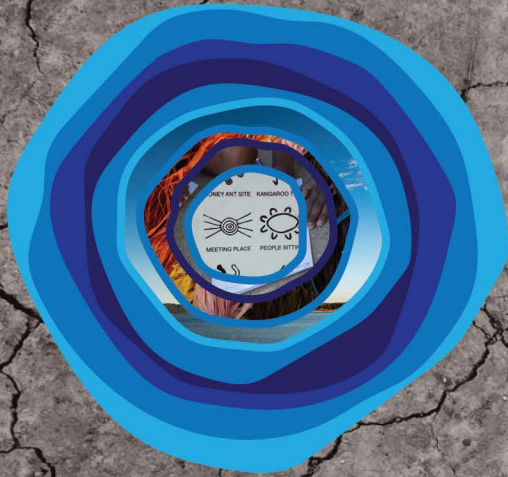




National Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Education Corporation

Policy and Practice: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce in Australian Public Schools



FINAL REPORT

Prepared for the Australian Government Department of Education

September 2019



National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Council



National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Council

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The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Council (NATSIEC) acknowledge Country and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present.

We would like to acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in schools to improve education. The significance and complexity of the work they do for the betterment of students, communities and education institutions across the country is too often unrecognised and unacknowledged.

We also acknowledge the Australian Department of Education for funding this project and providing an opportunity to present our recommendations for improving education through our Aboriginal Education Workforce.

TERMINOLOGY

In this document the terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' are used interchangeably. When the term 'Indigenous' is used it is referring to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia.

For the purposes of this project Aboriginal Education Worker (AEW) refers to the range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific/identified roles that operate within Australian Public Schools. These include but are not limited to roles defined as: Aboriginal Education Worker; Aboriginal Education Officer; Community Education Counsellor; Aboriginal Cultural Liaison Officer; Indigenous Education Worker; Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer; Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker; Aboriginal Teaching Assistant etc. In this report AEWs exclude Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff working in mainstream roles such as school teachers and school principals etc.

ACRONYMS

ACEO - Aboriginal Community Education Officer

ACG – Aboriginal Consultative Group

AEO – Aboriginal Education Officer

AEW – Aboriginal Education Worker – inclusive of all Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander Education specific roles



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AIEO – Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer

AIEW - Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers

ALCNT - Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest Teacher

ASLSO - Aboriginal School Learning Support Officers

ATA – Aboriginal Teaching Assistant

ATSIEAG – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group

CEC – Community Education Counsellor

ICT – Information Communication and Technology

IECB – Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies

IECM – Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting

IEO - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer

KE – Koorie Educator

KESO - Koorie Engagement Support Officer

NATSIEP - 1989 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy

NSW AECG – New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

NATSIEC – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Council

NTIEC – Northern Territory Indigenous Education Council

SAAETCB – South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Consultative Body

RCIADIC - Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

SLLCE - Senior Leaders/Leaders Community Engagement

TACE – Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation for Education

QIECC – Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Committee

VAEAI – Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated

WAAETC – Western Australia Aboriginal Education and Training Council



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across Australia AEWs are on the frontline of school employees working towards closing the gap in education outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Not only are they of crucial importance to 'Closing the Gap' in literacy, numeracy and attendance outcomes, they are also often leading curriculum and teaching and learning reforms to support Australian schools to deliver an education which appropriately includes the perspectives, histories and cultures of the first peoples of this nation. And, after a long history of neglect and racism from within schools towards Aboriginal communities, AEWs are working in schools as the central figure tasked to increase local Aboriginal community engagement with schools and education.

AEWs work with and support students and families who directly experience the intergenerational trauma caused through the violent invasion of their lands and subsequent implementation of racist policies imposed on their families. They work with communities and students who can have highly complex needs and who are disadvantaged in an education system which has to date only shown glimpses of understanding and respect for Aboriginal languages, knowledge and cultures. AEWs also work with and support non-Aboriginal staff and students. In doing so they often put themselves in culturally unsafe situations, face to face with the ignorance and racism that permeates through Australian society.

In addition to this a brief review of AEW role descriptions from across Australia highlights that AEWs can be required to initiate and lead whole of school activities; contribute to curriculum reform; develop educational resources; work with and without senior Executive to engage community and other external stakeholders; and deliver professional development for school staff. AEWs are also often in the position as the sole local Aboriginal community representative working within the school.

AEWs are generally amongst the lowest paid employees in Australian schools and in several states and territories their employment is at the whim of their school principal who may, or may not appreciate the vital importance of Aboriginal education outcomes.

THE RESEARCH AIMS

The aims of this research project were to:

- *identify and document AEW responsibilities and role statements within each jurisdiction*
- *identify and document jurisdictional policy frameworks relevant to the role of AEW*
- *review literature to identify and document contributors to success for AEWs, as well as common issues and barriers AEWs face*



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- *conduct interviews and consultations with NATSIEC members and their nominated representatives to further identify and document prominent contributors to success for AEWs, as well as common issues and barriers AEWs face*

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary questions this research project has sought to answer are:

- *what contributes to AEWs achieving success in their role?*
- *what barriers inhibit AEWs achieving success in their role?*

THE ABORIGINAL EDUCATION WORKER ROLE

AEWs (and equivalents such as AEOs, AIEOs, CECs, ATAs etc.) are employed in every jurisdiction across Australia. Across jurisdictions there are a wide range of duties that AEWs are expected to undertake. The most prevalent responsibilities found within AEWs role statements across Australia include:

- *Engaging Aboriginal parents and local Aboriginal communities with school education programs, events, committees and policy developments*
- *Supporting teachers to develop curriculum and embed Aboriginal perspectives, cultures, histories and languages across all curriculum areas*
- *Facilitate improved outcomes for Aboriginal student attendance, engagement/participation, education and wellbeing*
- *Support school Principals and Executive on whole of school strategy and direction for Aboriginal education*

Additionally AEWs can be required to deliver service programs to meet the needs of the school, local Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal students – this can include the development and delivery of cultural awareness programs for staff and Aboriginal cultural and language education programs for students.

AEWs are commonly expected to achieve a wide range of positive outcomes for:

- the school
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students
- the local Aboriginal community and parents
- other external stakeholders.

AEWs are positioned as the central and often sole figure employed in schools with specific responsibilities to improve the education and well-being outcomes of Aboriginal students as well as increasing positive engagements between local Aboriginal communities and schools.



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Given Australia's education system has historically neglected, and in many cases continues to neglect Aboriginal communities, knowledge, languages and cultures, the significance of the AEW's role cannot be understated.

RELEVANT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Each of the policies and programs we reviewed were selected based on a desktop research and scan for relevance to and connections with AEW's duty statements. As this project has been restricted by brief timeframes, the policies and programs we have sourced should not be viewed as a comprehensive account of current policies and programs relevant to AEW's work. However they do present a picture which shows that across jurisdictions there are a wide range of policies and programs that directly relate with requirements within AEW duty statements. Across jurisdictions, the commonly occurring policy and program objectives relating to AEW roles that we identified are:

- *Closing the Gap related – i.e. focused on improving outcomes in literacy, numeracy and attendance for Aboriginal students*
- *For improving teaching and educational outcomes for all students around the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives, cultures, histories and languages*
- *For improving Aboriginal community engagement and participation in education*
- *For improving access to specific employment pathways and improving transition from primary into secondary schooling for Aboriginal students*
- *For the development and implementation of individual learning plans for Aboriginal students*
- *For the development of culturally appropriate curriculum and resources.*
- *For the professional development of school staff to increase cultural awareness and for Aboriginal teachers and AEWs to develop in their roles*
- *For workforce diversity and inclusion employment strategies*

Other policies and programs we came across which are worth noting but fell outside the range outlined above included:

- **The Cultural Integrity policy**, which is implemented across all Australian Capital Territory schools and takes a 'positive strengths-based' approach to Aboriginal education reforms as well as providing a rich set of supporting resources for AEWs and educators to access. The Cultural Integrity policy also indicates that each school is required to show accountability for 'Cultural Integrity' through 'self-assessment' and reporting to Department processes. A fact sheet on the Cultural Integrity policy can be found at -
https://www.education.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1124210/CI-Fact-Sheet_Oct-2017.pdf



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- The ACT and Victorian Departments of Education have established staff networking structures where AEWs can formally and informally meet to share resources, knowledge and issues, and professionally develop in their roles. These networking processes appear to be facilitated through AEWs in these jurisdictions being employed through their respective Education Directorates rather than being employed by their individual schools.
- The South Australia Aboriginal Education Strategy (2019-2029) includes an implementation and accountability framework to ensure transparency and responsiveness to progressing learning and developmental outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people. The Strategy aims to strengthen accountability *by engaging Aboriginal people who are external to the department and who have expertise in education, child development, culture, community and nation building*. The Department's Senior Executive Group oversees and monitors progress against the strategy at a systemic, partnership and school level. There are plans for the Strategy to increase school level accountabilities for Aboriginal Education.
- The Aboriginal Education Worker Award (South Australia) is a significant piece of legislation which formalises salaries and conditions for Aboriginal Education Workers throughout the State of South Australia. Importantly clause 5.1.7 of the Aboriginal Education Workers award provides some acknowledgement for cultural knowledge and of community responsibilities.

THE LITERATURE AND THE INTERVIEWS

The literature sourced and reviewed primarily focused on AEWs and their work in schools from the 1990s – through to 2018. The main themes within the literature we reviewed were in the messages participants provided during interviews. The NATSIEC consultation and interview process was conducted during the months of May, June and July.

In regards to '**what contributes to AEWs achieving success in their role?**' recurring stories throughout the literature and interviews illustrate that there is a need for:

- **The institution of supportive collaborative working relationships** which support AEWs and their work within schools, as well as formal structured opportunities for AEWs to network with other AEWs across their respective region or jurisdiction.
- **Professional Learning** for principals and school teaching and administrative staff to develop a professional appreciation and understanding of the AEW role – and for principals and school staff to develop an understanding of how best to work with AEWs in delivering the objectives of their respective jurisdictions' Aboriginal education policies and programs – and for relevant Professional Learning to be designed to provide AEWs with opportunities for professional and career progression.



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- **Professional Leadership** from school principals and executive staff to advance their school's Aboriginal education agenda and ensure the AEW role and Aboriginal education outcomes are central within and shared across the school – and Professional Leadership across the institution of education including Education Ministers, Directors and other leaders and decision makers to lead institutional reforms to provide increased job security and recognition for AEWs such as has been achieved through the legislation of Aboriginal Education Worker Award, structuring formal Networking opportunities, instituting career development pathways etc.

In regards to '*what barriers inhibit AEWs achieving success in their role?*' recurring stories throughout the literature and interviews illustrate that the following issues have always been and continue to be prevalent:

- **Widespread lack of support, value and respect for the AEW role** – this issue appears prevalent across jurisdictions and presents as principals and teachers: avoiding the responsibility to effectively promote and utilise the AEW role; avoiding the responsibility to include Aboriginal perspectives, cultures and histories across teaching areas; actively devaluing Aboriginal education; being racist towards AEWs and/or their local Aboriginal communities. The literature review and interviews also indicate that a lack of support, value and respect for the AEW role is also prevalent within state and territory educational departments and their educational leaders and decision makers.
- **Poor Leadership** including understanding the work AEWs do and developing unclear duty statements – and a lack of support/and or understanding from school leadership about the complex work AEWs do.
- **Limited career and professional development opportunities** – in some jurisdictions there are levels AEWs can progress on dependent on their experience and qualifications. However the potential for career progression for AEWs appears to be limited to well below teacher status in all jurisdictions. Interviews, AEW job descriptions and the literature also indicate there is a mismatch between the formal professional development opportunities on offer and the skills required to successfully achieve the duties expected of AEWs. The literature and interviews also indicate there are limited formal networking opportunities for AEWs to share knowledge, resources, and to create new solutions to the complex problems they face.
- **Limited job security** – in some jurisdictions the AEW role appears to be dependent on whether individual principals value the role.



RECOMMENDATIONS

NATSIEC recommends that education departments in all jurisdictions:

1 - RECOGNISE THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF THE AEW ROLE BY INSTITUTING LEVELS OF AEW PROFICIENCY THAT PEAK AT THE SCHOOL SENIOR EXECUTIVE LEVEL.

2 - ENSURE THAT AEW ROLES IN SCHOOLS ARE INSITUTED AS PERMANENT ROLES THAT ARE NOT AT THE WHIM OF PRINCIPALS TO CULL OR OTHERWISE.

3 - WORK TO ENSURE SCHOOLS VALUE AND RECOGNISE THE AEW ROLE AND ABORIGINAL EDUCATION BY ESTABLISHING ABORIGINAL EDUCATION FACULTIES TO LEAD AND SUPPORT EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT, TEACHING, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES, AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING FOR STAFF IN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION.

4 - INSTITUTE QUALIFICATION BASED TRAINING FOR AEWs AND WORK TOWARDS ESTABLISHING RELEVANT ACCREDITED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR AEWs.

5 - DEVELOP AND SUPPORT FORMAL NETWORKING ARRANGEMENTS FOR AEWs TO MEET FACE TO FACE ONCE PER SCHOOL TERM TO SHARE RESOURCES, KNOWLEDGE, ISSUES ETC.

6 - WORK TO ENSURE THAT AEWs WORKING AT SCHOOL EXECUTIVE LEVEL ARE ALLOCATED ANNUAL BUDGETS TO SUPPORT THE INCLUSION OF COMMUNITY IN EDUCATION AND OTHER INITIATIVES CONSIDERED RELEVANT.

7 - STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS WITH NATSIEC AND EXISTING AND FUTURE AECGS TO PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT FOR AEWs.



