What are the entry needs of Remote Area Indigenous Adults in Structured Training and Employment Programmes in the Northern Territory, and do the Programmes meet these needs?

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Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank the participants of the programmes for volunteering to take part in the project. I would also like to thank my Indigenous work colleagues who helped me conduct the surveys.
Abstract

The Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), provides funding for private organisation’s to run structured training and employment programmes for Indigenous Adults. The aim of these programmes is to increase Indigenous employment in the private sector.

This research report is based on a need to determine how best to ensure participant’s enter into these programmes and gain the skills required to integrate into private sector organisation’s. This research question is therefore:

What are the entry needs of remote area Indigenous Adults in Structured Training and Employment Programmes in the Northern Territory, and do the Programmes meet these needs?

Participants within these programmes were surveyed by a questionnaire to determine what they viewed as their entry needs into the programme, and on ways in which they believed the programme could be tailored to better address these needs.

Recommendations were made for facilitators and administrators of the programme, in an effort to provide simple improvements to ensure greater participation and successful outcomes for the participants.

Introduction
A lot of research has been undertaken during the last fifteen years to identify the effectiveness of educational and employment programmes for Indigenous adults, and the barriers that prevent them from full participation in these programmes. The subsequent reports and articles have provided an insight into the issues and inequalities faced by Indigenous adults (as a minority culture) in the labour market, and when undertaking educational and employment programmes created by Non Indigenous Australians.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), in the 2001 Census of Population and Housing, the Indigenous population of Australia was 2.1% of the total population. In the Northern Territory 25.1% of the population was Indigenous. Nationally, the proportion of Indigenous adults aged 19 or over, enrolled in an educational programme was 12.0%. The comparative unemployment levels for Indigenous and Non Indigenous adults in the labour market were 17.6% and 7.3% respectively. These figures demonstrate an urgent need to increase Indigenous participation in the labour market and educational programmes.

Whilst this urgent need is easy to identify, long term, tangible results are often harder to achieve. This report will demonstrate the complexity of the Indigenous labour market and the difficulty in providing appropriate and effective educational and training programmes for Indigenous people. It will also provide recommendations for targeting programmes more effectively to increase Indigenous participation in the labour market.
Literature Review

The purpose of this review is to synthesize relevant literature to define the entry needs of remote area Indigenous adults, in structured training and employment programmes in the Northern Territory, and do the programmes meet these needs. Initially, literature was selected which focussed on educational issues relating to Indigenous adults in remote areas.

The review further targeted literature that concerned Indigenous educational values, learning styles, the delivery of training programmes for Indigenous adults in remote areas and the Indigenous labour market. By concentrating on these areas, common themes were identified, which enabled a critical analysis of the current literature to be undertaken.

The common themes identified as relevant that impact on Indigenous adults entry needs in training and employment programmes include:

- Access to training and employment programmes
- Flexibility of delivery and content of programmes
- Community consultation and involvement regarding the programme
- Culturally appropriate training
- Indigenous learning styles
- Language literacy and numeracy issues
- Attendance rates
- Role models

Definitions
Remote

The Australian Tax Office, Income Tax Zone Rebate Map (n.d.) defines remote areas as towns such as Katherine and Alice Springs, and any locations 250 radial kilometres from these towns, in the Northern Territory.

Adults

In the context of this study, adults are defined as those people who have attained the legal right to vote, that is 18 years of age.

Structured Training and Employment Programmes (STEP)

These sixteen-week programmes are a combination of non-accredited pre-employment training, accredited vocational education and training (VET), and work experience. They are aimed at increasing the level of employment of Indigenous adults employed in the private sector. Coles (1993:viii), indicates that in 1991 over 73% of Indigenous people employed in remote areas, were employed in either community services or public administration, both of which rely heavily on government funding. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations fund the STEP programmes.
Access to Training and Employment Programmes

Access to training and employment programmes for Indigenous adults is often determined by cost. Due to the high cost of facilitating such programmes in the remote areas of the Northern Territory, most providers prefer to relocate participants to the major centres where they have infrastructure already established. As noted by Catts and Gelade (2002:7), for most Indigenous adults, an extended period of absence (to attend training) is considered by some in their community a threat to their own cultural traditions.

As the aim of the programmes are to create new skills that lead to meaningful employment in the private sector, the majority of private sector employers are found in the major and regional centres throughout the Northern Territory. This need to relocate is an issue that faces many participants.

Resources in remote areas are scarce. Public and private providers need to work together and share existing facilities to benefit remote training, rather than centralise in the larger centres for exclusive use.

Access to programmes can also be determined by cultural factors, particularly avoidance relationships and kinship rules. These have the effect of excluding otherwise suitable participants. Programmes are often run with a minimum numbers requirement, and at times programme administrators ignore Indigenous kinship rules, purely to make up the numbers, Arnott et al (1998:24). This lack of concern regarding important social and cultural relationships has the effect of disempowering participants from undertaking programmes.

