

**What “Free TAFE” Means for Australian Adult and Community  
Education Providers**  
**A Submission by Community Colleges Australia to Federal and State  
Skills Ministers**

11 November 2022

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## Executive Summary and Requests: Free TAFE

The Commonwealth Government has agreed with all states and territories – confirmed in the October 2022 Budget – to create an additional 180,000 “fee-free” TAFE places, to commence in January 2023 and a further 300,000 places from 2024.

**CCA requests** the Commonwealth Government, with the states and territories, to develop:

1. Policy protocols around “free TAFE” that include appropriate guardrails that ensure the ACE sector is not inadvertently disadvantaged.
2. Clarification as to how access to “free TAFE” funding by not-for-profit adult and community education (ACE) and First Nations VET providers will take place.
3. Formal pathways – overdue – between Australian ACE and TAFE that ensure and encourage learners to transition seamlessly and efficiently from ACE to TAFE.
4. A program of investment in the digital infrastructure of not-for-profit ACE providers, building on 2009 “Investing in Community Education and Training” program.
5. A program that funds outreach officers and community engagement for ACE providers to recruit and support disengaged and disadvantaged learners.

CCA strongly endorses additional resources to TAFE as a major step to revitalise Australia’s training system in a way that reaches all students, especially those who are disadvantaged and unemployed. CCA supports a strengthened TAFE sector as the anchor VET institution. CCA recognises the shared values and important contributions that public TAFE and community education providers undertake to promote access and equity in education and training.

The “free TAFE” policy concerns CCA because of the possible unintended consequences for Australia’s ethical, community-based, not-for-profit ACE providers, which each year deliver training to almost half a million VET students – more than 10% of learners, and are a natural ally to TAFE. CCA believes that it is long overdue to develop pathways between ACE providers and TAFEs. This is even more important from 2023 onwards, with the additional funding to be supplied to TAFE. CCA is keen, in the Prime Minister’s words at the Jobs and Skills Summit, that additional TAFE funding be “the beginning, not the end” of progress on skills or training.

*ACE providers should not be disadvantaged by the larger marketing power of TAFE.* If undertaken without due care, students may very well skip ACE providers – which specialise in enrolling vulnerable and disadvantaged students (see Appendix A) – and enrol in TAFE courses just because of a higher level of “brand awareness”. Vulnerable and disadvantaged students could also enrol in inappropriate TAFE courses just because they are “free” and heavily promoted, commencing higher level qualifications beyond their capability.

There appears to be a growing flexibility in Commonwealth wording around “free TAFE”. It is essential that access by not-for-profit ACE and First Nations organisations in this funding not be barred. TAFE and ACE *are not* competitors; they are complimentary and should work together collaboratively, including career pathways to assist learners, communities and regions.

The potential disadvantage for ACE providers by “free TAFE” could be ameliorated in part by a national program to conduct outreach to adult learners who have become disengaged through impacts associated with COVID-19 or natural disasters such as floods and bushfires. Providers report a general fear and fatigue that affect willingness of potential students to study, which severely affects face-to-face training, as a large majority of disadvantaged learners are unable or unwilling to move to online learning.

## “Free TAFE” Background

The new Commonwealth Government has agreed with all state and territory Governments to create an additional 180,000 “fee-free” TAFE places, to commence in January 2023. This was confirmed at the meeting of Commonwealth and state/territory skills ministers, following an announcement at the National Jobs and Skills Summit.<sup>1</sup> The Commonwealth Government subsequently announced further details of the policy in the 25 October Budget:

This will respond to immediate skills needs and provide opportunities for Australians to get the skills they need for secure and rewarding jobs. This commitment includes \$493 million to deliver 180,000 Fee-Free TAFE and vocational education places. The Agreement will target industries with severe skills shortages, including the care sector, technology and digital, hospitality and tourism, construction, agriculture, and industries important to sovereign capability. Fee-Free places will be made available through public TAFEs and public dual sector providers and other providers in exceptional circumstances, where TAFE does not have adequate existing capacity, including for example, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-owned registered training organisations. The Agreement includes \$24 million to support the success of students with complex needs, and additional funding of \$50 million for the TAFE Technology Fund to provide modern facilities including in regional Australia, and \$7 million for essential vocational education and training (VET) data infrastructure reform.<sup>2</sup>

The Budget Fact Sheet states there will eventually be a further 300,000 fee-free places from 2024, with:

480,000 fee-free TAFE and community-based vocational education places to ensure that Australians have access to the skills they need for the jobs of the future. Fee-free places will be targeted to priority groups including First Nations people, young people, job seekers, unpaid carers, women in non-traditional fields of study and people with disability.... At least 15,000 of these places will be dedicated to courses in aged care to help relieve pressure in this sector.<sup>3</sup>

The Budget also announced, “additional funding of \$50 million for the TAFE Technology Fund to provide modern facilities including in regional Australia”.

