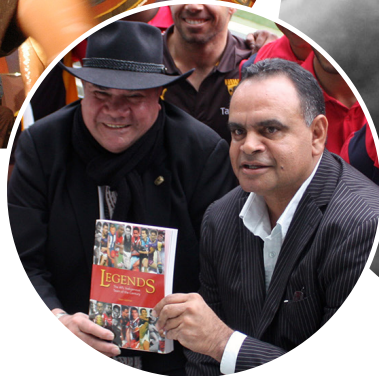# Towards
Cultural
Proficiency

A PHASED APPROACH TO BUILDING CULTURAL CAPABILITY 2013 - 2015

AIATSIS

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER STUDIES

Foreword

I am pleased and honoured to present the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Towards Cultural Proficiency - a phased approach to building cultural capability 2013 – 2015 (the Strategy). The Strategy is an innovative whole-of-organisation approach to achieving cultural proficiency. Far broader than just Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness, the Strategy applies a three year phased approach to building capability through three tiers of change: behavioural, structural and technical.

Underscoring these three tiers of change is an emphasis on the specific elements of individuals, organisation, and systems. Together, these comprise a solid analytical structure for examining where and how cultural competence can lead to cultural proficiency. The benefits of this approach will be a suite of innovative and inclusive culturally competent practices that strengthen AIATSIS's position as a world leader in raising awareness of Australian Indigenous cultures and histories. Potential benefits for AIATSIS and our stakeholders include:

- better outcomes for communities and governments through the fostering of greater understanding and appreciation of Indigenous communities

- improved workforce participation rates and job satisfaction through a narrowing of the 'cultural perception gap'

- an increase in the durability and usability of AIATSIS corporate knowledge

- increased staff competency through the prioritisation of corporate training and development; and

- improved workplace collaboration and consultation through encouraging greater cultural diversity and inclusiveness.

Taken together, the strategies outlined in the Strategy will enhance agency performance and capability and serve to position AIATSIS as the employer of choice for a range of highly skilled professionals, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The investment of resources we will continue to make in pursuit of excellence and expertise in the area of cultural proficiency will ensure we establish an enduring reputation as international leader in this area, setting an example for government agencies and research institutions both in Australia and around the world to draw on.

Understanding what constitutes cultural proficiency means in today's global corporate world is no simple task, particularly when externally determined pressures and deadlines demand solutions quickly and often on the run.

I commend this strategy to all with a stake in AIATSIS and our vision of achieving innovative and practical ways to encourage and value cultural inclusiveness in the workplace, in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Professor Mick Dodson, AM
AIATSIS Chairperson

Introduction

AIATSIS is a Commonwealth statutory authority within the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education portfolio, and is the world's premier institution for information and research about the cultures and lifestyles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, past and present.

The Institute undertakes and encourages scholarly, ethical community-based research, holds a priceless collection of films, photographs, video and audio recordings and the world's largest collections of printed and other resource materials for Indigenous Studies, and has its own publishing house.

AIATSIS occupies a special position in the Australian Public Service being a small agency with a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. Our activities affirm and raise awareness among all Australians, and people of other nations, of the richness and diversity of Australian Indigenous cultures and histories. This exceptional combination of function and people has led to the development of the AIATSIS Cultural Capability – a phased approach to cultural proficiency strategy, a unique systems approach to determining what is required to develop cultural proficiency.

The Strategy is more than rhetoric. Rather, I see this as an extraordinary opportunity to develop a meaningful and substantive response to the complex and dynamic cultural realities of contemporary Australia as they are experienced within an organisational context.

This is why our Strategy in the first year has at its core two fundamental tenets; one it provides a shared journey of learning for AIATSIS staff to build a common understanding and to gain commitment, and secondly provides a platform on which to build capability through successive strategies and actions.

I hope the Strategy will provide my colleagues in the APS with the impetus to join me in developing their own departmental responses.

I believe our journey towards cultural proficiency is an opportunity that not only promises greater outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is also fundamental to maintaining excellent collegial relationships in the workplace. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is diverse and thriving. Tapping into this multiplicity of experience and understanding through a lens of cultural competence will reward all Australians.

