

From Q Build to U Build

Palm Island Building Project

Final Report

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CONTENTS

Contents	2
KEY MESSAGES	4
1. Preamble	5
2 Project Introduction	6
2a Researcher role	6
Methodological Approach.....	6
2b The ITSO position	6
Figure 1: ITSO and QBuild organisational structure.....	8
Figure 2: ITSO external partners	9
3 Background research: Grounding the need for the ITSO ROLE	10
3a Key messages: Successful programs for VET in Indigenous contexts.....	10
Table 1: Six Priority Areas.....	10
3b Key messages: Successful VET in remote contexts	11
3c Key messages: Successful VET in the Construction Industry	11
3d Key messages: Successful mentoring in VET.....	11
3e Key messages: Successful transitions into employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	12
Figure 3: Guidelines to success for organisations in achieving employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people.....	13
4 Apprentice and Trainee activity on Palm Island: Background data.....	14
Table 2: Palm Island Apprentices 1997-2009	14
Table 3: Palm Island Trainees 1997-2009	15
5 Successes and Challenges: The itso role	16
5a SUCCESS STORIES	16
Over-riding message: No issues with work quality.....	16
Recruitment	16
Engagement Strategies.....	17
Retention	17
Attendance	18
Trainee Perspectives	18
Other Stakeholder Perspectives.....	18
5b. What are the challenges?.....	19
Attendance	19
Figure 4 Average absences over 43 weeks of traineeships.....	19
ITSO position within QBuild and in relation to stakeholders	20
Training provision	20
Supporting the coordination of training for trainees	20
Literacy support.....	21
Pathways beyond traineeships.....	21
Employer expectations.....	22
Drivers Licence	22
Community involvement	22
6 Summary Recommendations	24
Appendix 1.....	26
References.....	29

KEY MESSAGES

Industry Training Support Officer (ITSO) role

- The ITSO role is innovative and addresses many issues noted within the research literature as ‘critical’ components of successful VET programs in Indigenous communities. The ITSO has the confidence of all stakeholders referenced in the report.
- The ITSO role as established by QBuild, while well regarded by all stakeholders, has complex structural relationships both within QBuild and with external partners.

Trainees’ confidence and skill levels

- The high number of applications for the trainee positions in both 2008 and 2009 represents confidence in local community members’ willingness to undertake training/work opportunities.
- There are significant levels of confidence amongst all stakeholders in the trainees’ ‘on the job’ skill and capacities to undertake the work required within the traineeship and beyond.
- There remain consistent concerns about the literacy and numeracy skills and capacities of the trainees for ongoing training.
- The trainees expressed great appreciation for the support offered by the ITSO.

Trainees’ engagement and awareness

- Attendance is the major area of concern for the ITSO and the stakeholders who work with the trainees. Numerous measures to improve attendance are apparent within the activities of the ITSO – including personal support, ensuring stimulating work environment, addressing transport needs, respecting cultural activities.
- The trainees recognise and value the support provided by the ITSO role but still require significant guidance in ‘work practices’ and organisational culture.
- ‘Whole projects’ – seeing a construction site from start to finish – were considered major incentives for trainees and ideal opportunities for training. These opportunities were limited on Palm Island.

Trainees’ transitions to employment

- The ITSO has actively case managed each trainee beyond the tenure of the traineeship. This has had some success in developing work pathways.
- Employers in the construction industry are determined in their expectations for attendance and participation and the ITSO is vital in communicating these expectations during the traineeship and beyond.
- Transport issues, including the lack of a drivers licence, housing and family circumstances make employment pathways to the mainland difficult. Pathways on Palm Island within construction appear limited although not impossible.
- The ITSO role supports the building of a ‘work ethic’ but further use of community mentors is desirable within both the work and training realm.

1. PREAMBLE

Discussions with key stakeholders over a 12-month period noted concerns about the progress of VET on Palm Island. Meeting notes indicate the following issues:

- Low levels of literacy and numeracy skills and inadequate provision of support.
- Attendance of apprentices/trainees and work ethic generally.
- Confusion around coordination of stakeholders and timely completion of training.
- QBuild mentoring.
- Cultural awareness of those involved in training.

QBuild's appointment of the Industry Training Support Officer (ITSO) in August 2007 represents an innovative approach to improving outcomes for construction trainees on Palm Island. The position description clearly notes the intention to support the trainees as well as overseeing the coordination of all the requirements to fulfil the obligations of a traineeship. The selection criteria for the position clearly note the importance of technical skills within construction, as well as effective cross-cultural communication skills. A critical additional feature of the position is the location – Palm Island.

In view of the data and the research literature as presented here, there appears much to 'take heart in' in relation to current initiatives – and in particular, the QBUILD mentoring program and the introduction of the ITSO role. In line with this, the data collected during interviews with a range of key stakeholders adds further weight to the apparent, and current, 'success stories' of this initiative (and other accompanying schemes). That said, challenges remain – as one might expect with the implementation of any new program.

2 PROJECT INTRODUCTION

2a Researcher role

In the context of the initiative, and the establishment of the position of the Industry Training Support Officer (ITSO) more specifically, it was the role of the researchers to engage in the evaluation of the following outcomes:

- Increased attendance of apprentices and trainees to work experience and block training.
- Increased levels of skills of students and facilitation of their entry into building apprenticeships and traineeships.
- Increased confidence of students to undertake work opportunities.
- Increased awareness of/for students and apprentices of employer expectations.

Methodological Approach

In the process of undertaking this evaluation, the researchers reviewed quantitative data relating to progression and completion of construction apprenticeships on Palm Island – both prior to, and at the time of, the ITSO role implementation. The researchers also reviewed the ITSO role in the context of previous literature and similar roles, as well as other relevant research literature. So, too, they conducted interviews with a range of key stakeholders – including trainees, the ITSO, training providers, QBuild contractors and relevant organisations – at various points in time across the course of the research undertaking. These interviews focused upon ascertaining stakeholders’ views with regard to the attendance of apprentices/trainees, the skill levels and confidence of apprentices/trainees, and the apprentice/trainees’ awareness of employer/employment expectations. The interviews also sought to capture stakeholders’ views of the ITSO role and of the ways in which the role served to inform the knowledge base and practices of the apprentices/trainees in relation to the above mentioned points. Two visits to Palm Island were also undertaken by the researchers as part of the data gathering and broader research process.

2b The ITSO position

The “Position Description” (see Appendix 1) for the Industry Training Support Officer (ITSO), as produced by QBuild, states the following of the role:

Management and coordinator of Palm Island apprentices and trainees to successfully complete training and achieve successful employment outcomes. This position will also support the establishment of local Indigenous suppliers and service providers to ensure they meet QBuild’s delivery outcomes. Through this, the local people of Palm Island will be able to create and maintain businesses to increase access to local employment and training opportunities.

