

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL TRAINING AUTHORITY

Partners in

NATIONAL STRATEGY

a Learning Culture

from
2000
until
2005

Australia's *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander* Strategy for vocational education & training
2000-2005



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Foreword

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia are the first Australians. An Indigenous learning culture has been fundamental to the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, over many thousands of years to meet the challenges of a changing Australian environment: ecologically, socially, politically and economically. The past two centuries, in particular, have presented immense challenges for the first Australians in retaining Indigenous cultures and achieving justice and equity.

All Australians experience severe penalties if deprived of a learning culture and if excluded from life's opportunities, including work. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience this loss more than most Australians as a result of historical discrimination, ongoing disadvantage and a rapidly changing contemporary Australia.

Education and training specifically, and lifelong learning more generally, must be at the cutting edge of economic, social and cultural development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the new millennium.

It has never been more important and timely to renew our rich culture and to share and articulate our vision for a better future through vocational education and training (VET).

We hope all Australians, including governments, industry, education and training providers share our vision as *Partners in a learning culture.*

Kevin Bromley
Chair, ATSIPTAC

1. The vision

A vision for vocational education and training for Indigenous Australians¹

A vocational education and training system which renews and shares an Indigenous learning culture with all Australians in a spirit of reconciliation, equity, justice, and community economic development and sustainability.

This vision can be shared by all Australians who support the aspirations of Indigenous people in Australia. This vision is for:

- *cultural affirmation and community choice*

ENABLED BY

- *equal opportunity and affirmative action*

LEADING TO

- *flexible delivery, equitable outcomes and lifelong learning*

RESULTING IN

- *community economic development and sustainability*

CONTRIBUTING TO

- *reconciliation and justice in Australia.*

The strategy aims to achieve this vision, through a partnership between Indigenous Australian communities, governments, industry and training / education providers. We are all equal partners in building a learning culture.

¹ The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council (ATSIPTAC) established this vision in the process of developing this national strategy.

VET, RECONCILIATION, AND JUSTICE

The value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage to the Australian nation can be promoted through its incorporation in education and training programs.

VET can, and does play a constructive and meaningful role in achieving equity and equal opportunities for Indigenous Australians. In doing so, it helps progress Australia's national aspiration for reconciliation, between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians which is now a widely recognised goal for the Australian nation. A reconciled Australia relies heavily on the achievement of equity and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, including equity in education, training, and employment.

Equity and justice in vocational education and training means that the provision of skills and experiences, through culturally appropriate developed and delivered training programs, will enhance and increase opportunities for Indigenous Australians. This will allow for a fuller engagement in the economic, social, and cultural life of Australia, with the same range of choices as other Australians.

A strong and fair nation acknowledges and builds on the talents of all its citizens.

2. About this strategy

Partners in a learning culture is Australia's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategy for vocational education and training from 2000 to 2005.

The strategy has been prepared by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council (ATSIPTAC), in partnership with key stakeholders in Indigenous peoples' VET.²

The strategy was developed in several stages, in order to provide for extensive consultation with a wide range of Indigenous and other stakeholders. This has resulted in Indigenous ownership of both the consultative process and the resulting strategy.

Partners in a learning culture has been developed in order to:

- identify the key vocational education and training (VET) issues and activities that are most important for Indigenous community development
- include the perspectives of Indigenous people in current and future VET policy and programs at all levels
- ensure that VET decisions (and especially decisions about resources) result in better outcomes for Indigenous individuals and communities
- show how VET programs can be better managed for Indigenous communities
- lay down quality and continuous improvement measures which build upon positive gains already made within the VET sector
- set out measurable objectives to improve outcomes for Indigenous Australians in VET and employment.

The strategy complements a number of existing VET policies at the national, State and Territory levels, including:

- *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy*³
- *A bridge to the future: Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training 1998-2003*⁴ (and its supporting paper *Achieving equitable outcomes*⁵).

The strategy builds on a number of important national reforms and initiatives, including the National Training Framework, New Apprenticeships and VET in schools. These reforms and initiatives have the potential to improve VET outcomes for Indigenous people.

² ATSIPTAC will seek endorsement for the strategy from both the Board of the Australian National Training Authority, and from the ANTA Ministerial Council

³ Commonwealth of Australia 1989; reviewed 1994.

⁴ Australian National Training Authority 1998.

⁵ Australian National Training Authority 1998.

