

Provision of foundation skills training by community education providers in regional Australia

Lisel O'Dwyer and Mandy Mihelic



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About the research

Provision of foundation skills training by community education providers in regional Australia

Lisel O'Dwyer, Mandy Mihelic, NCVER

Defined as language, literacy and numeracy, and employability skills, foundation skills are essential for individuals to participate in further education, employment and wider society. Community education providers, such as community colleges, neighbourhood houses, faith-based organisations and adult learning associations, are key providers of foundation skills training. The characteristics of community education providers, such as their relatively small scale and flexibility in teaching strategies, make them particularly suitable for providing such training. Despite this, the impact of foundation skills training delivered by community education providers on education and employment outcomes and involvement in society is not well known, particularly in regional areas where the foundation skill levels of adults tend to be lower than in metropolitan areas.

This research investigates the contribution that community education providers make to foundation skills training in regional Australia, the models of delivery which seemed to work best, and whether the undertaking of foundation skills training helped build the social and human capital of the individual and broader community.

Key messages

- Proportionally more regional community education providers deliver foundation skills training than other regional training providers.
- Between 2018 and 2019 however, enrolments in foundation skills subjects with regional community education providers declined whereas enrolments with other regional providers remained steady. Regional community education providers reported difficulty in securing sufficient funding and appropriately qualified staff, which may explain the recent decline.
- A higher proportion of foundation skills subjects in regional areas were completed by students with community education providers than with other training providers. Little is known though about the education or employment pathways after foundation skills training due to limited capacity by regional community education providers to track student outcomes.
- The positive impact of foundation skills training on an individual's social and human capital was viewed as improved levels of self-confidence and self-worth among students, and development of soft skills. Any broader impact at the community level is yet to be determined.

Simon Walker
Managing Director, NCVER

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Executive summary

Foundation skills are essential for greater participation in education, employment and society (Skills Australia 2010). In this context, we use the definition from the National Foundation Skills Strategy (NFSS) for Adults, which defined foundation skills¹ as:

- English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, digital literacy and use of mathematical ideas
- Employability skills, including collaboration, problem-solving, self-management, learning to learn, and information and communication technology (ICT) skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life (SCOTese 2012, p.2).

The need for individuals to build and develop their foundation skills is becoming even more important with the growth in the use of technology in the workplace causing a shift away from low-skill work (Payton 2017).

Although its data are now becoming dated, the 2011-2012 Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) reported that almost half of Australia's adult population at that time had literacy and numeracy skills at a level considered to adversely impact on their ability to participate and function in a technologically-advanced economy (ABS 2013). Further, the PIAAC data showed that literacy and numeracy levels are lower in regional areas than major cities and vary markedly by age and gender. The 2016 Census data also showed that English proficiency for people who speak a different language at home is generally worse in regional areas than in major cities (ABS 2016).

Training providers, including community education providers, have a role to play in helping adults develop their foundation skills. The NFSS recognised the importance of community education providers in this role, describing them as critical for the provision of diverse foundation skills programs for adults and noting the value of flexibility in pathways to build learners' skills and confidence (SCOTese 2012, p.12).

The role of community education providers in developing the foundation skills of adults in regional areas is even more crucial given that little is known about the impact of such provision on the further education and employment outcomes or development of social capital of individuals in regional areas.

This research aims to rectify this lack of knowledge by examining the provision of foundation skills by community education providers, particularly those in regional areas. The key areas of interest are:

- Who is delivering foundation skills courses in regional areas?
- What works in the delivery of foundation skills courses in regional areas?
- How does successful completion of foundation skills courses influence the development of human and social capital within a community?

A multi-method approach is used to investigate these questions including the administration of an online survey to both regional and metropolitan community education providers and follow-up telephone interviews with a selection of community education trainers and managers, along with an analysis of

1 During the undertaking of this study, the concept of foundation skills, as applied by the Commonwealth Government, was refocused to English language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills up to AQF Certificate II level. Employability skills are not included.

inquiries to the Reading Writing Hotline (a national referral service for adults looking for help with their literacy and numeracy skills) and analysis of Total VET Activity (TVA) data².

Provision of foundation skills training by community education providers

In 2019, 83.2% of regional community education providers had enrolments in foundation skills subjects in 2019. This proportion is higher than for other regional training providers (72%) but similar to the proportion of metropolitan community education providers (84.9%; NCVET 2019).

Demand for both LLN and employability skills subjects delivered by regional community education providers increased between 2015 and 2018 but has since declined to 2016 levels. Enrolments with other regional training providers declined over this period and have been relatively steady since 2018.

Enrolments in employability skills subjects outweigh enrolments in LLN subjects at regional community education providers, whereas the reverse is found with metropolitan-based community education providers. This pattern may be due to the greater availability of funding for employability skills training in regional areas rather than LLN training or it may reflect the reported difficulties regional community education providers have in employing qualified LLN trainers.

Student profile

Foundation skills students with regional community education providers are generally more disadvantaged than students with other regional training providers. Consequently, regional community education providers are more challenged in their reach, teaching and delivery strategies. For example, the lower socioeconomic status of their students acts as a barrier to securing transport to attend training, using the internet, and accessing childcare.

Despite their more disadvantaged profile, a higher proportion of foundation skills subjects in regional areas were completed by students with community education providers than with other training providers.

Delivery models

Responses to the survey show no standard delivery model amongst community education providers due to high levels of uncertainty about future funding, the subsequent need to plan in relatively short timeframes and fluctuations in student numbers. A higher proportion of community education providers in regional than metropolitan areas reported difficulty in securing sufficient funding and appropriately qualified staff. Both regional and metropolitan community education providers face similar structural barriers, such as heavy administrative burdens.

Online learning may be a cost-effective delivery mode for education and training in regional areas but is generally not suited to foundation skills training, especially in LLN, because it requires a prerequisite level of literacy. Further, internet access is often poor in regional areas. Traditional class-based, face-to-

² Community education providers deliver both nationally recognised and non-nationally recognised training but as enrolment data for non-nationally recognised training is not required to be submitted for inclusion in the TVA collection, and therefore the quantum of such activity difficult to ascertain, the data analysis undertaken only focused on nationally recognised training activity.

face teaching was the typical mode of delivery for foundation skills training among survey respondents and interviewees.

Development of social and human capital

Based on the proportion of completions in foundation skills and their direct experience and engagement with students, community education providers reported that most individual students experience at least some improvement in their human capital. In addition to developing practical LLN and employability skills, providers report improved self-confidence and self-worth for most students, attributes that form the basis for greater community engagement and social interaction. They also note the development of human capital for better employability in the form of soft skills, and significantly improved social capital and inclusion at the individual level.

Community education providers are generally unable to gauge the broader social impact of foundation skills training due to lack of resources, time, and the means to follow up students after they have completed. Providers in small regional centres are often better able to use word-of-mouth and informal contact with former students to track outcomes. Two-thirds of regional community education providers who were able to track outcomes report that at least half of their students proceed to further study or employment, compared with less than half of students with metropolitan providers.

The number of foundation skill subject enrolments and completions and the different profiles of students with regional community education providers confirms their effectiveness at meeting the needs of local populations. These outcomes suggest that community education providers can assist their students in accessing VET and employment opportunities, as well as helping develop an individual's social capital. However, to measure and confirm the wider social and economic effects of foundation skills training delivered by community education providers, further research could compare the social inclusion and participation status of community education students before and after undertaking the training.



A profile of foundation skills training in regional Australia

This study employed mixed methods, including an online survey of both regional and metropolitan-based³ community education providers; semi-structured telephone interviews with trainers and managers from both regional and metropolitan community education providers; an analysis of inquiries to the Reading Writing Hotline service⁴; and an analysis of data from the Total VET Activity (TVA) Collection. Details of the methodological approach are in appendix A.

Who is delivering foundation skills?

In 2019, 220 community education providers delivered nationally recognised training, of which 191 provided training to students located in regional areas. Of these providers, 159 (83.2%) had enrolments in foundation skills subjects. This rate is similar for community education providers in major cities (84.9%) and higher than other training providers in regional areas (72%; NCVET 2019).

The following analyses are based on these regional community education providers who provide foundation skills training. Where relevant, comparisons are made with community education providers in major cities and other training providers in regional areas who also provided foundation skills training.

Disaggregating enrolments in 2019 by the component parts of foundation skills shows that both regional community educator providers and other regional training providers have **more** enrolments in employability skills subjects than in LLN subjects (subjects are also known as ‘units of competency’). Conversely, community education providers in major cities have more enrolments in LLN subjects than in employability skills subjects (figure 1).

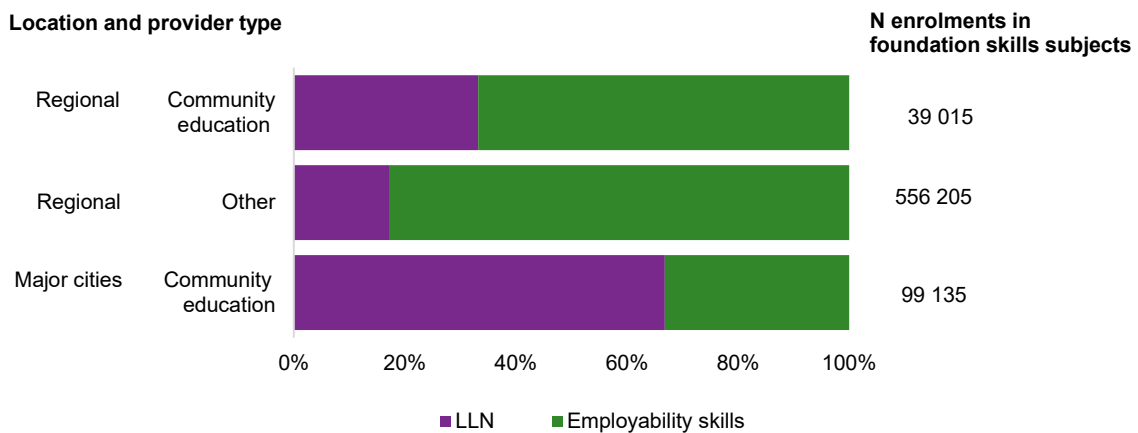
Key points

- Proportionally more regional community education providers deliver foundation skills training than other regional providers.
- Enrolments in foundation skills subjects with regional community education providers increased between 2015 and 2018 but have since declined.

3 The terms ‘metropolitan’ and ‘major cities’ are used interchangeably in this report and include the capital cities (excluding Hobart and Darwin), and major urban areas such as Newcastle, Geelong and the Gold Coast, based on the 2011 Accessibility and Remoteness Index for Australia (ARIA). The terms ‘non-metropolitan’ and ‘regional’ (locations other than major cities) are also used interchangeably.

4 The Reading Writing Hotline is a free national referral service for adults seeking help with literacy and numeracy.

Figure 1 Relative balance of enrolments in nationally recognised LLN and employability skills subjects for students aged 18-64 by location and provider type¹, 2019 (%)

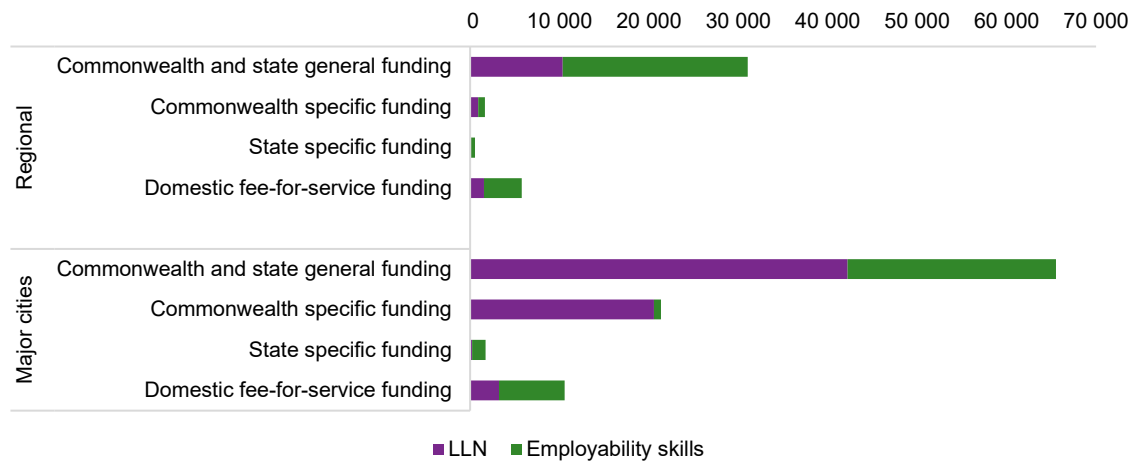


Source: NCVET 2019 Total VET Activity Collection.

