

# **“The Way Ahead” – Mentoring of Aboriginal Apprentices & Trainees Follow Up & Assessment**

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***“An Aboriginal mentor would have made a huge difference.”***

Aboriginal trainee (without *Way Ahead* support) who failed to complete.

***“It made me a better person in employment.”***

A *Way Ahead* participant on how the program helped.

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## 1. Summary

*The Way Ahead - Apprenticeships and Traineeships for Aboriginal People* is a mentoring program that aims to assist Aboriginal people in NSW to complete apprenticeships and traineeships. Originally introduced by the now defunct Department of Education and Training's New Apprenticeship Centre (DETNAAC), the program has been run by State Training Services (STS) since July 2007, initially through project funding provided by the Board of Vocational Education and Training (BVET), but now through mainstream program funding.

This Review was commissioned to delve more deeply into the nature and benefits of the mentoring services provided under *The Way Ahead*, to explore the perceptions of the key stakeholders (apprentices, trainees, employers and mentors) and to draw conclusions about the true impact of the program on retention. Research was conducted by Tony Powers and Arline Dumazel of Powers and Associates (Aust) Pty Ltd between September 2010 and January 2011.

The Review found that Aboriginal learners want and need mentors and believe that mentoring can play an important role in helping them to successfully complete their training. Learners who received *Way Ahead* mentoring were generally very happy with the service and would recommend it to their friends. It appears to be making a difference for these individuals.

The program faces two key challenges – **timeliness** (getting early notice of Aboriginal commencements so that assistance can be provided in the critical early stages of the traineeship or apprenticeship); and **participant selection** (working out who should receive *Way Ahead* assistance).

### *Timeliness*

The single biggest problem faced by *The Way Ahead* is the time it takes for the Department to hear about new Aboriginal commencements. The Review found that less than half of *Way Ahead* referrals occur in the critical first 3 months of training – the period when most (43%) of cancellations occur. This cancellation figure could be even greater if one considers trainees and apprentices who drop out in the very early stages of their training and who never appear on STS records.

The failure of Australian Apprenticeship Centres (AACs) to quickly notify DET of new Aboriginal commencements is the biggest cause of the referral delay. *The Way Ahead* was introduced when DET itself was an AAC and had control of this process, but it now relies on the cooperation of other providers. It can be months before the paperwork for such commencements is processed and they appear on the STS IVETS system. Until they do, STS cannot act.

### *Participant Selection*

*The Way Ahead* has a very small operating budget and can only provide assistance to a small proportion of the Aboriginal learners who commence each year. Faced with this restriction, the program needs to be selective to ensure that those most in need are given the most assistance, but the current process of selecting participants appears inefficient and somewhat random. In the absence of any other way of assessing client needs *before* being assigned a mentor, learners are currently assessed by their mentor at their first visit. It would seem that many are assessed at this visit as not requiring intensive support - 62% of participants receive just one visit from their mentor and little or no follow up.

This situation presents two problems. First, it means that too many of the program's limited mentoring dollars are being spent on needs assessment rather than real mentoring. 29% of all face-to-face contacts were through these one-off visits. Second, those who receive these one-off visits should perhaps not be considered as having had a real mentoring experience at all. The Review interviewed a number of these people who had only a vague recollection of having met their

“mentor”. Reviewing the quality and effectiveness of *Way Ahead* mentoring through their eyes distorts the true picture of the program’s effectiveness, but, as things currently stand, they represent the majority of program participants.

Other Review findings Include:

- ⊞ According to IVETS, in the period from 1 January 2007 to 30 June 2010, 11,486 Aboriginal people commenced in apprenticeships or traineeships. This comprised 2447 apprentices, 7400 new entrant trainees and 1639 existing worker trainees. The 226 *Way Ahead* participants examined in this review therefore represent just 2% of total Aboriginal commencements in the period;
- ⊞ At an individual level, there is evidence that the program has helped to improve retention. The retention rate of *Way Ahead* participants appears higher than that of Aboriginal apprentices and trainees as a whole (although the sample is small and there may also be selection bias factors at play);
- ⊞ Relative to their shares of total NSW Aboriginal commencements, the North Coast and Southern NSW Regions have a disproportionately high *Way Ahead* participation rate. Sydney, Hunter-Central Coast and New England all have disproportionately low *Way Ahead* participation rates;
- ⊞ Of the 226 *Way Ahead* learners included in the review, 78 completed their traineeship or apprenticeship, 74 were still in training and 74 had cancelled;
- ⊞ From the survey of Aboriginal non-completers (non-*Way Ahead* participants), it was found that 20.5% left to take another job or to return to study; 24.3% left because of a change in their personal circumstances (e.g. moved); and 23.3% left because of problems they were experiencing in the workplace;
- ⊞ Mentors themselves are generally happy with the way the program is run, although some expressed a desire for more training and the opportunity to network with other mentors.

### *Recommendations*

1. Undertake the initial assessment of the need for a *Way Ahead* mentor at or before commencement. This should include the use of a diagnostic tool or checklist as well as the input of employers, job service providers and the learners themselves.
2. Set minimum service levels for all program participants, an overall program participation target (e.g. “10% of all Aboriginal commencements each year”) and focus on providing support to learners in the first three months of their traineeships and apprenticeships (e.g. include a minimum of two visits in this period as well as weekly phone calls between visits).
3. Work towards providing equitable access to the service across NSW according to need.
4. Ensure that STS regional offices play an active role in promoting and supporting the program.
5. Review existing administrative and management processes to ensure that all STS Aboriginal programs harmonise (including the new mentoring program being transferred from the Office of Aboriginal Affairs). This includes revamping the existing *Way Ahead* program steering committee and extending its brief so that it guides and monitors the performance of all STS Aboriginal programs.
6. Improve the speed of referral to the program. This should include entering into Memoranda of Understanding with AACs that make their continued access to “automatic approval” status conditional on their notifying STS of Aboriginal commencements in a more timely manner.

7. Wherever possible, give prospective participants input into the selection of their mentor and inform them of the process they can follow to be assigned a different mentor if they need or want one.
8. As part of mentor development, provide them with more opportunities to share their experiences in dealing with common issues through regular meetings, teleconferences or a web page. Document successful strategies and distribute them to mentors.
9. With a large number of Aboriginal trainees undertaking their training in the “employment-based” mode, highlight in national training forums the need to make RTO training materials and work books more appropriate for Aboriginal learners. RTO learner support arrangements need also to be improved for these Aboriginal learners.
10. Require RTOs and GTOs who are delivering services to Aboriginal trainees engaged in the “employment-based” delivery mode to present details of how they intend to meet their specific learning needs, including those who have problems with literacy and numeracy.
11. Trial the development of a peer support network among Aboriginal apprentices and trainees in an STS region and consider using Facebook as a tool in this trial.
12. Take additional steps to inform all Aboriginal apprentices and trainees of the support that is available to them from STS and other service providers to help them complete their training.
13. Explore options to secure funding to significantly expand and improve the Way Ahead’s mentoring services.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Program History

*The Way Ahead - Apprenticeships and Traineeships for Aboriginal People* is a program funded and managed by State Training Services (STS) within the Department of Education and Training (DET). The program was conceived in 2004 and originally operated by the Department's Commonwealth-funded New Apprenticeship Centre (DETNAAC). It was part of a suite of initiatives designed to improve the participation and success rates of Aboriginal people undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships. At the time, DETNAAC's decision to reinvest a proportion of its Commonwealth Government service fee earnings back into a targeted initiative aimed at improving outcomes for its Aboriginal clients was (and perhaps still is) unique among New Apprenticeship Centres (now called Australian Apprenticeship Centres). The initiative resulted in a 230% increase<sup>1</sup> in Aboriginal apprentices and trainees registered with DETNAAC.

DETNAAC lost its New Apprenticeship Centre contract and closed in June 2006. The program also ended at this time, but was revived in July 2007 when the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training (BVET) provided funding to re-establish the mentoring component of the program, initially as a 1 year project. BVET later extended its project funding until a new funding source was identified and the program was added to the suite of Aboriginal programs managed by STS.

The program aims to improve apprenticeship and traineeship commencement, retention and completion outcomes for Aboriginal people. It is coordinated by an Aboriginal Project Officer (APO) based in Lismore. To a varying degree, regional offices of State Training Services also play a role in identifying participants, offering the service to employers and learners and initiating follow-up by the APO. A steering committee oversees the program.

In October 2009, an internal review of *The Way Ahead* was completed by the APO. This review found that the program was having a positive effect on the lives of many participants and was contributing to improvements in overall commencement, retention and completion rates. The report included a number of success stories and highlighted the extent to which some mentors were providing support "above and beyond the call of duty" to their learners.

In July 2010, BVET sought expressions of interest from research organisations to further explore the effectiveness of the mentoring provided under *The Way Ahead*. In essence, the research was to delve more deeply into the nature and benefits of the mentoring services provided to Aboriginal apprentices and trainees under the program. The perceptions of the key stakeholders (apprentices, trainees, employers and mentors) were to be explored, good practices identified and design improvements canvassed. To better understand what "makes or breaks" Indigenous apprenticeships and traineeships, the experience of two groups were to be included in the research – those with *Way Ahead* mentors and those without - to draw conclusions about the true impact of the program on retention. The research would help to identify the "moments of truth" that Aboriginal apprentices and trainees often need to navigate and how support can best be provided in these situations.

Powers and Associates (Aust.) Pty Ltd, a consulting firm with experience in the evaluation of Aboriginal employment and training programs, was selected to undertake the research.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Project Plan attached to the October 2009 Review of the program. This was an impressive achievement because, before the program was introduced, DETNAAC already had around 50% of all such registrations.

## 2.2 Methodology

A variety of methods were used to gather and analyse quantitative and qualitative data:

- ⊆ Analysis of Aboriginal commencement, retention and completion data recorded in State Training Services' IVETS database;
- ⊆ Analysis of data recorded in the *Way Ahead* management information system;
- ⊆ Structured telephone interviews with 55 *Way Ahead* participants who had either successfully completed their training or were still in training;
- ⊆ Structured telephone interviews with 210 Aboriginal apprentices and trainees (non-*Way Ahead* participants) who failed to complete their training;
- ⊆ Face to face interviews at 15 workplaces with 11 employers, 14 trainees and 2 apprentices in three regions (Wagga Wagga, Coffs Harbour and Sydney);
- ⊆ A workshop with 12 mentors attending a State Training Services conference in Forster;
- ⊆ A web-based survey of 16 past and present mentors;
- ⊆ Telephone interviews with 7 past and present mentors;
- ⊆ Face to face interviews with key project staff and other DET staff.

The research was conducted by Tony Powers and Arline Dumazel. The CSI Telemarketing Call Centre at the Dillwynia Women's Correction Centre in South Windsor helped to conduct the telephone research. The tools and questionnaires used in the research are included in [Attachment A](#).

## 2.3 Note on Participants Included in the Review

Defining who exactly was a *Way Ahead* program participant for the purpose of the review proved not to be straightforward. There were 627 people on the program's management information system, but this was reduced by the APO to a list of 329 people considered to be true *Way Ahead* participants – that is, individuals who had received some level of practical support from the program (e.g. a visit from a mentor). State Training Services then merged these records with their own list of apprentices and trainees and found that 88 of the 329 people were either not in their records (i.e. they had no training contract identification number) or had commenced outside the period under study (i.e. 1 January 2007 to 30 June 2010). After removing duplicate records, this left a core group of 226 *Way Ahead* participants for inclusion in the review.



### 3. The Way Ahead – Program Review

#### 3.1 Program data

Two sets of DET data provide an insight into the program performance of *The Way Ahead* – the IVETS database administered by State Training Services and the Excel spreadsheet used by the APO to monitor program performance and to keep track of mentor activity and learner outcomes. As mentioned earlier, these data sources were merged by State Training Services to produce an integrated record for this review. The following conclusions can be drawn from this database.

#### *A relatively small proportion of Aboriginal apprentices and trainees receive Way Ahead mentoring*

According to IVETS, in the period from 1 January 2007 to 30 June 2010, 11,486 Aboriginal people commenced in apprenticeships or traineeships. This comprised 2447 apprentices, 7400 new entrant trainees and 1639 existing worker trainees. (See [Table 1.](#))

The 226 *Way Ahead* participants examined in this review therefore represent just 2% of total Aboriginal commencements in the period. Even if all 627 of the individuals included in the program’s management information system were counted, *The Way Ahead* program reaches only 5% of the potential market of Aboriginal apprentices and trainees.

This has implications for any assessment of the program’s overall impact in improving retention in NSW. Funds available under the program are very limited<sup>2</sup> and this restricts its capacity to reach enough learners to have a significant effect on overall Aboriginal retention and completion rates.

**Table 1 – Aboriginal Commencements in Apprenticeships and Traineeship 1 Jan 2007 to 30 June 2010**

	Total Commencements	Way Ahead (Number)	Way Ahead (%)
Apprenticeships	2447	50	2.0%
New Entrant Trainees	7400	160	2.2%
Existing Worker Trainees	1639	16	1.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11486</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>2.0%</b>

#### *Retention rates of Way Ahead participants may be higher*

At an individual level, there is evidence that the program has helped to improve retention. The retention rate of *Way Ahead* participants appears higher than that of Aboriginal apprentices and trainees as a whole<sup>3</sup>. Reviewing the cohort of 3206 (non-*Way Ahead*) Aboriginal trainees and apprentices who commenced in the 2009 calendar year and the 63 *Way Ahead* learners who commenced in that period, *Way Ahead* participants had lower cancellation rates (including cancellations, withdrawals, dismissals and suspensions) than other Aboriginal apprentices and new entrant trainees. (See [Table 2.](#))

<sup>2</sup> The total budget is around \$350,000 per year. Excluding salaries, travel costs, promotion and administration costs, around \$200,000 is available to pay for mentoring services. This equates to about \$60 available for mentoring per Aboriginal commencement each year.

<sup>3</sup> The sample is quite small and care needs to be taken not to read too much into these results. For example, with more than half of *Way Ahead* participants connected to their mentors after 3 months, *many of those most likely to drop out* may fall outside the program’s current reach.

**Table 2 – Aboriginal Apprentices and Trainees Commencing in 2009 – Cancellation Rates (to end October 2010) of Way Ahead participants compared with other Aboriginal learners**

Status	All Apprentices & Trainees		Apprentices		New Entrant Trainees		Existing Worker Trainees	
	Way Ahead	Others	Way Ahead	Others	Way Ahead	Others	Way Ahead	Others
In Training	35	1570	10	344	20	883	5	343
Completed	9	463	0	3	9	395	0	65
Cancelled	19	1173	4	247	14	848	1	78
Total	63	3206	14	594	43	2126	6	486
% Cancelled	30%	37%	29%	42%	33%	40%	17%	16%

*Most Way Ahead participants have had only one visit from a mentor*

According to the database, 140 *Way Ahead* learners (62%) have met with their mentor only once. At the other end of the scale, 27 learners (12%) have had 6 or more visits. (See [Table 3](#).)

Regular face-to-face contact is not always an indicator of the quality or effectiveness of a mentoring relationship. It is reasonable for mentors to concentrate on those learners who need the most support and to maintain a watching brief on those less in need. This can take the form of regular phone calls, emails or text messages.

Of more concern are situations where there has been no follow-up at all after an initial meeting. The review found that there were a number of learners who were in this situation – some had only a vague recollection of their mentor. For these learners, *Way Ahead* could at best be described as part of the initial induction or needs assessment process rather than as a true mentoring program. The question arises as to whether minimum service levels need to be established and monitored as part of *Way Ahead* program design. (See 4.4.)

**Table 3 – Way Ahead Participants – Number of Mentor Visits**

Visits	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	?	TOTAL
No.	140	25	14	16	4	10	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	6	226
%	62%	11%	6%	7%	2%	4%	1%	1%	0.5%	1%	1%	0.5%	0.5%	3%	100%

*Regional participation rates in Way Ahead do not closely match regional commencement rates*

Relative to their shares of total NSW commencements, the North Coast and Southern NSW Regions<sup>4</sup> have a disproportionately high *Way Ahead* participation rate. Sydney, Hunter/Central Coast and New England all have disproportionately low *Way Ahead* participation rates. (See [Table 4](#).)

The reasons behind this mismatch are not clear. The APO is based in the North Coast region and it is natural that his presence there would help to promote program take up and to find potential mentors (17 have been used there while Illawarra, in contrast, has had just 2). Some STS offices may be more proactive in promoting the program. The office in Wagga Wagga in Southern NSW was visited as part of the consultations and seemed particularly active in local promotion. Sydney is a huge market and the program may have struggled to gain a foothold there. Sydney is also a very competitive market and other mentoring options (e.g. Indigenous Employment Program, Aboriginal Employment Strategy) might have a stronger presence.

**Table 4 – Aboriginal Commencements by Region 1 January 2007 to 30 June 2010 - Total and Way Ahead**

Region	All Commencements		Way Ahead Commencements		Difference (%)
	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	
North Coast	1593	14%	63	27%	+14%
Southern NSW	934	8%	43	19%	+11%
Illawarra/South Coast	899	8%	20	9%	+1%
Out of State	125	1%	4	2%	+1%
Unspecified	25	0.2%	3	1%	+1%
Western NSW	1906	17%	30	13%	-3%
New England	1119	10%	7	3%	-7%
Central Coast/Hunter	1669	15%	14	6%	-8%
Sydney	3216	28%	43	19%	-9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11486</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>0</b>

<sup>4</sup> Broad geographic regions rather than DET STS regions.

### *Providing support in the first few months may be crucial to improving retention*

An analysis of all Aboriginal apprenticeship and traineeship commencements in the 2009 calendar year highlighted the importance of providing support as early as possible to improve retention rates. Of the 3269 Aboriginal people who commenced apprenticeships and traineeships in NSW in this period, 1192 (36%) had dropped out (i.e. cancelled, withdrew, dismissed and suspended) by the end of October 2010. Critically, 43% of these drop outs occurred in the first 3 months of training. Another 29% had dropped out by the end of their seventh month in training. (See [Table 5](#).)

**Table 5 – Aboriginal Apprentices and Trainees Commencing in 2009 – Time from Training Agreement Commencement Date to Final (Inactive) Status Update**

Time to Cancellation	Number	%
Less than 4 months	516	43%
4 to 7 months	346	29%
7 to 12 months	262	22%
12 to 22 months	68	6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1192</b>	<b>100%</b>

### *Less than half of the referrals to The Way Ahead program occurred in the first three months*

54% of *Way Ahead* program referrals are made *after* three months of training<sup>5</sup>. 22% are made after six months. (See [Table 6](#).)

Given that the bulk of cancellations occur in the first three months, *Way Ahead* needs to connect with learners sooner if it is to have a significant positive effect on Aboriginal retention rates. The current program referral process relies on new commencements being flagged by IVETS - this triggers follow up by STS offices and the APO. IVETS data in turn depends on third parties (e.g. AACs) notifying DET of commencements in a timely manner.

The APO and mentors expressed some concerns about delays and believe that outcomes could be improved if new Aboriginal commencements could be identified and assigned mentors sooner than the system currently allows – see 4.3. The ideal arrangement would be one that connects mentors to learners even before they commence in the workplace.

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<sup>5</sup> There may also be a delay in actually making contact with apprentices and trainees after the referral process has taken place.

**Table 6 – Time from Commencement date of Training Agreement to Referral to Way Ahead**

Time to Referral	Number	%
Less than 4 months	99	46%
4 to 7 months	67	31%
7 to 12 months	38	18%
12 to 24 months	8	6%
24 to 36 months	1	0.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100%</b>

*(Note: No referral date recorded for 13 learners)*

#### *Younger people and apprentices may be at higher risk of cancellation*

Reviewing the 2009 cohort, some other features emerge that may inform program targeting. Learners under 35 years of age represent around 75% of commencements and 80% of cancellations – any program designed to improve overall retention rates for Aboriginal apprentices and trainees needs to focus on this group. Within this group, the age group most at risk of cancellation are those aged 20-24 – they represent 28.5% of commencements and 31.4% of cancellations.

In the first 10 to 22 months of the training, apprentices have slightly higher cancellation rates than new entrant trainees (41.3% versus 39.8%), though this gap is likely to widen over the full term of the (usually longer) apprenticeship training contract. Aboriginal existing worker traineeships are relatively fewer in number (492 commenced in 2009 or 15% of all commencements) and they have a much lower cancellation rate (16.1%).

#### *Over half of Aboriginal trainees do not attend formal (classroom) training*

In keeping with broader trends in traineeships, the majority of Aboriginal trainees (64%) are in an “employment-based” mode of delivery – that is, they undertake their training completely at the workplace. Only 23% of Aboriginal trainees are in a traditional “classroom-based” delivery mode. The records suggest that *Way Ahead* trainees are only slightly more likely than other Aboriginal trainees to be in the “classroom-based” mode (26% of participants) and slightly less likely to be the “employment-based” mode (57% of participants). (See [Table 7](#) below.)

The trend towards the “employment-based” mode may be increasing the need for mentor services. Those in classroom-based training in a TAFE college or a private RTO, for example, might have easier access to support services provided by those institutions, such as literacy and numeracy support and Aboriginal Support Officers, or support from peers. On the other hand, those in the “employment-based” mode can sometimes become isolated and lack support from a third party. Mentors can play a valuable role in this respect, but other systemic improvements are needed as well – see 4.5.

**Table 7 – Aboriginal Apprentices and Trainees Commencing 1 January 2007 to 30 June 2010 – Training Delivery Modes**

Delivery Mode		Apprentices	New Entrant Trainees	Existing Worker Trainees	Total
Classroom	All	2297	1666	128	4091
	Way Ahead	45	45	1	91
Course Completed	All	8	1	1	10
	Way Ahead	1	0	0	1
Electronic	All	5	406	92	503
	Way Ahead	0	19	0	19
Employment Based	All	114	4759	1329	6202
	Way Ahead	4	88	13	105
Enterprise Based	All	18	337	45	400
	Way Ahead	0	1	2	3
Other	All	5	231	44	280
	Way Ahead	0	7	0	7
<b>TOTAL ALL MODES</b>	All	2447	7400	1639	11486
	Way Ahead	50	160	16	226

*A third of Way Ahead learners have completed, a third are in training and a third have cancelled*

Of the 226 *Way Ahead* learners included in the review, 78 completed their traineeship or apprenticeship (i.e. their IVETS status indicated either “completed” or “complete proficiency”), 74 were still in training and 74 had cancelled.

*Way Ahead* mentoring services levels are similar across these three groups. The completed group had a total of 170 mentor visits (average 2.1), the in-training group had 148 (average 2) and the cancelled group had 149 (average 2). Similarly, learners who had had 6 or more mentor visits were equally represented among the three groups – there were 8 among the completed group, 7 in the in-training group and 7 in the cancelled group.

*Characteristics of Way Ahead learners who cancelled*

Among the 74 *Way Ahead* participants in the cancelled group, the issues that mentors were required to deal with most often (and which were recorded in the database) were poor attendance and punctuality (6 instances), difficulties experienced in off-the-job training including literacy and

numeracy issues (6 instances) and poor work performance and productivity (5 instances). For another 20 of those who cancelled, there are no clues in the database as to any issues causing problems for the learners or their employers (though this might be on their files).

7 learners, recorded as “doing well” or “does not need a mentor”, do not appear to have been followed up, but subsequently dropped out. A mentor’s intervention may not have necessarily saved these apprenticeships and traineeships, but the situation highlights the need for mentors to maintain a watching brief on all *Way Ahead* learners regardless of their perceived performance – see 4.4.

There are some indications in the program spreadsheet that, among the cancelled group, mentors were first referred only *after* problems had emerged in the workplace<sup>6</sup>. The use of mentors to *help salvage* a traineeship or apprenticeship at risk of cancellation is a legitimate response, but it needs to be acknowledged that this is different to linking mentors to learners at the very start of their workplace experience. Mentors ideally help to set learners on the right path at the outset - not just attempt a “rescue mission” when they stray. *The Way Ahead’s* success rate in improving retention can be compromised if too much of its mentoring activities only begin when things have already gone wrong.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the number of employer requests for mentors linked to performance issues experienced at the workplace some months after commencement.

## 3.2 Data from surveys of learners

Two surveys were conducted to gather information from trainees and apprentices:

- ⊖ A random sample of 1002 learners was selected from the database comprising (a) 865 non-Way Ahead learners who *failed to complete* their traineeship or apprenticeship; and (b) 137 Way Ahead participants who had either *successfully completed* their traineeship or apprenticeship or *were still in training*.
- ⊖ These two groups were contacted by telephone and asked if they would participate in a telephone survey designed to collect information about their experience in their traineeship or apprenticeship (including Way Ahead mentoring where provided) , to explore (in the case of the first group) the factors contributing to their non-completion and to gather ideas for improving support arrangements for Aboriginal learners.
- ⊖ 210 learners (21%) in the “non-completers” group and 55 learners (40%) in the “Way Ahead completers/in training” group agreed to participate and were interviewed. Copies of the survey instruments used are included at [Attachment A](#).

### 3.2.1 Survey of non-completers (non-Way Ahead)

#### Reasons for non-completion

Learners were asked to state the main reason why they did not complete their traineeship or apprenticeship. The most common reasons were changing jobs (17.6%), retrenchment due to a business downturn (11%), did not like the work or conditions (8.1%), moved to a different area (7.1%) and family and personal reasons (6.2%). Dismissal on performance grounds was next most common reason (5.7%)<sup>7</sup>. See [Table 8](#).

To assist analysis of the scope of issues mentoring needs to tackle if it is to improve retention, the reasons provided by the learners were grouped into six broad areas:

- ⊖ Change in personal circumstances (24.3% of cases)
- ⊖ Problems in the workplace (23.3%)
- ⊖ Change in employment or study (20.5%)
- ⊖ Change in business circumstances (16.7%)
- ⊖ Work performance problems (7.6%)
- ⊖ Training problems (5.7%)

The high number of “change in employment or study” non-completions is worthy of comment. First, it is reassuring to know that nearly one in five of those dropping out of their training programs do not become unemployed, but remain in work or go to full-time study. Second, it is fair to say that a proportion of those undertaking traineeships are doing so not because of the training and qualifications they offer, but because this is the only job they can get. With the extra experience they gain in the traineeship and with the labour market being quite strong, full-time jobs and better pay would naturally be attractive to some. Others, working on a casual basis, seem even to have been inappropriately pushed into traineeships because they attract employer subsidies<sup>8</sup>. Third, a number of those stating that they changed jobs also indicated that they had continued their traineeship or apprenticeship with their new employer. This continuation was not reflected in the official data, but may be a result of data processing delays.

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<sup>7</sup> The “retrenchment” reason might also include people who might have been dealing with work performance problems – they are often the first to be retrenched when businesses face a downturn.

<sup>8</sup> For example, one said: “I was working full time in another job and part time at the restaurant. I wasn’t able to attend training at TAFE. I told them I could not do it. I did not want to do it but they signed me up anyway.”



**Table 8 – Stated main reason for non-completion (non-Way Ahead learners)**

Category & Stated Reason	Number	Percentage of Total
<b>Change in personal circumstances</b>		
Moved to a different area	15	7.1%
Family/personal	13	6.2%
Health	7	3.3%
Lost Licence/Transport	7	3.3%
Got pregnant	6	2.9%
Age/retirement	2	1.0%
Prison	1	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>24.3%</b>
<b>Problems in the workplace</b>		
Did not like the work or conditions	17	8.1%
Supervisor/Manager conflict	10	4.8%
Pay	9	4.3%
Co-workers conflict	5	2.4%
Insufficient workplace support	3	1.4%
Harassment	3	1.4%
Racism	2	1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>23.3%</b>
<b>Change in employment or study</b>		
Changed employers	37	17.6%
Went to other study	6	2.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>20.5%</b>
<b>Change in business circumstances</b>		
Retrenchment due to business downturn	23	11.0%
Business sold or closed down	10	4.8%
CDEP lost funding to support traineeship	2	1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>16.7%</b>
<b>Work performance problems</b>		
Dismissed on performance grounds	12	5.7%
Left - work too hard	4	1.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>7.6%</b>
<b>Training problems</b>		
Training too hard	3	1.4%
Poor training	2	1.0%
Training not relevant	2	1.0%
Didn't want to do the training	2	1.0%
Problems with traineeship completion paperwork	2	1.0%
Literacy	1	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5.7%</b>

Learners were also asked to indicate whether specific factors contributed to their non-completion of the training (i.e. other than their stated “main reason”). See [Table 9](#). Apart from the primary reasons outlined above, this table highlights some difficulties which Aboriginal learners might be

facing more generally. “Problems with the boss” was the most frequent response (from 23.8%) of respondents, followed closely by “family problems” (23.3%) and pay concerns. Responses in the broad category of workplace problems (i.e. with boss, co-workers, conditions, on-the-job training) dominated.

**Table 9 – Other reasons for non-completion (non-Way Ahead learners)**

Did any of the following reasons <i>also</i> apply in your case?	Yes	%	No	%	Don't Know	%
You had problems with the boss	50	23.8%	158	75.2%	2	1.0%
You had family problems	49	23.3%	159	75.7%	2	1.0%
You did not like the pay	46	21.9%	163	77.6%	1	0.5%
You did not like the workplace	41	19.5%	167	79.5%	2	1.0%
You had problems with on-the-job training	41	19.5%	167	79.5%	2	1.0%
You had problems with co-workers	40	19.0%	168	80.0%	2	1.0%
You had transport problems	37	17.6%	169	80.5%	4	1.9%
You had health problems	33	15.7%	175	83.3%	2	1.0%
You did not like the type of work	32	15.2%	175	83.3%	3	1.4%
You moved to a new area	32	15.2%	177	84.3%	1	0.5%
Your employer wasn't happy with your performance at work	32	15.2%	172	81.9%	6	2.9%
You did not like the hours or conditions	30	14.3%	179	85.2%	1	0.5%
You had problems with the training at TAFE	16	7.6%	187	89.0%	7	3.3%
You had problems with friends	7	3.3%	201	95.7%	2	1.0%

### Issues where support is most important

The non-completers group was also asked “For you, how important is getting individual help and advice on the following issues when doing an apprenticeship or traineeship?” See [Table 10](#).

Help “settling into the new job” received the most “extremely important” responses (109 or 52%) followed by “providing advice to my employer” (43%), “help with staying motivated” (42%) and “problems in the workplace” (88%). Help with “personal problems” was generally ranked lower in importance as was “problems at TAFE/RTO” – the latter probably because many did not attend one.

**Table 10 – Importance of getting help with specific issues (non-Way Ahead, non-completers)**

Importance of getting help with specific issues	Not important at all	Somewhat unimportant	No opinion	Somewhat important	Extremely important
Settling into the new job	6	9	5	81	109
Providing advice to employer	12	17	15	76	90
Help with staying motivated	22	17	12	70	89
Problems in the workplace	12	11	13	86	88
Balancing work, community & family responsibilities	24	23	25	69	69
Getting into a work routine	17	15	11	106	61
Managing Money	40	27	26	59	58
Organising learning support (e.g. at TAFE)	11	11	57	74	57
Pressure from family/mates	33	26	28	77	46
Problems at TAFE/RTO	27	9	72	65	37
Personal problems	45	41	28	68	28

Considering the issues that were given either an “extremely important” or “somewhat important” ranking, “settling into the new job” was again the highest, receiving a combined “important” response of 90.5%, followed by “problems in the workplace” (82.9%), and “getting into a work routine” (79.5%). The highest “not important” combined responses were “personal problems” (41%), “managing money” (31.9%) and “pressure from family and mates” (28.1%).

### *Non-completers with mentors provided through other programs*

88 of the non-*Way Ahead* non-completers (41.9%) said that they had the support of a mentor during their apprenticeship or traineeship. Most of these (35) said that their employer provided a mentor – that is, their mentor was another staff member not one organised by a third party. Of the other 53, 11 were provided by a Commonwealth-funded Job Services Australia provider or Indigenous Employment Program provider; 4 by the Aboriginal Employment Strategy; 15 by some other unspecified service (including, perhaps, their RTO); and 23 did not know who provided their mentor<sup>9</sup>.

These results might partly reflect the fact that the word “mentor” means different things to different people. Some of the above were probably not formal mentoring programs at all, but simply people that individuals turned to for advice.

Some comments were made by people in this group that suggested they were not satisfied with the mentoring they were receiving. One said: “Mentors should be on time and reliable. I’m very disheartened.” Another said: “No one even came to see me. I didn't see a mentor at all in nearly a year. I know it's hard for them but they should come to see you.”

### *Other characteristics of this group*

Other characteristics of the non-*Way Ahead* non-completers group to emerge from the survey include:

- ⊞ **A 22% unemployment rate** - About one in five of those who did not complete their traineeship or apprenticeship were unemployed at the time of the survey. 43% were employed full-time, 22% were employed part-time and 13% were not currently in the labour force.
- ⊞ **30% Year 12 completion rate** – Most people in the non-*Way Ahead* non-completers group (61.4%) said that Year 10 or lower was the highest level of schooling they had completed. See [Table 11](#).

**Table 11 – Highest Year of Schooling completed by (non-*Way Ahead*, non-completers)**

Highest Year of Schooling	No.	%
Year 7	3	1.4%
Year 8	11	5.2%
Year 9	28	13.3%
Year 10	87	41.4%
Year 11	16	7.6%
Year 12	64	30.5%
No Response	1	0.5%

<sup>9</sup> This group included 3 who said they had *Way Ahead* mentors, but were not found on any of the program’s records, including the full database of 699 names.

### *Other comments on improving support to Aboriginal apprentices and trainees (non-completers)*

People were given the opportunity in the survey to provide their comments and suggestions to improve support arrangements for Aboriginal apprentices and trainees. These have been grouped into themes in *Text Box 1* below.

The need to provide personal mentoring support by an Aboriginal person was mentioned in many of the responses as was the need for this support to be regular and timely. Problems in the workplace, including dealing with racism, were mentioned and some suggested that workplaces should be “vetted” to ensure that they are suitable, can support a trainee and supervisors have training skills.

Other themes included help with problems in off-the-job training; maintaining motivation and morale; the need to provide more employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal people; providing transport and mobility assistance; and improving pay.

### **Text Box 1: In their words - Aboriginal learners who failed to complete their apprenticeship or traineeship (non-Way Ahead participants)**

210 Aboriginal learners who were *not* participants in *The Way Ahead* program and who failed to complete were asked what improvements could be made to support arrangements for Aboriginal apprentices and trainees. Some had mentors from other sources. Responses included:

#### **Need for Mentoring - General**

- ☐ “The whole time I was working I didn't get anybody to come and see how I was going and check up on me and talk to the boss. There was no communication between me and the boss. I felt I was doing the right thing and the other girl was complaining about me. I think someone should have come to see me and liaised with the boss.”
- ☐ “I just think that it would be nice to have a personal liaison officer to call you to see how you are going.”
- ☐ “Better support - I honestly didn't know where to go for help and if I needed help I wouldn't have known where to go. I did get a call once but that was all.”
- ☐ “A mentor would have made a difference.”
- ☐ “Outside mentor (not employer) would be good.”
- ☐ “More support from Aboriginal mentors. There were no Aboriginal people you could talk to who had the experience of going through a traineeship and that is important.”
- ☐ “An Aboriginal mentor would have made a huge difference.”
- ☐ “Maybe having a liaison officer - someone that comes from a Koori background.”
- ☐ “Mentor support – I felt isolated.”
- ☐ “Paperwork dropped off no contact number to follow through or ask for help.”
- ☐ “Make sure that a mentor is available - perhaps have a couple of people.”
- ☐ “Clarity with procedure and processes. A mentor program with an Indigenous person who can assist with all aspects.”

#### **Regular and timely contact**

- ☐ “Just contact, I suppose - which I was getting from [an Aboriginal employment and mentoring service]. They were there every Friday.”
- ☐ “Needs more information before starting and more support when first starting.”
- ☐ “Well I could have done with more help to continue because all that work was wasted and I could have completed the course. I really got nothing out of it and I was so close to finishing.”
- ☐ “More contact, this is the first time I've heard from anybody.”
- ☐ “Keep in touch - make sure they are doing it.”

- ☐ “It's all good - really show support to the trainees - push them a bit.”
- ☐ “No one even came to see me. I didn't see a mentor at all in nearly a year. I know it's hard for them but they should come to see you.”
- ☐ “Phone calls to the trainees or visits - particularly in the first year.”
- ☐ “Mentors should be on time and reliable. I'm very disheartened.”
- ☐ “Let people know that they can get help when they need it and possibly have someone on the phone any time they need to call them for help.”

#### **Help with problems in the workplace**

- ☐ “There were lots of racist comments. They need to advise staff and the company that even if you don't look Aboriginal they need to be aware.”
- ☐ “If you could call people if you were being discriminated against it would be good. I have speech impediment and they discriminated against me because of that.”
- ☐ “Employers should be assessed as to suitability/reliability.”
- ☐ “Ensure workplace is vetted and stable.”
- ☐ “Support - make sure the company can actually support a trainee.”
- ☐ “Act on complaints when put to the boss. Support the person putting the complaint in.”
- ☐ “Make sure the supervisors are fully qualified to train the trainees.”

#### **Help with problems in off the job training**

- ☐ “Maybe have tutors at TAFE for people that need help.”
- ☐ “Needed more help with TAFE.”
- ☐ “The one thing that I found quite difficult was some of the questions in the text book. I needed to ask people to explain them to me, it really worked me over.”
- ☐ “It's good to have support people - need to get more support in the academic side of the traineeship. You need to be able to ask someone.”

#### **Maintaining motivation and morale**

- ☐ “We need help with getting motivated - like I'm the only one in my family with a job. The rest are on Centrelink benefits.”
- ☐ “Help get people motivated more often.”
- ☐ “When you lose a job, support is needed to boost your self-esteem up to go for another job or traineeship.”
- ☐ “Just keep the morale up - just keep talking to them give them support.”

### **More employment and training opportunities**

- ☐ “Just having more options for kooris and more jobs available or traineeships.”
- ☐ “Just the workplace should take in more Aboriginal people - it's hard for some people to even get a go.”
- ☐ “I feel there needs to be more apprenticeships for Aboriginal people.”
- ☐ “Just like more letters and notifications on what is happening on the job network. I found out from friends that there was a job going. Nobody had called or texted me to let me know.”
- ☐ “Contacts so trainees can have other jobs they can go to if the one they're in doesn't go according to plan.”
- ☐ “Hard to seek employment. More companies to take on Aboriginal persons.”
- ☐ “Transferring - being able to carry it to a new employer rather than it being tied to one employer.”

### **Transport and mobility assistance**

- ☐ “Help with getting a drivers licence. A lot of aboriginal people don't have a licence so it's hard for them to travel. I mean not that they lost their licence - they just haven't got one.”

### **Pay**

- ☐ “Pay should be more.”
- ☐ “My advice is to find out what your pay is and make sure you get it from the start.”
- ☐ “Put the wages up.”

### **General**

- ☐ “I'm glad that a survey is being done on this subject!”



### 3.2.2 Survey of Way Ahead participants who have completed or are still in training

#### Extent of contact with mentors

The 55 *Way Ahead* learners who participated in the survey were asked questions about the extent of their contact with mentors – when the **first contact** occurred and **frequency of meetings** and **other contacts**.

37 of the respondents (67%) said that their first contact occurred in the first three months of the traineeship. This is somewhat higher than suggested by the data drawn from the combined database where 55% of first contacts were recorded as being in the first three months. 22% said that their first contact was 6 months or later after they commenced, while 5.5% said they did not know. Another 5.5% (3 respondents) said that they had *never* been contacted by a mentor.

14 respondents (25%) said that they only met with their mentor once, 5 said twice, 5 said three times and 20 (36%) said more than 3 times. Again, these responses suggest a higher number of mentor meetings than in the database where only 21% of learners are recorded as having had more than 3 meetings.

“Other contacts” included phone, text and email. 49% said that they had been contacted by the mentors through these media 3 or more times, while 18% said they had been contacted once or twice in these ways. The rest (33%) said that they had never been contacted in these ways.

#### Satisfaction with elements of service

Learners were asked to rate elements of the mentoring service they received. See [Table 12](#).

**Table 12– Satisfaction with service elements (Way Ahead learners)**

Element	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good	Don't Know
Availability of mentor when you needed	6	2	17	18	12
Number of contacts made by your mentor	6	6	22	12	9
Help with workplace problems	5	5	16	13	16
Help with training problems	5	4	15	14	17
Help with personal problems	6	4	11	12	22
Help with family/community problems	6	4	7	11	27

Mentor services were generally rated highly - the majority of responses for all elements were either “good” or “very good”. The highest dissatisfaction rating was for “number of contacts” which attracted a total of 12 very poor or poor responses (22%). Other dissatisfaction responses were

mainly from this same sub-group of learners who seem not to have had much service from their mentors. Elements with a high “don’t know” response – “help with family/community problems” and “help with personal problems” – most probably reflect mentoring relationships where assistance in these areas was not required.

In a separate question, learners were also asked if they thought it important that their mentor was Aboriginal. 36 (or 65%) said it was important; 16 (or 29%) said it was not; and 3 did not respond.

In another measure of satisfaction, learners were also asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements. See [Table 13](#).

**Table 13 – Agreement/disagreement with statements on the service (Way Ahead learners)**

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My "Way Ahead" mentor is/was a good match for me (e.g. personality, knowledge, style)	2 (4%)	6 (13%)	5 (11%)	16 (36%)	16 (36%)
I get/got on well with my mentor.	3 (7%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)	29 (64%)	11 (24%)
Having a mentor really helped me in my apprenticeship or traineeship.	5 (11%)	3 (7%)	7 (16%)	22 (49%)	8 (18%)
I can depend on my mentor.	3 (7%)	2 (4%)	5 (11%)	27 (60%)	8 (18%)
My mentor has helped me resolve a problem that might have ended my apprenticeship or traineeship.	5 (11%)	13 (29%)	7 (16%)	15 (33%)	5 (11%)
I didn't really need my "Way Ahead" mentor.	10 (22%)	12 (27%)	7 (16%)	8 (18%)	8 (18%)
I talk with my mentor when I have problems or things that worry me.	6 (13%)	12 (27%)	7 (16%)	16 (36%)	4 (9%)

(Note: 10 learners did not provide responses to this question.)

These responses suggest that *Way Ahead* learners generally feel that they have a good personal relationship with their mentors (88% reporting that they “get on well”) though fewer (72%) thought their mentor was a good match. 67% agreed that their mentor helped them in their apprenticeship or traineeship, with a smaller percentage (44%) indicating that they helped resolve an issue that might have ended their training.

Interestingly, 40% indicated that they do *not* talk with their mentors when they are worrying about something. This perhaps suggests a need for mentors to be more active in trying to get their learners to open up and discuss issues, or that learners have other supports that they turn to (see “Other Supports” below).

A significant percentage of responses (36%) also agreed with the statement that they “didn’t really need their *Way Ahead* mentor”. Linked to this, 40% *disagreed* with the statement that their mentor “helped resolve an issue that might have ended their training”. These responses could be the result of the program targeting the wrong people or, perhaps more likely, that these individuals had other support options or that their traineeship or apprenticeship just ran relatively smoothly.

Another measure of learner satisfaction was their willingness to recommend *The Way Ahead* to their friends. Responses to the question “would you recommend *Way Ahead* mentoring to your mates?” were: Yes – 85 % (46 responses); and No – 15 % (8 responses).

### **Other supports**

Learners were asked if any other mentoring support was provided to them in addition to their *Way Ahead* mentor. 28 (51%) indicated that there was. 4 said that they had a mentor from their Job Services Australia or Indigenous Employment Program provider; 3 said that the Aboriginal Employment Strategy provided one; and 21 said that their employer assigned a mentor.

With this range of alternative supports in place, it is likely that individual learners will make their own choice when they need help. The survey asked the question “If you needed outside help with an issue or problem that threatened to end your apprenticeship or traineeship, who would you contact first - your *Way Ahead* mentor or someone else?” While the majority of respondents (35 or 64%) said that they would go to their *Way Ahead* mentor, a significant minority (20 or 36%) said that they would contact someone else. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does raise questions about whether program targeting for *The Way Ahead* could be improved (e.g. to focus on learners without other supports).

### **Learner comments on how *The Way Ahead* helped them**

Learners were asked if *The Way Ahead* had helped them in their individual case and, if it did, how. 34 (63%) said it did and 20 (37%) said it did not. Typical comments on how it helped included:

- ☐ “It made me a better person in employment.”
- ☐ “It helped me learn a bit more.”
- ☐ “If I needed help my mentor would always be there.” (6 similar comments)
- ☐ “More assistance with my mentor when my employer was too busy.” (1 similar comment)
- ☐ “Someone to talk to and help finding employment for you.”
- ☐ “Support and motivation.” (7 similar comments)
- ☐ “Being able to talk to someone outside the workplace.”
- ☐ “Gave me confidence to speak to the boss.”
- ☐ “Helped me find a full time job.” (5 similar comments)
- ☐ “Helped explain to employer how important it was to attend an Indigenous ceremony twice a year and for me to be given time off work.”
- ☐ “Help when I was struggling with assignments – kept me on track.”
- ☐ “Personal things and school.”

Most of the comments reflected typical areas of mentoring support – motivation, someone to talk to, confidence building, liaising with employers, and simply being there when needed. One recurring area – help with finding a full time job (presumably after the traineeship or apprenticeship was completed) – is not so typical, but was clearly highly valued by the learners.

### *Other comments on improving support to Aboriginal apprentices and trainees (Way Ahead completers and continuers)*

As was the case with the non-completing, non-Way Ahead group, the Way Ahead “completers and continuers” group were also given the opportunity in the survey to provide their comments and suggestions to improve support arrangements for Aboriginal apprentices and trainees. Way Ahead learners were generally less forthcoming with suggestions than the other group, perhaps because the survey was somewhat longer and because the questions they had answered were focused on support issues than on the reasons for non-completion.

Responses are included in **Text Box 2** below. There is a clear and consistent message from this group – **more contact from mentors is needed.**

#### **Text Box 2: In their words - Way Ahead learners who completed their apprenticeship or traineeship or were still in training**

55 Aboriginal learners who were participants in *The Way Ahead* program and who either completed their training or were still in training were asked what improvements could be made to support arrangements for Aboriginal apprentices and trainees. Responses included:

- ☐ “The mentors are doing a great job.”
- ☐ “Very disappointed. I’ve been in an apprenticeship for more than a year, but have had no help at all.”
- ☐ “Provide a mentor who has more input. I didn’t really have a mentor.”
- ☐ “More visits. If you have any problems, the mentor needs to be there to give you support.”
- ☐ “There needs to be more contact by the mentor. My first visit from my mentor was also the last visit.”
- ☐ “Keep in contact more often.”
- ☐ “Yes, keep in contact more. Make contact by email. Talk to my employer as well.”
- ☐ “Cool, it was an excellent programme.”
- ☐ “More contact.”
- ☐ “We need a lot more Indigenous mentors in the Coffs Harbour Region.”
- ☐ “It is important for mentors if they say they will turn up then they will.”
- ☐ “Do more to make sure that the mentor is suitable for the individual.”
- ☐ “More contact by the mentor (putting a face to a phone number would have been a good idea).”

### 3.3 Qualitative data from employer and learner field interviews

Field interviews were held in three locations – Wagga Wagga, Coffs Harbour and Sydney. Most interviews were held at the workplace. In some cases, employers and trainees/apprentices were interviewed separately and in others they were interviewed together. The following cases provide an insight into the experience of a sample of learners and employers with *The Way Ahead* program.

#### *(a) Major bank in Wagga Wagga (separate meetings with employer and 2 trainees)*

The employer has two Aboriginal trainees, one being school-based. He said that he was extremely happy with their progress – one was now operating at a level of productivity in excess of other more experienced staff. He has met the trainees' mentor once, but other supporting personnel also visit, including from the RTO.

One of the trainees presented as being very confident and articulate. She said that she had had minimal contact with her mentor, but her need was probably lower than some. She suggested that peer mentoring and support could be encouraged by holding a regional social event (such as a barbecue) for local Aboriginal apprentices and trainees. (The local STS office said that they would be happy to facilitate this.) Such an event might create a peer support network as well as an opportunity for *Way Ahead* mentors and learners to connect in a non-threatening environment.

The second, school-based trainee said that she had an initial meeting with her mentor, but a promised follow-up meeting had not occurred. (Her mentor said that there was an agreement to delay follow up until after a school assessment period.)

#### *(b) Group Training Organisation in Wagga Wagga (employer meeting)*

This employer is a major employer of apprentices and trainees in the region. He has had a number with *Way Ahead* support, including a group of 12 trainees on a special project doing a Certificate II traineeship in Conservation and Land Management.

He said there was a real need for mentoring. Young people doing an apprenticeship or traineeship were generally at a "risky age" – they are "hitting the pubs" for the first time, they are experimenting and are still building a work ethic. The first 100 days of any employment are the most critical and this is when a mentor is most needed. The service needs to have "defined contacts" and not be left to operate on an unstructured "as needed" basis. "At the end of the day, I want them to have as much support as possible. If they don't feel comfortable talking to us about a problem and they have someone outside who can help, that's great. We want to give them options."

He has had experience with two different *Way Ahead* mentors. One he describes as "the ideal mentor", one who acted as a bridge between the employer and the trainee, could build the trainee's trust and knew when to push or challenge them. He gave the example of this mentor seeing a trainee "in a place where he shouldn't be" during work hours. He took the time to do some unscheduled mentoring to remedy the situation.

The other mentor, he believed, acted more as an advocate for the trainees, without seeing things from the employer's point of view. For example, a group of trainees was having trouble with a non-Aboriginal supervisor and the mentor intervened "to try to have the supervisor replaced." The GTO believed that the supervisor may have been a little blunt in his manner (e.g. "he made the fatal mistake of shaming a trainee in front of his mates"), but it was in the trainees' long term interest to learn skills to deal with such personalities in the workplace. Ultimately, in the GTO's view, the trainees may have finished their traineeship, but have failed to learn important lessons for their future employment.

*(c) Employment Service in Wagga Wagga (employer meeting)*

The organisation employed an Aboriginal trainee in a Certificate II in Business. The employer said that the nature of support provided to trainees and apprentices depended very much on the employer's circumstances. As an employment service provider, they could provide "wrap around" support to their trainees and the need for an outside mentor might not be as great. In other situations, where "getting the job done as efficiently as possible" was all that mattered, less time was available for this type of support and a mentor could be very useful.

The employer believes that *The Way Ahead* is a good concept, but is a bit "wishy-washy". In his view, having a mentor should be either "part and parcel" of being an Aboriginal trainee or it should not be offered at all. The mentor needs to be there from the start. "If they're not prepared to beef it up... get rid of it."

*(d) Plumbing Service in Wagga Wagga (apprentice meeting)*

The apprentice is in his final year of a plumbing apprenticeship. He presented as confident, friendly and articulate and had clear career goals. The database showed that he had been visited by a mentor 10 times. He described his mentor as a "good bloke" who has provided good advice over the course of his apprenticeship. He plans to start his own plumbing business. He believes young Aboriginal people need to be inspired and that positive role models need to be presented who have done things that they can emulate – not just elite sports stars.

*(e) Major bank in Wagga Wagga (trainee meeting)*

This trainee was confident and articulate and has not had much contact with her mentor. She plans to finish her traineeship and get a full-time job in the bank. She agrees that peer support would be a useful addition to support arrangements for Aboriginal learners. (She knows other Aboriginal trainees employed at other banks in the town.)

*(f) Manufacturing business in Wagga Wagga (employer meeting)*

The employer contact was not familiar with *The Way Ahead* program and the fact that one of his apprentices had a mentor. He had problems in the past with some Aboriginal workers with attendance issues, but his current apprentice is very good. He said he might have a mentor, but the service was "invisible" to him.

*(g) Aboriginal service organisation in Coffs Harbour (separate meetings with employer and 2 trainees)*

The employer was herself previously a trainee supported by *The Way Ahead*. She had been a CDEP participant and started work at the organisation initially on a casual basis as a grant application writer. She finished her traineeship and is now enrolled in further training. She was promoted to manager when the previous manager left. She strongly supports the need for mentoring and provides a lot of support herself to the organisation's two current trainees.

One trainee has only fairly recently returned to the workforce after raising her children. She said that she lacked confidence and that she had appreciated the support and advice of her mentor who had visited a few times – "I thought I was struggling, but really I wasn't!" Completing the training workbooks was a particular problem for her – sometimes she needed someone to explain the concepts in a language that was more down to earth. The mentor helped by "making it real" for her.

The other trainee said that she was going well and felt that her organisation was very supportive. She said that she thought the biggest reason why Aboriginal people fail to complete their traineeships is that they are “too proud or embarrassed to ask for help.” Both trainees said that working in a non-Aboriginal organisation would be challenging for them and that they would need more support if they were to work in such an environment in the future.

*(h) Local Council Parks and Gardens Department in Coffs Harbour (separate meetings with employer and trainee)*

The employer said that his trainee was one of a number employed across the organisation as part of its Aboriginal Employment Strategy. He said his trainee was a mature man who was a good and reliable worker. There had been no real issues with the training – he “felt comfortable the moment he started”. He would like to keep the trainee on, but that depended on the availability of funding.

The trainee was an experienced worker aged 59. He was previously a baker, but decided to do something else when that business was sold. He said that because he “did not look Aboriginal” he had not faced many obstacles in the workplace because of his race, but knew people who had. He has not had much contact with his mentor, but believes such support for younger Aboriginal people is crucial. He does what he can himself to help younger community members.

*(i) Local Aboriginal Land Council (Host Employer) in Coffs Harbour (joint meeting with employer, 3 trainees and representative of employment service managing the project)*

The Land Council is involved in a “Green Team” project and is hosting 4 trainees who are doing a Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management. A local employment service provider is managing the project and employs the trainees. The CEO of the Land Council likes *The Way Ahead* mentoring concept and would like to see it also used as a vehicle for community development (e.g. better connecting older community members with youth, improving their understanding of youth issues and thus elevating discussion of these issues at Council meetings).

It was difficult to get the three trainees to talk in the meeting, but they seem not to have had much contact with their *Way Ahead* mentors. They seemed well supported in other respects with their employment service provider also playing a mentoring and day-to-day supervisory role.

*(j) NSW Government Department (Host Employer) in Coffs Harbour (separate meetings with employer and trainee)*

This was a very small local coordinating office of a NSW Government Department with less than 10 staff. The employer said that her trainee was very good. She had had only limited contact with the mentor herself, but believed that the trainee had a good relationship with her mentor. She was keen to give the trainee some experience in a larger government office and had tried to organise this in the local Centrelink office. Unfortunately, the GTO said this was not possible because of occupational health and safety considerations. (This was surprising given that such rotations were once fundamental to the Group Training concept.)

The employer said there was a need to provide employers with *Way Ahead* program documentation to explain what the service offered. She also said that, as a courtesy, mentors should “keep employers in the loop” when they have contact with trainees outside the workplace (e.g. at TAFE).

The trainee was very confident and articulate and has clear career goals. She spoke very highly of her mentor and had been visited a number of times during her first (Certificate III) traineeship. She said that her mentor was instrumental in negotiating with her Group Training Organisation and her



host employer for a second Certificate IV traineeship. She said that she would love to mentor trainees herself now that she has gained experience in the workplace.

She also shared her insights into the situation of other Aboriginal trainees with whom she has had contact. She said that some have employers who are reluctant to speak directly with their trainees about problems and performance issues. Instead they rely on an intermediary (e.g. GTO) to address these issues for them. She believes more support is needed for such employers on how to get the best out of their trainees. She also suggested that the Department monitor the success rate of Aboriginal trainees with certain employers. She said that one large public sector employer in Coffs Harbour had “gone through” quite a few trainees and that there could be a problem with their personnel practices that needs to be addressed.

*(k) Fast food outlet in Coffs Harbour (joint meeting with employer and trainee)*

The employer said he was committed to supporting local Indigenous employment. When he first heard of *The Way Ahead*, he was enthusiastic, but was somewhat disappointed by the lack of mentor follow up after the first meeting with the trainee. He said that there had been no real issues in the traineeship, but believed that follow up was important, even if just a regular phone call.

The trainee had been working as a casual at the shop for about a year before she started the traineeship. She said that she had one meeting with her mentor at the start of the traineeship and that the mentor was “very nice”, but there had been no contact since.

*(l) Licensed Club in Coffs Harbour (apprentice meeting)*

This 29 year old apprentice chef was in the final week of his trade training. This was his third attempt in the apprenticeship – his first was in 1998, when he was fired for fighting with a waiter; his second was in 2001, when he was fired after sleeping in after working a 15 hour New Year’s Eve shift. “Third time lucky”, he said.

He vaguely remembers meeting his mentor at the start of his current apprenticeship in 2007 – a “nice lady” – but has had nothing to do with her since. He was asked if he thought a mentor would have helped him get through the two previous attempts at the apprenticeship. He replied: “No, it wouldn’t have made any difference. I just realised I had to make something of my life. There’s only so much others can do for you.” The apprentice plans to move back to the Gold Coast in 2011.

*(m) Childcare Centre in North Western Sydney (separate meetings with employer and trainee)*

The employer was unfamiliar with *The Way Ahead* program. The trainee recalls having met a mentor once, very early in the traineeship, but had not heard anything since, though follow up was promised. She said she appreciated the contact with the mentor and “got a lot out of it” and would have liked regular visits.

*(n) Childcare Centre in South Western Sydney (trainee meeting)*

The trainee is now doing Certificate IV after successfully completing Certificate III in Children’s Services. She said that she cannot recall any contact with a *Way Ahead* mentor at all (the spreadsheet indicated that she had been visited twice). She said that she did face a crisis at one point that threatened her continuation in the traineeship, but sorted things out with her supervisor without the aid of a mentor.



*(o) Fitness Centre in Western Sydney (separate meetings with employer and trainee)*

The employer said he was committed to Aboriginal employment. Although not Aboriginal himself, he has many Aboriginal friends and said he understands many of the issues they face in employment and training. His two *Way Ahead* trainees were mother and daughter – the mother had worked in the industry for years and had encouraged her daughter to do the same, but the daughter discontinued her traineeship early in the training. The mother continued in a Certificate IV Sport and Recreation (Fitness) traineeship, but is unlikely to successfully complete it. The employer is most dissatisfied with the service provided to his trainee by the Victorian-based RTO, which he said has provided virtually no support, guidance or instruction. He said that the trainee had literacy support needs and these were ignored. Having an effective mentor would have helped – “even semi regular contact would have made a big difference”.

The trainee said that she was very keen to complete her Certificate IV as it was a pre-requisite for work in personal training. Because she does not have the qualification, she is restricted to running fitness classes, despite her extensive skills and experience. Personal training work offers more long-term job security, particularly as she gets older. She stopped doing work in her current Certificate IV because she “couldn’t see the point”. She was learning nothing from the RTO and she was struggling with reading and writing – the course was all based on book work.

She said that a *Way Ahead* mentor visited her and her daughter early in the training, but has not provided any assistance since. Having a mentor that was able to address her RTO issues could have greatly assisted her. (She said that she had lost her mentor’s contact details and did not know how to initiate a follow up herself.)

### 3.4 Data from mentors

Mentor views on *The Way Ahead* program were gathered in three ways – a web-based survey of all current mentors, a workshop run during a DET conference attended by a number of mentors, and telephone interviews with mentors operating mainly in Sydney.

#### 3.4.1 Web-based survey of mentors

37 mentors were contacted by email and asked to complete a web-based survey. 16 completed the survey.

##### *Characteristics*

All of the mentors who responded to the web-based survey were Aboriginal. 6 were recruited to the program as the result of a direct approach by the APO, while the others heard about the program through their networks and contacted the APO. Most of this group (9) had received no training as a mentor, 3 had attended a 2 day workshop, 2 had formal qualifications in Aboriginal Mentoring (Cert III) and 2 had other training related to mentoring (e.g. Indigenous Leadership Program).

Current *mentoring caseload* varied with some servicing many learners and some none at all:

- ⊆ 6 had more than 10 learners
- ⊆ 2 had between 5 and 6
- ⊆ 5 had between 1 and 3
- ⊆ 3 had none
- ⊆ Average mentoring load was 5.3 learners

Similarly, the *hours currently spent* in *Way Ahead* mentoring per week also varied:

- ⊆ 1 spent 10 hours
- ⊆ 4 spent 5 hours
- ⊆ 2 spent 4 hours
- ⊆ 2 spent 3 hours
- ⊆ 3 spent 1 hour
- ⊆ 4 spent 0 hours
- ⊆ Average currently spent per mentor was 2.9 hours

In terms of *unused mentoring capacity* (per week) available among these mentors

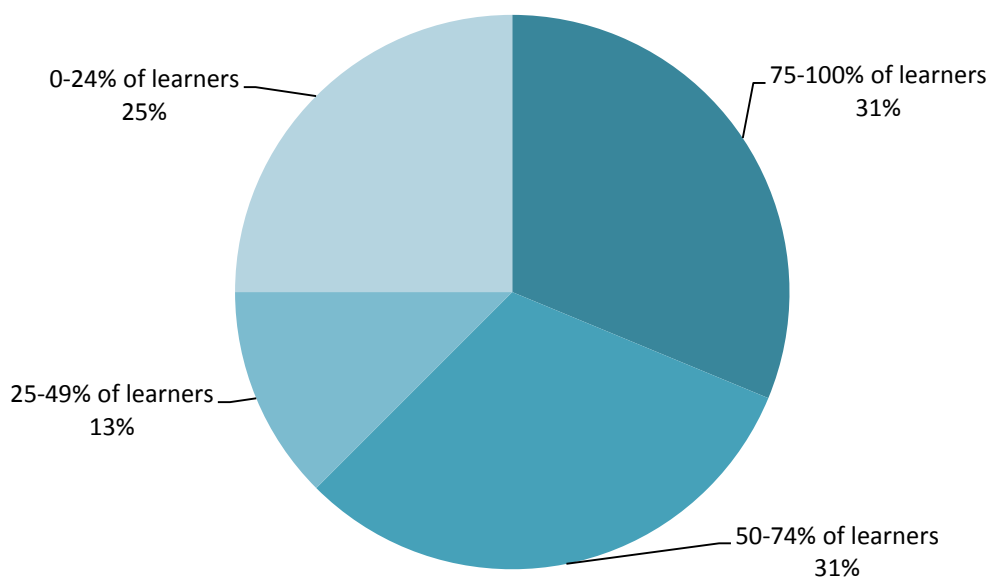
- ⊆ 1 could spend another 20 hours
- ⊆ 2 could spend another 15 hours
- ⊆ 2 could spend another 10 hours
- ⊆ 1 could spend another 7 hours
- ⊆ 4 could spend another 5 hours
- ⊆ 3 could spend another 3 hours
- ⊆ 1 could spend another 2 hours
- ⊆ 2 could not spend more time mentoring
- ⊆ Average extra available hours per mentor was 6.75 hours

5 mentors also provide mentoring under other programs (e.g. Job Services Australia, Aboriginal Employment Strategy).

##### *Mentor perceptions of learner needs*

Mentors were asked “What percentage of the learners who are referred to you would you say need intensive monitoring and follow up (e.g. fortnightly or monthly contacts)?” Most respondents believed that more than 50% of learners needed this intensive support (see [Chart 1](#)). If one compares this result to the Table 3, which shows that less than a quarter of learners receive 3 or more mentoring visits, the question arises as to why mentors are not providing more intensive support to these learners.

**Chart 1: Percentage of the learners who need intensive monitoring and follow up (as perceived by mentors)**



#### *Ratings of program elements*

Mentors were asked to rate different elements of the program. Responses are set out in [Table 14](#) below.

Very few elements were rated by mentors as being “poor” or “very poor” – the most notable exception being “the time taken to connect learners with mentors” which 5 mentors (31%) believed was poor.

“Neutral” responses also suggest some potential for improvement in some elements. 56% of respondents gave a neutral response to “training provided to mentors” and 38% gave neutral responses to “information and resources provided to mentors to help them do their job”, “the number of learners who are offered mentors” and “the regularity of contact between mentors and learners”.

**Table 14– Mentor rating of program elements**

Element	Very Poor	Poor	Neutral	Good	Very Good
The time taken to connect learners with mentors	0 (0%)	5 (31%)	2 (13%)	5 (31%)	4 (25%)
The identification of learners who are most in need of mentors	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	4 (25%)	8 (50%)	2 (13%)
Information and resources provided to mentors to help them do their job	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	6 (38%)	7 (44%)	2 (13%)
The number of learners who are offered mentors	1 (6%)	2 (13%)	6 (38%)	7 (44%)	0 (0%)
The geographic reach of the program (i.e. availability across NSW)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	5 (31%)	5 (31%)	5 (31%)
The regularity of contact between mentors and learners	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	6 (38%)	7 (44%)	2 (13%)
The process by which mentors are selected	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (25%)	9 (56%)	3 (19%)
The training provided to mentors	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	9 (56%)	5 (31%)	1 (6%)
The adequacy of payments made to mentors for their services	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	5 (31%)	6 (38%)	4 (25%)

In another measure of mentor perceptions of the program, they were also asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements. See [Table 15](#).

Mentors were generally of one mind in their responses to most statements. Virtually all believed that every Aboriginal learner should be offered a mentor; that supporting employers was a part of the job; that the first month was critical in supporting learners; that one visit was enough to tell if a learner needs regular follow up; that mentors need to be Aboriginal; and that learners should be contacted every month by their mentors. The only statement that drew a divided response was that “completion rates should be the sole measure of success” – half of respondents either disagreed or were neutral in response to this question.

**Table 15– Agreement/disagreement with statements**

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
All Aboriginal apprentices and trainees should be offered a mentor at commencement	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	16 (94%)
Actively providing advice and support to employers is part of my work as a mentor	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	2 (13%)	13 (81%)
The first month is the most critical time to provide support to Aboriginal apprentices/trainees	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	14 (88%)
After the first contact, I can usually tell if a learner needs regular follow up contact	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	5 (31%)	10 (63%)
Way Ahead mentors need to be Aboriginal	0 (11%)	0 (11%)	1 (6%)	4 (25%)	11 (69%)
Mentors should contact all their apprentices and trainees at least every month	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	4 (25%)	10 (63%)
Trainees and apprentices who have Way Ahead mentors are much more likely to successfully complete	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	5 (31%)	10 (63%)
Completion rates should be the sole measure of success for Way Ahead mentoring	2 (13%)	2 (13%)	4 (25%)	3 (19%)	5 (31%)

**Other comments from mentors**

Mentors were given the opportunity in the survey to provide other comments and suggestions. These have been grouped into themes in **Text Box 3** below and relate to *improvements in training, earlier referral and connection with learners, better marketing of the program and administrative matters.*

### **Text Box 3: In their words – Mentor Comments and Suggestions from the Web-Based Survey**

#### **Training**

- ☐ “We need more training. Would like to network and meet with other mentors and hear some cases, how they were handled and the outcome.”
- ☐ “Constant reviews to find ways for improvement. Mentoring workshops so mentors can network and learn from each other.”
- ☐ “I think that more training would be great.”
- ☐ “I think that the concept is fantastic and it is managed by committed passionate people. Its strength lies in the relationships that the mentors have with each other and their connections to their culture. I would like to see two things that I feel would strengthen the program: (1) Accredited training for all mentors and (2) early connection with the trainees and apprentices.”

#### **Earlier referral and connection with the learner**

- ☐ “I believe that the Mentor should be very active in the first month, at least 5 to 6 visits and then once a month until completion of apprenticeship or traineeship...”
- ☐ “I believe the mentor should meet the trainee as soon as possible – in the first week - so the mentor can meet the trainee and the employer and so the employer is also aware of the extra supports available.
- ☐ “If a mentor was able to be present at the sign up with the AAC, I feel that this would make the learner a lot more comfortable, as the mentor would be able to explain things to them.”
- ☐ “Mentors should be a member of the original sign up party with the trainee, employer and state training rep.”

#### **Marketing**

- ☐ “More marketing of the program thru PaCe and other Programs.”
- ☐ “The Mentoring should be advertised and displayed at all places of work.”

#### **Administration and management**

- ☐ “Less paperwork to complete.”
- ☐ “People who do these positions are usually already working full-time and caring for a family. I do this because I want to do all I can to help someone else to succeed; however fitting it into an already full-time life is extremely difficult. I would really love to see fulltime mentoring positions being created. I believe this would ensure a better service to trainees, employees and a much better support service to Aboriginal Australia.”
- ☐ “Employing the right Aboriginal Mentors... matching people up with personalities is the main factor.”

### 3.4.2 Telephone interviews with a sample of mentors

#### (a) Female Mentor (since mid-2009)

She was told about the program by her brother who is also a mentor. On his advice, she rang APO and received a one hour briefing on the program and requirements of a mentor. Since then has not had contact with anyone from DET apart from receiving details of a new learner. She has had 4 learners to date.

She believes a *half day training session* up front for mentors would help to set parameters, expectations and obligations for all involved in the program. It would also be good to have a *monthly chat* with someone else involved in the program to ensure all is going well.

She accepted the role as mentor because she thought she would be a good role model for young Aboriginal people. She is currently studying at university and works part-time. She believes that *all mentors should be good role models, have great communication skills and be approachable*. She believes that a mentor *needs to be Aboriginal* to understand the cultural issues and obligations. Strongly believes that if the learners had a non-Aboriginal Mentor, they would just not contact them.

When she receives information on a new learner, she makes phone contact and then sets up a face-to-face interview. She believes she is able to assess from this one hour interview whether the learner will require further assistance or not. If they do not, she will contact them again in 6 months to see how they're going. She has had 2 learners where she has had to have more than one meeting, but no more than 2 meetings for each.

Some of the recurring issues have been discrimination in the workplace due to the lack of knowledge by the employer and existing staff of Aboriginal culture, family issues (in particular a death in the family) and issues with undertaking the TAFE component. She has helped 2 learners through their TAFE component and spoken to 2 of the 4 employers about cultural sensitivities.

The mentor thinks that *phone contact with the learner on a monthly basis would be a good way to keep on top of the trainee's progress*, but when recruited was advised that two visits per trainees should be adequate if all looked okay at the first meeting.

She believes that the only measures of success should be completion of the traineeship and ongoing placement. There should be no half-measures. Aboriginal people need to step up and realise that they can achieve their dreams if they just focus and communicate better.

#### (b) Male Mentor (since 2008)

This mentor formerly worked in a specialist trade and was originally approached by the APO to mentor aboriginal trainees and apprentices in this industry. He received an initial one-hour training session from the APO. He became a mentor "for the money". He has a few trainees and apprentices at the moment, but they're all over NSW.

He believes he's a good role model for the trainees as there are not many Aboriginal people in the industry. He "knows everyone and what they're up to and can often make deals for the trainees". He said he *does not need any further training*, but has attended a few meetings with other mentors organised by the APO. He believes that people being recruited as mentors need to realise that *"it's not just mentoring about the job, it's mentoring on life"*. There's no point assigning a mentor to someone who does not help the trainee with their personal life, because this goes hand-in-hand with work life.

He thinks there should be *more face-to-face visits* (at least 3 over 12 months), as often the learners will say they are okay on the phone, but *in person "you get the real picture"*. He also thinks *something needs to be done about all the "bookwork"* involved because the "kids can't get through it all without help".

The mentor normally gets an email from the APO when a new trainee/apprentice starts. He will then ring the trainee and set up a meeting. He normally visits/rings a learner once a month, and on some occasions once a fortnight. (His assistance seems to go "above and beyond the call of duty". He has helped learners with bail money, has driven them to funerals, puts them up, buys them food, and helps them with their TAFE assignments.)

He spends a lot of time with employers trying to get them to understand Aboriginal culture and customs. Most of the issues the learners have are around racism in the workplace and employers not understanding that Aboriginal people don't like to be "fenced in". He believes that the reason the kids do not turn up for work is the feeling of being restricted by all the rules and regulations and the constant racist remarks that are made.

He also *keeps up with his learners via Facebook*. He believes it is the only way to know what they are really up to.

He believes the measure for success should be that the learner is still in a job, regardless of whether they've completed a traineeship/apprenticeship or not. "It's hard enough for an Aboriginal kid to get a job, survive on such little pay and cop all the racist remarks, let alone get through all the bookwork!"

#### *(c) Male Mentor (since 2007)*

The mentor was recruited by "word of mouth". He then organised to meet with the APO in person and spent half an hour with him discussing the requirements of a mentor. He believes there *should be at least a half day training session for mentors to prepare them* for the role and everything it might entail. He also thinks that there should be a *quarterly meeting with the APO and other mentors in the area* to discuss any issues that might come up.

He became a mentor because he felt he had something to give back to the community and feels that he has tried to make a success of his life. He had worked for a large organisation for 12 years and that experience has given him a good grounding to help others just starting out in the workforce. He has also just bought a house and is very proud that he can be a role model to those "slugging away" at a 9 to 5 job – "there's a light at the end of the tunnel."

He believes that the *mentor should be Aboriginal* in order to relate to the trainees/apprentices and speak from experience. A mentor needs to be a "believable role model".

The APO normally emails the mentor the details of a new trainee/apprentice and he will call them to set up a face-to-face meeting. If all looks good at the initial meeting and they seem confident, he then just encourages them to ring if they need him. He makes contact again within 6 months to touch base and ensure all is on track. He can normally tell after the first meeting if a trainee/apprentice might need extra time and will then contact them one month after the initial meeting.

He thinks *DET should come up with a questionnaire for the trainees that they can fill out at the 3 month mark* about how it is all going, and then this can be fed back to the mentor. "Often the kids won't admit there's a problem, but if they need to fill out a questionnaire, and they don't, that should set off an alarm to DET".



He has had to mentor employers on a number of occasions around issues of Aboriginal culture. At times, employers have initiated a meeting if they have thought there might be some problems brewing with the trainee. Issues he has dealt with include punctuality, being organised, planning for work/TAFE responsibilities, professionalism and coping with racism.

The program *goes beyond just mentoring on-the-job*. As a mentor, he said that he has also dealt with everyday life issues that might be so affecting the trainee, that they cannot do their job. "There's no training for that!" he said.

He believes that mentoring is 75% effective in assisting the trainee/apprentice get through. Some will need it more than others. He really believes that they *need to be mentored from the very start and it should not be optional*. If the mentoring is not intense up front, then there's more likelihood that the trainee might "slip through the cracks", especially if it is their first job.

*(d) Female Mentor (since mid-2009)*

The mentor heard about the program from another contact who encouraged her to contact the APO. She has a diploma in Aboriginal Community Development and is a swim coach. She believes she has something to give to trainees/apprentices and has 5 trainees (not on the review's database).

The mentor did not receive any training, but wished she had. She felt a bit overwhelmed in the beginning. She did receive an information pack, but needed to go through it all herself. She *asked for some training*, but was advised that the information pack covered it all and that she could contact the APO for guidance. She would have liked something more. She ended up researching "mentoring training" on the internet, but did not find very much. She *wants to be "fully prepared and professional"*. She still *does not feel confident about the parameters of the program*.

She *does not believe that mentors need to be Aboriginal*. She believes that there are non-Aboriginal people in the community who have just as much, if not more to give and set example by. She thinks that as long as the mentor is a good role model, has a good understanding of Aboriginal culture, can communicate with young people, and is interested, then that is fine.

When information is received on a new trainee or apprentice, she contacts them and makes an initial appointment. From that meeting she is able to assess whether the mentoring might involve just a few phone calls, or more extensive work. She thinks all mentors *should contact the trainee at least 3 times during their traineeship until the 9 month mark*.

She has mentored trainees/apprentices on issues such as punctuality, racism in the workplace, presentation and self-esteem and confidence.

The mentor believes that the only measure of success should be completion of the traineeship/apprenticeship or alternatively sustained employment. Nothing else matters. "If we don't aim high, we're short-changing the kids!" It would also be handy to have some more people involved in the program in Sydney, so the APO would not have to spread himself so thinly. A successful program relies on great mentors. "You can't be great if you're not sure if you're hitting the mark or doing the job to your best ability."

*(e) Male Mentor (since 2007)*

He was approached by the APO to become a mentor. He had a half hour chat and started from there. He has had a lot of life experience and so he does not feel he needs any more training. He'd be happy to attend some meetings throughout the year for a catch up. He has not done much mentoring lately. He thinks mentors should be Aboriginal – "no point otherwise".

He gives them a call up front, then follows up with a visit if necessary. They then get a follow up call at 6 months if all is okay. If it is not, he “normally hears about it”.

### **3.4.3 Workshop with mentors**

A number of *Way Ahead* mentors attended a DET conference held in Forster in November 2010. These mentors all had links with the department through other programs, such as the Aboriginal Enterprise Development Officer (AEDO) Program and the New Careers for Aboriginal People (NCAP) program. 12 (including the APO) agreed to participate in a brief impromptu workshop to provide input into the review. Key points made were:

- ⊞ Mentors said that their other program connections with DET meant that they had more knowledge of resources and processes that could be used to help trainees and apprentices. Those outside the DET program network might need additional support and advice to address certain issues (e.g. linked with training contracts, disputes, RTOs etc.);
- ⊞ The motivation for many mentors to get involved in the program is not financial. Rather, it is seen as a means of giving back to their community and of “looking after our mob”. The program requires a personal commitment – “we’re not 9 to 5 blackfellas – we see the people we mentor around the community all the time”;
- ⊞ Some mentors commented that *The Way Ahead* is one of the only Aboriginal programs that is not “outcome-based” and this was a good thing. It gave the program the flexibility it requires to respond to learner needs;
- ⊞ Keeping up with the program paperwork was perceived as a burden by some. There are cases where mentors provide support to learners and have not filled in the paperwork to claim payment. The fact that some are motivated by a desire to simply help Aboriginal learners was a factor in this;
- ⊞ There was a dilemma in working out the limits of mentoring – “when is enough enough?” There is a risk in “babying” learners, but flexibility is also needed to see people through crises;
- ⊞ Some mentors highlighted the problem of late referrals to the program – for example, GTOs calling for a mentor only when things go wrong. This compromises the results of the program and changes its balance from preventing problems to solving them;
- ⊞ Delays in the notification of new apprenticeship and traineeship commencements mean that learners can miss out on support in the crucial early stages of the training. AACs could provide earlier advice and even organise for a mentor to be connected at the initial “sign up”, but most are for some reason reluctant to do so. This has been a problem since DETNAC closed down and needs to be addressed by DEEWR, the Commonwealth Department responsible for AAC administration. One suggestion was that DET provide a small incentive payment or “spotter’s fee” to AACs to get them to flag Aboriginal commencements earlier;
- ⊞ There was unanimous agreement among this group that mentors need to be Aboriginal. Mentors need not only to have an understanding of Aboriginal culture and issues, but be able to act as a role model of Aboriginal success in the workplace;
- ⊞ Mentoring works and there is a need to regularly document good news stories. This should include examples of employers working effectively with *Way Ahead* mentors.

### 3.5 Synthesis – Key Issues to Emerge from the Review of Data

Issue	Research Element	Detail/Comments
<b>Scale/reach of the program</b>	Program data (3.1)	<i>Way Ahead</i> mentoring reaches a relatively small percentage of Aboriginal apprentices and trainees. To significantly improve overall retention and completion rates in NSW, the scale of the program might need to be increased.
<b>Current impact of program on retention/completion rates</b>	Program data (3.1)	There is some evidence that having a <i>Way Ahead</i> mentor improves retention for participating individuals. Overall, the retention rate is about 7% better for program participants.
<b>Extent of mentor contact</b>	Program data (3.1) Data from surveys of learners (3.2) Data from employer and learner field interviews (3.3) Data from mentors (3.4)	Many program participants have had limited and infrequent contact with their mentors. Some met their mentor at the start of their training but have not heard from them since.
<b>Regional spread of the program</b>	Program data (3.1)	Relative to their shares of total NSW commencements, the North Coast and Southern NSW Regions have a disproportionately high <i>Way Ahead</i> participation rate. Sydney, Hunter/Central Coast and New England all have disproportionately low <i>Way Ahead</i> participation rates.
<b>Support in the first 3 months</b>	Program data (3.1) Data from surveys of learners (3.2) Data from mentors (3.4)	Early support is crucial, but more than half of program participants are connected to their mentors <i>after</i> 3 months. This fact may also be exaggerating the effect of the program on retention - many of those most likely to drop out may fall outside the program's current reach. On the other hand, some learners appear to be joining the program only when things have started to go wrong – which may adversely affect the program's success rate.

Issue	Research Element	Detail/Comments
<b>Program targeting</b>	Program data (3.1) Data from surveys of learners (3.2) Data from employer and learner field interviews (3.3) Data from mentors (3.4)	Although there may be a case to provide mentoring support to all Aboriginal learners, given budget constraints it may be necessary to give priority to specific groups at higher overall risk of non-completion (e.g. youth, apprentices, new-entrant trainees, those without other support). Some Aboriginal learners may not need a mentor in the traditional sense and may benefit instead from alternative services – e.g. an induction program or a help/info line.
<b>Reasons for non-completion</b>	Data from surveys of learners (3.2)	While mentoring may not provide a solution to all of the issues raised, there may be value in mentors sharing successful responses to some of the most common reasons for non-completion.
<b>Mentor development</b>	Data from mentors (3.4)	Some mentors indicated that they would benefit from a more comprehensive induction training program and the opportunity to network with and learn from other mentors.

## 4. Discussion: Which Way Forward for The Way Ahead?

### 4.1 Scale and Reach of The Way Ahead Program

As detailed in Section 3.1, *The Way Ahead* program has provided mentoring support to only a small percentage of Aboriginal apprentices and trainees – somewhere between 2% and 5% over the last 3 years. If this “breadth” of service (i.e. number of learners involved) is limited, it could be argued that so too is its “depth” as most participating learners receive only one visit in the course of their training.

In the course of this review, there was widespread agreement from all stakeholders that Aboriginal apprentices and trainees benefit from high quality mentoring. However, the reality is that *The Way Ahead* is a small program and, as such, is unlikely to make a significant impact on the *overall* retention rates of Aboriginal apprentices and trainees in NSW, despite the positive effect it might be having on *individuals* receiving the service.

*The Way Ahead* program operates with a very modest budget of \$350,000 per year. If one excludes costs such as salaries, travel, marketing and promotion and various administrative expenses, just under \$200,000 is available each year to pay mentors across NSW to deliver their services to learners<sup>10</sup>. Put another way, if we wanted *The Way Ahead* to provide a mentor to every Aboriginal apprentice and trainee who commences each year, there is about \$60 per head available.

Ideally, more funding is needed to extend both the quantity and quality of the mentoring provided – see **RECOMMENDATION 5.13**. If the budget cannot be increased, decisions need to be made about both program targeting (i.e. whether certain categories of learners receive priority for the service) and the nature of the service provided. It would be better to have a well-targeted and effective program that provides intensive support to a smaller number of learners (at higher risk of dropping out) than to spread the program too thinly by providing a basic service to a larger number.

In broad terms, 17 to 24 year olds, new entrant apprentices and trainees and those who do not have mentors provided by other programs would seem to be logical priority groups for the program, but flexibility needs to be preserved to cater for individual circumstances. It might be helpful to re-visit the idea of using some kind of diagnostic tool to help identify those learners who are at higher risk of dropping out. Such a tool was included in the “Revised Referral Procedures” developed in 2007, but has not been used, perhaps because it was unclear who was responsible<sup>11</sup>. With over 3000 Aboriginal learners commencing each year, it might need the active involvement of STS field officers – see **RECOMMENDATION 5.1**.

The program should endeavour to provide mentors for at least 10% of new Aboriginal commencements each year (around 300 people at an average cost of roughly \$600 per head). Service levels may vary depending on the learner’s needs, but minimum service levels need to be set for *all* program participants (including number and timing of meetings and follow up contacts) – see **RECOMMENDATION 5.2**.

As resources are limited, care will also need to be taken to ensure that there is equitable access to the service across NSW (i.e. participation should be in line with each DET region’s share of total Aboriginal apprenticeship and traineeship commencements) – see **RECOMMENDATION 5.3**.

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<sup>10</sup> To put this into perspective, we are aware of at least one DEEWR-funded Indigenous Employment Program provider operating in a sub-region of Sydney that receives about \$90,000 to provide mentoring to its relatively small client base.

<sup>11</sup> “Step 3 – A telephone survey is conducted with all Aboriginal apprentices and trainees and their employers to identify the need/risk for mentoring support in the workplace.”

## 4.2 Program Delivery and Management

There is a strong case for STS regions to become far more involved in the promotion and delivery of *The Way Ahead*. While the Review did not include a formal assessment of regional office involvement in the program, anecdotal information suggested that this varies significantly from region to region.

The APO could continue to manage the program, but regions need to play a role in promoting the program locally (e.g. targeting learners, employers, training providers, AACs and others), liaising with mentors (e.g. providing advice and support on local issues), organising other support to apprentices and trainees (i.e. some issues might be less in the domain of mentors and more in that of STS field staff or the RTO) and liaising with the APO - see [RECOMMENDATION 5.4](#).

With a number of new Aboriginal employment and training programs soon to be transferred to STS from the Office of Aboriginal Affairs (OAA), including a separate mentoring program that is likely to come under the umbrella of *The Way Ahead*, it will also be necessary to review existing administrative and management processes to ensure that the programs harmonise. For the same reason, it might also be timely to revamp the existing program steering committee and to extend its brief. It should guide and monitor program performance of *The Way Ahead*, the new programs and other existing STS Aboriginal programs - see [RECOMMENDATION 5.5](#).

## 4.3 Improving the Referral Process

The single biggest problem faced by *The Way Ahead* is the time it takes for the Department to hear about new Aboriginal commencements. The Review suggests that less than half of *Way Ahead* referrals occur in the critical first 3 months of training – the period when most (43%) of cancellations occur. This cancellation figure could be even greater if one considers trainees and apprentices who drop out in the very early stages of their training and who never appear on STS records.

The failure of AACs to quickly notify DET of new Aboriginal commencements is the biggest cause. It can be months before the paperwork for such commencements is processed and they appear on the STS IVETS system. Until they do, DET cannot act.

*The Way Ahead* was introduced when DET itself was an AAC and had control of this process, but it now relies on the cooperation of other providers. The APO has piloted an “early warning” fax-based system with some AACs, but this has had mixed results. While it would seem to be in the interests of AACs to connect their learners with a service designed to improve retention (because they would earn a completion payment) in reality AACs may be mostly focussed on commencements and see them as the safest means of ensuring a strong cash flow.

DET provides services to AACs such as providing “automatic approval” rights in the processing of new commencements. Given the importance of early AAC advice to the effective implementation of *The Way Ahead*, it is reasonable that DET seeks to enter into Memoranda of Understanding with AACs that makes their continued access to “automatic approval” status conditional on their notifying STS of Aboriginal commencements in a more timely manner – see [RECOMMENDATION 5.6](#).

## 4.4 Service Enhancements

### *Characteristics of effective mentoring programs*

Mentoring means different things to different people. Definitions of mentoring have some elements in common, but there is little agreement beyond simply the involvement of a “significant other”, usually an older and more experienced person, in the development and guidance of a person. As

Hall (2003) puts it, “the terminology surrounding mentors, mentoring and mentees is bewilderingly various, vague and sometimes misleading”<sup>12</sup>. Similarly, Roberts (2000) refers to a “definitional quagmire”<sup>13</sup> surrounding mentoring.

It is important to stress that we are concerned here with planned mentoring programs – not with informal mentoring relationships that frequently develop in the workplace as a natural part of management and staff development. These planned and structured programs need to:

- ⊆ **Have a specific purpose** - In the context of *The Way Ahead*, we are interested in mentoring programs as a strategy to improve the *retention* of young Indigenous people in traineeships and apprenticeships so that they can gain qualifications and experience that can help them reach their life and vocational goals.
- ⊆ **Be based on the establishment of strong relationships** - Relationships are at the heart of the mentoring considered here – sustained, one-to-one, supportive, goal-oriented relationships which provide Aboriginal learners with a trusted advisor, role model, advocate and friend. *Simply labelling a person “mentor” is not in itself enough* to constitute a mentoring relationship if that person has neither the time nor the opportunity to develop a real relationship with the learner.
- ⊆ **Have formality and structure** – Mentoring programs need to have structure and to involve a *deliberate pairing of a mentor with a learner* by a third party. We are not talking about arrangements that are “so informal that the parties involved are unaware that mentoring is even taking place” (Jackson, 2003).
- ⊆ **Be delivered in a range of contexts** - This includes a range of settings appropriate for the achievement of the defined purpose, including workplaces, the Aboriginal or general community, training centres, or “remotely” through the internet or telephone.

In this context, the Review found that *The Way Ahead* has the potential to be an effective mentoring program, but needs to address a number of issues if it is to fulfil this potential.

### *How learners join the program*

Participation in *The Way Ahead* program should involve a real mentoring experience for the learner – including, as outlined above, *a strong relationship* and some *formality and structure*. While some of the learners interviewed in the Review did have a very positive mentoring experience, others had only a vague recollection of their “mentor”, having met them once and not heard from them since.

In reality, many in this latter group should not be considered as having joined *The Way Ahead* program at all. Their sole mentor visit could more accurately be called a “needs assessment” and many seem to have been assessed as not requiring follow up. This is not in itself a bad thing, but, with 62% of participants getting just one visit<sup>14</sup>, perhaps too many of the program’s limited resources are being expended on this needs assessment rather than on true mentoring.

If possible, the initial assessment of the need for a *Way Ahead* mentor should be undertaken at or before commencement<sup>15</sup>. The assessment could include the use of a diagnostic tool or checklist as well as the input of employers, job service providers and the learners themselves. Those who are

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<sup>12</sup> Hall, J.C., 2003, Mentoring and Young People – A literature review, The SCRE Centre, University of Glasgow

<sup>13</sup> Roberts, A., 2000 ‘Mentoring revisited: A phenomenological reading of the literature’, Mentoring & Tutoring, Vol 8, No 2

<sup>14</sup> Expressed another way, 29% of all mentor visits are these “one offs”.

<sup>15</sup> This will, of course, depend on the improved referral process described in 4.3.

assessed as being in less need of a mentor would be given information on other support that they can access if they need it, but they would not be considered to be participants in the *Way Ahead*'s mentoring program (see also [RECOMMENDATION 5.12](#)). DET Field Officers and Aboriginal Training Coordinators would need to play a role in doing the assessments and in recommending who joins the program. The final decision would rest with the APO. See [RECOMMENDATIONS 5.1 and 5.2](#).

### *Matching mentors with learners*

Existing participants generally indicated that they thought their mentors were a good match for them and so the APO's current processes are working well. Although the current pool of available mentors is quite small, it might be appropriate to give prospective participants more input into the matching process; for example, whether they want a male or female mentor or a mentor with particular industry or occupational knowledge. At the very least, all learners should be informed of the process they can follow to be assigned a different mentor if they need or want one. See [RECOMMENDATION 5.7](#).

### *Timing and duration of mentoring services*

All the evidence suggests that the majority of cancellations occur in the first three months of the training. If *Way Ahead* mentoring is to improve retention rates, it needs to do as much as possible in these three months. A minimum of two visits in this period does not seem unreasonable. Weekly phone calls between visits in this period are also recommended. See [RECOMMENDATION 5.2](#).

After the first three months, less frequent contact could generally be made – say, one more visit and fortnightly or monthly phone calls. There will be exceptions, of course, with some requiring more contact over the course of their training. Some will need extra support at specific times. Apprentices, for example, sometimes struggle in their second or third year, when their technical training can become more demanding.

### *Addressing common issues and supporting mentors to find solutions*

Table 8 in Section 3.2.1 highlights the most common reasons given by Aboriginal apprentices and trainees for discontinuing their training. While some of these reasons relate to issues over which mentors may have little or no control, it might be helpful for mentors if their future training and development focussed on these strategies and techniques that seek to address these issues:

- ☐ Change in personal circumstances
- ☐ Problems in the workplace
- ☐ Change in employment or study
- ☐ Change in business circumstances
- ☐ Work performance problems
- ☐ Training problems

There are no easy solutions to these issues and mentors need to be able to share their experiences in dealing with them through regular meetings or teleconferences – see [RECOMMENDATION 5.8](#). For example, some mentors may have had some success in assisting learners who were in danger of losing their driver's licences. Some might have persuaded learners to delay moving to another area until after they have completed their training or have helped re-establish the traineeship or apprenticeship in the new location. Some may have been able to equip learners with better conflict management skills or contributed to raising the cultural awareness of employers and their staff.

Documenting successful approaches to common issues would also be very helpful.



## 4.5 Other Services to Improve Retention

Mentoring is not a panacea and there are other things that could be done to improve Aboriginal retention rates in apprenticeships and traineeships. Some could be done at a local level, while others might require action at the training system level to ensure that Aboriginal learners' needs are being adequately met.

### *Supporting Aboriginal trainees engaged in the “employment-based” mode*

A very large number of Aboriginal trainees are in the “employment-based” mode – that is, they do not attend a training institution for any part of their traineeship. The Review found that some learners are struggling with the on-the-job training work books that are commonly used as part of this mode of delivery. While learners attending TAFE or private RTOs can sometimes access specialist resources to help overcome literacy problems, trainees in the “employment-based” mode cannot.

Some trainees said that their mentors helped them complete the workbooks, “making them real” by using language and examples that were more easily understood. While this is to be commended, it does raise questions about the suitability of RTO training materials and work books for many Aboriginal learners and whether RTOs should be required to do more to assist these learners. These issues need to be raised in national training policy forums - see **RECOMMENDATION 5.9**. There is also a case for the Department to require RTOs to do more to meet the needs of Aboriginal learners undertaking their training in the employment-based mode. For example, RTOs could be asked to provide information on the strategies they propose to use to meet these needs – see **RECOMMENDATION 5.10**.

### *Peer support and the use of social media*

Another implication of the growth of “employment-based” delivery of traineeships is that trainees can become isolated. In a classroom-based mode, they would at least regularly mix with other learners (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal). One idea that was raised by trainees and apprentices at a meeting in Wagga Wagga was the facilitation of peer support networks among Aboriginal apprentices and trainees. This could involve the local organisation of social get togethers (such as barbecues) where Aboriginal learners could meet, discuss their experiences, catch up with their mentors (if they have them) and hear from DET staff about other support that might be available.

STS staff in Wagga Wagga seemed interested in pursuing this idea. A model should be developed and piloted and the results shared with other STS regional offices - see **RECOMMENDATION 5.11**.

Another element that could be incorporated into this peer support idea is the use of social media, especially Facebook. This web-based application can be used as a communication and support tool and a model could be developed that suits Aboriginal trainees and apprentices. There are many web sites that provide guidance on the professional use of Facebook as an educational tool<sup>16</sup>.

### *Improving awareness of the support available*

Some of those surveyed who did not have mentors said that they would not know who to turn to if they had problems in their apprenticeship or traineeship. Given the vulnerability of this group, additional effort may be needed to inform all Aboriginal apprentices and trainees of the support that is available from STS and others - see **RECOMMENDATION 5.12**.

STS is exploring the idea of transmitting text messages to all apprentices and trainees that contain contact phone numbers for support. If this idea is implemented, details of Aboriginal support personnel need to be included. Even better would be to have an STS Field Officer attend all Aboriginal sign-ups where this information could be conveyed in person (and where learners' need for *Way Ahead* support could be assessed).

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<sup>16</sup> For example: <http://www.onlinecollege.org/2009/10/20/100-ways-you-should-be-using-facebook-in-your-classroom/>

## 5. Summary of Recommendations

### 5.1 Undertake the initial assessment of the need for a *Way Ahead* mentor at or before commencement. This assessment should include the use of a diagnostic tool or checklist as well as the input of employers, job service providers and the learners themselves.

In the interests of program efficiency, it is important that the initial assessment of learner needs not eat into limited mentoring delivery costs. Currently, 29% of mentor visits are “one offs” and many of these, it would appear, are not followed up with additional mentoring service.

Assessment would ideally take place at sign up (or earlier) and might include input from the employer, the learner and other service providers such as the AACs, GTOs and Job Services Australia. STS Field Officers would need to play a negotiated role in the assessment process and in applying the diagnostic tool. The diagnostic tool would need to be as “fact based” as possible and not require the people administering it to necessarily have a detailed understanding of Aboriginal community or cultural issues.

