the labour force.

Workers developed good job skills through their study

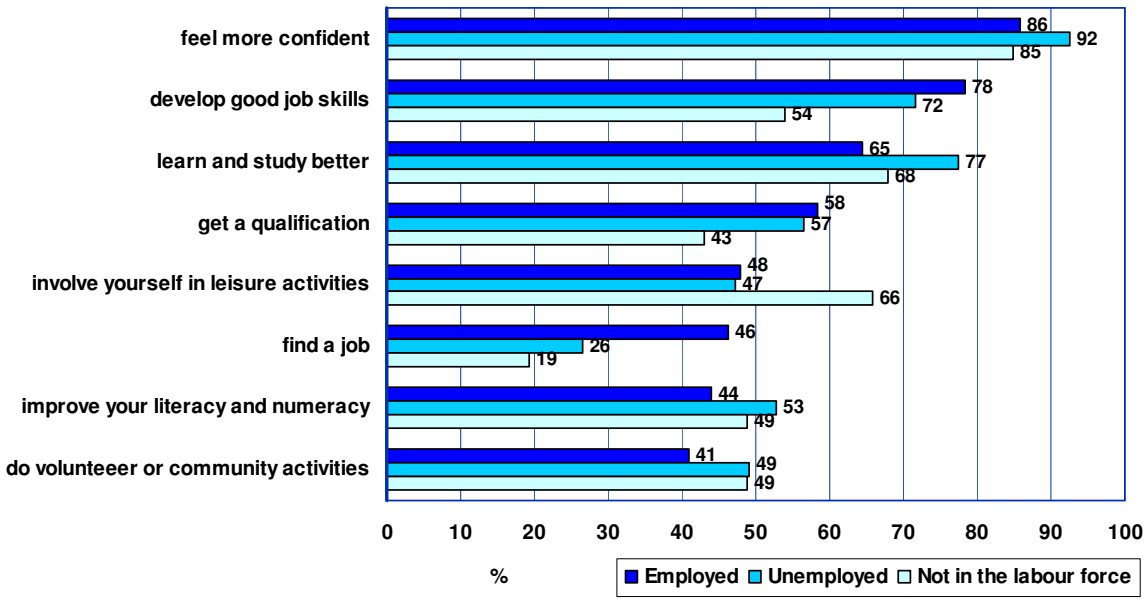
Those who were working in 2005 were more likely to say that their study had helped them to develop good job skills (78% compared to 72% unemployed and 54% not in the labour force) and to find a job (46%, 26% and 19% respectively).

Those looking for work in 2005 reported the greatest gain in self confidence and in study skills through their participation in study

The group of people who were looking for work when they were surveyed in 2005 were most likely to say in 2006 that their study experiences had improved their confidence (92% compared to 86% and 85% of those working and not in the labour force respectively). Unemployed people were also more likely to report improved study skills: 77 per cent agreed that their course helped them to 'learn and study better' (65% for those working and 68% those not working and not looking for work); and improved literacy and numeracy.

Those not in the labour force were more likely than the other two groups to report improved involvement in leisure activities (66% compared to 48% for workers and 47% for unemployed), but just as likely as those unemployed to report increased volunteer or community activities (49% compared to 41% of workers)

Figure 17. Impact of 2004 ACE study and any 2005 study by labour force status in 2005.



Improvements in capacities achieved through study in ACE and any other provider in 2004-2005

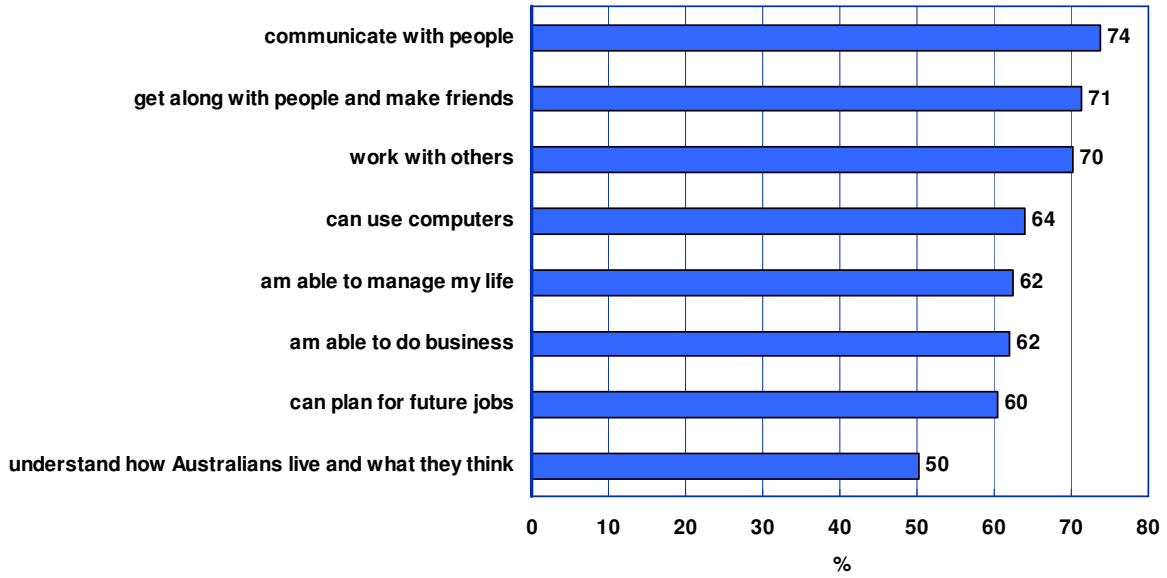
Respondents reported on other perceived improvements in capacities resulting from their study in 2004 and 2005 (see Figure 18 below). Here we can see that communication skills were identified as a key benefit of study. Nearly three-quarters of those surveyed (74%) said that their ability to communicate with people had improved with their studies, 71 per cent reported improved socialisation skills, and 70 per cent had seen improvement in their ability to work with others.

Improved communication and socialisation skills were reported to be a main benefit of study….

Other skills gained included improved Information Technology skills (64% agreement), and improved business capability (62% agreement). Management and planning also played a role: 62 per cent reported that their study had helped to improve how well they managed their lives, and 60 per cent reported improved capacity to plan for future jobs.

Half of those surveyed reported an improved understanding of Australian culture and way of life.

Figure 18. Improvements in capacities resulting from 2004 ACE and 2005 study

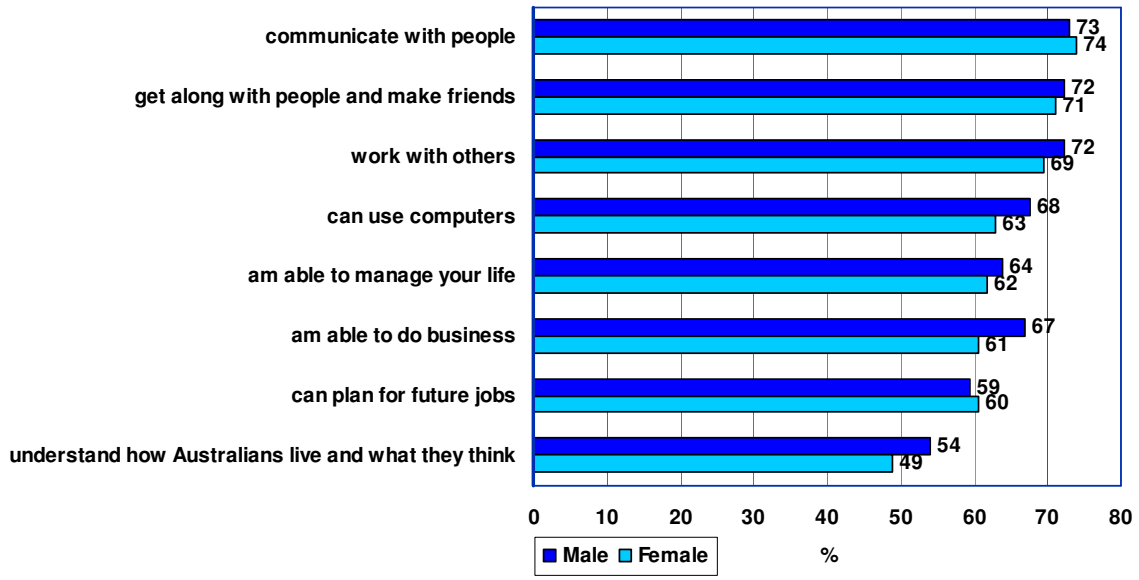


Gender

Again, gender differences in the responses were not large (see Figure 19 below). Men were more likely to report improved computer skills (68% of men compared to 63% of women) and business skills (67% of men compared to 61% of women), and a stronger understanding of Australian values (54% of men compared to 49% of women).

Men were slightly more likely than women to report improved computer and business skills

Figure 19. Improvements in capacities resulting from 2004 ACE and 2005 study, by gender.

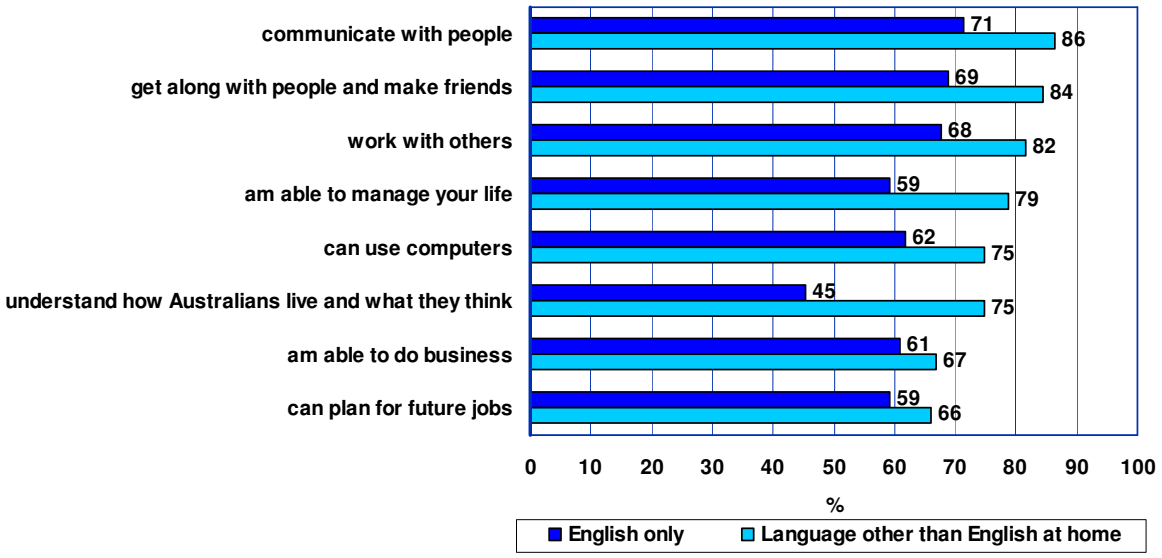


Language background

LBOTE people were more likely to report improvements in communication and socialisation skills (amongst other things)

When we look at people with a language background other than English compared to people from an English language background, we again see a range of differing responses (see Figure 20 below). LBOTE people were more emphatic about their improved communication skills as well as computer, business and management skills. The largest difference between the two groups was improved 'understanding of how Australians live and what they think', with 75 per cent of LBOTE people agreeing compared to 45 per cent of English language background people.