¹ 'Other' training providers includes TAFE institutes, universities, schools, enterprise providers, and private RTOs.

Survey respondents and interviewees in regional areas perceived that employability skills were prioritised in government funding over LLN skills. This view is supported by an analysis of the relevant TVA data, which shows that two-thirds of regional enrolments with community education providers funded through Commonwealth and state funding are in employability skills subjects (figure 2). For metropolitan community education providers, funding from these sources supports a higher proportion of LLN than employability skills subject enrolments (figure 2).

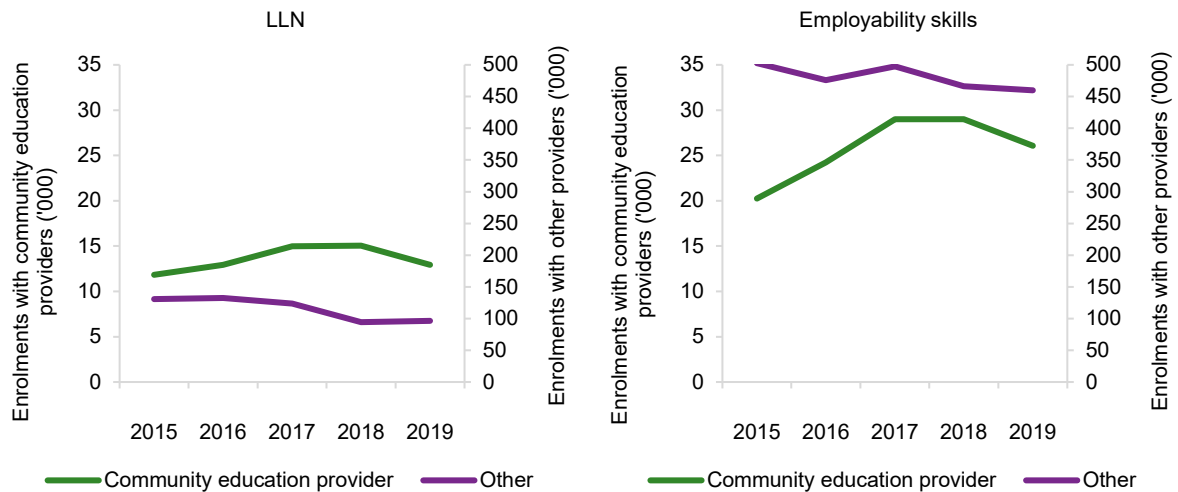
Figure 2 Relative balance of enrolments in nationally recognised LLN and employability skills subjects for students aged 18-64 by funding source for community education providers, 2019



Source: NCVET 2019 Total VET Activity Collection.

Between 2015 and 2018, the number of enrolments in both LLN and employability skills subjects with community education providers increased and then held steady in regional areas but have since declined. Enrolments with other regional training providers declined over this period and have been relatively stable since 2018 (figure 3). These two trends have implications for future resourcing and distribution of government funding by provider type.

Figure 3 Enrolments in nationally recognised foundation skills subjects in regional areas for students aged 18-64 by provider type, 2015-2019 ('000)

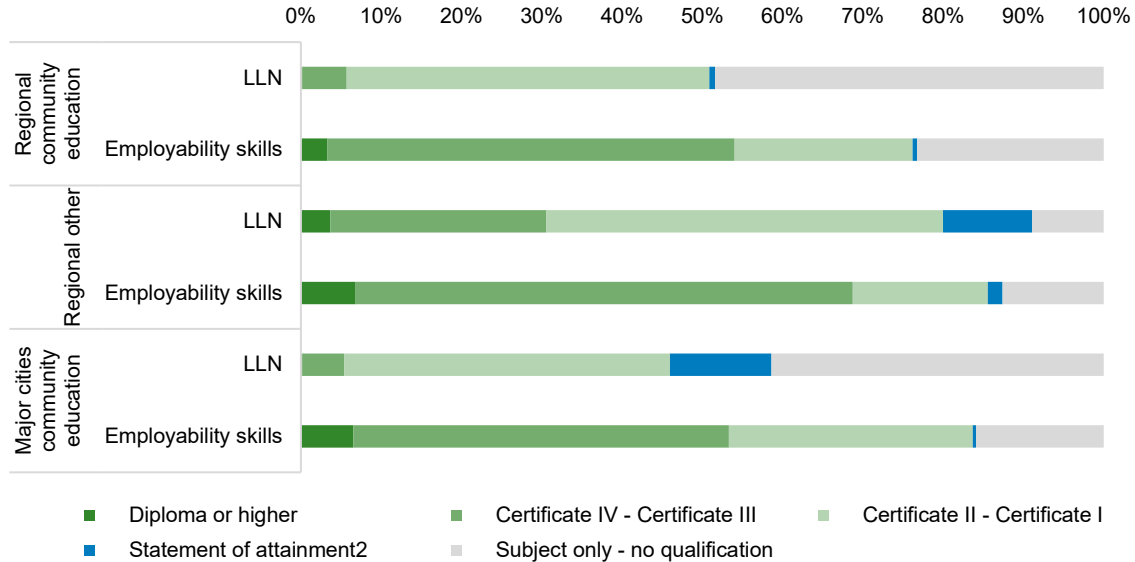


Source: NCVER 2019 Total VET Activity Collection.

1 'Other' training providers includes TAFE institutes, universities, schools, enterprise providers, and private RTOs.

Similar proportions of LLN subject enrolments with community education providers, in both regional areas and major cities, were undertaken as part of a qualification and as stand-alone subjects. For other regional training providers, a higher proportion of LLN subject enrolments were undertaken as part of a qualification than as stand-alone subjects (figure 4).

Figure 4 Program level of foundation skills subject enrolments for students aged 18-64 by provider type¹ and location, 2019 (%)



Source: NCVER 2019 Total VET Activity Collection.

1 'Other' training providers includes TAFE institutes, universities, schools, enterprise providers, and private RTOs.

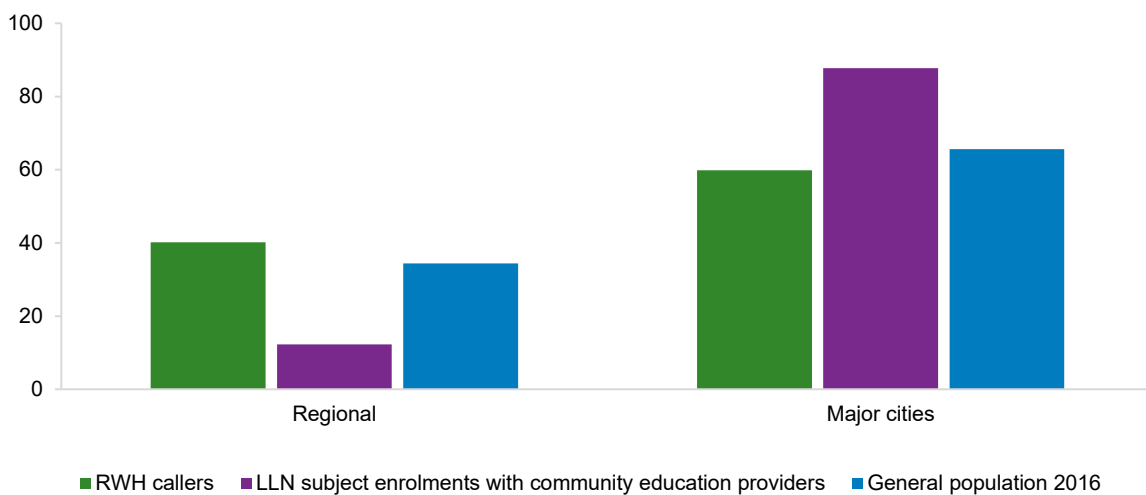
2 A statement of attainment represents completion of a training package skill set or an accredited course.

Insights from the Reading Writing Hotline data

Calls to the Reading Writing Hotline (RWH) service represent a measure of unmet need for foundation skills, although they are likely to under-represent actual need⁵.

In 2018, there were 1 016 callers to the RWH service aged between 15-64 years. Of these, 992 provided information about their location of residency. Forty per cent of callers to the RWH service in regional areas had an educational attainment of year 9 or less. This is slightly higher than the proportion of the general population aged 15-64 years with low educational attainment in regional areas in 2016. Of note is that people with low educational attainment in regional areas are under-represented in enrolments in LLN subjects with regional community education providers. Conversely, for people with low educational attainment in metropolitan areas, the proportion of LLN enrolments was considerably higher than the proportion of callers to the RWH service and the general population (figure 5).

Figure 5 For persons aged 15-64 with highest education of Year 9 or less, location of callers to the Reading Writing Hotline 2018^{1,2}, enrolments in LLN subjects with community education providers 2019³ and general population 2016⁴ (%)



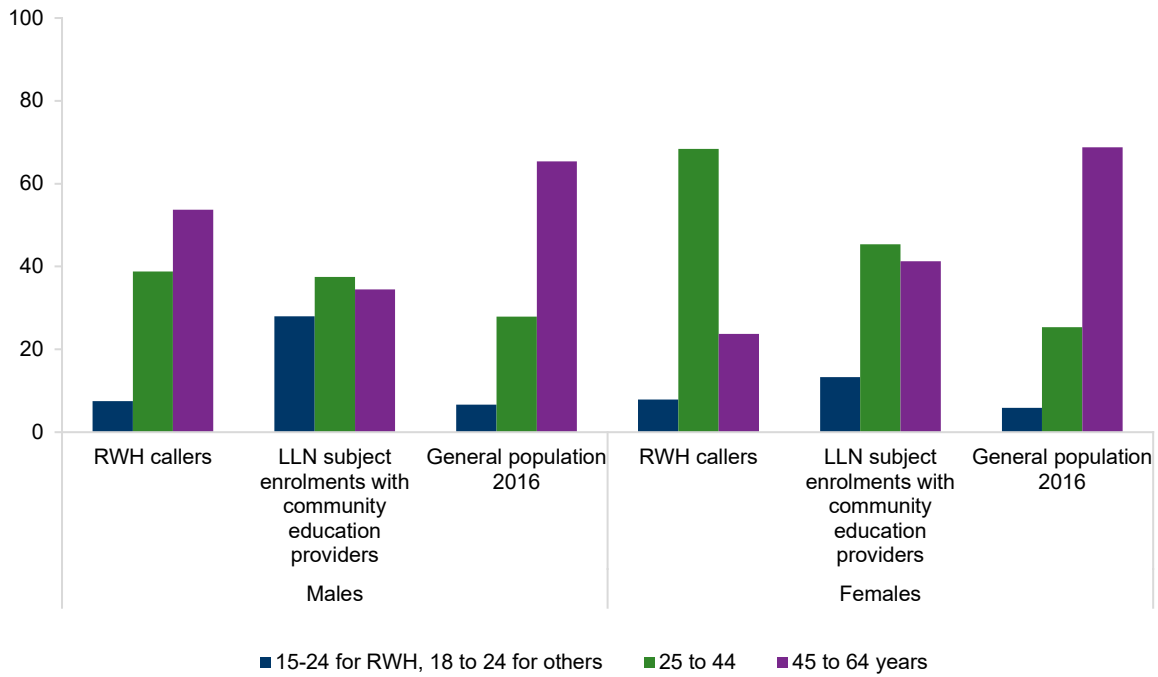
Source: 1 Reading Writing Hotline callers, January-October 2018; 2 Excludes callers to the Reading Writing Hotline who had completed special education; 3 NCVET 2019 Total VET Activity Collection; 4 Census 2016; excludes persons in other territories; migratory, offshore and shipping; and no usual address.

Age and gender

Of those with low levels of education attainment (year 9 or lower) in regional areas, we find a disparity between the proportion of callers to the RWH service and the proportion of LLN subject enrolments with community education providers for older males aged 45-64 years. A similar disparity is found for females aged 25-44 years (figure 6). This may suggest that community education providers have difficulty reaching these particular cohorts, or that they prefer training with other providers.

5 Some Australians would be unaware of the availability of the Hotline service. Others do not seek assistance due to embarrassment, fear of their literacy level 'being found out' or language difficulties (Iles 2020). Finally, some regional areas have poor mobile phone coverage (ACCC 2017).

Figure 6 For persons aged 15-64 with highest education of Year 9 or less in regional areas, callers to the Reading Writing Hotline¹ 2018, enrolments in LLN subjects with community education providers² 2019, and general population³ 2016, by age and gender (%)



Source: 1 Reading Writing Hotline callers, January-October 2018; 2 NCVET 2019 Total VET Activity Collection; 3 Census 2016; excludes persons in other territories; migratory, offshore and shipping; and no usual address.



What works in the delivery of foundation skills in regional areas?

