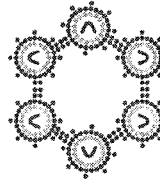
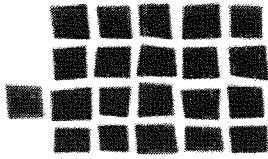


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NORTH COAST  
Aboriginal Learning  
Partnerships

Submission to:

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education  
and Training

Inquiry into combining school and work: supporting successful  
youth transitions

North Coast TAFE, North Coast Aboriginal Learning Partnerships  
(NCALP)

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(i) Summary:

The relative disadvantage experienced by young Aboriginal Australians in schools and pathways to work is extremely well recognised and documented from extensive research over previous decades. Young Aboriginal Australians, on average, are more likely to be disengaged earlier at all levels in both primary and secondary school; experience disproportionately low rates of high school completion (less than half that achieved by non-Aboriginal students); and experience significant difficulties in the labour market, resulting in higher Aboriginal unemployment levels and more protracted periods of unemployment NSW Government, 2008, p. 9).

Improving the education, employment and training pathways for young Aboriginal learners has therefore been a key priority and policy area for many Australian governments and education systems for some time. This need to increase successful transitions in education and employment for young Aboriginal learners is made more critical by the demographics of the North Coast of New South Wales where on average, around 8 per cent of all people are Aboriginal. Unlike wider regional areas, this population is dramatically skewed towards youth with between 40 and 50 per cent of all Aboriginal people on the North Coast between 5 and 24 years of age (ABS, 2007).

This submission is based upon the *V Tracks* program implemented by North Coast (NC) TAFE North Coast Aboriginal Learning Partnerships (NCALP) in 2008. *V Tracks* is an early intervention learning program for young Aboriginal high school students on the North Coast of New South Wales which concentrates on strategic and collaborative partnerships between TAFE and schools to increase the retention and engagement of these learners in education, employment and training. Through a focus on TAFE taster programs and school-based vocational learning in the earlier (Years 9 and 10) years of secondary schooling, *V Tracks* seeks to provide young Aboriginal learners with opportunities to taste, think about, choose and plan school and vocational pathways whilst exploring individual, workplace, educational and cultural values.

Earlier this year, NC TAFE NCALP presented a *V Tracks Learning in Place* proposal to the Commonwealth Government, seeking continued investment in the *V Tracks* Program. Concentrating on strategic and collaborative partnerships between TAFE, schools, industry and community, the proposal is parallel and complementary to the broader *Learning in Place* strategy developed by NC TAFE NCALP in 2008 and forwarded to the Australian Government for public comment on an Australian Compact (Social Inclusion Agenda).

Specifically, NCALP seeks to identify and utilise financial and partnership opportunities to:

- Customise cross-curricula (School/ TAFE) delivery and assessment strategies - including key competencies and employability skills
- Provide appropriate learner support - inclusive of students' future aspirations
- Manage individual pathways and transitions from school to further education, training and/ or employment - including School-Based Apprenticeships and School-Based Traineeships (SBAT)
- Incorporate cultural mentoring and Indigenous-focused youth engagement activities
- Engage young Indigenous people in structured work placement opportunities.

Based on a formal evaluation of the *V Tracks* Program, conducted in December 2008 through a National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) sponsored research project, this submission addresses the fifth term of reference for the '*Inquiry into combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions*':

***The effectiveness of school-based training pathways and their impact on successful transitions, including opportunities for improvement (particularly in relation to pathways to employment for disadvantaged people)***

(ii) What research tells us about VET and successful youth transitions:

Improving the retention and engagement of young Aboriginal learners in education, employment and training has been a key priority and policy area for many Australian governments and education systems for some time. In fact, improving the education, employment and training pathways for all young Australians and those at risk of early school leaving in particular, has been a focus for almost a decade. This is explicit in the Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (1999) in stating that ‘when students leave school they should have employment related skills and an understanding of the work environment, career options and pathways as a foundation for, and positive attitudes towards work, vocational education and training, further education and life-long learning’ (MCEETYA, 2001, p6).

In response to such goals and policy objectives, Australia has witnessed an expansion in Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs for young people, including VET in Schools (VETis) and TAFE-Based VET (TVET) programs, herein referred to collectively as School VET programs. To date, most formal School VET programs over the last decade have been aimed at Senior (Years 11 and 12) students.

Vickers (2005) however, emphasises the need for early school leaving and school to work disengagement to be tackled earlier and more collaboratively - revealing that young people who leave school early have often made that decision early in their high-school careers. Students who stated (in Year 9 or earlier) that they would not be in Year 12 were ‘seven times more likely to leave before completing school than were students with higher aspirations’ (Vickers, 2005, p 121). Anlezark, Karmel and Ong (2006) join Vickers in questioning whether VET programs should therefore be re-focused on younger students, given that many early school leavers do not get to Year 11.

