

The Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP  
Minister for Indigenous Australians  
Submitted via email: ISEP@niaa.gov.au  
Employment Branch, National Indigenous Australians Agency,  
Charles Perkins House  
GPO Box 2191 CANBERRA ACT 2601

10 September 2021

Dear Minister Wyatt,

**Re: Response to the Indigenous skills, engagement and employment Program (ISEP) discussion paper**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a response to the National Indigenous Australians Agency's Indigenous skills, engagement and employment Program (ISEP) discussion paper.

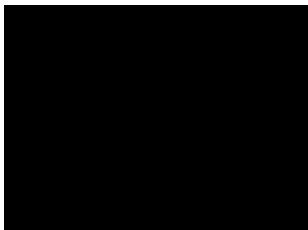
We understand that you seek feedback on the future investment in Indigenous-specific employment programs through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS). The Australian Government announced ISEP as part of the 2021-22 Budget to replace the Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTEC), Tailored Assistance Employment Grants (TAEG) and Employment Parity Initiative (EPI). This change will become effective from 1 July 2022.

The following pages provide:

- information about the Jumbunna Institute at the University of Technology Sydney;
- insights from our recent Gari Yala survey (produced in partnership with Diversity Council Australia), which surveyed 1,033 Indigenous people across Australia about their experiences at work; and;
- recommendations on improving the ISEP program and building a community of change for Indigenous employees in Australia.

We look forward to hearing from the Department should you wish to seek further information or clarity over our submission.

Kind regards,



Professor, Indigenous Policy (Indigenous Workforce Diversity)  
Jumbunna Institute  
University of Technology Sydney

**About the Jumbunna Institute:**

We're the Research Arm of the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research at UTS. Our members are committed academics, lawyers, creatives, practitioners and activists who can deploy a broad range of skills driven by shared passion.

Our work is focused around stories, campaigns, projects, and cases that consolidate our many different sets of skills and expertise towards a common goal. We work from one key guiding principle, that our work should be driven by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and contribute to their strength, sustainability and wellbeing. We believe that Aboriginal nations and people can use research as a tool to produce change and build capacity. We are committed to excellence and responsiveness to communities and clients.

We focus on work that combines our strengths to make genuine impact and change in Australia and internationally. All of our work supports outputs in the following areas:

- **Research with impact** – We produce world-class research on legal and policy issues that supports Indigenous Sovereignty and wellbeing, and that holds those in power to account. Research outputs include articles, case studies, books, legal analysis, policy submissions, contributions to Indigenous methodologies and critical legal theory, engagement with international scholars, and contribution to new media.
- **Services that transform** – We provide a suite of sophisticated, ethical and expert professional services. We operate nationally and have deep expertise and experience in the industries of law, governance, policy and new media. In addition to the provision of professional services, we seek to influence the development of new professionals to align with our objectives.
- **Teaching to build capacity** – Recognising the debt we owe to those who taught us, and the importance of fostering future collaborators and allies, we acknowledge the importance of teaching and of the use education. We contribute to and develop tailored subjects, short courses and professional courses to help communities and clients better effect change.
- **Story with purpose** – We recognise the central role of Story and the power of narratives. We are conscious of how we tell our story, and the stories of others, and prioritise community voices of Indigenous sovereignty, strength and vitality.

## **Gari Yala: Speak the Truth. Indigenous workplace insights.**

In 2020 the Jumbunna Institute, in partnership with Diversity Council Australia and sponsored by Coles and NAB, conducted Gari Yala (Speak the Truth): Centring the experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians at work. The Gari Yala report and findings are based on a survey 1,033 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers across Australia and reveals some shocking realities about experiences of racism, the lack of cultural safety, and identity strain experienced by Indigenous people across Australian workplaces. The report reveals that Indigenous employees continue to experience significant workplace racism and exclusion and that racism impacts wellbeing and job satisfaction.

This racism manifested in many ways, including people being mistreated because of their Indigenous background, hearing racial slurs and receiving comments about the way they look or 'should' look as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

The survey found that:

- 78% of respondents said it was important for them to identify as Indigenous within the workplace.
- 38% reported being treated unfairly because of their background sometimes, often or all the time, with 44% hearing racial slurs sometimes, often or all the time.
- Just 1 in 3 had the workplace support required when they experienced racism
- Only 1 in 5 worked in an organisation with both a racism complaint procedure and anti-discrimination compliance training that included a reference to Indigenous discrimination and harassment.
- Racism has a significant impact on employees, being 2.5 times less likely to be satisfied with their job and 2 times as likely to be looking for a new employer within the next year.

The report also provides ten truths for organisations to improve workplace inclusion for Indigenous staff based on evidence and designed for workplaces that are ready to listen to Indigenous staff and willing to act on what they tell them. These truths are detailed below.



### **Our Recommendations.**

Considering the recent Gari Yala Survey, the Jumbunna Institute has provided reflections based on the NIAA ISEP paper. This further draws upon the insights and experiences of Indigenous staff within the Institute, who have substantial experience within the Indigenous employment sector.

We provide the following recommendations that NIAA:

1. Invests in an annual survey to better understand the state of play of Indigenous workers' experiences, focusing on those involved in Government programs such as ISEP. As with Gari Yala, the survey may focus on a topic each year and should be co-designed and influence by an Indigenous expert panel.
2. Seeks amendments to the Fair Work Act to introduce a positive duty on all employers to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate racism in the workplace, under the same principles outlined as per the Australian Human Rights Commission's Respect@Work Inquiry.
3. Develops and funds a truth-telling commission to hear historical and current experiences of racism within workplaces to ensure these are heard and documented by Government, with a view to ensuring future change and healing.
4. Creates national standards and accredited training for individuals responsible for providing advice and addressing instances of racism towards Indigenous employees.
5. Ensures that Government programs create a culture of career advancement, rather than rewarding providers with milestone payments that create cycles of unemployment that align with funding regimes.
6. Partners with Lifeline and Gayaa Dhuwi in expanding their mental health support hotline service to include appropriate support and referral systems for Indigenous people affected by racism within the workplace.
7. Develops an education and training package, in partnership with Government agencies and the Australian Institute of Company Directors, concerning racism and creating culturally safe workplaces. This would include appropriate information for employers to implement policies and procedures to deal with racism.
8. Works with the Federal and State Education Departments to ensure school curriculums provide better awareness for the identification and impact of racism. This must be age-appropriate and evidence-based for children across their schooling journey.