Australian Vocational Education and Training Students 2020 Breakdown by Provider Type Fact Sheet 1

14 September 2021

Executive Summary

This Report

This Community Colleges Australia (CCA) Fact Sheet analyses the Australian vocational and education (VET) student number data from 2020, in comparison to 2019, detailing what changes have occurred. Because 2020 was the first "COVID-19 year", the report provides important insights into the impact that the pandemic has had on Australian VET student numbers, broken down by type of provider. The report includes both "total VET" and "government-funded VET" in 2019 and 2020, in six separate tables:

1. Australian Total VET Students by Provider Type (page 5)
2. New South Wales Total VET Students by Provider Type (page 5)
3. Victorian Total VET Students by Provider Type (page 6)
4. Government-funded VET Students in Australia by Provider Type (page 6)
5. Government-Funded VET New South Wales Students by Provider Type (page 7)
6. Government-funded VET Victorian Students by Provider Type (page 7)

This Fact Sheet is the first of four CCA reports on 2020 Australian student VET data.[1] Subsequent reports in this series will examine the changes that occurred from 2019 to 2020 with respect to various "equity" groups: Indigenous Australians; residents of regional, rural and remote Australia; people from lower socio-economic backgrounds; people from non-English speaking backgrounds; people with disabilities; older Australians; and women. These analyses are important because VET has traditionally been much more accessible to lower income, regional and rural residents and Indigenous learners, by comparison to university study.[2] Subsequent reports in this fact sheet series are:

- *Fact Sheet 2*: *Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of all Australian Adult and Community Education (ACE) Providers*
- *Fact Sheet 3: Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of New South Wales ACE Providers*
- *Fact Sheet 4: Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of Victorian ACE Providers*

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[1] Data is sourced from National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), *Total VET Students and Courses 2020*, 19 August 2021, https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/collections/students-and-courses-collection/total-vet-students-and-courses.
[2] See National VET Equity Advisory Council (2013), *National Report on Social Equity in VET 2013*, https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1016&context=transitions_misc.

Highlights and Conclusions

Analysis of the 2020 VET data shown in this report indicate that the first year of COVID-19 in Australia made a significant impact on many parts of the national VET sector.

TOTAL VET

Total Australian VET students declined nationally by 260,240 (6.2%) from 2019 to 2020. This pattern was replicated in New South Wales, down by 8%, and in Victoria, down by 13.6%. The New South Wales and Victorian declines are logical, considering the higher level of lockdowns and restrictions which took place in those states during 2020.

ACE students: Of the 3,921,285 Australian VET students enrolled in 2020, 386,225 (9% of the total) studied with a not-for-profit ACE provider, according to the NCVER data. This represents a substantial decrease of 20.7% (100,910 students) compared to 2019, the largest drop in recent history. The national decrease was replicated both in New South Wales – down 19.8% – and in Victoria, down 35.2%. This reduction in ACE students reverses many years of growth in student numbers in the ACE sector, reverting to the situation in 2017. [3] The NCVER 2020 data does not count New South Wales ACE students who studied non-accredited courses with vocational intent.[4] Nor does that data appear to fully count pre-accredited ACE students in Victoria, given the large enrolments reported by ACFE each year.[5] It is likely that both non-accredited (NSW) and pre-accredited (VIC) ACE student numbers increased from 2019 to 2020, because of the additional flexibility in funding provided by respective state governments, so the drop in student numbers may not be as significant as NCVER data suggests.

Why the ACE decrease: Much of the decrease in total ACE students appears to be due to the COVID-19 impact of less formal learning engagement by vulnerable and disadvantaged students, many of whom were unable to transfer to online and distance learning, and who are the first to leave training in times of stress and the last to return. CCA notes this worrying trend resurfaced in mid-2021 with COVID-19 Delta strain outbreaks and resultant lockdowns in New South Wales and Victoria, and has since deteriorated. Irrespective of some increases in non (NSW) and pre (VIC) accredited training, drops in training numbers need to be addressed urgently because it shows that many of the most vulnerable learners are likely to be missing out in important skills development. Both the learners and the economy will suffer as a result.

