



EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Members present:

Ms KE Richards MP—Chair
Mr JP Lister MP (virtual)
Mr MA Boothman MP
Mr N Dametto MP
Mr BL O'Rourke MP
Mr JA Sullivan MP

Staff present:

Dr A Beem—Acting Committee Secretary
Dr S Dodsworth—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC BRIEFING—THE DELIVERY OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN RURAL, REMOTE AND REGIONAL QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MONDAY, 29 AUGUST 2022

Brisbane

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The committee met at 10.01 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this public briefing. My name is Kim Richards. I am the member for Redlands and chair of the Education, Employment and Training Committee. I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the custodial land of the oldest living civilisation in the world. I pay my respects to the Turrbal people and the Jagera people and to their elders past, present and emerging. We are very fortunate in this country to live with two of the world's oldest continuing living cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

With me here today from the committee are: the deputy chair, Mr James Lister, the member for Southern Downs. He is joining us via the telephone. We also have Mr Mark Boothman, the member for Theodore; Mr Nick Dametto, the member for Hinchinbrook; Mr Jimmy Sullivan, the member for Stafford; and Mr Barry O'Rourke, the member for Rockhampton.

The purpose of the briefing today is to provide the committee with an opportunity to examine the delivery of vocational education and training in rural, remote and regional Queensland. The committee plans to launch an inquiry into this topic in the near future. The committee's proceedings today are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and are subject to the parliament's standing orders. The proceedings are also being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Witnesses will not be required to give evidence under oath, but I remind everyone that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence.

BURDON, Mr Ben, Group Manager, Social Policy and Programs Group, National Indigenous Australians Agency (via videoconference)

FULTON, Ms Deborah, Acting Group Manager, Economic Policy and Programs Group, National Indigenous Australians Agency (via videoconference)

WOOD GLADWIN, Ms Lara, Acting Employment Branch Manager, Economic Policy and Programs Group, National Indigenous Australians Agency (via videoconference)

CHAIR: I welcome our witnesses from the National Indigenous Australians Agency. All of our witnesses are joining us via teleconference today. Good morning and thank you for agreeing to provide us with a briefing today. I would like to invite you to make some opening comments and then the committee will have questions for you.

Ms Fulton: I think we are okay to go straight to questions. We were having a conversation about whether there was any early scene setting, but I think it is probably best if we let you lead discussion and we will answer any questions that you have.

CHAIR: No problem.

Mr Burdon: We might introduce ourselves and explain what our different work areas cover.

CHAIR: We would appreciate that.

Mr Burdon: Thank you for the invitation to participate in the briefing today. My name is Ben Burdon. My colleague, Ms Fulton and Lara, and I are dialling in from Ngunnawal/Ngambri country. We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging and extend that to all colleagues on the briefing, on the line and around the country today. We are mindful, as you yourself have acknowledged, that we are on lands of First Nations people.

I am the group manager for social policy and programs at the National Indigenous Australians Agency. Within my purview are social policy and programs. That picks up our work on education and early years and early childhood in particular. That is one kind of intersection with the committee's interests. Secondly, there is health, which is largely focused on social and emotional wellbeing and alcohol and other drugs—my area. As you would be aware, there are some things going on in that domain which may be of interest to the committee as well.

The last area that I cover relates to family and community safety. There is a little bit in that, but it is more around community night patrols, and family and domestic violence programming. There is a little less in that domain but more so what is going on in the health space. You would have seen

announcements late last week about the government's commitments on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce and then also on the education front and the early years front as well. I will hand over to my colleague Ms Fulton and she can give you a sense of what the economic portfolio covers.

Ms Fulton: I am the acting group manager for economic policy and programs. It is the companion division, if you like, to the one Ben leads on the social side but on the economic side. We have the remote jobs and employment services in the Community Development Program and some Indigenous specific employment support. Then there is business economic policy, remote housing and infrastructure, the Indigenous protected areas, Indigenous rangers as programs which are not specifically about jobs but do result in a lot of employment for Indigenous Australians.

It is probably useful to know that in general we are not replacing the mainstream agencies on any of the programs that NIAA runs except perhaps in the Community Development Program space for remote employment services. We are often working complementary to the other Commonwealth agencies that have the lead on the policy areas and then we come in with complementary support and an influencing role across government as well.