Enjoy the process of learning and change; better still enjoy the journey.

Russell Taylor
Principal

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Background

In 2014, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies will celebrate its fiftieth birthday. Established in 1964 as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, the strategic direction of the Institute during its early years was determined by the priorities of non-Indigenous bureaucrats and researchers primarily concerned with the collection and preservation of information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures.

Over the years the Institute's focus has changed along with public attitudes to reflect greater self-determination in the area of research and information management. AIATSIS is no longer an institution that 'salvages' information about Indigenous Australians, but rather one that gathers, produces, protects and disseminates information by and in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples. AIATSIS has led the way on developing participatory, ethical research practices and among Australian research institutions remains at the forefront of best practice in this area.

The Towards Cultural Proficiency – a phased approach to building capability 2013 – 2015 strategy builds on this success story by turning our corporate gaze inwards, to reflect on how as an organisation we can encourage greater skills, knowledge and values in the area of cultural proficiency. The development of the Strategy is an initiative derived from an Indigenous Caucus One AIATSIS Workshop, and is a critical platform for our One AIATSIS Guiding Principles and Shared Behaviours.

AIATSIS occupies a unique and irreplaceable role within Australia's research framework developing a reputation for rigorous and independent research across the breadth of Indigenous studies and affairs. We want to add to this reputation by improving on a number of initiatives we already do well acknowledging we can still improve, and as well undertake a number of additional initiatives to help inform a universal framework to support cultural proficiency in the workplace.

Our approach is undertake a journey of leaning that is phased over three years where our outcomes for each year will build on itself resulting in an ever increasing capacity to contribute towards becoming a culturally proficient workplace. Central to achieving this goal will be to develop a foundation of shared understanding and commitment amongst all AIATSIS staff in the first year of the Strategy.

The AIATSIS Executive has established a dedicated Project Management Team to guide the implementation and monitoring of the Strategy consisting of staff from across AIATSIS program areas. The Project Management Team will report directly to the Executive.

Being culturally competent is about appreciating cultures are diverse and no culture is superior. One embraces cultural diversity as the richness of humanity. The Towards Cultural Proficiency – a phased approach to building cultural capability 2013 – 2015 strategy will allow people to learn to appreciate and respect cultural diversity, and also to feel proud about their own culture. In the case of Australia, being culturally competent also means that you understand the past colonisation is still affecting the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel about themselves and their ancestors.

Kazuko Obata
Research

Starting with a vision

AIATSIS acknowledges the diversity of our staff is our most important asset and is critical to our ongoing success as a leading cultural institution. Our Strategy's vision to guide our effort towards becoming culturally proficient is...

A workplace where all culture particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are equally respected and engaged.

Cultural competence

A review of research literature relating to cultural competence undertaken in 2012 by AIATSIS revealed that there is no one standard definition for cultural competence. A commonly cited definition of cultural competence adopted in the Grote literature review for the Universities Australia (UA) framework (October 2011), is drawn from the health and education literature. This definition places cultural competence within a systems framework that emphasises the interrelationships between behaviours, attitudes and polices.[1]

While useful in drawing out the relationship between people, policies and information, this definition is limited by its failure to identify many of the other factors that make up cultural competence in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, as distinct from multi-cultural environments. It is in this context, AIATSIS has taken the opportunity through the Strategy to lead the thinking and development of the notion of cultural competence.

1. The definition in full reads, "A set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, Agency or among professionals and enable the system, agency or professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations". It is based on Cross, T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K., Issacs, M., 1989, *Towards a culturally competent system of care Volume 1*, Washington DC: Georgetown University Child Development Centre, CASSP Technical Assistance Center.

Framing cultural competence in AIATSIS

Our reputation for research, publishing, and collection policies has placed AIATSIS as the world leader in raising awareness of Australian Indigenous cultures and histories. A framework for cultural competence to guide our effort towards developing cultural proficiency is not only good business but essential business.

Business outcomes we anticipate to benefit from through the Strategy include:

- **Better research outcomes –** greater understanding and appreciation of Indigenous communities will result in better outcomes for communities and governments.