Vickers also finds three major themes which emerge in young peoples’ motivations for wanting to leave school early. The first group of reasons relates to work, or perceptions of school as making little or no difference to employment prospects; the second are school-related, for example not liking school or teachers, or failing to find school a happy and satisfying place to be; the third relate to unmet survival needs, including personal and family-related factors. It is the second set of reasons and corresponding examination of curriculum and program issues that is most relevant to this submission, along with the observation that up to 15 per cent of early school leavers do so because school either does not offer the course they want, or offers courses of little relevance or interest to them: ‘a lack of curriculum choice in the lower secondary school leads some students to lose heart, believing that high school will not offer them the job training they want in order to prepare them for work’ (Vickers, 2005, p 122). This draws on the research conducted by Pitman and Herschel and their corresponding examination of curriculum and program issues in schools.

Pitman and Herschel's (2002) research found that many young students were unaware that the senior curriculum included accredited vocational studies (VET) and that these students might remain in school if they could study 'something relevant'. This corresponds to the *Destination and Satisfaction Survey of 2004 HSC VET students in New South Wales* where 60% of HSC VET students reported that VET played a key role in keeping them at school, a figure rising to 70% for students with the lowest Year 10 achievement profiles - those most at risk of early leaving (Polesel et al, 2005). This has led to some states introducing VET programs and 'taster' courses in Years 9 and 10 of school.

Finally, Helme and Hill (2004) draw from the *Hands on the Future and Young Visions Survey*, both national studies of Indigenous students' experiences of VETiS, to identify four key roles of VET for Indigenous students: improving engagement with school and curriculum; broadening pathway options; providing workplace experience; and providing a pathway to employment. They cite several programs and studies which have explored the capacity and success of VETiS in improving schooling and post-schooling options for Indigenous students however these are restricted mostly to experiences of VET for senior school students, and also VETiS, as distinct from TAFE delivered VET (TVET).

In summary, it is understood that decisions to leave school early often occur in Years 8 and 9 and that VET has been demonstrated to play a significant role in retaining young people, otherwise at risk of early school leaving, at school. To date however, most school VET programs have been aimed towards senior school students.

(iii) *V Tracks* - Balanced vocational learning for young Aboriginal school students

Based on the research and evidence described above, The *V Tracks* program was designed and implemented by NC TAFE NCALP in 2008 to address a number of strategic aims for young Aboriginal people in the North Coast region, including:

- increased Higher School Certificate completion
- increased pathways to further education and training post-school
- improved liaison and collaboration between providers in diverse learning contexts including school, TAFE, private providers, industry and the community
- improved knowledge and management of individual student pathways and transitions between school, other learning and work
- customised and individualised curriculum complementary across school and VET/TAFE sectors and aligned with industry competencies
- project-based curriculum including 'tasters' that are practical, hands-on and enjoyable and include negotiated assessment
- curriculum that is innovative and inclusive of skills and knowledge necessary for students' future aspirations

- incorporation of key competencies and employability skills into curriculum, including ICT (information and communications technologies)
- incorporation of youth engagement activities and events that are Aboriginal - focussed and community-based such as 'Deadly Days' (see Appendix Three).

In précis, *V Tracks* aims to increase the visibility and availability of Vocational Education and Training (VET) to Stage 5 (Years 9 and 10) school students. Through a focus on TAFE taster programs and school-based vocational learning in the earlier years of secondary schooling, it seeks to provide young Aboriginal learners with opportunities to taste, think about, choose and plan vocational pathways and also explore individual, workplace, educational and Aboriginal cultural values.

These opportunities are created and supported through partnerships between NCALP North Coast TAFE, Schools, Government agencies, Industry and Business and the wider Aboriginal community. A synopsis of the *V Tracks* program elements is contained in Appendix One, however broadly speaking, the goal of *V Tracks* is to provide students with opportunities to participate in combinations of:

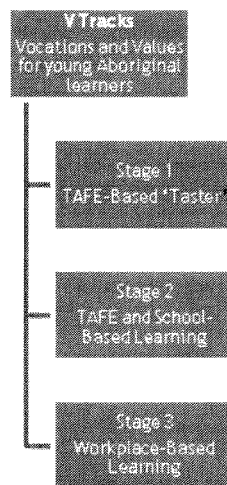
- TAFE-based delivery
- School-based planning, delivery and reflections
- Work placement; and
- Cultural mentoring.

