

Community Colleges Australia

NSW 2023 Election Policy Platform

Community Colleges Australia (CCA) requests the next New South Wales Government to **recognise, support, empower and enable** the state's not-for-profit adult and community education (ACE) providers.

NSW ACE providers constitute a unique part of the state's education landscape, delivering high quality, flexible and tailored education and training that meets diverse community and learner needs in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas. Through their accessibility, flexibility and adaptability, they bridge many of the gaps in the state's economic and social fabric.

New South Wales Community Education at a Glance

The numbers: ACE providers represent an important force in the NSW training landscape. Almost 40 ACE providers provide post-secondary education and training to the state's residents, workers, students and communities. In 2021, NSW ACE providers [delivered accredited vocational education and training \(VET\) to 13% \(168,835 learners\)](#) of the state total 1,293,455 students, which includes fee-for-service as well as government-funded students. This was more than half the number delivered by TAFE (23%, 300,950 students). NSW community providers delivered government-funded VET to **35,275 students, 7.6%** of the state total (TAFE delivered to 60.0%, 278,365 students).

Increased employment: NSW ACE providers achieve the **greatest increase** of adult learners [employed after training](#), with a 15.6% increase, compared to 11.6% for TAFE, 6.6% for private for-profit providers and a state average of 11.3%.

Meeting the needs of disadvantaged learners: NSW ACE providers consistently over-perform compared to other types of training providers, disproportionately catering for students from the state's most disadvantaged groups and regions. In 2021, NSW ACE providers [achieved the following percentage proportions](#) of government-funded VET:

- **10.6% students had a disability**, 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**, compared to 29.5% TAFE, 29.5% private for-profits, 25.5% schools and 42.0% enterprise providers;
- **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.

Women: 64.4% NSW ACE provider government-funded VET students are female, the highest of any provider group. This compares to 54.8% of TAFE, 48.9% of private for-profit providers, 45.7% schools and 48.2% enterprise providers.

Special assistance secondary schools: Almost one-third of NSW ACE providers run [special assistance secondary schools](#) that cater for marginalised and disadvantaged secondary students. These schools constitute a notable innovation, which has already transformed ACE business models to cope with changing social, economic and educational needs.

Other education, training and community services: NSW not-for-profit community providers work closely with small businesses, like the [Tech Savvy for Small Business](#), or deliver to seniors such as the [Tech Savvy Seniors](#), in association with Telstra. Through pre-vocational and leisure courses, NSW ACE providers engage tens of thousands of the state’s residents in life-long learning.

Social capital: Because of its community base, NSW ACE providers are significant builders of [social capital](#), particularly in [regional, rural](#) and [outer metropolitan](#) areas where educational institutions are part of the “glue” that holds communities together.

NSW ACE sector strengths include:

- superior engagement of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners;
- inclusive learning environments and practices with personalised attention;
- opportunities for engagement/re-engagement in community life, learning and work;
- for-purpose (not-for-profit), community-based and community-governed with the best interests of their communities at heart, not profit;
- integrated formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities that provide true lifelong learning;
- ability to collaborate with other ACE providers to produce better outcomes for the state’s learners, communities and economies; and
- skills that enable health and wellbeing, engagement in recreational pursuits and increased [civic participation](#) as well as skills for work.

History: NSW ACE providers have served their communities since 1913, the year [Workers Education Associations](#) (WEAs) were established: Newcastle (WEA Hunter, now [Atwea College](#)), Wollongong ([WEA Illawarra](#)) and WEA Sydney all operate as part of a continuous history that spans 110 years.

It’s not just the WEAs: Other NSW ACE providers have decades of continuous service, including [Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Community College](#) (1925); [Sydney Community College](#) (1945); [Northern Beaches & Mosman College](#) (1949); [Macquarie Community College](#) (1950); [City East Community College](#) and [Nepean Community College](#) (1952); [ACE Community Colleges](#), [Albury Wodonga Community College](#), [St George & Sutherland Community College](#) and [Western Riverina Community College](#) (1970s); [TLK Community College](#), [North Coast Community College](#) and [New England Community College](#) (1981); [Riverina Community College](#) and [Central Coast Community College](#) (1982); [VERTO](#) (originally Central West Community College) and [Mid North Coast Community College](#) (1983); [Tamworth Community College](#) (1984); [Tomaree Community College](#) (1985); and [Parramatta Community College](#) and [Kiama & Shoalhaven Community Colleges](#) (1986). *CCA is proud to represent such an historic sector of Australian education, with providers that have adapted to educational, economic and social changes over many years, continuing to serve their communities with distinction.*

What do we want for NSW ACE?

Legislative recognition through a new government structure

- Recognise the valuable work undertaken by the NSW ACE sector through an official NSW state government structure set up by legislation, like the previous Board of Adult and Community

Education, which will:

- promote the provision of adult and community education in NSW;
- foster, support and facilitate co-ordinated provision of NSW adult and community education;
- advise the Minister and the NSW Government on needs and trends in adult and community education;
- arrange for the distribution of government funds to not-for-profit adult and community education providers; and
- commission research into NSW adult and community education.

