

**Response to House of Representatives Standing Committee on  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs  
Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities.  
From Queensland Indigenous Languages Advisory Committee  
August 2011**

**Information on the Queensland Indigenous Languages Advisory Committee. QILAC**

QILAC was formed in 2005 by representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language programs, in recognition of the need for a state-wide body to advocate for Indigenous languages. The committee members have had many years of experience in both their own community language programs as well as a range of regional and national committees. QILAC provides an information service for individuals, communities and organisations interested in languages. It aims to help connect people from different communities and to encourage the sharing of knowledge and resources. The committee responds to Government inquiries and reviews and contributes knowledge and expertise to policy initiatives relevant to Indigenous languages in Queensland.

Members of the Queensland Indigenous Languages Advisory Committee have been involved in language work for well over 20 years. We would like to provide observations on the establishment, development, progress and problems associated with programs for researching and teaching Indigenous languages.

**Key Points to the QILAC Response.**

- There needs to be support for the national policy confirmed and actioned by all departments and areas of government.
- There needs to be recognition by all Australians of the important place languages play in Australia's international identity.
- There needs to be adequate funding to support community projects.
- There needs to be adequate funding to support government initiatives such as the learning of languages in schools. This relates especially to the human and material resources needed.
- There needs to be funding allocated through health and legal services.
- There needs to be attention paid to career paths for those who will work to strengthen language knowledge
- There need to be funds available for research, for creative cultural ventures, for publication, for promotion.

**Within community language programs**

- These need to be well staffed by people who can have a career in this chosen area of work.
- These programs face failure and depletion through lack of skilled and interested staff.
- The programs need to be well resourced in terms of equipment.-Recording and computers
- The programs need to share expertise and skills between smaller centres to avoid duplication.
- The programs need to coordinate training within regions
- The programs should encourage sharing of resources.

## **Indigenous Language Centres and Programs**

For the most part the Language Centres and Programs existing today were started in the 1980s and 90s. They have gone through times of development, strength and growth but in many cases are now in situations not as strong as they have been in the past. We note that this situation is not isolated to languages, and Indigenous organisations/programs of other types and mainstream community organisations in arts and culture are in similar situations.

This observation is in no way to belittle the current work underway in these organisations.

One of the interpretations of this situation is as follows.

Organisations of this nature are in most cases started by passionate people who essentially drive the projects with their energy and vision. These people generally work as volunteers for long periods prior to the programs finding their feet in the funding system and becoming organisations. The projects gain funding and grow depending on the nature of their work and their ability to access funding. Generally this growth is seen in the development of new projects for which they are also able to find financial support. Occasionally organisations are able to establish themselves and create a situation where they are to find a small amount of recurrent funding to cover the ongoing costs of the process of running programs which are dependent on annual funding submissions. As a general rule projects receive less funding than they apply for in any given year.

Most often the programs are not able to be reduced in line with the differences between the funding requested and the funding received and so are carried out and with expenditure cuts at all necessary points (i.e there may be additional reliance on volunteers, paid staff are required to do more unpaid overtime, additional in kind contributions may be sort.). Whichever the case, this places additional ongoing stress on the program/organisation. As people are passionate about the programs (and because they would often be carried out in the absence of funding all-be-it to a lesser level) they continue.

Very rarely is there consideration of the need for staff who work on these programs to be paid at commercial or public service rates, so what we find that jobs with the programs are low paid as well as over worked as we have previously discussed. This is common to community programs in other arenas.

There is no consideration in the way these programs are supported, for language workers within these programs to further their skills and careers so as to gain increase remuneration for their knowledge and experience. The people that take these jobs do so because they feel the need to do the work rather than for financial gain or career aspirations.

In most cases the programs continue with growing success until the driver is burnt out, and often reluctantly, moves on. Finding a new driver with equal passion willing and able to fill these positions of low pay and over-work is always difficult.

