Partners in a Learning Culture

Blueprint for Implementation
Mid-term Review

final report

Australia’s national strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in vocational education and training
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The implementation of the *Blueprint* and the implementation of *Partners in a Learning Culture*

In May 1998, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Board agreed that its advisory body, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Training Advisory Council (ATSIPTAC) should develop a specific strategy towards increasing participation by and outcomes for Indigenous peoples in vocational education and training (VET). After an extensive consultation process, the Council finalised a broad national strategy, *Partners in a Learning Culture*, identifying key areas towards improving outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

*Partners* was to be implemented throughout the Australian VET system for a six-year term: 2000–2005. In June, 2000, after about a year in development, ANTA released the *Blueprint* for implementing *Partners*. Following the framework of Objectives identified in *Partners*, the Blueprint listed a number of Strategies to be pursued in relation to each, and Actions to be taken by 48 among the 52 partner agencies who were signatories to *Partners* and the *Blueprint*. These included ANTA itself, state and territory training authorities (STAs), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)\(^1\), and many other agencies involved in aspects of VET for Indigenous peoples including representatives of employers, unions, Indigenous organisations, and various Australian government departments with relevant responsibilities.

Progress towards achieving the outcomes of *Partners* and the *Blueprint* would be monitored by the Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council (AITAC), newly established as an advisory council to ANTA as the successor body to ATSIPTAC. This Mid-term Review of implementation of *Partners* and its associated *Blueprint* is part of that monitoring process.

The research conducted for this Mid-term Review was intended to discover whether *Partners*, the national strategy for VET for Indigenous Australians, is being implemented, whether it needs renewed emphasis, and whether it needs changing.

Armed with answers to these questions, AITAC, ANTA and the ANTA Ministerial Council (ANTA MINCO) will then be in a position to determine whether *Partners* should continue beyond its current life 2000–2005. They will also be able to determine whether it should do so as a separate strategy, or whether its key elements could be rolled into the overarching *Shaping our Future: National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training, 2004–2010*.

Our findings suggest that:

- *Partners* is being implemented, though progress is still under way, gradual, patchy and uneven
- *Partners* needs renewed emphasis and attention in many parts of the VET system

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\(^1\) Following the completion of the Mid-term Review, the Australian Government made a decision to close down ATSIC. These changes took effect on 1 July 2004.
Some elements of the existing strategy – particularly in the Blueprint – could be modified to become more responsive to Indigenous students inside and outside the VET system, and to the needs, interests and circumstances of different Indigenous communities around Australia.

As a matter of urgency, Indigenous advice should be sought in relation to the development and implementation of the new National Strategy for VET, which should reflect this advice not only in relation to its Objective 4, where Indigenous issues are explicitly included, but in relation to all of its Objectives, particularly in relation to:
- relevant Action Plans for the National Strategy for VET
- appropriate Performance Measures
- the allocation of resources to ensure that Partners is implemented through the new National Strategy.

1. Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to reflect what has been learned so far about how Partners is being implemented through the specific Strategies and Actions outlined in the Blueprint.

2. Consideration should also be given to extending the life of Partners (currently 2004–2005) as a stand-alone national strategy for vocational education and training for Indigenous peoples.

Strategies in Partners in a Learning Culture and the Blueprint

Partners, as the definitive statement of the national strategy for VET for Indigenous peoples, provides a more complete and integrated account of what is intended by the Actions, Strategies and Objectives listed in the Blueprint. Implementation of the Blueprint Actions without reference to Partners is not producing the results intended in Partners. Moreover, it is not clear that, even if all those listed as responsible for Actions in the Blueprint did what was required, the Objectives of Partners would be achieved throughout the VET system. The Blueprint is a blueprint for the agencies that are signatories to Partners – not for the VET system as a whole.

Not only the concerted action of the partner signatories to the Blueprint, but also cascading and widespread communication and acceptance of the intentions of Partners must be achieved if the Objectives of Partners are to be realised. This means engaging the interest and transforming the practices of everyone involved in designing, developing, delivering and receiving VET, as well as people in the communities and industries VET aims to serve. The point is that implementing Partners is not just a matter of implementing the Blueprint Actions. It also means changing many minds and lives. It requires creating a different culture, different kinds of social relations, and different kinds of ideas about identity than exist in many places in Australia today.
3. Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to make it clearer that it should be understood in terms of the wider reform framework of Partners. It might also be revised to ensure that those responsible for implementing Blueprint Actions and Strategies do so in a way that reflects the intentions of Partners as a whole. Implementation of Blueprint Actions independently of the wider framework appears to have led to uneven and patchy progress in achieving improved training and employment outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

Implementation of the Blueprint

Objective 1: Involvement in decision-making

*Increase involvement of Indigenous people in decision-making about policy, planning resources and delivery*

Overall, quite good progress has been made towards securing Indigenous membership of key decision-making bodies, (Strategy 1) more in the Blueprint partner organisations than in others, and more at higher levels of the VET system than in some industry training advisory bodies (ITABs)\(^2\), registered training organisations (RTOs) and other organisations. The same is generally true about receiving Indigenous advice (Strategy 2) – it is more routine at the higher levels of the VET system, and less so in some ITABs, RTOs and other agencies. There has been less progress in increasing the number of Indigenous employees in VET (Strategy 3), and this means that VET organisations are deprived of Indigenous perspectives and advice as a routine part of their operations.

**Key findings from the NCVER Phase 1 Statistical Report**

The NCVER Phase 1 researchers indicated that no national data was available in relation to Objective 1.

4. Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to ensure that Indigenous participation and advice have a direct and local impact in the design, development and delivery of VET. The need to achieve this in all Training Packages should be stressed, along with the responsibility of all ITABs and RTOs for achieving it. Similarly, in relation to the delivery of training, revisions to the Blueprint should ensure that the preparation and continuing professional development of VET teachers makes clear their responsibilities for recognising, respecting and responding to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities.

5. There is a need to ensure responsiveness to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities not only at the level of peak bodies, but throughout the VET system. Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to encourage new signatories to the Blueprint not only at the peak organisation level, in relation to specific Actions and Strategies, but also at the local level. For example, it might be possible to have a campaign to “sign up” ITABs, TAFE institutes and

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\(^2\) Since the Mid-term Review, national ITABs have been replaced with 10 industry skills councils. Some state and territory training authorities have maintained their own Industry advisory arrangements.
private providers as signatories committed to achieving goals consistent with the intentions of Partners and the Blueprint. (One model for such an approach might be the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) Indigenous Corporate Leaders program which has “signed up” particular enterprises to take a lead in the employment of Indigenous trainees and apprentices.) It might also be possible to “sign up” new partner organisations for specific purposes and in relation to specific issues, as their expertise and resources are required.

**Strategy 1: Involvement in decision-making**

- Good progress was being made with the implementation of this Strategy, but not throughout the VET system. A large proportion of ITABs and many RTOs had not yet appointed Indigenous representatives to key decision-making bodies.
- There is still doubt about whether Indigenous representatives on key decision-making bodies are having the expected impact on decisions affecting VET.
- There are several obstacles to effective participation by Indigenous representatives (like poor induction of representatives, or lack of support for Indigenous representatives); informants suggested ways of overcoming some of these obstacles.

6. Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to encourage the appointment of Indigenous people to decision-making bodies in ITABs and RTOs, and to ensuring that professional development is available to assist and support Indigenous representatives where required. Access to culturally appropriate courses in governance may be appropriate for some Indigenous representatives.

**Strategy 2: Indigenous advice**

- There is good progress in the implementation of this Strategy. Many organisations in the sector have now established advisory bodies to assist them to receive Indigenous advice. A number of ITABs and RTOs, however, are yet to establish mechanisms for receiving Indigenous advice and some appear so far to be relatively indifferent to the needs, interests, concerns and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities.
- There is widespread ignorance of Partners through the sector as a whole. Further dissemination of and communication about the national strategy is needed if it is to become more effective in changing VET so it becomes more effective in making all aspects of VET more responsive to Indigenous peoples, knowledge, communities and cultures. This finding has important substantive and funding implications for the development of the Communication Strategy that is to accompany the next cycle of implementation of Partners and the Blueprint (an initiative being overseen by AITAC).
- There is a need for improved statistical collection of information about Indigenous participation in the sector.
- There is a need for a sustained and significant effort to encourage the development and maintenance of Indigenous RTOs that more effectively respond to the needs, interests, circumstances and aspirations of Indigenous clients and communities.
Organisations in the sector should plan and prepare to receive advice from Indigenous peoples via representatives on their boards and through advisory committees. They should also establish mechanisms for consulting directly with the Indigenous communities from which their Indigenous clients come (or could come). Consultation with communities should be locally – and regionally – responsive, ubiquitous, thorough and intelligent.

The VET system contains many examples of exciting new initiatives that have developed through organisations working well with Indigenous peoples and communities. On the other hand, the system also provides many examples of initiatives that have failed because Indigenous peoples have not been heard in the development of training in relation to community needs.

Stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 mentioned a range of initiatives that address the problems of language and literacy in creative and acknowledging ways. It must be acknowledged, however, that there is still an assumption within the training system that students will come to their course of study with a set of homogenous skills that will allow them to deal with the impositions of the content. Stakeholders were critical of funding arrangements for delivery that did not include a substantial allocation for language and literacy support. They argued that completions were often compromised because language and literacy are regarded as add-ons to provision rather than as legitimate aspects of the successful delivery of training.

Commenting on Action 2.6, which requires that ANTA seek advice from Indigenous peoples and organisations about research, the Phase 1 researchers made an initial list of possible questions that might be included in a national agenda for research on Indigenous VET:

- Does the national data show the same thing that was found in the NCVER study of the independent providers (Durnan and Boughton 1999), namely, that course levels and success rates are significantly better for Indigenous students when they do Indigenous-specific courses and study with Indigenous RTOs?
- What is the likely level and pattern of future demand from Indigenous communities on the VET system, given the anticipated rise in unemployment levels which has been the subject of research by Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) and ATSIC?
- How does the post-compulsory education participation rate of Indigenous peoples compare with non-Indigenous people overall, and does this alter our perception of “success” in terms of the very high rate of Indigenous participation in VET e.g. is this offset by the very much lower participation rates in Years 11 and 12 and in higher education?
- What are the industry destinations of Indigenous VET graduates, and to what extent are graduates going to work in the Indigenous sector, as described by Rowse (2002) in his recent review of CAEPR research on this question?

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To what extent is the focus on achieving higher levels of mainstream employment producing only temporary subsidised jobs?

To what extent does the whole-of-government regional approach result in improved education and employment outcomes?

To what extent is VET being used successfully by early school leavers and mature-age students as an alternative pathway into higher education?

What is the real cost of Indigenous VET provision in different jurisdictions and in different geographical areas, and what funds will be required to ensure the system meets the needs of its Indigenous clients?

Some members of AITAC were, however, cautious about the role of research in improving VET for Indigenous people. They indicated that calling for more research sometimes focuses attention on issues that are too specific, neglecting the broader context and concerns to which Partners is a response. They indicated that there is a need for more research by Indigenous researchers, and for more research that has a determinedly practical intent – to inform action towards improving training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people.

7. As for Strategy 1, consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to encourage the establishment of Indigenous advisory bodies to some ITABs and RTOs, and for supporting Indigenous members of these bodies to do their work.

8. Consideration should also be given to revising the Blueprint to encourage the formation of Indigenous RTOs, with the explicit involvement of Indigenous organisations and communities, and for purposes grounded in the training and employment needs, interests and circumstances of local Indigenous people and communities.

9. Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to incorporate a practical research agenda investigating issues in VET for Indigenous people. This should focus on research likely to achieve practical outcomes for policy and practice in VET for Indigenous people, and encourage research by Indigenous researchers.

Strategy 3: Indigenous employment in VET

There is a slow rate of increase in Indigenous employment in the VET sector, for a variety of reasons, including the relative unattractiveness of employment in the sector where employment opportunities were short term and episodic.

Some jurisdictions and some organisations in the sector have begun to demonstrate that mandated, deliberate and determined employment and career development plans assist in meeting this need.

A number of technical problems with employment statistics made it difficult to be certain about rates of Indigenous employment in the sector. These included issues about employees identifying as Indigenous, and variations among jurisdictions and organisations in the content and maintenance of employee databases with relevant information on types of employees and employment.
Some jurisdictions and organisations have implemented Indigenous employment and career plans with great success for Indigenous employees and their career development. These models should be more widely emulated throughout the VET system.

Short-term contractual arrangements for programs have a significant impact on Indigenous employment in the sector. Informants suggested that the sector should invest in full-time positions for Indigenous staff if the overall rate of Indigenous employment is to be increased.

Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to encourage widespread establishment of effective Indigenous employment and career development strategies throughout the VET sector.

Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to encourage employment, staffing and funding conditions in the VET sector that permit long-term and developmental planning for Indigenous staffing and staff development. Conversely, such revisions might aim to limit the extent to which short-term and episodic funding deflect potential Indigenous staff from work in the sector.

Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to include reference to the need to provide culturally appropriate training for Indigenous teachers in VET, particularly through the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. Substantially greater opportunities need to be created to encourage Indigenous people into work in the sector. Attracting Indigenous staff into the sector might also be assisted if recognition of prior learning (RPL), and recognition of current competency (RCC) processes were more accessible and more culturally appropriate to interested Indigenous people.

Objective 2: Participation in VET

Achieve participation in VET for Indigenous people equal to those of the rest of the Australian community

The research for the Mid-term Review suggests that much activity is under way in relation to VET in Schools (Strategy 4). There is also a good deal of activity in relation to professional development, more evidently for non-Indigenous staff (cross-cultural awareness training) than for Indigenous staff (Strategy 5). There is also a good deal of activity around partnerships between schools, post-secondary institutions, industry and communities (Strategy 6), though it is localised rather than widespread around the nation.

There is evidence of activity aimed at increasing access to and attainment in VET for Indigenous people (Strategy 7). Progress towards improved access and attainment in higher-level and more industry-relevant courses has been slow but steady, and it is probably true that some initiatives in this area are yet to bear fruit. In some areas for action listed under Strategy 7, there is little evidence of projects and programs that are likely to make a significant difference during the life of Partners. Efforts are being made in some key areas, but there is little evidence yet of widespread and substantial transformation of the existing situation. Two examples of areas where more effort may be needed are increased use of RPL and RCC for Indigenous people, and improving pathways from lower-level courses to Certificate III and above (especially in Training Packages which do not offer courses at lower Certificate levels).
Key findings from the NCVER Phase 1 Statistical Report

Against this Objective, the Blueprint for implementation requires a focus on participation and outcomes for Indigenous students in VET, particularly at the school-age level and on access and attainment in higher-level VET and more industry-relevant courses for Indigenous students.

Key findings from the data analysis undertaken on participation and completions in VET programs between 1997 and 2001 are as follows:

- Participation of Indigenous people in VET is very strong and the rate is twice that of other students.
- Young Indigenous people are especially participating in strong numbers, and at rates above those for non-Indigenous young people.
- The very strong participation rates in VET provide encouraging opportunities for the future of Indigenous people, especially given their relatively low participation rates in the other education sectors of school and higher education. However, against all indicators apart from participation, Indigenous people are faring less well ... than non-Indigenous people.
- There is a trend towards more Indigenous students studying Australian Qualifications Framework-related courses that therefore have industry and lifelong learning relevance.
- Although Indigenous VET students tend to study for lower-level qualifications than do other students, there is a trend also towards Indigenous people participating in higher-level Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) courses evidenced by: (a) Reduction in the number of Indigenous people participating in enabling courses (i.e., non-AQF); (b) increases in the number of Indigenous people participating in Certificates I and II; and (c) increases in the number of Indigenous people participating in Certificate III and above.
- Pass rates, however, have decreased, and withdrawal rates also continue to be higher than for non-Indigenous students. The lower levels of previous schooling among Indigenous VET students may be an important factor here, but all reasons for these lower achievement levels require investigation.

13. Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to encourage greater efforts towards improving Indigenous participation in VET at higher levels. Further efforts could be directed towards VET in Schools programs, but also towards improving pathways between lower and higher levels of training. To some extent, this may be achieved by making the design, development and delivery of training and training pathways more culturally appropriate and more responsive to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities. There are some examples of incentive schemes being used by STAs to encourage RTOs to enrol more Indigenous VET students (for example, in Western Australia where 100 training places are held centrally for distribution to RTOs willing to offer appropriate training specifically for Indigenous students).

14. Consideration should also be given to revising the Blueprint to make more specific reference to Actions designed to improve training and training pathways for Indigenous inmates in corrective facilities.
Strategy 4: VET in Schools

- In many parts of the country, VET in Schools initiatives are developing well. They are providing a powerful incentive for some Indigenous students to remain in school for Years 11 and 12. In some parts of the country, there are examples of innovative programs based on partnership arrangements that demonstrate extremely positive results for the students involved, for Indigenous communities, and for industry.

- Informants expressed reservations about the success of VET in Schools programs. These included concerns about tertiary eligibility for participating students, the impression that VET in Schools may be a form of “streaming” of Indigenous students into “second-rate” education, and the quality of some VET in Schools provision.

- In some jurisdictions, support programs aimed at Indigenous retention and achievement have produced impressive results in improved outcomes for Indigenous students.

- In remote communities, the VET in Schools model is frequently irrelevant, given retention rates to Year 11 and in some cases, the complete unavailability of secondary schooling.

15. Consideration should be given to increasing the priority of Action 4.3 of the Blueprint to encourage VET in Schools initiatives and career counselling in the junior secondary years of schooling.

Strategy 5: Professional development

- There has been a major commitment of funding in this area, but it remains true that most staff in the VET system do not participate in voluntary cross-cultural awareness professional development programs.

- There is a profound difference between cross-cultural awareness and genuine recognition of, respect for, and responsiveness to Indigenous people, knowledge, communities and cultures. It is the latter that Indigenous people and communities expect from VET.

- There is a remarkable variation in the degree to which ITABs, Training Package developers and RTOs are responsive to Indigenous circumstances.

- There is widespread evidence that Indigenous people experience the organisational culture of organisations in VET as indifferent to Indigenous people and communities, and sometimes hostile. These findings may reflect the patchy commitment to professional development in this area.

- Cross-cultural awareness programs need to move from being an “add-on” to a conscious part of the strategic planning process for all organisations in the sector. They also need to be integrated into programs of community consultation that involve Indigenous people in enhancing the responsiveness of organisations, particularly in remote areas.

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5 It should be noted that informants did not specify whether they were referring to VET in Schools as per the definition adopted under the MCEETYA Framework for Vocational Education in Schools which specifies that VET in Schools must be undertaken as part of a senior secondary certificate, or whether they were referring to vocational learning. Vocational learning is general learning that has a vocational perspective, and includes elements such as generic employability skills, enterprise education, career education, and community and work-based learning.
One more stable and enduring solution to the problem of professional development for non-Indigenous staff would be to embed cross-cultural awareness training into the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training course required as a baseline qualification for all VET staff.

There is a general need for professional development about initiatives taken in different jurisdictions and different locations to implement the Strategies of Partners and the Blueprint. Stakeholders consulted during this Mid-term Review argued that networks like the Western Australian Billabong website were needed to exchange ideas and experience across jurisdictions. AITAC and ANTA were seen as possible organisers of this initiative.

Indigenous staff need useable communication networks for continuing professional development and support. In some jurisdictions, substantial efforts have been made to establish websites and electronic communication linking Indigenous employees in VET. There is a strong argument for ensuring that this happens nationally. The proposed national trial of the WA Billabong professional development website is a useful step in this direction.

Continuing professional development for Indigenous staff needs to be embedded in Indigenous employment and career development plans in all organisations in the sector.

In Queensland, a professional development program was provided for some Indigenous communities to help them become well informed about their training needs and the courses that might meet them. More generally, there is a need to ensure that communities are informed about how training needs analyses can be connected to their community and economic development plans, and how training can be provided to meet those needs. Some AITAC members suggested that this could be achieved through promotion of training needs analyses in all jurisdictions.

What this means for the Blueprint

16. Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to encourage widespread cross-cultural awareness training and other Indigenous VET professional development for non-Indigenous VET teachers with the aim of eliminating the racism and institutional racism experienced by many Indigenous VET students and potential students.

17. Consideration should also be given to revising the Blueprint to encourage extensions to professional development for Indigenous staff of VET, including through initiatives like the WA-based Billabong website, which supports electronic communication between Indigenous staff in VET.

Strategy 6: Partnerships between schools, post-secondary institutions, industry and communities

There is good evidence of a range of school–VET–industry–community partnerships being developed around the country, but these initiatives are highly localised and generally dependent on the efforts of dedicated individuals.
Partnerships should not be regarded solely as oriented towards employment outcomes for students in the later years of schooling, but also involve Indigenous students in earlier years, aiming to create high expectations and an awareness of the potential benefits of training for their future prospects. This should be supported by the provision of high-quality career guidance beginning in the early years of secondary school.

A number of partnership programs for Indigenous inmates of corrective services institutions, linking training and employment post-release are showing considerable promise. Arguably, they should be replicated and developed throughout the country.

Strategy 7: Higher-level and more industry-relevant VET courses

The main finding here is that there appears to have been no marked increase in the number of Indigenous students in courses at Certificate level III and above since 1997. Reasons cited by informants for the low rate of progress of Indigenous students beyond Certificate II included:

- location and cost
- forms and duration of funding for programs
- the competitive and commercial practices of some RTOs
- the types of provision available
- the amount and quality of student support
- systemic features of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF)
- “recycling” of Indigenous clients through a number of low-level pre-vocational and Certificate I and II courses that do not lead to employment outcomes.

There are some significant initiatives around Australia aimed at increasing access to training at Certificate III and above for Indigenous people. Unless obstacles to progression of Indigenous people to training at Certificate III and above are addressed, however, it is likely that improvements in training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people and communities will be limited.

Indigenous clients of VET still access RPL and RCC at lower rates than non-Indigenous clients. This under-utilisation was explained in terms of cumbersome and time-consuming procedures. This is particularly relevant in the case of the accreditation of Indigenous teachers with a Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training.

Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to extend advice on appropriate strategies likely to assist Indigenous people into training at Certificate III level and above. These revisions might also include strategies that would assist in overcoming obstacles to higher-level training currently experienced by Indigenous people, particularly in rural and remote Australia.
20. Consideration should also be given to revising the Blueprint to encourage redoubled efforts to improve access to RPL and RCC for Indigenous people.

21. Revisions to the Blueprint might also be undertaken to include specific reference to Actions that would assist Indigenous teachers to qualify for Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. Similarly, reference might be made to actions that might lead to the modification of this Training Package to make it responsive to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities.

Objective 3: Culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered training

Achieve increased, culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered training, including the use of IT for Indigenous people

Research conducted for the Mid-term Review indicates that action is under way on Strategy 8 (training centres). Informants suggested that, where they had been established, some Training Centres had become the focus for community activity and training. Similarly, action is under way on Strategy 9 (training in IT skills and use), and there was evidence of widespread interest in IT among Indigenous people and communities. Informants certainly provided evidence that some IT was indeed in culturally appropriate forms. On the other hand, some informants were anxious that online delivery might sometimes be of a kind that would fail to engage the interest of Indigenous learners who may, under some circumstances, prefer face-to-face delivery of training.

As has been noted, the emphasis of Objective 3 on the cultural appropriateness and flexible delivery of training to meet the needs of Indigenous clients has retreated somewhat in the Blueprint by comparison with Partners. Cultural appropriateness and more flexible modes, styles and times of delivery are not just relevant to the work of Training Centres or IT skills and use. They are crucial to the whole work of the VET system. The research conducted for the Mid-term Review found a number of examples of Training Packages, ITABs and RTOs that were achieving cultural appropriateness and more flexible delivery of training. But it also heard from many informants who complained of Training Packages, ITABs and RTOs that were neither culturally appropriate nor flexible about delivery. Findings from the research for the Mid-term Review lead to these conclusions:

- There is a need to develop more culturally appropriate programs, practices and products in Indigenous VET, independently of the issue of IT and flexible learning. The issue of what constitutes “culturally appropriate programs, practices and products” is vexed and complex, and must be interpreted differently for different locations (for example, in metropolitan, rural and remote settings). In some cases, achieving culturally appropriate programs, practices and products requires modification and amendment to existing programs, practices and products. In general, this is referred to as “customisation”. In other cases, however, it has been argued that achieving cultural appropriateness cannot be achieved merely by modifying or amending programs, practices and products after they have been developed without reference to Indigenous people and perspectives. In these cases, some of our informants argued, it is necessary to begin the development process with Indigenous people and perspectives firmly in mind. The success of some
Indigenous-specific courses and Indigenous-controlled RTOs was often attributed to their incorporation of the perspectives, needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities from the outset. There is a profound tension between the two views, and decisions about which is appropriate are complex, needing to take into account the specifics of particular training and employment needs, and the particular circumstances of particular Indigenous people and communities. The decision cannot be taken simply in principle in favour of either side.

Our informants frequently argued that the “customisation” approach could not be stretched to meet many Indigenous people’s and communities’ needs, interests and circumstances; indeed, they argued that many failures of VET could be attributed to the precedence of the principles, program requirements, customary practices and industry-based products over clients’ needs, interests and circumstances. On the other hand, it was occasionally argued that the potential and possibilities of “customisation” had been insufficiently explored, and that the VET system had the capacity to respond much more proactively to Indigenous people, knowledge, communities and culture.

While recognising that the latter view may be sufficient to meet the case in some situations, we nevertheless conclude that the VET system has rigidities which make it extremely difficult for training providers to be sufficiently responsive to Indigenous people and communities. These include constraints in the design, development and delivery of Training Packages; in the initial preparation and professional development of VET teachers; in accreditation of training; in assessment and reporting; and in the funding and staffing of VET delivery.

Resolving the tension between “customisation” and “Indigenisation” of training will require new and different forms of training and delivery in some cases, and the adaptation of existing forms of training and delivery in others. The key point is that decisions between these alternatives will need to be made on a case-by-case basis, not just by assertion of a principle (for example, that all Indigenous needs, interests and circumstances can be adequately addressed by either approach). The VET system needs to be open and flexible enough to encompass both approaches. If it is not sufficiently open and flexible (as many of our informants now think), it is likely to be assimilatory in principle and practice, and to miss the opportunity to demonstrate to Indigenous clients, potential clients and communities that they can receive training that is well suited to their needs, interests and circumstances.

- “Flexible learning” needs to be understood not just in terms of IT and online learning. Stakeholders consulted in this research wanted forms of delivery that were more flexible in terms of time, content, and modes and styles of delivery.
- There is a need for further research into the value of the investment in online programs and products for Indigenous VET, and their impact in achieving the desired outcomes outlined in the Blueprint.
- There is a need to take advantage of the research and best practice models of flexible delivery beyond IT and online learning.
Key findings from the NCVER Phase 1 Statistical Report

There is a significant trend toward Indigenous people participating in IT-related courses, especially at Australian Qualifications Framework level II; however, pass rates have decreased.

22. Consideration should be given to revising the Strategies and Actions under Objective 3 of the Blueprint to emphasise what needs to be done to achieve cultural appropriateness in the design, development and delivery of vocational education and training. New Strategies and Actions may be needed to meet this need. It may also be necessary to identify key people and agencies in the VET sector (for example, Training Package developers, RTOs and VET teachers) who must take responsibility for ensuring that the design, development and delivery of VET are culturally appropriate.

23. The Actions in the Blueprint could be revised to take account of experience, research and good practice in flexible and online learning for Indigenous people.

Strategy 8: Training centres

- A number of Indigenous training centres (skill centres) have been established around the country, and frequently appear to provide models of good practice in VET that respond to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities.
- Some stakeholders criticised the competitive tendering process for Indigenous skill centres, and the absence of recurrent funding to support them.

24. Consideration might be given to revising Actions in the Blueprint to encourage long-term support for Skill Centres, especially where they play significant roles in providing training related to community, economic and enterprise development at the local level.

Strategy 9: Information technology training

- There is a large amount of activity in this area, with initiatives under way in most jurisdictions.
- There are problems with some forms of online delivery for Indigenous clients – though the research for the Mid-term Review also noted cases in which providers had considerable success with online learning in Indigenous communities.
- More remote communities found the new forms of communication, when accessible, popular and engaging, and frequently used the facilities for the marketing of skills and products.
- There may be a mismatch between the amount of resources allocated to IT training and the priority it is given by informants. Many informants would prefer face-to-face teaching and learning, though providers aiming to reach scattered and remote clients believe that it is possible to do so effectively when face-to-face contact is not feasible.

6 Now called skill centres.
One of the main findings of the Mid-term Review is that, in the design, development and delivery of training, Training Package developers, ITABs and RTOs must:

- seek and respond to Indigenous advice about training, both in general and in relation to the particular communities where training is to be offered
- make clear, definite and determined responses to the needs, interests and circumstances of different Indigenous people and communities, evident in both the content of training and in its delivery
- show clear and proactive evidence of respect for, recognition of, and responsiveness to Indigenous people and communities.

25. As indicated earlier, but with specific reference to the points just made, consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to include at least one Strategy under Objective 3 directly concerned with achieving cultural appropriateness in the design, development and delivery of VET throughout the VET system, including through Training Packages, and the work of ITABs and RTOs.

Objective 4: Links to employment

Develop closer links between VET outcomes for Indigenous people and industry and employment

It is evident from the research for the Mid-term Review that much activity is under way in relation to Strategy 10 (Expanding partnerships between Indigenous people, communities, RTOs and industry). There is strong local work going on in this area, and a range of programs of support for partnership-building from governments. There is also evidence that work has begun on Strategy 11 (Expanding opportunities for Indigenous people in Community Development Employment Projects (CDEPs)). This is complex because CDEPs serve different kinds of functions in different places, with different kinds of roles in individual skill development and community economic development. It seems that various STAs are now working with ATSIC towards better alignment of CDEP with training. It was less clear from the research that strong activity is occurring in promoting Indigenous training and employment through ITABs – Strategy 12. While some ITABs have been conspicuous in responding to Indigenous people and communities, the majority appear not to have made this responsiveness a priority in their operations. There is good evidence of activity under way on Strategy 13 (Promote Indigenous training and employment through Group Training Companies (GTOs)). Among other evidence suggesting that this is so is the striking finding that nearly one-quarter of all Indigenous trainees and apprentices in Australia are employed by GTOs, compared with 12 per cent of the total number of apprentices and trainees.

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7 The VET sector has adopted the term “group training organisations” since the Blueprint was endorsed.
Key findings from the NCVER Phase 1 Statistical Report

- Growth in Indigenous peoples’ participation in New Apprenticeships is positive, especially at the Australian Qualifications Framework Certificate III level.

- National VET employment outcomes data is not particularly useful in relation to Indigenous people, as Community Development Employment Projects employment is not distinguished from other forms of employment. This notwithstanding, employment outcomes for Indigenous VET students have improved overall but remain considerably poorer than for non-Indigenous students.

- There are significant differences between the geographic locations of Indigenous students and other students, with most Indigenous students residing in remote Australia compared with most other students being located in metropolitan areas (both remote and regional).

- There are significant differences among Indigenous students themselves in terms of their participation, achievements and outcomes from VET depending on their geographic location.

- While VET enhances employability it can also yield several other valid outcomes.

What this means for the Blueprint

26. Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to suggest models of good practice in building partnerships aimed at improved training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people, especially at the local level.

27. Consideration should also be given to revising the Blueprint to indicate Actions that might be taken at the local level to enhance training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people and communities, especially in rural and remote Australia.

Strategy 10: Partnerships between Indigenous people, communities, training providers and industry

- Good progress is being made with encouraging Indigenous involvement through New Apprenticeship Centres.

- There is evidence of a variety of community-based partnership initiatives, many of which were regarded as exciting by participants and other observers. Many stakeholders emphasised the need for involving Indigenous communities in building partnerships for training and employment.

- Many informants argued that whole-of-government approaches to community development, including those fostered by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Reconciliation commitment, promised significant outcomes for Indigenous people and communities, especially where they were focused closely on local needs, in partnership with local people. There was evidence that where this approach was being adopted with close reference to the expressed needs, interests and circumstances of local Indigenous people and communities, it was a powerful way to improve local training and employment outcomes. On the other hand, some informants cautioned that whole-of-government initiatives were sometimes in danger of introducing another level of government procedure in dealing with Indigenous communities – inter-agency work. It was strenuously argued that whole-of-government initiatives needed to be disciplined in directing their effort towards community development.
Strategy 11: Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP)

- This is an area of significant development through the work associated with Partners and the Blueprint. Nevertheless, substantial challenges remain if CDEP is to maximise opportunities for integrating training, employment and community development.

- Developments integrating training, employment and community development need to take account of the different purposes served by CDEP in different locations at different times. These include CDEPs that operate as:
  - a transition to “mainstream” employment
  - a transition to employment in the Indigenous service delivery sector (for example, employment in local Indigenous organisations)
  - the primary source of employment in the provision of local services to Indigenous communities
  - a springboard for local Indigenous enterprise development
  - a community development and cultural capacity-building initiative

- Informants recognised that CDEP fulfilled an important employment need, but questioned the capacity of the program to extend opportunities beyond simply “having a job”.

- Informants also commented on the effect of CDEP participation on the aspirations of some individuals. They also questioned what influence the availability of CDEP had on school retention rates for Indigenous students.

- CDEPs that worked most effectively focused on a range of partnership arrangements that tailored CDEP more closely both to the needs of the community and to the training needs of the participants in the program.

- One of the keys to the success of CDEP initiatives is the stress placed on training needs analyses that take into account not only the needs of participants, but also on the needs of local industry, and the interests and circumstances of local Indigenous communities. The initiatives gain significant momentum when training and community enterprise development are directed towards possibilities for enterprise development genuinely “owned” by the local community.

- The realities of remoteness create problems of access to both training and employment, placing constraints on the kinds of CDEP outcomes that can be generated.

- The relationship between participation in CDEP and access to Abstudy benefits is problematic and in need of review and possible redevelopment.

What this means for the Blueprint

28. Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to recognise the different kinds of CDEP programs in terms of their relationship to community economic development in different locations.
29. Consideration might also be given to revising the *Blueprint* to strengthen references to training needs analyses and the role they can play in improving the match between training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people and communities at the local level. These revisions might include outlining Actions to encourage the use of training needs analyses by local communities and providers.

30. Consideration should also be given to including Centrelink as a partner signatory to the *Blueprint*, and to encouraging actions that will clarify the ways in which Indigenous people can more effectively access CDEP and Abstudy benefits. The CDEP–Abstudy connection is an area in which significant developments are occurring, and specific action may be needed by DEST, Centrelink, and ATSIC, as well as in all jurisdictions, to enhance the training and employment outcomes from CDEPs for Indigenous people and communities.

**Strategy 12: Industry training advisory bodies (ITABs)**

- ITABs are under significant pressure since state and territory ITABs experienced the funding cuts of 2002. Further turbulence is expected with the prospect of further reorganisation to produce 10 industry groups under ANTA.

- It appears that only a minority of ITABs have demonstrated a significant commitment to Indigenous issues by seeking Indigenous representation and advice. Similarly, only a minority has ensured that:
  - training in their industry areas includes pathways from Certificate I and II to higher-level training for Indigenous students
  - Training Packages in their area are genuinely culturally inclusive (recognising and respecting Indigenous people, knowledge, communities and cultures) to the extent that they are clearly experienced as such by Indigenous clients and potential clients.

- ITABs have a significant role as supervisors and subsequent reviewers of Training Packages, but there is doubt about whether Indigenous advice is regularly sought by ITABs in a consistent and concerted way.

- Informants argued that the Business Service ITAB should intervene in the current National Review of the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training to ensure that Indigenous perspectives on appropriate delivery of training are taken into account. It was suggested that the Training Package be modified to include material on cross-cultural awareness and the needs of Indigenous learners.

31. Consideration should be given to revising the *Blueprint* to extend and elaborate Actions relevant to ITABs and the development of Training Packages – and pathways within them – to ensure that training is genuinely responsive to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities.

32. Consideration should also be given to revising the *Blueprint* to ensure that Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training is responsive to the needs of Indigenous teachers of VET and all Indigenous students of VET. The *Blueprint* might also be revised to encourage the developers and providers of this Certificate IV to ensure that all teachers in VET have an understanding of Indigenous people, knowledge, communities and cultures so all VET teachers can respond effectively to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous learners.
Strategy 13: Group training organisations (GTOs)

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of these organisations in improving outcomes for Indigenous students. Currently, GTOs employ a quarter of all Indigenous apprentices and trainees. It was thought that GTOs played such a significant role for three reasons:

- They are frequently located in areas with significant Indigenous populations but with “thin markets” of employment and training opportunities, often away from metropolitan areas where apprenticeships are directly with employers. So GTOs were often more responsive to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities, and more successful in placing Indigenous clients in apprenticeships.

- The GTOs act as advocates, placing Indigenous students with employers who might not, as a general rule, have considered employing Indigenous apprentices.

- Their focus on pastoral care meant that some GTOs had a social justice agenda as well as a VET, so they were more proactive in placing Indigenous students in apprenticeships than other employers might be.

Stakeholders reported on a number of innovative programs organised through GTOs, but this should not disguise the problems inherent in GTOs that militate against Indigenous participation. These include:

- Informants reported that some employers have stereotypical attitudes about Indigenous people and are therefore reluctant to take on Indigenous employees. The pool of possible workplaces open to Indigenous people is thus smaller than it ought to be, although this is an issue faced more broadly.

- GTOs recently adopted new national standards that include equity guidelines that parallel those of the AQTF, as well as a focus on ethical practice. It was argued that these new guidelines are promising in terms of responsiveness to the needs of Indigenous and other people and communities currently experiencing lower than expected outcomes in training and employment. Some observers nevertheless fear that some GTOs may pay only “lip-service” in complying with these equity guidelines, and make little real effort to achieve equity for Indigenous trainees and employees.

- There is a very small number of Indigenous-run GTOs. Some informants believed that increasing this number would make a significant contribution to improving prospects for Indigenous training and employment.

- No legislative or other mandate for GTOs to include Indigenous representation on their boards, thus limiting opportunities for GTO boards or external advisory groups to receive Indigenous advice.

What this means for the Blueprint

Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to take into account the new national standards that include an equity standard, adopted by Group Training Australia, and to encourage GTOs in their efforts to make training responsive to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities.

