

25 March 2021

Letter to:

- Richard Marles, Deputy Leader of the Labor Party, and Shadow Minister for National Reconstruction, Employment, Skills and Small Business
- Tanya Plibersek, Shadow Minister for Education
- Ged Kearney, Member of the Standing Committee for Employment, Education and Training
- Lisa Chesters, Member of the Standing Committee for Employment, Education and Training
- Joanne Ryan, Member of the Standing Committee for Employment, Education and Training

Dear Mr Marles, Ms Plibersek, Ms Kearney, Ms Chester and Ms Ryan,

I am writing to you to provide formal comments on Federal Labor's Special Conference 2021 National Platform (https://alp.org.au/media/2355/alp_national_platform_final_draft.pdf), from Community Colleges Australia (CCA), the national organisation that represents Australia's not-for-profit adult and community education (ACE) providers.

CCA Supports Labor's Policies to Reduce Australian Inequality

First, let me say that CCA broadly supports Labor's policies to create a more just and equal Australia. Australia's ACE providers consistently *over-perform in providing vocational education and training (VET) and pre-vocational training to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including Indigenous Australians, people with a disability, regional and rural residents, those in lower socio-economic backgrounds, and people from a non-English speaking background*. Our sector easily out-performs both TAFE and private for-profit VET providers. Not-for-profit ACE providers work primarily with disadvantaged groups, and CCA strongly supports any national government policies that relieve the burden on these groups and provide properly funded education, training and employment services.

Labor's Draft National Platform

The Labor Draft National Platform currently states:

- "Labor will ensure at least 70% of all public funding for vocational education goes to TAFE. The balance of funding will go to other high quality, trusted vocational education providers, including in the adult and community education sector." (p. 28)

However, the draft Platform otherwise ignores the vital role of Australia's not-for-profit ACE providers. As we note above, community education providers increasingly do the "heavy lifting" with Australia's most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, and do so in an ethical environment which is not motivated by profit (which we see as antithetical to good training outcomes), but by a desire to ensure communities thrive. We seek a stronger recognition in the Labor Platform of the important role not-for-profit ACE providers play.

We also seek recognition of the importance of foundation skills – language, literacy, numeracy, digital and employability skills, and that all Australians should have the right to access foundation skills training no matter what their stage in life.

Finally, given the recent report of the Aged Care Royal Commission, we strongly recommend that the Platform include a statement of the importance of improving the training of – and expanding – the aged

care workforce (see <https://cca.edu.au/royal-commission-into-aged-care-recommends-major-workforce-expansion/>.)

Background: The Australian ACE Sector

The Australian ACE sector is a significant VET player: with more than 400 providers of government-funded VET and 2000 other community education providers deliver pre-accredited, pre-vocational, personal interest learning and other courses. In 2019, nationally *our sector delivered to 11.6% of VET students, some almost one-half million of the 4.2 million VET students*. In addition, ACE providers:

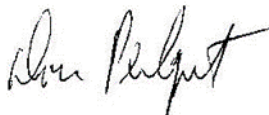
- students show the greatest increase into employment of any provider type: 16.8% of community education VET training graduates moved from unemployment to employment (2018) resulting from training, compared to 10.1% of TAFE graduates (national average) and 9.5% of private for-profit training providers;
- are especially important in regional and rural Australia, where they are frequently the only local provider – and can deliver 20% or more of training in some communities;
- specialise in very important areas of national training priority – foundation skills (language, literacy, numeracy, digital and employability), as well as aged care, disability and childcare worker training;
- take a “community development” approach, and deliver innovative employment-driven, regionally relevant projects, including social enterprises, environmental awareness and special assistance secondary schools for disadvantaged youth; and
- have a long history, providing unbroken history of service to 1913.

The Role of TAFE in Australian VET

CCA strongly supports proper funding of TAFE, which we regard as the anchor institution of Australian VET. Our members complement TAFE’s role and activities. Our policy on TAFE reads in part:

CCA recognises the shared values and important contributions that public technical and further education (TAFE) and community education providers undertake to promote access and equity in education and training across all segments of Australian society.... CCA recognises that TAFE is both the largest provider and an anchor institution for equitable VET.... The community VET sector complements TAFE in that it excels in delivering pathway programs that help vulnerable and disadvantaged students to get jobs, advance their careers and access further training frequently at TAFE. (See <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/CCA-Policy-on-TAFE-and-Community-Education-11April2017.pdf>.)

Yours faithfully,



Don Perlgut, PhD

Chief Executive Officer

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