



The Role of Adult and Community Education Providers in Sustaining Australian Democracy: A Discussion Paper

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“Adult education is a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong.”

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Introduction

This discussion paper examines the role that Australian adult and community education (ACE) providers can play in sustaining Australian democracy. Community Colleges Australia (CCA) has prepared this paper as a contribution to the Australian Senate’s Legal and Constitutional Affairs References [Committee Inquiry](#) into Nationhood, Identity and Democracy, and to stimulate discussion on the questions listed later in the paper, specifically about programs and models appropriate for the ACE sector; the importance of foundation skills – language, literacy and numeracy – in supporting democracy and citizenship; and sources of funding, support and partnerships.

The Worldwide Challenge of Democracy

Since the Brexit vote in June 2016 and the election of President Donald J Trump in November of that year, increasing numbers of commentators [have attempted to analyse](#) and develop solutions to the challenges and crisis facing democracy in Western countries. In [How Democracies Die: What History Reveals About Our Future](#), Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt warn that, “the guardrails of American democracy are weakening,” an erosion “of democratic norms that began in the 1980s and 1990s and accelerated in the 2000s.” Other titles such as [Democracy Divided](#), Yascha Mounk’s [The People vs Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It](#), David Runciman’s [How Democracy Ends](#), Jason Brennan’s [Against Democracy](#), Tim Soutphommasane’s [On Hate](#), Fintan O’Toole’s [Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain](#) and Ece Temelkuran’s [How to Lose a Country: The Seven Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship](#) now crowd bookshop shelves.²

Atlantic magazine entitled its [October 2018 issue](#), “Is Democracy Dying?” In the issue, [Yoni Applebaum writes](#): “In recent decades, Americans have fallen out of practice, or even failed to acquire the habit of democracy in the first place. The results have been catastrophic. As the procedures that once conferred legitimacy on organizations have grown alien to many Americans, contempt for democratic institutions has risen.”

[Richard Brody has commented that](#) the late Philip Roth’s counter-factual history, *The Plot Against America* – set in Roth’s favourite Weequahic neighbourhood of Newark, New Jersey, in which a Nazi sympathiser is elected President in 1940 and begins persecuting Jews – carries a “mighty psychological weight [that] rests upon a terrifyingly delicate balance of circumstances that depend on whims of chance.”

The Current Challenge of Australian Democracy

The Museum of Australian Democracy’s [Democracy 2025 project](#) warns that, “Across the world, trust in democracy is in retreat. Urgent action is needed.” The [2018 project report](#) notes that Australians with the lowest incomes are least satisfied with how democracy works, stating:

Satisfaction in democracy has more than halved in a decade [from 86% in 2007 to 41% in 2018] and trust in key institutions and social leaders is eroding. By 2025 if nothing is done and current trends continue, fewer than 10% of Australians will trust their politicians and

² We in Australia should not feel immune: the majority of these authors have recently been invited to visit Australia, and former Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner Tim Soutphommasane lives here.

political institutions — resulting in ineffective and illegitimate government, and declining social and economic wellbeing.

Why does this matter? Weakening political trust erodes civic engagement, reduces support for evidence based public policies, promotes risk aversion in government, and creates the space for the rise of authoritarian-populist forces. Trust is the glue that facilitates collective action for mutual benefit. Without trust we don't have the ability to address complex, long-term challenges. Trust is also closely tied to democratic satisfaction.

Analysing the results of the May 2019 election, ANU's [Australian Election Study found](#), "Australians' satisfaction with democracy is at its lowest since the constitutional crisis of the 1970s." Faith in Australian political institutions is also suffering. [Sam Roggeveen](#) (The Lowy Institute) writes that "Australia is not exempt" from world influences: "At the 2019 election the Coalition's primary vote was 41.4%, its second-worst result since 1972. Labor was at 33.3%, its poorest result since 1934." This resulted in the [highest-ever primary vote share](#) for independents and minor parties, at 25.2%.

[Roggeveen pessimistically describes](#) a "hollowing out" of Australian politics, placing the blame on Australia's political parties, which "are dying in place", losing public legitimacy and becoming more unstable, similar to the UK (although less so to the USA). According to Roggeveen, there "is a slow but steady withdrawal of the public away from politics centred around the major parties, leading to the erosion and destabilisation of the party political establishment," and an electorate that is both "more detached and volatile than ever before."

