

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs
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Dear Committee Secretary

We appreciate the opportunity to make a contribution to your inquiry.

We will focus on 2 key aspects: ***the provision of boarding school education and its outcomes,*** and ***best practice models, both domestically and internationally (for boarding).***

We write from our experience and commitment to see improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in education:

1. 37 years experience; teacher (since 1978) in predominantly Indigenous schools in WA, both Education Dep't, and independent Indigenous boarding schools, Principal 24 years, and Board Member (current). (see attachment 1 for experience and qualifications)
2. Creators and trainers of the only AQF accredited qualifications, contextualized for Boarding staff in Australia, over 5 years. Co-founders of Boarding Training Australia (RTO), training boarding industry staff in Australia, in approximately 50 boarding locations around Australia (see attached appendix listing 25 Indigenous and predominantly Indigenous Boarding Residences where we have trained staff in Certificate IV in Community Services, and/or Diploma of Youth Work, contextualized for the Student Boarding Industry).
3. Training boarding staff in International Boarding schools in locations: Philippines, Malaysia and Germany, and an Independent vocational secondary boarding college in Vanuatu.

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10 point plan to maximize the quality of Boarding provision for Indigenous students

1. Boarding must be appropriately staffed with qualified and culturally aware personnel, able to support student social and emotional wellbeing and mental health.

To meet the complexity of student need, stress and disadvantage, and provide a welcoming culturally aware environment, a residence requires qualified supervisory staff who are well-trained inducted. A cohort of Indigenous boarding staff needs to be developed and qualified.

“There is also growing recognition that schools need to be ready for Aboriginal children rather than solely a focus on getting children ready for school.” (Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice 2014)

*“...when moving away from the family **most Indigenous students need more, not less, social support as they contend with a culturally unfamiliar and difficult educational experience.**”*

(Ref: MCEETYA Exploring Multiple Pathways for Indigenous Students: Discussion Paper 2001)

2. Funding for boarding staff recruitment, training, induction and cultural awareness. The National Workforce Development Fund (NWDF) in 2012-13 was accessed by Boarding Training Australia to subsidise training for many boarding staff to complete the only accredited qualification for boarding staff in Australia, but ceased on change of Government in October 2013. There is still a huge need for training for boarding supervisors around Australia.

In Queensland, teachers are targeted and recruited who have expertise, enthusiasm and the capacity to teach in challenging remote Indigenous contexts by Education Queensland's **Partners for Success** strategy. Eligible teachers receive cultural training and incentives, and opportunities for interaction with Indigenous communities. A similar strategy is needed to raise the professionalism, skills and qualifications of boarding staff. A Commonwealth funded initiative by Boarding Australia, the NT Residential Care Workers Program began to develop this strategy in recent years.

3. Boarding is appropriately funded for health and wellbeing support, to address the adolescent health Gap. All Indigenous residences need an on-site nurse and health facility, with other professional supports, health screening facilities, education and support in nutrition, mental health and personal development. Very few Providers can afford the level of support usually needed for the Indigenous young people attending. While Close the Gap health funding is used in every other arena there is a glaring deficit here. There is a need for a "culturally appropriate" model of health screening, intervention and education, and pastoral care.

4. Lower student : staff ratios needed for Residences with significant numbers of Indigenous students – It is suggested ratios as low as *"8 : 1 to 10 : 1 rather than the 25 : 1 ratio on which most boarding schools operate"* are needed to *"facilitate the special care and interventions needed to assist the students' transition"*, to learn Residence culture and meet health and mental well-being needs.. (Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body, *Position Paper: Boarding Schools*, 2000, http://qiecc.eq.edu.au/docs/boarding_schools_paper V2.doc)

5. Boarding acknowledges and preserves cultural identity, is welcoming and inclusive and has a critical mass of Indigenous students. To prevent homesickness, cultural isolation and culture shock, a “critical mass” of Indigenous student is needed in a boarding residence, as well as a family-oriented, homely environment with positive role models and opportunities to retain their cultural connections to land, language and home. For students to feel culturally comfortable and supported, a strength-based approach is more respectful and effective than a negative, deficit focus.

One of the main influencing factors on Indigenous students staying on to year 11 and 12 was found to be: ***“a school environment that acknowledged, and sought to preserve, cultural identity, ... and treated Indigenous students with respect.”***

(Ref: MCEETYA Exploring Multiple Pathways for Indigenous Students: Discussion Paper 2001)

6. Students are prepared for Boarding away and assisted with transition by a funded program of Community Service Officers and Transition Support Officers in remote areas - as in the Queensland Transition Support Service which assists students and their families to manage the transition to Boarding through two streams of service:

1. **Community Support Officers (CSOs)** within the community who work to prepare and support students and their families to select, apply to and transition to a secondary school away from remote communities, that ‘best fits’ the needs and abilities of each student.
2. **Transition Support Officers (TSOs)** in the major regional centres, liaising with Boarding providers, who meets students weekly at their secondary schools to help them to orientate to their new schools and community and to remain enrolled until they complete year twelve.
3. **Indigenous cultural brokers** in the school and boarding teams will assist students and families in remote areas with communication, cross-cultural awareness and mentoring.

