

New directions for the CDEP Programme

In 2002, the Community Development and Employment Project (CDEP) programme employed approximately 35,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia and accounted for more than one quarter of the Indigenous workforce (Altman et.al. 2005). Without the scheme, official Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander unemployment statistics would rise from approximately 23% to 43% of the total Indigenous population. In very remote areas, the impact of the scheme on official unemployment statistics is greater. If these participants were classified as unemployed, the official rates of Indigenous unemployment would rise from 7% to 75.7% (Altman et.al. 2005).

Since its inception in the 1970s in response to a number of remote communities' concerns about the negative impacts of the introduction of welfare payments, the scheme expanded rapidly to be the largest program administered by the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). The scheme transferred to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) in 2004, prior to the abolition of ATSIC in 2005. \$570m was allocated in the 2004/05 budget to the operation of the scheme, funding 39,055 places in 240 CDEPs across Australia. Approximately 76% this budget is made up of Social Security payments that CDEP participants choose to forgo in order to be involved in the scheme (Altman et.al. 2005).

DEWR has taken responsibility for the reform of the scheme, releasing a discussion paper titled CDEP—*Building on Success* in February 2005, which formed the basis of community consultations. The *CDEP Future Directions* paper was subsequently released in April 2005 outlining four priority areas of reform:

1. linking CDEP to local community needs;
2. concentrating CDEP activities to three key areas: employment, community activities and business development;
3. linking CDEP with other programmes and services.
4. supporting CDEP organisations.

The consultations highlighted community concerns for more training for CDEP participants. Prior to the release of these papers, the

Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council (AITAC) to the ANTA Board prioritised the linkages between the CDEP programme and training. Australia's National Training Strategy for Indigenous Australians, *Partners in a Learning Culture 2000-2005* and the strategy's *Blueprint for Implementation* highlighted this issue under Objective 4—Links to Employment, Strategy 11—expanding opportunities for Indigenous people in CDEPs. The Mid-term Review of *Partners in a Learning Culture* (Kemmis et.al. 2004) found that 'substantial challenges remain if CDEP is to maximise opportunities for integrating training, employment and community development' including the need to 'take in

'...limited industrial protections for CDEP workers'

to account the different purposes served by CDEP in different locations at different times'.

In response to these findings, along with a range of other instigating factors, the Pathways to Employment Project (PEP) was funded by DEWR in 2004. It has been managed by ANTA with advice from AITAC since its commencement. The primary aim of the project is to investigate the impediments to training and employment outcomes within CDEPs and develop solutions at a local level. Additionally, the project intends to improve participation, retention and levels of attainment for Indigenous people in VET through the provision of local level support for participants and the development of partnerships between CDEPs and Registered Training Organisations. Sixteen pilot sites have been chosen for the project, representing a diverse range of CDEPs from across Australia.

Although the project is being coordinated nationally, it endeavours to provide enough flexibility to cater for local requirements. It emphasises community ownership and will provide opportunities to share information and examples of best practice through the implementation of an action learning methodology. The lessons from these 16

pilot sites will, in return, be fed in to the development of models for use in other CDEPs across Australia that will link CDEPs, VET and employment. It is intended that this will be rolled-up in to a strategy which will ensure the promulgation and sustainability of successful models. This project is seen by stakeholders as having the potential to provide capability at a local level to solve some of the issues that underpin the linkages of the CDEP scheme with training and employment. Of course, it cannot and should not be seen as a panacea.

The issues as they pertain to CDEP are complex and interrelated. The *CDEP Future Directions Paper* identified lack of funding for CDEP organisations as one of the crucial matters which impacts on a CDEP organisation's capacity to produce effective outcomes.

From a union perspective, we are also concerned about the limited industrial protections for CDEP workers and the exploitation of the scheme by governments who underwrite the roll-out of programs with CDEP workers when people should be employed in fully funded fulltime positions.

As a part of the intended reforms to the programme, the Federal Government has recently announced that it expects all 16 and 17 year old CDEP participants to be enrolled in accredited training. The AEU is concerned to ensure that this proposal is fully funded and that appropriate supports are put in to place to ensure student success.

For more information about the Pathways to Employment Project, see <http://pathways.r3.net.au/index.php>. ❖

References

- Altman, J.C., Gray M.C. and Levitusn R. (2005) Policy Issues for the Community Development Employment Projects Scheme in Rural and Remote Australia, Discussion Paper No. 271/2005, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU.
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (2005) *Building on Success CDEP Future Directions Paper*, Commonwealth of Australia 2005, Canberra
- Kemmis, S., Atkinson, M., Brennan, R., Atkinson, C., (2004) *Partners in a Learning Culture Blueprint for Implementation Mid Term Review Final Report - Executive Summary*, Australian National Training Authority, Brisbane.

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