## **Centralising Language Centre services.**

QILAC believes that a more effective model of centralized support for language programs should be considered, which would draw on existing strengths in established programs, and help in some regard to overcome the issues related to isolation and inadequate funding currently facing the language programs. Centralising key services for language programs needs to be considered as an efficient way of managing limited resources and skills. The centralized service would be used to

provide administrative support for the more demanding tasks facing programs, such as reporting, submissions and high level financial management. A pooling of linguistic expertise, (provided by Indigenous graduates) would allow for ongoing employment of linguists who would support a range of projects rather than being contracted to one language group only. Resource development could be efficiently handled by a centralized language service keeping a focus on the production of materials that could be adapted for a variety of locations and languages.

In remote and regional Australia particularly where young people have access to other fields of work which provide full training, high wages and comparative job flexibility and security (e.g. mining) the relative appeal of language as a career is low.

In urban areas, another scenario often plays out where workers in language centres develop a range of skills through their time with the language program, to then find much higher paying employment in the public service. The skills and experience are drained from the community organization through poor pay and career opportunities.

Education in Queensland, and indeed nationally, is a good example of this scenario. For many years Language workers in Queensland have wanted and tried to work in close connection with local schools to implement local language programs. There has not been any way for these programs to be formally recognized by the schools as part of the curriculum. Thus schools have found it very difficult to pay the teachers required to take the programs, let alone to make the resources required to run a quality language program.

Additional to these matters are those around ownership and production of resource materials. In this context even schools with a high level of community support for a language program, long term teachers with an active interest in running and supporting the program, community members, who without specific teacher training, have the skills necessary to work with the classroom teacher to deliver the program and sufficient resources to assist with the programs delivery struggle to maintain the programs for any length of time.

Change is now happening in Queensland with the development by the Queensland Studies Authority of the Indigenous Languages Curriculum, and with the proposal by Education Queensland to publish a Guide for the Teaching of Indigenous Languages in Queensland Schools. While this progress is positive at the policy lever, there are still many concerns about how the policy will be practically implemented.

The concerns relate to:

- Funding for the development of the high quality resources required to run a successful language education program. K-12 resources will be needed for each local language in Queensland, which could be around 100 approximately. The production of these resources will require input from language speakers, linguists and teachers as well as production workers (designers, layout, illustration) educators.
- The establishment of training programs to ensure that Indigenous language workers have access to teacher training programs which skill them to teach their languages in the formal education system.
- The institution of national award pay levels for Indigenous language teachers in schools which recognise the skills required to teach language programs and the need for career advancement opportunities for people who choose to undertake the necessary training and commitment.

**Pay structures for Indigenous language teachers**

In discussion with language workers and teachers around Australia, a summary of the levels of pay that Indigenous teachers currently receive has been collated. Please refer to Appendix A. We would refer the Committee to the Western Australian model that enables Indigenous language teachers to receive equal wages to other teachers at the graduate level. We would ask you to note however that where as other classroom teachers see their pay rates increase annually until senior levels the pay levels for Indigenous language teachers increase one pay scale on the completion of their first year of service but no further. Thus if an Indigenous language teacher continued in this role for numerous years they would only ever be paid the equivalent of a recent graduate.

**Training opportunities for language teachers.**

A brief summary of the range of training opportunities available for people who wish to train as Indigenous languages teachers in schools is provided as Appendix B. QILAC would also refer the Committee to the Western Australian model as Indigenous languages have been taught as LOTE in Schools across WA for some years. The WA Department of Education provides a three year training program for those Indigenous community members who wish to teach their languages in schools. The teacher trainees are paired with a local school, and a language speaker of additional proficiency if necessary, for the duration of their training. At the end the language teachers can apply for registration enabling them to teach language in schools. WA is the only state where Indigenous community members are supported through training to teach in schools in other than a co-teaching arrangement. It is also the only state which provides Language teachers the opportunity to undertake Professional Development activities in the same was as the other school teachers.