As well, *Partners in a Learning Culture* has been supported by several ATSIPTAC discussion papers, including:

- *Community development through skills development: new apprenticeships and traineeship opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (1997)*
- *Building pathways: school-industry workplace learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students (1998)*
- *Working together to break the cycle: VET in adult correctional facilities and juvenile justice centres (1998)*
- *Making I.T. our own: vocational learning in information technology and multimedia for Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (1999).*

State and Territory strategies are another important influence on this strategy. For example, *Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Economic Development Strategy*⁶ recognised VET as a key factor in improving the standard of living and quality of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. VET can do this by enabling the four actions identified in *Queensland's strategy*, which are:

- employing more Indigenous people in full-time jobs
- creating more self-generated business opportunities
- increasing the assets necessary to build successful businesses
- increasing locally-driven employment.

These strategic approaches have real potential for national application.

Implementing this strategy will be a collaborative effort between all the stakeholders in the VET system. The strategy will guide strategic planning, policy development, resource allocation, and service delivery by:

- training providers and employment agencies
- Indigenous community service providers
- national, State and Territory training authorities
- government departments with an interest in Indigenous affairs, employment, education, and regional development
- industry training advisory bodies and employers.

⁶ Queensland Government 1998.

3. Indigenous people are disadvantaged Australians

Indigenous Australians have far less access to ongoing lifelong learning than other Australians, and much less association with the training and careers that come with paid work

IT STARTS AT SCHOOL...

- In 1996, 71 per cent of Indigenous secondary students had dropped out of school before Year 12. This compares to just 26 per cent for all students.

...AND CONTINUES IN VET

- In 1996 only 12 per cent of Indigenous VET students had completed Year 12, compared to 36 per cent of non-Indigenous students.⁷

WITH AN EMPHASIS ON LOWER LEVEL COURSES...

- 47 per cent of Indigenous students were enrolled in low level, preparatory courses, compared to 25 per cent of non-Indigenous students.
- Only 8 per cent of Indigenous students were enrolled in professional or para-professional courses, half the proportion of non-Indigenous students (17 per cent).

...WITH LESS INVOLVEMENT IN TRAINEESHIPS AND APPRENTICESHIPS

- Apprenticeship and traineeship retention and completion rates are significantly lower for Indigenous Australians.
- There are low participation rates in private sector traineeships and apprenticeships.

WITH MORE STUDENTS TAKING LONGER TO FINISH, OR DROPPING OUT...

- Only 46 per cent of module enrolments for Indigenous students resulted in a pass, compared to 63 per cent for non-Indigenous students.
- Indigenous students in 1996 were more than twice as likely as non-Indigenous students to be continuing their modules or to have their result withheld.⁸

⁷ NCVET 1998, p.13.

⁸ NCVET, 1998

...WHICH ALL ADDS UP TO FEWER QUALIFICATIONS

- In 1996, only 14 per cent of Indigenous Australians had a post-school qualification, compared to 34 per cent of all Australians.

...RESULTING IN FEWER JOBS

- By May 1997, only 52 per cent of Indigenous VET 1996 graduates had jobs, compared to 71 per cent of non-Indigenous graduates.^{9,10,11}

Indigenous Australians are more likely to face broader socioeconomic disadvantaging factors that reduce their ability to successfully undertake VET^{12,13}

LOWER INCOME

- In 1996, median income for Indigenous people 25-44 years old was \$265, compared with \$437 for all Australians in the same group.¹⁴ Low income restricts access to VET in many ways, including less opportunities to do further professional development or technical training related to work¹⁵.

IMPACT OF 'STOLEN GENERATIONS'

- 10 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults aged 25 years and over were taken away from their natural family during their childhood. Although this phenomenon is changing (by 1994, only two per cent of Indigenous people aged 14 years or less had been similarly removed¹⁶), the personal, family and community dislocation caused by successive 'stolen generations' is immense. Given close family and community ties, a much larger percentage of Indigenous people are affected than the figures would suggest.

POOR ENGLISH LITERACY AND NUMERACY LEVELS

Language remains an important part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Approximately 13 per cent of Indigenous Australians speak an indigenous language at home (ABS 1996), a proportion which increases to about one third outside urban areas in Australia.

⁹ NCVET 1998.

¹⁰ Taylor and Altman 1997.

¹¹ Taylor 1997.

¹² Statistics on the extent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage are the subject of an annual report to the Australian Parliament: Social justice for Aboriginal Australians.

¹³ Golding and Volkoff 1998.

¹⁴ ABS, 1996

¹⁵ Altman and Hunter 1998.

¹⁶ ABS 1994, p.2.

VET which accommodates different levels of proficiency in English language, literacy and numeracy and embraces Indigenous languages is therefore critical for many Indigenous Australians seeking opportunities in education, training, and in the world of work. Training and education providers need to operate in environments that complement, are sensitive to, and affirm cultures¹⁷, multi-literacies¹⁸ and first languages.¹⁹

GEOGRAPHICAL AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have always been geographically dispersed throughout Australia. Strong ties to place, culture, land and family remain important to the present day for Indigenous peoples, and in combination with social dislocation factors, have resulted in a population skewed towards particular regions and localities associated with traditional lands. For example²⁰, only 30.4 per cent of the Indigenous population reside in major urban areas compared with 62.7 per cent of the total Australian population.