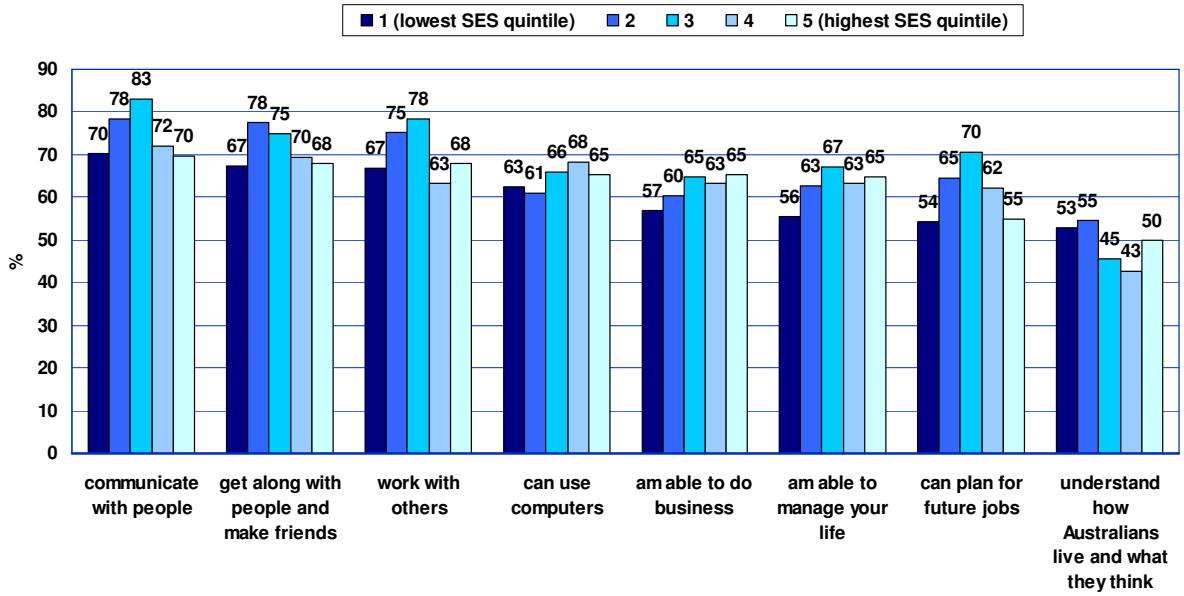
Figure 20. Improvements in capacities resulting from 2004 ACE and 2005 study, by language background.



Socio-economic status

Similar patterns again are found when these items are broken down by SES quintiles (see Figure 21 below). It was those in the middle band who had general found the most benefits from their study.

Figure 21. Improvements in capacities resulting from 2004 ACE and 2005 study, by SES.



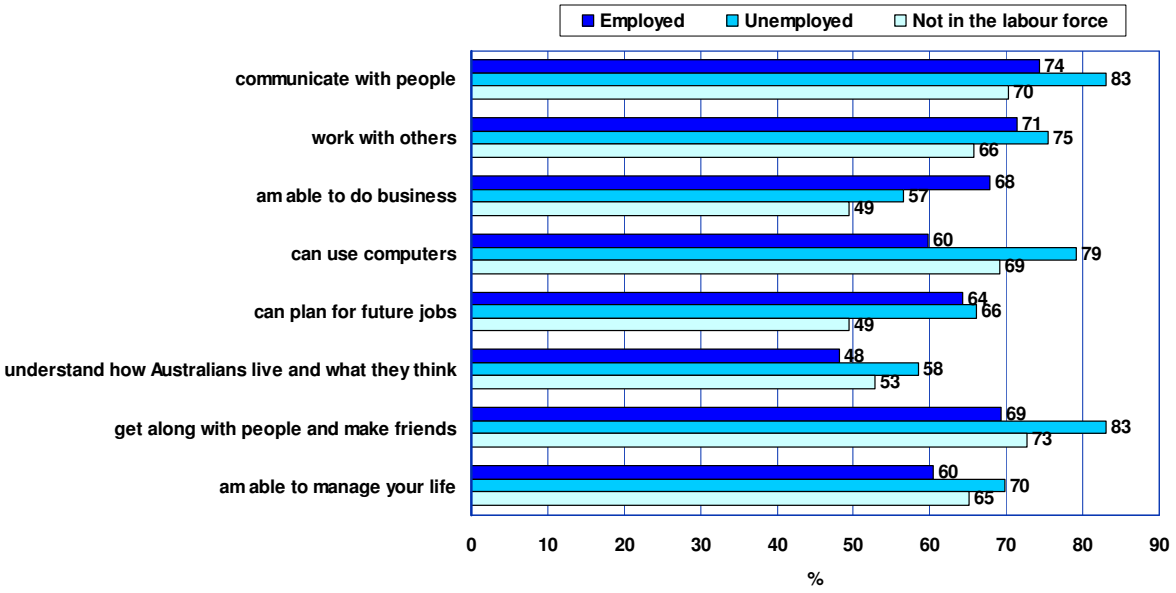
Labour force status 2005

As Figure 22 below illustrates, when we look at the responses of the cohort by their 2005 labour force status, those who were unemployed were the most positive about the benefits of their study in terms of: improved communication and socialisation skills (83% agreement for both 'communicate with people' and 'get along with people and make new friends', at least 10 percentage points ahead of those working and those not in the labour force); increased computer skills (79% compared to 60% of workers and 69% not in the labour force); and an improved capacity to organise and manage their lives.

People who were unemployed in 2005 were most positive about the benefits of study

Those who were working were most likely to report improved business skills.

Figure 22. Improvements in capacities resulting from 2004 ACE and 2005 study, by labour force status 2005.



4. Experience of ACE

This chapter examines the cohort's experiences of learning in the ACE sector. While in the previous chapter respondents were asked about the impact of any study undertaken (i.e. ACE study in 2004, and any study in 2005), here we are focussing on the experience of ACE only. As in the previous chapter we will look first at the experiences of the whole cohort and then of different groups. Three sets of factors are examined: the ACE learning context; the ACE experience; and ACE programs and providers.

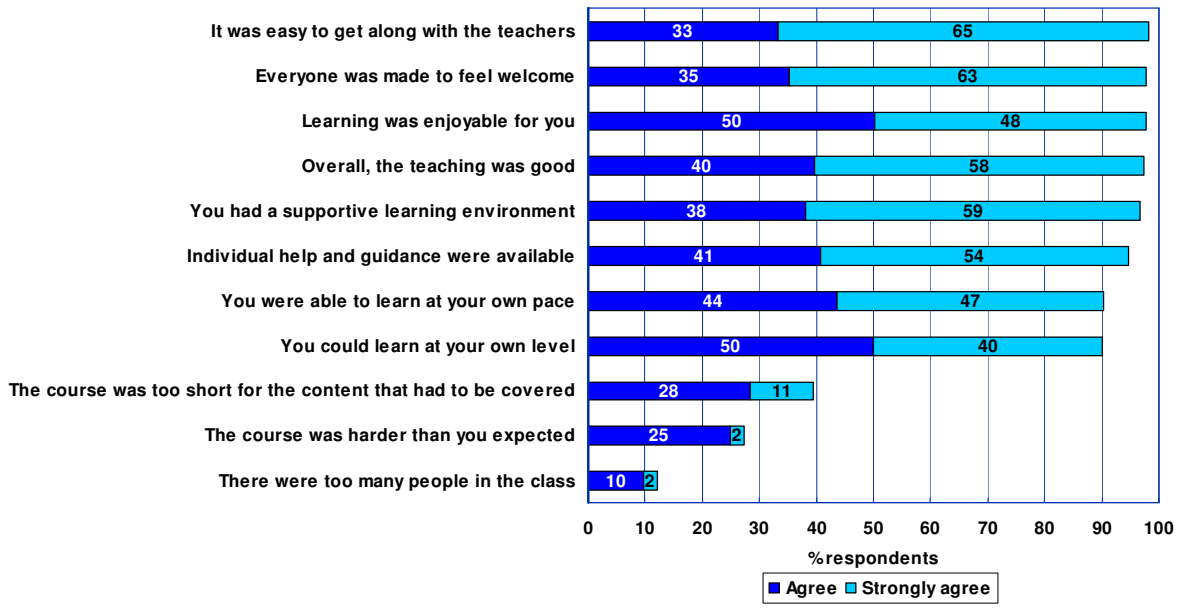
Learning in ACE

There was a strong endorsement of the learning environment in ACE

Overall, respondents were extremely positive about their experiences of learning in ACE. As Figure 23 reveals, almost the entire cohort found that: it was 'easy to get along with the teachers' (98% agreement), 'everyone was made to feel welcome' (98% agreement), 'learning was enjoyable' (98% agreement), the 'teaching was good' (98% agreement), there was a 'supportive learning environment' (97% agreement) and 'individual help and guidance were available' (95% agreement). Nine out of ten students also reported being able to learn at their own pace (91% agreement) and at their own level (90% agreement). This is a strong endorsement of the ACE sector's learning environment by all students.

However, nearly four in ten respondents felt that the 'course was too short for the content that had to be covered' (39% agreement), and just over a quarter reported that their course was more difficult than they had expected (27% agreement). A small proportion agreed that there were too many people in their class (12%).

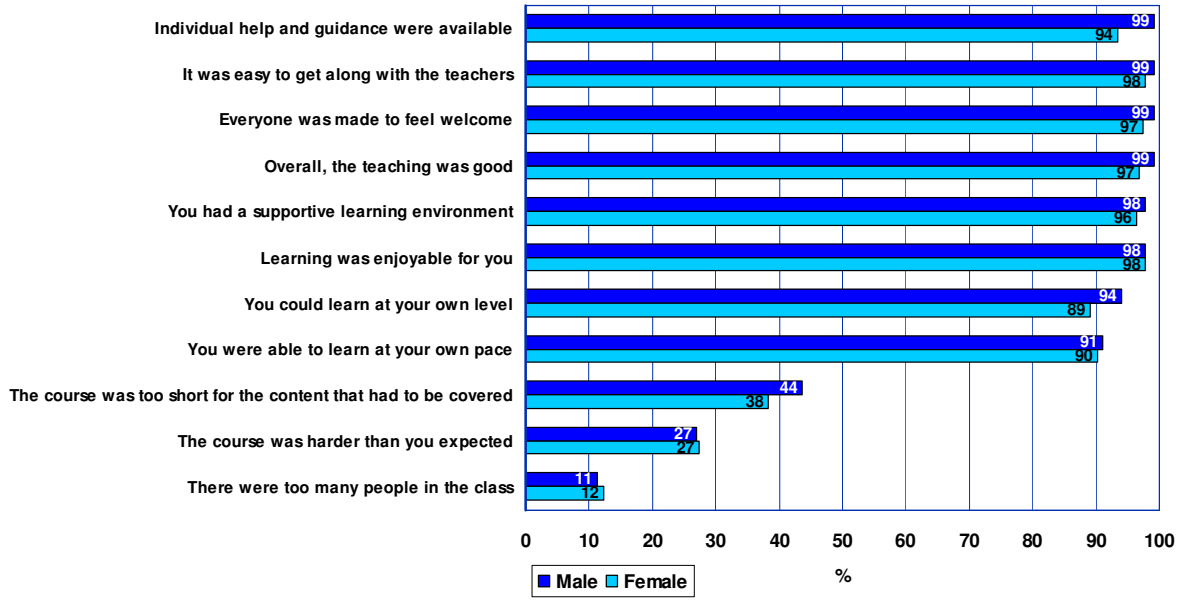
Figure 23. Experience of learning in ACE context



Gender

When it comes to learning in ACE, men were more positive than women on nearly all items – although these differences were small (see Figure 24 below). Responses broken down further by age groups revealed very similar patterns to the responses for all men and women.