Other sectors: VET students enrolled in TAFE with 18.2% of the total - 778,010 students, up by 2.5%, an increase of 18,635 students; private for-profit providers - 66.2% of the total (2,831,795 students, down

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[3] In 2017, 384,260 learners enrolled with an ACE provider.

[4] According to Dr Jim Cloutman, enrolments in non-accredited NSW ACE training have steadily increased since 2015, including an increase from 6,814 in 2019 to 7,343 in 2020. Source: *Supporting pathways in learning and life: Non-accredited training within the New South Wales Adult and Community Education (ACE) program*, Riverina Community College, June 2021 (unpublished).

[5] In 2019/20 in Victoria, government-subsidised pre-accredited module enrolments funded through the ACFE Board numbered 51,558, and the government-subsidised foundation module enrolments (presumably not all of them ACE) numbered 170,333. Although enrolments are larger than student numbers, they do indicate a likely much larger number of ACE students than reported by NCVER data. (Source: Victorian Department of Education and Training *2019–20 Annual Report*, October 2020, https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/annualreports.aspx.)

6.6% on 2019); university providers with 1.8% (74,885 students); school providers with 2.6%; and enterprise providers with 2.2%, which included a substantial drop of 22.9%, down 28,075 students.

Inconsistent declines: The decline in student numbers from 2019 to 2020 was not uniform across all VET sub-sectors, with TAFE students increasing nationally by 2.5%, increasing in New South Wales by 16.5%, but decreasing in Victoria by 11.3%.

GOVERNMENT-FUNDED VET

Government-funded VET students overall increased slightly – by 54,160 – to 1,300,520 students in 2020, a 4.3% national increase. Almost all of that increase came from TAFE, with an additional 59,560 students, up by 9.6%, now totalling just under half of all government-funded VET students. Much of the TAFE increase appears to have resulted from New South Wales, up 58,285 students, or 25.2%, and representing almost two-thirds of government-funded VET in that state. The aggressive implementation of the TAFE JobTrainer Program in NSW is likely to account for a proportion of this increase.[6] By contrast, Victorian TAFE declined by 11,370 students (8.1%).

Community education government-funded student numbers were down by 8,200 from 2019 (down 11.8%), including down by 13.9% in New South Wales and by 12.3% in Victoria, remarkably consistent nationally. See notes above regarding non-accredited study in New South Wales and pre-accredited study in Victoria.

Most other provider types kept relatively stable government-funded VET numbers, except enterprise providers, which dropped 43.6% nationally, including 20.8% in New South Wales and 19.6% in Victoria.

Source Data of this *Fact Sheet*

The source of data presented in this Fact Sheet is the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) report, *Total VET Students and Courses 2020*.[7]

In each of the tables in this Fact Sheet, two categories of student count included: "Total students" is a smaller number than "Total student count", because VET students can enrol with more than one provider and undertake more than one course during the year. On advice from NCVER, this Fact Sheet uses "Total student count" as the reference total when calculating percentages, because that number provides a more accurate breakdown of students by provider type. Numbers are rounded to the nearest 5.

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[6] See https://www.tafensw.edu.au/jobtrainer.

[7] National Centre for Vocational Education Research, *Total VET Students and Courses 2020*, 19 August 2021, https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/collections/students-and-courses-collection/total-vet-students-and-courses and https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder.

Total VET Students: Comparison of 2019 and 2020

Table 1: Australian Total VET Students by Provider Type – 2019 and 2020

Provider Type	2019 total students	Percentage of 2019 total students (%)	2020 total students	Percentage of 2020 total students (%)	2019 to 2020 increase/ decrease (%)
Total student count	4,587,580	100.0	4,276,740	100.0	-6.8
Total students	4,181,535		3,921,285		-6.2
TAFE	759,375	16.6	778,010	18.2	+2.5
Universities	77,375	1.7	74,885	1.8	-3.2
Schools	107,990	2.4	111,035	2.6	+2.8
Community Ed	487,135	10.6	386,225	9.0	-20.7
Enterprise	122,865	2.7	94,790	2.2	-22.9
Private	3,032,840	66.1	2,831,795	66.2	-6.6