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8 As at 1 January 2004, new Joint Group Training Program guidelines stipulate that group training organisations that receive public funding must achieve outcomes for disadvantaged groups, including Indigenous people.
Partners in a Learning Culture and the Blueprint:
Interactive complexity

- Those responsible for implementing specific Actions identified in the Blueprint need to see each Action in the wider context of the Blueprint as a whole, and, more particularly, in the wider context provided by Partners. For its Vision to be realised, Partners needs to be understood and enacted as a dynamic whole, not through isolated or fragmented activities that do not take the wider framework of its intentions into account.

- While progress towards achieving the intentions of Partners and the Blueprint is evident in relation to every Strategy in the Blueprint, overall progress is gradual, patchy and uneven. The consequence of this is that overall progress towards achieving the intentions encapsulated in the four Objectives of Partners is being impeded by lack of progress on one or another of the Objectives separately.

- It follows from the first two of these points that overall progress, and progress on each Objective, will be assisted if each is clearly understood and enacted in relation to the others. Progress is not just a matter of compliance with the Actions listed in the Blueprint, but of commitment to the overall Vision and Objectives of Partners. There is a need for revitalised dissemination and diffusion of Partners and the Blueprint, and to ensure that those responsible for Actions under the Blueprint interpret their particular responsibilities in the light of the intentions of Partners. These may be points to be taken into account in the design and implementation of the proposed Communication Strategy, which is to “re-launch” Partners and the Blueprint in the coming months.

- The key indicators of success in achieving the Vision and Objectives of Partners are improved training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people. The evidence gathered in the research for the Mid-term Review indicates that, on these key indicators, not much has changed since 1999 (before Partners appeared). Progress is being made in many areas that may be necessary to achieve that longer-term goal, but the whole machinery of VET has not yet been transformed sufficiently to ensure that Indigenous people have equitable training and employment outcomes when compared with other Australians. Achieving this transformation throughout the system is a formidable task, involving everyone responsible for VET in Australia. There will continue to be a need for a distinct national strategy for VET for Indigenous people until equity in training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people has been achieved.

What this means for the Blueprint

34. A principal response to this issue should be to ensure that everyone involved in the implementation of the Blueprint is guided by the overall Objectives of Partners, and is not mechanically implementing the Actions and Strategies outlined in the Blueprint as if each Action stood alone, outside the wider reform framework of both the Blueprint and Partners.

35. There is a need for revitalised dissemination of Partners and the Blueprint. The design and implementation of the proposed Communication Strategy, which is to “re-launch” Partners and the Blueprint in the coming months, should ensure that responsibilities to implement specific Actions in the Blueprint are guided by the wider reform framework of Partners.
What Indigenous people want from VET

Indigenous informants indicated that aspects of the VET system needed to change to be more responsive to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities. Aspects in which change might be needed included:

- funding and administration
- teacher preparation and professional development
- Training Package development and endorsement
- the delivery of training
- workplaces that are not characterised by recognition, respect and responsiveness to Indigenous people and communities.

The VET system as a whole needs to respond to the aims of Indigenous people seeking training. They want VET and a VET system that will:

- help secure and strengthen Indigenous identity
- help to maintain and develop capability – both the capability of individuals and the capacities of particular communities
- help to maintain and develop the social arrangements and social groupings – including family life – that sustain Indigenous society in particular communities and circumstances
- help in the maintenance and development of Indigenous culture in particular communities – including maintenance and development of languages, systems of belief, and a wide variety of cultural practices central to being an Indigenous person and community in this or that particular place and time
- assist in maintaining and developing participation in the economy – including training in skills that lead to valued work and careers – and in the economic development of communities
- assist in maintaining and developing care for and obligations to country, and to nature and the environment in particular localities.

Research for the Mid-term Review leads to the conclusion that Indigenous people and communities want a VET system characterised by:

- stable and continuing funding and operational arrangements that deliver training and employment outcomes relevant to the aims and aspirations of Indigenous people and communities (and that do not need to be “worked around” or “worked against”)
- training provision that effectively meets individual and community needs
- RTOs, GTOs and ITABs that respond to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities
• Training Packages, modes of delivery and teaching that are responsive and culturally appropriate

• links between training and employment that are accessible, responsive and flexible.

36. Consideration should be given to revising the Blueprint to more effectively recognise the points made above about what Indigenous people want and expect from VET and the VET system. These are subtle and diffuse matters, difficult to encapsulate in particular Actions in the Blueprint, but they might be more effectively communicated through the rationale of the Blueprint. They might also be communicated by encouraging readers of the Blueprint to use Partners as the source document that provides the framework within which the specific Actions in the Blueprint must be understood.
Chapter 2

Background

About this Report

As indicated at the beginning of the Executive Summary, in May 1998, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Board agreed that its advisory body at that time, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Training Advisory Council (ATSIPTAC) should develop a specific strategy towards increasing participation by and outcomes for Indigenous people in vocational education and training (VET). After an extensive consultation process, the Council finalised a broad national strategy, *Partners in a Learning Culture*, identifying key areas towards improving outcomes for Indigenous people.

*Partners* was to be implemented throughout the Australian VET system for a six-year term: 2000–2005. In June 2000, after about a year in development, ANTA released the *Blueprint* for implementing *Partners*. Following the framework of Objectives identified in *Partners*, the *Blueprint* listed a number of Strategies to be pursued in relation to each, and Actions to be taken by 48 among the 52 partner agencies who were signatories to *Partners* and the *Blueprint*. These included ANTA itself, state and territory training authorities (STAs), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), and many other agencies involved in aspects of VET for Indigenous people including representatives of employers, unions, Indigenous organisations, and various Australian government departments with relevant responsibilities.

Progress towards achieving the outcomes of *Partners* and the *Blueprint* would be monitored by the Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council (AITAC), newly established as the successor body to ATSIPTAC as an advisory council to ANTA.

As may already be suggested by these references to *Partners* and the signatory agencies, the term “partners” has different meanings in different contexts. It is worth noting three of them – though specific references to “partners” in this report are unlikely to be ambiguous about which is meant:

- “Partners” in the title of the document *Partners* is the most general use of the term, referring to partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.
- “Partners” in the term “partner agencies” refers to the organisations that are signatories to *Partners* and the *Blueprint* for its implementation.
- The “partners” referred to in many other places are local participants working together in the spirit of “partnership” evident in *Partners* and the *Blueprint*. These are agencies at the local level, like schools or employer groups or registered training organisations (RTOs) collaborating to implement one or other of the Strategies or Actions of the *Blueprint*. 


The Mid-term Review

The ANTA Ministerial Council (ANTA MINCO) determined that progress in implementing the Blueprint would be reviewed halfway through the six-year term of Partners – by the end of 2002. On the basis of this Review, the Council might then be able to determine whether more intensive action was needed to ensure progress towards achieving the Objectives, or whether the national strategy itself needed modification or amendment.

The Phase 1 research

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) conducted the research for Phase 1 of the Mid-term Review. Together with consultants Bob Boughton and Deb Durnan, the NCVER researchers conducted a survey of the agencies that are signatories to the Blueprint, a number of interviews and focus groups with relevant people, and an analysis of statistical information about the participation of Indigenous people in VET. The results of the Phase 1 research appear in two documents – Boughton, B., Durnan, D., Bowman, K., Loveder, P. and Jones, M. (2004) Partners in a Learning Culture Blueprint for Implementation: Mid-term Review Phase One Report (Brisbane: ANTA), and Saunders, J., Jones, M., Bowman, K., Loveder, P. and Brooks, L. (2003) Indigenous Students in VET: A Statistical Review of Progress.

The Phase 2 research

This report is the outcome of research conducted for Phase 2 of the Mid-term Review “of progress of the Blueprint for implementing Partners, the national strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in vocational education and training” (p.1, Project Brief).

The Project Brief for the Phase 2 research required the successful tenderer to incorporate the findings of the Phase 1 study into a combined report on the research for both phases.

In addition to reviewing and validating the findings of Phase 1, the Phase 2 research was intended to gather views from a range of other stakeholders in VET for Indigenous people. These were people, groups, organisations and agencies with interests in VET for Indigenous people in addition to the groups contacted in Phase 1. Another way to view the difference between Phase 1 and Phase 2 is to say that Phase 1 involved self-report by the partner agencies – largely the agencies responsible for the design, development and delivery of VET and agencies responsible for employment and Indigenous matters related to VET. By contrast, Phase 2 would also sample the views of people and groups intended to implement or benefit by the implementation of Partners and the Blueprint. These include Indigenous clients and graduates of VET, Indigenous organisations and communities, employers, managers and teachers in registered training organisations (RTOs), industry training advisory boards (ITABs), group training organisations (GTOs) and others.

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9 It should be noted that the term “registered training organisations” refers to very diverse kinds of organisations. State training authorities (STAs) are “parent” RTOs for TAFE institutes and some other organisations in their jurisdictions, and the institutes generally have RTO status by delegation from the STAs. Other private providers – some large and some small – are directly registered as RTOs. In this report, most references to RTOs are general, covering all these cases – STAs, TAFE institutes and private providers – but specific comments about them may need to be interpreted with care since findings may apply differently to different kinds of providers. The authors believe the intentions and meanings are generally clear in context.
A team of non-Indigenous and Indigenous researchers from Charles Sturt University was contracted to conduct the Phase 2 research. The team included Professor Stephen Kemmis, Marianne Atkinson, Roslin Brennan AM and Casey Atkinson, with the assistance of Annette Green and Erica Smith.

The project was undertaken between November 2002 and May 2003.

Procedure

In November 2002, the Phase 2 study began. The first tasks included analysing documents including draft reports of the Phase 1 research, survey responses from agencies contacted in Phase 1, and documentation about Partners and the Blueprint. The research team held an initial briefing meeting with members of the AITAC Management Monitoring Group. Initial contacts were also made with a number of potential informants. From mid-December onwards, the Phase 2 research team conducted national consultations with different groups of stakeholders in VET for Indigenous people around the country. The following paragraphs, based on the expression of interest submitted by the Charles Sturt University team, give more details about the methodology for Phase 2.

Analysis of Phase 1 data and documentation

Data and documentation from Phase 1 (including reports on relevant research literature) were analysed principally by comparing empirical data about implementation of Partners with each of the intended Strategies and Actions outlined in the Blueprint, and:

- identifying key findings relevant to each (including findings about the diversity of operations and outcomes in different settings)
- identifying issues arising in relation to each.

As a secondary part of this process, the research team assessed and evaluated observations and judgments about the nature and effects of Strategies, Actions, partnerships and the intentions of the Blueprint as a whole in relation to:

- possibilities and alternatives suggested in research literature
- the wider contexts (social, political, cultural, economic, physical) of operation of the program nationally
- the wider strategic environment of Indigenous vocational education, training and employment in Australia.

In the event, much less effort was expended on this latter part of the analysis than the first (comparing progress with the intentions of the Blueprint) and identifying key findings and issues. It must be said, however, that in the Phase 2 consultations stakeholders themselves raised many issues of the kind raised by the latter part of the analysis (possibilities and alternatives, wider contexts, elements of the wider strategic environment).
The results of these analyses appear principally in Chapters 3 to 7 of the present report. Chapters 3 to 6 report on progress with implementation of the Strategies listed under Objectives 1 to 4 of the Blueprint, as identified in the Phase 1 research and the Phase 2 research. Chapter 7 lists findings in relation to every Action listed in the Blueprint, again presenting the findings from both the Phase 1 and the Phase 2 research.

**Issues identification**

A key technique for the Phase 2 study was “progressive focusing” – identifying and narrowing-in on key concerns about the implementation of Partners. Some of the topics used in Phase 2 to identify issues in relation to each element of the Blueprint were the idea of tensions and interconnections between such things as:

- Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives
- policy and practice
- what is intended and what is observed (or, to elaborate, between rationales, intentions, actions, consequences, contexts and circumstances)
- the values and (self-) interests of different groups (clients, teachers, managers, policy-makers, etc.) associated with the implementation of Partners (as just one example, a possible tension between general values about lifelong learning and the self-interests of staff and clients in offering and taking short courses that meet immediate, short-term needs)
- the perspectives of people with different roles and functions in Indigenous vocational education, training and employment (for example, policy-makers, program managers, Indigenous teachers and clients, Indigenous organisations and communities, employers)
- system aspects of Indigenous VET and employment (that is, features to do with the formal social, administrative and economic structures and operational practices of organisations and institutions) and lifeworld aspects of the social relationships and settings in which Indigenous VET and employment occur “on the ground” (including processes for the formation and transformation of local culture, social relations, and personal identity and capability).

The discussion of Strategies and Actions in Chapters 3 to 7 includes findings, issues and insights obtained by thinking about the kinds of tensions and interconnections in this list. Some of these tensions and interconnections were also relevant in shaping the discussion presented in Chapters 8 and 9 of this report. Chapter 8 is a discussion of Partners and the Blueprint as an intertwined set of strategic objectives and actions to implement them. It shows how lack of progress in one area of the national strategy could impede progress in achieving intentions in other areas. Tensions and interconnections like those between what is intended and what is observed, between policy and practice, and between values and self-interests helped frame some of the findings in this Chapter. Chapter 9, “What Indigenous people want from VET”, is also based on findings, issues and insights thrown up by the tensions and interconnections in the list – for example, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives, and system and lifeworld aspects of VET.
Four kinds of consultations

The Phase 2 study was to involve four kinds of consultations:

- “broad-spectrum” consultations with a range of different kinds of stakeholders in VET for Indigenous people, conducted through focus groups in four jurisdictions (New South Wales, Queensland, the Northern Territory, and Western Australia)
- “narrow spectrum” consultations with particular groups who could speak to us about particular projects or issues thrown up as interesting in the course of other consultations
- “comprehensive” consultations with a key informant in each state or territory who could give us a very broad picture of implementation of Partners and the Blueprint in their jurisdiction
- continuing consultations with the AITAC Management Monitoring group, as a basis for exchange, advice and feedback on overall progress with the Mid-term Review.

The Phase 2 team also made separate visits to Western Australia (for a conference on the Western Australia version of Partners and the Blueprint) and to the Torres Strait (to interview a number of key informants on VET for Torres Strait Islander Peoples).

In the course of these different kinds of consultations, the Phase 2 team consulted with over 200 informants, all of whom were, in one way or another, stakeholders in VET for Indigenous people.

In general, the function of the broad-spectrum consultations was to test (seek clarification, validation and participant confirmation of) key findings, issues and recommendations arising from the Phase 1 research. As has been mentioned, the Phase 1 research surveyed agencies that are partner signatories to the Blueprint – their responses were self-reports on their own activities and initiatives towards implementation of the Blueprint.

By contrast with the self-report data gathered in Phase 1, a key process of the Phase 2 study was consultation with other stakeholder groups – informants who might be in a position to observe whether the kinds of changes envisaged in Partners and the Blueprint were actually occurring “on the ground”. The key stakeholder groups consulted were:

- Indigenous clients and graduates of VET
- representatives of Indigenous organisations and communities
- Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers of VET for Indigenous people
- managers and other representatives of RTOs, ITABs, and GTOs
- representatives of employer groups.

Following discussions with the Management Monitoring group of AITAC, it was decided that we should conduct “broad spectrum” consultations in Queensland, Western Australia, and the Northern Territory. It was also decided to arrange focus groups in the Torres Strait, to sample the views of Torres Strait Islanders directly. (In the event, it proved impossible to organise focus groups in the Torres Strait, so one of the Phase 2 team members conducted a series of interviews in the Torres Strait to tap the views of key informants there.)
In the focus groups, members of the Phase 2 research team drew the attention of participants to the four Objectives and 13 Strategies of the Blueprint. We also drew their attention to the intended Outcomes of Partners, particularly the outcomes intended for people in the group to which they belonged (Indigenous clients, employers, etc.). Each focus group was facilitated by at least two members of the Phase 2 research team – at least one Indigenous member (Marianne Atkinson or Casey Atkinson) and one non-Indigenous member (Roslin Brennan or Stephen Kemmis).

The facilitators did not assume that participants in the focus groups were familiar (or not familiar) with Partners and the Blueprint. Some were; some weren’t. The introduction and background material served to acquaint all with the basic structure of both documents. The facilitators took participants systematically through the four Objectives and 13 Strategies of the Blueprint, not just those most likely to be relevant to their particular perspective (for example, as an Indigenous client of VET). The facilitators were frequently surprised by what participants knew about elements of the Blueprint that, on the face of it, were not particularly relevant to the group to which they belonged. The focus group discussions generally lasted about 90 minutes, though some were shorter and several were longer.

In some jurisdictions, the Phase 2 team had considerable assistance from a local AITAC member or other contact who helped to organise the focus groups. In others, we had to arrange them on our own, following networks of contacts in that jurisdiction.

Focus groups for Indigenous clients and graduates of VET, and Indigenous organisations, were usually well attended, as were focus groups for managers and teachers in RTOs. It proved most difficult to get strong attendance from representatives of employer groups.

About five sets of focus group discussions were held in each of four places: Wagga Wagga, New South Wales; Brisbane, Queensland; Darwin, Northern Territory; and Perth, Western Australia. In general, we conducted focus group discussions with most stakeholder groups separately – for example, so clients and providers could speak openly and frankly. On some occasions, we combined some stakeholder groups – for example, Indigenous clients together with representatives of Indigenous organisations and communities.

In all, we contacted about 130 people in these consultations.

It was our intention to conduct a comprehensive set of consultations with the manager of the unit responsible for Indigenous VET in each jurisdiction – some by telephone interview, and some in face-to-face meetings. As indicated, our purpose in these consultations was to get a broad overview of implementation of Partners and the Blueprint in every jurisdiction around the country.

In the event, we were able to conduct most of these consultations, but not all. Because of difficulties arranging interviews with some key informants, it was not possible to interview managers in the relevant positions in three jurisdictions: South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory, and Tasmania.

In some jurisdictions, we spoke to more than one informant able to give us a comprehensive view of activities in that state or territory; in some jurisdictions, we held a telephone interview with three or four people who, as a team, were able to give a fairly comprehensive account of activities in their jurisdiction.

The Phase 2 team thus contacted about 14 people in the course of these consultations.
“Narrow-spectrum” or targeted consultations did not seek general views about the Blueprint and its implementation, but instead focused on specific issues and particular exceptional or exemplary cases or sites where particular issues had arisen. The aim of these consultations was to clarify issues and to get a grounded understanding of how particular issues emerged in the field, in particular local sites and circumstances.

Some of the stakeholders consulted in targeted consultations were identified from Phase 1 data and documentation – for example, people associated with delivery of particular programs or strategies around the country. Others were identified with the assistance of members of AITAC and ANTA staff. Participants in other kinds of consultations suggested still other contacts to pursue.

Most of these consultations occurred via telephone interviews, though some also took place face to face during trips for other purposes – for example, in association with visits to places where we were conducting “broad-spectrum” focus group consultations.

In all, we contacted about fifty informants in these “narrow-spectrum” or targeted consultations.

During the Phase 2 study, members of the research team met with the AITAC Management Monitoring group on seven occasions (including two by teleconference), and with the whole AITAC once. Phase 2 team members also had a number of telephone conversations with ANTA staff and AITAC Management Monitoring Committee members.

Analysis of Phase 2 data

In general, the same kinds of approaches to data analysis were employed in considering the material collected in the Phase 2 research as in our analysis of the Phase 1 survey data and the draft reports from Phase 1. That is, we were looking for information that would allow us to:

- determine the extent of implementation of Partners and the Blueprint
- identify key issues arising
- set the findings from both phases of the study in the broader context of the Australian VET system, VET policy and practice, and possible directions for future modification and directions related to the intentions of Partners and the Blueprint.

In a process roughly parallel to the one followed in the document analysis work at the beginning of the Phase 2 study (examining the information from Phase 1), we made a preliminary analysis of consultation data immediately following interviews, focus groups and other consultations. This “de-briefing” stage involved sorting field notes in relation to Actions, Strategies and Objectives of the Blueprint, and identifying key themes and issues emerging from the discussions. The preliminary analysis provided a guide to and a kind of “index” for later analysis, but also required the researchers to make their initial reactions and hypotheses explicit, so they could be reviewed and further validated by subsequent analysis of the whole archive of data.

Later analysis proceeded by sorting all data in relation to the Actions, Strategies and Objectives of the Blueprint (the information that appears in Chapters 3 to 7). It also involved identifying key issues to discuss in each of Chapters 3 to 6. In particular, this included:

- drawing general conclusions about progress in implementing each Objective and Strategy in the Blueprint
comparing the achievements in implementation of the *Blueprint* with the more general intentions of *Partners*

- identifying key issues related to implementation of each Strategy in the *Blueprint*
- identifying (especially from “narrow-spectrum”, targeted consultations) some “case stories” that would illustrate both positive and negative features associated with particular Strategies.

Especially given the extremely demanding timeframe for the Phase 2 study as a whole, these activities proceeded in parallel with the work of drafting this Report. In this way, analysis of progress with particular elements of the *Blueprint and Partners* was constantly cross-referenced with the overall Vision and Objectives presented in the two documents.

**Acknowledgments**

The Phase 2 team could not have conducted its work without the assistance of many people. Our greatest debt of gratitude is to the 200 or more key informants who gave us several hours of their time to participate in consultations in focus groups by telephone and in face-to-face meetings. Some gave several hours or a day, taking into account their travel time to and from consultations.

The Phase 1 research team provided us with excellent material and assistance. NCVER staff Kaye Bowman, Phil Loveder and Michael Jones provided overall coordination of Phase 1, and produced valuable information from relevant research, and a very informative statistical analysis. Consultants Bob Boughton and Deb Durnan provided survey material, an insightful report on implementation of the Actions and Strategies outlined in the *Blueprint*, and extremely helpful research information and advice that made a significant contribution to our work.

We are also grateful to ANTA staff Margo Couldrey, Anne-Maree Walker and Dean Sarra for their assistance. Margo Couldrey helped with briefing us before the project began, and helped to get it underway. As officer managing our contract, Anne-Maree Walker was an unfailing source of assistance with contract matters, arrangements, and information on a number of issues in Indigenous VET. Dean Sarra, as Executive Officer for AITAC, and as Chair of the Management Monitoring group at some key stages, provided incisive and insightful advice as well as effective support in matching the evolving timeframe of our project to the timeframe required by AITAC and ANTA.

We are grateful to members of AITAC who gave us helpful contacts to pursue in various states and territories, and useful information and advice on key issues in VET for Indigenous people. We are also grateful for their participation in a workshop with members of the Phase 2 team in April 2003, during which many key issues about the implementation of *Partners* and the *Blueprint* were raised.

We are also grateful to our Charles Sturt University colleagues Annette Green, who assisted with early fieldwork for the project, and Erica Smith, who advised on the project design and various aspects of VET and its operations.

Finally, we would like to record our thanks to André Demellweek, our project administrator, who cheerfully gave us invaluable and efficient organisational support and assistance in many facets of the research, from arranging travel through organising telephone interviews to setting up electronic research databases and preparing background materials for consultations.
Increase involvement of Indigenous people in decision-making about policy, planning resources and delivery

*Partners in a Learning Culture* lists nine strategies aimed at increasing the involvement of Indigenous people in decision-making about VET. It is noticeable, however, that four of the nine strategies nominated are not encapsulated in the Strategies for action in the document designed to assist in the implementation of *Partners* – namely the *Blueprint*. As has been indicated, the two documents, while closely related, do not match one another perfectly. The following table indicates some key differences between *Partners* and the *Blueprint* in terms of strategies for implementation of Objective 1 of both documents. At the start of Chapters 4 to 6, we will also summarise differences between the two documents as they apply to Objectives 2 to 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headline strategies for Objective 1 promoted in <em>Partners in a Learning Culture</em></th>
<th>Strategies for Objective 1 identified in the <em>Blueprint</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increasing involvement by Indigenous people at all levels of decision-making.</td>
<td>1. Secure Indigenous membership of key relevant decision-making bodies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the participation of Indigenous people in decision-making at the provider and local community levels.</td>
<td>2. Develop mechanisms for inclusion of Indigenous advice in all VET projects, programs and products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategies throughout all levels of the VET system.</td>
<td>3. Secure Indigenous employment in key areas of the VET sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring that vocational education and training (including Training Packages) is culturally inclusive.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Benchmarking cultural inclusivity.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unlocking the potential of partnerships.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating incentives for the employment and professional development of Indigenous staff (including in group training organisations and private training companies).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing mechanisms to ensure that Indigenous VET issues are addressed by key national, state and territory bodies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysing community needs and audit skills.</td>
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</table>
What has been excluded in the Blueprint version of Objective 1 are references to ensuring that VET is culturally inclusive; to partnerships; and to analysing community training and auditing skills. These topics are addressed under other Objectives in the Blueprint. Making VET culturally inclusive is addressed in Objective 3 (Culturally appropriate and flexible training) – though, as we shall see, it is not fully addressed even there, since the two Actions under Objective 3 focus on Skill Centres and development of IT skills. It is also considered in relation to staff and their professional development (cross-cultural awareness training) under Objective 2 (Participation). Partnerships are considered under Objective 2 (Strategy 6) and again in Strategy 10 under Objective 4 (Links to employment). Community training and auditing skills are also relevant to Strategy 10 under Objective 4.

It is not clear that anything has necessarily “been lost in the translation” between Partners and the Blueprint, but there is a suspicion that something may have been. For example, the Blueprint Strategies under Objective 1 do not have the emphatic reference of the Strategies in Partners to cultural inclusivity in the context of decision-making. Nor is it necessarily the case that those framing the Blueprint intended its Strategies to be interpreted – or interpretable – without reference to the rationale provided by Partners. It was no doubt expected that those responsible for implementing Partners through the Actions listed in the Blueprint would use Partners as their primary source document, taking its suggestions into account as a framework and context for the particular Actions required. From our conversations, however, it was difficult to avoid the conclusion that most thought the Blueprint was a faithful rendition of the intentions of Partners. This observation is confirmed at the state and territory level, where it is clear that official implementation plans follow the rhetorical model of the Blueprint rather than Partners. That is, the Blueprint has provided the framework on which these state and territory plans were constructed, despite the comment in some that the plans are “based on Partners”. There is a question about whether the Blueprint distils or decontextualises the broader intentions of Partners.

It seems to us that Partners provides a more complete and fulsome account of what is intended by the Actions, Strategies and Objectives outlined in the Blueprint. On this view, implementation of the Blueprint Actions might not be sufficient to produce the results intended in Partners.

Moreover, it is not clear that, even if all those listed as responsible for Actions in the Blueprint did what was required, the Objectives of Partners would be achieved throughout the VET system. The Blueprint is a blueprint for the agencies that are signatories to Partners – not for the VET system as a whole. No doubt these are very important, influential and even authoritative bodies, but they cannot guarantee that the VET system as a whole will be transformed in the way Partners envisages. For this to be achieved, what is required – in addition to the implementation of the Actions required in the Blueprint – is the active commitment of everyone in the VET system, and many key stakeholders outside it – Indigenous people and communities, employers and other organisations.
Recognising, then, that implementation of the three Strategies listed under Objective 1 of the Blueprint is limited and does not capture the full intentions of Partners, let us now discover what has been achieved towards implementation of Objective 1.

**Objective 1 overview**

**Key findings from the NCVER Phase 1 Statistical Report**

NCVER researchers compiling the Statistical Report indicated that national data was not available about Objective 1.

According to the research conducted by the Phase 1 researchers, good progress has been made with Strategy 1 – establishing formal mechanisms for receiving Indigenous advice. Most of the partner agencies responsible for implementing the Blueprint have appointed Indigenous people to key decision-making bodies and have established mechanisms for seeking and receiving Indigenous advice, though this has not been universally achieved in all ITABs and RTOs.

In general, good progress is also being made with Strategy 2 – the establishment of mechanisms for receiving Indigenous advice in VET projects, programs and products. There is evidence that Training Package developers are increasingly receiving Indigenous advice, but there are issues about:

- whether the advice is received early enough in the development process
- where the advice comes from (for example, AITAC, the Training Package Equity Advisory Service, or Indigenous people specifically consulted by developers within the development process)
- whether the package development process is responsive enough to Indigenous perspectives (for example, whether and when packages can be “customised” to take account of Indigenous perspectives versus when and whether package development should be driven principally by the needs and concerns of Indigenous people)
- the value and credibility attached to the advice being sought.

Phase 1 reported that over 60 per cent of the actions listed under Strategy 3 (Indigenous employment in the VET sector) were reported as in progress or completed. On the other hand, the Phase 1 researchers reported, “this optimistic picture has not translated into a significant rate of Indigenous employment in the sector” (p.37). Not only was the
Objective 1 (cont.)

base rate of Indigenous employment in the sector low; the Phase 1 researchers noted that it had not increased significantly in the years since Partners appeared. The Phase 1 researchers identified some issues concerning the quality of data about Indigenous employment in the VET sector. They raised the question of whether responsibility for collecting data about Indigenous employment in the VET sector should be allocated to Department of Education, Science and Training’s Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme Monitoring branch (p.38). In subsequent discussions, DEST has indicated that it is willing to collaborate in efforts to improve data collection about Indigenous employment in the VET sector, but the department has also pointed out that its IESIP data collection does not cover all Indigenous employment in the sector.

Phase 2 findings

Objective 1 overview

Overall, quite good progress has been made towards securing Indigenous membership of key decision-making bodies (Strategy 1), more in the Blueprint partner organisations than in others, and more at higher levels of the VET system than in some ITABs, RTOs and other organisations. The same is generally true about receiving Indigenous advice (Strategy 2). It is more routine at the higher levels of the VET system, and less so in some ITABs, RTOs and other agencies. There has been less progress in increasing the number of Indigenous employees in VET (Strategy 3), and this means that VET organisations are deprived of Indigenous perspectives and advice as a routine part of their operations.

At their workshop with Phase 2 researchers in April 2003, members of AITAC pointed out that Objective 1 was still very important. Progress towards achieving it was noted, but further efforts were needed to make participation more effective. It was pointed out that Objective 1 of Partners referred to participation in groups actually making decisions affecting VET for Indigenous people, not merely participation in groups giving advice about Indigenous issues. One member asked whether Indigenous people were indeed participating in decision-making about VET funding in all states and territories. The example of Victoria’s Wurreker agreement – through which regional arrangements for Indigenous VET are negotiated and agreed – was referred to as an arrangement permitting and requiring strong participation by Indigenous people in key funding decisions.

Strategy 1: Indigenous membership

Secure Indigenous membership of key relevant decision-making bodies

Phase 1 findings

Strategy 1 overview

Phase 1 reported that good progress was being made with this strategy, especially by the partner agencies that are signatories to the Blueprint. At the level of ITABs, however, and in some RTOs, it appeared that Indigenous members had not yet been appointed to key decision-making bodies. Because Phase 1 did not have a remit to seek information from the wide variety of relevant research agencies, no strong conclusion could be drawn about Indigenous membership on their key decision-making bodies.
The Phase 1 researchers received a variety of comments concerned with the operation of AITAC itself. AITAC advises ANTA on matters concerning VET for Indigenous people, including the national strategy *Partners in a Learning Culture* and the *Blueprint*. The Phase 1 researchers took the view that AITAC is crucial to the implementation and monitoring of the *Blueprint*. Informants contacted in the Phase 1 research suggested a number of issues that AITAC may wish to explore about its own operations and effectiveness, including, on p.35:

- professional development and in-servicing for members on its role and terms of reference, and each others’ responsibilities and programs
- strategies to deal with inappropriate level of representation by member agencies
- development of a mechanism for engaging with ITABs, including in relation to Training Package development
- anticipating a continuing need for implementation of an Indigenous specific VET strategy beyond the life of the Blueprint
- commissioning of policy papers, briefing and research to inform strategic decision-making
- establishing more focused and strategic reporting to meetings by partner agencies.

Phase 2 findings

**Strategy 1 overview**

In general, the findings of Phase 2 validate the findings of Phase 1 on Indigenous membership of decision-making committees. As indicated by Phase 1 research, it is clear that progress has been made in appointing Indigenous members to key bodies, and that a number of ITABs and RTOs have yet to take this step. The Phase 2 data also revealed however, that:

- in some particular committees, and with some particular Indigenous representatives, there is doubt about whether Indigenous representatives are having the expected impact on decision-making
- the appointment of one Indigenous person to decision-making bodies may have less impact on decision-making than the appointment of two or more Indigenous representatives
- the appointment of Indigenous people to advisory committees does not necessarily contribute to the intent of Strategy 1, namely, appointment to decision-making bodies (though it was also recognised that some bodies called “advisory committees” in fact had key decision-making roles).

The findings of Phase 2 validated the Phase 1 findings about AITAC to the extent that informants emphasised its importance as a source of advice to ANTA and to the VET sector. It is also clear from the findings that the sector as a whole, and many organisations within the sector, are significantly in need of Indigenous advice and perspectives if VET in Australia is to become wholeheartedly, thoroughly and ubiquitously responsive to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people.
It was recognised that some organisations in the sector, especially large RTOs, could arrange Indigenous advisory committees more readily than some smaller and some private RTOs. It was nevertheless argued that smaller and private RTOs should make strenuous efforts to seek and listen to Indigenous advice about their work.

**An increase in Indigenous representation**

In some cases the people consulted in Phase 2 reported that Indigenous representation on “key decision-making bodies” had increased in keeping with the intent of this strategy. Positions had generally been created for Indigenous people within the portfolios of the signatories to the Blueprint. This action discharged their responsibilities to comply but a number of stakeholders questioned the effectiveness of this compliance.

Phase 2 researchers received advice that not all Indigenous persons appointed to representative positions were aware of the Objectives and Strategies of Partners. Indeed, some were apparently unaware of the existence of a national strategy for Indigenous VET. Some informants also suggested that some Indigenous advisory committees in the sector were not well provided with evidence about the processes on which they were expected to provide advice. On the other hand, there was also evidence in some places that Indigenous advisory groups were having an impact on decision-making about VET for Indigenous people and communities.

At their workshop with Phase 2 researchers in April 2003, members of AITAC expressed concern that only 50 per cent of ITABs reporting in Phase 1 had so far appointed an Indigenous member.

In subsequent discussions, members of AITAC also pointed out that some larger organisations like TAFE institutes might more readily be able to appoint standing committees of Indigenous advisers, while some smaller organisations might have greater difficulty in establishing advisory committees and with securing Indigenous advice on their work. Informants expressed a powerful preference for large and small RTOs, and different ITABs, to establish Indigenous advisory committees where they had not yet done so.

**Obstacles to effective participation in decision-making**

Informants reported that the roles of Indigenous representatives varied widely. In situations where Indigenous representatives were operating at a high decision-making level they regarded their voices as both listened to and acted on. However, at lower levels of management there was a kind of “industrial deafness” to Indigenous viewpoints and advice. The creation of conduits for the views of Indigenous people does not necessarily equate with effective participation in the decision-making process. Some informants commented that Indigenous representatives were not supported or provided with adequate professional development to deal with the rigours of representation in sometimes quite daunting and formal situations. Governance issues were of particular concern. Other factors likely to influence the effectiveness and impact of Indigenous representatives included:

- the frequency of meetings
- the clarity with which the roles of the decision-making or advisory body were articulated
- the extent to which members are well informed about the operations of the particular representative body
the orientation or induction that Indigenous members received when joining the committee
the sense of commitment that the chairperson held towards Indigenous participation
the committee’s overall knowledge of the Blueprint and its intentions
lines of communication between the decision-making body and the management particularly in larger organisations
the support for the Indigenous members who are often moving into a quite alien and formal setting with specialised language and procedures.
In cases where only one Indigenous representative is operating in such a context, they sometimes feel undermined by the setting, and weakened in confidence to express their views. In such cases, representation may be more of a “token” gesture than real. “The solitary Indigenous voice is not adequate enough to cover all Indigenous opinions and then educate the whole community. There is a whole range of issues involved from the Indigenous point of view” (AITAC member 14/04/03).

Case study
The Victorian Wurreker Strategy (2000) is a reaffirmation of the commitment of the Victorian Government and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) to improving educational, economic and social outcomes for Koorie people. The development of the Strategy was underpinned by the concept of equivalent partnerships between community, TAFE and other government agencies. Wurreker aims to focus energy, attention and resources on a “birth-to-death philosophy of education” that places the “student at the centre of education policy and decision-making”.

In order to implement the Strategy, Wurreker committees have been set up in eight regional areas. These groups identify the education and training needs that are most relevant to their jurisdictions. They also provide advice on expected and realistic outcomes for Indigenous participants, appropriate delivery strategies and resource allocation. Linkages between communities and other agencies are facilitated by local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups. Protocols for the operation of the Wurreker committees and their relationships with Government agencies and TAFE have been agreed to at both state and local levels. These protocols reflect the cooperative sentiments of the Strategy and clarify the roles of the various partners.

Wurreker is an example of how partnerships in decision-making, when negotiated with sensitivity and respect for the contributions that each partner can make, can be culturally inclusive and responsive to the needs of Indigenous students and their communities. It is also a powerful example of how one state Aboriginal education consultative group has negotiated a substantial role in decision-making about education and training. Through Wurreker, the Victorian AECG has a vital say in decisions about VET, and its relations to Indigenous community and economic development in their regions.
Strategy 2: Indigenous advice

Develop mechanisms for inclusion of Indigenous advice in all VET projects, programs and products

**Phase 1 findings**

**Strategy 2 overview**

Phase 1 indicated that 70% of the actions required of partner agencies under Strategy 2 were reported as either in progress or completed. "This suggests that this Strategy is well on its way" (p.32).

"The intent of this strategy and its eleven actions is to ensure that Indigenous advice and decision-making is an integral part of the development of Training Packages and competencies" (p.32). Actions 2.1 to 2.6 in the Blueprint focused on the development of Training Packages, Action 2.7 on the development of state training plans, and Actions 2.8 to 2.11 on the management and direction of RTOs.

There was evidence that the developers of Training Packages were increasingly getting advice from Indigenous people, but the process was not yet secured in all package development work across all ITABs.