Mr Burdon: Just a little bit more broadly about the agency, there is another policy group, which is Empowerment and Recognition. That group, as the name suggests, is looking after the Uluru Statement from the Heart, particularly the constitutional recognition of the Voice. They do the Voice work and that team also picks up and plays a leadership role on Closing the Gap. If there are any Closing the Gap specific questions, we are happy to talk to and work with that team and come back to you if that is necessary. We also have a separate truth-telling task force which is looking at the truth telling and treaty as aspects of the Uluru statement. They also run our Territories Stolen Generations Redress Program which, as the name suggests, focuses on stolen generations redress arrangements for folk from the Northern Territory, the ACT and other territories.

That is a sense of our head office breakdown and then we have our regional presence across the country broken into three groups: eastern, central and western largely speaking. Western picks up the AFL states; that is probably the easiest way to describe it. We have a presence right across the country which gives us good connections into community and then back into Canberra.

That is a potted overview of the agency to give you a sense of where we are and what we do. We have a kind of key influencing role, as Ms Fulton said, in coordinating and driving First Nations policy for the government. We lead in certain policies and programs, but largely our focus is on ensuring mainstream delivery of culturally appropriate and safe programs for First Nations people. Then we play the leadership role very much so on the Uluru Statement from the Heart and also the Community Development Program and the government's commitments there as well. I am happy to join you today and provide what help and assistance we can.

CHAIR: What a broad cross-section of fields you cover. It is tradition to start off with our deputy chair for the first question.

Mr LISTER: Thank you for joining us. Can I ask about training delivery by government providers, not-for-profit providers and so forth? The outcomes report spoke about a need to have adaptable funding models for such organisations to be able to make it viable to deliver the training. Can you talk a little bit about that please?

Ms Fulton: I beg your pardon. Could you just repeat the second part of that? When you said 'outcomes report' were you referring to the consultations on the Indigenous Skills and Employment Program?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr LISTER: It is around the funding models for advisers—the need for them to be adaptable or flexible to enable the training to be provided or the officers to deliver the training. Can you talk a bit more about that please?

Ms Fulton: Yes, certainly. What was coming through in the consultations for the Indigenous Skills and Employment Program was a little bit of a point of comparison among the programs that we have been running. There was a lot of feedback across the country about the need to be more flexible and to really look at where an individual was in their own journey and to think about how to provide support for them rather than having them fit into fairly standardised models, if you like. Our programs had to focus very much on vocational training that would support people into entry level roles and then to support those people for up to 26 weeks. That was a strong performance metric in the current programs.

A lot of the feedback was that people often need a lot of support before they are even ready to think about going into a role—some of that is pre-employment readiness or foundational skills—and that they may well need a lot of post-placement support that might go well beyond 26 weeks. There was also feedback that we should be considering support that would not just help the individual fit into their employing organisation but help employers provide a safe environment to support people. It was a little bit less about the individual needing to do all of the adjusting to fit into their environment; there was a bit more of a two-way approach. It was less around seeing support as solely around getting people into these roles and more around helping people meet their aspirations, look at the sorts of transition pathway or jobs pathway that would support them and the journey they wanted to go on and where they wanted to end up rather than treating it as a more standardised employment services program, if that makes sense.

In relation to the funding model part of your question, that really reflects the fact that our funding model was very much weighted towards people receiving a 26-week employment outcome which was almost 100 per cent outcomes based. We need to think of more flexible models that would allow the kind of support that I was talking about. We need to accept there could be a lot of support for somebody even before they are ready to start considering the role and that they might need support well beyond 26 weeks. We should consider that what we have been doing was perhaps a bit too rigid.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Thank you for coming to the committee today. It is very interesting to hear about your perspectives. My question is for Deborah and it is similar to what the previous member was asking about. Talking about flexibility with different remote communities, can you give examples when it comes to vocational and educational training in Queensland what flexibilities are needed for different remote areas, for instance, on the cape, in the gulf regions and Western Queensland? Do you have any examples that would benefit or improve the system itself?

Ms Fulton: I do not have a specific example, but I can give you some general indicators of the kinds of things that came through. I do not have a case study in mind. With regards to the sorts of things that were coming through with that, when it comes down to it, the simplest approach is that it is about a case management approach and not looking solely at vocational training, for example. Quite often what people might need to be ready to participate in training or participate in work readiness training is quite a lot of support around their whole lives. Some of the things that are difficult for them, even to go to training, relate to whether they have safe housing, whether their family is able to be supportive, and whether they are able to get transport or accommodation. It really comes down to a more holistic case management approach, I think, that does not necessarily lend itself very easily to delineating what is the vocational training environment versus what is the rest of the support that person might need to succeed.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Therefore, do you have any ideas to improve that, to produce a better service outcome for these individuals?

