

Submission to Jobs and Skills Australia Response to the Foundation Skills Discussion Paper from Community Colleges Australia 8 May 2023

1. Introduction

Community Colleges Australia (CCA) provides this submission to Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) in response to the *JSA Foundation Skills Discussion Paper* released on 4 April 2023.¹ Following an important statement of CCA priorities and background to the Australian adult and community education (ACE) sector, this submission responds to the 17 specific discussion questions posed by the Discussion Paper (section 3). CCA also provides details of two additional two questions that we posed to members (sections 2.1 and 2.2). CCA prepared this paper with input from several members of its national ACE provider network.

1.1 Community Colleges Australia

Community Colleges Australia is the peak national body that represents community-owned, not-for-profit 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. For more details go to Appendix A or our website.²

1.2 Australia's Adult and Community Education Sector in Perspective

The number of Australian adult and community education (ACE) students rebounded by 15.2% in 2021 from a pandemic-impacted low in 2020, according to data from the NCVER. ACE "Total VET" student numbers increased from 390,185 in 2020 to 449,500 in 2021 (10.5% of national total).³ In 2021, 4.3 million students were enrolled in nationally recognised vocational education and training (VET), an increase of 9.0% compared to 2020.⁴ In addition to the ACE sector, in 2021: 3,186,795 students (74.1%) enrolled at private for-profit training providers, 778,300 (18.1%) at TAFE institutes, 114,100 (2.7%) at schools, 107,000 (2.5%) at enterprise providers and 75,600 (1.8%) at universities.⁵ Thus, the ACE sector continues to represent a substantial part of the Australian training system.⁶ ACE providers are particularly important in engaging the most disadvantaged the vulnerable learners, out-performing (in percentage terms) all other VET provider sub-sectors in their ability reach and engage those learners, lifting them from unemployment to employment.⁷

¹ *JSA Foundation Skills Discussion Paper*, Jobs and Skills Australia, 4 April 2023, accessed at <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/consultations/foundation-skills-discussion-paper>.

² See <https://cca.edu.au/who-we-are/about-us/>.

³ See <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/total-vet-students-and-courses-2021>.

⁴ See <https://www.ncver.edu.au/news-and-events/media-releases/vet-participation-up-nine-percent>.

⁵ See <https://www.ncver.edu.au/news-and-events/media-releases/vet-participation-up-nine-percent>.

⁶ See <https://cca.edu.au/who-we-are/communityeducation/>.

⁷ See Appendix B, as well as *Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of NSW Adult and Community Education Providers: Analysis of 2021 Data*, 16 January 2023, <https://cca.edu.au/nsw-ace-providers-over-perform-in-reaching-vulnerable-and-disadvantaged-learners/> and *Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of Victorian Adult and Community Education Providers: Analysis of 2021 Data*, 18 November 2022, at <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Victorian-Vulnerable-and-Disadvantaged-Students-by-Provider-Analysis-of-2021-Data.pdf>.

2. The Big Issues in Foundation Skills for ACE Providers

CCA has identified a number of “big issues” in foundation skills for ACE providers. In addition to the questions posed by the Discussion Paper, we asked our members “What barriers, if any, does your organisation face in delivering foundation skills?” and “What changes in policy and programs would you like to see and why?” CCA will provide a separate submission to JSA with responses to those questions.

In addition to answering the 17 questions posed by the *Discussion Paper*, this submission also addresses:

1. the role of VET and foundation skills in reducing Australian inequality (section 2.1);
2. partnerships and learner pathways (section 2.2); and
3. place-based delivery in foundation skills (section 2.3).

2.1 The Role of VET and Foundation Skills in Reducing Australian Inequality

CCA strongly believes that foundation skills have an integral and essential role in reducing inequality in Australia – and by extension – improving national social and economic participation. Unfortunately, wealth and income inequality are both increasing in Australia. The Australia Institute report *Inequality on Steroids: The Distribution of Economic Growth in Australia* states:

Since World War Two, the majority of the benefits of economic growth have flowed to the bottom 90% of income earners. However ... between 2009 and 2019 the top 10% got almost all of the gains of the latest recovery: that group secured 93% of the income growth in that period.... How long can Australia sustain an economic and social setting which excludes the bulk of its people from sharing in the economic gains?⁸

The Australian Government Productivity Commission concluded in 2022:

Investment in education has been found to reduce inequality and generally improves society by increasing equity and social cohesion, potentially improving the prospects of the most disadvantaged students by fostering social mobility.⁹

CCA has identified six ways to make Australia a more equal and just society which build on foundation skills:

1. **Create proper pathways**, from ACE to TAFE, and from VET to universities (see below).
2. **Embed systemic approaches and place-based access** to foundation skills training to ensure equity and accessibility.
3. **Develop regional skills plans**, in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, which prioritise social justice goals and consider the needs of the most disadvantaged learners.
4. **Fund foundation skills (FS)** – language, literacy, numeracy, digital and employability skills – properly, recognising the importance of skilled FS trainers and the special needs of adult basic education students, who may not fit into traditional VET teaching models: this includes national recruitment campaigns utilising the Reading Writing Hotline. With 7.0% inflation in Australia in the year through end of March 2023, funding must be heading backwards. This also means proper funding of physical facilities and digital connectivity for ACE providers.¹⁰

⁸ See <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/inequality-on-steroids-the-distribution-of-economic-growth-in-australia/>.

⁹ See <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/productivity/interim5-learning>.

¹⁰ See <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/consumer-price-index-australia/mar-quarter-2023>.

5. **Implement a national outreach program** to re-engage disadvantaged and vulnerable VET learners – a large percentage of whom will be on a foundational skills learning level – who have left training because of the impact of natural disasters or COVID-19 concerns, based on models similar to the Victorian Reconnect Program and the earlier TAFE NSW Outreach program, with a focus on student support and mentoring.¹¹ It is not possible to expand the delivery foundation skills in Australia without a substantial expansion of programs of community outreach and engagement to prospective learners, their workplaces, their families and their communities.
6. **Renew the national-state-territory policy statement** on the value and place of ACE and its place in Australian skills and training, to update the 2008 Ministerial statement.¹²

See additional details on the CCA website.¹³

2.2 Partnerships and Pathways

CCA believes that Australia has an acute need to create and sustain post-secondary pathways. The Productivity Commission’s report *From Learning to Growth* states:

The education sector needs to adapt to emerging skills requirements of the Australian economy. The skills demanded have been shifting, and there is also likely to be ongoing structural adjustment in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic. Over time, technological change and automation has replaced or enhanced aspects of some jobs, and generated demand for others. An increasing proportion of jobs require non routine skills, which typically demand workers with higher levels of education or training.

Other than through migration (with its attendant negatives of higher housing prices and other costs), the *only* way that Australia can increase its skilled workforce is through (1) investing heavily in foundation skills; and (2) encouraging and mandating pathways and collaboration between the ACE and TAFE, and between VET and universities. Unfortunately, we see too little of this collaboration taking place, with a jealous “guarding of the doors” of each sector.

These pathways will require an acknowledgement of the role of ACE and an integrated policy structure that supports ACE delivery within education and vocational frameworks. Better coordination and transparency will lift both learner and societal outcomes.

2.3 Place-Based Delivery in Foundation Skills

Increasingly, Australian governments and institutions have recognised the importance of place-based community services: “Place-based community-led initiatives are collaborative, long-term approaches to building thriving communities where many people and organisations work together towards a shared vision for their community.¹⁴ Because of the well-known place-based approach ACE providers take to

¹¹ See the CCA outreach proposal at <https://cca.edu.au/cca-proposes-outreach-program-to-re-engage-disadvantaged-learners-impacted-by-covid-19/>. The NSW Government is in the process of funding Outreach Support Officers for NSW ACE providers, to take place during the 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years.

¹² See <https://cca.edu.au/community-colleges-australia-calls-for-a-new-ministerial-statement-on-adult-community-education/>.

¹³ See <https://cca.edu.au/inequality-in-australia-what-can-vocational-education-and-training-do-about-it/>; <https://youtu.be/Lc-T3Lidm7k> - video of his presentation (25’39”); and <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Engagement-Australia-Conference-Don-Perlqut-22November2022-web.pdf> (slide presentation at a recent conference). Also see <https://cca.edu.au/is-australian-vet-up-for-addressing-the-challenges-of-inequality/>.