*V Tracks* Programs are therefore locally-designed to include opportunities for students to develop employment, study and communication skills, workplace readiness, cultural awareness and enhanced confidence and self-esteem and activities to:

- Explore and experience different vocational areas
- Design, implement and evaluate individual learning plans, adding to or complementing current school programs and activities
- Receive support to address English language, literacy and numeracy skills within the context of the learning plan and context of the vocational areas chosen
- Identify opportunities to work with mentors, case managers, school tutors and/or community members
- Experience cross-cultural orientation of programs through more equal and diverse learning contexts and strategies
- Prepare for and/ or engage in work placement
- Transition into further education, employment and training - including School VET programs, School-Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships

*V Tracks* has been designed across three distinct stages as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 V-Tracks Stages



Through these stages, students complete:

1. Initial non-accredited 'taster' activities in the custom-designed Introduction to VET course, which includes units from every vocational learning area available through North Coast Institute
2. Accredited units from the Statement of Attainment in Access to Work and Training in a particular Industry area or areas, including key competencies such as communication and employability skills
3. Highly-supported, and often group-structured, workplace-based learning. Students have an opportunity to later articulate into the Certificate I and II Access to Work and Training courses (See Appendix Two: Access to Work and Training) or Stage 5 (early commencement) or Stage 6 TVET.

(iv) The *V Tracks* Systems - Partnerships and community engagement

In addition to minimising disengagement from education, training and/or employment, *V Tracks* aims to support future demand and educational and vocational choices for young Aboriginal students through greater collaborative partnerships. Program Guidelines and a Program Template therefore support a whole-of-organisation approach to *V Tracks* to stimulate greater diversity of young Aboriginal participation across a greater range of TAFE, School and workplace learning programs.

That is, *V Tracks* seeks stronger collaboration not only between TAFE and Schools but also between businesses, industries and Aboriginal community organisations, including but not limited to:

- Municipal Councils and Industry Groups,
- Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECGs)
- Aboriginal Land Councils and other appropriate agencies.

In 2008, NCALP originally committed to five pilot *V Tracks* programs on the North Coast. However, through greater school, community and industry demand, this grew to nine programs in 2009 and was accompanied by additional funding through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR's) Whole of School Intervention (WOSI) and Aboriginal Coordination Centre (ICC) funding programs which NC TAFE NCALP seeks to attract again in 2009. Furthermore, the Department of Education and Training (DET) contributed funding to meet transport, supervision and in-kind costs to support the School students.

Flexible funding models, as opposed to a 'one size fits all' approach, means that consultation with different School clusters and different communities allows for the creation of local programs and solutions to respond to local aspirations, needs and skills shortage areas. To facilitate this, *V Tracks* Steering Committees at each of the nine local activity levels develop, implement and review the *V Tracks* program. At a minimum, these Steering Committees include: the NCALP *V Tracks* Coordinator; the Schools Regional Vocational Education and 15-19 Years Consultants; representatives from the individual Schools (including Principals, Careers Advisers, Aboriginal Education Officers, and Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers), Aboriginal Development and/ or Community/ Business Development Officers from Municipal Councils, and also local DEEWR representatives.

The *V Tracks* Programs that result from this process require the *V Tracks* Coordinator and other NCALP staff (for example Aboriginal Student Support Officers, Senior Education Officers and TVET Coordinators) to work in partnership with School Staff (for example Principals, Vocational Education Consultants, and nominated *V Tracks* Coordinators). This provides for the identification and meeting of on-the-ground operational requirements for each *V Tracks* Program, including collaborative decision making about:

- Activities and accredited learning to be included
- Provision of student support and supervision by Schools
- Transport requirements
- Clothing and other course needs
- Appropriate delivery venues
- The need for any customised delivery and assessment strategies
- Appropriate forms of learner support and other issues associated with implementing the courses
- Structured work placement opportunities.

Each of the three stages requires particular variations of partnership and collaboration. Stages 1 and 2 necessitate structured and clear communication and negotiation between the local TAFE campus and the Schools - to ensure connectivity with existing school programs and maximum student support for travel and other student needs. Stage 3 seeks to engage closely with the DEEWR Local Community Partnerships programs (LCP) that provide a conduit to local business and Industry for the Structured Workplace Learning (SWL).



(v) Culture and civic engagement - Deadly Days Festivals and other initiatives

There is recognition across the North Coast region that North Coast TAFE is in a position to do much more than provide education and training programs. For example, in 2008 the Australian Government's Community Festivals for Education Engagement initiative provided for 'Deadly Days Festivals' at three sites on North Coast TAFE campuses: Wollongbar, Coffs Harbour and Taree (See Appendix Three for further information).

The Festivals attracted more than 1550 young Aboriginal learners, 150 education and employment exhibitors and 400 Aboriginal elders and community members. Highlights included Troy Cassar-Daly and other exciting Aboriginal performers; Alison Page - MC and judge of the 'I wish I'd thought of that' Young Inventors competition; Sporting workshops with heroes Artie Beetson, Dave Peachey and George Rose; Hands-on vocational workshops in a great variety of industry areas; Careers expos and interactive sessions; Healthy living activities; Bush-to-BBQ treats; and Indigenous Hip Hop workshops.