The position reports to the District Manager Palm Island and will work closely with the Regional Apprentice Coordinator, various office staff, field staff and contractors performing a range of training, project

planning and delivery activities (p. 1).

The ITSO role is ‘marked out’ by its scope and diversity of responsibilities – such that are further amplified given the complexities of the site within which the ITSO operates and the range of stakeholders with which the ITSO is required to liaise. In summary (i.e., as adapted from the “Position Description”), the core duties and accountabilities of the ITSO role are:

1. Manage and coordinate apprentices/trainees to complete both on the job/off the job competencies.
2. Stimulate the learning process – to enhance the apprentices’/trainees’ motivation and confidence.
3. Develop and maintain liaison with a wide range of stakeholders – to ensure high level of commitment is given to establishing and maintaining local Indigenous suppliers and contractors to provide quality training opportunities for apprentices/trainees.
4. Monitor and review quality of performance and training of current programs – to ensure compliance and progression of apprentices/trainees in line with legislative, industry and timeframe parameters.
5. Manage performance issues of apprentices/trainees in liaison with a range of relevant stakeholders.
6. Regularly liaise with apprentices/trainees and relevant bodies to ensure training is completed on schedule and record books are maintained.
7. Maintain contact details for apprentices/trainees.
8. Coordinate travel and accommodation arrangements for apprentices/trainees attending off the job training.
9. Coordinate additional learning support if required – e.g., assistance with literacy and numeracy.
10. Coordinate recruitment, selection and induction of apprentices/trainees (in collaboration with Regional Apprentice Coordinator).
11. Handle administrative requirements of apprenticeships/traineeships – including incentives for non-QBuild employed apprentices.
12. Develop and support establishment of local Indigenous suppliers – to ensure they meet QBuild contractual requirements.
13. Manage and implement effective work programs and provide accurate reporting on status of program and activities to management.

Within the organisational structure of QBuild, the ITSO role emerges as having a range of reporting and relational responsibilities. These are apparent in Figure 1.

Figure 1: ITSO and QBuild organisational structure

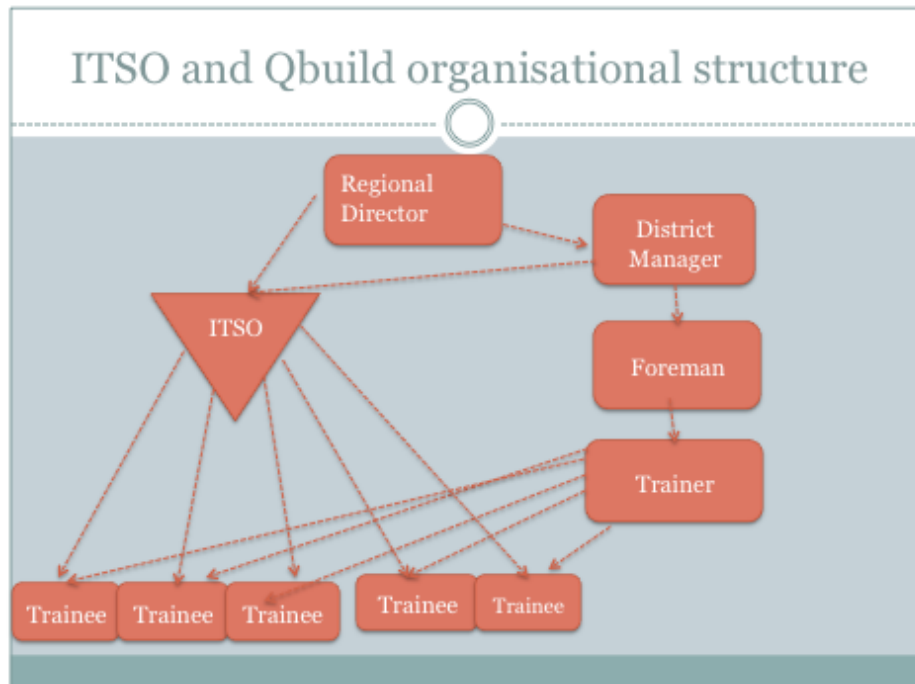
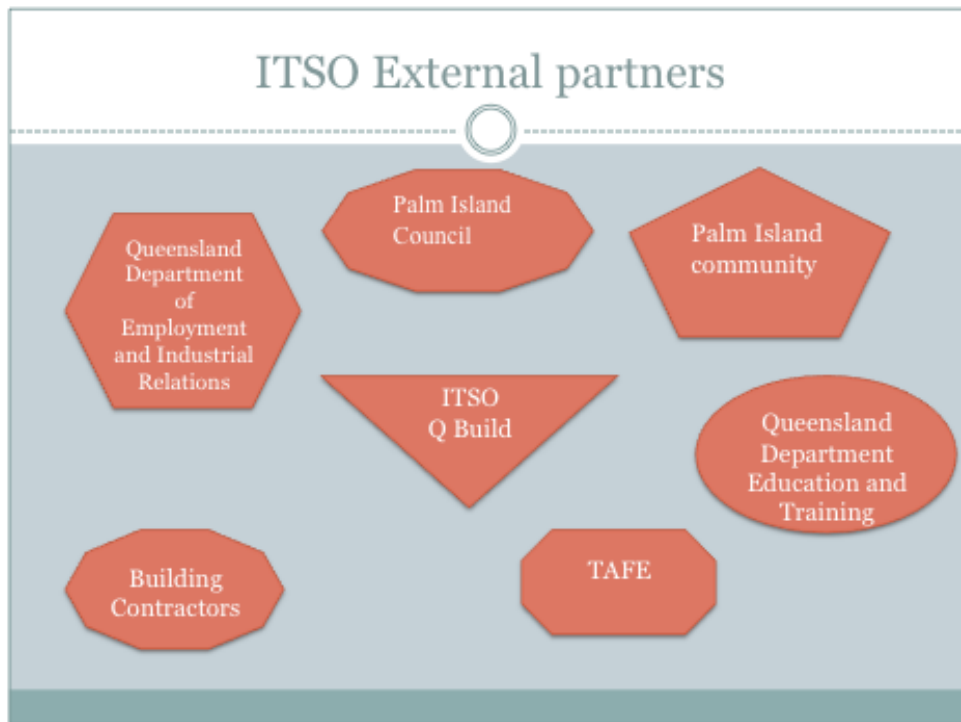


Figure 1 outlines the complexity of the relational roles within, and as associated with, the position. The ITSO has direct responsibility for the trainees, but also liaises with the District Manager to effectively allocate work tasks to the trainees through the foreman and trainer. The ITSO reports outcomes directly to the Regional Director, while also engaging with the requirements passed on to the trainees through the District Manager.

