

Vocational education and training (VET) as a tool for planning and management in savanna communities

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Introduction

The savanna region is geographically extensive, sparsely populated and culturally diverse. While it is very much part of Australia, the region is significantly different from the southern states in many ways. The assumptions that are applied to communities and education/learning do not necessarily apply in the savanna region. Vocational education and training plays a significant role for industries and individuals across the savanna region, but it also has the capacity to affect communities.

Traditional focus of VET

Vocational education and training (VET) has over the last decade become a significant contributor to building knowledge and skills in Australia. In the ten years to 2001, participation in VET increased by 77%. In the same period government funding for VET increased by over 200%. There are several reasons for this increase. VET is flexible and it can be tailored to the needs of enterprises. Training packages provide an education pathway for trainees that result in nationally recognised qualifications. Delivery of VET is not dependent on huge infrastructure requirements and is therefore applicable to a wide variety of contexts. In 2000 for example, one third of all VET students in the Northern Territory were Indigenous and most of these were from remote areas.

During the last decade the focus of VET has been on jobs. It has been about building the skill base for industry and enterprises. Training packages are developed by industry training advisory bodies to ensure that the learning that goes on is appropriately targeted to meet industry requirements.

A different approach to VET

While it is fair to say that VET has made a significant contribution to the needs of individuals and enterprises the current approach is not without its critics. The criticisms of VET centre on a number of quality issues. There are questions about the educational value and the transferability of skills and the appropriateness of VET training packages in remote communities.

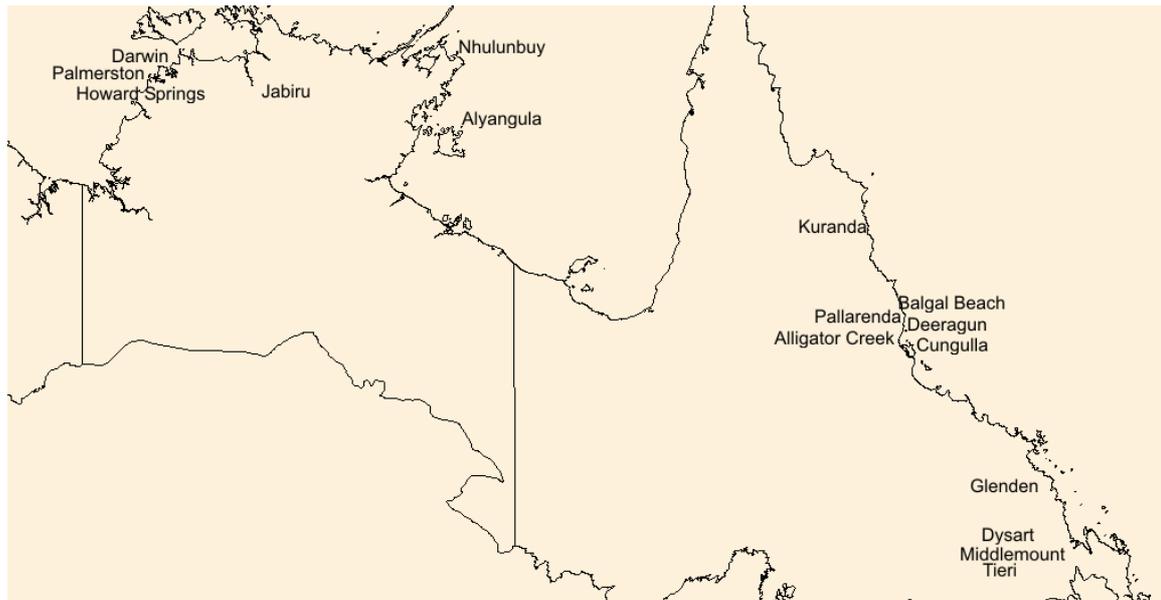
There is increasing acknowledgement that VET is about more than skills for employment. Research evidence suggests that particularly in regional communities around Australia, the strength of VET is reflected in partnerships between providers, industry *and* communities to ensure that the broader goals of communities are met through provision of VET. These needs include the health, environmental, social, leisure, safety needs as well as those relating to employment, education and wealth. This different approach to VET allows for the possibility that learning and training are

integral components of community processes that build social capital and community capacity, thereby enhancing the sustainability and well-being of communities.

This research

There are indications from past research that VET does contribute to social capital and community capacity. The focus of this research then is to identify ways that VET can be used more intentionally to build capacity. The approach used is to first identify places in the savanna region that show signs of existing high capacity, using quantitative data that is publicly available. These places are shown in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1 Savanna urban centres and localities with strongest indications of high capacity.



Using some of the places identified in this analysis the next phase of the research is to find out just how VET does contribute to the capacity of these communities using largely qualitative research techniques. It will also identify where there are training gaps—in terms of community need—and also identify models of effective delivery. The role of partnerships will be examined as part of this process.

Outputs/linkages

■ Statistical profile of savanna communities

The statistical profile of savanna communities is a reference tool that can be used not only for use in conjunction with research about VET but also a range of other Tropical Savannas Cooperative Research Centre (TS-CRC) projects. It reviews a broad range of statistical variables from 118 urban centres and localities within the savanna region.

■ Develop and trial learning resources consistent with the needs of savanna stakeholders

One of the goals of the research is to enable the development of training/learning resources that can be used more intentionally to build community capacity. It is envisaged that these will relate to other TS-CRC projects and research.