National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Conference Set to Celebrate Success

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Conference 2015 (NATSIEC), being held in Melbourne from 10-13 November, is set to celebrate the progress made in the Indigenous education sector.

Delegates representing key educational institutions and leadership groups from across Australia will attend the conference, which will reflect on the achievements of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) and discuss a platform for the future.

Over three days, delegates will hear from industry leaders including Lois Peeler who led the development of the first-ever independent Aboriginal secondary school in the early 1980s, Director of the Korin Gamadji Institute Belinda Duarte, Youth Advocate Benson Saulo and CEO of the Aborigines Advancement League, Esme Bamblett on issues such as the history of the AEP, best practice models for early education and opportunities for international collaborations.

Geraldine Atkinson, President of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI), said that although there is a long way to go to achieving equality of educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it’s important to celebrate and recognise the work that has been done to date. “This conference will undoubtedly highlight the gaps and identify areas where things need to improve, but it will be done with a view to discussing positive solutions. NATSIEC is an opportunity for some of our best thinkers and practitioners to come together and set the pathway for the next decade.”

A key emphasis of the conference will be on supporting a holistic approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education including through fostering connections to culture and focusing on community empowerment and local ownership.

Artists Vicki Couzens and Lee Darroch of Banmima Arts will be creating a possum skin cloak onsite with NATSIEC delegates. “It’s so important for us all to recognise the various elements that can support educational success. We need to understand that connections to culture and supporting social and emotional wellbeing of individuals and communities can be critical to setting up the right foundations,” said Atkinson.

The conference includes a comprehensive cultural program for delegates to enjoy local exhibitions and sites, on the traditional lands of the Kulin nations. Acclaimed artists such as Archie Roach, Lu Bennett and Dan Sultan will also perform at various events over the three days.
About the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP)

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) is Australia’s national policy on Indigenous education, comprising 21 goals. It was endorsed by all Australian governments when the policy was launched in 1989. The AEP’s overarching objective is to bring about equity in education and training outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Dr Kaye Price, editor of "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education: An Introduction For the Teaching Profession" (Cambridge University Press) which will be launched at NATSIEC 2015, reflecting on the AEP is quoted as saying:

“\"The Policy has survived many changes of government and remains the foundation for continuing improvement across all levels of education. Some might say nothing has changed, that the goals of the AEP have not been met, but we must look at what has been achieved from the time it was endorsed in 1989.\"

Along this continuum, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices have been heard, and continue to be heard, by policy makers and education systems. As a case in point, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workforce today is younger and more-qualified than in the past, reflecting dedication and commitment to our original aspirations.

The fact is that the AEP remains a relevant policy document, one that is cited almost every single day, by a range of educators, students and government officials. While in the main the goals have not been met, we continue to work towards them and reflect on what they mean and what they contribute. The AEP has given us a common purpose, and provided a goal in itself to work together “both ways” - with policy and knowledges.

NATSIEC 2015 is a celebration that we continue to gather and share our knowledge, wisdom and experiences in a testament to our belief in the value of knowledge and sharing those knowledges,”