

SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY INTO INDUSTRY SKILLS COUNCILS

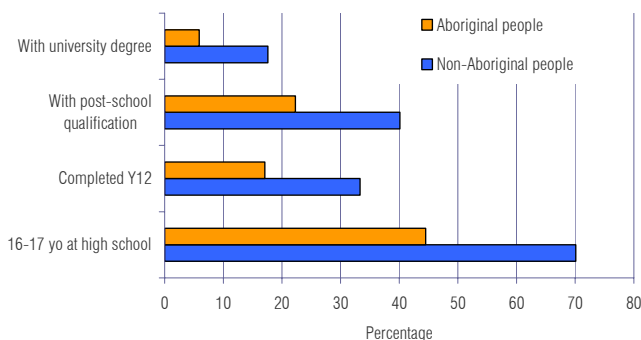
Introduction

The fourteen Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) of NSWALC Northern Region have recently completed a Regional Economic Development Strategy and Implementation Plan (REDSIP) to provide an evidence-based economic and business development strategy in northern NSW. All Land Councils express the view that education and training are primary needs in the communities, and that current training arrangements are not delivering the outcomes required to address skills shortages and inequitable levels of attainment.

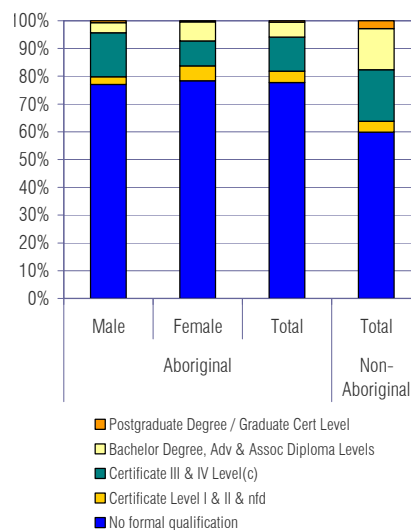
In the context of the Senate Inquiry, it is difficult to separate the various stakeholders in the VET sector in terms of specific accountability, but it is clear that the present structure is failing Aboriginal people in this region.

Current skills levels

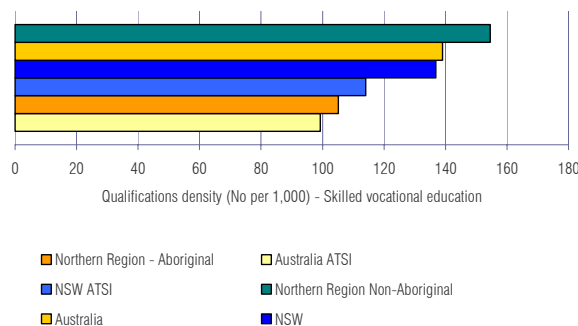
The graph below compares levels of educational attainment for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in our region. 22.3% of Aboriginal adults had a formal post-school qualification, compared with 40.1% of non-Aboriginal adults.



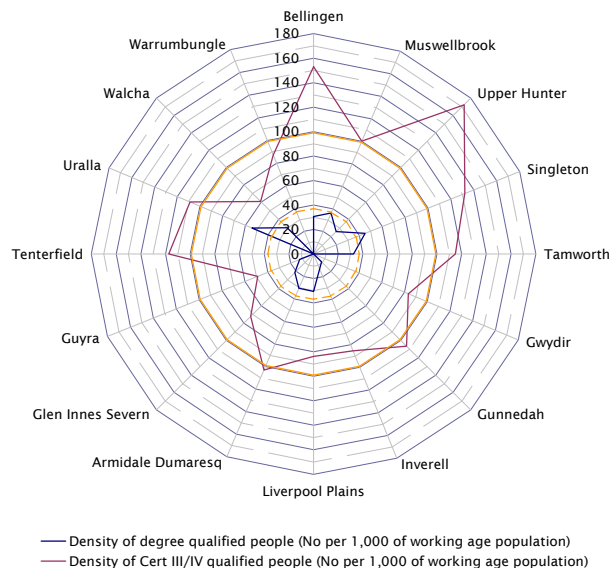
A larger percentage of Aboriginal men within the region had a formal qualification than Aboriginal women, but women tended to have a higher-level qualification.



The number of Aboriginal people with a skilled vocational qualification is shown below, relative to other population groups.



