

Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of NSW Adult and Community Education Providers: Analysis of 2021 Data

16 January 2023

Executive Summary

This report from Community Colleges Australia (CCA) details the performance of not-for-profit NSW adult and community education (ACE) providers in reaching vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. This report is part of a series that analyses government-funded vocational education and training (VET) students by provider type, based on 2021 data compiled by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).¹

New South Wales Overview

Community education providers delivered 7.6% of government-funded training in NSW in 2021, up from 6.2% in 2020. Over the same period TAFE delivered 60.0%, Private providers 28.0%, Schools 8.6% and enterprise providers 1.5%.²

Total NSW government-funded student numbers fell in 2021 from 472,385 to 464,220 students. The percentage provider shares of provision altered, most dramatically for TAFE and private providers. The private provider delivery share rose from 19.4% in 2020 to 28% in 2021, while the TAFE share decreased by a similar percentage from 68.6% in 2020 to 60%, albeit from a higher numerical base. School and enterprise provider provision both slightly decreased. ACE providers experienced a 1.4% rise in student numbers.

The ACE increase may be attributed to the JobTrainer market stimulus, packaged as “Skilling for Recovery” in NSW, a response to COVID-19 in 2020/2021. While JobTrainer provided a stimulus and increased training numbers in some areas, the 2021 data demonstrates a clear drop in the numbers of vulnerable or disadvantaged students engaging with learning across all provider types, supporting CCA’s view that these cohorts have been significantly impacted by COVID-19 factors and were not returning to training.³ The 2021/22 financial year government-funded VET data released in November 2022 reinforces this correlation.

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

- **10.6% students had a disability** (down from 13.5% in 2021), compared to 9.3% of TAFE, 5.3% of private for-profit providers, 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 42.0 % enterprise providers;

¹ Data source: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, *Total VET students and courses 2021*, <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/total-vet-students-and-courses-2021>

² Percentages do not add up to 100% (105%) as students may attend more than one provider and so can be reported more than once.

³ See *COVID-19 Impact on NSW Adult and Community Education Providers*, Community Colleges Australia, 23 February 2022, <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Impact-of-Omicron-on-NSW-ACE-Providers-23February2022.pdf>.

- **59.7% most disadvantaged students** – 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-profit providers, 1.0% schools and 9.5% enterprise providers;
- **34.8% older (age 45+) students**, compared to 18.6% TAFE, 23.5% private for-profits, 0.15% schools, and 22.5% enterprise providers; and
- **11.4% Indigenous students**, compared to 8.4% of TAFE, 6.9% of private for-profit providers, 0.13% schools and 5.9% enterprise providers.⁴

In addition, 64.4% NSW ACE provider government-funded VET students were female, the highest of any VET provider group in 2020. 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.”⁵

On almost all tracked measures of vulnerability and disadvantage, NSW ACE providers consistently over-perform compared to TAFE, private providers and other VET providers, disproportionately catering for students from the state’s most disadvantaged groups and regions.

⁴ Source: NCVER 2022, Total VET students and courses 2021: students DataBuilder. Accessed 22 August 2022 <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/total-vet-students-and-courses-2021>.

⁵ 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/>.

Tables in this report	page
1. Gender: Government-Funded VET in 2020 & 2021: by provider type	4
2. Disability status: Government-Funded VET in 2020 & 2021 by provider	5
3. Indigeneity: Government-Funded VET in 2020 & 2021: by provider type	6
4. Language other than English at home (LOTE), by provider type and %	7
5. Age group by provider type and %	7
6. Remoteness: Government-funded VET students 2020 & 2021 by Provider Type	9
7. SEIFA Disadvantage: NSW VET students 2020 & 2021	10
About Community Colleges Australia	11

Table 1: Gender: Government-Funded VET in 2020 and 2021: by provider type

NSW Government-Funded VET (TVET Collection) - by gender, provider type and by percentage 2020 and 2021								
Provider Type	2020				2021			
	Male	Female	Not known/ Other	Total	Male	Female	Not known/ Other	Total
State-wide				472,385				464,220
TAFE	135,470	187,720	920/ 5	324,115	124,920	152,465	965/10	278,365
	41.8%	57.9%	0.3%	68.6%	44.9%	54.8%	0.3%	60.00%
Community	9,910	19,085	145/15	29,155	12,250	22,725	275/30	35,275
	34.0%	65.5%	0.6%	6.2%	34.7%	64.4	0.9%	7.6%
Private	44,690	46,665	320/25	91,700	65,750	63,465	515/50	129,780
	48.7%	50.9%	0.33%	19.4%	51.4%	48.2%	0.44%	28.0%
Schools	22,850	18,440	90	41,385	21,570	18,265	105	39,940
	55.2%	44.6%	0.2%	8.8%	54.0%	45.7%	0.3%	8.6%
Enterprise	3,790	3,300	25	7,115	3,505	3,285	25	6,815
	53.3%	46.4%	0.4%	1.5%	51.4%	48.2%	0.4%	1.5%

