



Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research  
The Australian National University

Education, Training and Indigenous Futures  
CAEPR Policy Research: 1990-2007

## Research Summaries

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## Reference No. 33

Summarising: Campbell (2000), *The reform agenda for vocational education and training: Implications for Indigenous Australians*

Responsibility for the preparation of this research summary rests with the authors of the MCEETYA report *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990-2007* and not the original author(s) of the summarised material.

The MCEETYA report and associated research summaries are available at <[www.anu.edu.au/caepr/education.php](http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/education.php)>.

**Title of Research:**

The reform agenda for vocational education and training: implications for Indigenous Australians

**Research Publication:**

CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 202/2000

<[http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2000\\_DP202.pdf](http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2000_DP202.pdf)>

**Name of Researcher (s):**

S. Campbell

**Time Period:**

1989-1999

**Geographic Location:**

Australia wide.

**Methodology:**

This research focuses on the five objectives of the national reform agenda outlined in the Australian National Training Authority's (ANTA) strategy *A Bridge to the Future*. It explores the five objectives with reference to their potential impact on the quantity and quality of Indigenous participation in vocational education and training.

**Aims:**

The aim of this paper is to review reforms to the vocational education and training (VET) sector between 1989-1999 with specific concern for factors contributing to or limiting Indigenous participation.

**Selected findings and insights:**

The five objectives of the ANTA strategy explored in this research are:

- Equipping Australians for the world of work
- Enhancing mobility in the labour market
- Achieving equitable outcomes in VET
- Increasing investment in training
- Maximising the value of public VET expenditure.

Broader themes implicated in such reforms, and emerging across the objectives, include:

- While data suggest that Indigenous participation in training certificate programs and apprenticeships has increased significantly since the endorsement of the Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP) in 1989, it remains questionable how this participation has in turn been integrated into more meaningful and equitable long-term engagement in the labour market (i.e. as in employment contracts).
- Because Indigenous Australians complete compulsory or secondary schooling at significantly lower rates than non-Indigenous Australians, VET represents a significant alternative pathway to education, training and employment. Any changes or reform to the VET system clearly impact Indigenous people in important ways.

- The desire for equity in training often comes at the expense of diversity. The stated ambition that everyone should have equal access and benefit equally from training reforms obscures the reality that Indigenous disadvantage continues to militate against the equitable access to such programs.
- The contemporary standardisation of training in 'training packages' is geared towards market priorities of portable accreditation and uniform skill bases. The provision of training for many Indigenous people means a great deal more than pathways to employment or making a profit, and training provision should be sensitive to the broader social contexts and ambitions in which such training is sought by and delivered to Indigenous people.

### **Educational implications:**

The paper identifies a range of educational implications arising from the policy review.

The **flexibility** of training services is therefore extremely important:

- While high-mobility is a characteristic of many Indigenous people's lives, this mobility is largely kinship focused. People are unlikely to move outside of areas to which they identify, and where their family is located, in pursuit of employment, education or training. Training therefore needs to be deliverable in a range of localised contexts. **[culture]**
- The flexibility emerging in VET reform has important implications for Indigenous clients; particularly those in remote or rural areas with limited access to training programs. The delivery of on-line services has the potential to facilitate greater access and equity in training provision.
  - However, the 'digital divide' (lack of internet access and literacy) still experienced by Indigenous households and communities continues to militate against the broader effectiveness of these more flexible service delivery options.

'**User Choice**', an initiative that enables clients to choose the training provider best suited to their needs, or who is prepared to tailor training to those needs through consultation, is considered potentially the most significant policy initiative in terms of providing improved access and Indigenous control over training. Many of the specific cultural or social issues that commonly come into conflict with standardised training can be addressed and catered to in these arrangements.

- Alternatively, it is highly likely that Indigenous people, particularly in remote areas, are unlikely to have the kinds of access to information and options that would render that 'user choice' meaningful. **[career counselling] [support services]**

**VET in Schools:** Given the youth-bulge in the Indigenous population, the provision of VET in secondary schools is seen as having enormous potential to create alternative pathways to employment for Indigenous Australians. VET in schools is expected to improve student retention and, in developing better linkages between education and industry, nurture new pathways to employment. The challenge for schools is to design relevant curricula and promote VET in Schools to Indigenous youth at risk of leaving school early. **[training] [at risk students]**

The **overall climate of training reform** embodies a broader policy challenge: to develop a homogenous, standardised system that is also responsive to the diverse needs, aspirations and living contexts of Indigenous lives. This research suggests that such a tension reflects a conflict between mainstream 'industry needs' focus and a localised 'client needs' focus. It argues that the National Strategy overcomes these tensions, at least in theory, through the idea of customisation: of creating systems which are themselves designed to

be customised and responsive to diverse contexts (though this process is itself still geared towards industry needs). [policy]

This diversity of contexts, and uniformity of problems, suggests there is a need for the formation of an **Indigenous education organisation**, or some overarching 'advisory' body, to provide ongoing consultative and strategic input into addressing the impact of VET issues on Indigenous Australians.

### Relevance:

#### *Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education*

Participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory schooling, training and higher education