The internal organisational structure is expanded through a myriad of external partnerships and relationships. Working in the best interests of the trainees, the ITSO navigates relationships with all stakeholders within the community, and training and regulatory agencies to ensure timely completion of work and the traineeship. These external relationships are portrayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: ITSO external partners



The coordination of this myriad of external stakeholders is undertaken through a recently established consultative committee. This committee is charged with developing ways to support trainees and apprentices. Miller’s (2006) research supports the intent of this committee – ensuring ongoing negotiation with key community members through a formal structure as well as informal activities. While the committee structure is designed to be highly inclusive, one interviewee commented that these meetings are often “overpopulated by non-local, non Indigenous” representatives. The ITSO role is clearly critical in creating and sustaining a culture of inclusivity for all stakeholders.

3 BACKGROUND RESEARCH: GROUNDING THE NEED FOR THE ITS0 ROLE

A range of background research literature informs the evaluation of this project. This literature is summarised below.

3a Key messages: Successful programs for VET in Indigenous contexts.

Miller’s (2006) systematic review of literature related to vocational education and training in Indigenous contexts notes seven key features that contribute to success.

- Community ownership and involvement: This is considered the single most important factor in achieving success. The more control and input from the community, the more successful the outcomes.
- Training that reaffirms Indigenous identities: In addition to developing skills in industry areas, successful training also supports engagement with Indigenous histories, cultures and identities.
- Partnerships: Forging partnerships between community members and all stakeholders is critical for success of training outcomes.
- Flexibility in course design, content and delivery: Successful programs have more ‘practical’ course delivery, delivery within a community and are responsive to emerging needs as training progresses.
- Quality staff: Outcomes of programs are directly affected by the commitment and understanding of staff. There is evidence that the employment of Indigenous staff improves outcomes.
- Student support services: Strong education support services, particularly for literacy are required. In addition, financial and social support mechanisms are required.
- Responsive funding mechanisms: The realities of location, funding for emerging student needs, and stable long term funding are all required for successful programs.

A research forum on Indigenous VET posed a number of ‘ways forward’ for the agenda – that is, actions now needed to improve the outcomes from training for Indigenous Australians. These actions comprised six priority areas which, along with relevant descriptors, are presented in the table following (see Table 1).

Table 1: Six Priority Areas

(Source: O’Callaghan, 2005)

Priority	Descriptors
Building the capacity of the VET sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen Indigenous voices in decision-making • Grow Indigenous staff at the ‘coal face’ • Improve research and dissemination
Creating more pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link in with schools • Provide career guidance • Offer financial and other ‘non-academic’ support • Provide tutoring

Improving funding frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break the reliance on supplementary funding • Develop flexible funding models that can reflect local needs
Culturally-appropriate product development and delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandate cross-cultural training • Allow communities to lead training • Build relationships with and between students • Be flexible with learning and assessment methods
Links to employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide job placement support • Recognise community employment opportunities
Growing VET sector partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define partnerships • Build in time to develop relationships • Foster different types of partnerships

3b Key messages: Successful VET in remote contexts

A range of studies provide insight into additional requirements for successful VET in remote contexts:

- ‘Buy in services’ including fly-in/fly-out models have failed to meet the needs of remote communities.
- Local leadership of programs incorporating strong partnerships with local community leaders.
- A systematic approach to training in information and communication technologies (ICTs) is required to maximize communication opportunities. Using ICTs to deliver in remote communities has proved problematic due to both technical constraints and skill levels.
- Stable and long-term funding for remote delivery using a preferred provider is required (see for example Australian National Training Authority Research Advisory Council, 1998; Boyle & Wallace, 2008).

3c Key messages: Successful VET in the Construction Industry

Data from NCVER (2007) notes that within the construction industry, attrition rates remain high – 46.9% across a three-year span. In 2006, 26.5% of apprentices and trainees within the construction industry left within 12 months of commencement.

Best practice guidelines in the construction training area include:

- Systematic processes to ‘attract, train, retain, maintain’ apprentices within the programs offered.
- Dedicated mentors and mentor reports.
- Mandatory activities for completion within specified timelines.
- Completion of daily activity logs.
- Incorporation of supervisor feedback using systematic processes.

3d Key messages: Successful mentoring in VET

Mentoring (also commonly described as role modelling, guiding, coaching or advocacy) is a human resource development strategy that is widely used in industry to support employees.

An effective mentor is someone who can:

- Manage the partnership
- Encourage and empower
- Nurture
- Tutor and coach the trainee
- Offer mutual trust
- Respond to the trainee's needs

(http://www.natinfo.com.au/inakit/topic_c6.htm, 2008, p. 5; see also Clutterback, 1991).

Typically, the mentoring relationship involves three stages – and mentors need to understand these stages and their roles in each in order to be effective:

- Developing rapport and building trust
- Setting and reaching goals
- Bringing closure to the relationship

(http://www.natinfo.com.au/inakit/topic_c6.htm, 2008, p. 7).

In relation to Indigenous Australian trainees/apprentices, mentoring is widely seen to be a key component in achieving successful outcomes. And it is suggested that Indigenous trainees/apprentices will likely require support in the following four stages:

- Recruitment
- Formal training
- Work-based
- Transition from training to an ongoing working role

(http://www.natinfo.com.au/inakit/topic_c6.htm, 2008, p. 11).

It is also noted in research literature that mentoring Indigenous Australian trainees/apprentices presents special challenges, particularly around cross-cultural sensitivities. Given this, it is important for mentors (either Indigenous or non-Indigenous persons) to tailor their approach in order to address the needs of these trainees/apprentices and to ensure that Indigenous mentoring is not ad hoc in nature (http://www.natinfo.com.au/inakit/topic_c6.htm, 2008, p. 3).

3e Key messages: Successful transitions into employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

National data indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are “underrepresented in the workforce” and have “higher unemployment rates than other Australians – with the lowest employment-to-population ratio (46%) experienced by those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote areas” (Giddy, Lopez & Redman, 2009a, p. 9; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006).

