



VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE KIMBERLEY

TRAINING & EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRY SUPPORT

This Position Paper has been written at the request of the Kimberley Development Commission by the Kimberley Training Institute, the Kimberley's largest and the nation's fastest growing provider of employment related training and education.

DRAFT FOR PUBLIC COMMENT



Regional Blueprint – Training and Education Position Paper

TAFE Institutes play a very significant role in the provision of vocational training for Aboriginal students, but their contribution should be measured in much broader terms than issuing qualifications or statements of attainment. Engagement with Aboriginal students requires working in different ways. The myriad of socio-cultural issues impacting on Aboriginal students demands holistic strategies for improving participation and success rates.

There are around 500,000 Aboriginal people in Australia, but their distribution is very uneven. While the highest numbers are by far in New South Wales and Queensland, the overall proportion of the population in all states and the ACT is very small (less than 4%). Only in the Northern Territory do Aboriginal people form a significant proportion of the population (around 30%). In the Kimberley, North West of Western Australia it's around 50%. These low population figures across the states means that in many regions Aboriginal people can become 'invisible' to service providers and this makes servicing their educational needs even more complex.

TAFE Institutes are a key part of any strategy to break the cycle of unemployment, poverty, low aspirations, and poor self-esteem for any cohort under-represented in the labour market. This is especially true for Aboriginal people. For many Aboriginal students a step into TAFE is a life changing event.

Kimberley Training Institute's overall student cohort is comprised of nearly 60% Aboriginal students and thus we are very aware of the barriers Aboriginal people encounter in participating and completing studies and transitioning to employment. Some of the specific barriers within the overall training system include:

- Lack of connection and coordination between state and federal agencies
- Delivery occurring within funding and policy frameworks that makes it difficult to deliver the right solution
- Employer reluctance to engage with or employ Aboriginal students
- Lack of support and mentoring
- Lack of role models

Furthermore, there are numerous social-cultural issues impacting on Aboriginal communities including:

- Complex health and lifestyle problems
- Poor standard or inconsistent provision of housing

- High rates of mental health issues including depression, low self-esteem and suicide
- Drug and alcohol issues and the flow on impact of misuse on the next generation e.g. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)
- High rate of incarceration and participation in the criminal justice system
- Overall low levels of education

Any Training and Education blueprint in the Kimberley will need to consider the barriers and social cultural factors raised above. We believe there are four broad areas for strategic consideration:

1. Language, literacy and numeracy
2. Employment outcomes
3. Policy and funding frameworks
4. Support Services

Literacy and numeracy

A high proportion of Aboriginal people leave secondary education without or with limited basic language, literacy and numeracy skills. Training and education providers, specifically the local TAFE are well placed to do this but the challenge is to re-engage with a cohort that has had poor educational experiences previously.

This requires different pedagogy, staff with different skills, more flexible administrative systems, additional funding for support services (see below), and other measures. It requires a high level of innovation and needs to be engaging for learners. In some parts of Australia where Aboriginal languages have survived, there are additional requirements to work within and across language groups and link traditional language structures to English. This requires a high level of specialist teaching/lecturing skills and the use of interpreters (where needed) and/or teaching staff familiar with localised forms of Kriol languages – and so the need for increased emphasis on the first “L” in LLN.

Employment outcomes

Training ought to be delivered in the context of improving the labour market and focusing on increasing employability skills and employment outcomes.

Strengthening the relationship between training providers, the local TAFE and universities and industry with a common goal to offer training that equips Aboriginal people for work is required.

Work-readiness programs sponsored by large employers such as Rio Tinto have been very successful in providing employment outcomes for Aboriginal people. These sorts of work readiness programs could be a model adopted and better sponsored by Governments to improve Aboriginal employment outcomes. Work readiness programs would not have to be restricted to the resources sector and could equally be used in business, construction or community service contexts.

Policy and funding frameworks

Some state and federal policy and funding frameworks mitigate against Aboriginal participation and support in VET programs. The introduction of an entitlement model creates incentives to study in apprenticeships and skills shortage areas. Many Aboriginal students with poorer primary and secondary school outcomes may be disadvantaged by this model as they commence their training journey at the entry/foundation skills level. The foundation skills training programs including youth engagement programs to support Aboriginal people prepare for work will require support and funding into the future. Flexibility in vocational purchasing arrangements that consider the entry level of the student, Aboriginality, and the support services required to achieve outcomes is essential. Often Aboriginal people living in regional and remote areas are after life skills and/or a skill sets to enter the workforce and not a full qualification. Flexibility is the key to ensuring a place based approach is taken to purchasing of vocational training for Aboriginal people.

Support Services

TAFE provides more than vocational training to Aboriginal students. In many regional and remote areas TAFE Institutes work with a multitude of agencies to provide support services for Aboriginal students. The uncoordinated nature of these support services is often a problem where there is no single agency chartered with responsibility for overall case management of an individual.

TAFE Institutes are well placed to provide the intensive support provided to Aboriginal students by taking a holistic approach to addressing the complexity of students' needs.

By linking these disparate services, we are able to better provide for the “whole of life” needs of our students and thus improve their overall educational outcomes.

Progress towards many of the ‘Closing the Gap’ goals and objectives of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) will be achieved by increasing Aboriginal student participation and completion rates, which require a commitment to acknowledging and funding support services.

Recommendations for Action

- Substantial emphasis on Aboriginal work readiness through skills development and literacy and numeracy education
- A broader range of Vocational Education and Training in remote areas
- A strengthening of collaborative arrangements between educational institutes and industry
- Skilling the regional labour force to meet industry requirements and build capacity in the regional community
- Additional funding for agriculture training programs, particularly in the east Kimberley
- Significant capital investment in Kimberley Training Institute’s Broome Campus to address future training needs in the region.

