



## **NAATI FUNDING FOR INDIGENOUS INTERPRETING**

At the last public hearing of HORSCATSIA NAATI was asked about its funding for Indigenous interpreting. Because of limited time then only a brief response was possible. The Chair has requested this Supplementary Submission.

### **Background**

NAATI was established initially in 1977 as an authority within the Commonwealth Immigration and Ethnic Affairs portfolio. In 1984 NAATI was incorporated as an independent not-for-profit company owned and part funded by all the governments of Australia.

The background relevant to this Submission goes to:

- NAATI's constitutional mandate to work with Indigenous languages;
- how the national accreditation system for translators and interpreters works; and
- relevant changes in how governments part-fund NAATI.

### *NAATI Constitution*

Under its Constitution NAATI's Mission is to:

...set and maintain high national standards in translating and interpreting to enable the existence of a pool of accredited translators and interpreters responsive to the changing needs and demography of the Australian culturally and linguistically diverse society.

NAATI fulfils this mission by setting and maintaining the standards as required in its Mission in a national quality-assurance system of credentialing practitioners who meet these standards. NAATI credentialing provides quality-assurance to clients of translators and interpreters and credibility to agencies that employ practitioners who are credentialed appropriately.

Its Constitution enables NAATI to support any of the community languages spoken in Australia. In 1981 at the request of the then Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs NAATI agreed to offer its credentials in Indigenous languages.

### *National Accreditation System*

NAATI issues credentials to those translators and interpreters who meet its standards. As one Committee Member observed, these are similar to the license to practice required of Law graduates before they can work in their profession. In translating and interpreting NAATI credentials are not mandated i.e. there is no legislated requirement for practitioners to be credentialed. Governments generally have policies which state their preference for NAATI credentialed practitioners wherever practical. NAATI believes this policy directed approach to regulating what is still an emerging profession is appropriate.

Most NAATI credentials are issued to:

- graduates of Australian tertiary courses approved by NAATI (67% in 2010/11;
- graduates of international courses accepted by NAATI as equal to Australian courses (3%); and
- candidates who are successful in passing an accreditation test approved by and usually administered by NAATI.

There are 10 Australian universities, TAFEs and private Registered Training Organisations which provide training in translating and interpreting and are approved by NAATI. NAATI approval enables these institutions to recommend graduates who meet NAATI's standards to be accredited without further assessment. Accreditation for approved tertiary qualifications is NAATI's preferred pathway to accreditation.

NAAT conducts tests in some 60 languages, including some where there is no tertiary course available. These tests are not easy to pass and typically more candidates fail than succeed. NAATI and some institutions run pre-test workshops to help candidates prepare to sit these tests. The Queensland and NT training described in our Submission were such workshops.

NAATI testing is available generally where there is significant demand and there is enabling infrastructure such as language teachers, examiners and people with the skills needed to create and update test materials.

As described briefly at the public hearing, NAATI seeks to treat Indigenous languages the same as International languages and Auslan (the Australian sign language). It has the same accreditation standards in all languages even though the pathways to accreditation differ e.g. virtually all Auslan credentials are awarded on the basis of tertiary qualifications while most credentials in Indigenous languages so far awarded have been through testing.

#### *Government Funding Changes*

NAATI is funded by annual grants from all the governments of Australia plus revenue from fees for products and services, such as the fees charged to candidates who sit accreditation tests.

In the past we understand NAATI government funding came through departments which had responsibility for Indigenous as well as international languages. In recent years following changes in Administrative Arrangements at the Commonwealth (and generally at State and Territory levels) NAATI government funding has been provided through the departments responsible for migrant and refugee settlement. Funding for Indigenous services is now generally provided by separate departments. As on-going NAATI funding now generally comes from appropriations for migrant and refugee settlement purposes it cannot properly be used for other purposes.

As described in the earlier Submission, despite not having specific funding for Indigenous languages NAATI continues to work with relevant organisations which seek its assistance. It does so as part of its role in advising government agencies on translating and interpreting credentialing. The Queensland and NT initiatives described in the Submission are examples.

#### **Issues**

Speakers of Indigenous languages who wish to be credentialed as interpreters under the national accreditation scheme must either enrol in a NAATI approved course or seek accreditation through passing a NAATI approved accreditation test.

#### *Approved Courses*

At this time there is only one NAATI approved course for Indigenous language speakers. That is the Diploma of Interpreting in SA described in the earlier submission. Graduates of TAFE SA who reach the required standard can be recommended to NAATI for accreditation without sitting a test. As detailed in the earlier Submission, TAFESA's course is designed for Anangu students

in remote communities in the north west of SA. TAFESA believe though their approach can be applied elsewhere in other languages.

In the NT the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education had also been approved by NAATI, but that approval lapsed in 2008. The WA Central Institute of TAFE also ran a diploma course in Indigenous interpreting but we understand that course is no longer offered.

### *Accreditation Tests*

Most NAATI accreditations in Indigenous languages have been awarded on the basis of accreditation tests. In the mid-1990s NAATI conducted accreditation testing in indigenous languages itself but in recent years tests have been run by other organisations with NAATI assistance. Most notable of these has been the NT Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS).

As described in the earlier Submission the AIS over the last three years has managed a sustained program of training for its interpreters which has enabled since July 2008 14 to be accredited at Paraprofessional level and three at Professional. NAATI has assisted this process with testing materials.

One consequence of NAATI working with the AIS has been that the range of languages in which accreditation is offered has been limited to those which AIS could fund. Accreditation testing requires production of test materials such as dialogue scripts and organisation of examiners to assess candidates. This requires unusual expertise and takes time to organise. There are also issues in Indigenous languages which require particular attention if the process is to succeed.

AIS has told NAATI it is keen to extend the languages in which accreditation credentials can be offered and as flagged at the public hearing AIS and NAATI are currently examining what new initiatives might be possible.

Such collaboration with AIS so far has succeeded in boosting numbers of accredited Indigenous interpreters and in demonstrating that accreditation of Indigenous interpreters within the national system can be achieved but the current arrangements are not ideal for either organisation. Ideally NAATI should administer and be seen to administer all testing and AIS should be able to focus on training its interpreters and using them to deliver services.

If NAATI had specific funding for improving services for Indigenous interpreters both AIS and NAATI would be able to deliver better their core business. NAATI would be able to expand the range of languages and levels of accreditation available to AIS and could relieve AIS of much of its present involvement in testing. NAATI would also be able to progressively expand the range of languages tested beyond the NT. AIS would be able to deliver more services in the NT and to extend the support it provides to other interpreting services which wish to learn from its success.

### **Conclusion**

NAATI is keen to provide the same level of services in Indigenous languages that it provides in international and sign languages. This can be achieved readily by provision of modest funding appropriated for this specific purpose. Any such funding should be sustained, ideally over a three or five year funding arrangement to enable planning and building of capability to support Indigenous language service providers such as the NT AIS.

Canberra

April 2012