AIATSIS
AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER STUDIES

AIATSIS – An incubator for Indigenous Researchers?

Lessons from the Indigenous Visiting Research Fellowship and AIATSIS Grants Program

Commissioned Discussion Piece for the
Review of Indigenous Higher Education Access and Outcomes

Dr Lisa Strelein
Director of Research –
Indigenous Country and Governance

Introduction

In considering the effectiveness of measures to improve higher education access and outcomes for Indigenous people, the Review Committee has identified the critical support role that has, and could, be played by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). Specifically, the Committee has requested AIATSIS to provide a paper on higher degree researcher training and development of Indigenous researchers that focuses on how AIATSIS contributes to researcher training.

AIATSIS is viewed by the Committee as an incubator for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and it is useful in this Review to consider the possible learnings for the university sector from our programs. In addition the Committee has asked for critical comment on how this Review can best approach the building of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researcher capacity and what can be learnt about the challenges in developing Indigenous research capacity (including training, grant rounds, recruiting Indigenous researchers and barriers to employment).

As background, this paper examines the broad role of AIATSIS within the Research and Innovation sector and its support role within the Higher Education sector. The paper will examine the criteria applied by AIATSIS in relation to its Research Grants program to foster Indigenous research involvement.   The bulk of the paper provides a detailed analysis of the Indigenous Visiting Research Fellowship Program, which has emerged over the past six years as a vital incubator for Indigenous researchers. In particular this program has played a small but critical role in transitioning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into research careers and supporting completions of Higher Degrees by Research (HDR). The paper will reflect on the rationale and needs analysis that led to the introduction of the program, the structure of the program, the key learnings from its administration and the outcomes achieved.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

AIATSIS was established as a Research Institute in 1961 with a sole focus on 'Indigenous studies'.[1] Our functions under the AIATSIS Act include many aspects of research, including: conducting and encouraging research, publishing research, training researchers, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, promoting Indigenous studies and a general understanding of Indigenous peoples, and maintaining a cultural collection. While this may seem like a dispersed set of functions, these activities maintain their relevance to the different ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples engage with research, whether embarking on their own family history, understanding the history, language and cultural heritage of their community, undertaking a degree or completing a PhD, retrieving information collected by researchers and governments in the past, searching for good models or arguments to take to current governments or use in their community, or recording or developing new Indigenous knowledge and thinking and seeking publication of their work.

The place of AIATSIS within the Research Sector

While AIATSIS is unique in many ways, it is also part of the research infrastructure of the nation. AIATSIS is one of the nation's Publicly Funded Research Agencies (PFRAs) along with our portfolio cousins, the Commonwealth Science Industry Research Organisation (CSIRO), Australian Institute of Maritime Studies (AIMS), and the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO). Interestingly, AIATSIS is the only Humanities PFRA but we are vastly overshadowed by our larger relatives.

By contrast, for example, the CSIRO annual appropriation is some 56 times that of AIATSIS, while our nearest in size, AIMS, is more than twice the AIATSIS appropriation.[2] A study commissioned by AIATSIS to review our funding in comparison to other research funding revealed that in the six years to 2009, the research budgets of major government research agencies increased on average by 4.7 percent. AIATSIS has had growth of only 1.5 percent over the same period. In real terms our appropriation for research has decreased by 6 percent.[3] Due to the constraints in our resourcing, we cannot always deliver on expectations from the University or Indigenous community sector, although our potential to contribute could be significant if properly resourced.[4]

Importantly, AIATSIS spends only 25% of its appropriation on directly undertaking research projects. Our archival collections provide essential research infrastructure for Indigenous studies, but more importantly, are the unique cultural heritage resource of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and a part of the national estate. The need to maintain the materials, or more correctly the information they contain, and make them accessible to the public is a resource intensive responsibility.

Given of our membership structure, we have been recently recognised alongside the 'learned academies', such as the Australian Academy of Science and the Australian Academy of the Humanities as a measure of esteem within the research sector.[5]

AIATSIS has also impacted on the experience of research by Indigenous communities. Through our grant program and our Guidelines for ethical research, AIATSIS has led the way in defining ethical research in Indigenous studies. Increasingly we have also had an influence through direct engagement with the Australian Research Council (ARC) and National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to improve the quantum of research investment in Indigenous researchers and Indigenous research and the way research is funded and conducted through our Research Grants scheme.

