

## Far North training partnership

### Case study summary

Description	<p>Far North Training (FNT) partnership was established in 1997 in support of school-to-work transitions in regional Queensland. FNT was funded by the federal government as part of a national initiative of connecting schools to industry partners to create the best possible transitions for young people, providing a connection for working in specific industries. Its key purpose is to improve child and youth transitions. Originated in the key city in Far North Queensland (FNQ) (i.e., Cairns), FNT is now operating in several regional areas in FNQ. It extends its support and services to Indigenous communities in those areas. FNT has brokered partnerships with businesses and industry to provide educational experiences and employment opportunities that meet both the aspirations and capabilities of young people and the needs of local employers.</p>
Governance	<p>FNT is a not-for-profit, locally embedded and government-funded organisation.</p>
Operation	<p>Its key partners include schools, local industry enterprises (mostly small businesses), local communities and young people. Opportunities provided through the partnership included traineeships, work placements, and programs preparing young people preparations for the world of work. It has developed suites of purpose-built programs, i.e., customised to meet the needs of schools, industry and community. It provides advice on training and incentives system, alternative funding models to achieve program sustainability. It offers brokerage of other relevant partnerships, e.g., the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN). It also provides post-placement support for internal candidates.</p> <p>It is constantly engaged with different partners to ensure their understanding of the partnership work and its available support and services. Particularly, it offers its partners the system navigation support, mediating engagement from businesses. It places an emphasis on the provision of high level of service to foster partner confidence in the program and assurance regarding support available.</p>
Engagement with young people/ workplaces/ educational institutions	<p>FNT has engaged with its partners through various channels, including creating marketing campaigns and promotion of program via social media, job sites, community radio and the partnership's entire network. It has run information sessions for community, attended by young people, parents, government and community stakeholders.</p> <p>It has engaged and supported schools via transition pathway officers based at schools to enact referral process for young people 'flagged' at risk. It sits across a range of different sectors, alliances and groups for constant reinforcing of referral pathways and relationship management.</p> <p>It has also engaged employees and young people in work experience program alongside with other range of skilling and youth transition programs (e.g., Skilling Queenslanders programs). It has also developed relationships with partners through communications such as championing success (young people telling their stories). For example, to engage with regional communities, it also provided bus service for young people to access courses and other experiences not available locally such as showcasing of VET or post-school options.</p>

Continuity outcomes	The partnership's continuity is premised on factors, including engagement from different stakeholders and partners and resourcing. Specifically, adequate resourcing from government would improve the partnership's executive leaders' expertise and confidence in the program, taking it from an ad hoc piecemeal approach to sophisticated and well-tested and executed partnership model. As supervising trainees and dealing with traineeship systems are taking a lot of time from the core business, there is a need for adequate resourcing in partner organisations. Additionally, as this partnership is government-funded agency, continuing and targeted funding commitments are brought to the forefront in this partnership should it strive for continuity outcomes.
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### Tentative findings

<b><i>Using five premises to evaluate the formation and ongoing development of the social partnership</i></b>	
Factors supporting	Shared values, purposes and goals, and intended outcomes Shared ownership and decision-making and relations with partners Partnership governance and leadership Trust and trustworthiness Capacity building for partnership work
Areas for improvement	Resources (i.e., continuing funding) Securing engagement from parents
<b><i>Post-school pathways – informing and engaging</i></b>	
Context	A government-funded agency
Aim	Empowering youth, strengthening families and brokering partnerships between education and industry, delivering outcomes to involved stakeholders, with a particular focus on engaging with young First Nations people through traineeships in which health service traineeship program is an example of this aspect, supporting First Nations young people with entry level health career pathways. Whilst heavily promoted to young people, program was open to all First Nations candidates eligible to undertake traineeships.
Informing	Promoting to education stakeholders via email and social platforms, information session, marketing to alternative education pathways, showcase of success (i.e., role model)
Engaging	Traineeships, purpose-built programs, work experience programs alongside with other range of skilling and youth transition programs, engaging with schools to enact referral process for disengaged young people

