

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

An alliance of the CLC, NLC, CAALAS, NAAJA and AMSANT

APO NT SUBMISSION ON THE NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AUSTRALIA'S FIRST PEOPLES DRAFT EDUCATION POLICY

MARCH 2013

Introduction

APO NT is an alliance between the Northern Land Council (NLC), Central Land Council (CLC), Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT), North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) and Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (CAALAS).

The alliance was created to provide a more effective response to key issues of joint interest and concern affecting Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, including through advocating practical policy solutions to government. APO NT is committed to increasing Aboriginal involvement and implementation, and to expanding opportunities for Aboriginal community control. APO NT also seeks to strengthen networks between peak Aboriginal organisations and smaller regional Aboriginal organisations in the Northern Territory.

APO NT member organisations do not provide education services in the Northern Territory, however as community-controlled service delivery organisations we believe that we have valuable insights into the delivery of services in the NT. The comments made in this submission are mostly NT specific but maybe relevant for other remote areas of Australia. Aboriginal Peak Organisations (APO NT) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to National Congress of Australia's First People's on the draft education policy.

Overall, the draft education policy is a strong document and APO NT congratulates Congress on developing the policy. Our comments that follow in the main seek to strengthen the document in relation to remote education and the need to achieve greater community ownership over education delivery.

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| Introduction | |
| <p><i>Recognition of Diversity</i> The diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must be forefront in the minds and actions of education planners. Recognition must be given to the numerous First Nations groups (on the basis of language, estimated at more than 250) and the impacts of assimilation resulting from colonisation.</p> | Agreed. |
| <p><i>Cultural Reproduction</i> Education providers must take into account:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our histories • Our right to self-determination • Our desire to retain our culture and knowledge • Our diversity, together with the different paths we may choose to take. | Agreed. See comments below in relation to 5. <i>Collaboration</i> , and 7. <i>Language and cultural maintenance</i> . |
| <p><i>Sustainability</i> A third matter that must be at the forefront of policy makers' minds is that coordinated and sustained efforts are needed to produce more equitable outcomes. The history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education contains too many examples of programs being funded for short periods (start-stop funding). Many of these programs achieve good results but are then withdrawn as a result of impromptu political decision making.</p> | Agreed. See comments below relation to 4. <i>Resources</i> . |
| <p><i>Disabilities</i> Enhancing support for the special needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disabilities and other health conditions that affect their ability to learn, including hearing impairments and foetal alcohol syndrome.</p> | <p>Trauma (acute and trans-generational) and the related, multi-layered, impacts of substance misuse within communities also represent significant underlying issues to disadvantage and disability within childhood development.</p> <p>Whilst we agree that special provision needs to be made for the high proportion of ATSI children with disabilities in schools, we must also continue to be mindful of the interaction between paternalistic, top down, culturally-invalidating approaches to addressing educational needs and the perpetuation of trauma and disempowerment that lies at the heart of much of these disabilities and disadvantages. This suggests the need for community-driven and owned approaches to dealing with trauma and alcohol/drug-induced developmental impairment (including FASD). An example of such an approach is the response of the Fitzroy Valley community to FASD/ELT (see Social Justice Report 2010).</p> <p>These issues are particularly significant for remote communities which also have the additional handicap of inadequate resources and educational infrastructure.</p> |

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| Key Themes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education | |
| <p>1. Access and Equity: Social Determinants of Educational Attainment</p> <p>Strengthening parental, family and community involvement in education, and supporting carers through the provision of housing and employment, if required.</p> <p>Education may not be a high priority for people and their families where social determinants of disadvantage are concentrated; where young people have limited access to role models in paid employment or to those who provide positive experiences of formal education; or where family dysfunction and issues relating to child protection result in significant disruption.</p> | <p>Agreed.</p> <p>APO NT also suggests that there also needs to be greater focus on early childhood education as a social determinant of educational attainment (see early childhood education and schooling findings of the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse report, <i>What works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage.</i>)¹ The policy should include a specific section regarding the linkages between early childhood development and positive educative achievements.</p> |
| <p>2. Curriculum and pedagogy</p> <p>Better incorporating the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures into educational institutions and curricula, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.</p> | <p>Agreed.</p> <p>APO NT believes it also important to identify the need for properly resourced bilingual education programs in Aboriginal language speaking communities. (See also below 7. <i>Language and cultural maintenance</i>)</p> |
| <p>3. Excellent educators for excellent outcomes</p> <p>Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and improving their career development opportunities.</p> <p>In order for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to exercise their right to transmit their culture to future generations, governments and universities need to foster education and training of many more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-identified educators, with deep knowledge of their culture in all curriculum areas.</p> | <p>Agreed.</p> <p>Create equity in support for Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. For example, in the NT local teachers and teachers aides are not provided with staff housing.</p> <p>APO NT also believes that there should be training in cross-cultural communication and engagement skills, cultural awareness and Aboriginal languages, cultures and histories for non-Indigenous teachers.²</p> <p>APONT believes that in the Northern Territory there is a pressing need for an independent community controlled peak body for Aboriginal education. An Aboriginal controlled peak body for education could be responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing support and professional development for special education support assistant/ special education support officers (SESA/ SESO) in the areas of Indigenous Knowledges; • Providing support and professional development for teaching staff in the areas of Indigenous Knowledges. • Providing support to existing and developing independent Aboriginal schools |

