



NRL SCHOOL TO WORK - INDIGENOUS SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM SUBMISSION

This paper has been prepared by the NRL School to Work program, in response to the discussion paper on the introduction of the Indigenous Skills and Employment program.

The NRL School to Work program believes that addressing high levels of youth unemployment through more effective school to work transitional arrangements, increasing employment participation and driving productivity growth need to be a key focus of the Australian Government and the broader community, including local business.

Employers expect better outcomes and continually look for products tailored to their needs. Knowledge-based industries continue to grow which is placing greater emphasis on the importance of higher education and the acquisition of higher-level skills.

The NRL School to Work program recognises that improving employment outcomes for Indigenous school leavers is critical for creating economic independence, which can help to address the long-term disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians by addressing this need in the six-month period post leaving school. The evidence points to the fact that if a young Indigenous person is not employed within this six-month period there is a likely chance that they will become long-term unemployed.

Employers have an important role to play in supporting this process. Employers should be encouraged to support better education and training outcomes for Indigenous Australians by forming links with local communities and involving these communities in accredited employment-based training, such as traineeships and apprenticeships.

We recognise that Indigenous Australians are one of the most disadvantaged groups within the Australian labour market. It is well documented that, when compared with non-Indigenous Australians, Indigenous Australians continue to have:

- lower labour force participation rates;
- higher incidences of unemployment and longer durations of unemployment when they do participate in the labour market; and
- lower average incomes when in employment

Many job placements made by mainstream employment service providers are into casual and part-time employment. While these forms of employment may perform a stepping-stone role, they generally lead to ceasing after a wage subsidy is no longer available or there are not enough hours at that place of employment.

Sustainable employment is required to support the Government tackle the Closing the Gap priorities. This has become even more of a priority, given the lower chances of disadvantaged job seekers' being first in line for jobs during and after the COVID recovery.

The NRL School to Work program does get results. We provide a wrap-around support service that gets outstanding results. Our post-placement support results in a 92% retention rate at 26 weeks. We have a strong track record of excellence in achieving sustainable employment outcomes for Indigenous youth.



The NRL School to Work program service provision is an important foundation for improving Closing the Gap outcomes. First by Indigenous Year 12 students successfully completing their schooling, then transitioning these students into post school employment and/or further education.

The ISEP design will be based on the need to:

- **address specific barriers to employment at the regional and local levels;**

The NRL School to Work program has a proven history of addressing the barriers to employment for Indigenous Australians at both regional and local levels. Barriers to employment as identified in the Closing the Gap report include, increasing the knowledge and awareness of pathways for Indigenous Australians to actively engage with and build meaningful relationships with localised organisations who have secured identified opportunities for Indigenous youth to navigate. The NRL School to Work program has, in more than 11 regions, developed a specific local strategy to build relationships with many diverse employment providers in each region to ensure that young Indigenous school leavers are aware of employment opportunities available to them and promote active participation into these opportunities. The wholistic and multilayered approach to working with Indigenous students in their fundamental senior years, as they prepare for the transition from school to future in employment, helps to address the socio-economic disadvantage that has impacted many Indigenous people from seeking sustainable employment. Consistent, structured and culturally appropriate delivery of the NRL School to Work program to Indigenous school leavers helps to facilitate a supported transition to meaningful pathways, with the support and education from a culturally appropriate and safe School to Work Project Officer.

- **work with local communities to identify existing and emerging employment opportunities;**

Paramount to the NRL School to Work program has been the localised relationships established in all 11 regions the program is delivered to. In each of these regions, as market trends change and adapt, the relationships the program facilitates aides in the messaging the program is able to share with both the Indigenous participants of the program as well as inform the participating schools, families and additional Indigenous services that are working collaboratively with the program. In the current fast paced, growing and changing employment space, the entrenched relationships with educational bodies, employment providers and training organisations are fundamental to the continued success of the Indigenous participants that have been supported and are currently receiving support from the NRL School to Work program. The NRL School to Work program has established, as best practice, a number of MoUs with existing employment stakeholders in the Indigenous employment and training sphere, to ensure that a collaborative, multilayered approach is offered to Indigenous participants across all regions of the program's reach.

- **be responsive to emerging regional labour market needs and opportunities for both job seekers and businesses;**

The climate in employment services is dynamic and emerging. Employment services require effective means to enable their messaging to be received by education institutions who host a



significant population of the Indigenous candidates. The in-school and post schooling delivery of the NRL School to Work program has allowed the opportunities that have been sourced in the community to be effectively tailored and delivered to the participants of the program. This multi-dimensional delivery proactively facilitates the transition teams working with Indigenous participants to be responsive to the emerging labour market needs in each of the 11 regions being serviced by the NRL School to Work program.

- **target specific cohorts of Indigenous Australians based on data and evidence, supplemented with local knowledge and need; and support employers to understand and realise the potential of the Indigenous workforce.**

The NRL School to Work program has delivered to 11 regions identified as having increased populations of Indigenous Australians. Entrenched in the delivery of the NRL School to Work program has always been the acknowledgement of local knowledge, relationships, providers and community networks to ensure that a consultative targeted approach to the effective management of addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous Australians in unemployment and socio-economic disparity. An effective strategy of the NRL School to Work program has been the implementation of a free 26-week mentoring service for employers of newly placed employees. This service has not only facilitated support and transition into meaningful employment for participants of the program, but also provides education to employers regarding the benefits of supporting localised Indigenous employment, including a greater diversified employee network and furthering greater understanding of Indigenous Australia within the broader community. The employment of a diverse and engaged employee network has been proven to build greater outcomes for businesses, and entrenched community involvement and consultation. The NRL School to Work program during its 10 years of operation has seen several past participants look to the program to both give back and provide inspiration as well as opportunity to the next generation of Indigenous participants being serviced by the program. These links have ensured that graduates of the program have provided advocacy for continued and future employment of an Indigenous workforce.

The NRL School to Work program has proven for 10 years that it is able to achieve results and pave the way for Indigenous school leavers to successfully transition from school into further studies or meaningful employment. There have been over 3,000 Indigenous youth that have benefited from the program during this time. The program has been able to adapt to the changing nature of the labour market and remain relevant in a highly contested environment.

The NRL School to Work program is highly sought after by local schools and employers alike, to support school leavers in their final years and to supply quality candidates to employers. The program has an Indigenous workforce of over 50%, including one-quarter of staff having at one point been a participant in the program and wanting to now give back and provide other Indigenous youth with the same experience they had.

It is critical that in the design of ISEP that the qualities that organisations such as the NRL present are desired and therefore provided with an opportunity to continue to deliver an invaluable service to Indigenous youth.