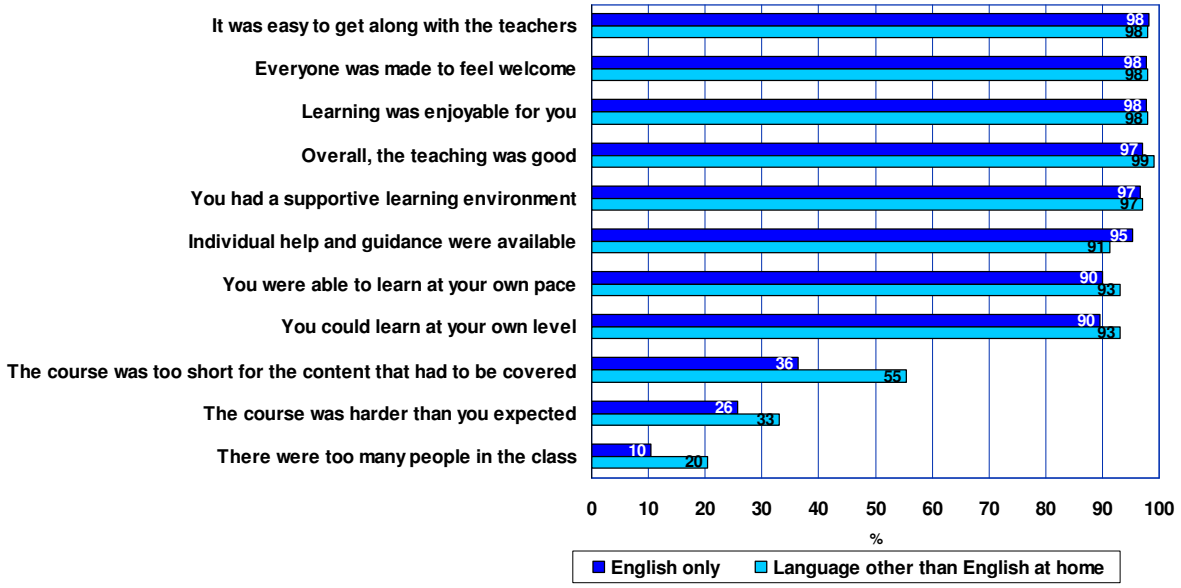
Figure 24. Experience of learning in ACE context by gender (total agreement).



Language background

There were not large differences between the responses of LBOTE people and English language background people when it came to agreeing with the positive statements on learning in ACE (see Figure 25 below). Both groups were extremely positive in this regard.

Figure 25. Experience of learning in ACE context by language background (total agreement).

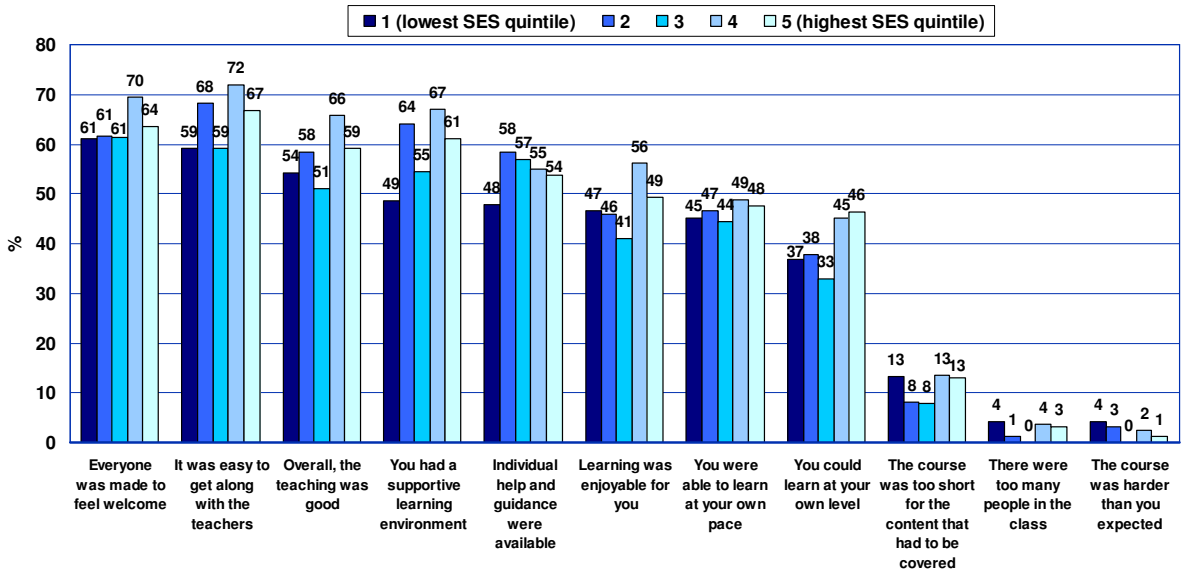


However, LBOTE people were much more likely to say that the course was too short for the content (55% compared to 36% of English language background people), that the course was harder than expected (33% compared to 26% of English language background people), and that there were too many people in the class (20% compared to 10%).

Socio-economic status

Figure 26 below reveals the responses to these questions by SES quintiles (and reports those strongly agreeing only). Here we can see that those from the lowest SES quintile are in general the least positive about the ACE learning context. This is particularly apparent for those looking for a supportive learning environment (49% agreement lowest SES quintile, 61% agreement highest), and seeking individual help and guidance.

Figure 26. Experience of learning in ACE context by SES (strongly agree only).



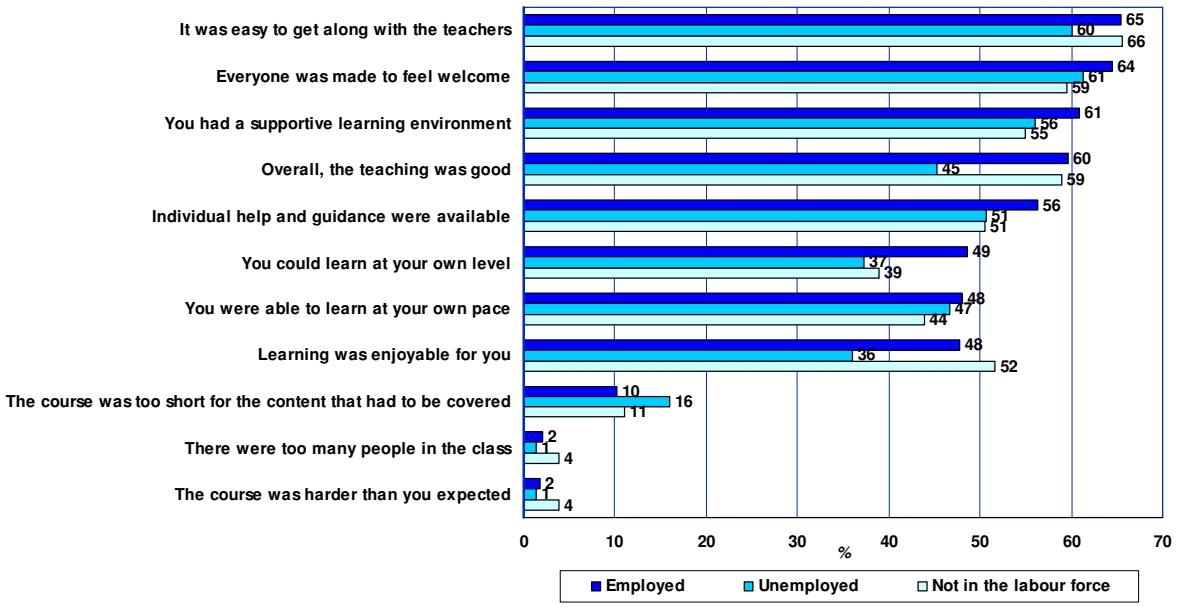
Labour Force Status

Figure 27 looks at the differences in responses by 2005 labour market status, and reports strong agreement only. Those who were working were the most positive here, being most likely to say that ACE was a supportive learning environment, that the teaching was good and that you could learn at your own level.

For the more vulnerable group – those who were unemployed in 2005 – the benefits of learning in ACE were not so clear cut. Those who were unemployed were the group least likely to get on with the teachers, to say that the teaching was good and that learning was enjoyable. They were also more likely to report that their course had been too short for the content that had to be covered.

Those not in the labour force were most likely to say that learning had been enjoyable.

Figure 27. Experience of learning in ACE context by 2005 labour force status (strongly agree only).



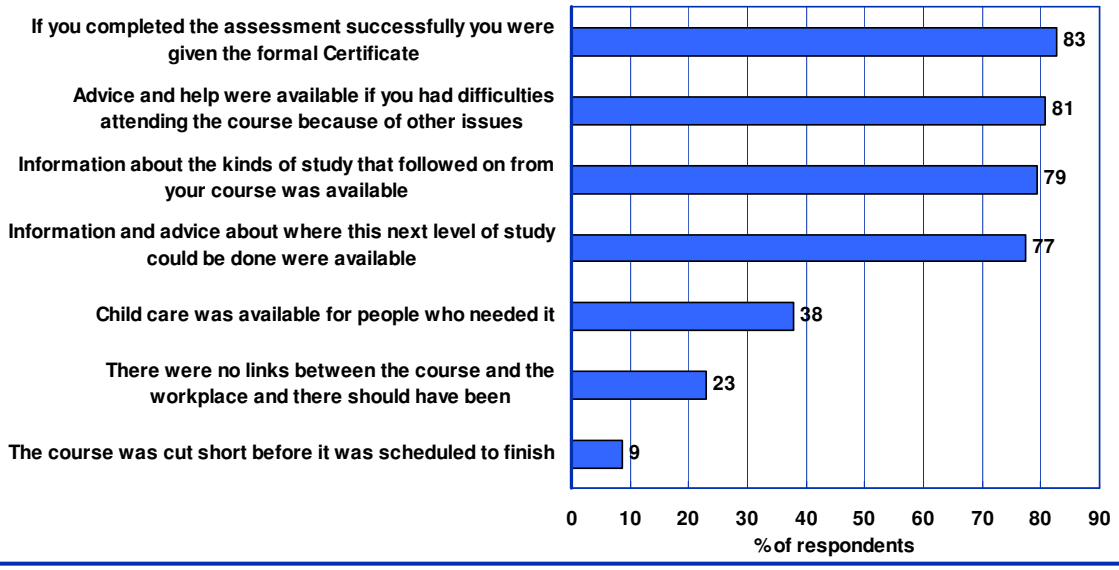
ACE experience 2004 and 2005

Figure 28 below shows respondents' perceptions of their ACE experience in 2004 and 2005. Eight in ten respondents felt that they received any help they needed if they had difficulties attending the course, revealing a certain level of perceived flexibility in the delivery of ACE courses.

About 80% of respondents reported that information about what and where to study next was available in ACE

Most people felt that information about study pathways was available in terms of what level study came next and where they could study (79% and 77% respectively), but this still leaves one in five not finding this information available from their ACE provider.

Figure 28. Respondent perceptions of their ACE experience in 2004 and 2005.



Nearly one-quarter of respondents felt that there should have been links between their ACE course and the workplace (23%). And nearly one in ten respondents indicated that their course was cut short before it was scheduled to finish (9%).