A key remit for community education providers is to prepare adult learners for further education, generally VET, and/or employment. Given the characteristics of regional populations, do community education providers use any particular delivery models for the delivery of foundation skills training? What models work best for which types of learners?

Delivery models are defined here as the assets or infrastructure and competencies of community education providers (management and staff), that determine how training content is taught. They are moderated by the value and security of funding. Given that all these aspects vary between community education providers, as do the types of students and their needs, there was no standard delivery model amongst community education providers.

Key points

- Uncertainty about future funding, planning using relatively short timeframes and fluctuations in student numbers adversely impact delivery.
- Fostering student engagement using specific teaching strategies underpins successful delivery.
- Little is known about pathways after foundation skills training due to limited capacity to track student outcomes.

Insights into student profiles

Survey respondents and interview participants described their students as vulnerable locals with low incomes, few skills, and low levels of LLN skills with little confidence in their abilities and job prospects. Their students include unemployed persons, older migrants from non-English speaking countries, job seekers and welfare recipients, students from foster homes or detention centres, and young people from homeless shelters; whose ages range from teens to older than 50 years. Many have some form of disability, ill-health, drug and alcohol problems or mental health problems, which affect their ability to gain skills and find employment.

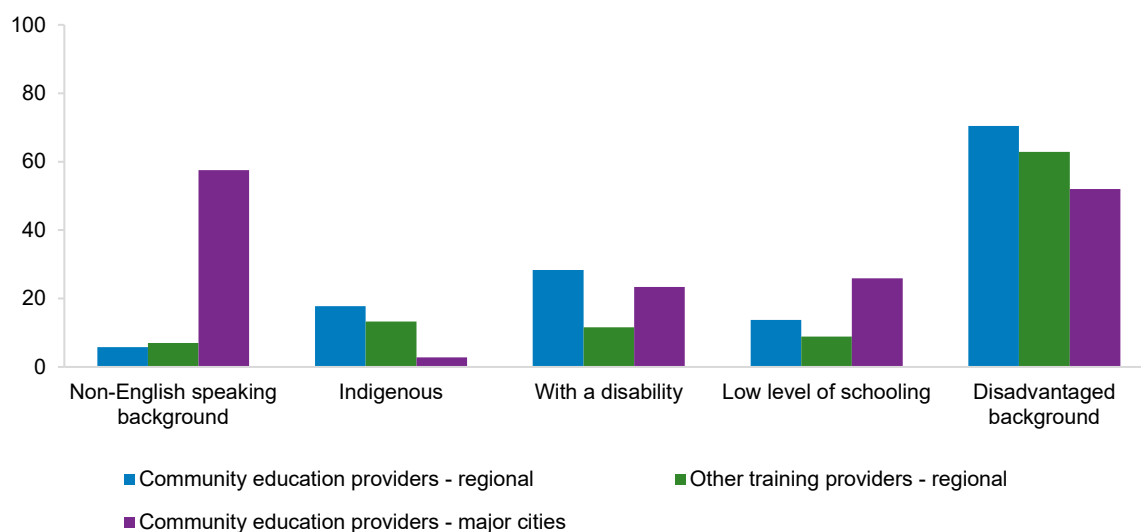
This picture is supported by TVA data. For example, the proportion of enrolments in foundation skills subjects by students from a non-English speaking background is much higher in major cities than regional areas, and similar for both types of regional providers (figure 7). Both regional and metropolitan community education providers also have higher rates of students with a disability than other regional training providers (figure 7) with interviewees explaining that this is likely due to their flexible course delivery, which is more suitable for the needs of disadvantaged students in general. Comments from survey respondents and interviewees were consistent with this profile:

‘The ACE/community colleges sector works with the most disadvantaged...’

‘People that come into our organisation would not go to an educational centre like an RTO or TAFE.’

These comments reveal that at least some students view community education providers as their best (or only) option for foundations skills training and training in general.

Figure 7 Enrolments in nationally recognised foundation skills subjects¹ for students aged 18-64 years by indicators of disadvantage², location, and provider type³, 2019 (%)



Source: NCVET 2019 Total VET Activity Collection.

1 As a percentage of enrolments in each type of foundation skills subject and location.

2 Low level of schooling is defined as Year 9 or lower and did not complete schooling. 'Disadvantaged background' is based on the percentage of enrolments in quintiles 1 and 2 of the SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage.

3 'Other' includes TAFE institutes, universities, schools, enterprise providers, and private training providers.

Many respondents noted that women often outnumbered men and that more younger people were participating in their foundation skills training than in the past. Age, gender, previous experiences of education and work and motivations all influence whether certain groups participate in foundation skills training, and the way course material is taught and delivered. They also influence pathways, if any, after completion (Kochoian et al. 2017; Wickramasinghe & Bowman 2018; Hitka et al. 2019).

The respondents' insights on age and gender are confirmed by the TVA data, which shows there were more females than males enrolled in foundation skills subjects across most age groups. For enrolments in LLN subjects, a higher proportion of students aged 18-24 years were enrolled with regional community education providers than with metropolitan community education providers. There is no real difference between regional and metropolitan community education providers in the age-sex structure of employability skills students (figure 8).

Figure 8 Age-sex structure of students aged 18-64 years enrolled in nationally recognised LLN and employability skills subjects with community education providers by location, 2019 (%)

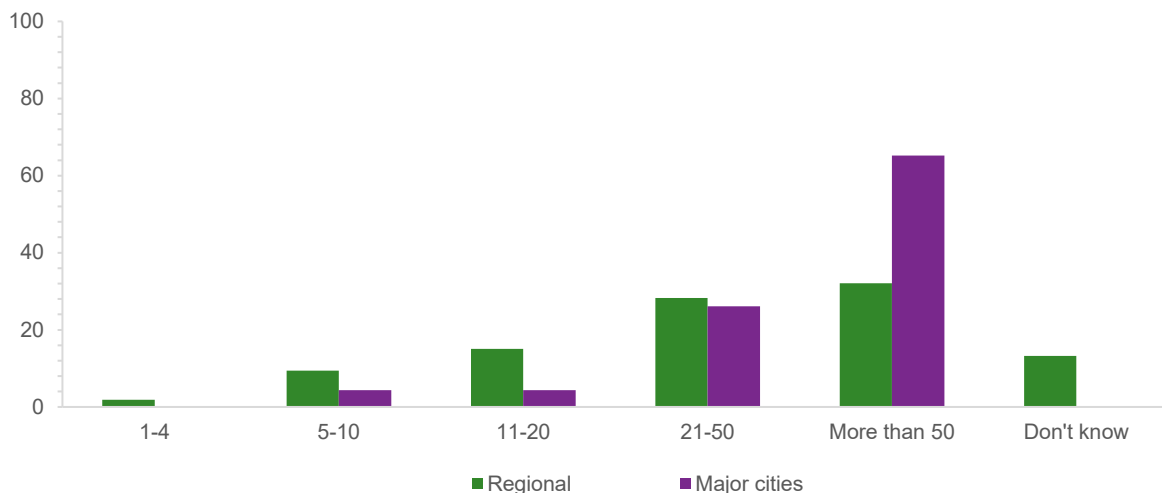


Source: NCVET 2019 Total VET Activity Collection.

Responses to the survey highlighted that variability in student numbers made it difficult for community education providers to budget and plan, especially in regional areas with fewer students. The small and fluctuating numbers reduce the economies of scale for regional community education providers that are available to metropolitan community education providers. As one respondent noted, ‘Accessibility for rural participants and enrolment numbers are always a challenge. There is never enough funding to deliver small classes that are realistic in the regional sector.’

Survey responses indicated that a little over half of regional providers have 50 students or less on average per year, noting that some classes may have fewer than ten students where several classes are delivered per year (figure 9).

Figure 9 Community education providers’ estimates of the average number of students enrolled in foundation skills training in last 12 months by location, 2019 (%)



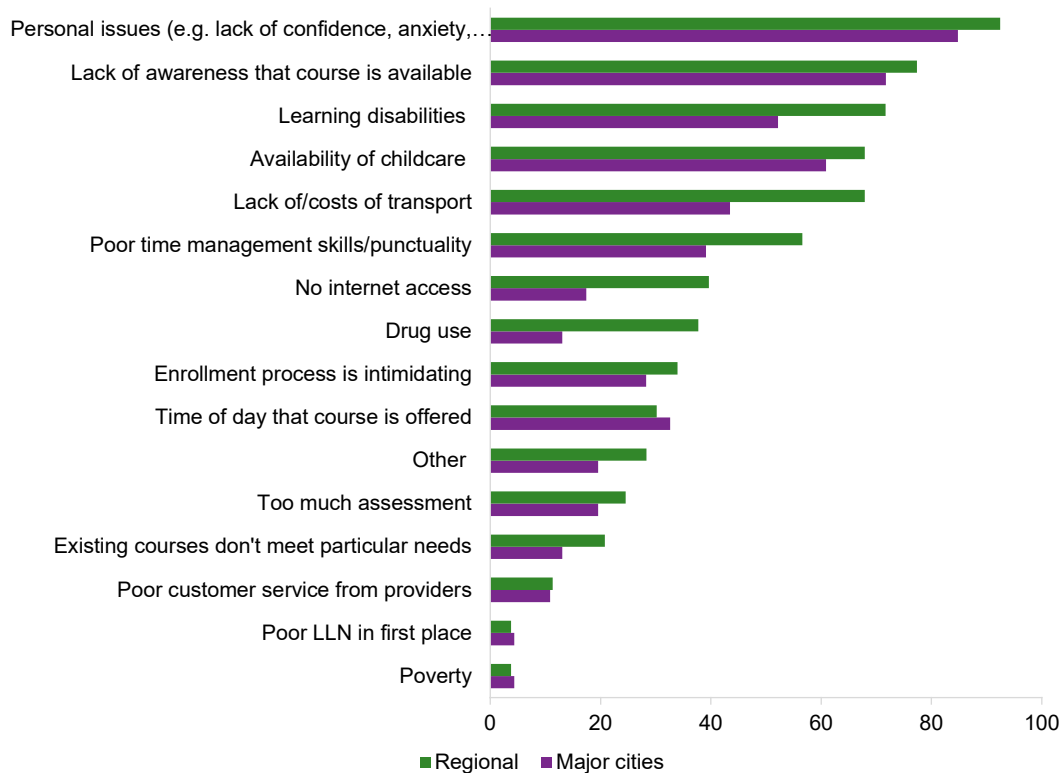
Source: Online survey of community education providers conducted between December 2018 and February 2019.

Enrolment, attendance and completion

Survey and interview respondents noted that students who require foundation skills are often highly disadvantaged in many ways and face daily issues.

Personal issues and not knowing foundation skills training is available are the two main barriers to the take-up of foundation skills training with community education providers, regardless of location (figure 10). The main differences in barriers between regional and metropolitan areas, where these barriers were perceived as higher in regional areas, included drug use, access to and cost of transport, lack of internet access, learning disabilities and poor time management skills/punctuality.

Figure 10 Community education providers' perceptions of barriers for students to undertake foundation skills training by location (multiple response), 2019 (%)

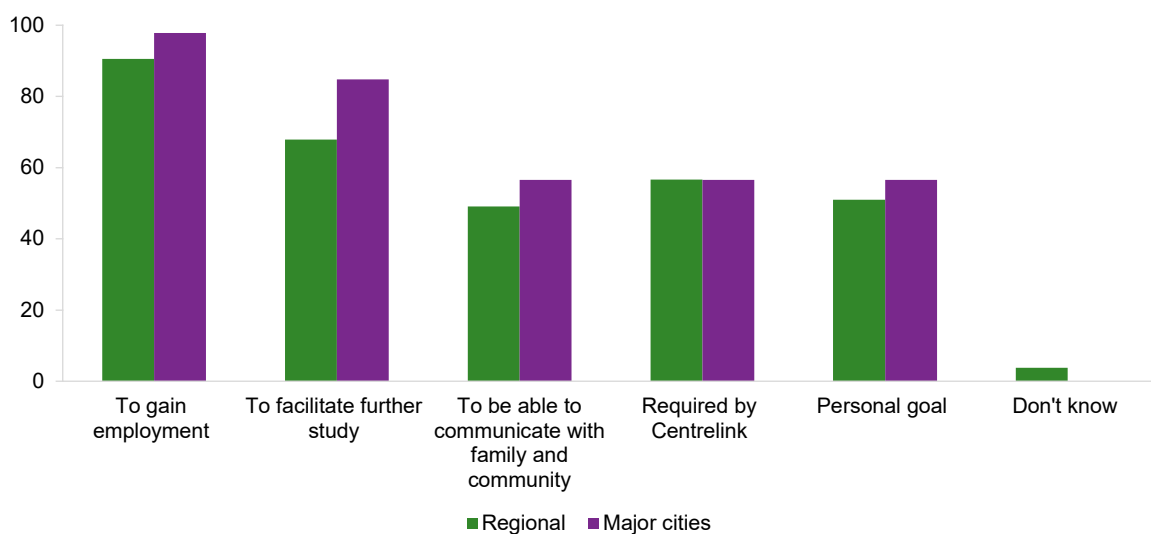


Source: Online survey of community education providers conducted between December 2018 and February 2019

Given the types of issues students experienced, attendance at training may be difficult. There may be a link between non-attendance and non-completion. Most interviewees reported they followed up non-attendees to find out why they did not attend the class. They offered ways for students to catch up on the missed material. Usually, students reported transport, illness, or cultural and other personal reasons for non-attendance. Attendance records of students referred by a job agency or Centrelink were reported to those agencies.