### Context for the social partnership

FNT was established in 1997 by the federal government as part of the national initiative of connecting schools to industry partners to create the best possible transitions for young people, providing pipeline for industries. Originated in the key city in Far North Queensland (i.e., Cairns), FNT is now operating in several regional areas. It extends its support and services to the Indigenous communities. Thus, FNT is a not-for-profit, locally embedded, and government-funded organisation. Its key purpose is to improve child and youth transitions. It has brokered partnerships with businesses and industry to provide learning experiences and employment opportunities that meet both the aspirations and capabilities of young people and the needs of local employers. One of the aspects of FNT is its engagement with young indigenous people. The health service traineeship program is an example of this aspect, supporting First Nations young people with entry level health career pathways. Whilst heavily promoted to young people, the program was open to all First Nations candidates eligible to undertake traineeships. The purposes of

the health service traineeship program also include supporting Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) with workforce development and contributing to positive Closing the Gap (CTG) health indicators outcomes via provision of culturally appropriate staff.

### **Evaluating the partnership work**

The tentative findings of this case study include identifying the premises that support the development and continuity of the partnership, and areas for improvements. The premises to evaluate the partnership work comprise building and maintaining: i) shared purposes and goals, and intended outcomes, ii) shared ownership and decision-making and relations with partners, iii) resources and capacity building for partnership work, iv) governance and leadership, and v) trust and trustworthiness. These are discussed in relations to building and sustaining the partnership work as well as informing about post-school pathways.

### **Building the partnership**

Through a consideration of the informants' accounts of the formation and development of the social partnership, the partnership work in this case study is held to be interactive and collaborative process of working together to identify, negotiate and articulate shared goals, and to develop processes for realising and reviewing these goals (Billett et al., 2005). In this instance, the partnership has collaboratively worked with its partners to identify their needs and expectations including those from young people, local industries and community to develop a suite of activities and purpose-built programs. One aspect of this partnership is the engagement of young and not so young indigenous people in diverse post-school options, including a health service traineeship program. To support these communities in regional areas, bus services to the cities were provided for them to access services which were not available locally such as showcasing of vocational education and training (VET) and/or alternative post-school options.

In meeting industry requirements and facilitating businesses' involvement in for work placement and traineeship processes, students were consulted to ensure that their placement or traineeship to suit their needs and interest. They were then well prepared for the world of work.

"They have very stringent interview processes with the kids to make sure that they are suitable, and they are well presented and intelligent before they send them to us. Given that physio is the pathway that it is, if they were to perhaps, they'll have such stringent interview processes and the kids that we got were uninterested or they were rude or they were consistently unreliable or you know anything along those lines, then perhaps it would lead us to reassess whether or not it was worthwhile doing."  
(industry partner)

Such effort of being proactive and organised and facilitating industry engagement was appreciated and acknowledged by industry partners and participating schools, contributing to their commitment to the partnership work.

"All of the behind-the-scenes hard work really doesn't come down to us at all. [partnership] is very proactive and they're very organised and they just make it an effortless program for us to be a part of, which as a business is all the more enticing to be a part of it because it's not eating into my time. It's not taking away from me being able to do my job here. It is something that is very easy for us to facilitate, and we have organised a program within our clinic once they're here that." (industry partner)

"... one thing that I really value about [the partnership] is their professionalism. ... without a doubt that they are probably one of the most professional organisations that I've worked with even prior to me working with them as. But you know now being a customer and when I was recruiting for them. [...] I also think they're very open and honest and they're also very responsive. So, they're all of their staff, are very responsive and they are very quick at making decisions." (school partner)

The role of the partnership is being highly proactive and performing roles that the private enterprise could not form easily, and also the same is true for schools, indicates the central role that these partnerships can play. That is, a facilitative role that fills the gaps between what schools can do and what is reasonable to expect of enterprises.

While social partnerships might focus on a common problem, partners likely bring distinct perspectives about the problem and how it can be resolved and what costs are sustainable (Billett et al.,

2007). In this partnership, there was a concern about 'value for money' regarding the programs/services provided. It was the exercise of mutual respect and transparency in their approach that assisted the partnership manage the concern, build and maintain the relations with their partners, demonstrating the value of their services.