*Please note that the information provided in Appendix A and B have been collated for purposes other than the writing of this submission. We include them now in case they are able to assist the Committee in your efforts to gain rapid understanding of the situation for Indigenous language teachers in the various states and territories. We would ask that these documents not be published without specific permission.*

## Appendix A - Notes on the rates of pay for people who are teaching Indigenous languages in schools.

*Indigenous Education Workers (ACT), Aboriginal Education Assistants (NSW), Koorie Educators (Vic), Aboriginal Education Workers (SA and Tas), Aboriginal Assistant Teachers (NT), Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (NT), Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (WA) and Community Education Counsellors (QLD). The category also encompasses specialist roles including Home School Liaison Officers (NSW) and Aboriginal Literacy Teachers (WA).*

### Queensland

Queensland currently has no awards or wages information specifically for Indigenous language workers. The most relevant award appears to be the COMMUNITY TEACHERS, ASSISTANT TEACHERS - ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AWARD - STATE 2003, summarised below.

#### COMMUNITY TEACHERS, ASSISTANT TEACHERS - ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AWARD - STATE 2003

[http://www.wageline.qld.gov.au/awardsacts/awardTree.html?\\_store=Awards&\\_id=C1840](http://www.wageline.qld.gov.au/awardsacts/awardTree.html?_store=Awards&_id=C1840)

Per fortnight	Per annum	
Community Teachers A and B		
1st Step		1,434.90
	37,435	
7th Step		1,836.20
	47,905	
Assistant Teachers		
1st Step		1,382.20
	36,060	
4th Step		1,479.70
	38,604	

**Community teacher A** means any person who has completed an associate diploma course approved by the Director-General of Education as an appropriate minimum qualification for employment as a community teacher A in Torres Strait Island schools or preschools or Aboriginal Community schools or preschools; or a course considered to be equivalent by the Director-General of Education.

**Community teacher B** means any person who has completed a certificate course approved by the Director-General of Education as an appropriate minimum qualification for employment as a community teacher B in Torres Strait Island schools or preschools or Aboriginal Community schools or preschools; or a course considered to be equivalent by the Director-General of Education.

**Assistant teacher** means any person employed in a Torres Strait Island school or preschool or Aboriginal Community school or preschool to assist registered teachers and/or community teachers in classroom and related duties

## New South Wales

In NSW Indigenous languages can be taught by qualified teachers who fall into the NSW Teachers Award like all other teachers, or by community members who must have a qualified teacher in the room with them at all times. There is no standard for their payment.

The Board of Studies was employing people on short-term contracts to be involved in projects to develop teaching programs and resources. This created a need to recognise differences between different people's skills and years of experience. The people on this pay scale most similar to Community members teaching in classrooms would be "Community Language Tutors".

### **Community Language Tutors**

Tutor with 0-2 years of experience in teaching Aboriginal language: \$20/hr, \$140 /day

Tutor with 3-6 years experience with knowledge of an Aboriginal language: \$25/hr, \$175/day

Tutor with 7 or more years of experience OR training/qualifications (SIL courses etc.): \$30/hr, \$210/day

Tutor with 0-2 years of experience in teaching Aboriginal language

- A Tutor with this level of experience would be expected to carry out the following: Assist in teaching lessons Assist in lesson planning Learn language through own research or workshops
- Assist in resource production

Tutor with 3-6 years experience with knowledge of an Aboriginal language

- As well as the above activities a Tutor with this level of experience would also be expected to carry out the following:
- Assist in developing and writing teaching and learning Units of Work Resource production Help promote the language program in school and elsewhere Continue language learning

Tutor with 7 or more years of experience OR training/qualifications (SIL courses etc.)

- As well as the above activities a Tutor with this level of experience would also be expected to carry out the following:
- Help teach the language to other Community Language Tutors Contribute to the development of and writing of teaching and learning Units of Work Advise school staff on language issues Support and advise other Community Language Tutors

The full BOS Rates of pay for language workers: Proposed Schedule is attached as Appendix B

### South Australia

Language speakers/workers work in co-teaching relationships with classroom teachers. Generally receive casual pay at the rate of about \$40/hour.