The 'Deadly Days Festivals' aim to give young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people greater opportunities in education, employment and training and positive and healthy living. Specifically, the festivals seek to help young people:

- Get the most out of future education and training pathways
- Find out more about employment and training opportunities
- Enjoy a positive outlook and healthy lifestyles
- Explore contemporary and traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- Get involved in activities promoting and sustaining culture, identity and community interaction
- Have fun through arts, music, performance and sporting activities.

The Deadly Days Festivals also encourage wider community collaboration through:

- Employment and training activities - through careers expos and stalls by employment, education, community and business organisations
- Educational, cultural and health-related activities, including TAFE Taster activities involving music, art, culture, health and fitness workshops, mentor and role model 'yarn up' circles
- Cultural performances from schools, TAFE and community representatives
- Opportunities for parents, family members or other adults to accompany their young people and participate in the learning activities.

NC TAFE is again hosting the Deadly Days Festivals in 2009 (September 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>), in Kingscliff, Grafton and Port Macquarie, incorporating widened program provision -

particularly in the areas of contextualised literacy and numeracy around the objectives of the festivals.

(vi) V Tracks 2008 - Achievements and Challenges

In 2008, its first year, *V Tracks* successfully provided vocational learning opportunities to more than 700 young Aboriginal School students on the North Coast of NSW - including students from more than 40 High Schools and TAFE delivery serviced from 14 of the 17 North Coast Institute Campuses. A summary of the schools and students numbers is below:

Program	Number of Schools (Including High Schools, Central Schools, Junior and Senior College campuses)	Stage 1	Stage 2
Kingscliff	6	130 students	100 students
Wollongbar	6	70 students	50 students
Casino	4 - including 2 outreach	60 students	40 students
Grafton	3	70 students	70 students
Coffs Harbour	6	130 students	70 students
Nambucca	3	80 students	40 students
Kempsey	2	90 students	40 students
Port Macquarie	4	60 students	60 students
Taree	6	80 students	45 students
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>40 schools</b>	<b>770 students</b>	<b>515 students</b>

Students engaged in a wide variety of TAFE and School-Based learning activities, all adapted to the needs and interests of the Schools and students involved. Project-based and taster programs were offered in the following industry areas:

- Conservation and Land Management
- Metals and Engineering
- Electro technology
- Automotive
- Carpentry and Joinery
- Painting and Decorating
- Hospitality
- Children's Services
- Hair and Beauty
- Music and Screen
- Aboriginal Art
- Digital media and
- Business Services

In December 2008, through a research project sponsored by the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER), an evaluation of the V Tracks program was conducted: *'The experiences of early vocational education and training programs for young Aboriginal learners: perceptions of practitioners and young people'*. Narrative was captured from the young Aboriginal learners, school and TAFE staff and this is currently being compiled to share with relevant partners and other educational providers.

- (vii) Key findings from the NCVER sponsored research - *'The experiences of early vocational education and training programs for young Aboriginal learners: perceptions of practitioners and young people'*:

All three groups involved in the research described many positive outcomes of the V Tracks program. For learners, this included:

- Greater insight into education, training and employment pathways including future: study options at school; study options at TAFE; career and job options; and skills needed for work.
- Improved attendance and engagement in school including increased appreciation of: school programs and their relevance to further education, training and employment; the importance of completing the NSW Higher School Certificate (HSC); their relationships with school staff.
- Increased self-esteem and confidence in: gaining new skills; recognising their abilities and interests; seeing a 'future pathway'; and taking on part or full time work

Two methodologies were selected for the research project and applied across five of the nine V Tracks Programs. Firstly, a 33 question survey was completed by 80 V Tracks students, from Years 8 to 10. Secondly, small (4 to 5 member) focus group interviews were conducted with 25 students, 24 school staff and 22 TAFE staff. The school staff included Principals, Careers Advisers, VET Coordinators, Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs) and Workers (AEWs); the TAFE staff included V Tracks teachers, Head Teachers, VET coordinators and Aboriginal Student Support Officers (ASSOs) - all of whom had significant involvement in the design, delivery and support of the V Tracks programs. The survey and focus group questions related to V Tracks and: future pathways; attitudes to school; the structure of the V Tracks program; student support; the TAFE learning environment; and notions of self efficacy. A snapshot of the findings is provided below:

#### *V Tracks and future pathways*

Students agreed that V Tracks had:

- Provided greater insight into future study options at school - 74%
- Provided greater insight into future study options at TAFE - 79%
- Provided greater insight into future career and job options - 84%

- Taught them more about the skills needed for work - 84%
- Given them confidence in thinking they could do part time or full time work - 69% and
- Helped them see a link between learning at School or TAFE and the world of work - 74%

*'For the undecided it definitely helped...there were two girls who decided that they wanted to stay at school...they had a realization of the steps needed to get where they wanted to go' (School Careers Adviser).*

