

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into indigenous training and employment outcomes

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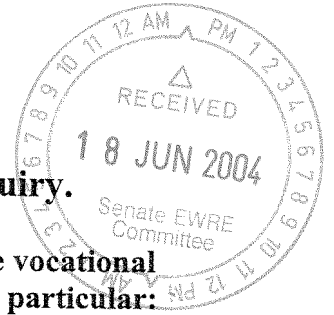
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Indigenous training and employment outcomes inquiry.

Impediments to Indigenous employment and measures to improve vocational training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people, and, in particular:

(a) the effect of Community Development Employment projects (CDEP) scheme on the education and long-term employment outcomes of Indigenous people in rural, remote and urban areas;

Over a two year period in 2002-2003, Aboriginal Training Programs (ATP) at the Institute of TAFE Tasmania (ITT) were funded through the Office of Post Compulsory Education & Training (OPCET) to deliver training to all CDEP participants in Tasmania. ATP worked closely with the two CDEP governing organisations in the state, Workforce Aboriginal Corporation and the Flinders Island Aboriginal Association, to make all CDEP participants aware of the training opportunities available.

Training was offered to groups or individuals to either enhance their skills for the CDEP position in an organisation or allowed individuals to pursue other career paths. Training is an essential component for CDEP participants to achieve long-term employment outcomes. CDEP should be seen by participants as a means to gain skills and accredited training to boost each person's ability to gain real employment. Participants and organisations with CDEP workers should see CDEP as a short-term opportunity (no more than 2 years) and not a long-term career path.

One area of training which should be compulsory is job seeking skills such as resume writing, job applications and interview skills. It is one thing to provide participants with the opportunity to increase their employability skills but it is another skill entirely for those participants to be able to sell themselves either on paper in their resumes and job applications or in person at job interviews.

(b) the appropriateness of the current framework for the funding and delivery of vocational education and training to meet the requirements of Indigenous communities and to prepare Indigenous people for employment, especially in rural and remote settings;

The current and proposed future framework for the funding of Indigenous VET is unsatisfactory in that it does not allow for stability in several areas. Indigenous staff are employed in teaching and non-teaching roles to specifically work with Indigenous communities in the delivery of VET or often in temporary positions that rely solely on commonwealth funding such as IESIP and NIELNS. The NIELNS funding has been reducing over the period of the current quadrennial funding round ending in 2004 and it has been announced that in the new quadrennium the will be very limited funds available to just a few providers who have been deemed successful.

As for IESIP this funding fluctuates on a yearly basis as it is tied to the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) student contact hours that Indigenous students have enrolled in the previous year. While Aboriginal Training Programs have striven to increase

FTE's in each successive year and/or at the least maintain the FTE level this becomes far more difficult if there is a diminishing supply of Indigenous specific training funds. Other than minimal in-kind support for office space and managerial support the Institute of TAFE Tasmania and the Tasmanian State Government have side stepped the issue of financially supporting its Indigenous VET unit in its efforts to deliver both sustainable and quality outcomes to prepare Indigenous people for employment, especially in rural and the few remote settings in Tasmania.

Difficulties also lay in Indigenous students accessing training through mainstream programs. Within TAFE Tasmania the majority of training programs have numbers of prospective students whose demand for training well and truly exceed the number of places available. In practice this means that through the selection process for high demand courses those applicants offered training places are those who score the highest, which often leaves Indigenous applicants without a place. This is often due to lower level literacy and numeracy skills, less self-confidence at interviews and a reluctance to enter new situations without the support of at least one other Indigenous person who will also be in that class.

One of the Commonwealth's proposals under the discussion paper "Indigenous Education: Achievement through Choice and Opportunity" "Australian Government Indigenous-specific funding for 2005-2008 Quadrennium" is to 'improve mainstream service provision for Indigenous students, particularly those in metropolitan areas.' It has now become more difficult for all prospective students including those who are Aboriginal to gain face-to-face course guidance, counselling and support as the Institute of TAFE Tasmania has substantially reduced its number of student counsellors and the course information advice is now provided by a contact centre.

To maintain and/or increase numbers of Aboriginal students successfully completing training in the future it is essential that the Indigenous Unit of the Institute of TAFE Tasmania is adequately resourced. Without the Aboriginal VET Officers to maintain contact with the Aboriginal community and its organisations student numbers will drop dramatically.

