

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into the progress and future direction of life-long learning

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Introduction – ACE Supporting Community-based Learning

Adult and Community Education (ACE) in NSW is a state-wide network of around 65 not for profit, locally managed organisations that provide courses in more than 400 locations throughout NSW. They range from large metropolitan and regional community colleges and WEAs (Workers Educational Association) to smaller rural organisations delivering opportunities in many towns throughout NSW. Approximately 50 organisations are located in rural NSW and 51 organisations are Registered Training Organisations (RTO).

ACE organisations in NSW are grouped together into seven clusters that are based on geographic, demographic and/or organisational similarities. These linkages provide opportunities for ACE organisations to share resources, professional development and to optimise training initiatives across regions.

In NSW the ACE sector is supported by the Board of Adult and Community Education (BACE). The Board is a statutory body legislated to provide policy direction and resource allocation to the 65 Board funded organisations.

ACE organisations have been providing second chance learning to members of Indigenous communities for many years. In recent times the commitment to relevant learning demonstrated by increased enrolments (see Tables A and B, and Graph 1) has been acknowledged by the Commonwealth through increased funding to the sector through the (IESIP) Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program. As a result, ACE organisations are well placed to articulate the aims of the review and have clearly demonstrated their capacity to meet local needs including the delivery of nationally recognised training.

The ACE sector submission addresses three of the terms of reference and these are referred to below.

Framework for funding

The current framework for ACE delivery is based on Commonwealth and State Government funding and comprises:

- A state government allocation to support provision of a diverse range of programs throughout metropolitan, regional and rural NSW;
- ANTA - sourced funds for vocational education and training (VET) including funds for English language, literacy and numeracy programs; and
- In addition the Board, on behalf of ACE providers, also accesses Commonwealth funds for adult Indigenous education through the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP).

IESIP funding is provided to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students and is **supplementary** to other ACE course provision funds such as VET and numeracy/literacy.

The supplementary nature of the state and commonwealth funding is a valuable initiative in strengthening the opportunities for Indigenous students and forms the basis for the ACE sector's commitment to enhancing vocational education and training.

The Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) provides IESIP Cluster Targeted Outcomes Project (TOPs) funding to the Board under a 'cluster agreement' wherein the Board of Adult and Community Education is the co-ordinating body for all ACE organisations in the NSW 'cluster'.

A 'Cluster TOPs Agreement' calculates the total number of Indigenous accredited (nationally recognised) and non-accredited VET student contact hours (SCHs) achieved by all ACE organisation that are a part of the NSW cluster.

ACE organisations are expected to achieve an increase each year in Indigenous participation and outcomes as a result of receiving IESIP funds. Annual funding is adjusted downwards by DEST if the sector's performance decreases.

In recent years, the level of IESIP funding to the ACE sector has fluctuated due to the changing availability of ANTA funds available through the NSW Training Market. This has created considerable shifts in participation rates from year to year as funding opportunities come and go. This is subsequently reflected in the rise and fall of enrolment figures.

Impacts

- The impact of this funding volatility is that training opportunities for Indigenous students through ACE also fluctuate and it is difficult to sustain valuable training partnerships with local Indigenous organisations as a result. Consequently, effective initiatives to engage more Indigenous people in training and higher level skills acquisition, particularly in the areas of health and teaching training, are compromised.
- Unlike TAFE NSW courses, ACE organisations are not able to offer fee exemptions for Indigenous students unless the provider accesses the limited IESIP funds for specific programs. The level of funding to the sector allows for concession rates to social security benefit holders but not fee exemption. In some cases, potential students can access additional course concessions or exemptions (such as Information Technology (IT) Course Discounts, VET Priorities Places and, Employment Training vouchers) if they are registered with a Job Network provider. In many cases the ACE provider is more accessible due to their location in regional and remote NSW. However potential clients are deprived the opportunity to access second chance learning based on their ability to pay.
- The issue of funding being tied only to nationally recognised training is referred to below, however it is important to note that in the NSW ACE sector a comparable number of enrolments and student contact hours are achieved in non-accredited

VET relative to nationally recognised training. For example, in 2003 there were 3,457 enrolments and 75,048 student contact hours in non-accredited VET compared to 2,419 enrolments and 89,919 student contact hours in nationally recognised VET. (The current IESIP contract however does not recognise this activity in terms of funding).

Competency-based training models

Indigenous communities are positioning themselves in new ways to maintain and build on traditional strengths, to ensure social cohesion and to promote economic sustainability. They are increasingly recognising the importance of effective competency-based training to deliver an appropriate mix of skills necessary for employment of Indigenous people.

