

National Jobs and Skills Summit Briefing

Adult and community education providers help Australian skills and jobs

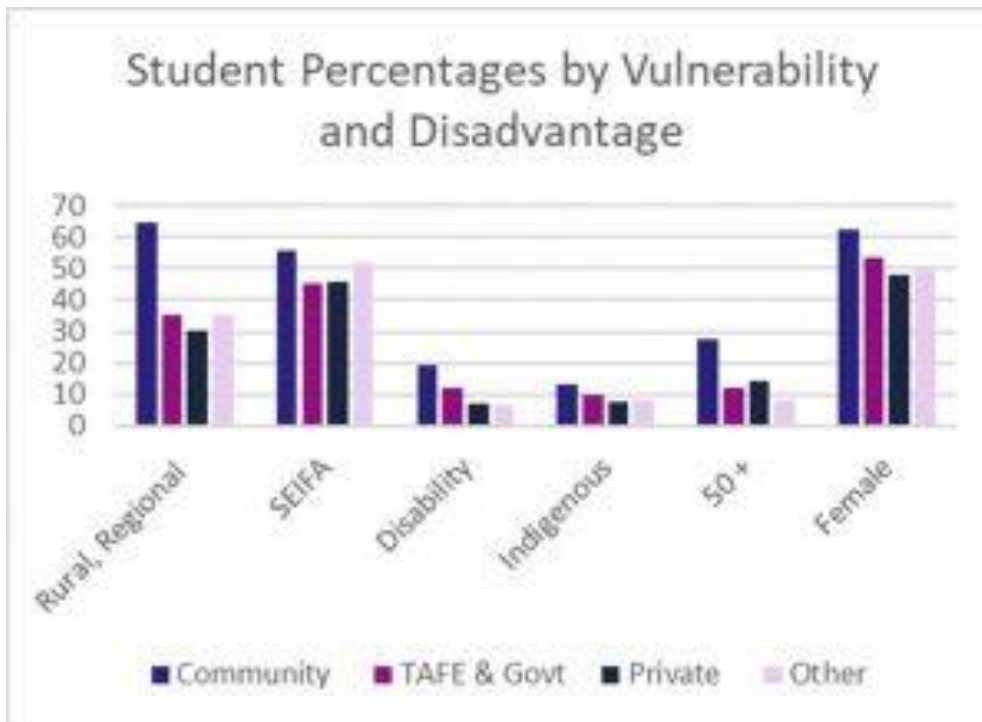
Australia's not-for-profit adult and community education (ACE) providers can and should play an important role in skilling Australia and will be an essential mechanism to assist government efforts to meet skills gaps – especially of disadvantaged learners – and to move to full employment.

Australia's adult and community education sector

- ACE student numbers **rebounded up by 15.2%** in 2021, increasing from a COVID-depressed 390,185 in 2020 to 449,500, representing 10.5% of the overall 3,186,795 students in 2021.
- **About 200 ACE training providers operate in Australia**, the majority in NSW and VIC. More than 2000 other ACE providers **deliver** pre-accredited, pre-vocational, personal interest learning and other courses that support jobs, skills and community development.
- The ACE sector specialises in areas of crucial national training priority: **foundation skills** (language, literacy, numeracy and digital) and the **care sector** – **aged**, disability and **early childhood learning**. Almost one-quarter of **government-funded aged care worker** (Certificate III Individual Support) students in NSW and VIC are with ACE providers, and about half of all ACE learners study for care sector occupations.
- ACE providers bring a well-known **place-based** and regionally relevant approach to their training, partnering easily with care providers, governments, business and community organisations, all of which trust the quality of ACE students. ACE providers are especially successful in engaging both young people as well as older (age 45+) learners in training.
- Community providers are especially **important in regional and rural Australia**, frequently the only local provider in their communities.
- ACE provider 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 (the national average) and 9.5% of private for-profit training providers.
- Compared with other VET provider types, ACE students were **the most satisfied** with assessment, the most satisfied with the overall quality of training and the most willing to recommend their training. Of those employed after training, ACE graduates found the training **relevant** to their current job and received at least one job-related benefit.
- ACE providers have an **unbroken 109 year history** of adult community education dating to 1913, the year that WEAs (Workers Education Associations) were established in **Newcastle, Wollongong, Sydney** and Adelaide.

Vulnerability and disadvantage

ACE providers significantly over-perform compared to both TAFE and private for-profit providers, disproportionately catering for students from **the most disadvantaged groups**: ACE providers have the highest government-funded student percentages for Indigenous (First Nations) people, people with disabilities, lower-socio economic backgrounds, women and regional/rural residents, as well as people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The **most successful Australian regions** that engage disadvantaged learners in VET and promote completion “report higher-than-average concentrations of community provision – especially important for learners with disabilities, unemployed and individuals with low prior educational attainment.”



What Australia’s VET sector needs: more trainers & re-engaged learners

Trainer recruitment: The *critical shortage of skilled aged care and foundation skills trainers* – especially acute in many regional and rural areas – results in part from existing worker reluctance to become trainers; the TAE Certificate IV qualification seen as an obstacle; and the negative press around the quality of care and qualifications of staff. *In response*, [CCA proposes an ACE TAE scholarship program for aged care and foundation skills trainers](#), combined with a **complementary mentoring support program** that pairs potential trainers with experienced VET and/or industry professionals, to assist new trainers to engage with VET.

Learner outreach and re-engagement: Lack of ACE student engagement in VET is most acute with Indigenous (First Nations) learners; people with a disability; migrants, refugees and people from a non-English speaking background; and people from lower-socio-economic backgrounds more broadly. *Many learners in these groups have been “left behind” during the pandemic, both in quality training and access to employment.* CCA proposes a [comprehensive outreach program](#) to engage members of these groups into learning, based on TAFE NSW Outreach and the [Victorian Reconnect program](#).

How the ACE sector can contribute effectively to Australia’s jobs and skills

The Australian ACE sector can contribute effectively to Australia’s jobs and skills needs if the sector’s strengths are recognised and targeted support provided, including:

- Creation of proper **pathways between ACE and TAFE** in all states and territories.
- **Reversal of national and state policies that have “marketised” VET**, also known as “user choice” – a term that does not show how destructive the policy has been. With 72% of all VET students, for-profit providers have effectively privatised Australian training, at the loss of TAFE and the not-for-profit ACE sector. [Research shows](#) that disadvantaged and outer regional students have missed out because of this policy. Contrast this to two educational sectors in

Australia – schools and universities – where for-profit education remains small in universities (@5%) and almost non-existent in schools.

- **A national-state-territory policy statement** on [the value and place of ACE](#) and its place in Australian education and training, updating the 2008 Ministerial statement.
- **An infrastructure funding program** that enables NFP community education providers to modernise physical facilities and to improve digital connectivity, supporting national economic recovery efforts, based on a model established in 2009 by the Commonwealth Government when it set up a \$100 million “[Investing in Community Education and Training program](#)”. Investing in ACE provider infrastructure simply [makes economic sense](#).
- **A comprehensive national VET policy**, in conjunction with the states and territories, including [adult literacy and numeracy](#), and includes a **regional and rural VET policy** that acknowledges the important – and undervalued – [role of community providers](#).
- **Proper VET funding**: Australian VET continues to be the poor cousin (“forgotten middle child”) of Australian education: [going backwards](#) for many years.
- **Ensure that Commonwealth VET initiatives** such as the Foundation Skills for Your Future and the [VET Student Loans program](#) are accessible, applicable and relevant to community education providers.

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