Enhancing Training Advantage for Remote Learners

Presented on behalf of the project team by John Guenther
The problem

While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are well represented in VET, across Australia attrition rates for AQF Level courses are 77%

And for the regions covered by case study sites for this research attrition rates are on average 81%

• Attrition rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people undertaking VET courses, very remote Australia, by labour force status, 2014 (Source: VOCSTATS Total VET Activity data)
Remote contexts for this study
Research questions

• **RQ1**: How can retention and completion in post-school training be improved (to improve employability) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander living in remote communities?

• **RQ2**: What indicators of success other than completion, would be important for training in remote communities (to improve employability)?
Project team

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Definitional considerations

- **Employability**
  - The skills which enable people to gain, keep and progress in employment, including skills in the clusters of work readiness and work habits, interpersonal skills and learning, thinking and adaptability skills’ (Naidu, 2013).

- **Retention and completion and attrition**
  - ‘Completion’ is then simply satisfactory achievement of the full program of intended study.
  - But attrition is the real problem: those who drop out

- **VET, adult learning and literacy**
  - Overlapping boundaries
  - AQF Continuum, but Foundation Skills as an added component
Human Capital Theory assumptions

• Education and training as an investment with economic returns (Becker 1993)
• those with higher skill levels tend to be more employable (Fredman, 2014; Independent Economics, 2013)
• earn more money (Blöndal & Field, 2002; Fredman, 2014),
• though there are some exceptions to this general rule (Karmel & Fieger, 2012).
• economies with higher levels of human capital, tend to be more productive and wealthier (Hanushek et al., 2013; OECD, 2001).
• They have lower rates of crime and perform better on a range of health and wellbeing indicators (Feinstein, 2002; Feinstein et al., 2008)
• But why do these assumptions not hold true for remote communities? (Guenther & McRae-Williams, 2014; McRae-Williams & Guenther, 2014).
VET as a tool for transition to employment?

Figure 1. Average unemployment rates for people with qualifications, very remote Australia 2011 (Source: ABS 2011 Census)
Employment as a vehicle for qualifications?

Attrition rate

Qualification level of training enrolment and completion

- Diploma or higher
- Certificate IV
- Certificate III
- Certificate II
- Certificate I

Employed  Unemployed  Not in the labour force
## Findings: case study completion rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case study site</th>
<th>Focus areas</th>
<th>Estimated completion rate for selected program(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW Yes I Can</td>
<td>Adult literacy campaign (non-accredited)</td>
<td>78%</td>
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<tr>
<td>QLD Cairns</td>
<td>Cert III Addictions Management and Community Development (AMCD); Cert IV Indigenous Mental Health (Suicide Prevention)</td>
<td>53%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Training College</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SA TAFE APY</td>
<td>Cert II/III Community Services, Aged Care, Home and Community Care</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lands</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>WA Ranger training program</td>
<td>Cert II Conservation and Land Management</td>
<td>Data not available yet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT Batchelor</td>
<td>Cert IV Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>training program</td>
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What did our respondents say affects retention

- Family, personal, and cultural matters
- Employment outcomes
- Trainer factors
- Training coordination and support
- Community and family support
Alternative indicators of success?

- Funding security
- Confidence and identity
- Foundation skills
- Culture and local knowledge
- Local community ownership
Implications and conclusions

• In this study, success is defined by the successful
• The power of perceptions: providers believe in what they are doing
• Funding models may inadvertently contribute to high attrition rates
• If success is not just about retention and employability (or employment outcomes) how do we take account of these measures?
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