Some ACE students would have liked for their course to have had links with the workplace

Gender

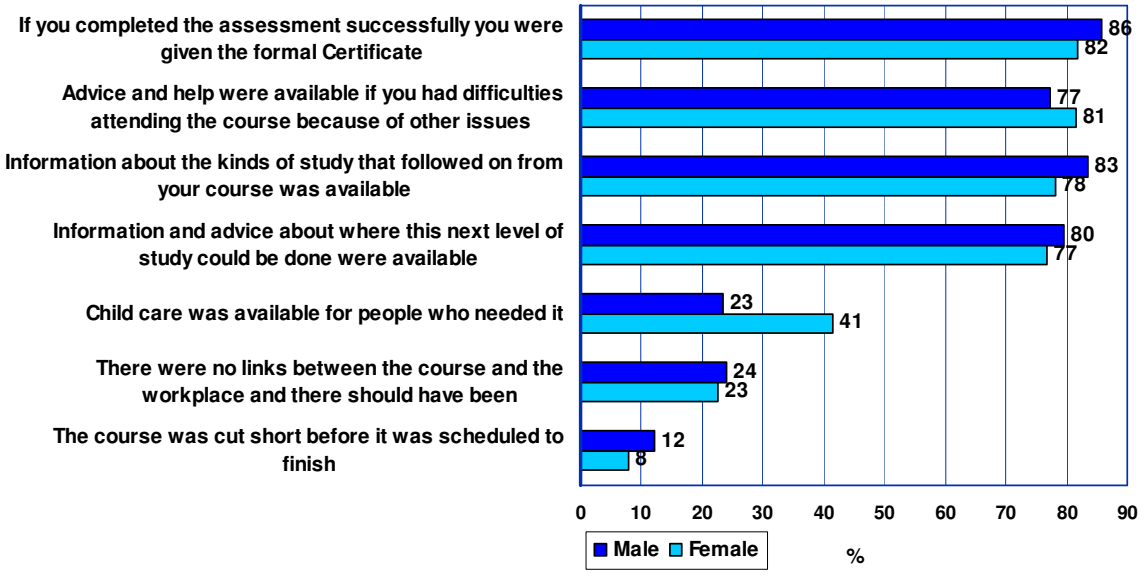
When we look at the differences in responses between males and females in the cohort, we can see that men were more likely to say that they had access to study pathway information and also to formal certification. Women on the other hand were slightly more likely say they had access to advice and help if they had difficulties. And perhaps unsurprisingly, women were more likely to comment on the availability of childcare.

Almost a quarter of both men and women would have liked there to have been links between their ACE course and the labour market, but found that there were none.

Men were more likely to report that their course had been cut short before it was scheduled to finish (12% compared to 8% of women).

As above, when we break down the groups by age and look at differences between women and men aged 40 and over, the pattern of responses is very similar to the cohort gender differences overall.

Figure 29. Respondent perception of their ACE experience in 2004 and 2005, by gender.

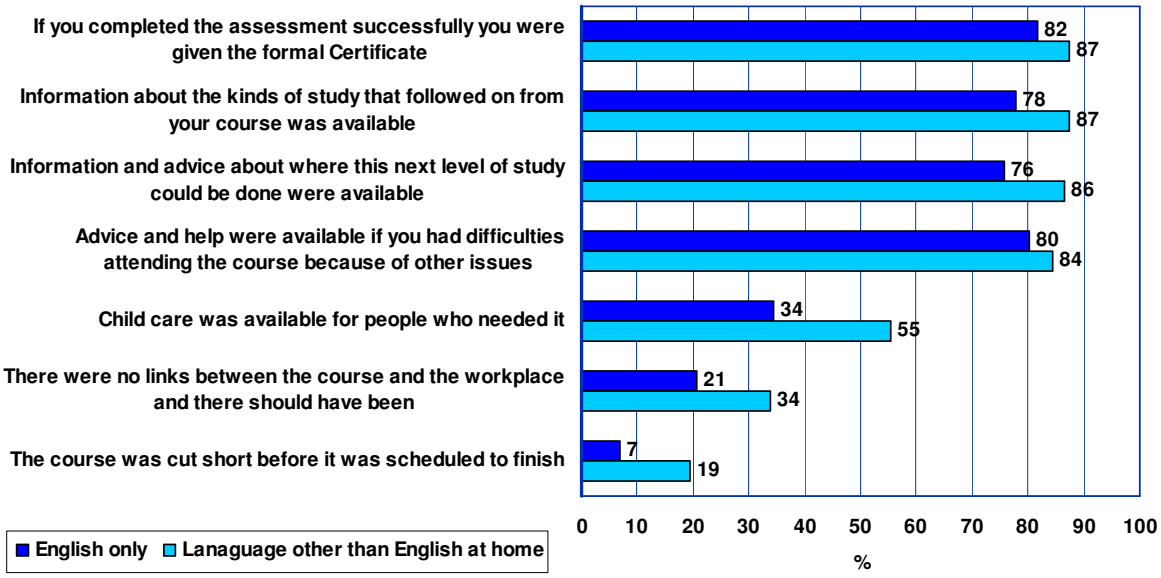


Language background

Figure 30 below breaks down the responses by language background group. We can see here that LBOTE people were more likely than English language background people to report access to certification and access to information about further study (courses and locations).

LBOTE people were also more likely to say that they wanted links with the workplace where there were none (34% compared to 21% of English language background people) and 19 per cent reported their course finishing before it was scheduled to, compared to only 7 per cent of English language background people.

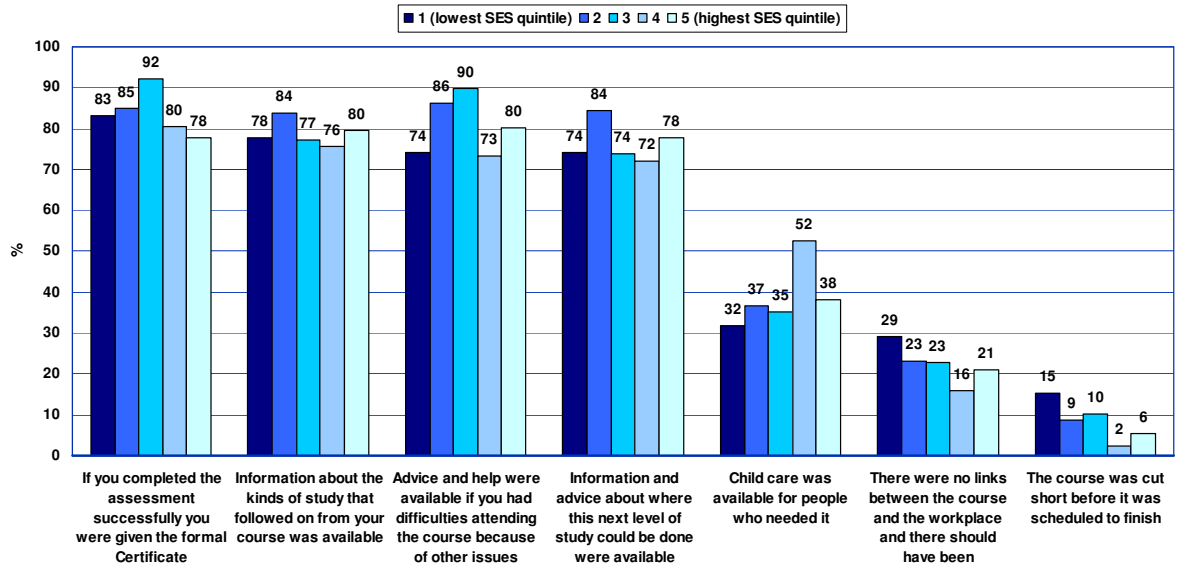
Figure 30. Respondent perception of their ACE experience in 2004 and 2005, by language background



Socio-economic status

Again when we look at the breakdown by SES, those in the middle SES band were most positive about their ACE experience. Those from the lowest quintile SES were most likely to report wanting links with the workplace and that their course had been cut short.

Figure 31. Respondent perception of their ACE experience in 2004 and 2005, by SES.

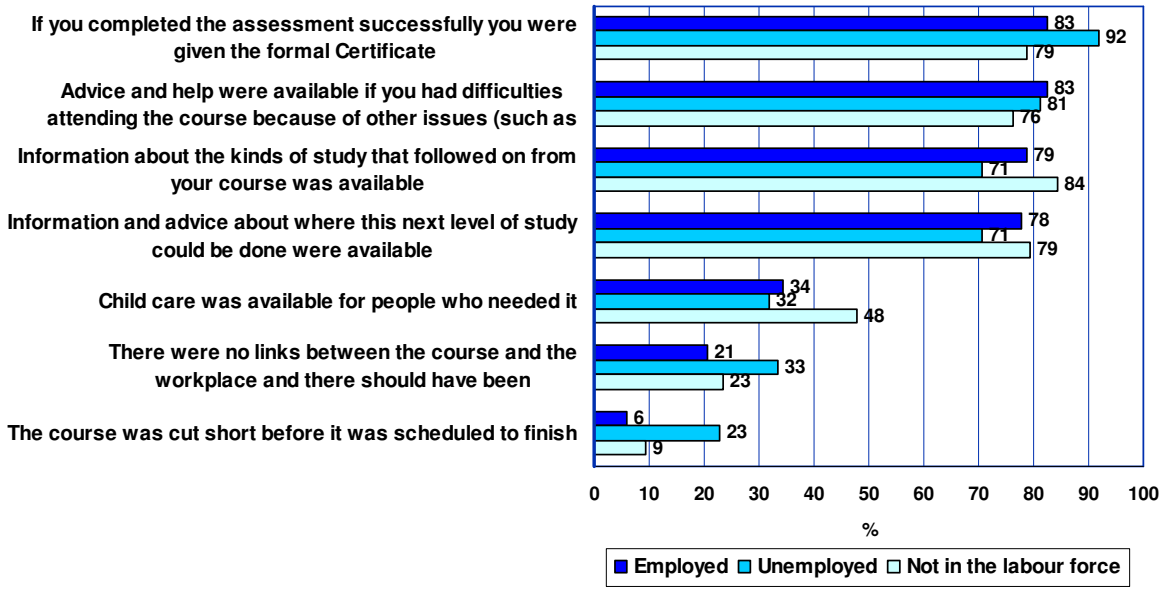


Labour force status 2005

Figure 32 below looks at the breakdown of the cohort's responses by their 2005 labour force status. We can see here that those who were unemployed in 2005 were most likely to report access to certification with 92 per cent agreement on this item (compared to 83% of workers and 79% of those not in the labour force). However those looking for work were least likely to report having access to information about study pathways. One-third would have liked to have seen links between their ACE course and the workplace (compared to 21% of workers and 23% of those not in the labour force). Those unemployed were also most likely to report that their course was cut short (23% compared to only 9% of those not in the labour force and 6% of those employed).

Those unemployed in 2005 were least likely to report having access to information regarding study pathways

Figure 32. Respondent perception of their ACE experience in 2004 and 2005, by 2005 labour force status.



Perception of ACE programs

This section explores perceptions of ACE programs. Overall, respondents thought there was a good range of courses available in ACE (88% agreement). Respondents also reported easy access to information about courses available (85%), and that the courses were affordable (84%).

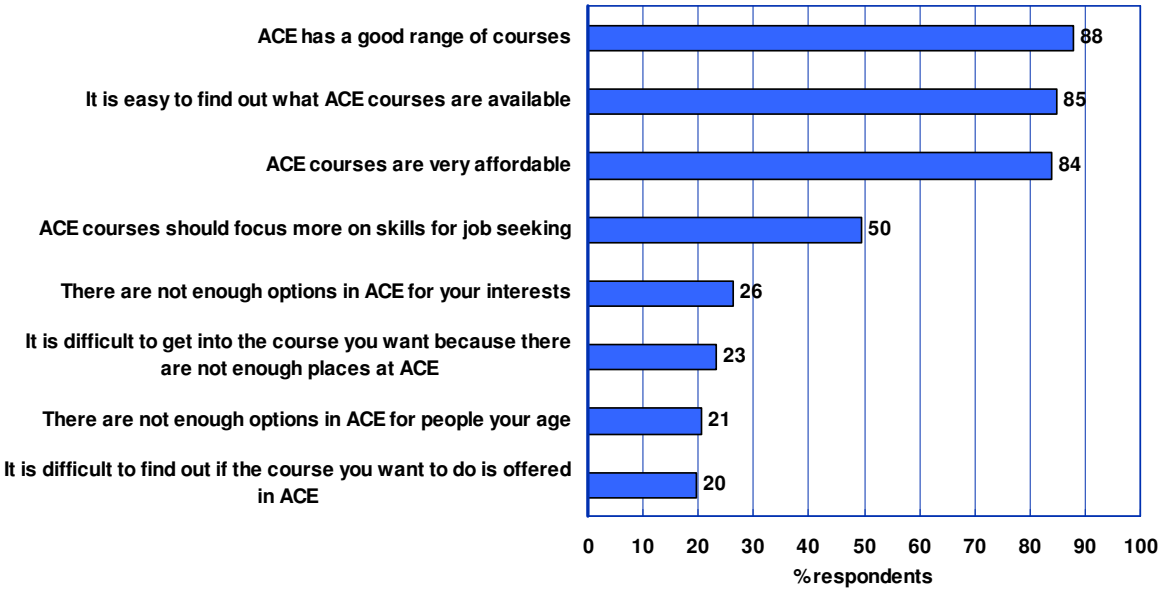
Overall, respondents were extremely positive about ACE programs reporting a good range of courses and that they are very affordable

However, half of our respondents commented that ACE courses should focus more on skills for job seeking.