Ms Fulton: Some of the ideas that came through in the consultations were really around how to provide that one-stop shop for somebody. There was a lot of discussion around the fact that there is a lot of support out there through different state initiatives and Commonwealth initiatives, but it is really complicated for individuals to understand how to navigate that. We really needed to have a way of looking at the programs that puts the person at the centre and looked at what they needed and then were able to unravel the complexity for them almost, whether it is through a one-stop shop or somebody who could broker all of those relationships; so not that you needed one program that could do absolutely everything, but somebody needed to be able to help understand the system. That was one of the things that we took forward in the design of the Indigenous Skills and Employment Program—to try to have a much more collaborative approach between the different services and accept that people would be working in partnership and people would not be going to just one place for support, but that everybody kind of needed to crowd around and support an individual to make sense of the system, if that makes sense.

Mr Burdon: If I can make some observations, we take a very similar approach in our education support. Obviously education is largely the purview of the state and then, at the Commonwealth level, the Department of Education. We play quite a targeted role in supporting boarding programs and providing that kind of whole-of-community, whole-of-individual approach to supporting children who may go away to be schooled or who may take up different schooling options, and to make sure that they have that kind of support for the student from community and from family to enable those students to achieve the best possible education outcomes possible. It is a very similar approach to what Ms Fulton is describing from the consultations from ISEP in that we can provide that kind of holistic community-based or community focused, family focused individual support program where we can achieve the best education or the best skills outcome in the circumstances of the individual.

CHAIR: Following on from that, have you set in your mind what is a good example of a region that is leading the space in that one-stop shop, providing that wraparound? Do you have any guidance in terms of where we might see that being done at its best?

Ms Fulton: One of the examples that was drawn to our attention when we were evaluating our current program is the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program, partly because of the local governance around it, if you like, and that stood out as quite a flexible program, quite localised decision-making and was able to look quite orderly at what people needed. That is actually (inaudible) look at.

CHAIR: Sorry, that last piece just broke up. Could you repeat that last bit?

Ms Fulton: That was recommended to us as a model to look at.

CHAIR: Skilling Queenslanders?

Ms Fulton: Skilling Queenslanders for Work, yes. We had access to an evaluation of that program that was a little bit older and I think it was evaluated again probably in recent years, and we arranged a call to talk through with senior officials on that to learn from it.

CHAIR: Would you be able to find out for us and maybe come back to us with where that Skilling Queenslanders for Work program was being deployed and what the organisation was that was delivering that particular program?

Ms Fulton: We will do that.

Mr SULLIVAN: I wanted to ask you if you were familiar with the Skilling for Queenslanders for Work program because our feedback, or my feedback anyway, about the program is that it is a flexible program for people who are perhaps not quite ready for TAFE or not quite ready for an apprenticeship but need the extra support to get into further education or get into a job more broadly. Was that part of your consultation, or part of your feedback, about how the program is designed for that and otherwise there is a bit of a gap in that area? Is that a fair summary, do you think?

Ms Fulton: Yes. It did not come up specifically during our consultations, but the organisation that evaluated our programs had been involved with the evaluation of (inaudible) program as well, and they connected us up. I think the elements within that which really did resonate with the consultations we had for ISEP were about that flexibility around that being able to look at what a person needed, rather than focus on the certificate courses and the like to be able to work more flexibly around where an individual was up to and what they were going to find most useful. The way it had a locally defined governance model around the place—so, what were the local jobs, what were the characteristics of the population there that the program might be helping—I do not think it was local decision-making, but it was a model that had a place-based governance component to it. Those things all came out consistently throughout our consultations as elements we should consider in a future program.

Mr Burdon: If I can add another example from the health sector, we have what we call workforce development support units which particularly focus on the social and emotional wellbeing and AOD—alcohol and other drugs—sectors, and then looking at supporting the development of the workforce in those places. We have seven, I think, working across the country and the agency funds a small number of them. Basically they are looking at developing that social and emotional wellbeing and alcohol and other drug workforce—so, counsellors, case workers and support workers—and what they do is basically provide those supports to build that workforce. That is another model that I can share some information on how that works. There are seven of these workforce development support units working around the country. Two of those are linked to training organisations. Basically, as Ms Fulton was saying, they look at both the individual and the organisation to try and match training needs and support needs to achieve positive workforce outcomes.

