



Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of NSW Not-for-Profit Community Education Providers: Analysis of 2018 Data

Community Colleges Australia
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Background

This report by Community Colleges Australia (CCA) details the performance of not-for-profit NSW community education providers in reaching vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, based on 2018 data compiled by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). This report is the third in CCA's series examining Government Funded VET data.¹

Each year the NCVER publishes annual totals for vocational education and training (VET) student activity for the previous calendar year. The NCVER publishes data in two formats:

- **Government funded VET**, defined as “all Commonwealth and state/territory government-funded training delivered by TAFE institutes, other government providers such as universities), community education providers and other registered providers” – 1.1 million students participated in government-funded VET in 2018²; and
- **Total VET** students participating in nationally accredited training (also known as “total VET activity”) – approximately 4.1 million students enrolled in VET in 2018.³

NCVER data undergoes significant quality control to ensure it will be of value to Australian policy makers and researchers.⁴ The NCVER makes available “data slicers” and the original data sets in ways that can be downloaded and compared. CCA has used these “data slicers” to prepare this report.

¹ See <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/NSW-Community-Colleges-Govt-Funded-VET-2016-Analysis-28September2017-1.pdf> and <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Vulnerable-and-Disadvantaged-Students-of-NSW-Community-Education-Providers-Analysis-of-2017-Data.pdf>.

² See <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/government-funded-students-and-courses-2018>.

³ See <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/total-vet-students-and-courses-2018>

⁴ See <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data-quality-policy> and <https://www.ncver.edu.au/about-ncver/about-our-data>.

In New South Wales, “government-funded VET” for community education providers primarily refers to one of two programs managed and funded by Training Services NSW, located in the NSW Department of Education (previously in NSW Department of Industry): and the ACE (Adult and Community Education) program and the Smart and Skilled program.⁵

This report compares the New South Wales NCVET 2018 “government-funded” student data, examining the differences between not-for-profit community education providers (often known as “community colleges”), TAFE (government/public) providers and private for-profit providers. In later reports, CCA will examine similar patterns for Victoria and for the whole of Australia for both government-funded and total VET activity.

Table 1 below details the following student characteristics across the three types of NSW VET providers that delivered government-funded VET during 2018:

- gender
- age
- Indigenous status
- disability status
- ARIA remoteness category
- SEIFA IRSD
- non-English speaking background

ARIA classifications fall into five categories: metropolitan, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote. Australian research acknowledges the increasing difficulty that many regional and remote residents experience in accessing education, training and other services, compared residents of major cities. For details of this disadvantage, see CCA’s reports *The Role of New South Wales Community Education Providers in Regional and Rural Economic Development* and *The Role of Community Education in Australian Regional and Rural Economic Development*.⁶

SEIFA IRSD refers to Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), an index “developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) that ranks areas in Australia according to relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage. The indexes are based on information from the five-yearly Census.” IRSD refers to “Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage”.⁷ SEIFA is widely used and acknowledged by Australian researchers as a strong comparative tool for disadvantage.⁸

⁵ Commonwealth and other state funding programs and initiatives make additional, mostly minor contributions to the government-funded VET totals.

⁶ See <https://cca.edu.au/home/nsw-regional-and-rural-economic-development-report-summary/> and <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/The-Role-of-Community-Education-in-Regional-and-Rural-Economic-Development-7February2017.pdf>, pp. 12-17. Also see <https://cca.edu.au/home/nsw-regional-and-rural-economic-development-report-summary/>.

Also see: Australian Productivity Commission, *Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia*, July 2013, http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/3521/1/Deep%20and%20Persistent%20Disadvantage%20in%20Australia_PC%20July2013.pdf.

⁷ See Australian Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/seifa>.

⁸ See “Australia’s most disadvantaged suburbs: where are they and who lives there?”, by Nicholas Biddle, *The Conversation*, 8 April 2013, <https://theconversation.com/australias-most-disadvantaged-suburbs-where-are-they-and-who-lives-there-13181>. And <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/datablog/ng-interactive/2019/apr/19/inequality-in-australia-an-interactive-map-of-disadvantage>.

Reaching Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Learners Summary

A close examination of the NCVER's 2018 government-funded VET data reveals that:

On almost all tracked measures of vulnerability and disadvantage, in 2018 NSW community education VET providers significantly over-performed compared to both TAFE and private for-profit providers, disproportionately catering for students from the state's most disadvantaged groups and regions.