The role of AIATSIS in the development of Indigenous researchers

The Statement of Expectations from The Hon Kim Carr recognises our role as a national leader of research excellence in Indigenous studies, as a hub for activity in this area, fostering national and international networks and community knowledge transfer. The Minister also expects AIATSIS to promote careers in research and also provide a career path for researchers, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

AIATSIS has played an important role in the development of Indigenous researchers in Australia. Many of Australia's most prominent Indigenous academics have been involved in the AIATSIS Council and Research Advisory Committee.

As an example that illustrates how AIATSIS can become a touchstone for Indigenous research careers, our current Deputy Chairperson, Professor John Maynard, has reflected on the formative role played by AIATSIS in his involvement in research. From first encountering AIATSIS in seeking information about his own family history, Professor Maynard applied for an AIATSIS Research Grant and then went on to complete his PhD and published his first book through AIATSIS' Aboriginal Studies Press. Supporting this 'life cycle' of research engagement is the unique contribution of AIATSIS to Indigenous research development when access to education remains disproportionately limited for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Professor Maynard became a member of AIATSIS and subsequently became involved in the governance of the Institute.

The AIATSIS Research Grants Program

For over 40 years AIATSIS has fostered and facilitated research and supported researcher training through our Research Grants Program. The Grants program has established benchmarks for Research in Indigenous studies through its funding criteria and contractual obligations, as well as through its ethics processes. The AIATSIS Grants program differs from other competitive research grants program in the following key ways:

- The criteria are weighted toward research projects that are undertaken by Indigenous researchers or in partnership with Indigenous communities.

- AIATSIS Grants program funds the costs of research with Indigenous communities, including employment and training of community members as part of the research team.

- AIATSIS expects to see a benefit to the community from the research over and above the benefit to any individual researcher

- The AIATSIS research ethics assessment is far more rigorous than University human ethics clearance processes, including community consent and support.

- Importantly, we pay careful attention to the appropriate attribution of intellectual contributions and intellectual property arrangements, including the use the title 'researcher'.

- The bias toward educational attainment and connection to a University that makes other competitive research funding exclusive is not a prohibitive barrier to accessing the AIATSIS Grants Program.

In more recent years, as AIATSIS funding has contracted, the program has supported primarily small grants of between $5,000 and 35,000.[6] The number of successful applications from Indigenous researchers or collaborative projects has steadily increased. However, the majority of successful applications are still through the university sector and not necessarily by Indigenous researchers as chief investigators.[7] We were concerned that Indigenous researchers and academics were not accessing the grants scheme as a direct

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consequence of the low participation rates in research and higher education more generally. However, we were also suspicious of an untapped demand for research participation.

Identifying the need – research participation

AIATSIS has long recognised the need to actively foster and promote greater participation of Indigenous people in the research and higher education sectors. Of those involved in the higher education sector, far too many Indigenous staff in Universities are either managing high teaching loads, or administrative loads; for example as centre directors.

We also recognise that many Indigenous academics still enter the research sector through alternative career trajectories, often coming from public service or community sector organisations, often later in their life. To this end, many Indigenous people struggle to complete PhDs at the same time as their teaching and administrative responsibilities, or while working in other sectors. We acknowledge the additional carer responsibilities that late career higher degree candidates often carry, including significant grand-parenting responsibilities.

We also note the low levels of mobility among Indigenous academics that often make it difficult to take advantage of career and study opportunities. All of these factors directly impacted on AIATSIS in our recruitment and retention of Indigenous research staff.

Recognising the need in the sector

The needs that have been evident to us have now been identified by sectoral analysis. In December 2008, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation's report on **Building Australia's Research Capacity** recommended, amongst other things, that 'the Australian Government implement appropriate measures to encourage the recruitment of Indigenous, regional and rural Australians to higher degrees by research'.[8] Similarly, the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education, acknowledged the disparity in participation and retention of Indigenous students and identified, among its strategic goals, a national system that supports access to higher education for students from traditionally under-represented groups such as Indigenous students and those from rural and remote areas and low SES backgrounds.[9]