Around a quarter reported that there were not enough options in ACE for their interests (26%) and that it was difficult to get into the courses they wanted to undertake in ACE because there were not enough places (23%).

One-fifth of respondents thought there were not enough options for people their age (21%) and also that they had difficulties finding out if the course they wanted to do in ACE was available (20% agreement).

Figure 33. Perceptions of courses available in ACE providers (agreement with statement).

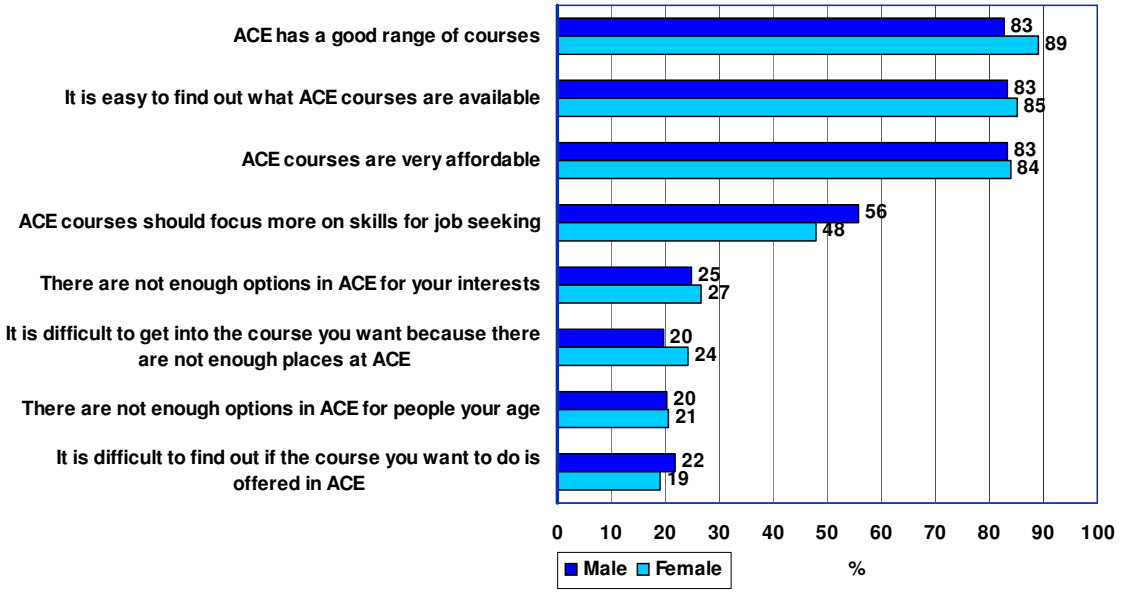


Gender

Figure 34 below shows these responses by gender. While differences were not large, women were slightly more likely to say they thought ACE had a good range of courses (89% of women compared to 83% of men), that it was easy to find out what ACE courses were available (85% of women compared to 83% of men), and that ACE courses were very affordable (84% of women compared to 83% of men).

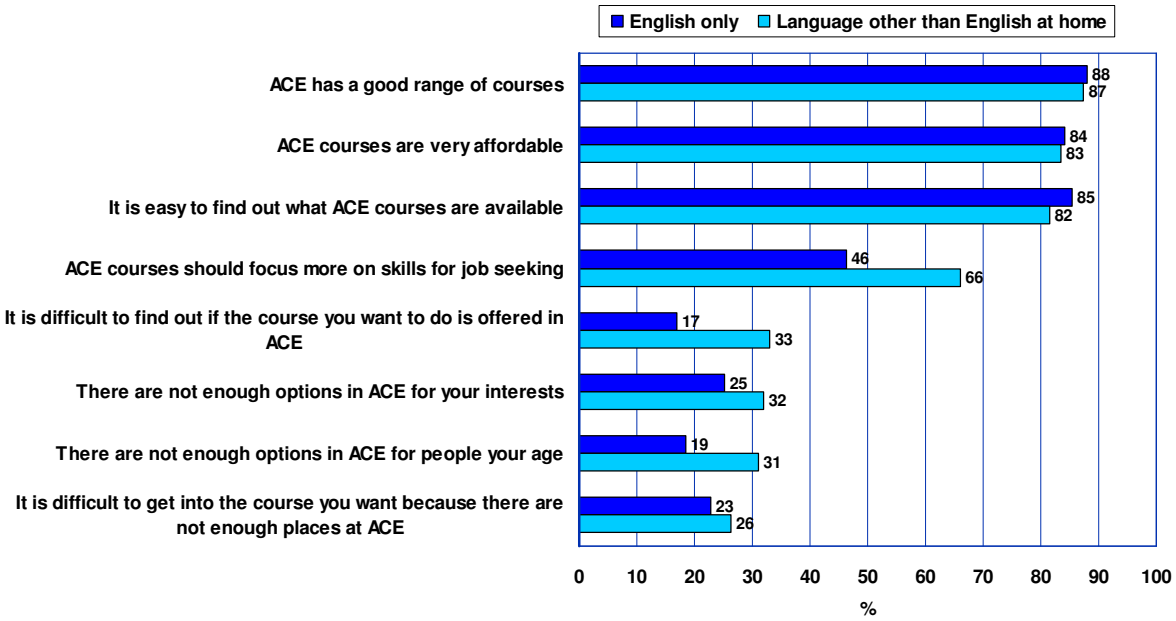
Men, however, were more likely to say that ACE courses should focus more on job seeking (56% of men compared to 48% of women).

Figure 34. Perceptions of courses available in ACE providers by gender



Language background

Figure 35. Perceptions of courses available in ACE providers by language background.



Both English language background and LBOTE people alike reported a good range of courses being available in ACE and that ACE courses were affordable.

Figure 35 above shows us that LBOTE people were much more likely to say that ACE courses should focus more on job seeking (66% compared to 46% of English language background people). In addition, one-third of this group reported some difficulties in finding out about courses in ACE (33% compared to 17%), and were more likely to perceive a lack of options for their interests or age groups.

Socio-economic status

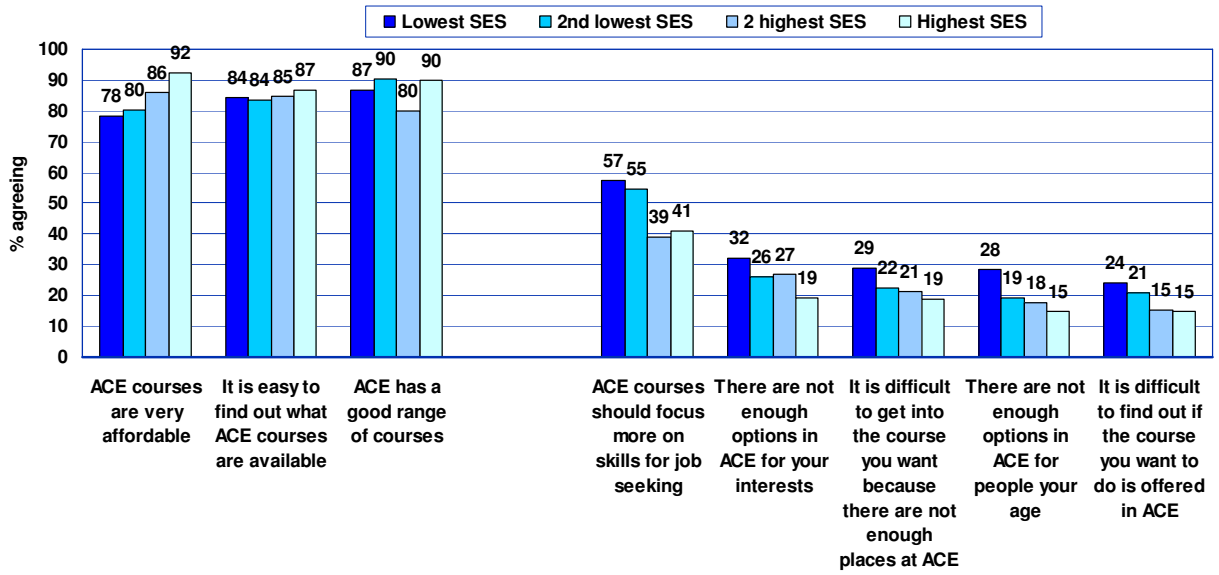
Figure 36 below shows the responses broken down by SES quartiles. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those from the higher SES backgrounds were more likely to note the affordability of ACE courses.

Those from a low SES background were more likely to express concerns about ACE course availability and options

However a negative relationship with SES was evident for a range of items, as follows:

- ACE courses should focus more on job seeking (57% agreement from lowest SES compared with 41% from highest);
- there are not enough options for interests (32% of lowest SES compared with 19% of highest) or for age (28% of lowest SES compared to 15% of highest);
- access is difficult because there are not enough places in ACE (29% of lowest SES compared to 19% of highest); and
- difficulties finding out if the course desired was available in ACE (24% of lowest SES agreeing compared to 15% of the highest SES quartile).

Figure 36. Perceptions of courses available in ACE providers by SES quartiles.

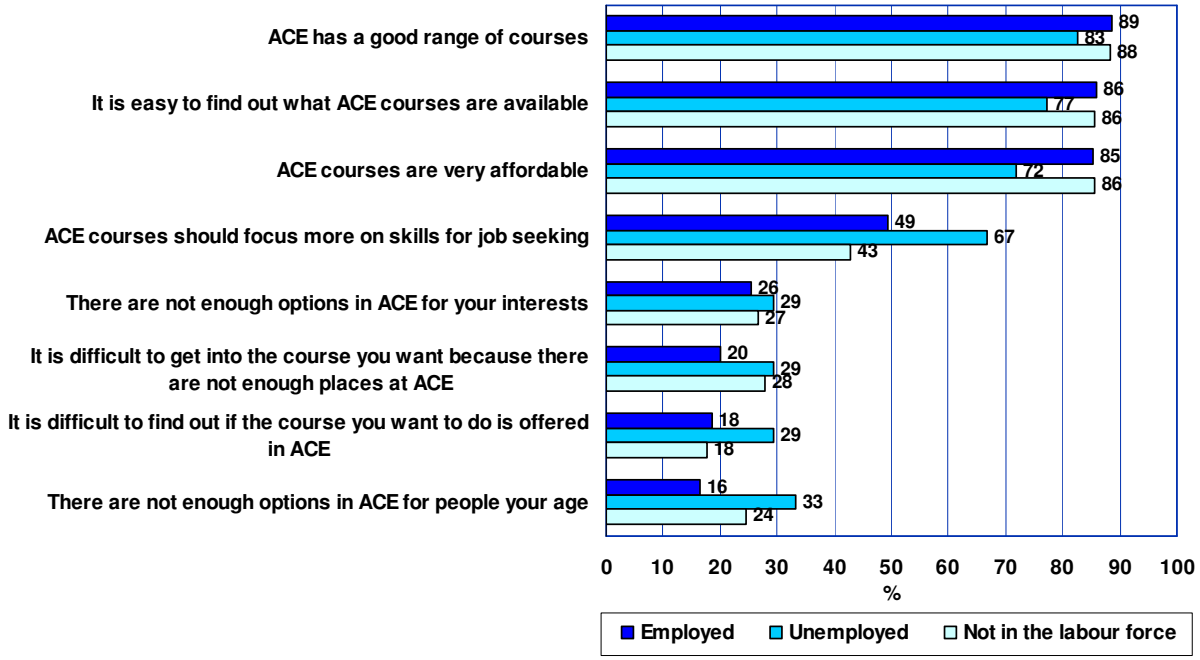


Labour Force Status

Finally, Figure 37 below shows the responses by labour force status. Those who were unemployed in 2005 were least likely to report that there was a good range of courses, that it was easy to find out what ACE courses were available, and that ACE courses were affordable; but we still saw quite high levels of agreement here.

