

Australian Adult and Community Education Alignment with Labor Policies

Prepared by Community Colleges Australia

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Introduction

The Australian adult and community education (ACE) sector strengths, purpose and capabilities have a very strong alignment with Federal Labor policies and commitments. Community Colleges Australia (CCA) has reviewed Labor policies and analysed the alignment below.

Labor Commitment to Disadvantaged and Vulnerable Australians

In his election [victory speech](#) early on Sunday morning following the election, incoming Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said that “We should always look after the disadvantaged and the vulnerable.” This phrase resonates strongly with Australian adult and community education (ACE) providers, which have the best performance of any vocational education and training (VET) sub-sector in their [ability to reach](#) from people lower socio-economic backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with a disability, older (aged 45+) learners and regional and rural students. The phrase “vulnerable and disadvantaged” was first used by the [Australian Government Productivity Commission in 2008](#).

Labor Policies

Free TAFE: Labor [has committed to](#) 465,000 fee free TAFE places, including 45,000 new TAFE places, a policy that draws from a [McKell Institute](#) report. This promise accords with [CCA support](#) for a strong TAFE system, as the anchor institution of Australian VET.

VET market: Labor’s policy reads: “The competitive vocational education and training market has led to significant market failure. Public funding to private providers has led, in too many cases, to exploitation of students and profiteering at the expense of the taxpayer. 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 which have the support of employers and unions, *including in the adult and community education sector*. Unscrupulous practices and operators will not be tolerated” ([ALP National Platform](#), p. 33, point 80). This is consistent with CCA’s request [to reverse](#) national and state policies that have “marketised” VET.

VET trainers: Labor has committed to “re-building and sustaining a workforce of professional vocational teachers and support staff” ([ALP National Platform](#), p. 34, point 81). This is an important commitment, given the shortages in VET trainers [experienced both by ACE](#) and [other VET](#) providers.

Lifelong learning: “Labor will support effective life-long learning to help all Australians to renew their skills and knowledge as our society and economy continues to change” ([ALP National Platform](#), p. 35, point 92). Lifelong learning [has long been the backbone](#) of Australian adult and community education.

Role of ACE: “Adult and community education is central to revitalising our post-school education system as we know that we won’t be able to deliver the change we need without your expertise, practice

and community connection,” writes the Office of Tanya Plibersek MP, Shadow Minister for Education, [to Adult Learning Australia](#).

Jobs and Skills Australia will be established “as a national partnership to drive VET education and strengthen workforce planning.” This organisation will be instrumental to help deliver CCA’s proposed national-state-territory policy statement on [the value and place of ACE](#), and comprehensive national VET policy, which includes a regional and rural VET policy.

Anti-corruption commission: The Labor commitment to a [Federal anti-corruption commission](#) (called “[integrity commission](#)” by many independents) underlines the important [role played by Australia’s ACE sector](#) in sustaining Australian democracy and promoting civic engagement. The not-for-profit ACE sector is perfectly positioned to support the underlying principles of Australian democracy inherent in a national anti-corruption commission. This results from place-based, geographically dispersed and community-managed organisations which bring a [long history](#) of purpose and mission statements that emphasise community engagement through learning, [resilience](#), [greater societal purpose](#) and [social inclusion](#).

Aged care: [Labor’s commitment](#) to “back a real pay rise for aged care workers” is significant, as it will support [aged care workforce recruitment and retention](#). Aged care workforce training is one of the ACE sector’s greatest strengths, with ACE providers training a large number of aged care workers at Certificate III Individual Support – 23% of government funded VET students in NSW and 19% in Victoria.

Early childhood: “Labor believes that early childhood education and care is one of the most valuable careers for our nation’s future and that it should only be provided by a highly skilled, professional and well-paid workforce. Labor will support high quality training for early childhood educators as well as improvements in their wages and conditions” ([ALP National Platform](#), p. 31, point 68).” Australian ACE providers are some of the country’s most important trainers in child care at Certificate III and Diploma level.

Infrastructure: The [Labor commitment to](#) “infrastructure as a sustainable, long-term investment in vital national projects – creating jobs and boosting productivity” coincides perfectly with CCA’s advocacy for [a national infrastructure funding program](#) that enables NFP community education providers to modernise physical facilities and improve digital connectivity for their learners.

Addressing disadvantage: “Labor will enable people’s participation in the economy and community by helping them gain the capacities needed through employment, volunteering, community service and education. Our policies will aim to break the cycle of entrenched and multiple disadvantage in particular areas, reflecting the reality that poverty is often concentrated in certain suburbs and towns – and that it can be overcome through policy choices and partnership with the community and business” ([ALP National Platform](#), p. 57, point 84). This coincides perfectly with the place-based approach by NFP ACE providers [to address disadvantage](#) in highly marginalised and vulnerable communities.

School ventilation: Labor has committed to a \$240 million [Schools Upgrade Fund](#) to upgrade “make sure all kids can learn at world class schools with great facilities in a COVID-safe environment” which will “improve ventilation and air quality by buying air purifiers, upgrading heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, building outdoor learning spaces and replacing windows and doors so they can let fresh air in.” CCA strongly supports [clean classroom air](#) to ensure safe learning environments, and proposes that such funding programs be extended to not-for-profit post-secondary education and training organisations.

Not-for-profit organisations: Labor recognises that “Community sector organisations play a vital role in supporting the vulnerable.... Labor will work with the community sector to establish a model of funding which better addresses the needs and interests of people they support and the local communities in which they work. This should include a focus on accessibility, sustainability, collaboration and the importance of early intervention. Labor recognises that community led organisations have been an essential part of delivering services and building community capacity” ([ALP National Platform](#), p. 59, points 94 & 95).

Government tendering: “Labor recognises that non-profit organisations are always better positioned than for-profit corporations to provide these crucial frontline support services. In the procurement of human services, Labor will remove the practice of competing on labour costs by ensuring tenders and grant programs are sufficient and appropriately funded to provide for adequate and safe staffing levels, and fair and reasonable wages and conditions” ([ALP National Platform](#), p. 59, point 97). CCA has expressed concern that NFP organisations have lost out on key Commonwealth education, training and employment tenders to for-profit organisations.

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