¹⁴ See <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/media-centre/media-releases/organisations-call-for-greater-focus-on-place-based-work-to-strengthen-communities>, a project from Mission Australia, United Way Australia, and six other organisations, including (CCA member) Jesuit Social Services.

their training and their ability to partner easily with care providers – who trust the quality training of the ACE students, the ACE sector achieves the greatest increase in moving students from unemployment to employment.¹⁵ This was reinforced in the 9 May 2023 Commonwealth Budget, which commits to addressing entrenched disadvantage in communities through “better use [of] place-based approaches to target disadvantage and to support a greater ability for communities to make decisions reflecting their needs.”¹⁶

CCA believes that we must create a balance between online learning and in-person learning. More than three years into the pandemic, the tremendous rush three years ago to move post-secondary education to online platforms must ease and develop a more sophisticated hybrid approach. VET providers and regulators have no excuse to let the quality of learning depreciate through inappropriate and poorly delivered online learning accompanied by reduction or elimination of in-person learning. As social commentator Hugh Mackay writes:

No significant learning can occur without a significant relationship ... no significant relationship can occur without empathy and empathy needs human presence.... The difference between online and face-to-face relationships can be captured in that one word: empathy.¹⁷

Australia is short-changing its learners and national skills base by cutting back on the quantity and quality of human teaching in our skills and training. CCA holds great concerns for any foundational skills programs that rely substantially or wholly on online delivery.

A recent Reading Writing Hotline report strongly supports CCA’s advocacy for place-based delivery of foundation skills. *Insights from the Classroom: A Survey of Adult Literacy Providers*, presents findings from 382 respondents, of which 32% worked for ACE providers and 48% for TAFEs.¹⁸ Key report findings:

- 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.
- Face to face teaching and learning models have higher delivery costs than digital and online learning.
- The Foundation Skills Training package is not meeting the needs of many LND learners.
- High levels of disadvantage in the community, exacerbated by COVID-19, bushfires, floods and other natural disasters create significant barriers for these learners. This reinforces LND gaps where there is intergenerational poverty coupled with low levels of literacy.

3. JSA Discussion Paper Questions

In this section, CCA responds to the specific questions asked by the JSA *Discussion Paper*.

1. Do you agree with the proposed definitions for literacy and numeracy?

¹⁵ See <https://ala.asn.au/adult-community-education/> and <https://cca.edu.au/australian-community-education-providers-achieve-the-best-results-in-bringing-students-into-employment/>.

¹⁶ See 2023/24 Budget Papers “Addressing entrenched disadvantage in communities,” <https://budget.gov.au/content/04-opportunity.htm#m5>.

¹⁷ *Australia Reimagined: Towards a More Compassionate, Less Anxious Society*, Pan Macmillan Australia, 2018, pp. 147-148; see <https://www.panmacmillan.com.au/9781743534823/>.

¹⁸ Available at <https://www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/RWH-Report-Insights-from-the-Classroom-Survey-of-Adult-Literacy-Providers.pdf>.

Broadly speaking CCA does not disagree with the proposed definitions, however we are cognisant that in applying the definitions it is important to ensure there are tools or measures to help with the decoding to apply targeted remedies. Below we provide a number of CCA member comments in response to this question.

Definitional continuity: “No real disagreement with the definitions of literacy and numeracy. However, there is a potentially unifying framework for the three that assists a practical definition of digital literacy beyond attention to the technology.”

Digital literacy “is a superset of literacy and numeracy in that the common elements of all three are interacting with technologies and symbols. The technologies range from pens, paper, calculators to devices. The interaction with symbols constructs meaning out of the environment and facilitates the exercise of power over that environment. The differences in Digital Literacy are the range, fluidity and non-standard nature of the symbols and technologies.”

Core Digital Literacies: “In some respects the technologies of literacy and numeracy are so ubiquitous it can be forgotten that the beginning of these literacies is recognition of the tools. We assume a pencil is for writing not picking teeth and forget in the process that that recognition is the beginning of writing. The novelty and fluidity of technologies in the digital environment however means that that most basic capability needs to be front and centre in definitions.”

“With this in mind, defining Digital Literacy would ideally contain capabilities for identifying tools, evoking those tools and interacting with the environment through them. Three capabilities present themselves as fundamental to engaging with the digital environment. Email communication; interacting with user interfaces be it a document or web page; locating digital artefacts such as files, apps and core user interface elements.”