There were conflicting views about whether advice on Indigenous perspectives was being received early enough in the development process. While ANTA reported that its monitoring of equity issues (including equity regarding Indigenous issues) could ensure that Indigenous perspectives were taken into account, informants questioned whether this occurred too late to have a major impact on consideration of the needs and circumstances of Indigenous clients and communities. It was not clear from the agencies reporting to the Phase 1 research team whether AITAC as an advisory group to ANTA should have this advisory role, or whether Indigenous perspectives could or should be sought and secured through ANTA's equity service (pp.33–34). On one reading of the evidence, the Phase 1 team suggested that the best and most secure way to achieve this would be by ensuring that Training Package developers and ITABs seek and use Indigenous advice very early in the package development process.

There was also an issue about whether an industry-driven package development process could achieve the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives across all ITABs and packages (particularly by "customisation" of packages to make them more suitable for Indigenous clients and settings), or whether an alternative process might be needed in some cases. So, for example, Indigenous groups and Indigenous RTOs might lead package development, building in from the start Indigenous perspectives based on Indigenous needs and circumstances, pp. 33–34). The Phase 1 team indicated (p.34) that ANTA and other Blueprint partners might not be aware of the strength of this tension, and not only in the case of the perspectives of “remote” Indigenous clients and communities. “...our view is that a resolution [of this issue] may well come through a careful consideration of ways to resolve the different approaches that the partners have taken in relation to the first seven actions in Strategy 2” (p.34).
In the view of the Phase 1 team, a significant shortcoming may be that the Blueprint names ANTA as the agency principally responsible for Actions 2.1 to 2.6, while other key partners (especially ITABs) must also take responsibility if the intentions of the Blueprint are to be achieved in the development of Training Packages. “In the major area of Training Package development, dealt with under Objective 1 Strategy 2, the ITABs are not even mentioned and have no accountability. ANTA is the accountable agency for the relevant actions ...” (p.49). It may be that agencies other than ANTA should be named as responsible for particular Actions in any future version or dissemination of the Blueprint.

In the course of their consultations, the Phase 1 researchers received information leading them to the conclusions that:

- some Indigenous people being asked to give advice were sometimes doing so without necessarily being aware of, or guided by, the national strategy and Blueprint as the key policy guides for Indigenous VET
- there is a tension between industry-managed and Indigenous-determined Training Package development, course development priorities, and strategies
- there is a need to facilitate the development of Indigenous RTOs and, to assist with this, the advice of NCVER could be sought about how to validate and improve the quality of Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information and Statistical Service national data collection so the information can be used to assist with the development and core funding of Indigenous RTOs.

Action 2.6 under Strategy 2 made specific reference to research on Indigenous people and VET, requiring

ANTS to consult with the National Indigenous Training Advisory Council on Indigenous issues in the review of key competencies and other generic skills as well as the implications of new programs, projects and research on Indigenous people.

The Phase 1 researchers suggested that, in addition to the research in VET done by NCVER,

Scope exists both in research and research training for collaboration with the ATSIC-funded national research centre that was established to monitor and evaluate the AEDP. The Australian National University’s Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, which has recently undertaken important work on Indigenous VET, as well as welfare reform and community participation agreements. There is also scope for greater collaboration on Indigenous research matters between the VET research centres and the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, a statutory body within the Indigenous Affairs portfolio, which has an education research program, and has recently focused on research into areas where VET is also moving, namely Indigenous governance, capacity-building, and land management (p.30).

They suggested that further research opportunities existed through the AVETMISS data collections, and that these collections could be strengthened to provide data more directly on the outcomes of Partners.
The Phase 1 researchers made an initial list of possible questions, quoted here, that might be included in a national research agenda for Indigenous VET:

- Does the national data show the same thing that was found in NCVER study of the independent providers (Durnan and Boughton 199910), namely, that course levels and success rates are significantly better for Indigenous students when they do Indigenous-specific courses and study with Indigenous RTOs?

- What is the likely level and pattern of future demand from Indigenous communities on the VET system, given the anticipated rise in unemployment levels which has been the subject of research by CAEPR and ATSIC?

- How does the post-compulsory education participation rate of Indigenous people compare with non-Indigenous people overall, and does this alter our perception of “success” in terms of the very high rate of [Indigenous participation in VET] e.g. is this offset by the very much lower participation rates in Years 11 and 12 and in higher education?

- What are the industry destinations of Indigenous VET graduates, and to what extent are graduates going to work in the Indigenous sector, as described by Rowse (2002)11 in his recent review of CAEPR research on this question?

- To what extent is the focus on achieving higher levels of mainstream employment producing only temporary subsidised jobs?

- To what extent does the whole-of-government regional approach result in improved education and employment outcomes?

- To what extent is VET being used successfully by early school leavers and mature-age students as an alternative pathway into higher education?

- What is the real cost of Indigenous VET provision in different jurisdictions and in different geographical areas, and what funds will be required to ensure the system meets the needs of its Indigenous clients?

All these questions have been asked directly of us during this study, and/or have arisen from our examination of the literature and the data we collected. (p.31).

Some members of AITAC were, however, cautious about the role of research in improving VET for Indigenous people. They indicated that calling for more research sometimes focuses attention on issues that are too specific, neglecting the broader context and concerns to which Partners is a response. They indicated that there is a need for more research by Indigenous researchers, and for more research that has a determinedly practical intent – to inform action towards improving training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people.


Phase 2 findings

Strategy 2 overview

Stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 reinforced the general views reported in Phase 1. Many organisations in the sector now routinely consult with Indigenous people and communities, and have established Indigenous advisory bodies. On the other hand, Indigenous perspectives are not routinely reflected in the training system (as indicated by the Phase 1 findings), and many ITABs and RTOs are yet to appoint Indigenous advisory bodies to ensure they can better respond to Indigenous people, perspectives and issues. This view was summarised by a stakeholder from the Torres Strait who maintained that it is “important to make a distinction between negotiation and consultation” (Torres Strait: Indigenous Manager).

The evidence from Phase 2 consultations as a whole suggests that there are substantial parts of the sector that remain at best indifferent to Indigenous people, perspectives and issues, and, at worst, hostile to them. Where it is found, the effect of this “deafness” to Indigenous views is to discourage Indigenous participation in VET on the one hand, and, on the other, to deprive non-Indigenous VET clients and graduates of a greater understanding and appreciation of Indigenous perspectives in their industries and areas of interest.

The Phase 1 researchers consulted principally with partner agencies that are signatories to Partners and the Blueprint. It may thus have been surprising that the Phase 1 researchers found evidence that some organisations were unaware of the existence of these documents as the national strategy for VET for Indigenous people. It was less surprising that Phase 2 should echo this finding, since Phase 2 consulted other stakeholders in the VET system – Indigenous clients and graduates, Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and managers in the VET system, representatives of Indigenous organisations, managers of ITABs and RTOs, and employer representatives. Many people in these groups could not reasonably be expected to be aware of the national strategy documents. It would be reasonable to conclude, however, that:

- there is widespread ignorance of the national strategy in the sector
- widespread and recurring dissemination and continuous improvement of Partners, in particular, is needed if the sector is to become more aware of, to implement, and to monitor each organisation’s effectiveness in responding to the intentions of the national strategy.

The evidence received in Phase 2 also validates the findings of Phase 1 that there is a need for:

- improved statistical collection of information about Indigenous participation in the sector
- a sustained and significant effort to encourage the development and maintenance of Indigenous RTOs that more effectively respond to the needs, interests, circumstances and aspirations of Indigenous clients and communities.

No doubt there has been a substantial awareness of Indigenous views and the need for Indigenous advice and participation in VET since at least the release of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy in 1989. No doubt the development of A Bridge to the Future (1998) and its supporting paper Achieving equitable outcomes (1998) contributed to this awareness. No doubt many organisations in the sector were already aware of ways to receive and respond to Indigenous advice by 2000, when
Partners appeared. It is likely that Partners contributed significantly to the trend towards appointment of Indigenous advisory bodies envisaged in Strategy 2. The evidence received from Phase 1, and from STAs, suggests that Indigenous advisory bodies are now widespread, especially in the public sector. Perhaps disappointingly, however, there is also evidence that some ITABs and RTOs:

- are yet to appoint Indigenous advisory bodies, and, even more importantly,
- appear to be more or less indifferent to Indigenous people, communities, needs, concerns, perspectives, issues and advice.

At their workshop with Phase 2 researchers in April 2003, members of AITAC considered the Phase 1 research finding that 90 per cent of RTOs reported that they met equity guidelines for Indigenous participation. There was doubt in some members’ minds about whether this statistic accurately reflected the reality – or perhaps one should say the impact – of Indigenous participation in key decision-making groups in the sector.

Receiving formal advice from Indigenous representatives versus responding to community views

The distinction was clearly made between the advice received from Indigenous people holding positions on formally constituted committees and boards, and the inclusion of the broader community in the decision-making process. The former, whilst valuable and acknowledging of Indigenous voices, often meant that the latter was not considered necessary and therefore not heard. This view was strongly supported by stakeholders from the Torres Strait. If community consultation did take place, informants commented that this was often “after the event” and that the outcomes had already been pre-determined. As a consequence, informants felt that more opportunities to tap into regional knowledge needed to be created so that the intimate understanding of the issues affecting local communities could be used before, rather than after, the planning for training has taken place. Similarly, there are significant differences between Indigenous communities in terms of the extent to which they wish to “fit into the European world” (non-Indigenous college manager: isolated community, WA) which may mean sacrificing their community autonomy, their identity and at times their culture. The different views of informants suggest that consultation must be:

- locally and regionally responsive
- ubiquitous
- thorough
- intelligent.

Consultation with Indigenous people and communities cannot be based on the premise that communities are homogenous. As one put it, “One size of consultation does not fit all” (non-Indigenous college manager: isolated community, WA).
A number of informants provided their own examples of how mechanisms for the “inclusion of Indigenous advice in VET projects, programs and products” can be developed in collaborative and effective ways. One informant described the process as one of “taking ownership” (AITAC 14/04/03) where Indigenous decision-making rather than the offering of Indigenous advice to those making the decisions, would be the criterion against which effectiveness would be judged. “There is a world of difference between increasing the capacity to influence the decision-making process and actually making the decision” (Indigenous representative: Torres Strait).

Another informant mentioned the need to provide opportunities for students to express their ideas and opinions and to be considered as legitimate partners in the decision-making activities of the provider organisation (NSW: Indigenous student).

Indigenous administration and governance, whilst guaranteeing a more forceful voice for Indigenous people in VET by providing a more culturally responsive way to organise the planning and implementing of training, has to be set in the wider context of the National Training Agenda. It is recognised that the extent to which Indigenous management and representation can make a difference to VET outcomes for Indigenous people is circumscribed by a framework of credentials and prescriptions that sometimes reduce the autonomy and flexibility of the organisations themselves. “Self management has been overtaken by the Training Framework, and decision-making has gone to the industry, leaving no autonomy for Indigenous people” (WA: Indigenous teacher, RTO). The tension informants identified – between responsiveness to Indigenous communities and responsiveness to the administrative requirements of the VET system – will be resolved only when Indigenous people participate in the design, development and delivery of all aspects of the VET system. It is unlikely to be resolved if Indigenous people are asked to act as managers of the implementation of a system that does not match their needs.

Clearly, the personality of the VET organisation plays a huge role in determining the extent of Indigenous advice in “all VET projects, programs and products”, and the subsequent value that is attached to this advice. Government instrumentalities that are bound by legislative and policy imperatives tend to operationalise Strategy 2 in ways that are more in keeping with those demands than to the Strategy itself. On the other hand, some private organisations demonstrate their ostensible compliance whilst changing their past practices only very slightly to accommodate the new arrangements and commitments.

The culture of particular organisations has a profound influence on the ways in which Indigenous advice is regarded. This is of special significance in larger organisations that can be relatively reluctant to accept Indigenous advice. In such cases, it can often take long periods of time for a culture of responsiveness to percolate down through layers of administrative practice built up over the history of the organisation. Cultural change can be a slow process and informants reported that working environments could still be “alien places for Indigenous people” (AITAC 14/04/03). As will be seen in discussion of other Strategies in this report, this is an abiding and pervasive finding from the Phase 2 research – and, worse, that Indigenous clients and potential clients of VET too frequently experience VET organisations as hostile to their needs, concerns and circumstances. (See, for example, our discussions of Strategy 5: Professional development, and Objective 3: Culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered training.)
Case story

In an isolated part of Western Australia, a major community planning strategy is under way. It is being developed by the Indigenous Council who consults with the community on every initiative or planned training program. The Council has a number of projects that are matched to the identified needs of families. However, most male students leave school at 14–15 years of age – the time of their initiation as adult men, and most 14–15-year-old females leave school as they begin to have families, and therefore there are serious barriers to the formal and accredited training path considering the language, literacy and numeracy demands of materials delivered at Certificate II level and above.

The courses identified for delivery by the Council include childcare, health and IT training. The community has a cultural centre that is used as the ‘on-the-job’ site for those people undertaking study in the area of tourism. Most people stay in their community and the programs are designed to be delivered on site with the idea in mind that those who are trained will in turn become the community trainers.

The education centre established two years ago has two directors, one of whom is a community member. This centre coordinates the development of a language and cultural curriculum in a collaborative way with the community through the Council, and works with the CDEP program to provide training in the essential services area of power, water and sewerage systems. The community planning strategy is aimed towards increasing the general skill levels of the community, and through, a partnership with the school, a model for delivering training that is driven by the community has become a reality. It is a response to acute remoteness that begins with the identified needs of the community and then acknowledges the features of the community through the arrangements and courses that are chosen to best suit the community needs.

Strategy 3: Indigenous employment in VET

Secure Indigenous employment in key areas of the VET sector

Phase 1 findings

Strategy 3 overview

Phase 1 reported that over 60 per cent of the actions listed under this Strategy were reported as in progress or completed. On the other hand, the Phase 1 researchers reported, “this optimistic picture has not translated into a significant rate of Indigenous employment in the sector” (p.37).

The headline findings of Phase 1 were that:

While major progress has been made under Objective 1, to the extent that Indigenous people are involved at almost every level of the VET system in providing advice, this has not translated into employment within the system at the level required to achieve ongoing operational level influence over policy and programs. For example, the Indigenous employment rate among partner agencies is lower than the national percentage of Indigenous people in the population whereas, for example, the participation of Indigenous people in VET is running at twice the national rate.

Secondly, given that the major thrust of the Blueprint was to create pathways through VET into employment, the failure to achieve a significant rate of Indigenous employment within VET itself could be said to imply that the Blueprint partners are as yet unable to do within their own industry what they are asking of employers within other industries (p.38).
The Phase 1 researchers identified some issues concerning the quality of data about Indigenous employment in the VET sector. They raised the question of whether responsibility for collecting data about Indigenous employment in the VET sector should be allocated to DEST's Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme Monitoring branch (p.38).

They also concluded that growth in Indigenous employment in the sector was slow, and that relevant agencies and jurisdictions may want to consider issues including:

- more effective use of the DEWR [Department of Employment and Workplace Relations] STEP program
- a nationally coordinated VET sector cadetship program to increase the number of Indigenous adult educators and managers in the system
- more targeting of existing public sector Indigenous employment strategies to VET sector agencies, including ANTA itself and the public RTOs (p.38).

Phase 2 findings

Strategy 3 overview

In general, the findings of Phase 2 consultations agree with those of the Phase 1 research involving the partner agencies to the national strategy and the Blueprint. Stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 echoed the concern about the slow rate of increase in employment in the sector. There was evidence, however, that many jurisdictions had introduced Indigenous employment and career development plans either as a government-wide initiative or in the education and training sectors. These were having some effect, and perhaps the employment statistics gathered in Phase 1 by the NCVER researchers do not yet reflect the impact of these initiatives.

Difficulties with employment statistics

Indigenous employment remains concentrated at the lower end of management in both industry and government. Indigenous staff appear to be “pigeon holed” (AITAC 14/04/03) at these lower levels and are unable to progress. Another stakeholder described this process as “the unseen stigma that gets in the way of finding meaningful employment” (Qld.: Indigenous manager). It is acknowledged that there are difficulties associated with accumulating accurate statistical information about “Indigenous employment in key areas of the VET sector”. In part, this may be explained as a problem of under-reporting of the number of Indigenous employees, possibly reflecting the discomfort some Indigenous people feel, in some circumstances, about identifying as Indigenous (AITAC 14/04/03). The lack of organisational data on Indigenous employment and the setting of percentage increase targets that start from exceptionally low levels exacerbate the problem. A 2 per cent increase in Indigenous employment could conceivably create opportunities for a very small number of people if the baseline data showed that there had previously been only a few employees. Nevertheless, as one AITAC member noted, in most jurisdictions, the number of Indigenous teachers in the sector is tiny in absolute terms, whether or not Indigenous employment in the sector is close to proportional to the rate of Indigenous people in the population of a state or territory. As a consequence, Indigenous employees may not yet be having the impact on the development and delivery of training hoped for in Partners.

Indigenous employment and career plans

Statistical difficulties aside, there are examples provided by informants of initiatives that are intended to increase Indigenous “employment in key areas of the VET sector”. As mentioned, most jurisdictions are now developing and/or implementing Indigenous
employment and career plans. In Western Australia, for example, an employment and career strategy has been developed and is now being implemented. Whilst this is a good start, one Western Australian informant noted that “Indigenous business is not yet core business” and this strategy has “not yet made a big impact on the way people think” (WA: Manager, Aboriginal training).

The formal development of career plans for Indigenous employment appears to be crucial to transforming current levels of Indigenous employment in general, not only within the VET system. The example provided by a Queensland informant managing the Indigenous employment section of a large public enterprise shows that where planning is strategic, coherent and organisationally endorsed, substantial changes can be made (Qld.: Indigenous employment manager).

**Case story**

The city council is committed to the implementation of an Indigenous employment strategy, and with an annual turnover of $1.5 billion the council has become an incubator for the present 60 Indigenous employees. The council employs 20 people in its employment services team and has an Indigenous employment program consultant. The employment strategy for Indigenous people takes a variety of forms. Young people are targeted through the provision of traineeships, apprenticeships, vacation employment, work experience opportunities and structured work placements within the council. Young Indigenous people who have been identified as being “at risk” because of substance abuse are accepted into the “Youth in Recovery” program and given a “second chance” through traineeships, or through employment. The team environment, and the formal and informal support provided to employees, are thought to be crucial factors in the success of this initiative. The Employment Services section of the council is proactive in seeking out potential Indigenous employees, recognising that Indigenous people are often reluctant to apply for many jobs in the face of the significant barriers they have encountered in the past. Applicants for jobs are interviewed and placed using a case management approach, thereby ensuring that Indigenous people are not lost in the system. The council also makes the most of its email network to recruit Indigenous staff and lodges all applications and enquiries in a database for future matching.

Once employed, Indigenous people are able to move within the organisation through a process of internal application and this, accompanied by an assertive and accredited training program for all employees, places them on a “footpath to a career”. The opportunities for Indigenous employees are further improved by access to internally provided courses in areas such as “addressing job criteria” and “job applications”.

Elders attend all council meetings and provide advice and staff for the cross-cultural awareness programs that are run through the council. The council would also like to develop closer links with CDEP programs, and this is an initiative for the newly appointed Indigenous Program Manager. The emphasis within the council is on the integration of employment and training programs, and the need to provide good-quality career advice to its Indigenous employees. The council makes a clear and practically supported distinction between “employment” and “career”. It recognises the importance of providing appropriately delivered training, matched to the aspirations and skills of the participants, and mixed with thoughtful mentoring in the workplace. The success of its Indigenous employment strategy is tangible proof that if “you only get one chance with our people”, that chance can be enough.
The impact of funding arrangements on Indigenous employment

One of the factors that militate against increasing levels of Indigenous employment in the VET sector has been identified under the generic heading of “funding arrangements”. “In some jurisdictions there is an over-reliance on IESIP\(^{12}\) funding. This form of funding results in a casualised workforce whose low pay levels put most of them below the poverty line” (AITAC 14/04/03). Short-term contractual arrangements for funding specifically Indigenous programs both inside and outside the larger VET providers cause a range of staffing and planning problems. “In a world of six-month contracts it is difficult to provide long-term career planning and development for the Indigenous staff involved” (WA: TAFE Indigenous program manager). This point was echoed by members of AITAC, who expressed concern about the degree to which Indigenous employment in the sector was in full-time, permanent positions versus part-time and short-term positions. It was suggested that the sector needed to invest in full-time and permanent positions for Indigenous people to achieve the changes envisaged in Objective 1 (that is, impact of Indigenous perspectives on key decisions). A similar point was made about levels of appointment in the sector.

At their meeting with the Phase 2 researchers in April 2003, some members of AITAC were not convinced that all jurisdictions were serious about Strategy 3. Some also pointed out that there are a lot more jobs outside the VET sector than within it, and that it followed that Indigenous employment might be slow to increase in the sector if employment in VET were less attractive to Indigenous people than employment outside the sector.

At all levels of the VET sector, informants felt that governments should invest in a long-term strategy for Indigenous employment that guarantees employees permanent positions. Such a policy would activate opportunities for professional development and career advancement that do not occur in many current circumstances (AITAC 14/04/03). On the other hand, members of AITAC also pointed out that setting employment targets was not necessarily an effective way to increase Indigenous employment in VET.

A key focus for Indigenous employment in the VET sector is in the area of teaching and training. A number of program managers reported that recruiting qualified Indigenous teachers and trainers who are appropriately qualified under the new AQTF arrangements is a difficult task (WA: remote program manager). It was acknowledged by other informants that students learn best when taught by Indigenous teachers and trainers, where the levels of cultural sensitivity and responsiveness are an assumption that underpins delivery (AITAC 14/04/03). The shortage of Indigenous teachers with a Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training (the minimum qualification needed to deliver accredited training) has been addressed by one TAFE college where the course was run and funded by the college specifically for Indigenous teachers (WA: TAFE Indigenous manager).

\(^{12}\) Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme Funding, administered by the Department of Education, Science and Training.
Achieve participation in VET for Indigenous people equal to those of the rest of the Australian community

As was the case with Objective 1, there are differences between the strategies headlined in *Partners in a Learning Culture* and those listed in the *Blueprint*.

### Headline strategies for Objective 2
promoted in *Partners in a Learning Culture*

- Increasing school retention rates through VET in Schools programs.
- Forging partnerships between schools and the post-secondary sector (including VET and universities).
- Increase the proportion of Indigenous students doing higher-level and industry-relevant courses.
- Marketing higher level courses, apprenticeships and traineeships to Indigenous people.
- Increasing student support services for Indigenous students doing higher-level VET courses, apprenticeships and traineeships.
- Creating incentives based on outcomes for providers that train Indigenous people.
- Increasing VET opportunities for imprisoned Indigenous Australians.
- Encouraging and promoting lifelong learning.

### Strategies for Objective 2
identified in the *Blueprint*

4. Focus on participation and outcomes for Indigenous students in VET in Schools programs.
5. Provide professional development for staff delivering VET.
6. Create partnerships between schools, post-secondary institutions, industry and communities.
7. Increase access to, and attainment in, higher-level VET and more industry-relevant courses for Indigenous students.

In this case, most of the elements of Objective 2 in *Partners* have been captured in the *Blueprint*, some at the level of particular Actions listed in the *Blueprint* rather than in the Strategies themselves. On the other hand, the mention of “student support services” in *Partners* has been somewhat diluted in the *Blueprint*, surviving principally in relation to creating spaces for Indigenous students at every VET facility. The emphasis on “lifelong learning” has been lost. And the focus in *Partners* on imprisoned Indigenous Australians has retreated almost to the point of invisibility in the *Blueprint*.

As was argued in relation to Objective 1, implementation of the specific Actions and Strategies of the *Blueprint* by the signatories and those they are required to work with on each Action is no guarantee that the intentions of Objective 2 will be realised in the way *Partners* envisages. On the other hand, much activity is under way in relation to most of the intentions of Objective 2, much of it involving localised work, and that suggests that if people are committed to making it happen, participation, retention and completion rates for Indigenous students in VET can be increased.
Objective 2 overview

Key findings from the NCVER Phase 1 Statistical Report

Against this Objective, the Blueprint for implementation requires a focus on participation and outcomes for Indigenous students in VET, particularly at the school-age level and on access and attainment in higher-level VET and more industry-relevant courses for Indigenous students.

Key findings from the data analysis undertaken on participation and completions in VET programs between 1997 and 2001 are as follows:

- Participation of Indigenous people in VET is very strong and the rate is twice that of other students.
- Young Indigenous people are especially participating in strong numbers, and at rates above those for non-Indigenous young people.
- The very strong participation rates in VET provide encouraging opportunities for the future of Indigenous people, especially given their relatively low participation rates in the other education sectors of school and higher education. However, against all indicators apart from participation, Indigenous people are faring less well ... than non-Indigenous people.
- There is a trend towards more Indigenous students studying Australian Qualifications Framework-related courses that, therefore, have industry and lifelong learning relevance.
- Although Indigenous VET students tend to study for lower-level qualifications than do other students, there is a trend also towards Indigenous people participating in higher-level AQF courses evidenced by: (a) reduction in the number of Indigenous people participating in enabling courses (i.e., non-AQF); (b) increases in the number of Indigenous people participating in Certificates I and II; and (c) increases in the number of Indigenous people participating in Certificate III and above.

Pass rates, however, have decreased, and withdrawal rates also continue to be higher than for non-Indigenous students. The lower levels of previous schooling among Indigenous VET students is likely to be an important factor here, but all reasons for these lower achievement levels require investigation. The Phase 1 researchers indicated that accountability for the actions intended under this objective is extremely complex, involving 46 separate agencies and 110 separate partner “action reports” (p.39). The data received in the Phase 1 study suggested that only 39 per cent of the actions required of partners under this objective are reported as in progress or completed.

The researchers write: “...the numbers [of Indigenous people] participating have continued to climb. What is most striking is that working-age Indigenous people now participate in VET at twice the rate of their non-Indigenous counterparts” (p.40). The researchers set this finding against the far lower participation rates of Indigenous (than non-Indigenous) students in Years 11 and 12 of schooling. In this context, the Phase 1 researchers reported that “the agencies that did report provided overwhelming evidence that the VET in Schools initiatives and school–VET industry partnerships (Strategies 4 and 6) were progressing well” (p.40).
Work aimed at improving outcomes for Indigenous clients via VET in Schools and school–VET industry partnerships (Strategies 4 and 6) was widespread and well under way. The Phase 1 researchers concluded that the rates of participation in professional development for Indigenous VET (Strategy 5) were lower than they should be. There was limited progress in the implementation of Strategy 7 (increasing the number of Indigenous students studying at AQF level 3 and above).

The Phase 1 researchers identified a number of general issues under Objective 2, including:

- where there is multiple responsibility for implementing actions under Objective 2, [the need for] identifying a single agency to report on implementation on behalf of all responsible agencies
- the need to increase the take-up of professional development in various aspects of Indigenous VET, and to improve monitoring and development of relevant professional development programs
- the need to increase Indigenous participation and outcomes in higher-level courses in VET, to monitor participation at each AQF level more closely by region and by industry area, and to examine more closely what approaches are most effective in different settings (p.42).

### Phase 2 findings

#### Objective 2 overview

The research for the Mid-term Review suggests that much activity is under way in relation to VET in Schools (Strategy 4). There is also a good deal of activity in relation to professional development, more evidently for non-Indigenous staff (cross-cultural awareness training) than for Indigenous staff (Strategy 5). There is also a good deal of activity around partnerships between schools, post-secondary institutions, industry and communities (Strategy 6), though it is localised rather than widespread around the nation. There is evidence of activity aimed at increasing access to and attainment in VET for Indigenous people (Strategy 7), but progress towards improved access and attainment in higher-level and more industry-relevant courses is slow – though perhaps initiatives in this area are yet to bear fruit. (In some areas for action, there is little evidence of projects and programs that are likely to make a significant difference during the life of Partners. Efforts are being made in some key areas, but there is little evidence yet of widespread and substantial transformation of the existing situation. Two examples where further effort is required are in the areas of increased use of recognition of prior learning and recognition of current competencies for Indigenous people, and improving pathways from lower-level courses to Certificate III and above.)

At their workshop with the Phase 2 researchers, members of AITAC made a number of points about Objective 2 in general:

- It was noted that Indigenous participation rates were high, but still not at the higher AQF levels (Certificate III and above).
- The view was expressed that Certificates I and II do not take students very far in terms of genuine employment outcomes.
It was argued that Indigenous-specific higher-level programs increased participation rates. The general issue of participation rates in Indigenous-specific versus “mainstream” courses was raised.

It was suggested that there be a closer look at cases where CDEP and VET programs were achieving better employment outcomes for Indigenous clients (for example, some “Caring for Country” programs).

There was discussion about the distribution of access to VET for Indigenous people – in terms of the range of levels and the range of training available in metropolitan, rural and remote Australia. It was suggested that some Indigenous communities have managed to arrange for the provision of high levels of training in particular areas, especially where training based on expressed and developed community needs (as happened, for example, with a Certificate IV in Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Practices at Boggabilla and Toomala).

Against the view that lower levels of access and participation were a consequence of availability of training in rural and remote Australia, the view was put that language, literacy and numeracy were indeed obstacles to access and participation in northern and central Australia.

Members suggested that there was a need for much greater support for Indigenous students at Certificate III and IV levels.

**Strategy 4: VET in Schools**

*Focus on participation and outcomes for Indigenous students in VET in Schools programs*

**Phase 1 findings**

**Strategy 4 overview**

As indicated earlier, the Phase 1 researchers indicated that “the agencies that did report provided overwhelming evidence that the VET in Schools initiatives ... were progressing well” (p.40).

**Phase 2 findings**

**Strategy 4 overview**

In general, the findings of Phase 2 validated those of Phase 1: there is considerable work going on in the area of VET in Schools, and the experience is frequently powerful, engaging and enabling for Indigenous students. On the other hand, some caution was expressed that VET in Schools arrangements might sometimes “stream off” Indigenous students into “lower-level” work at the upper end of secondary schooling, especially when participating in these initiatives had the side effect of excluding the students involved from tertiary entrance. The consultations with stakeholders in Phase 2 produced a great variety of success stories about VET in Schools – success for students not only in terms of learning and educational outcomes, but also in terms of additional qualifications and employment outcomes.

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It should be noted that informants did not specify whether they were referring to VET in Schools as per the definition adopted under the MCEETYA Framework for Vocational Education in Schools which specifies that VET in Schools must be undertaken as part of a senior secondary certificate, or whether they were referring to vocational learning. Vocational learning is general learning that has a vocational perspective, and includes elements such as generic employability skills, enterprise education, career education, and community and work-based learning.
Case story

The Australian Capital Territory Training Authority in conjunction with an RTO provided training for students in Years 10 to 12 in the Certificate II in Information Technology. The Indigenous trainer modified the materials to make them culturally appropriate and delivered the course over the two weeks of school holidays. The teaching methods took account of the backgrounds and interests of the students and the course was conducted in the friendly environment of ANU. The students were given lap-tops to work with both on site and at home, and the course was completed with 100 per cent pass rate. The sponsoring company gave the lap-tops to the students at the end of the course, thereby providing them with yet another tool to learn on.

Cautionary notes on VET in Schools

The rapid expansion of VET subjects offered in schools was recognised by participants as an excellent tool for both re-engaging Indigenous students and assisting them to become “work ready”. On the other hand, a number of informants cautioned against seeing vocational education or vocational learning at school as a catch-all panacea that would scoop up the sometimes disaffected Indigenous students. The reasons for the caution included the concern for those students exiting Year 12 without the respective state or territory tertiary entrance score and the “streaming” of students into VET in Schools subjects and away from the traditional senior high school subjects (WA: consultant, Aboriginal Education Operations Department).

- **Tertiary eligibility.** The issue of tertiary eligibility has been addressed in most states and territories\(^{14}\), where students can complete a number of VET subjects and still exit Year 12 with both a high-school qualification that leads to tertiary entrance eligibility, and a VET sector credential. It was also clear that by completing Year 12, students were better prepared for study of any kind beyond school. Some members of AITAC took the view that VET in Schools initiatives should be reviewed by boards of studies in those states and territories that do not currently recognise VET in Schools studies for tertiary entrance, to maximise opportunities for Indigenous students to gain a tertiary entrance score for participating in these subjects. Members considered that this might be a matter on which AITAC may wish to make a recommendation to the ANTA Board.

- **Streaming.** Given the history of streaming Indigenous students in the past (away from “academic” subjects and towards more “practical” ones), informants reported that Indigenous parents are anxious about students being streamed in this way (AITAC 14/04/03). It was thought the selection and participation of Indigenous students in VET in Schools initiatives should be closely monitored and case-managed.

Other informants questioned the “quality” of some VET in Schools provision and commented that a Certificate I or II gained while at school was no guarantee of employment or a smooth transition to higher-level qualifications within the training sector.

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\(^{14}\) As at early 2004, only Tas. and WA do not currently recognise VET in Schools studies for university entrance – however, WA is currently examining ways in which it can do so.
School-based New Apprenticeships

In Western Australia, the Aboriginal Educational Operational Plan (2001–2004) has nine key focus areas that map against the Objectives of the Blueprint “almost word for word” (WA: consultant, Aboriginal Education, Department of Education and Training). The Department of Education and Training has begun to implement a number of initiatives one of which is the pilot Indigenous School Based Traineeship Program that is funded by the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF\[1\]). This program is the only one its kind in Australia and is likely to be adopted and adapted by other states and territories. The students participating in this program receive the Western Australian Certificate of Education, a Certificate II in their industry area, and “most likely ongoing employment” (WA: Director of Aboriginal Training). At present this program has 200 students and an 85 per cent retention rate. Students mix school and work placement, attending on-the-job training for two days per week, where they work under the supervision of an RTO which assesses their progress. Students are paid for their work.

A school-based New Apprenticeship program has also been introduced in the Australian Capital Territory where workplaces have been encouraged to take on Indigenous students in the areas of sport and recreation, and building and construction. This is a new program and the evaluation will be completed at the end of 2003, but so far “it seems to be working well” (ACT: Indigenous manager).

Also in the Australian Capital Territory, an innovative approach has been taken in the provision of Certificate II in IT for groups of Indigenous students.

Other initiatives aimed at retention and achievement of Indigenous students at school

Two Western Australian programs, whilst not specifically directed towards Indigenous participation in VET, impact on this area.

- The “Aspirant Program” represents a strong effort to identify Indigenous students with particular kinds of potential in Year 8 and support their retention through a network of agencies and industry representatives. Students and their families can access services provided by partner members including DEST, the Smith Family, industry and the Red Cross. Each student has an industry-based mentor appointed by the steering committee overseeing the program in the districts. The forms of student support also include the provision of part-time employment for the participants, after-hours assistance with school work, leadership programs, and assistance when needed with personal development issues. Each program has a coordinator, appointed full time at Level 3, who is responsible to the representative steering committee in the districts. It is expected that there will be 20 such centres operational by 2004, and 30 by 2005.

- The “Attendance Program”, with a budget of $250,000, used a submission process to fund “innovative programs that are locally designed, flexible and creative” (WA: consultant, Aboriginal Education, Department of Education and Training) to address the issue of Indigenous non-attendance. Eleven submissions were funded across Western Australia “all of which are quite different and reflected the cultural variations across the state” (WA: Consultant, Department of Education and Training).

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\[1\] The Australian Government announced with the 13 May 2003 Budget, that it had decided to bring the operations of ECEF closer to key Commonwealth education and training programs. The functions undertaken by ECEF have now been transferred to the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).
Opportunities for VET in Schools in remote communities

VET in Schools subjects are generally available only to those students who are enrolled in Years 11 and 12. In some remote communities, few students complete Year 10 and those who do “may not be mature enough or have the skills to take them on” (NT: remote community, RTO manager). Clearly this problem, which is made starker by remoteness from structured work placements and the difficulties of attracting qualified staff, occurs across Australia. The VET in Schools model is predicated on the successful completion of Year 10, and given retention rates for Indigenous students to Year 11, there is a lot of work to be done earlier in their schooling.

The future of VET in Schools

In the AITAC workshop with Phase 2 researchers, one member reminded the meeting that it was not known whether VET in Schools funding will be available after 2004. More recent advice suggests that in 2003 ANTA MINCO will discuss a proposal for funding VET in Schools in the long term16.

Strategy 5: Professional development

Provide professional development for staff delivering VET

Phase 1 findings

Strategy 5 overview

Phase 1 indicated that “there has been a major commitment of funding in this area” (p.41). On the other hand, the report suggests that “most staff are not participating in PD” (p.40). The Phase 1 researchers suggested that more work needed to be done in this area by STAs and RTOs, perhaps with ANTA including requirements for professional development in its funding agreements with STAs. The researchers also emphasised the need for face-to-face involvement of Indigenous people in cross-cultural training programs, against the current trend towards online delivery.

Phase 2 findings

Strategy 5 overview

The Phase 2 research validated these Phase 1 findings. It should be noted, however, that in some jurisdictions, a major effort in cross-cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous staff was made a few years ago, and that numbers of staff participating have fallen off somewhat from that peak. In consultations with stakeholders in Phase 2, it was emphasised that there continues to be a substantial need for cross-cultural awareness training, for two reasons:

- so that non-Indigenous staff in the sector can be better informed about, and respond more appropriately to, Indigenous people, communities, perspectives, needs, concerns, circumstances, and issues

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16 Since the Mid-term Review was completed, the ANTA Ministerial Council endorsed “Principles and Guidelines for Improving Outcomes for Vocational Education and Training in Schools, 2005–2006). These guidelines confirm that the ANTA VET special purpose funds for VET in Schools should continue for 2005–2006.
to combat the racism still to be found in pockets throughout the VET system, sometimes overt and sometimes subtle but institutionalized, that Indigenous clients and potential clients experience in VET – sometimes in the actions of particular individuals, but more often in institutional administrative practices and practices of training delivery that exclude or repel Indigenous participants.

Most STAs are responding to these challenges, as are most RTOs (especially but not only in the public sector) and many ITABs. That some are lagging suggests that the intentions of Partners have not yet been fully embraced throughout the system, and that there are still many organisations that have not yet implemented its Strategies for improving the experience of VET for Indigenous people. To some extent, this may be a reflection on the dissemination of Partners and the follow-up support needed throughout the system (for example, by partners to the Blueprint) to implement it fully.

Stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 also echoed the finding of Phase 1 that there is a continuing need for face-to-face involvement of Indigenous people in programs that encourage cross-cultural awareness and secure identity for Indigenous people, both locally and through networks of support for the Indigenous people involved. But there is a need for something more than “awareness” – informants stressed that Indigenous people and communities need, and increasingly demand, to be treated with a very active and proactive attitude of recognition and respect for Indigenous people, knowledge, cultures and communities. Such attitudes are perhaps most clearly expressed through Indigenous participation in decision-making in all aspects of the funding, design and delivery of VET. It is evident from the experience of our informants that at the moment there is great variation in the degree to which ITABs, Training Package developers, RTOs and staff negotiating and delivering training are responsive to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous communities and individuals at the local and regional level.

Professional development and cultural awareness

Professional development has a crucial role to play in creating cultural awareness in staff involved in the teaching and training of Indigenous students. Although this Strategy has been placed among those to implement Objective 2 of Partners (Indigenous participation, retention and achievement), the implementation and effect of Strategy 5 also relates directly to Objective 3 (Culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered training). Professional development influences the extent to which culturally appropriate materials are supported by teacher practices, the attitudes that teachers and trainers have towards Indigenous students, and the level of support provided to Indigenous students in formal and semi-formal training contexts.

Professional development is intended to give teachers and trainers a greater appreciation of the lives and circumstances of their students so that the outcomes for students can be improved. The implementation of this Strategy is expected to satisfy the need to employ “high-quality teachers” (WA: Indigenous CEO, RTO) and this was seen as a “number one priority; cultural appropriateness and sensitivity of delivery are critical” (ACT: Indigenous training manager). A number of informants, however, were critical of aspects of the current professional development activities related to this
Strategy. They felt that the content of the materials and the depth of treatment of the relevant issues were superficial, and that in some cases the organisational commitment to providing professional development was patchy and “hit and miss” (Vic.: manager, Indigenous organisation). They suggested that the professional development activities needed to be reconceptualised to take them from “add ons” to more integrated and concentrated components of the overall strategic planning process (Vic.: manager, Indigenous organisation). In particular, RTOs could sometimes be described “as being deaf to Indigenous issues and Indigenous people” (Vic.: manager, Indigenous organisation). Given the influential roles of RTOs within the VET system, the need for sustained professional development for all staff, not just those with “designated Koorie positions” is clear (Vic.: manager, Indigenous organisation).

There were many stories, retold by informants, of the disasters that occurred when staff who were not culturally aware and sensitive delivered courses to Indigenous students. The mismatch between teacher experience and expectations and those of the students resulted not only in the gradual withdrawal of students but also left the students with a residue of suspicion or disaffection about trying another VET course.

**Case story**

In a small rural community the Indigenous community wanted to prepare itself to receive and care for the skeletal remains of a number of their forbears whose remains had been taken overseas for study at the end of the nineteenth century. They viewed this as a sacred responsibility. They planned a sequence of studies to prepare themselves to participate in the handling of these remains. First, they would make a study of local genealogy and family oral histories, along with study of their nearly-lost local language, to familiarise themselves more fully with their relationships to those whose remains were being returned. Later, they would learn how to participate in site work with the archaeologists who would assist them in returning the remains to a chosen local burial ground. The Indigenous person contracted to teach in the family-history stage of their learning plan was a local person who had left the area long before. Participants realised that this person knew almost nothing about local family history, and that the person frequently contradicted local knowledge and local Elders. After complaints about the teacher to the college manager, and a failure to get a replacement teacher, they boycotted the course. Attendance fell from 40 participants to 2 in a matter of weeks. Though the students remained committed to continuing their studies towards the site-work part of their learning plan, the module of study was not offered. The students suspect that the college manager is reluctant to find a teacher, perhaps to “punish” them for the boycott. At the time of writing, they were still anxiously awaiting news that the site-work module would proceed.
Professional development and organisational culture

Clearly there is a case for professional development, and this has to be contextualised within training enterprises whose organisational cultures may be fiercely entrenched and whose staff may be reluctant to admit new pedagogies that better match the needs and life experiences of their students. Some participants regarded this culture as being “subtly institutionally racist” (NSW: Indigenous teacher). The idea that “they are only here for the Abstudy” (NSW: Indigenous teacher) is still an unfortunate part of the attitudinal landscape. Students mentioned the discrimination that results from perceptions that they are paid to attend, and the fact that “they think we are privileged” (NSW: Indigenous student). One participant mentioned the threats of “cutting courses if you don’t turn up, and checking up on our attendance by phone” (NSW: Indigenous student). Others mentioned courses from which substantial numbers dropped out because of culturally inappropriate teaching, leading to course closure when numbers fell below the required minimum. (A reasonable person might wonder, in such circumstances, who should take the responsibility for this – the students, seen as fulfilling the cultural stereotype of unreliability by some staff, or the RTO that the students perceive to be providing and permitting the culturally inappropriate delivery to occur.) After such experiences, some reported that “TAFE is just too much of a struggle” (NSW: Indigenous student).

Cultural awareness and the securing of identity extends beyond the knowledge and understanding gained from short courses. It involves a sophisticated appreciation of the history and culture of the Indigenous population and the regional and local differences that impact on the delivery styles used, selection of materials, and forms of support required. For example, knowledge of island culture in the Torres Strait is quite different from an understanding of Aboriginal history. The “importing” of teachers and trainers from other localities has to be done with intelligence and deference to the needs and characteristics of the community. This is in rural and remote locations where the RTO chosen to provide training may staff the delivery with people who have little understanding of the cultural context they are entering. A number of stakeholders agreed that a complex web of circumstances created this situation. Expensive transportation and the lack of suitable on-site accommodation mean that it is difficult to get suitably qualified and community-aware trainers to geographically isolated communities. Funding arrangements that do not acknowledge and compensate for these difficulties further aggravate the situation, and when this is mixed with the frequently unattractive features of remote delivery, community responsiveness is often the casualty. While the “fly in, fly out” mentality is understandable it is also unsatisfactory, and the disenchantment of some remote communities is palpable. A great deal depends on the personalities of the practitioners – something never specified or measured or reported on in any compliance guidelines. Their commitment to see Indigenous people trained and placed is at the heart of “community-sensitive” provision.

Many informants commented on the need for extensive community consultation before the appointment of staff and suggested that the completion of a course in “cultural awareness” conducted in a location geographically separated from the community often resulted in disjunctions that could not be mended. “If you are going to study Aboriginal people, you won’t read about it in books” (WA: Indigenous CEO, RTO). There were also problems of recruiting adequately trained staff to deliver professional development particularly in the more remote areas of Australia.
In some cases, the unequal delivery of professional development to staff and the inadequacy of the funding available for the delivery of the courses (NSW: Indigenous teacher) meant that some staff were well equipped to engage and involve their Indigenous students whilst others were poorly prepared. Students moving between staff with different levels of cultural sensitivity experienced dislocations that often resulted in their withdrawal from training. This was particularly noticeable when Indigenous students moved into “mainstream” courses from the relatively safe confines of carefully crafted courses provided in an Indigenous unit.

Many stakeholders commented on the availability of courses on cultural awareness, and many genuine and sustained efforts are being made to provide these courses. The Western Australia Department of Education and Training has produced a CD-ROM including the topic of cross-cultural cooperation in its induction programs. It has also set up an intranet site called “Billabong” specifically for the use of Indigenous teachers in government-funded RTOs. This site is Indigenous-specific and offers a chat facility, and will shortly be available throughout Australia.

While welcoming these initiatives, a number of informants saw the process as patchy, and only occurring by a lucky chance. They suggested that a more stable and enduring solution would be to embed a unit of competency focusing on cultural awareness into the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training (WA: senior policy adviser, Department of Education and Training).

Informants emphasised the need for all non-Indigenous staff to engage in professional development activities designed to secure identity and increase cultural awareness and cooperation. In Victoria, the Wurreker Strategy calls for greater training in these areas across all levels of VET administration and teaching.

**Professional development for Indigenous staff**

Informants made a distinction between professional development activities for non-Indigenous and Indigenous staff.

By contrast with non-Indigenous staff, Indigenous staff need usable networks, some of which are electronically based, that facilitate contact and exchange between staff who are often geographically remote from one another. Informants also felt that regular meetings between Indigenous staff were critical in providing much-needed support. They also need access to networks for the dissemination of information relevant to their work. (Informants reported that some Indigenous staff in VET do not know about the existence of Partners.) In such ways, the opportunities for professional development could be publicised in a more inclusive way (Vic.: manager, Indigenous organisation).

Informants also emphasised the importance of professional development for Indigenous staff in the context of their career development. Systematic professional development opportunities, coupled with appropriate mentoring, have been shown to be key factors contributing to the career development of Indigenous staff in a number of jurisdictions and organisations.
A number of informants also mentioned that Indigenous teachers and trainers needed professional development in the area of governance and that this would equip Indigenous staff to take up, or continue, their roles as representatives on committees and boards. Victoria is currently developing the “Good Governance Guide” to satisfy this need (Vic.: manager, Indigenous organisation).

**Professional development and the community**

One informant suggested that the provision of professional development should be extended to include the “education of communities” (Qld.: staff member responsible for Training Package implementation, Department of Education and Training). Communities need to be well informed not only about their training needs and the courses that might meet them, but also about their prerogatives and options. This is especially so given:

- the policy of User Choice, which aims to encourage a “free market” of VET providers
- the sometimes aggressively competitive practices of RTOs intent on “selling” training to Indigenous communities
- the policy framework of the AQTF and the consequent equity obligations of training providers
- the existence of Partners as a resource book of ideas through which organisations can respond to community demands, and as a set of expectations and obligations to which the providers of training – indeed the whole VET system – is meant to respond.

A Queensland program may provide a model for other states and territories. This program is aimed to educate providers, potential Indigenous providers and community members about the implications of Training Packages, competency-based training and the framework of the AQTF. Part of the program’s rationale was the stated intention to “educate the general public so that they are then able to demand changes that fit with their community” (Qld.: staff member responsible for Training Package implementation, Department of Education and Training).

The consultation that underpinned the development of *Wurreker* strategy in Victoria resulted in the formation of eight regional decision-making bodies whose constitution will guarantee that communities will be the beneficiaries of the type of interactions mentioned above. The *Wurreker* strategy will also guarantee that Indigenous representatives have a substantial capacity to influence decisions about the selection of professional development that best matches the needs of regional communities.
Strategy 6: Partnerships between schools, post-secondary institutions, industry and communities

Create partnerships between schools, post-secondary institutions, industry and communities

Phase 1 findings  
Strategy 6 overview
As indicated earlier, the Phase 1 researchers indicated that “the agencies that did report provided overwhelming evidence that the ... school–VET industry partnerships ... were progressing well” (p.40).

Phase 2 findings  
Strategy 6 overview
Consultations with stakeholders in Phase 2 mirrored the Phase 1 finding. Stakeholders in Phase 2 mentioned a number of initiatives in which successful partnerships have been established to improve outcomes for Indigenous students. According to one, there are “some creative things with partnerships happening” (WA: Indigenous manager). In New South Wales, for instance, the Aboriginal Programs Unit is working with industry and TAFE to develop partnerships “and relationships” (NSW: DET, Coordinator, VET Services, Aboriginal Programs Unit) that have their practical expression in the development of a memorandum of understanding. “One of their core priorities is transition for Indigenous students into employment” (NSW: DET, Coordinator, VET Services, Aboriginal Programs Unit). The formalisation of these partnership arrangements requires time and negotiation but tends to give more durable results in terms of pathways for Indigenous students.

The Australian Capital Territory’s and Western Australia’s school-based traineeships and apprenticeships mentioned earlier in this report (in relation to Strategy 4) are obvious examples. In an increasing number of places, TAFE colleges and schools are also working together with industry to plan the provision of education and training based on clear employment goals. Some partnerships focus not only on employment outcomes for Indigenous students, but also on broadening the expectations that students have of themselves. In Geraldton, WA, for example, Hammersley Iron and Coburn School are linked in a partnership targeting Indigenous students for support in school and to help them build stronger expectations about the links between school, training and employment. Similarly, there are examples of universities working closely with TAFE colleges to provide more pathways for Indigenous students who wish to articulate between sectors.

In their workshop on the Mid-term Review with the Phase 2 researchers, members of AITAC made a number of points about Strategy 6. One member noted the need for significant support for building and maintaining these partnerships: “It doesn’t happen without significant support”. Another member emphasised that resourcing and leadership are the key issues in building partnerships. To achieve and sustain partnerships, it was argued that there is a need for local plans and commitment. In some cases, this may best be achieved by focusing on the support needed for individual students.
Other members stressed the importance of the community in the partnerships envisaged by Strategy 6: too often, one member stated, Indigenous students “are not being contacted, and not being helped to get courses relevant to them as individuals”. Too often, offerings were not service-driven, and sent clients towards Indigenous-specific courses. There is a need to inform Indigenous clients and potential clients about labour markets in their locality or region. If students are trained for employment not available locally but available elsewhere, then “we’re training our kids to leave our communities”. Communities need to be resourced to drive partnerships, it was argued, rather than (or in addition to) the other agencies in the partnerships (schools, post-secondary institutions).

Members pointed out that ECEF\textsuperscript{17} funding is meant to achieve partnership-building, and in very many cases has in fact done so. On the other hand, one argued, “partnerships” can be just another buzzword in the lexicon of the funding game – not a genuine process of mutual engagement by the partner institutions. Moreover, this member stated, even when schools and TAFE institutes are over the road from one another, partnerships may not be built or sustained. It is clear that building partnerships is often a slow and complex process, and that it can be diverted if the potential partners do not make a sustained commitment to achieving the outcomes sought – better training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people and communities.

Other AITAC members noted that Partners says little about partnerships in relation to corrective services, and that this is a gap that should be bridged. The high levels of Indigenous incarceration across Australia demand that the provision of training is culturally sensitive and matched to the profiles of the communities from which the prisoners come. “Cultural Development Officers” in Queensland work towards establishing links between prisons and the communities, and stakeholders agreed that such initiatives should and could be extended.

Recidivism rates among Indigenous people are exceptionally high and The Post-Release Employment Assistance Program in Queensland was a response to the identified need to assist ex-prisoners to “use the vocational skills they had developed during their time in prison and to make them work-ready” (Qld: manager, Corrective Services). The program focused on prisoners immediately before release and for a period after release. It provided a range of support services and training for inmates who were at high risk of long-term unemployment. These included literacy and numeracy assessment and tuition, job placement support, work experience and vocational training to rectify skills deficits. Initiatives like this reflect the need for ongoing support for Indigenous inmates once they leave the prison system. In this way, the training that they may have received during their time in prison will be made durable and usable by the provision of ancillary services that make employment more of a reality for this group.

It was also noted that there is a national strategy for VET in corrective services, and that this connection could be used in relation to the particular needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous clients in corrective services facilities.

\textsuperscript{17} ECEF – Enterprise and Career Education Foundation. Since the Mid-term Review was completed, the functions of ECEF have been taken over by the Department of Education, Science and Training.
Strategy 7: Higher-level and more industry-relevant VET for Indigenous people

*Increase access to, and attainment in, higher-level VET and more industry-relevant courses for Indigenous students*

**Phase 1 findings**

**Strategy 7 overview**

The Phase 1 researchers report that “Under Strategy 7, there seems to be limited progress. There has been no marked increase in the relative proportion of Indigenous students studying at AQF level 3 and above since 1997” (p.41). On the other hand, work is under way in most jurisdictions towards improving RPL, RCC and credit transfer arrangements for Indigenous clients.

The NCVER Phase 1 Statistical report included the following information about the numbers of Indigenous and non-Indigenous VET students, and the percentages of Indigenous and non-Indigenous VET students under 25 years of age:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Indigenous VET students</td>
<td>38,528</td>
<td>58,046</td>
<td>+50.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of non-Indigenous VET students</td>
<td>1,099,375</td>
<td>1,394,002</td>
<td>+18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Indigenous VET students under 25 years of age</td>
<td>43.0%</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
<td>+3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of non-Indigenous VET students under 25 years of age</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>+2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Indigenous VET students at AQF Certificate III and above</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
<td>+7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of non-Indigenous VET students at AQF Certificate III and above</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>+5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Indigenous VET students at AQF Certificate I</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>+2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of non-Indigenous VET students at AQF Certificate I</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>+1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Indigenous VET students in AQF recognised courses</td>
<td>75.2%</td>
<td>79.9%</td>
<td>+4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of non-Indigenous VET students in AQF recognised courses</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
<td>69.5%</td>
<td>+9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of qualifications completed by Indigenous students in AQF level III and higher</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>27.0%18</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of qualifications completed by Indigenous students in AQF level III and higher</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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18 The NCVER Phase 1 researchers indicated that information on qualifications completed was published for the first time in 2001.
The NCVER Phase 1 Statistical Report showed that, in 2001, there were major differences between metropolitan, rural, and remote Indigenous students in terms of the AQF levels studied:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Remote</th>
<th>All regions combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AQF III or higher</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>38% 36% 35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQF I and II</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>26% 28% 24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module only</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8% 3% 6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparisons of Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) levels studied by Indigenous and non-Indigenous VET students, expressed as a percentage of the respective Indigenous and non-Indigenous totals.

Key: I = Indigenous        NI = Non-indigenous

The Phase 1 NCVER researchers wrote (p.29):

> Overall, the proportion of Indigenous VET students studying AQF-certified courses was greater than that of non-Indigenous students (Indigenous 79%, non-Indigenous 68%). However, Indigenous students tended to study for lower-level qualifications than their non-Indigenous colleagues. In 2001, only 34% of Indigenous students were studying at AQF Certificate III level or above, compared with 44% of non-Indigenous students or, looking at the converse, 45% of Indigenous students were studying at levels of AQF I and II compared with 24% of non-Indigenous students (the missing percentages are for study which is non-AQF or for which AQF level is unknown). There were no marked changes in these relative proportions over the period 1997 to 2001.

More detailed comparison of the proportions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students studying at AQF Certificate III level or above in remote areas shows a striking difference. In 2001, 26% of Indigenous students were studying AQF III and above compared with almost double that proportion, 44%, of non-Indigenous students. This lower proportion of Indigenous students in remote areas studying at the AQF Certificate III level and above may have been influenced by the number of Indigenous students in those areas who spoke a language other than English at home. For Indigenous students in remote areas who spoke English at home, 31% were studying at AQF Certificate III level, compared with only 16% of those who spoke a language other than English at home, a difference of 14%. For AQF Certificate I and II levels (combined) the effect of English was much weaker (50% and 56%, giving a difference of only 6%).

Action is needed to encourage and assist Indigenous students in remote areas to take up AQF Certificate III study. This could include looking at ways to assist students who speak languages other than English at home (pp.29–30).
Strategy 7 overview

Consultations with stakeholders in the Phase 2 research confirmed the general finding of Phase 1 regarding Strategy 7. The question of access to, and attainment in, higher-level VET and more industry-relevant courses for Indigenous students was a common topic of discussion amongst informants. It was generally acknowledged that there is a deep divide separating “access” and “attainment” in relation to Indigenous students in VET. The statistical material collated by NCVER in Phase 1 of the Mid-term Review supports this. It was also agreed that Indigenous students are clustered around the Certificate I and II levels of the AQF, with relatively few students moving beyond the ceiling of Certificate II.

Various reasons were given for the low rate of progress of Indigenous students beyond Certificate II. Informants offered the following explanations:

- location and cost
- forms and duration of funding for programs
- the competitive and commercial practices of some RTOs
- the types of provision available
- the amount and quality of student support
- systemic features of the Australian Quality Training Framework.

It is clear that these reasons interact with one another to produce differential outcomes for Indigenous students.

Location and cost

The cost of delivery in rural and remote areas by the traditional providers such as TAFE is prohibitive and people simply have to “take what is offered” (WA: senior policy adviser, Department of Education and Training). This applies particularly to Certificate III and above. This view was echoed by a large number of informants.

Imagine a large map of Australia. Placed on the map are different coloured wooden blocks. The colours of the blocks represent training at different qualification levels. For each industry, blocks are piled on top of one another to make towers representing the different AQF levels available at that particular location: one block represents a prevocational course, a second is added to represent Certificate I, a third is added to represent Certificate II, a fourth is added to represent Certificate III, a fifth is added for Certificate IV, a sixth for Diploma level. What we notice about the blocks on the map is that they cluster around capital cities and a few other major metropolitan areas. Around Melbourne or Perth, for example, there are many different-coloured tall towers, representing the availability of many different industry qualifications at every level. In rural areas, clustered mostly around provincial cities and larger towns, there are some tall towers but more are middle-sized, and they are in fewer areas. In more remote and isolated areas, there are few towers and they are frequently just one block high – only prevocational courses are available. In a few locations, there are unexpectedly high towers, representing good VET provision in a particular industry of
regional importance; some represent the efforts of Indigenous communities developing their own enterprises, and attracting good training opportunities into the area in response to their industry-based training needs.

Part of the point of this exercise is to recognise that part of the problem of access to VET for Indigenous people is opportunity: there is simply a lack of opportunity to undertake training in many parts of Australia, because little training is available locally. As the Blueprint recognises,

Indigenous people are widely dispersed across Australia. Strong ties to place, culture, land and family remain important to the present-day Indigenous population. The widespread dispersal of Indigenous people calls for a VET sector that is flexible and responsive to cultural attributes and the demands of the community it serves.

This dispersal of Indigenous people has important implications for VET as 64 per cent of Indigenous people are living in rural areas and live more than 50km from the nearest TAFE college (p.39).

The Blueprint goes on to suggest that the needs of these Indigenous clients and potential clients can be met by training centres, community clusters and mobile units as well as information technology that will give online access to VET. The research for the Mid-term Review suggested that these strategies for delivery of training to rural and remote areas were being tried, and that many representatives of many RTOs were “on the road” selling training to remote Indigenous communities. Some such training proved to be relevant and effective for the Indigenous individuals and communities concerned. On the other hand, there were many examples where cynical salespersons had “signed-up” clients for packages that were poorly suited and/or irrelevant to the language and interests of the clients they were meant to serve, and more or less irrelevant to the industry and employment opportunities in the area.

**Funding arrangements**

All participants mentioned funding arrangements and the effects these have on the quality and continuity of VET provision. The sometimes unpredictable fortunes of providers mean that short-term immediately responsive courses are offered and long-term and more developmental planning to respond to the needs of the community and its need for capacity-building is ignored.

Funding arrangements that do not adequately discriminate between the particular needs of the urban, rural, and remote provision of VET was a common problem mentioned by informants. Delivery of training was defined not only as interaction with students, but it involved teacher support, professional development, coordination and networking. It is clearly more difficult and expensive the further apart the teachers and trainers are (NSW: Indigenous teacher) and it was suggested that the funding formulas need to be better adjusted to take account of these differences.

Another problem related to funding occurs in larger government-funded and run organisations. Funding is contingent on enrolment numbers. If the number of enrolments is at or above an agreed minimum, the course is offered. The corollary is that when and for whatever reason the enrolments fall, the funding is removed. This
stop-start approach to funding masks the more endemic problems that underlie the falling enrolments. Problems such as lack of Indigenous teachers, inappropriate materials or assessment, and a culturally inappropriate learning environment may have caused the drop-off in attendance and this then results in the withdrawal of the funding and the abandoning of the particular course and program. Such circumstances militate against the possibilities for systematic evaluation of the problem, the articulation and trialling of possible solutions, and the idea of improvement in response to concerted evaluation.

The more general lesson is that short-term and episodic funding undermines long-term and developmental planning at the local level for the staffing and the running of courses (WA: Indigenous coordinator; NSW: Indigenous teacher). This is one of the most vexed and enduring of the underlying tensions between the current form of administration of the VET system nationally and the aspirations of providers at the local level. It is all the more vexing for providers deeply committed to responsiveness to the specific training needs of local Indigenous communities and local industry.

The competitive and commercial practices of some RTOs

One of the reasons informants gave for the low rates of progress of Indigenous students beyond Certificate III was that private RTOs often put their concern for financial viability ahead of their commitment to the students and their VET outcomes. When profit drives provision, the resulting competitive practices often result in an influx of RTOs into a community.

Case story

One Northern Territory informant described a situation where 39 representatives of RTOs and other education providers visited a community of about 2,000 people in a single week. The community could barely cope with the influx, and was obliged to appoint a liaison officer to handle them.

The enthusiasm of some RTOs and some representatives of RTOs for “sign-ups” comes from a set of funding arrangements that do not necessarily guarantee consistent or ongoing teaching and training. In some jurisdictions, and under some funding arrangements for programs, commercial providers may receive as much as 70 per cent of the funding for a student on commencement; in other jurisdictions, pre-payment is the exception rather than the rule, and the majority of per-student funding comes for completions. When the majority of funding is paid on commencement, and when courses prove inappropriate for particular groups of students (for example, because of the language, literacy and numeracy requirements of Training Certificate III and above), students may in fact discontinue their studies. Because of the way the data is kept, however, they may still appear in the statistics as “not yet complete” in terms of student curriculum hours and module completions. The statistics for commencement, attendance, retention and completion are possibly skewed as a result of this practice. This may provide some part of the explanation for the relatively low rates of completion for Indigenous students – not just at Certificate III, but even at Certificate I and II levels.
Some stakeholders also commented on the number of Certificate I and II courses that Indigenous students had completed, particularly in rural and remote areas. They suggested that these courses are relatively easy to deliver and complete, and therefore attractive to an RTO that maybe more intent on completions than seamless transitions to higher-level qualifications. The fact that the gaining of the Certificate I and Certificate II qualifications infrequently lead to employment-mixed with the low level of Indigenous aspirations and expectation means that Indigenous students are “repeating” not “progressing” in disproportionately large numbers.

A number of participants provided examples of ways in which the problem of low rates of completion at Certificate III and above could be addressed. In New South Wales, for example, a recently signed memorandum of understanding between the DET and Australia Post guarantees employment for Indigenous students who have completed their Certificate III in Frontline Management with Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE. The expectation of employment at the end of the course reinforces the obvious link between higher-level qualifications and employment.

The amount and quality of student support

Informants regarded support for Indigenous students as being critical to their progress. This support needed to take different forms depending on the community and its location. In some cases, childcare was needed. In other cases, a particular kind of academic support was required to bridge the all-too-frequent gap between the end of formal schooling and the demands of the training system. “Second chance courses that help with a return to study are always an asset” (WA: Indigenous coordinator, Department of Education and Training). Participants made a clear distinction between the kinds of support that would assist a student in the “mainstream” as opposed to a student working in an Indigenous Unit with customised materials. The former needed “mentoring, coaching, role modelling and Indigenous staff to refer to” (WA: senior policy adviser, Department of Education and Training).

Participants also saw the need for “spaces” to be made available for Indigenous students whether they were studying mainstream courses or Indigenous-specific programs. A common and welcoming meeting place where the services could be concentrated and where students felt comfortable was considered to be central rather than peripheral to improving student retention. One Indigenous teacher commented that across the many campuses of the TAFE institute where she worked there was not one such meeting place and that this was a reflection of the organisation “dealing with its own administrative processes rather than focusing on student needs” (NSW: Indigenous teacher). The absence of a sense of place and the difficulties encountered with the labyrinth of institutional procedures, staff and materials beyond the Certificate II level have meant that some Indigenous people “won’t touch TAFE. It is just too much of a struggle” (NSW: Indigenous teacher; Queensland: Indigenous teacher).
Case story: Bindaree beefs up its Indigenous employment

In Inverell, NSW, Bindaree Beef’s meatworks has established an RTO to deliver training to its employees. In the past two years, stung by the rate of Indigenous unemployment (and its consequences for individuals and families in the local community), the human resources manager has made a push to employ more members of the Indigenous community. The meatworks – the largest Australian-owned processor and exporter of prime Australian beef – is the largest employer in town, and employment in the enterprise is very attractive – salaries for skilled workers range around $50,000 a year.

This manager chats to local Indigenous people when he sees them around the town, suggesting that, if they want work, they come to see him at the meatworks. When they come, he tells them they need to be drug-free to get a job, and that they should wait a couple of months before making an application if they did not test negative for drugs. One employee didn’t follow this advice and failed the test several times before going into rehab. Once drug-free, he applied again, and was employed. A year later, he is a valued employee (and drug-free), earning a substantial salary. The HR manager persists unobtrusively with people who want the work, following-up their initial enquiries and gently encouraging them to apply.

In the past two years, the enterprise has employed 170 Indigenous people among a total workforce of about 1,000 over its three sites. At Inverell, where the workforce numbers about 570, about 70 new Indigenous workers have been employed in this same two-year period. The company aims to ensure that its rate of Indigenous employment meets or exceeds the proportion of Indigenous people in the local community – probably about 7 per cent in Inverell. Indigenous workers fill a variety of roles in the organisation – as packers, boners and slicers, maintenance workers, stock persons, slaughter floor supervisors and office administrators.

The HR manager writes: “The company has also employed a specialist Indigenous employment consultant to conduct pre-vocational information sessions and provide ongoing support for its Indigenous employees. These provisions reflect the commitment that Bindaree Beef has to ensuring that its Indigenous staff are provided with the best chance to maximise their employment opportunities in the future. Bindaree Beef has adopted a holistic approach which successfully combines practical work experience with relevant structured training that is nationally recognised”.

After a three-month probationary period, every employee is offered training at Certificate II level in meat processing. Some progress to Certificate III courses where further training is relevant in specialist positions. This training gives the workers access to work in the industry anywhere in Australia. Indigenous employees participate in training as much as non-Indigenous employees do. The RTO has three full-time trainers – all employees promoted from other jobs to training positions. Because the trainers are permanent and on-site, they are able to offer language, literacy, and numeracy training and support to those Indigenous trainees who need it as a basis for their studies. The completion rate for Indigenous employees in the Certificate II course – and for those who do Certificate III – is about 90 per cent.

The RTO gets support for Indigenous training from the DEWR (Department of Education and Workplace Relations) STEP program. For the employer, this covers costs of induction and related expenses. The enterprise is proud to be a significant employer of Indigenous
people in its community – it is a signatory to the Indigenous Corporate Leaders Program of DEWR. At one of the company’s other sites, an Indigenous person has been manager of the meat processing operations. Perhaps an Indigenous member of staff will reach management level at Inverell in the not-too-distant future.

It’s a win-win situation: from the perspective of the local Indigenous community, the meatworks is now a reliable source of work and training; from the perspective of the company, the Inverell meatworks has now tapped into an expanded and stable supply of local workers.

The Australian Quality Training Framework

Another perspective on the issue of progress into and beyond Certificate III level focuses on the requirements of the new AQTF. Standard 9 of the AQTF requires RTOs to identify, negotiate, plan and implement appropriate learning and assessment strategies to meet the needs of each of its clients: Many informants consulted during the Mid-term Review believed that in practice, there is insufficient emphasis on this requirement. As one informant put it, “Provision needs to be the focus, not the product” (Qld.: manager, Training Package implementation).

Many informants consulted during the Mid-term Review believed that competency-based training (CBT) has been interpreted by some practitioners as encouraging assessment by small steps, on a small scale, resulting in a fragmented style of delivery that runs against the needs of many students. Many valuable principles of teaching and learning seem to have been abandoned under the weight of an assessment regimen that relies on the demonstration and recording of competency, not in the more global dynamics of the process of acquiring competency. The discounting of the central role of the learner is nowhere more observable than in the case of Indigenous students. While the AQTF encourages responsive delivery, the practices reported by stakeholders, and their reflections on the actual delivery of training reflected a profound difference between “the idea and the reality”.

Arguably, to accommodate these understandings into the design and delivery of VET would not merely accommodate the “Indigenous learning styles” of this group of learners – it could also demonstrate that making particular accommodations to meet the needs of groups identified and treated as exceptions is not the best way to handle the requirements of equity. On the contrary, it might demonstrate that equity requirements are best met by changing “the mainstream” – that is, by removing the obstacles that stand in the way of particular groups. This is the kind of change that has been wrought, in relation to gender, by the adoption of non-sexist language, now so widespread as to be almost universal. Stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 lead us to believe that much training is currently experienced by Indigenous learners as culturally exclusive; only when VET becomes thoroughly inclusive – that is, by changes to “the mainstream” – will there be widespread recognition that VET aims to meet their needs as learners, not simply as Indigenous learners.
Availability and delivery of Training Package qualifications

Other stakeholders commented on the disjunction between Certificate II and Certificate III courses. Certificates I and II were described as being accessible to a broad range of students provided there was support in the form of language, literacy and numeracy tutoring and mentoring. Beyond Certificate II, the “bookwork increases” (WA: executive officer, DEST) and modules impose substantially increased language, literacy, numeracy and learning demands on Indigenous students, particularly in the traditional trades. If students are not adequately prepared and supported, the result can be attrition rates that are exceptionally high (WA: executive officer, DEST).

The researchers heard clear evidence that in some jurisdictions Indigenous advice and advisers have been taken very seriously indeed, and programs, policies and practices have been modified. Sometimes, to meet the needs of particular client groups, providers are obliged to adapt Training Packages to the very limits of what might be termed “customisation” and to the limits of usual accreditation and assessment requirements. This appears to occur more frequently in rural and remote settings, and in other marginalised settings. Sometimes culturally sensitive providers of VET simply – and knowingly – subvert or bypass the ordinary requirements of packages to make relevant and appropriate training available to clients whose needs they can meet with other, related but different forms of training.

Another issue is that some Training Packages offer no courses at Certificate I and II levels. Various Actions under Strategy 7 of the Blueprint propose recognition of prior learning or current competencies, skills recognition, exemption processes, advice and support, and marketing campaigns as ways to encourage access to higher-level courses by Indigenous clients. In short, the aim is to identify, clarify and encourage pathways into Certificate III and above. Action 7.7 focuses on the nub of the problem in some industry areas. There is, however, there is no industry-based pathway into Certificate III because no lower-level courses are available in those industries’ Training Packages. Blueprint Action 7.7 states:

STAs to build into state and territory plans and industry training plans priorities for:

- enabling skills (basic work and lifeskills training that provide a pathway into further training)
- preparatory and prevocational courses
- AQF Certificate levels I and II.

From the perspective of the ITAB concerned, there may be little urgency or energy for building pathways into Certificate III courses through the provision of Certificate I and II. From the perspective of Indigenous participants, however, especially those who have not completed secondary education, courses at lower levels may be essential preconditions for access to Certificate III training in the area. From the perspective of these clients, it might be thought that the ITABs concerned are failing to recognise and respect this client group, and, in particular, to recognise and respect for the particular needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people, knowledge, cultures and communities.
Case story

In the Northern Territory, there are no secondary schools for Indigenous students in many communities away from major population centres. In remote areas, the formal, “mainstream” education of many Indigenous students finishes at the end of primary school. VET is an increasingly important source of further education for these students, and considerable effort and funding has been directed towards meeting this need. In 12 communities, disused technical and adult education facilities are in the process of being refurbished and re-opened to provide VET in response to this need; eight are operational and delivering VET programs. The new centres are under the control of community boards. The support provided for the centres means that continuity of provision is better assured, and there is a genuine opportunity to substantially enhance the general education of the people involved, as well as training in specific industry areas of interest to the participating communities. As one informant said, “These centres are not only important for the education of the individuals concerned, or for the training and employment outcomes they may achieve, especially where there is little in the way of employment opportunities in the community to start with. They have really important social and cultural outcomes for the people and for the communities – but who measures or cares about that?” In these centres, it would be of great assistance if Certificate I and II courses were available in industry areas relevant to their needs, interests and circumstances, but these local needs cannot be met if no training is offered at this level. This must count as a lost opportunity both for Indigenous communities and for the industry area – the communities because they cannot get a foothold into training in the area, and the industry because it loses the benefits of diversity and skilled local employees in its workforce.

At their workshop with Phase 2 researchers, members of AITAC suggested that there is a need for financial incentives for Indigenous clients and potential clients to improve provision and access at Certificate III and above. In Western Australia, TAFE colleges are being offered financial incentives to offer places to Indigenous clients at Certificate III and above. One hundred places are reserved for Indigenous clients centrally, and colleges will receive additional funding if they fill places with Indigenous clients.

The issue of Certificate III entry points creates the obvious problems described above. Stakeholders also discussed the reverse of this problem, commenting on the Indigenous under-use of RPL and RCC processes by Indigenous students. This under-use was explained in terms of the prodigious amounts of paper that have to be consumed to support these applications and the determined procedures that support RPL and RCC. “Control and rigid compliance militate against achievement” (WA: Indigenous Member of Parliament).

Both the paperwork and the procedures were often “unfriendly” to Indigenous students who were then obliged to revisit content they already knew. Not surprisingly, the courses then failed to engage them, increasing the likelihood that they would not complete their studies, and limiting their access to higher-level courses. Stakeholders commented that RPL and RCC were useful tools, particularly when the need for, and shortage of, Indigenous teachers and trainers is acknowledged so widely. They suggested that these processes could be used much more effectively to accredit Indigenous teachers with a Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training, adding to the pool of Indigenous staff to work with Indigenous students.
Objective 3: Culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered training

Achieve increased, culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered training, including the use of IT for Indigenous people

There is a powerful tension between two aspects of Objective 3: between the focus on culturally appropriate delivery on the one hand, and, on the other, “flexibly delivered training including the use of IT”. The strategies headlined in *Partners in a Learning Culture* are slightly clearer about the need to achieve culturally appropriate content and forms of delivery, but the specific Strategies and Actions listed in the *Blueprint* are less so. It might be argued that the *Blueprint* fails to indicate just how much work is needed if the design, development and delivery of training are to be genuinely culturally appropriate – and experienced as such by Indigenous learners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headline strategies for Objective 3 promoted in <em>Partners in a Learning Culture</em></th>
<th>Strategies for Objective 3 identified in the <em>Blueprint</em></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Catering for rural and remote communities.</td>
<td>8. Establish training centres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Developing electronic and online learning strategies specifically for Indigenous Australians.</td>
<td>9. Training in IT skills and use.</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Encouraging community expression of training and assessment needs.</td>
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To some extent, we have concluded that achieving cultural appropriateness in each of these things – design, development and delivery – is a “missing strategy” in the *Blueprint*. If *Partners* or the *Blueprint* are being revised, it would be worth considering making this a separate Strategy, with specific Actions enumerated for Training Package developers, ITABs, RTOs, training centres, group training organisations and other groups.