1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

1.1 NATSIEC

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Council (NATSIEC – formerly Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies or IECBs) refers to the collective grouping of the six state and two territory members of NATSIEC. Across Australia, NATSIEC members include the peak community advocacy and advisory bodies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education within their jurisdictions, each being closely linked with local Aboriginal communities, particularly with community members working in and passionate about education. NATSIEC holds a specialist view in Indigenous education and training, having spent over 30 years representing grassroots views on what works and opportunities for improvement in the education and training of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people around Australia. NATSIEC is also the most effective means through which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can be directly involved in the design, development and implementation of education policies and programs.

Since the IECBs (now NATSIEC) were defunded during the Tony Abbott government’s implementation of the much maligned Indigenous Advancement Strategy, an established independent national voice on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education has been non-existent.

A listing of current NATSIEC members is attached as Appendix 1

1.2 Background

This project emanated from the IECB’s advocacy for inclusion of a national independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community based voice in educational decision making and policy development. During early 2016 the IECB Chairs met with the Federal Department of Education. As a result of this meeting, Michele Bruniges, Secretary Education, responded by organising and Chairing a formal biannual Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting (IECM) where federal education representatives could meet and discuss current educational matters with IECBs. During December 2018, Lyndal Groom, the Department of Education’s Branch Manager – Student Participation, discussed an opportunity for IECBs to lead a project documenting jurisdictional policy frameworks and strategies, as well as contextual issues around the roles of Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs).

This report details policy and practices relating to AEWs. NATSIEC was also asked to complete a complimentary project around Indigenous language teaching and learning. The report for that project is titled *‘Policy and Practice: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages in Australian Public Schools’*.

1.3 Rationale

It is only relatively recently that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been welcome to work within Australia’s public schools. The role of AEW was first established across the majority of states and territories during the 1970s (Price, Jackson-Barrett, Gower & Herrington, 2017). The role has, since the 1970s, broadly involved:

- working as a conduit between schools and their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities,
- supporting teachers in their teaching and learning activities and curriculum development work, and



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- supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to achieve educational outcomes in schools

AEWs also play a critical role in ensuring that schools become more culturally responsive and safe places for Aboriginal students and communities. This aspect of their work can be highly valuable for achieving educational engagement and participation outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Lowe & Bub-Connor, 2014). On the other hand schools that function to deny or denigrate the identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are likely to produce lower educational participation and engagement, and detrimental health and well-being outcomes for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Hunter and Lewis, 2006).

The importance of building and establishing the Aboriginal education workforce has long been pushed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education advocates. The seminal 1989 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) clearly established 21 long term goals, one of which was to: *increase the number of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people working within the education industry at all levels* (Department of Education, 1989). Two years later Recommendation 297 of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) further demonstrated the vital need for the employment and further support of AEWs. It recommended recognition of:

- a. The vital role which Aboriginal Education Workers or persons performing a similar role but with another title-- can play in ensuring effective Aboriginal participation*
- b. Aboriginal Education Workers be given the recognition and remuneration which their role merits and that it be recognised that they suffer from conflicting expectations of community and Department as to their role; and*
- c. It be understood that there is a need for them to have accountability to the Aboriginal community as well as to their employer. (RCIADIC, 1991)*

There is evidence within the recent review of the RCIADIC that suggests that, across jurisdictions, education departments and schools have worked towards employing more AEWs and improving conditions of employment (Deloitte Access Economics, pp608-611 2018). However we also know that across and within jurisdictions there is a wide range of arrangements around the employment of AEWs within schools. AEW job titles, roles, expected capabilities, responsibilities etc. differ significantly between and within jurisdictions. Additionally, there continues to be a range of complex and contextual issues associated with these roles that continue to be problematic and unaddressed (Price et al, 2017).

The 2019 Closing the Gap report illustrates that national goals to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student literacy, numeracy and attendance outcomes are not on track. With only minimal improvements in regards to these outcomes since the Close the Gap policy was established, there remains a significant need for improving the way schools work with and engage their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and students. In regards to this it is important to question how schools and Aboriginal communities can get the most benefit from AEW roles within schools. This project aims to explore this question through a documentation and brief assessment of current policy frameworks, strategies and issues associated with AEW roles within each jurisdiction.



1.4 Objectives

The objective of this project is to:

- Document current Department of Education policy frameworks concerning the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workforce (identified school based positions) across jurisdictions
- Document and provide analysis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workforce (identified school based positions) roles and responsibilities and the issues, barriers and concerns associated with their work across jurisdictions within Australian public schools

1.5 Scope

The scope of this project is limited to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identified roles within public schools across jurisdictions. Therefore the project does not explore matters concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in school roles such as teacher, administration, principal etc.

1.6 Governance

This project has been managed by the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (AECG) and governed by the eight state and territory Chairs of NATSIEC.

1.7 Methods

To achieve the objectives of the project within the brief project timeframe, NATSIEC agreed upon the following methods.

Desktop research - to identify, document and provide brief descriptions of each jurisdiction's current policies, initiatives and employment practices relating to AEWs.

Literature review – to undertake a brief analysis of literature on AEWs in Australian public schools to identify what contributes to success and what issues and barriers prevent success for AEWs in their role.

Semi-structured interviews – with NATSIEC Chairs and 2-3 NATSIEC nominated representatives within each jurisdiction.

Note: More information on methodology is provided at the introduction of each of the corresponding data sections.

1.8 Limitations

The potential of this project has been limited by a brief timeframe and limited funding. This project, along with the associated *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages in Australian Public Schools* project formally began on April 26 with this Final Report required for completion on September 14. This timeframe limited the possibility for comprehensive data collection and analysis of each State and Territory's policies and practices concerning the Aboriginal education workforce. The timeframe and limited funding reduced potential to conduct more appropriate face-to-face interviews, support relevant community workshops and yarning circles, and hold formal collective NATSIEC face to face consultations on the project and research findings.



2. IN POLICY - ABORIGINAL EDUCATION WORKFORCE

There are a wide range of policy frameworks and initiatives across jurisdictions that specifically refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers and the work they undertake in schools. Given the brief timeframe for this report, this section provides only a brief overview of some policies in each jurisdiction that directly refer to the work AEWs are called upon to lead and/or support in schools. Where it was possible to source, specific information on AEW roles and duty statements has been provided for each jurisdiction.

2.1 National Policy Frameworks

There are numerous overarching national policy frameworks which relate to AEWs and the work they do. Some of the prominent and current policy frameworks and strategies include:

- *Closing the Gap*
- *The Australian Curriculum*
- *The National Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages*
- *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy*
- *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to the work of AEWs, is tabled at Appendix 2

2.2 QLD Education Workforce, policy and programs

The Queensland Department of Education employs Community Education Counsellors (CECs) in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identified school based positions. A documentation of the Community Education Counsellor role description is provided at Appendix 3

Some prominent Government and Department of Education policies and programs delivered in Queensland which, in regards to implementation, directly relate with the CEC role description include:

- *Every Student Succeeding - State Schools Strategy 2019 – 2023*
- *Department of Education's Strategic Plan (2018 -2022)*
- *Advancing Education: An action plan for education in Queensland*
- *Solid pathways – Critical and Creative Thinkers Program*
- *RATEP Community based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teacher Education Program*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to the work of CECs, is tabled at Appendix 4.



2.3 NSW education workforce, policy and programs

The NSW Department of Education employs Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs), Aboriginal School Learning Support Officers (ASLSO), Senior Leaders/Leaders Community Engagement (SLLCEs) and Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest Teachers (ALCNTs) in Aboriginal identified school based positions. A documentation of the role descriptions for AEOs and SLLCEs is provided at Appendix 5.

Government, Department of Education and AECG policies and programs delivered in NSW which, in regards to implementation, directly relate with the Aboriginal identified positions noted above include:

- *NSW Department of Education – Aboriginal Education Policy*
- *NSW Education Act*
- *NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group – Connecting to Country Program*
- *NSW Department of Education – NSW AECG Partnership Agreement*
- *NESA Aboriginal Studies*
- *NSW Government – Opportunities Choice Healing Responsibility and Employment Strategy*
- *NSW Government - NSW 2021*

A brief description of each of the above, including the policy and program objectives/commitments relevant to the work of AEOs is tabled at Appendix 6

2.4 ACT Education workforce, policy and programs

The ACT Department of Education employs *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers (IEOs)* in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identified school based positions. The Education Directorate employs 10 IEOs who work across 11 ACT public schools. A documentation of an IEO's role description is provided at Appendix 7

Some ACT Government and ACT Department of Education policies and programs which, in regards to implementation, directly relate with the IEO position include:

- *ACT Government: Strategic Plan 2018-21: A Leading Learning Organisation*
- *ACT Department of Education: Cultural Integrity in ACT Public Schools*
- *ACT Education Directorate: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network*
- *ACT Government's Student Aspirations Program*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to the work of IEOs is tabled at Appendix 8.



2.5 VIC education workforce, policy and programs

The Victorian Department of Education employs Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESOs) and Koorie Educators (KEs) in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identified school based positions. A documentation of the KESO role description is provided at Appendix 9.

Some prominent Government and Department of Education policies and programs delivered in Victoria which, in regards to implementation, directly relate with KESO and KE role descriptions. These include:

- *Victorian Department of Education and Training - Marrung Aboriginal Education Action Plan 2016 -2026*
- *Victorian Department of Education and Training – School Policy: Koorie Education*
- *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023*
- *Victorian Department of Education and Training Koorie Literacy and Numeracy Programs*
- *Victorian Department of Education and Training – Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2017-2020*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to the work of KESOs, is tabled at Appendix 10.

2.6 TAS education workforce, policy and programs

The Tasmanian Department of Education employs Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs) and Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs) in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identified school based positions. A documentation of the AEO and AEW role description is provided at Appendix 11.

Some prominent Government and Department of Education policies and programs delivered in Tasmania which, in regards to implementation, directly relate with AEO and AEW role descriptions include:

- *Tasmania’s Aboriginal Education Framework*
- *Tasmanian Government: Resetting the relationship with the Aboriginal community*
- *Aboriginal Sharers of Knowledge (ASK) program*
- *Aboriginal Education Services – The Orb*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to the work of AEOs and AEWs, is tabled at Appendix 12.

2.7 SA education workforce, policy and programs

The South Australian Department of Education employs Aboriginal Community Education Officers (ACEOs) and Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs) in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



identified school based positions. A documentation of the ACEO and AEW role description is provided at Appendix 13.

Some prominent Government and Department of Education policies and programs delivered in South Australia which, in regards to implementation, directly relate with ACEO and AEW role descriptions include:

- *The Aboriginal Education Strategy (2019 – 2029)*
- *Aboriginal Schools*
- *Aboriginal Education Worker Award*
- *Aboriginal community voice*
- *Aboriginal Cultural Studies*
- *Leaders and Educators*
- *SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2017–2021*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to the work of ACEOs and AEWs, is tabled at Appendix 14.

2.8 WA education workforce, policy and programs

The Western Australian Department of Education employs Aboriginal & Islander Education Officers (AIEOs) in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identified school based positions. A documentation of the AIEO's role description is provided at Appendix 15.

Some prominent Government and Department of Education policies and programs delivered in Western Australia which, in regards to implementation, directly relate with AIEO role descriptions include:

- *Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework*
- *Focus 2018: Directions for Schools*
- *Aboriginal Perspectives Across the Curriculum (APAC) project*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to the work of AIEOs, is tabled at Appendix 16.

2.9 NT education workforce, policy and programs

The Northern Territory Department of Education employs Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs) Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs) and Aboriginal Teacher Assistant (ATAs) in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identified school based positions. An outline of AIEW, AEO and ATA role descriptions is provided at Appendix 17.



Some prominent Government and Department of Education policies and programs delivered in the Northern Territory which, in regards to implementation, directly relate with ACEO, AEW and AT role descriptions include:

- *Indigenous Education Strategy: 2015–2024*
- *Framework for Inclusion: 2019 – 2029*
- *Keeping Indigenous Languages and Cultures Strong – A Plan for Teaching and Learning of Indigenous Languages and Cultures in the Northern Territory*
- *The Northern Territory Indigenous Languages and Cultures Curriculum*

A brief description of each of the above, including excerpts of information relevant to the work of AIEWs, AEOs and ATAs, is tabled at Appendix 18.

3. IN PRACTICE – ABORIGINAL EDUCATION WORKERS

This section aims to shed light on how AEW roles are working within Australian public schools. A brief literature review along with 15 open ended interviews were undertaken to inform this section.

3.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides a short illustration of common themes around '*what contributes to success for*', and '*what issues and barriers work against*' the Aboriginal education workforce in Australian public schools.

The literature we reviewed was sourced through entering the following search terms through the education discipline within the informit online database: 'Aboriginal Education Worker'; 'Aboriginal Teaching Assistant'; 'Indigenous Education Worker'; 'Koorie Education Worker'; 'Aboriginal Liaison Officer'; 'Koorie Education Support Officer'; 'Aboriginal Education Officer'; 'Indigenous Education Officer'; 'Aboriginal Education Workforce'; 'Aboriginal Community Education Officer'; 'Torres Strait Islander Education Worker'; and 'Torres Strait Islander Education Workforce'. The search results were dominated by journals on Indigenous health education and Aboriginal health workers and workforce. This indicates that perhaps more research on the plight of AEWs in Australian schools is needed. To source additional references NATSIEC Chairs provided the reviewer with suggestions of publications which they saw as relevant to this research.

3.1.1 WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO SUCCESS FOR ABORIGINAL EDUCATION WORKERS?

Below is a listing and brief description of commonly found themes that were found within the literature regarding what contributes to success for the Aboriginal Education Workforce.



