



**NSW Community Colleges
and Aboriginal Economic Development:
Statement by
Community Colleges Australia**

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Prepared by

Community Colleges Australia

PO Box 1839, Queen Victoria Building

Sydney NSW 1230

Tel (02) 9233 3634

Web www.cca.edu.au

Email admin@cca.edu.au

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Acknowledgement of Country

Community Colleges Australia (CCA) acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of our land, Australia. CCA acknowledges that our Sydney office is located on the traditional lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

This Statement

This paper arises from CCA's report to the Deputy Premier and the NSW Department of Industry, entitled *The Role of New South Wales Community Education Providers in Regional and Rural Economic Development* (January 2018).¹

That report proposed a project that will ensure that the capacity of the NSW community college sector can be leveraged effectively to improve economic development opportunities of NSW Aboriginal communities – both within as well as outside of Sydney – and complement NSW Government initiatives in Aboriginal employment and training.

About Community Colleges Australia

Community Colleges Australia (CCA) is the peak national body that represents community-owned, not-for-profit education and training providers. Our vision is for dynamic and vibrant communities, informed and empowered through learning. CCA is committed to assisting its members sustain and grow, enhancing education opportunities through choice for all Australians. CCA promotes learning innovation for all Australians by delivery that engages with and belongs to communities, focussing especially on vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. Our members are long-established community learning organisations located in metropolitan, regional and rural locations. They focus on student welfare and are committed to employment outcomes.

CCA works to increase awareness of the community education sector and its place in the economic and social fabric of our Australia. The majority of CCA members are Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) for vocational education and training (VET).

About Our Members

Our members:

- operate as small to medium size businesses, unconstrained by large bureaucracies;
- have mission statements that prioritise community development to meet local community social and economic needs;
- are independent organisations with autonomous governance structures, based in their local communities and work effectively with local and regional stakeholders;
- are linked through a powerful network through their peak organisation, Community Colleges Australia;
- are agile and flexible, able to respond quickly to changing community needs, developing local programs that address local challenges;
- have developed efficient business models, given limited government funding;

¹ See <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/NSW-Regional-and-Rural-Community-Providers-Regional-Econ-Devt-report-FINAL-25Jan2018-2.pdf>.

- are not-for-profit organisations, unencumbered by the need to produce profit for investors, resulting in a low risk to governments;
- are familiar with reinventing themselves, engaged in an ongoing process of performance improvement – if they do not develop, they do not survive;
- understand how to work collaboratively with the NSW Government in achieving education, training and employment goals; and
- frequently work with other government bodies, state, local and Commonwealth, and with not-for-profit, business, industry and other community stakeholders.

CCA's research has shown that NSW community education providers have a strong connection with economic development.² Traditionally, community colleges foster and promote lifelong learning, innovative and critical thinking, capable workers, good communication, improved social and cultural life of their communities, and the flexibility to meet challenges and change. All of these align closely with the aims of economic development.³

CCA's active network of community colleges constitute a major resource for the skilling and betterment of NSW Aboriginal communities. CCA seeks to ensure that this community capacity can be utilised for Aboriginal economic development in the state.

The Australian Parliament's Committee on Regional Development and Decentralisation has concluded that a, "place-based' approach to regional economic development is important because it recognises that regions are different, that one-size-fits-all approaches are often inappropriate, and that local communities must be central to development efforts."⁴ NSW community education organisations are well-placed to support place-based regional economic development activities with Aboriginal communities.

A Note on Terminology

Community Colleges Australia notes the following statement from the NSW Department of Community Services, *Working with Aboriginal People and Communities: A Practice Resource*⁵:

As Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of NSW; and as the NSW Government only has a specific charter of service to the people of NSW, this document refers only to Aboriginal people. References to Torres Strait Islander people will be specifically stated where relevant. It is important to remember that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are very different, with their own unique histories, beliefs and values.

It is respectful to recognise their separate identities. Community Services recognise that Torres Strait Islander people are among the First Nations of Australia and represent a part of our client and staff base. The Department's Aboriginal programs and services are available, without question, to Torres Strait Islander people.

² See <https://cca.edu.au/what-we-do/policy-research/>.

³ See Patricia Carroll, "Engaging the Community College in State and Local Economic Development: Maintaining the Balance."

⁴ Parliament of Australia, Select Committee on Regional Development and Decentralisation, 2017, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Regional_Development_and_Decentralisation/RDD/Issues_Paper/section?id=committees%2Freportrep%2F024094%2F24934.

⁵ Prepared by the Aboriginal Services Branch, NSW Department of Community Services, February 2009; see http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/321308/working_with_aboriginal.pdf.

