

## CCA CEO Dr Don Perlgut testimony at the Productivity Commission's 5 Year Productivity Review public hearing, 7 November 2022

CCA CEO Dr Don Perlgut appeared in front of [a hearing](#) of the Productivity Commission's "5 Year Productivity Review" on 7 November 2022. The hearing was held in Melbourne with the following Commissioners in attendance: Michael Brennan (Commission Chair), Alex Robson (Deputy Chair), Lisa Gropp and Catherine de Fontenay. Following is a slightly edited summary of Dr Perlgut's testimony. (Dr Perlgut appeared via remote video link.)

**DR PERLGUT:** My name is Don Perlgut; I am the CEO and company secretary of Community Colleges Australia Limited which is a not-for-profit association of not-for-profit organisations that are adult and community education providers. We abbreviate the term, adult and community education, frequently as ACE, sometimes referred to as community education providers by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

**Acknowledgement of Country:** I want to acknowledge that the CCA head office in the Sydney CBD is on the lands of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, and I honour their Elders, past, present and emerging. I want to thank the Productivity Commission and the commissioners and others very much for giving me the opportunity to talk with you. I want to talk with you about a number of things which are very close to my heart, as well as to our organisation's advocacy and representation activities.

**VET sector numbers:** In broad terms, our providers represent roughly 10% of total VET activity. In 2021, there were some 4.3 million students enrolled in national vocational education credited courses, which was an increase of about 9% on the previous year. Some – about 3.2 million, about 74% – were enrolled in private training providers; about 778,000 in TAFE; and about 450,000 in community education providers, representing 10.5% of the total VET activity.

**Inequality:** I want to reinforce the importance of tackling Australian inequality, because if we tackle inequality in Australia, we will become a more productive country. I also make the point that Australia's VET system needs more resources and reform. We are too focused on private profit and not sufficiently focused on social and economic outcomes.

**VET as an equaliser:** I note that Australia's VET system is one of our greatest equalisers, and that with 4.3 million participants between age 15 and 64 every year, VET is the most extensive of any of the educational sectors. My final point is that the not-for-profit ACE sector is an under-utilised resource, and I will explain some of the reasons for that.

**History of Australian ACE:** Let me provide more background about the ACE sector. We have a history in Australia that goes back to 1833 with the development of the Sydney Mechanics Institute, which was established that year. We have a direct history that goes back to 1913 with the establishment of the WEAs, known as Worker Education Associations. They were set up that year because somebody from the UK wandered around Australia in 1913 over six or seven months – when people had more time for their visits to this country. And at the end of his visit there were WEAs located in Adelaide, Sydney CBD, Wollongong – known as WEA Illawarra, and Newcastle – known as WEA Hunter. All four of those organisations have existed continuously to this date, an unbroken history of 109 years, well more than almost all other post-secondary education institution in Australia, excepting a few Australian universities.

**Branding of ACE:** The branding of the ACE sector, the not-for-profit ACE sector, is often confused with TAFE and with private for-profit providers. There is a very big distinction between the not-for-profit ACE sector and for-profit providers, in what they do, how they do it and what are their missions. Our members are for-purpose organisations and for-profit VET institutions. These points are often glossed over by that or ignored, and it is crucial to understand that. There's a public perception that the ACE providers are involved primarily in things like yoga, painting – that was the case until maybe 20 years or so ago. Up until that time, perhaps 90% of the business of the activity, it is now only 10 per cent of the business. All up, we are talking about roughly almost 400 ACE providers in Australia, a significant number, maybe of them located in regional and rural areas, and an additional 1500 ACE providers that are not delivering accredited training. The other thing to mention is that our sector has some of the best performance of lifting unemployed people into employment. We start with a much lower base, but we have a much greater percentage increase.

**National workforce importance in aged and child care:** And our sector has a very important role in two crucial areas of national workforce and productivity importance: aged care and early childhood learning, both of which have become established high priorities by the Commonwealth and state governments. In aged care, for instance, 23% of accredited government funded aged care students in New South Wales each year study with a not-for-profit ACE provider, and 19% in Victoria. Nationally, Australia has we do have a workforce shortfall of about 45,000 aged care workers. To deal with that, clearly the ACE sector has a very important role to play. Our sector also does a very unusual and high amount of work in regional and rural locations and is often one of the very few deliverers of training in many regional areas.