## Community Colleges Australia Response to Free TAFE

CCA strongly endorses additional resources to TAFE as a major step to revitalise Australia’s training system in a way that reaches all students, especially those who are disadvantaged and unemployed. CCA supports a strengthened TAFE sector as the anchor VET institution. We recognise the shared values and important contributions that public TAFE and community education providers undertake to promote access and equity in education and training across all segments of Australian society. Read the full CCA Policy Statement on TAFE on our website.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://ministers.dewr.gov.au/oconnor/meeting-federal-state-and-territory-skills-ministers-0> and <https://cca.edu.au/lessons-for-australian-adult-and-community-education-providers-from-the-jobs-and-skills-summit/>.

<sup>2</sup> See *Employment and Workplace Relations October 2022–23 Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS)*, 25 October 2022, available at <https://www.dewr.gov.au/about-department/resources/portfolio-budget-statements-october-2022-23>.

<sup>3</sup> *Budget October 2022-23 - Skills and Training fact sheet*, available at <https://budget.gov.au/2022-23-october/content/downloads.htm#FS>.

<sup>4</sup> See CCA Policy on TAFE and Community Education, 11 April 2017, available at <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/CCA-Policy-on-TAFE-and-Community-Education-11April2017.pdf>.

*The “Free TAFE” policy concerns CCA, however, because of the possible unintended consequences for Australia’s ethical, community-based, not-for-profit ACE providers, which each year deliver training to almost half a million VET students – more than 10% of learners.<sup>5</sup> CCA believes that it is long overdue to develop pathways between ACE providers and TAFEs. This is even more important from 2023 onwards, with the additional funding to be supplied to TAFE.*

CCA is keen, in the Prime Minister’s words at the Jobs and Skills Summit, that additional TAFE funding be “the beginning, not the end” of progress on skills or training.<sup>6</sup>

*ACE providers should not be disadvantaged by the larger marketing power of TAFE. If undertaken without due care, students may very well skip ACE providers – which specialise in enrolling vulnerable and disadvantaged students (see Appendix A below) – and enrol in TAFE courses just because of a higher level of “brand awareness”. Vulnerable and disadvantaged students could also enrol in inappropriate TAFE courses just because they are “free” and heavily promoted, commencing higher level qualifications beyond their capability. The lessons of the disastrous VET FEE-HELP Loans program – summarised by the Australian National Audit Office review – are that many low level learners enrolled in qualifications way beyond their capabilities simply because they were seen as “free” and therefore desirable.<sup>7</sup> Although “free TAFE” will, thankfully, not saddle learners with debt unlike VET FEE-HELP did, if the free programs recruit students incorrectly, those learners may not complete the courses, may obtain poor learning outcomes, may waste funds and potentially dissuade VET learners from engaging in further training.*

Delivering the skills and societal outcomes Australia needs requires building the agility and flexibility of the training system, ensuring system providers can meet foundational skill learner needs while responding to local communities and labour markets. ACE providers are nimble, flexible and accessible, specialising in breaking down barriers and developing pathways for learners of all ages.

The Australian Government Productivity Commission has cautioned against “free TAFE” policies without appropriate policy settings, primarily concerned about the “contestability” of private VET providers (which does not concern CCA)<sup>8</sup>. Other social sector organisations have expressed concerns that “free TAFE” can distort training choices for young people and entry level qualifications, if implemented incorrectly.<sup>9</sup>

CCA notes the planned additional \$50 million digital infrastructure for TAFE. Additional infrastructure supplied to the nation’s ACE providers – all independent entities – is an essential feature to ensure ACE providers can “keep up” with digital communications requirements and effectively serve their communities. ACE providers already create accessible gateways for digital inclusion, demonstrated by

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://cca.edu.au/australian-adult-and-community-education-student-numbers-rebound-in-2021/>.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/from-free-tafe-places-to-a-speech-by-dylan-alcott-heres-what-happened-on-day-one-of-the-skills-summit/xjn49yb4f>.

<sup>7</sup> *Administration of the VET FEE-HELP Scheme*, Australian National Audit Office, 20 December 2016, available at <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/administration-vet-fee-help-scheme>.