There were no real differences between regional and metropolitan respondents' perceptions of their students' motivations (figure 11), except as preparation for further study: regional students were considered less likely than metropolitan students to be doing foundation skills training for that reason. The main motivation was to improve employability, which interviewees frequently said was due to directives from Centrelink.

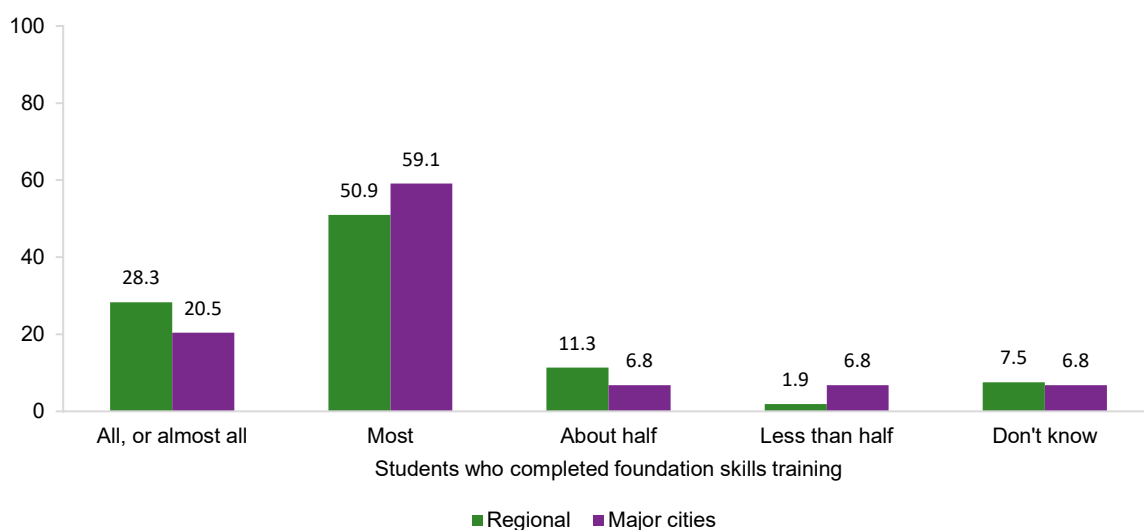
Figure 11 Community education providers' perceptions of their students' main motivations for undertaking foundation skills training by location (multiple response), 2019 (%)



Source: Online survey of community education providers conducted between December 2018 and February 2019.

Subject completions are a key measure of provider performance and an indicator of the ability of individuals to enter VET or employment. Despite the poor attendance rates in foundation skills training reported by some providers, survey respondents indicated that, over the last three years, the majority of community education students in both regional and metropolitan locations completed their training (figure 12).

Figure 12 Community education providers' perceptions of the number of students who completed foundation skills training over the last three years, 2019 (%)



Source: Online survey of community education providers conducted between December 2018 and February 2019.

An analysis of results in the TVA data shows a higher proportion of foundation skills subjects in regional areas were completed by disadvantaged students with community education providers than with other training providers. Looking only at community education providers, a higher proportion of LLN subjects were completed by disadvantaged students in regional areas than in metropolitan areas (table 1). This outcome defies higher levels of disadvantage, generally associated with worse training outcomes (McVicar & Tabasso 2016).

Table 1 Foundation skills subjects completed¹ by location, provider type, and disadvantage³ for students aged 18-64, 2019 (%)

Provider type	Regional				Major cities	
	Community education providers		Other providers ²		Community education providers	
<i>Disadvantage</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>>=1</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>>=1</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>>=1</i>
LLN subjects	82.2	79.0	71.2	67.5	79.6	69.0
Employability skills subjects	72.6	71.2	68.6	60.2	77.6	75.4
Total foundation skills subjects	75.0	73.9	68.9	61.6	78.3	70.8

Source: Total VET Activity subject enrolments 2019.

1 Defined as 'assessed – passed' and 'not assessed – completed'. Excludes 'assessed – failed'.

2 'Other' includes TAFE institutes, universities, schools, enterprise providers, and private training providers.

3 Defined as having one or more of the following characteristics: speaking language other than English at home, disability, Indigenous, low level of schooling (Year 9 or below or did not complete schooling), or in SEIFA IRD quintiles 1 or 2.

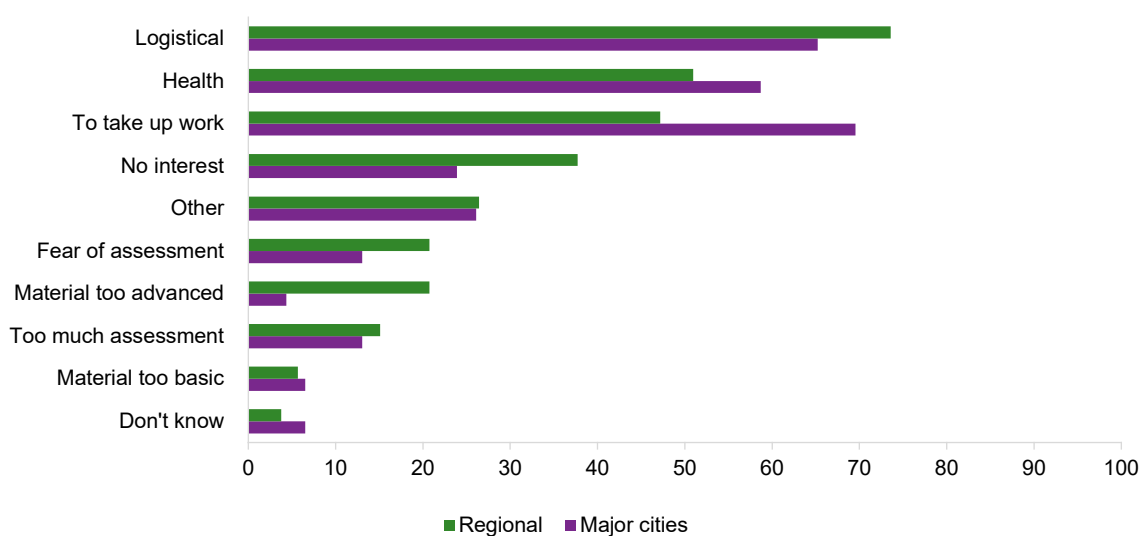
Factors associated with regional community education providers appear to counteract the effects of disadvantage. This pattern could be because:

- regional community education providers may be more likely to act as anchor institutions⁶ for example and have positive impacts on community development beyond their remit of education, or
- the smaller size of local populations may help form stronger interpersonal relationships with students and thus better learning outcomes.

Community education providers reported that sometimes students who did not complete on their first attempt tried again. The key reasons perceived by survey respondents as to why students with community education providers in both regional and metropolitan areas did not complete their foundation skills training were logistical concerns, health issues and to take up work. Compared with metropolitan community education providers, a higher proportion of regional community education provider respondents cited the learning materials being too advanced or that their students lacked interest as reasons for non-completion. Conversely, compared with regional community education providers, a higher of metropolitan community education provider respondents cited taking up work as a reason for non-completion (figure 13). It was pointed out that even students who did not complete still benefited from the training they did receive.

6 An anchor institution is usually a large not-for-profit organisation, such as an educational institution or hospital, playing a significant role in a locality by making strategic contributions to the local economy and community. Their invested capital, mission and relationship with the community (including individuals and business) means that they have strong ties to a location that they are less likely to break than smaller private enterprises (Harris & Holley 2016).

Figure 13 Community education providers' perceptions of students' reasons for not completing foundation skills training (multiple response) by location, 2019 (%)



Source: Online survey of community education providers conducted between December 2018 and February 2019

Recognition of achievement

Students who complete individual foundation skills subjects or the full training receive a statement of attainment or certificate. Survey respondents felt that most students appreciated this recognition, given that they frequently remarked that it was the first time they had received recognition for anything at all. The symbol of achievement promoted a sense of empowerment and accomplishment, especially for people with disabilities. While some students found the certificate useful when finding a job, respondents observed that others valued it privately and would not show it to a potential employer to avoid signalling the need to do foundation skills training in the first place.

Not all students appreciated the symbolism of a certificate of achievement. The interviewees agreed that students forced to attend the training by a job agency or Centrelink, or students undertaking training mainly to socialise tended to be indifferent to receiving certificates. Others were more interested in the outcomes of the training and gaining new skills, rather than formal recognition.

Funding and administration

A higher proportion of regional respondents than metropolitan respondents reported that getting *sufficient* funding had been difficult in the previous three years. There was little difference between regional and metropolitan-based respondents in terms of their perceptions of the *security* of funding (figure 14). Where funding was reliable, respondents saw its value as problematic. Comments on funding included:

‘LLN training used to be free or very low cost. Now students have to pay tuition fees for basic literacy support.’

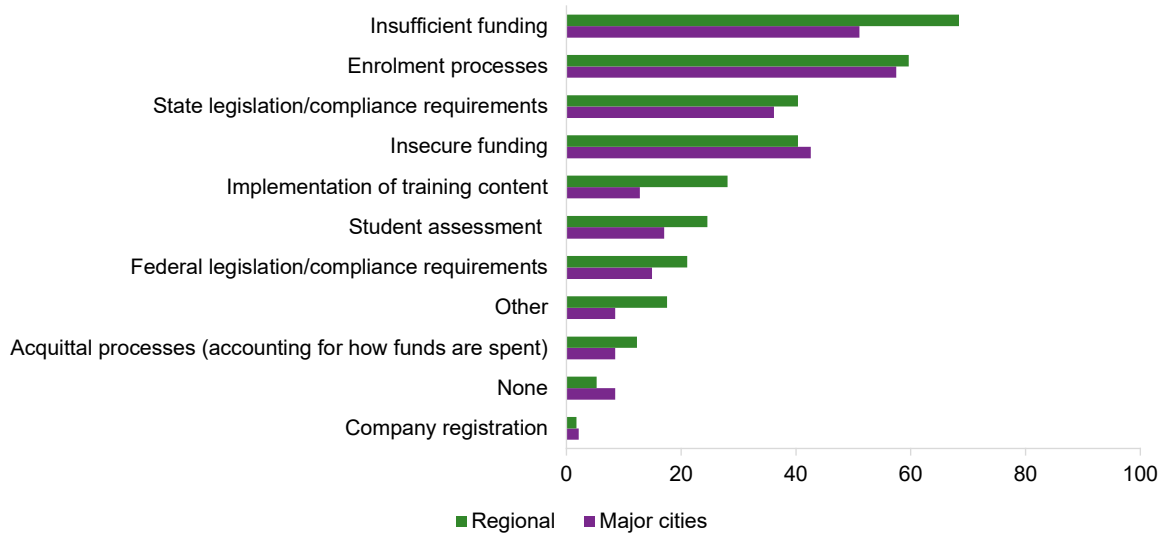
‘We have things working fairly well, but we are only just covering costs as the effort in foundation skills, particularly at low levels is not understood by funding bodies.’

‘... Given the amount changes every year, no forward planning can be done, and current concession prices can be difficult to set because of this.’

‘We’re seriously looking at whether as a very small organisation we can continue to deliver training... Funding is extremely tight..... I will be glad when I retire as I feel I cannot give my students value in their learning due to government funding and restraints.’

The only other administrative issue covered in the survey that was more important for regional respondents than metropolitan respondents, was implementing training content (i.e. having the resources to implement teaching strategies and address course material; figure 14).