Stakeholders consulted during the Phase 2 research – especially Indigenous stakeholders including students, teachers and representatives of Indigenous organisations – made it very clear that the content and delivery of VET are all too frequently experienced by Indigenous students as excluding. Too often, we heard about training that was ignorant of or irrelevant to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous students and communities, both in terms of the content of training and the way it is delivered.

Many people and organisations do overcome these obstacles, however, mostly by thoughtful and responsive consultation. On the other hand, we also found instances where people simply found ways around the obstacles, by doing things in ways other than what is prescribed and provided for in Training Packages or the assessment and reporting provisions of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF).
Objective 3 overview

Key findings from the NCVER Phase 1 Statistical Report

There is a significant trend toward Indigenous people participating in information technology-related courses, especially at Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) level II. Despite this, pass rates have decreased. The Phase 1 researchers indicated that more than 70 per cent of the actions required under this objective had been commenced or completed. There was controversy among some of those providing evidence to the Phase 1 researchers about the bracketing together of culturally appropriate training with flexible delivery and IT training. The term “culturally appropriate”, it was argued, should not be confined to discussions of Indigenous people in remote areas, and, further, “flexible delivery” and the use of IT do not guarantee solutions to the problems of providing and achieving success in VET for Indigenous clients (p.43). The researchers write: “One reason for the controversy surrounding this objective is the perception that large amounts of funds have been expended and are committed under this Objective, both through the infrastructure program and the flexible learning initiatives” (p.44).

Three general issues identified by the Phase 1 researchers needing further attention were the need:

- for further research into the value of the investment in online programs and products for Indigenous VET, and their impact in achieving the desired outcomes outlined in the Blueprint
- to develop a greater range of culturally appropriate programs, practices and products in Indigenous VET, independently of the issue of IT and flexible learning
- to take advantage of the research and best-practice models of flexible delivery beyond IT and online learning, including for example:
  - the use of work-based learning in Indigenous Health Worker training
  - alternative structuring of the ‘academic’ year to accommodate seasonal and ceremonial obligations
  - block release with use of community-based mentors and elders for student support as is used at Tauondi College in South Australia (pp.44–45).

Phase 2 findings

Research conducted for the Mid-term Review indicates that action is under way on Strategy 8 (Training Centres). Informants suggested that, where they had been established, some training centres had become the focus for community activity and training. Similarly, action is under way on Strategy 9 (Training in IT skills and use), and there was evidence of widespread interest in IT among Indigenous people and communities. Informants certainly provided evidence that some IT was indeed in culturally appropriate forms; some informants were anxious that online delivery might sometimes be of a kind that would fail to engage the interest of Indigenous learners who may, under some circumstances, prefer face-to-face delivery of training.
At their workshop with the Phase 2 researchers, members of AITAC commented that the notion of “flexibly delivered” training needs a much broader interpretation than IT alone — to encompass a range of kinds of flexibility including times of offering training, the content of training, and the kind of pedagogies appropriate for Indigenous clients.

As has been noted, the emphasis of Objective 3 on the cultural appropriateness and flexible delivery of training to meet the needs of Indigenous clients has retreated from view somewhat in the Blueprint by comparison with Partners. Cultural appropriateness and more flexible modes, styles and times of delivery are not just relevant to the work of training centres or IT skills and use. They are crucial to the whole work of the VET system. The research conducted for the Mid-term Review found a number of examples of Training Packages, ITABs and RTOs that were achieving cultural appropriateness and more flexible delivery of training. But it also heard from many informants who complained of Training Packages, ITABs and RTOs that were neither culturally appropriate nor flexible about delivery.

**Strategy 8: Training centres**

*Establish training centres*

**Phase 1 findings**

**Strategy 8 overview**

The Phase 1 researchers concluded that “the [infrastructure] program is a major success and has strong support from all relevant partner agencies,” delivering “both nationally accredited programs and some non-formal IT training and experience” (p.44).

**Phase 2 findings**

**Strategy 8 overview**

The Phase 2 researchers received less comment about Strategy 8 from stakeholders than the Phase 1 study researchers did. Perhaps this is because Phase 1 collected data from partners to the Blueprint whereas Phase 2 consulted with other stakeholders, some of whom were less informed about infrastructural issues in VET. Nevertheless, evidence collected in Phase 2 validated the general finding from Phase 1.

State and territory training authorities, with funding from ANTA, invite tenders for the construction of skill centres. This program also provides funding for equipping these centres. Centres have been established where they are in no obvious conflict with other providers. Skill centres were seen to be particularly important in rural and remote areas and in the Northern Territory, for example, there are 4 regional skill centres which were, in July 2002 absorbed into NT DEET. The four centres employ 15 staff. At the territory level, the Department of Employment, Education and Training is also involved with the refurbishment of community centres in remote locations. Four of these centres were operating in 2003, with plans to increase this number. The ultimate goal is to hand the centres back to the community to administer. The advantages of a community-owned centre in a remote location are clear, and stakeholders commented on the wide range of opportunities for community development provided by their existence. “The benefits are social, commercial, structural and educational” (NT: DEET, Indigenous equity initiatives officer). Centres of both kinds are seen to be crucial in delivering VET and other non-accredited courses to Indigenous students since they

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18 Now referred to as skill centres.
provide the venue and the facilities for ongoing programs. On-site provision is regarded as much more satisfactory than “drop-in, drop-out” programs.

Some stakeholders criticised the competitive tendering process for skill centres – they felt that the exercise had become one in which skill at writing tenders rather than the inherent good sense of the submission was the criterion for success. Further, the absence of recurrent funding to support skill centres was seen as a real threat to the continuity of their programs and the progressive delivery of their courses.

Case story

Abmusic (WA) is a highly successful enterprise that supports the development of Indigenous musicians, sound technicians and computer musicians. It was supported by ANTA in 1999 to extend its premises to include studios, classrooms, a recording studio and practice rooms, tutorial rooms and an administration block (Devendish, B: A Brief History of Abmusic, paper presented at the Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council National Conference, November, 2002, Surfers Paradise). In 2002, Abmusic received further funding to establish its computer music studio.

In the immediate term, Abmusic is about to commence a program developed in collaboration with the Western Australian Department of Education, to place Certificate IV students in mentored positions in schools. As more schools achieve RTO status, these people will be ready, on graduation and with the acquisition of the requisite Workplace Assessment Training Package units, to teach the Music Industry Training Package. Added to which, Abmusic currently employs three staff members in clerical and administrative training positions under the CDEP program.

As can be seen, the Abmusic College of Music, over the twelve years or so since its inception, has been progressively “living out” the four Objectives of Partners in a Learning Culture. It has developed a culturally appropriate structure, course content and delivery that has moved it from struggling unfocused school of 12 students to a thriving training provider with a current enrolment of 157. It is a truly Aboriginal organisation wherein Indigenous and non-Indigenous people work together to the same end – the advancement of Indigenous musicians – a spirit of genuine reconciliation. (Devendish, B: A Brief History of Abmusic, paper presented at the Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council National Conference, November 2002, Surfers Paradise).

The spirit, organisation and commitment of Abmusic and its staff are indisputable. The support of ANTA through the provision of funding for the equipping of a new centre is an architectural reality. However, the new funding models that are calculated on the specified number of nominal hours overlook some important considerations about the progress of Indigenous students. Traditionally students have been able to “repeat” those parts of their course where they are not demonstrating competency. Time was recognised as being a flexible component of the teaching and training environment. However, funding is now dependent on the monthly reporting of student achievement of the competencies. The result has been that teachers are rushing about assessing competencies with little time left for teaching, and students are staying away for their assessments. This situation is made more critical by the fact that Austudy and Abstudy also fund on a calculation of nominal hours and will not fund support courses for Indigenous students. The ingenious development of a Certificate in Industry Skills Support course that is now nationally accredited partially solved this problem but the tensions between the AQTF and the reporting protocols necessary for Austudy and Abstudy, have not yet been resolved.
Strategy 9: IT training

Training in IT skills and use

Phase 1 findings

Strategy 9 overview

The Phase 1 researchers concluded that “there is a large amount of activity in this area” (p.44). A variety of packages and ANTA’s “Equity Toolboxes” “had been produced focusing on Indigenous learners/learning needs” (p.44). The Phase 1 researchers noted two caveats, however:

- though a number of informants strongly supported the use of online resources for professional development and teaching, “they ... emphasise that in order for this approach to be successful with Indigenous students, it must be complemented with both face-to-face teaching and good technical support”

- “Given the substantial resources being devoted to IT training and the provision of online programs and products, it is of concern that a significant number of survey respondents did not rate this as a high priority” (p.44).

The NCVER Phase 1 Statistical Report provided this data on the number of Indigenous students in information technology courses in 1997 and 2001:

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Indigenous VET students in IT courses</td>
<td>1,640</td>
<td>2,930</td>
<td>+79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase 2 findings

Strategy 9 overview

In general, the findings of the Phase 2 consultations with stakeholders mirrored those of the Phase 1 research. Phase 2 found that:

- there is a large amount of activity in this area, with initiatives under way in most jurisdictions for which relevant data was available

- there are some problems with online delivery for Indigenous clients – though Phase 2 also noted cases in which providers had considerable success with online learning in Indigenous communities

- there may be a mismatch between the amount of resources allocated to IT training and the priority it is given by informants – perhaps because many informants would prefer face-to-face teaching and learning, though providers aiming to reach scattered and remote clients believe it is possible to do so effectively when face-to-face contact is not feasible.
Case story

In remote areas of the Northern Territory, “Info Exchange”, a Victorian not-for-profit group, has linked with a number of RTOs to provide computers and training for communities (NT: DEET, senior project officer VET Strategy and Development). IT access is varied in the Northern Territory, with some regions having good quality access while others do not. In general, remote communities found the new forms of communication “popular and engaging” (NT: DEET, senior project officer VET Strategy and Development). In some cases, the community was using the facility for the global marketing of their skills and products (particularly Indigenous art), thereby increasing the employment possibilities available within the community concerned. In particular, both the older and younger members of the communities expressed interest in the design of websites, and in the use of the technology for animation, art and music. “The key to the success of the training lies in the provision of the technology applied in culturally appropriate ways” (NT: DEET, senior project officer VET-Strategy and Development). One limitation to the success of this initiative was that family kinship taboos and community protocols sometimes meant that particular community members could not work in the same place at the same time – as happened when the computer hardware was located in schools or in skill centres.

Still another approach to increasing IT awareness is seen in Western Australia, where a mobile van takes IT training into communities (WA: senior policy adviser, Department of Education and Training).

Initiatives like these relate predominantly to the provision of non-accredited training. The Australian Capital Territory project with Year 10 students described earlier in this report outlines the ways in which students can be encouraged to take on IT training in a formal and accredited way.

At their workshop with Phase 2 researchers, members of AITAC noted that Edith Cowan University and James Cook University have been working on research into online delivery of VET to Indigenous students, and that this research may inform future initiatives in this area.
Objective 4: Develop closer links between VET outcomes for Indigenous people, and industry and employment

As discussed in relation to Objectives 1 to 3, there are differences in the way the intentions of Objective 4 are presented in *Partners in a Learning Culture* and the *Blueprint*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Strategies for Objective 4 identified in the <em>Blueprint</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing one-stop “training and employment shops” for Indigenous communities.</td>
<td>10. Establish and expand partnerships between Indigenous people, communities, training providers and industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding New Apprenticeship opportunities for Indigenous people.</td>
<td>11. Expand opportunities for Indigenous people participating in CDEP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customising Training Packages to allow for training and assessment tailored to specific local Indigenous needs and contexts.</td>
<td>12. Promote Indigenous training and employment through ITABs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding qualifications within Training Packages to ensure that the specific training needs of Indigenous communities are catered for.</td>
<td>13. Promote Indigenous training and employment through group training companies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding VET opportunities for Indigenous people participating in the Community Development and Employment Program (CDEP).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expanding opportunities for Indigenous people in group training schemes.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Expanding opportunities for Indigenous people in (skills centres (training centres).</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding opportunities for Indigenous people in small business and enterprise development.</td>
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Two important emphases of *Partners* that are more or less rendered invisible in the *Blueprint* are those concerning “customisation” and Indigenous “small business and enterprise development”. They are not lost altogether; but the specific Actions listed in the *Blueprint* focus on what the partner signatories can do, with less emphasis on how the signatory organisations can engage and work with communities, on the one hand, and industry and employers, on the other. Moreover, much of the real work on partnerships happens at the local level; there is only so much that peak organisations can do to foster and sustain them.

As stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 demonstrated, there is much more work to be done on the customisation of Training Packages and their delivery, and work is needed in more places if the success stories we heard about partnerships are to be replicated around the country.
Objective 4 overview

Key findings from the NCVER Phase 1 Statistical Report

- Growth in Indigenous peoples’ participation in New Apprenticeships is positive, especially at the AQF Certificate III level.

- National VET employment outcomes data is not particularly useful in relation to Indigenous people as Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) employment is not distinguished from other forms of employment. This notwithstanding, employment outcomes for Indigenous VET students have improved overall but remain considerably poorer than for non-Indigenous students.

- There are significant differences between the geographic locations of Indigenous students and other students, with most Indigenous students residing in remote Australia compared with most other students being located in metropolitan areas (both remote and regional).

- There are significant differences among Indigenous students themselves in terms of their participation, achievements and outcomes from VET depending on their geographic location.

- While VET enhances employability it can also yield several other valid outcomes.

The NCVER Statistical Report also indicated that, in 1997, 52 per cent of Indigenous TAFE graduates were employed after completion of a TAFE course, compared with 63 per cent in 2001 – an 11 per cent increase.

The Phase 1 researchers reported that about 46 per cent of the actions required under this objective had been commenced or completed (though this may be an underestimate because not all survey responses had been received by the time Phase 1 reported). The researchers concluded that “progress under Objective 4 is less than under the other objectives. In particular, there are problems, it seems, with Actions 10.4 (lack of reporting) and 10.5. All the actions under Strategy 11 need more attention. This relates also to Strategy 12, where ITABs and other agencies have responsibilities” (p.47).

The researchers emphasised the significance of this Objective: “Acknowledging how important vocational qualifications are for employment, the Blueprint points to the extreme nature of the problem ... The Indigenous working-age population is growing at twice the rate it is in the non-Indigenous population, and already in 2000, unemployment was running at over three times the non-Indigenous rate. Without CDEP, the rate would be 40 per cent, not the 23 per cent of the official figures. Moreover, this does not take account of the withdrawal of large numbers of people from the workforce altogether. Clearly, unless a solution is found to this problem, the existing living standards in communities, already far too low on so many indicators, will plummet even further. Pathways into meaningful work are urgently needed ... ” (p.47).
The researchers reported the views of their informants that the development of partnerships is crucial to achieve results in linking VET to employment outcomes, as is the whole-of-government approach to the issue. They concluded, however, that:

- it has to be a regional approach, sensitive to regional differences in what Indigenous people want from VET. The whole-of-government approach only works, our respondents argued, when it engages actively with local Indigenous community organisations, with local industry, local government, RTOs and schools (p.47)

- Respondents argued that the VET sector is not simply a partner in this approach, but it has a critical role in building capacity of people and organisations within the Indigenous community to participate effectively as equal partners in the process (p.48).

Four general issues about Objective 4 identified by the Phase 1 researchers were:

- the need to brief ITABs more fully on the Blueprint, and on mechanisms by which ITABs communicate with AITAC
- the possibility that union representatives on ITABs might be able to play effective roles in building partnerships and creating pathways into employment for Indigenous clients
- the need to ensure that Indigenous VET becomes an integral part of whole-of-government pilot programs in selected communities
- the need to investigate strategies for accredited and non-accredited training to support the development of Indigenous communities’ capacity to participate as equal partners in whole-of-government initiatives (p.50).

Phase 2 findings

**Objective 4 overview**

It is evident from the research for the Mid-term Review that much activity is under way in relation to **Strategy 10** (Expanding partnerships between Indigenous people, communities, RTOs and industry). As has already been indicated, there is strong local work going on in this area, and a range of programs of support for partnership-building from governments. There is also evidence that work has begun on **Strategy 11** (Expanding opportunities for Indigenous people in CDEP). As has been indicated, this is complex because CDEPs serve different kinds of functions in different places, with different kinds of roles in individual skill development and community economic development. It seems that many STAs, particularly, are now working with ATSIC towards better alignment of CDEP with training. It was less clear from the research that strong activity is occurring in promoting Indigenous training and employment through ITABs – **Strategy 12**. As has been indicated, while some ITABs have been conspicuous in responding to Indigenous people and communities, the majority appear not to have made this responsiveness a priority in their operations. There is good evidence of activity under way on **Strategy 13** (Promote Indigenous training and employment through group training organisations). Among other evidence suggesting this is so is the striking finding that nearly 25 per cent of all Indigenous trainees and apprentices in Australia are employed by GTOs, compared with 12 per cent of all apprentices and trainees being employed by GTOs.
Strategy 10: Partnerships

Establish and expand partnerships between Indigenous people, communities, training providers and industry

Phase 1 findings

Strategy 10 overview

Phase 1 reported that good progress was being made with encouraging Indigenous involvement through New Apprenticeship Centres. On the other hand, “Other actions under this strategy have not progressed very much” (page 48).

Phase 2 findings

Strategy 10 overview

In general, the findings of Phase 2 consultations confirmed the findings from Phase 1. In some instances, the findings were more encouraging than those of Phase 1. There was evidence of a variety of community-based partnership initiatives, many of which were regarded as exciting by participants and other observers.

Examples of partnership arrangements

Informants provided examples of partnership arrangements that have led to improved outcomes for Indigenous students. An Indigenous winery that provides accredited training and offers ancillary services such as childcare to its employees and students was described as a model (NSW: Indigenous coordinator). In this example, the community and representatives from CDEP joined forces to establish the new enterprise that has proved to be highly successful. “Every community should be doing something like that, that fits in with their long-term needs” (NSW: Indigenous teacher). In the Northern Territory, the project for the building of the railway has just been launched. This is a partnership between the government that is funding the industry and the lands councils representing the communities. From a possible 157 apprenticeships created for the project, 55 have been allocated to Indigenous people.

Informants noted that courses that were run to meet a particular community need were an excellent place to begin in extending the opportunities for Indigenous students. These courses represent a direct link between community and the provider, and could be the springboard to further training and community capacity-building. However, the fact that the customised courses may fall outside the credentialing framework of the AQTF poses problems for funding. As the following case story suggests, this problem is often compounded by the inappropriate selection of staff, and this impacts on retention and overall course satisfaction.
**Case study**

In a rural community, twenty or so Indigenous students were directed to a Certificate II “Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Practices” course in their local TAFE college – one of the two courses to which Indigenous students outside the “mainstream” courses of the college were being directed at the time. The art teacher assigned to the art component of the course was non-Indigenous, without conspicuous interest or expertise in Indigenous arts or arts practices. Dissatisfied, the students negotiated with the coordinator of the Koorie Unit for an Aboriginal artist from a nearby town to offer them some sessions. The Indigenous teacher arrived for the first session, to be confronted by the non-Indigenous art teacher who was indignant that an alternative to her teaching had been organised. A tense argument in front of the students followed, and ended with the Indigenous artist departing, vowing never to work for the college again. Over the following weeks, the students progressively abandoned the course, their studies incomplete.

**Partnerships in smaller, rural, and remote communities**

In smaller and often isolated communities, the lack of mainstream employment opportunities for Indigenous people was noted (NSW: Indigenous teacher). For this reason, partnership arrangements have to be planned for well in advance of course delivery so students can recognise that employment outcomes exist beyond Indigenous industry or organisations (NSW: Indigenous teacher). In communities like these, stakeholders suggested, employment sites to support training were not always readily available. Since students needed to leave the community to complete the on-the-job component of accredited training, the travel could become a barrier to course completion. Some students commented on how difficult it was both to leave and to come back. The sense of dislocation presented another kind of barrier, causing several to argue more strongly for community-based VET provision, grounded in the community’s aspirations for its own growth and development.

**Community involvement in partnership-building**

Many informants emphasised the need to involve local Indigenous communities in building partnerships for training and employment. Without community involvement and commitment, partnerships seemed more likely to meet the needs of training providers and employers than the needs of the community. There were examples of powerful and sophisticated arrangements that countered this trend, however. In Victoria, for example, the *Wurreker* strategy ensures community involvement in decision-making about VET. Under the *Wurreker* strategy, liaison officers appointed by the state have worked with communities and local employers to identify training needs in all eight Indigenous family regions of Victoria, and redoubled efforts to match training needs to local employment and employment development needs. A Victorian representative on AITAC commented that “the national, state and regional training agenda will not change unless the three groups identified in Strategy 10 [Indigenous communities, training providers and industry] change their current ways of operating” (AITAC, 14/04/03).
The involvement of Elders in the delivery of Indigenous-specific courses was also seen as being important to partnership-building. In some cases, however, when Elders were directly involved in delivering training they could encounter the hurdle of teacher qualifications under the provisions of the AQTF. Informants regarded this as a problem – a problem of recognising Indigenous qualifications not readily accredited under the AQTF. Some large training providers were reported to be unwilling to address the issue creatively – according to some informants, flexibility is not always the hallmark of large-scale public providers.

Other informants commented on the importance of involving students and potential students in the processes of partnership-building and identifying the courses that are needed locally (NSW: Indigenous teacher). Negotiating provision directly with potential client groups would seem to be a wise strategy in general; when they are developing provision for Indigenous people, providers need to be especially sensitive and aware that potential clients have both individual and collective, community-based reasons for undertaking training. Neglecting these interests, needs and circumstances is likely to result in training that is poorly matched to clients’ intentions, expectations and aspirations.

**Case story**

"On Thursday Island, having a boat licence is near essential for getting around". A partnership between the local TAFE and TAFE Queensland aims to meet the needs of local students and the community by providing accredited training that gives Thursday Island students the necessary credentials to become masters on commercial fishing vessels through a coxswain training program.

Last year this partnership was enhanced when a Custom Craft CAT was bought with funds generated by an agreement between the Torres Strait Regional Authority, the Indigenous Strategic Initiatives Program, and the Department of Education, Science and Training. This new craft created opportunities to extend vocational marine training and senior students are now able to complete their Certificate II in Marine Operations that includes the coxswain modules.

The community is exceptionally proud of this initiative. Not only do students receive their Certificate II within their community, but also the skills they learn are directly related to the needs of the community and contribute to its growth.

Some stakeholders discussed the need for partnerships that supported students during the crucial work placement component of their VET in Schools subjects. They suggested that the partnerships with the host employers could be improved so that a system of mentoring during this critical period could be developed. They also commented that these programs could provide support for retention through an organised and industry-supported orientation to the workplace into which the students were going. “Strategies, role models, and mentoring are needed before, during and after work placements to prevent out kids from failing” (NT: Indigenous equity initiatives officer). In some states, these programs have been developed.
Some informants noted that there are problems with the stability of community involvement in decisions about partnerships for training and employment development. The Indigenous community and Indigenous organisations “have different players at different times” (NSW: Indigenous teacher) and this means that “sometimes long-term plans for partnerships just don’t work” (NSW: Indigenous teacher). Wise players in the field recognise that there are tensions between the need to build partnerships, to plan for the long-term needs of the community, and to accommodate the changing composition of the community while also taking into account the planning and resourcing concerns of providers. One informant commented: “Direct linkages [with communities] are an important underpinning factor in the success of initiatives” (WA: Indigenous member of parliament). The example of “community education” provided under Strategy 5 represents a way in which the whole of a community can become better informed and involved in the formation of partnerships.

**Whole-of-government initiatives**

At their workshop with Phase 2 researchers, members of AITAC commented that the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) pilot initiative regarding whole-of-government developments in Indigenous communities were particularly relevant to Strategy 10. These initiatives are intended to make government agencies more responsive to community needs, and involve substantial, high-visibility attempts to harness the programs and procedures of different agencies directly in support of the needs of the communities involved. It may be that some of the seven or eight communities involved in the trials could be approached to discover whether VET has a role to play in achieving some of the community development and economic development outcomes sought under this initiative. Perhaps partnerships could be formed around the development of local VET initiatives based on identified training needs for the communities involved, linked to the possibility of improving employment outcomes through enterprise developments that would create employment in these communities.

While remaining hopeful about the COAG whole-of-government initiative, some stakeholders believed that the whole-of-government pilots were creating another layer of bureaucracy in dealing with Indigenous communities – *inter-agency* work that seemed to add to, rather than reduce, red tape. Like the researchers conducting Phase 1 of the Mid-term Review, they concluded that it would only be when initiatives were *genuinely* responsive to community needs, interests and circumstances that there would be a stronger chance of achieving positive outcomes for the communities they are intended to serve.
Strategy 11: Community Development Employment Programs (CDEP)

Expand opportunities for Indigenous people participating in CDEP

Phase 1 findings

Strategy 11 overview

Phase 1 reported that

- All the actions under this strategy need more attention (p.47).
- As a result of the implementation of Action 10.3 the ANTA Board met with ATSIC commissioners. This led to a sharper focus on the Actions under Strategy 11 which address the need to use the VET system to help CDEP participants find employment and more meaningful community participation (page 49); and
- Only a third of the STA actions required under Strategy 11, including the development of state-based strategic plans for VET in CDEP, were reported as under way (p.49).

Phase 2 findings

Strategy 11 overview

Strategy 11 involves substantially developing the links between training and employment outcomes through CDEP. The findings of Phase 2 largely confirm those of Phase 1 – that this is an area of significant development through implementation of Partners and the Blueprint. In most jurisdictions, the ways training opportunities can be expanded through CDEP are being systematically investigated and developed. The Indigenous Education branch of the Western Australian Department of Education and Training, for example, is communicating with ATSIC’s CDEP office in Adelaide to explore ways in which training can be better integrated into CDEP activities.

Perhaps one of the reasons that progress under this Strategy is gradual, as noted by the Phase 1 research, is that the negotiations to achieve better convergence between the objectives of CDEP and training are complex and sensitive. CDEP serves different functions in different locations. In different locations, and even for different participants in the same program, CDEP may operate:

- as a transition to “mainstream” employment
- as a transition to employment in the Indigenous service delivery sector (for example, employment in local Indigenous organisations)
- as the primary source of employment in the provision of local services to Indigenous communities
- as a springboard for local Indigenous enterprise development
- as a community development and cultural capacity-building initiative.

The different character of CDEP programs in different locations and for different participants implies very different kinds of training needs – each of which must be adapted to local community concerns, the aspirations of local participants, and the employment opportunities presented (or to be developed) in particular Indigenous communities. Developing an overarching framework in which training can be integrated
Objective 4
(cont.)

into CDEP in contextually sensitive ways is thus a complex task. The publication of Partners supports and gives direction to innovative activity aimed at strengthening the connections between training and employment through CDEP.

At the April 2003 AITAC meeting attended by Phase 2 researchers, the strategic importance of CDEP initiatives to Indigenous people, and to community economic development, was noted. About 35,000 people are currently participating in CDEPs, and there could be a need either for more or for less people to be involved depending on the way CDEPs were used by communities and by governments for economic development. Some argued that the focus of CDEP needed to change towards a stronger focus on enterprise development. It was pointed out that Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) had been working towards initiating Indigenous employment centres within a number of CDEP organisations; this initiative had been picking up momentum in the preceding year, and another round of Indigenous employment centre contracts would soon be called for. Whilst this initiative is a welcome addition to the strategies encouraging Indigenous employment, one stakeholder commented that some Indigenous people were “too scared to go on IEC, because they can’t get back to CDEP” (NT: Indigenous equity initiatives officer).

**CDEP: employment or career?**

In Phase 2 consultations around the country, informants held mixed views on the capacity of CDEP to expand opportunities for Indigenous people.

One argument is that CDEP can be seen as a “career” and that the employment aspirations of some Indigenous participants can be watered down as a consequence. “An Indigenous kid in Year 12 in the country, doing well at school, could do anything – but his ambition is only to work with his uncle on CDEP” (Vic.: manager, Indigenous organisation). The alternative view is that “If you are Indigenous, [and] not employed in a government designated Koorie position or elsewhere, you are unemployed” (Vic.: manager, Indigenous organisation). At their April 2003 meeting, AITAC members noted that in some places there is a kind of competition between schools and CDEP: some Indigenous students left school early simply for employment in CDEP. AITAC members believed that there is a need for research on the impact of CDEP on school retention rates. They also noted an initiative in Western Australia aimed at preventing early school leaving by Indigenous students who might otherwise become participants in CDEPs around the state. Through this initiative, ATSIC may fund the full-time wage component for 100 Indigenous students participating in Western Australia’s Aboriginal School-Based Traineeship Program.

Informants therefore recognised that CDEP fulfilled an important employment need, but questioned the capacity of the program to extend opportunities beyond simply “having a job”. Some informants felt that CDEP statistically masked appalling unemployment figures for Indigenous people and felt that what was needed was a rethink of the assumptions and practices that have grown up around the program. This is a view echoed by members of AITAC in the April 2003 meeting (indicated earlier).

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20 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services CDEP National office (now incorporated into DEWR) say that it is possible for individuals to return to the CDEP program after participation in the IEC program.
The NCVER Phase 1 Statistical Report data (p.31) confirms this perception. The data about employment outcomes achieved by Indigenous students participating in VET courses through TAFE shows that:

- the completion of the TAFE course improved employment outcomes for Indigenous graduates
- the employment rates for Indigenous people in remote areas are highest both before and after the completion of a TAFE course
- in urban, rural, and remote areas, unemployment rates for Indigenous people fell after their participation in TAFE VET courses.

On the face of it, these findings seem positive. Looked at more closely, however, the interpretation might be different. As the Phase 1 researchers noted, the National Student Outcomes Survey data on which the findings are based categorises participation in CDEP as an employment outcome. This raises questions about the nature of the pathways these Indigenous people are taking. Moreover, the finding about employment outcomes seems more inflated in remote areas, where 74 per cent of Indigenous people are employed post-course, though 70 per cent of them were employed pre-course. In some remote communities, CDEP is often the only form of employment available. This asks the basic question, “Is CDEP an ‘employment’ or an ‘unemployment’ program?” If it is an employment program, then a lot of work needs to be done to improve its effectiveness for Indigenous people and communities, in the view of our informants. If it is an unemployment program, then participation in TAFE VET programs may not be a pathway to “real” employment for these Indigenous participants; on the contrary, the pathway from VET to CDEP may merely be adding to the masked unemployment rates for Indigenous people (some 35,000 of whom are in CDEPs).

**CDEP, and community and economic development**

Stakeholders reported on a range of partnership arrangements focused on tailoring CDEP more closely both to the needs of the community and to the training needs of the participants in the program. Informants felt that CDEP could lead to further training and employment if these partnerships were further linked to employment outcomes and local industry, where it existed, or to a concerted and intelligent approach to the creation of “new” industries. In Victoria, an informant mentioned an example where CDEP developed a horticulture program involving the propagation of native plants and seeds. This began with the employment of non-Indigenous tradespeople who were gradually replaced by Indigenous staff in areas such as bookkeeping and horticulture as training and capacity increased. “This enterprise is growing. They have bought a new property and it is expanding” (Vic.: manager, Indigenous organisation). Although there are many issues associated with the creation of new industries and their sustainability, this is an area worthy of further exploration. There are many other examples of CDEP playing a role in community skills development directed towards community economic development, including (for example):

- the Murrin Bridge Winery near Lake Cargelligo in New South Wales, which has trained Indigenous community members in viticulture, and in construction and other trades, as part of a substantial enterprise development initiative for the community
the development of automobile services by Indigenous community members in Bairnsdale, Victoria

the development of a variety of Indigenous enterprises in Shepparton, Victoria, including a successful Indigenous clothing manufacturing enterprise.

Clearly, one of the characteristics of initiatives like these is the focus on developing Indigenous industry rather than simply occupying participant time, or on providing local services (on roads, cleaning services and the like) for Indigenous organisations. Such initiatives also accept the need to support Indigenous participants through the process of skill acquisition to equip them to take over the roles begun by non-Indigenous staff.

Informants argued that strengthening the role of community councils could significantly strengthen CDEP programs, especially in parts of the country where CDEP has been used principally to provide local government-type services to communities. In some parts of the country (Cape York, Bungala CDEP in Port Augusta, or Shepparton, for example), community councils were expanding their vision of how CDEPs could operate towards realising a broader vision of community economic development through finding and developing community enterprises and new opportunities for employment.

Training needs analyses and CDEP

Mention has already been made of the Victorian Wurreker strategy. Under this agreement with the Victorian government, and with government support, the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, Inc. (VAEAI) has undertaken research into local industry in each of the eight Indigenous family-based regions in the state. The main industries and possibilities for enterprise development in each region have been identified, along with the main areas in which Indigenous people, in CDEP and other programs, have been trained. The research found that there had been a poor match between the two. By focusing on areas in which training could lead to local employment and local enterprise development, Wurreker has begun to create industry-training partnerships which promise to be more productive in terms of local employment outcomes and local enterprise developments for Indigenous people and communities. One of the keys to the success of such an initiative is the stress placed on training needs analyses that take into account not only the needs of participants, but also the needs of local industry, and the interests and circumstances of local Indigenous communities. The initiative gains significant momentum when training is directed towards enterprise development opportunities genuinely “owned” by the local community.

By contrast, in some parts of the country, it was thought that too many Indigenous clients had nothing to do with the skills they developed in CDEP after training based in some current CDEPs. Some informants expressed concern that in these instances CDEP may have been experienced by participants as having become a stable form of employment in itself, militating against participants viewing CDEP as a springboard to other employment, and as a vital and effective context for further training.

Stakeholders commented that CDEP needed to become a more effective springboard to employment outside the confines of the program. They felt that this could be achieved through the provision of accredited training and that a lot of work needed to be done in establishing the skill shortages and training needs of the communities in which the programs were located.
Partnerships and CDEP

Stakeholders also discussed the need to link public training providers more closely with CDEP participants so that training was more rationally based on a sense that participants would move into and subsequently out of a program, with significant and substantial skills development on the way through. For instance, in New South Wales, a number of CDEP participants are studying in TAFE through a partnership arrangement. They are completing a Certificate I in Health and Fitness with the option of articulating into university studies (NSW: Indigenous teacher, TAFE).

CDEP and remote communities

The realities of remoteness create problems of access to both training and employment. The cost of transporting staff and equipment to provide customised training in geographically remote areas is punitive. In some areas where there are few labour market or business development opportunities, it is important to work with CDEP organisations to identify the training that will enhance the capacity of communities to build their own future and sustainable livelihoods.

It is important to remain cognisant of the importance of the need for training that not only has a vocational focus, but also ensures cohesion and cultural maintenance within communities.

Some communities can also be isolated from industry development opportunities as a result of their economic or residential history. These communities are often not geographically remote, but can certainly be considered economically remote. In these cases there is a need to explore possibilities for tying together economic development and training to create “new industries” (Vic.: Manager, Indigenous organisation).

CDEP and Abstudy

Some informants regarded the relationship between participation in CDEP, training and Abstudy as problematic. There are a number of successful examples of combinations of CDEP participation and participation in training supported by Abstudy. One example was at 4AAA radio in Brisbane, where Indigenous people are employed two days a week under CDEP to work at the radio station, and study for the other three days with Abstudy support. Access to Abstudy benefits may be more complex in some such arrangements, however. One Queensland informant suggested that, in a regional CDEP involving Indigenous healthworkers, participants had been unable to access Abstudy travel and accommodation benefits to support visits to Brisbane for related health-worker training. In the light of such anomalies, members of AITAC commented that the relationship between CDEP provisions and those for Abstudy needed review and redevelopment.

Advice from DEST suggests that

If your activity under CDEP is study or training, you are unable to access ABSTUDY as this would be a double payment for the same activity. If you are working as part of CDEP and would like to study or access training on top of this, you are eligible for ABSTUDY (comments from DEST on draft Phase 2 Report).

The Phase 2 research suggests that this relationship between CDEP and training is not clear to people in the field in different jurisdictions. The ambiguity between CDEP and
ABSTUDY activities and benefits is a matter that deserves clarification for people in the field. It suggests that ANTA, ATSIC, DEST and Centrelink should together review the matter, and provide advice that will assist Indigenous people in CDEP to maximise opportunities for training in association with CDEP activities, and ways to access ABSTUDY benefits that may be or become available to support them.

**Strategy 12: Promote Indigenous employment through ITABs**

*Promote Indigenous training and employment through ITABs*

**Phase 1 findings**

**Strategy 12 overview**

The Phase 1 researchers noted that Actions under Strategy 12 “... need more attention, in particular in areas for which... ITABs and other agencies have responsibilities” (p.47).

**Phase 2 findings**

The Phase 2 consultations broadly confirmed this finding of the Phase 1 researchers. It is clear from the information gathered around the country that:

- ITABs are under significant pressure since the 2002 funding cuts to state and territory ITABs. Further turbulence is expected with the prospect of further reorganisation of national industry groupings under ANTA.

- Few ITABs have demonstrated a significant commitment to Indigenous issues, either through seeking Indigenous representation and advice, or through ensuring that:
  - training in their industry areas includes pathways from Certificate I and II to higher-level training for Indigenous students, or
  - that Training Packages in their area are genuinely culturally inclusive (recognising and respecting Indigenous people, knowledge, communities and cultures) to the extent that they are clearly experienced as such by Indigenous clients and potential clients.

The Seafood ITAB was cited by a number of informants as a clear exception to this rule – and was said to be progressive and responsive in a range of other areas as well as responsiveness to Indigenous concerns.

One informant well placed to comment on ITABs in the Australian VET system is convinced that the degree to which ITABs are responsive to Indigenous concerns “is a matter of individuals”. In this informant’s view, whether ITABs are responsive to Indigenous concerns boils down to whether the particular individuals involved in the boards happen to be interested in, and committed to, improving training and employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians. That such a view is possible suggests that ANTA is wrong to believe that its principal policy tools of funding power, contracts, equity advice, monitoring and auditing are sufficient to produce significant transformation of an existing situation where Indigenous people are under-represented in the higher, more strictly industry-related levels of VET. What is also needed is galvanization of commitment in ITABs to ANTA’s equity aims and agenda.
The role of ITABs in responding to the training and employment needs of Indigenous Australians

The 2002 budget cuts to the state and territory ITABs have had a profound impact on their organisation and level of operation. At the state and territory level, there has been a progressive amalgamation of the ITABs into alliances based on the pragmatics of survival rather than on any strategic arrangement of industry areas (Qld.: manager, Training Package implementation). At the national level, the proposal to reduce the ITABs to 10 industry skills councils has left the question of Training Package development and review unresolved.