<sup>8</sup> The Productivity Commission has warned “Free TAFE policies are also unlikely to provide community wide benefits” because of “substitution from students who would have otherwise studied at private providers”, and that TAFEs would increase “their already dominant market share”. Source: Australian Government Productivity Commission, *5 Year Productivity Inquiry: From learning to growth*, Interim report 5, 4 October 2022, available at <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/productivity/interim5-learning>.

<sup>9</sup> Presentation by Kira Clarke at the WAVE National Forum, Melbourne, 21 October 2022, <https://wave.org.au/wave-national-forum-2022/>.

their work with seniors (Tech Savvy Seniors<sup>10</sup>), young people (Good Things Foundation<sup>11</sup>) and small business (Tech Savvy Small Business<sup>12</sup>).

CCA believes that it's time to implement a national adult and community education (ACE) provider infrastructure program.<sup>13</sup> In 2009, the then Commonwealth Government set up a \$100 million "Investing in Community Education and Training program", part of a \$500 million VET Capital Fund that included TAFE.<sup>14</sup> This fund offered not-for-profit community education providers grants up to \$1.5 million for major capital infrastructure developments and upgrades. CCA, working with Per Capita in 2017, surveyed almost half of the community providers that received funds under this program.<sup>15</sup> Our research found that more than 100,000 additional students undertook training in the subsequent seven years as a direct result of that funding, as well as greatly enhanced accessibility for students with disabilities and numerous other community benefits. *In other words, one new student was trained for every \$1,000 invested, a fabulous return on investment.*

### **CCA Requests:**

- *Policy protocols around "free TAFE" that include appropriate guardrails that ensure the ACE sector and VET students generally are not disadvantaged by poor student marketing or recruitment practices, to the long-term detriment of Australian skills.*
- *Formal pathways – long overdue – between Australian ACE and TAFE that ensure and encourage learners to transition seamlessly and efficiently from ACE to TAFE.*
- *A program to invest in digital infrastructure of not-for-profit ACE providers, building on the 2009 "Investing in Community Education and Training" program.*

## **Apparent Flexibility Around "Free TAFE"**

There appears to be a growing flexibility in Commonwealth wording around "free TAFE". This includes the sentence: "Fee-Free places will be made available through public TAFEs and public dual sector providers and other providers in exceptional circumstances, where TAFE does not have adequate existing capacity, including for example, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-owned registered training organisations" (appearing in the Budget papers).

This new wording around "free TAFE" begins to address CCA's concerns of what funding for TAFE might do if undertaken without guardrails, policy protocols and clear guidelines as to suitable VET students or marketing. It is essential that ACE providers be included in the "exceptional circumstances" funding policy and that the bar for access by not-for-profit ACE and First Nations organisations to the "free TAFE" allocation of 180,000 places is not set extremely high, as the phrase "exceptional circumstances" will be interpreted by TAFEs themselves. CCA fears this qualification will constitute an impossible barrier for First Nations and other not-for-profit organisations to participate in this funding stream: many, if not most, TAFEs will strongly resist any funding going to not-for-profit organisations, largely because they wrongly believe that the not-for-profit ACE sector constitutes a competitor to them. TAFE and ACE *are not* competitors and should not be viewed that way; they are complimentary and should be working together collaboratively, including development of career pathways to assist learners,

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<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.telstra.com.au/tech-savvy-seniors/face-to-face-training#colleges>.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au/>.

<sup>12</sup> See <https://nbmc.nsw.edu.au/courses/Funded+Training/Tech+Savvy+for+Small+Business>.

<sup>13</sup> See <https://cca.edu.au/its-time-for-a-national-adult-and-community-education-infrastructure-program/>.

<sup>14</sup> See <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Commonwealth-Infrastructure-Funding-2009-10-ICET-Guidelines.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> See [https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Per-Capita-CCA-conference-presentation\\_final.pdf](https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Per-Capita-CCA-conference-presentation_final.pdf).

communities and regions. Unfortunately, there are very few instances around Australia where such collaboration takes place.

The second flexible wording occurs in the Commonwealth’s fact sheet, which reads “fee-free TAFE *and community-based* vocational education places...” CCA is pleased to see both qualifications, however requests urgent clarification on how not-for-profit ACE and First Nations VET providers can participate in this funding.