"Over time, [the partnership] have increased their ability to demonstrate values, so you know, by having that meeting where we come back after the work experience program where they do talk about how successful it has or how you been and that helps for me to understand the value that that they generate. So, I think, yeah, it's probably around that, that value if you by not having if you don't have an, I do try and include other people within our organization into some of those conversations and meetings with FNT. So, they then to can see the value in what we're getting, what's being delivered to us." (school partner)

Additionally, it was the high level of service that fosters partners' confidence in the programs and assurance regarding the support available. This was done through constant engagement with partners to ensure their awareness and understanding of the partnership work. In this way, the partnership has built trust and trustworthiness through processes that engage, inform and are informed by partners' contributions. Also, their engagement with partners is in ways that build confidence within the partnership. A key element about trust and commitment was identified when partners were "looking forward to" participating in the partnership work. This was taken as providing evidence of a commitment that leads to trust and openness within the partnership.

### ***Sustaining the partnership***

Sustaining the partnership work is premised on several factors. In this partnership, it was the commitment and engagement at different levels and effective communication that were considered pivotal for its sustainability. Firstly, it was commitment to communities. For example, it takes effort and genuine engagement to support the communities and their people. For the Indigenous communities, it was the credibility built via a First Nations leadership team. It was the longevity of the initiatives within the communities that maintain trust and trustworthiness of the partnership work. In other words, place-based response approach was prioritised by this partnership. Secondly, it was commitment to purpose in which capabilities approach was used to identify and understand young peoples' needs and interest, for example.

"... around helping young people define who they are, what their strengths and talents are, what they would like to do" (board member)

Through the process of identifying and understanding needs, shared purposes and goals were developed and maintained to achieve intended outcomes for partners. For example, in the health service traineeship program for young and not so young Indigenous people, it was the commitment to future workforce development and understanding of contribution to wider organisational goals and closing the gap targets that assists sustain the partnership work.

"... young people who have sustained employment for six months or more or who have been removed from youth allowance or benefit" (board member)

Importantly, it was the engagement and commitment to partners over time to maintain trust and trustworthiness through maintaining good relationships with partners, for example.

"I think having a really good relationship with local businesses is gonna be paramount to making sure that the program continues to be a success. I think in Cairns, we're lucky it's we're not a small town, but we're not huge town either. So, the relationships that they have built on over the years have remained intact. And like us, we've been doing it for a number of years, and I don't never see a time where we won't do it. So, making sure that they foster really successful relationships is going to be the number one thing, because without businesses to take these kids on VPT doesn't work. There's nowhere for kids to go, and they do really struggle." (industry partner)

"They were a community provider that I ... could put hand on my heart to sell to potential employees. I think that their level of professionalism is first class and so that's probably one of the things that I really enjoy about dealing with them." (school partner)

To maintain such relationships needs frequent and effective communication to inform and engage partners in ways that reflect shared governance, clearly identified roles and procedures. When partners are in regular contact (i.e., open communication and transparency in their approach), there is likely a high level of awareness and understanding among partners regarding the partnership and its work.

"I like the logical nature of the way they work and the fact that they can back that up with evidence, so they'll do that. They do respond. And the way that they respond is normally they'll respond to me directly or they may respond to the parent as well, and they'll always copy me on any information that is exchanged between parents, student and themselves. So, they always keep me across what's going on. Uh, and that always been really honest in their dealings and very transparent." (school partner)

When the partnership is well organised, with clear operating procedures, partner participation and engagement is likely to be strengthened and sustained, contribution to the partnership work being seen as the collective responsibility, thus facilitating the partnership work.

"Like I said, [the partnership] is very organised and I respond well to organised people, so the more organized they are really open channels of communication when they're organizing place ments, we'll continue to have businesses happy to work with them because they're not chasing their tails ultimately." (industry partner)

"Having really clear, open communication between stakeholders and just setting out, you know who does what, what the expectations are, what are sort of the parameters of what the program looks like in the service provided we achieve that." (coordinator)

"I'm not a blocker, I suppose I understand the role that they play. I understand their expertise and I let them do the job that they're paid to do so." (school partner)

Sustained partnership work is evidenced through achievement of intended outcomes that reflect collective interest. An example of this aspect is viewing engagement in the partnership work as a win-win for businesses and students or trainees.

"One of my hiring criteria for my employees is that they are very good mentors and trainers, and they're happy for both young physios that come aboard but also for work experience kids that are coming through as well, they need to be patient. They need to be happy to answer questions and to help them learn, help them grow so that they can go on to make great decisions, to be hopefully fantastic little physios. We will come back around to us and apply for job and they finish their degree." (industry partner)

While partnership work is likely to be activities contained within social partnerships, sustaining it requires collective efforts and commitment to certain degree from all partners. In this case study, the partnership has been sustained clearly based on the sense of collectivity and effective participation and engagement as partners.