Participants in reviewed literature, Arbon V. et al. (2002:52), McCrae D. et al. (2000:164) discuss the effect of institutionalised racism, on their opportunities to undertake employment and training programmes, and ultimately, access the labour market.

Private sector employers restrict access to equal opportunity employment through cultural stereotyping, definitions of legitimate work and workplace practice.
Addressing institutionalised racism is extremely difficult as it is often invisible to employees in the majority culture. The need to create an awareness of this issue can be done by Indigenous participants in employment and training programmes discussing and sharing their experiences. The need for participants to communicate openly and honestly provides educators with an understanding of the employment barriers they face. This in turn provides educators with an opportunity to discuss with participants and potential employers possible solutions to overcome them. Private sector employers do require information to allow them to make informed decisions about the potential value of Indigenous employees to the organisation, rather than operating on incorrect stereotypes. For some Indigenous adult’s institutionalised racism is a deterrent from undertaking the programme and integrating into the private sector workforce.
Flexibility of Delivery and Content of Programmes

Ideally, all training programmes should be community based because of cultural, social, and economic considerations. If these considerations are met, there is a greater potential for Indigenous adults in remote areas to secure employment opportunities in their communities, Coles (1993:58).

The specific disadvantage for delivering employment and training programmes in some remote communities is the lack of employment opportunities or the opportunity to further develop specific skills learnt, which would assist in the development of the community.

If genuine employment opportunities exist then flexibility of delivery must be a high priority. As outlined by McCrae, D. et al (2000:169), one of the greatest impediments of successful educational outcomes for Indigenous students is the lack of flexibility in educational programmes. This manifests itself in content, structure, pedagogy, and organisation of the programme. This lack of flexibility often compounds negative schooling experiences of Indigenous adults as their ability to determine the content and method of delivery of their educational activity is still beyond their control. Arbon, V. et al (2002:33) agrees,

"[The] apparent lack of Indigenous employment or advancement is seen primarily as a failure of training, usually in relation to inappropriate delivery".

This lack of flexibility acts as a barrier hindering participation in training and employment programmes. The programme therefore must be perceived by the participants as flexible, if it is to succeed in meeting their educational, training and employment needs.
The ability to determine content is a key issue that empowers participants to pursue self-developmental learning activities whilst increasing their employability and status within their communities. According to Catts and Gelade (2002:09) appropriate content in community VET programmes can include:

- Driving licenses
- Automotive maintenance
- Artistic and cultural skills
- Information technology

Coles (1993:56) observed that previously, the content of training programmes for remote area Indigenous adults has been below the standard required to effectively match the skills needed in the areas they were seeking employment. Even if employment were secured, the standard of training received, would not be acceptable to the wider community for the same position.

This lack of transferable skills has created a demand for non-accredited courses, which closely match the needs of the individuals within that community. The STEP programme contains accredited and non-accredited components. These non-accredited components are used to provide entry knowledge needed to undertake the accredited courses within STEP. The issue facing programme administrators is does the programme provide participants with qualifications that are relevant in helping them gain employment and, are the levels of skills gained by participants truly transferable into the wider community.

Currently, VET training packages are developed according to industry needs and reflect the majority cultures educational beliefs and values. This report does not have the scope to discuss this issue effectively, however it raises the question: Are the key competencies used in VET truly representative of all Australians?
Catts and Gelade (2002:11) argue that the competencies based definition of current VET delivery for Indigenous Australians is essentially assimilationist. This view is also supported by Butler and Lawrence (1996 quoted in Arnott, et. al. 1998:29) who observe,

Centralised VET policy design [is] intended for implementation in far away sites, policy distanced from Indigenous cultures with different languages, traditions, practices and alliances with the land, exacerbates the invisibility of these people.

The ability of Indigenous adults to have autonomy over the content of these programmes encourages participants to fulfil their individual learning needs, which provides increased confidence when seeking employment in the private sector.
Community Involvement and Consultation

Community consultation with Indigenous adults in remote areas is important for any training or employment programme if it is to be widely supported by the potential participants and the community.

There is a need to warn Non-Indigenous people against making false cultural assumptions about Indigenous people within particular communities. This occurs without effective consultation. These assumptions create barriers that can alienate community support for a programme.

As noted previously, consultation with elders in Indigenous communities can identify and disclose avoidance relationships amongst potential participants, to educators, when selecting for a programme.


- Cultural inclusion
- The establishment of good personal relationships and mutual trust
- Open and honest communication
- Empowered negotiation between equal parties
- Predictability about project events and developments
- Flexibility
- Localisation
The entry needs of participants undertaking these programmes could be influenced by employment opportunities in the community. As identified by Catts and Gelade (2002:10), the hierarchical structure within the community often precludes suitable participants from securing jobs. Because of this likelihood of not securing employment, participants would rather exclude themselves from undertaking such programmes, instead opting for the Community Development Employment Programme (CDEP).

McCrae, D. et al. (2000:164) referring to the National Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, observed that,

“Improved outcomes will result from increasing the level of involvement of Indigenous people in decision making and service delivery”.

