



**Community
Colleges
Australia**

Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of NSW Adult and Community Education Providers: Analysis of 2019 Data

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About this Report

This report from Community Colleges Australia (CCA) details the performance of not-for-profit NSW adult and community education (ACE) providers in reaching vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. This report is the fourth in CCA's series that analyses government-funded VET students, based on 2019 data compiled by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).¹

Reaching Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Learners

On almost all tracked measures of vulnerability and disadvantage, in 2019 NSW community education VET providers significantly over-performed compared to TAFE, private for-profit and other providers, disproportionately catering for students from the state's most disadvantaged groups and regions.²

This achievement results from the funding provided by the NSW Government's "ACE Program" (previously called "CSO") and the ability of NSW ACE providers to use the funds effectively and successfully to meet the program's desired outcomes to "guarantee training for key equity groups".³ The calendar year 2019 figures are consistent with the 2016, 2017 and 2018 government-funded VET data.⁴ In 2019, NSW ACE providers achieved the following percentage proportions of their government-funded VET student populations:

- **19.2% students with a disability** (17.7% in 2018), compared to 11.7% of TAFE and government providers, 6.4% of private for-profit providers and 5% of other VET providers;
- **64.5% regional and rural students** (61.5% in 2018), compared to 35.1% of TAFE and government providers, 30.1% of private for-profit providers and 35.5% of other providers;

¹ See *Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of NSW Not-for-Profit Community Education Providers: Analysis of 2018 Data*, Community Colleges Australia, 25 September 2019, <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Vulnerable-and-Disadvantaged-Students-of-NSW-Community-Education-Providers-Analysis-of-2018-Data.pdf>.

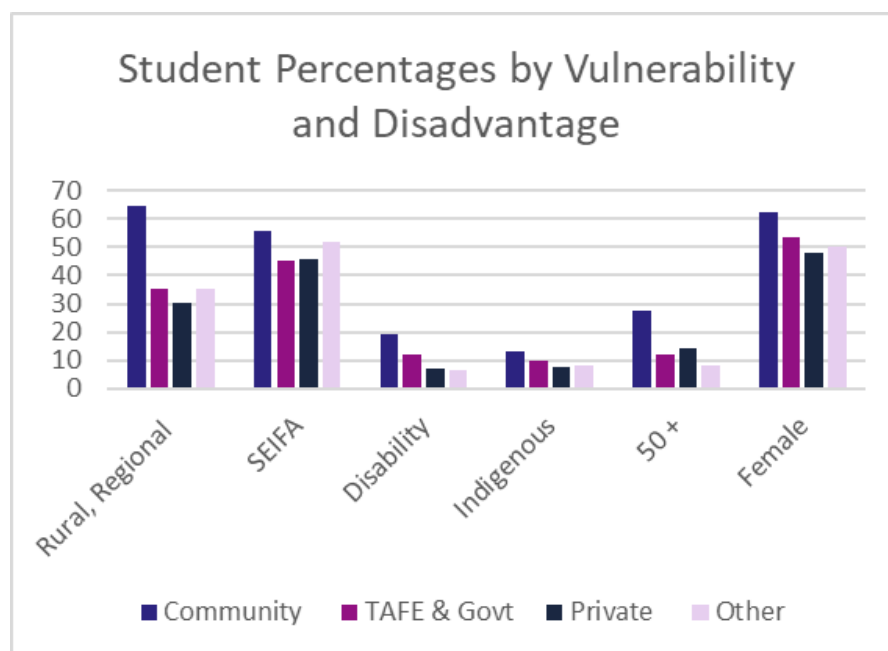
² Other training providers "refer to secondary schools, non-government enterprises, education/training businesses or centres, professional associations, industry associations, equipment/product manufacturers and suppliers, and other training providers not elsewhere classified." (See <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/government-funded-students-and-courses-2019>, p. 24.)