Mr DAMETTO: Deborah and Ben, thank you very much for joining the committee today and for your briefing. Firstly, if you do not mind me asking, whereabouts are you based? This is the first time I have heard of your organisation, to be fair.

Ms Fulton: We are headquartered in Canberra. The agency has 11 regional offices and then a truck load of sub-regional offices.

Mr Burdon: I think we are located or have a presence in about 70 or 80 spots across the country. Formally we are part of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. We worked within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet for a number of years and then formally became our own independent executive agency a little over three years ago, in 2019. We are an independent executive agency working within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, headquartered here in Canberra, but a massive footprint across the country.

Mr DAMETTO: Congratulations and well done. When you are talking about remote and Indigenous communities across the country—and I will talk about Queensland for now because that is where we represent—can you please tell us the top five things that are hindering people getting into long-term employment or even gainful employment?

Ms Fulton: In remote communities, lack of jobs is the key one. There are often transport and accommodation barriers for people as well, depending on how far they might need to travel for work. There are often a lot of challenges around identity documentation and an ability to either have a licence or get police checks, have the basics such as birth certificates and things like that. There is the lack of an ability to be skilled where they are; they are having to travel for that further education or that vocational training. There are those four. Then there are the people not necessarily coming back to home. Once they make the effort to travel and study somewhere else, then they might end up working somewhere else. Even if they would prefer to go back home, they do not really feel that they have opportunities back home, so they stay in a satellite.

Mr DAMETTO: Has the Queensland blue card system ever come up as being a hindrance to getting employment in remote and Indigenous communities?

Ms Fulton: I cannot speak to that. Possibly our regional employees would have a sense of that. We have offices in Townsville, Cairns and Brisbane. They would probably have more in the way of local context as to what people have found as barriers in Queensland specifically.

Mr O'ROURKE: Thank you for being available for today's briefing. I want to make some inquiries as to whether you have any data around the apprenticeship board trainees' completion in Queensland, and what are some of the barriers or enablers that have been identified in relation to course completions?

Ms Fulton: That is not what (inaudible) with the skills (inaudible). What I can do is see if we can get any information on that. We do not have data with us, but I can reach out to a colleague and find out if there is any information we can get. I know from general inquiries we were making a while ago around what is the Indigenous participation rate in the apprenticeship programs, it was quite good, but the completion rates and the location, I do not have any data on that. I will ask to see if we can furnish you with anything.

Mr SULLIVAN: I am happy for this to go to anyone, but I suspect it is Ms Fulton's area. In the opening from both of you, you suggested that the NIAA has a bit of an advisory role across government in terms of working with all the different agencies and I suspect that includes the states as well. Can you give us a bit of an insight as to how the employment services of the Commonwealth government interact with the training services that the states provide and how those two complementary areas work together? Can you give us an insight from the federal government's point of view?

Ms Fulton: The way the employment services programs had been operating is that they would rely heavily on the state based vocational training if it were available. The Commonwealth has done work with the states in the last couple of years around matching funding where there was a process of working out what states and territories wanted to prioritise as their vocational training and then matched funding would go in. The employment services providers would connect jobseekers into that training. They would not be directly managing it, but they would be supporting individuals to go find the training that they wanted to do from—

Mr SULLIVAN: Being aware of what is available and sending them in the right direction?

Ms Fulton: Yes, that is right and then providing that individual with a bit of mentoring support, a bit of wraparound support potentially, but sending them off to the different courses.

Mr SULLIVAN: As well as the holistic support that you mentioned before in terms of transport and all the other things that go with people participating in that sort of activity?

Ms Fulton: That is right but I think to different degrees. The employment services models were set up along the idea of jobseeker classification indexes, which classified somebody based on their job readiness. So the level of support that they would get depended a little bit on how they might have emerged there, so the more job ready people tended to be—

Mr SULLIVAN: And the degree of funding that comes with those various scales.

Ms Fulton: That is right, yes. The programs that we had been running within NIAA that were complementary to the mainstream—so complementary to what was jobactive—resembled the jobactive model but they were only taking Indigenous jobseekers. There was an expectation that they would be more likely to have had a range of different barriers and need more of that wraparound support.