It is recognised that a number of interrelated factors can come to operate as barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. So, too, it is acknowledged, “obstacles to employment differ amongst regions and communities and in many cases are influenced by the type of economy that prevails” (Giddy, Lopez & Redman, 2009a, p. 9). The obstacles encountered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders include:

- Level of job opportunities in limited economies
- Low levels of education and relevant training
- Lack of experience

- Poor health
- Problems with alcohol, drugs and gambling
- Aspirations to work and role models
- Workplace culture and level of support for employees
- Geographical isolation, transport and reluctance to leave the community for employment
- Limited understanding by corporate sector of how socioeconomic disadvantage impacts on the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees
- The challenges involved in balancing family and community obligations with the demands of work
- Access to organized childcare (Giddy, Lopez & Redman, 2009a, p. 9; Commonwealth of Australia, 2008; Tiplady & Barclay, 2007).

Acknowledging these obstacles, Giddy, Lopez and Redman (2009b) present guidelines to success for organisations in achieving employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people (see Figure 3 following).

Figure 3: Guidelines to success for organisations in achieving employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people



(Source: Giddy, Lopez & Redman, 2009b)

4 APPRENTICE AND TRAINEE ACTIVITY ON PALM ISLAND: BACKGROUND DATA

Data obtained from the Department of Training provides a comprehensive picture of trainee and apprenticeship activity on Palm Island over the last decade. This data is significant in quantifying the challenges for the ITSO in supporting timely completion.

Table 2 notes the apprentice activity across industry areas from 1997-2009. The construction area, in particular the carpentry trade, has provided the largest group of apprentices, with three completions. Overall, the cancellation rate over the last decade is 55%. The Palm Island community currently has five active apprentices.

Table 2: Palm Island Apprentices 1997-2009

Trade area	Active	Active - Recommendation	Cancelled	Completed	Expired	Withdrawn	Grand Total
Automotive Mechanic (Light Vehicle)	1					1	2
Bread Baking/Pastry Cooking			1		1		2
Bricklaying			1				1
Cabinet Making	2						2
Cabinetmaking			1				1
Carpentry			9	3			12
Carpentry (Construction Fitout and Finish)			1	4		1	6
Electrotechnology Systems Electrician				1			1
Engineering Fabrication Trade (Heavy Fabrication - Boilermaking)			1				1
Engineering Tradesperson (Mechanical) (Diesel Fitting)			1				1
Engineering Tradesperson Electrical (Installation Wiring Focus)			2			1	3
Engineering Tradesperson Fabrication (Heavy)				1			1
Glass and Glazing	1		1				2
Meat Retailing	1	1	5	2			9
Painting and Decorating				1			1
Painting and Decorating (Construction Fitout and Finish)			2	1			3
Plumbing and Draining			4	1			5
Grand Total	5	1	29	14	1	3	53

Table 3 outlines traineeship activity over the last decade. There are currently high levels of activity within traineeships (22 enrolments) in the industry areas of cleaning, construction and aquaculture, and school based traineeships in sport and recreation areas. Completion rates over the last decade indicate that 25% of commencements (34 trainees) have completed. This table also outlines the significant number of expired contracts over the decade (n = 45). While the reasons for contract expiration are not explored within this evaluation, the ITSO role, to coordinate timely implementation of training, seems particularly pertinent. It should be noted that this data does not record numbers of commencements – trainees may cancel before the signing of a training contract. Consequently, it is likely that this data significantly underestimates cancellations.

Table 3: Palm Island Trainees 1997-2009

Trainee area	Active	Cancelled	Completed	Expired	Withdrawn	Grand Total
Aged Care Worker				1		1
Aquaculture Operator Level 3 (Coxswain)		2				2
Aquaculture Operator Level 3 (Senior Farm Hand)			3			3
Business Administration		10	3	1	2	16
Business Level II		1				1
Child Care		2		9	1	12
Childcare		2		1		3
Cleaning Operations Level III	4	1				5
Community Recreation Assistant	1	1	9		1	12
Community Services Worker	1					1
Education (Information Technology Support)		2	2	4		8
Education (Integration Aide)		2		3		5
Education (Language and Literacy Assistant)		1	1	2		4
Education (Office Support)		1		4		5
Education Support		1				1
Essential Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders		2	8	5		15
Fitness Instructor	1					1
Frontline Management Level IV	1		1			2
Health Care Support				1		1
Horticulture				1		1
Horticulture Level 2		3				3
Hospitality (Kitchen Operations)	2	1				3
Hospitality (Operations) Level II		1		1		2
Hospitality (Operations) Level III			1			1
Independent Grocery				2		2
Information Technology				3		3
Information Technology (Generalist)		1				1
Information Technology Level 3			1			1
Office Administration		1	2			3
Office Administration Level 2				1		1
Police Liaison Officer Level III	2		2	1		5
Public Service - Level IV - General		1				1
Radio Broadcasting - Level III		1				1
Retail Operations Level II			1	1		2
Small Business Traineeship		1		4		5
Sport and Recreation		1				1
Water Industry Operator (II)		2				2
Grand Total	12	41	34	45	4	136

The tables above (i.e., Tables 2 and 3) present the challenges for the ITSO role on Palm Island. While nationally attrition rates within the construction industry are high – over three years around 47% of apprentices leave withdraw or cancel their contract– and within a 12 month period 26.5% of apprentices and trainees in the construction industry leave (NCVER, 2007). Reviewing the Palm Island data above indicates that completion rates are very significantly below national completion rates for trainees and construction trainees.

5 SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES: THE ITSO ROLE

As outlined above, the ITSO role requires engagement in an extensive range of relationships. Interviews were conducted to review the success of this role with trainees, Q Build employees, contractors, training provider representatives, employers (both on and off Palm Island) and organisations charged with overseeing legislative requirements.

A number of key messages emerged from these interviews.

5a SUCCESS STORIES

Over-riding message: No issues with work quality

The over-riding message – and indeed ‘good news story’ – to emerge in relation to the Palm Island QBuild apprentices/trainees is that their quality of work is not in question. Rather, it was the case that the range of stakeholders interviewed praised the quality of their work. There is high-level confidence in the trainees’ ability to do the work involved in the traineeship.

Recruitment

Evidence of the ITSO’s success in recruiting candidates in 2008 is apparent in the number of applicants – namely 26 applications for apprenticeships/traineeships. This rate sits in stark contrast to the application rate of/in other sites – Bamaga, Thursday Island and Bamaga – which received nil applications.

In 2008, the following recruitment initiatives were reportedly enacted by the ITSO – with apparent success: putting up posters in the Island’s airport, local store and schools, including the Kirwan High School Secondary Campus on Palm Island. He also enlisted the assistance from school and job placement agencies to submit applications. In addition to following ‘official’ QBuild protocol, and taking note of the ‘grapevine’, the ITSO also interviewed other candidates who he thought had “potential to succeed”.