Table 2: New South Wales Total VET Students by Provider Type – 2019 and 2020

Provider Type	2019 NSW students	Percentage of 2019 NSW total students (%)	2020 NSW students	Percentage of 2020 NSW total students (%)	2019 to 2020 NSW increase/ decrease (%)
Total Student Count	1,418,655	100.0	1,303,945	100.0	-8.1
Total students	1,301,925		1,197,505		-8.0
TAFE	297,605	21.0	346,610	26.6	+16.5
Universities	260	0.02	170	.01	-34.6
Schools	39,580	2.8	40,695	3.1	+2.8
Community Ed	202,520	14.3	162,440	12.5	-19.8
Enterprise	31,555	2.2	26,995	2.0	-14.6
Private	847,135	59.7	727,035	55.8	-14.2

Table 3: Victorian Total VET Students by Provider Type – 2019 and 2020

	2019 VIC students	Percentage of 2019 VIC total students (%)	2020 VIC students	Percentage of 2020 VIC total students (%)	2019 to 2020 VIC increase/ decrease (%)
Total student count	1,081,075	100.0	924,980	100.0	-14.4
Total students	1,012,510		874,850		-13.6
TAFE	181,355	16.8	160,905	17.4	-11.3
Universities	50,435	4.7	48,340	5.2	-4.2
Schools	16,255	1.5	15,040	1.6	-7.5
Community Ed	82,155	7.6	53,230	5.8	-35.2
Enterprise	13,245	1.2	10,475	1.1	-20.9
Private	737,630	68.2	636,990	68.9	-13.6

Government-Funded VET Students: Comparison of 2019 and 2020

Table 4: Government-funded VET Students in Australia by Provider Type – 2019 and 2020

Australia	2019 total students	Percentage of 2019 total (%)	2020 total students	Percentage of 2020 total (%)	2019 to 2020 increase/ decrease (%)
Total student count	1,316,460	100.0	1,365,420	100.0	+3.7
Total students	1,246,360		1,300,520		+4.3
TAFE	610,695	46.4	670,255	49.1	+9.6
Universities	58,355	4.4	59,935	4.4	+2.7
Schools	98,025	7.4	100,820	7.4	+2.9
Community Ed	69,680	5.3	61,480	4.5	-11.8
Enterprise	33,715	2.6	19,025	1.4	-43.6
Private	445,990	33.9	453,905	33.2	+1.8

Table 5: Government-Funded VET New South Wales Students by Provider Type – 2019 and 2020

Provider Type	2019 NSW students	Percentage of 2019 NSW total students (%)	2020 NSW students	Percentage of 2020 NSW total students (%)	2019 to 2020 NSW increase/ decrease (%)
Total student count	435,025	100.0	493,395	100.0	+13.4
Total students	414,070		472,355		+14.1
TAFE	258,820	59.5	324,115	65.7	+25.2
Schools	39,290	9.0	40,075	8.1	+2.0
Community Ed	32,160	7.4	27,705	5.6	-13.9
Enterprise	8,985	2.1	7,115	1.4	-20.8
Private	95,770	22.0	94,385	19.1	-1.4

Table 6: Government-funded VET Victorian Students by Provider Type – 2019 and 2020

Provider Type	2019 VIC students	Percentage of 2019 VIC total students (%)	2020 VIC students	Percentage of 2020 VIC total students (%)	2019 to 2020 VIC increase/ decrease (%)
Total student count	331,425	100.0	313,260	100.0	-5.5
Total students	317,960		301,760		-5.1
TAFE	140,300	42.3	128,930	41.2	-8.1
Universities	41,305	12.5	41,690	13.3	+1.0
Schools	9,815	3.0	8,575	2.7	-12.6
Community Ed	24,800	7.5	21,740	6.9	-12.3
Enterprise	2,245	0.7	1,805	0.6	-19.6
Private	112,960	34.1	110,520	35.3	-2.2

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 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 and pre-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.

CCA 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

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