For purposes of consistency with NSW practice, this document uses the term “Aboriginal people” when referring to NSW (although uses the term “Indigenous people” when referring to other parts of Australia). CCA acknowledges that Torres Strait Islander people are among the First Nations of Australia, many of whom also live and work in the state.

NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Geography and Population

The official 2016 census results show that 216,176 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people resided in NSW, representing 2.9% of the total NSW population and 33.3% of the Indigenous population in Australia. Subsequent ABS estimates showed an “undercount” of about 17.5%, meaning that these figures are likely to be revised upwards.⁶ Indigenous Australians are proportionately over-represented in regional and rural NSW, in comparison to the general population: 44.6% Indigenous people live in NSW major cities, 33.7% in inner regional areas, 17.2% in outer regional areas, 2.9% in remote areas and 1.6% in very remote areas.⁷

Australia’s Indigenous population significantly lags behind the non-Indigenous population in wealth, income and educational achievements. This is reflected in NSW through the following statistics:

- 63% of Aboriginal people in NSW aged 20-24 years had completed Year 12 or higher, compared with 87% of the non-Aboriginal population (2014-15);
- 39% of Aboriginal people and 61% of non-Aboriginal people aged 20-64 had a post school qualification (2011);
- 53% of Aboriginal people aged 15-64 years in NSW were employed, compared with 71% of non-Aboriginal people (2014/15);
- the unemployment rate in NSW for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people aged 15-64 years was 15% and 5.7% respectively (2014/15); for people aged 18-24, it was 26% and 11.4% respectively (2011);
- 42% of Aboriginal households in NSW owned or were purchasing their home, compared with 65% of non-Aboriginal households (2016);
- median weekly household income for Aboriginal households in NSW was \$550, compared with \$850 for non-Aboriginal households (2014/15); and
- Aboriginal people in NSW were 11 times more likely than non-Aboriginal people to be imprisoned; and 74% of Aboriginal people in prison in NSW had experienced prior imprisonment, compared with 49% of non-Aboriginal people; Aboriginal young people were detained at 15 times the rate of non-Aboriginal young people in NSW (2014/15).⁸

⁶ See <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-28/concerns-over-undercount-of-indigenous-population-in-census/8660972> and <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2940.0>.

⁷ See <http://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/pdfs/research-and-evaluation/KEY-DATA-ABORIGINAL-PEOPLE-JULY-2017.pdf>. This document notes, “The term ‘Aboriginal’ is used to describe the many nations, language groups and clans in NSW including those from the Torres Strait. The preference for the term ‘Aboriginal’ to ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ in NSW recognises that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of NSW.

⁸ See <http://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/pdfs/research-and-evaluation/KEY-DATA-ABORIGINAL-PEOPLE-JULY-2017.pdf>.

Vocational Education and Training and Indigenous Australians

Indigenous Australians participate in vocational education and training (VET) at much higher rates than non-Indigenous people – nationally at a rate of 18.7%, double the rate of non-Indigenous Australians – although VET completion rates sometimes lag. By contrast, Indigenous participation in higher education (3.6%) is half that of rate of non-Indigenous Australians. In common with non-Indigenous students, VET student percentages are much higher in regional, rural and remote locations. While TAFE remains the dominant VET provider to NSW Indigenous students (59%), the NCVET notes that community (4.1%) and for-profit private providers (27%) have increased their Indigenous students over the past 10 years.⁹

The NSW community education sector over-performs with relation to the number of Indigenous students served through government-funded VET. Some 12% of NSW community education VET students funded by government programs were Indigenous in 2016, compared to 8.4% of TAFE students, 6.3% of private for-profit provider students and a NSW provider average of 8%.¹⁰

The NSW Government has invested a great deal of effort into addressing Aboriginal disadvantage. A key part of this is the Aboriginal Affairs strategy called “OCHRE”, which stands for Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment.¹¹ Major research projects have examined the economic development of Aboriginal communities. In 2011, the Allen Consulting Group report concluded:

There is no lack of programs or funding initiatives to improve Aboriginal economic participation. Indeed, a large number of education, employment and economic development programs are delivered or available in NSW, some jointly funded by the NSW and Commonwealth Governments. However, despite all these efforts and investments, no significant progress has been made in closing the gap in economic outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.¹²

A 2016 NSW Legislative Council inquiry into economic development noted that “education is the cornerstone of economic and community development,” and that the challenge was to integrate education with economic opportunities such as business development and land development.¹³ The report’s 39 recommendations have been widely discussed, and the

⁹ See <https://www.ncver.edu.au/data/data/infographics/indigenous-vet-participation-completion-and-employment-outcomes-infographic> and <https://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/publications/all-publications/indigenous-vet-participation-completion-and-outcomes-change-over-the-past-decade>.

