

22 June 2023

Chris Davis
Acting Executive Director, Training Services NSW
NSW Department of Education

Follow-ups from meeting with Community Colleges Australia on 19 June 2023

Dear Chris,

Thank you very much for your time when we met online on 19 June 2023, during which CCA discussed various aspects relating to the 2023/24 Smart and Skilled allocations, especially as they relate to NSW adult and community education (ACE) providers. We detail several points below.

Request to Publish Easy to Access Details of all Smart & Skilled Providers 2023/24

CCA requests the Department to publish details of all 2023/24 Smart and Skilled providers. We understand that there are many new providers from 1 July 2023, including inter-state TAFEs delivering in border regions. We believe the additional providers make it even more essential that the Department model transparency and open-ness of who is receiving state funding to deliver government-funded VET in NSW. The publication of this list should include details of the organisations, websites and contacts and be easy to access and to read, not just discovered by the more circuitous route of trying to find providers for certain courses in certain regions.¹

Requirement for Membership in a Peak Organisation

Previously the NSW Government required “membership in a peak organisation” as a pre-requisite for receiving Smart & Skilled funding. That was very helpful to ensure “quality control” of providers. To this requirement, CCA proposes the additional phrase of “membership in a peak organisation *with ethics requirements*”. Does this still exist in NSW? If it has disappeared (we cannot find it online), CCA strongly recommends that the Department re-institute the requirement as a matter of priority.

Foundation Skills via Online Delivery

CCA – and foundation skills/adult literacy experts generally – would be deeply disappointed if the now “opened up” foundation skills funding allowed and encouraged significant amounts of online delivery. We know from experience and research that online is a very poor way to deliver foundation skills: a recent report from the Reading Writing Hotline, *Insights from the Classroom: A Survey of Adult Literacy Providers* details these issues.² The report draws on a survey of 382 respondents, of which 32% worked for ACE providers and 48% for TAFEs:

- Face to face individualised and learner centred delivery is what works best for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LND) learners.
- Online courses can provide access for some. However, the digital divide and low LND skills make it a less appropriate delivery mode for most LND learners.

¹ Providers can be found by very circuitous routes through this page <https://education.nsw.gov.au/skills-nsw>, which does not provide the transparency we seek.

² The report is available at <https://www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/RWH-Report-Insights-from-the-Classroom-Survey-of-Adult-Literacy-Providers.pdf>.

- Face to face teaching and learning models have higher delivery costs than digital and online learning.
- “Provision of LN programs is best done face to face rather than online. The move to digital delivery tended to disproportionately disadvantage LN learners due to:
 - limited digital literacy skills;
 - lack of access to secure internet access;
 - print-based resources being preferable for adult LN learners;
 - lack of access to home computers; and
 - insufficient self-directed learning skills to manage online programs.”

Regional Intelligence Tools

The Department has referred to “regional intelligence” tools which have been used to inform and guide the Department’s allocation of Smart and Skilled funding. CCA is pleased the Department has and continues to build the quality of the economic and demographic intelligence it uses to forecast and map labour market / training demand. We do request more information about the specific mechanisms and approaches utilised. Better clarity and understanding of the nature of the modelling/forecasting tools used – as well some of the assumptions and resulting information about specific regions/occupations – would be enormously valuable both to inform providers/local communities and allow some of the intelligence to be tested. For instance:

- Does the intelligence play out the way forecasts suggest?
- Are there factors, such as attitudes to new regional initiatives, a shortage of childcare places, climate change, etc. which impact demand in ways that are not measured?

CCA regards itself and the NSW ACE providers as partners with the NSW Government in meeting community, social, educational, skills and economic needs. Better and more transparent data and modelling will deliver learning and stronger outcomes. So much of the regional intelligence information appears to outsiders as a “black box”; we request more details and a more transparent process.³ We assume the NSW Skills Assessment process used in the Smart and Skilled EOI was an outcome or part of the suite of tools used. While very broadly indicative, it was not a very helpful resource for training providers which work in active and nuanced markets.

Thank you again for your assistance and willingness to work with CCA and the important NSW ACE sector. Together we will ensure the state of NSW does its best to meet the dynamic needs of our learners and their communities.

Yours sincerely,

Don Perlgut, PhD
Chief Executive Officer

Evelyn Goodwin
Manager, Policy & Projects

³ CCA seeks more details than can be found in the Training Service NSW website: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/education-and-training/vocational/funding/smart-and-skilled-program-2023#toc-nsw-skills-assessment>.