This distribution has important implications for VET delivery. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey²¹ confirmed that many Indigenous people live considerable distances from local TAFE providers. In fact, 64 per cent of Indigenous people living in rural areas live more than 50 km from the nearest TAFE College.

Indigenous students comprise a much higher proportion of Australian's enrolled in VET in remote communities. For example in 1996, 26 per cent of Indigenous VET participants lived in remote regions compared with just three per cent of non-Indigenous VET participants.²²

The dispersion of the Indigenous population requires the delivery of VET which is both culturally appropriate and flexible. While learning in remote areas through new information technologies offers significant potential, it will not, by itself, provide solutions without addressing solutions of inequitable access (of both students and communities) to use or support those technologies.

In 1996, the proportion of the Indigenous population of Australia under 15 years of age was 40 per cent, compared to just 21 per cent of the total population. The Indigenous community is young and growing.

¹⁷ Buchanan and Egg 1996.

¹⁸ Cope and Kalantzis 1998.

¹⁹ Golding, Volkoff and Ferrier 1997.

²⁰ ABS 1996 Census

²¹ ABS 1995, p.44.

²² NCVET 1998, p.15.

POOR LIVING STANDARDS (HOUSING AND HEALTH) AND LOW LIFE EXPECTANCY

The health and general living standards, including housing, for Indigenous people are poor in comparison with the rest of the Australian population.²³

Indigenous people have recorded higher rates of both recent and long term illnesses, with reported conditions including asthma, diabetes and heart problems. Poor health standards have a direct impact on life expectancies for Indigenous Australians. For example in 1996, the ABS reported that the life expectancies of Indigenous males (57 years) and females (62 years) are nearly 20 years below those recorded for the total Australian population.

Indigenous Australians are more likely to experience the absence and failure of basic services such as running water, electricity and sewerage, which are important factors when considering health and housing standards.²⁴

The potential for VET to have flow on effects to overcome Indigenous disadvantage on a whole range of issues is significant. Skilled communities have a far greater opportunity to address housing, community infrastructure, health and other community services.

HIGH ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT RATES

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are grossly overrepresented in prisons as a proportion of the population: from three times their proportion in the population in the Northern Territory, to 23 times in Tasmania.²⁵
- Indigenous people removed from their families have arrest rates twice the (already high) rate for Indigenous people not removed.²⁶

It is not being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person that is disadvantaging in itself. Rather, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to be subject to a wider range of disadvantaging factors, and therefore experience multiple disadvantages.

²³ See *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commission Reports*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1994.

²⁴ See 1994 ABS *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey: Detailed Findings*, 1995.

²⁵ ATSIPTAC iii, 97

²⁶ ABS 1994, p.2

4. Objectives

The vision of:

A vocational education and training system which renews and shares an Indigenous learning culture with all Australians in a spirit of reconciliation, equity, justice, and community economic development and sustainability

... will be achieved by:

- 1.** Increasing involvement of Indigenous people in decision making about policy, planning, resources and delivery
- 2.** Achieving participation in VET for Indigenous people equal to those of the rest of the Australian community²⁷
- 3.** Achieving increased culturally appropriate, and flexibly delivered training, including use of information technology, for Indigenous people
- 4.** Developing closer links between VET outcomes for Indigenous people and industry and employment

These four objectives for Indigenous Australians aim to complement and enhance a series of objectives contained within VET sector strategies²⁸.

The strategies include:

- *A Bridge to the Future* (Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training 1998-2003)
- the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy*; and
- a number of State and Territory based strategies.

²⁷ Boughton and Durnam 1997.

²⁸ Whilst *Partners in a Learning Culture* is designed to bring about greater national consistency and co-ordination, it does not seek to prescribe strategies. Rather it seeks to provide greater support and guidance for the various State/Territory initiatives.

OBJECTIVE 1: Increasing involvement of Indigenous people in decision making about policy, planning, resources and delivery

INCREASING INVOLVEMENT BY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AT ALL LEVELS OF DECISION MAKING

There is a clear and undeniable logic to the proposition that the best way to improve vocational education and training outcomes for Indigenous Australians is to involve them at all levels of decision making²⁹. This will ensure that decisions take account of the cultural and other issues of importance to Indigenous people.

The National *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy*³⁰ advocates that Indigenous people must be involved in making decisions at all levels of the VET system: local, state, territory and national. Specifically, they need to be involved with bodies that make decisions about policy, planning, resource allocation and service delivery.