(c) the effectiveness of competency-based training models to deliver appropriate level or mix of skills necessary for employment of Indigenous people, including the achievement of the necessary standards of literacy and numeracy;

In many instances competency-based training is an excellent means of delivering training to Indigenous people. This holds true for 'hands on' training where Indigenous people learn a practical skill and then can demonstrate their competence. There are several areas in which competency-based training and the use of training packages means that training in a particular industry cannot be undertaken. Problems arise if students are not employed in that industry and so cannot have on-the-job assessment, they have no simulated work environment or a practical project where students can do real work and are able to be assessed.

Standards of literacy and numeracy are required to be assessed as competent unless there are alternative assessment methods or tools. In most cases where a student is struggling to achieve because of low levels of literacy and numeracy there is not the

time or ability to improve an individuals lit/num levels within the training. In most cases Indigenous students apply for Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS) for tuition outside of the classroom.

Recently an Aboriginal pre-employment training course in the Certificate II in General Construction, literacy and numeracy tutoring was available in class to a group of the students who had been identified with insufficient lit/num. In the class of 15 Indigenous students almost half self identified as requiring help with numeracy and a quarter had limited literacy. An in class tutor was available to work with the students 2 mornings a week when most of the theory based work was done. What occurred was that the tutor started working with those students identified on a 1:1 and small group basis while the remainder of the students worked with the teacher. As the group built a rapport those students who were managing well started to supplement the work of the tutor by providing peer support to those students who needed assistance.

Of the 15 students who commenced the pre-employment training 2 left part way though the course and the remaining 13 completed the training with 12 gaining their certificate. Since completing the training 5 have commenced work or have apprenticeships and 2 have gone onto further educational opportunities. This was an excellent outcome!

(d) the effectiveness of the Commonwealth, state and territory-based initiatives to engage more Indigenous people in training and to encourage higher level skill acquisition in skilled trades and professions, including health and teaching;

Commonwealth initiatives through the use of ANTA funds have been a very successful model of increasing numbers of Indigenous people entering and successfully completing training including at the higher skill levels of certificate 3 and above in Tasmania. The ability to offer vocational education and training in specific skilled trades and professions has attracted more people into training through ATP and subsequently there are more Indigenous people gaining employment.

One of the reasons for this success has been the ability of Indigenous people to train as a group in classes that are culturally appropriate and are structured to meet the needs of that group e.g. the number of days per week and the time of day that the training is offered. This is unlikely to occur in mainstream programs where timetabling is generally based on staffing and not client focused unless it is a commercial course when the relevant industry is consulted. ATP is able, through consultation with the Aboriginal community in the local area by its Aboriginal VET Officers, to design a training program, which more closely reflects the needs of the Aboriginal community where it is to be delivered.

It is our experience that many Aboriginal students who enter and are then successful in Aboriginal specific training are more likely to continue onto further training in mainstream than Indigenous people who enter mainstream programs initially. The added support of the Aboriginal VET Officers and of other Aboriginal students in the training program builds a support network that encourages Aboriginal students to overcome barriers that would in other cases have them dropping out.

Unfortunately the Tasmanian State Government has been reluctant to support Indigenous VET in this state. Other than the promise of 6,000 resource hours last year, that ATP has yet to be able to access, there has been no state funding or initiatives to counteract the reduction of Commonwealth IESIP funding at the end of the last quadrennial funding round in the year 2000 where staffing level were cut by 50%. Other than supporting Indigenous students in their training and creating opportunities for Indigenous students to access training in mainstream and Indigenous specific training one of ATP's key concerns is maintaining Aboriginal VET Officer staffing levels. The effectiveness and ongoing success in Indigenous VET in Tasmania is reliant on the continuing employment of the Aboriginal VET Officers at no less than current levels.

Comparison of roles, responsibility and remuneration between Aboriginal VET Officers and similar positions within TAFE Tasmania highlight substantial inequity in the classification of Aboriginal VET Officer positions. The required level of responsibility for Aboriginal VET Officers is not reflected in the current classification of the positions. Due to the nature of funding available to ATP, VET Officers have opted to maintain a classification level not indicative of their position in order to ensure the availability of funds for training. There are currently 3 permanent fulltime VET Officers, two part-time VET Officers on short-term contracts and one part-time Administrative Assistant, also on short-term contract. All Aboriginal Training Programs positions are currently funded by Commonwealth initiatives. Effectively, Tasmania makes no realistic contribution to Aboriginal VET employment within TAFE Tasmania. Because Tasmania has not acknowledged responsibility for Aboriginal VET Positions the limited commonwealth funding available to ATP for training has been further reduced by the need to expend a percentage of funds on essential support staff.