### ***Areas for improvements for continuity outcomes***

Discussed above are the partnership's efforts contributing to sustaining partnership work. In partnership work, adequate resources are essential for the partnership to fulfill its purposes and goals, and achieve intended outcomes, particularly in terms of time, finance and human capital (ACER, 2008; Black, 2008). In this partnership, its continuity outcomes are premised on resourcing, capacity building for the partnership work, and sustained engagement from different partners.

As this partnership is government-funded agency, continuing and targeted funding commitments are brought to the forefront in this partnership should it strive for continuity outcomes. Particularly, adequate resourcing from government would improve the partnership's executive leaders' expertise and confidence in the program, taking it from an ad hoc piecemeal approach to sophisticated and well-tested and executed partnership model.

"... number one, I cannot emphasize this enough is funding that is not piecemeal funding that is structured and ongoing that executive leadership can rely on. [...] So yeah, just funding that's a little bit more reliable. Would be really huge to ensure the longevity." (coordinator)

When enacting social partnerships, partnerships of different kinds may require support or specific interventions to develop the capacity for partnership work (Billett et al., 2005, 2007). There may be a strong sense of collectivity and a readiness of individuals or organisations to participate effectively as partners, but building the capacity to maintain effective partnership work is essential for their development and continuity (Billett et al., 2005, 2007; Seddon & Billett, 2004). For example, as supervising trainees and dealing with traineeship systems are taking a lot of time from the core business, there is a need for adequate resourcing in partner organisations, including capacity building for the partnership work.

“The second thing is adequate resourcing within those organisations around supervision. That's very, very important. It does take time to look after a trainee and those supervisors don't have knowledge most of the time around how a training ship really works and what the traineeship systems like.”  
(coordinator)

“There really needs to be specialized support from an industry viewpoint around the program to step people through it. [...] Adequate support from an external stakeholder to make it get it over the line.”  
(coordinator)

The analysis of this partnership work has identified and verified principles articulating the potential of social partnerships to effectively enact important educational purposes, i.e., achieving and improving outcomes for young people thus providing pipelines for industries, meeting the needs of local communities. However, social partnerships have to be enabled and supported. In this partnership, resourcing and committed engagement from all partners is likely to be a means to appraise the quality and sustainability of the partnership work.

### **Informing young people about and engaging them in post-school pathways**

As improving post-school pathway outcomes for young people is prioritised in this partnership, it has engaged with its partners through various channels, including creating marketing campaigns and promotion of program via social media, job sites, community radio and the partnership's entire network. It has organised information sessions for community, attended by young people, parents, government and community stakeholders.

“We promoted it to our entire network, which is really extensive. You know all the schools, all of the alternative education providers, all of the little not for profits that support young people who might have recently disengaged from school.” (coordinator)

“So certainly not just working with that EQ cohort of organisations very much working with all the spectrum of organisations out there who work with, with people in the community who might have candidates. We worked with all the job active providers.” (coordinator)

Staff reportedly visit schools on a regular basis to talk to students about opportunities for work placements, providing students with perspectives about different post-school pathways to make informed decisions.

“In terms of their work experience and that program that they provide, it's based on giving students a perspective on what they want to do after school, and I think that's helped both me and the people that I know who have done work experience through FNT. I know that's helped a lot in deciding what they want to do in their future.” (student trainee)

The partnership organisation has engaged and supported schools via transition pathway officers based at schools to enact referral process for young people ‘flagged’ at risk. It sits “across a range of different sectors, alliances and groups for constant reinforcing of referral pathways and relationship management”. It has engaged employees and young people in work experience program alongside other range of skilling and youth transition programs, marketing to alternative education pathways (e.g., Anglicare, Busy Schools, Clontarf, Skilling Queenslanders programs). It has also developed relationships with partners through communications such as championing success (young people telling their stories).

“Both years that I did the program, which is 2020 and 2021, 2021 was really nice because we actually had the facilities trainee from 2020 join me on the program. And so he was able to speak to his experience as a young person and he actually got offered a permanent role at Wuchop after it. So that was really nice to be able to hear him showcase that we then ran.” (coordinator)

A structured approach was implemented in the work placement program for Year 10 students. It was reported to include i) initial information session with students, ii) meeting with students and their parents to communicate the program's objectives, iii) a 15-minute interview with each student in preparation for their placement, iv) updating progress of students' placements and expectations from industry/employers, and v) post-placement reflections. Indeed, there was a clear communication plan in place between schools and the partnership to discuss and monitor student/trainee progress.