*'There's a big difference between hearing about options and seeing options' (School AEO.)*

*'Its helped me talk with them more about work experience, subject selections and all sorts of things' (School Careers Adviser).*

*'I found it really important to be mapping the pathways, including TVET and apprenticeships and jobs... all the time.... Its language they haven't even heard of and therefore aren't familiar with yet' (TAFE teacher).*

*'Some staff had really outdated views on what we offer through TAFE and TVET.... Cross-sectoral visits between school and TAFE staff would be great to update professional currency' (TAFE teacher).*

A recommendation is that early intervention programs such as V Tracks need to be explicit and consistent in identifying and discussing multiple pathways with students, making little assumption about the level of student or staff awareness regarding opportunities. An outcome from this research for example, has been the design of school and TAFE teacher delivery and implementation guides for V Tracks.

#### *V Tracks and attitudes to school*

Many students agreed that V Tracks had:

- Encouraged them to stay longer at school (eg to complete the High School Certificate) - 73%
- Encouraged them to attend school more - 64%

*'So many of them came back into school the next day, so proud of what they'd done. It was an incentive to be good - so there were big improvements in behaviour and attitude' (School AEO).*

*'It's like they'd had a realization and seen a bigger picture - that there's something more, instead of us just going 'you've got to be at school...you've got to be at school....you've got to be at school' (School Coordinator).*

*'There were other students in the school who hadn't originally been selected because of conduct issues. When they saw and heard what they were missing out on, they envied the V Tracks students...Then they picked themselves up and improved their behaviour and attendance at school so that they could be in the program too' (School AEO).*

*'Some students started to pay more attention in particular subjects, for example maths, because the TAFE teacher said how important it was to be able to do measurements and calculations' (School Coordinator).*

*'It's like a light was switched on, or they could see a light at the end of the tunnel' (School VET Coordinator).*

#### *Structure of the V Tracks program*

Consistent across all three groups was the belief that programs like V Tracks need to:

- Target students most at risk of early school leaving *'and not just Koori kids because they're Koori' (School Careers Adviser)*. School staff for example, recognized that clear guidelines for student selection would ensure that V Tracks programs specifically targeted young people who would benefit the most from the program, and not those students already on a clear academic pathway, a perspective with which students also agreed:

*'I knew already that I wanted to finish high school and go to university, so I didn't want to miss out on school..... but for kids who don't know what they want to do yet, its great' (V Tracks student).*

- Target primarily Year 9 students for all program stages, with: Year 10 students included in early-year V Tracks activity before a focus on the School Certificate and Year 11 subject selection; Years 7 and 8 students supported in making a smooth transition into high school and understanding the importance of school.

*'Younger kids wanted to know why they couldn't do it yet, but they need to get a taste of school first'...'Going from primary to high school is hard enough' (V Tracks students).*

- All three groups however, strongly supported the idea of making opportunities visible to all junior years, not only through Open Days and the Deadly Days Festivals but also through sharing and role modelling back at the school between older students and younger students. *'The V Tracks students became leaders back at the school...they had an increased profile in the school yard' (School Coordinator).*
- Include meaningful learning, key competencies and assessments relevant to further study and 'real world' work skills.

*'Students should have opportunities to include their V Tracks outcomes in school portfolios, or in authentic assessments they need to complete in key learning areas' (School Careers Adviser).*

*'Why can't V Tracks be a content-endorsed course or elective - counting towards the School Certificate?' (School VET Coordinator)*

*'It's not just about going to TAFE and having heaps of fun... what are the skills you'll learn for future education and the world of work? We don't want to set them up for a fall and we don't want to romanticize what they can do... so they turn up a year later for TVET and it's all a lot harder' (TAFE teacher).*

- Emphasize the value of *'practical, project-based, hands-on and real learning'* - recommendations repeated in all focus groups. *'It was fun and interesting doing real things instead of just learning for the sake of it' (V Tracks student).*

*'It was good to finish something instead of going from one thing to another without finishing things' (V Tracks student).*

*'The program was all killer, no filler.... hard work in a short amount of time but all real and relevant' (School Deputy Principal).*

- Aim for continuity and regularity in timetabling: *'If it's a regular program, it becomes another routine for everyone and allows the students to get into a pattern, just like they'd be expected to at work' (School Coordinator).*

*'We shouldn't be worried about the young people...those at greatest risk of dropping out... missing a day of school, because we'll lose them altogether if they don't do something like this' (School Principal).*

*'Our teacher made sure she didn't give any tests while we were at V Tracks .... most of the stuff we do at school just comes out of books anyway - so it's easy to catch up' (V Tracks student).*

- Encourage school executive, school to work committees, AEOs, AEWs, Head Teachers, Careers Advisers and additional school staff to accommodate the program so that students don't miss key teaching and assessment events in their mainstream curriculum, and aren't mistaken to be truant. *'My teacher didn't believe I'd been at TAFE the day before-hand, he thought I was wagging it' (V Tracks student.)*