Figure 14 Administrative difficulties experienced by community education providers when delivering foundation skills training in last three years by location (multiple response), 2019 (%)

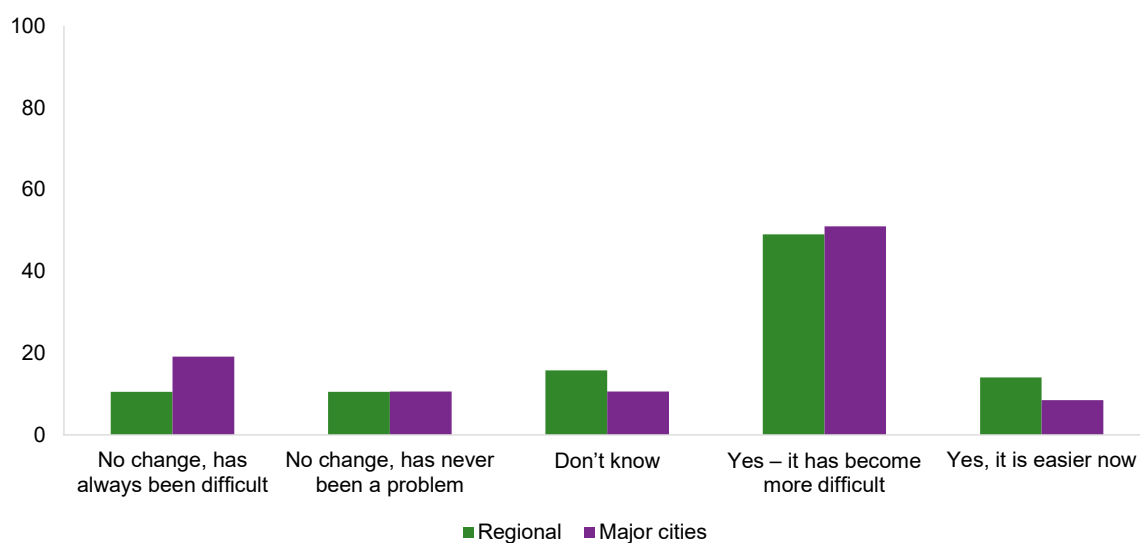


Source: Online survey of community education providers conducted between December 2018 and February 2019

An insight picked up in the interviews in reference to Indigenous students (and possibly relevant to other students) was the value of ‘rolling intakes’ to encourage enrolments; being able to enrol at any time better suited the students than fixed dates. Community education providers have the flexibility to address needs at any level at any time. Unfortunately, rolling intakes are not compatible with administration systems based on fixed dates and durations. Translating the results of this delivery style to formal reporting for the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) or other agencies is difficult.

Providing training has become difficult for more than half of the respondents (figure 15).

Figure 15 Whether community education providers' ability to deliver foundation skills training has changed over the last 3 years by location, 2019 (%)



Source: Online survey of community education providers conducted between December 2018 and February 2019

Most foundation skills training provided by the interviewed providers was government-funded, either through state or federal government, or both. Sometimes students had to pay a small contribution, but there was almost always a tension between cost and affordability. Respondents emphasised that students needing foundation skills training are mostly in disadvantaged circumstances and unable to undertake the training if they had to pay. Almost all providers described their funding as inadequate to meet the demand for the foundation skills training. One regional respondent reported that their foundation skills training needed twice as many students compared with other training to be able to cover the costs, and that generally, funding for foundation training is lower than for other training. The respondents explained that foundation skills students, particularly LLN students, need extra support (such as more individual attention) than government funding can cover. As Dymock (2012) also found, many of the providers had to find additional funds by charging fees to the referring body or by organising fetes or craft sales.

Providers felt that funding should not be tied to training packages (nationally accredited courses) and that more should be available for non-nationally recognised foundation skills training, which is more flexible and sometimes better suited for highly disadvantaged students with different learning styles and negative experiences of classroom environments.

The interviews allowed respondents to expand on the difficulties associated with implementing training content for nationally recognised training, related to the requirements prescribed by ASQA and the Australian Core Skills Framework. Teachers had some scope to vary their teaching methods but were not always able to meet the needs of some students. Providers of non-nationally recognised or informal training had complete flexibility to design the training around student needs. The prevalence of this type of training amongst community education providers meant that regardless of location, most survey respondents did not find the implementation of training content difficult.

Staffing

Community education providers in both regional and metropolitan areas had difficulty in finding qualified staff, but the problem was particularly acute in regional areas. Survey respondents in regional areas were much more likely to be small organisations with fewer than five full-time equivalent employees (figure 16).

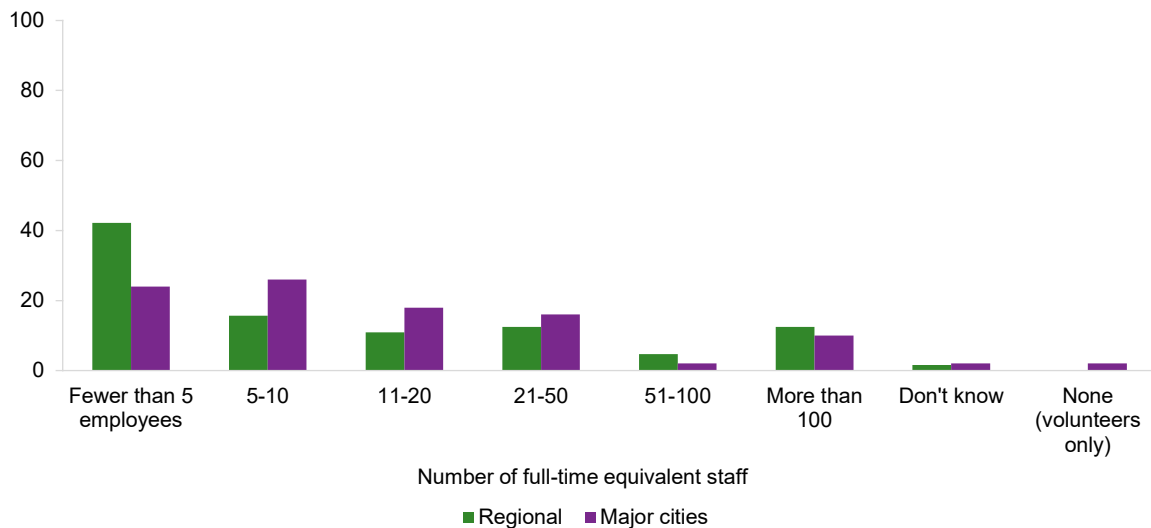
Some survey respondents commented on the difficulty in finding qualified staff and funding restrictions:

‘It is extremely difficult to find LLN trainers NT wide.’

‘LLN practitioners will soon be extinct. Many providers are slowly reducing their staff numbers, and LLN specialists are the first to go from our organisation. X employs people with Cert. IVs in Health and Fitness to teach LLN, rather than qualified and experienced professional LLN teachers.’

‘Most [foundation skills teachers of Indigenous students] are heading for retirement.’

Figure 16 Number of full-time equivalent staff in community education providers by location¹, 2019 (%)

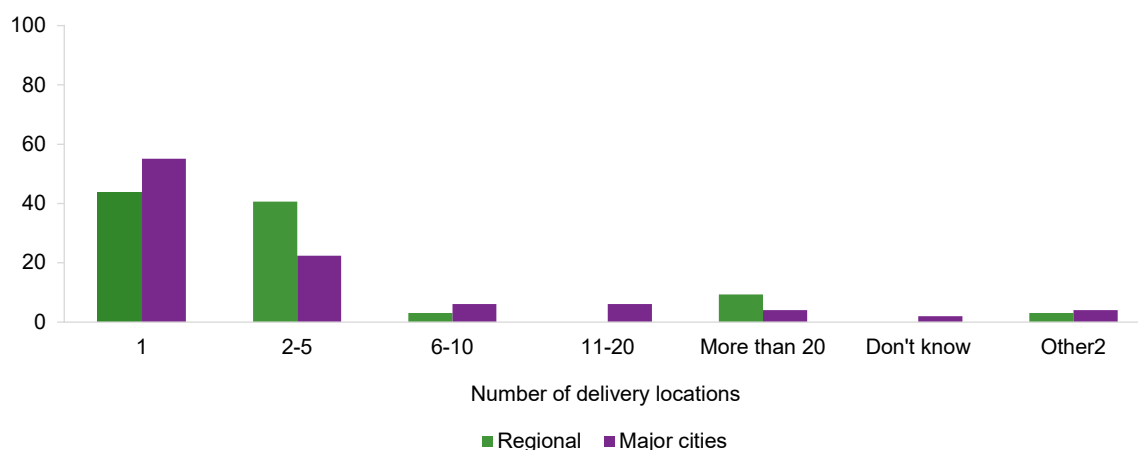


Source: Online survey of community education providers conducted between December 2018 and February 2019.

¹ The relatively large proportion of regional community education providers with more than full-time staff consists of organisations that operate in both regional and major cities.

Just over half of the regional community education providers responding to the survey operate in more than one location (figure 17). Given the long distances between locations in regional areas, small staff numbers, and the absence of online delivery, survey respondents reported that staff spend considerable time travelling.

Figure 17 Number of community education provider¹ delivery locations, by location, 2019 (%)



Source: Online survey of community education providers conducted between December 2018 and February 2019

1 The perhaps unexpectedly large proportion operating in more than 10 locations represents providers operating in both metropolitan and regional areas, which are categorised as regional.

2 The 'other' cases include outreach programs in local areas and state-wide using facilities such as schools.

Teaching methods

Class-based, face-to-face teaching was the standard mode of delivery for foundation skills among survey respondents and interviewees. Although the number of sessions per week and length of each session varied between providers and between individual students, overall, most training took six to twelve months to complete (with a minimum of ten weeks), depending on how many units or subjects the students undertook.

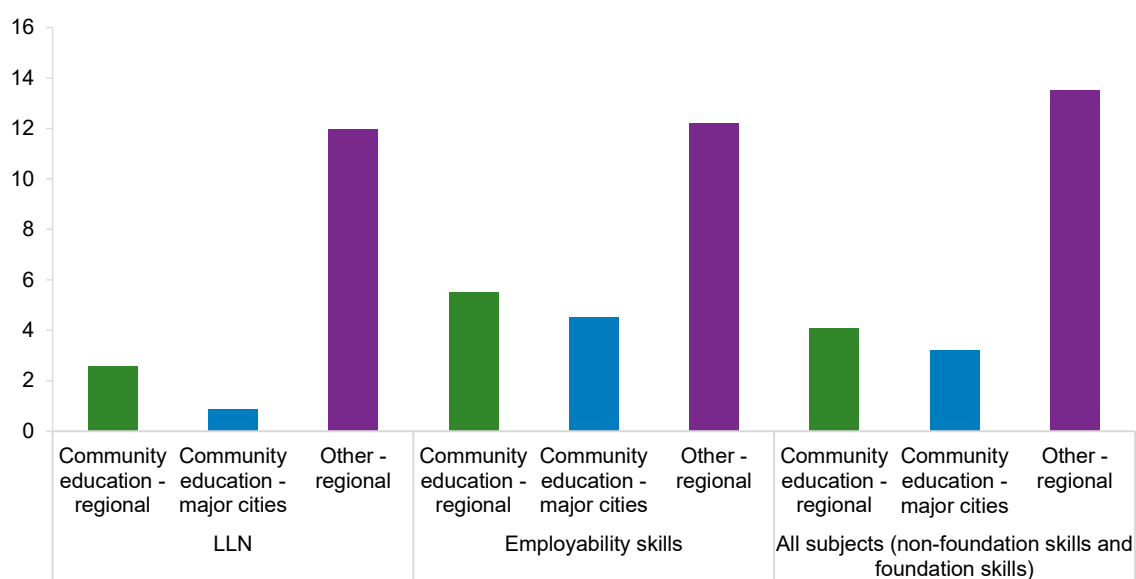
Online learning can be a cost-effective delivery mode for education and training in regional areas. TVA data show that other providers in regional areas deliver about 12% of LLN and employability skills subjects and about 14% of all subjects in this way (figure 18).

However, community education providers emphasised that online delivery is generally not suitable for foundation skills training, especially in LLN, as reflected in figure 18. Their position may reflect the types of students they service - several made comments such as:

'This might appear, on the face of it, to be slack on our part; however, the level of computer skills and/or access among the target cohorts is typically quite limited.'

Survey respondents said that their students did not have the necessary prerequisite LLN and digital (LLND) skills required for online training, and internet access was not available or reliable in many areas.