More than two thirds of people who were unemployed in 2005 believed that ACE courses should focus more on skills for job seeking (67% compared to 49% for those working).

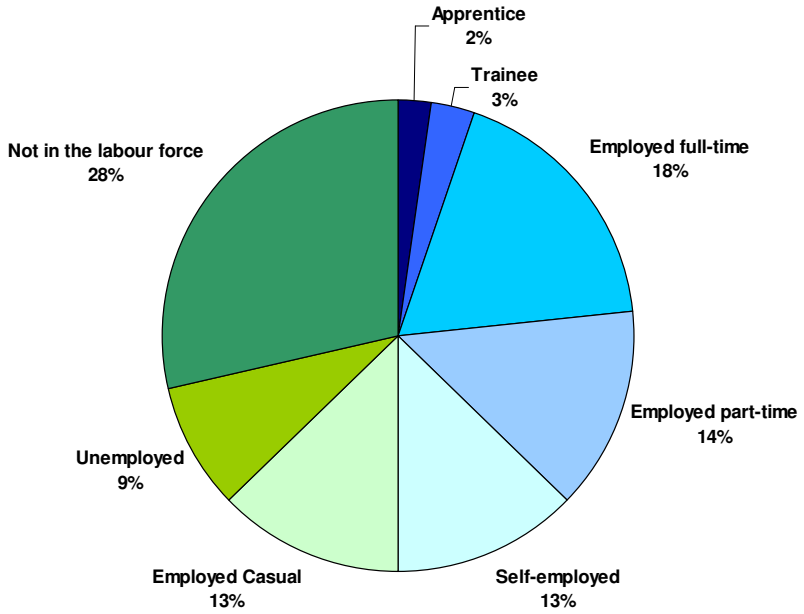
Figure 37. Perceptions of courses available in ACE providers by 2005 labour force status.



5. Work & ACE

This chapter further examines the connections made by the cohort between their ACE study and their work. Figure 38 below shows the cohort by their detailed labour force status in 2006. We can see that 63 per cent of respondents were working when they were surveyed, 9 per cent were looking for work and 28 per cent were not working and not looking for work.

Figure 38. Labour force status in 2006



Workers reported strong links between their study and their work

Respondents were asked about connections between their study (in ACE or elsewhere) and work (see Figure 39 below). More than 7 in 10 said that their study helped with tasks they do at work (73% agreeing), 61 per cent said it taught them skills to help them get a better job, 47 per cent said that it helped them to get a job, and 26 per cent said their study helped them to set up or run a business. Thus strong connections were made by the cohort between study and work.

Figure 39. ACE and other study contribution to work 2006 survey (% agreeing).

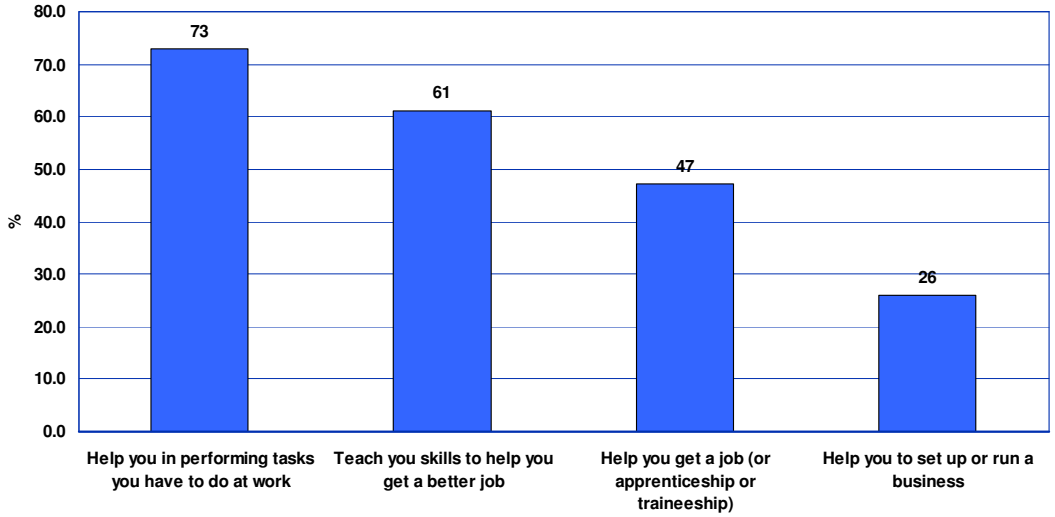
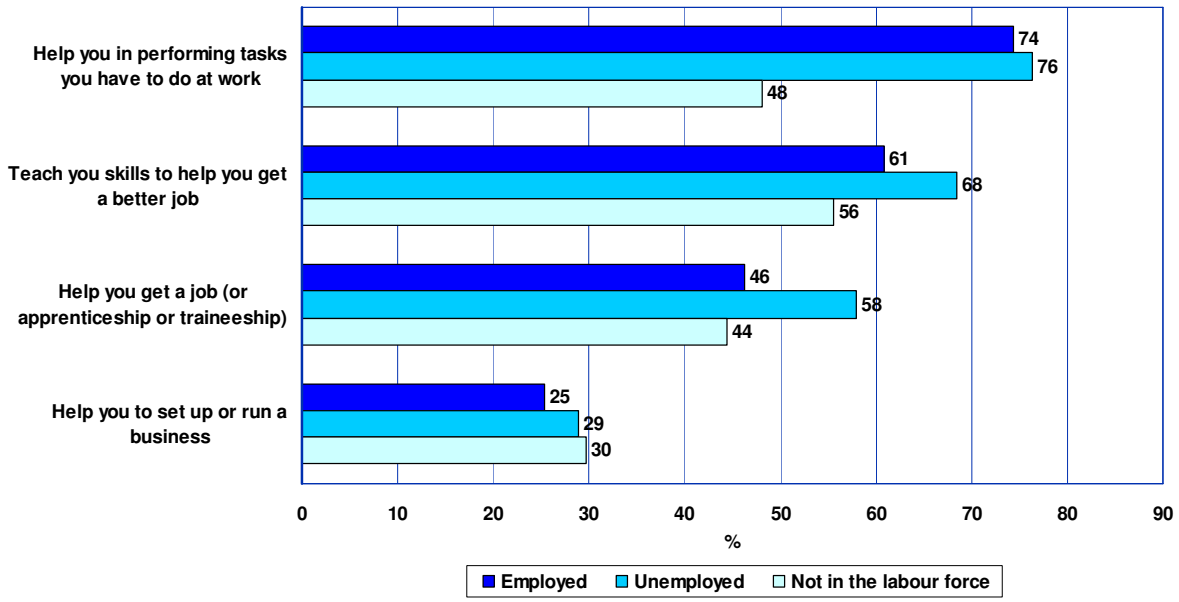


Figure 40 below examines the connections between study and work by respondents' 2005 labour force status. We can see here that 68 per cent of those who were unemployed in 2005 reported that their study had taught them skills to help get a better job, and 58 per cent said that their study had helped them to get a job. 74 per cent of those working said that their study had helped them in performing the tasks they do at work.

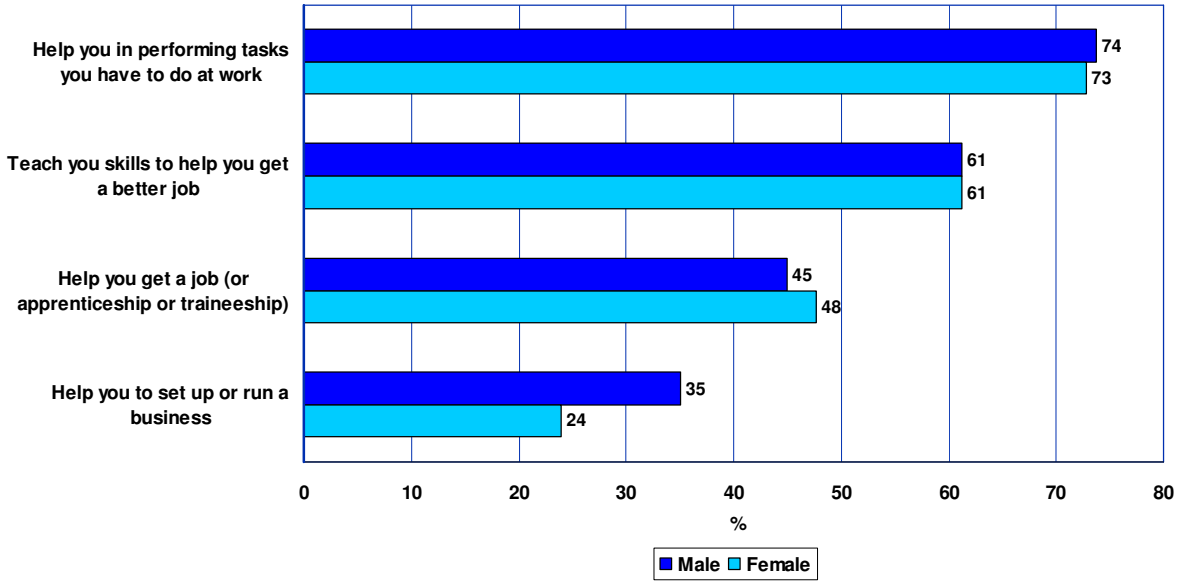
58% of those unemployed in 2005 said that their study had helped them get a job

Figure 40. Impact of 2004 ACE study or any study since by 2005 labour force status



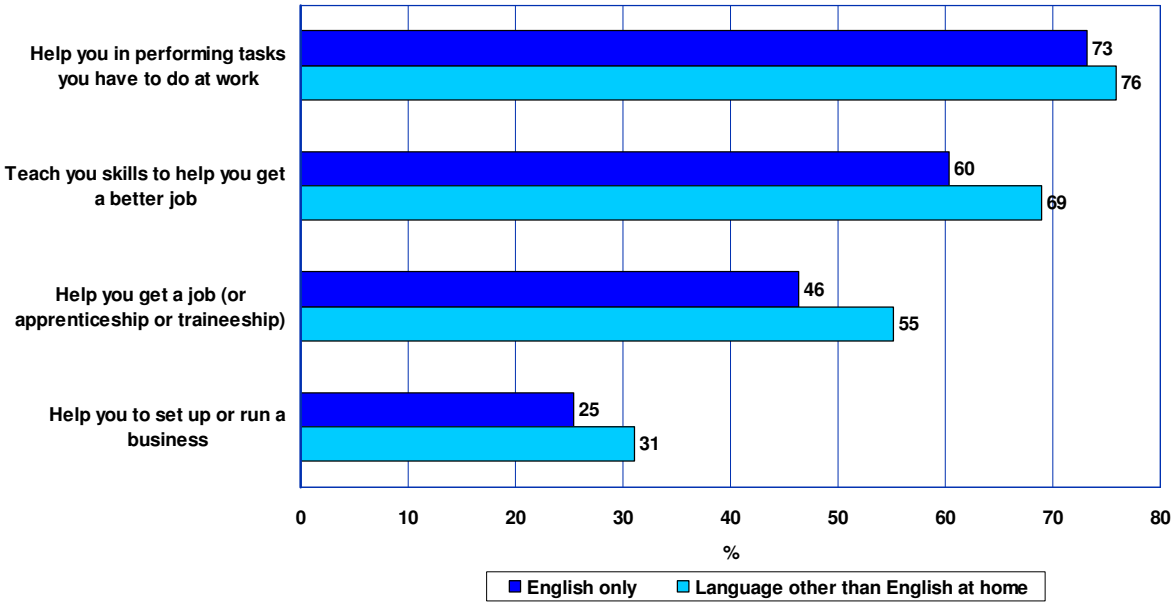
The responses for men and women were very similar, except men were more likely to say that their study had helped them to set up or run a business (see Figure 41 below).