"My VET coordinator and my supervisor they communicate occasionally just to discuss where I am with my certificate and see how I'm going at school and how I'm going at work and just seeing how they can change what they're doing with me" (student trainee)

However, it was reportedly a disconnection between information parents received from national media (i.e., skill shortage in construction trades) and offering from schools (i.e., school-based traineeship/apprenticeship) and industry (i.e., not willing to take in students thus not being supportive). Thus, there is scope for the partnership to improve the engagement in post-school pathways.

"...recognising that there's shortage but don't have that school-based pathway. That combined with the fact that employees are quite reticent to take on school-based traineeships. So, we do have this disconnect where we do have a number of students who are warning to participate in, you know, start their post school journey at school and capacity is available for them to do it. But the industry isn't supporting them, so you know, and I understand what industry perhaps don't, you know, have the capability or the capacity to do that, but there is a miss that there's a disconnect in the message and I think and you know and so on the one hand parents time or I want my student doing school based traineeship but they're just aren't enough to go around." (school partner)

This engagement could involve identifying opportunities and perhaps having interventions at an earlier stage, assisting students transition into employment during gap years. There was the need for an established relationship with students across three years 10-12 (i.e., prior to Year 12). The current model only engages Year 10 students through the work placement program then the last week of Year 12 through the transition-to-work program. There is a gap in Year 11 and Year 12 when students were not engaged and guided. There is the need for the partnership to build a relationship with students through continuous engagement with students across all senior secondary years. Thus, a shift from program-based to relationship-based mechanism was recommended.

"Probably more information as to how we can do it on an ad hoc basis, but probably more formalized way in which they can inform us about some of their programs that can support students [...] they have them in year 10 and then they don't see them again until the last week of you 12." (school partner)

Such a shift in the approach and the continuity of informed advice and consultation was deemed important as it would extend support to young people who dropped out at the end of Year 11, for example.

"... we've had some exit at the end of year 11. So yeah, if there was a way in which, if we were sort of exchanging that communication regularly about some of those programs, some of those kids don't get captured." (school partner)

Additionally, to achieve better outcomes for young people, engaging them in authentically diverse post-school pathways and their preferred occupations, there is a need for engagement from more diverse industries and more deliberately involving parents in the process of advising on post-school pathways.

"There are a lot of industries that they don't get insight into, and if that's what they're interested in, it's a bit of a bit of bad luck for you guys. My daughter was one of them, so she had to do something. That was her industry adjacent, I guess, which she still loved the week, and it was fantastic, and it's given her a Plan B. Should she not get into her first university course? But she was unable to do anything that really interested her because of what they are allowed to actually do. So, whether or not there is room for improvement there so that it is more suitable to all of the kids and all of the things that they might like to do so that it sparks more interest because there would be a lot of kids going into it just not interested because they can't do what they wanna do. [...] It would have to be a

pretty extreme structure change of FNT for our partnership to fail and from our side, the only thing I could see.” (industry partner)

“I think the students knowing what they can, what is out there and what is possible and knowing that university isn't the one only option. So, you can do certificate courses and apprenticeships and that can still get you to a place where you want to be. I think is really beneficial to know and for parents to be involved in that process, and not just the students being told.” (student)

The analysis of this case study highlights the importance of social partnerships in liaising and facilitating transition pathways. It was suggested that such social partnership model, with industry partnerships brokerage role to support students, is helpful and effective. This sentiment was shared by one of the industry partners:

“The way university degrees and apprenticeships and stuff work now very different to 20 years ago when I graduated high school, and they'll be very different in 20 years' time when my grandkids graduate high school. So, these sorts of partnerships going on far into the future just mean that parents and students will always know where to access information and how to go about the very many different ways there are to get to the career that they want.” (industry partner)

Indeed, social partnerships such as this have been set up to help young people make informed career choices, provide hands-on learning experiences and access to industry expert advice, and offer apprenticeships, traineeships and diverse career pathways. Thus, partnerships with industry have contributed to better employment outcomes for young people.

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