Figure 18 Proportion of enrolments in foundations skills subjects delivered online for students aged 18-64 years by location and provider type¹, 2019 (%)



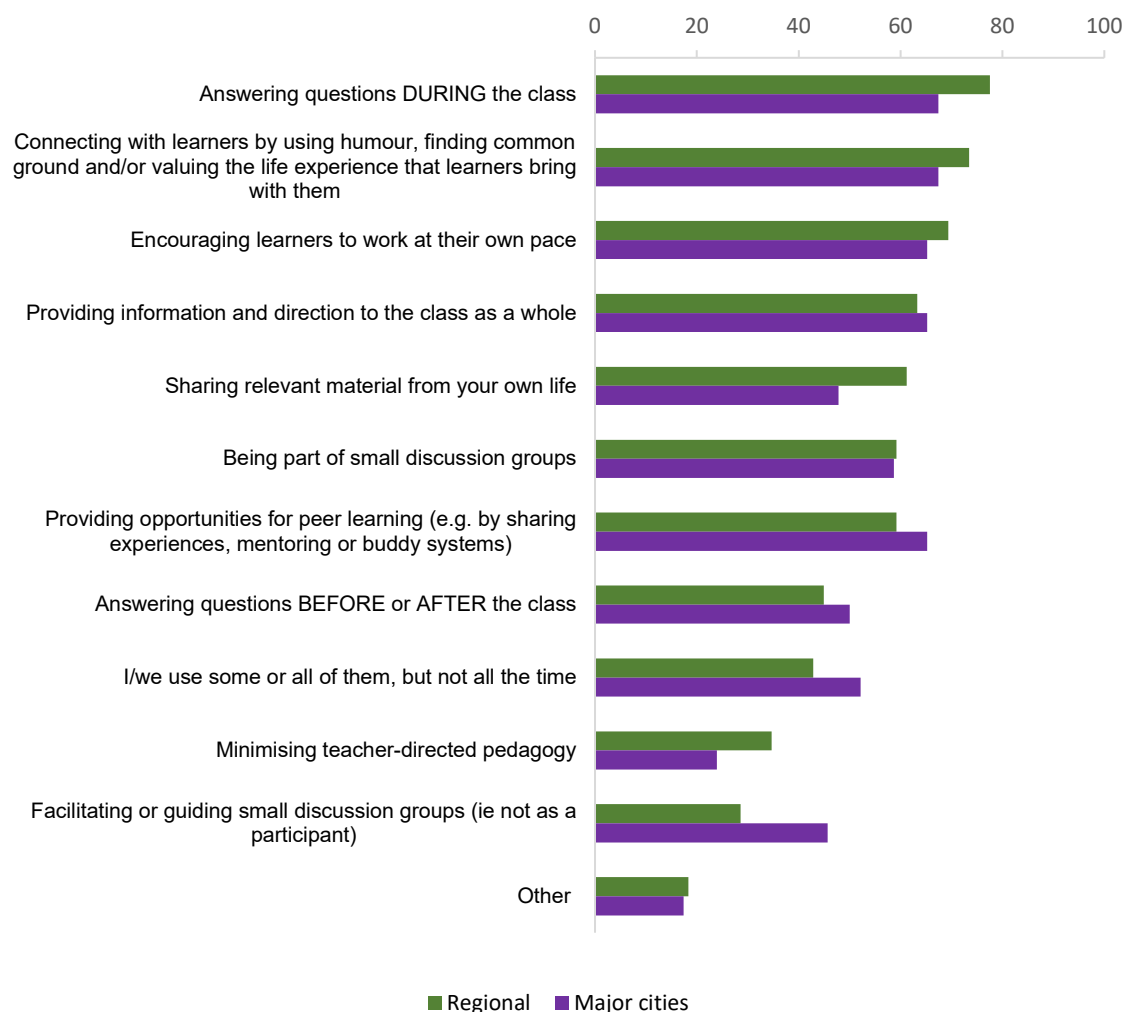
Source: NCVER 2019 Total VET Activity Collection.

¹ 'Other' training providers includes TAFE institutes, universities, schools, enterprise providers and private training providers.

Most providers gave students a written and verbal overview at the beginning of the training. Trainers accommodated personal learning styles, identified by informal conversations, or by observing student attitudes and behaviours. They used a variety of teaching devices, including written exercises, visual activities, observations, role plays, practical exercises, and hands-on activities. Almost all interviewees commented that relevant hands-on activities were most popular with students, and most were not interested in book and pen tasks.

The online survey found some differences in teaching approaches between regional and metropolitan community education providers (figure 19). A higher proportion of regional providers answer questions from students during the class rather than before or after, share relevant personal life experiences and minimise traditional classroom-based settings for example. They are much less likely to facilitate or guide small discussion groups than metropolitan providers. These patterns are likely to be related to smaller class sizes.

Figure 19 Teaching strategies used by community education providers by location (multiple response), 2019 (%)



Source: Online survey of community education providers conducted between December 2018 and February 2019

The ‘other’ responses from the survey provided greater detail and identified other useful teaching strategies:

‘Out of class excursions to work and/or training relevant sites. ... These activities are highly valued by our students.’

‘This year we have hired a job seeker who volunteers with our organisation to deliver two classes of our WorkReady training - providing him with invaluable work skills and confidence and providing peer support within the class.’

‘Encouraging learners to volunteer at the centre or in the community.’

‘Learner led learning: flexible curriculum that allows teachers to incorporate issues raised by students.’

‘Make the learning relatable (why we are learning this?)’

‘Providing hands-on creative arts, building and construction, beauty and make-up, landscape and horticulture programs gives the students something to focus on that is NOT LLN related. Then they

can learn ‘invisibly’ through embedded strategies while having fun. It’s much more effective than didactic teaching. Using experiential, practical learning techniques and social group bonding.’

‘Sometimes play can be a very effective tool. We have played Two Up in the classroom ... We’ve also used games such as Monopoly and similar and this translated well too.’

‘Working with other local organisations and bodies in our community.’

One interviewee independently summarised all of the above comments:

‘Students will learn if the subject is linked/relatable to a student’s life or interest, small group learning, practical based and the student feels safe in their learning environment, which community education providers and LLN/employability training are designed to do.’

Flexibility in teaching strategies was important, also noted by Dymock (2012). Tutors helped students with issues as they arose, such as responding to a Centrelink letter. A trainer in rural Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory explained that her main teaching methods were practical activities and observations only, because the community had a cultural rule about not leaving a permanent record.

Another interviewee working with Indigenous students said that support from family members is very important. At least two members of a clan generally attend training sessions, acting as a support for an individual student. The support person (or persons) benefits from the training too and develops trust in the organisation and staff. Teachers also need to be aware of the role of the ‘skin system’ and body and sign language in their teaching strategies.

Generally, teachers based their methods on student preferences, experience, cultural needs, listening to their students, and observing their behaviours, learning and progress. They use a conversational speaking style and foster engagement by building a good relationship with individual students, building confidence, incorporating positive reinforcement for early successes and celebrating small achievements. Medlin’s (2016) review of the Australian literacy and numeracy workforce literature has also highlighted the importance of soft skills in teaching as well as technical expertise.

Some students were obligated to attend foundation skills training by Centrelink requirements. These students generally did not engage, and most did not benefit from the training. Motivating disengaged youth to attend was also difficult, necessitating the use of a pick-up service, counsellors, and assessors from a youth background. Student attendance and participation were also often affected by family responsibilities, cultural and religious events such as Ramadan, and drug and alcohol problems.

Goal setting

Almost all providers did some form of goal setting with their students. Some training incorporated a compulsory unit on goal setting. Others had individual consultations with their students before the training began about their short-term and long-term goals for employment and study. Trainers sometimes used a ‘vision board’ (a collage of post-it notes identifying goals and aspirations on a pinboard) to motivate students and help keep them on track. Each session included setting goals for the day, reviewing longer-term goals, and goals already reached.

Assessment, feedback and evaluation

Most providers had a formal assessment system using written and verbal assessments and observations of activities, such as mock interviews. They might use short-answer tests where students are asked to respond to various scenarios or situations. For example, one provider asked students to write a report on a recent museum visit. A Northern Territory provider commented that while there were ASQA requirements for formal assessment, the words ‘tests’ or ‘assessments’ were never used with Indigenous students. In these cases, a one-on-one discussion with students might be used to assess skills without calling it ‘assessment’.

Students could have several attempts to reach competency. Most providers tried to make their assessments as simple as possible. They offered accommodations such as a scribe, support workers for high need students, extra support and flexibility, quiet areas, more time to do the tasks, or use of special equipment. A few providers split the assessments into smaller tasks. Most providers gave written and verbal feedback.

A few providers either had simple, ongoing informal assessments but no tests, or no assessments at all, particularly in non-nationally recognised training. Instead, students are given immediate verbal feedback. Dymock (2012) also reported no or almost no formal assessment in non-nationally recognised LLN programs.

Most students completed some form of self-evaluation or training evaluation at the end of the training. Some trainers had a self-evaluation discussion with students in the form of reviewing their study plan and discussing their progress and goals.

Facilities

The physical facilities in which the foundation skills training was delivered were generally good. They were usually standard classrooms or training rooms provided with computers or laptops, internet access, and standard facilities such as tables, desks, projectors, whiteboards, and air conditioning and heating. Some rooms also offered bean bags and even a pool table to make the space more inviting. Childcare options were available with some of the providers; in one case there was a free creche service.

All venues had tea and coffee break facilities. Some provided morning tea and lunch. All providers supplied hard copy resources and writing materials.

An interviewee in a metropolitan location described the facilities as ‘basic but generally sufficient’. She had observed that the foundation skills training was allocated to the least desirable rooms on campus and that foundation skills students were sometimes denied access to computer rooms. She suggested that these instances occurred because foundation skills students were considered less important than other students.

One-on-one teaching took place in libraries, workplaces, cafes, or any place where the learners felt comfortable. One provider in remote parts of the Northern Territory described an unusual learning environment where trainers brought all equipment (laptops, Wi-Fi dongles, books, and pens) and delivered the class outside under a tree, or in a space below a house. Sometimes this class had access to council premises.

Professional development and practice

Professional development is a key means of capacity building and improving standards. In the community education context, professional development encompasses flexible delivery methods, teaching plans, how to teach grammar, mental health awareness and mental first aid, assessment tasks and staying up to date with curricula in mainstream classes at school (to enable incorporating content into the foundation skills training with younger students).

Interview and survey respondents indicated that access to professional development opportunities in both regional and metropolitan areas is generally good. Staff in some organisations had access to further study for full qualifications relevant to teaching foundation skills. Sometimes the costs of professional development were funded by the organisation, but respondents reported that professional development is often at the individual trainer's expense.

The two providers that offer one-on-one tutor-student support (rather than group-based training) provided their tutors with professional development on how to be a tutor. This training is given by senior staff or volunteers. Support meetings are used to discuss teaching issues, share ideas and debriefing.

Although some of the interviewees' organisations use volunteer teachers, and volunteers are known to contribute a great deal of foundation skills teaching (Dymock 2012; Circelli 2015), volunteers are not funded to undertake professional staff development. Interviewees reported that volunteers are referred to peer support and assistance from more senior trainers.

Marketing and reach

Almost all community education providers surveyed or interviewed indicated that they gained referrals from job or disability agencies, state government departments such as the Department of Justice, community support organisations such as Parents Next, high schools, health services, Centrelink, the Reading Writing Hotline, and employers. Relationships between the community education providers and these entities are the most effective way of getting metropolitan students to enrol in foundation skills training. Most providers have a website and social media pages where they advertise their training. However, in regional areas, word of mouth and examples set by family and friends are the most effective ways of attracting students. Providing childcare (often by volunteers), kitchen facilities and snacks were also useful incentives.

Some providers use soft entry techniques to attract students, such as handing out flyers at shopping centres, schools, careers expos, open days, local markets, putting up signs at the libraries and giving talks at local events. The efficacy of such approaches is not clear as they do not directly target the people who need foundation skills and people with low levels of literacy or confidence are unlikely to sign up for a training course without support.

Many also offer personal interest or other vocational training, so providers were able to advise these students of the availability of foundation skills training. Completing foundation skills training is sometimes a prerequisite for enrolling in other vocational training for students with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills.

Occasionally, former students were invited back to talk about their experience to new students, or a former student's success story was filmed and advertised on the provider's website. This strategy is not necessarily appropriate for Indigenous students, as promoting oneself attracts cultural disapproval. In

several instances, providers allowed students to sit in on a class to see if they would be comfortable in a class setting.