Figure 41. Impact of ACE on those working in 2006, by gender



LBOTE people were more emphatic about the links between their study and work (see Figure 42 below) than English language background people.

Figure 42. Impact of ACE on those working in 2006, by language spoken at home



Those in the lowest SES group were least likely to find connections between study and work (see Figure 43 below). However those from the 2nd lowest and middle quintile were most likely to report help in getting a job.

Figure 43. Impact of ACE on those working in 2006, by socioeconomic status (SES quintiles)

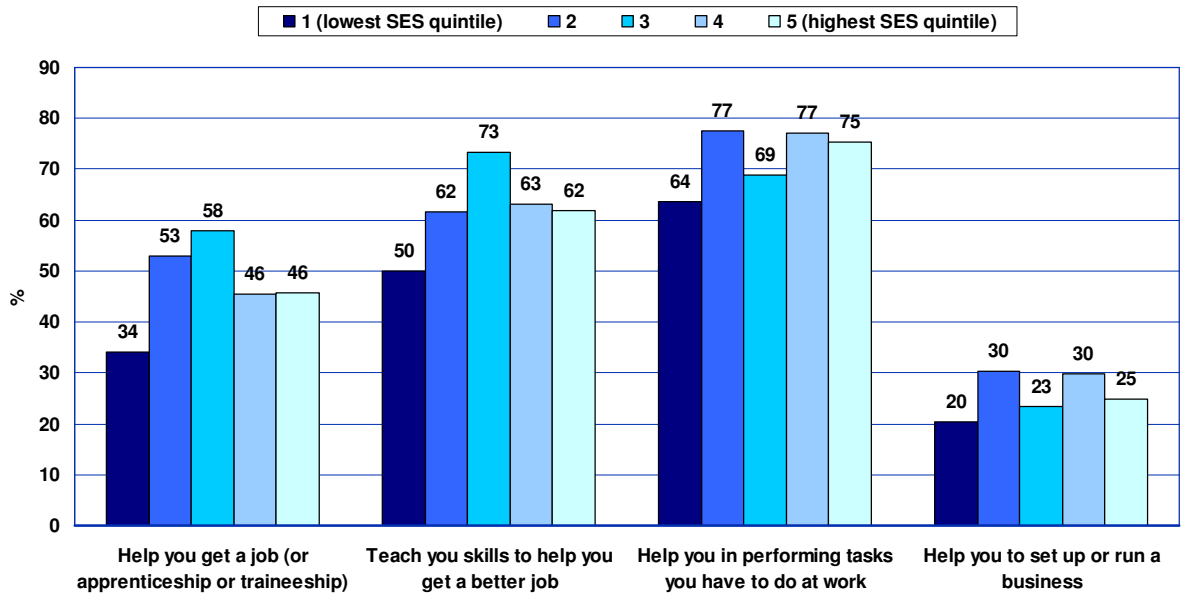


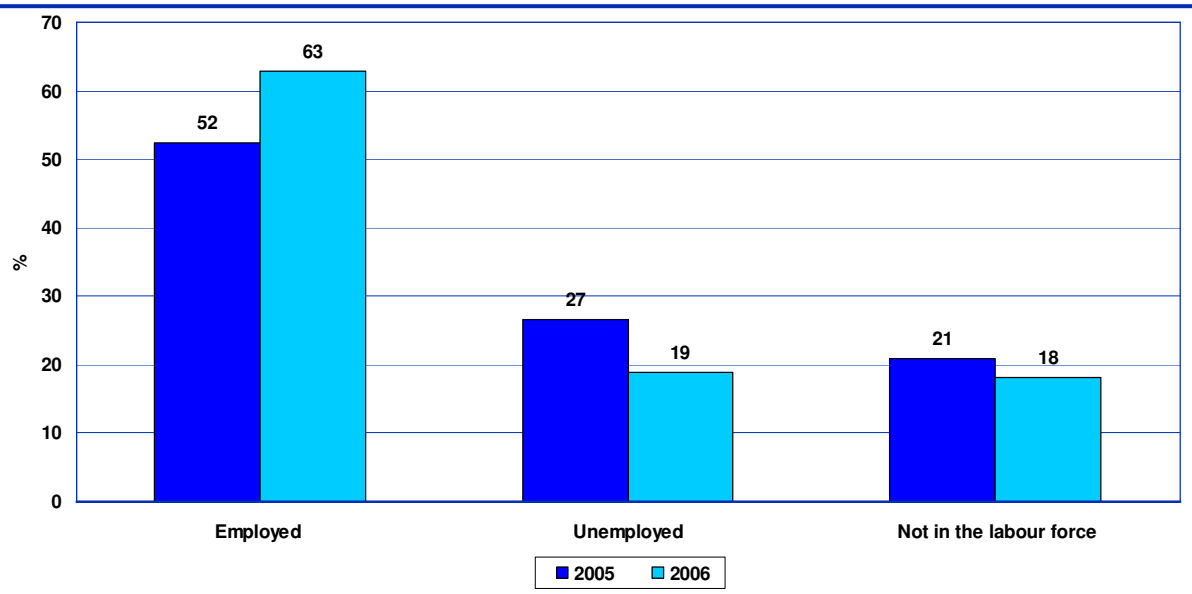
Figure 44 below shows the change in labour force status over the duration of the longitudinal study. It clearly shows the proportion of workers employed full-time more than doubling from 13 per cent in 2004 to 28 per cent in 2006. This is matched by a decline in the unemployment rate from 24 per cent in 2004 to only 8 per cent in 2006. The proportions working part-time and not in the labour force have remained fairly constant.

Over the 3 years of the study, unemployment rates decreased significantly and full-time employment rates increased

Figure 44. Change in Labour Force Status 2004-2006 (all data for 2006 Survey cohort only).

This decline in unemployment is further explored in Figure 45 below. Of all those who were unemployed in 2004, 52 per cent were working in 2005 and 63 per cent were working in 2006. While 27 per cent remained unemployed in 2005, this dropped to 19 per cent in 2006. In addition, some of those unemployed in 2004 had moved out of the labour force (21% during 2005 and 18% during 2006).

Figure 45. Labour force status in 2005 and 2006 for 2004 unemployed



6. Community building & ACE

Growth in engagement in volunteer work from 2004 to 2005 and again to 2006.

37% of the cohort was undertaking some form of volunteer work in 2006

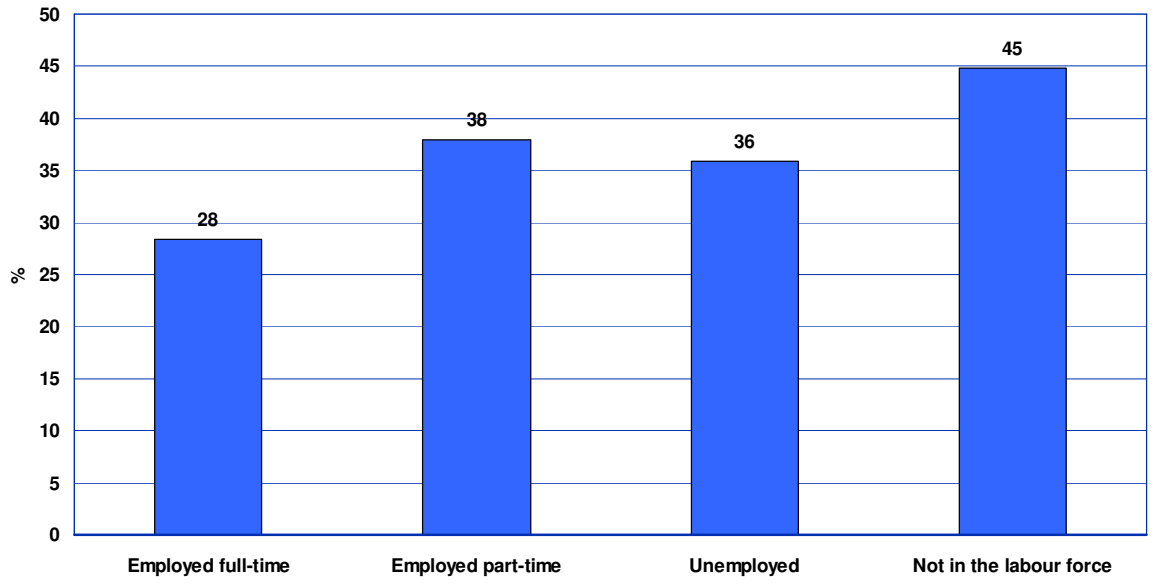
Across the duration of the longitudinal study, we can see an increase in community engagement, as measured by the proportion of the cohort engaged in volunteer work (see Table 16).

Table 16. Volunteer work, 2004-2006

	2004	*2005*	*2006*	*2007 plans*
% engaged in volunteer work	27.4	38.0	37.0	45.7

The proportion of the cohort engaged in volunteer work in 2006 by labour force status is detailed in figure 46 below. Nearly half of the people not in the labour force were undertaking volunteer work (45%), while 36 per cent of unemployed people were also taking part. Of those working, 38 per cent of those employed part-time were doing some volunteer work as well, and 28 per cent of those employed full-time also found time for volunteer work.

Figure 46. Proportion engaged in volunteer work in 2006 by 2006 labour force status



7. Conclusions

The longitudinal study of ACE learners commissioned by the ACFE Board aimed to measure the sector's impact, effectiveness and community reach by addressing the following broad questions:

- Does ACE make a difference (and, if so, how do we know?)
- For whom does ACE make a difference?
- What is it about ACE that makes a difference?

Over the duration of the study, the contribution that ACE has made to the cohort as a whole – as well as for different groups – has become evident. In this third year of the study, where 646 of the original cohort were surveyed (from a sample of 3,047), we have seen that ACE:

- provides a platform for further study - offering encouragement, laying a foundation and assisting with entry to new and higher level courses, both within and beyond the ACE sector;
- creates connections with work – building employment related skills for workers and strongly supporting acquisition of jobs for unemployed people;
- expands involvement in leisure activities, particularly for people who are not in the labour force;
- strengthens understanding of Australian culture and values, particularly for LBOTE people;
- builds communication, social and life management skills, particularly for unemployed people.

ACE: a platform for further study

More than half of the cohort continued to undertake some form of education and training in the two years following their original ACE course. For those undertaking a new course in 2006, strong connections were made between this decision and their experiences in study in ACE in 2004 and ACE and elsewhere in 2005. Their previous study had encouraged them to apply, there were links between courses in terms of content, and completing their previous course had helped them to get into the new course. Course completion rates amongst the cohort were high.

Decisions made about where to study in 2005 in general filtered through to choices made in 2006. Those who continued to study in the ACE sector in 2005 continued to study there in 2006 (if they chose to undertake any study at all). Conversely, those who moved out of the ACE sector (i.e. to TAFE, university, private training providers and schools) to study in 2005 were more likely to continue to study outside the ACE sector (again, if they chose to study at all). Those taking the non-ACE study pathway were more likely to have originally enrolled in an award course at ACE than those who

continued to study in ACE over the three years. They were also more likely to have enrolled in their original ACE course for economic and vocational reasons, for example, to prepare for further study and gain qualifications. It seems that ACE fulfilled this role for them.