### Western Australia

In Western Australia Aboriginal Languages Teachers are appointed under Section 47.6 of Teacher Career Structure. The graduates apply for "Limited Authority to Teach" LAT Registration then start on Level 1.6 but can only advance to level 1.8. If they want to progress further up the teaching scale they have to do a full degree.

Teachers who possess a qualification recognised by the Director General as being an appropriate qualification are placed on the salary scale prescribed in Schedule B – Salaries of this Award, as follows:

(b) Four-year-trained Teacher - Level 1, Point 6.

<http://www.sstuwa.org.au/resources/conditions-of-work/teacher-2008-public-sector-award/2434-22-salaries->

## Appendix B - Notes on the situation with regard to Indigenous language teaching in the school system in each of Australia's states and major territories.

### Queensland

In Queensland there are limited opportunities to obtain any qualifications in Indigenous languages or Indigenous language teaching or related career pathways. This has forced individuals interested in career options to go elsewhere in Australia to study e.g: Batchelor College.

Most linguists who have completed their degree in Linguistics at Batchelor need to enrol in a Graduate Diploma in Education where they complete 10 units (mostly teaching pracs) to be able to teach in schools.

James Cook University and North Queensland TAFE offer flexible options for gaining a Bachelor of Education, but the course does not provide any specific training for the graduates to be language teachers. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers who know their language can also teach languages in schools.

It has been suggested that a CERT 1V in Train the Trainer might be an option for giving language workers/speakers the ability to teach in schools however it is not clear that this qualification would be sufficient for the Department of Education. This might be possible as a Community teacher B under the COMMUNITY TEACHERS, ASSISTANT TEACHERS - ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AWARD - STATE 2003. However it is unclear what certificate courses are/would be approved by the Director General of Education and what the approval process is.

[http://www.wageline.qld.gov.au/awardsacts/awardTree.html?\\_store=Awards&\\_id=C1840](http://www.wageline.qld.gov.au/awardsacts/awardTree.html?_store=Awards&_id=C1840)

**Community teacher A** means any person who has completed an associate diploma course approved by the Director-General of Education as an appropriate minimum qualification for employment as a community teacher A in Torres Strait Island schools or preschools or Aboriginal Community schools or preschools; or a course considered to be equivalent by the Director-General of Education.

**Community teacher B** means any person who has completed a certificate course approved by the Director-General of Education as an appropriate minimum qualification for employment as a community teacher B in Torres Strait Island schools or preschools or Aboriginal Community schools or preschools; or a course considered to be equivalent by the Director-General of Education.

**Assistant teacher** means any person employed in a Torres Strait Island school or preschool or Aboriginal Community school or preschool to assist registered teachers and/or community teachers in classroom and related duties

## New South Wales

In NSW most Aboriginal community language teachers have no qualifications. For legal requirements, a qualified teacher is in the room with them at all times. In the best case scenario the qualified teacher is interested in the program, enjoys a good working relationship with the community member, helps with lesson planning and resource production.

Aboriginal community members who have no teaching qualification receive low pay and have little job security.

Some Aboriginal community language teachers are qualified teachers (either primary or secondary). The secondary teachers may be teachers of History, Aboriginal Studies, any other subject but happen to be teaching language as well.

A few Aboriginal community language teachers have qualifications from the University of Sydney's Koori Centre, i.e. Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma and Master of Indigenous Languages Education. All of these qualifications are for Aboriginal people who are already qualified teachers.

The Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma and Master of Indigenous Languages Education equip Indigenous educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement the NSW Aboriginal Languages K-10 Syllabus and syllabi from other states. Course content is arranged into linguistics, theory and practice strands and is applicable to all Indigenous Australian languages. Students do not need to be fluent in an Indigenous Australian language to enter the courses and may undertake external study in one as part of the Graduate Diploma or Master.

The courses are offered on a full-time basis by mixed-mode ('block release') requiring attendance at three blocks each semester. Teaching staff are drawn from within the University and Indigenous Australian language programs from across the state.

Entry to the Graduate Certificate of Indigenous Languages Education requires that candidates have successfully completed two years towards a teaching qualification, that is: a Diploma in Education (Aboriginal), or equivalent.