Additionally, it was suggested that the recruitment of a younger cohort and school based trainees/apprentices which eliminated a number of problems that arose for more mature-aged trainees/apprentices (for example, resentment on the part of mature-aged to being instructed to clean up on site; the sense that they were treated like children; the feeling of being restricted by limited work practices; the difficulties associated with travelling to, and residing in, Townsville for extended periods – including family commitments; their resistance to attending TAFE and literacy/numeracy-related issues) was seen as being a key to successful recruitment.

Having reflected upon recruitment practices used in 2008, the ITSO proposed changes to the process for 2009. He suggested that trainees would likely be “young people who have completed up to Year 10 off the Island” – for example, at Abergowrie College or Kirwan High School. The reasoning behind such selection was, he suggested, that “these young people are more likely to have established work ethic and less likely to be subject to peer pressure”. He noted, too, that he had spoken to the staff of Kirwan High School Secondary Campus (Palm Island) with a view to gain recommendations of possible suitable candidates. The criteria for such recommendations were to be framed around the literacy and numeracy skills, record of attendance, and family background of the potential candidate.

In 2009, the recruitment process involved the advertising of available positions in both mainstream newspapers (e.g., The Townsville Bulletin and The Courier Mail) and online. The ITSO stated that – following the appointment of successful applicants – he had established a system whereby the trainees/apprentices were advised that they were on a three-month trial and would be released if their performance/attendance was not satisfactory. They were also provided, during the course of interview, with a clear explanation of the job description and clear guidance on what constitutes ‘satisfactory’ (i.e., in relation to performance). It is to be noted here, that these protocols were not previously in place prior to 2009.

As was the case in 2008, recruitment once again proved to be successful in 2009 with 12 applicants applying for positions.

Engagement Strategies

A number of strategies were put in place and coordinated by the ITSO in an effort to engage the trainees/apprentices. These included:

- The arrangement of field visits to the mainland (e.g., Tropical Homes, ATCNQ).
- The use of contractors.
- The seeking out of “whole” projects – e.g. school toilet block, clock tower and town house projects.
- The purchasing of a variety of tools, the organisation of personalised toolkits, a restored trailer (complete with Indigenous and QBuild logos) and a shed for the use of the trainees/apprentices. It is to be noted here that such initiatives ‘tapped into’ the notion of building a sense of ownership for the trainees/apprentices – i.e., ‘U-Build’. Of this, the ITSO noted: “[These] have worked very well ... trainees feel [a] sense of ownership and pride”. That said, he also noted that such a sense of ownership and pride had “not seem(ed) to encourage attendance” – which remains a significant issue and is discussed at a later stage in this report.

Retention

In terms of retaining trainees/apprentices, a number of initiatives or directions were instigated by the ITSO. These included for example:

- The scheduling by QBuild of “meaningful” projects to co-ordinate with block training (see also “Engagement Strategies”).
- TAFE provision of “electives” delivered on the Island.
- Monthly meetings with training providers/key stakeholders to discuss challenges/successes for all trainees on a case-by-case basis (i.e., a case management approach).
- The provision of work experience opportunities for school based trainees – as facilitated by and between the ITSO and Kirwan State High School staff members.
- The offering of a “variety” of tasks in order to keep trainees engaged and on-track.
- Monitoring of a Training Plan by the ITSO and a Work Plan by the Workplace mentor.
- The ongoing work of the ITSO and his counterparts as detailed below (see “Attendance”).

The work of the ITSO is, as he suggested, also aided by that of an Indigenous DETA staff member – who the ITSO identified as being “able to do things” that he himself cannot, who “can work in ways” that he himself cannot. This work – as the DETA staff member stated – involves, largely, mentoring as it relates to the “personal issues” of the trainees. And the success of this type of work is attributed, in part, to the fact that the DETA staff member is a local Indigenous person with community ties. Additionally, the ITSO noted that he is

supported by a Workplace mentor – and that this relationship is again seen to be an important one.

Attendance

The ITSO has put in place a number of strategies to deal with the issue of attendance including:

- Picking up employees/trainees and taking them (i.e., transporting them) to work sites.
- Taking a roll.
- Having trainees sign time sheets and ensuring their completion of log books and required formwork.
- Calling in on work sites throughout the day.
- Calling in at TAFE every day training occurred – and often sitting in on lessons.
- Tracking down absentees to follow up on reasons for absence.
- Building relationships with trainees’ families (via morning teas, home visits, casual encounters etc) to ensure support for trainees.
- Following up on a range of issues on behalf of key stakeholders as they emerge.

Additionally, faced with frequent non-attendance by the trainees/apprentices, the ITSO sought to encourage attendance by identifying, and making explicit, lost income that results from such (in)action. Further, he supplied assessment reports and asked trainees/apprentices to self assess in terms of their attendance record in an effort to raise their awareness.

Trainee Perspectives

The trainees held highly positive views of the ITSO and of the work that he did. Indeed, his role was seen as pivotal. They spoke of him as being supportive and consistent, and alluded to his genuine interest in them and their progress. So, too, they noted and spoke of being appreciative of the work he did in providing support for employment transition. They also commented on his provision of transport, of picking them up for work in the morning for example, as being particularly helpful. Finally – and serving as testament to the importance of the ITSO role and the current ITSO’s capacity to effectively perform the role – upon meeting with one trainee on Palm Island, the researchers were instructed that they must “do everything you [*sic*] can to keep him (i.e., the current ITSO)”.

Other Stakeholder Perspectives

As was the case with the trainees, other key stakeholders sang the praises of the ITSO and of the role itself as an initiative more broadly. One stakeholder expressed his belief in the importance of an ITSO: “Yes, you definitely need a good ITSO”. Another, a TAFE staff member, stated that the ITSO’s support was “very important to [the] potential for success” of the trainees/apprentices and cited the following as examples of the crucial work undertaken by the ITSO: following up on issues, continuous reinforcement of work ethic and expectations of employers, ensuring completion of administrative tasks (e.g., log books and filling in forms), as a reference point for trainees and instilling independence. The TAFE staff member also spoke of having “regular conversations on progress of trainees” with the ITSO and of such conversations enabling the “matching [of] content to need” – for instance, time management and log book completion. He also advocated that the ITSO was “culturally sensitive and genuine in his approach”. Finally, while attendance remains a significant issue of concern – and in particular ongoing attendance – there was a general sense among the stakeholders interviewed that the ITSO’s role in supporting attendance “has been very important”.

5b. What are the challenges?

While the successes of the role in relation to recruitment, engagement and coordination of stakeholders are significant, some challenges remain. This is not surprising given the short period of, what is, the initial implementation of the ITSO position.