INSTITUTION OF SUPPORTIVE COLLABORATIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Throughout the literature establishment of receptive, supportive, collaborative and mentoring relationships between AEWs and school staff and principals is commonly cited as contributing to success. The importance of supportive collaborative working relationships is also cited as necessary to increase understandings of the often complex political and cultural contexts in which AEWs are operating in in their role. Regular meetings between AEWs and school principals to discuss Aboriginal education issues and raise related concerns is another example of fostering supportive collaborative working partnerships for success in the literature. It is also suggested that there is often a lack of value and recognition attributed to the AEW role in schools and that supportive collaborative relationships may help address this issue.

The literature also commonly refers to the importance of developing shared responsibilities across the school for supporting the significant objectives behind the AEWs role. It is suggested that developing processes around shared responsibility and working collaboratively also supports avoiding the commonly cited non-Aboriginal expectation that any duty relating to Aboriginal education and students can only be dealt with by the AEW. AEW involvement in collaboratively developing teaching programs is also cited as supporting sustainability, continuity, success and ownership over the role and work of AEWs (Price et al, 2017; Andersen, Gower & O:'Dowd, 2015; Winkler, 2006; Gower, Partington, Byrne, Galloway, Weisssofner, Ferguson & Kirov, 2011; MacGill, 2017).

Additionally findings from John Bradbury's work on numeracy projects in the Northern Territory found that *"an equal partnership between the classroom teacher and the assistant teacher was essential and helped to achieve better outcomes for students"*. Bradbury's projects recorded very positive feedback about community engagement and empowerment from schools where equal teacher/AEW partnerships existed (Parliament of Australia, 2011).

PROVISION OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Throughout the relevant literature the provision of relevant professional learning, development and training opportunities for AEWs was highlighted as important. One article indicated professional learning areas such as conflict resolution, leadership, time management, effective communication, information technology, book keeping skills and literacy and numeracy pedagogy would be beneficial. Equally if not more-so prevalent in the literature was the need for ongoing support and professional learning for non-Indigenous staff to develop the cultural capital required to reduce ignorance of and appreciate concepts within Aboriginal communities (Warren, Cooper & Baturo, 2004; Winkler, 2006).



APPROPRIATE CLEARLY DEFINED AND COMMUNICATED ROLES

Ensuring the AEW role is appropriately recruited, clearly defined, understood and communicated was commonly cited as important in the literature. In regards to this the need for more AEWs (employed from schools' local Aboriginal communities), along with recruiting Aboriginal male and female staff was also commonly cited to help minimize the raft of educational disadvantages that Aboriginal students face.

The institution of promotion levels so there could be potential for career progression for AEWs was commonly referred to as important. Negotiating AEW roles and consultative reviews of AEW roles was also illustrated as important for ensuring AEWs felt they had ownership of their role. Finally in terms of appropriately instituting the role of AEW in schools the literature commonly cites the importance of including time for AEWs to conduct community and parent engagement meetings (Andersen et al, 2015; Howard, 2004; Price et al, 2017).

Recognition of the value of local AEWs is commonly identified as important and necessary in regards to clearly defining and valuing the role of AEWs.

In the Parliamentary committee on Indigenous languages *Ms Kerry Kasmira, the Principal at Arlparra School in Utopia Homelands, emphasised the value of Indigenous assistant teachers who speak and understand English and the local Indigenous language:*

“Without exception, our assistant teachers have far more professional diversity than any of the white teachers here, in terms of being able to address the needs of the students” (Parliament of Australia 2011)

FORMALISATION THROUGH POLICY AND LEGISLATION

The industrialisation of AEW's roles has been cited as a crucial development for increasing AEW employment sustainability and better recognising AEW experience and contribution through formal pay scales. Additionally National and State Policies and Strategies that call for educators to deliver on locally developed culturally relevant curricula and engagement with Aboriginal communities has been cited to increase employment security and recognition of AEW roles (Price et al, p 7, 2017; (MacGill p63, 2017).

RESOURCING AND FUNDING

Access to resources such as the provision of AEW working rooms, ICT requirements and support and other physical resources such as phones and cars was also cited as supporting success for AEWs in their role (Price et al, 2017).



3.1.2 WHAT ARE THE ISSUES AND BARRIERS FACED BY THE ABORIGINAL EDUCATION WORKFORCE?

The literature sourced for this review presented very clear messages around prevalent barriers and issues faced by AEWs in their role. The range of issues and barriers have been broadly categorised under two main themes, 'leadership and/or institutional barriers' and 'unprofessionalism'. It is important to note that these themes are interrelated and should not be considered in isolation. These themes have been gleaned from a relatively brief review of the literature and therefore should not be considered as a comprehensive representation of the issues and barriers associated with AEW roles in public schools.

In regards to the issues and barriers faced by AEWs today it is worth considering Recommendation 289 of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody*, which identified the '*important need for Aboriginal Education Workers to be appropriately recognised and remunerated for their work and for their commitments to the Aboriginal and Torres Islander community, in order to ensure their effective participation in the education system*' (Deloitte Access Economics, 2018). Recently, the 2018 *Review of the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody* indicates all jurisdictions have fully or almost fully implemented recommendation 289. The issues within the literature that we have outlined below suggests otherwise.

LEADERSHIP AND/OR INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

There were three leadership and/or institutional related barriers commonly cited in the literature:

1. AEW roles in schools are not clearly matched with or bound by their duty statements

As identified in AEW role descriptions (see Appendices 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 & 17) AEWs are commonly employed to undertake a wide range of professional activities, including working with external stakeholders, delivering whole of school events, curriculum reform, resource development, team teaching and as well as working closely with Aboriginal students and local Aboriginal communities. However, the literature we reviewed indicates that at the school level, the work AEWs undertake is often not clearly defined within or matched to their role statements (Gower et al, 2011). This refers to AEWs being asked to perform duties that are outside what is identified in their role statements. For example, the literature suggests AEWs are often called on to undertake menial tasks such as cleaning. At the other end of the spectrum AEWs can be called on to work with senior executive to engage community and other external stakeholders and deliver professional development workshops for school staff, which may also not be identified clearly in their role statements (Buckskin, Hignett & Hignett, 1994; Price et al, 2017; Macgill, 2017). In a likely reference to this issue, Indigenous educator Mark Rose has stated that AEWs are "*often the lowest paid employee in the school, yet in a quick*



review of their day you will find them making principal-like decisions” (Rose in Price et al pp 3, 2017).

2. AEWs have poor career and professional development opportunities

Whilst AEWs are often called upon to undertake highly complex tasks, there appears to be a dearth of formal qualification based training around the role (Price et al p9, 2017).

Research from the Dusseldorp Skills Forum indicates there is a mismatch between the skills required to undertake the AEW role successfully and the formal training that is provided. Winkler (2006, p18) suggests that providing training opportunities in areas such as conflict resolution, literacy and numeracy pedagogy, information technology, and effective communication could help AEWs in skilling up for their complex role.

The literature also indicates a lack of career development opportunities for AEWs. In regards to this Gower et al (2011) found that AEWs were often employed at the same level regardless of their skills and expertise in the field. Almost 40 years prior to this, in 1975, the Aboriginal Consultative Group (ACG), in their report to the Schools Commission stated that AEW's *“conditions were often inadequate, particularly the low salary levels”* (Price et al p4, 2017).

There is also evidence indicating a lack of formal networking opportunities established for AEWs to share knowledge, resources, and collectively develop creative new approaches and solutions to the complex problems they face (Winkler, 2006; Price et al p9, 2017).

3. AEWs are often employed under tenuous, non-recurrent and low salaried funding arrangements

In 1975 the ACG showed concerns regarding the lack of permanency for AEW roles in schools and recommended that all AEWs *“be employed on a permanent basis”* (Price et al p4, 2017). In 1985 House of Representatives select committee noted that AEW *“conditions were often inadequate, particularly the low salary levels and lack of permanency”* (in Price et al p 4, 2017). The 1994 Buckskin et al *research project into the working conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers* highlights that while AEWs held important roles in schools there were concerns regarding their low salaries and inconsistent permanent employment opportunities. A few decades later Price et al's (2017) research indicates issues regarding the prevalence of non-recurrent and tenuous funding for AEW roles.

UNPROFESSIONALISM

The three issues outlined below have been categorised under the theme ‘unprofessionalism’ because each issue illustrates actions and behaviours that are at variance with or contrary to professional standards or ethics.



1. Lack of recognition and value attributed to the role

Lack of recognition and value attributed to the work of AEWs is consistently raised in the literature. The range of issues associated with this include:

- a lack of support and/or understanding from school leadership regarding the complex work AEWs are required to do
- being given menial tasks beneath or outside their job description – cleaning; helping organise rooms; behaviour management
- the continued approval (or not) of tenuous funding arrangements for AEW positions in schools
- the relatively low salaries applied to the AEW role
(Price et al p4, 2017)

There are also commonly occurring statements in the literature identifying that there is little recognition of the fact that AEWs live in and are a part of the communities they are working for. This refers to a lack of understanding that AEWs' status and role extends into their local Aboriginal communities (MacGill p59, 2017; RCIADIC, 1991). AEWs can often be the sole Aboriginal community representative working within the school. This position can become very complicated when AEWs are confronted to respond, outside of work hours, within the community, to the often occurring and complex issues that schools raise for Aboriginal communities.

The opening of Winkler's (2006) article *Hidden Treasures: recognizing the value of Indigenous educators* indicates the breadth of duties AEWs may be called upon to do and suggests they are called upon to do 'everything Aboriginal' for the schools they work in.

"An Aboriginal child has a sudden drop in attendance. The behavioural issues of another Aboriginal child needs investigation, with possible links to a negative change in home environment. The school librarian wants advice on the purchase of Indigenous themed readers. Sorry Day is approaching and no appropriate school assembly has been arranged. To use a catchphrase from a popular 1980's movie: Who you gonna call?"

The work AEWs are called upon to do is clearly important however a key point Winkler and many of the other articles we reviewed make is that they are not recognised for their contribution.

2. Lack of engagement/initiative from non-Aboriginal staff

The literature we reviewed also indicates the work of AEWs is commonly hindered by low levels of engagement and initiative by non-Aboriginal staff on Aboriginal education related matters. As outlined earlier, the most comprehensive empirical research on Aboriginal education illustrated that Australian teachers are on average spending 0.4% of their teaching time on anything regarding Aboriginal education (Luke, Cazden, Coopes, Klenowski, Ladwig, Lester, MacDonald, Phillips, Shield, Spina, Theroux, Tones, Villegas, & Woods (2013). Of further concern is Warren et al's (2004) point



that most teachers in high Indigenous population schools tend to be young, inexperienced and not possessing the cultural capital to understand or engage with their local Aboriginal community. Compounding the issue is the assertion that these teachers often bring with them a range of cultural biases which need to be unpacked (Warren et al, 2004).

The lack of engagement and initiative from non-Aboriginal staff can be explained, in part, by the ongoing social and cultural disconnect between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. In addition to this, non-Aboriginal educators have commonly voiced they have had little training or life experience to prepare them to, for example, incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into their teaching and learning or to appropriately engage with local Aboriginal communities (Luke et al, 2013). The lack of engagement and initiative from non-Aboriginal staff may also be explained as a legacy of the neglect and racial intolerance Australian education institutions have traditionally shown to Aboriginal peoples and their knowledge, culture and languages.

The lack of engagement and initiative from non-Indigenous principals and staff has been cited as an 'abrogation of responsibility' (Price et al p7, 2017) and as perpetuating an 'ongoing dissonance between AEWs and other school staff' (MacGill p57, 2017).

3. *The continuation of overt and covert racism and discrimination in Australian schools*

The literature we reviewed identifies that racism and discrimination are prevalent issues which AEWs have to face in their work. The comprehensive review of Buckskin et al (1994) highlighted AEWs commonly confronted experiences of racism in Australian schools during the late 20th Century. More recently MacGill's research states that "buffering racism" is a routinely silenced aspect of the AEW role, and that anti-racism policies are not always upheld by principals (MacGill p60, 2017).

Furthermore MacGill's (p67, 2017) research highlights that "*although there have been reforms in terms of workplace agreements, the oral histories clearly demonstrate that ACEOs continue to experience indirect discrimination in schools as a result of a general ignorance regarding their complex roles in the school and community*".

3.2 NATSIEC CONSULTATIONS AND INTERVIEWS

The NATSIEC consultation and interview process was conducted during the months of May, June and July. Phone and face to face interviews were arranged and conducted with all of the six state and two territory NATSIEC representatives. Each NATSIEC member was also asked to nominate additional representatives for interview. In some states NATSIEC nominated representatives were unavailable for interview. As identified in the limitations section the short project timeframe limited potential for a more comprehensive consultation and interview process. The table below provides a breakdown of interviews conducted in each state/territory.



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| STATE/TERRITORY | Interviewees contributing to this report | Total |
|-----------------------------------|---|-----------|
| New South Wales | NATSIEC Chair and two AEWs | 3 |
| Australian Capital Territory | NATSIEC Chair, one AEW, one Indigenous Language Teacher | 3 |
| VIC | NATSIEC Chair | 1 |
| TAS | NATSIEC Chair | 1 |
| SA | NATSIEC Chair, one Indigenous Language teacher | 2 |
| WA | NATSIEC Chair | 1 |
| NT | NATSIEC Chair, one AEW, one former school principal | 3 |
| QLD | NATSIEC Chair | 1 |
| All States and Territories | | 15 |

Note: All NATSIEC Chairs have worked closely with AEWs over a long period of time. Two NATSIEC Chairs had worked as an AEW in the past.

Interviews included a set of broad open ended questions based on the project objectives. The interview questions are attached as Appendix 19. The 15 interviewee responses were transcribed and returned to interviewees for accuracy checking. The interview data was then coded into themes, documented and then resent to interview participants for comment and input.