Density is by 1,000 people of working age. The density of qualifications held by Aboriginal people in the Region falls well short of national benchmarks.



The radar diagram shows, for each local government area in our region, a comparison with the national average density of people holding a qualification to degree level and above, or a skilled vocational qualification, for Aboriginal adults. The national average density of Aboriginal people holding a qualification to degree level is 37 per 1,000 of the Aboriginal population of working age and for a skilled vocational qualification, the density is 99 per 1,000 of the working age population (cf. yellow circles). Comparative figures for non-Aboriginal adults are 129 per 1,000 and 130 per 1,000, respectively. The consequences of this for productivity within our region do not need to be spelled out.

Problems and solutions

Population projections indicate an increase in the Aboriginal working age population across the region of approximately 50% from the 2006 baseline figures to 2021, in contrast with a projected decline in non-Aboriginal working age population of about 7% over the same period. A skilled Aboriginal workforce is essential for the economic sustainability of our region. In consequence, it is important to increase the level of engagement

between eligible Aboriginal individuals and the training system.

One critical issue for our Land Councils is lack of clarity as to responsibilities among service providers in the VET sector. We fear this mirrors actual fragmentation among sector players, which appear reluctant to critically review the effectiveness of training delivery, so for the Land Councils working at local level, it is difficult enough to try to engage positively with the likes of TAFE and other training providers, let alone dealing with relationship issues between players within the sector. Relationships and, specifically, divisions of responsibilities between the TAFE Institutes, State Training Services and the Industry Skills Councils are quite opaque from our perspective.

Given increasing pressures coming from our communities who would like to have greater access to available employment, we are frustrated at the inability of the training system as a whole to provide our people with the skills necessary to obtain work, function in the workplace and develop a career path in the longer term.

The answer to this is better targeted training packages which provide for continuity in skills development, articulation with higher level qualifications, and portability between the Aboriginal community sector and the mainstream. In this last regard, the Land Councils are of the opinion that it is preferable to incorporate modules designed to meet the needs of the Aboriginal employment sector within mainstream training packages, rather than to develop Indigenous-specific packages.

Our people complain about being the most trained sector of the population; however, the data reveal that what training has been provided has generally been limited to basic vocational level. More particularly, training provided has not typically matched local industry needs, related work experience has not been available and, consequently, employment outcomes have not resulted. Nor has there been a continuum of training that allows people to develop and move from sequestration in entry-level positions, in cases where employment has resulted from training. A



potential role for the ISCs in our region would be to target workforce development efforts towards Aboriginal people already in employment who have been recruited in accordance with Indigenous employment policies, and then left to languish long-term without any clear career path.

Of particular concern in relation to the proliferation of basic vocational qualifications among our people are the changing needs of industry for employees with increasingly higher skill levels, to improve productivity and engage with technological enhancement. The focus needs to be on articulation, and the development of multiple accessible pathways through VET and higher education to counter an ever-growing disconnect between training and labour market needs.

One specific area of frustration for our Land Councils, and for the NSWALC network more broadly, is programme development in the area of cultural heritage protection, in the context of conservation and land management offerings. We understand that NSWALC is addressing the proposed AHC10 Training Package in some detail in its submission to this Senate Inquiry. We would, however, mention our frustration at a regional level in having our Land Councils' specific needs in terms of sites protection addressed in course development through NSW TAFE. Our regional Catchment Management Authority contributed funding to develop training material specifically to train community members in sites work. A consultant was engaged to consult our Land Councils on specific requirements, but the Land Councils are utterly frustrated at the glacial rate of progress which, based on latest information, is confined to one discussion with one Land Council. It may be that this issue is a local TAFE problem rather than a systemic issue which embraces the AgriFood Skills Australia; however, as we indicated above, such is the opacity of the system that we have no way of knowing.

Conclusion

Aboriginal people in our region, as elsewhere, form an untapped resource, the development of which will be crucial to economic and sustainability into the future. We currently have a jobs deficit of nearly

1900 positions (at 2006 levels) for parity with the non-Aboriginal population sector. Those of the population who are in work urgently require upskilling to meet the changing needs of their workplaces, and immediate attention should be given to formulating a strategic approach to assisting school leavers into economically productive pathways, whether this be through the VET or higher education sectors. The ISCs are almost certainly well placed, with the right advice, to make a significant contribution, but only in the context of a transparent, energetic and accountable VET sector acting together to attain common goals.

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