In the past, and at the time of the development of Partners, the role of the ITABs was to:

- accumulate industry advice and use this to develop the Training Packages for the particular industry area
- oversee the development of the Training Package for their industry area usually through a process of tendering
- develop training plans
- in the case of state and territory ITABs, assist with registration and audit of RTOs under the provisions of the AQTF.

It is acknowledged that these roles were differentially interpreted and carried out by ITABs across the country (South Australia: manager, ITAB). National ITABs contracted out the writing of the Training Packages. The extent to which Indigenous advice was received and acted upon, given the nature of the ITAB organisational structure, is doubtful. Similarly, the extent to which ITABs regarded their roles as being critical in the promotion of Indigenous training and employment is questionable. “Some never played a proactive role and some came to be regarded as the policemen of the VET system” (Qld.: manager, Training Package implementation). There are some notable exceptions provided by the Phase 1 findings, and confirmed by Phase 2 researchers. The Northern Territory government has maintained its training advisory councils (ITAB equivalents) but amalgamated them into six groups. Their roles remain as providers of advice, as industry networks throughout which information can be passed, and as conduits between industry and the Department of Employment, Education and Training. A similar set of circumstances was reported from the Australian Capital Territory. However, the general consensus appears to be that a number of factors have reduced the capacity of ITABs to implement this Strategy:

- the reduced funding of ITABs
- the absence of quality control across the country
- what some informants perceived to be the closed nature of the consultation processes around ITABs (which may not have consulted with all relevant parties, including Indigenous advisors, in their determinations)
- debates about the legitimacy of their role now that their “job in pushing the Training Package agenda seems finished” (Qld.: manager, Training Package implementation).
In terms of the Blueprint, one of the most significant roles for ITABs lies in their supervision of the development and subsequent review of Training Packages. These are expected to be culturally appropriate, accessible and provide appropriate pathways into further training. The current review of the Business Services Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training (currently the minimum teacher/trainer qualification for anyone delivering accredited training) has not distinguished itself by either the inclusion of Indigenous advice to, or Indigenous membership of, the Review Panel. It is particularly disturbing, given the value of, and explicit need for, Indigenous staff within the VET sector so profoundly acknowledged through ANTA's development and promotion of Partners as its national strategy for VET for Indigenous people. It is unlikely that this oversight – a missed opportunity to influence the quality of delivery for Indigenous students, particularly during this critical phase of consultation – will be remedied by filtering the revised package through a committee with Indigenous representation just before its endorsement.

Participants also commented on the constraining aspects of the Training Packages, even given the ability to customise the materials and content to suit Indigenous students. When the constraints of the Training Packages and accredited courses are complemented by the provisions of the AQTF, and overlaid with funding contingencies dependent on the delivery of recognised training, the situation sometimes becomes critical for providers who are trying to match courses and students. The example provided in the next case story shows how the intersection of these factors has operated to move one RTO away from the intentions of the Blueprint rather than closer to it.

**Case story**

This RTO has a history of success in providing music training for Indigenous students. It developed nationally accredited courses to the Associate Diploma level over a 12-year period based on staff feedback and extensive consultation with the community and students. It also offers a very successful bridging course with increasing enrolments. The retention rates and reputation have both been high. It became, an RTO in 1999 and is publicly funded. It operates out of an ANTA-funded skill centre.

In 2002, the organisation had to agree to deliver training using industry Training Packages as a condition of continued funding. The staff completed the process of customisation of the Training Package for Indigenous students. However, it has been obvious that (unlike the delivery strategies) the assessment regimen imposed by the Training Package operates against the best interests of Indigenous students: assessment guidelines and the evidence gathering and reporting of outcomes cannot be customised. According to staff, not being able to customise assessment and reporting places a limit on the extent to which packages can be made culturally appropriate – the constant scrutiny of student progress is in itself experienced by Indigenous participants as a culturally inappropriate learning environment. In former times, staff of the RTO believed that their holistic approach to assessment was far more culturally appropriate. They now believe that returning to those holistic assessment practices would compromise the continuing registration of the organisation.
Strategy 13: Promote Indigenous training through group training organisations (GTOs)

Promote Indigenous training and employment through group training organisations

Phase 1 findings

Strategy 13 overview

The Phase 1 researchers concluded that “good progress is being made in this area” (p.48).

The NCVER Phase 1 Statistical Report included the following information about participation in New Apprenticeship training:

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<tr>
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<td>Number of Indigenous New Apprenticeship commencements</td>
<td>4,980</td>
<td>5,910</td>
<td>+18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of non-Indigenous New Apprenticeship commencements</td>
<td>77,134</td>
<td>210,374</td>
<td>+272.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Indigenous New Apprenticeship completions</td>
<td>1,346</td>
<td>2,098</td>
<td>+55.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of non-Indigenous New Apprenticeship completions</td>
<td>22,703</td>
<td>82,846</td>
<td>+364.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Indigenous New Apprentices in training with group training organisations</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>-4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of non-Indigenous New Apprentices in training with group training organisations</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>-2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase 2 findings

Strategy 13 overview

The consultations for Phase 2 confirmed the finding of Phase 1. On the other hand, concerns about employer attitudes towards Indigenous apprentices and trainees, and the realities of governance within GTOs raised concerns about the extent to which these organisations are able to respond consistently to the needs of Indigenous students.

GTOs and their contribution to Indigenous training and employment outcomes

GTOs employ a quarter of all the Indigenous apprentices and trainees in Australia. They are involved in school-to-work programs, school-based New Apprenticeships, structured work placements, traineeships and apprenticeships. The importance and influence of these organisations in improving outcomes for Indigenous students is therefore very clear. Informants agreed that there is a need to increase Indigenous participation in apprenticeships and GTOs are a powerful mechanism for achieving this aim. Informants also agreed that the focus should be on “outcomes for individuals” (SA: manager, VET and equity programs), and that to achieve these outcomes more continuous and ongoing support for Indigenous participants is needed.
It was thought that GTOs played such a significant role for three reasons:

- GTOs are frequently located in areas with significant Indigenous populations but with “thin markets” of employment and training opportunities, often away from metropolitan areas where apprenticeships are directly with employers, so GTOs were often more responsive to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities, and more successful in placing Indigenous clients in apprenticeships.

- The GTOs act as advocates, placing Indigenous students with employers who might not, as a general rule, have considered employing Indigenous apprentices.

- GTOs’ focus on pastoral care meant that some GTOs had a social justice agenda as well as a VET agenda, so they were more proactive in placing Indigenous students in apprenticeships than other employers might be.

One of the problems associated with relying on GTOs to promote Indigenous training and employment is that employers with stereotypical attitudes about Indigenous people can be very reluctant to take on Indigenous trainees and apprentices, especially in small business. As one employer commented: “I don’t want my business to look like a welfare agency”. In the face of such attitudes, GTOs often have a difficult task in working with employers to modify these perceptions and improve outcomes for Indigenous students. Group Training Australia (GTA), the national industry association for the group training network, has attempted to address this problem and contribute to implementation of the Blueprint by producing a publication aimed at improving Indigenous access to VET by showcasing examples of GTOs demonstrating best practice in the employment of Indigenous apprentices and trainees.

The new national standards for GTOs align with the provisions of the AQTF and one of the intentions is to ensure that equity for Indigenous students is stipulated and complied with. GTOs will be audited for compliance against these standards. Some informants, however, expressed concern that as with other aspects of compliance, “lip service” and “statements on the books” do not necessarily guarantee equity.

Informants felt that the best outcomes would be achieved when GTOs were established and run by Indigenous people. Unfortunately, one Indigenous GTO with this structure and management had recently failed in Western Australia due to reported “funding difficulties” not the making of the Indigenous people involved (WA: manager, not-for-profit employment services company). In the Northern Territory, one of the territory’s two GTOs specialises in training for Indigenous people, ensuring that training is delivered by Indigenous trainers and backed up by professional development and support for Indigenous students.

Another limitation on GTO commitment to Indigenous participation in VET is structural – some GTOs are run as “not-for-profit” organisations. They are all incorporated under various pieces of legislation and have boards of management or external advisory groups that reflect their style of incorporation. Some boards are drawn from a cross-section of the community, some reflect bipartite or tripartite arrangements, and some
are employer-focused. Irrespective of the type of management, Indigenous representation is the exception rather than the rule and, where it is a feature of the particular GTO, advocacy and individual commitment are the critical factors in ensuring that Indigenous views and realities are accorded the credibility they deserve.

**Case story**

The Tiwi Islands confront problems of substance abuse, domestic violence, the potential loss of local language and the gradual reduction in the respect that people have for the ceremonial aspects of their lives. In these ways, they are a set of islands with many of the horrors that confound Indigenous communities around Australia. In an attempt to turn these problems around, Tiwi Training has provided some valuable lessons on how community and training provision can work together to achieve improved outcomes for Indigenous students specifically and for the community generally.

Tiwi Training is a group training organisation that is two years old. It is also an RTO and an incorporated company with a board of directors drawn from the Tiwi Island communities. Tiwi Training employs six full time staff.

In consultation with the community, the board of directors has developed a strategic plan for the development of the Islands, which is expansive and focused on building the capacities of these communities. Strategic planning is no easy task and the Tiwi Board employed a group of consultants to help with this process. Overwhelmingly, the communities wanted training and an economic separation from the welfare programs that have characterised their recent past. With the assistance of STEP funding and money from DEWR, Tiwi Training has placed 126 apprentices with employers over the past two years in a range of programs. The forestry project involved upgrading roads to allow the easier harvesting of timber. The fish farm produces 10 tonnes of Barramundi per week for both export markets and Australian consumption. The housing projects have helped with the building of the skill centre. Apprentices are also working with electricians, the schools and the health clinics.

The profile of training needs that came, and continues to come, from the strategic plan for the Tiwi Islands is a significant driving force in the provision of training. The profile determines the skill needs and shortages within the communities and identifies employment opportunities. This then informs the process of placing apprentices in particular jobs. Services are then contracted to specific RTOs which must have a permit issued through the Lands Council before they enter the Islands. Staffing and quality provision is closely monitored. Most accredited training remains at Certificate I and Certificate II and, since English is a second language for most Tiwi students, there are significant literacy problems associated with delivery. For this reason a WELL coordinator has been employed to provide language and literacy help where it is needed most. A mentoring program is also in place to provide pastoral care so that problems are recognised and dealt with before they take on a life of their own. These two initiatives are characteristic of Tiwi Training and its philosophy. The company recognises that students need support to achieve and that “problems need to be plugged as they happen”.

Tiwi Training is also characterised by its commitment to the community and its views that are then contextualised within a holistic approach to community development and training.
Chapter 7

What partners have done to implement the *Blueprint*

What has so far been achieved in the implementation of the *Blueprint*?

In this chapter, we present findings from Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the research conducted for the Mid-term Review about each of the Actions listed in the *Blueprint*. In general, Phase 1 sought the views of the partner agencies to the *Blueprint*, while Phase 2 sought the views of other stakeholders – including:

- Indigenous students and graduates of VET
- Indigenous communities and organisations
- Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers of VET
- managers of RTOs
- representatives of ITABs
- representatives of employers
- some others.

There was thus an important difference between the findings of Phase 1 and Phase 2. The data collected in Phase 1 was informed institutional self-report provided by the signatory partners to the *Blueprint*. By contrast, the information collected from other stakeholders in Phase 2 captures their observations about what has so far been achieved in the implementation of the *Blueprint* and Partners more generally.

These two perspectives, then, give a more rounded appreciation of what has been done to implement the *Blueprint*, and the extent to which its intentions are being achieved.

**Objective 1: Involvement in decision-making**

*Increase involvement of Indigenous people in decision-making about policy, planning resources and delivery*

**Strategy 1: Indigenous membership**

*Secure Indigenous membership of key relevant decision-making bodies*

**Action 1.1**

*ANTA Ministerial Council to appoint an Indigenous person from industry to the ANTA Board. (For action by ANTA; timeline unspecified.)*

This action was completed with the appointment of Dr Evelyn Scott to the ANTA Board.

A number of the informants in Phase 2 commented on the importance of this appointment and that the “visibility” of an Indigenous member of the ANTA Board was a powerful symbol of the increased commitment to improving outcomes for Indigenous students in VET.
What partners have done to implement the *Blueprint* (cont.)

**Action 1.2**  
STAs to appoint an Indigenous person/s to the state/territory training authority. (For action by STAs by end of 2000.)

**Phase 1 findings**  
Fifty per cent (4/8) of STAs reporting to Phase 1 indicated that they had appointed an Indigenous representative.

**Phase 2 findings**  
Phase 2 received little additional information about this Action.

**Action 1.3**  
STAs to secure Indigenous participation on state/territory VET decision-making bodies. (For action by STAs by end of 2001.)

**Phase 1 findings**  
All states and territories report that they have established formal mechanisms for receiving advice from Indigenous people at the state or territory level, but this has not been achieved universally at regional and local levels.

**Phase 2 findings**  
Phase 2 findings confirm the existence of formally established mechanisms for the receipt of Indigenous advice at the state or territory level. However, stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 also commented on the problems associated with representation of Indigenous views at this level. Perhaps the most consistent problem was the sense of isolation experienced by a “single voice” in an often daunting and alien environment characterised by procedures and protocols that are not always easy to cope with. At regional and local levels, stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 emphasised the variations in participation of Indigenous members. The experiences varied from Indigenous advisory committees that were drawn from the Indigenous community, to single “token” appointments where opinions and perspectives were often lost. Informants stressed the need for systematic support for Indigenous members of decision-making bodies through the provision of induction, mentoring and professional development activities.

**Action 1.4**  
RTOs receiving government funds for provision of training to Indigenous people to establish mechanisms for gaining Indigenous advice on all aspects of training including membership on boards of management. (For action by STAs by end 2002.)

**Phase 1 findings**  
This process is well under way, but the aspiration that every government-funded RTO have established a formal mechanism for receiving Indigenous advice has not yet been achieved.

**Phase 2 findings**  
Stakeholders interviewed during Phase 2 reflected the differences in the formal mechanisms for receiving Indigenous advice from government-funded RTOs. In some cases the procedures for accepting this advice were well established and understood by the organisation. In other cases, the organisational culture and the weight of historical practice stepped between the valid acceptance of this advice and its practical implementation. Indigenous membership on boards of management was not consistent across Australia. This was most clearly seen in the case of group training organisations (GTOs) where the boards of management were established in keeping with the terms of their incorporation and often did not include an Indigenous member. While GTOs did not always operate in conjunction with their own RTO a number of not-for-profit GTOs nevertheless received government funding and stakeholders mentioned the need to move beyond the prescriptions of the new national standards to ensure that representation at this level of decision-making became a reality rather than a description.
Research bodies receiving government funds to establish mechanisms for gaining an Indigenous perspective on advice on appropriate research. (For action by ANTA by the end of 2002.)

Phase 1 findings
There is a wide array of research bodies to which this aim refers. It is not clear which, or how many, have established mechanisms for receiving Indigenous advice. Phase 1 reported that ANTA proposes to take action to ensure that relevant VET research bodies have Indigenous advice, noting that “The National Research Evaluation Committee (NREC) through the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) conducts a significant amount of research on Indigenous training issues. ANTA’s key research centres are currently under review – ANTA plans to investigate the options for building-in a requirement to obtain an Indigenous perspective in the tender arrangements” (p.29).

In relation to research, the Phase 1 researchers formed the view that there was a need to initiate an Indigenous-directed, coordinated, strategic and policy-focused research agenda in Indigenous VET, specifically in relation to the Blueprint objectives and strategies; and to consider also options for a coordinated approach to research training to increase the number of Indigenous researchers working in the field (p.31).

Phase 2 findings
Stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 did not comment on this action in an explicit way. They did provide examples of some initiatives that were being undertaken locally to systematically collect data on Indigenous training needs as a basis for planning provision. Some stakeholders did suggest that there needed to be a much more concerted effort to disseminate information about Partners to the wider VET community and that research on programs that were working well would be beneficial if the results could be made more easily accessible to practitioners and managers. This was a particularly relevant issue to providers of VET in remote and rural locations where the opportunities for networking and the general exchange of ideas was restricted by distance.

Members of AITAC were interested in learning more about research on online learning in VET, particularly in relation to Indigenous people. They understood that research was under way on the topic at Edith Cowan and James Cook Universities, and through NCVER, and expressed interest in having researchers from these institutions make a presentation on their findings.

Strategy 2: Indigenous advice
Develop mechanisms for inclusion of Indigenous advice in all VET projects, programs and products

Action 2.1
Training Package developers to consult with the National Indigenous Training Advisory Committee as a primary source of advice in the development and review of Training Packages. (For action by ANTA; by the end of 2002.)

Phase 1 findings
Phase 1 did not receive strong data about this Action. According to ANTA, Training Package developers are increasingly getting advice on Indigenous issues, though not necessarily from AITAC. The establishment of the Training Package Equity Advisory Service may be a partial answer to this need, but concern was raised whether monitoring of the extent to which Indigenous perspectives have been addressed occurs early enough in the Training Package development process.
Phase 2 findings: Stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 did not comment on this action directly. However, many argued strenuously and repeatedly that the present level of Indigenous advice into Training Package development and review was inadequate and was not resulting in more culturally appropriate materials becoming available in the “mainstream”. They did mention that efforts were being made to provide Indigenous-specific courses, but this did not, in itself, answer the need for more culturally appropriate training in “mainstream” courses and in most courses at Certificate III level and above.

Action 2.2: ANTA to establish an equity advisory service that includes Indigenous expertise (e.g. based on the current model of the Language and Literacy Advisory Service). This service will assist developers of national Training Packages or support materials to enhance opportunities for Indigenous people and review the accessibility of packages before submission to the NTQC. (For action by ANTA by the end of 2002.)

Phase 1 findings: This has been achieved, but Phase 1 received some advice that the Equity Advisory Service alone cannot effectively meet this need. It was argued that Training Package developers, ITABs and other relevant groups as part of the package development process, must receive Indigenous advice.

Phase 2 findings: Some stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 disputed the effectiveness of receiving Indigenous advice principally as part of a Training Package review process and suggested that there needed to be a far greater systemic commitment to this Action if it were to provide the kind of advice suggested. The fact that Training Package development and review are processes that are often outsourced makes the implementation of this Action extremely difficult. Stakeholders consulted during Phase 2 made it clear that attempting to address the issue via monitoring is structurally cumbersome and appears to be largely ineffective in producing materials that Indigenous students would regard as culturally appropriate. Some suggested that a more fundamental examination of Training Packages and the development of support materials and delivery issues is needed. This should include an examination of the assumptions that underpin their current level of prescription and implicit pedagogies, and these should be questioned in terms of their appropriateness for Indigenous students. In particular:

- some course material and the delivery of some training beyond the Certificate II level appears to assume language, literacy and numeracy skills that are often not matched to the actual skill levels of Indigenous students
- most courses at the higher AQF levels assumed the existence of workplaces where students can carry out the on-the-job component of their courses, but this link to the workplace cannot routinely be assumed to be available for all students, especially in areas that were “employment-poor”.

Action 2.3: Training Package developers to include information on Indigenous issues in all stages of Training packages and support materials: policy, development, assessment, review and evaluation and delivery. (For action by ANTA by the end of 2001.)

Phase 1 findings: See comment on Action 2.1.

Phase 2 findings: See comments above on Action 2.1
Stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 questioned the level of influence of Indigenous advice in the Training Package development and review process. Whilst some provided examples of the ways in which Training Packages have been usefully “customised” to suit Indigenous students, they questioned the extent to which, as a matter of policy, Indigenous perspectives were made explicit within the Training Packages themselves. They also raised issues about assessment, frequently commenting that the methods suggested in the materials were either unworkable in the locations in which the students were undertaking the courses or so fragmenting of the training process that delivery became almost totally assessment driven. The case story in Chapter 4 (Objective 2: Participation), in the section on Strategy 5, gave a clear example of how Indigenous views were disregarded in the delivery of training in a rural community. The case story in Chapter 8 (Interactive complexity) under Objective 1, concerning the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in Training Packages for Indigenous health workers illustrates some of the tensions around “customisation” versus “Indigenisation” of packages. This is the tension about whether, on the one hand, Training Packages can be modified to suit a particular group of Indigenous students, or whether, on the other, they must be designed, developed and delivered in ways that are thoroughly attuned to the work contexts for which the training is undertaken.

**Action 2.4**

*Training Package developers to retain or create appropriate entry-level AQF Certificates, including, where appropriate, AQF level 1, and prevocational options for industries that have VET qualifications or Training Packages. (For action by ANTA by the end of 2000.)*

**Phase 1 findings**

ANTA reported on several projects under way that will assist in achieving the intentions of this Action.

**Phase 2 findings**

A number of stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 commented on the need to retain or create appropriate entry-level AQF Certificates. This need is particularly acute in rural and remote areas where access to secondary education is not available and where VET provision increasingly fills the gap. Many commented on the need to provide entry-level training that is far more finely tuned to the language, literacy and numeracy needs of Indigenous students. Bridges between students’ current skill levels and the qualification outcomes to be achieved, and the implicit demands of the training process, need to be acknowledged and responded to in ways that are not currently part of the development process.

**Action 2.5**

*Training Package developers to make explicit language and literacy components of all Training Packages. (For action by ANTA by the end of 2000.)*

**Phase 1 findings**

ANTA reported on a variety of projects, policy initiatives and professional development activities being undertaken in pursuit of the intentions of this action. The Phase 1 researchers reported that literacy remains an obstacle to the achievement of improved outcomes for certain groups of Indigenous clients, and argued that “literacy-specific” courses are needed for people with literacy levels below NRS2, with appropriate pathways to and from them.
Phase 2 findings

Phase 2 confirmed the Phase 1 findings. Stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 mentioned a range of initiatives that address the problems of language and literacy in creative and acknowledging ways. It must be acknowledged, however, that there is still an assumption that students will come to their training course with a set of homogenous skills that will allow them to deal with the impositions of the content. Stakeholders were critical of funding arrangements for delivery that did not include a substantial allocation for language and literacy support. They indicated that whilst “sign-ups” (getting students “signed-up” to commence a course) may be relatively easy to procure, completions were often compromised because language and literacy are regarded as luxurious add-ons to provision rather than as legitimate aspects of the successful delivery of training.

Action 2.6

ANTA to consult with the National Indigenous Training Advisory Committee on Indigenous issues in the review of key competencies and other generic skills as well as the implications of new programs, projects and research on Indigenous people. (For action by ANTA by the end of 2000.)

Phase 1 findings

ANTA reported that some progress is being made in implementation of this Action, particularly through anticipated consultations with AITAC about work being done for the National Training Quality Council on the incorporation of employability skills in Training Packages.

Phase 2 findings

Apart from ANTA’s report, Phase 2 received no additional commentary on this Action.

Action 2.7

States/territories to benchmark performance against the Blueprint in state VET plans and measure performance and develop mechanisms to ensure that Indigenous VET is given priority. (For action by STAs by the end of 2001.)

Phase 1 findings

Some relevant information was received about this Action, suggesting that benchmarking by STAs is under way. The information suggests that not enough other agencies are yet undertaking this benchmarking, particularly ITABs.

Phase 2 findings

Phase 2 received little additional commentary about this Action.

Action 2.8

ANTA in conjunction with STAs to develop and publish additional guidelines in relation to access and equity for registering and auditing RTOs and QETOs (Standard C3 of the National Course Standards for RTOs). Additional guidelines to include detailed advice and strategies that encourage training providers to meet the standards. Areas of coverage to include, but not be limited to:

- accessible information
- teacher competencies
- training delivery and assessment
- policies, procedures and practices.

(For action by STAs and ANTA by the end of 2000.)

Phase 1 findings

Phase 1 reported that, of 895 RTOs identified by six STAs, nearly 90 per cent met access and equity guidelines. This suggests that good progress is being made in the implementation of Action 2.8.
What partners have done to implement the *Blueprint* (cont.)

**Phase 2 findings**
Phase 2 confirmed the findings of Phase 1 in relation to this Action. It should also be noted, however, that stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 were often critical of the differences in practice that exist across RTOs. The “patchiness” of implementation was explained in terms of the particular constitution of the RTO (whether it came under public or private jurisdictions) and the differing levels of organisational and individual commitment to successful outcomes in Indigenous VET. The “provision of guidelines” and the need for RTOs to be compliant under the AQTF were thought to be no guarantee that the “areas of coverage” stipulated in this Action would translate into better and more culturally sensitive delivery of VET courses for Indigenous students. Commitment rather than compliance was thought to be the crucial factor in the successful implementation of this Action – as in many other areas of the Blueprint and Partners. On the other hand, some stakeholders felt that the reporting mechanisms left large holes through which information on the implementation of this Action could easily slip and suggested that progress should be measured more tightly.

**Action 2.9**
STAs to provide guidelines to RTOs and QETOs and implement audit requirements. (For action by STAs and ANTA by the end of 2000.)

**Phase 1 findings**
See comment on Action 2.8.

**Phase 2 findings**
Phase 2 received no additional commentary on this Action.

**Action 2.10**
STAs to encourage the establishment of Indigenous RTOs and partnerships between Indigenous organisations and RTOs. (For action by STAs by the end of 2001.)

**Phase 1 findings**
Five of eight STAs reported to Phase 1 on this issue, suggesting that 20 RTOs (about 1 per cent of all RTOs) are Indigenous. Phase 1 also reported that “Survey respondents provided significant qualitative evidence of partnerships being developed between RTOs and Indigenous organisations” (p.35).

**Phase 2 findings**
Phase 2 researchers heard much commendatory evidence from stakeholders about Indigenous RTOs and their effectiveness in responding to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities. Phase 2 also found a number of examples of successful partnerships between Indigenous communities, Indigenous organisations and RTOs.

**Action 2.11**
STAs to encourage RTOs to provide appropriate, designated, identifiable spaces for Indigenous people on campuses. (For action by STAs by the end of 2001.)

**Phase 1 findings**
It is not clear from the findings of Phase 1 whether or to what extent this action is being implemented, though some STAs did report that STAs are encouraging RTOs to provide appropriate, designated and identifiable spaces for Indigenous people.

**Phase 2 findings**
Phase 2 confirmed the importance of providing designated spaces for Indigenous people on campuses. Students, in particular, commented on the importance of these spaces in preserving their sense of learning confidence. They regarded as crucial to their retention such factors as the chance to meet together as a group, to access support services where they are available, and to feel part of a community.
In some RTOs contacted in the Phase 2 study, no designated spaces were available for Indigenous students, and the students regarded this lack as a significant comment on the extent to which they were valued and supported. (Indigenous students in VET should not be thought to be uninformed on this topic. Many contacted during the Phase 2 research were in their seventh or eighth VET course, frequently from a variety of institutions, often in very different geographical locations. Some students in every group are likely to be aware of the kinds of support and the kinds of designated spaces available in other places.)

In rural and remote areas, designated spaces were often not available and the architecture of general training spaces was often community-unfriendly. This was being addressed through the establishment of skill centres in some parts of Australia and through government initiatives to reinvigorate community facilities already in existence.

Strategy 3: Indigenous employment in VET

Secure Indigenous employment in key areas of the VET sector

Action 3.1 All organisations attracting VET funding to develop plans to increase numbers of Indigenous employees and appoint Indigenous employees in key areas identified. (For action by STAs and ANTA by mid-2001.)

Phase 1 findings The Indigenous employment rate among agencies reporting in Phase 1 averaged 1.3 per cent. For the ITABs and ANTA, the rate was zero; in DEST, it was 9.5 per cent. “WA RTOs employed 139 Indigenous people (2.3 per cent of total employment); Victoria employed 190 Indigenous people, but there was no total employment figure so no rate could be calculated” (p.37). The Phase 1 researchers also passed on the comment from ANTA that no adequate mechanism existed “to monitor, report, or enforce this activity” (p.37)

Phase 2 findings Phase 2 found pockets of commitment to this Action. In cases where an organisation had established an action plan for the implementation of the Blueprint, there was a greater likelihood of Indigenous people being represented in the employment figures. Some organisations had made strategic appointments of Indigenous people in planning and policy positions, although the numbers appeared to be relatively small. A number of stakeholders reported that increased numbers of Indigenous employees appeared to be clustered at the lower ends of the employment ladders. A number also commented that there are blockers intrinsic to the public sector that create the perception amongst Indigenous people that criteria for employment are beyond their capacities and credentials. More generally, uncertain funding and short-term contracts characterise the employment context of the VET system, especially for teachers, and this does little to assist the development of career paths for Indigenous staff.

Other stakeholders mentioned the difficulties of attracting and retaining Indigenous staff. The casualisation of the VET workforce often meant that Indigenous staff employed on a contractual or part-time basis dropped out of the employment market for domestic economic reasons. This tendency was most noticeable where there was no solid core of Indigenous employees within an organisation to provide mentoring and support to new staff.

A number of informants reported on the difficulties of collecting data on this Action.
The Department of Education and Workplace Relations (DEWR) to offer advice on the assistance available through Indigenous employment programs to organisations within VET that develop plans to recruit Indigenous staff. (For action by DEWR by mid-2001.)

**Phase 1 findings**
Phase 1 reported that there was progress in the implementation of this action, particularly through the DEWR STEP program.

**Phase 2 findings**
A number of stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 confirmed the operation of this program. The funding had been used to provide Indigenous staff with a Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training, thereby equipping them with the base-level credential to deliver accredited training.

**Action 3.3**
Public providers, through their resource agreements, establish benchmarks for Indigenous staff numbers and levels (including teachers) and measure changes over time. (For action by STAs by mid-2001.)

**Phase 1 findings**
Phase 1 reported that there have been problems in achieving adequate benchmarking and monitoring of Indigenous staff numbers via STAs, though it appeared that good progress was being made by some STAs with both benchmarking and monitoring.

**Phase 2 findings**
Phase 2 informants reported that the benchmarking for Indigenous staff numbers and levels was patchy across the states and territories. There was also concern both that the methods of data collection and the reporting protocols were inadequate. In those places where the Blueprint was mirrored by a system-based and context-customised set of strategic and operational plans, the success of this Action was more likely to be observable. Furthermore, if the commitment to Indigenous employment was bolstered by human resources practices and policies within the organisation, the likelihood of increasing levels of Indigenous employment increased. However, some stakeholders reported that as long as Indigenous VET remained a peripheral “equity” issue, the commitment to collecting usable and informative data on this Action would continue to generate poor quality data on which to base planning decisions.

**Objective 2: Participation in VET**
Achieve participation in VET for Indigenous people equal to those of the rest of the Australian community

**Strategy 4: VET in Schools**
Focus on participation and outcomes for Indigenous students in VET in Schools programs

**Action 4.1**
ANTA in collaboration with the MCEETYA Taskforce on VET in Schools, to commission a study to analyse factors affecting Indigenous student participation in programs developed under the new framework on vocational education and VET in Schools, and report on outcomes including:
- involvement by AQF level by Indigenous participants

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21 Referred to as “DEWR” in the Blueprint
What partners have done to implement the *Blueprint* (cont.)

- consultation with current and potential participants and their families
- assessment of specific needs of Indigenous students in relation to program delivery and work placement
- support mechanisms including program design, fee structures and funding programs
- the extent and nature of barriers to Indigenous students accessing and participating in programs, and observations and recommendations on how these can be overcome.

*(For action by ANTA and MCEETYA Taskforce on VET in Schools by mid-2002.)*

**Phase 1 findings**  
ANTA reports that a research project has been commissioned to explore Indigenous participation in the VET in Schools program, and that some relevant action is being taken through work associated with MCEETYA’s New Framework for VET in Schools.

**Phase 2 findings**  
The Phase 2 research confirmed the finding of Phase 1. A great deal of other information from stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 concerned VET in Schools, indicating that this is a very active area of development in Indigenous education and training.

**Action 4.2**  
ANTA to request the MCEETYA Taskforce on VET in Schools to develop models and/or pilots which assist Indigenous students in compulsory years of schooling to participate in vocational activities that have strong community support, particularly in rural and remote areas, including using Indigenous networks and informal community mentoring.  
*(For action by ANTA and MCEETYA Taskforce on VET in Schools by mid-2001.)*

**Phase 1 findings**  
ANTA reports that progress has been made in implementing Action 4.2 through an Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) initiative in Far North Australia.

**Phase 2 findings**  
Phase 2 confirmed this finding.

**Action 4.3**  
ANTA to request the MCEETYA Taskforce on VET in Schools and the MCEETYA National Careers Taskforce to expand the awareness of career and VET in Schools options through the provision of career information and guidance to Indigenous students commencing below Years 8 and 9. This should include the development and use of products and materials including online advice and the development of appropriate structures to ensure that appropriate career guidance is available to all Indigenous students.  
*(For action by ANTA, MCEETYA Taskforce on VET in Schools, MCEETYA National Careers Taskforce by end 2001.)*

**Phase 1 findings**  
ANTA reported that “Through the secretariat of the MCEETYA Transition from School Taskforce, ANTA has commissioned the Curriculum Corporation of Australia to conduct a project about career guidance and advice for Indigenous students” (p.17).

**Phase 2 findings**  
Phase 2 confirmed widespread support for the idea of providing career guidance for Indigenous students. Although informants did not comment on the project specifically, they did recognise the importance of making high-quality and culturally appropriate information available to Indigenous students in a number of formats using a variety of media. This was seen as being particularly relevant in Years 8 and 9 given the low retention rates of Indigenous students. A number of stakeholders maintained that the provision of career advice needed to move outside the precinct of the school to include industry and employment inputs.
Strategy 5: Professional development

Provide professional development for staff delivering VET

Action 5.1

Specific professional development funding to be allocated to provide:

- professional development, including cross-cultural awareness, within the VET sector for non-Indigenous people that will increase the capacity of the sector to provide opportunities for Indigenous people
- professional development for Indigenous people to enable them to develop the skills necessary for working and progressing within the sector
- resources to undertake research into the development of standards for teaching Indigenous students and for the development of techniques which are useful for delivery; this research should take account of programs currently available.

(For action by ANTA by end 2001.)

Phase 1 findings

The Phase 1 researchers indicated that six of eight STAs reported on the extent of professional development with Indigenous and Non-Indigenous staff, including initiatives addressing at least two of the three specific areas identified in Action 5.1.

Phase 2 findings

Phase 2 received considerable commentary about professional development, including cross-cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous staff, and professional development for Indigenous staff. (See the comments on Strategy 5 in Chapter 4.) Phase 2 did not receive information about “research into the development of standards for teaching Indigenous students and for the development of techniques which are useful for delivery” – though there was frequent mention, from many sites, of techniques useful for delivery (and of techniques and arrangements which were the opposite).

Action 5.2

ANTA to encourage the VET sector to participate in DEWR’s National Indigenous Cadetship Program to gain qualifications needed for a range of jobs in the sector. (For action by ANTA and STAs by end 2001.)

Phase 1 findings

The Phase 1 report indicates that the evidence on Action 5.2 is unclear, and suggests that this area should be followed up in Phase 2. ANTA reported that it is considering how to pursue the matter with DEWR and STAs.

Phase 2 findings

Phase 2 did not receive specific information about this matter from the particular stakeholders we consulted.

Strategy 6: Partnerships between schools, post-secondary institutions, industry and communities

Create partnerships between schools, post-secondary institutions, industry and communities

Action 6.1

DEST in conjunction with other stakeholder bodies, to undertake specific projects to support the creation of VET partnerships between schools, post-secondary institutions, businesses and communities to maximise vocational outcomes for Indigenous young people. Support for these partnerships could include:

- literacy and numeracy development (via the National Indigenous English Language and Numeracy Strategy – DEST)
What partners have done to implement the Blueprint (cont.)

- **innovative demonstration projects** (via Wadu funding for community partnerships provided by Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF))
- **workplace learning coordination for Indigenous people** (via Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) supported school–industry programs)
- **establishment of additional structured workplace partnerships** Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ACCI)
- **indigenous school-to-work transition VET strategy initiatives** Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

*(For action by DEST, ECEF and ACCI by end 2001.)*

**Phase 1 findings**
The Phase 1 researchers indicated that DEST and a number of STAs reported a wide variety of partnership initiatives and activities under way, including initiatives in the specific areas identified for action.

**Phase 2 findings**
The Phase 2 researchers confirmed the existence of a range of innovative projects and initiatives designed to improve the outcomes for Indigenous VET students. Whilst the stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 welcomed these programs, there was agreement that all the areas outlined in Action 6.1 require a lot more work to translate the successes in isolated instances into mainstream opportunities.

**Action 6.2**

ECEF, Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), DEWR and ACCI, in consultation with the MCEETYA Taskforce on VET is Schools to promote models of best practice for pathways between schools, post-secondary institutions, businesses and communities to support Indigenous young people. *(For action by DEWR, DEST, ACCI, ECEF by end 2002.)*

**Phase 1 findings**
See comment on Action 6.1.

**Phase 2 findings**
Phase 2 confirmed that examples of best practice were being promoted through publicity, awards, and professional development activities. It was interesting to note in relation to this Action that a number of stakeholders, particularly teachers, mentioned their need for better-quality information about the potential of these partnerships and the details that made best-practice examples workable in specific locations across Australia. These comments frequently arose in conversations about dissemination of the Blueprint and the extent—often limited—to which those working “on the ground” were aware of both its existence and its importance.

**Strategy 7: Higher-level and more industry-relevant VET for Indigenous people**

*Increase access to and attainment in higher-level VET and more industry-relevant courses for Indigenous students*

**Action 7.1**

STAs, with ANTA, to undertake research to improve opportunities for Indigenous people to access recognition of prior learning (or current competencies) assessments. This is to include:
- reviewing disincentives for training providers to provide assessments
- developing assessment models.