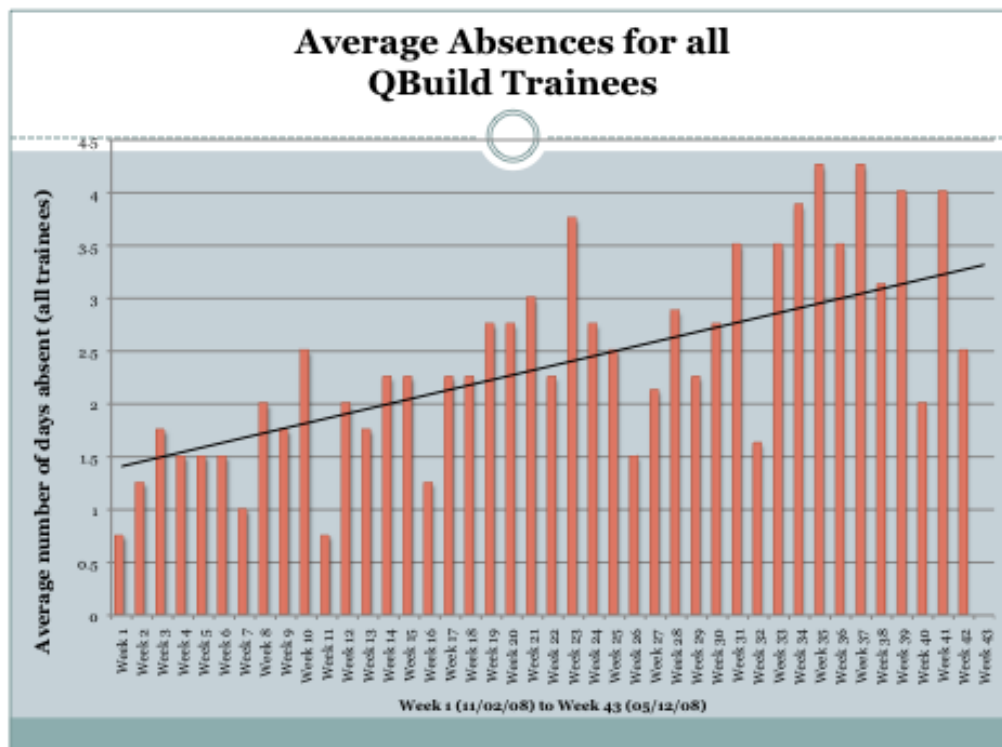
Attendance

Over the course of 2008, attendance remained the major issue for successful completion. The numerous strategies attempted by the ITSO can be described as only partially successful. While an improvement in attendance was noted by interviewees from previous years – ongoing attendance was nonetheless identified as an issue of continuing concern. It was suggested, for example, that trainees “would often be absent for extended periods”. In relation to this, it was also suggested that a culture of accountability need be fostered – a suggestion that is not ‘out of step’ with Sarra’s (2008) claims for the need for accountability, such that involves the clarifying of standards for performance.

This lack of ongoing attendance was also noted, specifically, as hampering the trainees’ successful completion of TAFE-based learning.

In interviews, the trainees noted that their attendance was an issue, but did not appear to note any specific consequences. Figure 4 notes the average absenteeism for the period of the evaluation with a trendline noting the increasing average period of absence over 43 weeks from 1.5 days per week during the early stage of the traineeship to over 3 days per week at the end of this period.

Figure 4 Average absences over 43 weeks of traineeships



Discussing this trend to increasing absences, it should be noted that the period of the traineeship overlapped with many significant issues on Palm Island, and in a small

community it is not surprising that local events have significant impact on engagement in the world of work.

ITSO position within QBuild and in relation to stakeholders

As a new role, the interface of the ITSO with the internal organisational workings of QBuild appears to have been well navigated. As a mentor and support person for the trainees, the ITSO has gained rapid insight into the support requirements of the trainees, their families and their community. Many of the insights gained by the ITSO related to personal circumstances impacting on work conduct, but engagement with cultural factors and community values were also critical to the success of – and to his success in – the position. Personnel within the QBuild organisation appear to appreciate many of the circumstances faced by the trainees, but the ITSO was often the ‘bridge’ into the community for QBuild staff more generally.

Given the need for a multipronged approach to engagement, the ITSO was acutely aware of the need for the trainees to be involved in activities that would promote maximum enthusiasm. On occasions, the lack of whole projects – ‘start to finish’ jobs; challenging, meaningful, authentic jobs – hampered the efforts of the ITSO, who tried to sustain interest in building projects by taking a whole of project approach. Appreciation by QBuild locally for this ‘whole project’ approach was very apparent, but as an organisation, QBuild needs to consider how this can be a core part of the work to sustain trainee interest. An ongoing stream of ‘whole projects’ is unlikely for a remote community, but nevertheless, the sense of achievement for trainees when involved in such projects should not be dismissed.

In light of the high number of trainees in 2008, trades person to apprentice ratio were often stretched. Trainees commented on the need to ensure that job times were extended to allow maximum training to occur on the work sites.

Training provision

Training representatives remarked on the need for “intensive” support to create successful learning environments for trainees. Often poor literacy and numeracy levels, negative past educational experiences and few role models create a challenging environment. With this noted, training representatives were positive about the contribution of the ITSO.

In relation to TAFE provision, the following challenges – and suggested current initiatives and/or strategies for improvement – were noted:

- (While the delivery of electives by TAFE is now taking place on the Island) there remains a need for the delivery of “core” modules.
- There exists a need for “continuity” in the delivery of formal training in order to combat the difficulties associated with knowledge retention and, therefore, completion of competencies.
- The need for further and appropriate support of trainees remains – i.e., 1 on 1 support. For example, in the case of literacy/numeracy intervention (issues which are identified as significant barriers to the success of trainees). This, however, it was also acknowledged, is not available under current funding regimes.

Overall, there was a perceived need for community-based and community led training provision.

Supporting the coordination of training for trainees

TAFE has committed to providing training on Palm Island to ensure maximum opportunities for completion. From the perspective of the training provider, and as signalled above,

funding for the provision of TAFE remains an issue of significance. This point was addressed by TAFE personnel during interview, and is typified in the following comments:

TAFE [is] not sufficiently funded to support all students in line with their needs.

[The] quality of support is compromised by financial imperatives.

Small class sizes [are a] major cost factor.

It is to be noted that these comments highlight future challenges when viewed alongside research – such as that of Miller (2006) – as detailed previously.

The ITSO role was seen as pivotal by the trainers in ensuring training progress was closely monitored. Emerging needs of the trainees were identified by the ITSO and passed on to training staff, including time management skills and log book completion. In addition, the ITSO ensured the timely completion of administrative work associated with the training.