**CCA requests clarification as to how access to “free TAFE” funding by not-for-profit ACE and First Nations VET providers will take place.**

## Outreach to Disadvantaged and Disengaged Learners

One means to help ensure that not-for-profit ACE providers are not disadvantaged by “free TAFE” would be the establishment of a national program for ACE providers to conduct outreach to adult learners who have become disengaged through impacts associated with COVID-19 or natural disasters such as floods and bushfires. CCA’s research indicates that the lack of 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. Providers report a general fear and fatigue that affected willingness of potential students to study: “Many people are less keen to leave their house, less keen to participate in activities with many other people around, especially when in close proximity or having to share the same closed-air-space or common facilities. This severely affects face-to-face training delivery in a traditional classroom.” In addition, a large majority of disadvantaged learners are unable or unwilling to move to online learning.<sup>16</sup> These groups have often been “left behind” during the pandemic and often lag in vaccination rates and work in occupations more vulnerable to COVID-19 transmission.<sup>17</sup>

Community Colleges Australia (CCA) has proposed an outreach program to re-engage disadvantaged and vulnerable learners who have left training because of COVID-19 concerns. Australia has a strong history of VET outreach and student engagement, with pioneering work undertaken previously through TAFE New South Wales and currently through the Victorian Reconnect Program.<sup>18</sup> Even prior to the pandemic, disadvantaged ACE students faced many barriers to learning participation. Dr Jim Cloutman, formerly of Riverina Community College, writes:

The barriers that community college [ACE] students face can encompass mental health issues and deep-seated beliefs that they could not handle work, not just in terms of technical skills, but from the point of view of dealing with the many challenges that come from engaging with others in a workplace environment. And these various barriers can agglomerate, hampering correct decision making and engagement with meaningful, longer-term employment ... only 9% of longer-term unemployed people, for example, have no barriers at all to acquiring work, while 63% have two or more major barriers.<sup>19</sup>

**CCA requests a new program that funds outreach officers and community engagement for ACE providers to recruit and support disengaged and disadvantaged learners.**

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<sup>16</sup> See <https://cca.edu.au/cca-proposes-outreach-program-to-re-engage-disadvantaged-learners-impacted-by-covid-19/>.

<sup>17</sup> Source: <https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsq/clinical/vaccination-gap-vulnerable-communities-left-expose>.

<sup>18</sup> See <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/reconnect-program.aspx> and <http://nswtox.com/>.

<sup>19</sup> Source: *Supporting pathways in learning and life: Non-accredited training within the New South Wales Adult and Community Education (ACE) program*, by Dr Jim Cloutman, June 2021, available at <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Supporting-Pathways-in-Learning-and-Life-by-Dr-Jim-Cloutman-Riverina-Community-College.pdf>.

## Appendix A: How Australian ACE Providers Over-Perform in Engaging Vulnerable and Disadvantaged VET Learners

Australian ACE providers significantly over-perform on almost all tracked measures in reaching vulnerable and disadvantaged students. Examples from New South Wales (2020) and Victoria (2021) are detailed below.

The numbers below constitute an extraordinary achievement of outreach and engagement of vulnerable and disadvantaged Australian post-secondary learners, undertaken in collaboration between the ACE providers and their respective state governments. The data indicates how important ACE providers are to Australia's social, economic and educational development. Re-engaging disadvantaged Australians, who are often the first to leave training during crises such as COVID-19 or catastrophic floods – and the last to return – should be a high priority for all governments. ACE providers are central to that mission. ACE providers are the “go to” training organisations in their states when policy objectives prioritise reaching regional and rural, disabled, Indigenous, disadvantaged or older learners.

### A.1 New South Wales

In 2021, NSW ACE providers achieved the following percentage proportions of their government-funded VET student populations:

- **10.6% students with a disability** (13.5% in 2021), compared to 9.3% of TAFE, 5.3% of private for-profits, 2.2% schools and 2.8% enterprise providers;
- **45.9% regional and rural students** (48.6% in 2021) compared to 29.5% TAFE, 29.5% private for-profits, 25.5% schools and 42% enterprise providers;
- **59.7% most disadvantaged students** (64.2% in 2021) – bottom two SEIFA quintiles – compared to 44.2% TAFE, 29.5% private for-profits, 40.6% schools and 50.7% enterprise providers;
- **19.4% non-English speaking background students**, compared to 21.3% of TAFE, 15.6% of private for-profits and 9.5% enterprise providers;
- **34.8% older (age 45+) students**, compared to 18.6% TAFE, 23.5% private for-profits and 22.5% enterprise providers; and
- **11.4% Indigenous students**, compared to 8.4% of TAFE, 6.9% of private for-profit providers and 5.9% enterprise providers.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, 64.4% NSW ACE provider government-funded VET students were female, the highest of any VET provider group in 2021. This compares to 54.8% of TAFE, 48.9% of private for-profit providers, 45.7% schools and 48.2% enterprise providers. According to the Australian Medical Association and the Grattan Institute, “The challenges and burdens faced by women are exacerbated with women’s economic security, participation in formal employment, political representation, health outcomes and educational achievement negatively impacted, and more so than men.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Source: NCVET 2022, Total VET students and courses 2021: students DataBuilder. Accessed 22 August 2022 <https://www.ncvet.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/total-vet-students-and-courses-2021>.