This was also supported in the report of the Indigenous Education Policy Taskforce (1988:18 as quoted in Arbon 1997:77) when it reported that,

“Community involvement must be based on the principle of Indigenous self-determination in education”.
Culturally Appropriate Training

The importance of culturally appropriate content and delivery of training and employment programmes for Indigenous adults cannot be understated. For many Indigenous adults they remain ‘profoundly motivated’ by the assumptions of their Indigenous philosophical heritage, Groome and Hamilton (1995:35) and Morgan and Slade (1998:7). This inherent motivation felt by most Indigenous adults, needs to be incorporated positively into structured employment and training programmes, by ensuring Indigenous participants are given the power to have input into all aspects of the learning activity, so that it is viewed by the participants as relevant and appropriate.

Harris (1998) argues that the current white system of education is a threat to Indigenous identity, and to perpetuate white educational values on Indigenous adults threatens their world-view. Acknowledgement of this dilemma is acceptance of the need for culturally appropriate delivery (at least) in training and employment programmes for remote area Indigenous adults.

Spiers (1998:67) ponders the meaning of the term culturally appropriate. In her study of culturally appropriate distance education training, Indigenous participants determined that culturally appropriate training is,

“Whatever people decide is OK for them”.

This rather simplistic definition of culturally appropriate training reinforces the importance of open and honest communication needed between Non Indigenous educators and Indigenous adults, to ensure a mutually trusting and supportive environment. Genuine relationships aid this process, ensuring respect and the opportunity for flexibility in content and delivery.
The major theory regarding culturally appropriate delivery for Indigenous adults is two-way or both ways learning. The best example of two-way learning in practice is Batchelor College in the Northern Territory, who have pioneered the introduction of this approach.

Essentially the focus of provision is on learning, listening and allowing space in the programme for curriculum changes to reflect an acceptable mix of Indigenous and white society cultures.

Ah Chee (1991:12) observes two way learning as

“A process whereby Indigenous and European cultures come together to develop appropriate curriculum that benefits both cultures”.

For Non-Indigenous educators who are facilitating programmes with Indigenous participants, there is a need to foster an approach of two way learning. Honeyman (1986:36 as quoted in Byrnes 1993:157) suggests that Non Indigenous educators should,

“Listen, listen, listen to your students and their friends and relatives. It is costly, but no cross-cultural bond is forged without a conscious effort”.

Whilst the general body of literature supports the use of two way learning, there are some criticisms identifying that two-way learning often becomes too culturally focused. At times, it can ignore the basic skills required to effectively participate in Australian society and this is particularly true of English language, literacy and numeracy skills.

Ideally, two-way learning is an exercise in harmonious balance and it should reflect Indigenous and Non Indigenous knowledge equally in structured VET programmes. The concept of two way learning is valid and should be used when conducting programmes for Indigenous adults.

**Language Literacy and Numeracy Issues**

According to the ABS Census of Population and Housing (1996:85),
“In the Northern Territory just over 60% of Indigenous people also speak an Indigenous language, or Indigenous English and have varying levels of English proficiency”.

Therefore, a large proportion of potential participants will have English language, literacy or numeracy deficiencies. It is crucial to assess and acknowledge these needs of the participants before undertaking a training and employment programme. Once an accurate audit is complete, additional language, literacy and numeracy training, relevant to the potential employment opportunities, should be incorporated into the programme. Coles (1993:58) observed that poor levels of English literacy and numeracy were the greatest challenge facing Indigenous adults from completing training courses. Some reasons include, participants not completing a secondary education, and having English as their second or third language in their community. English is generally used when communicating with Non-Indigenous people from outside the community, and coupled with a lack of secondary education, language, literacy and numeracy issues impacts their ability to undertake training and employment programmes.

The senate standing committees report, Katu Kalpa (2000:42), identified that potential causes for poor language and literacy in Indigenous communities included poor school attendance, health problems and the limited number of suitably trained teachers. Groome and Hamilton (1995:59) as well suggested that the degree of family mobility and a lack of reading at home would also affect individual’s language and literacy proficiency.
The impact low levels of literacy have on employment opportunities cannot be overstated. The criticisms in the literature outlined the poor levels of language, literacy and numeracy skills obtained by Indigenous adults is, that culturally relevant curriculum and other related factors overshadow the primary goal of schooling, (i.e. the proficiency of language, literacy and numeracy to be able to gain meaningful employment in the workforce).

The majority of Indigenous adults use Aboriginal English.

“Aboriginal English is a valid dialect of English which is used extensively among Indigenous communities.”

Groome and Hamilton (1995:59)

McCræe. et al. (2000:172) reported that for many Indigenous people Aboriginal English is used as a central feature of their identity. Peer pressure on younger adults from their peers may influence the use of Aboriginal English or SAE.

