



**Community
Colleges
Australia**

9 November 2023

Community Colleges Australia (CCA) Submission to NSW VET Review



To: Dr Michele Bruniges
Chair, NSW VET Review.

From: Russ Hawkins, CEO, CCA.

Dated: Updated attached on Wed 9th November based on the original document which this document replaces – original submission on Monday 25th September 2023.

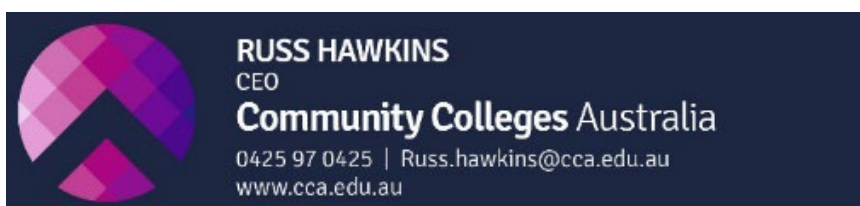
Dear Dr Bruniges,

Community Colleges Australia is delighted to be working with your stakeholder reference group as the national peak body representing community and not-for-profit Adult and Community Education providers.

As you are aware our presence is particularly strong in NSW.

Our Pathways, Innovation and Partnership Agreement (PIPA) Funding model at page ten is the cornerstone of our submission and opens the door to a conversation about how our members can best serve the needs of the communities we work with.

Kind regards,
Russ Hawkins.
CCA, CEO.



Community Colleges Australia Submission to NSW VET Review

Background and context

Community Colleges Australia, Genesis; The formation of WEA

The Workers Educational Association was first formed in 1903 in England and expanded in 1913 to WEA Sydney, WEA Illawarra, WEA Hunter (now ATWEA) and WEA South Australia. This social progressive movement occurred in the same era as industrial and social movements such as industrial workers of the world (known as Wobblies) founded in Chicago 1905 and the NSW trade union movement opened Trades Hall Library in 1914. Organised labour turned their attention to progressive social policy. Worker leadership and socialist movements saw worker empowerment and self-education as pro-social movements capable of addressing the structural failure of government and employers to provide life-long learning and educational opportunities beyond the primary years of compulsory schooling. Most WEA members in 1913 probably lived a hard and short life by today's standards, which made educational self-actualisation challenging if you were a factory, manual or agricultural worker.

Fast forward 110 years and our sector is witnessing burgeoning special assistance school enrolments. In addition, 70% of all VET sector students choose private registered training organisation providers. This is evidence enough that students from 15 years of age to 70 years + are voting with their feet as increasing numbers of young people and young adults are leaving many government options in their wake. Students are increasingly powering through private, online, not for profit and community-based School-VET-ACE micro-skills, micro credentials and short courses which best meet immediate and rapidly changing work-based learning and skills.

TAFE NSW; Is Vocational Education and Training progressing back to the future?

The convergence of School-VET-ACE sectors is heading “Back To The Future” as students vote with their feet, or on the long tail of Covid, don't return to school at all or attend irregularly. Witness Catholic Education NSW CEO Dallas McInerney who has been quoted recently as warning “there is a risk that school attendance will never return to normal” in the aptly named Sydney Morning Herald article – Schools Out: Forever.

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/school-s-out-forever-risk-attendance-will-never-bounce-back-education-chief-20230706-p5dm7v.html>

School vocational curriculum and adult community education will be back in vogue as consumer-students respond to school-work-life pressures by dropping traditional mainstream school curriculum, which is perceived to be too academic, using outdated textbooks and unlinked to workplace pathways.

Millennials and their children might increasingly focus their vocational education in their early careers on just-in-time learning for the workplace and building the early part of their careers on micro-skills and micro credentials under the auspices of employers that encourage and even fund this workplace vocational learning.