The Bradley Review also acknowledged that 'Indigenous involvement in higher education is not only about student participation and the employment of Indigenous staff. It is also about what is valued as knowledge in the academy'.[10] To this end, the Cutler Review of the innovation system in 2008 recognised that the role of AIATSIS should be 'broadened and strengthened in recognition of the special importance of preserving indigenous collections and the unique value of indigenous traditional knowledge and practices within Australia's innovation system'.[11] The government response to the Cutler review highlighted the need for investment in Australia's Indigenous research capacity and skill base and the important role of Australia's publicly funded research organisations.[12]

The Government's *Research Workforce Strategy* identified the need for a specific plan to increase Indigenous participation in Australia's research workforce.[13] To this end, the

Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council National Indigenous Higher Education Workforce Strategy was developed. IHEAC has repeatedly drawn attention to the gross under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in University employment. The disparity among research intensive employment is even greater, requiring an increase of six times the current level.[14]

Indigenous Visiting Research Fellowships Program

It was in the context of the under-representation of Indigenous peoples in the research sector that AIATSIS developed the Indigenous Visiting Research Fellowships (IVRF) program. The aim of this program is to support Indigenous researchers to visit AIATSIS for short periods to further their research or to engage with current public policy debates. Applicants for this program are people with experiences and backgrounds who wish to contribute to knowledge about Indigenous societies and inform public policy, or who are considering moving into a research career. The objectives of the program are to:

- Overcome barriers to participation in the research sector for Indigenous people;

- Increase the quantum of Indigenous research output available to the education and innovation sectors; and

- Increase uptake of Indigenous research by policy makers in key 'closing the gap' target areas; and

- Increase research degree completions and indirectly increase higher degree participation and down stream educational participation and attainment.

The required resources

After a trial period, funded through ad hoc savings, in 2008 AIATSIS established an *Indigenous Researchers Fund* and *Indigenous Visiting Research Fellowship program.* Start-up funds were provided through a one off grant of $900,000 from the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). DEEWR provided funding to support Indigenous researchers in the field of Indigenous Education and policy research. As well as this support, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) provided an additional $84,000 to enable research into Indigenous mental health and young Indigenous people's aspirations and transitions.

In 2010-11 the Department of Innovation Industry Science and Research (DIISR) provided a one-off grant of $500,000 with a focus on supporting PhD completions. This year DIISR has provided a further $350,000 as a one off to continue the program. A program of $500,000 per annum provides at least four 12 month fellowships each year (or pro-rata for shorter periods and depending on accommodation needs) and an Indigenous coordinator. The program is regularly over-subscribed.

Structure of the Program

The program provides an opportunity for Indigenous researchers to undertake a period of residency in Canberra to conduct their research full-time, access national collections of research materials (e.g. AIATSIS, National Library and National Archives, National Museum, Australian National University) and to engage with policy makers.

The Fellowships are advertised as a 'bulk round'; that is there are multiple appointments from a single recruitment process. In our experience, this increases confidence among applicants that may not otherwise apply for a single vacancy.

Successful applicants are paid at Lecturer level A or B, taking into account their work experience over and above their academic qualifications. They are also supplied with relocation allowance, including travel and accommodation, where necessary to facilitate the short term stay. They each have access to a research fund of up to $8,000 per researcher per annum to support their research.

Each Fellowship participant enters into an individual program of research suited to their current level of experience and professional career priorities. Researchers are encouraged to give presentations and publish materials during their time at AIATSIS.

The program is focused on providing infrastructure and support for the completion of projects. The Fellows receive academic support and mentoring from more experienced academic staff within the Research Program as well as support from an Indigenous coordinator who is responsible for pastoral care and mentoring.

The program is designed to support rather than compete with University programs and supervision. Where IVRFs are enrolled at a University, AIATSIS supervision is focused on coaching and skills development in project management, writing and the art of getting through a PhD. This requires a partnership with the University and supervisor.

Outcomes

Since the introduction of this funding, AIATSIS has engaged 25 Indigenous researchers over the six years of the program for various periods to undertake a range of research including mental health, education, entrepreneurship, housing, Commonwealth/State relations, chronic disease, artistic expression, among other topics.

The program has attracted a variety of people but three key catchments have emerged:

- Late term, part-time PhD candidates who have struggled to complete;

- Individuals working in support roles within universities who were interested in exploring a research/academic career; and

- Public service or community sector managers who are interested in 'trying out' research.

The program proved most attractive to Indigenous academics who were nearing completion or had just completed their PhDs and were looking for a culturally and academically secure

environment to complete a major project. The contribution of the program to Research Higher Degree participation and completion was not intended to be the sole focus of the program, but has been a pivotal outcome.