For example, the development of the tool itself could include an analysis of IVETS data to identify factors that put Aboriginal learners at risk of non-completion and which mentoring can remedy. These might include factors that relate to individual work history (e.g. “Has the individual failed to complete a traineeship or apprenticeship in the past? Is this the learner’s first job?”), location (e.g. remote communities), labour market (e.g. where labour markets are strong and people are finding better paid full-time jobs, mentoring may not stop people from dropping out of traineeships), trade or calling, industry, age and gender.

### 5.2 Set minimum service levels for all program participants, an overall program participation target (e.g. “10% of all Aboriginal commencements each year”) and focus on providing support to learners in the first three months of their traineeships and apprenticeships (e.g. include a minimum of two visits in this period as well as weekly phone calls between visits)

All *Way Ahead* participants should have a real mentoring experience that goes beyond an initial chat. The program should also seek to extend its current reach.

As a “second tier” of service to Aboriginal learners, those who are not given a mentor under the *Way Ahead* should be given a comprehensive information package (and, ideally, a phone call from STS) that clearly explains the range of support that is available and who can help them resolve any problems they might face (See also 5.12).

### 5.3 Work towards providing equitable access to the service across NSW according to need.

It may be necessary to set indicative targets to ensure that service provision matches the geographical spread of Aboriginal commencements across NSW. This would not be based just on population and participation, but on the analysis of retention risk factors described above.

### 5.4 Ensure that STS regional offices play an active role in promoting and supporting the program

Regions can play a vital role in promotion, individual needs assessment, liaison with the APO and providing support that complements that provided by mentors.

- 5.5 Review existing administrative and management processes to ensure that all STS Aboriginal programs harmonise (including the new mentoring program being transferred from OAA). This includes revamping the existing *Way Ahead* program steering committee and extending its brief so that it guides and monitors the performance of all STS Aboriginal programs**

The imminent transfer of a number of new programs from the Office of Aboriginal Affairs makes it timely to review current arrangements.

- 5.6 Improve the speed of referral to the program. This should include entering into Memoranda of Understanding with AACs that make their continued access to “automatic approval” status conditional on their notifying STS of Aboriginal commencements in a more timely manner**

Speed of referral is perhaps the most critical operational issue to address.

- 5.7 Wherever possible, give prospective participants input into the selection of their mentor and inform them of the process they can follow to be assigned a different mentor if they need or want one**
- 5.8 As part of mentor development, provide them with more opportunities to share their experiences in dealing with common issues through regular meetings, teleconferences or a web page. Document successful strategies and distribute them to mentors.**
- 5.9 With a large number of Aboriginal trainees undertaking their training in the “employment-based” mode, highlight in national training forums the need to make RTO training materials and work books more appropriate for Aboriginal learners. RTO learner support arrangements need also to be improved for these Aboriginal learners.**
- 5.10 Require RTOs and GTOs who are delivering services to Aboriginal trainees engaged in the “employment-based” delivery mode to present details of how they intend to meet their specific learning needs, including those who have problems with literacy and numeracy.**
- 5.11 Trial the development of a peer support network among Aboriginal apprentices and trainees in an STS region and consider using Facebook as a tool in this trial.**
- 5.12 Take additional steps to inform all Aboriginal apprentices and trainees of the support that is available to them from STS and other service providers to help them complete their training.**
- 5.13 Explore options to secure funding to significantly expand and improve the *Way Ahead’s* mentoring services.**

The above recommendations seek to identify improvements that can be implemented within existing budgetary constraints. The fact remains, however, that the *Way Ahead* is a currently a very small program and can therefore only reach a small percentage of Aboriginal learners.

The review’s findings suggested that there was a substantial unmet demand from Aboriginal apprentices and trainees for mentors. Additional funds from the State Government to expand the program would be most welcome. DET should also engage with the Commonwealth Government to explore cooperative approaches to supporting Aboriginal apprentices and trainees through mentoring.

## ATTACHMENT A – Research Tools and Questionnaires

### Way Ahead for Aboriginal People Survey of Apprentices & Trainees – “Current and Completed”

#### **INTRO:**

*We are doing a review of the help provided to Aboriginal apprentices and trainees. We are contacting people like you who have had mentors under the Way Ahead program. Would you mind answering a few questions? It should only take about 5 minutes.*

**1.) What was the highest level of school you completed? (e.g. Yr 10, Yr 12 etc) \_\_\_\_\_**

**2.) About how many people in total are (or were) employed at the organisation where you are doing your apprenticeship or traineeship?**

Less than 5

6-10

11-20

21-50

51-100

More than 100

**3.) Are/were there other Aboriginal people employed at your workplace?**

Yes

No

**4.) How often did you meet with your Way Ahead mentor?**

Never

Once

Twice

Three times

More than three times

**5.) How long were you in your apprenticeship or traineeship before your first had contact with your Way Ahead mentor?**

In the first week

In the first month

In the first three months

In the first six months

Later

**6.) How often did you have other contact with your mentor (e.g. phone, text, email)?**

- Never
- Once
- Twice
- Three times
- More than three times

**7.) How do you rate the following:**

	<b>Very Poor</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
The availability of your mentor when you needed him or her	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
The number of contacts made by your mentor	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Mentor help with workplace problems	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Mentor help with training problems	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Mentor help with personal problems	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Mentor help with family or community problems	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

**8.) How much you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
My "Way Ahead" mentor is/was a good match for me (e.g. personality, knowledge, style)	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
I get/got on well with my mentor.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Having a mentor really helped me in my apprenticeship or traineeship.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
I can depend on my mentor.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
My mentor has helped me resolve a problem that might have ended my apprenticeship or traineeship.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
I didn't really need my "Way Ahead" mentor.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
I talk with my mentor when I have problems or things that worry me.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
My mentor knows what is going on in my life.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

9.) For you, how important is getting individual help and advice on the following issues when doing an apprenticeship or traineeship:

	<b>Not Important At All</b>	<b>Somewhat Unimportant</b>	<b>No Opinion Either Way</b>	<b>Somewhat Important</b>	<b>Extremely Important</b>
Settling into the new job	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Getting into a proper work routine	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Managing money	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Problems in the workplace	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Personal problems	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Problems at TAFE	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Balancing work & community or family responsibilities	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Pressures from family and mates	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Providing advice to my employer	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Organising learning support (e.g. at TAFE)	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Help with staying motivated	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

**10.) If you needed outside help with an issue or problem that threatened to end your apprenticeship or traineeship, who would you contact first - your Way Ahead mentor or someone else?**

I'd call my Way Ahead Mentor

I'd call someone else

**11.) Apart from your Way Ahead mentor, did any of the following ALSO provide you with a mentor to help you in your apprenticeship or traineeship?**

My Job Services Australia, Job Network or IEP provider (Commonwealth Government)

Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES)

My employer

Other

**12.) Do you think it is important that your mentor is Aboriginal?**

Yes

No

**13.) Would you recommend Way Ahead mentoring to your mates?**

Yes

No

**14.) Has the Way Ahead Program helped in your individual situation? If yes, how:**

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**15.) Do you have any other comments that might help us improve mentoring services provided to Aboriginal apprentices and trainees?**

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**Thank You!**

**Thank you for taking our survey. Your response will help us to provide better support to Aboriginal apprentices and trainees.**

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**Survey of Mentoring & Support for Aboriginal Apprentices and Trainees – “Did Not Complete”**

**INTRO:**

***We are doing a review of the help provided to Aboriginal apprentices and trainees. We are contacting people like you who have started apprenticeships or traineeships in the last two years, but who have not completed them. Would you mind answering a few questions? It should only take about 5 minutes.***

**1.) What is the highest level of school you completed? (e.g. Yr 10, Yr 12 etc) \_\_\_\_\_**

**3.) How long were you in your apprenticeship or traineeship with (INSERT EMPLOYER NAME) before it ended?**

- Less than 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 12 months
- 1 to 2 years
- More than 2 years

**4.) About how many people in total were employed there when you were doing your apprenticeship or traineeship?**

- Less than 5
- 6-10
- 11-20
- 21-50
- 51-100
- More than 100

**5.) Were there other Aboriginal people employed there?**

- Yes
- No

**6.) What was the main reason why you did not complete the apprenticeship or traineeship?**

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**7.) Did any of the following reasons also apply in your case? (Yes or No)**

- You did not like the type of work
- You did not like the workplace
- You did not like the hours or conditions
- You did not like the pay
- You had transport problems
- You had problems with co-workers
- You had problems with the boss
- You had problems with on-the-job training
- You had problems with the training at TAFE
- You had family problems
- You had health problems
- You moved to a new area
- You had problems with friends
- Your employer wasn't happy with your performance at work

**8.) What is your current employment situation?**

- Employed full time
- Employed part time
- Not in the labour force (e.g. full time study, caring for a child)
- Unemployed

**9.) Did you have the support of a mentor or mentors during your apprenticeship or traineeship?**

- Yes
- No

**IF YES -> Go to Q10, Otherwise jump to Q11**

**10.) Who provided your mentor?**

- My Job Services Australia, Job Network or IEP provider (Commonwealth Government)
- Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES)
- The Way Ahead Program (NSW Dept of Education & Training)
- My employer
- Other
- I don't know

**11.) For you, how important is getting individual help and advice on the following issues when doing an apprenticeship or traineeship:**

	<b>Extremely Important</b>	<b>Somewhat Important</b>	<b>No Opinion Either Way</b>	<b>Somewhat Unimportant</b>	<b>Not Important At All</b>
Settling into a new job	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Getting into a proper work routine	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Managing money	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Problems in the workplace	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Personal problems	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Problems at TAFE	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Balancing work & community or family responsibilities	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Dealing with family & peer pressures	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Providing advice to my employer	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Organising learning support (e.g. at TAFE)	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Help with staying motivated	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

**12.) Do you have any other comments that might help us improve the support we provide to Aboriginal apprentices and trainees?**

**Thank You!**

**Thank you for taking our survey. Your response will help us to provide better support to Aboriginal apprentices and trainees.**

## Survey of Mentors

### *Mentor Details*

**1.) Are you an Aboriginal or a Torres Strait Islander?**

Yes

No

**2.) Are you an employee of the Department of Education and Training?**

Yes

No

**3.) Are you an employee of an organisation that delivers New Careers for Aboriginal People (NCAP) or Aboriginal Enterprise Development Officer Program (AEDO) services for DET?**

Yes

No

**4.) Please describe how you were first recruited to be a mentor under the Way Ahead program:**

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**5.) What training have you received through the program to provide mentoring services?**

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### *Mentoring Activity Levels*

**6.) In which of the following years have you been a mentor under the Way Ahead program? (You can tick more than one)**

2005

2006

2007

2008

2009

2010

**7.) Approximately how many learners are you now mentoring under the Way Ahead program?**

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**8.) Approximately how many hours per week in total do you now provide Way Ahead mentoring services?**

**9.) Given your other commitments, how many more hours per week of mentoring services might you be able to provide?**

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**10.) Do you also provide employment mentoring services for any of the following? (Leave blank if you do not)**

- Job Services Australia providers
- Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES)
- Indigenous Employment Program (IEP)
- Other

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***Contact with Learners***

**11.) When do you normally first have face-to-face contact with learners under the Way Ahead program?**

- Before they start with the employer
- On the first day (e.g. at sign up)
- In the first week
- In the first month
- In the first three months
- In the first six months
- Later

**12.) When you have first contact with a learner, describe how you decide what level of follow up and monitoring is needed?**

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**13.) What percentage of the learners who are referred to you would you say need intensive monitoring and follow up (e.g. fortnightly or monthly contacts)?**

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**14.) What percentage of learners who are referred to you would you say need very little monitoring or follow up (e.g. once every three or six months)?**

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**Program Design**

**15.) How do you rate each of the following aspects of the Way Ahead program:**

	<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Very Poor</b>
The time taken to connect learners with mentors	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
The identification of learners who are most in need of mentors	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Information and resources provided to mentors to help them do their job	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
The number of learners who are offered mentors	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
The geographic reach of the program (i.e. availability across NSW)	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
The regularity of contact between mentors and learners	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
The process by which mentors are selected	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
The training provided to mentors	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
The adequacy of payments made to mentors for their services	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

16.) Indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
All Aboriginal apprentices and trainees should be offered a mentor at commencement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actively providing advice and support to employers is part of my work as a mentor.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The first month is the most critical time to provide support to Aboriginal apprentices and trainees.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
After the first contact, I can usually tell if a learner needs regular follow up contact.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Way Ahead mentors need to be Aboriginal.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mentors should contact all their apprentices and trainees at least every month.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trainees and apprentices who have Way Ahead mentors are much more likely to successfully complete their training.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Completion rates should be the sole measure of success for Way Ahead mentoring.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Issues**

**17.) In your experience so far as a Way Ahead mentor, how often have you had to deal with problems faced by learners related to:**

	<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>
Settling into the job	( )	( )	( )	( )
Getting into a proper work routine	( )	( )	( )	( )
Managing money	( )	( )	( )	( )
Relationships with co-workers or supervisors	( )	( )	( )	( )
Racism in the workplace	( )	( )	( )	( )
Alcohol and drug issues	( )	( )	( )	( )
Other personal problems	( )	( )	( )	( )
Completing training assignments and assessments	( )	( )	( )	( )
Problems at TAFE or private training provider	( )	( )	( )	( )
Problems balancing work & community or family responsibilities	( )	( )	( )	( )
Dealing with family & peer pressures	( )	( )	( )	( )
Losing motivation	( )	( )	( )	( )

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**Successes & Disappointments**

**18.) Briefly describe your greatest success story as a Way Ahead mentor? Was completion of the traineeship or apprenticeship at risk? What saved the day?**

**19.) Briefly describe your biggest mentoring disappointment under the Way Ahead program. What went wrong?**

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**20.) Do you have any other suggestions or comments on the mentoring provided under the Way Ahead program?**

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