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In the early part of 2010, CSNSW undertook to participate in the Australian Government’s Indigenous Cadetship Support (ICS) Program administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). The ICS is part of the Australian Government’s Indigenous Economic Development Strategy and aims to improve the professional employment prospects of Indigenous Australians. It links Indigenous tertiary students with employers in a cadetship arrangement involving full-time study and work placements. Cadetships enable Indigenous students to gain the professional qualifications and experience needed for a range of jobs in the private, public and community sectors and move into employment on completion of their studies. It can also assist employers to identify potential Indigenous employees. The ICS forms part of the Australian Government’s Indigenous Employment Policy (IEP). The IEP recognises the particular disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians in the labour market and that special measures are required to secure improved outcomes. The ICS is administered by the Indigenous Employment Programme Branch of the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). Under the ICS, Indigenous cadets assume full-time study and an annual 12 week (or equivalent) work placement with an employer, which complements their course of study. The work Placements can be undertaken during the long vacation break, between academic years or be spread throughout the year. The expectation is that the cadet will commence employment with the employer on the successful completion of their cadetship.

The ICS provides up to $15,400 per annum to support cadets with a living allowance, cover study-related costs and offset employer administration costs. Other forms of assistance, most notably travel assistance for cadets who are studying or undertaking their work placement away from home, are also available. Cadets are paid a wage by their employer during their work placement.

More information on this program can be obtained by visiting the ICS website, consulting the ICS Handbook, calling the Indigenous Employment Line on 1802 102 or emailing ics@deewr.gov.au.

Why participate in the ICS Program?

Statistics show Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in the criminal justice sector for reasons which are many and complex. Whilst CSNSW recognises the valuable contribution of all of its staff, it also recognises that the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait offenders can be better addressed through the delivery of services by staff who have a deeper understanding of the Indigenous culture. By participating in the ICS Program, CSNSW not only provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander undergraduate students with valuable paid work experience and (for those cadets who meet the
academic and work performance requirements) a full-time job at the end of their degree. It is also nurturing a future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce which can provide services to Indigenous and non-Indigenous offenders alike.

Because CSNSW needs more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff working as psychologists, teachers and probation and parole officers, it has focused on these employment areas when advertising its cadetships. In its first round of cadetship offers, CSNSW offered one psychologist, four teacher and three probation and parole positions. It is currently engaged in the recruitment of an additional psychologist and probation and parole officer. The seven cadets, who have already commenced their cadetships with CSNSW, have recently been working in the Fairfield and Wollongong Community Offender Services Offices, Parramatta, Bathurst and Grafton Correctional Centres and the CSNSW Head Office. Whilst engaged in the work experience component of their cadetship, the cadets are employed as temporary staff, and attract appropriate Award conditions.

How did we recruit?

CSNSW started the recruitment process for its cadets in May 2010, by advertising extensively in the Indigenous press and relevant regional and local press. Further, all NSW universities were informed of the cadetships being offered, and similar advice was disseminated through the CSNSW and other public sector Indigenous networks. Cadet applicants were required to submit a written application, and their progress to interview and invitation to participate in other selection processes was determined on the basis of competitive merit. Successful cadet applicants were also required to undertake an Australia-wide criminal record check, coupled with referee checks.

Training and placements

As the sponsoring employer, CSNSW provides cadets with a paid 12-week work placement each year (funded by CSNSW) and makes all necessary payments to the cadet, including the weekly study allowance and the yearly book and equipment allowance (funded by the DEEWR). CSNSW also provides the cadet with a mentor, and maintains contact with the cadet outside of the work placement period. With the condition that the cadet meets all necessary academic and work performance requirements during their cadetship, CSNSW will offer the cadet a full-time permanent job at the end of his/her cadetship in a career stream which aligns with their academic and work experience achievements.

It must be noted, however, that whilst cadets successfully completing their course of study will be offered employment by CSNSW, cadets will be subject to standard probationary periods and are expected to follow all relevant policies, procedures and protocols and adhere to these during their work experience and probationary periods.

The Commitment required and the rewards available

The effective administration of the Indigenous Cadetship Support Program has been assured through the positive working relationships which have been built amongst the staffs of the DEEWR, the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet and CSNSW, and it is evident that this kind of relationship is not unique amongst the participating State government agencies. The Department of Premier and Cabinet also facilitates an agency network, where participating agencies can meet and discuss the implementation of the Program, share ideas and experiences, and basically work towards ensuring as many opportunities as possible are open to...
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and that the cadets undertaking the program succeed in their studies and chosen career.

Cadets can join the Program at varying stages of their degree, so they may spend as little as one or two year years as a cadet (before graduating), or as much as five years. It is therefore important for the cadets to be well supported through the provision of relevant and meaningful work experience, by receiving feedback on their work performance and by being provided with supervisors and mentors who have an understanding of the Program and want to see it work. Whilst it is early days for CSNSW in the running of this Program, the support and enthusiasm for the Program, from the most senior of levels to those staff who might just merely hear about it, has set a pathway which is positive and exciting. Some of the rewards from the Program can be easily measured, and have been described above. However, some of the rewards will not be that easily measured, but will, over time, have a positive impact on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the organisation as a whole.

References

The Indigenous Cadetship Support (ICS) - Overview

Law Reform Commission of Western Australia – Aboriginal Customary Laws Discussion Paper

Indigenous Cadetship Support: Sponsor Agreement

NSW Public Sector Indigenous cadetship program: guide for cadets and their supervisors and mentors