- Four IVRFs have completed their HDR since or during the Fellowship with two more due in the next 6 month period.

- Eleven IVRFs are currently enrolled in a postgraduate degree.

- Two IVRFs have completed post doctoral research under the program.

- Two IVRFs decided that they were not yet ready to undertake research higher degrees but both have taken on research administration roles in nationally competitive grants programs.

- Most of the IVRFs participated in the AIATSIS seminar series and at conferences, including overseas invitations.

- A number of the IVRFs have had their research published.

Vignette #1: Dr Kerry Arabena

CEO Lowitja Institute and former Indigenous Visiting Research Fellow, Kerry Arabena, entered the IVRF program in 2007 as a public service escapee, with extensive experience in managing Indigenous and community sector organisations. She experimented with the idea of research on a three month IVRF program and applied for a three year fellowship with AIATSIS. She enrolled in and completed a PhD through ANU and won the Crawford prize for the best thesis in 2011.

'I have often had to do things on the run, or at a pace determined by the political expediencies, or funding deadlines, or in reaction to crises. Learning things in an institution that allows the time and space to integrate this learning is such a blessing, especially to be funded to do so!'

AIATSIS has also benefited from the IVRF program. The program has led to an increased critical mass of researchers based at AIATSIS, which has created a more dynamic research environment for all staff. For the first time in the organisation's history, 50% of research fellows are Indigenous people. Many more senior Indigenous staff have also been able to contribute to the culture of the organisation, through training, mentoring and leadership to others.

The Indigenous coordinator position proved invaluable in ensuring that the cultural and social needs of those moving to Canberra were covered. This position proved most successful when the coordinator was also completing a PhD under the program.

The existence of a substantial cohort (up to 10 IVRFs at any one time) has proved invaluable in creating a supportive and productive environment for completion or projects. The

emergence of cohorts of IVRFs and existing staff around particular subject areas, such as education or artistic expression, has also increased the team environment and support structures within the program.

AIATSIS introduced its thinking and learning to the Australian Research Council (ARC), during their review of the Discovery Indigenous Researcher Development program (DIRD). This led to changes to the DIRD program to introduce Indigenous Research Fellowships at the postdoctoral level. The Indigenous Fellowships are now also available at senior academic levels.[15]

Issues

Limited mobility

A significant number of applicants or interested individuals have expressed a desire to complete the Fellowship from their home base. To provide fellowships on this basis would undermine some of the key purposes and outcomes of the program by reducing the impact of a concentrated period of research in a supportive environment. For AIATSIS, our Research Grants program provides an alternative that can be taken up without needing to spend time at AIATSIS. Nevertheless, this aspect of the demand for the program is unmet.

Ongoing employment, career pathways

The IVRF Program was originally conceived as a short term researcher development program. However fellows under this program have provided additional strength to AIATSIS in key areas of education, health and the arts that would otherwise be absent. Fellows under the program have also expressed interest in continuing employment with AIATSIS after their fellowships. However we have no capacity for appointment or career progression from this program. In addition the 12 months available for the fellowship does not allow time for the development of Australian Research Council or other alternative funding options to be considered.

Supervision

Researchers under this program are generally postgraduate or early career researchers requiring intensive supervision and coaching. A number of the IVRFs had experienced poor supervision or had been enrolled for such long periods that their supervision arrangement were no longer viable. AIATSIS has identified the need to work closely with the students' supervisors at their host university wherever possible. We visit supervisors and invite them to spend time at AIATSIS to work intensively with their students.

Ad hoc funding

The funding is now exhausted and AIATSIS has been unable to secure resources through the budget process to continue this program. The annual one-off funding from DIISR over the past two years is greatly appreciated but does not provide some of the flexibility that longer term secure funding would provide. This is particularly the case in terms of promoting mobility by allowing flexibility in time-frames for take up.

Key Learnings from the IVRF program

A large return on a small investment

The IVRF Program, by any standard, is a 'boutique' program. The limited investment is highly targeted to deliver significant outcomes and thereby provide outstanding value for money.

The need for a mature wage

There is no doubt that the level of salary attached to the fellowship is critical to its ability to attract and retain excellent candidates from a range of sectors and at different stages in their life.

