Pathways to where?

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in vocational education and training

NCVER

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Editor's note
Throughout this report the term 'Indigenous' is used to refer to Australian Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. While use of this term has not been officially recognised by governmental departments, the authors believe it is preferable to the more usual nomenclature.

Disclaimer
Although this project was assisted by a contribution from the Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program (AESIP), the views and recommendations expressed in the report do not necessarily represent the views of the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

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Executive summary

The primary aim of this research study was to identify the pathways taken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians as they move into, through and on from TAFE. It sought to 'track' Indigenous Australian students from their first point of entry into TAFE to their exit points, to review their articulation pathways, and to examine their changing educational and employment needs. Although the terms of reference for the study specifically referred to TAFE pathways, current statistical data apply to some other VET providers. The project therefore was extended more broadly.

The study was based on three sources of information:

- documentary analysis of relevant literature, especially recent DEETYA and ATSIC reports;
- analysis of the NCVER data bank of VET statistics; and
- first hand information derived from questionnaires distributed to present and past Indigenous TAFE students, and to TAFE teachers and co-ordinators, in eight selected institutions in all mainland States and the Northern Territory.

The documentary analysis revealed that a far reaching policy shift is taking place—a shift from equity to Indigenous rights. This is likely to lead to an increasing emphasis on Indigenous autonomy and self-determination in the management of VET programs. No longer will it be acceptable for non-Indigenous policy makers, administrators and educators to provide VET programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Instead, the control of VET for Indigenous Australians increasingly will be in their own hands. This could impact strongly on VET programs, resulting in a significant restructuring of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pathways through VET.

Statistical data show that from an equity perspective the VET sector appears to be doing very well in attracting Indigenous Australian students into its courses. Taking a closer look, however, it is clear that two thirds of all Indigenous students are enrolled in preparatory courses that are pre-requisites for VET. They still have many years of study ahead of them before they can complete a legitimate VET pathway. Statistics also show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under-represented in all vocational streams and fields of study, particularly at the higher skills levels. In spite of concerted equity initiatives, and the development of exemplary TAFE programs in some communities, the anticipated representation and graduation across all streams and fields of VET have not been fully realised.

The field study showed that the greatest concern of Indigenous Australians is that they are bound by an established system of pathways that is predominantly non-vocational. Before they can embark on 'real' VET, they have to 'catch up' on missed education, especially through literacy and numeracy programs. Many accept this and see satisfaction in the process of education itself, rather than the end product. Studying with Indigenous peers, studying so they can be seen as role models for the next generation, or studying so they can help young children and grandchildren with their homework, were some of the major reasons cited by Indigenous students for undertaking VET courses.

These reasons for pursuing VET studies are not always seen as legitimate by providers, but as additional benefits only. Thus, while the present equity-driven system of VET is offered to Indigenous Australians, and while positive outcomes in the form of paid employment and entrance to higher education are not always evident, there will be continuing dislocation between the views of providers and recipients. There needs to be a change of emphasis in VET delivery from a 'catch-up' model to one that espouses Indigenous rights. Workable pathways into, through and beyond VET need to be created collaboratively with Indigenous people.

In light of these findings the following directions are suggested:

1 Ownership and control of all VET provisions for Indigenous Australians should be transferred progressively to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander management, preferably with the support and guidance of ATSIC. Developments should focus on the local level as Indigenous people deliberate on jobs, job creation and VET needs in their own communities.

2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be encouraged to redefine the concept of Vocational Education and Training. Community groups should review their wider adult education and life-long learning requirements, and broader programs developed in response to local social and cultural needs. In this way VET should become part of a more integrated and inclusive approach to community education that is open to all adults regardless of age and prior schooling.

3 Staffing is a focal issue. More Indigenous staff should be appointed, and non-Indigenous staff selected and culturally sensitised by Indigenous mentors. Teaching should incorporate Indigenous wisdom and learning, and be more experientially based.

4 Processes need to be established to recognise prior Indigenous learning. Indigenous languages and cultures should be affirmed and used in the teaching/learning process. Courses need to be contextualised while still meeting the VET needs of local communities.

5 A collaborative approach based on shared facilities and integrated programs should ensure a seamless transition for young people from school to VET to work. Pathways through VET should be designed to lead efficiently to available opportunities for paid or self-employment. Study in the VET sector should become an end in itself for those who so desire. Smooth articulation between VET and higher education must be facilitated by developing more effective transfer and cross-credit arrangements for Indigenous students.

Many of the above suggestions are not new. Various DEETYA and ATSIC reports have covered similar ground. We hope this report adds impetus to their ongoing implementation.

Finally, the report noted that the VET sector has a potentially significant role to play in the reconciliation process. It could become the educational cutting edge as Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians seek to be reconciled to a positive and common future together. As we approach the year 2000 and the Sydney Olympics, the world's gaze will be turned upon Australia. Indigenous Australians will play a significant role in this event. Human rights will be high on the public agenda. The report concludes that VET has an exciting opportunity to provide an exemplary model of reconciliation in action.

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Acknowledgements

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We also want to thank the many students and staff who spent time completing questionnaires. In so doing they provided valuable primary data without which this project would lack legitimacy.

The staff of the NCVER library have constantly been aware of the search needs of the project and have made frequent useful finds for us. We particularly thank Marjolijn Jones, Sarah Hayman and Lea-ann Harris for their easy cooperation and willingness to do a little bit extra.

NCVER statisticians John Foyster, Susan Dawe, Toni Cavallaro and Kerry Gibson have pushed current computer technology to its boundaries in order to produce new information that enabled us to get a bigger and more accurate picture of the involvement of Australia's Indigenous peoples in the VET sector. They have also alerted us to further exciting research possibilities for the future in this important field.

Many people whose names we do not know assisted in the early, formative stages of this project. We acknowledge their foundational work.

Finally we received valuable feedback to a draft of the report from members of the Project Advisory Committee, and from several other people from ATSIC, DEETYA, the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and elsewhere. We wish to express warm appreciation for their constructive advice.

Jennie Teasdale and Bob Teasdale

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACVETS	Australian Committee on Vocational Education and Training Statistics (formerly VEETAC)
AGPS	Australian Government Publishing Service
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
ATWORK	Aboriginal Technical Worker
AVETMISS	Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information and Statistical Standard
CAT	Centre for Applied Technology
DEET	Department of Employment, Education & Training (pre-1996)
DEETYA	Department of Employment, Education, Training & Youth Affairs (from 1996)
IAD	Institute for Aboriginal Development
NATMISS	National Management Information and Statistics System
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (This includes a network of leading national and regional institutions concerned with technical and vocational education—UNEVOC)
VET	Vocational Education and Training

1 Introduction

1.1 The scope of the project

This research project was set in place to identify the pathways taken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as they move into, through and on from Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in Australia. It aimed to 'track' Indigenous students from their first point of entry into TAFE to their exit points, to review their articulation pathways, and to examine the changing educational and employment needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The project also attempted to construct a profile of the characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who had completed or were currently completing studies in the TAFE sector across Australia. Additionally, a profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in TAFE was to be constructed by course and location.

The research outcomes were to form the basis of an examination of current resource allocation to the delivery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and training and the issues involved in maintaining this level of support. Associated with resource allocation were the implications of technological change for the delivery of courses to Australia's Indigenous peoples.

1.2 What do we mean by educational pathways?

Within Australia's education systems there are clearly prescribed formal pathways of learning within the school sector. It is compulsory for all students to progress through primary and secondary schooling until the age of fifteen. Post-compulsory education (of which vocational education and training is a part) provides a large variety of educational pathways that students can follow after their compulsory years of schooling, if they compete successfully for places.

These choices include continuing with secondary education in government or private schools (which may involve undertaking vocationally oriented studies during the post compulsory years); entering the higher education (i.e. university) sector on completion of secondary schooling; enrolling in the vocational education and training (VET) sector (of which TAFE is the largest component); winning training places in industries or enterprises; or seeking training with a private provider. For early school leavers,

disadvantaged groups or persons from non-English-speaking backgrounds, optional pathways have been created. These include adult and community education programs and 'bridging' or vocational preparation programs. These education systems and the pathways that students can take within them are illustrated diagrammatically in figure 1 (Blanksby & Bruhn 1994).

This study focusses upon the particular pathways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people take into, through and beyond the VET sector. The terms of reference for the study specifically refer to TAFE pathways. However the statistical information currently available applies to a range of VET providers, of which TAFE is the predominant one. The fieldwork specifically carried out for this project was based in selected TAFE colleges and so fits the prescribed parameters.

1.3 Pathways into VET

Although the discussion in the previous section states categorically that 'it is compulsory for all students to progress through primary and secondary schooling until the age of 15', many Indigenous people entering VET have had minimal, interrupted and/or inappropriate compulsory schooling. Some mature-age students, particularly in remote areas, have had little or no formal schooling at all. In this study one respondent described it as 'missed education'; others said: "I never had much education in my early life"; and "we didn't get the attention in primary and secondary schools". The research carried out for this report found that 1.5 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents currently studying in the VET sector had no schooling whatsoever and 7.5 per cent had only attended primary school. While 80 per cent had secondary school experience, almost half of these secondary students left school well before the age of 15. Only 11 per cent had been involved in secondary school beyond the compulsory years.

Thus most Indigenous students entering the VET sector have done so without the anticipated formal educational background achieved by many other Australian students in their years of compulsory schooling. High priority therefore has been given to the provision of standard English literacy and numeracy skills, and to special entry programs. This initially created difficulties for the VET sector where clearly delineated vocational education pathways assumed that incoming students at very least had participated in and achieved the benefits of compulsory schooling in the mainstream Australian education system.

1.4 Pathways through VET

In an attempt to achieve some degree of equity for Indigenous Australians and other disadvantaged groups such as people from non-English speaking backgrounds, TAFE, the government-funded major provider of VET, and some private providers, embarked on the development of training courses that would address this area of perceived educational need. Educational pathways were specifically created by VET providers and through government labour market programs to enable educationally needy Australians to 'catch up'. In these pathways there was an emphasis on numeracy and literacy training and 'bridging' or vocational preparation programs. For example, *TAFE Stream 2100–entry to employment or further education: basic education and basic employment skills,* is described as follows:

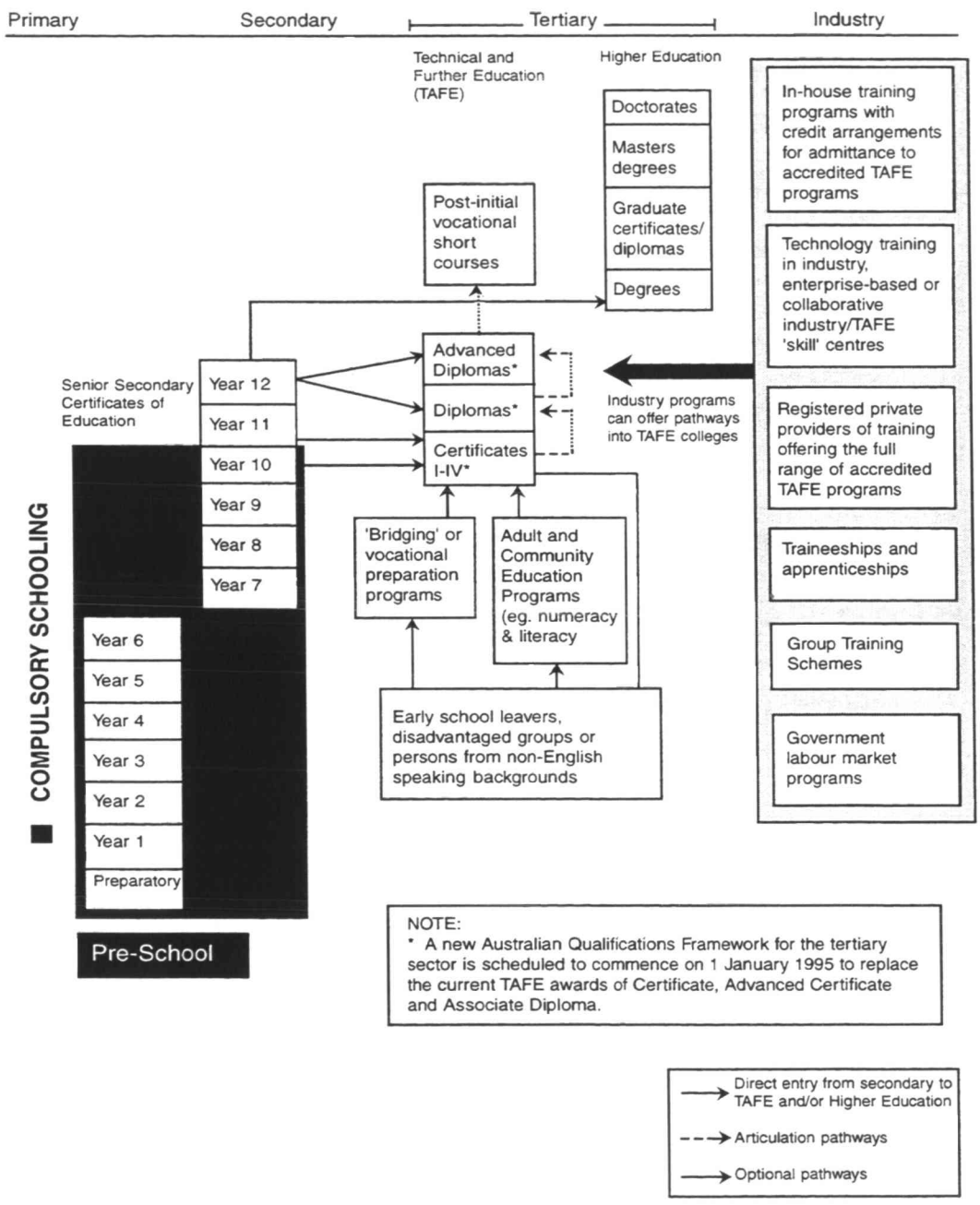
> *Courses [which] provide remedial education or involve other preparatory activities to enable participation in subsequent education or social settings, and are of a type which aim to achieve basic skills and standards. Included . . . are [courses] . . . for the acquisition of literacy and numeracy.*

A second example is *TAFE Stream 2200—entry to employment or further education: educational preparation.* Although more of a mainstream course, it also provides remedial education similar to that described above, but in addition offers:

> *. . . certificate of entrance courses, pre-certificate courses, tutorial mathematics courses for certificate students, tertiary orientation program courses and diploma entrance courses.*

The determination of government to provide educational access and equity for all Australians saw an increase in funds for these programs. This enabled providers to seek and gain government support for study programs that focussed on access and equity. The underlying rationale was to provide real opportunities for people with limited educational qualifications, including Indigenous Australians, to be brought up to the educational standards of successfully schooled mainstream Australians so they eventually could participate fully in VET programs. These alternative pathways are shown in figure 1. Thus was perpetuated the now well-established 'catch-up' model of education for Indigenous Australians that is practised not only within TAFE colleges, but widely throughout the VET sector. In affirming this model it was implied that Australia's Indigenous peoples either did not have any valid educational provisions of their own or, if they did, such provisions were considered of little or no value in mainstream Australia. This important point is explored in chapter 2, 'A changing policy climate: From equity to rights', and further discussed in subsequent chapters.

Figure 1: Relationships between primary, secondary and tertiary education and training sectors and industry



(Source: Blanksby, V & Bruhn, P—UNESCO-UNEVOC Case studies 1994)

Chapter 3, 'The big picture: Patterns of participation in VET', will take a closer look at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as they enter, progress through, complete and/or drop out of VET, and will identify geographically where and what they study. Against this background, the question of the rights of Indigenous people to control their own vocational education and training will be raised.

Indigenous students entering the VET sector found that they could not embark upon 'real' vocational training until they had shown they were capable of undertaking mainstream vocational courses. Frequently the road to achieving this end was described by Indigenous respondents in the study as long, hard and boring. One graduate student put it this way:

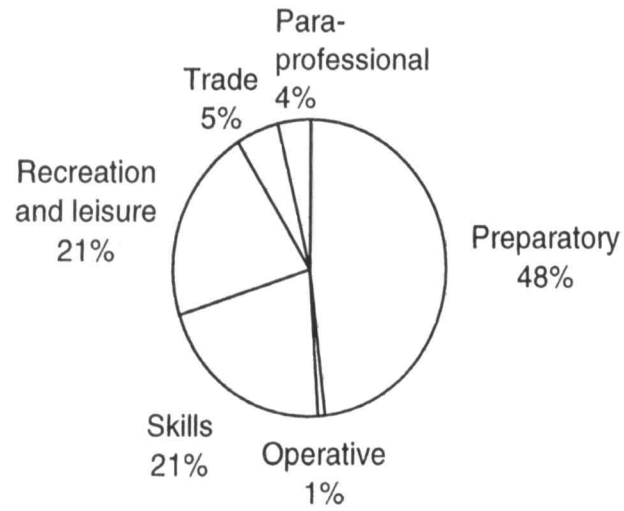
> *. . . courses should be more flexible, specially with Aboriginal people, they are sick of doing the same old courses like general education and preparatory studies.*

In commenting about their prior learning, Indigenous respondents briefly mentioned schooling or other basic TAFE courses. They seemed conditioned to believe that any worthwhile previous learning must relate to schooling or mainstream education. None of them mentioned their own cultural experiences of education at this point. However, in answering subsequent open-ended questions, they clearly saw the possibility that VET courses could recognise and affirm their culturally unique prior learning. This suggests that there needs to be a more flexible approach to the recognition of prior learning, one that affirms the legitimacy of culturally different learning experiences.

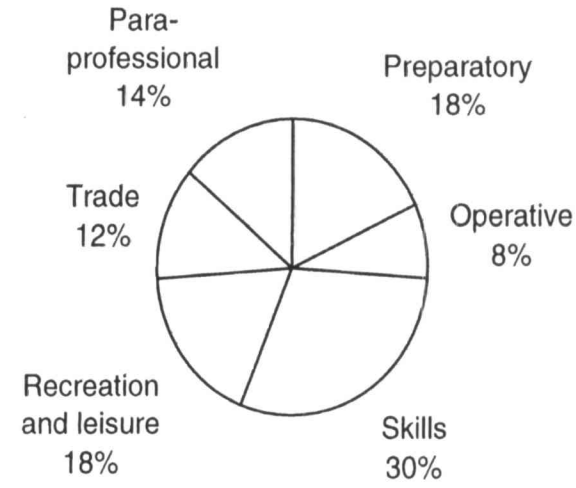
Because remedial, preparatory and basic education streams, fields of study and courses are accredited and thus legitimised within the VET system, pathways through the sector are moulded in such a way that real vocational education and training cannot begin until the skills and knowledge within the pre-vocational streams are accomplished. As a consequence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students without the basic qualifications obtained in mainstream Australian schooling are locked into these 'catch-up' pathways. Figure 2 graphically illustrates how almost half of the Indigenous students are caught up in these preparatory pathways, compared with only 18 per cent of non-Indigenous students. The direct comparison with the pattern of courses undertaken by the wider population, though not unexpected, is salutary. These pathways will be examined in greater depth in subsequent chapters of the report.

What has emerged in this study is another concept of pathways in and through the VET sector that appears to be culturally determined. Indigenous respondents clearly demonstrated that their reasons for undertaking studies in the VET sector, and particularly in TAFE, and the kinds of pathways they were choosing to follow within it, were

Figure 2: Enrolments in course types in TAFE, Australia 1994



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 1994
(Number of enrolments = 32 571)



Other Australians 1994
Number of enrolments = 1 160 174

Steam of study groupings:

Preparatory courses	2100, 2200
Recreation and leisure courses	1000
Operative courses	3100, 4100
Trade courses	3211, 3300, 4300
Skills courses	3212, 3221, 3222, 3400, 3600, 4200
Para-professional courses	3500, 4400, 4500

often very different to those the system both expected and prescribed. There appears to be a covert conflict of interest between the two sets of expectations and the pathways followed. Chapter 4, 'Indigenous peoples' pathways through VET: A detailed analysis', examines these study pathways in the VET sector, and looks closely at the two perceptions of educational pathways that emerged in this research. It also looks at the barriers encountered by Indigenous students progressing through VET programs based on the current 'catch-up' model. One teacher summed it up this way: 'The learning (content) and environment is the same as the one that failed them (or in which they perceived themselves as failures) earlier in life'.

Chapter 5, 'The question of staffing and resources and the teaching/learning process', and chapter 6, 'Creating productive VET pathways with Indigenous Australians', both discuss constructive ways of changing this 'catch-up' mind set.

1.5 Articulation pathways into and out of VET

Many students who dreamed of entering a particular vocational education pathway within the VET sector found that their chosen course of study was not offered at the college they attended. For example a respondent living in a coastal river-mouth community said, "All I wanted was a power-boat motor maintenance course. But it wasn't on . . ." Unlike some non-Indigenous Australians who might travel elsewhere for a particular study opportunity, the social cohesion of the local Indigenous community, and the respondent's extended family within it, were more highly valued. As a consequence that student 'stayed put' and accepted that 'it wasn't on'.

This study also showed that a large majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who had already completed a course of study in the VET sector had no other option but to embark on a further VET course—or even several courses—in order to have any possibility of gaining entry into the higher education sector, or into employment. There seemed to be a continually vanishing end-point, and articulation between courses was often far from clear. Many saw this 'course upon course' requirement as a barrier to achieving the vocational ends they wanted. Quite predictably for some, the barriers became insurmountable and they dropped out. For others, study became an end in itself, other motives for vocational study taking priority over the need to train for employment. These motives will be examined later in the report. Often current students were so immersed in the demands of a particular course that they had given little thought to courses beyond those currently being studied.

As students actually studying in the higher education sector were not part of this research, no first-hand information on their articulation into that sector is available. However, questions about the

articulation pathways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders take from school into the VET sector, through the VET sector itself, and from the VET sector into employment or higher education, will be addressed in chapter 7, 'Smoothing the way: Attending to articulation'.

1.6 The project's research methodology

Three major sources of information were drawn upon to write this report.

First, literature relevant to the research was located and reviewed. Documentary analysis was undertaken, particularly of recent DEETYA and ATSIC reports. The outcomes are summarised in chapter 2, 'A changing policy climate: From equity to rights'. The chapter considers the major reports, reviews, and associated recommendations that have shaped Australian Government policies and programs relating to the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the VET sector, and in the wider society. The chapter also takes account of international developments, especially global Indigenous issues that need to be considered in the Australian context.

A *second* major information source was the substantial bank of NCVER statistical data prepared for the Australian Committee on Vocational Education and Training Statistics (ACVETS). The data examine the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the technical and further education (TAFE) sector nationally, although some data are available from a range of other VET and community providers.

In 1989, TAFE introduced a data element into its statistical collection procedures called the 'Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander code', in order to determine whether or not students identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander persons. By 1993 the first complete set of figures from all States and Territories relating to this classification became available (Foyster 1994, p. 16). With each succeeding data collection more information is being published, thus enabling an increasingly clear picture to emerge of the status and progress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the whole VET sector. At the time of preparation of this report the complete 1993 and 1994 statistics were available, together with a number of the 1994 tables, and the 1995 Vocational Education and Training Graduate Destination Survey questionnaire that had been sent to VET students across Australia. As the data bank builds up year by year, the exciting prospect of longitudinal analysis emerges.

This report draws specifically from the following information sources to analyse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student participation in vocational education and, in particular, the TAFE sector:

- Selected vocational education and training statistics 1994 (NCVER for ACVETS 1995)
- Selected vocational education and training statistics 1993 (NCVER for ACVETS 1994)
- A preliminary report of the pilot 1993 national client follow-up survey of the vocational education graduates (Dawe 1993)
- Statistical annex of the national review of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (AGPS 1994)
- Vocational education and training graduate destination survey 1995 (ABS 1995)

NCVER was also able to provide some unpublished data from the 1994 and 1993 surveys.

Third, first hand information was obtained from field research. The first project advisory committee meeting in April 1994 agreed to the research being conducted in nine field sites across Australia. The primary data sources for the study were to be based on interviews with present students, past students and staff at the selected sites. A careful pilot program for testing the appropriateness of the questions also was planned. Unfortunately this process foundered.