Partnerships with key Indigenous bodies need to be strengthened (where they exist) and developed (where they do not). This will result in clearer, more regular consultation and negotiation on important VET issues.

Currently, Indigenous people are involved in VET mostly as advisors, rather than as decision-makers. Whilst the Commonwealth, States and Territories all have Indigenous advisory councils and committees for VET, advisory mechanisms at the local level are poorly defined and are nationally inconsistent. The quality of advisory arrangements in recent years has varied, and a systemic approach to the provision of advice needs to be developed. Existing arrangements need to be reviewed and consolidated.

There is still a long way to go to achieve appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on key decision making bodies.

INCREASING THE PARTICIPATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN DECISION MAKING AT THE PROVIDER AND LOCAL COMMUNITY LEVELS

Given the enormous geographical, cultural and linguistic diversity of Indigenous Australians, it is particularly important that Indigenous people are well represented at the local and community level, and that they help shape

²⁹ Teasdale and Teasdale 1996.

³⁰ Original policy DEET 1989: reviewed Commonwealth 1994.

decisions about the provision of training and assessment products and services to individuals and local communities.

The inclusion of Indigenous people in local decision making will help remove barriers which currently prevent Indigenous communities investing and participating in vocational education and training. Such local involvement will, in time, make the Australian VET system more responsive to the needs of Indigenous people.

IMPLEMENTING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES THROUGHOUT ALL LEVELS OF THE VET SYSTEM

A practical and achievable strategy for increasing participation in decision making is to increase the proportion of Indigenous people employed by the VET system. Indigenous people are seldom found at the senior management and executive levels whether this be in the State and Territory training agencies or among providers.

The proportion of Indigenous people in employment at all levels of VET administration, including in senior VET positions, needs to increase. Where inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has occurred in the administration of vocational education and training, it has resulted in more informed and focused decisions on VET resource allocation and quality arrangements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It has also enhanced community participation and outcomes.

ENSURING THAT VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (INCLUDING TRAINING PACKAGES) IS CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians recognise a strong and continuing tie between their culture, land, identity, language, and sense of self. The loss of one or more of these things can (and does) exclude many Indigenous people, not only from their Indigenous culture, but also from lifelong learning, the wider society, and the world of work.

Language remains an important part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Approximately 13 per cent of Indigenous Australians speak an Aboriginal/Islander language at home.³¹ This percentage increases to around one-third outside the urban areas of Australia.

³¹ ABS Census 1996.

Indigenous Australians look to the VET system to cater for varying levels of proficiency in English language, literacy and numeracy, and to embrace Indigenous languages. They look to VET providers to offer products and services that are sensitive to (and complement) Indigenous cultures and languages.

Training Packages have the potential to incorporate the needs of Indigenous Australians. Indigenous Australians should therefore be involved in developing and implementing Training Packages, and in the design and delivery of professional development activities and materials that will lead providers to develop culturally appropriate training and assessment.

State and Territory quality and recognition arrangements, which affect Training Package implementation, also need to support learning styles that are sensitive to cultural issues.

BENCHMARKING CULTURAL INCLUSIVITY

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has identified 'cultural inclusivity' as a key element in benchmarking the delivery of public services, including education and training, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.³²

It is important that quality performance measures include culture as a quality measure.

Formal education and training systems and the quality assurance mechanisms which underpin them are playing an emerging and important role in both renewing learning cultures and opening up new Indigenous enterprises.

Culture, identity, language, literacy, numeracy and life skills must be wrapped up with vocational training and workplace learning in order to achieve quality outcomes that are valued by and valuable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, by everyone in the world of work, and by all Australians.

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF PARTNERSHIPS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians recognise the value of both reconciliation and partnerships on a range of levels: between individuals, training providers, employers, industry, government, and communities³³.

Partnerships are now recognised as the key to successful vocational education and training programs for Indigenous Australians because they:

³² CAR, 1998

³³ Djerrkura 1998.

- allow benchmarking between spheres of government and community sectors to promote efficiencies³⁴;
- involve a wide range of stakeholders in the ongoing process of Australian reconciliation;
- include Indigenous people as equal partners in VET; and
- lead to better learning pathways and employment outcomes.

The most successful outcomes in VET (including in New Apprenticeships, group training and VET in schools) have been built from the foundations of partnerships between equal stakeholders.

Partnerships have been shown to produce benefits for individuals, including:

- increased skill levels
- increased access to employment
- greater mobility in the labour market
- more supportive and rounded learning environments.

Partnerships also result in:

- VET that is more responsive to community, social, and cultural needs
- VET that is more responsive to industry demands
- more effective policy setting
- more effective public VET expenditure.