Literacy support

The need for effective and sustained literacy support was identified as a key issue – and the lack of such, a “major challenge” confronting trainees. The apparent literacy ‘difficulties’ experienced by trainees was seen to “create barriers” to their completion of both worksite and TAFE training. There was also a reported “resistance” by trainees to attending formal literacy (and numeracy) training, and a sense that the difficulties they experienced were, for them, a “big shame job”.

The above points, as identified by interviewees, sit in line with research findings relating to literacy and VET. For example, as McGlusky and Thaker (2006, p. 6) note, the “lack of literacy and numeracy skills is a significant barrier to Indigenous students accessing VET courses.” They note also, that, “literacy and numeracy support actually given to Indigenous students remains inadequate across much of the VET sector, although effective support systems are available” (McGlusky & Thaker, 2006, p. 5). So, too, do the resultant challenges find support as offered in the research of Miller (2006).

Pathways beyond traineeships

The limited opportunity for trainees to transition to full apprenticeships – and indeed the Island’s high rate of unemployment – was identified as a significant issue. Interviewees spoke of an absence of links between training and employment possibilities as they existed on the Island – and of the need to address this in forward-thinking and sustainable ways, and in ways that demonstrated a commitment to the community. In relation to this, for example, the following comments were made:

[In] many instances where people have signed up for apprenticeships with no work outcomes on the Island [] they must travel to the mainland to continue. [The] result is massive upheaval for people who are locals by choice ...

[They] often find they have to leave the Island to seek work in the areas they have trained in. [The] incentive to progress is removed when there are clearly no jobs in this area on the Island.

QBuild have no obligation to employ past the training period – so self defeating in a way, keep turning people over rather than employing them long term. This may have a negative effect on

those applying as no jobs result from the training.

The ITSO has worked to ensure a successful transition beyond the traineeship. The work to support transition has spanned support for new housing on the mainland, securing positions with mainland employers, providing guidance to navigate personal circumstances such as family expectations, as well as resume preparation assistance. This individualised case management of transition also included interviews with each trainee and a thorough planning process.

The two trainees who have successfully completed their training have had ‘patchy’ transitions to the workforce. One trainee commenced a full apprenticeship on the mainland – with the position sourced by the ITSO who also arranged housing. This position lasted less than a week due to attendance issues. The second successful completer of the traineeship is hopeful of an apprenticeship on the mainland, but has concerns about uprooting family to accompany him. Two of the three trainees who did not complete their training have moved into other training/education pathways – one with the intervention of the ITSO. The third of these has taken up fulltime employment as arranged by the ITSO. With regard to the third non-completer, literacy levels have been identified as a potential barrier to the completion of further training and, as such, the attainment of formal qualifications. So, too, the new employer’s requirement of the employee holding a drivers licence is to be signalled as a potential issue.

It is to be noted here that transitions for non-completers may be relatively successful – as all have accessed either an employment or training pathway. In view of this, the role of the ITSO in assisting such transition should also be acknowledged.

Employer expectations

Discussions with an employer experienced in working on Palm Island reveals an unwavering expectation that employees, including apprentices and trainees, will be regular attendees. No exceptions to this are tolerated. There is, however, considerable goodwill to engage with cultural obligations such as attendance at funerals and other family kinship responsibilities. Within the construction industry generally, the expectations for regular attendance and high commitment to the workplace – as demonstrated by a willingness to arrive using any available transport means (bicycle, walking etc) – are well entrenched.

Drivers Licence

While it was noted that a drivers licence course was offered on the Island, not having a drivers licence was seemingly commonplace among trainees. With regard to this, the lack of a drivers licence was identified as bringing about challenges for trainees – i.e., impacted upon their ability to get to TAFE and/or the work site when alternative transportation was not offered.

Community involvement

The ITSO role has worked to engage the community in relation to the intent of the traineeship, the expectations for conduct within the traineeship, as well as the welfare of the trainees themselves. These actions are well supported in the research literature.

The need for community involvement – further and continued community involvement – was also noted. And this was addressed in the following range of ways – ways that sit in alignment with the research findings and recommendations of, for example, Miller (2006):

- The need for trainees' stakeholders to communicate with employing agencies and Council.
- The need for trainees' stakeholders to communicate with and gain the support of family.
- The need for community members who have successfully completed training to take a lead as mentors.
- The need for inclusion of community representatives in lead roles in existing programs.
- The need for mentoring of local community members as future mentors.

Further to this, the need for the implementation of some form of induction program addressing "cultural awareness" (for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders) was noted.

6 SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

In a short period, the ITSO role has supported the successful completion of traineeships for 40%, or two of five, trainees. In addition, non-completers appear to have had a positive transition to the workforce. While it is not possible to make reasonable statistical comparisons given the size of the QBuild trainee cohort, it is clear that the completion rate for this cohort is above that of Palm Island trainees over the previous decade. This should be regarded as a very considerable breakthrough in completion of training.

Consequently, and as a result of the evaluation, the following recommendations are made in relation to the ITSO role:

Recommendations for ITSO role

- The ITSO role within QBuild continues for at least a five year period. This would allow a succession plan to be put in place, preferably with a Palm Island community member to take over the role.
- The ITSO links to the community ensure confidence of/in trainees and other stakeholders. It is proposed that regular briefing sessions for QBuild employees be conducted to ensure the role is well understood, and further that QBuild employees participate in cultural awareness training to gain further insight into the complexity of the role within the wider community.

Recommendations relating to trainees' confidence and skill levels

- The ITSO should ensure a thorough literacy and numeracy program is developed in collaboration with the training provider that is both individualised and tailored to the trainee's needs.
- In an effort to attract, retain and support the trainees, the ITSO should be resourced to disseminate 'good news' stories about the trainees' confidence and skill level to the community in a variety of ways. This could include the production of posters, short video clips etc for use within the community.
- In acknowledgement of the role the ITSO plays in providing holistic support, the role should be resourced to ensure access to a wide variety of holistic support services for trainees, including the ability to recommend additional training where required.

Recommendations relating to trainees' engagement and awareness


- Given the often irregular attendance of trainees, the ITSO should continue to work with community elders to secure community endorsement for regular attendance. This is critical to improved outcomes for trainees.
- While respecting cultural traditions in relation to attendance, it would seem appropriate that QBuild mirror wider employer expectations for consistent and regular attendance, and that after both an explicit induction into attendance requirements and a suitable trial period with trainees, that the ITSO be supported in upholding rigorous attendance requirements aligned to wider employer expectations.
- In relation to improved awareness with regard to attendance, it is advisable that QBuild make more use of reflection tools such as the *QBuild Trainee Assessment Report* and systematically unpack the significance of the attendance and punctuality criteria within this report.
- To support engagement, QBuild should endeavour to support the ITSO in sourcing, where possible, 'whole projects' for trainees.