[Vigorous debates surrounding Roggeveen's book](#) included [George Megalogenis](#); [Judith Brett](#), who cautions about the moderating effect of Australia's compulsory voting – unlike the UK or USA; [Nicholas Gruen](#), who notes that the 2013 Federal election outcome abolishing carbon pricing was equivalent to our own "Brexit" moment, but how Australia's jury system is a sustainable pillar of our democratic tradition; and [John West](#), who points out that Australia is one of only 20 "full democracies" in the world. In his 2018 National Press Club speech, [Richard Flanagan](#) said that Australians feel "we are somehow immune" from dangerous overseas currents, with a society that "grows increasingly more unequal, more disenfranchised, angrier, more fearful." The passion of the writers indicates the strength and depth of feelings on the topic.

Democracy and elected governments in a democratic country are not the same. [Professor Eric Sidoti](#) writes that while there is some evidence of dissatisfaction with Australian democracy, "it is important to distinguish between loss of trust in democracy and a loss of trust in government or particular public institutions. Most of the research addresses the latter."

Australia's political parties appear to be in perpetual crisis, as Canadian [political scientist Jonathan Malloy observes](#):

While I was well aware of the general structure and characteristics of the Australian party system, the sheer complexity still overwhelmed me, even after four months of casual observation.... Australian party leaders now seem to live in a permanent state of advanced paranoia, with their parties full of churning intrigue and perpetual challengers, making it difficult to think much beyond surviving the next week.

Australian institutions are responding. The Australian Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee has a current [inquiry into nationhood, national identity and democracy](#), which has [published a discussion paper](#) and [received 168 submissions](#) from institutions and the public (some of

the submissions are listed in the References below). Inquiry questions include “how can declining trust in Australia’s democracy be reversed?” and “what is the role of civics education?” The Democracy 2025 project based at the [Museum of Australian Democracy](#) at Old Parliament House in Canberra has developed [extensive resources](#) and recently hosted a cross-party discussion on how to reform Australian democracy ([watch it here on Vimeo](#)).

There are also a number of high-quality education resources for Australian school students, including [The Story of Our Rights and Freedoms](#), Australian Human Rights Commission and Cool Australia (view [their cool infographic here](#)); [Democracy Rules: An electoral education resource](#), Australian Electoral Commission (AEC); [ABC Education](#); [The Museum of Australian Democracy](#) and Education Services Australia’s [Civics and Citizenship website](#).

Opportunities for Australian Adult and Community Education Providers

“In times of change, people turn to learning in order to understand what is going on, to adapt to it and to shape the change.” - Raymond Williams, quoted in [Times Educational Supplement](#)

There are [more than 2500](#) Australian adult and community education (ACE) organisations in Australia, of which [357 are Registered Training Organisations \(RTOs\)](#), delivering accredited vocational education and training (VET) to 481,200 students (11.8% of the 2018 national total). These organisations are connected through national associations such as Community Colleges Australia and Adult Learning Australia, and through state-based associations such as Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, ACE Victoria and Community Centres South Australia. Together, Australia’s adult and community education sector provides a significant national institutional resource, based in communities and with a high degree of established credibility.

When the Australian [Democracy 2025 project asked parliamentarians](#) what other reforms they wanted like to see, the responses highlighted a strong desire for improved publicly funded civics education as well as life-long civics education. This supports [Dr Tom Gerald Daly’s point](#):

There is an argument that deficiencies in civic education have played a part in the current crises in the USA and the UK.... In Australia, [research has suggested](#) that a lack of constitutional knowledge among the public may be linked to political mistrust.... For students approaching voting age, civics education is not compulsory, as it is in a variety of other countries.

An extensive research basis shows that that improvements in education can have a strong positive impact: [Thomas Dee found](#) that increases in education were strongly correlated to the proximity of (US) junior and community colleges, and had a large effect on subsequent participation in voting. “These results suggest that the effect of education on political participation is causal, rather than just the consequence of selection,” concludes Harvard economist Edward Glaeser in [Why Does Democracy Need Education?](#) The US National Endowment for Democracy – [whose supporters include](#) representatives from across the US political and academic spectrums – has [taken a strong stand](#) supporting the value of education in countering the rejection of liberal and democratic values.