CREATING INCENTIVES FOR THE EMPLOYMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF INDIGENOUS STAFF (INCLUDING IN GROUP TRAINING COMPANIES AND PRIVATE TRAINING COMPANIES)

Indigenous people are under represented in employment at middle and senior levels of government bureaucracies including vocational education and training systems. There is a particularly low representation in the private sector. The Indigenous population has proportionally fewer people employed in managerial and administrative positions (3.7%) and advanced clerical and service workers (2.2%) than the total population (9.3% and 4.3% respectively).³⁵

³⁴ CAR 1998.

³⁵ *Census of population and housing, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, ABS 1996.

The VET sector needs to increase employment opportunities, develop marketing and recruitment strategies, as well as developing professional development strategies and opportunities for Indigenous people so that VET outcomes for Indigenous people reflect the needs of the community.

DEVELOPING MECHANISMS TO ENSURE THAT INDIGENOUS VET ISSUES ARE ADDRESSED BY KEY NATIONAL, STATE AND TERRITORY BODIES

There is a need to increase the participation of Indigenous people in decision making at national, state and territory and local level, so that issues of importance to the Indigenous population can be included in policy decisions. Clear and more regular consultative mechanisms and negotiations with key Indigenous bodies will assist in this. Consideration could be given to ensuring membership on key decision making boards and bodies rather than solely gaining advice through consultative processes. In addition there needs to be active participation in policy and planning development and resource allocation at all levels of government.

Consultation arrangements in recent years have been variable. A more systematic and consolidated approach to the provision of advice needs to be developed. Furthermore, the inclusion of Indigenous people in decision making processes will help remove barriers which currently prevent Indigenous communities investing in and participating in the directions of their own education. In summary, structural and delivery arrangements in VET need to be more sensitive to the needs of Indigenous people.

ANALYSING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY NEEDS AND AUDIT SKILLS

A whole-of-community approach to training would need to cover a broad range of rural and remote based industries. Many Indigenous people live in areas of Australia that are isolated and there is limited knowledge of the skills and training needs of these communities.

To provide appropriate training, there is a need to have data about the needs and capacity of communities, region by region. This in turn will lead to better decision making and will maximise the value of VET expenditure. While some States and Territories have community development plans in place, an extension of these plans will also assist in connecting education and training with the strength of the economy and society as well as building on cultural diversity and life experiences of Indigenous learners.

A comprehensive skills audit will inform VET decision making and inform community development plans.

OBJECTIVE 2: Achieving participation in VET for Indigenous people equal to those of the rest of the Australian community

INCREASING SCHOOL RETENTION RATES THROUGH VET IN SCHOOLS PROGRAMS

Poor retention rates in secondary school are a key factor in the disadvantage of Indigenous Australians, a factor that reduces lifelong learning and therefore economic and social opportunity.

In 1996, 71 per cent of Indigenous secondary students had dropped out of school before Year 12. This compares to just 26 per cent for all students.

This inequality flows on into VET, and indeed into all post-secondary qualifications. For example, in 1996 only 12 per cent of Indigenous VET students had completed Year 12, compared to 36 per cent of non-Indigenous students.³⁶ In 1996, only 14 per cent of Indigenous Australians had a post-school qualification, compared to 34 per cent of all Australians.

VET in schools helps Indigenous students stay at school, by increasing the relevance of schooling and providing opportunities for work-based learning which might not otherwise be available to them.

The promotion of VET in schools to Indigenous students needs to be improved. It could include the use of images of Indigenous students, focusing on the industries and competencies Indigenous students are interested in. School-based and work-based learning and assessment approaches must match the cultural, linguistic and community context of students.

Indigenous students in VET in schools may also need special assistance to help them with low levels of English literacy and numeracy, or cultural difference.

FORGING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND THE POST SECONDARY SECTOR (INCLUDING VET AND UNIVERSITIES)

Better links between schools and the post-secondary sectors will generate mechanisms to help people overcome barriers such as low levels of English literacy and numeracy and improve education and training outcomes for Indigenous students.

³⁶ NCVET 1998, p.13.

INCREASE THE PROPORTION OF INDIGENOUS STUDENTS DOING HIGHER LEVEL AND INDUSTRY RELEVANT COURSES

The vocational education and training sector is increasingly the sector of choice in post-compulsory education and training for Indigenous people in Australia.

The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* has resulted in increased access by Indigenous people to vocational education and training, especially through Technical and Further Education (TAFE). However there has been a skewing of that access towards the lower end of the qualifications spectrum:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do a more limited range of courses, at lower levels, than the Australian average. Further, Indigenous completion rates are below the Australian average. The following statistics illustrate these points.