**ACE overperforms in reaching disadvantaged learners:** Our sector over-performs, in percentage terms, in reaching people with a disability, much higher than TAFE or the for-profit providers, The same for people who are Indigenous or First Nations, and people who are age 45-plus, now determined to be older workers. Our sector is particularly well also in engaging what we would call more broadly high-needs learners. Now, I don't want to take too much time, and this will need time for discussion, but I did want to give some background about identifying four key areas that we are very, I would say, expressing a high degree of concern about what's that. I mentioned about our importance, and I mentioned the importance of that as ensuring higher productivity for Australia.

**VET marketisation:** We do not believe – and there is [important research from Dr Don Zoellner](#), Charles Darwin University, who has analysed deep numbers from both New South Wales and Victoria – that the marketisation of VET has **not** succeeded in increasing the number of disadvantaged and vulnerable Australian in VET. In fact, in some ways marketisation has discouraged people, especially people in outer regional and in remote areas where there has been a decrease in training provision.

**Foundation skills:** I want to make a special case for foundation skills, which is a technical term that I do not like as it doesn't necessarily mean a lot to people. We are referring to language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills. We need proper funding and true outreach. True outreach because it is not - if you're familiar with the Kevin Costner-starring film where he had the phrase, 'Build it, and assume that they will come.' The film was called Field of Dreams. It is not the case when you're engaging with vulnerable and disadvantaged adult learners. You cannot simply provide it and assume that the learners will show up and say, 'It's online; they'll be there.' It does not happen. It is not the case.

**Place-based learning,** especially for disadvantaged and lower level and high-needs learners and especially for people that have some disadvantage in terms of literacy and numeracy is absolutely essential. Digital delivery is not the answer, and there's a fair bit of literature on this topic. My point is that there are some barriers for Australia's community or aged sector in achieving its potential to assist Australia in becoming more productive and becoming a more productive economic nation.

**Free TAFE:** The first of these [barriers] is one that the Productivity Commission has noted, which is that the free TAFE proposal has the potential to unbalance the whole VET system if it is not combined with proper guardrails. We are not opposed to the TAFE system; we regard the TAFE system as the anchor institution for Australian VET, very essential that it receive proper funding. Nevertheless, free TAFE if it is just put out that way, may very well mean that people who are inappropriate to study in certain qualifications in TAFE may sign up for those [qualifications] and have unsuccessful experiences.

**Learners in the wrong courses:** There is an important case study that many young people and disadvantaged people participated in the VET FEE-HELP policy disaster. In December 2016 the Australian National Audit Office analysed how the program was run so badly and was particularly disastrous for Indigenous Australians and for people from lower incomes.

**The need for guardrails:** We also anticipate that if free TAFE is done badly, it has the potential to do some major unbalancing. I'm not saying that it will be, but we do not yet see the guardrails and the policy settings are there to ensure that it is done correctly.

**Learner outreach and community engagement:** The two final points to make – it is essential to fund outreach and engagement of high-needs low-income and other vulnerable learners, and it cannot be done on the cheap. This is crucial. And my final point: we strongly believe that community development must be acknowledged as part of the post-secondary learning experience. Learners cannot and should not be viewed as individual consumers, but as part of a continuum of local businesses, community organisations, and community networks. This is reflected in the NCVET definition of what a community education provider is, that it keeps community development at its heart.

**COMMISSIONER ROBSON:** Thanks, Don. I might just ask you about - you mentioned some work. I think it was Don Zoellner you had mentioned and on marketisation. What exactly do you mean by that and what does that work show in your opinion?

**DR PERLGUT:** I'm going to give you the summary. [Don Zoellner](#) showed that the New South Wales and the Victorian approach to extending government funding to for-profit providers took place in different time-frames and in different means and mechanisms. He points out that both of them effectively arrived at the same place. One thing that they were very successful in doing was to increase the number of providers of government-funded VET, but increasing the number of providers is not necessarily a good thing. Their approaches were not necessarily successful in increasing the number of learners from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds, especially in outer regional areas – the likes of Broken Hill, Griffith, Hay, Moree and Mildura. Those outer regional areas have actually had a reduction in the amount of vocational education training available.

**For-profit training:** And there's some crucial reasons for that: when for-profit providers are engaged in education, effectively they want to make a profit. It is not profitable to go to what we often call 'thin markets' or it is not profitable to go to areas where you have high-needs learners. Therefore, for-profit enterprises will tend to go to learners who do not exhibit high needs, are easy to find, easy to reach, easy to teach and easy to get through.