In some cases it may be possible for candidates with similar but different qualifications to be granted admission.

## Western Australia

In Western Australia Aboriginal Language Teaching has been included through LOTE for some years and the Department of Education provides a specific in-school traineeship for Language speakers interested in teaching in the school system.

The traineeship and the course incorporates language revival/maintenance strategies, language teaching methodology and current resources for the teaching of Aboriginal languages and has the following requirements.

Applicants need to be teaching at least one language class every week for the duration of the training as this is a practical course and trainees are assessed on their skills in planning and teaching and their language proficiency and use.

This is a three year course - two years in-school traineeship, which includes attending 4 block releases and a third probationary teaching year.

Block releases – total 20 days. Four block releases of 5 days, two in-term and two in school holidays. These are held in various locations across the state depending on the availability of venues and cost. Block releases are intensive live-in/residential training. Trainees must attend all block releases, as each block builds on the skills acquired in the previous block.

After block releases trainees return to schools to teach in language class/es, applying skills and using materials developed at block release. This practical application forms the basis of assignment requirements.

Assignments must be completed during the term and submitted at the beginning of each block release.

On successful completion of the course and all assessment requirements graduates will be eligible to apply to the WA College of Teaching (WACOT) for "Limited Authority to Teach" LAT Registration. When registration is complete graduates will be eligible for appointment as an Aboriginal Language Teacher qualified to teach their own language not other learning areas. Aboriginal Languages Teachers are appointed under Section 47.6 of Teacher Career Structure (Level 1, point 6, of the Teachers Award.) As graduate teachers they are entitled to attend all graduate teacher PD and attend any PD offered to classroom teachers.

#### **Language proficiency requirements**

Acceptable level of oral competence is determined in their oral proficiency exercise with an Elder or language speaker.

Applicants are given a picture and asked to talk about the picture using as much language as possible. Responses are rated – all/mostly/some/little/no language etc. This oral language is from in-head knowledge not written prepared or researched information.

Elder/language speaker then asks some questions in language about what the applicants have said, responses are rated again.

Minimum requirement is knowledge and use of a number of words although they may not be able to put sentences together – this is acceptable if they have an Elder or another language speaker they can work with on a regular basis.

Preferred level is at least word level knowledge and some simple sentence use, but this is not possible in revival situations.

This provides the course presenters with an idea of people's language levels and the amount of support they will need through the training. People need a minimum to be able to prepare resources.

## Victoria

TAFE in Victorian Indigenous languages course (Cert 3 & 4) have a very small teaching component Cert 3 & 4 on giving students revival skills rather than teaching specific languages. Completion of these courses does not qualify anyone to be an official teacher in a school.

In Victoria schools which need to fill a teaching position but are unable to find an appropriate person who also holds a teaching qualification can make an application for an otherwise qualified person to be registered with “permission to teach”. This is often used in LOTE situations.

### Permission to teach

Registration with permission to teach (PTT) is intended only for individuals who are not qualified teachers but who have been offered short-term employment to undertake the duties of a teacher in delivering and/or assessing student participation in the school’s curriculum program where a qualified and registered teacher was not available (demonstrated by advertising the position).

An application for PTT is required where:

1. the person is being engaged for the delivery and/or assessment of student participation in an educational program; and
2. the educational program is part of a curriculum that is:
  - ☒ authorised by the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (e.g. VELS, VCE, VCAL); or
  - ☒ authorised by the International Baccalaureate Organisation, or
  - ☒ in a non-government school, satisfies the VRQA requirements and is approved as the educational program of the school by the school’s governing body; and
3. the educational program forms part of the required curriculum for a student in that school; and
4. the person is being engaged because of their specific skills and experience in a particular subject or discipline and is required to deliver and/or assess student participation in the required curriculum for a student; and
5. the educational program is to be conducted at a school (as defined under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006).

Anyone who has been granted PTT must be under the general supervision of a registered teacher.