<sup>21</sup> Source: “The impact of COVID-19 on women,” by Dr Helen McArdle, Chair, AMA Equity Inclusion and Diversity Committee, Australian Medical Association, 3 March 2021, available at <https://www.ama.com.au/articles/impact-covid-19-women>. Also see: *Women’s work: The impact of the COVID crisis on Australian women*, by Danielle Wood, Kate Griffiths, Tom Crowley, Grattan Institute, 12 April 2021, available at <https://grattan.edu.au/report/womens-work/>.

## A.2 Victoria

In 2021, Victorian ACE providers achieved the following percentage proportions of their government-funded VET student populations:

- **10.9% students with a disability** (14.2% in 2020), compared to 7.0% of TAFE, 3.8% private for-profits, 7.8% universities, 3.7% schools and 3.8% enterprise providers;
- **47.6% most disadvantaged students** (bottom two SEIFA quintiles) (50.3% in 2020), compared to 37.3% TAFE, 38.7% private for-profits, 31.6% universities and 39.2% of schools;
- **46.2% speak a language other than English at home** (43% in 2020), compared to 17.6% of TAFE, 23.3% of private for-profits, 31.6% universities and 39.2% of schools;
- **73.6% female students**, compared to 44.0% TAFE, 52.3% private for-profits, 45.6% universities, 40.0% schools and 43.5% enterprise providers;
- **23.9% regional students** (25.3% in 2020), compared to 30.9% TAFE students, 24.4% private for-profits, 19.2% of universities, 23.9% schools and 24.3% enterprise providers; and
- **31.5% older** (age 45+) students (29.9% in 2020), compared to 14% TAFE, 17.9% private for-profits, 11.6% universities, 4.9% schools and 14.4% for enterprise providers; and
- **1.9% Indigenous students**, compared to 2.3% of TAFE, 1.5% of private for-profits, 1.3% universities, 2.0% schools and 1.1% enterprise providers.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Source: NCVET, Total VET students and courses 2021: students DataBuilder, 18 August 2022, <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/total-vet-students-and-courses-2021>.



## Appendix B: The Australian ACE Sector

### B.1 History and Perception of ACE

The history of not-for-profit community-based learning links directly to 1913, with the establishment of Workers Educational Associations (WEAs<sup>23</sup>) and even back to 1833 with the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts (SMSA<sup>24</sup>). The branding is often confused with TAFE; and sometimes private for-profit VET providers, which sometimes attempt to hide the fact that they are not-for-profit organisations by utilising business names such as “community education” or “community colleges”.

While the public perception remains that ACE providers primarily deliver leisure or non-accredited adult education, that has changed in the last 25 years, so that accredited (or pre-vocational/pre-accredited funded) training has become the major focus of ACE providers. There are almost 400+ ACE training providers (RTOs) in Australia, with the majority located in Victoria and NSW – states with governments that systematic funding programs and policies, and an estimated additional 2000 non-RTO ACE providers which deliver pre-accredited, pre-vocational and personal interest learning.<sup>25</sup>

### B.2 Australia's Adult and Community Education Student Numbers

The number of Australian adult and community education (ACE) students rebounded by 15.2% in 2021 from a pandemic-impacted low in 2020, according to the NCVER.<sup>26</sup> ACE “Total VET” student numbers increased from 390,185 in 2020 to 449,500 in 2021.

In 2021, 4.3 million students were enrolled in nationally recognised vocational education and training (VET), an increase of 9% compared with 2020.<sup>27</sup> In 2021, 3,186,795 students (74.1%) enrolled at private training providers, 778,300 (18.1%) at TAFE institutes, 449,500 (10.5%) at community education (ACE) providers, 114,100 (2.7%) at schools, 107,000 (2.5%) at enterprise providers and 75,600 (1.8%) at universities.<sup>28</sup>

The Victorian figures do not necessarily include the very large amount of pre-vocational training that ACE providers (often under the Victorian brand “Learn Locals”) undertake – not included in accredited VET funded by the Victorian Government.