One of the enduring strengths of ACE is its ability to provide grass-roots opportunities for individuals to come together to develop their own and their communities learning potential. The challenges of change presented by industry wanting more competency-based training have been met with creating effective partnerships between ACE and Indigenous communities.

ACE is often the first point of contact for adults who wish to extend or update their skills, interests or educational attainment and provides 'second chance' opportunities for re-entry into education and training.

Impacts

- The impact of ACE provision through second chance learning is that Indigenous students can either achieve a national recognised VET credential, or, if they have limited skills, undertake flexible adult programs in non-accredited VET without the initial pressure of assessment. ACE student data illustrates that in fact many students choose the non-assessment option in the first instance until they feel more confident in their capacity to learn.
- However, IESIP funding is specifically tied to enrolments in nationally recognised training. Hence, although they are completing studies in vocational education and may subsequently enrol in, or receive recognition for, an accredited course or training package qualification, many Indigenous students are not necessarily working to achieve a VET credential. These enrolments therefore, are not recognised in terms of funding although they are critical to establishing VET pathways for Indigenous clients.
- This is particularly evident when adults seek to improve their literacy/numeracy skills. Such skills are deemed critical by the student for progress towards further education or employment, or as a means of contributing towards community development and assisting children and young people in their care. Unfortunately these programs do not attract funding because the primary aim is to create a platform of skills on which to launch pathways to further education and training rather than achieve a credential (at that point in time).

Communities in partnerships

The Board assists community-based organisations to develop specific strategies that encourage Indigenous people to participate in training at all levels, and to encourage Indigenous groups to identify their own learning needs. As a result, ACE providers have developed several innovative programs designed to enhance the vocational and educational skills of Indigenous people.

The Commonwealth IESIP funds may be used for any purpose that contributes to increasing Indigenous participation and outcomes in accredited courses in the ACE sector. In addition the program provides support for effective intervention strategies aimed at improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

In 2003, 16 partnerships were formed between ACE providers and local Indigenous organisations resulting in approximately 6047 enrolments. Examples of VET activity delivered for communities include:

- Certificates III in Aged Care Work and Disability Work from the Community Services Training Package and Certificate IV in Governance for Indigenous Organisations both in the Northern Inland region;
- Certificate IV in Community Management in the Macleay Valley;
- Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training in Nowra; and Certificate II in Land Management (Aboriginal Community Ranger Assistant) in the Sydney Metropolitan area.

Support for delivery of a range of other courses occurs in many other communities and included literacy, numeracy and information technology.

The following case studies outline the way in which 3 ACE providers worked successfully with Indigenous communities to create learning programs which resulted in significant impacts and tangible outcomes for the providers and the communities.

The projects are delivered in conjunction with a rural, regional or metropolitan ACE organisation. Although each project had different goals and achieved different outcomes they had common experiences and similar challenges.

Impacts

The key to the success of the partnerships was the recognition that old methods of delivery had not worked. Creative thinking, a willingness to listen, sensitivity to local issues and adaptability on the part of the particular providers enabled working partnerships to be developed.

A variety of flexible programs was offered and gave students the opportunity to graduate from courses which they could not normally attend. Each case study describes a unique response to a particular need by local communities, and the very positive results which came from those programs.

1. Hunter Community College in partnership with Yarnteen ATSI Corporation.

How was the program initiated?

In a unique partnership, three Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), the Yarnteen ATSI Corporation, and some local businesses in the Hunter region have worked together to develop employment opportunities and to establish new models of Indigenous education. At the centre of the partnership is the local Community Development and Employment Programs (CDEP) organisation, Yarnteen ATSI Corporation. Yarnteen is a central organisation for the local Awabakal people and is the parent company for Yamuloong, an RTO.

Yarnteen sponsors a number of pre-vocational and culturally enriching training programs while Yamuloong provides vocational training.

Hunter Community College (HCC) and Hunter Group Training Company (HGTC) are the other two RTOs in the partnership and they provide training in specialised areas. Hunter Community College supports Yarnteen and Yamuloong courses with literacy and numeracy tutors as well as conducting pre-vocational courses with Yarnteen. Hunter Group Training works with Yarnteen to provide training mainly in carpentry and joinery.

Specific businesses have been strategically linked to a number of training programs to provide work experience for the students and possible future employment.

What was learned?

