



The Hon. John Barilaro MP

Deputy Premier
Minister for Regional New South Wales,
Minister for Skills and Minister for Small Business

OM19/645

Dr Don Perlgut
Chief Executive Officer
Community Colleges Australia
PO BOX 1839
QVB Post Office
SYDNEY NSW 1230

Dear Dr Perlgut

Thank you for your email of 1 March 2019 containing Community Colleges Australia's NSW Election Policy Platform.

Firstly, I would like to thank you for your support over the last few years, and for being part of the NSW Government's Smart and Skilled reforms to Vocational Education. NSW's Adult and Community Education (ACE) providers continue to overachieve in training and supporting students who live in regional NSW, have a disability, are indigenous, or are otherwise socially, or economically, disadvantaged. These providers continue to perform above-and-beyond and, during a time when non-government providers are unfortunately frequently demonised, demonstrate the benefits of a healthy, diverse, Vocational Education system.

Introduced in 2015, the Smart and Skilled reforms revolutionised Vocational Education in our State and is driven by the objective to improve outcomes for all those who undertake training, and to support our strong economy. I am proud that NSW is now the largest provider of Government-funded Vocational Education and Training in the nation. This achievement would not be possible without our fantastic ACE providers, and I thank Community Colleges Australia for our continued positive engagement and your tireless advocacy.

In the last four years, together, the Liberals and Nationals in Government, and our Smart and Skilled providers, have modernised Vocational Education into a genuine alternative to university. Smart and Skilled is enabling people in NSW to make more informed choices about their training, knowing which courses can give them the skills they need to get a job, advance their career or continue onto further study. These reforms are most evident in the phenomenal uptake of apprenticeships we have witnessed in recent years, and I am proud that this year we are seeing more students starting their apprenticeship than any other on record.

The NSW Government's commitment to supporting ACE providers has seen an increase in Community Service Obligation (CSO) funding each year from \$17.5m in the 2016/17 financial year to \$21.3m in 2018/19. I am keen to see this growth continue and for the review that the Department of Industry is currently undertaking into the CSO funding to take into account the access training for equity groups,

particularly in regional areas, that distinguishes the ACE sector. Additionally, on top of the \$2.3 million to help ACE providers meet the cost of infrastructure maintenance already committed, I can confirm the ACE sector will be eligible to apply for the next round of the Stronger Country Communities Fund. \$50 million, or 50 per cent of the next round, of the fund will be dedicated specifically for projects and programs aimed at supporting young people in regional NSW with more details to follow on how ACE providers can be apply.

As you are aware, while all Smart and Skilled providers including ACE providers can submit requests to vary their financial caps and seek re-allocation of funding, I am eager to ensure all processes are as responsive as possible. As you recognise, in areas of greatest social and economic need we must ensure our Government-funded skills training is responsive to demand while maintaining high quality standards.

Continued advocacy and promotion of Vocational Education will be at the forefront of a re-elected Liberals and Nationals Government. Through working together with Community Colleges Australia, non-government providers, industry groups and employers, we will continue the advancement and modernisation of skills training to create the workforce, and society, NSW deserves.

ACE providers will be a critical component of this continuous improvement, through their unique ability to empower some of our most in need and isolated communities. I am supportive of exploring avenues to recognise and strengthen our valued ACE providers. As you state, this could be through consultation with the Commonwealth Government and other states and territories with an aim to update the previous ministerial statement, or through the establishment of a statutory authority to advise Government on how best to meet the needs of NSW individuals, industry, regions and the economy through ACE providers. I have asked my office to begin exploring the possibilities around this and look forward to continuing to engage with you following our election campaign.

Thank you again for providing your policy platform. Your championing on behalf of ACE providers is invaluable, and I look forward to working with you further in the future.

Yours sincerely



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