National recognition of adult and community education

- The state of New South Wales to work with the Commonwealth and other states and territories to update and reissue the 2008 national [Ministerial Statement](#) on Adult Community Education.

Establish state targets for VET provided by ACE

- For the VET system in New South Wales to remain diverse, relevant and sustainable, ACE-provided VET should be maintained at a minimum of 15% of total VET students and 10% of government-funded VET students.

Infrastructure and operations

- Ongoing operational support of at least \$100,000 per year for each ACE provider to undertake outreach and engagement of under-served vulnerable and disadvantaged groups which have withdrawn from training due to natural disasters and COVID-19 concerns.
- Establish a facilities fund to support digital transformation that ensures ACE provider capabilities are up to date and fit for purpose, as well as undertake construction of new facilities and renovate existing premises.
- Funding to ensure buildings are accessible to people with disabilities, given that ACE providers have the [highest percentage of learners](#) with disabilities of all VET providers.

Program Funding

- A 50% increase in funding for the NSW Adult and Community Education (ACE) Program – which funds ACE providers to deliver to disadvantaged groups – to **at least \$37 million/year**, as a highly effective investment in the state’s future.
- Annual indexation of ACE Program funding at a minimum to inflation.
- Quarantine ACE Program funding solely for not-for-profit community education providers.
- Extend ACE Program contract timelines from one year to a minimum of three years to provide certainty, flexibility and greater innovation in delivery – consistent with national and international [best practice](#).
- Re-allocate some Smart and Skilled funding from other VET providers (particularly the private for-profit providers) to not-for-profit community providers, especially in locations of greatest social and economic need such as [regional and rural NSW](#) and [Western Sydney](#).
- Increase the funding basis for foundation skills and adult basic education, because their intensive and high-cost nature required for the lowest educational level of learners and the total [“volume of learning”](#) needed in foundation skills programs.
- Recognise that digital literacy and [digital inclusion](#) are inter-connected; teaching of digital literacy skills cannot be undertaken without ensuring disadvantaged learners have proper access to IT hardware (devices), software and high speed bandwidth.
- Develop a targeted program delivered by NSW ACE providers to [assist the state’s older workers](#) in retraining and employment skills.

Governance, leadership and professional development

- Provide ongoing annual funding to NSW ACE sector to undertake governance and leadership improvement, to ensure proper governance and best practice is implemented and followed.
- Maintain and expand the current Teaching and Leadership programs.

Workforce development

- Support development of the ACE sector workforce, especially in areas of high need and great ACE expertise such as [aged and disability care](#) and [early childhood learning](#).
- Invest in and support the state's depleted [foundation skills workforce](#), including increased access to university-level language literacy and numeracy training that will address critical skill shortages.

Quality of teaching

- Re-establish and provide core funding to State Government-led VET teaching on a state-wide basis, through a model like the [Victorian VET Development Centre \(VDC\)](#) to promote the development and raise the professional standing of everyone working in the state's VET sector.
- Continue NSW Government support for CCA's [Community Education Trainer of the Year Awards](#).

Pathways and collaboration

- Establish proper learner pathways between the NSW ACE sector and TAFE NSW as well as NSW universities.
- Mandate collaboration with TAFE NSW so that the needs of the state's learners can be met, including access to excess facilities and land at not-for-profit rates.
- Recognise and embed NSW ACE providers as partners into regional migration integration and skilling pathways.

Regional Skills Planning and Regional Economic Development

- Develop a state-wide training plan that incorporates a spatial/geographic analysis to skills provision (and [does not operate from 50,000 up](#)).
- Consider and build on the deep and diverse [strengths of the NSW ACE sector](#) in development of regional skills plans.
- Recognise the importance of in-person skills training – and both the limitations of online learning – for many vulnerable and disadvantaged learners.
- Create a special section of [UrbanGrowth NSW](#) – a “Community Education Development Corporation” to ensure that the state's not-for-profit ACE providers have opportunities – along with access to funds and land – to take up their full role in the Sydney urban growth centres.
- Include NSW ACE providers in training delivery at Sydney's second airport and other locations of significant state importance.
- Acknowledge and fund NSW ACE providers to assist and support regional migrant integration and upskilling initiatives. Migration is critical element in building the capacity and resilience of regional NSW and there are gaps in current integration and skilling programs like knowledge of customs and work practices. ACE providers have the education, training and local industry and community expertise to address these needs.
- Establish new funding programs to support [innovative ACE](#) regional economic development projects, business and program delivery such as business incubators, collaborations between community and Aboriginal training providers, new social enterprises, innovative employment programs and model mental health projects.
- Reconstitute [education precincts](#) to include ACE providers specifically, along with TAFE and universities and other partners.

Support for ACE Learners

- Continue NSW Government support for CCA's [Community Education Student of the Year Awards](#).
- Acknowledge the extent, diversity and [need for ongoing support](#) and funding to address foundational skills gaps across economic, community and industry sectors; and that in-person individualised and learner-centred delivery works best for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LND) learners.
- Support the development of a “Community Education Foundation” that will supply scholarships and unique experiences to ACE learners.