Aside from integrating disaffected, vulnerable and disadvantaged students into Australian society, including new migrants, there is a history of utilising Australia’s adult and community education

(ACE) sector in civics and democracy education. From 1997 to 2004, the Commonwealth Government provided almost \$32 million to a national “Discovering Democracy” program, which encouraged “the development of skills, values and attitudes that enable effective, informed and reflective participation in political processes and civic life.”³ The late [Professor John Hirst](#) chaired a national Civics Education Group – which [included](#) Dr Ken Boston, Professor Greg Craven, Professor Stuart Macintyre and Ms Susan Pascoe – for whom the project’s aim was for students to “understand the way we govern ourselves and to think of themselves as active citizens.”

The Discovering Democracy project included [an adult education component](#) through the resourcing and establishment of a “Civics and Citizenship Learning Circle Program” for the adult and community sector, focussing on the four areas of the Governance of Australia, the Three Spheres of Government, the Australian Nation and Citizens & Public Life. More than 500 groups registered with Adult Learning Australia as civics and citizenship learning circles, and many more kits were distributed.

Thus the potential value of Australian adult and community education to support democracy lies in at least four areas:

- general education of the population, raising the level of educational attainment;
- running specific democracy, civics and citizenship programs;
- specific education of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (see next section); and
- providing sustainable not-for-profit community-based institutions that help to ensure the maintenance of [community social capital](#), on the basis that “a country [that] has a vigorous associational life is better able to create and maintain a democracy.”

Australian Education and Training, Citizenship and Democracy

Although universities are traditionally thought of as the places where independent and analytical thinking relate to civics education, Australian vocational education and training (VET) probably has a much greater role, because of the VET sector’s engagement of more lower socio-economic status (SES) students. According to [Tom Karmel and Patrick Lim](#), “the distribution of VET students is over-represented among groups of lower socioeconomic status, while the distribution of higher education students is under-represented in this group.” In addition, low SES students are particularly clustered in VET Certificates I and II, with higher SES students most prominent studying at Diploma level.

Table 1 (below) compares 2018 Australian enrolment percentages for specific vulnerable and disadvantaged groups across the university sector (column 1), all vocational education and training (VET) students (column 2) and sub-set of not-for-profit community education provider VET students (column 3).

The results show a distinct pattern of how the most VET students are, on balance, a much more disadvantaged group than university students. Of VET students, community education students are further more disadvantaged. In comparison to university students, twice as many community

³ The Discovering Democracy Program was announced by the Hon. Dr David Kemp MP, then Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training in May 1997, and endorsed by the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in June 1997; see <https://www1.curriculum.edu.au/ddunits/about/about.htm>. Dr Kemp is currently the [Chair of the Board](#) of the Museum of Australian Democracy.

education students are “low SES” (in the bottom quarter - 25%); have a disability; or live in regional, rural and remote areas. In addition, community education providers enrol four times as many Indigenous people and more than seven times as many people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Although data on the number of adults aged 45+ is not easily available for university enrolments, that information has been included for total VET enrolments and community education students: the clear conclusion from so many adult enrolments in the community education sector is that sector provides one of the most efficient ways to engage Australian adults who might otherwise be marginalised.

Table 1: Australian University, VET and Community Education Student Cohorts: Equity Group Percentages Compared, 2018

	University student enrolment proportions (%)	Total VET students program enrolments (%)	Community Education provider students program enrolments (%)
Student Group			
Low SES (bottom 25%)	17.0	28.2	34.6
Students with a disability	7.3	8.0	16.0
Indigenous	1.9	5.9	7.6
Regional and rural	19.8	31.2	36.6
Remote and very remote	0.8	2.6	2.1
Non-English speaking background	3.4	24.1	25.3
Adults aged 45+	n/a	15.9	25.3

Table notes:

1. For definitions of each student group, see Appendix A below.
2. Figures exclude “not known” respondents, where students have not reported the data.
3. “Low SES” represents the bottom quarter (25%) of students. In the case of VET and Community Education provider student enrolments, this figure is an estimate extrapolated from VET students in the bottom “quintile” (20%).
4. Table sources:
 - University: Paul Koshy, *Equity Student Participation in Australian Higher Education: 2013 – 2018*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Curtin University, Perth, 2019, Table 3, p. 7, https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/NCSEHE-Equity-Student-Briefing-Note_2013-18_Accessible_Final.pdf
 - Total VET and Community Providers: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), *Total VET students and courses 2018*, Adelaide, 6 September 2019, <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/all-data/total-vet-students-and-courses-2018-data-slicer>.

In many places – especially Europe – VET as a preparation for work is seen as an integral part of citizenship. Nancy Hoffman [writes](#):

Countries with strong VET systems have a different conception about learning for jobs. They make a distinction between a calling or occupation and learning the specific skills needed to weld or solve banking problems or manage the IT system in a corporation Work is related

to active citizenship and thus education and training needed for work are seen as the joint responsibility of the government and what are called nicely the “social partners” (employers and labor unions).

