



# BEYOND SCHOOL:

## Increasing opportunities for Aboriginal people in post-secondary education

The Aboriginal Education Conference held at the University on October 23 and 24, brought together over 100 Aboriginal Delegates, a majority of them Aboriginal, people mainly from throughout New South Wales and the Hunter Valley. Many of them were students, teachers and lecturers from schools, TAFE, universities and colleges of advanced education who came to hear a number of distinguished Aboriginal educationists from other states discuss ways in which they are increasing opportunities for Aboriginal people to enter tertiary education and providing support for Aboriginal students.

Speakers included this year's Boyer lecturer, Professor Eric Willmot, Head of the School of Education at James Cook University, who argued the case for providing some exclusively Aboriginal schools while improving the quality of education for Aboriginal students in state schools.



*Professor Eric Willmot*

The role that an Aboriginal community college can play in developing self-esteem, confidence and skills necessary to cope with tertiary education was outlined by Lillian Holt, Deputy Principal of the Aboriginal Community College, Adelaide.

An overview of Aboriginal tertiary education in New South Wales was presented by Bob Morgan, President of the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. Barry Thorne outlined the role and direction of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in Aboriginal education.

The training programmes in business administration offered at associate diploma, degree and postgraduate diploma level by the Aboriginal Task Force at the South Australian Institute of Technology were described by Sonny Flynn, Co-ordinator of the Task Force. This replaced a paper to have been given and in fact supplied by Veronica Arbon, on the programmes, many of them offered externally, by the Aboriginal Studies and Education Centre, at the South Australian College of Advanced Education designated as the key centre for Aboriginal Studies in Australia. Copies of this paper and some others can be obtained from the Department of Community Programmes.

Eve Fesl, a linguist and Director of the Aboriginal Research Centre at Monash University, emphasised the urgent need for Aboriginal graduates. "White people are at the top of the power structure", Ms Fesl said, "and unless Aboriginal professional people can attain some of these top positions, white people will be making decisions about Aboriginal lives for the rest of our lives and for generations to come".

She stressed the need for Aboriginal teachers as well as training programmes in Aboriginal culture and history for all teachers. "We can have the best programmes in the world, but if teachers are racist, the kids will drop out anyhow". Aboriginal lawyers are also needed. "We are now having to pay white lawyers and then having to try to get across to them what we want on land rights and our feelings on the land".

There is a need too, for Aboriginal political scientists. A National Aboriginal Conference established in accordance with

Aboriginal traditional systems may have been far more appropriate than the NAC designed by Europeans. Similarly problems experienced by land councils and co-operatives and decisions made by bodies dealing with Aboriginal funding illustrate the importance of training Aboriginal economists, accountants and business administrators.

Aboriginal philosophers, historians and archaeologists are needed to approach their fields from an Aboriginal perspective; likewise Aboriginal psychologists and sociologists who can not only introduce an Aboriginal perspective, but may throw a new light on such issues as why so many white people in Australia have more race hatred towards Aborigines than any other group and what makes many white teachers racist in the classroom.

Aboriginal women in Alice Springs have developed plans for an Aboriginal birth centre since the newly-built Alice Springs Hospital is seen as inappropriate to Aboriginal birthing customs. There is a need for Aboriginal doctors and nurses (and architects) with a perception of the different values in Aboriginal society.

Eve Fesl highlighted the problems faced by Aboriginal graduates in what she described as the "Aboriginal Industry". White Anglo-Saxon males are still the decision-makers. When equity programmes are introduced often women are chosen who uphold the values of the men in power, "door keepers" who will keep out any bright women who may threaten male values. White "experts" and some Aboriginal people in positions of authority feel threatened by Aboriginal graduates and sometimes work against them. There is a need to reassure them that tertiary education does not, as it is sometimes claimed, undermine Aboriginality.

The Monash Orientation Scheme (MOSA) established by Eve Fesl and outlined by the current Director, Isaac Brown, in fact was designed to reinforce Aboriginality while giving support to