This resource was created and presented by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). The purpose of the resource was to provide a simple summary of NCVER’s statistics and research on Indigenous Australians (including both Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people) and vocational education and training (VET). The resource was decommissioned in November 2013. This document provides archival access to the contents of the resource prior to its decommissioning.
Introduction

The purpose of this resource is to provide a simple summary of NCVER’s statistics and research on Indigenous Australians and vocational education and training (VET).

For the purposes of this resource Indigenous Australians includes both Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people.
VET statistics

NCVER collects data on the national VET sector, including on Indigenous students. National VET data collections are managed in accordance with the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS), which specifies what information is collected and submitted to NCVER. NCVER data for Indigenous students are based on self-reporting, and some degree of caution should be used as figures may potentially be underreported. For an overview of the scope and content of the national VET collections held by NCVER please see: VET statistics: Explained

All NCVER data relating to Indigenous VET students can be found in Indigenous student statistics.

It includes statistics on:

- Students and courses: VET students, the courses they undertake and their achievement
- Apprentices and trainees: students who undertake an apprenticeship or traineeship and have a Contract of Training
- Student Outcomes: VET completers and their post-training employment, reasons for undertaking their training, relevance of the training to their employment, level of satisfaction, any further study aspirations.

In 2004, NCVER conducted an Indigenous Student Survey. This survey extends some of the information sought in the Student Outcomes Survey, with a specific focus on Indigenous people and the benefits arising from training.

NCVER also manages the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), which tracks young people as they move from school to post-school destinations. LSAY contains some information on Indigenous students.
Indigenous participation in VET

The value of education in helping alleviate disadvantage has long been acknowledged. Vocational education and training (VET) offers one pathway that Indigenous people are increasingly taking. NCVER data show that in recent years Indigenous people have participated in training at a higher rate than their representation in the Australian population, but at lower qualification levels.

See Indigenous VET statistics for further information.

Saunders, et al (2003) found that from 1997 to 2001 participation rates of Indigenous students showed:

- a trend towards more participation in Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) courses
- they tend to engage in lower-level courses but this is shifting with an increase in numbers of students participating in higher-level qualifications
- despite the increase in participation rates the pass rates continue to be lower than for all students
- in fact, a decrease in pass rates and an increase in withdrawal rates.

Another significant variation between Indigenous student and general student population is their location. Saunders, et al (2003) found that a large proportion of Indigenous students were located in rural and remote areas.
Increasing Indigenous participation in VET

Much research has centred on how to improve the experience, teaching practices and outcomes for Indigenous students. Miller (2005) conducted a systematic review of research in the area, with the purpose of identifying the key factors required to achieve positive and improved outcomes from training for Indigenous Australians. These factors are:

- community ownership and involvement
- the incorporation of Indigenous identities, cultures, knowledge and values
- the establishment of 'true' partnerships
- flexibility in course design, content and delivery
- quality staff and committed advocacy
- extensive student support services
- appropriate funding that allows for sustainability.
Community involvement

The more authority that communities are able to exercise in all aspects of training development and delivery, the more successful the training will be for Indigenous students (Balatti et al. 2004; Kral & Falk 2004; Marika et al. 2004). Anderson (2009 forthcoming) undertook an evaluation of a VET program delivered to a remote community in NT from the community’s perspective.

The findings show that community involvement and ownership were identified as the most important factors for success by this community and that more work needed to be done to adequately involve the community.

Wallace (2008) asserts that the relationship between regional students’ identity and the attitudes and experiences of their families and communities contributes to their behaviour and beliefs about undertaking education and training and this can be both negative and positive.
Identity & Culture

Marika, et al (2004) found there is a need to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into all training, through the environment, resources and course content; this includes fully embracing Indigenous knowledge in the recognition of prior learning (Kenyon, Saunders & Gibb 1996), while recognising the diversity of Indigenous people and different community contexts (Gelade & Stehlik 2004). Recognition provides a space in which Indigenous people feel comfortable with learning (Marika et al 2004).