*'We weren't worried about missing out on school, because our teacher built V Tracks into what we were doing at school' (V Tracks student).*

*'V Tracks can be a part of the School to Work Planning and Personal Learning Plans that we're all supposed to work on with the kids anyway' (School AEO).*

*'V Tracks sits beautifully in the Work Education curriculum' (School VET Coordinator).*

A recommendation from this is that schools and TAFE bring together consultants and learning and development officers to map school and earlier VET curricula to provide context, relevance and articulation pathways for the learners. That is, a preference for a multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral approach to retention and engagement of young Aboriginal learners was clearly expressed, so that programs like V Tracks are 'built in' and not 'bolted on' to existing school or TAFE programs.

- Allow flexibility at the school cluster and community level to design activities that not only complement existing school curricula and programs as described above but meet the needs and aspirations of the students included and match local skills shortage areas. *'Having time for the young people to identify or deepen a passion...and work on that...is important...that's where the energy develops and grows' (School Coordinator).*

*'What's the point in learning if there's no job for us at the end of it? We don't want to learn things just for the sake of it' (V Tracks student).*

- Share knowledge and commitment at the school and TAFE executive, Head Teacher and administration levels so staff *'don't see it as another wishy washy black fella program' (School Coordinator)* and instead *'share a culture of excitement and excellence through a whole-of-school and whole-of-campus effort (TAFE staff member).*
- Encourage parental and wider community *'buy-in'* in terms of the program design and implementation: *'Kids see the value of a program if they see their parents running around like blue-assed flies to make it happen'. 'Having the parents and community there on the Open Days was really important and magical' (School staff member).*

*V Tracks - learners and the TAFE learning environment*

97% of the students said they enjoyed going to the TAFE campus whilst the school and TAFE staff agreed that the young people rose to the expectations of an adult learning environment:

*'The TAFE teachers got the young people to lift their attitudes and skills from the very beginning, by talking with them about what was expected of them at TAFE' (School Coordinator).*

*'There was a great sense of equality because the kids could call them (teachers) by their first name and relate on a personal level' (School AEO).*

*'The young people were able to step up in an adult environment and...act like adults so they could be treated like adults' (School staff member).*

*'The students would also monitor each others' behaviour and 'rouse' if someone was 'mooglin' (playing) up...those students quickly fell back into line' (TAFE Aboriginal Student Support Officer).*

*'It was a great place to be... the teacher treated us like we weren't kids and acted like a normal everyday person... you still got in trouble if you did something wrong, but then things went back to normal...it was just because the TAFE teacher was persistent in us getting things right' (V Tracks student).*

Students were also impressed by the equipment and tools they were able to successfully use. *'I don't know why schools spend money on smart boards and plasma TVs and stuff.... Why don't they buy tools more useful in the real world?' (V Tracks student).*

School staff, students and TAFE staff all agreed that simply increasing the visibility of the VET learning environment had a great impact on the students and their identification of future pathways and possibilities. Opportunities for 'hands-on' learning provided the young people with greater awareness and appreciation of what they were capable of learning and 'doing' in a practical and real-world sense, outside of the traditional school classroom.

#### *V Tracks and student support*

Provision of student support, through school and TAFE teachers, coordinators and Aboriginal support personnel was identified as important:

- The support of school staff, whilst I'm at TAFE, is important to me - 65% of students
- The support of TAFE staff, whilst I'm at TAFE, is important to me - 73% of students

*'I've definitely noticed improved relationships with the students....there's been a building of trust and more awareness of my role' (School Careers Adviser).*

The role of school staff in discussing curriculum and pathway options with students was emphasized, as was the strengthening of personal relationships - allowing young people to feel more connected to their learning, the adults supporting them and the adult learning environment. This relates to Vickers' findings about school-related reasons for young people wanting to leave school early - and their perceptions of whether they 'like' or engage with teachers and staff.

*'It was important having the AEOs, ASSOs and even parents coming along....they would discipline in culturally appropriate ways.... Aunty saying 'this is my country, you respect this country while you're here' (TAFE Aboriginal Student Support Officer).*



*'It was good being better than, or as good as, the teacher....and learning together (V Tracks student.)*

*The roving flow of teachers from schools was wonderful - the students felt connected and proud' (TAFE teacher).*

It became clear however, that if school staff were present, or dropping into the workshops, that it was important for them to actively participate and support what was happening at the time:

*'If teachers were just up the back of the room, talking to each other..... or dropping in to remove a student to discuss something else (unrelated) with them.... this could be very disruptive' (TAFE teacher).*

The implications on school staff work-loads, to be released from school and able to provide such active support were raised numerous times:

*'It's all well and good to advocate for one or two consistent school staff members to actively participate in the program, but is this built in funding wise?' (School coordinator).*

*'Or is it 'more on top of'? If we believe in the need for these programs, which we do, we need to resource them' (School Principal).*

#### *V Tracks and self efficacy*

90% of the students agreed that V Tracks had given them confidence in learning new things and both school and TAFE staff reported students' increased self-esteem, pride and confidence:

*'They weren't afraid to ask questions....they had courage and resilience they hadn't experienced before because they were all starting from a level playing field' (School Coordinator).*

*'Having more choice about what we learned was awesome and getting skills in so many different areas.... I had no idea I could do these things' (V Tracks student).*

The opportunities students had to self-manage small projects contributed to their sense of accomplishment, their identification of skills and natural aptitude and confidence to try new things: *'It was cool taking something home, that you'd made all on your own and in one day!' (V Tracks student).*

*'It made me feel good about myself ....I saw I was good at things that I didn't realize before...It was 'deadly'.... I was proud' (V Tracks student).*

*'It was incredible seeing kids you never would have thought... blossom' (School VET Coordinator.)*

*'One of our most disadvantaged young people is now first in line for everything - it brought him out of himself....one year 9 fella has been coming right out of his shell' (School AEO).*

74% of students also believed *V Tracks* had given them a fresh start in a different learning program. *'It was a fresh start for many learners who had negative learning....or behavioural histories .....there's no red cards or blue cards....just a new page for many of them (School Coordinator). 'Three quarters of the kids talked about 'naughty cards' but at TAFE they started fresh' (TAFE teacher).*

Overall, the students rated the *V Tracks* program very highly:

- 80% believed they had benefited from attending the program
- 84% would recommend the program to other students and
- 93% believed that programs like *V Tracks* should continue.

Both school and TAFE staff have already been guided by the interim findings of this research in considering how *V Tracks* can build on its strengths and address identified challenges in 2009. For example, the program proposals and criteria now include reference to, or application of, key findings from the research whilst executive teams within both sectors have committed to making the findings available and recommended for professional and curriculum resource support and development.

(viii) *V Tracks* 2009 and on - Aspirations and Opportunities

Whilst *V Tracks* has demonstrated significant success in its first year, NC TAFE NCALP acknowledges that more can be done to grow the capacity of these programs. NC TAFE NCALP has therefore sought continued investment in *V Tracks* to continue and expand upon the innovative and effective programs for young Indigenous school students on the North Coast of New South Wales. *V Tracks*, as part of the Institute's broader *Learning in Place* proposal, presents a solid business case given the demographics of the region and the Australian Government's commitment to boosting Australia's skills, productivity and human capital potential; closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage; and building a national agenda of social inclusion.

Specifically, NCALP seeks to identify and utilise financial and partnership opportunities to:

- Customise cross-curricula (School/ TAFE) delivery and assessment strategies - including key competencies and employability skills
- Provide appropriate learner support - inclusive of students' future aspirations

- Manage individual pathways and transitions from school to further education, training and/ or employment - including School-Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBAT)
- Incorporate cultural mentoring and Indigenous-focused youth engagement activities
- Engage young Indigenous people in structured work placement opportunities.

New and strengthened partnerships will be vital to meeting these needs. NC TAFE NCALP is therefore convening a series of workshops and round-tables with school executive and consultancy teams in 2009, to explore how it might work collaboratively and more strategically to address these critical aspects of Aboriginal youth programs.

## Appendix One - V Tracks Program Outline

### V Tracks

#### Vocations and Values for Stage 5 students

*To be 15 or 16 years old means facing a fork in the road ...*

*The V-Tracks program is about creating opportunities for*

*Year 9 and 10 Aboriginal School students to:*

*Taste, Think about, Choose and Plan Vocational Pathways and  
Explore Individual, Workplace, Educational and Aboriginal Cultural Values*

#### *Purpose of the Program*

The *V Tracks* program has been developed by the North Coast Aboriginal Learning Partnerships (NCALP) team at North Coast Institute as a key initiative of its 2020 Vision and response to the NSW State Plan and Two Ways Together frameworks. *V Tracks* aims to increase the retention and participation of Aboriginal secondary school students, as it is these students who experience disproportionately higher rates of early school leaving and related low levels of proficiency in English language, literacy and numeracy.

Specifically, *V Tracks* aims to increase the visibility and availability of Vocational Education and Training (VET) to Stage 5 students. Through a focus on TAFE taster programs and school based vocational learning in the earlier years of secondary schooling, young Aboriginal learners will be provided with more learning options and support to develop employment, study and communication skills, workplace readiness, cultural awareness and enhanced confidence and self esteem.