Mr SULLIVAN: Another issue that is not strictly within your portfolio but I suspect is an issue that you encounter is the availability of decent internet/NBN services in remote communities in particular. How does that impact on training and is that an area that your agency has been able to intervene with the communications department, or whatever it is called now? Does your agency advise or advocate in that space as well?

Ms Fulton: Yes. That would make a huge difference if there were more reliable communications and internet in remote areas. It would be a game changer for people to be able to learn on country and work on country as well. It would not matter where people were located for jobs. That would make a dramatic improvement. Yes, we play a role with communications in advocating. We have been doing some work around digital inclusion. We ourselves actually maintain some remote telecommunications in a number of very small remote areas where under the universal—what is it called?

Mr Burdon: Service.

Ms Fulton: A telecom related thing—

Mr SULLIVAN: Community service agreement.

Ms Fulton:—where they provide services to communities under a certain number of people. We provide basic telecommunications to about 50 communities I think. We certainly play a role in trying to influence across government. It is not an area at the moment where there have been the resources going in that would genuinely change.

CHAIR: Do you have any mapping on where those key issues exist where people are digitally inhibited from participating in those communities?

Ms Fulton: We do not have mapping. Throughout remote Australia I think there would be some level of inhibition. What we could do though is ask Communications if they have done something. Let me take that on notice.

CHAIR: That would be great. Thank you.

Mr O'ROURKE: What are the top issues requiring action to improve VET and employment outcomes in rural, remote and regional parts of Queensland from your perspective?

Ms Fulton: I think access would be huge. Coming back to what we were talking about earlier, people often cannot access the VET training where they are and they need to travel for it. Where there are services there are not a lot. There is not a lot of competition and the quality might be variable. Either expanding the range of services that is available or dealing with that particular exclusion so that people potentially can be participating in courses through distance education would make a major difference I think.

I think it is really the access to that sort of wraparound support that people might need in remote areas. Again, the range of services on offer in very remote places is pretty limited. All of that just makes living harder. A recurring theme—it came up in almost every consultation we had—was the challenges of getting things like driver's licences when it comes to people being able to travel at all and access to vehicles as well.

Mr DAMETTO: I know this is not directly what we are here to talk about today but, seeing as your agency is so broad when it comes to speaking about Indigenous issues in Australia, would you be able to describe how the Indigenous voice in parliament and the constitutional changes would change the employment and training outcomes for Indigenous people in remote Queensland?

Ms Fulton: This is a bit speculative obviously because that work is underway.

CHAIR: It is probably hard to speculate on, I would have thought.

Mr DAMETTO: The only reason I ask is that, yes, I understand there is some speculation but there is probably no-one better than your agency to describe what is going on with the plan for this, because I have no idea.

Ms Fulton: Depending on how it plays out, if there is a series of regionally based representative groups that are helping to set priorities, discuss issues, work through what a medium-term development plan might look like for communities in that region, that then would be a pretty powerful set of inputs into policy-making and program delivery. That would be across the board not just for employment or training but as a representative voice influencing state and Commonwealth policy. You have pretty direct input on the issues that government is discussing, and that would be pretty influential.

Mr DAMETTO: Is that already happening through the 70 to 80 agency outreach posts that you have across the nation at the moment? There would be a fair bit of Indigenous input into those that would feedback to your agency in Canberra.

Ms Fulton: That sort of local context that we get through the regions is invaluable. The key difference is that it is not elected or representative, so it might be more stakeholder by stakeholder or place based in some particular circumstances. They do not have a collective authority, if you like, in terms of influencing government.

Mr DAMETTO: But that is what your agency does, right?

Ms Fulton: Our agency is a Commonwealth agency—

Mr DAMETTO: That influences government policy decisions or creation?

Ms Fulton: But we are not, if you like, representative of Indigenous Australia.

CHAIR: You have probably—

Mr DAMETTO: I am trying to understand it. I am a little bewildered. That is all.

Mr Burdon: At the end of the day, the voice will give a representative view from community about what community wants and needs and their aspirations. That will give us a richer understanding of how we can go about, as government, facilitating and enabling the delivery of programs and services to community that will best meet their aspirations and needs and ultimately close the gap in the broad range of socio-economic outcomes for First Nations communities. We need to do more work to be able to close the gap with the rest of Australia. It is really that sense of consulting and working with community about those aspirations—those social and economic aspirations—to best be able to deliver on them. If there is that representative voice of community then we are going to—as Commonwealth, state and territory—be able to best deliver on those aspirations and needs and close socio-economic gaps with the rest of Australia.