The same capitalist forces of global economics which shaped monumental corporations 100 years ago are still at play today and evolving in 2023. Standard Oil (the Rockefeller entrepreneurs), Henry Ford Motors and mass munitions manufacturing for war in the late 19th and early 20th Century is mirrored in 2023 by even a casual glance at the NASDAQ index and a new arms race with no need to look any further than AUKUS.

As history repeats itself, working Australians in 2023 have witnessed two decades of US based technology giants such as Apple, Amazon, Microsoft and Tesla innovate and disrupt entire industries; Witness Uber's impact on Taxi Plate License buy/sell costs which have been decimated as an investment. Once lucrative taxi plate owners and investors have seen their capital shredded by Uber's industry disruption. Sydney taxi plates routinely sold in the early 2000's for five hundred thousand dollars (\$500K AUD) and now go as cheaply as fifty thousand dollars (\$50K AUD) and less in Sydney and Melbourne.

Technology giants and their ilk foster vocational training that is back in vogue for "student/consumer choice" and students will respond by leaving coursework, apprenticeships, school curriculum and all other credentialing which is too complex and has too little immediate gain in the school to work transition. The risk with mainstream schooling is that students will abandon all curriculum which is not sharply focused on their chosen vocations.

The sector needs to articulate quality versus the quick buck.

Quality provision for students who go shopping for vocational education and training is a big topic of discussion behind the water cooler and in staffrooms across our sector. Industry heads are

increasingly calling out unscrupulous registered training organisations, such as a recent example of fridge, freezer and air conditioning mechanics going public.

<https://www.climatecontrolnews.com.au/refrigeration/death-notice-to-dodgy-rtos>

The concept that fridge mechanics have gained credentials with little to no idea about how to repair industrial sized gear or possibly even repair their own Kelvinator in the kitchen at home is frightening.

The Australian Refrigeration Council by way of example, publicly reported in November 2022 that they were working smart and hard with the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) to call out industry cowboys, those RTOs that traded quality coursework and integrity for the quick buck with scant regard for genuine, recognition of prior learning (RPL). Similarly, and perhaps even more shocking (pun intended) in July 2023 the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) called out those “RTO’s ripping off migrant workers”.

<https://www.etunational.asn.au/2023/07/21/dodgy-rtos-ripping-off-migrant-and-other-workers-through-fake-qualifications/>

The ETU suggests that dodgy RTO providers were “faking” the RPL credentials and experience of migrant workers in exchange for payments exceeding \$20,000. It is not hard to imagine the criminal level of culpability and criminal negligence which is possible if a worker, client, or any community member is electrocuted as a direct result of “fake” RPL and qualifications. Quality educational provision, assessment and credentialling in the RTO space is a serious business and when mixed with fake electrician qualifications a potentially deadly business.

The sector needs to rapidly grapple with this question; Is school out for good?

Many long-term members of CCA work with increasing numbers of 15–18-year-old students who are vulnerable, disengaged, socio-educationally disadvantaged, and opting out of formal schooling at younger and younger ages. The special assistance school (SAS) sector including many CCA members are successfully providing inclusive and relevant VET pathways, curriculum, work experience, learning in addition to highly developed wellbeing frameworks for amongst the most exciting vocational enrolment opportunities in the nation.

The C-19 Pandemic may have accelerated a trend of more young people intentionally opting out of formal and traditional schooling pathways.

This is exacerbated by student and parent perception that our monolithic public, Catholic and independent schooling sectors and associated bureaucracies cannot adequately and rapidly adapt to better customise learning despite clear evidence of both student need and demand. Student and parent perception that big school systems are rigid and unbending mean many will look for an alternative. Traditional schooling structures have evolved in the post WW2 era catering to an emerging middle class and later working-class access to high quality, long course tertiary education.

Increasingly, Millennial students are asking if a degree is necessary at all.

Professor Peter Dawkins, Acting Commissioner Jobs and Skills Australia shared at NCVET Melbourne conference in July 2023 the 5C's of workplace skill quoting National Skills Commission data that says immediate growth sectors include.

1. CARE: Aged and disability carers are forecast to grow 28%
2. COGNITIVE: Management and Organisational analysts are projected to grow 32%
3. COMPUTING: Software and applications programmers are forecast to grow by 27%
4. COMMUNICATION: HR managers are forecast to grow 16%
5. CLIMATE: Emerging green and carbon neutral economy drives massive sector growth.

The VET or Uni (or both) pathway?

The June 2023, Australian Universities Accord Interim Report examined the university and vocational education relationship and reported that; “*graduates need a mix of transferable work-related skills and learning capabilities to participate effectively in the workforce. While new approaches to skills acquisition are emerging in the form of micro credentials, cadetships and other short courses, inconsistent funding arrangements and regulatory frameworks are stifling further innovative course design*”.

CCA has long championed sector wide funding and regulatory reform and welcomes this insight into the debate. The Review has also heard that transitions between VET and higher education are fragmented and misaligned.

“Making it difficult for students to navigate across sectors and obtain the skills they need. Universities’ credit transfer, advanced standing and RPL practices are inconsistent and can act as a barrier to further study. The Review is exploring how industry and the higher education and VET sectors can establish parity of esteem and collaborate more effectively in the development of innovative course content, and in providing more quality placements and Work Integrated Learning across more courses “.

CCA advocacy and influence in this space is critical to meeting members needs and to the type of society we are seeking to create. Most of the most marginalised and socio-educationally disadvantaged Australians, those living with a significant disability, the homeless and those living below the poverty line have a much more limited capacity to access university level education than middle Australia.

Community Colleges however remain as they always have the rock solid first step up on the educational ladder of opportunity and for this reason alone (in addition to many other reasons) CCA must own and articulate our own world view in this university and vocational education relationship. **CCA members have a 110-year history as community beacons of hope.**

CCA member organisation VICSEG New Futures located in Coburg Victoria has a high proportion of newly arrived overseas migrant families. VICSEG New Futures management has rapidly developed its own small scale aged care and disability simulation labs in house which is inspirational to see. VICSEG New Futures trains students in manual handling in preparation for work in the aged care sector and other key aged and disability care competencies to meet significant employer demand linked to burgeoning NDIS funding and our greying population. VICSEG’s tuition of migrant families across the northern and western regions of Melbourne has resulted in two decades of high community social impact with fast, flexible, online and face to face delivery of a changing suite of courses, skills and competencies which match a changing job market.

The Grattan Institute paper at 2023 NCVET Melbourne stated the future of work is marked by forty-year lows in unemployment, meaning young people, workers with a disability and otherwise marginalised and vulnerable groups have the opportunity to participate in employment.

Sector wide skills challenges means migration once again becomes a government priority. VET that is locally accessible, affordable, flexible and English proficiency courses become very important.

Danielle Wood CEO Grattan Institute stated that 8 out of 10 Australians are currently employed in the service sector and 9 out of 10 jobs of the next decade will require a post school qualification.

CCA members occupy the VET space with three important driving forces.

Relationship. Relationship. Relationship.

Community Colleges Australia members build key relationships with local stakeholders. At St. George and Sutherland Community College (SGSCC) for example, local providers of residential, domestic and community care work with SGSCC staff and management to fully equip students with appropriate workplace skills. CCA members develop strong relationships with local community providers, employers, and stakeholders every day. Through our special assistance schools (SAS), aged care, disability, and English language provision CCA members build sector relationships for sector capacity. In turn these key relationships fostered, nurtured, and expanded by CCA members then influence government decision makers. CCA members enhance, empower and partner with local community providers and give voice to those providers.

CCA members contribute greatly to the fabric of the community and the nation by forging local, meaningful, and lasting relationships.