**ACE and TAFE sectors** do not have that luxury because it is part of our makeup and our very genesis is to reach high needs learners. [Research from the NCVET](#) shows that in regional areas that had a high percentage of ACE providers the delivery of foundation skills, language, literacy, numeracy was actually done much more effectively than areas that did not have a high percentage.

**Quality of training:** The amount of effort and the amount of money spent on delivering vocational education and training is often equivalent to the quality. There certainly can be inefficiency and waste, but it is not possible to do things on the cheap, and when we have instances where people try to cut corners through putting people online that need some face-to-face instruction, not giving people

student support, not giving people proper learning engagement, that the outcomes, even though they might somehow 'pass' the qualification, but the actual learning outcomes and employment outcomes are inferior.

**COMMISSIONER ROBSON:** That's very good, thanks. And do you have any aggregate data or research on the - you mentioned this unmet demand for foundational skills. In terms of the size of the problem, what are we talking about, in your estimation?

**DR PERLGUT:** I refer you to a recent and valuable report released by the Reading Writing Hotline, which is a national service for literacy learners that receives queries and puts them in contact with providers. The Reading Writing Hotline is funded by the Commonwealth Government, and is a successor organisation to the Adult Literacy Information Office. Back in the early 1990s, when I worked for ABC Television, I worked very closely developing two adult literacy television series with the predecessor organisations to the Hotline. So I have a long history in this area.

**Foundation skills research:** The Hotline released a report for which they surveyed respondents – 382 literacy teachers. Across the board, adult literacy providers were reported really crucial unmet community needs. Calls to the hotline often indicate there are many needs in communities not being met by the current language, literacy, numeracy classes. The unmet need most cited by respondents to the survey was the need for individual and tailored literacy assistance: 64%. The second-most cited unmet need was for 'Wraparound supports to address barriers and enable participation.' That's what I'm calling outreach. That was 52%.

**Literacy needs continued:** Next was 'Help them with form filling.' – 49%. Here's a parenthetical aside: form filling during COVID-19 with so many things going online, and also during a time of disasters where people are filling in forms for insurance and everybody else, form filling for people of low literacy has become more fraught than ever. The two final points that came out of the report was pathways into accredited courses, 47% respondents. And the lack of accredited or non-accredited courses delivered in community settings. Not institutional, but community settings: 43% of the respondents said there was a greater need.

**COMMISSIONER de FONTENAY:** Thanks, Don. It was a great pleasure to meet with you and other members of the association earlier this year. I just wanted to ask whether your organisation has a view on whether it would be a good idea to extend income-contingent loans to VET students. And you mention that yoga and those types of courses are now only representing about 10% of your offering. Part of our recommendation was that those types of courses be excluded from income-contingent loans, and so I'd be interested in your view as to whether there is a clear dividing line between - let's call it the yoga macramé end of the spectrum and then courses that people take for the purpose of gaining employment. Thank you.

**DR PERLGUT:** Catherine, thank you very much. And thank you again for the previous opportunity to provide engagement and discussion for the inquiry. Yes, our organisation has a very strong view about the extension of income-contingent loans.

**VET Student Loans:** Replacing the VET FEE-HELP program with VET Student Loans has by and large been a public policy success. That's partly because we're dealing with what was probably one of [Australia's worst public policy disasters](#), with billions of dollars badly spent, and an enormous amount of, shall we say, angst and government - let's call it inefficiency undertaken. I understand that VET Student Loans runs at roughly one-third or less of what the total VET FEE-HELP funding was, and that's probably where it needed to be, and it seems to be running without any perceivable major issues.

**Income contingent loans:** There have been a couple of different proposals, one of which came from a recent report of [the New South Wales Government](#). Community Colleges Australia strongly opposes

expansion of VET Student Loans down to the Certificate III level. We strongly oppose that on the basis that so many of the people who are due to study at Certificate III tend to be from relatively low income and low educational backgrounds. We all know that people who are working in the aged care sector with their Certificate III are receiving an average of about \$23.50 an hour. I do understand that the Tribunal is going to increase that by 15%, which will take them up to \$27 roughly or that per hour. Nevertheless, we are not talking about a large amount of money. I also acknowledge that Australia's HELP system which is income contingent, very unlike the American system which just locks in and insists that people start paying, which has created some significant political problems and [attempts by the current Biden Administration](#) to forgive some of those loans.

**Direct funding at Certificate III level:** If the Australian or state governments are interested in encouraging people to participate in VET, especially at that Certificate III, we do not believe that these programs are suitable for people at entry level for crucial qualifications like aged care, child care and a host of others. We believe that they should be directly funded. I will leave small co-payments to the economists to discuss, but the income-contingent loans can leave people with substantial debts, and particularly for people who are not necessarily going to earn a great deal of money. I do not believe that is a proper public policy.

