

**Workshop 13:**  
**Draft implementation plan for TAFE NSW provision for  
Aboriginal offenders in correctional centres**

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## **Introduction**

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, in examining the underlying issues associated with the over representation of Aboriginal people in custody, noted that:

“Poverty, inadequate living conditions and consequent poor health reduce the ability of Aboriginal people to assert their autonomy and to take control over their lives. Past inequalities in educational access, employment and low levels of material wealth continue to hinder Aboriginal people’s efforts. Readdressing these inequalities is an integral part of returning control to Aboriginal people”.

The *Implementation Plan for TAFE NSW Provision for Aboriginal Offenders* reflects the determination of the Department of Corrective Services, AEVTI and TAFE NSW to act together and in concert with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure quality provision and delivery of educational services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders of the NSW correctional system. The objectives are to provide vocational education and training services that will confirm the identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders to control, create pathways leading to employment and / or further education, empowering their own destinies and to take a proactive role in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and in the larger Australian society on release.

The *Implementation Plan* is the product of consultation with stakeholders from the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Corrective Services. The Plan has benefited from the contributions of the members of both departments, which will provide a guide to those committed to and responsible for the continued implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

## **Background**

The relevant policies of the Commonwealth, the Australian National Training Authority, the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) and the NSW Department of Corrective Services (DCS) have informed the development of this Implementation Plan.

This plan has been developed within the framework of the TAFE NSW/DCS Memorandum of Understanding 2002-2005 which outlines the arrangements for all TAFE NSW provision in correctional centres.

A sub-committee of the Monitoring and Liaison Committee Aboriginal Vocational Educational and Training Working Party, (AVETWP), was established to provide coordination and to ensure wide consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders.

The Working Party is comprised of representatives from the Department of Education and Training Aboriginal Programs Unit (APU), the Outreach Programs Unit (OPU), the DCS Aboriginal Support and Planning Unit (ASPU) and the Adult Education and Vocational Training Institute (AEVTI).

## **Aim**

The aim of the *Implementation Plan* is to establish responsibilities, objectives, strategies and clearly defined measurable outcomes to ensure the quality of TAFE NSW provision to Aboriginal offenders.

The *Implementation Plan* has been developed with the aim of ensuring the IESIP performance indicators are met through a holistic approach throughout the Strategy. The IESIP performance indicators have been incorporated into this document to assist with the reporting requirements to DEST on the IESIP funding.

## **Principles**

This *Implementation Plan* will achieve the principles outlined in the TAFE/DCS MOU to underpin TAFE NSW provision of services to Aboriginal offenders. The specific principles related to Aboriginal vocational education and training provision must be inclusive of the following points:

- Be directly related to a program of self-determination
- Contribute to wider community capacity building
- Empower Aboriginal offenders to make a contribution to their communities
- Contribute to economic self-sufficiency and to the effective conduct of Aboriginal community organisations
- Improve academic, economic and social participation

## **Background Issues**

The over-representation of Aboriginal people in NSW correctional centres has been extensively documented since the early 1980's. Despite the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody for more non-custodial sentences, Aboriginal people in NSW continue to be incarcerated at greater rates than non-Aboriginal people.

In March 2003, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in full-time custody was 1,682. This represented 21% of the total inmate population. Aboriginal people comprise less than 2.1 % of the NSW population.

The number and percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in custody has increased significantly over the last 10 years. In June 1984, there were 8 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in custody which was approximately 5% of the total number of women in custody. In March 2003 there were 236 Aboriginal and Torres Strait women in custody which represented 32% of the total number of women in custody.

### **Issues affecting education participation by Aboriginal offenders**

The following issues have a significant impact on the participation and outcomes for Aboriginal offenders in vocational education and training.

#### **Consultation**

Effective and ongoing consultation and negotiation between the relevant TAFE and DCS staff and Aboriginal offenders is paramount. The input of Aboriginal offenders is important in the planning, development and delivery of vocational education and training provision to ensure the extensive involvement of Aboriginal offenders in correctional centre education.

This can be problematic due to variations of sentence lengths, individual needs versus group needs, resource limitations of particular correctional centres and TAFE colleges. Adequate provision for the coordination of programs is important in ensuring proper consultation and in creating the conditions for successful outcomes.

#### **Health**

Relevant educational staff from both TAFE NSW and DCS need to be aware that the health status of Aboriginal offenders, for example, alcohol and other drug dependency, psychological issues and hearing loss through (otitis media )may affect their participation in education courses.

#### **Cultural**

Significant cultural issues such as grief and loss, clan group differences, feelings of personal shame, offences against other Aboriginal people, displacement from Country, kinship and extended family.

#### **Staff Development**

The provision of culturally appropriate staff development for all teachers of Aboriginal offenders is essential. This is a particular issue for part-time teachers in TAFE.

#### **Flexible Delivery**

Given the movement of offenders within the correctional system, flexible delivery including mixed mode and distance learning, continuous enrolments, variable exit and entry points, is an important aspect of facilitating access to TAFE provision for the maximum number of Aboriginal offenders.

#### **Classification**

In order to progress through the system, all offenders need to meet the various requirements of the classification system. Classification may direct an inmate to undertake

a program before a change of classification will be considered. It is important that the classification system takes into account the cultural, educational needs and participation of Aboriginal offenders.

### **Resources**

The capacity to deliver comprehensive course provision depends heavily on human, financial and material resources available.

### **Limitations of correctional environment**

The main limitation of education in correctional centres is that education provision must be structured around the priorities of the centre. Participation in education may be limited or interrupted by such priorities as other offender programs, work, court appearances, transfers to other centres or lockdowns.

The DCS Operational Agreements vary between each correctional centre and need to include strategies and structures which address the educational needs of Aboriginal offenders.

### **Financial incentives**

The socio economic position faced by most Aboriginal offenders and their families means that financial incentives are important to encourage greater participation in education.

### **Length of Sentence**

Aboriginal offenders tend to serve shorter sentences which makes completion of courses difficult within the correctional centre.

### **Case management**

A case plan for an Aboriginal inmate must include educational needs and must be incorporated in their program pathway upon reception to the centre.