- **Increased staff participation -** narrowing the 'cultural perception gap' will lead to improved participation rates.

- **Enhanced corporate knowledge -** identify greater opportunities to increase usability of corporate knowledge.

- **Enhanced corporate capacity –** identify and prioritise corporate training and development to areas of need.

- **Increased employment outcomes –** positioning AIATSIS as an employer of choice will enhance agency performance and capability through greater cultural diversity and inclusiveness.

- **Improved communication between staff -** increased cultural understanding between all staff will lead to improved workplace collaboration and consultation.

At AIATSIS we accept building capability to become culturally proficient is an organisation wide initiative that will permeate every aspect of our business. Adapting Universities Australia's *Guiding principles for the Development of Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities*, our framework for determining cultural proficiency provides an integrated and holistic model to focus our collective effort.

Below is the AIATSIS business framework for building cultural proficiency.

Building on research success

All research in AIATSIS observes the standards embodied in our *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous communities.* The 14 principles in the Guidelines set best standards for ethical research and human rights.

To improve on the success of the Guidelines further, research applicants will be required to demonstrate effective engagement requirements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander communities.

Supporting Principle – We value diversity of cultures in our workplace

External Influences

Parliament
Economy
Government
Policy
Legislation
International Community
Indigenous Communities
Indigenous Communities and organisations
Research and collection Institutions

Supporting Principle – Contribute positively to the well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples

Cultural Competence Foundation

Awareness → Learning → Understanding

Individual ↔ Organisation ↔ Systems

Supporting Principle – AIATSIS systems and policies reflect the highest standards for cultural competence

AIATSIS CCF Objective
A workplace where all culture particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander cultures are equally respected and engaged.

Community Relationships
Skills Jobs, Professional Development
Governance
Information and Communication

Research — Field Research, Indigenous Research, Cultural Competency Research
Recruitment and Engagement — Recruitment Retention and Development, Learning and Development
Effective People Management — Performance Management, Workforce Planning
Indigenous Employment and Training — Staff Networks, AIATSIS Employment Strategy
Media — Use of Media, Authors
Publications — Publications
Communication and Stakeholder Management — Strategies, Internal Communications
Corporate Strategy — Corporate Documents, Workplace Policies
Committees and Consultation — Workplace Committees, Dispute Management
Interpersonal Communication — Building Decision Making Capacity, Connecting with Community
Client Services — Access, Corporate Services, Design
Design

Supporting Principle – We are a world authority for information

Corporate Goals

Annual Report
Business Plan
Corporate Plan
Council

> *To be culturally competent is about having knowledge of cultures and adversity. Hopefully the Towards Cultural Proficiency – a phased approach to building cultural capability 2013 - 2015 Strategy can bring the best out of all of us as we improve our understanding of what culture is and how this passed knowledge to elders is very important.*
>
> *Culturally competent is also about being proud of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and their cultures, and I hope to share and pass my knowledge on to my co-workers as we look to serve our communities and stakeholders.*
>
> **PJ Williams**
> **Family History Unit**

Explaining the framework

Three integrated levels make up the core of the framework serving four business quadrants to focus our effort. At the centre of the framework is the Strategy's vision. The three integrated levels consist of:

- Level 1 – Policy Themes
    o Level 2 – Foundation Areas
        Level 3 – Action Areas

Level 1 - Policy Themes

Four Policy Themes group AIATSIS's business functions. Each Policy Theme has a guiding Policy Principle to guide each individual strategy and action. The four Policy Themes and their Supporting Principles are:

- Skills, Jobs, Professional Development - We value and support diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in our workplace.

- Information and Communication - We are a world authority for managing, creating, and disseminating information related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

- Governance - AIATSIS systems and policies reflect the highest standards for cultural competence.

- Community Relationships - Our activities build strong relationships that contribute positively to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Level 2 - Foundation Areas

Eleven Foundation Areas form a second lower level. Each Foundation Area supports a specific Policy Theme in turn providing a number of core building blocks on which to group capability for cultural competence. The four Policy Themes and corresponding Foundation Area building blocks are:

- Skills, Jobs, Professional Development - Recruitment and Retention, Effective People Management, Indigenous Employment and Training.