**Perception that training is “free”:** People who will be pushed into these loans may very well find themselves signing up for things which they believe are free, just what happened in the worst days of the VET FEE-HELP. And you go oh, no, no, no, but people are going to tell them. It's going to be written there. They're going to tick boxes. People will say that, and I'll say yes, they will say all that, and then they say, 'How much do I have to spend?' and then the person says, 'Oh, nothing. It's on the never never.' 'Oh, well, sure, I will sign up.'

**Income contingent loans in a high inflationary time:** We are open to discussions about some Certificate IV qualifications that could be suitable for income-contingent loans. However, we strongly believe that if that is to proceed, that it should first be done on a pilot basis with careful selection of what those qualifications are, depending on who the client groups will be and what the areas of needs are, and the anticipated capacity of those future learners to pay down the track so that they are not 10, 20 and 30 years later carrying a debt. You might then say to me, 'Oh, but it's still income contingent', and I say to you I know a large number of people in their late 20s and early 30s who are starting out and are carrying debts of from university study, and they didn't do expensive university courses, but because of inflation now, 7% for the 12 months period through the end of September, and then CPI on their loan is added, 7% to whatever their outstanding loan. Because of that, they have effectively not paid off any of their loans and are finding it a drag on their ability to purchase houses and units. This is not something that we need more of in Australia.

**COMMISSIONER GROPP:** Thanks. Can I just take you back, though. Earlier you said that you didn't favour free TAFE courses either, because people did courses, spent time on things that they didn't get a job in at the end of the day. So what level of payment are you looking at, particularly if you're not in favour of income-contingent loans? So how would you set the payments to – not to encourage, but not discourage, in that case?

**DR PERLGUT:** There are debates on this. Let me go back to the free TAFE. We are not opposed to that. We know that free TAFE is happening. I am not Don Quixote, tilting at windmills, ensuring that things – trying to say things that are not going to happen and will stop. No. What we are saying about free TAFE is that it needs to have proper policy settings and guardrails to ensure that people are not inappropriately recruited into TAFE courses they should not be in. I will now return – it may not be the nicest analogy – but I will return to the VET FEE-HELP policy disaster.

**VET FEE-HELP** was well-known for [recruiting people into courses of study](#) for which they were manifestly unsuited and that they would not complete. If free TAFE is run in this way, without ensuring that vulnerable and disadvantaged and certain learners are not properly supported in their choice of TAFE courses and where they're going, that creates potential problems on the basis that, 'it's all free; it doesn't matter'. Well, it does matter. Whether or not there is some small co-payment, these are matters for policy discussion. Community Colleges Australia does not have a formal view on that. I have my own views, in that I always think there is some small co-payment; however, I acknowledge that Australia has a significant number of people for whom spending an extra \$10 or \$20 or \$50 is a significant expense. So I don't want to be the person to say, "Oh, no, nothing should be free in education"; I do not believe that. I think that more research needs to be done.

**Free TAFE:** But my key point is, the way that that free TAFE is rolled out, the way that it is advertised, the way that students are recruited and the way that students are brought in and that they are advised as they are brought in about what the alternatives are, all of these are essential policy settings. I do not yet see at this stage, either on a state or on a Commonwealth level, that those settings are there.

**Free TAFE flexibility:** There's been one small change, but I do not believe that it is necessarily going to be significant. The recent Budget announcement a couple of weeks ago was that free TAFE funding would also be available "in exceptional circumstances" – they used that phrase, for not-for-profit, First Nations organisations, delivering education and training that might not otherwise be covered by TAFE. Presumably, this might mean other not-for-profits, but it does say "exceptional circumstances", and to the best of my knowledge, all that is going to have to be approved by the state or territory TAFE. At this stage, I do not anticipate that that small "out clause" will be utilised. Remember I am not opposed to free TAFE *per se*; I am opposed to a willy-nilly, offering it to everybody and all that comes.

**VET pathways:** My final point is I believe that we in Australia have to do something we have not been able to be successful in doing yet: we have to create proper pathways in our VET system to ensure that we have pathways from one to another, and a classic example would be people operating and studying the foundation skills, meaning Certificate levels I and II, and the Certificate level III level, up to TAFE. We do not have established pathways in New South Wales where I live, nor really in Victoria where we do a great deal of work. We had some reasonable work in South Australia, which has sort of fallen by the by way. We need VET pathways as an essential, and I would say increasingly urgent requirement, as we start to add additional funding, especially to TAFE. People are going to be flocking to TAFE, but we need to ensure that people flock to TAFE in the right courses, in the right areas, and in the right ways.