### When is PTT NOT required?

Extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, supplementary instruction and support programs outside of the required curriculum generally require an instructor who does not undertake the duties of a teacher as defined above.

Where the program is an extra-curricular or co-curricular program which is offered optionally to students and in addition to their required curriculum will not be considered to be undertaking the duties of a teacher and permission to teach is not required.

For example: instrumental music teachers, sports coaches, Aboriginal Language specialists, specialist artists participating in an artist in residence program, language instructors in community schools, etc

Such people, who do not have the responsibility for delivery and assessment of student participation in an educational program are generally not considered to be undertaking the duties of a teacher and would not be required to hold permission to teach.

People employed in these positions would require a satisfactory Working with Children Check and be able to implement the school's policy concerning duty of care.

Further information is available from the Victorian Institute of Teaching phone 1300 888 067.

### South Australia

In South Australia there is nothing specifically available in terms of courses that will take an individual all the way from school-leaver to qualified school language teacher with a proficiency in Aboriginal languages.

In SA government schools it remains the case that the bulk of Aboriginal languages teaching is carried out by teams of two, comprising a registered classroom teacher and a language expert from the community planning and teaching together. The language expert doesn't need any particular training and is usually paid casually at around \$40/hour

There has been some recent work done in SA in developing two new TAFE courses -- Cert III "Learning an Endangered Aboriginal Language" and Cert IV "Teaching an Endangered Aboriginal Language". The TAFE courses are designed to encourage people -- such as these co-teachers -- to consider becoming teachers of their own languages in a variety of situations, including home communities, community schools, as well as state schools. These two courses are still under trial and not yet listed in the national register. Also, although providing a firm base for learning and teaching Aboriginal languages, neither will lead to teaching qualifications in the formal sense (which would require additional study then, in SA at least, registration with the teachers' authority).

The University of Adelaide has a couple of undergraduate subjects in the Adelaide language (Karna) and the linguistics of Aboriginal languages revival, but apart from that there is nothing specifically on Aboriginal languages teaching.

### Northern Territory

Language specific teaching, if conducted, is done by Indigenous Teachers, and Assistant Teachers. Assistant teachers assist in the classroom supporting the classroom teacher in all subjects. When communities chose to run an Indigenous Languages and Culture (ILC) program Assistant teachers and Indigenous teachers teach this subject. In the central region there are 23 schools with ILC programs. The Indigenous staff run these ILC programs in addition to their other duties. Community members usually undertake training when they become Assistant teachers. Some of the Indigenous teachers who are teaching language in schools have completed the Graduate Certificate in Applied Linguistics at Batchelor institute.

The NT Department of Education employs two people one in the Top End and one in the Centre to support the teachers in the production of resources and preparation of ILC lesson plans.

In Alice Springs there is an Arrernte LOTE program through which Language is taught in each of the public primary and secondary schools. This program involves one Indigenous Teacher and one

Assistant teacher. These are the only teachers in the Territory who have Indigenous Language as their only teaching area.

Assistant teachers in the Territory have stated that the WA model would be a good way to get appropriate recognition for their Language teaching duties.

### **Australian Capital Territory**

From Indigenous Languages Programmes in Australian Schools: A Way Forward, 2008

The information provided by representatives from all three education jurisdictions in the ACT indicates that there are no significant policies or associated documentation regarding the implementation of Indigenous languages programmes in ACT schools.

At the time of the report two schools in the ACT were running Wirajuri language awareness programs. Arawang Primary School had 53 students taking the language classes (3 Indigenous), these classes were taught by a general teacher and a Volunteer community member. Narrabundah Primary school had 93 students taking the k-6 language program (45 Indigenous). The report tables these classes were being taught by a Volunteer community member without a classroom teacher.

### **Tasmania**

From Indigenous Languages Programmes in Australian Schools: A Way Forward, 2008

Tasmanian Aboriginal languages are not currently taught within the mainstream education system, as the community policy for some years has been that language learning is to take place only within the Aboriginal community until such time as the Aboriginal community decides otherwise.

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