Mr DAMETTO: Excellent. Thank you very much for your answer.

Mr BOOTHMAN: My question goes to support for high-need students in remote areas, whether it is a personal situation or an environmental situation in terms of where they live. What support is available for these students and do you have any data to show that this support is getting some meaningful outcomes?

Mr Burdon: Are you talking about primary and secondary students?

Mr BOOTHMAN: Personal or environmental. They may have issues at home that could be detrimental to their learning outcomes. I am asking what type of support is available and whether you have any data to show that it is working. You might have to take that question on notice.

Mr Burdon: It is probably best if I can come back to you on some sources. The agency works very much here to run programs that support and leverage what has been done at the state and Commonwealth level. Maybe it is best if I come back and provide you with some detail about what is happening at the Commonwealth and the Queensland level and then some detail about what we are doing within the agency in Queensland and some of the arrangements that we have in place there.

Mr BOOTHMAN: I appreciate that. If we can have something which details what the outcomes are, that would be greatly appreciated.

Mr Burdon: I can give you a very small example. I attended a graduation ceremony with an organisation called Yalari last Friday. They provide scholarships for around 20 students per year at each of the secondary level schools to private school boarding schools across the country. Some of the students come from very remote areas—Tiwi and Badu up in the Torres Strait. Those children are all graduates this year and are all headed towards finishing their final year of schooling and going on to other endeavours. Those programs provide that kind of wraparound, whole-of-family, whole-of-community approach to delivering those education outcomes for those kids. That is just one small example.

CHAIR: I am sorry: what was the name of the scholarship program, again?

Mr Burdon: It is Yalari. It has a fabulous website that you can have a look at. There is a range of education programs that work from private school and public school to learning on country, which is another interesting program that just marked its 10-year anniversary. That operates with the Northern Land Council in the Northern Territory. There is a range of other programs and I can happily come back and provide the committee with some further details.

CHAIR: Fantastic. That sounds like an excellent program.

Mr SULLIVAN: I want to make a quick comment rather than ask a question. Mr Burdon, you would have seen a fortnight ago that the government made a formal response to the Path to Treaty in Queensland and how that interacts with the Statement from the Heart and the Voice to Parliament. I am very interested in that and we could talk about it all day, but this committee is about education and training. Lack of questioning about that is not due to a lack of interest; it is just that the focus today is on skills and training. Thank you for all the work that you do. I am sure you will continue to work with our government and our stakeholders as we take a real dovetailed approach in that area. I just wanted to flag that with you, as well.

CHAIR: Well said.

Mr Burdon: Thank you.

Mr BOOTHMAN: In relation to the Yalari program, how are the students selected?

Mr Burdon: Yalari is a private organisation. They work with government and they work with private sponsors. It works on a sponsorship basis. Children and families apply for scholarships and are selected through Yalari itself. I would be loath to go into a further level of detail given that it is a private organisation.

CHAIR: It is on their website.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Students with high needs and, as I said, personal and environmental issues would not apply for this type of program; it would be the more stable communities?

Mr Burdon: I think that is probably going into a level of detail that is really something for—

CHAIR: A question for Yalari.

Mr Burdon: It is a question for Yalari. I refer to it as an example of the programs that are out there, and there are many others that work across all students with a range of needs and aspirations.

Mr DAMETTO: During the important work that the agency carries out across Australia, have things been identified as a hindrance for accessing training or employment such as domestic and family violence, alcohol and drug dependency or cultural inconsistencies? Were any of those things ever brought up?

Mr Burdon: In terms of access to education?

Mr DAMETTO: Education and then employment.

Mr Burdon: I think broadly speaking it is not just in our work but all work across all levels of government, with the Commonwealth and all the states and territories and with all Australians, not just First Nations Australians. Access to the so-called social and cultural determinants of health and wellbeing are very important. Family, housing, food on the table are all important indicators towards education and, ultimately, employment outcomes. If you look at the 17 targets across Closing the Gap, while there are 17 of them they all do work together so you need efforts across all elements of the Closing the Gap targets to achieve positive outcomes.