**COMMISSIONER GROPP:** I just want to just follow that up. You talked about "small co-payments". So what sort of amount are you talking about? And say, for your courses, what do people pay up-front?

**DR PERLGUT:** Yes. There's a difference of opinion on this on our sector, and again, Community Colleges Australia does not have a formal view on this. There are some of our members that are very happy to offer things on a totally free basis, especially to people who are the most disadvantaged; there are others that would like small co-payments, even \$5 or \$10, to ensure that there is commitment. It's not an area that we, as an organisation, have looked into in any great depth. I do go back to my point, is that there are a very large number of low-income Australians for whom significant amounts of – even moderate, modest amounts of money – could be seen to be very serious imposts on them.

**COMMISSIONER GROPP:** Would you differentiate across types of courses?

**DR PERLGUT:** I would have to think more about that, in terms of different types of courses. And again, different types of courses. When rolling out a free system of study, irrespective in TAFE or anywhere else, you must ensure that the right people are signing up. So that's why yes, different types of courses. TAFE has moved into things like aeronautical engineering and similar things. This is good for TAFE and

it's probably very good for the country; however, we do not want people that have low literacy and low numeracy leaping into that, such as the Diploma in Aeronautical Engineering without having done the basics. We are entering a point where we need to be doing lots of re-examination. One of the things that the Reading Writing Hotline report identified was that one in five Australians, 20% of Australians have some level of low literacy and numeracy; two in five Indigenous Australians have low literacy levels. Other low literacy, numeracy is consistently pointed to by workplaces as one of the greatest areas of challenge and difficulty. It's not something that people on the street necessarily think about, but it is one that we do need to be thinking about, as we become a more technologically advanced, service-level economy.

**COMMISSIONER de FONTENAY:** Thanks Don. Just one more question. You mentioned that you had concerns about online learning, but a lot of your institutions are in outer regional areas. I'm just curious that you don't see – that you don't find that there is some potential for facilitating learning in those locations if people can access better materials online. Is that not something that you've found in your teaching, that it's been helpful to use online materials as well as face to face?

**DR PERLGUT:** That's a very good question, and the short answer is, absolutely, there is tremendous potential, and I can say with quite a high level of confidence that every single one of our member organisations has incorporated elements of digital delivery. I'm not using the word "online", but I'm using "digital delivery", I mean digital interaction in some way, shape or form.

**Online delivery:** Let's focus especially on the needs of disadvantaged and some of the low-level qualifications, such as that Certificate III. The idea – and there are providers that do this – that you will do a Certificate III Individual Support (Aged Care), you will do it online, and that with everything online, and that somehow other than trying to shove you off to some sort of work experience, that you are going to get a proper education and training, is simply not true. I refer back to the Reading Writing Hotline report, which says, "provision of language of language, literacy and numeracy programs is best done face to face".

**Digital disadvantage:** We are talking about foundational skills level. But we're also talking easily 20% of Australians. This is not a tiny number. The Hotline report states "the move to digital delivery tended to disproportionately disadvantage literacy and numeracy learners due to limited digital literacy skills, lack of access to secure internet. Print-based resources are preferable for adult language and literacy learners. Lack of access to home computers," meaning the hardware, not just the internet access, and "Insufficient self-directed learning skills to manage online programs."

**Advantaged learners and digital access:** As you move up the educational and the income ladder, and as we know, the two are inextricably linked, there comes a point that the equation starts to invert. If you are going to do a Diploma in Management, most, if not all, will do it online. But when we look at that Certificates I, II and III – the large majority of what ACE students do – online learning is not an effective means of learning. It's easy to add online testing and grading, so people are not filling in boxes in pencil. But by and large, the results, in our experience, is online learning is inappropriate for low-level and high-needs learners.

**COMMISSIONER BRENNAN:** Just a question or two that go back to your points about foundation skills and foundation learning. First, I just want to test a hypothesis with you and then kind of tease out, if it's true, what one would do about it.

So, it seems to me that one of the issues around foundation learning is that there are certain contexts in which people are likely to come into the system for some foundation skills. One might be the Adult Migrant English Program, one might be people who have come into the VET system via TAFE or an RTO to do a Certificate II in something or other and the TAFE or the RTOs decided that they need a bit of

foundation skills. And I guess one might be in the employment services market if there's a view that someone's employment prospects – so they're in the labour market. They're on income support. The provider has decided it would be advantageous for them to get some additional literacy and numeracy skills.