Research by Dockery (2009) examines the effect of cultural attachment on Indigenous participation in education and training. The findings show that in non-remote areas cultural attachment is complementary to successful participation in education and training and employment. However, in remote and very remote locations, despite strong cultural attachment, access to education and training is still limited and therefore disadvantages these Indigenous Australians.
Course design and teaching

**Working in true partnerships**
Training providers need to establish strong multilateral partnerships, with communities at the centre. Mutual reciprocity ideally needs to be formalised so that inequalities are less likely to occur. This provides a means through which human and financial resources are shared to reduce duplication of effort (Balatti et al. 2004, Kral & Falk 2004).

**Flexibility in course design, content and delivery**
Flexibility of systems, policies, funding and delivery allows for the easy adaptation of training programs to meet local needs and contexts (Kral & Falk 2004, Marika et al. 2004). Young, Guenther & Boyle (2007) found there is a need to develop and improve the reliability, relevance and useability of information and communication technologies in providing and supplementing training, especially in rural and remote areas.

**Quality staff and committed advocacy**
Kemmis et al. (2006) highlight that the commitment and understanding of all staff involved at various levels of the training system, from policy development to teaching delivery, is essential, as students feel that the most important aspect of effective training for them is the relationship they have with their teachers. The importance of the presence of Indigenous staff across the VET sector is paramount; a steady decline in Indigenous staff numbers remains a key issue that must be addressed by VET systems and providers. Kemmis et al. (2006) suggest that a community development approach, rather than one driven by bureaucratic pressures, is most likely to build the Indigenous VET workforce.
Student support

McGlusky and Thaker (2006) emphasise the lower levels of Indigenous literacy and numeracy as a critical barrier to participation in higher-level VET courses, suggesting that there is a clear need for increased tutoring assistance and literacy elements to be built into training packages.

In order to retain Indigenous students in the VET system and provide pathways to employment-related outcomes, a range of support services are required across financial, cultural and social needs. Partnerships with organisations outside the VET sector can provide the necessary ‘joined up’ services to alleviate the barriers that Indigenous students face in entering and continuing their participation in training.
Funding

Appropriate funding that allows for sustainability

Funding for Indigenous training must reflect the realities of geographic location and need. New or existing initiatives that are shown to be effective through in-built evaluation must be backed up with long-term funding, otherwise the cycle of reinvention will continue to perpetuate fitful and ad hoc practices (Balatti et al 2004, Burke & Long 2005).
Indigenous outcomes from VET

Post-VET outcomes

For information on the employment and further study outcomes of Indigenous VET students see Indigenous VET statistics.

Supporting Indigenous employment

A recent report by Giddy, Lopez and Redman (2009) highlights the factors leading to successful employment outcomes for Indigenous people. The research identified the essential and desirable criteria necessary to support successful outcomes for Indigenous employees. The essential criteria are:

- having strong vision and understanding the importance of monitoring targets
- responding to the employment market
- maintaining strong relationships with community and business
- offering ‘job related’ and culturally appropriate training
- collaborating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and the community
- providing holistic support
- ensuring strong staff commitment.

VET as a pathway to higher education

Findings from a briefing paper (10) using Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) data show that, after completing school, Indigenous young people are still more likely to commence VET studies than attend university.

In a more recent paper (Nguyen (2009) forthcoming), this finding was again confirmed. More in-depth analysis was conducted using cohorts who were first interviewed in 1995 and 2003 to try to discover the effects of literacy and numeracy levels on Year 12 completion and participation in post-school education and training. Results from the analysis showed that, although there have been significant improvements in Indigenous outcomes over the past ten years, these improvements have also been achieved by non-Indigenous students, therefore leaving the gap unchanged.
NCVER Research Reports

NCVER has published a number of research reports relating to Indigenous Australians and VET.

The VOCEDplus international VET research database holds information about Indigenous people and the labour market, VET and Australian policy related to Indigenous people and research documents.

For all VET statistics relating to VET and Indigenous people visit: Indigenous student statistics.