The value of a cohort

The importance of having a critical mass of Indigenous researchers in situ can not be underestimated, both in terms of the personal support structure but also in terms of developing thinking and improving personal expectations for success. In particular, current PhD students or those aspiring to a research career were able to see completions happening around them and get advice from Indigenous researchers at various stages of their career. Ideally, we would like to expand the program to attract high-ranking academics, perhaps for shorter period to support their personal research output and inspire early career researchers in the program.

The need for flexibility

It is imperative that the program maintains the flexibility to respond to and accommodate the different life circumstances of each IVRF. For example, the original funding over multiple years allowed flexibility for a number of the researchers as to when they could commit to the program. They were able to plan up to three years in advance to make arrangements in their own lives to take advantage of the opportunity. In one example, this

allowed for a mother to make arrangements for her son with a mental illness to move with her to Canberra for the duration of her fellowship. Her resulting research on appropriate care arrangements for Aboriginal people with mental illness was awarded the prize for best essay and published in the **Australian Medical Journal**. She has since enrolled in a Masters degree.

intensive case management

Each person comes to the IVRF program with a different history, often of disadvantage and discouragement in pursuing their research aspirations. The support structure put in place under the IVRF program has been imperative, particularly the cultural support. During the program we have had to confront stresses and needs that are part of relocation and completing a PhD. Some issues have required psychological support.

The number of IVRFs who have arrived with a history of poor supervision and under-developed research skills has been concerning. We have adopted a coaching and mentoring approach based on project management/research planning, research and writing skills, and thesis completion.

Demand and capacity for research career participation

The level of interest in the program has revealed the depth of potential for the development of an Indigenous research workforce. The number of quality appointable candidates would not diminish if this program were doubled immediately. Again, the interest from the IVRFs for ongoing research careers remains an unmet demand.

Vignette #3: Valerie Cooms

Valerie Cooms sought out an IVRF after completing five years as the CEO of a Native Title Representative Body. Valerie's PhD in History has been languishing half finished for that period. The pressure of turning down high paying administrative positions to complete her PhD was exacerbated by her grand-parenting duties and her community responsibilities. The mature wage offered under the program made the decision to re-engage and complete her PhD that much more manageable.

'If you want serious Indigenous research, you have to pay for it. It's good that AIATSIS has realised this through the Indigenous Researchers' Fund. I had to wait until my kids had grown up before I could afford to do the research and study I am doing now.

Unless there are more Indigenous people writing and publishing, there's not a lot for other scholars to hang their theory on.'

Conclusions

The funding for the IVRF program has provided an opportunity for AIATSIS to support Indigenous research that it would not otherwise have had resources to in the past. It has proved an exciting opportunity for AIATSIS to encourage Indigenous research (both community and academic) and subsequently enhance the skills of Indigenous researchers.

Overall, the IVRF program has been an opportunity to implement a successful Indigenous program that has a direct success in supporting PhD completions and substantial research projects. Over the longer term, the outcomes from this program have the potential to improve AIATSIS' reputation among Indigenous researchers and strengthen our relationship with the University sector. It also has the potential to develop into a prestigious program that will attract increased interest and support Indigenous researchers' mobility and research output.

Unfortunately the funding crisis currently confronting AIATSIS means that one or both of AIATSIS Researcher training programs are unlikely to continue in 2012-13 without further external investment.

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[1] The membership criteria for AIATSIS are contained in the *AIATSIS Rules* and are based on a significant contribution to Indigenous Studies or to the Indigenous community.

[2] Australian Government, Budget 2011-12, Portfolio Budget Statements: Innovation Industry Science and Research, in $000: AIATSIS 13,172; AIMS 30,883; ANSTO 165,579; CSIRO 720,415. Available at http://www.innovation.gov.au/AboutUs/FinancialInformationandLegislation/BudgetInformation/Pages/default.aspx> accessed 20 August 2011

[3] Macroeconomics 2009, p.7. The report revealed that over the six years to 2009, the research budgets of major government research agencies have increased on average by 4.7 percent. AIATSIS has had growth of only 1.5 percent. In real terms our appropriation for research has decreased by 6 percent. Funding per researcher has also declined by almost 1% while growing significantly across other government research agencies (e.g. ANSTO 7.28%; AIMS 5.28%; cf CSIRO -0.7%). Following this report, AIATSIS was the only agency in the portfolio not to have received any part of the $5.7 billion package for the higher education and innovation sector in the 2009-10 Budget.