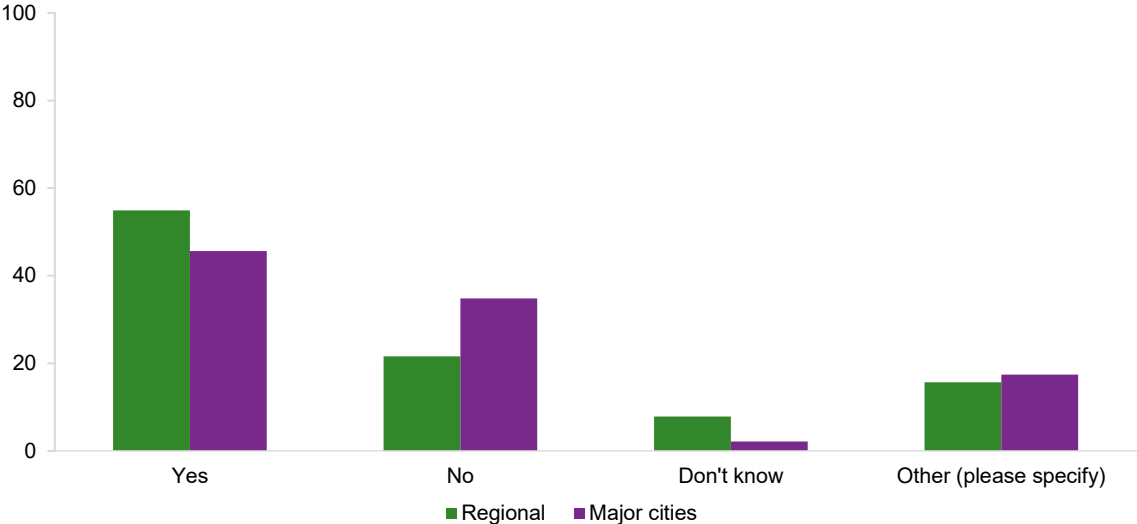
Student outcomes

Identifying post-training pathways depends on the ability to track students after they have completed (or left) the training. The survey and interviews reveal the difficulties associated with completions and post-training pathways in both regional areas and metropolitan areas.

Employment and further education

Community education providers responding to the survey reported a limited ability to track their students once they completed their foundation skills training. Less than half of metropolitan community education providers in the online survey tracked student outcomes; however, more than half of regional community education providers did so (figure 20). Both regional and metropolitan providers cited ‘no means of tracking’ and ‘lack of time and funds’ as the main reasons for why tracking was not done. Any tracking that could be done was usually informal and occurred more often in regional or small communities.

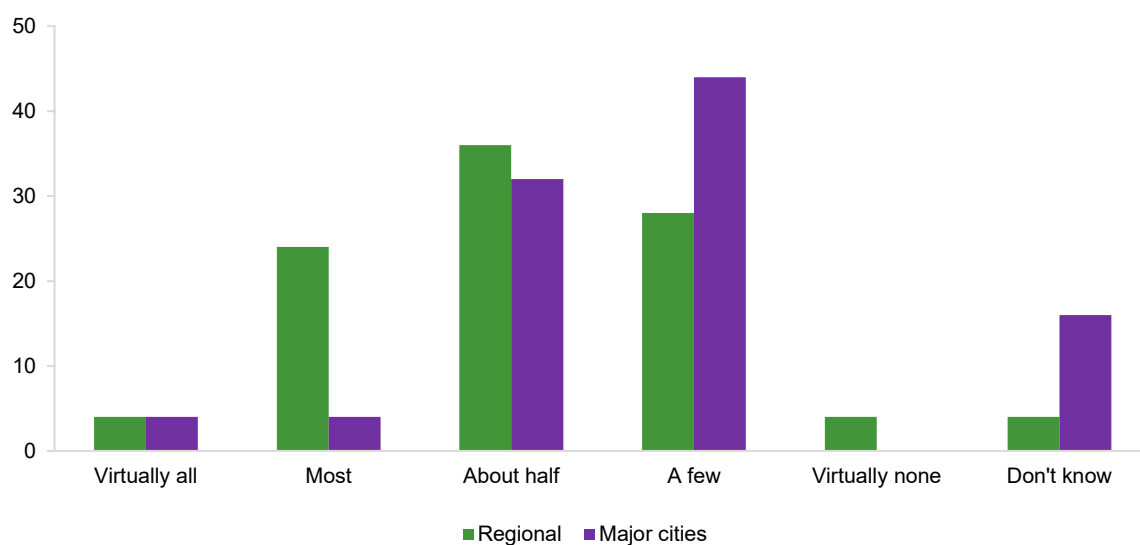
Figure 20 Whether students with community education providers are tracked after completing foundation skills training by location, 2019 (%)



Source: Online survey of community education providers conducted between December 2018 and February 2019.

Of the small number of respondents who do track how many students go on to further study in VET, other education or employment, 64% of regional community education providers (40% for metropolitan providers) thought at least half of their foundation skills students go on to further study or employment. Just over a quarter (28%) of regional community education providers and just under half (44%) of metropolitan community education providers were of the view that ‘a few’ go on to further education or employment (figure 21).

Figure 21 Community education providers' perceptions of how many students go on to further education or employment after completing foundation skills training¹ by location, 2019 (%)



Source: Online survey of community education providers conducted between December 2018 and February 2019

¹ The number of providers able to respond to this question was 25 for each provider type.

Despite limited formal tracking abilities, almost all interviewed providers noted that some of their students go on to further education, either with the same provider or another provider type, usually TAFEs. Some students may undertake more foundation skills training, or they may go on to vocational training at certificate II, III, or IV level. The most frequent fields of study were reported to be childcare, community services, arts and health, beauty, horticulture, construction, and business.

Some students seek or secure direct employment, usually in low-skilled work roles such as cleaning, but job opportunities are poor in regional areas, particularly in very remote communities in the Northern Territory. Consequently, if a job opportunity arises, many students feel compelled to take it and leave their training.

Providers described other student outcomes as 'not doing anything' - remaining disengaged from the community and on Centrelink payments. Others continue with current employment or undertake formal volunteering with a community organisation. Younger students often go back to finish Year 11 and 12 at school. Students who do the training for reasons such as improving their ability to read stories to their children or to help them with homework continue their usual daily life.

Most providers find out about outcomes for some individuals informally via students chatting with their tutors or trainers, or when students ask for a reference for a job or study application. The online survey shows that respondents in small regional areas are more likely than metropolitan-based respondents to find out what their students might be doing through word-of-mouth or running into their students on the street. Sometimes they gain this information through their relationships with other agencies.

A few interviewees surveyed their students during or at the completion of the training, but most did not collect any reliable data on student outcomes. Like the survey respondents, the interviewees referred to a lack of resources (namely funding, time and staff) to track student outcomes more formally. Similarly, Dymock's (2012) study on non-nationally recognised LLN learning found almost no tracking of outcomes. Providers in that study estimated a lower rate of students going on to further study or employment (roughly 10-15%). However, most students undertaking non-nationally recognised LLN did not do so for employment-related reasons.

Often students do not wish to share information on their post-training pathways due to privacy concerns as illustrated by the following comments from interviewees and survey respondents:

‘Learners often have limited trust and follow up contact can be experienced as harassment.’

‘People don’t like to be asked, [they] value privacy.’

‘Too invasive.’

The introduction of the Unique Student Identifier (USI) will enable tracking of students who complete nationally recognised foundation skills training through the VET system but not the possibly substantial proportion undertaking non-nationally recognised foundation skills.

Satisfaction with foundation skills training

All of the interviewed providers, both regional and metropolitan, reported that generally, their students were highly satisfied, especially if the training was tailored to suit the students. Satisfaction was determined either through a survey at the end of the training or by simply asking students verbally for feedback about the training. Other indicators of satisfaction are students coming back to do another foundation training at a higher level and high attendance rates.

Only two interviewees commented that sometimes the training did not meet the students’ needs either because the students are at a more advanced level than what the training offers, or the content is out of touch with industry requirements. Students forced to attend the training by Centrelink were typically described as having low levels of satisfaction, low attendance rates, and low completion rates.

Employer work experience

Work experience or placements were not a standard part of employability skills training in either regional or metropolitan areas. A few community education providers do help students gain work experience if they have partnerships with local employers. These arrangements might be in the fields of hospitality or community service. The providers reported that employers who offer work placements seem satisfied with the skills the students have gained from their foundation skills training. Occasionally, work experience led to employment for the student.

One interviewee spoke of inviting guest speakers from areas such as carpentry, engineering, retail, healthcare, or aged care to meet the students during the training. Some providers offer volunteering placements in their own centres as an alternative to work placements.

Organising work experience and placements is usually challenging for community education providers in general. Gaining small business support is difficult for providers in small regional centres, and larger companies were said to have too much bureaucracy. Additionally, the students’ literacy and numeracy skills are often not yet sufficient to be considered work ready.



The broader impact of foundation skills training on social and human capital

The high level of foundation skills subject completions meeting standard competencies represents a substantial improvement in human capital for most individuals. Measuring change in social capital⁷ is more difficult. This study uses the observations of providers throughout the training as a key measure, collected via the online survey and interviews.

In addition to successful competency-based completions as a measure of human capital, both metropolitan and regional community education providers noted that foundation skills training also improves human capital in the form of soft skills: these skills include better communication and language skills; more positive attitudes towards learning and better manners; respect for other people’s opinions and diversity; and being part of a group or team.

Most providers in both locations reported positive changes in social capital (figure 22); 78% of regional providers and 87% of metropolitan providers see positive effects for at least some students.

Key points

- Foundation skills training by community education providers is perceived as supporting the development of social engagement and broader social networks.
- Foundation skills training was also seen to support growth in human capital, including soft skills, in community education students in both regional and metropolitan areas.

Figure 22 Community education providers’ perceptions of change in social capital of students by location, 2019 (%)



Source: Online survey of community education providers conducted between December 2018 and February 2019

7 Human capital is defined as ‘the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being’ (OECD 2001, p.18). Social capital is defined as ‘the networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups’ (OECD 2001, p. 41). This definition of social capital is also used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Some respondents emphasised that foundation skills training imbues more than just foundation skills and human and social capital; it also engenders psychosocial resilience or mental health benefits:

‘The learner’s life outcomes improve in all areas of health and well-being, future potential study or work opportunities, increased social capital, increased confidence and feeling of safety and stress prevention or buffering ... We are located in a very low socioeconomic area of a regional town and the people that come into our organisation would not go to an educational centre like an RTO or TAFE.’

‘There is currently not enough awareness of how beneficial this training can be to promoting positive outcomes and ensuring completion of further study.’

However, respondents also felt that the way foundation skills are funded and the focus on employability skills are hampering the wider benefits of foundations skills training:

‘Funded foundation skills has resolved to be 100% human capital-based rather than social capital-based. This makes it difficult for foundation skills to concentrate on anything other than employability. We align more closely with ... the tangible but immeasurable changes that Governments are not interested in.’

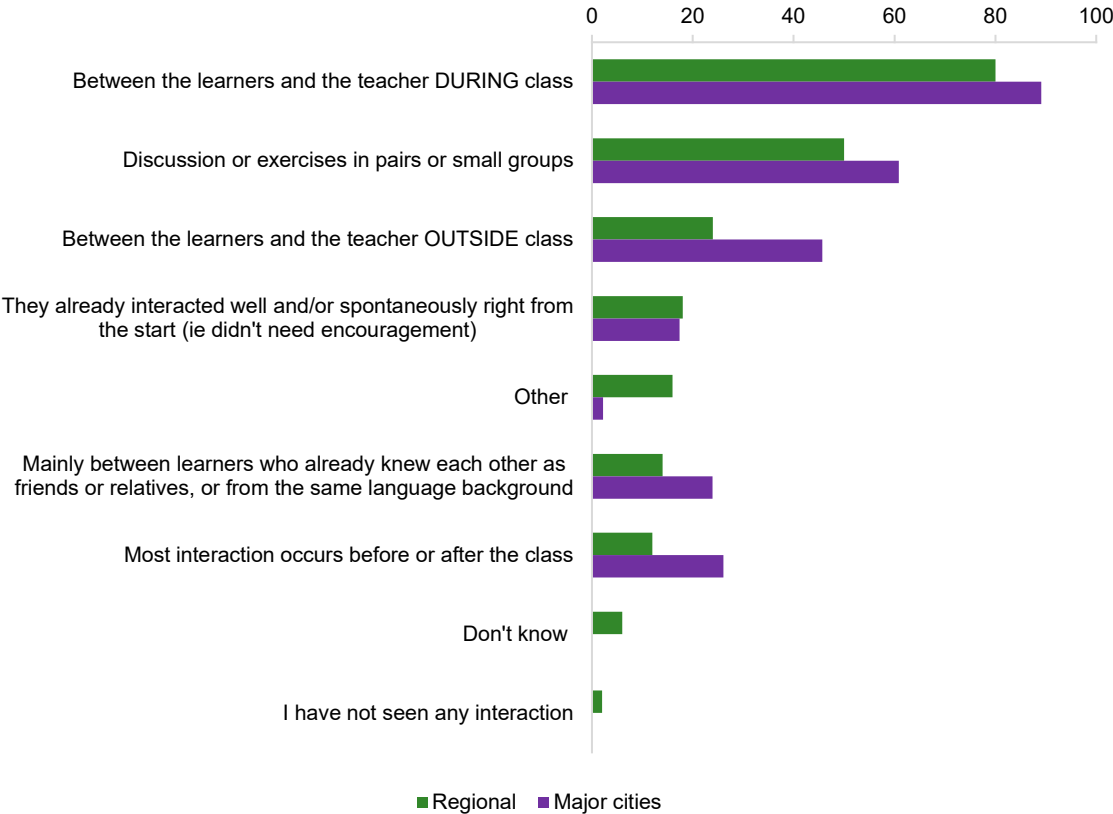
‘While many of [ESL students] are looking for work in the future, many of them desire to learn English that will allow them to mix in their community and develop relationships. Foundation skills training can make this difficult at times.’