- Indigenous students comprise a small proportion of business, engineering and science students.
- 50 per cent of Indigenous TAFE students in 1996 were doing multi-field courses (including English as a second language, functional literacy and numeracy, general skills development and pre-employment programs), compared to just 21 per cent of non-Indigenous students.
- 47 per cent per cent of Indigenous students were enrolled in low level, preparatory courses, compared to 25 per cent of non-Indigenous students. Only eight per cent of Indigenous students were enrolled in professional or para-professional courses, half the proportion of non-Indigenous students (17 per cent).

MARKETING HIGHER LEVEL COURSES, APPRENTICESHIPS AND TRAINEESHIPS TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

The participation rates for Indigenous Australians in higher level courses, apprenticeships and traineeships are significantly lower than for other Australians, and even lower in private sector traineeships and apprenticeships.

Higher level courses, apprenticeships and traineeships must be properly marketed to Indigenous Australians, through effective partnerships between communities, employers and providers.

Marketing campaigns must take account of the special needs of Indigenous people. They must broaden the apprenticeship and traineeship choices that Indigenous students perceive themselves as having, and must help Indigenous students identify the opportunities available to them.

INCREASING STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS DOING HIGHER LEVEL VET COURSES, APPRENTICESHIPS AND TRAINEESHIPS

In 1996, only 46 per cent of module enrolments for Indigenous students resulted in a pass, compared to 63 per cent for non-Indigenous students.

Indigenous students in 1996 were more than twice as likely as non-Indigenous students to be continuing their modules or to have their result withheld.³⁷

Apprenticeship and traineeship retention and completion rates are significantly lower for Indigenous Australians.

Support services that Indigenous students need in order to do higher level VET courses, apprenticeships and traineeships are needed, and providers must be funded to supply them. These services include numeracy and literacy skills support and development, customised to suit Indigenous learning styles and delivered either by Indigenous people, or people with a sensitivity to Indigenous people and cultures.

CREATING INCENTIVES BASED ON OUTCOMES FOR PROVIDERS THAT TRAIN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Providers who actively market to Indigenous people, and who provide the support services that Indigenous students need, are likely to incur additional costs. There are likely to be similar additional costs related to the work-based component of learning. This is an investment in Australia, and incentives should be provided to providers and employers to make this investment.

Outcomes need to be measured:

- quantitatively (in terms of the total numbers of students)
- qualitatively (in terms of the level of qualification attained).

³⁷ NCVET 1998.

INCREASING VET OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPRISONED INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody found that vocational education and training has a central role to play in both preventing and responding to the disproportionately high rate of Indigenous peoples' arrest and detention³⁸.

In doing so, it noted the clear link between vocational education and training and employment: over 80 per cent of Indigenous prisoners in the early 1990s were unemployed at the time of arrest.

Action to improve Indigenous prisoners' access to VET will reduce the possibility of recidivism. Specialised employment and training programs to help them make the transition from prison to work must be developed, supported and expanded.

ENCOURAGING AND PROMOTING LIFELONG LEARNING

Lifelong learning has always been a strong element of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian cultures. It has enabled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, over many thousands of years, to continue to interact, develop and adapt with the changing Australian environment.

Like many Australians, Indigenous people value lifelong learning because of the vital role it plays in sustaining the cultural, social and economic fabric of the community³⁹. Lifelong learning certainly affirms and renews culture and leads to the development of social capital⁴⁰. Indigenous people have consistently and clearly indicated their desire to undertake further learning or training.⁴¹

³⁸ ATSIPTAC 1998b.

³⁹ UNESCO 1996; Kearns 1998.

⁴⁰ Falk and Harrison 1998.

⁴¹ ABS 1995.

OBJECTIVE 3: Achieving increased culturally appropriate, and flexibly delivered training, including use of information technology, for Indigenous people

CATERING FOR RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have always been widely dispersed throughout Australia. Strong ties to place, culture, land and family remain important to the present day Indigenous population. This results in a population skewed towards particular regions and localities associated with their places of origin.

The widespread dispersion of Indigenous people has important implications for VET. 64 per cent of Indigenous people living in rural areas live more than 50 km from the nearest TAFE College.⁴²

Only 30.4 per cent of Australia's Indigenous people live in major urban areas, compared to 62.7 per cent of the total Australian population. Indigenous Australians represent a significantly higher proportion of the population across northern Australia, western New South Wales, northern South Australia and western Queensland.

Indigenous VET students comprise a much higher proportion of Australians enrolled in VET in remote regions. In 1996, 26 per cent of Indigenous VET students lived in remote regions, compared to three per cent of non-Indigenous VET students.⁴³

The widespread dispersion of Indigenous Australians calls for VET that is responsive and flexible.