When assessing the language and literacy skills of Indigenous participants, it is important to understand and appreciate their use of Aboriginal English, Eades (1988 as quoted in Groome and Hamilton 1995:59). It can also provide an opportunity to reaffirm their identity amongst their peers and to the Non-Indigenous educators. It also gives them acceptance from fellow participants within the programme, because they identify with a common dialect.
Indigenous Learning Styles

Harris (1980 as quoted in Byrns 1993:163) proposes the following characteristics of Indigenous learning styles:

- Participants have a present time orientation, i.e. they are motivated to learn the skill immediately if there is a direct need, rather than for some time in the future
- They prefer learning by observation and imitation rather than instruction
- Participants respond better to group learning as opposed to individual orientation
- There is a holistic rather than sequential approach to learning tasks

The hands on learning style was also supported by McCrae et al (2000:125) who also determined that this created a greater level of sustained participation and motivation by the participants.

In similar research of Indigenous learning styles, Malin (1990 as quoted in Groome and Hamilton 1995:51), observes that in Indigenous communities young adults are used to high levels of autonomy and independence. If the training program however, is inflexible and controlled this can cause tension, and lead to absenteeism.

Teaching strategies that reflect Indigenous learning styles should involve a high component of practical based, small group activities. Educators should minimise singling out particular students in front of others, and attempt to reduce the language, literacy and numeracy reliance that is so much a part of white educational provision.
Attendance Rates

Lack of attendance is the major factor identified in the literature that impedes the successful outcomes of Indigenous adults in educational programmes. For remote area participants attendance can be influenced by poor health in the community, family pressures, social obligations and shame.

As outlined in the Senate Standing Committee report, Katu Kalpa (2000:43-45), social obligations can take precedence over education, as kinship plays such a fundamental role in Indigenous society and education is of secondary importance.

Shame has an effect on attendance. For example, some participants do not attend as they may not have enough money for lunch. They feel shame to go and ‘humbug’ other participants and therefore avoid the programme. Programme administrators recognise this issue and provide lunch for participants, for attending the STEP. For particular participants it has improved attendance.

Participants who do not attend regularly require intensive support to be afforded the same opportunities as those who do attend regularly. This places added stress on educators who may not have the experience to be able to deal effectively with this issue. Whilst this is a balancing act, it occurs in all programmes regardless of the participants or the aim. The discerning factor is that most participants on STEP programmes require intensive assistance that can be demanding for the educator.
Role Models

In the literature reviewed, an encouraging aspect of improving educational and employment outcomes has been the incorporation of Indigenous role models into programmes.

McCrae et al (2000:171), describes the positive impact that Indigenous role models can provide,

“A significant Indigenous adult presence is the major factor in the gains we have been able to make in attendance, behaviour and learning in class”.

And also,

“Student mentoring by Indigenous adults was a feature of about one third of the projects. In most cases this has been cited directly as a factor in their success”.

When facilitating training and employment programmes, the literature supports the inclusion of Indigenous adults in all aspects of the programmes. Another positive approach in creating opportunities for successful programmes is the inclusion of previous participants, to speak informally with current participants on their journey through the programme and what they have achieved since completing the program. These role models provide participants with tangible experiences that represent the possibilities available to participants if they maintain their focus and motivation.

Methodology
This research was conducted by using an empirical study. It was concerned with defining what are the entry needs of Indigenous adults participating in Structured Training and Employment Programmes (STEP), and also identifying their expectations from the programme.

Initially, permission was obtained from the Managing Director of the Myriad Group to undertake the research. The purpose for the research was outlined including the benefits of obtaining the data, and the possible improvements that can be made to the programme.

The survey was initially trialled on ten participants who previously completed STEP during 2001/2. This trial enabled adjustments and clarification of the questions to occur ensuring the survey was clear and unambiguous. The questions were influenced by a literature study on issues facing Indigenous adults participating in and completing training and employment programmes (Survey attached Appendix 1).

Ethically, before each participant undertook the survey, the purpose of the research was explained through a face-to-face discussion and an explanatory letter (attached Appendix 2). It was emphasized to all participants that the survey was voluntary and confidential. Completed surveys would be anonymous. Non-participation in the survey in no way diminished their opportunity to be offered a position on the programme. Every person who applied for STEP was asked to participate in the research. Twenty-six potential participants were surveyed.

Participants completed the survey with the support of Myriad Group Indigenous employees. The purpose of this was to ensure participants would feel comfortable participating and any queries would be able to be answered in a culturally appropriate manner.

Participants were informed they only needed to answer those questions they wanted too. Each survey took on average fifteen to twenty minutes to complete.
Once participants completed the survey, the data was summarised and analysed to determine common themes. Furthermore, recommendations were made for improvements to the current programme to ensure that it adequately meets the entry needs of participants.

This research report is available to all participants, as a copy will be provided to and kept on file at the Myriad Group.

Findings and Discussion
The survey consisted of 21 questions in a combination of both open and closed format. Each question was analysed and collated for comparison across the sample.

Of the 35 participants surveyed, 26 surveys were completed. This represents a participation rate of 74%.

**Figure 1**

The charts at figure 1 and 2 display the age and gender of the research sample. The information provided shows that:

- The average age for males in the sample was 28.7 years
The average age for females in the sample was 29.4 years.

This provided a cross section of gender and age for the survey sample, which gives the opportunity for greater accuracy when analysing trends across generations in the data.