Utilising Australia’s [under-funded VET system](#) – and in particular the network of not-for-profit adult and community education providers would seem to be a clear priority for supporting Australian democracy and assisting citizenship. However this conclusion comes with some qualifications about the weakness of Australian VET. As [Professor Anne Jones writes](#):

Australian vocational education qualifications are based on impoverished curricula which fail to address the capabilities needed by adults in a twenty-first century democracy, let alone prepare them to contribute to innovation. Historically, attempts to enrich vocational education qualifications with substantial general capabilities have been reduced to inclusion of narrow, short-term proficiencies. For example, senior secondary and most university curricula address the broad twenty-first century capabilities needed to be ethical and responsible global citizens, creative contributors to innovation, adaptable lifelong learners able to navigate the changing worlds of life and work.... In training packages these important lifelong capabilities are reduced to a much less ambitious series of “employability skills for” immediate use in the workplace, such as “problem solving, collaboration, self-management, communication and information technology skills”.

[Professor Jones](#) also cautions:

Despite government requirements for vocational education providers to test core skills before enrolment and to address gaps, there are insufficient resources to deliver the substantial remedial programs needed to develop core literacy, numeracy and digital skills to proficiency level.

Thus a crucial way for VET to ensure Australian citizens are prepared for engaging as citizens – through teaching literacy, numeracy and digital skills – is still a weak link. Empowering the VET system for citizenship and democracy will entail quite a bit of work, and will parallel a number of [current Australian Government reforms](#).

As [Dr Damian Oliver once notably](#) wrote about the weakness of Australia’s VET system, it is:

Like a forgotten middle child, squeezed between schools – which tend to get a lot of policy attention, like the youngest child – and universities, which tend to get the prestige and status, like the oldest child. The VET sector has a lower status in Australia.

UK Ministry of Reconstruction 1919 Final Report on Adult Education

January 2020 marks 101 years since the release of the [UK Ministry of Reconstruction’s Final Report on Adult Education](#), commissioned by then Prime Minister Lloyd George and written by economic historian [Richard Henry Tawney](#), who argued that adult education is “a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong.”

The report is [still a milestone in adult education](#), including its impact on Australia:

The report represents a hugely important statement of the value of adult education and its role in creating and sustaining successful democratic societies, animated by shared civic, social and economic goals. It not only recognised the wide impact adult education can have on society.... Adult education, it argued, is ... indispensable to national recovery and to sustainable, effective democracy.

More than 100 years later, the British [WEA states](#):

The 1919 Report provided a template under which adult education, oriented towards building a democratic and tolerant civil society, flourished through most of the 20th century. Adult education – committed to enriching the communities where people live and work – constituted a vital, if often unacknowledged, part of the social fabric.

Australian ACE Promotion of Democracy and Citizenship

Why does it matter what Richard Rawnley wrote in in the UK in 1919? Because Australian NFP community education (ACE) providers – [taking the lead from the UK Workers Education Association \(WEA\)](#) – have served their communities continuously since 1913, the year Australian WEAs were established.

Sydney ([WEA Sydney](#)), Newcastle (WEA Hunter, now [Atwea College](#)), Wollongong ([WEA Illawarra](#)) and WEA [South Australia](#) operate as part of a uninterrupted 107 year history delivering adult and community education to their communities. Support for and maintenance of democracy was a WEA founding goal, with the [first WEA President declaring](#) that Australia seems “to be an almost ideal environment for the accomplishment of the great aims of the WEA – the creation of an educated democracy, a nation of men and women moved to give of their best to the country.” The mission of [WEA Sydney](#) still states, “We believe that WEA activities are of value to individuals both in their personal life and in their role as citizens in a democratic society.”

The tradition of Australian adult and community education extends back to 1864 with NSW evening colleges, codified in 1880 with the NSW [Public Instruction Act](#) under then Premier Sir Henry Parkes, also known as [the “Father of Federation.”](#) That Act established [Evening Public Schools](#), “to instruct persons who may not have received the advantages of primary education”. Australian community education providers maintain this tradition with their emphasis on [“foundation skills”](#) – language, literacy, numeracy and employability skills.