But presumably, that's leaving a vast number of people out there who have challenges either in the job market or just fully engaging in society by virtue of low literacy or numeracy. But that's a group that's difficult to touch. You sort of almost need, I think you were kind of replying earlier, an active outreach – active recruitment strategy for you to get out there and try and encourage people into a foundation course which may be of benefit.

So, I wanted to test, firstly, is that hypothesis right that you think we've got some existing entry points which are kind of piggybacking on existing policy avenues, but then this vast reservoir of people out there. And if that is true, what's a mechanism by which you can get out there and identify people who would benefit from literacy and numeracy foundation skills and encourage them into a system like community education or something else that could fulfill that?

**DR PERLGUT:** Michael, that's a very good question. I'm going to answer it in two to three ways and finish by answering your main question. Workplace delivery is another thing I need to make note, and the Hotline report showed that "Workplace delivery of language and literacy is low and many people currently working are unable to access language, literacy and digital skills courses outside of work hours." So, we do have a challenge, and a significant number of people who are currently employed have a significant challenges with literacy.

**Outreach:** Let me address the point about outreach. This is one of my favourite topics and let me state for the record I was trained as a town and social planner. When I undertake my work in post-secondary education, I bring two things to it: a community engagement approach, and geographic approach in that much learning takes place in physical environments. To do adult learning properly, we need proper leadership by the Commonwealth government in association with the states and similar things to ensure that people – and as we are talking about at least a million or more and it's probably two to four million Australians that have some significant literacy problems. And among Indigenous Australians, two out of five.

**Literacy campaigns:** One way to do it is to do campaigns. I am a veteran of 1990's International Literacy Year – known as "ILY". I was the ABC project manager – that's the Australian Broadcasting Corporation project manager for International Literacy Year when the ABC worked closely with a number of providers, the Commonwealth Department of Social Services, the Department of Education Employment and Training and with TAFE NSW to develop and deliver both in radio and television, substantial number of literacy teaching courses and to promote through community service announcements and elsewhere that people could undertake extended learning and they would be referred to the then Adult Literacy Information Office (ALIO) hotline which has now been taken over by the Reading Writing Hotline.

**SBS TV *Lost for Words*:** You may be familiar with the two [SBS TV adult literacy series \*Lost for Words\*](#). The second series has recently been released, and I know one of the key teachers on that series, Jo Medlin, who is the President of the [Australian Council for Adult Literacy](#) (known as ACAL), and one of the students named [Grahame from Tamworth Community College](#) who participated in a recent Community Colleges Australia conference.

**Adult literacy TV:** One of the things which comes out of my experience with the ABC during that period in ILY 1990, and subsequently in 1994 when we did a second series with TAFE and where we did major promotions, is people need to pick it up, and so often it is not necessarily reaching the person with the literacy needs but reaching somebody who knows them and it gets referred to them.



**Outreach:** For us to achieve the full potential, we cannot wait for them to come. It's not Kevin Costner building his field – his ball field in the corn fields of Iowa in the film *Field of Dreams* and expect the 1920s Black Sox to walk out of the fields to play baseball. What we need to do is genuinely go out. I don't want to extend the metaphor of the corn field, as it is not corn fields that we're going out to. But we're going out to in the Australian community in all the various places, some of them are harder than others. Remote Australia – remote indigenous Australia – has its own challenges and needs its own strategies, and I understand that the current Commonwealth Government is starting to address some of those. That's very good news, but as I said, provision of literacy is insufficient.

**Campaigns and different media:** National campaigns utilising social media, printed media, face to face, all sorts of interesting things. At one point there was an egg company that printed on the eggs, "Need reading help? Ring 1800 xxxxxx." There's a lot of different ways to do campaigns, and we in Australia are some of the best in the business when it comes to campaigns, going back to some of the early ones where we were trying to prevent people from getting AIDS. Let us apply this to foundational skills; it will be in all our interests to do so. I hope I've answered that question and I hope you can feel the passion in my voice when I say this.

**COMMISSIONER BRENNAN:** It's palpable, Don.

**DR PERLGUT:** Thank you very much. I believe I've covered my high points and I thank you very much for your time and your attention and I wish you the best of luck. Community Colleges Australia and I as an individual are happy to answer further questions during your final weeks of consideration.

(Download the original transcript of this testimony on the [Productivity Commission website](#).)