This achievement results from the funding provided by the NSW Government's "ACE Program" (previously called "CSO") and the ability of NSW not-for-profit community providers to use the funds effectively and successfully to meet the program's desired outcomes to "guarantee training for key equity groups".⁹ The calendar year 2018 figures are consistent with the 2016 and 2017 government-funded VET data.¹⁰

In 2018, NSW community education providers achieved the following percentage proportions of their government-funded VET student populations:

- **12.6% Indigenous students** (13.4% in 2017), compared to 9.4% of TAFE and 6.4% of private for-profit providers¹¹;
- **18.7% students with a disability** (19.7% in 2017), compared to 11.9% of TAFE and 7.2% of private for-profits;
- **68.3% regional and rural students** (63.8% in 2017), compared to 35.3% of TAFE and 29.5% of private for-profits¹²;
- **65.5% most disadvantaged students** (bottom two SEIFA quintiles; 65.6% in 2017), compared to 51.2% of TAFE and 52.4% of private for-profits;
- **41.9% older, age 45+, students** (35.8% in 2017), compared to 18.8% of TAFE and 19.3% of private for-profits; and
- **58.1% female students**, compared to 51.4% of TAFE and 48.7% of private for-profits.

See Table 1 below.

⁹ For more details about the ACE program, see https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/ace/ace_program.html

¹⁰ See <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/NSW-Community-Colleges-Govt-Funded-VET-2016-Analysis-28September2017-1.pdf> and <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Vulnerable-and-Disadvantaged-Students-of-NSW-Community-Education-Providers-Analysis-of-2017-Data.pdf>.

¹¹ 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>.

¹² Non-metropolitan regions of Australia experience higher rates of social and economic inequality; see Nick Evershed, "Inequality in Australia: an interactive map of disadvantage", *The Guardian Australia*, 19 April 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/datablog/ng-interactive/2019/apr/19/inequality-in-australia-an-interactive-map-of-disadvantage>.

Table 1: Comparison of Community Education, TAFE and Private for-profit Student Percentages by Provider Type by Vulnerability/Disadvantage

Category	Community Education (student %)	TAFE and govt (student %)	Private for-Profit and other providers (student %)
Aged 45+	41.9	18.8	19.3
With a disability	18.7	11.9	7.2
Indigenous	12.6	9.4	6.4
Non-English speaking background	10.8	21.3	11.2
Rural regional and remote	68.3	35.3	29.5
Socio-economic disadvantage (SEIFA)	65.5	51.2	52.4
Female	58.1	51.4	48.7

Employment and Training Outcomes

Community education providers continue to deliver strong outcomes for students achieving employment following their study, equalling and often outperforming TAFE or their private provider counterparts. As Table 2 (below) shows:

- More than 51% of community education students moved from being unemployed to being employed after engaging in training, compared to a 43% average for all NSW students.
- Almost 83% of community education students were employed or in further study after training, on par with other providers.

Given that community education providers proportionately engage more vulnerable and disadvantaged learners than TAFE or for-profit providers, achieving similar employment and further training percentages, these outcomes are notable achievements.

Research supports anecdotal evidence that community education providers often have good knowledge of local labour market needs and reputations for trustiness and success in engaging high need learners, providing accessible to pathways into mainstream study or work options after more ‘traditional’ options have failed.¹³

More research is needed to understand and demonstrate the impacts that community education providers deliver for their students. As they are closely embedded within their communities, they can provide local solutions for local people through targeted “place-based” training. While highly skilled in reaching disadvantaged groups, community providers should not be pigeonholed, as their innovative approaches can have strong local impact on economic development.

¹³ Source: NCVER, 2018, *Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners*, <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/improving-participation-and-success-in-vet-for-disadvantaged-learners>. Also see: Australian Bureau of Statistics: 4198.0 - *Experimental index of Household Advantage and Disadvantage*, 2016, February 2019, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4198.0Main+Features12016?OpenDocument>.

Table 2: Comparison of Community Education, TAFE and Private for-profit Student Percentages by Provider Type by Employment Status

Outcome	All students (%)	Community (%)	TAFE (%)	Private (%)
Not employed before training but employed after training	43.0	51.3	39.0	52.5
Employed after training	71.6	73.6	68.1	79.2
Employed or in further study	83.6	83.0	82.8	85.3
Improved employment status after training	57.2	60.0	54.8	62.2
Satisfied with overall quality of training	89.1	88.6	89.6	88.1
Achieved main reason for doing the training	84.0	86.1	82.6	86.6

Source: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), 2019¹⁴

As Table 3 (below) shows, community education providers do especially well in engaging and supporting female learners, with 2018 figures showing:

- 55% of female learners were not employed before training but employed after training, topping all VET provider categories;
- 76.5% of female learners were employed after training, well exceeding the NSW average;
- 84.6% of female learners were employed or in further study, equal to the highest of any provider type;
- 61.9% of female learners improved their employment status after training, the highest of all provider type; and
- 87.2% of female learners achieved their main reason for doing the training, the highest of all provider type.

