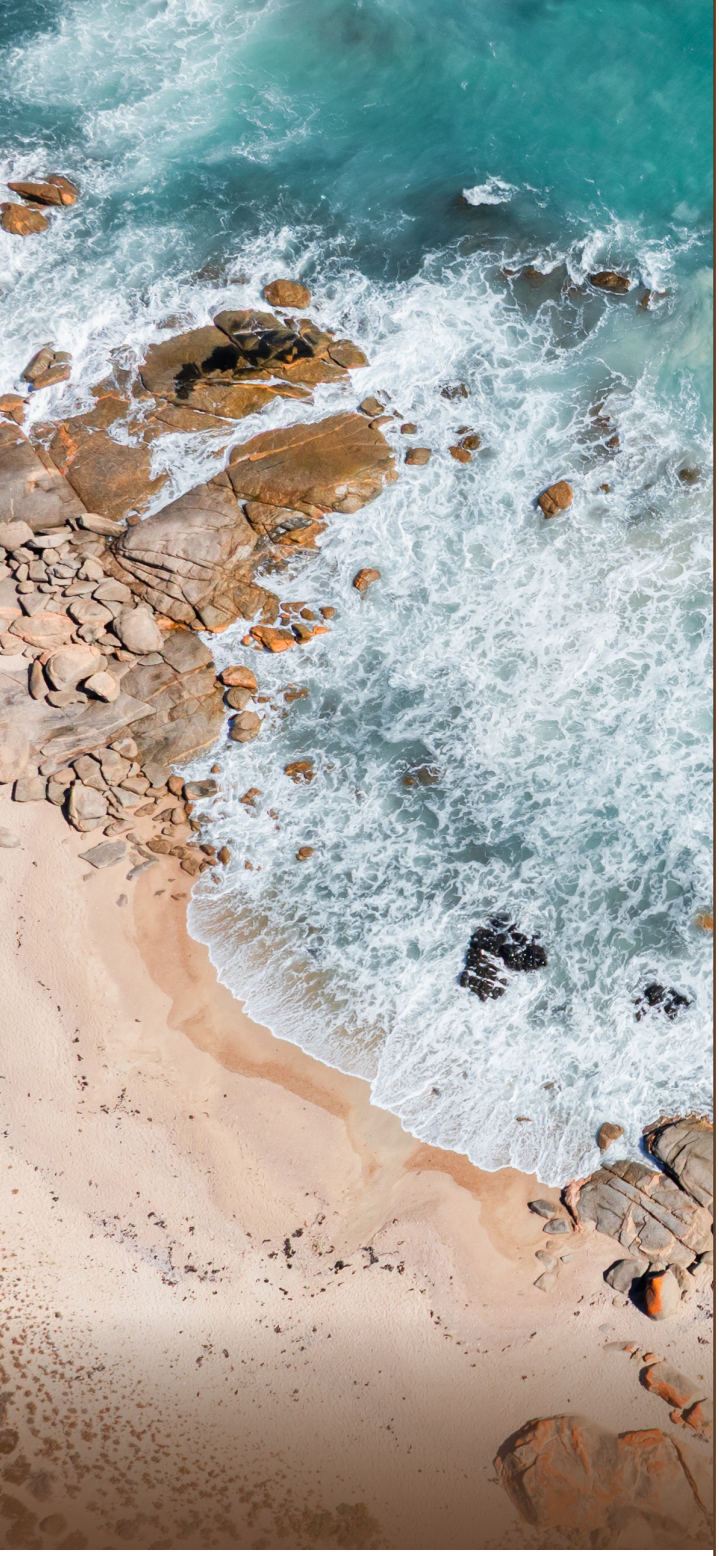
Australian Government | Jobs and Skills Australia

Our summary of the **First Nations VET Workforce Research Paper**





Acknowledgement of Country

The First Nations VET Workforce Research Paper team, along with Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) acknowledge the Traditional Owners from the lands across Australia. We thank them for their ongoing care of Country; the skies, the waterways, and the Earth. We pay our respects to the ancestors who are in the Dreaming, the Elders and First Nations people who may read and are impacted by this work.

Our mob is growing stronger inside the VET sector, and this paper shows what many of us have been saying for a long time: when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lead the work, make the decisions, and teach our own way, our students and our communities do better.

Across the country, Aboriginal Community-Controlled and First Nations-owned registered training organisations (RTO), along with TAFEs and other training providers, are starting to step up. They're seeing the importance of real First Nations leadership, not just token jobs or box-ticking.

Official statistics show that between the 2016 and 2021 Censuses, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander VET workforce grew by 18 per cent. While this growth is positive, more needs to be done to increase the number of our people participating as learners across the VET system. Growth alone does not equal equity. Many Aboriginal educators continue to be employed in insecure, short-term roles with lower and volatile incomes. This insecurity comes at a real cost to our wellbeing, our families and the communities we serve.

There is a strong and growing pipeline of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people stepping into the VET workforce, reflected in the increasing number of Indigenous graduates completing the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. This demonstrates our capability, commitment and desire to lead education for our people; however, the system continues to place ceilings on our progression. Structural barriers limit access to secure employment, senior roles and decision-making positions, while our knowledge and cultural expertise are relied upon without genuine power or recognition. Until these systemic issues are addressed, the VET system will continue to benefit from Aboriginal labour without delivering Aboriginal leadership, stability or self-determination.

Aboriginal Community-Controlled and First Nations-owned RTOs are not just training providers; they are cultural, community and safe spaces for our people. Those of us working within these organisations carry responsibilities that extend far beyond teaching and compliance. We provide cultural authority, community connection, mentoring and advocacy for our students—work that holds the system together for many Aboriginal learners. Yet this cultural and relational labour is consistently under-resourced and invisible within mainstream workforce and funding frameworks.