For Hunter Community College the success of the programs rests largely on the supportive partnership that has emerged between Yarnteen, Yamulong and HCC. *Having a supportive environment has been critical to keeping the students in these courses. Teacher selection is another major factor. HCC runs an eight week program in Aboriginal Studies and we encourage tutors who are teaching Aboriginal students to do the course* says the original IESIP Coordinator at HCC.

Another critical success factor is flexibility and the need for programs to evolve with the changing needs of the students.

2. Strathfield Regional Community College in partnership with Kurranulla Aboriginal Corporation

How was the program initiated?

A partnership between the Kurranulla Aboriginal Corporation, Strathfield Regional Community College, Kurnell Football Club and the Royal Botanical Gardens produced the dream of a Heritage Trail and Wetland Track at Marton Park, Kurnell (a coastal suburb of the Sydney Metropolitan area). The partnership identified a course that they believed would appeal to Indigenous people, connect young Indigenous people to their culture and lead to employment. The Certificate III in Land Management (Aboriginal Community Ranger) integrated theory and practical components.

Contracted Training Provision (CTP) Program funding was obtained to use a site being developed by the Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council.

Students were recruited from a number of sources including Centrelink, Koori Mail and local papers, the Gandangara Aboriginal Land Council was involved in the selection and placement of students. However it was discovered that the Gandangara site would not be ready in time for the course and a new site had to be found.

Through extensive consultation with various Indigenous communities the Kurranulla Aboriginal Corporation and Kurnell Football Club emerged as new partners in the project. Kurranulla Aboriginal Corporation provided the on-going links with the community and Gandangara supported the project by providing a bus to transport the students to the new site.

After almost twelve months in the planning, the course commenced with fifteen students.

What were the results?

The course was demanding with 1,094 hours of delivery. Strathfield Regional Community College, Project Coordinator believed that the success of the program can be attributed to:

- early assessment of students' literacy and numeracy levels and, where required, extra support was built into the delivery of the project
- the appointment of an Aboriginal tutor who was used for all training relating to Aboriginal culture, society and heritage
- incorporating assessment into the practical work component throughout the project
- being small and community based which allowed for the flexibility that was required to get students through the course
- having regular contact between the coordinator and students which was important to establish rapport and address any problems immediately.

3. Barraba Community Learning Association in partnership with ATSIC Tamworth Regional Office

How was the program initiated?

Barraba Community Learning Association includes the northern part of the western region of NSW and takes in the towns of Narrabri, Moree, Inverell, Bundarra and Barraba. The association also works in Gunnedah in partnership with ACE Gunnedah, another Board funded organisation.

After consultation with ATSIC Regional Officers, and surveying a number of Indigenous organisations across the cluster area, the Barraba Community Learning Association entered into a partnership with ATSIC Tamworth Regional Office to develop a three-phase project titled *Murri Management*.

The first phase included rewriting a version of *Informed and In Control*, a resource developed for community-based organisations, to increase the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out the legal and financial responsibilities of management committee and staff members of funded organisations.

The second phase included the development of culturally sensitive case studies and worksheets to illustrate the principles in each unit and develop the skills required for the implementation.

The final phase is currently in progress and includes piloting the materials in three Indigenous organisations and one community organisation which has a high representation of Indigenous people.

What was learned?

Having made the decision to be seriously involved in Aboriginal education, allocating the funds and identifying the strategies with the Aboriginal organisation proved to be just the beginning of the process.

The Project Coordinator said: *You need to be prepared to make changes. Not everything will work but if you keep talking to the organisation and listening- most importantly listening –then the organisations will start to come to you with ideas. The need to be flexible and responsive is most important and if it isn't working, go back and change the way it's done.*

Table A

Enrolments and SCH by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students in nationally recognised training. (2000-2003) -NSW ACE
Enrolment Statistics 2003

Enrolments	2000						2001						2002						2003					
	SCH (000)		Enrolments		SCH (000)		Enrolments		SCH (000)		Enrolments		SCH (000)		Enrolments		SCH (000)		Enrolments		SCH (000)			
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%		
ATSI	970	1.3	29.4	1.8	2,867	3.4	101.5	5.3	3,842	3.7	169.1	6.9	3,031	3.0	109.4	4.0								
Yes	61,118	82.7	1,348.6	83.0	66,396	78.7	1,480.0	77.8	83,378	81.2	1,936.7	79.7	79,921	80.8	2,224.5	82.6								
No	11,790	15.9	245.6	15.1	15,095	17.8	320.9	16.8	15,400	15.0	324.2	13.3	15,952	16.1	356.5	13.2								
Not Stated																								
TOTAL	73,878	100.0	1,623.6	100.0	84,358	100.0	1,902.5	100.0	102,620	100.0	2,430.0	100.0	98,904	100.0	2,690.5	100.0								