Of those surveyed, the average age was 29 years. This demonstrates that Indigenous adults were being drawn to these programmes in their late 20's. Identifying this age range is important for programme planning. Some reasons for this may include a lack of success in finding employment through their own merits, looking for a change in career path, or an increase in family commitments.

As 61% of participants in the sample were female, with an average age of 29.4 years, it is possible that some were entering the workforce for the first time, or returning after having and raising children. This is a problem for many young Indigenous women, as they drop out of school when they are still teenagers and become pregnant. This invariably excludes them from completing their secondary education, and creates barriers for them when looking for employment.

This is supported by Arbon, V. et al (2002:40) who observe,

“Of particular concern to workshop participants overall were young women who began families early and the subsequent inability of this group to re-enter systems of training or work.”

Figure 3
The charts in figure’s 3 and 4 summarise the data relating to each participants final year of school completed. This question provides an indication of typical education levels achieved by potential STEP participants.

From the research sample:

- Four participants had completed Year 12, three of whom were female.
- Fourteen participants completed year 10
- Seven participants did not complete year 10

This raises an interesting question, 'Why is there such a distinct difference in year 12 completion rates between males and females?'

Possible reasons may be that females generally understand better the importance of education for securing their independence through a meaningful job in the labour market. Alternatively, there are a higher proportion of female teachers and assistant teachers in the school system throughout the Northern Territory, and this may make it easier for younger girls to relate to the educators based on gender.

Indigenous children tend to have a higher level of autonomy than Non-Indigenous children do. What Non-Indigenous people perceive as a lack of discipline can make the transition to a structured and disciplined school environment difficult for Indigenous children.

They also often face severe social hardships including physical and sexual abuse, alcoholism, petrol sniffing, and family breakdowns, all of which distract or prevent them from attending school.

In their community, males tend to face a higher level of peer pressure during adolescence, which can equate to high levels of absenteeism.

Twenty-one of the twenty-six participants in the sample did not undertake year 11 or 12.

Reasons for this identified in the literature can include reluctance due to a lack of resources and support from family, friends and the school system, boredom with the curriculum and its method of facilitation, or peer pressure.

The inability of participants to complete year 10 creates severe educational and social barriers to overcome later in life. These include limited literacy and numeracy skills and a lack of recognised educational standards.
Table 1 displays the data gathered in question four and five of the survey. It relates to whether or not participants had completed any qualifications since leaving school and, if they had, what were they?

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completed Qualifications</th>
<th>Certificate 1</th>
<th>Certificate 2</th>
<th>Certificate 3</th>
<th>Certificate 4</th>
<th>Diploma</th>
<th>Advanced Diploma</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those surveyed, eleven participants had completed additional qualifications. Fifteen participants had not completed any recognised qualification. This could be due in part to their previous lack of educational attainment in the school system. The highest qualification achieved by females was an Advanced Diploma, whilst for males it was Certificate 2. This further highlights a lack of educational achievement for males. None of the participants surveyed had pursued tertiary study.

Questions 6 and 7 were used to provide an indication of participant’s participation in the labour market. Of those surveyed twenty-three out of twenty-six participants identified that they had been in a paid position. The remaining three participants indicated that they had not.

Figure 5 displays the duration in months since participants last paid position. This is useful because it provides information on the length of time people have been unemployed, and is useful to gain a greater understanding of the need for possible pre-employment training.
activities to be included in STEP (i.e. resume writing, interview techniques and goal setting), to refocus and motivate the participants when job seeking.

Figure 5

Table 2 outlines the duration considered acceptable from members in their community to attend a training and employment programme. Of the participants surveyed, thirteen out of twenty-six indicated that they would be prepared to relocate from their community to commence the programme.

Table 2
Of those that responded positively:

- Five participant’s indicated that they would be able to attend a programme for 10 to 12 months
- Six participant’s could attend for 4-6 months
- Two participant’s for less than a month

Indigenous participants from communities, as noted by Catts and Gelade (2002:7), who take an extended period of absence to attend training may face a threat to their cultural traditions as considered by some members of their community. For participants, employment in organisations outside their communities may limit contact with family, thus increasing the likelihood of absenteeism or poor work performance. In these instances, longevity of employment can then be at risk.

There are limited employment opportunities in communities in the Northern Territory. The Community Development and Employment Scheme (CDEP) and local council administration create the bulk of employment opportunities for Indigenous adults living in communities. Those that gain employment in the private sector are often in a position where they have to sacrifice living in their community in order to maintain employment. Most return to community life.

As outlined in the Senate Standing Committee report, Katu Kalpa (2000:43-45), social obligations can take precedence over education, as kinship plays such a fundamental role in Indigenous society and education is of secondary importance.

| Question 8 and 9: Acceptable duration to attend external training programmes |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                             | < 1 month | 1-3 months | 4-6 months | 7-9 months | 10-12 months | Greater than 12 months |
| Male                       | 2         | 0           | 2           | 0           | 2             | 0                  |
| Female                     | 0         | 0           | 4           | 0           | 3             | 0                  |

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As outlined in the Senate Standing Committee report, Katu Kalpa (2000:43-45), social obligations can take precedence over education, as kinship plays such a fundamental role in Indigenous society and education is of secondary importance.
In question 10, fifteen out of twenty-six indicated that their participation in STEP would be somewhat influenced by avoidance relationships and kinship rules.