I will need to check and come back to you, but if the developmental indicators, target 3 is actually going—I think the indication or the movement that the Productivity Commission recently reported on; and we can share links to this web—were actually going in the wrong direction for all Australia. I will need to double-check that and come back. Those early developmental indicators are important for education outcomes, not just for First Nations children but for all Australian children, as are reading from a very early age and growing up in a safe and secure environment.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much, Deborah and Ben, for your answers.

CHAIR: I will close with a final question. When asked for a good example of a program that is working in this space, you volunteered Skilling Queenslanders for Work. Taking Queensland out of the picture and given that you have that national lens, are there states that are doing anything that you are aware of that might be of value for the committee to investigate further?

Ms Fulton: Ben was just reminding me that we both had the opportunity recently to go out to Banyala in North-East Arnhem Land, as a bit of an offshoot to Garma, where they were signing a local decision-making agreement with the Northern Territory government and celebrating the 14th anniversary of the Blue Mud Bay sea rights declaration. That was on homeland. I think what was interesting there was really around what is working in place. For schools that have been NT government funded, we had been providing support through the Indigenous rangers program which is providing both training and jobs for people to stay on country. There was a lot of collaboration with the Northern Land Council around working on schooling on country.

Mr Burdon: Yes, schooling on country.

Ms Fulton: Increasingly, the way the agency is trying to shift is just around that place based approach. It is going into the location, looking at what services are there, who is active there and, as Ben was talking about before, the way a community might explore their needs and aspirations and looking at how to work together through the various services to help people stay on country if that is what they want to do.

Mr Burdon: The ceremony that day was also the graduation ceremony for a number of children from the community who were graduating at various levels, from certificate I right through to certificate IV for ranger related skilling, coxswaining on boats, boat handling and the like. It is about skilling them into working as rangers on country. The Learning on Country Program that I mentioned before is another very interesting program. It is showing some good educational outcomes. Again, there is detail and information available through the internet. It is something that the Northern Land Council has coming back. As Ms Fulton said, it is a real community place based approach that, with strong local leadership, shows good outcomes if you put community and country at the heart of decision-making.

Ms Fulton: The other example that came to me while Ben was speaking, which also came up during Garma, was the studio—

Mr Burdon: Studio Schools of Australia. It operates more at a primary school level, if I recall correctly. Again, that is a similar kind of learning on country and learning in community approach. As they say, it is teaching education both in the community and the local tribal sense, but also education in a mainstream Australian sense. The children are able to grow up and walk in both worlds at the same time.

CHAIR: I am on the website now. Is Studio Schools of Australia based in Western Australia?

Mr Burdon: There are a couple of studio schools around the country.

CHAIR: Terrific.

Mr DAMETTO: I am sorry, Ben, to give you more work than you already have, but are you aware of the Katter's Australian Party bill before parliament at the moment on Indigenous blue cards for remote Indigenous communities?

CHAIR: I do not think you can pre-empt debate of a bill.

Mr DAMETTO: No, but I would like to see if he has had a look at the bill and could give some commentary.

CHAIR: It is not relevant to the inquiry before us.

Mr DAMETTO: Not a drama. Thank you very much. I thought it would be something that could help employment in Indigenous communities, but I will leave it at that, Chair.

CHAIR: That brings us to the end of our time. Thank you very much for your time today. You have certainly provided us with a good understanding on a whole range of aspects around vocational education and training in our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Thank you for that. Four questions have been taken on notice and you are going to come back to us on: the details of the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program that you have seen that was really good, the organisation that ran that and the location it was run out of—we would be grateful for those details; data on course completions; is there any information that you can provide us in terms of where there are shortfalls in digital communications affecting VET delivery in regional, rural and remote communities although only for Queensland, to narrow that down a little bit for you; and, lastly, the member for Theodore's question around examples of—

Mr BOOTHMAN: High need students seeking additional support and how that is actually working.

CHAIR:—additional wraparound services and outcomes. If we could get the answers back by Monday, 5 September that would be terrific. Thank you very much for your attendance.

Ms Fulton: On the second question on the completions, I had that down as being apprenticeship related.

CHAIR: Yes, it was apprenticeship completions. Thank you again very much. Thank you to Hansard, our secretariat staff and the parliamentary broadcast staff. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's inquiry web page in due course. I declare this public briefing closed.

The committee adjourned at 10.57 am.