Community Colleges Australia members deliver a broad range and high number of varied Community Service Qualifications, which include a mandatory Work Placement component. Our pipeline from education to employment in all the essential service areas of Childcare, Aged Care, Youth Work, Disability, Community Services and Mental Health should never be underestimated by NSW Treasury, Estimates Committees and Government come funding time. Our sector is recognised for ensuring students are suited for, interested in, and prepared for the field of work they are engaging with. It's unfortunate that this is not the case in many circumstances where students are just doing a course with little likelihood of successful employment. Many of our students receive employment offers when on work placement. We are creating the current and next generation of community service employees who will shape, build and develop the fabric of our national character and national story well into the next century.

Community Colleges build both a society and an economy!

In this environment CCA members are offering a continuum of skills and micro-credentials on ever-changing skill sets that cater to student need. CCA members intelligently mix hybrid course delivery modes from online and face to face local delivery models from micro-skilling to specific award and recognition linked to employee competencies. Our CCA members thrive in this environment because:

1. CCA members are local and deeply embedded within our communities. Seen and heard on the main shopping and commercial strips of our suburbs, cities, regions, and country towns. The local CCA member Community College is both familiar and long term. We know someone who has done a course or works there. We are locals who help locals to interpret the world online and face to face with local advice, warmth, care and courtesy with human and not “all online” interaction and “all online” delivery. We have a name and a face and so do our students.
2. CCA members are nimble and agile and adjust course content and delivery modes to meet student need rapidly and efficiently. We cater quickly to market forces for place-based solutions, real time, just in time. CCA members and our students and staff are free from deeply bureaucratic and monolithic government departments and processes at the client-student interface. Our program range from short, affordable courses, correctly paced to student need to full and part qualifications in areas of personal, community and industry need. CCA members listen and adjust learning to the needs of the student, customizing skills adaptation in a way that meets student need.
3. CCA members act and cater to student demand on each rung of the educational ladder of opportunity. Faithful to our WEA 1913 vision we empower workers and local community members to stand up and be counted, taking control of their own individual lifelong learning. Where employers and government are sometimes perceived to have failed the community by creating learning from time to time which is too costly, too bureaucratic, too hard to access or culturally and socially prohibitive CCA members achieve success by listening to, and catering to, adult and community education which best meets student need.
4. CCA members work with both people and content. We customise learning locally and in real time catering to the dynamic life changes, interests and employment needs of our students. We understand life’s challenges, frustrations and roadblocks to learning. We give as much support around wellbeing, community, and inclusiveness as we do around content. We are 50-50 people and process. Education-Training and Wellness locally, just in time.
5. CCA members from the CEO to all staff and our students live, work, socialise and engage in their own lifelong learning locally. We have our finger on the pulse of our own communities. We form part of the fabric of the communities we live and work in. We react methodically and logically as we always have done, in course design, course changes and market forces. We furnish evidence such as one third of all CCA members having a

registered Special Assistance Sector School for youth in operation and another third investigating the sector for growth and to meet local student and community need. This rising demand and meeting that demand is evidence of CCA membership flexibility, adaptation, growth and a refined awareness of local needs and local people.

PIPA Funding Proposal

Pathways, Innovation and Partnerships Agreement for NFP community education provider funding (PIPA)

PIPA funding: CCA proposes that NSW Government allocate \$20M annual indexed funding under a Pathways, Innovation and Partnerships Agreement (PIPA) for not for profit community education providers to support the many students on a pathway to non-traditional and alternate VET and tertiary study, across all life stages.

CCA proposes A new model:

This CCA VET Review updated submission model requests \$20M annually indexed, to be made available to not for profit (NFP) and community industry peaks for adult and community education providers in the historically underfunded not-for-profit education space. The Pathways, Innovation and Partnerships Agreement will strengthen the quality and capacity of the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector currently supported by the NSW Department of Education.

CCA proposes that a reference group of CCA aligned experts convene under NSW government funding protocols to administer funding for NFP Community education providers, with the aim of lifting the capacity and capability of these providers to achieve fair, equitable and accessible outcomes and pathways for adult learners.