7. Student profile matching and ‘staged entry’ to appropriate Boarding situations for students.

Parents need guidance to be aware of all the choices available for boarding, to be equipped to match their child’s needs with Boarding providers’ contexts, and recruitment and selection practices. There is an apparent ‘revolving door’ syndrome developing in some more remote areas

when information is not readily available and parental choice is often easily influenced by many differing factors. Boarding programmes are failing some students because the match is not good and issues develop for which the program is not resourced or staffed appropriately and the challenges become overwhelming.

Community Support officers could be trained to provide guidance to help parents 'stream' students for "**staged entry**" to appropriate Residences, selecting against "objective criteria for success". (CEC Submission: Supporting Aboriginal Students living away from home. Discussion Paper p.5, QIECB, p.9)

The Northern Territory Remote Indigenous Parents Association (RIPA) members are developing culturally appropriate transition and support material to raise parental awareness of the issues involved in the choice.

Many remote students would benefit by having a "**half-way step**", i.e. younger students attend community-based boarding facilities eg Kardu Darrikardu Numida Hostel in Wadeye, and DjibiDjibi Residential Facility in Jabiru, N.T., that partner with the local community school, helping students to attend regularly and gain social and Boarding skills, before later transitioning to "out-of-community" boarding.

8. Boarding must have effective, long-term partnerships with parents and communities to succeed. Many Aboriginal parents find schools alienating and far-removed from their everyday lives. Some programs have no awareness of the unique challenges and disadvantage from which the families are battling and do little to connect or inform appropriately.

An appropriate and culturally secure environment in Boarding requires a staff team that has:

- inclusive, positive relationships and links with parents and communities,
- a culture of openness and sensitivity, with strong two-way communication
- every member of staff valuing cultural identity and connection, especially those in Management (the Principal and Head of Boarding)
- culturally aware staff who make a concerted effort to connect and relate
- Remote Indigenous Parents Association RIPA, (being developed by NT PACE project) will help build parent capacity – continued funding will be required.
- IT assistance for communities and boarding residences to set up Skype communication,

- open and sensitive dialogue with communities about student absences for funerals, ceremonies, and community sport events
- regular cultural awareness and visits to communities by residential staff - invaluable but costly
- early intervention and good communication with families to prevent student suspension and the 'revolving door' syndrome.

9. Education deficits are specifically targeted and students given learning support:

- schools have ESL or ESD programs, and in-Residence tutoring and homework support
- more Vocational options in schools available and
- career guidance given a funded priority and connected with family –school dialogue
- Training in Restorative practice for school and Residence staff, as a culturally appropriate behavioural management strategy e.g. as implemented by Tiwi College, N.T.

10. Other practical considerations required:

- Boarding to be accountable: implementation of Boarding Standards across Australia with regulatory monitoring for Indigenous residences, similar to the CRICOS standards for International students (or at the very least a well-developed self-assessment process).
- Consult and listen to experienced local boarding providers when planning new Boarding facilities or re-modelling old infrastructure e.g. room sizes, outdoor areas, security, staff quarters, etc
- Streamlining of Abstudy funding processes – removal of communication obstacles, more parent-friendly, flexible, streamlined processes with creative solutions contributed by consulting with boarding providers
- Rigorous long-term research and data collection needed, to study the many variables above and their relative significance.

Appendix 1.

Boarding staff have been trained in Certificate IV for Student Residential Care (and more recently in Diploma of Youth Work) at the following Boarding Residences (with solely or predominantly

Indigenous student cohort).

NT

Alice Springs – Yirara College, St Philips College

Darwin – Kormilda College, St Johns Catholic College, Marrara Christian College

Tiwi Islands - Tiwi College

Jabiru - Djidbi Djidbi Residential Facility (Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation)

Katherine – Callistemon House, Fordimail AHL Hostel

Wadeye Remote Indigenous community - Kardu Darrikardu Numida Hostel (AHL)

Tennant Creek – Wangkana Kari Hostel

Queensland

Weipa – Western Cape

Townsville – Shalom Christian College

Cairns – Djarragun,

Thursday Island – Kaziw Meta, Canon Bogo Pilate AHL Hostel

WA

Coolgardie Christian Aboriginal Parent-Directed School

Esperance Christian Aboriginal Parent-directed School

Wiluna – Karalundi Aboriginal Education Community

Perth –Aboriginal Student Accommodation Service (Department For Child Protection and Family Support)

Kununurra Aboriginal Student Hostel AHL

Broome - Country High School Hostels Authority

Perth - Clontarf Aboriginal College

NSW

Sydney - Biala Hostel (girls)

Sydney - Kirinari Hostel (boys)

Newcastle - Kirinari Hostel – (boys)

Bourke/Gongolgon - Currawah Adventist College

Appendix 2: References

CEC Submission: Supporting Aboriginal Students living away from home. Discussion Paper 2008

MCEETYA Exploring Multiple Pathways for Indigenous Students: Discussion Paper 2001

Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body, *Position Paper: Boarding Schools*, 2000

Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice 2014

Student Profiling Kit

<http://www.boardingtrainingaustralia.com.au/files/Student%20Profiling%20tool%20kit.pdf>