Source: NCVET 2022, Total VET students and courses 2021: students DataBuilder, 22 August 2022. Numbers rounded to the nearest 5.⁶

⁶ Available at <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/total-vet-students-and-courses-2021>.

Table 2: Disability status: Government-Funded VET in 2020 and 2021: by provider type

NSW Government-Funded VET (Total VET Collection) – Disability status provider type and by percentage 2020 and 2021								
Provider Type	2020				2021			
	Disability	No disability	Not known	Total students	Disability	No disability	Not Known	Total students
TAFE	28,240	291,000	4,875	324,115	26,020	246,745	5,600	278,365
	8.7%	89.8%	1.5%	68.6%	9.3%	88.6%	2.0%	60.0%
Community	3,925	22,395	2,835	29,155	3,750	27,835	3,695	35,275
	13.5%	76.8%	9.7%	6.2%	10.6%	78.9%	10.5%	7.6%
Private	5,945	73,985	11,770	91,700	6,875	109,215	13,690	129,780
	6.5%	80.7%	12.8%	19.4%	5.3%	84.2%	10.5%	28.0%
Schools	955	10,205	30,225	41,385	865	9,960	29,120	39,940
	2.3%	24.7%	73.0%	8.8%	2.2%	24.9%	72.9%	8.6%
Enterprise	165	5,975	970	7,115	190	5,865	760	6,815
	2.3%	84.0%	13.6%	1.5%	2.8%	86.1%	11.2%	1.5%

Source: NCVET 2022, Total VET students and courses 2021: students DataBuilder, Total, Provider type, Australia (onshore) total, State/territory of delivery location, Funding source, Disability status by Year. Numbers are rounded to the nearest 5.

Table 3: Indigeneity: Government-Funded VET in 2020 and 2021: by provider type

NSW Government-Funded VET – Indigenous status provider type and by percentage 2020 and 2021								
Provider Type	2020				2021			
	Indigenous	Not Indigenous	Not known	Total students	Indigenous	Not Indigenous	Not Known	Total students
TAFE	23,655	298,215	2,240	324,115	23,275	252,850	2,240	278,365
	7.3%	92.0%	0.7%		8.4%	90.8%	0.8%	
Community	3,330	24,525	1,295	29,155	29,470	4,035	1,775	35,275
	11.4%	84.1%	4.4%		83.5%	11.4%	5.0%	
Private	6,035	82,170	3,495	91,700	8,955	115,565	5,260	129,780
	6.6%	89.6%	3.8%		6.9%	89.0%	4.1%	
Schools	2,280	37,790	1,315	41,385	2,225	36,385	1,330	39,940
	5.5%	91.3%	3.2%		5.6%	91.1%	3.3%	
Enterprises	425	6,260	430	7,115	400	5,955	455	6,815
	6.0%	88.0%	6.0%		5.9%	87.4%	6.7%	

Source: NCVET 2022, Total VET students and courses 2021: students DataBuilder, Total, Provider type, State/territory of delivery location, Funding source, Indigenous status by Year. Numbers rounded to nearest 5.

Table 4: Language other than English spoken at home (LOTE), by provider type and percentage: 2020 and 2021

NSW Government-Funded VET (TVET Collection) - by language other than English spoken at home (LOTE), provider type and by percentage 2020 and 2021								
Provider Type	2020				2021			
	LOTE	English	Not known	Total	LOTE	English	Not known	Total students
Total students				472,385				464,220
TAFE	64,150	250,500	9,465	324,115	59,280	208,215	10,870	278,365
	19.8%	77.3%	2.9%	68.6%	21.3%	74.8%	3.9%	60.0%
Community	4,660	22,115	2,380	29,155	6,850	25,165	3,260	9.2%
	16.0%	75.9%	8.2%	6.2%	19.4%	71.3%	9.2%	7.6%
Private	15,915	64,775	11,010	91,700	20,230	95,145	14,410	129,780
	17.4%	70.6%	12.0%	19.4%	15.6%	73.3%	11.1%	28.0%
Schools	325	39,845	1,210	41,385	405	38,370	1,165	39,940
	0.8%	96.3%	2.9%	8.8%	1.0%	96.1%	2.9%	8.6%
Enterprise	745	6,045	325	7,115	650	5,900	265	6,815
	10.5%	85.0%	4.6%		9.5%	86.6%	3.9%	

Source: NCVET 2022, Total VET students and courses 2021: students DataBuilder, Total, Provider type, State/territory of delivery location, Funding source, Language other than English spoken at home (LOTE) by Year. Numbers rounded to nearest 5.