Most people felt that information about study pathways was available from their ACE provider in terms of the types of courses that followed on from their original course and also where they could study at the next level. However, one-fifth of the cohort reported difficulties finding out whether the course they wanted to do in ACE was available.

Looking back at their ACE experiences, those surveyed were extremely appreciative of the ACE learning environment. The overall cohort felt that: learning was enjoyable in ACE; there was a supportive learning environment; help and advice was available; the teaching was good; and it was easy to get along with the teachers. The opportunity to learn at their own pace and own level was also recognised. Respondents also generally felt that there was a good range of courses available in ACE and that the courses were affordable.

A few challenges for ACE were also identified. Some ACE students felt that:

- their ACE course was too short for the content
- it was more difficult than they expected
- there were not enough options for their interests or their age-group
- there were not enough study places available in ACE.

When reflecting on what they had gained through their 2004 ACE study and also study in ACE and elsewhere in 2005, improved self confidence rated most highly. Better communication and socialisation skills went alongside this.

ACE: making connections with work

The labour market status of the cohort improved dramatically over the duration of the study, with the full-time employment rate more than doubling, and the unemployment rate declining by two-thirds.

Improved capacity to work was seen as a major benefit of study, with more than seven in ten respondents reporting that their 2004 ACE or 2005 study had enabled them to develop good job skills. And nearly three-quarters of workers said that their study helped with tasks they do at work. Nearly half of workers said that their study had helped them to get a job.

Although these strong links between study and work were identified, nearly one-quarter of respondents felt that there should have been links between their ACE course and the workplace, and these had not existed. Half of all respondents believed that ACE courses should focus more on skills for job seeking.

draft

ACE: benefits key groups

Language background other than English

People with a **language background other than English (LBOTE)** were extremely positive about their experiences in study (ACE 2004, ACE or elsewhere 2005). In particular, they noted improved study skills and improved literacy and numeracy, better communication skills, and a greater understanding of the Australian way of life. LBOTE people were more emphatic than English language background people about the links between their study and work.

LBOTE people were just as enthusiastic as English language background people regarding the learning environment in ACE. They appreciated the quality of teaching and that they could learn at their own pace. However, LBOTE people were much more likely to say that their course had been too short for the content, that their course had been more difficult than expected, and that there had been too many people in the class. Two-thirds of LBOTE people advised that ACE courses should focus more on skills for job seeking.

Unemployed

Those who were **unemployed in 2005** were more likely than those working or not in the labour force to say in 2006 that their study experiences had improved their confidence and had helped them to learn and study better. Unemployed people were also most likely to report improved communication and socialisation skills. There were strong links made between study and finding work, with nearly six in ten of those who were unemployed in 2005 reporting that their study had helped them to get a job.

This group does however present some challenges for ACE. Those who were **unemployed in 2005** were least likely (compared to workers and those not in the labour force) to be positive about their learning experiences in ACE. They also more often reported a lack of access to information about study pathways. One-third would have liked there to have been links between their ACE course and the workplace, and two-thirds of unemployed people emphasised that ACE courses should focus more on skills for job seeking.

Men

While gender differences tended not to be large overall, it is worth noting that in general, **men** were slightly more positive about their learning experiences in ACE than women.

Finally

This longitudinal study has identified some key benefits of studying in ACE, as well as some challenges for the sector over the three years of the project. The work and study pathways of respondents, revealed by this study, clearly demonstrate the powerful capacity of the ACE sector to engage learners and connect them to further study, employment and involvement in their local community.

Appendix 1: The survey instrument

A Community Studies Approach to Researching Strategic Issues in ACE
LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Telephone Survey Instrument, Stage 3, 2006

<u>If were studying in 2005, ASK</u>
A1a. In 2005 you were enrolled in [NAME OF PROVIDER] studying [NAME OF COURSE, LEVEL OF COURSE]. Can I please confirm this?

Confirm provider, name and level of course
Provider:
Name:
Level:

Subject only/non-award /no qualification/ non-accredited	1
Certificate I	2
Certificate II	3
VCE/VCAL	4
Certificate III	5
Certificate IV	6
Diploma	7
Advanced Diploma	8
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)	

Continue to A2.

<u>If were not studying in 2005, ASK</u>

A1b. When we spoke to you in April last year, you said that you were not studying. Did you do any study at all after that, in 2005?

Yes	1 (continue to A1c)
No	2 (continue to B1a)

<u>If A1b = 1, ASK</u>
A1c. What course did you study? (ask to select main course if more than one)

Name of course:
Name of Institution/Provider:
Studying full-time/part-time:
Level of Course:

Subject only/non-award /no qualification/ non-accredited	1
Certificate I	2
Certificate II	3
VCE/VCAL	4
Certificate III	5
Certificate IV	6
Diploma	7
Advanced Diploma	8
Undergraduate Degree	9
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)	

Continue to A2

A2. Did you complete this course? (choose one option only)

Yes	1 (go to A3a)
Currently continuing same course	2 (go to C1)
No	3 (go to A4a)

<u>If A2 = 1, ASK:</u>

A3a. Did you complete the formal assessment for this course? (choose one option only)

Yes	1 (go to A3b)
No	2 (go to A3b)
There was no formal assessment	3 (go to A3b)
Don't know	4 (go to A3b)

A3b. Did you receive a statement of attainment or certificate? (choose one option only)

Yes	1 (Go to B1)
No	2 (Go to B1)
Don't know	3 (Go to B1)

<u>If A2=3, ASK:</u>

A4a. Were any of these reasons why you did not complete the course?

Your personal (/family) circumstances changed	Yes/No
Got a job/working now	Yes/No
Stopped for a while but intend to take up again	Yes/No
Changed to full-time/part-time	Yes/No
Didn't like it (/Wasn't interesting)	Yes/No
Course was too difficult (/Couldn't cope with the study demands)	Yes/No
There was too much travel involved	Yes/No
It was too expensive	Yes/No
The course wasn't relevant to career plans	Yes/No
Class times were inconvenient	Yes/No
Dissatisfied with the teaching	Yes/No
Course was cancelled	Yes/No
You never intended to finish the course	Yes/No
You got what you needed from the course	Yes/No
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)	

A4b. What was the main reason you did not complete the course?

A4c. Do you plan to return to this course in the future?

Yes	1 (continue to B1)
No	2 (continue to B1)

ASK if A2=1 or A2=3 or A1b=2 (did not study at all in 2005)

B1a. Are you currently studying?

Yes	1 (Go to B1b)
No	2 (Go to B6)

<u>If B1a=1, ASK:</u>

B1b. Why are you doing this study?

I am doing this study because I hope it will help me to (Strongly Agree/Agree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree)

Improve my job skills
Get a job
Change my job
Prepare myself for further study
Gain a qualification
Develop a new interest or activity
Improve my personal wellbeing/confidence
Meet new people and share a learning activity

B2a. How many courses are you enrolled in?

B2b. What course(s) are you studying (all courses)?

Name of course
Name of Institution/provider
Studying full-time/ part-time
Level of Course:

Subject only/non-award /no qualification/ non-accredited	1
Certificate I	2
Certificate II	3
VCE/VCAL	4
Certificate III	5
Certificate IV	6
Diploma	7
Advanced Diploma	8
Undergraduate Degree	9
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)	

B3. Do you see your current course as following on from what you were studying in ACE in 2004 or from your study last year?

Yes 1
No 2

(SKIP to B5 IF A2=3)
B4. Did completing your 2004 ACE course or your study last year help you to get in?

Yes 1
No 2

B5. Did your experiences in your 2004 ACE course or your study last year encourage you to apply for your new course?

Yes 1 (Go to C1)
No 2 (Go to C1)

<u>ASK ALL:</u>
D1a. The next question relates to the kinds of skills some people consider important to gain or improve through study in ACE and other providers.
Did your 2004 ACE study or any study you did in 2005 help you to (Yes/No):

improve your literacy and numeracy
learn and study better
develop good job skills
find a job
do volunteer or community activities
involve yourself in leisure activities
get a qualification
feel more confident

D1b. This question shows what some people have said about what they gained from their study in ACE and elsewhere. Do you agree or disagree that:

My study experiences since enrolling in ACE in 2004 have improved how well I… (Agree/Disagree):

- communicate with people
- work with others
- am able to do business
- can use computers
- can plan for future jobs
- understand how Australians live and what they think
- get along with people and make friends
- am able to manage my life

D1c. If there are other ways in which you have benefited from your studies since 2004, please tell us.

D1d. The most important thing I gained from my learning experiences since I started my 2004 ACE study is:

D2. Thinking about your experience of learning in ACE (Community House or Learning Centre) in 2004 (and 2005), to what extent would you agree or disagree that, (strongly agree/agree/disagree/strongly disagree)

- You had a supportive learning environment
- Individual help and guidance were available
- It was easy to get along with the teachers
- You were able to learn at your own pace
- You could learn at your own level
- Everyone was made to feel welcome
- Overall, the teaching was good
- The course was too short for the content that had to be covered
- There were too many people in the class
- Learning was enjoyable for you
- The course was harder than you expected

D3. Thinking about your experience of study in ACE in 2004 or last year, do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Agree/Disagree/Not Applicable):

- Child care was available for people who needed it
- There were no links between the course and the workplace and there should have been
- If you completed the assessment successfully you were given the formal Certificate
- Advice and help were available if you had difficulties attending the course because of other issues (such as health, transport, disability, accommodation, family relationships, affording the fees …)
- Information about the kinds of study that followed on from your course was available
- Information and advice about where this next level of study could be done were available
- The course was cut short before it was scheduled to finish

D4. Our next question is about courses available in ACE (at Community Houses and Learning Centres).
Would you say that (Yes/No):

- ACE has a good range of courses

It is difficult to get into the course you want because there are not enough places at ACE
There are not enough options in ACE for people my age
It is easy to find out what ACE courses are available
ACE courses are very affordable
ACE courses should focus more on skills for job seeking
It is difficult to find out if the course you want to do is offered in ACE
There are not enough options in ACE for my interests

ASK ALL:

E1. Are you now working?

Yes full-time	1
Yes part-time	2
No, looking for work	3 (Go to E4)
No, not looking for work	4 (Go to E4)

If E1=1 or E1=2, ASK

E2. If working:
What is your job?_____

Are you an apprentice	Yes (Go to E3)/No
Are you a trainee	Yes (Go to E3)/No
Are you self employed	Yes (Go to E3)/No
Are you a casual employee	Yes/No

(if casual) How many hours are you working on average per week? ……
(Continue to E3)

E3. If working:
In your view, did your experiences in ACE in 2004 or your study since:

Help you get a job (or apprenticeship or traineeship)	Yes/No
Teach you skills to help you get a better job	Yes/No
Help you in performing tasks you have to do at work	Yes/No
Help you to set up or run a business	Yes/No

ASK ALL:

E4. Are you currently doing any volunteer or community work?
□ Yes, please specify:
□ No

F1. Do you plan to do any volunteer or community work next year? (Please mark ONE option only)

Yes	1
No	2
Undecided	3

F2. Regarding study, what do you plan to do next year? (Please mark ONE option only)

Continue the course I am currently doing	1
Do another ACE course	2
Study at TAFE	3
Study at University	4
Study at a private training provider or other study	5
Not planning to undertake any study	6
Undecided	7

F3. What are your plans for work next year? (Please mark ONE option only)

Work - full-time	1
Work - part-time	2
Work - casual	3
Not planning to work	4
Undecided	5

G1. And lastly, we would like to contact you again in the future to ask how your plans are working out. Would you agree to be contacted to answer a few brief questions next year?

□ Yes If yes, please CONFIRM your name and phone number:
Could we also have the name and number of someone who will know where you are in case we cannot contact you next year?

H1. Before I go, is there anything else you'd like to add about your ACE study or its outcomes?

That is the end of the interview. Thank you very much for your time and assistance.