In comparison the Tasmanian State Government contribute significantly to funding Aboriginal Education in the Department of Education. The state contributes approximately \$400,000 annually to support both identified and tagged positions, sundry grants and a small training component in Aboriginal Education. Should Aboriginal VET be valued and supported any less than Aboriginal Education? Lobbying the state government to address this financial inequity over the past 8 years has proved to be a thankless task.

It is worth mentioning that Tasmania is the only state, to our knowledge, that does not contribute any funding to support Indigenous VET and IESIP.

(e) models for engaging industry and Indigenous communities in partnerships to develop long-term employment opportunities for Indigenous people – in infrastructure development through to the arts – and the limitations and opportunities these confer.

In the past 3 years ATP has turned its attention to more partnership arrangements that benefit the Aboriginal community and are focused on employment outcomes. The Certificate II in General Construction mentioned above is one example where four

organisations worked collectively to provide the appropriate pre-employment training with negotiated job outcomes. In this partnership there was an identified skills gap identified by Workforce Aboriginal Corporation in the Building industry. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) negotiated a Structured Training Employment Program (STEP) with the Construction Industry Training Board.

Under this partnership a pre-employment construction course was run for Aboriginal people in Hobart and Burnie through TAFE Tasmania in 2003 with a third course to be run in Launceston in 2004. ATP negotiated the training and supplied student support such as literacy and numeracy skills development, DEWR supplied the training funds and negotiated the STEP contract and WAC provided safety equipment and is assisting students to gain apprenticeships or other employment in the building industry. Of the 27 students enrolled in the 2 courses in 2003 23 gained their certificate and 10-12 have gained employment/apprenticeships. Through this project not only has Aboriginal community training needs been met, Aboriginal employment has increased and there are now more people with pre-employment skills to partially fill the skill shortage in the recent building boom.

A second partnership, which is running over a 3-year period, is one between ATP and Aboriginal Education (DOE). A relatively new course that was piloted by ITT in 2002 is the Certificate II in Education (Teacher Aide). There had been interest from the Aboriginal community for training as teacher aides as Aboriginal women especially saw this as an opportunity to have employment but still be free to care for their children out of school hours and during school holidays. Anne French Manager, Aboriginal Policy & Programs (Education & VET) approached ATP to run the teacher aide training in each region to skill up enough Aboriginal people to fill identified Aboriginal Education Worker positions in schools throughout the state.

Through competitive bid funding from the Office of Compulsory Education and Training ATP has successfully submitted for funding for the last 2 years for this training. In 2003 13 Aboriginal students gained their Certificate II in Education (Teacher Aide) in Burnie on the North West. Of those, 4 have returned to study their Certificate 3 in Youth Work and aim to continue until they gain their Diploma before looking for employment and of the remainder all but 1 person has gained employment as a teacher aide or tutor in a relief/casual or part time capacity. This same course will be run for Aboriginal students in the North in 2004 and it is being considered for the South in 2005.

In both projects Aboriginal VET Officers played a vital role in supporting the students through the training. This occurred through recruitment, mentoring, career advice, assistance with resume and job applications and when issues arose that threatened a student's ability to successfully complete their training, an Aboriginal VET Officer was available to support them.

While both of the partnership projects mentioned above have and will continue to achieve excellent outcomes for both Indigenous Training and Employment within Tasmania, again it has been a result of Commonwealth funding, no State Government funds were made available.

It has long been reported that the State Government of Tasmania supports Indigenous VET through Competitive Bid Programs, administered through the Office of Post Compulsory Education and Training. In reality this is \$80,000 a year, through a tender process and the funds are ANTA funds, again Commonwealth funds administered through a State Government agency.

Through responsive, relevant partnerships with government, industry and the Tasmanian community TAFE Tasmania's Aboriginal Training Programs is delivering culturally appropriate, supportive, 'hands on' training. The program is also taking the next step by working towards attaining employment outcomes for students.

TAFE Tasmania's Aboriginal Training Programs continually strives to break through the cycle of unemployment in the Aboriginal community by providing quality training, improving literacy and numeracy levels and building pathways to a better future.