The process through which this funding may be accessed would be determined through transparent and accountable mechanisms.

Annual call for PIPA funding applications:

CCA proposes that our sector call for funding submissions annually in November for project start at the Calendar Year, which would encompass both single and multi-year projects aimed at delivering and embedding agile, community and industry responsive initiatives to support learners. A reference group of CCA and NFP ACE and industry peaks administer funding applications based on robust criteria would be formed.

PIPA Funding Criteria:

PATHWAYS: CCA and other not for profits advance the goals of the national skilling agenda by providing a pathway for community education providers to work with students who are not ready for traditional pathways to VET study. VET readiness is rarely discussed but CCA members are acutely aware that many vulnerable students, disability students and clients, new migrants and vulnerable migrants are not well equipped to attend traditional VET pathways. Further, CCA members are accessible and available, most often providing both a first point of community contact and support when its needed. This is not the typical approach taken across VET providers focused on profit, and/or more traditional business models. ACE accessibility openness and support is a key factor underpinning the value of PIPA.

INNOVATION: CCA recommends a new funding stream for emerging technologies and innovation that are re-shaping the traditional skilling landscape. St. George & Sutherland Community College uses international best practice Disability NDIS capability for potentially innovative ICT technology access for vulnerable citizens, it is also currently engaging in Chat GTP trials; ACE Colleges Lismore, have developed a mobile phone app for indigenous learner drivers, andragogical approaches to learning to develop incorporating experiential learning and gamification to develop soft skills are being explored in other community colleges. The proposed PIPA funding model is the perfect vehicle to explore innovative VET practice particularly for the state's more vulnerable learners.

PARTNERSHIPS: Collaboration and engagement with relevant community, industry and education stakeholders will be crucial elements of any successful PIPA application and initiative.

The VET review will be strengthened when recommendations reflect the widest possible collaboration with stakeholder groups. A narrow focus on one part of the sector will not meet the needs of the NSW community which this review and Dr Bruniges fine work, undertakes with best endeavors to serve, extend and support.

Further information

About Community Colleges Australia

CCA is the national adult and community education (ACE) peak body that works on behalf of its members to enable them to achieve social, cultural and economic aspirations for their communities. This includes the enhancement and strengthening of delivery of quality community education throughout Australia.

1. We represent the not-for-profit community education sector nationally to government and relevant agencies, other industry associations, the business community, not-for-profit organisations and the media, seeking greater recognition of adult, community and continuing education in all its forms, from formalised training to informal lifelong learning.
2. We advocate for a greater recognition of adult, community and continuing education in all its forms, from formalised training to informal lifelong learning.
3. We create a forum for co-operation, networking ideas and issues within the ACE sector.
4. We facilitate opportunities for new products, services and partnerships that will benefit CCA members.

In 2022, NSW ACE providers achieved the following percentage proportions of their government-funded VET student populations:

- 9.2% students had a disability (down from 13.6% in 2020), compared to 9.0% of TAFE, 5.0% of private for-profit providers, 2.1% schools and 3.6 % enterprise providers.
- 48.3% regional and rural students, compared to 30.2% TAFE, 28.5% private for-profits, 25.4% schools and 45.5 % enterprise providers.
- 61.2% most disadvantaged students – bottom two SEIFA quintiles, compared to 46.1% TAFE, 47.6% private for-profits, 50.1% schools and 52.2% enterprise providers.
- 18.7% non-English speaking background students, compared to 21.4% of TAFE, 23.5% of private for-profit providers, 0.8% schools and 6.6% enterprise providers.
- 34.8% older (age 45+) students, compared to 18.7% TAFE, 23.5% private for-profits, 0.15% schools, and 19.4% enterprise providers.
- 11.6% Indigenous students, compared to 8.7% of TAFE, 6.4% of private for-profit providers, 5.2% schools and 7.1% enterprise providers.