³ For more details about the NSW ACE program, see https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/ace/ace_program.html

⁴ See *Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of NSW Not-for-Profit Community Education Providers: Analysis of 2018 Data*, 25 September 2019, <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Vulnerable-and-Disadvantaged-Students-of-NSW-Community-Education-Providers-Analysis-of-2018-Data.pdf>.

- **55.7% most disadvantaged students** in the bottom two SEIFA quintiles (55.1% in 2018), compared to 45.5% of TAFE and government providers, 45.7% of private for-profit providers and 51.7% of other providers.
- **13.2% non-English speaking background students** (13% in 2018), compared to 21.1% of TAFE and government providers, 17.2% of private for-profit providers and 6.7% of other providers.
- **27.8% older (age 50+) students** (27% in 2018), compared to 12.2% of TAFE and government providers, 14.4% of private for-profit providers and 7.9% of other providers.
- **13.1% Indigenous students** (12.0% in 2018), compared to 9.7% of TAFE and government providers, 7.6% of private for-profit providers and 8.4% of other providers.

Women: In 2019, 62.3% NSW ACE provider government-funded VET students were female (61.5% in 2018), compared to 53.3% of TAFE, 47.9% of private for-profit providers, and 50.2% of other providers. *Although women are not necessarily a disadvantaged group, they can be economically vulnerable, which has occurred through the uneven economic and job loss impacts due to the Coronavirus pandemic: “A higher proportion of women (8.1%) than men (6.2%) lost their jobs between March and April 2020, and women suffered a greater reduction in working hours, largely connected to the feminised sectors, including retail and hospitality. Women also reduced their hours of work to care for, and home school, children.”*⁵



⁵ See “COVID’s toll on women – why Australia needs a Gender Impact Statement,” by Trish Bergin, Broad Agenda, 5 August 2020, <http://www.broadagenda.com.au/home/we-need-a-gender-lens-on-public-policy-more-than-ever/>; and “Progress towards economic equality for women in Australia has been wiped out by the coronavirus,” by Naveen Razik, SBS News, 18 August 2020, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/progress-towards-economic-equality-for-women-in-australia-has-been-wiped-out-by-the-coronavirus>.

Table 1: Comparison of Community Education, TAFE, Private for-profit and Other Provider Student Percentages by Vulnerability/Disadvantage – Government-Funded VET, 2019

Category	Community Education (student %)	TAFE and govt (student %)	Private for-profit providers (student %)	Other providers (student %)
With a disability	19.2	11.8	6.9	6.4
Rural regional and remote	64.5	35.1	30.1	35.5
Socio-economic disadvantage (SEIFA)	55.7	45.5	45.7	51.7
Non-English speaking background	13.2	21.1	17.2	6.7
Aged 50+	27.8	12.2	14.4	7.9
Indigenous	13.1	9.7	7.6	8.4
Female	62.3	53.3	47.9	50.2

About the Data

The total number of students reporting as engaged in government-funded VET reported in NSW in 2019 was 403,625 (in 2018, the number was 400,890). The data are reported as a percentage of students enrolled with each provider type and not as a percentage of the whole. Students classified as “not known” were removed from the non-English speaking background, disability and socio-economic disadvantage categories reported above.

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

- **Government-funded VET**, defined as “all Commonwealth and state/territory government-funded training delivered by technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, other government providers (such as universities), community education providers and other registered providers” – 1.2 million students were enrolled in government-funded VET in 2019⁶; and
- **Total VET** students participating in nationally accredited training (also known as “total VET activity”) – approximately 4.2 million students enrolled in VET in 2019.⁷

Statistics in this report are derived from the NCVET government-funded VET report, 2019, and the use of the recently released NCVET Databuilder tool, accessed during August 2020.⁸

In New South Wales, “government-funded VET” for ACE providers primarily refers to one of two programs managed and funded by the NSW Department of Education (previously the NSW Department of Industry): and the Adult and Community Education (ACE) program and the Smart and Skilled program.⁹

⁶ See <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/government-funded-students-and-courses-2019>.

⁷ See <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/total-vet-students-and-courses-2019>.

⁸ See <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder#gf-students>.