A new start was made in early 1995 with predominantly new personnel. Due to time limitations the face-to-face interviews were abandoned and replaced by questionnaires to be administered by local TAFE personnel in eight trial sites selected by the project steering committee as representative of the many and diverse Indigenous contexts across Australia.

Three questionnaires to track Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student pathways through TAFE were designed by the NSW TAFE Commission with some suggestions from People Perspectives (see appendix 1). The first questionnaire targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students undertaking studies in the TAFE sector now *(present students).* The second questionnaire was distributed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who had completed TAFE courses *(past students).* The third was compiled for Teachers and Co-ordinators involved in teaching courses with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students *(teachers and co-ordinators).*

Questionnaires in the three categories were distributed to a contact person nominated by the college, or by the state or territory TAFE authority, at the eight sites selected by the Steering Committee. The rationale behind the choice of these sites related to five factors:

- each State and Territory (excluding ACT and Tasmania) should be represented
- both Aboriginal *and* Torres Strait Islander Australians should have their say

- sites needed to include a fair representation of the many and diverse Indigenous peoples of Australia
- urban, suburban, country town, remote and island Indigenous peoples should be represented
- TAFE colleges with high enrolments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and with co-operative personnel were selected in order to facilitate a sufficient response rate.

The New South Wales TAFE Commission took major responsibility for the distribution and collection of the questionnaires. The Commission communicated with each college and contact person on a regular basis throughout the consultation period and developed an exceptionally high level of co-operation and goodwill. In spite of this the return was mediocre with an approximate response rate of only 60 per cent. Because of the relative smallness of the sample and the limited response, no location details will be provided in order to maintain an acceptable degree of confidentiality. However, as the overall trends are significant, these will be reported and discussed.

The national response rates for each questionnaire are as follows:

- present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: 69 responses
- past Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: 22 responses
- teachers and co-ordinators: 18 responses

The responses to the questionnaires revealed some interesting trends, and although relatively small in number, they can provide valid and useful guidelines for educators in the VET sector as they seek to tailor courses to the needs of Indigenous Australians. Prior to proceeding with the substantive analysis of the data, a comment on the research methodology of the project is necessary.

1.7 Limitations of the research process

Australia is a huge continent with only a small proportion of Indigenous peoples within its total population. The 1991 Australian census reports that of Australia's 16 850 349 people, 1.58 per cent, or 265 463 persons, claimed to be of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent. Contained within this number are Indigenous peoples of remarkably varied backgrounds with distinctly different languages, cultures and lifestyles. It therefore is a grave mistake to assume that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians can be 'lumped' together as a homogeneous entity with similar educational requirements. While acknowledging these differences, the authors feel that the scope of the report cannot adequately separate out or represent every cultural and language group or community type. However, when appropriate and possible, these differences will be highlighted.

There are also significant difficulties in gathering data from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that cannot be ignored. First, and possibly foremost, it is well known that Indigenous Australians are tired of researchers, and of being researched. This is due to the large volume of research that focusses on them; to the cultural insensitivity of some non-Indigenous researchers; to the lack of visible, positive benefits of the research for their own people; to the intrusion on their privacy; and to the inappropriateness of most western research methodologies in Indigenous Australian contexts. In spite of this we, the non-Indigenous researchers, persist. Fortunately for the government and others, a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do assist with and respond to research requests. However, one wonders when this level of tolerance by Indigenous people for non-Indigenous researchers eventually will disappear.

This research was carried out with great sensitivity by the NSW TAFE Commission. The level of goodwill and co-operation was kept at a constantly high level. And yet the response rate was not as high as we had hoped. Why? Several factors mentioned by respondents, in addition to those stated in the previous paragraph, should be taken into account:

- TAFE students are the subjects for numerous surveys and questionnaires; many of them administered in teaching time. Teachers eventually refuse or simply 'don't get round to it' when they find too much teaching time is being lost.
- Some colleges said they had filled in a similar questionnaire and did not see the need for a repeat. (The 'similar' questionnaire was traced to the ABS vocational education and training graduate destination survey 1995.)
- The sheer difficulty of getting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with emerging standard English literacy skills to complete fairly lengthy questionnaires is seen as an insurmountable barrier by some TAFE teachers and administrators.
- The fluidity of staffing within this project, and in TAFE Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education units, often caused dislocation and a loss of momentum and interest in the project.
- One non-Indigenous teacher respondent, in a written letter, expressed such a high level of dissatisfaction with TAFE, with teaching Indigenous students within the TAFE system, and with this research process, that all questionnaires to the college were returned unopened by that one teacher.

Some completed student questionnaires showed a high level of uniformity within a college's response. This is understandable and is in no way a criticism of the college or the teachers involved. Rather it is a criticism of the process we have put in place. It is not difficult to imagine teachers getting students to complete the questionnaires in class time and responding to students' requests for assistance by

interpreting questions and suggesting what they considered as appropriate responses, especially through the cues provided. Without such direction the task in all probability would be seen as irrelevant by Indigenous students and put aside. In the initial stage of the project this problem was anticipated and it was suggested by the project advisory committee that an Indigenous consultant assist students with written responses. Unfortunately this constructive suggestion was lost in the subsequent difficult passage of the project, largely due to budget restrictions.

It is believed by the writers of this report that even within the tight timeframe available for this study, a far more appropriate research methodology could have been used. A face-to-face, open-ended, group-based discussion with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander VET students, past and present, in a non-classroom setting within each of the colleges chosen, would have been a preferred option. According to the wishes of the students past and present, they could have been interviewed either as a single group or as two separate groups in a place of their own choosing. We believe a small team of Indigenous and experienced non-Indigenous researchers, sensitive to the context of the respondents, and operating in an open, collaborative way, could have achieved far more comprehensive results with a greater degree of validity. Teachers and co-ordinators of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs also could have been interviewed as a group in a separate location. Such an approach is suggested for future research of a similar nature.

NCVER statistics experts also alerted us to the limitations of the statistical data. Initially it was anticipated that the range and quantity of data available from 1991 to 1995 would allow a longitudinal analysis: indeed much needed and useful conclusions might have been drawn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the VET sector. However, because of the changing management patterns of the statistical process and the different parameters of the data collectors' questions over this period, comparative analyses of this kind simply are not yet feasible. The authors also have been cautious in their use of figures from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduate survey and unpublished data relating to Indigenous students who withdrew from TAFE courses before completion because of the relatively small and non-representative samples surveyed.

In spite of the limitations, the statistical data do provide a 'big picture' of significant national trends in the VET sector. Computer technology also allows a closer look at specific figures relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in this sector, and permits reliable comparisons between Indigenous students and the total VET population. Unless otherwise noted, the analyses contained in the report refer to the 1994 NCVER statistics because they provide the most recent, comprehensive and detailed information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the VET sector.

1.8 The project personnel

Due to difficulties in obtaining field data the design of the research was changed during the project. The current authors were brought in at a later date to work alongside a NSW TAFE Commission project manager and an NCVER liaison officer. Already some field research had taken place and some reporting completed. Field sites and a methodology for further research had been decided upon. The research was to be implemented by the NSW TAFE Commission project manager and the field work was to be carried out by locally recruited field workers at the eight study sites. In addition, a report on a policy discussion of resource allocation issues and a further report on technological and related organisational developments were to be written as source material for the current writers.

As the project unfolded many difficulties emerged, especially in relation to changes in staffing and field sites. New sites were chosen and new people briefed, but momentum inevitably was lost, timelines lagged and dislocations occurred. Background reports were not able to be written and the field work suffered with redoing. Some of these difficulties were unforeseen and thus unavoidable. In spite of the many frustrations, however, there remained a real commitment to the successful completion of the project by both NCVER and the NSW TAFE Commission. Nevertheless, it is of great concern that projects of national significance that relate to culturally sensitive issues concerning Australia's Indigenous peoples should encounter dislocations of this kind. Perhaps this project can provide some useful lessons for those who are called upon to carry out similar studies in the future.

2 A changing policy climate: From equity to rights

2.1 National policies and practices

The participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in VET cannot be considered in isolation from other developments. *First,* it needs to be viewed against the whole backdrop of Commonwealth Government initiatives relating to Indigenous Australians. In recent years there has been a plethora of reports, reviews and associated recommendations that have shaped Government policies and programs. *Second,* it needs to be considered in relation to wider international developments. Global Indigenous issues are being discussed and debated on an unprecedented scale. The impact on Australian Government policy is becoming increasingly evident.

Virtually every government report relating to Indigenous Australians begins by highlighting their disadvantaged status. A typical statement appears in a recent ATSIC document:

> *. . . by any objective measure, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remain the most disadvantaged group within Australian society, still unable to exercise and enjoy basic rights that other Australians take for granted.*
>
> (*Recognition, rights and reform* 1995, p. 2)

In 1988 an Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force chaired by Paul Hughes concluded that: '. . . Aborigines remain the most severely educationally disadvantaged people in Australia'. Notwithstanding the significant improvements in the subsequent six years, the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples reached an almost identical conclusion:

> *In 1994 Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders continue to be the most educationally disadvantaged groups in Australia. . . .They do not participate in education to the extent that other Australians participate, particularly in secondary education; in technical and further education and in higher education they participate only in particular and narrow fields of study.*

Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders still do not enjoy equitable and appropriate outcomes from education.
(National review of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: Summary and recommendations 1994, p.2)

This emphasis on the disadvantaged status of Indigenous Australians has resulted in a dominant theme of equity. The National Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force, for example, formulated 21 long-term goals that were endorsed by all governments. These came into effect at the beginning of 1990. The underlying rationale of most of the goals has to do with 'equality of access', 'equity of participation' and 'equitable outcomes'. As a consequence, the Commonwealth Government has allocated increasing amounts of money to educational programs for Indigenous peoples. The *Response of the Commonwealth Government to the national review of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples* (September 1995), for example, goes to considerable lengths to document precisely how much new funding it is allocating to all areas of Indigenous education in response to the report's recommendations. The rationale is clear: 'This government has taken the lead in accelerating efforts to achieve educational equity for Indigenous people' (*Response*, p.5).

The emphasis on equity is founded upon the idea of the individual's right of citizenship within the nation or, as the Commonwealth Government itself has expressed it, on the idea of 'a fair chance for all'. [See for example: *A fair chance for all: National and institutional planning for equity in higher education: A discussion paper,* DEET 1990.] As Peter Gale (1995) points out, the educational practices associated with goals of equity are '. . . an increased focus on educational access, participation and outcomes in relation to those groups identified as disadvantaged'.

As a consequence of the above goals, the government's major indicators of the success of its policies and programs have been statistical summaries of participation rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in education at all levels from pre-school to post-graduate. As we shall see in the next chapter, however, such statistics often mask underlying differences in patterns of participation. This is recognised in the *National review of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: Final report* (September 1994, pp. 73–75). While noting that, based on 1992 figures, the TAFE participation rate of Indigenous Australians is almost twice that of other Australians, the report does express concern that Indigenous enrolments are concentrated in basic education and preparatory courses, thus suggesting a continuing pattern of disadvantage.

2.2 A flawed approach?

There is one fundamental flaw in relying on equity and individual rights as underlying principles in the provision of education for Indigenous peoples. Such reliance maintains a perception of the Indigenous person as 'disadvantaged' and therefore in need of being 'brought up' to the standards of the rest of the nation. And this perception leads in turn to assimilatory practices whereby Indigenous education is seen solely as the acquisition of western knowledge and preparation for the world of work. In other words, *an approach based on principles of equity can perpetuate the very inequalities and injustices it is trying to overcome.* Michael Dodson, Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice, has expressed this in a most potent way:

> *Policies and programs which rest primarily on a perception of need and powerlessness subtly reinforce the powerlessness of the recipients who are seen as being given justice rather than receiving their rights.*
> (cited in *Three years on: Volume one: Overview reports* 1995, p. 8)

Fortunately a significant policy shift is becoming apparent in the most recent government reports, especially those of ATSIC. It is a shift from principles of equity and individual rights to an emphasis on Indigenous rights founded upon a recognition of the collective rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as original owners and occupants of the land of Australia. The shift is reflected most clearly in an ATSIC report to government on native title social justice measures, the preface of which states: 'Our focus is on institutional, structural, collaborative, co-operative reform. It is about a fundamental shift from welfare to basic rights, from dependence to autonomy, from government assistance to power' (Recognition, rights and reform 1995, pp. ix–x). The report goes on to discuss Indigenous rights as the recognition of:

- rights to equality of treatment with all other Australians
- the particular status of a nation's Indigenous peoples
- rights to cultural, social and economic diversity
- the right to self-determination of the priorities and paths in life.

The National review of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: Final report (1995 p. xi) also gives recognition to Indigenous rights in a bold statement that appears on a separate page by itself, preceding the main report: 'Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders are the first nations of this continent and have inalienable rights as the Indigenous peoples of Australia. Education is one of these rights'. Notwithstanding this strong assertion, however, the subsequent report reverts largely to principles of equity, and to recommendations aimed at removing disadvantage.

The impetus for an Indigenous rights emphasis has come from two main sources, one national, the other international. Nationally, the 1992 High Court decision on native title (now widely referred to as

the Mabo decision), which led to the passing by the Commonwealth Parliament of the Native Title Act 1993, has opened the way for a new recognition of the rights and status of Indigenous Australians. The High Court decision represents a major watershed in relations between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of Australia. Relationships of dependency are giving way to those based on principles of ownership and control, and of empowerment and self-determination. Lois O'Donoghue, chairperson of ATSIC, takes up this theme:

> *. . . programs and policies . . . must be provided in ways which increase empowerment and lessen the sense and perception of dependency. Empowerment is not, however, to be seen as some gift of restitution. It is a simple matter of right. It is recognition of the fundamental entitlement of all Australians, within the overall social framework, to control their own destinies, to be treated equally and fairly, and to enjoy the same opportunities as their fellow citizens.*
>
> (*Three years on: Volume one: Overview reports* 1995, p.8)

Internationally, the impetus has come from the 1993 International Year of the World's Indigenous People, and from the more recently proclaimed UN International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. Both the Year and the Decade have given strong emphasis to the inherent collective rights of Indigenous peoples, one of the specific goals of the Decade being acceptance by the UN General Assembly of a declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples. From an Australian perspective ATSIC has endorsed the goals of the Decade. In a strong and hard-hitting review (*Three years on: Volume one: Overview reports*, 1995, pp.23–41) it analyses a number of recent international covenants and declarations, its major thrust being:

> *. . . to convince Australia that it must make a quantum leap, from patronising and condescending welfarism and the dependency and sense of inadequacy it engenders, to a policy foundation of full recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples.*
>
> (*Three years on: Volume one: Overview reports* 1995, p.23)

The chapter then goes on to examine in more detail the concept of Indigenous rights. It suggests they fall within an overarching principle of self determination, and that they can be divided into three broad categories:

- *Autonomy rights* (i.e. the right of Indigenous peoples to determine the way in which they live and control their own social, political and economic development)
- *Peoplehood or identity rights* (i.e. the right to exist as distinct peoples with distinct cultures; and rights relating to cultural and intellectual property)
- *Territory and resource rights* (which include the right to land and to the resources of that land)

2.3 Implications for VET

Global trends associated with the Indigenous rights movement, together with continuing analysis of the implications of the Mabo decision, are having an increasingly clear and pervasive influence on Australian Government policy. A careful analysis of recent reports shows a distinct shift in emphasis from equity to Indigenous rights. Some reports, especially those of ATSIC, are reflecting the shift with greater conceptual clarity than others.

Recent DEETYA documents, especially the *National review of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples* (1995) and the more recent *Response of the Commonwealth Government* (September 1995) to this report, reveal the beginnings of the shift, although principles of equity still co-exist in seemingly incompatible ways alongside recommendations based on an Indigenous rights approach. Whilst these conceptual inconsistencies are likely to continue in the short term, in the longer term the momentum of the Indigenous rights movement, driven by global pressures, by ongoing responses to the Mabo decision, and by ATSIC itself, undoubtedly will lead to a significant refocussing of national policies and practices. This will have major implications for the delivery of VET services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Following the trend of recent ATSIC recommendations, especially those in *Recognition, rights and reform* (1995), we are likely to see VET policies based on principles of autonomy, power, self-determination, ownership and control, and on the clear recognition of cultural, social and economic diversity. What does this mean in practice?

1 At all levels—national, state, regional and local community—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians will assume ownership and control of VET service delivery to their own people. Consultation by VET personnel with Indigenous Australians will no longer be sufficient. Instead, the situation is likely to be reversed. Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders will be in control of their own technical and further education, and it is they who will consult with non-Indigenous VET personnel if and when the need arises.

2 There will be greater recognition of cultural diversity. Indigenous knowledge and wisdom will have a legitimate place in the VET curriculum, as will Indigenous processes of knowledge analysis and transmission. As Peter Gale (1995) expresses it: 'From an Indigenous rights perspective . . . Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would be valued as holders and conveyers of knowledge, and entrusted to manage its production and conveyance in the tertiary sector'.

3 Following on from the above, we are likely to see changes in VET curriculum theory to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on knowledge and learning. Kurt Seemann

and Ron Talbot (1995), writing from a central Australian Aboriginal perspective, for example, argue that:

> *Educational reforms have done little more than rewrite curriculums that are perpetuating the compartmentalisation of knowledge. Most curriculums appear crowded, disintegrated and directionless. Many students are unable to see the overall value of their accumulated knowledge and wisdom for they have become buried in a mass of modularised learning.*

Seemann and Talbot go on to suggest that programs for Indigenous Australians need to be rebuilt on alternative foundations using an integrated, holistic approach that is responsive to local needs. This already is happening in a few parts of Australia. The trend is likely to become more widespread as the implications of Indigenous rights become accepted.

4 On a more practical level we will see much wider employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators in the VET sector. Together with members of local communities they will have control over educational resources that have been allocated to them on a just and equitable basis.

The future directions of VET provisions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people suggested above are fully consistent with the more general educational trends argued by Australian futures scholars Hedley Beare and Richard Slaughter (1993). Their *Education for the twenty-first century*, while not dealing specifically with Indigenous societies, does foreshadow that education will become more interdisciplinary, more person-oriented, and more responsive to diversity.

Already in Australia, as noted above, we are able to find isolated examples of the above trends in the VET sector. One that has been documented in a recent paper is the Aboriginal Technical Worker (ATWORK) program developed by the Centre for Appropriate Technology in Alice Springs. It is the first nationally developed TAFE vocational curriculum that focusses exclusively on Indigenous community needs. The program is directed towards the sharing of skills, knowledge and techniques that will enable students to take control of their community technologies through an understanding of the environmental, built and social contexts in which the technology exists. This is achieved through:

(i) course modules that are community design-project driven; students draw their learning resources from the actual issues, problems and developments taking place in their own communities

(ii) an emphasis on the integration of various technologies, materials and cultural knowledge in order to produce

appropriate responses that actually support community functions and cultural activities

(iii) giving students skills in identifying, preventing and solving technological problems in their communities . . . [to] support their chosen lifestyle.

The course is therefore directly involved in supporting the process of community development through technological empowerment (Seemann and Talbot 1995).

2.4 Summary

A significant shift is taking place in government policy documents dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. Basically it is a shift from equity to Indigenous rights, reflecting both international trends and post-Mabo implications. As it begins to impact on matters of principle, and thence on policy and practice, we are likely to see substantial changes in the response of the VET sector to its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander constituents. There will be an increasing emphasis on autonomy and self-determination in the management of VET programs, and an emergence of curriculum content and processes that reflect Indigenous perspectives on knowledge and wisdom. We are likely to see significant rerouting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pathways through VET. To prepare for this VET providers first need to assess the current situation. In the next chapter we therefore turn to an analysis of the latest national statistics on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' participation in VET.

3 The big picture: Patterns of participation in VET

3.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the VET sector

The following discussion is based largely upon information published by the Australian Committee on Vocational Education and Training Statistics (ACVETS). These data are pegged to the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS), the latest and most sophisticated standard measure of vocational education and training in Australia.

AVETMISS has evolved through the commitment of ACVETS to the collection of reliable statistics about the VET sector. It is applicable to an increasing range of the VET programs offered by a variety of providers. It includes programs delivered by State TAFE systems (the major providers), adult and community education, the adult migrant education service, State training authorities and some private providers. Because AVETMISS is being progressively implemented from 1994 to 1996, some data included are not, as yet, wholly 'AVETMISS-compliant'. Thus any aspects of the following discussion based on AVETMISS statistics will refer only to general trends rather than provide specific detailed analyses .

In a 1993 survey (Selected Vocational Education and Training Statistics 1993 [NCVER for ACVETS 1994]) 21 282 respondents identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students in the VET sector. The 1994 figure is 23 844 (Selected Vocational Education and Training Statistics 1994 [NCVER for ACVETS 1995]). Foyster (1994) argues that the actual number is even greater because some of the half million students who did not answer this question would have been Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander participants, and also it can be inferred that some students enrolling in more than one course responded negatively to the question in earlier enrolments and then indicated that they were ATSI in later enrolments. "However," says John Foyster, "the magnitude of these two effects cannot be estimated."

Undoubtedly the VET sector and its principal component, TAFE, enrols more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than any other post compulsory education provider. At present the numbers participating are increasing significantly year by year. For example, the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander Peoples (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994) reported a 33 per cent increase between 1991 and 1992.

In 1993, of the 1 451 477 clients within the VET sector, 1.47 per cent identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australians. In 1994 the figure remained fairly steady with 1.41 per cent clients from an overall total of 1 693 476. Looking at the 1991 Australian Census figures we see that within a total population for the nation of 16 850 349, those claiming to be of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island descent accounted for 1.58 per cent. The VET data, on the surface at least, suggest that Indigenous students proportionally are represented almost on a par with non-Indigenous students. However, a closer look at the data available, particularly in relation to the type and duration of courses and the number of graduates from courses, reveals a somewhat different picture.

3.2 TAFE: The major post-compulsory education provider

Of all post-compulsory education providers, TAFE, the public vocational education and training provider, has the highest enrolments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Many TAFE colleges and institutes have developed specific programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that tend to attract significant clusters of Indigenous students. However, many other Indigenous students are in mainstream courses.

TAFE's ability to establish programs in remote areas, as well as in rural and urban centres, is very advantageous to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups. By responding to the perceived needs of potential clientele in a particular context, TAFE has the opportunity to service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students optimally. A number of localised providers also have responded to the expressed wishes of Indigenous people. The Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD) in Alice Springs and Tranby College in Sydney are two examples of institutions that are particularly valued by Indigenous people. However, TAFE is the largest VET provider, and so has the highest enrolments. It is this extensive state and territory network across the nation, together with its ability to establish appropriate programs, that gives TAFE the potential to provide even stronger and more relevant educational pathways for Indigenous Australians in the future.

Many teachers and administrators, including the relatively small number who responded to this project survey, believe that the TAFE sector is not only the major provider but also the preferred provider.

Many respondents tended to compare TAFE with secondary schooling and rated their TAFE experience as decidedly better than that. This presents a positive view of their TAFE experience.

However, also deeply embedded in many responses was a feeling (often explicitly stated) that things could be better in the TAFE system. This unease appears to be associated with an inability actively and effectively to control the pathways within the VET sector. This comment from a successful Indigenous student sums up the underlying feeling with eloquence: 'You have to look at different courses. Let students say what they want to do. Because we are reaching the year 2000, we need to look at courses that will help us in the future'.

We believe the real challenge for TAFE institutes and other providers in the VET sector is to change the notion of providing education *for* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to one of working *alongside* them in the design, implementation and management of courses. In this way VET would be affirming and strengthening Indigenous cultural identities, while at the same time enabling Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, through appropriate teaching/learning processes, to enter the domain of non-Indigenous Australians if and when they chose to do so. This process is intrinsically linked to the question: 'Who controls Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander vocational education?' and to the broader question of Indigenous rights. These questions will be taken up in the latter part of this chapter.