- To support greater understanding of ‘workplaces’ that the trainees be provided with a suitable location to support a later transition into the QBuild work site. This might be a ‘half-way shed’ that would enable a place to meet and review work practices and possibly incorporate some training facilities.

Recommendations in relation to trainees’ transitions to employment

- Given the variable experience within transition, it is recommended that the ITSO role description be reviewed to recognise the need to coordinate a range of activities, both formal and informal, inclusive of family and community members, to support transition beyond the traineeship. This will require possible supplementary resourcing to support such activities. In addition, transition activities should include presentations by employers to the trainees in relation to their minimum expectations for attendance and work conduct.
- Given the ITSO’s positioning with other stakeholders and the relationships that such positioning fosters, it would seem appropriate that the ITSO coordinate as far as feasible, the development of wider employability skills for trainees, particularly a drivers licence.
- Endorsing the actions so far, and with reference to the activities completed, it is proposed that the ITSO support the widest possible involvement of community members in transition planning, including identification of local mentors who can support and monitor progress of trainees beyond QBuild.
- Within the constraints of resourcing, it is suggested that the ITSO role be extended to include the first 6-12 months of employment or training beyond the QBuild traineeship.

In summary, the ITSO role is a productive model of the individualised case management required for apprentices and trainees – and particularly so, as the research attests, in the case of Indigenous (and remote Indigenous) apprentices and trainees. While much of the success of the QBuild ITSO role may relate to the outstanding personal characteristics of the individual in the current position, it does provide an exemplar of what might be achieved if commitment to the position can be sustained.



Build a Career with QBuild

Industry Training Support Officer

ABOUT QBUILD

QBuild is the lead Queensland Government building and maintenance delivery agency, providing clients with a comprehensive range of services, including building construction and minor works, planning and delivery of building maintenance and the provision of facility management services including security, cleaning and environmental services.

In addition to its core service delivery outputs QBuild contributes significantly to Government priorities across the State, including the provision of business, employment and training opportunities within local communities and the coordination of disaster management activities.

ABOUT OUR POSITION

Title	Industry Training Support Officer
Classification	AO5
Total remuneration	Salary Range**
Location	Palm Island, Burdekin Region
Vacancy Number	CSQ to complete
Closing Date	CSQ to complete

** (Includes employer superannuation contributions of 12.75% and annual leave loading)

The primary purpose of the position is responsibility for the effective management and coordinator of Palm Island apprentices and trainees to successfully complete training and achieve successful employment outcomes. This position will also support the establishment of local Indigenous suppliers and service providers to ensure they meet QBuild's delivery outcomes. Through this, the local people of Palm Island will be able to create and maintain businesses to increase access to local employment and training opportunities.

The position reports to the District Manager Palm Island and will work closely with the Regional Apprentice Coordinator, various office staff, field staff and contractors performing a range of training, project planning and delivery activities.

Some of the key tasks required of the position will include the following:

1. Manage and coordinate apprentices and trainees to successfully complete on the job and off the job apprenticeship and traineeship competencies.

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2. Stimulate the learning process. Foster participative decision-making, team building, professional development and self-management on the job and off the job, thereby enhancing the apprentices and trainees motivation and confidence.
 3. Develop and maintain a close liaison with partner organisations, the indigenous community, departmental staff, other Government departments, non-Government organisations and Local Government Authorities to ensure a high level of commitment is given to establishing and maintaining local Indigenous suppliers and contractors to provide quality training opportunities for apprentices and trainees.
 4. Monitor and review the quality of performance and training of current programs to ensure compliance and progression of apprentice and trainee competencies in line with legislative requirements, industry standards and agreed time parameters.
 5. Manage performance issues of apprentices and trainees in liaison with management, relevant government and community bodies.
 6. Regularly liaise with apprentices and trainees, Regional Apprentice Coordinator, RTO and schools to ensure apprentice and trainee training is completed on schedule and record books are maintained.
 7. Maintain contact details for apprentices and trainees.
 8. Coordinate travel and accommodation arrangements for apprentice and trainees attending off the job training at the RTO and on the job training in alternate locations.
 9. Coordinate additional learning support if required – for example, assistance with numeracy and literacy skills.
 10. Coordinate the recruitment, selection and induction of apprentices and trainees in collaboration with the Regional Apprentice Coordinator.
 11. Handle the administrative requirements of apprenticeships and traineeships including the timely completion of Commonwealth Government incentives for non-QBuild employed apprentices.
 12. Develop and support the establishment of local Indigenous suppliers to ensure they meet QBuild's contractual requirements as a supplier.
 13. Manage and implement effective work programs and provide regular, timely and accurate reporting on the status of programs and activities to management in accordance with agreed guidelines.

ABOUT THE PERSON

The following key selection criteria outline the knowledge, skills and abilities required to successfully undertake this position:

1. Demonstrated technical skills, experience and/or knowledge of the building industry, the development and management of relevant training programs and the development business relationships.

2. Demonstrated ability to manage apprentices and trainees operating in a building environment, including knowledge of or the ability to rapidly acquire knowledge of the Australian Apprentice framework, the Australian Quality Training framework, Employment Equity, Anti-discrimination and Workplace Health and Safety principles and practices.
3. Demonstrated ability to liaise, consult and develop co-operative relationships and engage effectively with partner organisations to create identifiable training opportunities through sustained viable businesses.
4. Highly developed written and verbal communication skills including consultation, negotiation, facilitation, conflict resolution and team maintenance especially those required in a remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context.
5. Demonstrated knowledge of the issues affecting indigenous youth and the ability to work with young people to achieve successful outcomes.
6. Demonstrated knowledge or the ability to rapidly acquire thorough knowledge of QBuild products and services and their interface with other products offered by the Department of Public Works.

ABOUT YOUR APPLICATION

To apply for this vacancy we'd like you to provide the following information:

1. an "Application for Advertised Vacancy" Coversheet;
2. your current resume, outlining your previous work experience, qualifications and referees; and
3. your response to the Key Selection Criteria.

When submitting your application please include two complete copies of the documentation with the original.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This role description outlines the minimum outcomes required for the position and for employment.

You may wish to access further information regarding QBuild on our website, which is located at www.qbuild.qld.gov.au.

External applicants or general employees appointed to this position will have their appointment confirmed following satisfactory performance during a six month probationary period; in accordance with section 73 of the *Public Service Act 1996*.

Applications will remain current for 12 months.

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