*(For action by ANTA, STAs by end 2002.)*

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22 Referred to as “ASTF” in the Blueprint
Phase 1 indicated that STAs and ANTA reported that some progress had been made in relation to this area of action. “Work has progressed under 7.1 and 7.2 to use RPL and RCC to progress people through the VET system and to facilitate credit transfer and articulation (7.6). However, the Statistical Report [of the Phase 1 study] shows the take-up of RPL by Indigenous students is still below average. A number of agencies indicated they were waiting on the results of the research ANTA was commissioning on this before taking more action” (p.41).

Phase 2 findings

Stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 reported that some work on RPL and RCC was taking place, although this was not a consistent set of activities either within or across states and territories. Stakeholders also mentioned that RPL and RCC were of critical importance to Indigenous people who wish to take up employment within the VET sector. On the other hand, some stakeholders reported that the overly bureaucratic set of processes accompanying the application for RPL or RCC often appeared to discriminate against Indigenous people and act as a deterrent rather than an encouragement. Other stakeholders reported that there was little if no RPL given for prevocational courses, and this meant that Indigenous students had no opportunity to be given credit in the very courses where most of them are clustered.

Pending the outcomes of the research referred to in 7.1, STAs to take steps to increase the number of Indigenous people awarded modules through skills recognition and to measure the increase in numbers of Indigenous people awarded modules through RPL and RCC methods and their appropriateness to Indigenous people. (For action by STAs by the end of 2001.)

As for Action 7.1, Phase 1 indicated that STAs and ANTA reported that some progress had been made in relation to this area of action.

Work has progressed under 7.1 and 7.2 to use RPL and RCC to progress people through the VET system and to facilitate credit transfer and articulation (7.6). However, the Statistical Report [of the Phase 1 study] shows the take-up of RPL by Indigenous students is still below average. A number of agencies indicated they were waiting on the results of the research ANTA was commissioning on this before taking more action (p.41).

Phase 2 findings

As for Action 7.1

STAs to examine ways of increasing access to higher level VET and industry relevant programs. This will include types of support and their suitability for Indigenous students, fee structures, exemption processes, guidelines and models (including scholarships and community development approaches). (For action by STAs by mid-2001.)

Phase 1 findings

STAs and ANTA reported that some progress had been made in relation to this area of action. “The STAs have all commenced work under 7.3 and 7.4 to increase access to higher-level and industry-relevant programs” (p.41).
Phase 2 findings

Phase 2 researchers found that stakeholders had a great deal of information on this Action. Stakeholders reported that the areas of examination outlined in Action 7.3 clearly influence the outcomes for Indigenous students in VET and some significant initiatives are under way across Australia to increase access to higher-level VET programs. Stakeholders were also very clear that unless these areas for action are addressed, improvements for Indigenous students would be limited.

Action 7.4

STAs to ensure that Indigenous students can access higher-level courses. This should include:
- sound advice regarding careers, employment market trends and areas of future growth in employment demand
- expertise to recognise the individual’s capacity and to be aware of the supports and technologies available to them
- encouragement to undertake training to gain higher-level and industry-relevant qualifications and continue lifelong learning
- employment of Indigenous people to provide mentoring support.
(For action by STAs, DEWR and DEST by the end of 2001.)

Phase 1 findings

As for Action 7.3, STAs and ANTA reported that some progress had been made in relation to this area of action. “The STAs have all commenced work under 7.3 and 7.4, except NT, to increase access to higher-level and industry-relevant programs” (p.41).

Phase 2 findings

As for Action 7.3

Action 7.5

ANTA, together with the STAs, to develop a marketing campaign to attract Indigenous students to higher-level and industry-relevant VET and tertiary courses, with commensurate outcomes. (For action by ANTA, STAs and ACCI by the end of 2001.)

Phase 1 findings

The report from Phase 1 indicated that “There has been little activity to date on the marketing campaign called for under 7.5” (p.41).

Phase 2 findings

Phase 2 found that a number of marketing campaigns have been carried out across Australia to attract students into VET courses. Some of these have been organised at a local level, in response to articulated community needs, and have relied on the enthusiasm and commitment of particular individuals or small groups. Others are either system-based or produced by organisations such as Group Training Australia.

Action 7.6

ANTA, with STAs, to take steps to establish appropriate credit transfer and articulation arrangements for further education and training and/or employment. This includes courses provided outside the system. (For action by ANTA by mid-2002.)

Phase 1 findings

As for Action 7.5, Phase 1 indicated that STAs and ANTA reported that some progress had been made in relation to this area of action.

Work has progressed under 7.1 and 7.2 to use RPL and RCC to progress people through the VET system and to facilitate credit transfer and articulation (7.6). However, the Statistical Report [of the Phase 1 study] shows the take-up of RPL by Indigenous students is still below average. A number of agencies indicated they were waiting on the results of the research ANTA was commissioning on this before taking more action (p.41).

Phase 2 findings

As for Action 7.5
What partners have done to implement the *Blueprint* (cont.)

**Action 7.7**

STAs to build into state and territory plans and industry training plans priorities for:

- enabling skills (Basic work and lifeskills training that provide a pathway into further training)
- preparatory and prevocational courses
- AQF Certificate level I and II.

(For action by ANTA, STAs and ITABs by the end of 2001.)

**Phase 1 findings**

The Phase 1 researchers indicated that they had received little information from ITABs responding to the survey conducted in Phase 1. The survey responses from ITABs accounted for “the majority of the ‘no responses’, ‘no answers’ and unknowns” (p.39). “Only one ITAB (Local Government) acknowledged the responsibility it had under Blueprint Action 7.7, to build priorities for Indigenous people into their ITAB plans” (p.41). And, again, “Only one ITAB, the Local Government one, reported it had commenced the work in its Industry plan as required under action 7.7” (p.39).

**Phase 2 findings**

Phase 2 found that ITAB responses to this Action varied enormously. This is not surprising given the de-funding of state and territory ITABs in 2002. In some states and territories, partnerships between ITABs, public providers and government departments reflected good-quality relationships focused particularly on AQF Certificate Level I and II. Phase 2 received no evidence of ITAB involvement in initiatives relating to enabling skills or preparatory and prevocational courses.

**Objective 3: Culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered training**

*Achieve increased, culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered training, including the use of IT for Indigenous people*

**Strategy 8: Skill23 centres**

**Establish skill centres**

**Action 8.1**

ANTA to implement guidelines for accessing the ANTA VET infrastructure for Indigenous people sub-component of the infrastructure program – to include options such as community skill centres, community cluster groups, mobile units and IT. Priority to be given to submissions from rural and remote communities. (For action by ANTA by mid-2000.)

**Phase 1 findings**

See summary comment on Strategy 8 in Chapter 5.

**Phase 2 findings**

Stakeholders in Phase 2 provided a number of case studies of skill centres established as a result of this funding. One concern expressed by a number of stakeholders focuses on the expectation that the skill centres need to become self-funding. This was of particular concern to rural and remote communities, where the geography and the local economy limited the possibilities for the kinds of partnerships with industry or enterprise that might assure their future. Other stakeholders commented that the need for high quality submission writing skills often meant that community bids were at a disadvantage before they entered the tendering process.

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23 Although the Blueprint used the term “training centre” we will now use the revised term “skill centre”.

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STAs and ATSIC to disseminate information on guidelines widely, including to community organisations and STAs, to assist organisations to develop proposals within the guidelines. (For action by ATSIC and STAs by the end of 2000.)

Phase 1 findings
See summary comment on Strategy 8 in Chapter 5.

Phase 2 findings
See comment on Action 8.1.

STAs to ensure nationally recognised training is provided through centres funded under infrastructure programs. In addition to formal training, informal activities such as net surfing and computer games, should also be available to encourage usage and skills acquisition. (For action by STAs by the end of 2002.)

Phase 1 findings
See summary comment on Strategy 8 in Chapter 5.

Phase 2 findings
See comment on Action 8.1.

**Strategy 9: IT training**

*Training in IT skills and use.*

**Action 9.1**
STAs to provide entry-level courses in IT to be delivered in culturally appropriate ways, and market IT training to all members of Indigenous communities. (For action by STAs by the end of 2001.)

Phase 1 findings
See summary comment on Strategy 9.

Phase 2 findings
Stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 provided some examples of ways in which this Action is being implemented. The take-up rate of IT training is particularly strong in rural and remote areas, where links between the promotion of local industries and the use of IT are commercially clear. A number of innovative approaches are being used to market IT training, including the use of mobile units that visit communities and deliver training on-site. There was little evidence to support a conclusion that the initiatives were widespread or that the focus on cultural appropriateness of delivery and the construction of materials was a priority for STAs.

**Action 9.2**
Education Network Australia VET Advisory Group (EdNA-VET) Advisory Group to commission the development of culturally appropriate electronic and online content as part of effort under the collaborative framework for technology. (For action by ANTA by the end of 2002.)

Phase 1 findings
See the general comment on Strategy 9. ANTA reported progress in this area. In particular, it was reported that 18 applications for training had been received from Indigenous organisations, and 58 from rural and remote communities. Twenty-five projects are now completed.

Phase 2 findings
Phase 2 received no commentary on this Action from the stakeholders we consulted.
Action 9.3

Encourage use of online materials in development of training programs. (For action by STAs by the end of 2002.)

Phase 1 findings
See the general comment on Strategy 9.

Phase 2 findings
Stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 were not generally enthusiastic about the use of online materials for Indigenous students. The focus on print and the often culturally exclusive nature of online VET materials was not considered to be a useful interpretation of “flexible delivery”. A number of stakeholders stressed the need for online delivery to be part of a mixed or blended approach to learning, commenting that it worked well where the students were learning about IT through IT. There was also evidence that some programs were using online and web-based approaches with great success for particular groups of students undertaking particular courses. Others saw the creation of an online environment that linked Indigenous teachers of VET across states and territories as a productive way of using the technology as a tool to keep people in touch with issues and ideas.

Action 9.4

Distribute information regarding online teaching methods. (For action by STAs by the end of 2002.)

Phase 1 findings
See the general comment on Strategy 9.

Phase 2 findings
Phase 2 received no commentary on this Action from the stakeholders we consulted.

Objective 4: Links to employment

Develop closer links between VET outcomes for Indigenous people, and industry and employment

Strategy 10: Partnerships

Establish and expand partnerships between Indigenous people, communities, training providers and industry

Action 10.1

DEST to encourage New Apprenticeship Centres to facilitate and improve the participation of Indigenous people in New Apprenticeships. (For action by DEST by the end of 2004.)

Phase 1 findings
The Phase 1 researchers indicated that:

... DEST reported significant progress [under this Action], getting New Apprenticeship Centres to give greater attention to Indigenous clients. When the existing NAC contracts expire in June 2003, new contracts will provide a specific performance indicator on this. DEST reported that in the six years since its inception, NAAP has assisted 447 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander clients (4.2% of total clients), of whom 363 (28%) achieved either a New Apprenticeship or an employment outcome. A GTA report commissioned by ANTA under Action 13.2 also reports good progress. Group training organisations employ 1220 Indigenous apprentices, 22% of all Indigenous apprentices and trainees; and Indigenous apprentices and trainees make up 3.4% of all GT apprentices and trainees. Overall, the number of Indigenous apprentices and trainees is growing steadily (p.48).
Despite the progress being made, the Phase 1 researchers drew attention to several concerns identified from data in the statistical report:

while the absolute number of Indigenous apprenticeships and traineeships is growing, the Indigenous share of total places is actually falling. This means that inequality is growing, not narrowing (p.48).

Indigenous apprentices and trainees are concentrated much more than their non-Indigenous counterparts in the lower level courses and qualifications.

... the Indigenous share of these places is much less than their overall participation rates in VET, meaning that Indigenous VET students access this form of assistance into employment at a much lower rate than their non-Indigenous fellow students and potential students (p.48).

The Phase 1 researchers noted that significant gains had been made in Indigenous participation in apprenticeships and traineeships in “structural construction and final finishes”, and that progress needs to be made in the retail sector.

Phase 2 findings

Phase 2 researchers confirmed the results of Phase 1. Stakeholders also discussed a number of initiatives taking place around Australia designed to increase Indigenous participation in apprenticeships and traineeships with some impressive results. However, stakeholders qualified their enthusiasm in light of the concentration of Indigenous students in Certificate I and II, the relatively poor rate of completions when compared with non-Indigenous students, some inherent reluctance on the part of employers to take on Indigenous apprentices and trainees, and the sometimes abysmal levels of support that Indigenous students receive whilst completing these.

Action 10.2

DEST to articulate obligations to facilitate and improve the participation of Indigenous people in New Apprenticeships in revised or new funding contracts for New Apprenticeship centres. (For action by DEST by the end of 2003.)

Phase 1 findings

See comment on Action 10.1.

Phase 2 findings

Phase 2 examined the revised arrangements for New Apprenticeship Centres and noted that there needs to be far greater precision in the language used for compliance and more accurate reporting protocols if this is to be effective.

Action 10.3

ATSIC to ensure that adequate employment and training results from government contracts through the inclusion of such clauses in government contracts in areas of high Indigenous population, and monitor outcomes. (For action by ATSIC by the end of 2001.)

Phase 1 findings

It is not clear from the evidence available from Phase 1 whether ATSIC has commenced or completed Action 10.3.

Phase 2 findings

As for the Phase 1 researchers, the Phase 2 team received no comment about this Action from the stakeholders we consulted.
What partners have done to implement the *Blueprint* (cont.)

**Action 10.4** Government and industry agencies to stimulate strategic partnerships between government agencies and major industry through:
- dissemination of examples of leading practice in relation to partnerships
- promotion of scholarships for VET in specific industries for Indigenous students
- promotion of partnerships such as the ACCI partnership model
- existing programs such as the Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment project
- extension of Indigenous Cadetship program.

*(For action by DEWR, BCA and ACCI by the end of 2002.)*

**Phase 1 findings** The Phase 1 researchers indicated that little information had been received about Action 10.4 from the key agencies before the reporting deadline (pp.47, 48), though this may have changed with survey responses received after that time.

**Phase 2 findings** Phase 2 researchers found limited evidence to support the assertion that the strategies suggested above are either known about or have had an impact on Indigenous VET.

**Action 10.5** STAs and DEWR to facilitate the development of models of collaboration using RTOs and other organisations such as ACCI and state chambers of commerce and industry to:
- establish community links
- assist Indigenous communities to become businesses
- develop models for servicing communities.

*(For action by STAs and DEWR by the end of 2002.)*

**Phase 1 findings** The Phase 1 researchers indicated that the Victorian STA had instituted statewide key stakeholders forums, hosted by Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. The Queensland STA also reported on its efforts to fulfil the intentions of Action 10.5.

**Phase 2 findings** Phase 2 received substantial commentary about partnership-building and the role of some STAs in assisting in the development of partnerships – for example, in the partnerships developing under the umbrella of the Victorian *Wurreker* agreement. On the other hand, we did not receive comments specifically related to STAs and DEWR actions “to facilitate the development of models of collaboration” in the ways suggested in Action 10.5.

**Action 10.6** The Survey Network Group of the National Training Statistics Committee to develop a question about perception of Indigenous VET students and VET graduates for the next employer survey. *(For action by ANTA and NCVER by the end of 2002.)*

**Phase 1 findings** Phase 1 reported that action in this area had not yet commenced (p.48).

**Phase 2 findings** Phase 2 did not follow up on this Action, and thus cannot provide additional information or advice.
### What partners have done to implement the Blueprint (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action 10.7</th>
<th>ACCI to commission a survey of Indigenous job seekers and communities to assist in identifying ways to increase Indigenous employment in the private sector. This should include attitudinal issues including negative perceptions and stereotyping by employers and possible employees. (For action by ACCI in consultation with DEST, DEWR, and ANTA by the end of 2001.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1 findings</strong></td>
<td>Phase 1 reported that action in this area had not yet commenced (p.48).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 2 findings</strong></td>
<td>As for Action 10.7, Phase 2 did not follow up on this Action, and thus cannot provide additional information or advice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action 10.8</th>
<th>ACCI and ANTA to develop strategic links with ATSIC commissioners on employment and VET-related issues through strategic conversations. (For action by ACCI and ANTA by the end of 2000.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1 findings</strong></td>
<td>The Phase 1 researchers reported that “As a result of the implementations of Action 10.8 the ANTA Board met with ATSIC commissioners” (p.49).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 2 findings</strong></td>
<td>Phase 2 can confirm that Action 10.8 is under way, though we cannot confirm whether ACCI has been involved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action 10.9</th>
<th>DEST and ANTA to develop a strategy of simulated business initiatives to more effectively target Indigenous communities, e.g. practice firms, young achievement. (For action by DEST and ANTA by the end of 2001.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1 findings</strong></td>
<td>Some action appears to have begun in this area, but Phase 1 reported that “under 10.9 ‘simulated business initiatives’ there have been some practice firms established, for example at Tauondi in South Australia. Overall, however, the sense is that the industry linking strategy is not yet having substantial effect, nor are the partnerships in this area robust and durable” (p.49).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 2 findings</strong></td>
<td>Phase 2 received no comment directly on Action 10.9 from the particular stakeholders we consulted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action 10.10</th>
<th>ANTA to identify examples of best practice in industry to disseminate to employers. Examples may include ECEF and Lend Lease projects. (For action by ANTA by the end of 2001.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1 findings</strong></td>
<td>It is not clear from the findings of Phase 1 whether this Action was being implemented. ANTA reported that action had commenced and that further negotiations were to be held to make additional progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 2 findings</strong></td>
<td>Phase 2 received no commentary about Action 10.10 from the stakeholders we consulted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategy 11: CDEP

Expand opportunities for Indigenous people participating in CDEP

Action 11.1

STAs to ensure that CDEP is included as a priority in state/territory training plans. (For action by STAs and ATSIC by the end of 2003.)

Phase 1 findings

Phase 1 reported that there is only limited evidence of action being taken in this area by STAs, and “progress is still patchy”. The production of an information kit to assist CDEPs may facilitate further progress.

Phase 2 findings

Phase 2 researchers found that CDEP was a source of concern to many stakeholders. In some cases, linkages between CDEP and the provision of well-designed and well-tailored training have occurred, but many issues about the nature of the program remain unresolved — in particular, its links with industry, and its capacity to create mainstream employment possibilities for participants. Phase 2 researchers heard much evidence about the variety of kinds of links between CDEP, training and employment in different programs around the country, and the need for these links to be replicated in a way that meets the particular needs of individuals and communities.

Action 11.2

ATSIC with STAs to develop a strategic plan for VET in CDEP and to:

- encourage all CDEPs to have a training needs analysis conducted which forms the basis of the training plan
- consult with CDEPs and ATSIC regional councils to develop culturally appropriate and relevant strategies for delivering VET to CDEPs in accordance with the training needs analysis
- DEWR to make funds available for training needs analyses

(For action by STAs and ATSIC by the end of 2003.)

Phase 1 findings

As for 11.1, Phase 1 reported some limited progress in this area.

Phase 2 findings

As in Phase 1, the Phase 2 researchers found some examples of places where the component parts of Action 11.2 were being implemented. On the other hand, there are many places that have not taken these steps. There is thus only patchy evidence that the training needs analyses are being conducted — let alone regularly, universally and routinely conducted — by CDEPs, and that they have been designed to feed into the consequent planning and delivery of credible and capacity-building training. Some work has begun but it appears from stakeholders that it is not widespread.24

24 Since the Mid-term Review was undertaken ANTA has entered into a partnership with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), to undertake a project to identify the VET required by Indigenous people participating in 16 CDEP sites around Australia to move into sustainable “off-CDEP employment” or small business, negotiate arrangements for the delivery of identified training, and improve links between training and employment. The project is a direct response to Strategy 11 of the Blueprint. One of the project outcomes will be a framework to support the replication of the project methodology across other sites.
What partners have done to implement the *Blueprint* (cont.)

**Action 11.3**

STAs to develop an information kit and provide advice to CDEPs on becoming RTOs and entering partnerships with RTOs.

*(For action by STAs and ATSIC by the end of 2003.)*

**Phase 1 findings**

The information kit is being developed. The Phase 1 researchers also noted:

- “A special case is the CDEP schemes which under Action 11.3 are encouraged to become RTOs or to form partnerships with RTOs” (page 35).
- “From the STA reports ... it appears at this stage only five CDEPs are operating nationally as RTOs. This may improve, given that an information kit to help CDEPs become RTOs or build links with them is now underway” (p.49).

**Phase 2 findings**

The Phase 2 team received little information or commentary about this Action from the stakeholders we consulted.

**Action 11.4**

NTFC to endorse programs which will assist CDEPs to deliver VET. This may include endorsement of the CDEP Coordinator Training Course and the IOT package. *(For action by ANTA and ATSIC by the end of 2000.)*

**Phase 1 findings**

Work has been contracted toward achievement of this Action. The Phase 1 researchers noted that “ANTA also reported that the May 2002 ANTA MINCO meeting agreed ‘to support’ early implementation of the qualifications for governance of Indigenous organisations from the Business Services Training Packages (IOT), named under 11.4 as another way to provide assistance to CDEPs” (page 49).

**Phase 2 findings**

Phase 2 informants reiterated the need for governance training for those involved in administering and managing CDEPs²⁵.

**Strategy 12: Promote Indigenous employment through ITABs**

**Promote Indigenous training and employment through ITABs**

**Action 12.1**

ANTA to ensure that service agreements with national ITABs specify that industry training strategic plans and marketing plans include specific actions for improving opportunities for Indigenous people in that industry, including access to training places and increasing employment opportunities. *(For action by ANTA by the end of 2000.)*

**Phase 1 findings**

Phase 1 reported that only 9 of 28 ITABs responded to the Phase 1 survey. The researchers concluded that a number of those reporting showed “a serious lack of awareness” of the *Blueprint* and its objectives. According to the Phase 1 researchers, the de-funding of ITABs at the state and territory level seemed likely to “hinder implementation and Indigenous involvement”.

**Phase 2 findings**

Phase 2 informants reported on the varied responses to Action 12.1 by ITABs. The recent amalgamation, at both the national and state and territory levels, has created some opportunities for new partnership arrangements between departments of education and training, and ITABs. However, the imperative as expressed in this Action

²⁵ Since the Mid-term Review was completed, there has been increased emphasis on governance training for CDEPs, which is now provided through the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations, and TAFE in NSW, for example.
seems to have fallen between the cracks – as the influence of the ITABs wanes, so
does the effectiveness of this Action. Our research suggests that there is considerable
doubt about the extent to which ITABs receive, let alone respond to, Indigenous advice
or perspectives. Some ITABs have made efforts to respond; most are yet to do so.

Action 12.2 STAs to ensure that state ITABS incorporate expert information on Indigenous issues
when developing state industry plans. Relevant issues include training needs and
employment opportunities for Indigenous community members. (For action by STAs
and state ITABs by the end of 2000.)

Phase 1 findings See comment on Action 12.1.
Phase 2 findings Phase 2 informants mentioned that Indigenous representation on ITAB boards varied
from none to some, with “none” being the most common situation. Without this
representation, it is doubtful that ITABs in general will respond to Indigenous perspectives
either in the design and delivery of training or in improving pathways to further training
and employment for Indigenous people.

Strategy 13: Promote Indigenous training through Group Training Companies

Promote Indigenous training and employment through Group Training Companies.

Action 13.1 ANTA, through its performance agreement26 with GTA, require GTA to:

- promote and facilitate, through state and territory networks, the uptake of
  Indigenous employment, including New Apprenticeships
- encourage case management of Indigenous New Apprenticeships.

(For action by GTA by the end of 2001.)

Phase 1 findings Phase 1 reported that good progress is being made in this area.
Phase 2 findings Phase 2 informants reported that GTA has completed this Action and that the materials
supporting the implementation of the Action are available on the GTA website. The
materials include an outline of the advertising and marketing campaign and a “Best
Practice Guide for Employing Indigenous Australians through Group Training Arrangements”.

Action 13.2 ANTA to review the implementation of the national funding model for group training
under the joint policy. The review will include the application of equity weightings
applied by STAs. (For action by ANTA by the end of 2000.)

Phase 1 findings Phase 1 reported that ANTA was undertaking this review, commenting that “A GTA
report commissioned by ANTA ... reports good progress” (page 48).
Phase 2 findings Relevant stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 reported that the new National Standards
for group training organisations are aligned with the AQTF and include equity provisions.
GTOs will be audited for compliance against these standards. While this is a good step
forward, our informants cautioned against equating “a statement on the books” with
improved equity conditions for Indigenous students. Informants expressed concern that
some training organisations, especially those who see their particular target clientele as
non-Indigenous, may merely give lip-service to equity concerns.

26 The agreement between ANTA and GTA is now called a service agreement
What partners have done to implement the Blueprint (cont.)

**Action 13.3** Industry groups, DEST and STAs to promote to group training organisations the benefits of:
- employing Indigenous people
- supporting/mentoring Indigenous employees/trainees
- appointing Indigenous employment officers to work with VET in Schools, employers and communities.

*(For action by STAs, ACCI, AIG and DEST by the end of 2001.)*

**Phase 1 findings** Phase 1 reports good progress in this area.

**Phase 2 findings** Phase 2 researchers found that the commitment to Indigenous training and employment as promoted to GTOs was often diluted by the realities of employer reluctance to take on Indigenous trainees and apprentices. Employers sometimes regarded Indigenous students as unreliable and troublesome, and thus as people who could compromise the profitability and the smooth running of the workplace. Clearly, work has to be directed towards changing employer attitudes – a difficult task for GTOs, given their reliance on host employers for their continued existence.

**Action 13.4** STAs investigate and pilot the establishment of Indigenous group training organisations.

*(For action by STAs and GTA by the end of 2001.)*

**Phase 1 findings** Phase 1 reports good progress in this area.

**Phase 2 findings** Phase 2 informants supported the call for Indigenous GTOs. GTOs in the Northern Territory have a strong focus on Indigenous training and participation, and the lessons learnt in these and a number of other GTOs could form the basis for the formation of a totally Indigenous GTO.
How the Objectives and Strategies of Partners in a Learning Culture and the Blueprint interact towards meeting the needs, aspirations and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities

The Objectives and Strategies of Partners in a Learning Culture and the Blueprint were not conceptualised in isolation from one another. Following a long history of policy for Indigenous education and training – from long before the formation of the 1989 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy – it has been recognised that a coherent approach to the improvement of Indigenous education and training depends on a variety of interconnected elements. These include:

- effective participation by Indigenous people in decision-making about education and training
- staff professional development for:
  - non-Indigenous people who need to be intelligently aware about, appreciative of, and responsive to Indigenous people, knowledge, communities and cultures
  - Indigenous staff in education and training, who will be appropriately represented at all levels of employment if supported by targeted employment and career development programs
  - Indigenous community members involved in decision-making about education and training, including other members of the families of Indigenous students
- the development of programs, procedures and practices that will ensure that Indigenous students have access to, and participate, continue and achieve success in, education and training
- the development of curriculum and training materials, and teaching and assessment that Indigenous students will experience as culturally appropriate and inclusive, engaging and enabling
- programs to supply and develop the kinds of infrastructure and facilities that will genuinely support Indigenous students and communities in education and training.

For some time, then, it has been widely understood that transforming the education and training of Indigenous people requires transforming the “mainstream” of education and training systems that have been experienced as excluding, and even hostile, by Indigenous students. On this understanding, change is needed not only at the margins of education and training systems, to improve opportunities for this particular group of students – but also needed throughout the systems themselves. As Partners and the Blueprint for its implementation clearly show, and as one of our informants put it, “Indigenous business is core business” throughout education and training. This means that institutional programs, procedures and practices throughout education and training – the practices of students, teachers and administrators in every area of education and training systems – must change to achieve cultural inclusiveness (not just “become more culturally inclusive”).
A coherent strategy for Indigenous education and training must thus proceed on many fronts – as Partners and its Blueprint do. Enacting an overall strategy like Partners is not just a matter of working on individual areas towards goals, targets and expected outcomes in each, but in ways that connect and integrate efforts across areas. Work in each particular area – the culturally appropriate delivery of culturally appropriate training, for example – also requires that complementary work be done in other areas – preparing, hiring and supporting Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers able to teach in culturally appropriate ways in culturally appropriate facilities and locations, for example.

Some observers of the progress made in implementing the Blueprint might conclude that the progress towards overall achievement of its vision had been a little impeded by focusing on particular Actions rather than the overall Vision of Partners. As we showed at the beginning of each of Chapters 3 to 6, the Strategies and particular Actions of the Blueprint are more modest in scope, imperfectly rendering the more dynamic, more holistic intentions of Partners. To some extent, it might be argued, the process of setting specific goals, targets and indicators, and defining Actions relevant to each of its separate Strategies, is inherently fragmenting. Against this, it might reasonably be said that defining specific Actions for each Strategy is simply to ensure that orderly progress can be made across the whole range of Strategies and Objectives of Partners. No doubt this is true – as long as those doing the implementing in fact do keep the overarching Vision clearly in mind, and as long as progress is being made on all fronts. But this Mid-term Review suggests that progress is far from uniform: better progress is being made in some areas (Objectives, Strategies, Actions) than in others, and at some sites in the VET system than at others.

This is the usual state of affairs in reform programs – whenever major transformation is sought across a whole system. The goals change, the means of achieving them change, the people involved change – but they change at different rates. Informants consulted in Phase 2 of the Mid-term Review frequently mentioned this fact, whether nodding wisely at the vagaries and unevenness of systemic change or expressing frustration that the changes needed have not been made more quickly. But people know. And informed participants in systems know that their best efforts are being hampered by the slowness of change in other areas that should be complementing their efforts. Indigenous teachers, for example, may thus express frustration that employment and career development planning in human resources branches has not yet become widespread. Members of Indigenous organisations may complain that the VET system is not yet providing culturally appropriate training and pathways into higher levels of training and from that training to employment. Indigenous students may complain that they still meet institutional racism in the form of practices that exclude them from places, support and forms of training delivery that would meet their needs – perhaps because managers in particular places have not yet made it unacceptable for their institution to behave in such ways. Indigenous communities, frustrated by training that seems to lead nowhere, may complain that no RTO has yet undertaken the kind of comprehensive training needs analysis that would connect training securely to community economic development plans.
To some extent, the consultations in Phase 2 of the Mid-term Review revealed that there is a culture, not so much of complaint, but of low expectations about what can be achieved in responding to the legitimate needs and demands of Indigenous people. Many things must be achieved together if the whole VET system is to deliver what Partners aims to achieve.

Progress may be uneven, but our research shows that progress is being made in most areas of the Blueprint for implementation of Partners, and in most areas of the country. On the other hand, our consultations with stakeholders in VET for Indigenous people suggest that progress will remain slow so long as commitment to achieving the Vision of Partners remains patchy and idiosyncratic. We mentioned earlier that funding, accountability, auditing and other requirements of the VET system are not enough to produce the transformation of VET envisaged in Partners. These things may be technically necessary, but they are not practically sufficient. As we said earlier, “commitment, not just compliance” is necessary to achieve the transformation.

In this Chapter, we hope to show that there are tensions as well as interconnections between parts of the Australian VET system as it undertakes this journey of transformation. Because progress in some areas is slower than in others, hoped-for changes are being impeded. While this continues to be the case, many clients and potential clients of VET will continue to see little evidence of transformation in their chances in terms of training and employment, down at the local level. Also, while this continues to be the case, the greatest successes will be achieved only through the dedicated, intelligent and sometimes heroic efforts of individuals with enough knowledge of the system to make it work for their students, in their location. Often, though by no means always, the people responsible for these “breakthroughs” were Indigenous people acting with the support of their communities; many times, they were non-Indigenous people of extraordinary commitment. VET in Australia may owe these people a debt of gratitude for showing what can be done, but it cannot and should not rely on such people and such efforts to achieve what the system should routinely achieve – in the words of the Vision of Partners in a Learning Culture:

*a vocational education and training system which renews and shares an Indigenous learning culture with all Australians in a spirit of reconciliation, equity, justice, and community economic development and sustainability.*

To address the issue of “unevenness” in progress towards achieving this Vision as a whole, we will consider the “interactive complexity” of the component parts of Partners and the Blueprint. By this we mean considering the ways in which the different Objectives, Strategies and Actions interconnect, and how lack of progress on one front may impede progress on others.
The interactive complexity of the component parts of *Partners in a Learning Culture*

*Partners* has four Objectives. Together, they express a kind of “theory” about how VET and employment outcomes can be improved for Indigenous people. Figure 1 presents this “theory” in diagrammatic form.

What is meant by “theory” here? We use the term to suggest that the four objectives of *Partners* are not just interconnected, but that some are pre-conditions for others – that is, attaining one objective will tend to cause, or entail, a greater chance of attaining another. The arrows in Figure 1 show the nature and direction of these entailments.

The reason for emphasising the interconnectedness of the four Objectives is to highlight their “interactive complexity” – that is, the complex interrelationships that exist between them, making them a dynamical whole. To highlight this is to insist that *Partners* should not be understood just as a sequence of particular strategies and actions to be implemented independently of one another, or to be measured only each in its own terms against targets and key performance indicators. It is to insist that they be understood as a complex set of actions aimed at meeting complex intentions for changing VET to meet the needs of different groups of Indigenous clients.
The interactive complexity of *Partners* is both evident and explicit in the statement of the Vision and Objectives of the national strategy in the *Blueprint*:

The vision of:

A vocational education and training system which renews and shares an Indigenous learning culture with all Australians in a spirit of reconciliation, equity, justice, and community economic development and sustainability will be achieved by:

- increasing involvement of Indigenous people in decision-making about policy, planning, resources and delivery
- achieving participation in VET for Indigenous people equal to those of the rest of the Australian community
- achieving increased culturally appropriate, and flexibly delivered training, including use of information technology, for Indigenous people
- developing closer links between VET outcomes for Indigenous people and industry and employment (p.15).

We think that a reasonable person reading *Partners* is entitled to conclude that, as a strategy for change, it implies five important assertions or claims. These claims are what lead us to think of *Partners* as embodying a “theory”. The five claims are these:

1. Progress towards achieving Objective 1, concerning involvement in decision-making, is likely to improve the chances that Objective 3 (Culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered training) will be attained. This is so because if Indigenous people advise on the content and practice of VET programs, products and practices, they will help to make these programs, products and practices more culturally appropriate for Indigenous clients. (Arrow 1 in Figure 1.)

2. Progress towards achieving Objective 1 may also help towards attainment of Objective 2 (Participation in VET). This is so for the same kinds of reasons as in 1. (Arrow 2 in Figure 1.)

3. Progress towards achieving Objective 1 may also help towards attainment of Objective 4 (Links to employment). This is so because if Indigenous people advise employers and employer groups, and people and organisations forming partnerships with employers and employer groups, it is more likely that Indigenous people will achieve employment outcomes in the industries involved. (Arrow 3 in Figure 1.)

4. Progress towards achieving Objective 3 may help towards attainment of Objective 2. This is so because more culturally appropriate and more flexibly delivered programs, products and practices are likely to be more accessible to Indigenous clients, more engaging, and more likely to meet their needs and interests. (Arrow 4 in Figure 1.)
5. Progress towards achieving Objective 2 will help towards attainment of Objective 4, because improved participation by Indigenous people in VET, improved retention, and improved achievement mean that there will be more, better-qualified Indigenous participants in and graduates of VET more likely to achieve employment outcomes. (Arrow 5 in Figure 1.)

These are reasonable claims, but they turn out to be surprisingly difficult to achieve in practice – especially throughout a national system of VET. Achieving each individual Objective is difficult. Ensuring that each makes its contribution to the next is also difficult. And it is thus difficult to ensure that the first three work in concert to achieve the last – enhanced employment outcomes for Indigenous clients and graduates of VET.

On the basis of the information we have gathered from a wide range of stakeholders in VET for Indigenous people, we believe that much is being achieved towards improved employment outcomes for Indigenous clients and graduates of VET. On the other hand, the evidence of the Mid-term Review shows that considerable difficulties remain, and substantial obstacles are still to be overcome. More particularly, there has been greater progress in implementation of the first three Objectives of Partners than there has in the fourth.

The “theory” of Partners is further elaborated through the articulation of 13 Strategies attached to the four main Objectives. Beyond the level of strategies, the Blueprint for the implementation of Partners lists a number of Actions to be taken by partner agencies (signatories to the Blueprint). By implementing the particular Actions outlined in the Blueprint, it is expected that partner agencies will contribute towards the attainment of the Objectives of Partners.

In what follows, we present four figures (Figures 2 to 5) showing the particular Strategies connected to each Objective. We will make a few summary observations about each intended to indicate, from the information we have collected from a variety of stakeholder groups, some of the achievements, difficulties and obstacles so far encountered in the implementation of the Blueprint and Partners.
Objective 1: Involvement in decision-making

Figure 2 shows the three Strategies intended to help in the attainment of **Objective 1** of *Partners*:

- **Strategy 1**: Secure Indigenous membership of key decision making bodies
- **Strategy 2**: Develop mechanisms to include Indigenous advice in all VET projects, programs, products
- **Strategy 3**: Secure Indigenous employment in key areas of the VET sector

Overall, quite good progress has been made towards securing Indigenous membership of key decision-making bodies (Strategy 1) – more in the *Blueprint* partner organisations than in others, and more at higher levels of the VET system than in some ITABs, RTOs and other organisations. The same is generally true about receiving Indigenous advice (Strategy 2) – it is more routine at the higher levels of the VET system, and less so in some ITABs, RTOs and other agencies. There has been less progress in increasing the number of Indigenous employees in VET (Strategy 3), and this means that VET organisations are deprived of Indigenous perspectives and advice as a routine part of their operations.

The level of progress towards achieving the intentions of these Strategies has effects on other Objectives of *Partners* and the *Blueprint*.

It is clear from the information gathered in the course of the Mid-term Review that stakeholders believe that there are shortcomings in achieving Objective 3 (Culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered training). The developers of Training Packages appear not to have received sufficient advice to ensure that packages, across the board, are actually *experienced* as culturally inclusive by Indigenous students. There are exceptions to this rule – frequently in organisations where Indigenous people are significantly involved in interpreting and delivering packages, and in communities where community involvement in training needs analyses has ensured that packages are relevant to the needs, interests and circumstances of the local Indigenous people. In such cases, Packages are customised to meet local needs. But there are three kinds of contrary cases:

- cases where the requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) (especially in the definition of competencies, and assessment and reporting) place limits on customisation
cases where the definition of competencies is based on industry views of competencies that are not matched to the employment needs and workplace possibilities actually present in communities

- cases where Indigenous students undertake Indigenous-specific training, either designed for employment in Indigenous organisations or communities (or, more generally, the “Indigenous sector”) or limiting their employment opportunities to the non-Indigenous sector (which sometimes also creates difficulties of “credential acceptance” if graduates seek employment outside the sector).