NATSIEC reiterates that, with more adequate funding and additional time, methodologies such as: face to face consultations; workshops; yarning circles; etc. would have been made possible. We acknowledge this limitation in regards to the following findings.

The findings below provide a documentation of consistent messages sourced through the interviews. Analysis and discussion of the interview data, along with the other data sourced through this project, is provided in the Discussion section.

Interviews were conducted with NATSIEC members and their nominated from each state and territory. Therefore the interview findings around success, and barriers and issues reflect institutional differences across the states and territories.

AEWs ARE PROUD AND PASSIONATE ABOUT WHAT THEY DO

In addition to the findings outlined below the interviews revealed that AEWs are very passionate about the work they do in schools. When asked how they felt working within schools 80% of interviewees specifically indicated that AEWs felt very proud and/or passionate to be working in the role. These responses were commonly described in relation to working with, and achieving outcomes for, Aboriginal students.



3.2.1 WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO SUCCESS FOR AEWs IN THEIR ROLE?

Several common themes arose in the interviews around what contributes to success for AEWs. The most prevalent themes are listed below.

PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP - 73% of interview participants directly mentioned leadership or responsibilities of school leadership as contributing to success in their role. Some of the comments regarding this included:

“There are schools that do it well. These schools are the ones that are able to make the role central within the school and implement the AEW’s knowledge across the school.”

“It depends on the leadership of the school as to whether we feel empowered, disempowered, welcome or not welcome”

“Positive relationships with school leadership and leadership support in growing the role within and across the school rather than allowing the AEW position to be an isolated entity”

“School leaders that, you know, do the things that value a person - involve AEWs in meetings, asking for and valuing their opinion and advice, providing opportunity for them to contribute to the school culture and school functions. Sometimes they’re (AEWs) placed on the executive of the school and they have a role to play. That perception of a senior role in the school gives status and recognises AEW’s central role.”

UNDERSTANDING, SUPPORTING, VALUING AND RESPECTING THE AEW ROLE - 93% of interview participants indicated the importance of school staff understanding, supporting, valuing and respecting the AEW role. Some of the comments regarding this included:

“I think when you work together and be open and honest and transparent the outcomes will be there...Here the teachers give me due respect, they’ll say ‘can you come and help put an Aboriginal perspective into this?’ They’ll bring papers and I’ll



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say 'what is the outcome you want, what is it you want the students to learn out of this?' So I think working together as a team, that's important because often one person can't do it on their own" (interview participant shows unit and individual lesson plans they had lead the development of with a year two teacher where students were to learn initial stages of Aboriginal interrelated concepts of Lore, Dreaming, Land, Spirituality, Family and Astronomy etc.).

"Greater shared understandings of what the role is also contributes to AEWs feeling confident and secure in their role."

"The expertise and passion I have are appreciated by all staff who regularly come for advice and input and I have staff who are willing to step outside the square and teach Aboriginal perspectives across all KLAs"

"When AEWs get a sense of being valued equally in a team of educators who are aiming for education outcomes for students, then they likely can feel successful in their role."

STRUCTURAL CHANGE AND RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES - 67% of interview participants indicated the importance of structural systemic type change and flexibility to support success of AEWs in schools. Some of the comments regarding this included:

"It was not solely a school based role. I was able to take the initiative to extend the role to work with families. This was a more holistic approach which included things like helping our students' family members find jobs and accommodation. You can't expect kids to come to school and engage if there are major employment and housing issues in their family"

"I think access to ongoing Professional Development and Training, which leads to a qualification, which leads to increased salary and eventually to teacher status."

"We also fought for a structure which provided increased collective engagement support. When they (AEWs) were school based employees they were limited as they could only interact in certain ways and were basically like childcare workers. The change to employ KESOs (AEWs) as regional based employees within DET had some issues but now KESOs are able to be working as a regional team rather than isolated as Koorie individuals in schools."



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“The Aboriginal Education Worker Award that was brought in has been a major achievement for AEWs because it regulates levels of employment and benefits associated with full time status.”

“Our AEWs are not funded by individual schools but by the education directorate and we have our own unit within the Department so we are not owned by schools or under direct instruction of schools. We have our school based supervisors but my manager is in the Department and myself and other AEWs come back to the Unit for professional activities like PL, meetings, and workshops.”

“The ACT Department have a new focus on ‘cultural integrity’ which has changed the Aboriginal education model away from a deficit model. The onus is on schools now to be accountable and show what we are doing, we must teach perspectives throughout the curriculum and make the physical and academic environment aspirational for our students as well as ensure cultural safety. Schools are actually competing with each other to achieve a high standard of ‘cultural integrity’.”

“Funding has changed to ensure accountability through schools having to show how they spent their money on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.”

“In Tasmania AEWs would likely benefit from an alternative structure such as being employed through Aboriginal Education Services where coordination of group AEW workshops and other collective networking opportunities could be supported.”

“There is a need to bring back affirmative action policies to mandate employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the board from entry level to senior leadership roles.”

“For the role to work properly in schools I think you need a male and a female in the roles, culturally this is more appropriate.”

3.2.2 WHAT ARE THE ISSUES AND BARRIERS THAT AEWs FACE IN THEIR ROLE?

The interviews sourced a raft of commonly cited issues and barriers that AEWs face in their role in schools. The most prevalent themes are listed below.



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LACK OF PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP – 60% of interview participants directly mentioned ‘school leadership’ as inhibiting the potential of the AEW role. Some of the comments regarding this included.

“How you felt in a school was dependent on the school’s leadership structure...you could have a decent (Aboriginal education) policy but if the school principal didn’t support it then it would be just words on paper.”

“The process of recognition... there’s been a churn of Principals and it is not automatic for the handover of the new Principal to recognize and celebrate the contributions local Aboriginal staff can make.”

“Depends on the leadership of the school whether we feel empowered, disempowered, welcome or not welcome.”

“Sometimes you had a good principal, and then a change of leadership would occur and all of a sudden the new person would have a new agenda in regards to your role. It became less valued...With AEWs principals have the ultimate say, I’ve seen it before when a new leader comes in and there goes the AEW role.”

“The role is very dependent on how the school’s leadership staff decided to develop their school budgets...If AEW is not valued then it can become unfunded and non-existent from one year to the next.”

“AEWs are often given the kids who are the hardest or have behavioural issues and then asked to ‘fix’ them as well as ‘fix’ the curriculum to include Aboriginal culture and perspectives.”

“Some KESOs (AEWs) are simply employed to deal with disciplinary matters. The issue here is they are being asked to fix kids, to be the ‘fixers’. We are saying no, they should be the facilitators...for example there are mental health specialists in schools these days. KESOs are not trained mental health specialists, therefore you can’t expect them to take that professional role.”

LACK OF INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURAL SUPPORTS - 100% of participants (N=15) highlighted a wide range of issues and barriers that indicate the AEW role is not



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institutionally embedded and supported within public school systems. Some of the comments regarding this included.

“Unfortunately with policies like Close the Gap there are no clear mandates laid down for schools and Departments to work for the betterment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. There is a need to bring back affirmative action policies to mandate employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the board...as AEWS but as teachers as well as within Department... from entry level roles to senior leadership roles.”

“AEWs would benefit from an alternative structure such as being employed through Aboriginal Education Services where coordination of group AEW workshops and other collective networking opportunities could be supported.”

“Funding to value Aboriginal knowledge is often limited...I would love to have Elders in the room but they deserve to be paid to be here and to share their knowledge...but I don't have a large budget to do this.”

“There's something to say about education systems and the way the people are employed within them – the systems in place don't necessarily support an open transparent merit selection process which causes conflict because people can get the jobs because they're friendly with the principal and will do what the principal says rather than work for the best benefit for Aboriginal students and the community...There's some other issues with the system and some could say they're discriminatory...for example AEOs in NSW, when they apply for a transfer of schools then they have to also have an interview, this is not the case for other school staff and it inhibits their ability to be mobile and transfer.”

“There needs to be more positions in schools but they need to be valued above a 'tick a box' employment strategy outcome of the Department of Education...There is an official NSW Department of Education AEO role statement document but AEOs can be given separate role statements by schools which diminish the workers' potential to do the work they believed they were employed to do. This is a way principals and school leadership staff manipulate systems and avoid properly engaging and working with Aboriginal communities.”

“Global funding arrangements being pushed onto schools has resulted in schools rather than the Northern Territory Department of Education holding responsibility for employment – schools now have the money to employ – it then comes



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down to school principals, and who and what they value will also influence how local Aboriginal people are employed, how many are employed, who is employed and how long they employ them for each week. This personalised decision making process does not often result in secure appropriate employment where local Aboriginal staff are valued and recognised for their knowledge language and culture.”

“I was working with the school Executive and operating at that level however I was actually paid well under that level, the school even acknowledged this.”

“There wasn’t enough funding for adequate transport for the role. For example if I needed a car I would have to book it and (if it was available) pick it up from another location from where I worked from. There was no car easily accessible so this was a liability for other schools that were further away because I couldn’t travel there easily or as often as I wanted.”

“The role of AEWs is crucial for cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families within a school context and funding needs to be provided for their permanent employment in a school.”

“AEWs are generally very proud to be able to talk about, teach and share their culture, languages and experiences. However the education system is not always aligned equally with AEWs in valuing these aspects of education.”

“I think it would be good to have more AEWs. Schools want us but we’re stretched quite thinly across schools.”

“There needs to be a mindset of development when schools, the Department, and Education Ministers work to engage communities. Holding the one day workshop with community to ‘tick a box’ does not cut it. Firstly, there’s generally no measurements in place to see if these sorts of practices has benefited community for tomorrow. Secondly, this kind of approach isn’t consultation. You can’t go out with a program or policy already developed and talk ‘at’ community and call that consultation. Consultation is working together. We have to have this concept of development and working with communities attached to consultation with world class measures behind it to ensure that what is being done is taking effect.”



LACK OF ACCESSIBLE RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND QUALIFICATION BASED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES - 73% of participants directly indicated there is a dearth of accessible relevant professional development and qualification based training opportunities for AEWs. Some of the comments regarding this included:

“There is still a lot of work to do regarding professional learning. This was supported in 2008...to develop a professional learning resource to support AEWs but it was never implemented, no training package was introduced.”

“There’s a universal rejection to training only being provided in Darwin or Alice Springs, people want training locally because there’s Mothers and Grandmothers and others who have family responsibilities. Having to go away off Country means training doesn’t get linked to reality.”

“There is a lack of support and professional learning opportunity for the AEW role. AEWs are employed because they are Aboriginal and then what happens is they’re expected to just function instead of providing professional learning and specialized training to support them in their role. There are some very complex issues AEWs are expected to deal with and they’re not supported to do this.”

“The bigger issue is we need standards which recognize the skills and strengths of people on the ground... the mentality of people in Canberra who develop/endorse standards of practice in schools is generally white fella based and not drawing on strengths of local culture and the language comes into this. The standards don’t recognize the skills and strengths of people on the ground.”

“Access to professional learning, upskilling and training – AEWs are not necessarily seen as professional – there are barriers to access appropriate training to keep skills updated, (it’s a) barrier because they’re low on the employment scale, they’re not seen as important as other school staff and therefore less important to invest in training for them.”

“There is a gap in professional development opportunities for AEWs. Unless an AEW already possesses leadership skills then they can often become subservient in their role and not supported to achieve their potential in the role... and the role is not sustainable. Job security is low due to short term contracts leaving AEWs with uncertainty about their position at the end of each year... Being an AEW is not highly recognized or regarded in schools – across the school sector. There is a need for opportunities to gain further recognized qualifications.”



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“Recently training for childcare workers became regulated and formalised. So maybe we need formalized training for AEWs to support AEWs feeling secure through attaining recognised formal qualifications.”

RACISM AND IGNORANCE - 73% of participants directly indicated that racism and ignorance towards Aboriginal people continues to inhibit success for AEWs. Some of the comments regarding this included:

“Sometimes AEWs are caught between two worlds – they can feel and be torn, divided and compromised in their role...There are issues around racism and recognising the value adding AEWs bring...valuing what Aboriginal people bring to the table as Aboriginal people as well as the lack of understanding of the role they play in community...they are accountable to community and schools.”

“I came up against a few instances of racism from senior school executive staff.”

“Attitudes of school staff that are negative and/or complacent towards AEWs and their non-inclusion as a staff member and lack of support to deal with issues that relate to schooling...The underlying cause is racism and the treatment of AEWs as inferior to professional and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.”

“I didn’t enjoy the school setting as I came up against a couple of incidences of racism from senior executive, the senior leadership staff. Many of the student’s parents also complained to me about racism within the school.”

“Fundamentally nothing has changed in terms of what black fellas are asking for, what has changed is white fellas coming in and applying their rhetoric of the day and compounding their legacy of failure in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.”

“AEWs can clash with senior school leadership who don’t understand their role or don’t wish to engage with AEWs. All their knowledge often isn’t used as it could be within schools. Sometimes for NAIDOC they’re trotted out. Sometimes the way they are treated and asked to work is a bit tokenistic and very hit and miss.”

(AEWs are) “dealing with the ingrained racism and ignorance that can be an everyday thing within schools. There are two worlds colliding, the colonising world and the Aboriginal world.”



“Part of the role was to engage community. When I was out engaging community in what the school was trying to do for our kids, some teachers had the perception that ‘it’s good to be black because they just get to go out of the school in the community and yarn up with everyone’. The perception of some in the school was that I wasn’t doing valuable work for the school.”