DEVELOPING ELECTRONIC AND ON-LINE TRAINING STRATEGIES SPECIFICALLY FOR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

New information technologies offer some potential to improve learning opportunities in remote areas. But new technology will not, by itself, be useful unless individuals and communities are supported to use, and can use, the technology.

⁴² ABS 1995.

⁴³ NCVET 1998, p.15.

As noted in *A bridge to the future*, VET systems need to help reduce the gap between the digital 'haves' and 'have-nots'. *A bridge to the future* also noted that new forms of educational and communications technology will increase the demand for accessible, flexible and convenient training. However, it is increasingly clear that information technology learning must start in the early school years.

A low percentage of Indigenous children undertake early childhood education. This disadvantage is entrenched as they move through life and they are less inclined to keep learning.

This delayed progression has particularly adverse consequences for learning about information technology learning, because of the constantly evolving nature of the technology and its wide application in all aspects of life, commerce and work.

The goal of widespread technological learning for Indigenous Australians will require coordinated, strategic, and long-term effort. It requires flexible delivery networks and Indigenous training centres, extra professional development for providers of Indigenous training, and partnerships between communities, schools, VET and higher education providers, and industry.

For Indigenous people, information technology can complement human 'face to face' teaching and learning - but it will not replace it.

ENCOURAGING COMMUNITY EXPRESSION OF TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT NEEDS

Flexible delivery is not just about new technology and other modes of delivery, but means giving individuals and communities far greater control over what training is provided, when, where, how and by whom. Indigenous people need courses that

- cover a broad range of rural and remote industries
- are culturally appropriate in content, method of delivery, and in length and timing

- recognise the role the community plays in learning
- anticipate an active role for local communities in developing training and assessment
- are accompanied by support services required to encourage individuals to engage in lifelong learning, such as income and accommodation support.

The recent structural and policy reforms in VET (competency based / self paced training and assessment, Training Packages, flexible unit costing, user choice) offer great promise for Indigenous Australians to exercise greater control over their learning. Government, communities, industry and VET providers must now work together to make this promise a reality.

OBJECTIVE 4: Developing closer links between VET outcomes for Indigenous people and industry and employment

ESTABLISHING ONE-STOP 'TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT SHOPS' FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Vocational education and training can, and does, lead to jobs. This is as true for Indigenous Australians as for non-Indigenous Australians. In 1996, 80 per cent of Indigenous Australians with vocational qualifications were working, compared with only 49 per cent of those without a qualification.⁴⁴ Given that job outcomes tend to improve the higher the level of the qualification (and that Indigenous people tend to do lower level qualifications), there is every reason to believe that improving access to VET would dramatically improve the job prospects of Indigenous people.

And indeed, the job prospects of Indigenous people need dramatic improvement. (23 per cent in 1996 compared to nine per cent for all Australians⁴⁵). This rate would be significantly higher if participants in the Community Development and Employment Program (the 'work for the dole' scheme) were statistically defined as 'unemployed'.⁴⁶

This unemployment rate is projected to increase as the Indigenous population grows⁴⁷. In 1996, 40 per cent of Indigenous people were less than 15 years old, compared to just 21 per cent of the total population.⁴⁸

'One stop training and employment shops', based in Indigenous communities or in relevant regions and staffed by Indigenous people, could be an important means to promote training opportunities linked to work. Aware of Indigenous cultures and needs, such shops could work with training and assessment organisations to make their products and services more relevant to local Indigenous communities. They would be the active face of training and employment partnerships.

EXPANDING NEW APPRENTICESHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

As previously noted, although participation rates by Indigenous VET students

⁴⁴ ABS 1996 data.

⁴⁵ ABS 1998, p.33.

⁴⁶ Australian National University 1997.

⁴⁷ Australian National University 1997.

⁴⁸ ABS 1996, p.2.

are good compared to the national average, participation tends to be in lower level courses with less direct connection to work opportunities.

The statistics attest to this: by May 1997, only 52 per cent of Indigenous VET 1996 graduates had jobs, compared to 71 per cent of non-Indigenous graduates.⁴⁹

Research is needed to identify the barriers to involvement by Indigenous people in apprenticeships and traineeships, particularly in industries that have significant potential to provide them with employment and VET opportunities. This research should form the basis for workable solutions, to be applied nationally.

CUSTOMISING TRAINING PACKAGES TO ALLOW FOR TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT TAILORED TO SPECIFIC LOCAL INDIGENOUS NEEDS AND CONTEXTS

Training Packages have the potential to be adapted and customised to meet the needs of individual communities. Training Packages must provide ways to include culturally specific themes, and ensure that training is developed and delivered in a culturally appropriate manner.