This century-plus unbroken history of Australian adult education makes these providers some of the country’s oldest adult and post-secondary education institutions, rivalling the [“sandstone” Universities](#) of Sydney ([founded 1850](#)), Melbourne (1853), Adelaide (1874), Tasmania (1890), Queensland (1909) and Western Australia (1911).

Australian ACE providers have an enviable record of sustainability and community service, and It’s not just the WEAs. For instance, other [CCA current members](#) show many decades of continuous history: [Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Community College](#) was founded in 1925; Sydney Community College dates back to 1945; Northern Beaches and Mosman Community College dates to 1949; [Macquarie Community College](#) to 1950; [City East College](#) and Nepean Community College to 1952; [ACE Colleges](#), [Albury Wodonga Community College](#), [ET Australia](#), [St George Sutherland Community College](#) and Western Riverina Community College to the 1970s; [Tuggerah Lakes Community College](#),

[North Coast Community College](#) and [New England Community College](#) all to 1981; [Riverina Community College](#) and Central Coast Community College to 1982; [VERTO](#) and Mid North Coast (Port Macquarie) Community College to 1983; [Tamworth Community College](#) to 1984; Tomaree Community College to 1985; and [The Parramatta College](#) and [Kiama Community College](#) to 1986.

This historic role of Australia’s ACE providers in adult education and community service cannot be replicated; if the sector did not exist now, no government or community sector would attempt to create it, because of the complexity and deep community connections required to develop such organisations. And although we call the sector “adult”, it is important to acknowledge how a large number of Australian ACE organisations – especially in regional and rural locations – have established and operate [independent special assistance secondary schools](#) for vulnerable, disadvantaged and disengaged young people, many of them with disabilities and many of them Indigenous.

Place-based learning constitutes the core business of Australian ACE providers, however their activities extend well beyond the classroom; they provide numerous opportunities for engagement in community life, learning and work. Civil society organisations in Australia are essential structures to ensure democratic functioning, as a recent [broadcast on ABC Radio National](#) illustrates. Australian community education sector’s activities promote increased civic participation and building “[social capital](#)”, particularly in regional, rural and outer metropolitan locations where local educational institutions are part of the “glue” that holds communities together. CCA’s recent conference included presentations on [how to engage local communities](#), [empowering community networks](#), [engaging disadvantaged young people](#) and the [challenges facing adult literacy](#).

Australian democracy and citizenship is far more than the government of the day, as [Geoffrey Brahm Levey writes](#):

As consequential as a government’s activity may be, the governmental domain of a national identity rarely travels “all the way down” to fundamentally reshape the broader national culture and identity. For one thing, democratic governments are not normally around long enough for that to be possible.... Another expression of national identity is inscribed in a society’s public institutions. There is a trivial sense in which this applies: one might speak of a “national identity” much as one speaks of a “national broadcaster” or a “national railway”. But the public domain of a national identity also expresses something deeper and more enduring about the character of the nation. Public institutions, on the whole, tend to outlive governments.

CCA contends that the network of Australian adult and community education providers constitutes an important multi-centred and broadly dispersed national institution, one that helps to express what is unique not only about Australian education and training, but Australian culture, work and community.

ACE Ministerial Policy Declarations: The Importance of Foundation Skills for Australian Citizenship

Ministerial ACE policy declarations from [Victoria](#) and [South Australia](#) (New South Wales will follow in 2020) acknowledge the importance and role of the adult and community education sector in Australian education, training for employment and participation in society. The [Victorian](#)

[statement's](#) first goal is, "To engage and support adult learners who need to develop their core foundation skills for work, further study, and to *participate in society as valued citizens.*" This reflects the last [Commonwealth statement](#) (2008) – now outdated but still relevant – in which the fourth principle stated, "Increased provision of vocationally focussed programs by ACE is supported while its community and *citizenship capacity building* agenda continues." (Emphasis by the author.) The [South Australian statement](#) (2017, PDF) speaks of "encouraging participation in social activities and ... developing socially and culturally informed citizens, our communities become better places to live."

The role of Australian adult and community education providers in supporting Australian democracy needs be acknowledged by the [Commonwealth Government](#), with a [renewed national ACE policy statement](#) that supports [national VET goals](#) and stands near the centre of a national strategy for the maintenance of Australian democratic institutions and support for civil society.

Part of this acknowledgement is the unique role that ACE providers play in foundation skills – language, literacy and numeracy. A wealth of international evidence supports this importance; a [United Nations report](#) states that literacy:

Is a transformational process that empowers individuals, broadens their critical thinking and provides them with the ability to act. A person without basic literacy lacks real opportunities to effectively engage with democratic institutions, to make choices, exercise his/her citizenship rights and act for a perceived common good.