¹ Closing the Gap Clearinghouse (AIHW, AIFS) 2011. What works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage: key learnings and gaps in the evidence. Produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies as cited in Response to Stronger Futures, Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory Submission, August 2011

² Op cit, Response to Stronger Futures, Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory Submission, p. 14

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| <p>4. Resources</p> <p>Increasing resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, and ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations are involved in implementation and resourcing decisions.</p> <p>Better opportunities need to be provided for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and to do so, educational institutions and programs responding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student needs must be appropriately resourced.</p> | <p>Agreed.</p> <p>APONT supports the focus in the draft policy on the need for adequate resourcing of Aboriginal education. This is an issue of particular significance in the NT because of the high number of remote schools. Evidence suggests there has been systemic, racially discriminatory under-resourcing of Aboriginal education in the NT. Research in the community of Wadeye found that Wadeye children received less than half the average per capita funding for children attending school in the Territory. In a case to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) this was found to be racially discriminatory. Recent claims suggest such under-resourcing—achieved by funding Aboriginal remote schools based on an expected participation rate of about 35%, compared with 97% for non-Aboriginal children—is endemic.</p> <p>A further problem in the NT has been a policy whereby some small schools in remote communities are not recognised by the NT Government as schools but are classified as ‘Homeland Learning Centres’ and do not receive the infrastructure and funding of normal schools.</p> <p>Other resourcing issues disproportionately impact on remote communities and schools, such as transport and access to culturally appropriate distance education. It is essential that state and territory governments be held accountable by the commonwealth government with regard to the adequate and equitable resourcing of Aboriginal schools and education.</p> <p>The racially discriminatory policy of not supplying housing for locally recruited teachers and teachers aides (along with health workers etc) must be abolished</p> |
| <p>5. Collaboration</p> <p>Congress strongly recommends local decision-making along with community and family engagement as critical to improving education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The development of curriculum and pedagogical approaches must involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, teachers, parents, care-givers, community Elders and leaders.</p> | <p>Agreed.</p> <p>APO NT believes that there needs to be positive rather than negative messaging around parental responsibility and school attendance.³ In our view, both governments have focused too heavily on coercive and punitive measures — such as the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM) trial and recent NT legislative changes that provide for fines and other coercive measures on parents and independent children who fail to attend school. Fines and other forms of coercion, and rejection of cultural inclusion in schools, play to populist desire for strong action but are not supported by available evidence as effective in improving school attendance, retention or achievement. Such approaches fuel the already widespread concern</p> |

³ Op cit, Response to Stronger Futures, Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory Submission, p. 14

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| | <p>of Aboriginal parents that schools do not support their aspiration for their children to have a good education in both western schooling and traditional knowledge. It is difficult to see how such a situation can result in the effective partnerships between schools, parents and communities that governments have committed to. We also believe it is important for Aboriginal people to not only be involved in their education systems, but control and develop them. The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse report, <i>What works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage</i> summarised key evidence from Australian and international research in relation to schooling and education and suggested that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • projects characterised by a high degree of Indigenous involvement and control produced significant benefits for participants; and • engaging parents in children’s learning was of critical importance. <p>Self-determination is manifest in allowing Aboriginal people to develop and control their own education.⁴ The United Nations Economic and Social Council also emphasised the importance of Indigenous teachers developing their own language programs and their own educational material.⁵ Article 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) includes that “Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning”.</p> <p>APONT believes that in the Northern Territory there is a pressing need for an independent community controlled peak body for Aboriginal education, which would greatly increase opportunities for Aboriginal participation and control. This may include the establishment of independent Aboriginal schools.</p> |
| <p>6. Culturally affirming institutions There is a need for schools and other educational institutions to provide environments in which students are free from prejudice and discrimination, and in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are understood, honoured and respected. There must be substantial changes to the social and cultural atmosphere and processes in many educational institutions if they are to provide this environment</p> | <p>Agreed.</p> |

⁴ Schwab, R.G. (1996) ‘Having it both ways’: The continuing complexities of community-controlled Indigenous education’. CAEPR Discussion Paper. No.111/1996, p.1.

⁵ United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO). (2008). *Report of the International Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous Languages*. 7th session. New York.

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| <p>7. Language and cultural maintenance Congress sees language as “the foundation upon which the capacity to learn, interact and to shape identity is built.” Language learning, maintenance and revival have been identified by Congress members as requiring urgent attention.</p> | <p>Agreed. Language is integral to maintaining culture and to the nurturing of social and emotional well-being that enables students to advance through the education system. APO NT suggests that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • properly resourced bilingual education programs should be available to Aboriginal communities, and; • teachers in Aboriginal language speaking schools should be required to have qualifications in the teaching of English as a second language (ESL). This was a recommendation of the NT Coordinator-General for Remote Services.⁶ <p>As outlined above, APONT believes that in the Northern Territory there is a need for an independent community controlled peak body for Aboriginal education. An Aboriginal controlled peak body for education could be responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a suitable bilingual program to be implemented into schools across the Northern Territory and to involve the local community in the implementation; • Develop language programs for teachers working with Aboriginal students. |

⁶ Office of the Northern Territory Coordinator-General for Remote Services Report, June 2011 to August 2012