- Eight participants indicated that their participation in STEP would be very strongly influenced by potential avoidance relationships and kinship rules with other participants.

- Seven indicated their participation would be strongly influenced by avoidance relationships and kinship rules.

- The remaining eleven participants indicated they would not be influenced by these relationships.

Of those participants who would be influenced by avoidance relationships and kinship, their reasons included:

- ‘Family obligation’
- ‘Because that is what I was taught’
- ‘Family relationships and respect’

An understanding of the existence of these relationships between potential participants is important to provide an insight into possible group dynamics and issues that may arise during the programme.

This is a major issue to be understood and accommodated when facilitating the programme. Facilitators need to be aware of the potential relationships that may exist within a group. A solution to determine the impact such relationships may have on programmes is for Myriad Group Indigenous employees to discuss in general terms with potential participants whether these relationships and rules are considered relevant to them.
In questions 11, 12, and 13, participants were asked to rate their opinion on whether or not they should have an opportunity to have input into various aspects of the programme. Table 3 summarises this data.

**Table 3**

SA – Strongly Agree, A- Agree, D-Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 11,12 and 13: Participants to Have Input Into:</th>
<th>What is taught</th>
<th>How the programme is taught</th>
<th>The days and times of the programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Twenty-five out of twenty-six participants identified that they wished to have some input into what is taught in the programme.

Their comments included:

- ‘So the teacher knows what I need to learn’
- ‘To make sure it suites me’
- ‘It meets my needs’

Twenty-two participants strongly agreed or agreed that they wished to have input into how the programme is taught.

Their comments included:

- ‘So that it is relevant to me’
- ‘So that they use language I can understand’
- ‘So that it is interesting’

Twenty-one participants identified that they wished to have input into the days and times of when STEP should be run.

Comments from those who disagreed with the opportunity to have input into the days and times when STEP should be run included:

- ‘I will turn up when I have to’
- ‘I am willing to attend at any time’

Overall, the overwhelming positive responses indicate participants want to have ownership over the programme. Giving participants an equal opportunity to determine what, when and how they learn, provides the opportunity for them to become empowered in their learning.
Question 14 asked participants whether being Indigenous motivated them to succeed in STEP. Twenty-five out of twenty-six participants agreed that their Indigenous culture and identity either motivated or highly motivated them to succeed in the programme. Some of their responses included:

- ‘To make my family proud of me’
- ‘To show Non-Indigenous people what we can do’
- ‘To do something positive’
- ‘To be a role model for my kids’
- ‘To encourage other Indigenous people’

This is supported in the literature by Morgan and Slade (1998:7) and Groome and Hamilton (1995:35), who maintain that,

"Indigenous Australians are motivated by their philosophical heritage".

This intrinsic motivation enables facilitators to explore a common theme with participants, which can be used as the basis for building strong relationships. Relationships are all important in STEP as they allow educators to relate individually to participants and on a deeper personal level. These relationships are used to encourage, support and guide them in the programme and when they are placed into employment.
Question 15 asked participants whether cultural activities should be included as part of STEP. Sixty nine percent of those surveyed agreed with this statement. This further supports the findings that participants are motivated by their philosophical heritage and identity.

Some of their reasons included:

- ‘So that they [participants] can appreciate where they came from & make them proud of their past’
- ‘Because it makes us better and more proud together’
- ‘Depends on the students. For me yes because it helps me with who I am’
- ‘It will help people identify with the course and feel more comfortable with each other and the trainers’

Suggestions for activities included:

- Gallery tours of Aboriginal Art and culture
- Cultural awareness issues in the workplace
- Oral histories on peoples pasts
- Walks to local Indigenous sites of interest

The inclusion of cultural activities will allow participants to celebrate and learn about themselves and others within the group. Such activities can provide a source of inspiration and confidence for participants, so they can relate to one another, feel proud, and learn more about their identities. From a facilitators perspective this can be a catalyst from which to strengthen the resolve of the group to succeed.

Participants in question 16 were asked to outline what they viewed as culturally appropriate training. Some of their responses included:
• ‘People being able to understand me & respect me & have the time to explain things & not use big words’

• ‘Training I would be able to relate too’

• ‘Trainers that are sensitive to my needs’

• ‘Training that provides Indigenous people a chance in succeeding in a profession’

• ‘Helps Aboriginal people living in the suburbs understand the way of living for Aboriginal people in the communities, & teach community people to live within the suburbs’

• ‘Training which takes into account cultural aspects & outlooks of students involved’

Three major themes were identified as being essential for culturally appropriate training.

They are:

• Respect for the individual and their background

• Trainers that are sensitive to participants needs

• Understanding that participants will have different ‘world views’ from other participants and trainers.
As Aboriginality is a core feature of their motivation to succeed, it is important to ascertain what they view as culturally appropriate training, as this allows facilitators to conduct their sessions within participant’s culturally defined parameters.

Since Indigenous Australians are not a homogenous group, such observations provide facilitators the ability to ensure their provision encompasses these parameters, and to be flexible. Participants in STEP bring with them different values and beliefs, and it is important for facilitators not to make assumptions regarding participants expected behaviours.

In question 17, participants were asked to identify their preferred learning styles. This is useful as it provides data from which participant’s particular preferences for learning can be identified, and it provides data to compare against current research of characteristics of Indigenous learning styles.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 17: I learn best when:</th>
<th>On my own</th>
<th>In pairs</th>
<th>In groups</th>
<th>Listening and watching the teacher</th>
<th>Writing things down</th>
<th>Doing practical examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: participants responded to more than one learning method during the survey.

The results show that:

- 31% of participants favoured group learning
• 29% of participants favoured practical examples

• 16% of participants favoured learning by listening and watching the trainer

These findings are consistent with research from Harris (1980 as quoted in Byrnes 1993:163), who propose educators should incorporate a high component of practical based training and small group activities.

Ten percent of female participants also responded that they preferred to learn by writing things down. Only 1% of males responded positively to this method of learning. The difference between both genders might be explained by a lack of literacy and numeracy skills of males as a direct result of a lower standard of educational attainment.

In question 18, all participants responded that English was their first language. Some participants however, also spoke an Indigenous language. These other languages included:

• Yolngu Matha

• Ngangikurnggurr

For those that spoke a dialect, it was open to discussion as to whether English was in fact their first language. If not, then by choosing English did participants perceive they had a better chance of being selected for the programme, as the programme is facilitated in English? This observation is provides an opportunity for further research into this behaviour.

Subsequently in question 19, all participants responded in the affirmative that it was easier to learn in English, rather than another language.

In addition, observing and teaching participants during the programme it became obvious that they relied heavily on the use of Aboriginal English when interacting with facilitators and other participants. This is an important observation because Aboriginal English (AE) differs from Standard Australian English (SAE), in that it uses words from different
Indigenous dialects to represent SAE words. By using AE, participants have the opportunity to reaffirm their Indigenous identity amongst other participants and facilitators.

During STEP, the Myriad Group uses a combination of Indigenous and Non Indigenous educators. Question 20 asked participants whether they would prefer to be taught by Indigenous educators, Non Indigenous educators, or a combination of both. All participants responded that they would prefer to be taught by a combination of both Indigenous and Non Indigenous educators. Some of their responses included:

- ‘A mix is always best’
- ‘Whoever is qualified whether Indigenous or Non Indigenous’
- ‘It doesn’t matter who does it, as long as they make it easy to learn’
- ‘Different ways of looking at things’
- ‘Learn from anybody who can help us’

By using a combination of educators, the programme is more balanced with regard to Indigenous and Non Indigenous content and approaches to looking for, securing and maintaining employment.

Question 21 was used to gain data regarding participant’s perceptions on role models being used within the programme.

- 96% of the participants responded that the use of previous participants who had successfully completed the programme would help them
- One participant did not agree that it would help them, however they did feel it would help others on the programme
Some of their responses included:

- ‘If they can do it then so can I’
- ‘They probably explain in plain language how they coped’
- ‘Will help me understand what they did & how they felt about the programme’
- ‘To find out what they achieved’
- ‘To listen to successful Indigenous people gives me a good feeling’
- ‘Sometimes these mob have situations you can relate to’
- ‘Cause they will know what to do when I am stuck on something’

The inclusion of role models in the programme provides participants with tangible experiences that represent the possibilities available to them if they maintain their focus and motivation.

**Recommendations**

The research has raised several recommendations to ensure STEP is relevant to the participants and which meet their entry needs.

**Facilitators**

1. Small group learning and practical demonstrations are to be encouraged as methods of facilitation to overcome language, literacy, and numeracy issues.
2. Participants to have input to determine the content of the programme, how it is taught and when it is taught, and ensure the process is transparent.

3. Respect views through open discussions, and have input in determining how outcomes for learning activities are to be achieved.

4. Encourage the use of Aboriginal English

**Programme**

5. Use Indigenous role models to motivate participants to provide them with opportunities to relate to others who have been in their position.

6. Include cultural activities in STEP, as determined by participants, to highlight their Aboriginality and increase their motivation to succeed.

**Administrators**

7. Identify more accurately, through establishing relationships with community elders whether a STEP participant’s absence from community life will affect their ability to secure long-term employment in a position, potentially away from the community.

8. Have a greater awareness of the impact avoidance relationships and kinship rules can have on attendance, and where possible accommodate these relationships with the help of participants.

9. Plan and develop programmes to ensure both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous knowledge are incorporated equally.

10. Appropriate employment outcomes are sourced and negotiated with participants, that enable them to fulfil any cultural and community obligations they may have.

11. Conduct cross-cultural training for private sector employers before they employ a STEP participant.
Conclusion

There has been a lot of research done on Indigenous participation and outcomes in education and training. This research report has highlighted some of the entry needs of remote area Indigenous adults undertaking STEP in the Northern Territory. It has also provided some recommendations to improve current programmes to ensure they remain relevant and appropriate for the participants who undertake them.

The research report shows there is a distinct lack of mainstream educational achievement attained by the participants, with only four out of twenty-six participants continuing on to complete either year 12. This lack of recognisable educational standards, particularly language, literacy and numeracy is one of the major barriers Indigenous adults face when participating in STEP. The research also shows that participants learning styles were consistent with Harris’ research (1980 as quoted in Byrnes 1993:163), and facilitators should where possible adopt a practical approach to training, as opposed to literacy-based methods.

It also shows that participants wished to have more ownership over the programme, and to undertake it on their terms. This suggests that facilitators and administrators should negotiate with participant’s all aspects of the programme. This is important particularly when discussing avoidance relationships and kinship, as Non Indigenous parties may be unaware of the effect these relationships will have on a participant’s ability to complete the programme successfully. Through negotiation, relationships can be developed (with participants and elders) within the communities and this will go some way to ensure the programme sits within an appropriate cultural context and their Aboriginal ‘world view’. This report provides a starting point from which to further investigate ways to improve STEP, thus ensuring funding for these programmes is used effectively to increase Indigenous participation in the private sector.

References


http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.NSF/51c9a3d36edfd0dfca256acb00118404/0fe8206bf6b0d763ca2567f4002146fc!


Australian Tax Office. n.d. *Income Tax Zone Rebate Map*.


Appendix 1

**STEP Participant Entry Needs Questionnaire**
This questionnaire is designed to provide information that can be used to ensure the structured training and employment programmes (STEP) are targeted to maximise the education and employment outcomes for participants.

1. What is your date of birth? ______________________

2. Gender: ____________________

3. What was the last grade of school that you completed

Year 6  □   Year 7  □   Year 8  □   Year 9  □
Year 10 □   Year 11 □   Year 12 □

4. Since you completed school have you done any further studies?

Yes  □   No   □

If you answered no, continue to question 6

5. If yes, what level qualification have you achieved?

Certificate 1 □   Certificate 2 □   Certificate 3 □   Certificate 4 □
Diploma □   Advanced Diploma □   Degree □
Post Graduate Studies □

6. Have you ever been in a paid employment position?

□ Yes   □ No

7. If yes, when were you last employed? ______________________
Structured Training and Employment Programmes (STEP) are run over a sixteen-week period.

8. To undertake a STEP if required I would:

☐ Be prepared to relocate from my community

☐ Not be prepared to relocate from my community

If you would be prepared to relocate from your community go to question 9, if not go to question 10.

9. What is considered by members of your community to be an acceptable period of absence to attend a STEP? __________

Circle the option that you feel best describes your feelings on the following statements:

10. My potential participation in STEP:

a) Is very strongly influenced by avoidance relationships and kinship rules

b) Is strongly influenced by avoidance relationships and kinship rules

c) Is slightly influenced by avoidance relationships and kinship rules

d) Is not influenced by avoidance relationships and kinship rules

Why?

_______________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________
11. As a participant in STEP I want to have input into what is taught in the programme.

   a) Strongly agree

   b) Agree

   c) Disagree

   d) Strongly disagree

   Why?

   ____________________________________________________________

   An opportunity exists for flexibility when determining the days and times of the programme. This is done in equal consultation with all participants.

12. As a participant in STEP I want to have input into the days and times when the programme is to be run.

   a) Strongly agree

   b) Agree

   c) Disagree

   d) Strongly disagree

   Why?

   ____________________________________________________________
13. As a participant in STEP I want to have input into the way the programme is taught.

   a) Strongly agree

   b) Agree

   c) Disagree

   d) Strongly disagree

   Why?

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

14. As an Indigenous Australian my culture and identity:

   a) Highly motivates me to succeed in STEP

   b) Motivates me to succeed in STEP

   c) Limits my ability to succeed in STEP

   d) Highly limits my ability to succeed in STEP

   Why?

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________
15. Do you think Indigenous cultural activities should be included as part of STEP?

Yes □  No □

Why?

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

16. What does culturally appropriate training mean to you?

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

17. I learn best when …

a) on my own

b) in pairs

c) in groups

d) by listening to and watching the teacher

e) by writing things down

f) by doing practical examples

18. Is English your first language?

□ Yes □ No

If you answered no, what is your first language?
19. I find it easier to learn things when I am taught in English rather than another language.

☐ True ☐ False

Why?

20. During the STEP I would like the educators to be:

☐ Indigenous educators only

☐ A combination of Indigenous and Non Indigenous educators

☐ Non-Indigenous educators only

Why?

21. Listening to Indigenous participants who have completed previous programmes will help me?

a) Strongly agree

b) Agree

c) Disagree

d) Strongly disagree
Why?

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

Please add any additional comments you wish to make

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________

Joshua Blake  Myriad Group, Darwin, NT.