



Australian Government
**National Indigenous
Australians Agency**



NIAA

NIAA submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment

National Vocational Education and Training Regulator
(Data Streamlining) Amendment Bill 2023

4 April 2023

Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples



Contents

Introduction	3
Closing the Gap	4
Target 6 and 7	4
Priority Reform 1 and 2	4
Priority Reform 4	5
Governance of Indigenous Data Framework.....	5



Introduction

The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Education and Employment Committee on the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator (Data Streamlining) Amendment Bill 2023 (the bill).

The NIAA is committed to improving the lives of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The NIAA recognises that each community is unique. The agency includes people across Australia who work closely with communities to make sure policies, programs and services address these unique needs.

The NIAA plays an important role in leading the efforts of all Commonwealth agencies to contribute to better outcomes for First Nations Australians. Under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap there is shared accountability for ensuring the outcomes of Closing the Gap are achieved through implementation.

The objective of the National Agreement is to enable First Nations people and governments to work together to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians.

The Minister for Indigenous Australians, supported by the NIAA, is responsible for coordinating the delivery of the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan. All Commonwealth Ministers are responsible for taking action to achieve targets that sit within their portfolio. Importantly, all ministers, departments and agencies across the Commonwealth have a role to play to deliver the Priority Reforms, outcomes and targets in collaboration and partnership.

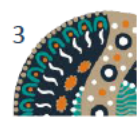
In that context the NIAA has an interest in the proposed amendments to the bill.

Currently there are data lags of up to 20 months, which impact on the provision of current and responsive policy advice. Access to current and consistent Vocational Education and Training (VET) data will assist in informing the development of policies and programs in relation to Closing the Gap Targets 6 and 7, as well as contributing to Closing the Gap Priority Reform Areas 1, 2 and 4.

The NIAA is supportive of the proposed amendments that will allow for timely, accurate and consistent data regarding VET to inform policy and program development and management:

- allowing skills ministers to delegate powers under VET regulations to other individuals
- enabling the release of more information to the public about VET training
- providing more flexibility to work in partnership with First Nations people regarding data governance and use, and
- enabling the DEWR Secretary to make determinations about VET data systems.

The NIAA seeks to have the inclusion of the relationship between the data measures in the bill with Priority Reform 4 - Shared Access to Data and Information at Regional Level of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap explicitly stated. This is to ensure commitments under Closing the Gap are met in relation to data and information.



Closing the Gap

Target 6 and 7

Access to current and reliable information on VET courses and student participation, completions and attainment will assist with understanding progress and policy issues impacting on achieving Closing the Gap Targets 6 and 7 that relate to further educational outcomes for First Nations Australians.

- Target 6 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reach their full potential through further education pathways. By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70 per cent.
- Target 7 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are engaged in employment, education or training. By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67 per cent.

Recent data from the Productivity Commission and Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates that both Targets 6 and 7 show improvement but are not currently on track:

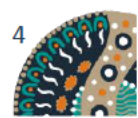
- Target 6 - Nationally in 2021, 47 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–34 years had completed non-school qualifications of Certificate III or above. The Productivity Commission has highlighted a drop of around 16 per cent for First Nations students aged under 35 enrolling in a Certificate III or higher qualification (data to 2020). Increased First Nations student enrolments in Certificate III and above qualifications and improved completion rates will be needed to achieve this indicator.
- Target 7 - Nationally in 2021, 58 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15–24 years were fully engaged in employment, education or training.

Priority Reform 1 and 2

The Australian Government provides \$1.6 billion annually as a contribution to states and territories for each jurisdiction's VET delivery. Responsibility for VET delivery rests with the states and territories through the National Agreement on Skills and Workforce Development (NASWD).

Under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, building the community controlled sector, and strengthening and establishing formal partnerships and shared decision making are two of the four priority reforms committed to by all governments. Research by National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) suggests that Indigenous students are more successful when they are taught by local trainers and are able to engage in their learning on country and in their own language¹. This suggests that efforts to expand and grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations (ACCRTOs) sector and other Indigenous organisations providing training and support services, will provide the cultural settings and learning styles needed to improve outcomes for First Nations people in the VET sector.

¹ Guenther, J, Bat, M, Stephens, A, Skewes, J, Boughton, B, Williamson, F, Woollorton, S, Marshall, M & Dwyer, A 2017, Enhancing training advantage for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, NCVER, Adelaide.



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Working in partnership (Priority Reform 1) with First Nations people and peak bodies allows government to engage deeply and comprehensively through a range of forums, and ensure that skills and training priorities and Closing the Gap initiatives are designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Australian Government is committed to helping and assisting ACCRTOs in the delivery of services and support to First Nations communities. A strong and thriving ACCRTO sector is critical to achieving Priority Reform 2 – Building the Community-Controlled Sector, and Targets 6 and 7.

Access to reliable and current data ensures policy advice and program development can be better targeted to support ACCRTO operation and sustainability, improve student participation and completion rates, and subsequent economic outcomes.

Priority Reform 4

The result of increased responsiveness that will come from these amendments will assist with the alignment of the Commonwealth's commitment to Priority Reform 4 - Shared Access to Data and Information at Regional Level of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. In addition, clause 32 and 33 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap provide a guide to establishing respectful partnerships with First Nation peoples in regards to shared decision-making.

Governance of Indigenous Data Framework

NIAA is leading work across the Australian Government to develop an Australian Public Service - wide Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data (the Framework). The Framework is being developed in partnership with First Nations and other non-government representatives. The intention of the Framework is to improve the accessibility, relevance, interpretability, and timeliness of government-held data for and in partnership with First Nations peoples. The objectives of the Framework align with some of the measures in the bill as well as the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The increased availability of data as a result of the proposed changes in the bill should improve access to First Nations data and support shared decision making with First Nation partners. The proposed changes to the bill align with the objectives of the Framework and will provide an opportunity for Australian Government agencies to better use First Nations data and exercise good practice in Governance of Indigenous Data, as outlined in the Framework.

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