EXPANDING THE QUALIFICATIONS WITHIN TRAINING PACKAGES TO ENSURE THAT THE SPECIFIC TRAINING NEEDS OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES ARE CATERED FOR

Indigenous communities have specific training needs relating to areas of disadvantage such as health, education and training as well as in culturally specific areas.

Through the development and implementation of Training Packages, outcomes for Indigenous people can be maximised and learning sensitive to cultural issues can be incorporated.

Examples of programs where the specific needs of Indigenous people can be met include the incorporation of a specific qualification for Aboriginal Health Workers in the Health Training Package, an Indigenous organisations management qualification under Business Services and a cultural tour qualification under Tourism.

⁴⁹ NCVET 1998.

EXPANDING VET OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE PARTICIPATING IN THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (CDEP)

VET can enhance the employment outcomes for 31,000 CDEP participants⁵⁰ through specially tailored arrangements in locations that lack viable labour markets, particularly in isolated and remote locations. This may require a whole-of-government approach which links the delivery of training and employment services, with economic and infrastructure development.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN GROUP TRAINING SCHEMES

Group training companies, because of their nature, can provide many employment and training opportunities for Indigenous people. Through their funding agreements, training brokers need to be held accountable for their use of public funds, particularly in relation to equity groups.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN TRAINING CENTRES

Funds are provided by government to training centres to increase industry involvement in the development of a broader, more competitive training market. Government funds are also provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training providers to assist them in the expansion or refurbishment of training facilities. By expanding opportunities in this area, the future needs of Indigenous students will be able to be met by providers.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

VET has a major role to play in providing the skills required to take advantage of economic and business opportunities. In turn, economic development can create job and training opportunities, especially in areas where current labour markets restrict access to training through lack of on-the-job opportunities. In addition, economic and enterprise development can expand opportunities for Indigenous people in VET, particularly through *New Apprenticeship* initiatives.

Small business training programs for Indigenous people should be tailored to include self-paced, small business management courses, support networks and mentoring programs, delivered by training providers that specialise in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

⁵⁰ Numbering 31,000 in 1999: see ATSIC Briefing Paper to ATSIPTAC, April 1999.

5. Key performance measures

Partners in a learning culture, Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategy for VET, is being implemented in the period 2000-2005, a similar, but longer time frame to *A bridge to the future*, Australia's national strategy for VET.

The seven national key performance measures (KPMs) contained within *A bridge to the future* will measure outcomes for Indigenous peoples as well as for all Australians.

To further measure the success of *Partners in a learning culture*, specific KPMs for the four objectives outlined have been identified. These are listed below.

OBJECTIVE 1: Increasing involvement of Indigenous people in decision making about policy, planning, resources and delivery

Key performance measures

- Number of Indigenous people in decision making and advisory roles
- Number of Training Packages which specifically refer to Indigenous people and their training needs
- Number and type of Training Packages which have entry level qualifications and Indigenous culturally appropriate content
- Increase in employment of Indigenous people in key areas of VET to a level equal to Indigenous population in the relevant State/Territory
- Increased number of Indigenous people on decision making bodies
- Number of RTOS meeting audit requirements against guidelines
- Increased number of Indigenous Training Organisations

OBJECTIVE 2: Achieving participation in VET for Indigenous people equal to those of the rest of the Australian community

Key performance measures

- Participation of Indigenous students in VET in schools programs by AQF level and ANTA Industry group
- Participation of Indigenous students in higher level VET courses
- Participation in of Indigenous students in VET by AQF
- Module/unit of competence pass rates for Indigenous VET in Schools participants
- Module/units of competency pass rates for Indigenous VET students
- Proportion of Indigenous people awarded a module through RPL and RCC
- Proportion of qualifications completed by AQF level under VET in schools programs
- Proportion of qualifications completed by AQF level and geographic location, (by capital city, other metropolitan and rural and remote) for all Indigenous VET students

OBJECTIVE 3: Achieving increased culturally appropriate, and flexibly delivered training, including use of information technology, for Indigenous people

Key performance measures

- Participation of Indigenous students in IT VET programs
- Pass rates for Indigenous students in IT VET modules/units of competency.
- Proportion of Indigenous people in information based industries accessing training

OBJECTIVE 4: Developing closer links between VET outcomes for Indigenous people and industry and employment

Key performance measures

- Number of Indigenous commencements, in training, and completions, by AQF level, in New Apprenticeships
- Number and percent of Indigenous people in the workforce participating in training
- Employment rates for Indigenous VET graduates and VET module completers
- Proportion of Indigenous VET graduates who go on to further study
- Indigenous commencements, in training, and completions by AQF level, in New Apprenticeships, where the employer is a Group Training Company
- Number of people on CDEP undertaking accredited training and area/field of study
- ITABs have specific actions for improving opportunities for Indigenous people in their strategic plan and marketing plans

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