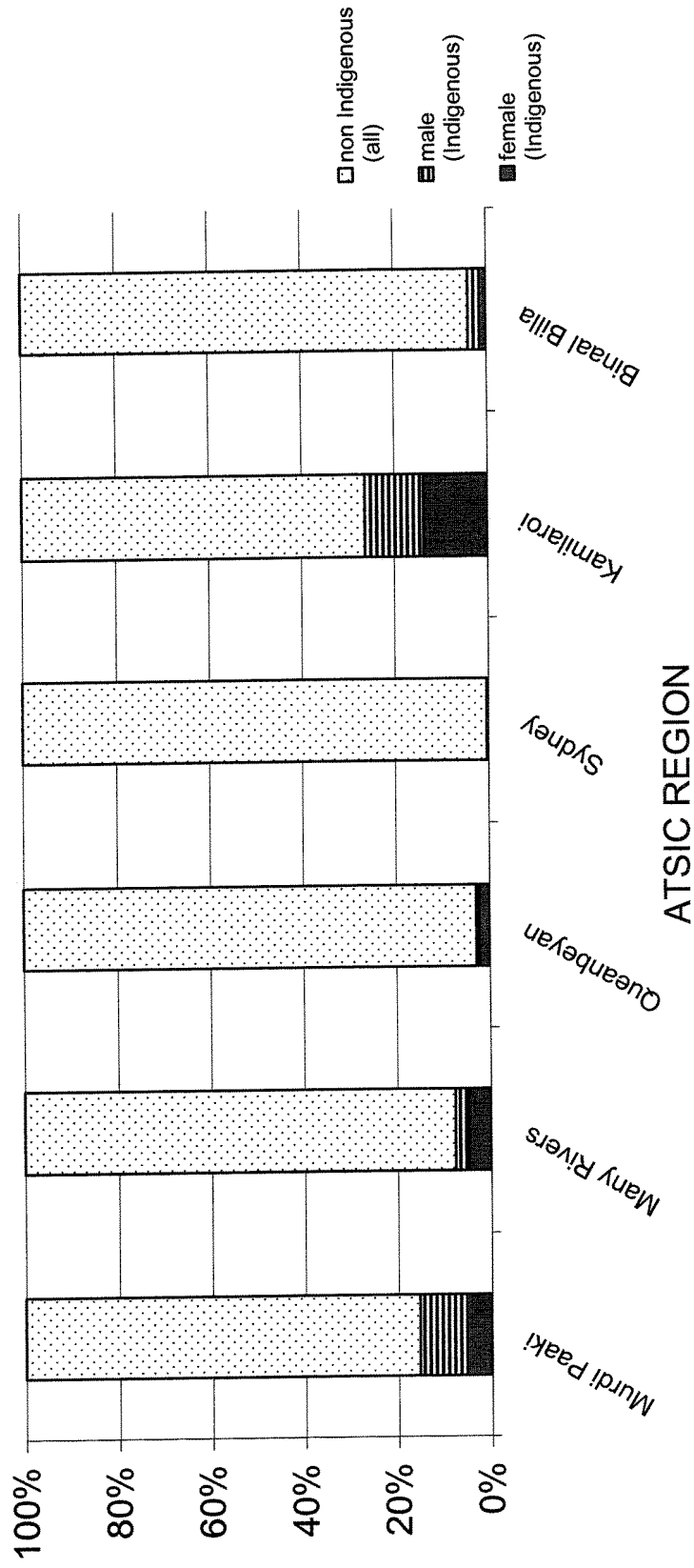
Table B

Enrolments by Cluster and Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander-NSW ACE Enrolment Statistics 2003

Cluster	Total		Indigenous	
	#	%	#	%
Greater Sth West	9,075	100.0	475	5.2
Inner West	54,616	100.0	1,767	3.2
Mid Nth Coast	22,737	100.0	235	1.0
Northern Inland	12,975	100.0	686	5.2
Northern Rivers	23,161	100.0	1880	8.1
South East	8,573	100.0	74	0.8
Watagan	39,275	100.0	320	0.81
Total Rural	170,412	100.0	5,437	3.1
Metropolitan	196,954	100.0	610	0.3
TOTAL	367,366	100.0	6,047	1.6

Graph 1

Indigenous student contact hours compared to all Adult & Community Education
(ACE) student contact hours in NSW by ATASIC Regions (2002)



BACE Statistical Data Collection 2002