4. DISCUSSION

Across Australia AEWs are frontline school staff working towards closing the gap in education outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Not only are they of crucial importance to ‘Closing the Gap’ in literacy, numeracy and attendance outcomes, they are also often leading curriculum and teaching and learning reforms to support Australian schools to deliver an education which appropriately includes the perspectives, histories and cultures of the first peoples of this nation. And, after a long history of neglect and racism from within schools towards Aboriginal communities, AEWs are working in schools with a primary task to increase local Aboriginal community engagement with schools and education.

AEWs work with and support students and families who directly experience the intergenerational trauma caused by the violent invasion of their lands and subsequent implementation of racist policies imposed on their families. They work with communities and students who can have highly complex needs and who are disadvantaged in an education system which has to date only shown glimpses of understanding and respect for Aboriginal languages, knowledge and cultures. AEWs also work with and support non-Aboriginal staff and students. In doing so they often put themselves in culturally unsafe situations, face to face with the ignorance and racism that permeates through Australian society.

In addition to this a brief review of AEW role descriptions from across Australia highlights that AEWs can be required to initiate and lead whole of school activities; contribute to curriculum reform; develop educational resources; work with senior Executive to engage community and other external stakeholders; and deliver professional development for school staff. AEWs are also positioned as the local Aboriginal community representative working within the school.



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AEWs are generally amongst the lowest paid employees in Australian schools and in several states and territories their employment is at the whim of their school principal who may, or may not appreciate the vital importance of Aboriginal education outcomes.

Two findings of this project around policy and practice are relatively well known.

1. **Policy:** Each jurisdiction's respective departments of education has developed a range of policies, strategies and programs which should promote actions at the school level that support AEWs in the work they do. In some cases the policies have worked to institute arrangements which are directly benefitting AEWs and the work they do.

The common intent behind each jurisdictions relevant policies and programs is generally to: lift performances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to 'close the gap' in educational outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, particularly in the areas of literacy numeracy and attendance; promote Aboriginal language and culture within schools and the curriculums delivered; and to increase school – local Aboriginal community engagement

2. **Practice:** The literature and interview data illustrate that within schools, AEW's role around supporting Aboriginal education policies is often severely hindered through a range of serious systemic gaps and issues which require immediate attention and response from education ministers, department leaders, school principals and school staff.

At this point analysis of the findings presents three significant issues which NATSIECs see as requiring urgent attention and response.

1. **AEW positions are not valued or secure in some jurisdictions** - In some states and territories it was stated that school principals are given too much authority in making decisions about AEWs. For example one interviewee stated that *"the role is very dependent on how the school's leadership staff decided to develop their school budgets...if the AEW is not valued then it can become unfunded and non-existent from one year to the next"*. Policies such as Local Schools Local Decisions in NSW and Global School Budgets in the NT have been criticized in a similar light. The policies have resulted in increased autonomy for leaders to either value and promote AEWs Aboriginal education outcomes or devalue, neglect and in some apparent cases shift the AEW role out of their school entirely.



2. **AEW roles are undervalued and come with limited career and professional development opportunities** - Currently the pay scales, career progression and professional development and training opportunities for AEWs appear mismatched with the expectations set out in their duty statements and the significance of the Aboriginal education policy agenda more broadly. As has been stated the role of AEW is crucial. However the literature and interview data sourced during this project highlight a long history of AEWs feeling undervalued and unsupported in their work within schools. During interview, one former AEW stated that *“I was working with the school Executive and operating at that level however I was actually paid well under that level. The school even acknowledged this.”* Another interviewee stated that *“there is a gap in professional development opportunities for AEWs. Unless an AEW already possesses leadership skills they can often become subservient in their role and not supported to achieve their potential in their role”*. Previous reviews of AEWs have stated that AEWs have often been employed at the same level regardless of their skills and expertise in the field. Another research article reviewed indicated that there is a clear mismatch between the skills required to undertake the AEW role successfully and the formal qualification based training that is available and relevant to the role.

3. **There is very limited support in schools for the work AEWs do** – A recent large scale empirical research on Indigenous education which included more than 200 schools and 825 teachers across Australia found that out of a possible 1200 minutes of teaching time per week, Australian teachers were on average spending 5 minutes per week (or 0.4% of teaching time) teaching through or about Aboriginal education i.e. Indigenous cultures, languages, histories, literature, identities, perspectives etc. (Luke et al, 2013). The research also found a significant number of teachers weren’t spending any time at all teaching anything regarding Aboriginal education and that there is inadequate teacher training offered to prepare them. It cannot be understated how detrimental the collective level of teacher ignorance and lack of action for Aboriginal education initiatives is for AEWs and Aboriginal students and communities. Aboriginal education initiatives support Aboriginal students’ to learn about and value their culture so they can grow up forming positive rather than negative associations between their identity and their education.

In addition to the lack of teacher engagement with Aboriginal education initiatives, interviewees and the literature we reviewed consistently indicated that school principals are often unsupportive and/or ignorant to the work AEWs can achieve and that AEWs can regularly experience racism from school staff.

AEWs are generally employed without relevant qualification based training, and, while they’re employed it appears that professional and career development opportunities are few and far between. In these circumstances, it would be naïve to consider that AEWs can bring significant



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educational outcomes for Aboriginal students and create a reconciliatory 'bridge' between schools and their local Aboriginal communities.

To better achieve the significant the outcomes strived for in Aboriginal education policies and the outcomes implied within AEW's duty statements there will need to be:

- institutional reforms around AEW pay scales, career progression, qualification based training and relevant accredited professional development opportunities
- AEW networking opportunities with AEW colleagues within their jurisdictions to share knowledge, resources, and collectively develop creative new approaches and solutions to the complex problems they face
- the establishment of formal supportive collaborative working arrangements within schools to ensure that Aboriginal education is everyone's business and not solely the AEW's.



5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings within the literature review and interviews indicates that by and large education Ministers, Departments of Education and schools have failed to appropriately institute AEWs for the highly complex task of improving Aboriginal education outcomes.

NATSIEC recommends that education departments in all jurisdictions:

1 - RECOGNISE THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF THE AEW ROLE BY INSTITUTING LEVELS OF AEW PROFICIENCY THAT PEAK AT THE SCHOOL SENIOR EXECUTIVE LEVEL.

2 - ENSURE THAT AEW ROLES IN SCHOOLS ARE INSITUTED AS PERMANENT ROLES THAT ARE NOT AT THE WHIM OF PRINCIPALS TO CULL OR OTHERWISE

3 - WORK TO ENSURE SCHOOLS VALUE AND RECOGNISE THE AEW ROLE AND ABORIGINAL EDUCATION BY ESTABLISHING ABORIGINAL EDUCATION FACULTIES TO LEAD AND SUPPORT EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT, TEACHING, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES, AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING FOR STAFF IN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION.

4 - INSTITUTE QUALIFICATION BASED TRAINING FOR AEWs AND WORK TOWARDS ESTABLISHING RELEVANT ACCREDITED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR AEWs

5 - DEVELOP AND SUPPORT FORMAL NETWORKING ARRANGEMENTS FOR AEWs TO MEET FACE TO FACE ONCE PER SCHOOL TERM TO SHARE RESOURCES, KNOWLEDGE, ISSUES ETC.

6 - WORK TO ENSURE THAT AEWs WORKING AT SCHOOL EXECUTIVE LEVEL ARE ALLOCATED ANNUAL BUDGETS TO SUPPORT THE INCLUSION OF COMMUNITY IN EDUCATION AND OTHER INITIATIVES CONSIDERED RELEVANT.

7 - STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS WITH NATSIEC AND EXISTING AND FUTURE AECGS TO PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT FOR AEWs.



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7. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

NATSIEC CHAIRS

| State/Territory | Chair |
|------------------------------|--------------------|
| New South Wales | Cindy Berwick |
| Victoria | Geraldine Atkinson |
| Australian Capital Territory | Carly Freeman |
| Tasmania | Clair Andersen |
| South Australia | Peter Buckskin |
| Western Australia | Isabelle Adams |
| Northern Territory | Mark Motlop |
| Queensland | Leon Epong |

Note: Chairs are current as at time of publication of report

APPENDIX 2

National Policy Frameworks

Closing the Gap: The Closing the Gap policy was established in 2008. Closing the Gap aims to improve the lives of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Closing the Gap claims that Australian governments have worked together to deliver better health, education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and to eliminate the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The policy includes an education priority with several targets focused on closing the gap in school attendance and literacy and numeracy outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous school students.

In 2018 only one target (halve the gap in year 12 attainment) was on track to being achieved. The policy has been criticised for providing a ‘top down’ ‘deficit based approach’ to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student education outcomes.

<https://www.theeducatoronline.com/k12/news/strengthsbased-approach-needed-for-indigenous-education/245053>



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Recently the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) committed to forming a genuine formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to finalise the Closing the Gap Refresh and provide a forum for ongoing engagement throughout implementation of a new Closing the Gap agenda.

A notable highlight in regards to support for the work AEWs do is that the 2019 Closing the Gap report highlights teacher quality as a key area for further development.

Teacher quality is the most significant in-school determinant of student achievement. Further work is required to improve initial teacher education programs, and professional development of the existing educator workforce, to build overall capacity to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers also needs to be improved, as they are significantly underrepresented in the education workforce.

The Australian Curriculum: The Australian Curriculum includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures as a cross curriculum priority.

While there is considerable support for curricula that aim to support the development, delivery and assessment of education on Aboriginal Histories and Cultures in schools – NATSIEC are aware that previous reviews of the Australian curriculum have brought the following types of criticisms, many of which AEWs would encounter in their work at the local school/community level, regarding implementation of the cross curriculum priorities:

- *there is too much choice in terms of students being able to choose between various electives that results in missing out on significant and foundation historical knowledge, understanding and skills*
- *it promotes a superficial checklist mentality, it appears tokenistic.*
- *they added a layer of complexity which was not needed*
- *they are voluntary and so their impact is weakened. If they were to have educational validity they should have been included in specific learning areas*
- *fears about yet more content overload*
- *there is a danger of content relating to the priority covering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, culture and heritage being treated in a tokenistic and superficial manner unless taught by specialists*
- *fears that the school curriculum could easily become politicised*

https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/review_of_the_national_curriculum_final_report.pdf



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National Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages – “The Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages is the first national curriculum document - Foundation to Year 10 - to provide a way forward for all schools in Australia to support the teaching and learning of the languages indigenous to this country” More information on the Framework can be found at <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/languages/framework-for-aboriginal-languages-and-torres-strait-islander-languages/>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (2015) – The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy* (the Strategy) documents an agreed commitment of education ministers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. The Strategy includes a set of principles, priorities and actions that inform jurisdictional approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

The initial set of actions focus on:

- Attendance and Engagement
- Transition Points (including pathways to post-school options)
- Early Childhood Transitions
- Workforce
- Australian Curriculum

The Strategy can be found at - <https://www.education.gov.au/national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education-strategy>

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians – The Melbourne Declaration is a joint declaration of Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments which ‘sets a vision for schooling in Australia’.

Following the [Hobart Declaration on Schooling](#) (1989) and the [Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century](#) (1999), the [Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians](#) (the Melbourne Declaration) was agreed in 2008. The Melbourne Declaration recognises that ‘Improving educational outcomes for all young Australians is central to the nation’s social and economic prosperity.

*The first Goal of the Melbourne Declaration states that **Australian governments, in collaboration with all school sectors, commit to promoting equity and excellence in Australian schooling. This means that all Australian governments and all school sectors must ensure that schools build on local cultural knowledge and experience of Indigenous students as a foundation for learning, and work in partnership with local communities on all aspects of the schooling process, including to promote high expectations for the learning outcomes of Indigenous students.***



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At the time of writing the Melbourne Declaration is under review with a new 2019 Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians planned.

APPENDIX 3

QLD Workforce Role Descriptions

Community Education Counsellor (Identified)

Work Unit: State Schools Division

Classification: CEC - Teaching in State Education Award - State 2016

Levels: CEC : 1 - 4

Job Type: Permanent/Temporary/Full-time/part-time: 36 1/4 hour week

The Community Education Counsellor (CEC) reports to the School Principal or delegate

ROLE - The Community Education Counsellor (Identified) will have responsibility for the following:

- Provide educational counselling and support services to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and students across a number of schools
- Provide cross cultural awareness training to the broader school community
- Participate in the development of activities in and out of school likely to enhance the involvement in education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families
- Develop and undertake support service programs designed to meet the needs of the school/s that will encourage the educational participation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and students
- Establish and maintain links with out of school sources of information and support services to assist in the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and students
- Provide information to the school community about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander social and cultural perspectives



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- Utilise in an accountable manner, state and commonwealth funded school based programs that focus on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and communities
- Provide advice and information to school administrators regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and cultural protocols in order to meet the needs of schools and their communities
- Ensure that relevant information concerning Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander social and cultural issues is readily available to all members of the school community
- Participate in activities to develop partnerships between members of the school community

<https://qed.qld.gov.au/search?k=community%20education%20counsellor>

APPENDIX 4

QLD Policy and Programs

Queensland Department of Education policy and programs which directly refer to the work which Community Education Counsellors may be called upon to lead and/or support in schools include:

Every Student Succeeding - State Schools Strategy 2019 – 2023 – identifies Queensland's plan to 'lift the performance of each state school student, teacher and principal'. The Strategy makes two specific references to work that sits within Community Education Counsellor's responsibilities. As a priority, it includes "*Close the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*". Under the 'Successful Learners' focus area it stipulates that to 'meet our students needs' there is a need to "*embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in Culturally, responsive, contextualised ways*".

The Strategy is aligned with the **Department of Education's Strategic Plan (2018 -2022)** which identifies the importance of "*targeting strategies best suited to the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*".