⁹ See https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/ace/ace_program.html and <https://smartandskilled.nsw.gov.au/>. Some Commonwealth and other state funding programs and initiatives make additional, mostly minor contributions to the

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*.¹⁰

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", split into five equal population segments.¹¹ SEIFA is widely used and acknowledged by Australian researchers as a strong comparative tool for disadvantage.¹² SEIFA Quintiles 1 – 2 are the most disadvantaged, with quintile 1 is the worst disadvantaged category. The socio-economic disadvantage percentage does not include quintiles 3, 4 and 5, the least disadvantaged quintiles.

NCVER data undergoes significant quality control to ensure it will be of value to Australian policy makers and researchers.¹³ The NCVER makes available "data slicers" (also known as "data builders") and the original data sets in ways that can be downloaded and compared. CCA has used both these data tools to prepare this report.

Delivering Employment and Training Outcomes

NSW ACE providers proportionately engage more vulnerable and disadvantaged learners than any other type of VET provider – and deliver similar or better training and employment outcomes. As Table 2 (below) shows, following the completion of training:

- 81.2% of community education students were employed or in further training;
- 42.7% moved from unemployment to employment;
- 70.1% were employed after training;
- 62.3% improved their employment status;

government-funded VET totals.

¹⁰ 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/>.

¹¹ See Australian Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/seifa>.

¹² 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 "Inequality in Australia: an interactive map of disadvantage," by Nick Evershed, *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>.

¹³ See <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data-quality-policy> and <https://www.ncver.edu.au/about-ncver/about-our-data>.

- 83.4% achieved their main reason for doing the training; and
- 90.9% were satisfied with the overall quality of their training.

Highly skilled in reaching disadvantaged groups, the innovative approaches of community providers have strong impacts on regional economic development and social cohesion. Embedded in their communities, NSW ACE providers deliver local solutions for local people through targeted “place-based” training.

NSW ACE providers support the Premier's policy priorities to provide high quality education, break the cycle of disadvantage and contribute to a strong economy. NSW ACE providers have good knowledge of local labour market needs and strong reputations for trustworthiness and success in engaging high needs learners, providing accessible to pathways into mainstream study or work options after more “traditional” options have failed.¹⁴

These outcomes are notable achievements, as community education providers proportionately engage more vulnerable and disadvantaged learners than TAFE or for-profit providers.

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

Outcome	All NSW students (%)	Community (%)	TAFE (%)	Private (%)
Not employed before training but employed after training	39.4	42.7	35.9	51.9
Employed after training	70.1	70.1	66.5	79.8
Employed or in further study	84.0	81.2	83.6	85.3
Improved employment status after training	61.3	62.3	57.4	71.6
Satisfied with overall quality of training	90.4	90.9	90.3	90.6
Achieved main reason for doing the training	84.0	83.4	82.1	87.5

Source: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), 2019¹⁵

NSW ACE providers also perform especially well in engaging and supporting female learners. NEVER year 2019 data shows:

- 46.8% of female ACE provider learners were not employed before training but employed after training;

¹⁴ 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>.

¹⁵ Available at <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/collections/student-outcomes/vet-student-outcomes>

- 72.3% of female learners were employed after training, well exceeding the NSW average;
- 83.3% of female learners were employed or in further study;
- 64.4% of female learners improved their employment status after training; and
- 84.6% of female learners achieved their main reason for doing the training, well above the NSW provider average.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 NSW ACE providers substantially contribute to female employment in the state, especially important as the state recovers from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

About Community Colleges Australia

Community Colleges Australia (CCA) is the peak national body that represents not-for-profit, community-owned 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 adult and community education sector by increasing 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. CCA members 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

¹⁶ Source, NCVET 2019, VET Student Outcomes 2019, available at <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/collections/student-outcomes/vet-student-outcomes> and <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/all-data/vet-student-outcomes-2019-data-slicer>.

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

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

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PO Box 1839 QVB Post Office Sydney NSW 1230 | 02 9233 3634 | admin@cca.edu.au | www.cca.edu.au