¹⁰ In 2016, Indigenous Australians made up 2.9% of the NSW population; see <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20Population%20Data%20Summary~10>. Indigenous Australians participate in VET at a much higher rate than non-Indigenous Australians – approximately double; see <https://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/publications/all-publications/indigenous-vet-participation-completion-and-outcomes-change-over-the-past-decade>.

¹¹ See <http://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government-aboriginal-affairs-strategy> and http://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/pdfs/OCHRE/AA_OCHRE_final.pdf.

¹² The Allen Consulting Group, *NSW Government Employment and Economic Development Programs for Aboriginal People: Review of programs and broader considerations*, Report to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, The Hon. Victor Dominello, MP, December 2011, http://www.acilallen.com.au/cms_files/acgaboriginalemploymentnsw2011.pdf.

¹³ See NSW Parliament, *Economic Development in Aboriginal Communities*, Legislative Council Standing Committee on State Development, 2016,

NSW Government is in the process of implementing a number of them.¹⁴ The final report, and the preceding discussion paper, both emphasised the importance of VET in Aboriginal community development.¹⁵

The NSW Ombudsman report, entitled *Addressing Aboriginal disadvantage: The need to do things differently* (2011), includes a chapter on “Building economic capacity in Aboriginal communities”, which emphasises the importance of VET and the “specific challenges associated with enhancing economic capacity and employment opportunities in disadvantaged and/or rural and remote locations.” The report notes that the “NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) is the largest self-funded Aboriginal representative organisation in Australia, and ... has a key role to play in creating economic opportunities for Aboriginal people in NSW.”¹⁶

The network of 120 Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) provides an immediate set of stakeholders for NSW community education organisations to work with. Such collaboration can be challenging because of the many challenges that the LALCs face.¹⁷ Community Colleges Australia recognises the important role that Aboriginal Land Councils play in regional and rural NSW, has begun to engage with the Councils to create the connections.

Examples of how NSW Community Education Providers Serve and Engage with Aboriginal People and Communities

While most all NSW community education providers work with their local Aboriginal communities in some way, some have created unique and unusual approaches. A large proportion of CCA’s NSW members have Aboriginal staff, and many have dedicated Aboriginal coordinators.

ACE Community Colleges in Lismore has developed an award-winning Aboriginal driver education program is funded by NSW Roads and Maritime Services and ACE CSO program funds.¹⁸ Partnering with Aboriginal Land Councils, local police and magistrates, justice representatives, Jobactive and DES organisations, the college subcontracts the driving instruction to local community-endorsed driving schools. The college has undertaken extensive engagement with Aboriginal offenders, supporting state government services to maximise Aboriginal economic participation. ACE is currently working with a local Aboriginal organisation to fulfil their aim to have all Aboriginal staff in their day care centres. The trust-

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryReport/ReportAcrobat/6076/Final%20report%20-%2030%20September%202016.pdf>

¹⁴ See

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryReport/GovernmentResponse/6076/Government%20response%20-%20received%201%20May%202017.pdf>.

¹⁵ New South Wales Parliament, *Economic Development in Aboriginal Communities: Discussion Paper*, Legislative Council Standing Committee on State Development, 2016,

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryOther/Transcript/10068/070716%20Discussion%20paper.pdf>.

¹⁶ NSW Ombudsman, October 2011,

https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/3342/SR_Aboriginal-disadvantage-report.pdf.

¹⁷ See <http://alc.org.au/>.

¹⁸ See <https://www.acecolleges.edu.au/community/aboriginal-driver-education-program/>, <https://www.northernstar.com.au/news/community-college-aces-caltex-road-safety-awards/2968675/> and <https://cca.edu.au/ace-community-colleges-wins-award-for-indigenous-driver-education-program/>.

based relationships leading to these initiatives have been developed and nurtured over a long time period.

Port Macquarie Community College has developed an Indigenous engagement strategy to ensure that commitment to Indigenous people is embedded throughout the organisation. The College delivers specialised Aboriginal education and training programs, including learning to drive (Birpai Learners), youth mentoring – including seven Foundation Skills and Community Services units of competency, basic computers – including six Foundation Skills and IT units of competency), Aboriginal storytelling and Indigenous Land Management (leading to a Certificate III).