3.3 VET: Where and what do Indigenous Australians study?

The statistical data held at NCVER have enabled us to construct a provisional profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the VET sector by State and Territory. The following data refer to enrollees who have identified themselves as having Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status. The results cannot be regarded as an exact profile for four major reasons:

(i) not all enrollees have identified their cultural origins;

(ii) the figures do not include all VET institutions;

(iii) enrollees frequently enrol in more than one course; and

(iv) postcode data on which the locational analyses were based were incomplete, and did not include invalid, unknown or overseas postcodes.

The statistics that are available, if interpreted with caution, do provide a fascinating picture of where Indigenous people study and what programs they are undertaking. The scope of the present study does not allow a full exploration of the data. However the preliminary picture that emerges could well form the basis for further useful research.

Analysis of the available figures enabled us to identify by State and Territory a total of 807 courses in which there were at least five Indigenous enrollees. Identifying courses where there were 100 or more Indigenous enrollees yielded a more manageable total of 53 courses. These two data sets form the basis of all subsequent analyses in this section. It was also possible to identify in which socio-geographic context enrollees were studying using seven general categories:

- capital city
- other metropolitan
- large rural centre
- small rural centre
- other rural area
- large remote area
- other remote area

For reasons of confidentiality, it is not possible in this report to identify exact geographical locations or particular VET institutions.

3.3.1 New South Wales

This State recorded the highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments, with 11 705 in 212 courses. In total, 30 per cent of all enrolments were located in other rural areas, closely followed by 28 per cent in the capital city of Sydney. The remainder were scattered across the State with slightly more falling into the small rural centre category (17%). Approximately equal numbers of male and female enrollees were represented.

Table 1 shows the NSW courses that had more than 100 Indigenous enrollees. The highest figures are at the base of the table with almost 1000 enrollees in Aboriginal Vocational Preparation. The seven courses with the highest Indigenous enrolments all fit into the category of 'catch up', preparatory or basic education programs. Interestingly, the equity push is evident in the middle range with a significant number of Indigenous enrollees in a National Engineering Training Program and in 'Computers—a first course'. Aboriginal Community Health also has a substantial enrolment. The reasons for this will be discussed later in the report. Clerical Support Services and Office Administration are also popular with Indigenous enrollees. It is also notable that even courses specifically designed for Indigenous clients have a small number of non-Indigenous students. Only in these courses do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students outnumber their non-Indigenous counterparts. Not surprisingly, in all other courses, Indigenous students form a tiny minority.

Table 1: VET courses in NSW with 100 or more Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander enrollees

ATSI	Non-ATSI	Stream	Course name
101	1923	2100	Training access
106	3287	2100	JSST (accredited TAFE subjects)
110	1223	3100	First aid
118	3832	3300	Office administration
120	1757	2200	Career education for women
127	1654	3100	Clerical support services
133	7592	2200	Matriculation
139	9	3221	Aboriginal community health
178	2353	2200	Tertiary preparation
192	8444	3211	National engineering training program
241	9098	3100	Computers—a first course
274	5963	2100	Get skilled
341	1498	2100	Outreach
404	4475	2100	Job training
496	9919	2100	Outreach access
638	3406	2200	General education
719	9355	2100	Literacy and numeracy pre-vocational
898	1879	2200	Adult basic education
998	56	2100	Aboriginal vocational preparation

Source: NCVER

3.3.2 Queensland

There were 165 courses with a total of 6379 Indigenous enrolments. Of these, the 12 courses listed in table 2 recorded Indigenous enrolments exceeding 100. Learning Support courses 'attracted' very large numbers of students, suggesting that Queensland VET educators, like their colleagues in other states and territories, are concerned with providing equitable study opportunities for all Australians. A cluster of courses focussing on literacy and communication, basic education, general studies, computing, and vocational preparation, reiterate the emphasis on providing opportunities to 'bridge the educational gap'. Real vocational courses included commercial studies and office administration. The high number of Indigenous enrolments in the certificate course on national parks conservation techniques is particularly notable.

Fifty-four per cent (54%) of enrollees were men and the remaining 46 per cent women. Almost half of all Queensland enrollees were

studying in rural areas, slightly more than a quarter in remote locations, and the remaining quarter in Brisbane and other metropolitan centres.

Table 2: VET courses in Queensland with 100 or more Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander enrollees

ATSI	Non-ATSI	Stream	Course name
110	861	2100	Newstart literacy course
112	2209	3100	Cert. in Office Administration
129	3 965	3222	Cert. in Commercial & Office Studies
132	8155	3211	Cert. in Engineering/Construction
138	658	2100	Cert. in National Parks Cons. Techniques
142	5388	4100	Computer users workshop
169	15	2100	Cert. in Basic Education (ATSI)
257	6260	2200	Literacy & communication skills
280	16888	3221	Cert. in Commercial & Office Fundamentals
313	23	2100	Cert. in General Studies (ATSI)
368	40	2200	Cert. in Vocational Preparation (ATSI)
889	23 797	2200	Learning support course

Source: NCVER

3.3.3 Western Australia

Western Australia recorded 3322 Indigenous enrolments in a total of 155 courses. Table 3 demonstrates that the large majority of enrollees are in preparatory courses focussed on basic education. Looking through the remaining 150 courses not listed in table 3, significant enrolments continue to occur in similar introductory education courses, except that 83 Indigenous enrollees (along with 1018 others) are recorded as undertaking a preliminary Certificate in Art and Design.

Forty-four per cent (44%) of Western Australian enrollees are not surprisingly studying in remote locations, 35 per cent in the capital city of Perth, and the remaining 21 per cent in rural areas. Women enrollees were in the minority (44%).

Table 3: VET courses in WA with 100 or more Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander enrollees

ATSI	Non-ATSI	Stream	Course name
126	439	2100	Program for mature age entry
216	1935	2100	Basic literacy course
255	78	2200	Cert. in Vocational Entrance
264	19	2200	Cert. of Foundation Education
422	160	2200	Cert. in Preparatory Studies

Source: NCVER

3.3.4 Northern Territory

Almost three-quarters of the 3211 Indigenous enrollees in the Northern Territory are undertaking their VET studies in remote areas; that is, in their own homeland communities. Twenty-two per cent (22%) are studying in Darwin and Alice Springs. The remaining three per cent are located in a rural area; in all probability at the only residential Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tertiary college at Batchelor. Male enrollees were in the majority (54%). Courses with more than 100 enrollees are shown in table 4.

Table 4: VET courses in the NT with 100 or more Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander enrollees

ATSI	Non-ATSI	Stream	Course name
130	0	2100	Cert. in Preliminary General Studies
144	36	2200	Cert. in Vocational Studies
146	566	3222	Cert. in Practical Computer Operations
152	428	3222	Cert. in Office Skills
171	0	3222	Cert. in Health Science (Aboriginal

Source: NCVER

Unlike other States and Territories, it is significant that the highest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments in the Northern Territory are in the vocational streams of health science, office skills and computing. Preparatory education comes next. Not included in the table are the 99 enrollees in the Certificate in Horticultural Skills (Aboriginal Community), the 86 in the Certificate in Automotive Mechanics Trade (MITS), and the 84 in the High School Interface Training Program. The data also record 223 Indigenous students participating in courses with a module identity code only, suggesting that they are not enrolled in whole courses or programs, but rather in a number of isolated modules from various courses. This point needs further investigation.

3.3.5 South Australia

Eight out of 68 courses with Indigenous participants in South Australia have over 100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrollees. As evident in table 5, the largest numbers are enrolled in introductory education courses. Then come four vocationally oriented courses: business and commercial studies, mechanical engineering, Aboriginal primary health care and information technology. Most South Australian students are enrolled in the capital city of Adelaide (37%). Small rural centres are locations for 25 per cent of enrollees, while 27 per cent are enrolled in remote locations in the far north and the far west of the State. Forty-three per cent of enrollees are female.

Table 5: VET courses in South Australia with 100 or more Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander enrollees

ATSI	Non-ATSI	Stream	Course name
103	6	3222	Cert. in Information Technology (clerical)
103	7	3222	Cert. in Aboriginal Primary Health Care
127	3204	3221	Mechanical engineering (general access)
207	9322	3221	Business & commercial studies (general access)
243	1056	2100	Cert. in Introd Voc Ed (general access)
286	123	3221	Aboriginal education (general access)
448	1987	2100	Preparatory education (general access)
501	10	2100	Cert. in Introd Voc Ed (Aboriginal access)

Source: NCVER

3.3.6 Victoria

A total of 1813 VET enrolments is included in the Victorian listing. Enrollees are equally divided between metropolitan centres and rural locations. Just a handful are categorised as remote. Of the 102 courses in which Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander students were enrolled only two in this survey had over 100 enrollees (see table 6). Again female enrollees are under-represented, with only 43 per cent of the total.

Table 6: VET courses in Victoria with 100 or more Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander enrollees

ATSI	Non-ATSI	Stream	Course name
113	88	3500	Assoc. Dip of Arts (Australian art fashion)
176	5	2200	Cert. in Koorie Education Training & Employment

Source: NCVER

Although the highest Indigenous enrolments in Victoria are in a specifically designed education, training and employment course, there is also a strong emphasis on Aboriginal art and design. Not shown in this table are the additional 70 enrollees in the advanced Certificate in Koorie Art and Design and the 67 in Koorie Art and Design. These appear to be a popular and successful series of courses.

3.3.7 Tasmania

Only 229 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments were recorded for Tasmania. Slightly more than half this number were enrolled in rural areas, the remainder in the capital city of Hobart. Following trends in other States, the highest enrolments were recorded in Aboriginal adult access (N=65). Small business management (N=23) and art, craft and design (N=20) were vocational courses that had the next highest enrolments. A total of 43 courses in this small state had more than five Indigenous enrollees. There appears to be an equitable gender representation in the enrolment figures.

3.3.8 Australian Capital Territory

Six VET courses in the ACT attracted at least five Indigenous enrollees. Highest enrolments were recorded in adult basic education (N=30) and adult preparatory studies (N=11). A context specific course, Australian Public Service Office Traineeship, had 17 enrolments. All but seven of the 176 enrolments were in the capital city of Canberra. Men and women were fairly equally represented.

3.4 A profile of Indigenous Australians entering, completing and dropping out of the VET sector

An analysis of NCVER data and the information gained from the field research enables us to build up a provisional profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students entering, moving through, completing and dropping out of the VET sector. Because the data on withdrawals and graduates relate to a relatively small sample only, caution must be exercised in drawing definitive conclusions for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates and withdrawals. However, some significant general trends are evident.

3.4.1 Entry students

In 1994, 32 571 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments were recorded in the VET sector. This represents 2.8 per cent of the total enrolments. (Note that the total number of enrolments is larger than the number of clients because clients enrol in several courses.)

Why had these currently enrolled Indigenous students taken up studies in the VET sector? Having heard in person from someone already undertaking VET, and possibly having seen some visual

advertisements about VET courses, most Indigenous students enrolled believing they would quickly gain vocational skills that would guarantee them employment. They also said they had enrolled 'to gain confidence' and possibly to gain access to higher education. 'Interest' was cited as another major reason. A significant number also wanted to assist their children and grandchildren into more productive educational pathways than they personally had experienced.

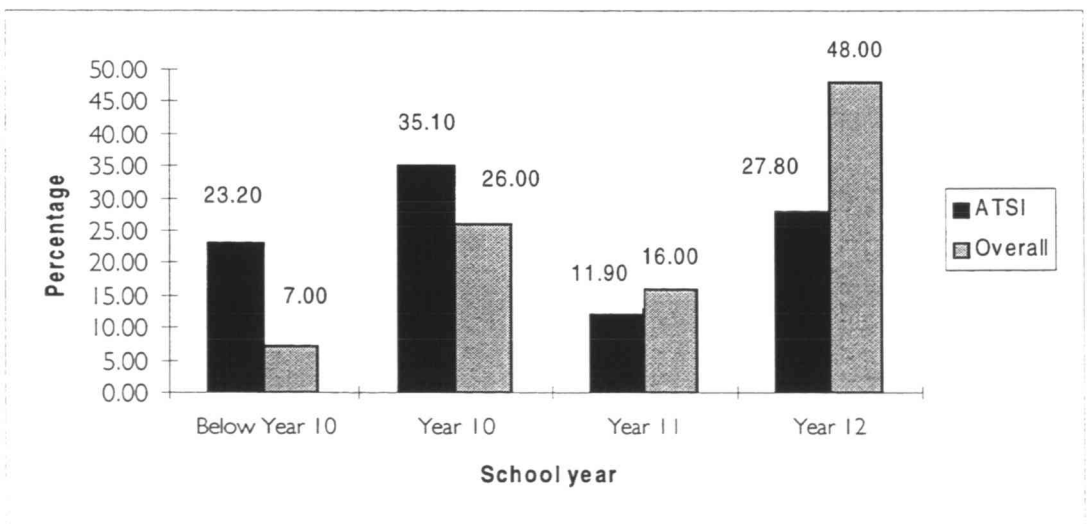
As mentioned in chapter one, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrollees have significantly lower pre-entry qualifications than the overall population. This is well illustrated in table 7 and figure 3 which show highest level of school achievement, and in table 8 showing highest pre-entry qualification.

Table 7: Highest level of school achievement*

Level of school achievement	ATSI %	Overall %
Below Year 10	23.2	7.0
Year 10	35.1	26.0
Year 11	11.9	16.0
Year 12	27.8	48.0

*Note: Because of rounding of decimal points and missing data, totals may not be exactly 100%. This applies to all subsequent tables.

Figure 3: Highest level of school achievement



This information shows that it cannot be presumed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrollees have even the basic level of schooling normally expected of TAFE entrants. It also reiterates the situation of 'western education lag' that the majority of Indigenous students find themselves in when entering the VET sector. This situation is compounded when the highest pre-entry qualifications of

Indigenous Australians (table 8) are compared to those of all other Australians (table 9).

Table 8: Highest pre-entry qualification—Indigenous Australians

Highest qualification	ATSI %
No pre-entry qualification	59.4
Certificate	21.4
Other post-secondary qualification	7.5
Trade qualification/apprenticeship	6.7
Advanced certificate	2.3
Associate diploma	1.4
Diploma	0.6
University degree	0.9

Source: NCVER

Table 9: Highest pre-entry qualification—all Australians

Highest qualification	Overall %
No pre-entry qualification	51.0
Certificate	18.0
Trade qualification/apprenticeship	12.0
Other post-secondary qualification	6.0
Advanced certificate	4.0
Associate diploma	2.0
Diploma	3.0
University degree	6.0

Source: NCVER

Considering other pre-entry qualifications, there is a clear difference between the two categories, with Indigenous entrants lagging behind. The comparatively large percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with certificates appears as a slight aberration, especially as it exceeds the overall rate for all Australians by 3.4 per cent. Insufficient data are available to 'unpack' this statistic. However, unofficially a 'certificate' can apply to many levels.

The high level of certificates recorded by Indigenous respondents may indicate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students return more frequently for further study in the TAFE sector at the certificate level. These certificates may have included those awarded for completion of prevocational and other preparatory programs. Supporting this suggestion are figures that show 17.1 per cent of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students had previously studied in the VET sector before entering their present course, compared with an overall percentage of 11 per cent. There is also evidence that only 40 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (compared to 56% overall) were in regular paid work (predominantly part time), thus leaving more time and opportunity for further study.

On a gender basis, there are currently more women enrollees in the VET sector than men. Indigenous enrolments do not follow the national trend, having slightly fewer women enrollees than men. The figures are as follows:

1993: Male—53%; Female—47% *1994*: Male—52%; Female—48%

Tables 10 and 11 are derived from the 1994 statistics and show the streams and fields of study in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are enrolled, and also provide a gender breakdown. These data also are presented in the form of bar graphs in figures 4 and 5.

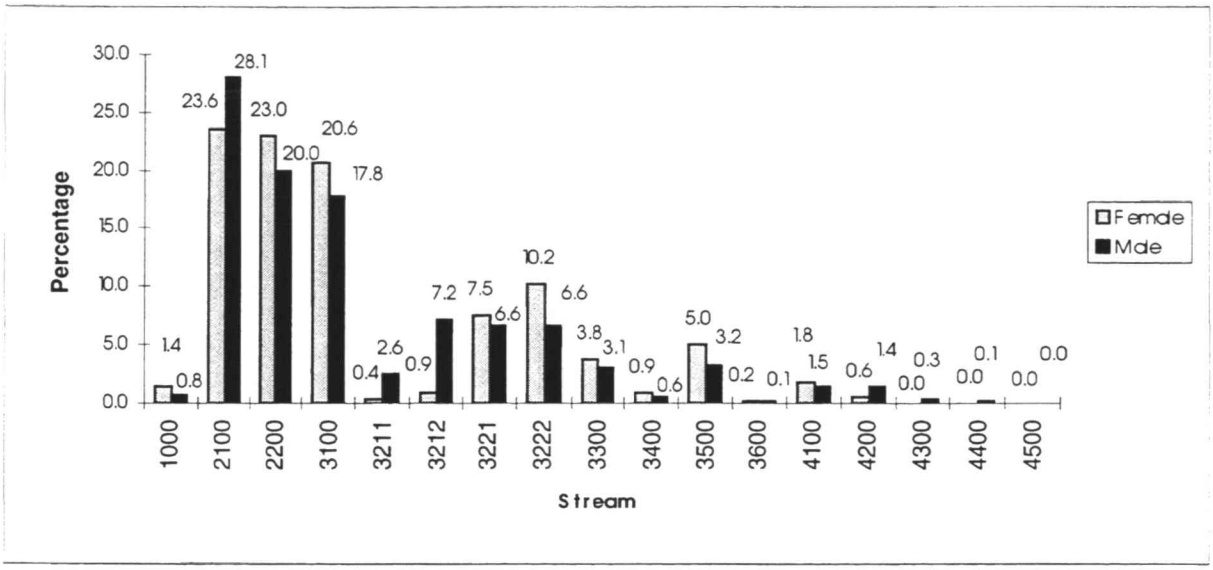
Table 10: Proportion of Indigenous enrolments by stream of study and gender

Stream of study	Female %	Male %
Cluster 1		
1000 Recreation & leisure	1.4	0.8
2100 Basic employment skills	23.6	28.1
2200 Educational preparation	23.0	20.0
3100 Operatives: initial	20.6	17.8
3211 Recognised trades: part exempt	0.4	2.6
3212 Recognised trades: complete	0.9	7.2
Cluster 2		
3221 Other skills: part exempt	7.5	6.6
3222 Other skills: complete	0.2	6.6
3300 Trade technician/supervisory	3.8	3.1
3400 Para-professional technician	0.9	0.6
3500 Para-prof higher technician	5.0	*3.2*
3600 Professional	0.2	0.1
4100 Operatives: post initial	1.8	1.5
Cluster 3		
4200 Trades/other skills: post initial	0.6	1.4
4300 Trade tech/super: post initial	0.0	0.3
4400 Para-prof tech: post initial	0.0	0.1
4500 Para-prof high tech: post initial	0.0	0.0

Note: (italicised numbers indicate a larger proportion of women students in a stream)

Source: NCVER

Figure 4: Indigenous enrolments by stream and gender



These data reveal that men outnumber women in basic employment skills and, perhaps not surprisingly, in recognised trades, whereas women have a higher representation in educational preparation and operatives: initial. In the second cluster of figures, women are certainly more strongly represented than their male counterparts in all categories. Interestingly, in the final cluster, although Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are barely represented at all in advanced skills and supervisory areas, the few Indigenous students studying in these streams are men. Reasons for these gender differentials need further investigation.

Perhaps the most interesting data in table 11 relate to the business, administration and economics field, where the number of Indigenous women students is well over double that of the men. This is a far more substantial gender difference than is shown in figures for all other Australians. There is an expected gender difference in engineering and surveying, about the same as that in the national breakdown. More Indigenous women are studying in health and community services, although proportionately more Indigenous men are in this field than data show for the total Australian population. The services, hospitality and transportation field has twice as many Indigenous women studying, a significantly higher proportion than the figure for all Australians. These and earlier data are examined in more detail in chapter 4.

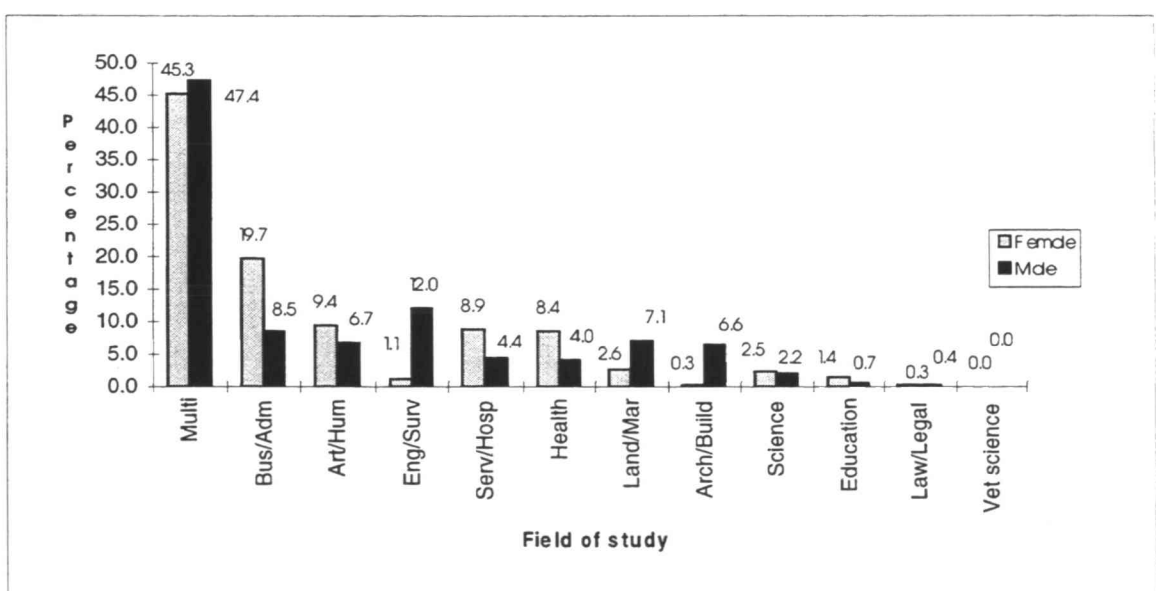
Current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reported that although they appeared to have had some choice about what they could study in the VET sector, once they had actually enrolled they found their choices could be restricted, largely because of their low levels of literacy and numeracy, or because the courses they wanted were not offered. Many respondents who had entered VET with high expectations of studying a wide variety of 'user friendly' courses,

Table 11: Proportion of Indigenous enrolments by field of study and gender

Field of study	Female %	Male %
TAFE multi-field education	45.3	47.4
Business, administration, economics	19.7	8.5
Art, humanities & social sciences	9.4	6.7
Engineering, surveying	1.1	12.0
Services, hospitality, transportation	8.9	4.4
Health, community services	8.4	4.0
Land and marine resources, animal husbandry	2.6	7.1
Architecture, building	0.3	6.6
Science	2.5	2.2
Education	1.4	0.7
Law, legal studies	0.3	0.4
Veterinary science, animal care	0.0	0.0

Source: NCVER

Figure 5: Indigenous enrolments by field and gender



found that these options simply did not exist. On questioning students about what they had hoped to study, an interesting range of areas was suggested by them. They included numerous practically oriented courses such as Aboriginal dance and drama; music; outboard motor maintenance; media, including operating radio and television stations; art and craft; biology; geography; horticulture;

flight pilot training; science; and mathematics. Being channelled from these vocationally-oriented courses which were perceived as relevant into *basic employment skills* and *educational preparation* appears to be a cause of considerable disappointment for some students. It is encouraging to note, however, that some of these preparatory courses are now being integrated with mainstream technical and other electives as well as work experience programs. For some cases it may be possible for those enrolled to negotiate the nature of their individual program of study. Table 12 and figure 6 show the age profile of VET enrollees.