[4] The current staffing of the Research program exceeds 40 Equivalent Full Time staff. AIATSIS research is currently funded by more than 60% externally generated research funding. The majority of funding is from government sources.

[5] The inaugural Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies conference held in 1961 resulted in the passing of the *Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Act 1964* (Cth) which was repealed and replaced by the *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Act 1989* (Cth) (AIATSIS Act). The AIATSIS Act sets out the functions and governance of AIATSIS, including an independent governing Council.

[6] In the 1970's around 24% of total AIATSIS funding was allocated to grants. This figure fell to 9.3% by the late 1980's, at which time the Council decided that 7.5% of the total AIATSIS budget should be allocated to grants.

[7] The 2009 and 2010 rounds were nearly 80 per cent university administered applications.

[8] House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Innovation. 2008. Building Australia's Research Capacity: Report of the Inquiry into research training and

research workforce issues in Australian universities, Rec. 26, available at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/isi/research/report.htm> accessed 20 August 2011.

[9] Australian Government. 2008. *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report (The Bradley Review),* pp. 3-4. See also Rec. 30. Available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Review/Pages/ReviewofAustralianHigherEducationReport.aspx> accessed 20 August 2011.

[10] Australian Government. 2008. *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report (The Bradley Review),* p. 32. Available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Review/Pages/ReviewofAustralianHigherEducationReport.aspx> accessed 20 August 2011.

[11] Terry Cutler. 2008. *Venturous Australia – Building Strength in Innovation: Review of the national innovation system (The Cutler Review)*. Rec. 7.13. Available at <http://www.innovation.gov.au/Innovation/Policy/Pages/ReviewoftheNationalInnovationSystem.aspx> accessed 20 August 2011.

[12] Australian Government. 2008. *Innovation Agenda,* Priority 2 and Priority 1, respectively.

[13] Research Skills for an Innovative Future: a research workforce strategy to cover the decade to 2020 and beyond (19 April 2011), Priority 7.3.

[14] Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC). 2011. *National Indigenous Higher Education Workforce Strategy*, pp.8ff. Available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/HigherEducation/Programs/IHEAC/Pages/Home.aspx#nihews > accessed 20 August 2011.

[15] The Minister announced the IVRF and the ARC initiatives in a joint press release, date.

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Appendix 1: AIATSIS Strategic Research Plan 2009-2012

In 2009 AIATSIS developed a research plan that sought to identify the central defining feature of research at AIATSIS. We identified that making contribution to Indigenous wellbeing was a shared value of our research. We identified the following priorities for the following three years:

- Establish AIATSIS as a respected and known Indigenous critical voice in policy by developing a stronger role for AIATSIS in the provision of a rigorous evidence base for policy development.

- Reflect Indigenous knowledge in our research outputs and fostering Indigenous researchers.

- Position AIATSIS as a hub for collaborative research in Indigenous studies

- Maintain existing partnerships and develop new linkages with key stakeholders.

- Communicating and making accessible the results of our research.

The research activity of AIATSIS is structured around two research programs and 6 areas of research focus, supported by a research business team.[16] The areas of research focus are not necessarily discrete business units but are used to organise our planning reporting and communication of research. The areas of Research Focus are:

- Indigenous social and cultural wellbeing

- health and wellbeing
- Education, history and cultural transmission
- Language, arts and cultural expression

- Indigenous country and governance

- Native title and traditional ownership
- governance and public policy
- land and water

The research business team has cross program responsibility for public programs, communication and publication as well as research business development (grant getting) and grant giving.

Areas of research concentration are organised as units or teams; the largest of these is the Native Title Research Unit followed by the newly established AIATSIS Languages Unit. We have recently piloted a 'centre' concentration, the Land and Water Research Centre, which will profile and promote greater participation from researchers across the program and external research partners in this particular area of research.

The organisational structure that has been adopted will allow the natural emergence of teams or units, based on the NTRU model. We have identified the benefits of small teams of two or three researchers in being able to increase productivity and attract interest and funding (for example in health and language) in comparison to the traditional isolated single research fellow structure of the past. The Indigenous Visiting Research Fellowships have allowed new coalitions to emerge in education, history, and arts and literature. This has resulted in new external partnerships including the Blackwords/Austlitt partnership on Indigenous literature.

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[16] The two research programs are each headed by a Program Director at Associate Professor/Professorial level.