- 67.0% NSW ACE provider government-funded VET students were female, the highest of any VET provider group in 2022. This compares to 54.8% of TAFE, 48.9% of private for-profit providers.

On almost every measure of vulnerability & disadvantage, CCA providers consistently over-perform compared to TAFE, private providers & other VET providers. CCA members disproportionately & successfully cater for students from the nation's most socio-educationally disadvantaged and vulnerable groups including in disability and aged citizens.

Government discussion paper

Our CCA review of NSW VET review discussion paper as provided publicly at:
https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/skills/nsw-vet-review/NSW_VET_Review_Discussion_Paper.pdf

This important NSW VET review aimed at re-funding a depleted NSW TAFE has stated that;
Quote from Page 8:

While the NSW VET sector is achieving strong completion outcomes, there are some areas for concern including falling completions for certain trade programs, lower-level qualifications and VETSS. Of key concern is the numbers of students whose background, circumstance or where they live make them significantly less likely to complete their studies.

CCA says in any potential press release “CCA members work with their communities including with many high equity and high support needs students who are pre-TAFE. Some students are not yet ready for TAFE. These students may be unwilling or unable to attend TAFE because of a wide range of access and equity issues. These students frequently find their local community college meets their needs.”

And;

CCA asserts that “Many high equity students come to their local and familiar ACE Community College and have done so for 110 years of CCA member history since WEA was formed in 1913. These students may be on a pathway to TAFE NSW or University and arrive at their local Community College as a first step on that journey. A prime example is newly arrived migrants arriving at the door of CCA members to investigate foundation skills in Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy”.

CCA can furnish the following data to address this note above from page 8 of the NSW VET Review discussion paper:

In 2022, NSW CCA ACE providers achieved the following percentage proportions of their government-funded VET student populations:
9.2% students had a disability (down from 13.5% In 2020), compared to 9.0% of TAFE, 5.0% of private for-profit providers, 2.1% schools and 3.6% enterprise providers. (CCA notes that

this reflects the slow return to VET of students with a disability, particularly those with disability services)

- 48.3% regional and rural students, compared to 30.2% TAFE, 28.5% private for-profits, 25.4% schools and 45.5 % enterprise providers.
- 61.2% most disadvantaged students – bottom two SEIFA quintiles, compared to 46.1% TAFE, 47.6% private for-profits, 50.1% schools and 52.2% enterprise providers.
- 18.7% non-English speaking background students, compared to 21.4% of TAFE, 15.8% of private for-profit providers, 1.5% schools and 22.5% 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.

11.6% Indigenous students, compared to 8.7% of TAFE, 6.4% of private for-profit providers, 0.15% schools and 7.1% enterprise providers.

67.0% NSW ACE provider government-funded VET students were female, the highest of any VET provider group. This compares to 53.9% of TAFE, 50.7% of private for-profit providers, 46.9% schools and 52.0% enterprise providers.

This important NSW VET review aimed at re-funding a depleted NSW TAFE has stated that. https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/skills/nsw-vet-review/NSW_VET_Review_Discussion_Paper.pdf

From pages 7,8,9 of the discussion paper

Many students face complex barriers to participating in and completing VET studies While challenges faced by different students are unique, there are some intersecting and common barriers to participation, such as language and literacy hurdles, difficulties in gaining recognition for prior education and work experience, a lack of prior employment, geographical location and limited availabilities of employers and VET educators.

And

Overall, there is still a need to find new strategies to improve access and participation rates across all learners, ensure participation leads to positive outcomes, and to address barriers.

CCA Comment: CCA member organisations prioritise vulnerable learners and continuously strive to improve participation, student engagement and outcomes. Inclusion and support have *always been* core to their delivery models.



Community Colleges Australia

PO Box 1839 QVB Post Office Sydney NSW 1230 | 02 9233 3634 | admin@cca.edu.au | www.cca.edu.au