Table 12: Age of VET enrollees

Age (in years)	ATSI %	Overall %
Under 16	*3.26*	1.43
16	*5.18*	3.74
17	*6.35*	4.80
18	6.74	7.56
19	6.42	7.25
20	5.29	5.66
21	*4.46*	4.45
22	*4.04*	3.70
23	*3.46*	3.06
24	*3.21*	2.78
25–29	*14.32*	11.76
30–39	19.37	20.56
40–49	8.80	12.73
50–59	2.95	4.25
60–64	0.62	0.77
Over 64	0.32	0.59
Unstated	*5.20*	4.91

Note: (italicised numbers indicate a higher ATSI percentage)

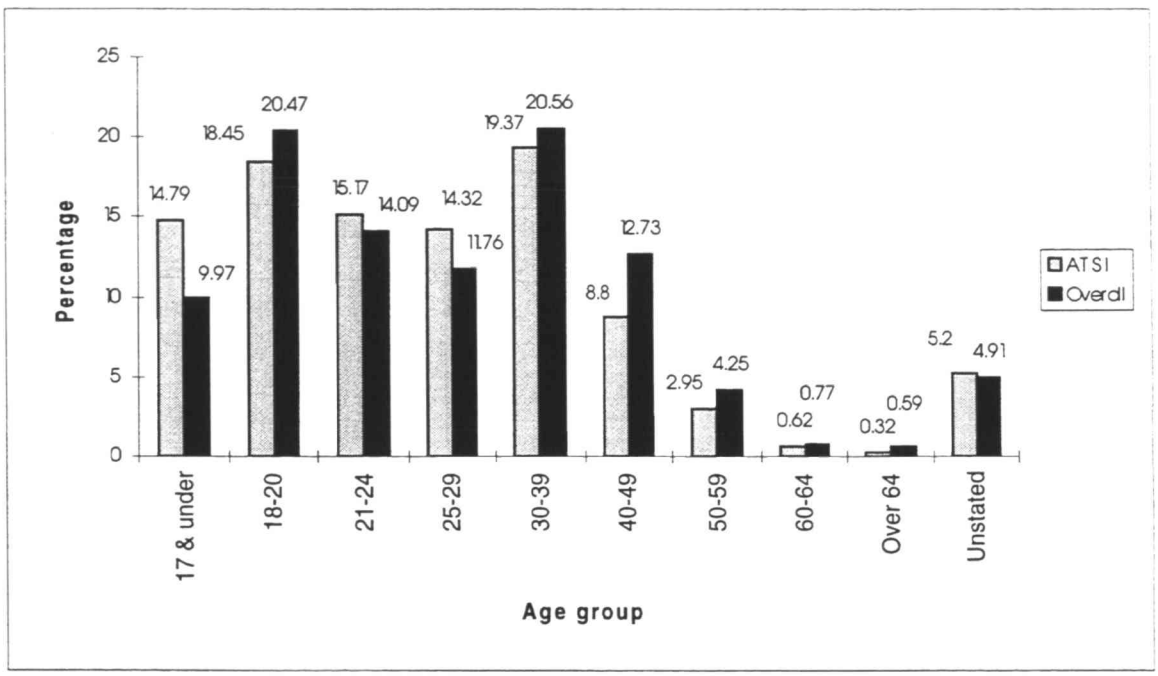
Source NCVER

The age profile for Indigenous peoples broadly conform with the profile of the overall Australian VET population. There is evidence from the survey, however, that when Indigenous people become parents of school age children, the awareness of their own perceived educational limitations motivates them to further study. Respondents frequently suggested that their own study pathways within VET provided a role model for their children and for other young people in the community.

In response to the question: 'Do you have sole responsibility for supporting a child/children?', Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students said a very loud "yes", with 17.7 per cent responding in the affirmative, compared with only 7.8 per cent overall. Special support, in many cases already provided for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in this situation, must be continued. The fieldwork for this project showed that child care was greatly valued and

considered very satisfactory by the majority of Indigenous parents using such provisions. However, the continuation of child care must be a priority if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sole supporting parents are to be given a realistic chance to undertake and succeed in their studies.

Figure 6: Age of VET enrollees



Relatively few Indigenous students were supported in their studies by their employer. However, relative to the total population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students received proportionately as much employer support. Face value percentages suggest less support largely because fewer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were in regular paid work (40%, compared with 56% overall).

Finally, the majority of current students were studying part-time (77%) and were attending day classes at a college for courses of either one semester or one year's duration.

3.4.2 Graduate students

A somewhat similar profile to that described above for current students can be drawn for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who have successfully completed studies in the VET sector. There are, however, some points of difference that should be noted. These analyses are drawn from the appendix to the 1993 National client follow-up survey of vocational education graduates (Dawe 1993) and from the fieldwork carried out for this project.

In the graduate survey, of the total of 25 330 responses, 1.4 per cent, or 345 persons, said they were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. Though relatively small in size, this sample can add important insights to the present study.

In which streams of study had this sample graduated? Certainly the area of highest enrolment—educational preparation—produced the highest percentage of graduates. Almost a quarter of all Indigenous graduates had studied in this stream. Three other streams within the cluster of initial vocational skills dominated: operatives initial (16.6%), other skills: complete (15.7%) and recognised trades: complete (11.3%). These figures closely parallel graduate figures for the overall population. It is interesting that although Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolment figures for the latter two streams are proportionately very small, the success rate in these streams is outstanding. Does this relate to the competency of the students allowed entry into these more selective streams? Could it also be associated with the nature of the streams? For example, the trade-based courses would involve contracts of training and enjoy a generally high completion rate.

The figures for fields of study show that Indigenous students are graduating predominantly from business, administration and economics (18%), from health and community services (13.1%), from arts, humanities and social sciences (9.9%), and from services, hospitality and transportation (7.6%). The proportionate number of graduates in health and community services significantly exceeds the graduate number for the overall population. In arts, humanities and social sciences the figures are parallel. Interestingly, these are all programs in which women are the predominant enrollees. In other fields of study, figures lag significantly behind.

The statistics show that 63.7 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates studied full time, compared with only 45.5 per cent for the overall population. Correspondingly, 31.9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates studied part time, compared with the overall figures of 54.7 per cent. The fact that almost two-thirds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates studied full-time could reflect that more of them are unemployed (statistics cited elsewhere in the report verify this claim) and therefore can engage in full-time study. Also, funding available on equity grounds enables more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to study full-time.

Interestingly, figures based on enrolments of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students show that 77.35 per cent study part time, with the remaining 22.65 per cent full time. Relating this to the above graduate figures, does this suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who undertake full time studies are more likely to succeed? This suggestion may warrant further investigation.

Not surprisingly, the data show that Indigenous VET graduates have a higher level of school achievement than Indigenous students undertaking short, non-award VET courses. Graduates also had more paid work and held more permanent employment positions than Indigenous non-graduates. This paints a picture of Indigenous

graduates who appear to be more familiar with and more comfortable within the western educational milieu. Success breeds success. In spite of this however, the figures still indicate that Indigenous Australian students lag substantially behind the overall population.

Very few graduates reported that their earlier learnings were recognised. Most of those surveyed felt that much of their earlier education would not have helped because it was not directly related to the course they studied. This is a contentious issue that will be taken up later.

To conclude, a number of graduate students expressed pleasure at what they had achieved within their vocational education and training, with one insightful commentator suggesting 'There should be more of this TAFE going instead of being on the dole'.

3.4.3 Withdrawing students

Only limited information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who have withdrawn from TAFE courses was available. The information was gleaned from a Special report drawn from the 1993 TAFE exit survey for those respondents who identified themselves as belonging to the group of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and who had withdrawn from their TAFE course in 1992 (Dawe, NCVER for VEETAC 1993). For reasons of confidentiality, the following data report only general trends.

When questioned as to their reasons for leaving a course before its completion, up to two thirds of the respondents chose not to answer specific questions. However, in keeping with the general research findings, the most frequently cited response by those who answered was 'family reasons'. This is a culturally legitimate response and thus needs to be treated with respect. A related statistic of interest is that almost a quarter of these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents described themselves as 'sole supporting parents'.

Withdrawers had less schooling and pre-entry qualifications than their Indigenous counterparts who were currently studying or who had graduated. Figures suggest that the highest withdrawal rates occur in the following streams:

Initial vocational courses—operatives	23.6%
Education preparation	20.6%
Basic education and employment skills	17.5%

More specifically, three major fields of study see high Indigenous withdrawal rates:

TAFE multi-field education	39.7%
Business, administration	20.6%
Engineering, surveying	11.1%

Inevitably, the highest withdrawal rates occurred in streams and fields that had the highest enrolments. Having specifically identified

these streams and fields of study, VET authorities have an excellent opportunity to take a closer look at these 'at risk' areas and develop with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues retention strategies that address the deficit.

Only 26.9 per cent of withdrawers believed that the course of study they initially entered had any relevance to their job. This figure must be aligned with the fact that 47.6 per cent in this category of withdrawers chose not to respond, perhaps suggesting that they did not have current employment, while the remaining 25.4 per cent said that their course of study was 'not at all relevant' to their job.

3.5 Who controls Indigenous vocational education?

Unquestionably, Indigenous Australians have been almost completely dependent until now on the funding, the goodwill, and the decision-making of the dominant non-Indigenous policy makers for the provision of VET opportunities. The public provider, TAFE, has been charged with the major responsibility for delivery of VET to Australia's Indigenous peoples. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultative committees certainly have contributed to planning and implementation processes within the TAFE system. State and federal governments have carried out consultations too numerous to count with Indigenous communities in a sincere attempt to get things right. Governments also have been assiduous in ensuring that advisory and reference groups include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members, and these people have contributed very valuably to educational processes within TAFE colleges. However, the ultimate control of vocational education for Indigenous Australians within the TAFE system has definitely not been in their own hands. The process has been 'top down'. It has been government controlled and managed, thus perpetuating the dependency and powerlessness that Indigenous Australians have suffered during the past two centuries. In keeping with the emerging acceptance of a philosophy of Indigenous rights, we suggest that a 'bottom up' approach would be more appropriate, thus complying with the directions being advocated by ATSIC.

Control must extend to the rights of Indigenous peoples to create their own pathways through the VET sector. This may mean Indigenous control of teaching and learning, recognition of the prior cultural learning of Indigenous peoples and an affirmation of Indigenous languages and cultures. However, such a statement is presumptive as Indigenous peoples must work out what this means for themselves. Suffice to say that a more proactive, two-way management system needs to be devised that allows Indigenous people control of their own vocational education and training. This pivotal discussion will be continued in subsequent chapters.

4 Pathways through VET: A detailed analysis

4.1 Study streams

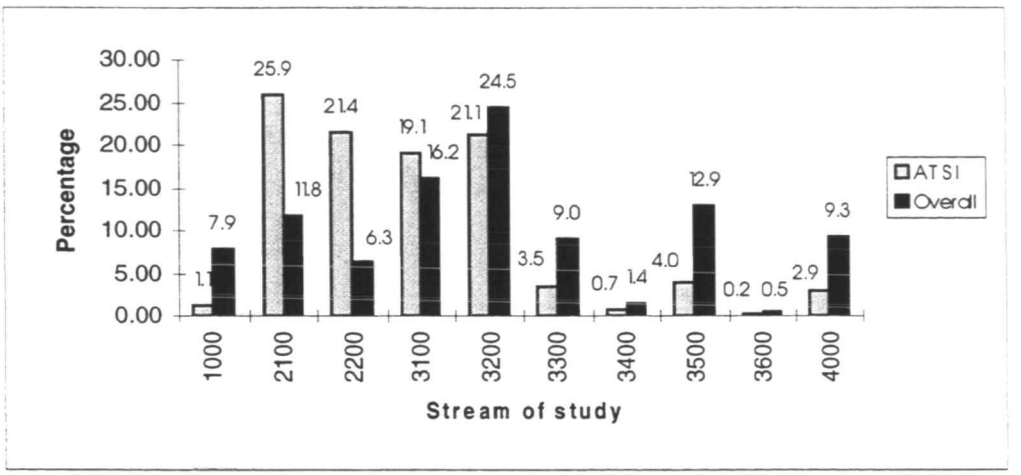
What streams of study are currently providing pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the VET sector? Table 13 and figure 7 provide some basic information about the 1994 enrolment patterns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students compared with enrolment patterns overall. (Source NCVER)

Table 13: Enrolment patterns

Stream of study	ATSI %	Overall %
1000 Recreation, leisure and personal enrichment	1.1	7.9
Entry to employment or further education:		
2100 Basic education and employment skills	25.9	11.8
2200 Educational preparation	21.4	6.3
Initial vocational courses:		
3100 Operatives: initial	19.1	16.2
3211 Recognised trades: partial exempt	1.6	2.3
3212 Recognised trades: complete	4.2	8.5
3221 Other skills: partial exempt	7.0	5.9
3222 Other skills: complete	8.3	7.8
3300 Trade technician/supervisory	3.5	9.0
3400 Paraprofessional/technician	0.7	1.4
3500 Paraprofessional/higher technician	4.0	12.9
3600 Professional	0.2	0.5
Courses subsequent to initial vocational courses:		
4100 Operatives level	1.7	2.2
4200 Skilled level	1.0	5.6
4300 Trade technician: supervisory	0.2	1.0
4400 Paraprofessional: technician	0.0	0.2
4500 Paraprofessional: higher technical	0.0	0.3

Basic education and employment skills attracted approximately one quarter of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments in 1994, the same proportion as in 1993. This percentage is more than double that of the overall population of VET students. The proportion of Indigenous students enrolled in educational preparation was 21.4 per cent (compared with 22.6% in 1993), this being more than treble the percentage for VET enrolments overall.

Figure 7: Enrolment patterns



Figures from the graduate survey suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were more successful in educational preparation than those enrolled in basic education and employment skills. Interestingly, the descriptors for both streams are almost identical. The critical difference appears to be that educational preparation courses are focussed on the acquisition of specific entrance requirements; for example: '. . . certificate of entrance courses, pre-certificate courses, tutorial mathematics courses for certificate students, tertiary orientation . . . and diploma entrance courses'. This is very significant. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people come from a known tradition of functional learning where the purpose of a learning task is always clear. Learning for the sake of learning; i.e. without a specific purpose or goal, is not an intrinsic cultural norm. It therefore makes sense to focus Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learning on functional, achievable goals. To this end, some programs combine these functional and underpinning skills.

Though only relatively small numbers of Indigenous students gained entry into 3222 (other skills: complete) and 3221 (recognised trades: complete), figures from the graduate survey showed them more successful here. Other skills: complete (Stream 3222) is described as:

> *. . . initial education and training for entry to vocations which are not recognised trades but which require a range of skills at a similar level. Such vocations require a high degree of skill, usually in a wide range of related activities, performed with minimal direction and supervision.*

Students' successes in this stream are parallelled by the apparently high level of success in recognised trades: complete, another set of initial vocational skills courses specifically related to complete recognised trade courses with a similar degree of difficulty. Students who successfully completed courses in this stream were qualified for entry into a specific trade. The comparatively high degree of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander success in these vocational areas

needs to be examined more closely, and the possible variables contributing to their success identified. One contributing factor, undoubtedly, is that such programs involve employers and the learner entering into a formal contract of training.

Areas where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were significantly under-represented when compared to the total population were Stream 1000, recreation and leisure; Stream 3212, recognised trades: complete; Stream 3300, trade technician/ supervisory; Stream 3500, paraprofessional higher technician; and Stream 4200 trades/other skills post initial.

In summary, basic education and employment skills, educational preparation and initial vocational skills (operatives) —Stream 3100— are the study pathways being utilised by over 66 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students involved in VET in 1994. In 1993 the proportion was slightly higher, with 68 per cent. This is almost twice the proportion recorded for total Australian enrolments in both 1993 and 1994. However, it is very evident that as skills levels increase within the streams, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments decreases far more rapidly than enrolments for the total population. At the highest levels (3300 to 3600—see table 13) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are under-represented.

The data in table 13 and figure 7 also show a very low Indigenous participation rate in Stream 1000, recreation, leisure and personal enrichment courses. Some commentators suggested that this 'doesn't matter'. This depends on how one views education in the VET sector. Some argue, indeed, a number of stream 1000 programs have vocational potential. The reasons why Indigenous people are under-represented in this field of study may be worthy of further investigation.

4.2 Fields of study

It is also useful to consider the statistics in terms of fields of study. These are shown in figure 8 and table 14. On the basis of these data from 1994 one could draw a fairly accurate conclusion that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student pathways through TAFE most commonly begin with entry into multi-field education, an area that by and large provides basic educational and possibly some initial vocational skills to enable entry into specific mainstream vocational programs.

As self-determination gathers pace, it is not surprising that these figures show Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are seeking skills in business, administration and economics, over and above all other vocational fields (13.8% in 1994; 14.2% in 1993). Business, administration and office skills are seen as critical to learning the ways of 'the other' so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders can

more readily take control of their own futures. However, Indigenous people are still significantly under-represented in this field of study in comparison with overall enrolments.

The growing importance of Indigenous art and craft to the economy of many communities may be reflected in the enrolments in the arts, humanities and social studies field of study.

The comparatively large and increasing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in health and community services relates in part to the fact that the health of Indigenous Australians is globally recognised as lagging far behind that of non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous people have clearly recognised this need, which is reflected in relatively higher enrolments in this field of study when compared to the overall population. Many of these enrollees are women.

In an endeavour to respond to Indigenous health needs, substantial funding has been provided by the Australian Government, by non-government organisations and by philanthropic groups both within and outside the country. Part of this funding has been invested in training. Indigenous people themselves also are anxious to improve the health of their people. However the courses and their content need to be seen to be relevant by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Figure 8: Participation by field of study

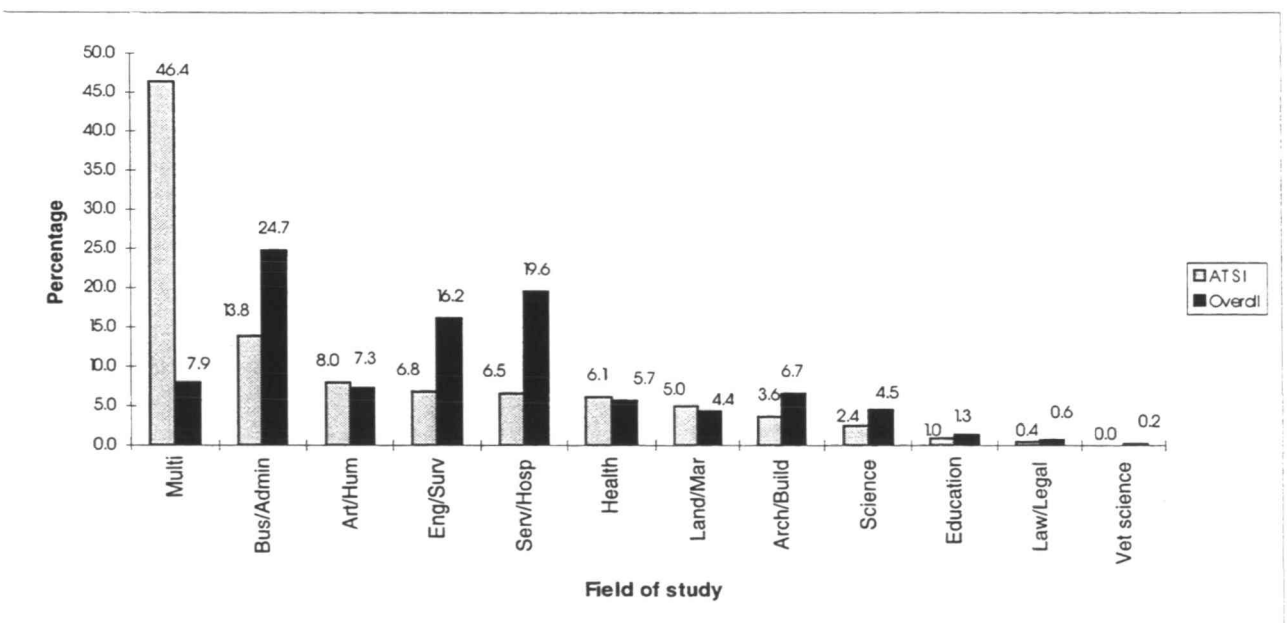


Table 14: Fields of study (shown as percentages)

Field of study	ATSI %	Overall %
TAFE multi-field education	46.4	17.9
Business; administration; economics	13.8	24.7
Arts; humanities and social sciences	8.0	7.3
Engineering; surveying	6.8	16.2
Services; hospitality; transportation	6.5	10.6
Health; community services	6.1	5.7
Land and marine resources; animal husbandry	5.0	4.4
Architecture; building	3.6	6.7
Science	2.4	4.5
Education	1.0	1.3
Law; legal studies	0.4	0.6
Veterinary science; animal care	0.0	0.2

Source: NCVER

There are a number of other fields where Indigenous people are significantly under represented. Architecture and building has approximately half the number of enrollees as the overall population. Non-Indigenous architects and builders have been constructing shelters for Indigenous peoples for well over a century with negligible success. Only recently has there emerged a culturally empathetic architectural view that has grown out of a two-way learning process involving both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. (Refer, for example, to the work of Western Australian school architect and builder, J M Fitzhardinge, and also to renowned architect Glen Murcutt's Marika-Alderton house in the Yirrkala community in the Northern Territory. In both cases the work of these non-Indigenous architects has been significantly enhanced by their openness to Indigenous perspectives.) Is this an area, then, where more effective bicultural VET programs might be developed to reflect this new fusing of Indigenous and non-Indigenous traditions? Certainly such programs as the Aboriginal Technical Worker (ATWORK) have attempted to combine the use of appropriate technologies with the lifestyles and contexts in which the skills acquired in training will be used.

Engineering and surveying is an allied field of under-representation. Science is also very low. The nature of the programs in which Indigenous people are enrolled in these fields needs further explanation. In contrast, the relatively high level of enrolment in land and marine resources and animal husbandry reflect the location of many Indigenous students in rural and remote areas. It also reflects work which Indigenous people have undertaken since European settlement. It undoubtedly also reflects a concern with landcare and environmental management in Indigenous controlled areas.

The services, hospitality and transportation field also shows significant under representation. In a country with an increasing income from tourism, the unique quality of Australia's Indigenous

tourism could be a great drawcard, and a significant source of employment for some Indigenous groups. Certainly a few outstanding Indigenous tourism ventures are emerging, but maybe the expansion of this area is a two-way process that the VET sector could be exploring at a greater rate than current figures suggest.

A TAFE equity target to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to participate appropriately in all fields has been a high priority. Its success has been relatively limited. We question the appropriateness of the target. Have non-Indigenous peoples been asked if they really want to participate in all of these streams of study? We believe Indigenous Australians themselves need to be making the decisions about the fields of study they would like developed. (Indeed, many of the fields of study in which enrolments for Indigenous people are proportionally higher than the overall enrolment are explicable in terms of their importance to Indigenous individuals, their families and communities. They are already making informed choices.) If TAFE continues to be the major VET provider for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is possible that new fields of study could be created collaboratively with them to ensure their VET needs are being met. Undoubtedly, this will mean discerning areas of high need and working toward the creation and implementation of appropriate programs on Indigenous terms.

4.3 Hearing Indigenous voices

Statistical data of the kind presented above can provide only a limited perspective. In particular, they lack a 'human face'. One therefore needs to listen closely to the voices of Indigenous recipients of VET—to the voices of students who have succeeded, of those who currently are enrolled in VET courses, and of those who have dropped out. Unfortunately the scope of the field research in this study gave relatively limited opportunities for Indigenous respondents to comment upon the 'big picture' of the VET pathways they were experiencing, or had experienced. It concentrated more on details about barriers they had encountered, barriers relating to courses, colleges, conditions, teachers and teaching styles. However, the following conclusions can be drawn from the student responses.

An open-ended question on what students disliked about their courses yielded an interesting variety of useful comments. First, students expressed disappointment that they were unable to pick subjects that really interested them. In terms of teaching methodology, they were quick to point out the emphasis on what westerners describe as 'talk and chalk'. 'Courses were too rushed and too crammed' they said, and '. . . the explanations often lacked clarity'. 'Boring' and 'hard' were descriptors used by several, while others remarked on a lack of enthusiasm by some teachers, especially to follow up work effectively. Limited feedback from teachers, and the fact that some assessments were just 'too hard' or expectations were just 'too high', also were mentioned. Complaints were made

that many courses overlapped in content. The lack of field trips outside the institution was a major criticism. Several respondents spoke of the need for an urn for tea making and adequate heating during cold weather.

Four very constructive suggestions emerged from the students:

- More classes needed 'travelling outside' using field trips and excursions.
- The Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and/or other government representatives, and the media (i.e. representing television, radio and newspapers), could be invited to presentation nights and other special events.
- Because older Indigenous students do not fit comfortably alongside young Indigenous learners, they would prefer separate classes.
- A wider variety of more 'user friendly', practically-oriented courses such as drama, film making, music, art and design, biology, geography, applied science and mathematics could be offered.

'And what do you like about your course?' The overwhelming response from many was couched in terms of 'meeting, working and communicating with fellow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students'. This feeling was enhanced if teachers were empathetic and friendly, and if the facilities were comfortable for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

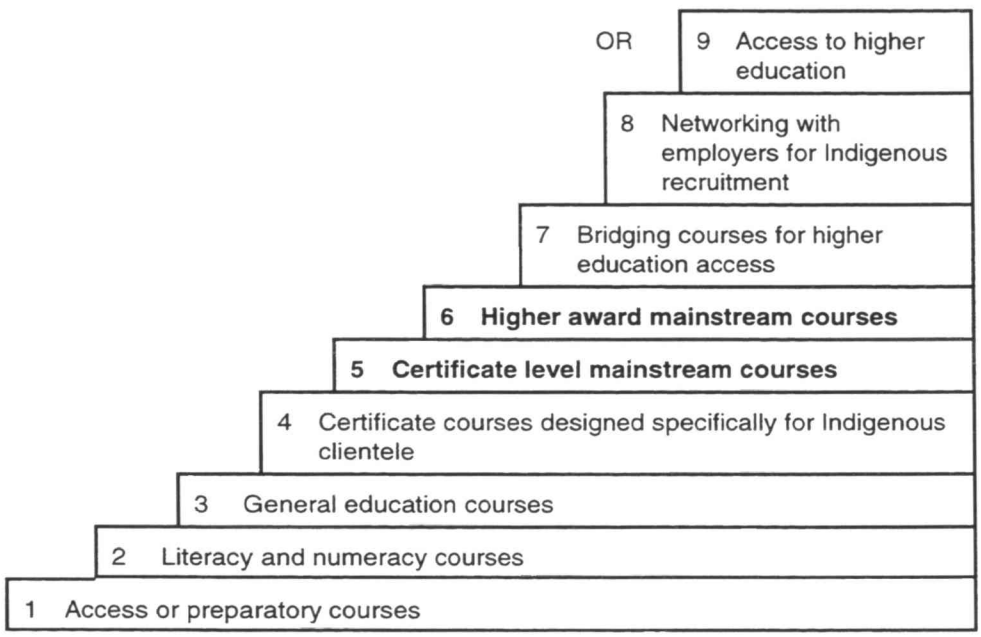
The second major response related to educational opportunities, best summed up in this statement: 'I'm catching up on missed education'. Many expressed the view that by studying at TAFE they would gain ready entrance into the workforce. Others spoke about gaining skills in language, communication, research, thinking, computers, English and mathematics. 'Meeting new people, making new friends and new things learned', were the words of one graduate respondent. Some commented positively about field trips outside the classroom: 'The trips teach me about other people's culture'. (Students still maintained, however, that field trips were too few.) Well taught adult education classes that respected Indigenous culture, that gave time and space to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and that taught 'what I needed to know' and 'gave us a chance to learn what we didn't learn anywhere else', were affirmed by Indigenous respondents.

'Gaining more confidence' was cited by several as an outcome of their studies. However, the exact meaning of this statement appeared uncertain. Some alluded to greater confidence with study, others spoke about personal confidence, and a number referred to a greater confidence in dealing with the demands of the dominant non-Indigenous Australian society. 'Working at one's own pace' was valued by some graduate students, while 'oral communication in

classes' was mentioned positively. Again, for graduates, 'getting the final result' was the really high point that dissipated the frustration and difficulty of study.

4.4 Teachers' perceptions of pathways

Having presented some of the views of the students, one must also take into account what teachers have said. The majority of teachers (75%) in the TAFE sector who responded to this survey believed that there are common educational pathways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students follow through TAFE colleges. The pathways are fairly clearly prescribed. The approximate sequence is as follows (reading from the bottom), with some minor variations in individual colleges and with some elements able to be taken concurrently:



These teachers believed this to be the way that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students themselves want to go, and that it is the best educational pathway for them. Interestingly, the remaining 25 per cent of teachers who responded did not think there were well established pathways, and suggested that their students were not comfortable with the so-called 'established' pathways, and that 'educational access is not well believed'. Among this minority group of teachers it appears that several were Aboriginal. As there was no way of identifying this on the completed questionnaires, this supposition cannot be carried further. However, this minority view will be taken into account.

Teachers were also asked to consider more suitable pathways for Indigenous Australians into, through and beyond the VET sector. Two distinct sets of opinions emerged, though on the surface they look quite similar. On the one hand, some teachers and co-ordinators

took the perspective that '*more* has to be done *for* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' to encourage them into existing programs and pathways. For example: more flexible entry requirements; more resources; more flexible and self-paced learning strategies; more learning packs of shorter duration; more time to complete courses ('. . . remember Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have little educational experience and low self-esteem'); more specially designed, culturally appropriate courses; more student support; more work experience; more courses to meet different emotional, educational and social needs; more practical courses, e.g. 'screen printing'; more accredited courses; and more help given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to get them to articulate into other suitable courses. It was obvious that this group of teachers and co-ordinators believed that existing VET pathways were suited to the needs of Indigenous clients and could be improved by having more resources poured in to strengthen rather than to change them.

A smaller but significant number of respondents expressed a different opinion. These respondents seriously questioned the 'rightness' of existing pathways. They advocated what could be described as a 'back to the drawing boards' approach, beginning with the suggestion of engaging in community consultation to '. . . establish needs and design appropriate courses in content and length'. The next step they suggested was to develop in consultation with communities an appropriate learning environment—a place that has a '. . . strong feeling of togetherness to encourage security', was one teacher's description. This place might need to be located 'outside cities and towns', suggested another. At every level—receptionists, administrative officers, counsellors and teachers—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff should be represented, and an Aboriginal liaison officer was seen to be 'a must'. Realistic work experience, and '. . . industries creating a culture of education: get this qualification and then there's work', was also recommended.

In relation to pathways *through* TAFE, a similar dualistic approach emerged. With one group of respondents more childcare headed the list; followed by more support for students with family and community problems; 'more practical courses'; more literacy and numeracy classes; more flexible delivery based on short modules that coped with 'sporadic family interruptions'; more '. . . cross-portability between TAFEs'; more personal and career counselling and more academic support; better equipped libraries; and more transport.

A more reflective and measured approach was adopted by a number of teachers and co-ordinators who suggested that non-Indigenous staff '. . . need to be aware of where their students are coming from'; they must understand and respect the culture; and they must be clear about their roles. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students also must have a clear picture of their role, as well as the roles of their teachers. Good levels of communication are essential so that students feel 'welcomed and appreciated' and confident in the learning

environment. 'Personal counselling [of staff] should result in real adaptation to the individual differences of the students', is one thought-provoking comment. Another respondent suggested that '. . . constant pastoral care and support for study and other issues' by Aboriginal colleagues would bear fruit, and also commented that students need to feel they are making *real* progress.

Going *on* from TAFE elicited a number of responses. Strong encouragement, counselling and knowledge about possible employment or further study options should be provided. Well articulated study pathways needed to be clearly specified and more readily available. The importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander role models to inspire confidence was emphasised. One teacher made the following comment: 'Be realistic about what qualifications are possible at this stage of history. Teaching degrees, for example, are out of reach. Recognise that a person with a DipT (Indigenous teacher) is just as good as a highly qualified non-Indigenous teacher.' Another teacher respondent would like to see '. . . more awareness of and employment in the public service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates' from the TAFE sector.

A final, open-ended question about educational pathways through VET saw teachers and co-ordinators reiterating a number of points:

- First, listen to the needs and wants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Provide jobs; at the moment there are none: 'I think we're on the wrong track—things are getting meaner and leaner'.
- There is an urgent need for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in 'Aboriginal dense' areas.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to improve their literacy and numeracy skills if they want to follow TAFE pathways.
- We need to build up Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's self-confidence, self-esteem and thus employability and ability to fit into the mainstream.

A final comment possibly speaks as much about the teacher as the opinion expressed: 'It is an attitude problem. Aborigines have academic skills but the majority lack motivation and commitment to move on and articulate with other areas. It is very difficult to move them on.'

4.5 Conflicting cultural perceptions of pathways

It is now time to examine the two viewpoints about VET pathways that seem to be emerging in this study.

First, there is a view that seems to represent the Indigenous voice. Interestingly, this voice is not only coming strongly from Indigenous people themselves, but also from sensitised non-Indigenous, cross-cultural educators. It is a voice that sees Indigenous rights at the core of VET. It rejects the catch-up model and points to a system that enables Indigenous Australians to take active control of the vocational education of their own people. It is clearly reflected in the recent ATSIC documents that were reviewed in chapter 2.

A useful way of gaining insights about perceived pathways into and through the VET sector is to ask Indigenous students why they entered the sector at all. Their answers are very revealing. As to be expected, many initially believed that the widely advertised VET pathways would lead them to employment. Although some were successful in finding jobs, others discovered after enrolment that they were not even on a vocational education pathway. Said one respondent, "I would really like to get into a job course". The relatively few who were enrolled in specific vocational pathways also found out, along with other Australians, that there was no real guarantee of employment at the end.

Another group of students enrolled because they were interested to catch up on missed education. Employment at the end was far less important than the process of being educated in a VET institution with a group of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peers, the latter reason often taking precedence over the former. Government funding facilitated such patterns of study. As stated elsewhere, many saw it as a much better option than being on the dole. Others said they simply enjoyed 'the challenge of learning'.

A significant number of mature enrollees entered because, by studying, they saw themselves as role models for younger people in their own culture, and thus able to strengthen their own community. In an associated category, others studied so that they could assist their children or grandchildren with their learning. These social reasons were deemed of prime importance by many Indigenous respondents.

A somewhat more complex response relates to those who enrolled for 'personal development' or 'to build up confidence'. Confidence in what? It is an indictment against their formal educational experiences if Indigenous people have been led to believe that their lack of western education is a cause for low self esteem and lack of confidence, and therefore implies a need for personal development. It is entirely a different matter if the learning environment is one which values individuals, identifies strengths, addresses areas of need and allows individuals, perhaps for the first time in their life, to experience success in a system valued by mainstream society—and which therefore begins to unlock doors and opens new pathways. Nevertheless, there is a gulf between a quick fix solution encouraged by some educational policies and practices and a more considered

response which requires longer to develop the relationships with communities and individuals on which success can be built. Given the high staff turnover and uncertain funding base of many of these preparatory programs (they, themselves, can be somewhat marginal) there is a risk that the elements of success for a program and their ability to build up the confidence and develop individuals' personal potential is put at risk.

An alternative perception of 'building up confidence' comes from several Indigenous respondents. They seek to gain confidence by getting further knowledge about non-Indigenous views of life, about 'the way they think and do things'. Once this western knowledge is gained these students feel they can manage mainstream Australian culture with greater assurance. In a sense these students are striving to become bicultural so they can operate successfully and confidently in both worlds. One student described it this way: 'TAFE classes are giving us our independent learning to better our lives and fit into mainstream society for a better future for ourselves and our children'.

In sum, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may initially enter the VET sector with the motive of following a vocational pathway that will lead to employment. However, the current reality is that many Indigenous people have come to see the process of education as an end in itself. Maybe the long study pathways or the lack of jobs at the end of those pathways have contributed to their thinking. It also may be an intrinsic cultural norm not to be continually looking a long way ahead but to be living more in the present. The notion of a study pathway as a social asset to the extended family and the community is also a very important one for most Indigenous adult students.

These Indigenous perceptions of pathways contrast with the views of many providers. From a government perspective, the aim of encouraging Indigenous students into the VET sector is to provide them with further education so that unacceptable levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational achievement and unemployment can be addressed. Under-representation of Indigenous people in most educational achievement and vocational areas has prompted the government to provide funding and training places for them in VET institutions. The hypothesis that an increase in the participation rate of Indigenous peoples in currently under-represented vocational areas eventually will lead to equitable employment patterns seems not to be proving successful. The authors believe that a significant improvement will not occur unless there is change in the system itself, a change that not only accommodates Indigenous views but also encourages continuity of effort and support. We believe a system that maintains the current 'catch-up' approach with Indigenous peoples is no longer tenable.

5 Staffing, resources and the teaching/learning process

5.1 Teachers and other staff

While key areas of the VET sector dealing with the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are controlled and staffed by non-Indigenous Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will continue to occupy a disadvantaged status. Change is needed. This research clarified two particular needs.

First, a strong and straightforward request from the student and teacher respondents in the field study was that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff numbers be increased in the VET sector. 'Staff' is not just confined to teachers. It includes managers, administrative staff, academic advisers, counsellors, liaison officers, secretarial staff, ancillary staff, and any others who support the implementation of VET programs.

Increasing the number of Indigenous staff does not mean moulding and transforming Indigenous peoples into employees who conform to the non-Indigenous Australian norm. It means recognising and affirming the inherent leadership, counselling, advisory, teaching, mentoring and liaising skills of Indigenous Australians. It means trusting the judgement of Indigenous communities and having the wisdom and imagination to see the value of this course of action. Very significantly, it also means increasing the Indigenous presence in VET institutions in areas supporting high Indigenous populations. In this way, VET institutions can more truly embark on a two-way learning process that can be of benefit to all Australians. The alternative is to maintain a system of non-Indigenous dominance that is inhibiting Indigenous rights in the field of vocational education.

Second, in controlling their own VET programs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not anticipate getting rid of non-Indigenous teachers. The large majority of Indigenous people see the importance of a future in this country that upholds and respects the rights of *all* Australians. The future must be approached together. But this 'togetherness' in the VET sector will need to reflect a significant change in attitude by those teachers who are working from a catch-up model, and who see it as their responsibility to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students up to the 'standards' of other Australians. To confront this issue will be very difficult for many teachers, and even impossible for some. There will be a need for

sustained professional development and cross-cultural training to inform and sensitise teachers to this necessary attitude shift and its implications for their teaching. Furthermore, if senior administrators in the VET sector do not understand and share these changes, 'changing' teachers will be a hollow rhetoric. Within sections of the New Zealand education system, fundamental changes in attitude amongst non-Indigenous teachers have been achieved with remarkable results for Maori and non-Maori staff and students alike (see, for example, Teasdale 1994). Perhaps we can learn from the New Zealand experience.

5.2 Creating a conducive teaching/learning environment

5.2.1 Improving delivery modes

Initially it is important to examine the existing teaching/learning environment within the VET sector. All respondents in the national survey were asked to report their perceptions of the kinds of teaching and learning they had experienced. They were given a range of alternative modes of study (table 15) and delivery approaches (table 16) to consider.

Table 15: Modes of study

Modes of study	ATSI %	Overall %
Attending TAFE classes/centres	80.4	88.0
Block release	14.6	8.0
Workplace learning	2.0	1.0
External study	1.8	1.0
Other	1.2	2.0

These figures confirm that the major mode of delivery within VET courses is 'teacher centred and classroom based instruction'. However, this study mode encompasses a wide range of potential delivery approaches. Without more precise information, it is impossible to draw significant conclusions. It is of potential concern that 'lectures' are thought by students to represent such a high proportion of the delivery approaches used. However, potentially they are the most readily identified and understood—and only represented one of a number of alternative approaches. Moreover, the question did not canvass the full range of possible delivery approaches, and therefore the high percentage of lectures does not preclude use of more participatory approaches. (However, it would be most discouraging if a range of non-didactic instructional processes were *not* used.)

It is encouraging that people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background are enrolled in programs which employ a higher

proportion of self-paced studies and make more use of available technologies than programs overall, as indicated in table 16.

Table 16: Course delivery methods

Delivery methods*	ATSI %	Overall %
Lectures	92	93
Other technology (including video, fax, TV, radio, phone)	34	30
Self-paced	29	19
Computer aided instruction	19	16

* Note that students were able to identify more than one method.

The statistics in table 16 on self-paced learning also must be looked at closely. From a theoretical perspective, educationists see self-paced or self-regulated learning as '. . . the process whereby students personally activate and sustain cognitions and behaviours systematically oriented to the attainment of learning goals' (Schunk 1991, p. 293). In simple terms, self-paced learning means that learners do not passively receive knowledge from teachers, but are actively involved in the teaching/learning process. They are empowered through it. This may include selecting and analysing the information to be learned, negotiating ways of teaching and learning, planning and sustaining a planned pattern of learning, and assessing the meaningfulness of materials. It is a flexible approach and is, as Barry and King (1993, p. 563) state '. . . a very mature way of operating, yet research is establishing that students . . . function in this way'.

The data suggesting that 29 per cent of Indigenous students believe they have experienced self-paced learning looks very encouraging. If it is a true reflection of the delivery approaches used, it means that almost one-third of those who responded to the questionnaire felt a sense of control over and direct involvement in the learning process.

However, self-paced learning means different things for different people. The sophisticated educational meaning offered above may not be readily understood by many students. To some students and teachers self-paced learning in the simplest terms means working on the given materials at one's own speed, until one gets it right. In the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students this flexible delivery may allow them more time; allows them to come in and out of study programs so they can attend to the social responsibilities of their culture; encourages a recognition of prior learning; and provides an incentive to complete their courses in a less pressurised timeframe. We suggest that both meanings of 'self-paced learning' are vital and that VET teachers should further consolidate the latter, and be committed to exploring ways of implementing the former, more sophisticated, meaning. More detailed work is needed on the

approaches to learning used in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs.

The use of computer-aided instruction and other technologies is to be applauded, given their emphasis on visual and self-directed learning. These modes are appropriate and acceptable to the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and place them on par with other students in both the school and the tertiary education sectors who have easy access to these new technologies.

5.2.2 Two-way learning

College based classes, the primary focus of VET teaching, can be intimidating for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, especially if they are mainstreamed and the students do not have adequate support networks. Ideally, there should be an option of specially designed courses and classes that suit their learning requirements should students prefer this approach. Certainly there are many such specially designed courses, but they may be difficult to justify and sustain, particularly if they are excessively costly. The programs should also be evaluated with input being particularly sought from Indigenous client groups and other stakeholders.

Whatever mode of study is chosen, an enclave or support network within the college can work to the advantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Enclaves with Indigenous staff, offering facilities such as academic, social, personal and study skills support, appear to work well and to facilitate a two-way teaching/learning process. Case studies of successful programs already in operation in tertiary educational institutions need to be prepared and made accessible to colleges planning educational programs involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Learning 'on the job' in the workplace using a mentor system has practical advantages in preparing for many occupations; e.g. road making, health workers, teaching assistants, small business management and building construction.

There is also resistance to and controversy about the appropriateness of competency-based training being '. . . imposed by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments' on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It is argued that it promotes conformity, fails to '. . . engage with ethical and cultural issues' and is a '. . . contradiction of Aboriginal epistemologies' (Kirkby 1993, p. 8). We believe this criticism is valid when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can only be assessed using national competency standards interpreted in a narrow way. However, workplace or 'on-the-job' learning is a very practical and positive way for any student to learn about many aspects of a particular vocation. In this case both 'competence' and learning are contextualised and the approach is very well suited to Indigenous people's preferred learning styles. Its success is enhanced if a skilled and committed Indigenous mentor can support the learner. One is reminded of the contents of a pamphlet

written by Benjamin Franklin, circa 1784. The text is worth reproducing below as it demonstrates many of dilemmas faced in designing and contextualising learning, particularly when different cultures and viewpoints are concerned.

Franklin wrote:

> *At the treaty of Lancaster, in Pennsylvania anno 1744, between the Government of Virginia and the six nations, the commissioners from Virginia acquainted the Indians by a speech, that there was at Williamsburg a college with a fund for educating Indian youth; and that if the chiefs of the six nations would send down half a dozen of their sons to that college, the government would take care that they be well provided for, and instructed in all the learning of the white people.*

The Indians' spokesman replied:

> *We know that you highly esteem the kind of learning taught in those colleges, and that the maintenance of our young men, while with you, would be very expensive to you. We are convinced, therefore, that you mean to do us good by your proposal and we thank you heartily.*
>
> *But you, who are wise, must know that different nations have different conceptions of things; and you will not therefore take it amiss, if our ideas of this kind of education happen not to be the same with yours. We have had some experience of it; several of our young people were formerly brought up at the colleges of the northern provinces; they were instructed in all your sciences; but, when they came back to us, they were bad runners, ignorant of every means of living in the woods, unable to bear either cold or hunger, knew neither how to build a cabin, take a deer, nor kill an enemy, spoke our language imperfectly, were therefore neither fit for hunters, warriors, nor counsellors; they were totally good for nothing.*
>
> *We are however not the less obligated by your kind offer, though we decline accepting it, and to show our grateful sense of it, if the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their sons, we will take care of their education, instruct them in all we know, and make men of them.*
>
> (Pamphlet by Benjamin Franklin circa 1784)

Learning, whether for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or within an industry or even an individual enterprise has an important cultural perspective. Certain approaches to learning and program content may therefore be valued differently by different groups dependent upon the contexts in which the learning will ultimately be used.

The data in table 15 show block release as the second most cited mode of study by Indigenous Australians. (Some States such as Queensland, particularly favour this mode of instruction and use it frequently while others do not.) Many suggest that this system permits Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to study in short blocks of time allowing them to fulfil their social and cultural obligations more easily. It also seems easier to maintain momentum

and motivation over shorter, sustained time periods using this approach. From an employer's perspective, block release may not be regarded as satisfactory. However, for unemployed students, it is an important and productive mode of study.

The statistics suggest that VET external studies programs do not attract many students, particularly Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. Experience has shown that Indigenous students respond far more positively to learning in social settings rather than using distance modes. A particular impediment for many Indigenous students is that distance learning has a greater dependence on English literacy and numeracy skills. On the other hand, it has the advantage that Indigenous students can remain at home in a familiar context. The difficulties they may encounter in a social milieu not conducive to study can be largely counteracted by providing a study centre with tutorial assistance. Where possible, 'on-the-job' learning is also desirable, particularly if there is a mentor/tutor available to support the student in his/her studies in the workplace. These arrangements are most appropriate for rural and remote area Indigenous students. (An example of such a program is the modularised integrated training system [or MITS] used to train automotive mechanics in isolated communities in the Northern Territory.)

In summary, a two-way teaching/learning process that incorporates a wide range of approaches, and upholds and affirms both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational values, is surely a sounder approach to VET than one that espouses only a non-Indigenous Australian view.

5.2.3 What Indigenous graduates have to say

To create a conducive teaching/learning environment Indigenous peoples must be directly involved. They know their preferred directions and what is best for their people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates, in responding to the pilot national client satisfaction survey, had a number of comments to make about their teaching/learning experiences in the VET sector. Generally all graduates, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents, were satisfied with their teachers' levels of knowledge about their subjects. However, all students were a little less happy with the teaching skills practised by their teachers, and with teachers' abilities to relate to students. Considerably less satisfaction in these areas was expressed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who had withdrawn from a course. Interestingly, however, these students did not record as much dissatisfaction on these issues as the overall sample. Indigenous graduates were very positive about the amount of contact time they had had with their teachers. Their compatriots who withdrew said they were less satisfied, as did those of the overall sample who withdrew. Students, though not willing to award course organisation

a grading of 'excellent', indicated that they were 'satisfied' that courses were well organised.

This suggests that students' expectations of their teachers are largely fulfilled. Maybe students have only their own experiences of prior education to draw upon and are unaware of the possibilities of different teaching/learning strategies yielding better success. Nor may the potential for innovation and change be realised by learners not 'schooled' in the area of teaching methodology. Certainly there is a convincing case for continuing professional development for TAFE teachers in relation to new teaching methodologies. Additionally, teachers should be prepared specifically for teaching in cross-cultural contexts.

On the question of course organisation one also wonders how many students are aware of or understand the options available. Most students feel that they are there to learn and do not see or maybe are not offered opportunities to contribute to course organisation. The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students would be even less ready to suggest organisational changes at a public level where they are usually in a minority, and where they perceive it is neither appropriate nor sensitive for them as students to question teachers or educational administrators.

5.2.4 Teaching and learning: A final comment

In summary, the VET teaching/learning processes revealed in this study showed a dearth of interactive methodologies; a primary dependence upon the lecture mode; minimal use of workplace experience; and a predominance of classroom instruction. Quite predictably the majority of Indigenous students were not totally satisfied. Their suggestions for improvement included more outside learning, more on-the-job work experience, and more talking with each other and teachers. Several Indigenous students pointed out that their previous educational experiences had been very negative and that re-entering any educational arena was difficult. To this end a number of teachers and students said that the creation of a welcoming, relaxed, comfortable and socially easy environment, that offered encouragement and support for students, had worked well. Practical things like an ever ready tea urn, a place to throw or kick or hit a ball, and heaters in a cold climate, were suggested by several groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The presence of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff was regarded as the strongest incentive. The inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and wisdom and the incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander processes of knowledge analysis and transmission will have a potentially profound effect on student performance and attitude. It is important that the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge and wisdom be affirmed, and their inclusion in new courses and programs be nurtured.

The question of mainstreaming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students remains a contentious one for non-Indigenous teachers and

administrators. It is best resolved by the students themselves, in association with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisers, as they deliberate upon what is best for their own context. To deny access to mainstream courses is unjust. Perhaps there is a need to look carefully at a more flexible approach to teaching, learning and assessment in mainstream courses, as well as providing appropriate support for Indigenous participants. The VET sector's swing towards competency-based training may well be a 'plus' for Indigenous Australians.

To conclude, is it possible to 'allow' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people control of the vocational education of their own people? Can it be a reality? In the light of the current policies both nationally and internationally, such control is their collective right as Indigenous peoples, and therefore should become a reality. We are talking here about funding, about management, and about decision making. Indeed, these processes relating to control are delicate and extremely sensitive. However, we are convinced that Indigenous management and control of VET programs for Indigenous students is both necessary and possible. Perhaps an appropriate starting point is at the local level, and this has been attempted successfully in a number of settings. To reiterate what has been said earlier in this report, consultation with local Indigenous communities will no longer be sufficient. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be in control of their own vocational education, and it is they who will consult with non-Indigenous personnel if and when they feel there is a need.

5.3 Considering the social aspects of learning

One of the most important ways of creating a conducive learning environment within VET institutions is to take notice of the social aspects of learning so intrinsic to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. This study highlighted two in particular.

First, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students prefer to learn in community. Unlike many non-Indigenous Australians who learn competitively and individually, Indigenous students prefer to learn in the company of peers, sharing and learning from and with each other. A fierce, competitive, individual spirit is rarely evident. Learning is a social activity to be enjoyed. A competent teacher is respected if he or she enters into the spirit of this interdependent learning. This style of teaching and learning is often the exact antithesis of what is practised by many non-Indigenous teachers, although even here there are increasing changes in the so-called mainstream programs. There is a real opportunity for change if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers are employed and if current VET teachers are given the encouragement and professional training to recognise and practise more appropriate teaching methods that encourage learning 'in community'.

Second, a number of mature-age Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in rural and remote communities pointed out the cultural inappropriateness of including very young students in their classes. Such inclusion undermines the authority of elders in some local communities. This is a sensitive awareness issue that should be discussed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisers before a course commences. Its application may vary in different geographical locations, but only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can provide advice and management here. As well, there are likely to be other cultural issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship structures, ceremonial matters, etc. that should be respected and accommodated. Of course there should be less of a problem here if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers were in control—especially if they have appropriate local knowledge.

5.4 Facilities and services

The graduate survey showed that a large majority of all graduates rated VET services and facilities as 'good' or 'very good'. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander figures also followed this trend, although those who withdrew tended to describe them as only 'fair'. The often contentious issue of childcare provisions seemed not to be a problem. Comparatively, 27 per cent of *all* respondents in the national survey rated and therefore presumably used childcare facilities, while 43 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents rated childcare facilities. Users were generally well satisfied.
Approximately half of the respondents in the field study said they had received help with childcare. This had come from a range of providers including TAFE, local councils, private childcare groups, and from family or friends. The large majority were satisfied with the level of childcare available. Relatively few felt that more childcare provisions were needed.

The national survey showed that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates (80%) appear to have used 'study skills help' than the overall population (59%). The results also indicated a fairly high level of satisfaction with this assistance, although the 24.2 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who rated the service as 'fair', 'poor' or 'very poor' should not be overlooked. Nor should the 20.6 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander withdrawers who rated these services similarly. Questions to both current and past students about needing 'help with studies' produced an important response. The large majority answered neither 'yes' nor 'no'. Instead, they responded with 'sometimes'. Inherent in this response is a request by Indigenous learners to be able to seek assistance on their own terms when they believe they need it, not when teachers want to provide it or think it is needed. They indicated that they would like to be able to make the decision about when they needed help, not have it made for them. This again raises the important question of control over VET processes.

'Counselling' was given a rating by 71 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates, with the majority suggesting it was 'fair' to 'good'. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander withdrawers expressed a similar view. Only 51 per cent of the total population gave a rating to this service, with 49 per cent saying it was irrelevant. It therefore appears that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have called upon counselling services far more frequently than other students. The exact mode of counselling is not described, therefore we assume that it has been wide ranging, including academic, career and personal counselling.

Again this is a sensitive area, and without reading too much into the statistics, they suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students need to seek counselling more frequently, and possibly feel more comfortable doing so. It does raise the question of the quality and mode of counselling offered to Indigenous students. TAFE is a mainstream educational facility with its services pitched to the needs of a range of different groups; the counselling services need to reflect the profile of the institution's client base. If a provider is seriously accommodating Indigenous students and recognising their rights to self determination, support services including counselling must be controlled and staffed predominantly by Indigenous people themselves. Alternatively the support services need access to counsellors who will have credibility with the individuals seeking counselling. As mentioned elsewhere, enclaves or other specifically designed support services for Indigenous students in tertiary educational institutions have proved successful.

About entry into the all-important workforce, only 30 per cent of respondents to the field survey said they had 'been given information about jobs or work choices'. This point will be discussed further in chapter 7, Smoothing the way: Attending to articulation.

A series of questions regarding assistance in travelling to and from TAFE classes showed that most Indigenous students came independently using student fares on public transport, or by getting lifts with relatives or friends. They expressed a strong preference to continue travelling in this way. No requests for special provisions were suggested.

A personal question that asked, 'Since commencing your TAFE course from which of these places have you received money?' showed that 86 per cent of students in the field survey were recipients of Abstudy and nine per cent had been supported by family or friends. No views on financial provisions were expressed though two respondents indicated that funding for VET study was much better than being on the dole.

In general, infrastructure such as buildings and equipment were rated by students as very satisfactory. Libraries were seen as well equipped and up-to-date, teaching rooms and workshops as comfortable. A few

specific capital resources were requested including, for example, a games room and sporting facilities.

5.5 Resourcing programs

Curiously, in the research conducted for this study, the cry for more resources in the VET sector did not come from the Indigenous students but from a group of teachers who expressed a considerable degree of negativity about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' prospects for success in the VET sector. It must be noted that a smaller but well articulated response came from another group of teachers who suggested instead that the relatively large allocation of resources specifically committed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in the VET sector needed to be better utilised. This group refused to get caught up with the 'we need more' syndrome. Perhaps they are right. Looking for ways of using existing resources more productively may be of greater benefit than simply asking for more. Here are some suggestions:

- The most obvious need is to restructure staffing profiles to allow the employment of more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching, administrative, liaison, counselling and academic support staff.
- Existing non-Indigenous staff are entitled to, and are in urgent need of, professional development programs. This should simply be a matter of redirecting existing provisions.
- Ongoing curriculum development, customisation and delivery approaches should focus on the creation of contextualised courses that realistically support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and that recognise the legitimacy of Indigenous wisdom, content and methodology.
- New capital resources should be planned as a two-way process so that the teaching/learning needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are accommodated in a more satisfactory way.
- Some research funding could be made available to enable Indigenous researchers to identify new and better pathways through and beyond the VET sector.
- Two areas of major concern to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are assessment and the recognition of prior learning. For many students, these areas are a cause of disillusionment and failure. More flexible and imaginative means of assessment are feasible. Creative, culturally aware teachers and Indigenous counterparts could devise and disseminate these processes. In addition, the processes for recognising the prior learning of Indigenous students can be culturally biased and add to their disadvantage when entering the VET sector. On equity grounds this must be rectified. Culturally sensitive procedures that can be easily applied should be developed.

- A final suggestion is that resources be shifted to extend the provision of new technologies for distance teaching so that remotely located Indigenous people can maintain their life at home whilst studying. Although there are some successful programs already operating this way that could be used as exemplars for other locations, there is a great need to ensure that all remotely located, Indigenous VET students are adequately catered for in this age of increasing technological sophistication. The 'tyranny of distance' can no longer be used as an excuse for educational disadvantage.

The single, most important factor in the discussion about resources relates to their control. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should be the decision makers about what is needed and how resources are used.

6 Creating productive VET pathways with Indigenous Australians

Perhaps the operative word in the title of this chapter is 'with'. Creating pathways *for* Indigenous people through the VET sector by targeting their perceived needs and writing courses for them has been the dominant approach. However, the significant improvements that were anticipated have not always been forthcoming. Certainly the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people now participating in the VET sector is at an all time high, and is still increasing. Equity participation targets look as if they are being reached. But more students should mean more VET graduates with training that is enabling them to move into the workforce, or into other programs (including higher education) to further their studies at appropriate levels. Across the spectrum of all vocational streams and fields of study, our earlier discussion has shown that there are still too many areas where Indigenous students and graduates are under-represented. The numbers of Indigenous people either gaining access to universities or finding permanent employment may be increasing as the years go by. But the process seems too slow and lacking in momentum. Where are existing VET pathways for the majority of Indigenous Australians leading?

In this chapter it is argued that, although the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are increasing in the VET sector, a concomitant increase in the numbers of graduates with vocational skills and with permanent employment has not been realised. The rationale behind the discussion in this chapter is that in seeking equity for Indigenous Australians, VET policymakers have set up systems *for* their clients, with the intention of facilitating pathways for them into the mainstream. This has been a critical reason why the numbers of vocationally skilled graduates have not increased as significantly as anticipated. We suggest that Indigenous Australians should have the right to control VET provisions for their own people. It is no longer sufficient to create VET pathways for them. Instead, non-indigenous VET personnel should be helping to create productive VET pathways *with* Indigenous Australians if and when invited to do so. Perhaps a positive starting point is to hear what ATSIC has to say.

6.1 Listening to ATSIC

The recent ATSIC report, *Recognition, rights and reform* (1995, pp. ix–x) makes an eloquent statement about the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to cultural, social and economic diversity, and the right to '. . . self-determination of the priorities and paths of life'. The implication of this for the VET sector is clear: Indigenous Australians must be given the right to create their own pathways of study in the VET sector. And for this to happen, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups must be given ownership and control of their own education. This will involve a transformation of existing relationships. There will need to be a transfer of power from non-Indigenous to Indigenous Australians in the VET sector: not consultation, not representation, but a genuine transfer of power. This is not without its problems, given the focus of control over budgets and resources at the system, and even the institutional level. To give a large measure of control of resources to a particular group within an institutional framework may prove challenging in the short term. However, Lois O'Donoghue, chairperson of ATSIC, spoke recently about the agenda that has emerged from *Recognition, rights and reform:* 'At the core of this agenda is the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider community' (O'Donoghue 1995, p. 14). She then went on to talk about self-determination, regional agreements and self-government, with a clear implication that the whole structure and balance of the relationship needs to change. She concluded:

> *This nation has many compelling reasons for dealing with our situation. Some of these reasons might be pragmatic, to do with international scrutiny, our image going into the Olympics. The best of these reasons, however, are to do with our common humanity, our sharing of this continent, and what the idea of being 'Australian' will mean in the future.*
> (O'Donoghue 1995, p. 15)

It seems that VET policy makers, albeit directed by Indigenous advisory committees, are listening, but maybe they are not hearing in full. In addition they may be hearing, but the practical issues to be faced in bringing about a real change in the focus of control of substantial resources at the institute may also be problematic, particularly if there is not a high level of institutional autonomy—or if the budgetary control does not lie exclusively with those responsible for Indigenous programs or education. The changes suggested by ATSIC and other Indigenous advisers like Michael Dodson (see chapter 2) are radical. But it is the positive way forward.

Policy changes are slow to be implemented and so the ripple effect will inevitably take a long time to reach the edges of the very large VET pond. Policy makers must hear, and the change process must be started without delay. Australia needs to hurry or the world's scrutiny, that will undoubtedly come in the Olympic year 2000, will be upon us, and we could find our nation being accused of continuing inhumanity towards its original peoples.

6.2 Recognising prior learning

An area of cultural sensitivity arises when Indigenous learners have recognised qualities and skills in their own culture which are either not recognised or sometimes even ignored by non-Indigenous educators. For example, it has been our experience (Teasdale 1993; Teasdale & Teasdale 1995) that senior Aboriginal men and women with proven management skills relating to Indigenous health, Indigenous education, cultural 'business' or art/craft ventures, have found their management skills are frequently regarded as worthless, and that to become 'recognised' managers they must recreate their management styles to suit western perceptions. This calls for a continuing process of reconciliation between the two cultural views of management. It also calls for teachers to become sensitised to cross-cultural teaching, and to curricula that take account of and draw strength from the two world views. (A perfect example of this is the quotation from Franklin's pamphlet reproduced on page 59.)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have particular wisdom, skills and cultural attributes that should be recognised, and that could be utilised more effectively in their training. There often can be unfair discrimination because of inadequate procedures to assess prior knowledge. First, prior Indigenous knowledge and wisdom must be recognised as legitimate. And second, efficient, simply applied procedures need to be devised to affirm and recognise that learning. Above all, Indigenous students should not be humiliated by having to repeat, sometimes over and over again, what they already know, for the sake of a western educational protocol.

The statistics show that a far larger number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates did not receive credit for or exemption from any part of their course, compared with VET students overall. Respondents to the field study also had very little prior learning recognised, and certainly none of them received recognition for any prior Indigenous learning. They also commented that their prior learning had not really facilitated their entry into VET, nor had it assisted them at all in their study programs.

The recognition of prior learning is a contentious issue. It is TAFE policy to recognise prior learning if a student can produce tangible evidence of receiving a recognised qualification that can articulate with the course being studied, *or* if they can demonstrate to an assessor that they already have the skills to be taught. A comfortable, easily administered articulation procedure for credit transfer that recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' prior learning, particularly experiential learning, has yet to be devised.

An additional problem faced by TAFE is that many of the programs especially designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are regarded by some TAFE teachers and administrators as shallow or insubstantial when put alongside mainstream courses. This belief has the implication that these 'catch up' courses are less worthy in

terms of transfer of credit and the recognition of prior learning. Such an attitude speaks of a faulty system based on a paternalistic approach that is unacceptable in today's climate of Indigenous rights and cultural appropriateness.

TAFE institutions also struggle to encompass and recognise the plethora of courses taught to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by other VET providers, as well as the non-accredited short courses taught by providers other than their own. Standards are variable. Perhaps the most inequitable result is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are often totally unaware of the legitimacy or otherwise of a course being offered, and feel angry or 'conned' when told yet again that their studies have not led to a recognised qualification, or when they believe that what they have already learned has to be repeated. Sensitive, workable procedures have to be devised and put into place, so that Indigenous Australian students receive full credit transfer and recognition for all prior learnings, whatever their origin.

6.3 Affirming Indigenous languages and cultures

As well as recognising prior learning and achieving satisfactory articulation of credit transfer, there will need to be a greater recognition and affirmation of Indigenous cultures and languages. There are many Indigenous languages in daily use in Australia. For some Australians the Indigenous language is the first and sometimes the only medium of communication. Yet the loss of Indigenous languages is a real and continuing threat. Tunstill (1995) describes Indigenous languages as '. . . struggling in a sea of English or global hyper-talk to give character to the face of Australia. . .' The will to keep these languages alive and functional is passionately pursued by many Indigenous Australians. Increasing numbers of schools are accepting the challenge to incorporate an Indigenous language into their curricula. Indigenous language teachers and assistants are required to carry out this task. It would seem appropriate that the VET sector recognise the legitimacy of Indigenous languages and explore with Indigenous speakers ways of teaching their languages as courses in their own right, and also within language teacher training programs. Useful exemplars would be the programs of Maori language being taught by the VET sector in New Zealand. Another important consideration is the use of Indigenous languages as a medium of vocational instruction in relevant social and geographical contexts. (A practical example of this was management training programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people dual-taught in English and relevant Indigenous languages by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teaching staff. This program was offered by the [then] open college in the Northern Territory.)

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people speak Indigenous English, sometimes loosely referred to as 'Aboriginal English'. This is a legitimate and recognised form of communication. As yet,

Indigenous English is still not officially recognised in the VET sector. This immediately disadvantages Indigenous English speakers who are expected to come the whole way into the standard English speaking world. Again, we believe there is room for negotiation and a two-way learning process that affirms and recognises both forms of English, as well as other Indigenous languages.

Many facets of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are in the public domain and can be shared if taught by Indigenous teachers. These are not just confined to the cultures of the past—to the 'museum' cultures. Rather, they are part of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Vibrant Indigenous music as represented by popular bands like Yothu Yindi; art in its many forms, now internationally acclaimed; Indigenous ecological tourism; 'bush tucker', initially popularised by the 'bush tucker man' on ABC television; football and other sports; drama and dance; the many and varied Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creative business enterprises; radio and television broadcasting epitomised by Imparja and the National Indigenous Radio Network; as well as recent Indigenous autobiographical writings, are just some of the exciting examples evident. We acknowledge that the VET sector has picked up some of these areas and that Indigenous people are proactively involved, but they tend to be the exception rather than the rule.

There has been an increasing awareness of Indigenous culture by all Australians, especially post-Mabo, and as the reconciliation processes take hold. We believe there is an opportunity here for vocational educators to catch the energy of this forward momentum by incorporating Indigenous languages and cultures into their programs. Certainly some Indigenous learners and teachers would be advantaged if this was the case. The positive sense of control and contribution could reap untold benefits for all Australians. And we believe that a significant number of non-Indigenous Australians would welcome systematic study opportunities to become more informed about the rich diversity and range of Indigenous Australian cultures.

As well as being courses in their own right, these programs about Aboriginal languages and cultures could be the educational vehicles for teaching literacy, numeracy, management, mathematics and other subjects currently taught in isolation to Indigenous Australians under the guise of basic education, educational access and vocational preparation. By contextualising courses into a known world, all learners achieve far more.

6.4 Contextualising courses

Already in this report, numerous comments have been made about contextualising programs and courses. The first step in this necessary exercise is to believe that VET courses can be successfully embedded into Aboriginal and Islander contexts, and that this can be done by Indigenous people themselves. Not only will it be necessary to listen to the wishes of the Indigenous people in a particular location, but more importantly to let them control and direct the processes of contextualisation. If non-Indigenous people are asked to assist, they should do so as facilitators, not as managers and controllers. Account also should be taken of the reality of implementing Indigenous language and cultural programs, both as courses in their own right and as contexts through which English language, literacy, numeracy and technacy can be taught if Indigenous people so wish.

These changes will be exceedingly difficult to implement, largely because of the rigidity of the predominantly western system of conducting VET courses, and the doubts that many of its administrators and educators have and will continue to have about the competence of most Indigenous people to control their own education. We sense that within the VET sector there are still vestiges of a protectionist, paternalistic mentality that denies Indigenous rights. Already there are contextualised programs working well in the VET sector. Two Alice Springs based ventures are notable; the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT), part of the Centralian College of TAFE, and the Institute of Aboriginal Development (IAD), a private provider. Several programs in New South Wales also provide excellent examples, including courses in Aboriginal visual and performing arts at the Eora Centre in Redfern, and courses at Tranby College and for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Dance Theatre. These can be important reference points. Other Indigenous peoples elsewhere in the world also have succeeded. If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people wish to seek advice from further afield, representatives of other Indigenous cultures could become mentors and advisers, particularly through the information highway.

Contextualisation has another dimension. Recall in chapter 1 the Indigenous student living at a coastal river-mouth who wanted to learn about the maintenance and upkeep of power boats. Because no such course was available at his local TAFE college, 'it wasn't on' for him. Maybe he was the only student wanting such a course, though one would be surprised if such a course was not in demand in that geographical location. However, for reasons that cannot exactly be determined from the data available, the course was not taught. From other sources, it can be fairly reliably stated that the course was not offered in that location because facilities and/ or teachers were not available. Behind this story is the age-old claim of 'lack of funding'. Perhaps it also suggests institutions and systems that need freeing up, that can shed parochial boundaries and explore ways of making things happen.

Let us create a hypothetical situation. In another TAFE college an effective, one-semester, competency-based power boat maintenance training course is taught. Maybe that college is in another State. Academic counsellors have told the potential student that it is offered in that college and suggest they can arrange to transfer him there. Although initially excited, the student realises that he cannot, in fact does not, want to leave his own family and community, and that the financial cost of going away to study is prohibitive. Also he has paid employment close to his home, and his power boat is housed in a boat-shed by the river nearby. Momentarily he recalls some relatives in the place where the course is taught and thinks he could stay with them. But the reality of staying soon outweighs the possibility of going. So he stays put, ploughing on with his seemingly endless educational preparation program. At least he is studying with peers, and at most he is surrounded by his own family, his own community, and his own country.

Still working in hypothetical mode, let us change the outcome. The flexible, accommodating, yet budget-strapped TAFE system, uses its video-conferencing system to enable the student to undertake a significant part of the program in power boat maintenance and/or the institute arranges for the student to be enrolled at the other institute and arranges a local mentor to support the student in maintenance training. When necessary, communication by fax, phone or Internet is made with the teacher of that course in the other institute. The student very quickly gets the hang of things and requires less of the hourly paid (or even voluntary!) mentor's time because he is interested, motivated and determined. The mentor learns alongside the student, keeps check of progress and decides with the student when he is ready for assessment. An external assessor (maybe the original teacher from the other institute) comes to check that the student is able to carry out the competency-based tasks associated with power boat maintenance. Alternatively, they may draw on local assessment expertise.

An additional positive outcome is a rapid increase in English literacy and numeracy, painlessly acquired through a successfully contextualised course. Soon friends and colleagues join the original student and learn from him by watching and doing, because in their eyes he has now become a power boat expert. They too complete the course using the study pathway created. The experienced mentor is now not just working with one student but with several, including three unemployed young men. Interestingly, the course was requested by four other colleges to use in similar circumstances. Maybe this is too good a story, but it is only individuals and institutional structures which are parochial, pedestrian and inflexible that prevent such a scenario from becoming a reality.

TAFE now provides courses that integrate the development of literacy and numeracy within the context of vocational training and work experience. The search for further exemplars of good practice could yield valuable information to share, and will hasten the process

of successful, widespread contextualisation of courses. Nevertheless some institutions and the staff within them are reluctant to lose control, and this prevents them, and their providers from achieving the flexibility that is being increasingly demanded—not just in Indigenous vocational education, but across the broader spectrum of VET programs as well.

6.5 Discovering exemplars of good practice

Across the States and Territories there are at least 70 VET colleges providing special programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Undoubtedly there are programs that are going very well, others that are simply 'going', and others again that are encountering considerable difficulties. Putting pride aside, it would seem sensible that some collegial sharing may assist those who are experiencing difficulty.

One, the centres within institutions that are exemplars of good practice both in TAFE and in the wider VET sector need to be identified. Two, perspectives on what might be considered as exemplars of good practice need to be investigated from:

(i) the view of VET and TAFE personnel; and

(ii) the view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves.

Both perspectives are important because they can inform each other. By inviting State and Territory VET/TAFE authorities, DEETYA and ATSIC to nominate centres of excellence, both perspectives can be considered. Any discrepancies between the two will need closer investigation. There are already a number of TAFE colleges designated as centres of excellence in Aboriginal education, for example the Djigay Centre at Kempsey, New South Wales.