- Information and Communication - Media, Publications, Communication and Stakeholder Management.

- Governance - Corporate Strategy, Committees and Consultation, Interpersonal Communication.

- Community Relations - Clients Services, Research.

Workforce Planning and cultural competence

Planning for the workforce of the future in AIATSIS is about knowing where our critical positions are ensuring we have the right people in the right roles with the right skills.

Our cultural competence training program will provide a common foundation on which to target corporate training and development needs.

Level 3 - Action Areas

The third and final level of the framework consists of a number of Action Areas subsets. These Action Areas provide the operational level response to examine and determine cultural capability. This operational response is provided by analysing individual business tools to translate into specific strategies and actions, and when factored together drive our collective effort toward achieving cultural proficiency.

The eleven Foundation Areas and corresponding Action Area subsets are presented below:

- Recruitment and Retention - Recruitment and Engagement

- Effective People Management - Learning and Development, Performance Management, Workforce Planning

- Indigenous Employment and Training – Staff Networks, AIATSIS Employment Strategy

- Media - Use of Media

- Publications - Authors, Publications

- Communication and Stakeholder

Management – Strategies, Internal Communications

- Interpersonal Communication - Dispute Management, Building Decision Making Capacity

- Client Services - Access, Connecting with Community, Corporate Services, Design

- Research - Field Research, Indigenous Research, Cultural Competence Research

- Corporate Strategy – Corporate Documents, Workplace Policies

- Committees and Consultation – Workplace Committees

Researching cultural competence

As Australia's leading authority on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, AIATSIS is taking the lead role to define cultural competence, particularly as it applies to the Australian Public Service and broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research field.

Identified in the Towards Cultural Proficiency – a phased approach to building cultural capability 2013 - 2015 strategy is the key action of undertaking further research of the literature to determine a suitable definition for cultural competence.

External influences and Corporate Goals

On the left hand side of the model are External Influences that impact AIATSIS business processes and outcomes. Often these external influences are outside of our control. Consisting of both national and international dimensions, these influences guide and inform our business functions.

The Corporate Goals on the right hand side are ultimately where we want to be able to report successful outcomes that demonstrate capability to support cultural proficiency. The combined effort of all strategies and actions up through the three levels are strategically positioned to support the framework and broader AIATSIS vision of...

Building pathways for the knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to grow and be shared

Cultural competence foundation

Supporting the framework is a continuum of Awareness, Understanding and Learning. Progressing through this continuum from left to right will result in AIATSIS developing a stronger and more integrated understanding and application of cultural competence.

The continuum is a cyclical process that is dynamic and ongoing. As AIATSIS's cultural competence capability is strengthened, so will awareness change in turn leading to a higher ability to apply learning and understanding of business practices to drive toward cultural proficiency.

Context for change

Reviewing AIATSIS business processes and practices from a combined perspective of organisational effectiveness and change management, will provide a holistic organisational framework for gathering the business intelligence for change. Three key elements to review and examine organisational effectiveness include:

- Individuals - people will be responsible for the doing

- Organisation - has to become part of the corporate culture (policies, practices, beliefs, values and behaviours); and

- Systems - must be applied systematically and holistically.

Each of the these three key elements will be reviewed in an organisational context for change consisting of the following three strategies:

- Behavioural change - change through use of human resources

- Structural change - change in structure and techniques to accomplish goals

- Technical change - change in methods used to get things done

Gathering the business intelligence for change

The business intelligence process that brings the both the organisational effectiveness and change context together is the Business Analysis Matrix (BAM). Through the BAM we will identify a series of qualitative goal or aspirational statements to confirm what is working well, and where new strategies and actions are required to improve capability to achieve cultural proficiency.