This Jobs and Skills Australia paper shows that to truly understand the challenges and opportunities for mob in VET, the research had to begin with our stories and experiences. The paper looks at our mob working on the ground teaching, supporting students, running programs and leading teams. It focuses on what helps us to stay in the job, what pushes us out, and what needs to change so that more of our mob can build strong careers in VET.

This work links back to bigger national agreements and plans, but most importantly it comes back to what our people need and what has always worked for us. The paper doesn't waste time trying to "model" our lives like data points. Instead, it brings together what we already know — what lifts us up, and what holds us back. It shows our strength, our skills, and the cultural knowledge we bring to VET, and it makes clear that the system needs to start valuing all of that properly. It puts forward five design principles to guide the best next step for mob workforce in VET.

The Design Principles were co-designed with First Nations VET experts, to support culturally grounded workplaces, better recognition of cultural labour, and conditions that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to stay, grow and lead in the VET sector. Working together with First Nations VET experts, JSA listened to these stories, identified the common threads across successful practices, and used these shared learnings to shape the Design Principles.

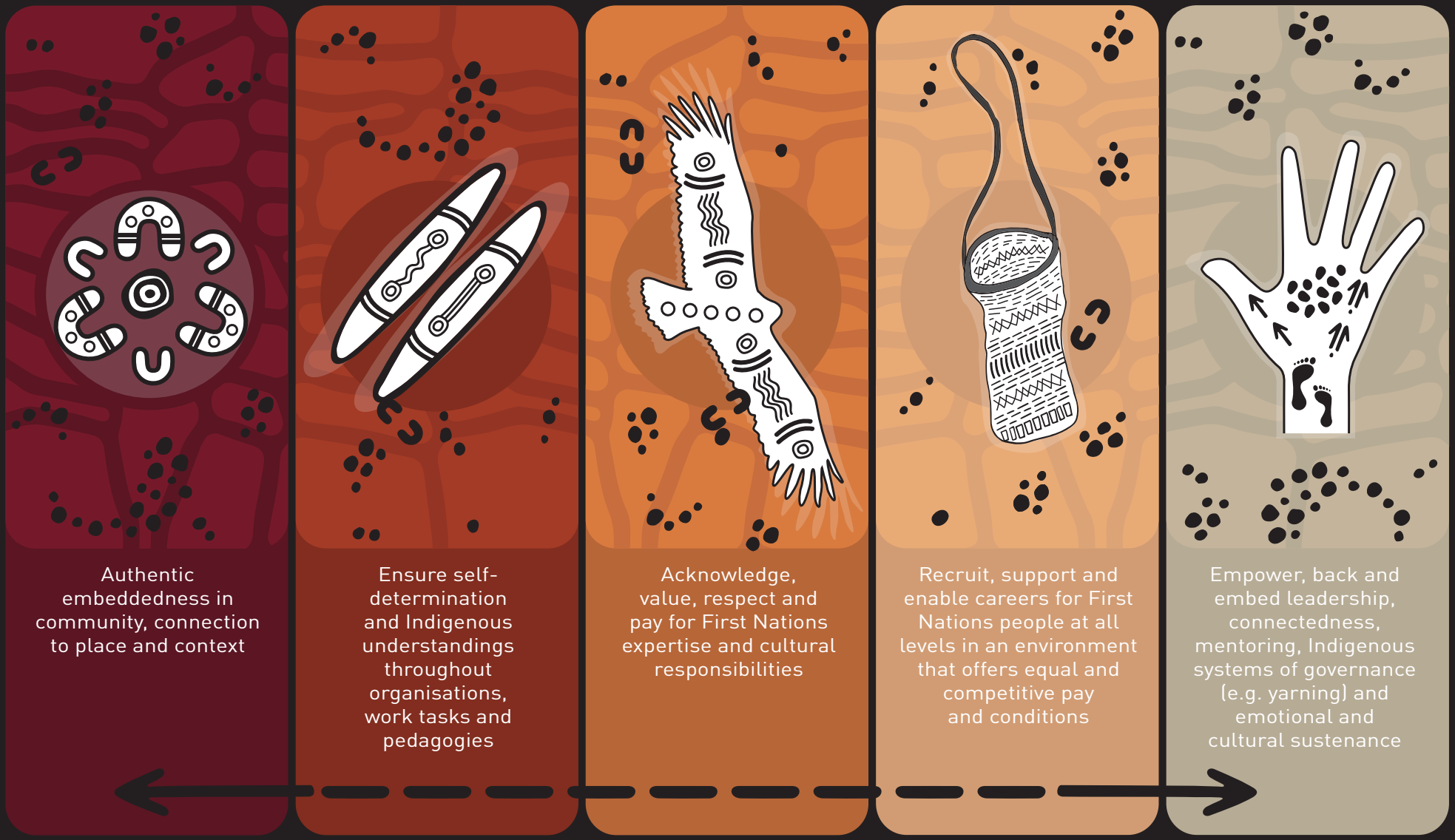
We hope the Design Principles are a guide to improving the experiences for our mob working in the VET sector.

Irene

Irene Sazdov



To download the full report with further details of the Design Principles and the artwork story go to https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/studies/vet-workforce-study
For further details contact: VETWorkforceAnalysis@JobsandSkillsAustralia.gov.au



Our five design principles as the best next step for mob workforce in VET

This document reflects the perspectives and knowledge of Irene Sazdov, a Nurrunga woman, drawing on her experience and contributions to First Nations VET research. It has been developed with the guidance and support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Professor Peter Radoll, honouring the cultural knowledge, expertise, and lived experience that inform this work.