The Strategy is also aligned with **Advancing Education: An action plan for education in Queensland** which references the importance of working towards achieving the following Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education outcomes:

- *Our plan will advance Queensland's education system so that: "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are engaged in their learning and achieve academic success"*
- *Target under-represented groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, to improve participation and achievement in STEM.*
- *supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's access to their heritage by maintaining, learning or researching their traditional cultures and languages.*



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- *working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to complete Year 12 and successfully transition post-school*
- *employing specialist coaches in literacy or English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) to lift the reading outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*
- *helping improve the reading of disadvantaged students. <<< not specifically referring to community edu counsellors here... comment on this*
- *establishing an Indigenous-specific parent and community engagement strategy to promote active partnerships with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community*
- *providing professional development, mentoring and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, including for educators in remote communities*

Solid pathways – Critical and Creative Thinkers Program – is a program which Community Education Counsellors *may* be involved in and/or benefit from. The program is *for high achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Students involved in the program participate in weekly online lessons that are aligned to the Australian Curriculum. During sessions, students connect with other high achieving students from schools across Metropolitan, South East, North Coast, Darling Downs South West, Far North Queensland and Central Queensland regions.*

A key component of the Critical and Creative Thinkers program is the special STEM camp experiences offered to students. Camps feature environmental activities, in which students learn about the ecosystems and resources of the environment from traditional owners and how critical and creative thinking has led to environmentally sustainable land management practices that highlight the knowledge, technologies and processes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The program also incorporates professional development around pedagogy, cultural capability and incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and perspectives for Queensland state school staff.

<http://indigenous.education.qld.gov.au/school/Pages/solid-pathways.aspx>

RATEP Community based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teacher Education Program –

The RATEP program helps increase the number of registered Indigenous teachers and paraprofessionals in Queensland by offering programs in the home communities of the student teachers.

<http://www.indigenous.education.qld.gov.au/school/ratep/Pages/default.aspx>



APPENDIX 5

NSW Workforce Role Descriptions

Aboriginal Education Officers

Aboriginal education officers (AEOs) are employed in schools which include significant enrolments of Aboriginal students. They are employed to:

- *work closely with teachers to develop culturally appropriate resources and programs.*
- *promote Aboriginal education, encourage students and support parents.*
- *work with teachers to assist Aboriginal students achieve their potential*
- *keep the Aboriginal community informed of students' progress and achievements, and of things like parent meetings, school activities, new programs and other changes.*
- *provide role models for Aboriginal students and have a positive impact on helping them achieve their potential.*

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/jobs-and-opportunities/school-careers/school-support-roles>

Senior Leader/Leader, Community Engagement

Senior Leaders and Leaders Community Engagement strengthen relationships between the school and their community and assist the Executive Principal in the implementation of the Connected Communities Strategy.

The role includes:

- *supporting Local School Reference Groups*
- *working with community leaders to establish Aboriginal language and culture programs in the school*
- *promoting school values and programs in the community*
- *attending community meetings*
- *promoting community attendance at school events*
- *supporting interagency coordination.*

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/aec/connected-communities/connecting-with-community-and-aboriginal-culture#Senior1>



APPENDIX 6

NSW Policy and Programs

NSW GOVERNMENT - OPPORTUNITIES CHOICE HEALING RESPONSIBILITY AND EMPOWERMENT

STRATEGY - The Opportunities, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment (OCHRE) Strategy commits the NSW Government to supporting Aboriginal communities by building strong working partnerships that have at their heart respect for local Aboriginal culture, leadership and decision making. OCHRE aims to support strong Aboriginal communities in which Aboriginal people actively influence and fully participate in social, economic and cultural life.

OCHRE specifically focusses on the following areas of which AEOs are directly responsible to lead and/or support in schools:

- *teach more Aboriginal languages and culture to build people's pride and identity*
- *support more Aboriginal students to stay at school*
- *support more Aboriginal young people to get fulfilling and sustainable jobs*

Key school based initiatives under OCHRE include the Connected Communities strategy and the Language and Culture Nests

<https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/our-agency/staying-accountable/ochre/nsw-government-aboriginal-affairs-strategy>

NSW ABORIGINAL EDUCATION POLICY

The NSW Aboriginal Education policy was first established in 1982. The current policy objectives, 1.1 through 1.8, stipulate a wide range of NSW Department of Education commitments that directly relate to AEO's work. The commitments stated include: provision of support for Aboriginal students; curriculum and mandatory professional development around the teaching of Aboriginal education initiatives; increased employment and promotional opportunities for Aboriginal staff; provision of culturally inclusive learning environments for Aboriginal students; development of local partnerships; collaborative educational decision making with Aboriginal communities, and; the implementation of

- *Aboriginal studies programs.*
- *Aboriginal languages programs.*
- *Aboriginal cross-curriculum content within schools.*
- *Aboriginal perspectives in education.*

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/aboriginal-education-and-training-policy>



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NSW 2021 includes the following ‘priority actions’ that AEOs would be required to lead or support to ‘close the gap’ in educational outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

- *Provide access to high quality professional learning and research to teachers and school leaders to maximise their ability to improve reading and numeracy outcomes for Aboriginal students*
- *Implement evidence-based whole school literacy and numeracy programs and personalised learning plans for all Aboriginal students*

https://media.opengov.nsw.gov.au/pairtree_root/c6/a6/e2/3f/a0/52/42/ed/be/3b/47/cd/80/5a/ca/b8/obj/110906_NSW2021.pdf

NESA ABORIGINAL STUDIES

Aboriginal studies provides students with an opportunity to learn about the past and present experiences of Aboriginal and other Indigenous peoples through research and inquiry methods. Students study:

- the impact of social justice and human rights issues from pre-contact to contemporary times
- the effect of laws, policies and other legal decisions
- Aboriginal cultural, political, social and economic life today.

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/hsie/stage-6/aboriginal-studies>

NSW EDUCATION ACT

The NSW Education Act states: *that every person concerned in the administration of this Act or of education for children of school-age in New South Wales is to have regard (as far as is practicable or appropriate) to the following objects:*

- (f) provision of an education for Aboriginal children that has regard to their special needs*
- (g) development of an understanding of Aboriginal history and culture by all children*
- (m1) provision of opportunities for Aboriginal families, kinship groups, representative organisations and communities to participate in significant decisions under this Act relating to the education of their children (NSW Government, 1990).*

<https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/act/1990/8>



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NSW DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION – NSW AECG PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

The NSW AECG and the NSW Department of Education have a formal partnership. The ‘agreed priorities’ within the Partnership include many areas which AEOs etc etc. work towards achieving on a daily basis.

Agreed priorities

- *Providing opportunities to enable active engagement and participation of Aboriginal parents and communities in all aspects of education and training in schools, TAFE NSW Institutes and Adult and Community Education Colleges.*
- *Ensuring that Aboriginal students have access to quality learning and training environments that enhance their capacity to live fulfilling and productive lives that contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of their communities.*
- *Supporting parents and/or carers and families, within the context of improving education and training outcomes for students, to build their capacity to actively engage in the formal education and training of their children and young people.*
- *Ensuring that Aboriginal children have skills for learning by the time they start school by providing access to a variety of relevant and culturally inclusive prior to school and preschool programs.*
- *Targeting efforts to ensure that Aboriginal students develop appropriate reading, literacy and numeracy skills that reflect parity with their non-Aboriginal peers throughout the successive stages of learning.*
- *Continuously increasing Year 12 completion rates and the rates of attainment for equivalent Vocational Education and Training qualifications.*
- *Ensuring that all Aboriginal students have access to a range of educational learning options that include self-directed distance education and training and/or on-line delivery learning.*
- *Engaging students in learning for longer by ensuring that more Aboriginal people are participating in and completing Vocational Education and Training courses at higher qualifications levels and are supported to achieve these qualifications.*
- *Ensuring that the education and training workforce has the capacity to respond effectively to the holistic education and training needs and aspirations of Aboriginal students and communities.*



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- *Providing opportunities for feedback, assessment and review of implementation of the Partnership Agreement across the public education and training system will be achieved through formal and informal reporting processes.*
- *The Director-General and/or the NSW AECG President have a mandate to request an overall review of the progress of the Partnership Agreement on advice from stakeholders.*

<https://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au/about/partnership-agreement/>

NSW ABORIGINAL EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE GROUP CONNECTING TO COUNTRY PROGRAM

Connecting to Country is an Aboriginal community cultural awareness teaching programme. This Programme provides a much needed cultural conduit between the States teaching fraternity and Aboriginal peoples and communities. Teachers are offered a unique opportunity to engage directly with Aboriginal Australians at the local community level.

Over the course of three days, participating teachers learn about local Aboriginal culture, history and social experience. By the end of the programme it is anticipated that participating teachers will have significantly bettered the depth of their insight into the myriad of social, cultural, historic, economic and political issues that continue to affect and concern Aboriginal peoples and communities. Teachers will similarly attain a culturally informed awareness of the cultural geography of their local school precinct and more broadly their school's region, and encounter firsthand the concept and meaning of country from an Aboriginal cultural standpoint.

<https://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au/policies-and-programs/connecting-to-country/>

APPENDIX 7

ACT Workforce Role Descriptions

From 2018 IEOs will support schools to build their Cultural Integrity by:-

- Supporting Schools to engage with families and community
- Supporting teachers to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across the curriculum
- Providing advice and leadership to schools on celebrating significant events and milestones for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples



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- Supporting schools to grow a culture of high expectations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and
- Facilitating successful student transitions between year levels, between schools and to post school study or work

<https://www.education.act.gov.au/support-for-our-students/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education>

APPENDIX 8

ACT Policy and Programs

ACT Department of Education policy and programs which directly refer to the work which IEOs may be called upon to lead and/or support in schools include:

STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-21: A Leading Learning Organisation.

The ACT Government's current strategic education plan makes no direct reference to the importance of IEOs and the work they do, nor does it make reference to the importance of Aboriginal education outcomes. However it does emphasise areas which IEOs would inevitably be heavily involved in such as 'empowering teachers and other professionals to strengthen learning for all' 'strengthening the system to focus on equity and quality', 'cultural integrity' and 'embracing diversity'.

<https://www.education.act.gov.au/our-priorities/strategic-plan>

CULTURAL INTEGRITY IN ACT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The ACT Department of Education has developed a Cultural Integrity policy intent which calls for all ACT schools to:

“demonstrate both respect and high regard for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, knowledge system languages; welcome and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and local community members; meet the learning needs and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students... Cultural integrity represents a break from the negative discourse that has dominated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education for many years... ACT school leaders will be change agents building a culture of high achievement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and ensuring improved cultural integrity is a priority...”



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Schools will be provided with a rich set of supporting resources, framed around a self-assessment continuum. Resources will feature examples of local and international leading practice... Resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will be allocated to schools in two ways: an annual payment to all schools to build their Cultural Integrity, and an enrolments-driven allocation”

<https://www.education.act.gov.au/support-for-our-students/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education>

The Cultural Integrity Continuum:

The Cultural Integrity self-assessment continuum *has drawn on the latest evidence and research which says that to build their Cultural Integrity schools should focus on four dimensions:*

- *Engagement with families and community*
- *Teaching with Cultural Integrity*
- *Leadership, celebration and environment; and*
- *High expectations and successful transitions*

<https://www.education.act.gov.au/support-for-our-students/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education>

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STAFF NETWORK

The ACT Education Directorate supports an *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network* (Staff Network). Membership is open to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees including IEOs.

Since 2016, the Staff Network has met quarterly with the Senior Executive Team to progress issues raised through members, including culturally responsive recruitment practices, career development and leadership. The meetings provide opportunities for the Senior Executive Team to update the Staff Network on key initiatives and seek feedback on Directorate activities.

In 2017, the Staff Network Executive worked extensively with the Senior Executive Team in relation to Cultural Integrity, unconscious bias and cultural change processes relating to a diverse workforce within the Directorate. This resulted in the development of an extensive Cultural Integrity learning journey for all corporate executives and ACT public school principals.

<https://www.education.act.gov.au/?a=1291070>



STUDENT ASPIRATIONS PROGRAM

Student Aspirations Program promotes participation in leadership opportunities and supports the retention and attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, focusing on pathways and transitions.

<https://www.education.act.gov.au/support-for-our-students/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education>

APPENDIX 9

VIC Workforce Role Descriptions

Koorie Engagement Support Officer

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is committed to improving outcomes for Indigenous children and young people and growing understanding and knowledge of the culture, history, and practices of Victoria's first peoples. It does this through a range of programs and by working with the education sector, with communities and families and with key partner agencies. A critical element in our work is the role of the Koorie Engagement Support Officer.

Koorie Engagement Support Officers work in four distinct areas.

1. With learners, families, service providers and the wider community to promote the importance of learning and development and to facilitate the access, participation and engagement of Indigenous children and young people in learning and development services, in order to increase:

- Participation by children and families in early childhood services
- Student engagement, well-being and achievement
- Transitions into and completion of education and training beyond school.

2. With service providers, government departments and agencies to ensure that children and young people who are at risk of poor outcomes have the supports they need and require to continue, or reengage, in education and learning.

3. Alongside specialist advisory services, to support providers in ensuring culturally inclusive learning environments and adopt practices and approaches which ensure achievement for Indigenous students.



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4. Provide advice to teaching professionals in their development and delivery of curriculum to ensure that this appropriately reflects local Koorie history, culture and protocols.

These roles are identified positions and are available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Applicants only (S.12 Equal Opportunity Act 2010).

KOORIE ENGAGEMENT SUPPORT OFFICER (KESO):

ROLE:

- The Koorie Engagement Support Officer (KESO) role sits within the Regional Services Group (RSG).
- The RSG provides an interface between regions and the Department's central office. The Group supports regional partnerships, regional early childhood services, schools and other education providers to deliver high quality services and outcomes.
- The KESO role supports the DEECD priorities in Early Years and the Education Strategy for Koorie students including the *GarrinGarrin Strategy* and *WirnalungGanai: Our People - Aboriginal Inclusion Action Plan*, to improve the outcomes of the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework (VAAF) and its Closing the Gap initiatives.