Measures and Measurement

“Both APS and PSTRE appear to miss the continuity of the D with the LLN and aren’t explicitly used by the College. In practice the challenge of measurement of digital literacies is their highly contextual nature. The palette of tools and interfaces is infinitely larger than pen, paper, alphabet, number.”
“Hence the challenge is the translation of literacies from one context to another. However there are core literacies in digital capability that can be employed to navigate multiple interfaces and a core vocabulary that can in effect comprise a symbol set akin to an alphabet. In this the unifying framework is the notion of language from spoken to written to mathematical to digital.”

“The definitions are correct but because they are broad and mean different things to people at different levels it all can become a series of issues that are bundled together and become almost impossible to envisage a solution to. The fact that we talk about Language, Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Skills (and even sometimes employability) together and then access to meaningful work and community participation as a goal and 3 million people with a Foundation Skills barrier makes it a really huge issue that bundles people in very different situations together.”

“We have a language system that recognises and accepts that people from NESB’s need English language at certain levels for participation in community, work, etc. I think in Digital Skills we find it easier to comprehend that some people have had no exposure at all, some have some Digital Literacy but broadly below a workforce requirement level and others have some good skills but gaps.”

“In Literacy and Numeracy we occasionally see some focus on the illiterate (things like Lost for Words) and we often see the reports about the high numbers of people that who are below the required

workplace levels in Literacy and Numeracy (often reported around 45% Literacy and 55% Numeracy which I think draws from PIAAC stats and includes all people at below level 3). While the data is there and I am sure at some level it is known and applied it seems that we are not that clear that these figures are made up of people that cannot read or write at all to people that are holding down good jobs but struggling with some skills and everything in between. Not saying either is a bigger issue or should be higher focus – but they are very different cohorts."

2. What definition would you propose for digital literacy?

CCA consultation broadly reflected the view that digital literacy should not be just about digital technologies, as digital technologies evolve rapidly. More than just learning to use existing software and hardware, digital literacy is more related to problem solving skills and confidence in handling new hardware and software.

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) definition that includes “to participate” is more likely to include all levels. We can often focus on Digital Literacy while evolving technologies can leave people behind.

The first definition in the discussion paper focusses on using technology to solve problems and the security and safety challenges created by technology, however digital technology skills are now required in almost all aspects of modern life – from accessing entertainment, booking appointments, receiving government benefits and communicating with others in your personal life, to complete further education and for many employment opportunities. Rewording of the interpretation provided by ACARA or something more in line with the definition provided for literacy.

Another comment from a regional provider: “The first one is OK but missing glaringly is an understanding of data and connectivity. Without understanding how to access data and manage it on devices we aren’t through step 1 of the process of learning or accessing information in this format. Should be first.”

3. Do you currently use or are you aware of any digital literacy measures to inform policies and/or programs?

CCA is deeply engaged with, supports and keeps abreast of the work of the Digital Skills Organisation (we are a formal Member), and that of the (previous) Skills Service Organisations to develop a digital skills model/framework to inform digital literacy insight/policy settings. CCA is also aware of the range of digital frameworks in use internationally. The Digital Inclusion Alliance, the Good Things Foundation, as well as Telstra’s Tech Savvy Seniors Program inform provider programs and CCA’s research and advocacy work.

4. How do you currently use (or have previously used) data on foundation skills, including PIAAC data?

CCA makes use of a broad range of data sources to inform our work. While dated, there is a robust body of research that informs practice and advice. This however does not quantify nor focus education effort adequately. We use research and provider input and feedback on their experiences to help to support and represent current practice, learner and community needs and delivery to meet those needs. PIAC, ABS, NCVET, industry body and academic research all document the spread, identified needs, locations and shortfall in regional delivery. As the JSA is aware, current data collections and research is often piecemeal and inadequate. The paucity of support and funding for research and activity in this area makes it difficult to forecast and deliver effective targeted and supported foundational skills.

For program providers; large, standardised data sets such as PIAC are not as relevant as individualised assessment tools. However, data is critical in program development where programs are designed in response to community needs.

Two characteristics that set LLND apart from other training are relevant to the question of data. If an accepted starting point is that LLND literacies are determined by the individual's purposes and the context, then the traditional competency models of uniform measure and standards to measure against that are abstracted from context and purpose require a finesse in development.

At the same time the capacity to abstract varies along the spectrum from literacy to numeracy to digital literacy. The data sets created and used are program and person specific. The gap then is at the practice level in the Digital Literacy space. LLND is then necessarily personal and tends even in group contexts to the one-to-one program design. While there are tools like LLN Robot and the ACSF that enable tailoring for LLN these are lacking for digital literacy.

5. What data do you need to inform questions related to foundation skills policy and program development?

Key points in answer to this question:

- Consistent timely data sets that measure the characteristics of adult foundational skill needs and ways to identify what is required to meet these needs. Systemic approach that scopes need over time.
- Information on regional differences.
- CCA and providers are aware there are many 'hidden' people in communities/ societies that require assistance. Even where a general 'sense' of these cohorts may be identified, information and tools to engage and assist will be needed to inform how programs, assistance can be provided in meaningful ways.
- Ongoing evaluation or initiatives– the sector does not have the tools not the resources to measure progress or outcomes over time.
- Data, research and evaluation of methods that take into account the spectrum of learners and their needs.
- A more accurate measure of the socio-economic status of FSK students, and long term follow up of their outcomes after participating in foundation skills training.
- Many providers look for local rather than big data, using reports from local chambers of commerce, regional development, industry and service providers to help focus efforts. Geographically, demographically relevant data sets that can be broken down and/or combined would be of high value. Results from providers own delivery and LLN D assessment tools, are also used to inform and improve or target new programs.
- A pipeline of better skilled educators and researchers. Crucial to the ongoing success of foundation skills policy.

6. What data sources and data assets do you hold/create/use in relation to foundation skills that have not been covered above?

Feedback from an ACE provider: "We get all students to complete an LLN assessment, we use this data to support students individually as well as to address the needs of a cohort, where relevant."

7. What gap/s or challenges have you encountered with what is currently available?

The existing data covers limited scopes and time frame. While some are useful (e.g. employment status), it would be useful if more long term and diverse data is available.

Data approaches at jurisdictional levels, e.g. state training authorities are often dismissive of, or poorly measure the result of low AQF level learners, leading to performance measurement issues, compounding impacts on providers working with these cohorts.

Federal and state, regional policy and data is piecemeal and limited.

Over time the funding and support for community-based provision of LLN has declined. The need is hidden, hard to reach, the ability of providers to meet these needs well is uneven and declining, skilled educators are thin on the ground, so it is a circular self-propelling challenge.

Those individuals or cohorts of low LLN&D are unlikely to engage with formalised surveys or feedback, and are often highly distrustful of government and/or technology.

Outcomes are necessary. However, are hard to measure without a connected policy response.

8. Is there an alternative approach/option that you think would be suitable for the survey?

The results of the planned survey must align significantly with those from PIAC to provide a high level of continuity. The current gap of over a decade is already highly problematic. The extensive work and evidence base that informs the PIAC process should not be discarded for the sake of an Australian product. Adding additional value through use of assessment tools would be beneficial.

Responses from Providers

“Long term studies similar to the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth.”

“Yes, qualitative data would be very important – numbers only measure the visible and connected.

“Option B appears more preferable than A at least. However, the College’s experience is that those who experience the greatest barriers and have the greatest need are also those least likely to be represented in surveys.”

“Digital data collection about digital literacy is almost a contradiction in terms and is true also for LLN. Returning to the question of the individual and contextual character of LLND limitations, an alternative might be the development of assessment tools made available to the providers and others who interface with the community.”

“Surveys that operate also as assessment tools that can be supported in the classroom or interview contexts could in effect provide rolling data collection tuned to currently collected data sets such as the AVETMISS data. The LLN Robot operates in part in this fashion both collecting data on cohorts and developing responses using the ACSF. A Digital Literacy equivalent is sorely needed.”

“While the obvious limitation here is the narrowing of the sample to those engaging with education as adults the use of providers at the same time can facilitate a bridge between the most difficult to reach and scoping the problem and providing a solution.”

9. Are there online tools for measuring LLND that you think would be suitable to be adapted for the needs of the survey?

Many providers in the sector currently use the LLN Robot (Learning Resource group product) and see this as a useful tool that has potential for use in the survey. It collects data on cohorts, and informs response development. No online tool can cater for those in remote communities, or areas where access, familiarity or use of online is not known or accepted.

10. What frameworks do you use in describing foundation skills (such as the Australian Core Skills Framework ACSF)?

The predominant response by providers to this question was the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). Sample of comments:

“We use the ACSF and have explored but not implemented assessment tools for DRAFT Digital Literacy Skills Framework, APRIL 2020, Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business.
<https://www.skillseducation.com.au/pages/acsf-resources>”

“We use ACSF based tools in Pre-Training Assessments and broadly when providing Language support but as a guide rather than too technically.”

11. What outputs would be most useful for you (such as reports, analytical articles, CURFs, other microdata)?

For effective representation, a cross section of quantitative and qualitative research and reports are needed. Longitudinal data to measure what’s taking place and how well it is meeting need, as well as to reflect needs as they arise over time.

Core to this need is quality, appropriately funded research reflecting the high level of regard given by all levels of government to truly robust and inclusive foundational skills policy.

For educators in the community the most useful outputs are those that provide a language commonly understood to facilitate communication among services and with learners along with reports and gap analysis to support individualised and collective program development.

12. The proposed age range is persons aged 16-65 years. Does the proposed age range align with your needs?

ACE providers work across the full age range and deliver according to their community needs. There was a strong response from providers that the proposed range be open ended. As quoted below ‘*80 is the new 65.*’ Lifespan, and engagement with life and work must be considered if the survey is considering Australian socio-economic realities.

Other specific comments from survey responses:

“Yes but could cover younger aged people as well.”

“No, this age range does not even come close to addressing the needs of the community. From July 1, the Age Pension will increase to 67 years (and has in fact not been 65 since before July 2019). We have many clients over this age. Many of our senior clients need to supplement their income for survival. This

takes many forms from full time work, part time work, setting up their own business e.g. selling on face book market place, Amazon etc.”

“There *should not be a restriction on age* as there are no restrictions on the need to survive in modern society.”

“There is still a need for people over the age of 65 to acquire digital literacy skills to participate in life skills, many people are working well beyond 65 these days and now 80 is the new 65. We have older people seeking LLND training – some are seeking to improve their language skills even though they have lived in Australia for a long period of time but have the support of a partner who may now have passed away or they have separated so they need to be independent to support themselves. Others have perhaps worked in a trade environment which did not require digital literacy and they are now seeking to learn more to communicate and access online services such as Centrelink and Medicare.”

13. What level of statistical geographical output do you need? Why?

Member responses:

“If you can see at a suburb level where the LLN needs are, it would allow you to find training venues and locations which would be suitable to capture more prospective students.”

“Statistical data to a LGA or regional level would be useful to plan and target specific courses to locations.”

“Remote community data is important.”

“Statistical Areas Level 2 are currently used in conjunction with LGA ABS data to understand communities. A similar level could be used to focus program development.”

14. Which groups would you like to see more extensive research into and why? For example, First Nations, recent migrants, mature age workers, Australians in rural or remote locations?

Recent migrants, First Nations, Australians in rural or remote locations, Mature age workers (for the reasons discussed in question 12) recurred across responses received by CCA.

Responses:

“All of the groups identified and one not mentioned- adults with intellectual disability, warrant more extensive research.”

“In the first instance simply as an equity issue these groups are most impacted by rapidly evolving literacies in the community and the changing tools required to navigate current society. However, it is not solely an equity argument.”

“The differences between the challenges each of these groups face and their response to the limitations in LLND skills highlight the variability in how communities (specifically community education providers) describe and respond to the challenges limitations in LLND present for these groups, ultimately leading to better program development and meaningful personal development in program participants.

15. Do you have any examples of existing data collection activities with First Nations people that may be applicable to assessing foundation skills in a culturally safe manner?

No responses were recorded from survey participants.

16. How would you recommend JSA engage with First Nations Australians for the feasibility study?

There is an existing network of First Nations training providers led by Tranby Aboriginal Cooperative (a CCA member) that is ideally placed to assist with this. The Foundations Skills Advisory Group also has an excellent Indigenous member line-up that can be utilised. All providers posit that on the ground local input is crucial to accessing true needs. CCA strongly suggests that this is a responsibility of the Government to work out and would include investing in a mixture of First Nations engagement consultants (there are many excellent ones), involvement by the states and territories and Indigenous-specific Reference Group/s. You will also want to engage the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA). We strongly recommend that you recruit high-level Indigenous staff into the Commonwealth to help guide this process. It would be embarrassing if you did not have Indigenous staff on board for this engagement.

Feedback from NFP Community education providers

“Ask the First Nations people what they want? As this is the major actor to forward movement and trust. I know when you ask their needs, regardless of background not everybody will have an immediate answer. However, it may assist in unpacking the need.”

“Ensure the individuals understand the reason for the study, being very transparent, ensure there is a First Nations Consultant who is well known in the area to be there to assist with the engagement and if in a remote community try and have it at a hall and serve food, so the community can connect. On the ground and talk with elders in community – not just ‘service providers’”.

17. What are the key research questions you have for this part of the study?

CCA hopes this study would create a picture of LLND proficiency across Australia that enables transparent information about the state of the nation, how extensive needs are, how needs are currently being serviced or where and for whom it is most acute.

This will require an exploration and deep analysis of the characteristics of adult literacy, numeracy including digital literacy, exploring regional differences – including the population cohorts and place based features.

Other member feedback to this question:

- “Developing foundations skills, deepen and broaden adult foundation skills.”
- “Developing foundation skills to support the broadening and depth of knowledge and skills to support individual socio-economic capability.”
- “Developing foundation skills to support positive socio economic change.”
- “Digital coverage and access.”

One relevant comment, shared by many providers is a view that this area has been studied at length and local action is required to address needs. This could be research as well.

Appendix A: 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.

CCA assists its members to sustain and grow, promoting learning innovation, focussing especially on vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. They focus on student welfare and are strongly committed to employment outcomes for their learners.¹⁹

Our members have 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, CCA members 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, and independent special assistance secondary schools.²⁰ 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 our members operate.

Our members have 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.

¹⁹ See <https://cca.edu.au/who-we-are/about-us/>.

²⁰ See <https://cca.edu.au/special-assistance-secondary-schools-end-2020-on-a-high-note/>.

Appendix B: ACE Providers Reach Australia’s Most Disadvantaged Post-Secondary Students

Table 1 below compares 2018 national Australian enrolment percentages for specific vulnerable and disadvantaged groups across three profiles: the university sector, all VET students and the sub-set of not-for-profit community education provider VET students. CCA has been monitoring the ACE provider percentages of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups each year since 2018, and the patterns have not changed in any significant way.²¹

The results show a distinct pattern of how the most VET students are, on balance, a much more disadvantaged group than university students. Of VET students, ACE (community education) students are further much more disadvantaged. In comparison to university students, twice as many community education students are “low SES” (bottom quarter – 25%); have a disability; or live in regional, rural and remote areas. In addition, ACE providers enrol four times as many Indigenous people and more than seven times as many people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Table 1: Australian University, VET and Community Education Student Cohorts: Equity Group Percentages Compared, 2018

Student Group	University student enrolment proportions (%)	Total VET students program enrolments (%)	ACE provider students program enrolments (%)
Low SES (bottom 25%)	17.0	28.2	34.6
Students with a disability	7.3	8.0	16.0
Indigenous	1.9	5.9	7.6
Regional and rural	19.8	31.2	36.6
Remote and very remote	0.8	2.6	2.1
Non English-speaking background	3.4	24.1	25.3

For notes on this Table, see CCA’s full *Sustaining Democracy* Discussion Paper, pp. 7 & 18.²²

ACE providers also have a great ability to partner easily with other providers, who trust the quality training of the ACE students. In part as a result of this, as well as the personalised support that ACE

²¹ See CCA reports: *Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of NSW Adult and Community Education Providers: Analysis of 2021 Data*, 16 January 2023, <https://cca.edu.au/nsw-ace-providers-over-perform-in-reaching-vulnerable-and-disadvantaged-learners/> and *Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Students of Victorian Adult and Community Education Providers: Analysis of 2021 Data*, 18 November 2022, at <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Victorian-Vulnerable-and-Disadvantaged-Students-by-Provider-Analysis-of-2021-Data.pdf>.

²² *The Role of Adult and Community Education Providers in Sustaining Australian Democracy: A Discussion Paper* by Dr Don Perlgut, Community Colleges Australia, 9 January 2020, available at <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Role-of-adult-and-community-education-in-sustaining-Australian-democracy-and-supporting-civil-society-Jan2020.pdf>.

students receive, learners at ACE providers consistently have the greatest increase in moving students from unemployment to employment, compared to all other VET providers.²³

²³ See <https://cca.edu.au/australian-community-education-providers-achieve-the-best-results-in-bringing-students-into-employment/>.