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<sup>23</sup> See <https://atwea.edu.au/history/>. WEAs currently exists in New South Wales (Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong) and South Australia (Adelaide).

<sup>24</sup> See <https://smsa.org.au/about/history/>.

<sup>25</sup> See *Australian adult community education environmental scan 2022*, prepared by Adult Learning Australia, <https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Australian-ACE-Report-2022.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> See <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/total-vet-students-and-courses-2021>.

<sup>27</sup> See <https://www.ncver.edu.au/news-and-events/media-releases/vet-participation-up-nine-percent>.

<sup>28</sup> See <https://cca.edu.au/australian-adult-and-community-education-student-numbers-rebound-in-2021/>.

## ACE Students by State and Territory 2021

State/Territory	2019	2020	2021	Change 2020 to 2021 (%)	National ACE total 2021 (%)
New South Wales	206,940	167,100	168,835	1	37.6
Victoria	84,610	55,955	78,085	39.5	17.4
Queensland	42,380	34,435	37,510	8.9	8.3
South Australia	49,545	38,235	46,760	22.3	10.4
Western Australia	84,895	77,530	84,415	8.9	18.8
Tasmania	4,250	3,845	20,545	534.3	4.6
Northern Territory	9,105	8,030	9,535	18.7	2.1
Australian Capital Territory	8,935	5,235	4,290	-18	1
Offshore	115	205	225	9.8	-
<b>Totals</b>	<b>490,345</b>	<b>390,185</b>	<b>449,515</b>	<b>+15.2%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: NCVER 2022, *Total VET Students and Courses 2021*: students DataBuilder<sup>29</sup>

### B.3 The Value ACE Providers Bring to Australian Training

Australian ACE providers bring extra value to Australian skills development and training through numerous factors. They:

- Obtain strong community and government support because of their not-for-profit status and mission to do good, such as “Our mission is to positively transform the lives of individuals, families and communities”.<sup>30</sup>
- Are place-based, building on local and regional strengths to create pathways to jobs.
- Develop and sustain partnerships between government, not-for-profit community and businesses, to develop job skills, encourage economic development and enable citizen participation.
- Provide learner-centred education, with small class sizes, complemented by personal and student support.
- Collaborate with other ACE providers and build the capacity to leverage collective strengths.
- Operate with flexibility, agility and speed, employing wide range of tools and a freedom to take risks.
- Are not bound by government structures like state and territory TAFEs.
- Are not beholden to private shareholders to deliver profit “taken out” of the business.
- Re-invest surplus funds in their organisations and local communities, building human, social and economic capital.
- Excel at lifting unemployed learners into employment: 13% of ACE learners move from unemployment to employment, a greater increase than any other provider type.<sup>31</sup>
- Play an essential role in national priority skilling such as aged care workforce training: 23% of Certificate III Individual support (Ageing) government-funded students in New South Wales, 19% in Victoria and 13% nationally.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Source: NCVER, <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder#tva-students>.

<sup>30</sup> See <https://www.verto.org.au/about-us> (VERTO is a CCA member headquartered in Bathurst NSW).

<sup>31</sup> Source: <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/vet-student-outcomes-2021>.

<sup>32</sup> See <https://cca.edu.au/cca-proposes-support-programs-for-ace-aged-care-trainers-students-and-workers/>. This is also the case in Early Childhood Learning training, where ACE providers train more than 12% of government-funded VET students; see <https://cca.edu.au/cca-makes-strong-case-for-focus-on-early-childhood-learning-training-places-to-nsw-ace-providers/> and

## Appendix C: About Community Colleges Australia

Community Colleges Australia (abbreviation: “CCA”) is the peak national body that represents community-owned, not-for-profit adult and community education (ACE) 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 community education sector by increasing the 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.<sup>33</sup>

CCA assists its members to sustain and grow, promoting learning innovation, focussing especially on vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. They 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 almost 110 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 and collaborations with local non-government organisations, government agencies, social services and employers.

### Contact:

#### Community Colleges Australia

PO Box 1839 QVB Post Office, Sydney NSW 1230

Level 7, 58 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000

Tel (02) 9233 3634

Email: [admin@cca.edu.au](mailto:admin@cca.edu.au)

Web: <https://cca.edu.au/>

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<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/collections/students-and-courses-collection/total-vet-students-and-courses>.

<sup>33</sup> See <https://cca.edu.au/who-we-are/about-us/>.