#### *Balanced Vocational Learning for Young Aboriginal People*

The goal of *V Tracks* is to provide students with opportunities to participate in combinations of: TAFE based delivery; School based planning, delivery and reflections; Work placement; and Cultural mentoring. *V Tracks* Programs should therefore be locally-designed to include opportunities for students to:

- Explore and experience different vocational areas
- Design, implement and evaluate individual learning plans, adding to or complementing current school/ cluster programs and activities
- Receive support to address English language, literacy and numeracy skills within the context of the learning plan and context of the vocational areas chosen
- Identify opportunities to work with mentors, case managers, school tutors and/or community members
- Experience cross-cultural orientation of programs through more equal and diverse learning contexts and strategies
- Prepare for and/ or engage in work placement
- Transition into further education, employment and training - including School VET programs, School-Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships

*Partnerships and responding to local need*

These Program Guidelines and attached Program Proposal Template have been devised to support a whole-of-organisation approach to Aboriginal education and to stimulate greater diversity of young Aboriginal participation across a fuller range of TAFE, School and workplace learning programs. In addition to minimising disengagement from education, training and/or employment, *V Tracks* aims to support future demand and educational and vocational choices for young Aboriginal students through greater collaborative partnerships. That is, *V Tracks* seeks stronger collaboration not only between TAFE and Schools but also between these sectors and Industry and Aboriginal community organisations, including but not limited to: Municipal Councils and Industry Groups, Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECGs), Aboriginal Land Councils and other appropriate agencies.

## **Appendix Two - Access to Work and Training**

The Statement of Attainment in Access to Work and Training was developed after extensive consultation with stakeholders. A particular issue was the vulnerable nature of access and equity learners at this level, and ethical concerns about enrolling vulnerable students in a Certificate I qualification with the resultant message of failure of exiting them with a Statement of Attainment. The consultation stressed the need for students to be able to attain the qualification they are enrolled in. The consultation feedback also stressed the need for clear, accessible and meaningful learning pathways appropriate for particular learner groups, including young Aboriginal people.

The Statement of Attainment in Access to Work and Training is part of the TAFE NSW Access Employment, Education and Training (AEET) Framework which includes accredited courses at AQF 1 to 3 that provide learners with access to employment, education and training.

The AEET Framework is a response to national and international research on the importance of Employability Skills. Qualifications in the Framework contain units of competency clustered according to the Employability Skills Framework proposed by the Business Council of Australia (BCA) and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI). The use of the Employability Skills Framework has been endorsed by the National Training Quality Council (NTQC).

The Statement of Attainment in Access to Work and Training specifically addresses these Employability Skills, particularly those which focus on the development of Communication, Planning and Organising, Self-Management and Learning skills. Designed to meet the needs of people who wish to access pathways to vocational and further education, it provides learners with support in:

- further developing their Employability and/or vocational skills
- seeking paid or unpaid work
- clarifying career goals
- developing specific skills required for entry to vocational training.

## Appendix Three - Deadly Days Festivals

### DEADLY DAYS

#### A TAFE-Schools-Community initiative to retain and engage young Aboriginal Learners in Education, Employment and/ or Training

In October 2008 North Coast Aboriginal Learning Partnerships (NCALP) North Coast TAFE hosted three '*Deadly Days*' Festivals at Wollongbar/ Lismore, Coffs Harbour and Taree.

The '*Deadly Days*' Festivals are part of the Australian Government's Community Festivals for Education Engagement initiative and aim to increase education, employment and training opportunities for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and also promote positive and healthy lifestyles. Specifically, the Deadly Days Festivals seek to increase the capacity of local communities to plan and implement festivals that meet the following objectives:

- Communicate positive engagement with education
- Showcase employment, training and vocational pathways
- Encourage positive engagement with healthy lifestyles and reduced crime
- Promote contemporary and traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- Engage partners in activities that promote and sustain culture, identity and community interaction
- Include arts, music, performance and sport activities

*The Festivals attracted more than* 1550 young Aboriginal learners, 150 education and employment exhibitors and 400 Aboriginal elders and community members.

**Highlights included** Troy Cassar-Daly and other exciting Aboriginal performers; Alison Page - MC and judge of the '*I wish I'd thought of that*' Young Inventors competition; Sporting workshops with heroes Artie Beetson, Dave Peachey and George Rose; Hands-on vocational workshops in a great variety of industry areas; Careers expos and interactive sessions; Healthy living activities; Bush-to-BBQ treats; and Indigenous Hip Hop workshops.

#### **In 2009, NCALP and North Coast TAFE are planning BIGGER, BETTER and DEADLIER *Deadly Days* Festivals:**

- At Kingscliff, Grafton and Port Macquarie - **September 1<sup>st</sup> to September 4<sup>th</sup>**
- 2 action-packed days, with '**Hands-on Learning, Workshops and Try-a-Trade**' on Day 1 followed by arts, culture, music, sport, education and employment expos on Day 2
- And special guests to be announced soon!

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