Context for Change (Process)		Strengthening Cultural competence (Identifying the low)				Strategy/Actions	
		Individual	Organisation	Systems		What is working well	Where we can target change
Behavioural Strategy → Change in attitudes							
Structural Strategy → Change in structure and design							
Technical Strategy → Change in production and methods							
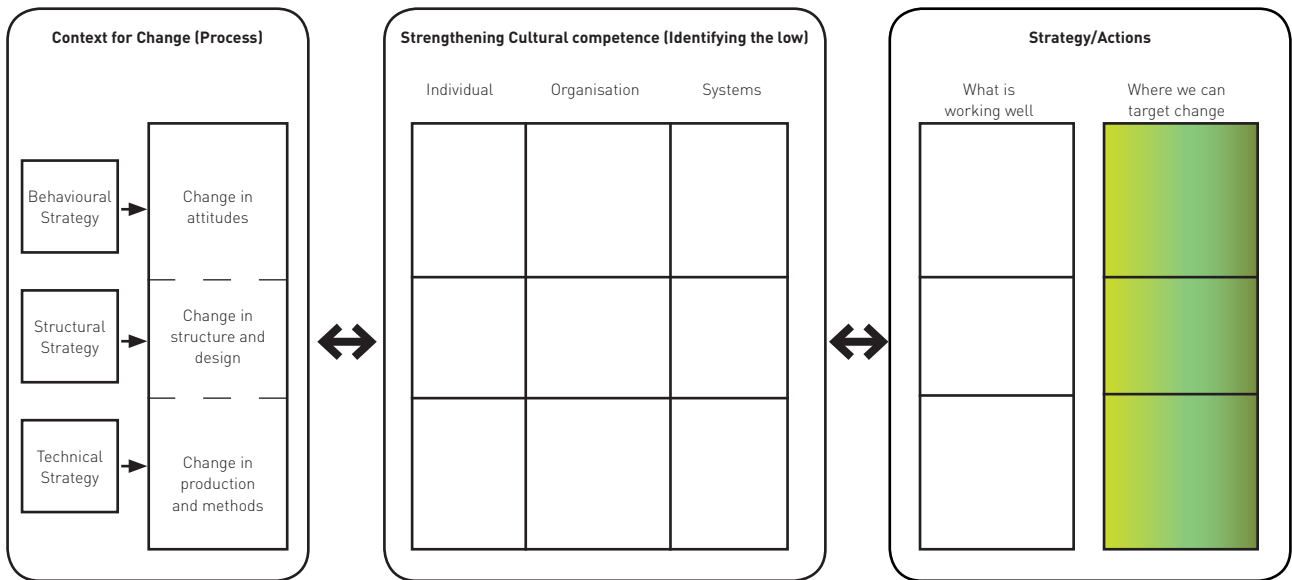
The model below shows the BAM incorporating the organizational effectiveness and change context for change to identify what is currently working well, and where opportunities exist to improve cultural competence.

To demonstrate how the BAM works, ask the following question, "how could an individual, or organisation, or system influence a change in behaviour, or structure, or methods to support cultural competence in the workplace for a Mentoring and Buddy program?

The result will be a number of qualitative or aspirational statements that will confirm what is working well, or where strategies and actions could provide further improvement. The strength of the BAM is that it provides a systematic approach to support cultural competence change by considering an organizational context for change i.e. considers the 'why'.

The following diagram shows a completed example for a Mentoring and Buddy program.

Cultural mentoring and immersion

In February 2012 a senior Quandamoka woman and researcher at AIATSIS invited me to come with her to a native title claim group meeting at Dunich, North Stradbroke Island.

This experience contributed to my cultural understanding and competence in a number of different ways. I gained a better understanding of the way that the idea of community and belonging can really contribute to people's wellbeing, and insight into how group decision making can work in an Aboriginal community

Most of all, I valued this opportunity because it allowed me to learn more about a colleague and her background, and to share in an experience of her home, her country and her people.

Nick Duff
Senior project Manager NTRU

Mentoring/Buddy Program

The Objective of the Mentoring and Buddy Program is to support staff to develop specific skills, knowledge, and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures required to work effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues, communities and stakeholders.