The second of these kinds of difficulties is illustrated in the following case story.

**Case story**

Informants in New South Wales, the Northern Territory and Queensland are deeply concerned about the appropriateness of Health Training Packages to the needs of Indigenous health workers. Informants perceive that the Community Services and Health Service ITAB appears to have been focused on the needs of “mainstream” students and the “mainstream” health industry, not on the particular situation of Indigenous health workers who may be the sole or principal providers of primary health care in some communities. Some informants from the Indigenous health industry believed that they have had little success in getting their concerns about the appropriateness of training heard. In their view, Indigenous representation on the Health ITAB, together with an Indigenous advisory body more richly acquainted with the Indigenous health industry could help to ensure that Indigenous health worker training is more directly and effectively oriented to their work and workplaces. Our informants conceded that many of the skills required by Indigenous health workers are the same as those required in the health industry as a whole. But they also emphasised that the skills are employed in different combinations, with different priorities, and in different work contexts from those the developers of the Health Training Package seemed to have had in mind.

In Queensland, informants indicated that work is being done on the recognition of prior learning and current competencies to improve the situation for Indigenous health workers in training. They also indicated that a program being run by Indigenous Health in cooperation with the Queensland University of Technology offered training more closely tailored to the needs of the managers of Indigenous health services.

Our informants reported that the National Review of Competency Standards for Health now under way is being urged to take *Partners in a Learning Culture* into account, and to recognise the specific needs, circumstances and work situations of Indigenous health workers. ANTA has contracted Community Services and Health Training Australia to develop Indigenous health worker competency standards. But there continues to be conflict over the degree to which existing training can or should be “customised” to take into account the particular needs and situation of Indigenous health workers versus developed specifically to recognise and accredit competencies needed by Indigenous health workers and health service managers. Various powerful professional and industrial bodies in the health industry have strong views on the issue, and there is some anxiety that new ways to resolve the conflict will not be found. Our informants fear that if those voices continue to dominate the debate, new approaches will not be found, and training for Indigenous health workers and health service managers will continue to fall short of what is needed.
It is also clear from information gathered in the course of the Mid-term Review that progress towards achieving Objective 2 (Participation in VET) is being hampered by lack of responsiveness to Indigenous perspectives, concerns and circumstances. The research for the Mid-term Review identified many cases where Indigenous participation, retention and achievement was strong, and where training was meeting local needs and improving employment outcomes for Indigenous people. In these cases, we frequently found that Indigenous advice had been listened to and “heard” by Training Package developers, by RTO representatives and other bodies conducting training needs analyses in local communities, and by the teachers and managers interpreting and delivering the packages. Such people were responding to advice from “above” (Indigenous representatives and advisory bodies on key organisations) and “below” (from local Indigenous communities and organisations). But the researchers also encountered many stakeholders with very different stories to tell. There were many stories of training – both in content and delivery – that was culturally inappropriate, poorly matched to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities, and frequently delivered only at Certificate I or II levels, offering no guarantee of employment possibilities on completion. Sometimes the barriers that inappropriate training put in the way of Indigenous students were sufficiently impenetrable for the students to conclude that VET “wasn’t for them”. In short, the effect of inappropriate training may sometimes be to “inoculate” potential clients against training. If the people and organisations delivering training were more uniformly and profoundly informed by Indigenous perspectives on training and industry, such an outcome might be less common than it is.

The information collected in the course of the Mid-term Review was less clear about Objective 4 (Links to employment) than other Objectives. It seems from consultations with stakeholders consulted in Phase 2 of the Review that many employers at the local level remain unconvinced that Indigenous employees are for them. Many workplaces have employment, and thus qualifications, only at Certificate III and above. These may not in fact be accessible to Indigenous people in many places. While there was good evidence of notable successes in building community employer partnerships, it cannot yet be taken for granted that pathways to higher-level training and to employment are routinely “open” to Indigenous clients of VET. Too often, the webs of connection are torn by failures to appreciate the needs, interest and life circumstances of Indigenous people and communities. Some, but far from all, cases where success was being achieved in linking VET to employment outcomes for Indigenous people were instances where Indigenous voices were assumed to be relevant both to deciding what training should be offered, and to explicit plans for Indigenous employment and career development. Sometimes, this occurred in particular industries (the Seafood ITAB was mentioned as exemplary). Sometimes it occurred because of the commitment of particular employers to coherent career planning (the large city council mentioned in one of the case stories in Chapter 3 is a case in point). Sometimes it occurred because Indigenous employer organisations (like community councils) participated in making relevant training available for their Indigenous employees. Sometimes it occurred because training was integrated into well-thought-out, consultatively agreed community economic development plans.
One disheartening message from this research might be that training will be best matched to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people only when:

- Indigenous organisations arrange it for themselves
- it is delivered by Indigenous RTOs and trainers
- employment outcomes are provided in Indigenous enterprises and organisations.

But the reality is different. There is gradual and general progress towards achieving employment outcomes for Indigenous people through training in many industries and locations around the country – especially where the design, development and delivery of training heeds Indigenous voices. Moreover, partnerships with Indigenous people, organisations and communities are bearing fruit in terms of employment outcomes in many places, though this situation is still far from the norm. The task of building partnerships between Indigenous organisations and communities, industries and employers, and training developers and providers is likely to remain an essential objective and continuing task for VET.

The key test of the degree to which Objective 1 is being achieved is impact – the impact of Indigenous perspectives and advice on the decisions taken by different groups about the design, development and delivery of VET for Indigenous people. Clearly, many informants believe that, while there are exceptions, “deafness” to Indigenous advice remains widespread throughout the VET system. Some ITABs, RTOs, GTOs and other organisations (including some organisations that are signatories to Partners and the Blueprint) continue to operate in ways that treat responsiveness to Indigenous concerns as something exceptional, to be done at the margins of usual ways of operating. As one of our informants put it: [For such organisations] “Indigenous business is not core business”.
Objective 2: Participation in VET

Figure 3 shows the Strategies intended to assist in the attainment of Objective 2 of *Partners*:

*Figure 3: Strategies associated with Objective 2 of *Partners in a Learning Culture**

The research for the Mid-term Review suggests that much activity is under way in relation to VET in Schools (Strategy 4). There is also a good deal of activity in relation to professional development, more evidently for non-Indigenous staff (cross-cultural awareness training) than for Indigenous staff (Strategy 5). There is also a good deal of activity around partnerships between schools, post-secondary institutions, industry and communities (Strategy 6), though it is localised rather than widespread around the nation. There is evidence of activity aimed at increasing access to and attainment in VET for Indigenous people (Strategy 7), but progress towards improved access and attainment in higher-level and more industry-relevant courses is slow – though perhaps initiatives in this area are yet to bear fruit. (In some areas for action, there is little evidence of projects and programs that are likely to make a significant difference during the life of *Partners*. Efforts are being made in some key areas, but there is little evidence yet of widespread and substantial transformation of the existing situation. Two examples are increased use of recognition of prior learning (RPL) and recognition of current competencies (RCC) for Indigenous people, and improving pathways from lower-level courses to Certificate III and above.)

On the “theory” of *Partners*, Objective 2 is meant to have an impact on achievement of Objective 4. As the last paragraph suggests, some Strategies under Objective 4 are beginning to have such an impact, while others are not.
Strategy 4 (VET in schools) is making some impact on links to employment, especially where it is associated with workplace-based training and traineeships, but there are questions in the minds of some Indigenous people about whether VET in Schools initiatives are a form of “streaming” Indigenous students away from tertiary-oriented school studies. The involvement of employers in partnerships with schools in supportive mentoring relationships with individual Indigenous students is another promising initiative but programs of this kind are still relatively isolated.

There is doubt about whether Strategy 5 (Professional development) is increasing or having the intended effect (informants report that it is frequently “preaching to the converted”), and doubt about how cross-cultural awareness might contribute to improved links to employment and improved employment outcomes, especially in the short term.

As already indicated, initiatives under Strategy 6 (partnerships involving Indigenous communities, schools, post-secondary institutions and employers) are showing promise in terms of employment outcomes. As we saw in the discussion of this Strategy in Chapter 4, however, there are many difficulties in forming and sustaining these partnerships, especially in “industry-poor” and “employment-poor” parts of the country.

As with Strategy 6, there is evidence of programs and initiatives under Strategy 7 (Improved access to and attainment in VET, particularly in higher-level and more industry-relevant courses) that may yield more widespread returns in years to come, but the progress that is being made seems to be in localised initiatives. It remains true that not enough Indigenous people are yet taking courses at Certificate III level and above. There is so far only localised evidence of initiatives to improve RPL and RCC, to develop pathways from prevocational courses through Certificates I and II into Level III and above, and to develop pathways from training to employment.

Objective 2 is at the heart of the national VET system. It concerns the system’s main reason for being: the work of vocational education and training. Strategy 4 (VET in Schools) is about expanding VET into schools, a little to the side of the main effort of VET through RTOs.

Strategy 5 (Professional development) should be making a difference: it concerns the formation and development of both the non-Indigenous and Indigenous workforce in VET, so VET will be alert and attuned to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities. If Strategy 5 had achieved its intentions, Indigenous clients of VET would not so frequently comment on the irrelevance or inappropriateness of Training Packages or the delivery of training, or on the ways they feel excluded by RTOs that don’t recognise, respect and respond to Indigenous people and communities.

Strategy 6 (Partnerships) is having an impact in various locations where partnerships have been built – the promise shown in these initiatives could be much more widely emulated throughout the VET system.

Strategy 7 (Improved access, achievement and retention, especially in higher-level and more industry-relevant courses) should be having a more dramatic effect. It concerns pathways into VET, between levels in VET, and from VET to employment. Our research suggests that it is common for Indigenous clients to experience these pathways as mazes, or as littered with substantial barriers that prevent them making better progress. Moreover, especially in rural and remote areas, frequently “industry-poor” and employment-poor”, it may not be correct to assume some of the things that some ITABs and Training Package developers appear to take for granted – for example, that industry placements are locally available, or that trainees are currently in employment in the relevant industry.
Because it is at the heart of the VET system, Objective 2 is the key test for the system. It is also at the heart of the work of ITABs, Training Package developers and RTOs. To the extent that the employment outcomes envisaged in Objective 4 continue to be unsatisfactory for Indigenous clients and potential clients of VET, Partners continues to be needed.

**Objective 3: Culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered training**

Figure 4 shows the particular Strategies intended to assist in the attainment of **Objective 3** of Partners:

Research conducted for the Mid-term Review indicates that action is under way on Strategy 8. Informants suggested that, where they had been established, some skill centres had become the focus for community activity and training. Similarly, action is under way on Strategy 9 (Training in IT skills and use), and there was evidence of widespread interest in IT among Indigenous people and communities. Informants certainly provided evidence that some IT was indeed in culturally appropriate forms; some informants were anxious that online delivery might sometimes be of a kind that would fail to engage the interest of Indigenous learners who may, under some circumstances, prefer face-to-face delivery of training.

As has been noted, the emphasis of Objective 3 on the cultural appropriateness and flexible delivery of training to meet the needs of Indigenous clients has retreated from view somewhat in the Blueprint (by comparison with Partners in a Learning Culture). Cultural appropriateness and more flexible modes, styles and times of delivery are not just relevant to the work of skill centres or IT skills and use. They are crucial to the whole work of the VET system. The research conducted for the Mid-term Review found a number of examples of Training Packages, ITABs and RTOs that were achieving
cultural appropriateness and more flexible delivery of training, but it also heard from many informants who complained of Training Packages, ITABs and RTOs that were neither culturally appropriate nor flexible about delivery.

According to the “theory” of Partners, achievements in Objective 3 are meant to result in improved participation, retention and achievement in VET, especially in higher-level and more industry-relevant courses – Objective 2. Our informants suggested that there were conspicuous examples to show that this effect had been observed – significant improvements in participation, retention and achievement by Indigenous clients – though these improvements were yet to be substantial, sustained and significant at Certificate III level and above. On the other hand, there is much more evidence of training that is not designed, developed and delivered in culturally appropriate and flexible ways. The more usual experience of Indigenous clients seems to be that training will not be particularly suited to their needs, interests and circumstances – though the situation is certainly changing. We have made this point a number of times in this report, and will not labour the point further here. But there can be no doubt that one of the main findings of the Mid-term Review must be that, in the design and delivery of training in the VET system, Training Package developers, ITABs, STAs RTOs must:

- seek and respond to Indigenous advice about training, both in general and in relation to the particular communities where training is to be offered
- make clear, definite and determined responses to the needs, interests and circumstances of different Indigenous people and communities, evident in both in the content of training and in its delivery
- show clear evidence of respect for, recognition of, and responsiveness to Indigenous people and communities.

That this cannot yet be taken for granted throughout the training system shows that the work of Partners is far from complete. Many Training Package developers, ITABs, STAs and RTOs have some way to go before they will be able to demonstrate that they are meeting the broader intentions of Objective 3 – that training is culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered.
Objective 4: Links to employment

Figure 5 shows the four Strategies intended to assist in attaining **Objective 4** of **Partners**:

- **Strategy 10**: Expanding partnerships: Indigenous peoples, communities, RTOs, industry
- **Strategy 11**: Expand opportunities for Indigenous people in CDEP
- **Strategy 12**: Promote Indigenous training and employment through ITABs
- **Strategy 13**: Promote Indigenous training and employment through group training organisations

It is evident from the research for the Mid-term Review that much activity is under way in relation to Strategy 10 (Expanding partnerships between Indigenous people, communities, RTOs and industry). As has already been indicated, there is strong local work going on in this area, and a range of programs of support for partnership-building from governments.

There is also evidence that work has begun on Strategy 11 (Expand opportunities for Indigenous people in CDEP). As has been indicated, this is complex because CDEPs serve different kinds of functions in different places, with different kinds of roles in individual skill development and community economic development. Many STAs are now working with ATSIC towards better alignment of CDEP with training.

It was less clear from the research that strong activity is occurring in promoting Indigenous training and employment through ITABs – Strategy 12. As has been indicated, while some ITABs have been conspicuous in responding to Indigenous people and communities, the majority appear not to have made this responsiveness a priority in their operations.

There is good evidence of activity under way on Strategy 13 (Promote Indigenous training and employment through group training organisations). Among other evidence suggesting this is so is the striking finding that nearly one quarter of all Indigenous trainees and apprentices in Australia are employed by GTOs, compared with 12 per cent of the total number of apprentices and trainees.

As was noted in relation to Objective 2, the VET system cannot by itself improve employment outcomes for Indigenous clients: the clients themselves, Indigenous communities, industry and employers also have roles to play. Achieving improved employment outcomes for Indigenous people is not the responsibility of the VET system alone. The system cannot single-handedly create employment initiatives or employment outcomes for Indigenous communities. Nor can it single-handedly change
the attitudes of employers or industry groups indifferent to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous communities. The system as a whole, and individual RTOs, cannot, on one hand, create partnerships with Indigenous people and communities and, on the other, with industry and employers if these groups are hesitant or reluctant. But the system can be proactive in seeking such partnerships, and it can work towards establishing them over the long haul. Committed, sustained and collaborative efforts to implement Partners and the Blueprint are among the ways the VET system can demonstrate responsiveness to community and industry partners, and its determination to improve training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people.

Conclusions

The research for the Mid-term Review leads us to these conclusions:

- Those responsible for implementing specific Actions identified in the Blueprint need to see each Action in the wider context of the Blueprint as a whole, and, more particularly, in the wider context provided by Partners. For its Vision to be realised, Partners needs to be understood and enacted as a dynamic whole, not through isolated or fragmented activities that do not take the wider framework of its intentions into account.

- While progress towards achieving the intentions of Partners and the Blueprint is evident in relation to every Strategy in the Blueprint, overall progress is gradual, patchy and uneven. The consequence of this is that overall progress towards achieving the intentions encapsulated in the four Objectives of Partners is being impeded by lack of progress on one or another of the Objectives separately.

- It follows from the first two of these points, we believe, that overall progress, and progress on each Objective, will be assisted if each is clearly understood and enacted in relation to the others. As we suggested earlier, progress is not just a matter of compliance with the Actions listed in the Blueprint, but of commitment to its overall Vision and Objectives. The source of the Vision and Objectives is Partners. There is a need for revitalised dissemination of Partners and the Blueprint, and to ensure that those responsible for Actions under the Blueprint interpret their particular responsibilities in the light of the intentions of Partners.

- The key indicators of success in achieving the Vision and Objectives of Partners are improved training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people. The evidence gathered in the research for the Mid-term Review indicates that, on these key indicators, not much has changed since 1999 (before Partners appeared). Progress is being made in many areas that may be necessary to achieve that longer-term goal, but the whole machinery of VET has not yet been transformed sufficiently to ensure that Indigenous people have equitable training and employment outcomes when compared with other Australians. Achieving this transformation throughout the system is a formidable task, involving everyone responsible for VET in Australia. In our view, there will continue to be a need for a distinct national strategy for VET for Indigenous people until equity in training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people has been achieved.
How the Australian VET system responds to the needs, aspirations and circumstances of Indigenous people

The very existence of Partners in a Learning Culture is evidence that people responsible for the VET system want to change the system to improve training and employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians. The establishment of AITAC is evidence that ANTA wants to do this in ways guided by the knowledge, advice and expertise of Indigenous people. This Mid-term Review of the implementation of the Blueprint for Partners was designed as an opportunity to check whether Partners and the Blueprint were having the intended effect – whether progress was being made towards realising their Vision of a VET system which renews and shares an Indigenous learning culture with all Australians in a spirit of reconciliation, equity, justice, and community economic development and sustainability.

The research for this Mid-term Review has found that progress is being made towards this goal, though it is somewhat patchy and uneven in the VET system as a whole. It is also clear that some parts of the system have made substantial and significant changes in the intended directions, and that there are powerful and exciting examples of improved outcomes in training and employment for Indigenous people and communities.

The title Partners in a Learning Culture makes two things explicit: that Indigenous culture in Australia is, and has always been, a culture that nurtures learning, and that the Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors of the national strategy believe that progress can be made towards achieving its Vision through partnership. A full understanding of learning, culture and partnership is needed if the Vision is to be realised. The research conducted for this Review has given us the opportunity to hear something about the extent to which Indigenous stakeholders in VET – trainees, teachers, managers, communities and organisations – believe that progress has been made towards achieving the Vision. It has also given us the opportunity to hear something about what Indigenous people and communities want from VET. One way to answer the question is to say “they want what all Australians want from VET – training and employment outcomes that meet their individual and community aspirations”. A VET system that responds to their aims and aspirations sensitively, thoughtfully and appropriately is no doubt what all Australians want. But different Indigenous people and communities, like other groups, regard different things as “sensitive”, “thoughtful” and “appropriate” responses to their particular needs, interests and circumstances.

Our Indigenous informants differed in their views on many topics. For example, different informants had different views on the question of whether and when Indigenous-specific courses were appropriate, and on whether and when it was appropriate for Indigenous students to learn in Indigenous units. Implicitly or explicitly, our informants recognised and acknowledged that different responses would be appropriate to local people, needs, interests and circumstances in different cases. “One size doesn’t fit all”:

- in the forms of consultation with communities (the topic being discussed by one our informants when this was said)
- in partnership-building
- in the content and modes of delivery of Training Packages
What Indigenous people want from VET (cont.)

- in the distribution of Indigenous students through specific courses and units or “mainstream” courses and institutions
- in relation to the training needed to support community economic development aspirations.

Or in relation to many other practical questions.

It seemed to us that our informants did agree, however, on some big questions about what Indigenous people and communities want from training and employment. As we shall see, some things they want are distinct from the things non-Indigenous people want – or at least what they ordinarily say they want from training and employment. The most significant of these distinctive things is that Indigenous people and communities want recognition of, respect for, and responsiveness to their needs, interests and circumstances as Indigenous people. They want recognition of, respect for, and responsiveness to Indigenous people, knowledge, communities and cultures.

From what Indigenous informants said to us, it is clear that they do not regard VET in Australia in 2003 as uniformly and ubiquitously responsive to Indigenous people, knowledge, communities and cultures. They expressed frustration, concern or anger about various aspects of VET that they regarded as inadequate. Their responses point to various matters that people in and around the VET system may want or need to consider or to reconsider. We will sketch some of these matters in the following sections.

The VET system

Figure 6 shows several of the main functions of the national VET system, together with some of the major agencies responsible for managing those functions. The arrows in the diagram represent two things: money (for example, in the form of funding, contracting, or purchasing of training) and administrative power (for example, in the form of accreditation, regulation or accountability). The arrows in the diagram indicate how key organisations in the VET sector “steer” or are “steered by” other organisations – in general, through funding arrangements and administrative regulation. Money and administrative regulation do not necessarily flow in the direction of the arrows; they are intended to indicate that exchanges between the agencies identified take place, with money and administrative power as the “currencies” in which the exchanges are transacted.
Funding and administration

As Figure 6 shows, various agencies have responsibility for the funding and administration of VET in general: the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), state training authorities (STAs), and registered training organisations (RTOs). In general, these bodies are clearly committed to implementing Partners and the Blueprint but, as comments in earlier chapters have shown, some key administrative arrangements pose problems for a VET system aiming to respond to the particular needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people. These include:

- short-term and episodic funding and staffing that militate against long-term and continuing planning and delivery of VET at particular sites and to particular Indigenous clients and communities
- short-term contracts for staff that detract from career development for Indigenous staff in the VET system
- requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) that frequently limit the degree to which Training packages can be customised for particular groups of Indigenous clients by placing constraints on:
  - the qualification and accreditation of teachers
  - the content and forms of delivery of Training Packages
  - assessment and reporting.
Teacher preparation and professional development

RTOs have the principal responsibility for teacher preparation and professional development. They must prepare teachers to be able to offer accredited training (the minimum qualification is Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training offered by RTOs), though some VET teachers have other teaching qualifications, frequently from universities. While most RTOs, especially larger RTOs and public providers, are committed to training and delivery to meet the needs of Indigenous clients and communities, some aspects of teaching and teacher preparation are unsatisfactory from the perspective of Indigenous clients and potential clients. These include:

- culturally inappropriate teaching and modes of delivery
- short-term and voluntary cross-cultural awareness professional development programs that do not seem to be ensuring that all staff in RTOs demonstrate recognition of, respect for, and responsiveness to Indigenous people, knowledge, communities and cultures
- teacher preparation through the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training which currently contains no substantial reference to teaching Indigenous students.

Training Package development and endorsement

Training Package development and endorsement occurs through Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs) – though specialist Training Package developers are contracted to undertake the work of developing particular packages. A number of ITABs are making substantial efforts to develop packages that are culturally appropriate, and meet the needs of Indigenous people and communities in diverse metropolitan, rural and remote areas of Australia. On the other hand, informants consulted in research for the Mid-term Review indicated that this is an area where more work is needed. Issues to be addressed included:

- Training Package design and delivery unresponsive to the needs of Indigenous people and communities, or culturally inappropriate in terms of the degree to which design, delivery, assessment and reporting requirements match the needs of Indigenous clients, their teachers and their communities
- assumptions about links to employment built into the design of packages (like assumptions about the availability of work placements, or the kinds of work available) that cannot be met in Indigenous communities, especially in “industry-poor” and “employment-poor” parts of the country
- delivery options
- the lack of pathways to training and employment outcomes, especially pathways into and out of the key courses at Certificate III level and above where more significant employment outcomes are to be expected.
The delivery of training

The delivery of training to clients of the VET system occurs through RTOs – frequently on-site in the workplace, though also at the facilities of RTOs (like TAFE institutes or other private providers of accredited training). There is great variation in the degree to which RTOs are responsive to Indigenous people and communities. Some features of the operations of some RTOs limit the degree to which they can recognise, respect and respond to Indigenous people, including:

- requirements of the AQTF that place constraints on the qualification and accreditation of teachers (especially where appropriately qualified staff cannot be made available at sites where particular kinds of training are needed)
- lack of access to Indigenous advice about how to work with Indigenous people and communities
- lack of dedicated spaces and support for Indigenous clients
- modes of delivery of training that are culturally inappropriate
- training poorly matched to the needs of Indigenous clients and potential clients, and to the economic development plans of local Indigenous communities
- training that is poorly matched to employment possibilities and industry needs in the areas where the training is taking place.

Workplaces

Finally, as mentioned, training frequently occurs in the workplace, where employers and union representatives also may assist in creating conditions for the conduct of training. Representatives of employers and the unions also play roles in the formation of training through their participation in ITABs. Many industries, employers and workplaces are making efforts in Indigenous employment and training for Indigenous people (for example, through traineeships and apprenticeships). Indigenous unemployment rates remain higher than for other Australians, however, and would swell by a further 35,000 people if CDEP participants were included in the Australian unemployment statistics. Improving employment outcomes for Indigenous people is an urgent necessity. Indigenous informants mentioned a variety of features of workplaces that make them unwelcoming to Indigenous people. These included:

- lack of access to work and workplaces where Indigenous employees could develop their skills and identity through training
- racism in some employment practices and workplaces
- lack of Indigenous employment and career development strategies in some workplaces, especially in smaller enterprises
- lack of community economic development plans, or lack of training and enterprise development support for them, as a basis for building Indigenous employment in communities
What Indigenous people want from VET

- the under-use of CDEP as a means for subsidising Indigenous enterprise development and employment in some places – in particular, places where Indigenous enterprises could realistically and feasibly be developed
- the shortage of jobs in Indigenous organisations and enterprises
- lack of understanding among many employers of the family and community obligations and commitments of Indigenous employees, and lack of experience in the ways employment conditions can be tailored to match these obligations and commitments.

Some of these difficulties are addressed in situations like those where group training organisations negotiate placements for Indigenous trainees and apprentices, acting as advocates and educators with employers. Some are addressed by strong community participation in defining and developing enterprises suited to local community needs, interests and circumstances. Some are addressed by “champions” of Indigenous training and employment within workplaces. Most are addressed when larger organisations (like the city council in the case story in Chapter 3, in the section on Strategy 3) adopt and vigorously enact a strong Indigenous employment and career development strategy.

In Chapter 8, we indicated that the different Objectives, Strategies and Actions of Partners and the Blueprint are interconnected in a dynamic whole. We described the interconnectedness in terms of “interactive complexity”. The same is true of the VET system: the different parts must work together if the kind of transformation envisaged in Partners and the Blueprint is to occur. As we indicated in Chapter 8, change in the VET system is gradual, patchy and uneven. It seems to us essential that continuing efforts to disseminate and achieve the intentions of the national strategy are needed. This means that continuing efforts will need to be made throughout the system to achieve understanding and acceptance of, and commitment to, the aims of Partners.

What Indigenous people want from VET

Expanding the VET system as depicted in Figure 6 and Figure 7 shows the six principal aims that underpin the intentions of Indigenous clients of VET when they seek training.
What Indigenous people want from the VET delivery system

As indicated in Figure 7, Indigenous clients of VET require training of particular kinds and particular forms of delivery appropriate for their own particular individual, social, cultural and economic needs, interests and circumstances. They want training that will:

- help secure and strengthen Indigenous identity
- help to maintain and develop capability – both the capability of individuals and the capacities of particular communities
- help to maintain and develop the social arrangements and social groupings – including family life – that sustain Indigenous society in particular communities and circumstances
- help in the maintenance and development of Indigenous culture in particular communities – including maintenance and development of languages, systems of belief, and a wide variety of cultural practices central to being an Indigenous person and community in this or that particular place and time
- assist in maintaining and developing participation in the economy – including training in skills that lead to valued work and careers – and in the economic development of communities
assist in maintaining and developing care for and obligations to country, and to nature and the environment in particular localities.

To a greater extent than many in the VET system may understand, the way VET is currently structured, and the way it operates, makes many Indigenous people feel that it does not work towards these aims. Instead, they believe, it works to transmit and secure not “ours” but “your” (that is “your non-Indigenous”) form of identity, “your” ideas about capability, “your” ideas about society, “your” culture, “your” kinds of economic participation, and “your” ideas about the natural world. In short, in many places the VET system is experienced by Indigenous people as assimilatory, not as recognising, respecting and responding to Australia’s cultural diversity and, in particular, Indigenous world-views.

From the perspective of Indigenous clients of VET, economic outcomes – and employment outcomes in particular – are not the sole, and perhaps not even the most important, outcomes to be achieved from training. As for other groups, employment outcomes are likely to be a means to other ends, not an end in themselves. The point of listing these other aims is to show that economic outcomes are part of a complex group of aims for Indigenous clients. It must be shown that Indigenous clients have a range of motivations in seeking training; and that training providers need to attend to the range of these aims if they are to offer appropriate kinds of training through appropriate forms of delivery in terms of the whole profile of aims in the minds of any particular group of Indigenous clients. This profile of aims should be reflected in the particular profile of outcomes that Indigenous people seek from this particular training experience.

The priority order of the six aims listed above may differ for different Indigenous people at different times in their lives, at different historical moments, and under different circumstances. But the fifth-mentioned – maintenance and development of participation in the economy – is not likely to be the sole and most central aim for most Indigenous clients and potential clients of VET at any particular time in their lives, at any particular historical moment, or under any particular set of circumstances. The same is true, of course, for many non-Indigenous Australians. Our principal point is this: if participants in the VET system — managers and teachers, for example — think that maintenance and development of economic participation is the sole basis for their “contract” with clients, they are likely to miss much about the nature, lives and expectations of the people they set out to teach.

Similarly, it is worth noting that Indigenous clients – and not only Indigenous clients – are likely to come to VET not only for reasons of personal advancement, but also with family and community intentions in mind. If managers and teachers in the VET system think their “contract” is solely with the client, without reference to the client’s family and community responsibilities and aspirations, they are likely to misunderstand the client’s motivations, experience and achievements. Indeed, some of our Indigenous informants argued, many people in the VET system are unaware of the degree to which they do not understand Indigenous clients and communities. Many are also unaware of the extent to which some of their assumptions about the nature of the VET system and how it should work are at odds with the needs, knowledge, concerns, circumstances and cultures of Indigenous people and communities.
To meet the expectations and aspirations of Indigenous clients, the VET system needs to take into account the whole range of intentions the clients have when they consider taking a VET course or qualification. The whole range of partners in the system – employers, unions, Training Package developers, ITABs, RTOs, STAs and ANTA itself – need to consider the extent to which their operations can accommodate, respond to and contribute to the expectations and aspirations of Indigenous clients and potential clients. *Partners* is the main policy tool by which the VET system aims to respond to clients’ expectations and aspirations.

The research conducted for this Mid-term Review was intended to discover whether *Partners*, the national strategy for VET for Indigenous Australians, is being implemented, whether it needs renewed emphasis, and whether it needs changing.

Armed with answers to these questions, AITAC, ANTA and ANTA MINCO will then be in a position to determine whether *Partners* should continue beyond its current life (2000 to 2005). They will also be able to determine whether it should do so as a separate strategy, or whether its key elements could be rolled into the overarching *Shaping our Future: National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training, 2004–2010*.

Our findings suggest that:

- *Partners* is being implemented (though progress is still under way, and it is gradual, patchy and uneven)
- it does need renewed emphasis and attention in parts of the VET system
- some elements of the existing strategy – particularly in the *Blueprint* – could be changed.

Given that a new national VET strategy is currently in development, our findings also suggest that:

- as a matter of urgency, Indigenous advice should be sought in relation to the development and implementation of the new national VET strategy, which should reflect this advice not only in relation to its Objective 4 where Indigenous issues are explicitly included, but in relation to all of its Objectives, particularly in relation to:
  - the relevant action plans,
  - appropriate performance measures
  - the allocation of resources to ensure that *Partners* is implemented through the new *National Strategy*.

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27 *Shaping our Future: Australia’s National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004–2010*, was endorsed by the ANTA Ministerial Council in November 2003. It contains four objectives, one of which is focused at increasing outcomes for Indigenous Australians – *Indigenous Australians will have skills for viable jobs and their learning culture will be shared.*
In this and previous chapters, we have noted a variety of issues arising from consultations that relate particularly to the VET system itself – things that might be considered or reconsidered to make the system and its operations more sensitive to, and more effective for, Indigenous people and communities. The research for the Mid-term Review leads us to conclude that Indigenous people and communities want a VET system characterised by:

- stable and continuing funding and operational arrangements that deliver training, and training and employment outcomes relevant to the aims and aspirations of Indigenous people and communities (and that do not need to be “worked around” or “worked against”)
- training provision that effectively meets individual and community needs
- ITABs, RTOs and GTOs that respond to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities
- Training Packages, modes of delivery and teaching that are responsive and culturally appropriate
- links between training and employment that are accessible, responsive and flexible.

In short, Indigenous people and communities want a VET system that is genuinely and proactively responsive to Indigenous concerns. As this and other chapters of this report show, however, there is still widespread “deafness” to Indigenous advice, perspectives, needs, concerns and circumstances in the VET system. Perhaps there are people whose ‘deafness’ is a result of racist attitudes and behaviour, but given the way we organised our consultations for this research, we did not encounter many such people – if any. But it is nevertheless reasonable to say that many Indigenous people experience institutional racism in various aspects of their encounters with VET. When organisations treat Indigenous issues only at the margins of their operations, as exceptions to the norms of the institution, Indigenous people are likely to experience themselves as being marginalised, and the organisation as excluding or hostile. In a number of states and territories around Australia, many large organisations (like STAs and departments of education and Training) are making very significant efforts to change the whole range of their policies, procedures and practices to ensure that Indigenous voices are heard, and that Indigenous employees and clients are treated with recognition and respect. It is a slow process, however, and progress is uneven throughout the organisation – especially when the organisations are very large.

Within the sector, things are certainly changing in the directions envisaged in Partners and the Blueprint. We have mentioned that there is a danger that a further opportunity for change will be lost – the opportunity represented by the current national review of the existing Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. This is the baseline qualification for teachers in VET, and currently it does not include competencies to do with teaching Indigenous clients. As we understand it, the review has yet to hear the voices of Indigenous people about what needs to be done to make training more relevant to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous trainees and communities. As far as the review is concerned, this is territory still to be explored and mapped. The establishment of an advisory committee to “check” the final product...
seems to us to be a poor solution to a far deeper problem – too little, too late. If “deafness” to Indigenous people and communities is to be cured throughout the system, and especially in the content and delivery of training, significant change is needed. This is especially so at the “sharp end” of training, where the system makes direct contact with, and too often alienates, Indigenous people and communities. Unless changes are made, the current rate of alienation of Indigenous people from VET, especially at the higher levels, will continue. The transformations needed will be seen in changed content, forms, practices and contexts of training. A new Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training, more closely attuned to Indigenous people and voices, could help to make this transformation happen.

Things may be changing within the sector, but there is a question about the degree of change occurring in affiliated industries. There, things may not be progressing as well, and progress may be even patchier. All levels of government are increasingly attuned to Indigenous voices, as is the case in some large businesses and industrial firms. But many parts of industry remain unresponsive to Indigenous people and issues. Beyond the horizons of Partners and the Blueprint, more work of reconciliation remains to be done. The task of overcoming racism – including institutional racism – and indifference in the wider Australian community remains incomplete. While it remains so, the number of partners for Indigenous people, organisations and communities will be fewer than it should be, and the work of transformation envisaged by Partners will continue to be necessary.

These, we believe, are powerful and compelling reasons for continuing to have, and continuing to modify and adapt, a national strategy for VET for Indigenous people. Given that it has already achieved some visibility and acceptance, it would seem appropriate to continue to work on and through evolving versions of Partners. But it seems to us premature to conclude that the work of Partners has now been sufficiently achieved to roll this national strategy into the overarching National Strategy for VET, or into the work of the Equity Advisory Service. More powerful and focused measures are needed to ensure that equity for Indigenous Australians is achieved throughout VET. This will only occur when the “mainstream” of VET provision has been transformed to guarantee that, as a matter of course, Indigenous people, knowledge, communities and culture are treated with recognition, respect, and responsiveness. These are the forms of regard to which Indigenous people are entitled by right – not only by their rights as Indigenous people, but also by their rights as Australians.
## Appendix A

### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACCI</td>
<td>Australian Chamber of Commerce &amp; Industry</td>
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<tr>
<td>AEDP</td>
<td>The Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research</td>
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<td>AIG</td>
<td>Australian Industry Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>AITAC</td>
<td>Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council</td>
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<td>ANTA</td>
<td>Australian National Training Authority 2004</td>
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<td>ANTA MINCO</td>
<td>ANTA Ministerial Council</td>
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<td>AQF</td>
<td>Australian Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>AQTF</td>
<td>Australian Quality Training Framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATSIC</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATSIPTAC</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Training Advisory Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>AVETMISS</td>
<td>Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information and Statistical Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCA</td>
<td>Business Council of Australia</td>
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<td>CAEPR</td>
<td>Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBT</td>
<td>Competency Based Training</td>
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<td>CDEP</td>
<td>Community Development Employment Projects</td>
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<td>CE</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
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<td>DEET</td>
<td>NT Department of Employment Education and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEST</td>
<td>Department of Education, Science and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>DETYA</td>
<td>Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (now DEST)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEWR</td>
<td>Department of Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEWR STEP</td>
<td>Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Structured Training and Employment Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECEF</td>
<td>Enterprise and Career Education Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>EdNA-VET</td>
<td>Education Network Australia VET Advisory Group – now called the Flexible Learning Advisory Group</td>
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<td>GTA</td>
<td>Group Training Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>GTC</td>
<td>Group Training Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>GTO</td>
<td>Group Training Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>IESIP</td>
<td>Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>information technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>ITAB</td>
<td>industry training advisory body</td>
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<td>MCEETYA</td>
<td>Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAAP</td>
<td>New Apprenticeships Access Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCVER</td>
<td>National Centre for Vocational Education Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>NREC</td>
<td>National Research Evaluation Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>QETO</td>
<td>Quality-endorsed training organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCC</td>
<td>recognition of current competencies</td>
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<td>recognition of prior learning</td>
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<td>RTO</td>
<td>registered training organisation</td>
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<td>VET</td>
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