VERTO has engaged two Orange schools in the Aboriginal Youth Leadership Program, with funding from the Commonwealth's Indigenous Advancement Strategy. VERTO also runs "New Careers for Aboriginal People (NCAP) Program in the Mid-Western region, which placed 66 people into employment and more than 80 into training in 2016/17.

Western College in Dubbo has recently begun to engage with Aboriginal community radio stations in northwest NSW. Working with Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation (MPREC) – an Indigenous-owned and managed not-for-profit organisation – the college is delivering foundation skills and digital technology training to the staff of Aboriginal community radio stations, thereby supporting regional Indigenous employment strategies.

Robinson College in Broken Hill has developed expertise in engaging many of the most disadvantaged Indigenous residents to build learner confidence and develop "work-ready" skills for participation in regional economic development programs, and works with partners including the Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation.

These colleges provide good models of Aboriginal resources and engagement that need to be investigated further, and possibly extended and expanded. They provide the basis upon which to assist the NSW ACE sector to undertake greater engagement to further both Aboriginal training activities as well as economic development. CCA has already made contact with Aboriginal land councils, and has begun to develop the capacity to continue process in part through its member "Indigenous Affinity Network".

These approaches show that the NSW community education sector is well-placed to expand its role in working with Aboriginal communities. Community providers, with their "for purpose" approach, local and regional focus, community development orientation and ability to personalise services, all bring a unique approach to working with the most disadvantaged people – as a recent (March 2018) report from the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) has shown.¹⁹

Complementing Existing NSW Government Programs

Aside from the NSW Department of Industry's Smart and Skilled program and Community Services Obligation program – neither of which are focussed solely on Aboriginal students – there are few established governmental opportunities for community education providers to build on their activities with Aboriginal communities.²⁰

¹⁹ See <https://cca.edu.au/new-ncver-report-confirms-australian-community-education-providers-provide-the-best-vet-services-to-disadvantaged-australians/>.

²⁰ Smart and Skilled includes Smart, Skilled and Deadly – Training for Aboriginal People in NSW under Smart and Skilled, which links to a number of the support programs run by the Aboriginal Support Unit.

There is a need to develop a resource kit for community education organisations so that they can engage effectively with Aboriginal groups, communities and individuals. Training Services NSW has created an Aboriginal Services Unit to manage programs that focus on improving access to employment and creating business opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.²¹

Training Services NSW has created and filled specific Aboriginal advisor roles in all regional offices. The Aboriginal Services Unit administers four funding programs designed to support culturally appropriate education and training pathways for Aboriginal people:

- Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment Program subsidises the salary costs of Aboriginal employees in a public service agency or local council, and funds innovative community projects that create education, training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.
- New Careers for Aboriginal People assists Aboriginal people into employment or training opportunities which will enhance their prospects of permanent employment. (As noted above, VERTO participate in this program in the central West of NSW.)
- The way ahead for Aboriginal People Program provides mentoring services for Aboriginal apprentices and trainees, as well additional workplace support.
- Aboriginal Enterprise Development Officers foster and support the development of sustainable Aboriginal business enterprises.

The Unit has recently announced an Aboriginal Programs Advisory Committee that will provide leadership and direction to the inclusion of non-government and community views into policy and program areas.

In addition to these initiatives, TAFE NSW enrolls substantial numbers of Aboriginal students and provides additional services, both to the students as well as those working with them, including Eora College at Sydney Institute.²² The NSW Department of Education has extensive dedicated resources for Aboriginal engagement and learning.²³ Recently, the NSW Local Government Association worked with the NSW Office of Local Government to develop the “Collaborate NSW” website, “to support the inclusion of Aboriginal communities in council decision-making, service development and delivery.”²⁴

Embedding VET pathways and economic opportunities for Aboriginal people aims to foster the resilience and strength of Aboriginal communities across the state. CCA wishes to ensure that its members support this outcome for the Indigenous inhabitants of NSW.

Contact

Community Colleges Australia
PO Box 1839, QVB Post Office, Sydney NSW 1230
(street address: suite 1016, 155 King Street, Sydney NSW 2000)
Tel (02) 9233 3634
Email admin@cca.edu.au; web www.cca.edu.au

²¹ See https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/programs_services/funded_other/acp/index.html.

²² See <https://www.tafensw.edu.au/courses/aboriginal-pathways>,
<https://www.tafensw.edu.au/digital/getting-started/aboriginal-students>,
<https://www.tafensw.edu.au/digital/aboriginal-education> and <http://sydneytafe.edu.au/current-students/eora-college/eora>.

²³ See <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/aec/aboriginal-education-in-nsw-public-schools>.

²⁴ See <http://collaboratensw.org/>.