Context for Change (Process)

Behavioural Strategy → Change in attitudes

Structural Strategy → Change in structure and design

Technical Strategy → Change in production and methods

Strengthening Cultural competence (Identifying the low)

Individual	Organisation	Systems
Staff seek participation in AIATSIS's Mentoring/Buddy Program	Mentoring training is integral to AIATSIS success, particularly for succession planning.	Communicate good news stories regularly on success of the Mentor/ Buddy programs e.g. One AIATSIS newsletters
Both the mentor and mentoree take an active interest in a learning journey to enhance each other's cross	All new staff are required to participate in a Buddy Program. The Mentor Program is used as a succession planning initiative for key positions identified through the Workforce Planning project.	
All mentors are required to have attended appropriate mentor within the last 3 years.	Provide mentor training to establish a stable number of qualified mentors from within each business area. Target - 20 people.	Establish a formal Mentor/Buddy. Include in induction process, requirement for new starters to be assigned an Aboriginal and/or duration of induction (3months)

Strategy/Actions

What is working well	Where we can target change
Over twenty five percent of our staff are Indigenous with on average more than 6 years length of service. The Indigenous caucus – an established staff network body - meets monthly as an advisory body to the AIATSIS Principal on a range of workplace issues. An informal Buddy system is operating successfully across AIATSIS proving to be a successful initiative in assisting new employees to settle into AIATSIS.	Develop a formal mentor and Buddy policy. Participation in Buddy program is mandatory for all starters which includes an Indigenous staff member as the buddy. Participation in the mentoring program is voluntary but strongly encouraged. Mentor training be provided to interested individuals. Buddy Training be provided to Caucus members Include good news stories in one AIATSIS newsletters.

Determining priorities and taking action

Priority cultural competence themes identified from an Indigenous Caucus Towards One AIATSIS workshop included:

• recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff

• cultural safety; and

• behaviour and accountability.

The Strategy builds on the priority themes commencing with a number of key activities for delivery in the first year. These priority activities will establish a firm understanding of what cultural competence change means for AIATSIS, gaining the buy in of staff, and moving forward with a select few actions to cement a foundation for change.

By adopting a phased approach, each year of the Strategy will add to learning and outcomes of the previous year.   Strategies and actions for delivery in the second and third years of the Strategy will be determined from reviewing and evaluating each year's effort. This way all strategies and actions will remain prioritised according to business needs and with the support of AIATSIS staff.

The priority actions identified for 2013 consist of:

• Staff Consultation – a series of information sessions and focus groups to build a common understanding and commitment amongst staff.

• Revising the use and assessment of Selection Criteria 1 – examine Identified Positions and recruitment policy to identify where real change can be best made to support cultural capability.

• Developing appropriate cultural capability training – developing in-house a multi-level strategy to support staff to develop and grow their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures required to work effectively in the Institute.

• Cultural Competence Guide for Supervisors – assist supervisors to identify where development activities can support cultural competence.

• Reconciliation Action Plan - develop a new reconciliation action plan.

• Research – Develop a number of research proposals to examine what does being culturally competent mean for AIATSIS and the broader Australian Public Service.

Measuring success through Key Result Areas

Six Key Result Areas will measure the Strategy's overall success. These include:

1. Skilled People - maximising performance through skilled and qualified people

2. Job Satisfaction - getting the environment right to get the best out of people

3. Disseminating Information - high quality available information

4. Stakeholder Relations - connecting and engaging effectively

5. Building Knowledge and Relations – contributing to improved cultural competence understanding

6. Culturally inclusive governance – representative practices and processes.

Implementing and monitoring progress

Accompanying this strategy is an implementation plan that will remain live and flexible. The Project Management Team consisting of staff across the institute will monitor overall performance reporting regularly to the Executive.

References

T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K., Issacs, M., 1989,Towards a culturally competent system of care Volume 1, Washington DC: Georgetown University Child Development Centre, CASSP Technical Assistance Center.

Universities Australia, 2011, Guiding Principles for Developing Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities, Canberra, ACT.

Glossary of Acronyms

AIATSIS   Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Studies

BAM   Business Analysis Matrix

UA   Universities Australia

NOTES