The broader ‘positive effects’ include greater social engagement or broader social networks, which contribute to social capital development at the community level. The OECD (2001) acknowledged that the non-economic benefits of learning are as important as the impact on economic productivity, and that they can also complement or facilitate labour force participation by enhancing the ability to learn and other relevant skills such as flexibility.

Individual social capital and engagement

Not unexpectedly, most of the observed improvements in social interactions (as an indicator of social capital) are between the students and the teacher in both locations (figure 23). The improvement is not as pronounced for students in regional areas, especially for interactions outside the class. This pattern could reflect lower levels of social capital amongst the regional students at the outset, in comparison with metropolitan students.

Figure 23 Community education providers' perceptions of improvement in type of social or communicative interaction during foundation skills training by location (multiple response), 2019 (%)



Source: Online survey of community education providers December 2018 – February 2019

When interviewed about the development of social capital, providers usually reported what they had observed at the level of the individual: improved self-confidence and self-worth, leading to greater community engagement and social interaction. Other personal developments include independence, greater happiness and reduced anxiety. Students also develop networks outside the immediate family and offer help to others.

All interviewed providers include social learning activities in their teaching and encourage a collaborative learning environment. They all incorporate group discussions, team-work exercises, open communications, group activities and group work projects, as well as the more overtly social activities centred on sharing food and meals. Consequently, students developed friendships, supported one another and became more social and active participants. Some community education providers reported that students found the social aspects to be important and rewarding outcomes in their own right. Socialising is sometimes the main reason for students attending, especially for stay-at-home mothers, persons with disabilities who are socially isolated or immigrants or refugees with limited social networks due to language barriers. Relevant practical activities such as role-play, simulated interviews with Centrelink staff or doctors, touring TAFEs and paying bills proved to be great social experiences with good learning outcomes. These activities are also viewed as developing life skills while encouraging the acquisition of language, literacy and numeracy skills and potential employment opportunities.

Several providers mentioned food as a catalyst for encouraging social relationships but also attendance per se. Some provide lunch as part of the training or organise special events revolving around food. One regional interviewee described the underlying benefits of sharing food in a class situation:

‘Because the class is so diverse, we have these amazing cooks that have food from Thailand, Cambodia and Pakistan, France, and I find that a lot of these cultures in my experience, they show care through food... During morning tea we’ll just sit and share the food, and talk about how they made it, and you know share a bit of culture and make relationships that way.’

While providers from all areas recognise that the diversity of food from different cultural backgrounds gives individuals new experiences, cooking as an LLN teaching strategy was too expensive or unsuitable for some providers. One respondent with only Indigenous students focused instead on art and on integrating key areas of daily living into their foundation skills training, such as event preparation and management, designing T-shirts, preparing for family funerals and communication with agencies like the police and housing authorities.

Another provider drew on other community organisations to introduce and connect the students to services they might need or to help inform them about future study or employment:

‘We bring in lots of guest speakers from a whole variety of different organisations to come and talk about their services, we do it for the students, and their learning, but we also do it for their personal lives as well. We bring in different community organisations, like Anglicare, or children centres, community workers or social workers, youth workers, or aged care centres. For them to think about what they may want to do, for employment, but also for them to know what services are around, and like health services, or domestic violence, or women’s health... And then training providers, if they want to go onto further study, and we actually go on a tour of TAFE to get them through the door, because I found in the past people were too scared to go through the doors of TAFE, they thought it was unachievable for them.’

Providers had also noticed increased engagement with the community. Students shared that they feel more confident to attend community events, join social groups and clubs, join the gym, and volunteer. Parents became skilled and confident enough to read with their children and participate in school activities. Many obtain employment or begin actively looking for employment, plan to go on to further education, or start a business. Turning art into a business was described as an important catalyst for change for Indigenous persons in the Northern Territory.

The respondents shared many accounts of remarkable change, not just for select individuals but for whole cohorts of students and sometimes benefiting others. Examples include the following:

‘[A] federal politician was helping a charity providing menstrual products for homeless people and our students got on board with that... they felt like they were doing something important with an important politician.’

‘The people I’ve worked with, one of the ladies is now the principal of a school, another is a minister in a church, another one is working with the federal government on a strategic plan for the community. There is a group of them that are running a very successful arts and crafts business, [it] started as a literacy and numeracy class, and they are now running a successful business and it’s been going for 25 years.’

‘I had a [NESB] lady in her 60s; the health department had given her taxi vouchers to get to appointments and go to places, because she couldn’t use public transport. She sat at home, couldn’t go anywhere because she couldn’t write the destination on the voucher. So she stayed with us long enough to learn how to read and write all the locations she would want to go to. And now when I see her around she is the happiest lady because she is independent. Something as simple as that can change people’s lives. And that’s from coming to a literacy class.’

‘One of the kids we’ve been working with had extreme anxiety. She had spent five years in her house without seeing sunlight. ... Just to get her to leave the house was an enormous activity on its own. She completed the training [and] now she is absolutely embracing life and is working towards getting into a Cert III in Youth Work or a Cert III in Community Services. [She was with] kids of her own age that were all in similar situations ... they could support each other through those hard times. And we got a great outcome.’

Even this limited selection of accounts identifies at least five types of improved social inclusion (ASIB 2012) as a direct result of provision and completion of foundation training: having a voice; participation in the workforce; personal mobility; the opportunity to participate in education and training; and social support or friendship networks.

Similarly, Dymock (2012) identified that LLN training improved students’ social contact, control of their lives, command of English for everyday life, and self-confidence. These non-economic benefits are more important than employment to many students. He too argued that the contribution of foundation skills to personal development and social capital should receive greater acknowledgement, particularly via funding.

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Appendix

Appendix A Method

Online survey

An online survey targeted at community education providers (including registered and non-registered training organisations) in both regional and metropolitan areas was conducted from December 2018 to February 2019. Data was collected from 115 respondents in most states and territories: 49 from regional or remote providers; 50 from metropolitan providers; 12 from providers based in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan locations. Table A1 provides the distribution of participating community education providers. This distribution closely represents the distribution of community colleges based on Community Colleges Australia membership (Goodwin 2018).

Table A1 Distribution of survey respondents by state and territory

State	n	%
NSW	25	21.7
Victoria	67	58.3
Queensland	3	2.6
South Australia	16	13.9
Tasmania	1	0.9
Northern Territory	2	1.7
ACT	1	0.9
Total	115	100

Source: 2019 community education provider survey December 2018 – February 2019

Of the 115 survey respondents:

- 49 were from Community Colleges or other organisations focused solely on adult education
- 61 were from Neighbourhood or Community Houses or other organisations which provide adult foundation skill training in addition to other functions
- three from referral or other administrative agencies
- two other/not stated.

Not all respondents answered every question, so the number of cases may vary slightly between charts and tables based on the online survey. Unless otherwise specified, respondents whose organisation operated in both metropolitan and regional locations have been grouped as 'regional', as they can provide insights based on regional experience.

The questionnaire used is presented in the accompanying support document along with a brief overview of key policies and funding arrangements relating to foundation skills programs. The questionnaire sought to garner information about a myriad of topics including models of foundation skills course delivery as well as information on provider type, size, student and staff profiles, student outcomes and the perceived broader impact of foundation skills training. The content for the online survey was developed based on:

- Previous research
- Feedback from a workshop held at the 2018 Community Colleges Australia Conference in Sydney to discuss key issues facing their organisations
- Consultation with the Project Advisory Committee.

Emails inviting participation were sent to community education providers via Community Colleges Australia, the Reading Writing Hotline and Adult Learning Australia’s mailing lists and to peak bodies in each state and territory with requests to circulate to members. Two reminder emails were sent in early January and early February 2019. Other strategies to promote the survey included information on NCVET’s portal, twitter feeds, LinkedIn and Facebook groups. As noted by Circelli (2015), there is no complete sampling frame for all community education providers and so the responses represent a convenience sample rather than a representative sample.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selection of 22 providers located throughout Australia in both rural and major cities. Interviewees were selected to represent a mix of States and rural and metropolitan locations (table A2). They were contacted by email and telephone and invited to participate in semi-structural telephone interviews conducted between April and June 2019. They included trainers and managers.

Table A2 Location of interviewees

State/ territory	Metropolitan	Regional
NSW	2	2
VIC	1	2
QLD	1	2
SA	2	1
WA	1	1
NT	1	2
TAS	0	2†
ACT	1	0

Source: case study interviews, April – June 2019.

† One of these delivered state-wide.

The regional locations had populations ranging from several hundred to more than 100 000. Most were of low socioeconomic status with high unemployment and low education levels. Some had substantial migrant and refugee populations. Most towns and communities had basic services available, such as health centres, schools, and shops, although small centres lacked specialist health care such as maternity wards. Industrial bases included agriculture, construction, retail, hospitality and tourism (centred around wineries for example). Most jobs were in nursing, health care, education and teaching and community services.

The two interviewees working with communities in the Northern Territory described small Indigenous communities where English was often a second language, and people live according to traditional customs without travelling beyond their local area.

Interviewees from urban fringes described their student catchments as small-scale agricultural (e.g. strawberry farms) and industrial areas, with some tourism and hospitality. In general, metropolitan community education providers were located in lower socioeconomic status areas.

Reading Writing Hotline data

Data from telephone calls to the Reading Writing Hotline (RWH) for the period of January - October 2018 were also used to indicate need for LLN skills courses. The RWH is a free national referral service for adults seeking help with literacy and numeracy. The RWH data collects demographic information such as age, gender, geographic location and English-speaking background, as well as the individual's highest level of education. Of approximately 1 400 calls to the RWH in 2018, about 1 000 were from persons aged 15-64 years. The average annual number of calls for the period 2010 - October 2018 was approximately 2 000.

Total VET Activity data

NCVER's Total VET Activity (TVA) Collection enabled analyses of enrolments in subjects aligned with the LLN and employability skills defined in the NFSS definition described earlier. Further detail about the subjects selected is provided in appendix B.

Note that community education providers in both metropolitan and regional areas deliver both nationally recognised and non-nationally recognised training. As a consequence of the particular needs and profile of their learners, the community education sector has a high proportion of providers that are not registered training organisations, delivering non-nationally recognised training only. These providers are not required to submit their enrolment data for inclusion in the TVA Collection. The actual number of community education providers and the quantum of training they deliver is therefore unknown⁸. Consequently, analyses of the TVA data in this report include only nationally recognised training provided by registered training organisations. Findings from the survey and interviews however are based on information from providers of both nationally and non-nationally recognised training.

⁸ Bowman (2016, p.7) estimated there were about 2000-2500 community education providers, mostly in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia with the majority of these providing foundation skills training.

Appendix B Program and subject selection from the Total VET Activity Collection

The Total VET Activity Collection identifies subjects focusing on English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) and employability skills.

For this project the field of education (FOE) codes for LLN subjects are:

- 091501 - English Language
- 100705 - Written Communication
- 100707 - Verbal Communication
- 120103 - Literacy and Numeracy Programmes.

Literacy and numeracy cannot be addressed separately.

For this project the FOE codes for employability skills subjects are:

- 120503 - Job Search Skills Programmes
- 120505 - Work Practices Programmes.

Subjects in the other general education fields of education ('General education programmes - nfd', 'General Primary and Secondary Programmes', and 'Learning Skills Programmes') are excluded because they were not included in the Foundation Skills Training Package (and account for less than 3% of all enrolments in foundation training under the FOE code of 12 - Mixed Field Programs).

Digital literacy was not specifically addressed in this report because it is not coded as a separate subject or field of study. However, many literacy, numeracy and employability subjects include digital literacy.

The employment skills field 'Career Development Programmes' is excluded because programmes and subjects in this field are generally offered in conjunction with other vocational training and not as foundation training. Such training was mainly offered by other training packages specialising in fields such as business and commerce, fitness, hairdressing and cosmetology, dramatic arts or health. The field 'Employment Skills Programmes - nec' is excluded because none of the programmes in this field were included in the foundation skills training package.



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