ROLE DESCRIPTION: to:-

1. Work with education and child and family service providers, key stakeholders and Victorian Koorie communities to raise the profile of learning and development to increase:-
 - a. Early years participation
 - b. Student engagement and wellbeing
 - c. Retention and achievement
 - d. Entry into and successful completion of higher qualifications
2. Work with other departments and agencies to strengthen the commitment to Koorie children and young people through learning and development outcomes.
3. Assist the coordination of services to support the re engagement of at risk Koorie children and young people.
4. Work with providers to support their establishment of culturally inclusive learning environments.

RESPONSIBILITIES: Stakeholder Engagement - Expert Advice + Support – Program/Strategy Delivery

SELECTION CRITERIA:

Proven Capabilities in the following:-



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- Criteria 1.** 'Specialist Expertise - Koorie Engagement & Culture' - Knowledge & Skills
- Criteria 2.** 'Project Management' - Develop, organise, co-ordinate and implement project plans that clearly describe program objectives, actions required and progress made
- Criteria 3.** 'Relationship Building' - Establishes and maintains relationships with people at all classification levels, stakeholder groups, organisations and communities
- Criteria 4.** 'Initiative & Accountability' - Is proactive, initiates action and follows DEECD's referral and reporting processes
- Criteria 5.** 'Communication' - written, verbal, presentation, interpersonal

APPENDIX 10

VIC Policy and Programs

Victorian Department of Education and Training: Marrung Aboriginal Education Action Plan 2016 - 2026 - Marrung commits the Victorian Department to taking action towards achieving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. Several of the outcomes and actions closely connect with the roles and duties of KESOs and KEs. These include:

- **OUTCOME:** *Koorie children and learners of all ages are strong in their identity within all services*
ACTION: *We will improve the cultural inclusivity of service providers*
- **OUTCOME:** *All Victorians understand and respect Koorie culture and history*
ACTION: *We will support sectors to enhance learners' understanding of Koorie culture and history*
- **OUTCOME:** *Services and Koorie communities work together on local, place-based approaches to improving learning outcomes*
ACTION: *We will increase opportunities for Koorie people to participate in decision making that affects them*
- **OUTCOME:** *Success for Koorie Victorians is core business for all educational leaders*
ACTION: *We will further develop our leaders in the early childhood, schools and VET sectors*
- **OUTCOME:** *Koorie students engage fully throughout their schooling years, and gain the knowledge and skills to excel at Year 12 or its equivalent*
ACTION: *We will support schools to better support their Koorie students*



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Additionally, “In Victoria, **THE MARRUNG: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026** for Koorie students requires all government schools to prepare Individual Education Plans (IEPs), Career Action Plans, and Transition Plans where relevant for every Koorie student in their school, so that issues identified with literacy, maths and science skills are addressed as early as possible. This plan is developed in partnership with the student, their parent or caregiver, and if required, a Koorie support worker, and regularly revised with all concerned. Each plan may also cover key transition points (pre-school to school; primary to secondary; compulsory to post-compulsory) and should be linked to any Career Action Plan. The local Koorie Education Support Officer (KESO) is responsible for assisting the school, where needed, to address any issues which have an impact on our children's experience and achievement at school.”

<http://www.vaeai.org.au/documents/>

Programs and actions under MARRUNG include:-

- extending the Early Year Literacy and numeracy Support to Koorie students not meeting Year 3 Reading and Numeracy benchmarks in Years 4 and 5
- working with schools with high Koorie absences and sharing effective practice
- reviewing the Koorie Academy of Excellence (currently operating in northern metropolitan Melbourne) and exploring opportunities to roll out an expanded model across the Four DET regions
- supporting schools to use individual education plans, including trialling Koorie student and family support plans through the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO)
- undertaking research to identify factors that contribute to academic achievement (including higher NAPLAN and ATAR score) and implement supporting strategies
- Marrung Education Scholarships for high achieving Aboriginal students studying Years 11 and 12 in Government schools

Victorian Department of Education and Training – School Policy: Koorie Education

The Victorian Department of Education and Training website includes a policy statement on Koorie Education which states that Victorian schools are expected to:

- *work in partnership with the local Koorie community to develop place-based approaches to improving student outcomes*
- *support the development of high expectations and individualised learning for Koorie students*



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- *create a learning environment for all students that acknowledges, respects and values Koorie cultures and identities*
- *view success for their Koorie students as core business*

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/curriculum/Pages/koorie.aspx>

Victorian Department of Education and Training Koorie Literacy and Numeracy Programs

Two programs are funded to assist Koorie students in Victorian government schools who are below benchmarks in literacy or numeracy:

- The Early Years Koorie Literacy and Numeracy Program supports eligible students in prep to year 3.
- The Extended Koorie Literacy and Numeracy Program supports eligible students from year 4 onwards

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/english/Pages/koorieelitnum.aspx>

Victorian Department of Education and Training – Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2017-2020

Focus area 7 of the Strategy states that “The Department has a strong commitment to Aboriginal inclusion as evidenced by its Aboriginal Inclusion Plans which support a more inclusive culture and provide better support to Koorie people employed by the Department. The Strategy lends support to the Department’s commitment to Aboriginal inclusion by promoting a workplace which respects Koorie culture, values and practices. Fundamental to these efforts is the provision of a safe and welcoming environment for everyone that ultimately contributes to making the Department a more inclusive workplace and an employer of choice for Koorie people... The aim of the Strategy is to complement the Department’s approach to Aboriginal inclusion by increasing the visibility and support for Koorie culture across the Department and to facilitate career development opportunities that supports Koorie people to develop and progress their careers to match their aspirations and potential. These efforts are framed within the People Strategy which is dedicated to ‘empowering our people to be the best’.”

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/divequity/Pages/default.aspx>



Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023

Goal 5 of the Framework commits to *'Aboriginal learners excelling at school'*

Objectives under this goal that align with KESO and KE roles include:

- 5.1 Bring Aboriginal achievement at school in line with learners' aspirations
- 5.2 Increase the proportion of Aboriginal students who feel safe and connected at school.

Goal 6 of the Framework commits to *'Aboriginal learners are engaged at school'*

<https://www.vic.gov.au/aboriginalvictoria/policy/victorian-aboriginal-affairs-framework/victorian-aboriginal-affairs-framework-2018-2023.html>

APPENDIX 11

TAS Workforce Role Descriptions

The Department employs Aboriginal Education Officers (**AEOs**), Aboriginal Early Years Education Workers (**AEYEWs**) and co-funds schools to employ Aboriginal Education Workers (**AEWs**). AEOs, AEYEWs and AEWs play an important part in education for staff, students and the Aboriginal community. An understanding of local culture and strong community ties contribute to the improvement of educational outcomes for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal Education Services employs Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs) who work across schools across the state. They play an important role in schools for learners, teachers and the Aboriginal community. An understanding of local culture and strong community ties contribute to the improvement of educational outcomes for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners. AEOs support teachers and Aboriginal students in the areas of academic achievement, participation, attendance, retention, pathways and in developing a rich curriculum inclusive of Aboriginal histories and cultures across the curriculum.

Aboriginal Education Services supports schools to directly employ Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs). AEWs work with school principals and teachers to support Aboriginal learners in the areas of engagement and participation. They also play a key role in providing knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal people, community and culture within schools to promote better cultural understanding and supportive school environments.

<https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/school-colleges/aboriginal-education-services/>



APPENDIX 12

TAS Policy and Programs

Tasmania's Aboriginal Education Framework

Tasmania's Aboriginal Education Framework supports Tasmania's Closing the Gap Strategy. This Strategy takes into account Tasmania's unique socio-cultural context and responds to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy.

The Framework aims to ensure that - Aboriginal students are engaged in learning programs and supported by staff, families and the valued and respected input of the Community.

- Aboriginal children and young people are enrolled, engaged, attending and progressing at rates equivalent to those of other students.
- Ongoing support for educators to enable the provision of culturally responsive pedagogy.
- To provide dynamic learning environments that are responsive to the needs of Aboriginal students.

<https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/school-colleges/aboriginal-education-services/>

The Department of Education commits to:

Work in partnership with community and families to support Aboriginal students and states that:

Aboriginal students are provided with:

- an inclusive approach to teaching and learning that values their community and culture
- support through targeted programs and through Aboriginal workers attached to some schools
- access to specific Aboriginal career pathway programs and opportunities
- a curriculum inclusive of Tasmanian Aboriginal histories and cultures

All Aboriginal students will have a Learning Plan: This plan will:

- be developed in partnership with families, students and their teacher(s)
- assist the school in understanding how to build on community and cultural connections
- identify specific goals for learning
-

<https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/parent-fact-sheets/aboriginal/>



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Aboriginal Education Services – The Orb

The Orb is a collection of online multimedia resources designed to assist the teaching of Tasmanian Aboriginal histories and cultures.

It is highly visual and is suited to a range of learning styles. It embraces a number of Aboriginal ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing, including learning through narrative, connection to Country and cultural practice.

A selection of teaching materials including; learning tasks, inquiry-based investigations and illustrations of practice have been included to extend teacher and learner understanding of the concepts introduced within The Orb. These materials use Australian Curriculum achievement standards, content descriptors, general capabilities, and cross-curriculum priorities to support the planning, teaching and assessment of integrated units of work. It can be used across all learning areas and year groups. It is a publically accessible website.

<https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/school-colleges/aboriginal-education-services/>

Visit The Orb at www.theorb.tas.gov.au

Tasmanian Government: Resetting the relationship with the Aboriginal community

The Tasmanian Government has made a formal commitment to reset the relationship with Tasmanian Aboriginal communities. Key Priority 2 of the commitment calls for a - *Focus on Tasmanian Aboriginal history and culture in the delivery of the Australian curriculum*. The Department of Education is leading the development of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Histories and Cultures Framework.

http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/390103/Reset_update_OAA_2018.pdf

Aboriginal Sharers of Knowledge (ASK) program

The Aboriginal Sharers of Knowledge (ASK) Program provides Tasmanian Government schools with opportunities to involve Aboriginal Cultural Educators to work alongside teachers to deliver learning programs that draw on the rich knowledge and experiences of the Aboriginal community.

ASK Aboriginal Cultural Educators work with teachers in class and off-campus settings to assist in providing culturally responsive programs and curriculum.

<https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/ASK%20Program%20-%202019%20Guidelines.pdf>



APPENDIX 13

SA Workforce Role Descriptions

The Department employs Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs) and Aboriginal Community Education Officers (ACEOs). These employees must be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.

Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs):

Having regard to the nature and range of duties proposed, there are 5 levels within the AEW structure:

Classification: **Aboriginal Education Worker Level 1**

Work Level Definition: An AEW at this level will:

- have the capacity to develop a range of skills and knowledge including literacy and numeracy skills, computing, interpersonal and other skills necessary at this level
- work under close direction with limited requirement for exercising initiative
- work in a team environment
- develop an understanding of the DECS Plan for Aboriginal Education
- assist teachers in the classroom in the key learning areas particularly literacy and numeracy
- communicate effectively and demonstrate a commitment to and rapport with the Aboriginal community
- undertake the Aboriginal Education Workers Accredited Course or equivalent to acquire the knowledge, skills and ability to perform the functions required at this level

Classification: **Aboriginal Education Worker Level 2**

Work Level Definition: An AEW at this level will:

- undertake work of a more responsible nature in terms of scope and complexity than that required of a level 1
- work under general direction with a requirement for exercising initiative, discretion and judgement
- work in a team environment
- have responsibility to undertake components of the DECS Plan for Aboriginal Education
- assist teaching staff in the classroom by actively participating in making collaborative decisions with teachers
- use effective home school liaison strategies which contribute to an improved learning environment for Aboriginal students
- collaborate effectively with Aboriginal parents and community members; support Aboriginal Student Support Parent Awareness (ASSPA) committees
- undertake the Aboriginal Education Workers accredited Course, Anangu Teacher Education Program (AnTEP) or equivalent and apply the ideas gained to benefit Aboriginal students



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Classification: Aboriginal Education Worker Level 3

Work Level Definition: An AEW at this level will:

- work under limited direction with a requirement to exercise, initiative, discretion and judgement in the coordination of programs to support the educational needs of Aboriginal students
- have a high level of understanding and demonstrated commitment to the teaching and learning priorities identified in the DECS Plan for Aboriginal Education
- work collaboratively with teachers to develop and implement strategies to improve student achievement particularly in the key learning areas of literacy, numeracy and technology
- work in a team and demonstrate the skills, knowledge and ability to provide direction, advice and leadership to assist with the coordination of Aboriginal Education services in school
- establish consultation processes to encourage parental involvement
- in collaboration with teachers/student counsellors, provide a comprehensive counselling service to Aboriginal students on school related matters
- work collaboratively with other service providers to support the development of strategies to meet the educational, social and other identified needs of Aboriginal students
- liaise and consult with government and non-government agencies on services provided to and for Aboriginal students and parents
- undertake the Aboriginal Education Workers Accredited Course, Anangu Teacher Education Program (AnTEP) or equivalent to acquire the knowledge, skills and ability to perform the functions required at this level

Classification: Aboriginal Education Worker Level 4

Work Level Definition: An AEW at this level will:

- exercise responsibility for the Aboriginal Education Worker employment group in the district and district operations, including the coordination, oversight and management of resources
- assist in setting of priorities relating to Aboriginal Education for that particular district as they relate to the goals and milestones of the DECS Plan for Aboriginal Education
- have a high degree of autonomy to work collaboratively with teachers and other service providers within the district
- coordinate work in a team environment to develop work plans, negotiate the resolution of issues and concerns and provide initiatives specifically for Aboriginal students in schools
- have a commitment and rapport in working with Aboriginal parents and the local community to establish effective arrangements for the participation and involvement of Aboriginal parents in educational decision-making, including supporting Aboriginal Students Support Parent Awareness (ASSPA) committees in schools with districts
- display advocacy and commitment to a shared vision to improve the educational outcomes for Aboriginal students and the inclusion of Aboriginal parents and community members in the decision making structures are essential components of work at this level

Classification: Aboriginal Education Worker Level 5

Work Level Definition: An AEW at this level will:

- manage the Aboriginal Education Workers employment group with the group of districts



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- advise senior management Aboriginal Education on issues affecting Aboriginal Education Workers and liaise with other appropriate groups to ensure a coordinated approach to the education of Aboriginal students
- be responsible for implementing significant initiatives and demonstrating skills of discretion, judgement and autonomy in the day to day coordination of DECS/Aboriginal services
- exercise a high degree of initiative, judgement and autonomy by having significant role in the State-wide policy development and implementation of policy and programs related to the goals and milestones of the DECS Plan for Aboriginal Education in particular those related to student achievement, employment and access
- provide appropriate advice, undertake duties of a sensible, critical and complex nature and provide a consultancy service to a wide range of service providers and clients in the region
- demonstrate a knowledge of the principles of adult learning as they relate to the share facilitating of training and development related to Aboriginal Education

http://www.saet.sa.gov.au/app/uploads/2017/06/IndustrialAwards_AboriginalEducation.pdf

Aboriginal Community Education Officers (ACEOs):

An Aboriginal Community Education Officer (ACEO) supports individual Aboriginal students and their families within the school and preschool community

Duties:

The role of an Aboriginal Community Education Officer (ACEO) includes:

- working with teachers in the implementation of Aboriginal Cultural Studies and Aboriginal perspectives in curriculum design and delivery
- administrative functions such as record keeping, reporting writing and maintaining files and information on Aboriginal students
- contributing to site learning plans and individual learning plans to improve Aboriginal student social development, wellbeing and learning
- helping teaching staff develop and maintain relationships with Aboriginal students, parents and families
- promoting an Aboriginal community voice in educational decision-making
- providing advice on the cultural diversity of Aboriginal groups

<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/working-us/preschool-and-school-support-ancillary/aboriginal-community-education-officers-aceos>



APPENDIX 14

SA Policy and Programs

The Aboriginal Education Strategy (2019 – 2029)

The Aboriginal Education Strategy was released in December 2018 with the aim to increase outcomes for Aboriginal students by developing successful foundations in the early years, supporting excellence at school and pathways to success.

The approach for developing the Aboriginal Education Strategy “took into account Aboriginal nation building, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the principles of self-determination. The key element of the co-design process was to consult with Aboriginal parents, caregivers, communities and organisations.

We listened and heard a call for a culturally safe and responsive education system, with transparent implementation plans, key deliverables and rigorous reporting arrangements. We will support Aboriginal parents and community to have stronger relationships with teachers, school leaders and education services.”

The following Principles and focus areas, which have been set to guide the implementation of the strategy, clearly indicate that the strategies success will be highly dependent on South Australia’s Aboriginal Education Workforce.

Principles

- 1. Highest expectations** – We will have the highest expectations for Aboriginal children and young people’s achievement.
- 2. Accessibility and responsiveness** – We will partner with families and communities to create culturally safe and inclusive learning environments, identify opportunities for growth and respond to barriers for Aboriginal children and young people.
- 3. Culture and identity** – We will acknowledge, value and respect Aboriginal knowledge, wisdom and expertise, including our existing Aboriginal staff and students and we will adopt local approaches to teaching Aboriginal histories, cultures and languages.
- 4. Community engagement** – We will hear, seek and respect the voices of Aboriginal people and their representative organisations, and encourage participation of Aboriginal students, parents, carers, families and communities across our services.



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5. Accountability – We will be transparent and accountable for improving learning outcomes, using allocated resources to achieve growth and development for all Aboriginal children and young people.

Key focus areas include:

- teaching practice and curriculum delivery
- languages
- engaging families and communities
- workforce development
- funding policy
- Aboriginal governance, service design and delivery

<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/dept-ed-aboriginal-education-strategy-2019-2029.pdf>

Aboriginal Schools

Special learning programs are provided for students attending Aboriginal schools in outback South Australia, regional centres and metropolitan Adelaide.

Teaching programs take account of culture, social experience and learning experience. Aboriginal languages are spoken at most Aboriginal schools. For more information see:

<https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/education-and-learning/aboriginal-education/aboriginal-schools>

Aboriginal Education Worker Award

The Aboriginal Education Worker Award is a significant piece of legislation which formalises salaries and conditions for Aboriginal Education Workers throughout the State of South Australia. Importantly clause 5.1.7 of the Aboriginal Education Workers award provides some acknowledgement for cultural knowledge and of community responsibilities.

http://www.saet.sa.gov.au/app/uploads/2017/06/IndustrialAwards_AboriginalEducation.pdf

Aboriginal community voice

The SA Department of Education Website states that “*when you work on a governing council for a school or preschool (site) that has a lot of Aboriginal students you must make sure that the views and*



needs of Aboriginal families and students are thought about.” In terms of including Aboriginal community voice the Department also makes several suggestions which relate with AEW duties including “setting up partnerships” and making “meaningful connections with Aboriginal families and communities”

<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites-and-facilities/governing-councils/working-others/aboriginal-community-voice>

Aboriginal Cultural Studies

The Aboriginal cultural studies curriculum supports young South Australians to understand and celebrate the historical and contemporary contributions, stories, history and culture of Australia's Aboriginal people.

<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/teaching/projects-and-programs/aboriginal-cultural-studies>

SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2017-2021

The *SACE Board Aboriginal Education Strategy 2017-2021* aims to prepare more Aboriginal students to achieve their SACE while maintaining their Aboriginal culture and identity, as well as positioning them to succeed in their local community and as global citizens.

The Strategic Priorities set out in the SACE are:

1. Empowerment: identity and belonging
2. Respect: strong commitment and high-expectations relationships
3. Leadership: people and culture
4. Capacity Building: culturally and contextually responsive curriculum and assessment
5. Achievement: excellence, aspiration, and merit
6. Transparency: data analysis and evaluation

Each strategic priority of the SACE program includes a range of aims and suggested initiatives which fall in line with AEW and ACEO role descriptions. For more information on SACE see <https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/documents/652891/3311159/SACE+Board+Aboriginal+Education+Strategy+2017%E2%80%932021.pdf/d7dbd4b5-7033-4ecb-a1e7-92433163a781>



APPENDIX 15

WA Workforce Role Descriptions

Aboriginal & Islander Education Officer (AIEO)

Role: AIEOs provide support and assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their parents/guardians, teachers, the school and the community. Their knowledge, understanding and the sharing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, language(s) and culture help AIEOs perform this role. Aboriginality is considered essential for this position (under Section 50 (d) of the Western Australian Equal Opportunity Act (1984)).

AIEOs undertake different tasks, depending on the needs of the school and community and the particular skills and abilities they bring to the position.

The Principal negotiates the AIEO role in the school and collaboratively plans a program of work with the AIEO. The performance management process includes identification of professional learning needs.

Working with the school leadership team the AIEO can significantly contribute to whole school-level directions by:-

- contributing to strategies and directions for Aboriginal education and support for Aboriginal students
- providing strategic advice and support to school leaders and teachers on matters relating to Aboriginal education
- facilitating community contribution to the formulation of school policies and development of educational programs
- liaising between the community and the school to develop programs that are relevant to both educational and cultural needs
- providing information to parents on the education system and relevant school procedures and policies
- participating in committees or decision making groups; and
- contributing to the development of school and community partnership agreement



Communication and cultural advice:

- AIEOs can act as a bridge between the teacher, the students, the parents and the wider community
- AIEOs can make a significant contribution to lesson planning, including studies of the local area, Aboriginal studies and incorporating Aboriginal perspectives across all curriculum areas
- AIEOs may be able to help students understand the messages the teacher is trying to give
- Depending on the school location, not all students in the class will be fluent in Standard Australian English - it may be a second or subsequent language
- AIEOs are usually familiar with the local community and can share their knowledge on issues in the community, family relationships and cultural events
- AIEOs may be able to assist in behaviour and attendance issues.

<https://search.jobs.wa.gov.au/files/vacancies/592786/18048426.pdf>

APPENDIX 16

WA Policies and Programs

Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework

The [Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework](#)⁷ is identified as a priority in the Department's Strategic Plan for WA Public Schools 2016-2019 and Focus 2019.

The framework supports all Department of Education staff to reflect on their approaches to the education of Aboriginal students. It sets expected standards for all staff when working with Aboriginal students, their families and communities. The framework supports staff to reflect on their behaviours, attitudes and practices and identify opportunities for improved action.

The framework is aligned with the [Australian Professional Standard for Principals](#)⁸ and [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#)⁹.

Following a period of familiarisation with the Framework in 2016, from 2017 schools are expected to use self-assessment against the framework in school improvement planning. This practice should form part of schools' ongoing improvement planning. In 2018, school leaders are expected to



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implement the framework as a clear statement of expected practice and behaviour in schools and communities to increase Aboriginal student achievement and drive improvement planning.

<http://det.wa.edu.au/aboriginaleducation/detcms/navigation/aboriginal-education/>

Focus 2018: Directions for Schools

The WA Department of Education's *Focus 2018: Direction for schools* includes the statement to:

Provide targeted support for improved engagement and academic performance of Aboriginal students at identified secondary schools.

http://det.wa.edu.au/policies/detcms/cms-service/download/asset/?asset_id=19983677

Aboriginal Perspectives Across the Curriculum

APAC is a project that aims to broaden and deepen students' and teachers' understanding of Aboriginal cultures and ways of being.

<http://det.wa.edu.au/aboriginaleducation/apac/detcms/navigation/apac/>

APPENDIX 17

NT Workforce Role Descriptions

Individual School Principals determine what roles are required within each school dependent upon a number of factors:

- Urban, Regional and Remote
- Language group or groups
- Cultural heritage
- Community participation
- student diversity

Specific roles performed by Aboriginal Education Workers within the Department are:

- Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEWs)
- Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs)- Urban and Regional Schools
- Assistant Teachers (Remote)



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Some of these roles may include Cultural Advisor, Remote School Attendance Officer, Family Liaison Officer, Cultural Liaison Officer, Transition Support Officer

Assistant Teachers

Assistant teacher positions are designated for Aboriginal people. Assistant teachers are employed in remote schools and have knowledge of the students, their families and the community. They support schools with the education of local students and a range of cultural activities. Encouraged PD to become assistant teachers – two programs through Bachelor – cert 111 to advanced diploma in education.

<https://www.teachintheterritory.nt.gov.au/teaching-territory/opportunities-aboriginal-and-or-torres-strait-islander-people>

APPENDIX 18

NT Policy and Programs

Indigenous Education Strategy: 2015–2024

The five principles underpinning the Indigenous Education Strategy are closely linked with the responsibilities of AEOs and ATAs.

1. Education provides social and economic advantages and all learners are respected.
2. Student wellbeing and education outcomes will not be compromised.
3. Community is engaged, has choice and culture is respected.
4. Resource decisions are based on effective, evidence-based practices driving improved outcomes for Indigenous students.
5. Autonomy is balanced with consistent and system-wide effort, accountability and alignment with Northern Territory Government policies addressing the needs of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory.

https://education.nt.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0013/229000/led_review_strategy_brochure.pdf



Framework for Inclusion: 2019 – 2029

The Framework for Inclusion includes a strong emphasis on the importance of family and community engagement.

<https://education.nt.gov.au/publications/framework-for-inclusion-2019-2029>

Keeping Indigenous Languages and Cultures Strong – A Plan for Teaching and Learning of Indigenous Languages and Cultures in the Northern Territory

This Plan provides a long term vision and goal for building the capacity of Indigenous leaders, sector and school leaders and classroom educators to implement teaching and learning programs in Indigenous Languages and Cultures.

<https://education.nt.gov.au/statistics-research-and-strategies/indigenous-education-strategy/indigenous-education-strategy-issue-15/keeping-indigenous-languages-and-cultures-strong>

The Northern Territory Indigenous Languages and Cultures Curriculum

The Northern Territory Indigenous Languages and Cultures Curriculum was developed by a reference group led by Indigenous educators from across the Northern Territory.

At the heart of the curriculum is cultural knowledge, organised across three strands: Country/Land, People and Kinship, and Natural Environment. Students in Northern Territory schools come from diverse linguistic backgrounds and to cater for this diversity the NT ILC Curriculum provides four broad learner pathways:

1. First language pathway
2. Language Revitalisation, Revival and Renewal Pathway
3. Second Language Learner Pathway
4. Language and Cultural Awareness Pathway

The choice of pathway is based on the community language profile and the knowledge situation of the languages. Schools negotiate the choice of the focus language and the best language learning pathway with the school community

<https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/indigenous-languages-and-cultures>



APPENDIX 19

Interview Questions

Aboriginal Education Workforce

Have you worked in schools in an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander specific role in public schools?

If yes - Tell us about your role and how you feel/felt working within the school you are/were in?

What contributes or contributed to you feeling successful and/or happy in your role?

Are/were there any barriers to achieving what you wanted to achieve in the role?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the role?

If no - can you tell us about what you are aware of in regards to how Aboriginal people feel working within schools?

Can you tell us what you are aware of in regards to what contributes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in schools feeling successful and/or happy in their role?

What barriers are you aware of that inhibit AEWs achieving what they want to achieve in schools?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the role?



National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation