

Aboriginal Visual Arts Sector Workers: Access to Training and Professional Development

The aim: a network of skilled, Aboriginal arts centre workers and visual artists, employed in their own communities, building the capacity and sustainable growth of the Western Australian Aboriginal visual arts sector.

The value of the Aboriginal visual arts sector

Impact on community

"Pride, self-esteem, maintenance of culture, transmission of culture, inter-generational learning, meaningful activity, purposeful life, creative achievement, recognition from peers; recognition from national and international art media, provision of much of our nation's 'corporate identity'; provision of 'Australia's greatest cultural export' and other social and spiritual benefits are difficult to quantify. But they should not be discounted even in the most rational market economies. This is an industry that cannot and should not simply be measured in statistical economic data."ⁱ

As this notable submission to the 2007 federal inquiry into Australia's Indigenous visual arts and craft sector highlights, quantifying the value of Aboriginal visual arts is complex. Quite aside from the arts' intrinsic beauty and value, social and economic impacts are difficult to measure, but inarguably significant.

Impact on economy

Estimates of the dollar value of the current Aboriginal visual arts market vary very widely, however a figure between \$2-300M is generally agreed on as a reasonably modest evaluation.ⁱⁱ Art sales have been identified as "the primary or only source of non-government income" for many remote indigenous communities.ⁱⁱⁱ As well as the broader economic contribution the sector makes to the Australian economy, community goals around economic independence and self determination are advanced by the work and success of the sector.

Impact on tourism strategy

The sector contributes significantly to the state and national tourism agenda. As recently identified in the Australia Council paper International Arts Tourism: Connecting Cultures, "Over 820,000 international tourists engaged with First Nations arts while in Australia in 2017, an increase of 41% since 2013. Engagement with First Nations arts was higher for international arts tourists who travelled outside capital cities. More than a third of these travellers attended a First Nations arts activity in 2017 (36%), compared to 24% of international arts tourists overall."^{iv}

Impact on natural resource management

More recently, a blossoming field of study which brings elements of geography, human ecology, sustainable development and environmental science together with heritage and cultural studies, (CNRM, or Cultural and Natural Resource Management), highlights the way in which Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practice, including visual arts practice, is inextricably linked to country and enhances sustainable natural resource management.^{v vi}

Existing Aboriginal Arts Industry Related Vocational Qualifications

Certificate I in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Arts

Individuals develop fundamental creative and technical skills that underpin visual arts and craft practice in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural arts context.

Not on scope in WA.

Certificate II in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Visual Arts Industry Work

Individuals perform a range of mainly routine tasks using limited practical skills and fundamental operational knowledge in a defined context, working under direct supervision.

Not on scope in WA.

Certificate II in Information and Cultural Services

Individuals develop the basic creative and technical skills that underpin visual arts and craft practice in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural arts context.

On scope at North Regional TAFE.

Certificate III in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Arts

Individuals develop a range of art and craft skills in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural arts context and take responsibility for own outputs in work and learning. Practice at this level is underpinned by the application of introductory art theory and cultural history.

On scope at North Regional TAFE.

Certificate IV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Arts

Individuals work in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural arts context and produce work that shows a well-developed command of technique in their chosen art form. Practice at this level is underpinned by application of broad and integrated technical and theoretical knowledge and the ability to analyse and use information from a range of sources.

Not on scope in WA.

Diploma of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Visual Arts Industry Work

Individuals with a sound arts or arts management knowledge base use a range of specialised, technical and managerial competencies to plan, carry out and evaluate their own work or the work of a team. They may provide leadership and guidance to others and have some responsibility for the output of others.

Not on scope in WA.

Current Training Package Projects

National review of Visual Arts, Craft and Design training products:

<https://www.skillsforaustralia.com/project-page/culture-visual-arts-craft-and-design/>

National review of Arts Administration training products:

<https://www.skillsforaustralia.com/project-page/culture-arts-administration/>

The issue

A lack of accessible training for Aboriginal arts centre workers and visual artists to facilitate career sustainability and the upskilling necessary to allow them to thrive in their roles at all levels.

Remote Aboriginal art centres need skilled workers, artists and managers in order to grow the industry sustainably, and deliver the broad benefits described above. Skills needs include art sales, people management, facilities management, marketing, governance and business management as well as sector specific cultural and community knowledge and exhibition, interpretation, curatorial and conservation skills.^{vii viii}

Nationally accredited training currently exists, and is being reviewed in 2019-20 for applicability to industry needs (see text box). However, to date, a range of barriers have meant that appropriate training has been largely inaccessible to remote communities and arts centre workers and managers living on country and in remote communities. These issues are explored briefly below.

Challenges and risks

High turnover of art centre staff

The capacity of remote Aboriginal arts centres to grow the sector sustainably is partly reliant, as with all industries, on retaining skills and knowledge within the organisation. Owing to the remoteness of many Aboriginal art centres, few skilled arts workers and managers are able to commit to remaining in their role for periods that extend beyond 1-2 years. While the knowledge-exchange this phenomenon facilitates is of acknowledged value to the art centres, long-term strategic initiatives and capacity building become difficult to deliver. A worker who would be more likely to stay in the role for a sustained period would enable the development of legacy knowledge, mentoring and more rigorous training. Therefore, there is a desire in the sector to develop the skills of local Indigenous visual artists and arts workers living in remote communities to take on senior roles as they become vacant.

A lack of skilled trainers on site

Stakeholders report difficulty finding skilled trainers willing to relocate to remote locations to deliver training. Where trainers can be made available, an additional issue may occur in providing housing for them. While relocation need only be temporary, it is still disruptive enough to act as a barrier to participation.

Thin market issues

The cohort requiring access to Aboriginal visual arts industry training are very widely dispersed and usually remotely located. It is difficult in this context to achieve the economies of scale necessary to allow a training provider to break even or make a profit. Future demand is also difficult to gauge, but is likely to be lower once a critical capacity is reached, since only replacement managers are likely to require access to training solutions.

Where a cohort is smaller than necessary to be financially manageable for the provider, the training may be offered fee-for-service, however this is considerably more expensive, making it less affordable for the student, art centre or community.

Lack of clarity around funding and payment

There is sometimes a reported lack of clarity around billing and payment where a service is provided by the registered training organisation. It may be difficult for a provider to commit to training delivery without guaranteed payment. However, the student is not always able to cover the cost of study and so other funding streams become necessary and the community is often required to cover costs. Thin market issues, as above, exacerbate this issue. A complex funding environment often sustains remote communities, meaning appropriate funding streams to support access to training are not clear.

Visual artists are not recognised as employed

Visual artists are not recognised as workers for the purposes of the federal Community Development Program.^{ix} This means that practicing visual artists often have to seek out other forms of employment in order to keep accessing financial support, which in turn creates a barrier to consistent, sustainable work within the artists' chosen field.

Similarly, the federal Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) program makes provision for funding arts centres including workers, but not for practicing artists. In practice many workers work across the two areas, producing creative work and engaging in operational work for the arts centre, and these delineations can act as a barrier to artists and arts workers accessing funding to support their professional development in a holistic way.

Potential models and solutions

Existing qualifications

Nationally accredited training already exists as outlined above, some of which is on scope with a Registered Training Organisation to deliver in WA. If barriers as described above can be addressed, full formal qualifications could be delivered on site, affordably, to Aboriginal students where they live and work.

Skill sets and micro-credentialling

If industry identify that only certain skills from within the suite of accredited qualifications are vital to the upskilling of Aboriginal arts centre workers, a selection of units can be delivered without the attainment of a full qualification (a skill set). This may be a more affordable and less time intensive option, though does not provide a formal qualification, and does not attract funding support. Similarly, micro-credentialling refers to an as-needed approach to training, where key skills and units are delivered as required, perhaps though not necessarily leading to the attainment of a qualification over time.

VET delivered to secondary school students

Where students are still embedded in the secondary school system, they may access subsidised vocational education. Very generally, Certificate II is viewed by industry as an appropriate level of qualification delivery to Year 11 and 12 students. This will not deliver industry ready graduates but should place students in good stead for further study and allow them to articulate into higher level qualifications more successfully. However, a training provider is still required to work with the school in this instance (in some instances the school may be a registered training organisation).

Interstate providers and auspicings arrangements

Where economies of scale cannot be met for any Western Australian provider, another solution may be to partner with an interstate provider already delivering the qualification elsewhere, and work with them either directly or under an auspicings arrangement.^x For instance, TAFE Queensland is currently the only RTO scoped to deliver the Diploma of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Visual Arts Industry Work and so will have skilled trainers and assessors on board as well as existing reference materials. Alternatively, another provider may be well positioned to work with remote communities and add the qualifications to scope, such as NT based dual-sector provider Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education.^{xixii}

Online delivery

Where possible, delivering some units online would improve economies of scale and improve profitability for providers, since a trainer is not required to travel to or stay in a remote community, and products can be delivered to a cohort that is widely distributed across the state. However digital connectivity, and in some instances digital literacy, may be barriers to this delivery mode. This mode of training would still need to be supported by in-person delivery since there is a considerable degree of technical skill embedded in these qualifications.

Qualified resident trainers

Long term, qualified arts centre managers living in their communities could attain the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment,^{xiii} and work with/for a provider to deliver ongoing training in their community in a contextualised way and at a lower cost. Employing an existing resident minimises housing costs associated with having a trainer based in the community, and as noted in the Strengthening Skills (Joyce) Review,^{xiv}

“Research by NCVET suggests that Indigenous students are more successful when they are taught by local trainers and are able to engage in their learning on country and in their own language... Accordingly, to improve outcomes, there needs to be a program that expands the pool of Indigenous-owned-and-led training organisations that can more easily provide the cultural setting and learning style that helps Indigenous learners succeed.”

Non-accredited training

A range of professional development initiatives already exists outside of the vocational education space, and may be better suited to addressing the upskilling needs of this sector. Several peak bodies offer relevant training, including AACHWA, Regional Arts WA, Art on the Move and the Australian Museums and Galleries Association WA. Clearly identifying the specific needs of the sector will support decision making around whether these organisations alone can deliver the upskilling required by the sector or whether more rigorous, accredited training is required.

Traineeships

Where employers can demonstrate a need for skilled workers, and a commitment to employ them, traineeships may be established in WA. Traineeships allow rigorous on-the-job training to be delivered in a framework that provides a guaranteed form of employment to the worker and in this way supports career pathways. Traineeships do not currently exist for any of the qualifications under consideration here, although there is a current traineeship attached to the Certificate III in Arts Administration which includes some skills aligned to the role of Aboriginal Arts Centre Manager.^{xv}

In this context, advocating for visual artists and arts centre workers to be considered employed for the purposes of the CDP would allow these workers to access traineeship opportunities and build sustainable careers. Given that visual art sales are the leading source of non-government income for many Indigenous communities, the argument for including visual arts work under the program is strong, and awareness raising in this area may be fruitful.

IVAIS and other funding support

The federal Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) Program funds a range of Western Australian bodies to provide services to Indigenous visual artists across the state, including up to 10% allocated for arts worker training and professional development.^{xvi} Other support is provided via the Federal Department for Communication and the Arts, and at the state level via the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) and the Department of Communities, among others. As yet, no funding stream has been identified to provide fiscal support to the delivery of formal qualifications to remote Aboriginal visual artists and arts workers, however several potential avenues of enquiry exist. If additional, recurring funding support could be applied, training may become more affordable and accessible for the sector.

Suggested further actions

- AACHWA: Ongoing: Aboriginal Arts Worker Internship Program. Plans continue to expand program with WA Museum and Art Gallery of WA.
- FutureNow/ AACHWA: Validate issues paper with industry and Aboriginal arts centres and associated communities, and review.
- AACHWA: Conduct further consultation with membership to explore and potentially deliver an accredited vocational training program.
- AACHWA: explore advocacy avenues with Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Minister for Culture and the Arts
- FutureNow: Include Indigenous Arts Centre Managers in 2020 State Priority Occupation List submission
- FutureNow: Maintain watching brief on implementation initiatives from the Joyce Review, with relation to recommendation 6 of the six-point plan which argues for “greater access (to training) for disadvantaged Australians.”

References

All links accessed October 2019

i https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Completed_inquiries/2004-07/indigenousarts/report/c03

ii <http://aboriginalartonline.com/resources-market-php/>

iii <https://theconversation.com/indigenous-art-centres-that-sustain-remote-communities-are-at-risk-the-vet-sector-can-help-121179>

iv <https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/uploads/files/arts-and-tourism-report-pdf-5bf1f3c5079ac.pdf>

v https://www.nespnorthern.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2.1.18_marcus_barber_yirralka_fact_sheet_web.pdf

vi <https://www.notredame.edu.au/research/nulungu/about-us>

vii See FutureNow's museums and galleries skills matrix for an overview of the broad skill sets found in a range of gallery spaces.

viii <https://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/department/publications/publication/integrating-art-production-and-economic-development-in-the-kimberley-2015-2016>

ix <https://www.employment.gov.au/community-development-program-cdp>

x Auspicing in the vocational education and training (VET) sector involves an organisation entering into partnership with a registered training organisation (RTO) in order to have the training and assessment that it undertakes recognised under the National Training Framework. In such an arrangement, the RTO has responsibility for assuring the quality of the assessments conducted by the other organisation. Thus, the RTO is required to set up systems for monitoring and evaluating assessment processes and judgements about competence. The RTO is also responsible for issuing the qualifications and/or statements of attainment that ensue from that training.

xi <https://www.batchelor.edu.au/about/>

xii Note FutureNow does not advocate on behalf of individual providers. Reference providers are by way of example only.

xiii <https://training.gov.au/Training/Details/TAE40116>

xiv https://pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/strengthening-skills-independent-review-australia-vets_1.pdf

xv <https://www.dtwd.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/uploads/class-a-b-report-oct2019.pdf>

xvi https://pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/strengthening-skills-independent-review-australia-vets_1.pdf

Get in touch

You are invited to contribute to this issues and strategies mapping paper, which will be revised periodically, based on information provided by stakeholders. Updates will be available to [view](#) on FutureNow's website. Please get in touch with AACHWA or FutureNow- we're looking forward to talking with you.

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