Table 5: Age group by provider type and by percentage 2020 and 2021

NSW Government Funded VET (TVET Collection) by Age Group, provider type and by percentage 2020 and 2021					
NSW	Age	2020	%	2021	%
Total students		472,385		464,220	
TAFE		324,115	68.6	278,365	60.0
	14 years and under	100	0.03	125	0.04
	15-19 years	58,490	18.0	58,825	21.1
	20 to 24 years	61,210	18.9	56,830	20.4
	25 to 29 years	42,655	13.2	34,225	12.3
	30 to 39 years	72,400	22.3	57,785	20.8
	40 to 49 years	47,745	14.7	37,380	13.4
	50 to 59 years	27,480	8.5	20,900	7.5
	60 to 64 years	7,785	2.4	6,185	2.2
65 years and over	6,095	1.9	6,045	2.2	

	Not known	150	0.05	55	0.02
Community Education Providers	Total	29,155	6.2	35,275	7.6
	14 years and under	10	0.03	25	0.1
	15-19 years	4,700	16.1	5,785	16.4
	20 to 24 years	4,245	14.6	5,250	14.9
	25 to 29 years	2,600	8.9	3,035	8.6
	30 to 39 years	5,025	17.2	5,880	16.7
	40 to 49 years	5,075	17.4	6,025	17.1
	50 to 59 years	4,670	16.0	5,730	16.2
	60 to 64 years	1,865	6.4	2,330	6.6
	65 years and over	950	3.3	1,205	3.4
	Not known	20	0.1	15	0.04
Private Providers	Total	91,700	19.4	129,780	28.0
	14 years and under	25	0.03	30	0.02
	15-19 years	15,660	17.1	21,710	16.7
	20 to 24 years	15,825	17.3	24,120	18.6
	25 to 29 years	10,790	11.8	15,580	12.0
	30 to 39 years	18,920	20.6	27,360	21.1
	40 to 49 years	14,950	16.3	20,775	16.0
	50 to 59 years	11,105	12.1	14,465	11.1
	60 to 64 years	3,250	3.5	4,050	3.1
	65 years and over	1,135	1.2	1,655	1.3
	Not known	40	0.04	35	0.03
Schools	Total	41,385	8.8	39,940	8.6
	14 years and under	315	0.76	380	1.0
	15-19 years	40,590	98.08	39,195	98.1
	20 to 24 years	195	0.47	220	0.6
	25 to 29 years	40	0.10	50	0.1
	30 to 39 years	60	0.14	25	0.1
	40 to 49 years	80	0.19	30	0.1
	50 to 59 years	80	0.19	20	0.1
	60 to 64 years	10	0.02	10	0.03
	65 years and over	10	0.02	-	-
	Not known	5	0.01	5	0.01
Enterprise	Total	7,115		6,815	
	14 years and under	5	0.1%	5	0.1
	15-19 years	2,780	39.1%	2,770	40.6
	20 to 24 years	615	8.6%	720	10.6
	25 to 29 years	500	7.0%	490	7.2
	30 to 39 years	1,130	15.9%	970	14.2
	40 to 49 years	1,010	14.2%	780	11.4
	50 to 59 years	760	10.7%	665	9.8
	60 to 64 years	205	2.9%	210	3.1
	65 years and over	105	1.5%	200	2.9
	Not known	-	-	-	-

Table 6: Remoteness: NSW Government-funded VET students as reported within the Total VET Collection 2020 and 2021 by Provider Type