A representative sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs that are exemplars of good practice could be evaluated according to the above criteria and then case studied by a small team of competent Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers. In collaboration with local staff and students the programs could be described and reasons for their success identified. As a further step, the key features of the programs could be documented on video using the film units that already exist in the VET sector. Subsequent voice-overs and printed materials could be added to the documentary record. Video film is easily distributed and can be used effectively for the professional development of administrators, teaching staff and other personnel. To supplement this, staff and student exchanges could be arranged, and where necessary culturally sensitive curriculum advisers could assist with further contextualisation of programs.

6.6 Developing enclaves and networks in local VET institutions

Enclaves, networks or other specifically designed support services for Indigenous students in tertiary education institutions have proven successful. Enclaves are clearly distinguished groupings of Indigenous staff and students in an institution, generally formally constituted. Networks are usually less formally structured and arise when people within an institution are drawn together because of common social bonds or interests. With the advent of the Internet and other new communication technologies, a whole new range of networking within and between institutions becomes possible. The possibilities and likely impact of these technological changes for Indigenous Australians have yet to be fully explored in the VET sector.

There are a number of effective post-compulsory education support systems for Indigenous students both in Australia and overseas. In New Zealand the marae, or community meeting house, has proved eminently successful as a place where Maori students can receive culturally appropriate support and guidance in their studies. In Australia there are also a variety of exemplary support systems within both the VET and the tertiary education sectors that are applauded by Indigenous students and staff as well as their non-Indigenous counterparts. Yunggorendi at Flinders University in South Australia is one successful example. Within the university, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have a 'home' at Yunggorendi; it has Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who act as role models and who provide academic and personal counselling for students. Importantly, it is growing as a centre that informs and educates the non-Indigenous tertiary community. When necessary it can also act as an advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

From this and other examples it is evident that there are significant advantages to be gained by institutions having strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enclaves and networks in their midst. The social strength of grouping students together in a designated physical space is of prime importance. Such centres, staffed predominantly if not exclusively by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, provide security, advice, counsel and advocacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and, most importantly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff can act as effective role models. Some decry the notion of an 'enclave', suggesting it is exclusive and separatist. Indeed it can be, but the nature of the enclave is very much determined by the social climate of the institution in which it exists. An open institution that works toward positive inter-relationships between all students, staff and administrators will go a long way towards countering the exclusivity of an Indigenous enclave.

A second exciting benefit for an institution is the positive impact that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enclave or network can have on the whole college community. Non-Indigenous students and staff can be welcomed from a point of strength, and they can be positively instructed in formal and informal settings about Indigenous Australian cultures.

The above comments are general; each enclave or network develops its own character according to its context. For institutions wishing to begin an enclave or network, a resource that describes existing, successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled ventures could be produced and shared, particularly through the Internet. Case studies of successful programs already in operation in VET and tertiary educational institutions need to be prepared and made accessible to colleges planning educational programs involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

6.7 Exploring new technologies

The rate at which new communications technologies are entering the everyday lives of ordinary Australians is unprecedented. Over the last three or four decades, Indigenous Australians have been quick to adapt to these radically new and different tools. Videos, fax machines, mobile telephones, radio and television (including video-conferencing), computers and associated technologies have transformed the lives of those living in rural and remote communities. Generally they have adapted easily to the new technologies and feel comfortable with them, far more so than with print media in the form of written reports, books, newspapers and journals.

The use of new technologies in vocational education and training offers opportunities to the large number of Indigenous students who are attempting to study in remote locations (see, for example, Teasdale 1993). In the Northern Territory 74 per cent and in Western Australia 44 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are living and studying in such locations. In both Queensland and South Australia over a quarter of the Indigenous students are in remote areas. It would seem feasible, in fact highly desirable, that this very significant number of remotely located Indigenous students should have greater access to VET through the numerous new distance modes available and by optimising the use of new technologies that they already use with ease.

The potential for a greater and more efficient use of new communications technologies in education is enormous. Already TAFE policymakers and practitioners have made considerable progress in exploring their possibilities for vocational education both nationally and at the State and Territory level. The vocational education and training of Indigenous Australians in relation to the new technologies should be an important part of their brief.

The authors suggest that a national working party, drawn from within the VET sector and with majority representation of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, could investigate this potential for use within the VET sector, particularly as it might relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students. Such a process, if well deliberated and carried out, could ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are not left behind in this new age of electronic information and exchange.

6.8 Celebrating successes

Several of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and graduates who responded to the questionnaires believed that there should be significant celebrations when they graduate, at whatever level. Many colleges do have award giving ceremonies to which dignitaries and the media are invited. Attractive publications also are produced where pictures of selected awardees are shown. We believe this must continue, but that there is a still more profound and far reaching request that is being articulated by Indigenous people.

Celebrating success is about ensuring an Indigenous future in this country. It is also about providing essential role models for younger Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. All successes, no matter how small, should be publicly affirmed and celebrated in whatever way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people see as appropriate.

7 Smoothing the way: Attending to articulation

7.1 Barriers to smooth articulation

The articulation pathways from school into VET, and from VET into university study and/or employment, are far from smooth for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These connecting points are of real concern. They have been the focus of numerous investigations and working parties in the VET sector. In its progress towards trying to achieve equity for all Australians, the VET sector continues to struggle with ways and means of fitting Indigenous people into mainstream vocational education when they often do not have even the basic educational pre-requisites for entry into established VET pathways. It is interesting to speculate on the amount of use that *is* made of available pathways. It is possible that pathways which people really do not want to use have been created at the cost of considerable effort. In short, are we creating pathways that no-one wants to use? Only the greater availability of higher quality enrolment and other data will enable this issue to be broadly explored—especially if individuals' enrolment patterns can be examined over a time series. The VET sector often struggles to feed exiting Indigenous students into satisfying jobs or into other programs of education and training (including the higher education sector). Why the struggle? At least three prime reasons or barriers can be pinpointed.

- The perception by many VET teachers and policy-makers that many Indigenous Australians cannot really cope with mainstream vocational education. Hence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can become trapped in a seemingly endless circuit of preliminary and preparatory courses. There is also the issue of whether the programs they undertake should be mainstream, or developed specifically for their needs (with the danger that they are not seen as the equivalent of mainstream programs), or a mixture of both approaches.
- The fact that economic conditions in Australia are continuing to create an uncertain employment market. There are simply not enough jobs for all Australians who require them. From an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective there is a high level of frustration because the promises of articulation into the work-force are so infrequently realised.

They are also often resident in areas with a high level of inherent unemployment.

- The overall lack of flexibility in the VET sector. The system itself and its individual institutions are not always sufficiently adaptable to enable Indigenous Australians to develop courses and to create successful pathways for themselves into, through and beyond VET—courses and pathways that have broader goals than the purely vocational.

7.2 Connecting school and VET

The VET sector has worked particularly hard to provide smooth articulation pathways for school leavers into vocational education and training. Over many years a variety of innovative pathways through schools, industry, apprenticeships, block release for short courses, community projects and other collaborative programs have enabled many young Australians, including some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, to embark on satisfying vocational study pathways. In spite of this there are many other Indigenous Australians who have simply not fitted comfortably into these mainstream pathways, possibly because they lacked the required basic educational prerequisites and found the pathways 'out of harmony' with their own cultural view of the world. School, particularly secondary school, has rarely been a happy and educationally satisfying experience for Indigenous Australian people. For this reason entering the VET sector, even with special entry provisions, can produce negative feelings in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The challenge for the VET sector is to create a different teaching/learning environment that welcomes, encourages, and provides manageable, clearly described pathways towards achievable goals. This requires some creative thinking, possibly involving many of the suggestions outlined in chapters 5 and 6. It also requires much closer consultation between schools and VET institutions at the local level. These consultations must involve local Indigenous communities so that practical, local solutions can be sought and found. Policies about school/VET articulation can be made within the confines of State, Territory and national boardrooms, but the real cutting edge is whether realistic pathways can be worked out at the level of the local community.

7.3 Articulation within the VET sector

Statistical information and the results from the field study showed that even though entrants may have had a clear vocational pathway in mind when initially enrolling in VET

institutions, and particularly in TAFE colleges, the large majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students found that instead they had to enrol in educational preparation courses or pre-vocational studies. They may have envisaged a fairly quick passage through VET, but the reality proved different.

The national statistics show that almost 50 per cent of Indigenous students now undertaking courses intend to re-enrol in another VET course upon completion of their current studies. Significantly, less withdrawers say they will pursue further VET studies, suggesting that they have lost the initial momentum that motivated them to study, and that other goals have taken priority. Most students who plan further study hope to move into what they describe as 'real' VET pathways; that is, into courses beyond their educational preparation and/or pre-vocational studies.

It is clear from the statistical evidence that pathways through VET for Indigenous students can be long and far from clear-cut. The majority of teacher respondents to this survey argued from a 'catch-up' perspective. They advocated that before Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students could enter mainstream VET courses they must make up for missed education. That is, they must have acceptable levels of standard English literacy and numeracy and demonstrate, through general education and educational access courses specifically designed for them, that they are capable of managing mainstream courses. A few Indigenous students agreed, affirming that they had to catch up on 'missed education' if they were to enter mainstream VET courses. (One could feel a sense of resignation in some of these responses; other respondents were angry; others again were merely opting to use funded study as an end in itself.) For those teachers and students who supported this view, the emerging articulation pathways through VET, beginning with 'catch-up' courses and progressing to mainstream programs, were on the right track.

As reported in chapter 4, a significant number of students and a quarter of the teachers disagreed with this approach. They suggested that maybe there were other articulation pathways through VET that would better serve the Indigenous students within it. Instead of the current long haul, where there are articulation difficulties between different programs and courses in the VET sector, a smoother series of articulated pathways within the VET sector and between the plethora of VET providers could be created for Indigenous people by Indigenous people themselves. Some of the ramifications of this important and rightful claim have been examined in chapter 6.

Interestingly, most Indigenous respondents seemed content to remain in the TAFE sector, rather than pursuing their studies

with private providers. This suggests that TAFE has established a credibility amongst many Indigenous communities, even if students do have serious questions about what and how the programs are being delivered. This provides an excellent opportunity for the public VET providers to respond proactively to the directions suggested in this report.

Another area of articulation concern occurs particularly in remote areas, when Indigenous peoples often have little choice or information about educational providers and can find themselves locked into the educational programs of providers who may or may not be offering what they want. A ruthless consequence is that these courses can lead nowhere. Articulation pathways between courses offered by various providers are often very unclear or do not exist at all. There can be a precariousness about the integrity of a provider's program which can prevent individuals from entering the program—or entering it with the level of recognition they should probably receive. Provisional enrolments, or enrolment in a component of a larger program can offer the possibility for learner and provider alike to try each other out. However, a proudly received statement of attainment or certificate can be totally meaningless if an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander learner wants to progress. Opportunities for credit transfer may not be real. This is a dilemma for Indigenous communities, and for all registered providers, including TAFE.

7.4 Linking VET institutions with universities

As the scope of this study did not include Indigenous students in higher education, the following comments are derived from the literature, and from other research carried out by the authors in recent years (see, for example, Teasdale & Teasdale 1992, 1994; Teasdale & Little 1995).

The route from the VET sector into university or other higher education institutions can be a long and arduous one for most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The majority of mainstream university entrants do not come from a largely oral culture where the printed word is peripheral to most everyday activities. It is further compounded by the socio-economic and educational backgrounds of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. So many non-Indigenous Australians have a head start whilst their Indigenous counterparts come from behind because the higher education system is geared to western modes of teaching and learning. In some ways, for Indigenous learners to succeed, it becomes largely a question of getting better and better at conforming to the educational norms of the non-Indigenous majority. In making this sort of statement, the authors are well aware that a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students want to do it this

way. They are fully capable of and committed to succeeding in the system as it stands, while still maintaining their Indigenous identity. And they do. This choice must be recognised, affirmed and applauded.

However there are other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are capable of tertiary study but who are daunted by what is seen as an uncompromising system. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entry processes into universities need to be demystified. VET could pave the way by developing direct links between its courses and selected university programs. Ideally this would include cross-crediting arrangements that enabled students to make seamless transfers between the two systems. Nevertheless, this pathway may not be smooth even for the most mainstream of the VET sector's offerings! Academic counsellors need to be readily available to offer assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are making a transition of this kind.

An addendum to this discussion, statistics now reveal that there is an increasing number of students moving/articulating from the university domain into the VET sector. Students with degrees, and some with only partially completed university qualifications, are seeking practical job skills in the VET sector in the hope of gaining employment. Focussed studies are being made of this relatively large but poorly understood pathway. Indigenous students should not be excluded from this articulation possibility.

7.5 The interface between VET and employment

In the 1993 national VET graduate survey, 69 per cent of all respondents replied that they had paid work. This compares with only 50 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates, thus reiterating the lower employment rate of Indigenous Australians. Data also showed that 33 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents had permanent work, while 47 per cent of the overall population reported they were permanently employed. Obviously in a depressed labour market, jobs are hard to get for everyone (and particularly in rural and some of the areas where many Indigenous people live); certainly these figures reflect this. However, the significant employment lag for Indigenous graduates is of concern.

Only 46 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates saw a correlation between their study pathways and their current employment. A mere 27 per cent of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student sample of withdrawers believed that the course of study they initially entered had any relevance to their job; a further 48 per cent in this category of

withdrawers chose not to respond, while the remaining 25 per cent said that their former course of study was 'not at all relevant' to their job.

Where are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander VET graduates working or finding work? Table 17 provides some useful information drawn from the graduate surveys. These data show that VET seems to be providing a significant pathway for Indigenous students to take up positions in community services. This suggests that Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders are using VET courses to enable them to manage their own communities, an essential step in self-determination.

Table 17: Areas of employment of VET graduates

Areas of employment	ATSI %	Overall %
Community services	18.0	21
Manufacturing	8.1	17
Wholesale, retail trade	5.7	14
Public administration, and defence	5.7	7
Recreational, personal, other services	5.4	12
Construction	3.3	8
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting	2.4	3
Finance, property, business services	1.5	9
Transport, storage	0.9	3
Electricity, gas, water	0.3	2
Communication	0.3	1
Mining	0.0	1
Non-classifiable	0.6	1
Total responding	**52.2**	**99**

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who responded to this question about employment is significant, and tells its own story. What has happened to the remaining 47.8 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates who did not respond and so are not represented in the table? In a sample of only 333 valid responses (as compared to a total response rate overall of 25 330), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in the industries described is minuscule. Looking at all categories, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under-represented. So yet again the data challenges

the success of equity initiatives. Obviously Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may choose not to be involved in some fields of study, seeing them as irrelevant. However, a brief glance at this table causes one to wonder why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not better represented in critical areas such as mining, finance and public administration, and suggests the need for this question to be explored further.

The breakdown by occupation in table 18 adds further insights to the discussion. First, only 51.9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates responded. The serious under representation in all occupational categories is again salutary. Interestingly, 'tradespersons' has the highest percentage, with 'salespersons and personal service workers' also a popular occupation. This pattern follows the overall trend for all Australian VET graduates.

In response to the question, 'Is this your first full-time job?', 56 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates chose not to respond, compared with 43 per cent overall; 24 per cent said 'yes', compared with 23 per cent overall; and 20 per cent said 'no', compared with 34 per cent overall. The absence of a response to this employment question by well over half of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents speaks for itself. However, the figures regarding a first full-time job points to the VET sector's success in preparing and placing almost a quarter of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates in full-time work. It also is encouraging to see that these figures on 'first full-time employment' demonstrate an equitable outcome for Indigenous Australians when put beside the figure for all Australians.

Table 18: Occupations of VET graduates

Occupational categories	**ATSI %**	**Overall %**
Tradespersons	14.4	29
Salespersons and personal service workers	12.0	17
Clerks	9.0	18
Paraprofessionals	5.1	9
Labourers and related workers	3.6	8
Professionals	3.6	9
Plant and machine operators and drivers	1.2	2
Managers and administrators	0.9	6
Non-classifiable	2.1	2
Total responding	**51.9**	**100**

In a sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who indicated that they had withdrawn from their studies before completion, most said they had initially entered into study to get a job or for reasons of personal development, yet only 27 per cent of that sample said they now had regular paid work.

When asked if they were assisted in finding a job after completing their studies, respondents to the field study said that they were largely on their own. A number felt that 'TAFE could have helped us a lot more'. This raises two questions:

(i) How closely is VET linked to the job market?

(ii) What better strategies can be used to feed exiting VET students into satisfying jobs?

It seems as if many VET providers are preoccupied with the training process as an end in itself, rather than seeing success as placement of graduates in the workforce. There are exceptions to this; a number of VET institutions take great pride in assisting graduates in finding work. These institutions need recognition and should be asked 'How do you do it?', so that others may learn.

7.6 Final comment

"The trouble is," said many respondents to the current study, "there aren't any jobs out there". Many non-Indigenous Australians would offer similar comment. The apparently poor level of articulation between the VET sector and a job market that offers few employment opportunities, is of real concern across Australia for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, it can be used as an excuse for much more complex program design articulation problems that need to be addressed.

The results of this study demonstrate categorically that only small proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the VET sector actually are enrolled in vocational courses. "Of course they're not," comes the swift reply, "They do not have the basic education, the literacy or numeracy skills, or the personal confidence to cope with these courses. Give them these skills and the confidence first, and then they can move on." This is VET's objective. Within TAFE, the major provider, pathways have been put in place to do just that. But the objective is not always successfully achieved. Insufficient students last the distance, and if they finally do reach the end of the road, the jobs are often not there. A definite rethink is required. Not a rethink by non-Indigenous policy makers and educators making decisions for and about Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander people, but a negotiated, collaborative decision-making process that is led by Indigenous peoples themselves.

The expansion of Aboriginal-controlled businesses and the provision of community and other services by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people provides jobs; maybe not enough, but a real opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people committed to this pathway. A small but potentially interesting growth area is that of self-employment or freelancing. With the increasing popularity of Indigenous art, craft, music and tourism, for example, VET can, and does, provide study opportunities for people employed in these and numerous other Indigenous enterprises and small businesses. Many courses have already been offered in these areas in recent years both by TAFE and by other providers. Some have been very successful and have received strong support from Indigenous clients and communities. The successes of others has been limited. The major underlying reason for the limited success is related to several key issues: the control of the courses; the content of the courses; the methodologies used to impart and assess knowledge; and the contexts and styles of the teaching. As both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians continue to address these issues and discover increasingly productive ways of teaching and learning, VET can enter into an exciting phase of collaboratively developing more appropriate vocational and management education pathways with Indigenous people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students not only want to control their own learning but want to determine their own futures, including their employment futures. VET courses should provide pathways that enhance this process.

8 Conclusions

Drawing the various strands of this report together, the following conclusions have been reached.

8.1 A perceived policy shift

First, and perhaps foremost, a critical and far reaching policy shift is foreshadowed, a shift that already is starting to redefine relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Fundamentally it is a shift from equity to Indigenous rights. Borne out of deliberations during the 1993 International Year of the World's Indigenous People, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have joined other Indigenous or first nation people across the world in asserting their rights to ownership and control of their own affairs. This momentum is being maintained in the continuing UN International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. The Australian government gave formal recognition to the rights and status of Indigenous Australians in the Native Title Act 1993, and through ATSIC is now starting to explore the implications of Indigenous rights in all areas of policy and practice. What does this mean for vocational education and training?

First, it means there will be an increasing emphasis on Indigenous autonomy and self determination in the management of VET programs. There is strong evidence of a shift in thinking by policy makers, administrators and providers alike from providing vocational education and training *for* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to providing these programs in close collaboration with Australia's Indigenous peoples. However, this report argues that a further shift is required where the control of VET programs for Indigenous Australians will be in their own hands. Secondly, it will lead to the emergence of curriculum content and processes that reflect Indigenous perspectives on knowledge and wisdom. This will impact strongly on VET programs and we are likely to see a significant rerouting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pathways through VET.

8.2 Statistical trends

National ACVETS data show that from an equity perspective the VET sector appears to be doing extraordinarily well in attracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into its courses. Proportionately, they are represented in VET at approximately the same rate as all other Australians. Taking a closer look at these figures, however, we see that two-thirds of all Indigenous students in fact are enrolled in preparatory courses that are pre-requisites for other mainstream VET programs. They still have many years of study ahead of them before they can claim to be completing a legitimate vocational education pathway. Statistics also show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under-represented in a range of vocational streams and fields of study, particularly at the higher skills levels. Graduate figures also confirm that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are under-represented in many fields of employment. In spite of concerted equity initiatives, particularly through TAFE, the major VET provider, the hoped for representation and graduation across all streams and fields of VET have not been fully realised. Indeed there have been some exciting success stories with particular people and programs, but the anticipated national momentum is not there.

8.3 Listening to Indigenous views and working together

In listening to Indigenous voices through the literature, and through the field study, one gets the impression that, although generally pleased with their VET experiences, there is a sense that 'things could be better', particularly with TAFE, the major provider. The greatest concern is that they are bound by an established system of pathways that are predominantly non-vocational. Before they can embark on 'real' vocational education, they have to catch up on missed education, and especially on standard English literacy and numeracy. They also have to undertake personal development courses to build up their confidence. Many Indigenous Australians accept this and see satisfaction in the process of education itself, rather than in the end product. Studying with Indigenous peers, studying so they can be seen as role models for the next generation, or studying so they can help young children and grandchildren with their homework, were some of the major reasons cited by Indigenous students for undertaking VET courses.

These key reasons for pursuing VET studies are not regarded as legitimate by educational providers but as additional benefits only. As a consequence, while the current equity-driven system

of VET is provided *for* Indigenous Australians, and while positive outcomes in the form of paid employment and entrance to other education and training programs (including higher education) are not always evident, there will be a continuing dislocation between the views of many providers and those of recipients of their programs. If, however, there is a change in VET delivery from a model that emphasises 'catch up', to one that affirms and espouses Indigenous rights, we should begin to see significant and positive changes. Workable pathways into, through and beyond VET need to be created collaboratively *with* Indigenous people.

8.4 Pathways that work for Indigenous students

This study has attempted to represent the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians within the context of changing national and international definitions of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. As the VET sector responds to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and to shifts in government policy, we are likely to see the emergence of more productive and more workable VET pathways. The VET response will involve some significant shifts in current policy and practice. Based on the findings of this study, and on trends already evident in the VET sector, we suggest that the following directions will need to be taken.

First, ownership and control of all VET provisions for Indigenous Australians will need to be transferred progressively to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander management, preferably with the support and guidance of ATSIC. Certainly ATSIC will need to be involved with ANTA and DEETYA in determining national funding provisions and priorities, and in the overall co-ordination of the transfer. Finer tuned policies and implementation procedures will need to be determined by Indigenous groups in the various States and Territories. However, the real 'grass roots' developments should occur at the local level as Indigenous communities deliberate on jobs, job creation and vocational training needs for their own people in their own communities or further afield.

Second, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups should be encouraged, again with support from ANTA, DEETYA and ATSIC, to redefine the concept of 'Vocational Education and Training'. Perhaps the concept of 'vocational training' will be perceived as too restricting. Instead, local groups might be encouraged to review their wider adult education and life long learning needs, and broader programs developed in response to the social and cultural life of the community. In this way VET might become just one aspect of a more integrated and inclusive

approach to community education that is open to all adults regardless of age and prior schooling.

Third, in a changed VET scenario, it is highly unlikely that the services and support of non-Indigenous educators will be dispensed with altogether. However, in controlling their own VET education, Indigenous people may wish, on their own terms, to collaborate with and seek advice from non-Indigenous educators. Staffing will be a focal issue. More Indigenous staff will be appointed, and non-Indigenous staff selected and culturally sensitised by Indigenous mentors. The teaching/learning process will recognise and incorporate Indigenous wisdom and learning, and predictably will be more experientially based. Culturally sensitive social aspects of learning will be taken into account, and facilities and services within VET institutions will reflect Indigenous values, and will continue to respond to the specific needs of Indigenous clients. Current funding for resources will be reorganised and reallocated by Indigenous managers as needs and priorities change.