The report [further states](#) that political learning:

Requires a broad set of skills or else civic literacy, which naturally presupposes functional literacy. The role of literacy in political participation and in the formulation of political opinion has long been recognised by national governments.

Other [UN reports](#) support this research, which has been supported by Australian policy research by [Jane Newton](#) and [others](#). Australia's not-for-profit community education providers [continue to over-perform in delivering foundation skills](#); this must be an essential part of any national strategy to improve the country's democratic institutions.

Conclusion

At a moment of political change and loss of faith in many democratic institutions, both in Australia and world-wide, it's time to return to the some of the historic and ideological roots of adult and community education. Australia's active and vital ACE providers have maintained and sustained a collective infrastructure and developed a resilient capacity to adapt to change and to support the communities in which they operate. It's time to re-acknowledge their strengths and the value that they bring to Australian society and our democratic functioning. CCA seeks active means to make this happen.

We Want to Hear from You

Community Colleges Australia would like to hear from you, with your comments and responses to this discussion paper. Some of the questions we would like you to address include:

- What do you see the role of adult and community education providers in promoting and sustaining democracy in Australia?
- What specific citizenship educational models and programs have worked in your community or region, and why? We would like to share “best practice” models.
- What democracy and citizenship-related projects, activities and events are appropriate for Australian ACE providers?
- How important are [foundation skills](#) – language, literacy, numeracy, employability and digital – to the sustainability of Australian democracy? If they are important, what can be done to increase the provision of foundation skills?
- Is your organisation interested in partnering or collaborating with CCA or our members in efforts to encourage Australia democracy and good citizenship?
- What potential sources of funding are available to assist CCA or Australian adult and community education providers to develop and disseminate resources and educational programs?
- Are there issues or matters that we have missed in preparing this paper?

Please contact us: we would like to hear from you.

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About Community Colleges Australia

Community Colleges Australia (CCA; www.cca.edu.au) 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.

Indigenous Acknowledgement

CCA acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of our land Australia. 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.

References

This paper does not include footnotes, but instead uses a “blog” form of referencing, with hyperlinks from individual phrases or words. Below are key references cited in this paper.

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Appendix A: Table 1 Student Cohort Definitions

The definitions have been sourced from Table 3, page 7 of Koshy, Paul (2019). *Equity Student Participation in Australian Higher Education: 2013 – 2018*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Perth: Curtin University, available at https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/NCSEHE-Equity-Student-Briefing-Note_2013-18_Accessible_Final.pdf.

The university data on disadvantaged and vulnerable students was originally designated in *A Fair Chance for All* and formally defined in *Equity and General Performance Indicators in Higher Education* (“the Martin Review”).

Low socioeconomic status (Low SES) students: Socioeconomic status (SES) is assigned to students on the basis of the Statistical Area 1 (SA1) in which they reside. SA1s have a population of between 200 to 800 people, averaging around 400. All SA1 areas are ranked nationally using the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ (ABS) estimates of the *Socio-Economic Index for Areas* (SEIFA) — *Index of Education and Occupation* (IEO). This is calculated using ABS census data (ABS, 2015). Low SES students reside in SA1s with the lowest quartile (25%) of the Australian population in this ranking. The 2011 census is used to define SES between 2013 and 2015 and the 2016 census for 2016 to 2018.

Students with Disability: Students self-report disability to their education provider, usually via a formal enrolment declaration.

Indigenous students: Students self-report as Indigenous to their education provider, either at the time of their enrolment or during their studies.

Students from regional and rural areas: Regional students are defined as having a permanent home address in an SA1 area that is classified as regional or rural using the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS).

Students from a non-English speaking background (NESB): A student is assigned NESB status if they are a domestic undergraduate student who arrived in Australia less than 10 years prior to the year in which the data were collected, and come from a country where the primary language spoken is not English. NESB students are often referred to as students from “culturally and linguistically diverse” backgrounds, or “CALD students.”

The NCVER definitions are consistent with the university definitions; see <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/total-vet-students-and-courses-2018>.

“As bleak as things may look now for proponents of democracy around the globe, the story is not yet over. The past decade has shown how fragile democracy can be, but also reminded people why it is worth fighting for. Whether the 2010s will be remembered as a warning sign or a death knell for democracy depends on the choices we make in the decade now beginning.”

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