NSW Government Funded VET - by remoteness, provider type and by percentage 2020 and 2021					
NSW	Remoteness	2020		2021	
Total students		472,385	%	464,220	%
TAFE	Total	324,115	68.6	278,365	60.0
	Major cities	214,810	66.28	182,745	65.6
	Inner regional	68,890	21.25	59,305	21.3
	Outer regional	22,575	6.97	20,250	7.3
	Remote	1,985	0.61	2,015	0.7
	Very Remote	705	0.22	635	0.2
	Not known	15,120	4.67	13,385	4.8
Community	Total	29,155	6.2	35,275	7.6
	Major cities	13,505	46.3	17,700	50.2
	Inner regional	9,845	33.8	10,835	30.7
	Outer regional	4,060	13.9	4,890	13.9
	Remote	355	1.2	320	0.9
	Very Remote	155	0.5	135	0.4
	Not known	1,220	4.2	1,390	3.9
Private	Total	91,700	19.4	129,780	28.0
	Major cities	61,625	67.2	85,940	66.2
	Inner regional	18,255	19.9	26,850	20.7
	Outer regional	7,055	7.7	10,300	7.9
	Remote	805	0.9	945	0.7
	Very Remote	200	0.2	210	0.2
	Not known	3,705	4.0	5,510	4.2
Schools	Total	41,385	8.8	39,940	8.6
	Major cities	26,130	63.1	26,045	65.2
	Inner regional	7,995	19.3	7,185	18.0
	Outer regional	2,865	6.9	2,675	6.7
	Remote	205	0.5	240	0.6
	Very Remote	70	0.2	65	0.2
	Not known	4,115	9.9	3,730	9.3
Enterprise	Total	7,115	1.5	6,815	1.5
	Major cities	3,910	55.0	3,615	53.0
	Inner regional	1,180	16.6	1,340	19.7
	Outer regional	1,330	18.7	1,220	17.9
	Remote	350	4.9	290	4.3
	Very Remote	10	0.1	10	0.1
	Not known	335	4.7	335	4.9

Table 7: SEIFA Disadvantage - NSW VET students 2020 & 2021 (Total VET)

NSW Government Funded VET - by SEIFA category, provider type and by percentage 2020 and 2021					
NSW	SEIFA	2020		2021	
Total students		472,385		464,220	
TAFE	Total TAFE students	324,115	%	278,365	%
	Quintile 1: most disadvantaged	71,915	22.2	64,780	23.3
	Quintile 2	73,170	22.6	63,650	22.9
	Quintile 3	63,145	19.5	53,460	19.2
	Quintile 4	48,440	14.9	40,970	14.7
	Quintile 5: least disadvantaged	57,265	17.7	45,265	16.3
	Not known	10,175	3.1	10,240	3.7
Community	Total	29,155	6.2	35,275	7.6
	Quintile 1: most disadvantaged	8,720	29.9	10,685	30.3
	Quintile 2	9,370	32.1	10,360	29.4
	Quintile 3	4,655	16.0	5,975	16.9
	Quintile 4	2,765	9.5	3,385	9.6
	Quintile 5: least disadvantaged	2,400	8.2	3,220	9.1
	Not known	1,240	4.3	1,650	4.7
Private Providers	Total	91,700	19.4	129,780	28.0
	Quintile 1: most disadvantaged	25,480	27.8	34,070	26.3
	Quintile 2	21,610	23.6	30,510	23.5
	Quintile 3	17,115	18.7	24,315	18.7
	Quintile 4	11,965	13.0	17,765	13.7
	Quintile 5: least disadvantaged	11,195	12.2	16,505	12.7
	Not known	4,335	4.7	6,605	5.1
Schools	Total	41,385	8.8	39,940	8.6
	Quintile 1: most disadvantaged	11,645	28.1	11,355	28.4
	Quintile 2	9,470	22.9	8,850	22.2
	Quintile 3	8,045	19.4	7,695	19.3
	Quintile 4	5,595	13.5	5,510	13.8
	Quintile 5: least disadvantaged	5,320	12.9	5,195	13.0
	Not known	1,305	3.2	1,340	3.4
Enterprise	Total	7,115	1.5	6,815	1.5
	Quintile 1: most disadvantaged	1,595	22.4	1,530	22.5
	Quintile 2	2,045	28.7	1,925	28.2
	Quintile 3	1,160	16.3	1,235	18.1
	Quintile 4	895	12.6	835	12.3
	Quintile 5: least disadvantaged	1,075	15.1	955	14.0
	Not known	345	4.8	335	4.9

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.⁷

CCA assists the ACE sector to sustain and grow, promoting learning innovation, focussed especially on vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. ACE providers focus on student welfare and are strongly committed to employment outcomes for their learners.

The ACE sector has been providing flexible and dynamic education and training opportunities to individuals, groups and businesses for a long time – in some instances more than 110 years. As well as operating in accredited VET, ACE providers 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 ACE providers 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 sector has 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

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

⁷ See <https://cca.edu.au/who-we-are/about-us/>.