Fourth, processes will need to be established to recognise prior Indigenous learning. Indigenous languages and cultures should be affirmed and used in the teaching/learning process. Courses will need to be contextualised while still meeting the diverse vocational and cultural needs of local communities. If English literacy and numeracy are sought they will need to be taught in contexts that are both meaningful and realistic. In a spirit of interdependence, programs that are exemplars of good practice should be identified, affirmed and shared. New technologies should be explored and adapted for use in Indigenous contexts–remote, rural, urban and suburban. Successes of individuals, programs, communities and institutions should be celebrated.

Fifth, any barriers to smooth articulation from school into VET, and from VET into work, should be removed. A collaborative approach based on shared facilities and integrated programs should ensure a seamless transition for young people from school to VET to work. Pathways through VET should be designed to lead efficiently to available opportunities for paid or self-employment. Study in the VET sector should become an end in itself for those who want it that way. Smooth articulation between VET and higher education must be ensured by developing more effective transfer and cross-credit arrangements for Indigenous students.

In summary, we urge VET authorities and providers to take a positive and proactive stance. VET managers in conjunction with Indigenous counterparts, can play a potentially exciting role in facilitating changes in VET provisions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Such changes will not only be of

benefit to Indigenous Australians, but will bring greater opportunities to everyone in the nation. Whether the wider Australian community is ready or not, however, the process of Indigenous rights has started, is gathering momentum, and will continue to take hold. Indeed, some excellent examples of the approach advocated above already exist. These need to be documented and disseminated so that their successes can be celebrated and introduced more widely.

8.5 Towards 2000: VET's role in the reconciliation process

We believe the VET sector has a significant role to play in the Government's processes of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It has the potential to become the educational cutting edge as both groups seek ways and means to be reconciled to a positive and common future together. The VET sector, through its many institutes and centres, can explore and implement programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians that they themselves have designed and are controlling. Additionally, non Indigenous students can be encouraged to undertake fully recognised courses about the many and diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and cultures, and about other contemporary issues that engage them with Indigenous Australians. There is no reason that specific courses on Aboriginal reconciliation cannot be taught in tandem.

As we approach the year 2000 and the Sydney Olympics, the world's gaze will be turned upon us. Indigenous Australians will play a significant role in this global event. There is no question that human rights will be high on the public agenda. The media will interpret what it sees, and the results will be watched by millions across the world. VET has an exciting opportunity to provide an exemplary model of reconciliation in action.

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Appendix One

Questionnaire

for Indigenous students doing TAFE courses now

Research Manager
Hugh Guthrie (**NCVER**)

Questionnaire Design
NSW TAFE Commission
People Perspectives, SA

Information for Field Workers about the questionnaire for students doing TAFE courses ***now.***

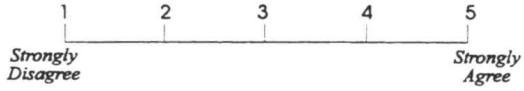
Use these questions as guidelines when talking with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are currently doing TAFE courses.

There are three ways you may be able to collect the information for the questionnaires:

1. Interview people on a one-to-one basis and record their answers on the questionnaire sheets.
2. Interview a group (class) of people and record the consensus responses - ***Please note on the top of the questions if it is a group response.***
3. Give the questionnaire to people to complete for themselves if they feel confident enough to do this.

Please do these things:

- make extra copies of the questionnaire if you don't have enough.
- fill in a separate set of questions for each small group, and/or for each person you talk with
- if people are filling in their own questionnaires give an example of how to answer the scaled questions.



- tell them the aims of the questions (see page 1)
- thank the people for agreeing to answer questions and tell them what the research is for (see page 1)
- try to talk in an easy way with the group or person rather than 'firing' questions at them
- make sure you are sensitive to any cultural matters or business with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in your area
- try to get people to give answers to all the questions
- as people talk, write down some notes, and then fill out all the answers straight after the talking is finished
- tell the people that their answers will be respected and treated as confidential
- do not write down the names of the people who answer these questions

For information about this survey, please contact:- Don Colless, TAFE NSW Ph:(02) 965 6911
or Hugh Guthrie NCVER Ph:(08) 332 7822

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Research Manager
Hugh Guthrie (**NCVER**)

Questionnaire Design
NSW TAFE Commission
People Perspectives, SA

RESEARCH PROJECT

Tracking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student pathways through TAFE

Aims:

- *To identify any barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as they move through TAFE courses*
- *To find ways these barriers can be removed*
- *To create smoother pathways through TAFE for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*

The people we are talking to:

- *Present TAFE Students*
- *Past TAFE Students*
- *TAFE Teachers and Coordinators*

What outcomes do we want?

- *Better information about courses and pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in TAFE*
- *Ways to remove barriers so everyone can have a fair go in TAFE courses*

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS DOING TAFE COURSES NOW

To answer the questions, please place a tick in the box next to the answer you choose or write your answer in the space provided.

So that we can plan courses for the future we would like to find out about the TAFE course you are doing now.

1 What is the name of the TAFE course you are doing now?

_____

_____

_____

Can we talk about that course?

2.1 What is the name of the TAFE college that you go to most often?

_____

2.2 When is your course taught?
- ☐ Day only
- ☐ Evening only
- ☐ Day & evening
- ☐ Weekend only
- ☐ Other *(please tell us)*_____

2.3 How long is your course?
- ☐ 1 Term
- ☐ 1 Semester
- ☐ 1 Year
- ☐ ___ Years *(How many years)*
- ☐ Other *(please tell us)*_____

2.4 Where do you have classes?
- ☐ at the college
- ☐ at a mobile learning centre
- ☐ where you work
- ☐ in the community
- ☐ at home
- ☐ at school
- ☐ Other *(please tell us)*_____

_____

2.5 In most weeks how many hours do you spend at your course?
_____ hours.

2.6 Do you have any choice about the subjects you do as part of your course?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

2.7 Do you have work experience or on-the-job training as part of your course?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

We'd like to find out what you think about your TAFE course. Please read each of these statements and give them a score out of 5.

If you strongly agree with the statement, circle the number 5. If you strongly disagree with the statement, circle the number 1.

3.1 Most of the work in my course is too easy.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

3.2 I need time with my teachers outside class.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

3.3 The library has everything I need.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

3.4 There should be more recreational activities at TAFE outside class hours. (Like sport or crafts)

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

3.5 The equipment we use is up to date.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

3.6 I should have been given more help selecting the subjects in my course.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

3.7 The rooms and workshops where we are taught are comfortable (Cooling, lighting etc.).

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

3.8 The college offers the right courses for me.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

4.1 What do you dislike about your course?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4.2 And what do you like about your course?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

So that we may better help people going to TAFE we would like to know about the help that you have received.

5.1 Studying for a TAFE course can be difficult. Would you like more help learning how to do this study?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

5.2 Would you like extra help with reading and writing to handle the course you are doing now?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

5.3 Have you been given information about jobs or work choices?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

5.4 Are you responsible for any children under 10 years of age?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No *(If 'No' go to 6.1)*
- ☐ Sometimes

5.5 Since starting your TAFE course have you received any help with child care?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No *(If 'No' go to 6.1)*
- ☐ Sometimes

5.6 If Yes what help was that?

- ☐ TAFE Child Care Centres
- ☐ Council Child Care Centres
- ☐ Private Child Care Centres
- ☐ Help from family or friends
- ☐ Something else *(please tell us)*_____

5.7 Do you need more help with childcare?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

6.1 Since starting your TAFE course have you received <u>any</u> help getting to and from the college where your course is being taught?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No *(If 'No' go to 7)*

6.2 If **Yes** what help was that?

- ☐ cheap or free buses or trains
- ☐ getting lifts from friends or relatives
- ☐ something else *(please tell us what)*

6.3 Do you need more help getting to and from the college where your course is being taught?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

7 Since commencing your TAFE course from which of these places have you received any money?

- ☐ Abstudy
- ☐ Jobsearch or Newstart
- ☐ Austudy or a training allowance
- ☐ your job
- ☐ family or friends
- ☐ somewhere else *(please tell us)*

So that we can give people the courses that they want, we would like to know about your reasons for doing a TAFE course.

8 How did you first find out about the course you are doing now?

- ☐ someone told me about it
- ☐ from TAFE information (posters, videos)
- ☐ it was suggested to me by a Government Department or employee
- ☐ I have known about it for a long time
- ☐ from school
- ☐ other _____

---

9 Why did you choose to do this course? *(Tick as many boxes as you like.)*

- ☐ to help me get a job
- ☐ to change jobs
- ☐ for promotion
- ☐ to get extra skills for my job
- ☐ to change my career
- ☐ to help me to do other courses
- ☐ for interest
- ☐ to gain confidence
- ☐ to do Land Council work
- ☐ to help my children/ grandchildren with school work
- ☐ other *(please tell us)*_____

---

more...

Finally we would like to know about any other education you have taken part in.

10 At what level did you leave school?

- ☐ didn't go to school
- ☐ in primary school
- ☐ year 7
- ☐ year 8
- ☐ year 9
- ☐ year 10
- ☐ year 11
- ☐ year 12

11 Did you do any other courses or subjects, at school or anywhere else, that have helped you with your present course?

- ☐ Yes (If Yes, please tell us)
- ☐ No

_____

_____

_____

12 Were you allowed to miss out any part of your present course because of study or work you had done before?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

13 Did you have to do any other course before you could start your present course?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

14 Please tell us the names of any other courses you wanted to do but couldn't?

_____

_____

_____

_____

15 Why couldn't you do these courses?

_____

_____

_____

_____

16 Have you any of these qualifications?

◆ Certificate in *(eg: Trade Certificate in Plumbing. Certificate in General Education.)*

_____

_____

From _____ College

◆ Advanced Certificate in _____

_____

From _____ College

◆ Associate Diploma in _____

_____

From _____ College

◆ Diploma in _____

_____

From _____ College

◆ A Graduate Diploma / University Degree
Higher Degree _____

_____

◆ Do you have any other qualifications?

_____

_____

From _____ College

If you wish, please make any other comments about your experience of TAFE courses in the following space.

Thank you for filling in this questionnaire.

Please give it back to the person who gave it to you.

Appendix Two

Questionnaire

for Indigenous people who have done TAFE courses in the past

Research Manager
Hugh Guthrie (**NCVER**)

Questionnaire Design
NSW TAFE Commission
People Perspectives, SA

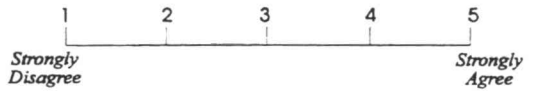
Information for Field Workers about the questionnaire for people who have done TAFE courses in the *past.*

Use these questions as guidelines when talking with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have done TAFE courses in the past.

There are three ways you may be able to collect the information for the questionnaires:
1. Interview people on a one-to-one basis and record their answers on the questionnaire sheets.
2. Interview a group (class) of people and record the consensus responses - ***Please note on the top of the questions if it is a group response.***
3. Give the questionnaire to people to complete for themselves if they feel confident enough to do this.

Please do these things:

- make extra copies of the questionnaire if you don't have enough.
- fill in a separate set of questions for each small group, and/or for each person you talk with
- if people are filling in their own questionnaires give an example of how to answer the scaled questions.



- tell them the aims of the questions (see page 1)
- thank the people for agreeing to answer questions and tell them what the research is for (see page 1)
- try to talk in an easy way with the group or person rather than 'firing' questions at them
- make sure you are sensitive to any cultural matters or business with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in your area
- try to get people to give answers to all the questions
- as people talk, write down some notes, and then fill out all the answers straight after the talking is finished
- tell the people that their answers will be respected and treated as confidential
- do not write down the names of the people who answer these questions

For information about this survey, please contact:- Don Colless, TAFE NSW Ph:(02) 965 6911
or Hugh Guthrie NCVER Ph:(08) 332 7822

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252 Kensington Road, Leabrook,
South Australia 5068
Phone: (08) 332 7822
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Research Manager
Hugh Guthrie (**NCVER**)

Questionnaire Design
NSW TAFE Commission
People Perspectives, SA

RESEARCH PROJECT

Tracking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student pathways through TAFE

Aims:

- *To identify any barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as they move through TAFE courses*
- *To find ways these barriers can be removed*
- *To create smoother pathways through TAFE for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*

The people we are talking to:

- *Present TAFE Students*
- *Past TAFE Students*
- *TAFE Teachers and Coordinators*

What outcomes do we want?

- *Better information about courses and pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in TAFE*
- *Ways to remove barriers so everyone can have a fair go in TAFE courses*

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS DOING TAFE COURSES IN THE PAST

To answer the questions, please place a tick in the box next to the answer you choose or write your answer in the space provided.

So that we can plan courses for the future we would like to find out about the TAFE course you did.

1 What was the name of the TAFE course you did?

_____

_____

_____

Can we talk about that course?

2.1 What is the name of the TAFE college that you went to most often?

_____

2.2 When was your course taught?
- ☐ Day only
- ☐ Evening only
- ☐ Day & evening
- ☐ Weekend only
- ☐ Other *(please tell us)*_____

2.3 How long was your course?
- ☐ 1 Term
- ☐ 1 Semester
- ☐ 1 Year
- ☐ ___ Years *(How many years)*
- ☐ Other *(please tell us)*_____

2.4 Where did you have classes?
- ☐ at the college
- ☐ at a mobile learning centre
- ☐ where you work
- ☐ in the community
- ☐ at home
- ☐ at school
- ☐ Other *(please tell us)*_____

_____

2.5 In most weeks how many hours did you spend at your course?
_____ hours.

2.6 Did you have any choice about the subjects you did as part of your course?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

2.7 Did you have work experience or on-the-job training as part of your course?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

We'd like to find out what you think about the last TAFE course you did. Please read each of these statements and give them a score out of 5.

If you strongly agree with the statement, circle the number 5.
If you strongly disagree with the statement, circle the number 1.

3.1 Most of the work in my course was too easy.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

3.2 I did not have enough time with my teachers outside class.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

3.3 The library had everything I needed.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

3.4 There should have been more recreational activities at TAFE outside class hours. (Like sport or crafts)

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

3.5 The equipment we used was up to date.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

3.6 I should have been given more help selecting the subjects in my course.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

3.7 The rooms and workshops where we were taught were comfortable (Cooling, lighting etc.).

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

3.8 The college offered the right courses for me.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree — *Strongly Agree*

4.1 What did you dislike about your course?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4.2 And what did you like about your course?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

So that we may better help people going to TAFE we would like to know about the help that you received.

5.1 Studying for a TAFE course can be difficult. Would you have liked more help learning how to do this study?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

5.2 Would you have liked extra help with reading and writing to handle the course you were doing?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

5.3 Were you given information about jobs or work choices?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

5.4 Were you responsible for any children under 10 years of age while you were at TAFE?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No *(If 'No' go to 6.1)*
- ☐ Sometimes

5.5 After starting your TAFE course did you receive any help with child care?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No *(If 'No' go to 6.1)*
- ☐ Sometimes

5.6 If Yes what help was that?

- ☐ TAFE Child Care Centres
- ☐ Council Child Care Centres
- ☐ Private Child Care Centres
- ☐ Help from family or friends
- ☐ Something else *(please tell us)*_____

5.7 Did you need more help with childcare?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

6.1 Since starting your TAFE course did you receive any help getting to and from the college where your course was being taught?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No *(If 'No' go to 7.1)*

6.2 If **Yes** what help was that?

- ☐ cheap or free buses or trains
- ☐ getting lifts from friends or relatives
- ☐ something else *(please tell us what)*

6.3 Did you need more help getting to and from the college where your course was being taught?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

7 While doing your TAFE course from which of these places did you received any money?

- ☐ Abstudy
- ☐ Jobsearch or Newstart
- ☐ Austudy or a training allowance
- ☐ your job
- ☐ family or friends
- ☐ somewhere else *(please tell us)*

So that we can give people the courses that they want, we would like to know about your reasons for doing a TAFE course.

8 How did you first find out about the course you did?

- ☐ someone told me about it
- ☐ from TAFE information (posters, videos)
- ☐ it was suggested to me by a Government Department or employee
- ☐ I had known about it for a long time
- ☐ school
- ☐ other _____

9 Why did you choose to do this course?
(Tick as many boxes as you like.)

- ☐ to help me get a job
- ☐ to get a better job
- ☐ for promotion
- ☐ to get extra skills for my job
- ☐ to change my career
- ☐ to allow me to do other courses
- ☐ for interest
- ☐ to gain confidence
- ☐ to do Land Council work
- ☐ to help my children/ grandchildren with school work
- ☐ other *(please tell us)*_____

10 What have you done since finishing your TAFE course?
(Tick one box only.)

- ☐ got a job
- ☐ got a better job or promotion
- ☐ do my present job better
- ☐ started my own business
- ☐ gone onto a further course

more...

- ☐ am a more skilled person
- ☐ doing Community or Committee work e.g. for Land Council
- ☐ helping kids with homework
- ☐ telling others about education e.g. grandchildren
- ☐ other *(please tell us)*_____

_____

11 Are there any reasons why any of these haven't happen?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Finally we would like to know about any other education you have taken part in.

12 At what level did you leave school?

- ☐ didn't go to school
- ☐ in primary school
- ☐ year 7
- ☐ year 8
- ☐ year 9
- ☐ year 10
- ☐ year 11
- ☐ year 12

13 Did you do any other courses or subjects, at school or anywhere else, that helped you with your course?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

14 Were you allowed to miss out any part of your course because of study or work you had done before?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

15 Did you have to do any other course before you could start the last course you did at TAFE?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

16 Please tell us the names of any other courses you wanted to do but couldn't?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

17 Why couldn't you do these courses?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

18 Have you any of these qualifications?

◆ Certificate in *(eg: Trade Certificate in Plumbing. Certificate in General Education.)*

____

____

From______________________________College

◆ Advanced Certificate in ________________

____

From______________________________College

◆ Associate Diploma in __________________

____

From______________________________College

◆ Diploma in __________________________

____

From______________________________College

◆ A Graduate Diploma / University Degree Higher Degree ________________________

____

◆ Do you have any other qualifications?

____

____

From______________________________College

Please make any other comments about your experience of TAFE courses in the following space.

____

Thank you for filling in this questionnaire.

Please give it back to the person who gave it to you.

Appendix Three

Questionnaire

for teachers and coordinators

Research Manager
Hugh Guthrie (**NCVER**)

Questionnaire Design
NSW TAFE Commission
People Perspectives, SA

Information for Field Workers about the questionnaire for teachers and coordinators.

Use these questions as guidelines when talking with teachers and/or coordinators of courses with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

There are three ways you may be able to collect the information for the questionnaires:
1. Interview people on a one-to-one basis and record their answers on the questionnaire sheets.
2. Interview a group of people and record the consensus responses - ***Please note on the top of the questions if it is a group response.***
3. Give the questionnaire to people to complete for themselves if they prefer to do this.

Please do these things:

- make extra copies of the questionnaire if you don't have enough.
- fill in a separate set of questions for each small group, and/or for each person you talk with
- tell them the aims of the questions (see page 1)
- thank the people for agreeing to answer questions and tell them what the research is for (see page 1)
- make sure you are sensitive to any cultural matters or business with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in your area
- try to get people to give answers to all the questions
- as people talk, write down some notes, and then fill out all the answers straight after the talking is finished
- tell the people that their answers will be respected and treated as confidential
- do not write down the names of the people who answer these questions

For information about this survey, please contact:- Don Colless, TAFE NSW Ph:(02) 965 6911 or Hugh Guthrie NCVER Ph:(08) 332 7822

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Research Manager
Hugh Guthrie (**NCVER**)

Questionnaire Design
NSW TAFE Commission
People Perspectives, SA

RESEARCH PROJECT

Tracking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student pathways through TAFE

Aims:

- *To identify any barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as they move through TAFE courses*
- *To find ways these barriers can be removed*
- *To create smoother pathways through TAFE for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*

The people we are talking to:

- *Present TAFE Students*
- *Past TAFE Students*
- *TAFE Teachers and Coordinators*

What outcomes do we want?

- *Better information about courses and pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in TAFE*
- *Ways to remove barriers so everyone can have a fair go in TAFE courses*

QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND COORDINATORS OF COURSES WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS

Some information to help you to complete this questionnaire.

The courses or programs referred to in this questionnaire may either be designed specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students or be courses with Aboriginal and Torres Strait student participation.

SECTION A

1. What is the name of the college where you teach or coordinate programs with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students?

_____

2. Please name the courses that you currently teach or coordinate.

_____

_____

SECTION B

A question about barriers to participation

3. What do you think are the main barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as they a) enter, b) go through and c) go on from TAFE?

In answering this question you might like to consider some of the issues listed in the column labelled ***Cues*** *on the right hand side of the NEXT page.*

a) entering TAFE

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

b) going through TAFE

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

CUES

- *Appropriateness of course content*
- *Cultural appropriateness*
- *Length of course*
- *Where courses are taught*
- *When they are taught*
- *Different or modified courses*
- *Specially designed courses*
- *Formal vs informal courses*
- *Accredited courses*
- *Recognition of prior learning*
- *Assessment requirements*
- *Work experience*
- *Articulation (links) with other courses*
- *Course difficulty*
- *Teaching support materials*
- *Teaching methods*

c) going on from TAFE

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

- *Teacher qualifications and experience*
- *Aboriginality of teachers*
- *An ATSI coordinator*
- *Access to administrative staff*
- *Special or targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander classes*
- *Appropriate classrooms*
- *Up-to-date equipment*
- *Library facilities*
- *Transport*
- *Car parking*
- *Child care support*
- *Financial support*
- *Enrolment advice*
- *Availability of course information*
- *Career counselling and information*
- *Personal counselling*
- *Literacy or numeracy support*

SECTION C

A question about educational pathways
These questions will help us to get a picture of what pathways exist across Australia

4. Are there common educational pathways followed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in your college?

☐ Yes
☐ No

5. If you answered YES to the above question, please describe these common pathways.
There are two examples below of what we mean.

Example 1.

Various non-accredited preparatory courses **followed by** literacy and numeracy courses **followed by** vocational training courses.

Example 2.

Introduction to building trade course **followed by** Trade Certificate **followed by** Post Trade Certificate **leading to** Work.

Please give your examples in the spaces below

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. If you answered question 5 above, why is the pathway you described common?
(You can tick one or more of the boxes)

- ☐ It is what the students want
- ☐ It is what Abstudy allows
- ☐ These are the industry requirements for employment
- ☐ It is what the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community wants
- ☐ These are the only courses available at this college
- ☐ We can only get funding for these courses
- ☐ These are the best educational pathways for student needs in this area
- ☐ Other

_____

_____

_____

_____

SECTION D

A question about solutions

7. In your opinion, what needs to be done to create smoother pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as the a) enter b) go through and c) go on from TAFE?

As for question 3, in answering this question you might like to consider some of the issues listed in the column labelled **Cues**, on the right hand side of the page.

a) entering TAFE

b) going through TAFE

CUES

- *Appropriateness of course content*
- *Cultural appropriateness*
- *Length of course*
- *Where courses are taught*
- *When they are taught*
- *Different or modified courses*
- *Specially designed courses*
- *Formal vs informal courses*
- *Accredited courses*
- *Recognition of prior learning*
- *Assessment requirements*
- *Work experience*
- *Articulation (links) with other courses*
- *Course difficulty*
- *Teaching support materials*
- *Teaching methods*

- *Teacher qualifications and experience*
- *Aboriginality of teachers*
- *An ATSI coordinator*
- *Access to administrative staff*
- *Special or targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander classes*

- *Appropriate classrooms*
- *Up-to-date equipment*
- *Library facilities*
- *Transport*
- *Car parking*

- *Child care support*
- *Financial support*
- *Enrolment advice*
- *Availability of course information*
- *Career counselling and information*
- *Personal counselling*
- *Literacy or numeracy support*

Q 7. cont. over . . .

Q 7. cont.

c) going on from TAFE

SECTION E

An opportunity to reflect on the whole issue of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in TAFE.

8. Do you have any other comments you would like to make about educational pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through TAFE?

Thank you for your contribution to this project.
Please return this questionnaire to the person who gave it to you.