This pattern of being of community education providers ability to support, engage with and meet the needs of female VET students in New South Wales is very valuable, and can become the basis for new and targeted policies and programs for engagement and training of women, including older women (see Table 1 above), in the workforce. Female workforce participation in Australia has reached an all-time high¹⁵, although women still lag behind men in many categories of workforce participation, employment, superannuation balances and salary levels.¹⁶

According to the Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: “Increasing women’s workforce participation leads to better living standards for individuals and families, improves the bottom line of businesses and is a significant driver of national economic growth.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Available at https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0037/4284649/VET-student-outcomes-2018.pdf

¹⁵ Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, February 2018, <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/6202.0Media%20Release1Jan%202018>.

¹⁶ Source: Australian Government Workplace Gender Equality Agency, “Gender workplace statistics at a glance 2018-19”, <https://www.wgea.gov.au/data/fact-sheets/gender-workplace-statistics-at-a-glance>.

¹⁷ “Women’s workforce participation – an economic priority”, <https://womensworkforceparticipation.pmc.gov.au/womens-workforce-participation-economic-priority.html>.

Table 3: Comparison of Community Education, TAFE and Private For-Profit Student Percentages by Provider Type by Gender

Not employed before training but employed after training		All students (%)	TAFE (%)	Community (%)	Private (%)
Overall		43.0	39.0	51.3	52.5
<i>Male</i>		47.0	45.1	43.4	53.0
<i>Female</i>		40.7	35.6	55.0	52.1
Employed after training		All students	TAFE	Community	Private
Overall		71.6	68.1	73.6	79.2
<i>Male</i>		75.9	74.2	65.9	81.0
<i>Female</i>		68.5	63.5	76.5	77.8
Employed or in further study		all students	TAFE	Community	Private
Overall		83.6	82.8	83.0	85.3
<i>Male</i>		86.4	86.9	78.9	86.4
<i>Female</i>		81.5	79.8	84.6	84.6
Improved employment status after training		All students	TAFE	Community	Private
Overall		57.2	54.8	60.0	62.2
<i>Male</i>		61.8	61.6	55.0	63.0
<i>Female</i>		54.0	49.8	61.9	61.5
Satisfied with overall quality of training		All students	TAFE	Community	Private
Overall		89.1	89.6	88.6	88.1
<i>Male</i>		89.3	89.6	89.9	88.4
<i>Female</i>		89.0	89.6	88.0	88.0
Achieved main reason for doing the training		All students	TAFE	Community	Private
Overall		84.0	82.6	86.1	86.6
<i>Male</i>		84.9	84.2	83.4	86.5
<i>Female</i>		83.3	81.4	87.2	86.7

Source: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), 2019.¹⁸

¹⁸ Available at https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0037/4284649/VET-student-outcomes-2018.pdf.

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. To make our vision a reality, CCA works to empower Australia's community education sector by increasing the awareness of the sector and its place in the economic and social fabric of our nation. CCA advocates at all levels of government on the value of the community education sector, and for our members' activities and programs.

CCA assists its members to sustain and grow, promoting learning innovation, focussing especially on vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. They focus on student welfare and are strongly committed to employment outcomes for their learners.

Our members have been providing flexible and dynamic education and training opportunities to individuals, groups and businesses for a long time – in some instances more than 100 years. As well as operating in accredited VET, CCA members offer a range of other learning opportunities, including non-accredited training, lifestyle and lifelong and cultural learning courses – education for which they are historically well-known. These educational activities help build self-esteem, re-engage “missing” learners and create and sustain social and community networks, all of which help to reinforce and sustain the communities in which our members operate.

Our sector's history permits our members to be strategic and innovative in their flexibility to employ a wide range of tools. Our sector plays a strategic role because our members have the freedom to take considered risks. They are not bound by government structures in the way that TAFEs are, nor are they beholden to private shareholders to supply cash returns in the way of for-profit private providers.

Our members have an historic commitment to invest in their communities and respond to the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged Australians, including a commitment to foundation skills. They do this through small class sizes, focussing on personal support, and creating connections to and collaborations with local non-government organisations, government agencies, social services and employers.

Further Information

Community Colleges Australia

Postal: PO Box 1839, QVB Post Office, Sydney NSW 1230

Street address: suite 30, level 7, 58 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000

Tel. (02) 9233 3634

Email admin@cca.edu.au

Web www.cca.edu.au