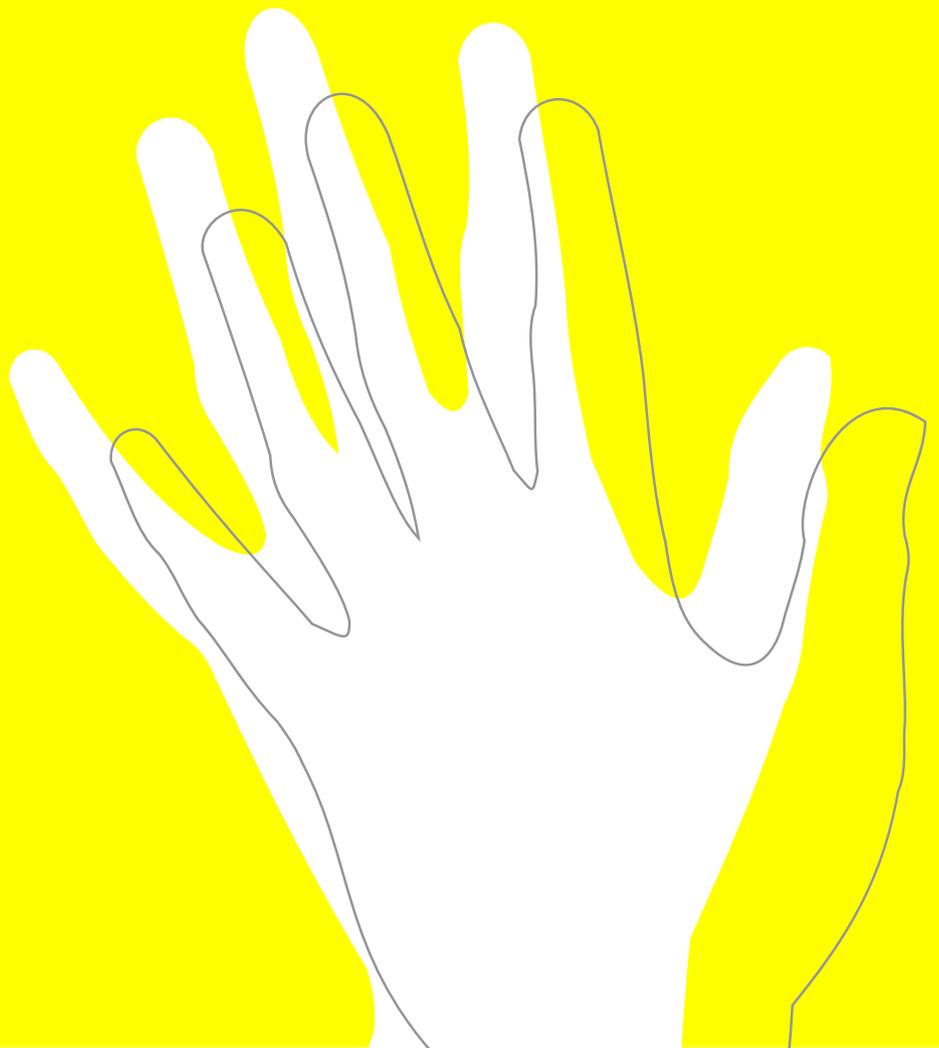
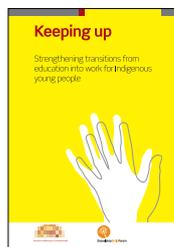


# Keeping up

Strengthening transitions from education into work for Indigenous young people



**Keeping up: Strengthening transitions from education into work for Indigenous young people and its companion How young Indigenous people are faring: Key indicators 1996-2006** have been jointly published by Reconciliation Australia and the Dusseldorp Skills Forum.



**Keeping up: Strengthening transitions from education into work for Indigenous young people** draws on the key insights from the *How young Indigenous people are faring* paper. It maps the patterns of what is happening for Indigenous young people and identifies how improvements can be made.



**How young Indigenous people are faring: Key indicators 1996-2006** uses ABS Census data to examine and comment on changes in the education and labour force participation of young Indigenous people (15 to 19 year-olds, 20 to 24 year-olds and 25 to 29 year-olds).

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# Foreword

## Let us utilise these reports to make a stand together for our young people.

We should see the data provided in “How young Indigenous people are faring” as a line in the sand from which to move forward, and from which to measure our progress over time.

In the summary report, “Keeping up”, there are inspiring examples of programs and organisations that are working effectively to strengthen Indigenous youngsters’ connections to learning and work.

Look around your community and state, and you will find many more examples of similar successful programs. Why then does this report reveal such a discrepancy of outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people?

The reasons are complex and varied. One such factor is the short term funding of innovative programs, which prevents the achievement of sustainable results. Another is the lack of recognition and support for the passionate people whose ideas and hard work is what makes the difference for our young people.

Having now begun the process of accepting our shared responsibility for past failures, we now need to focus on developing our joint capacity for success.

It scarcely needs repeating but we are all in it together to assure the future of the nation by giving all our kids the chance to find their potential.

The education revolution we need begins and ends with people and community. A revolution based on the belief that all Australians have the right to a good education; an education which recognises and respects diversity as a strength for our nation’s future.

Please take the time to digest both the data and the recommendations set out in the reports, and share them with colleagues and friends.



Professor Mick Dodson AM  
Co Chair  
Reconciliation Australia

## Over the next decade, more young Indigenous people than ever before will rightfully expect an equal opportunity to make the most of the education, training and work which is afforded to other young Australians.

How well we respond to their expectations will be a measure of how genuine we are in valuing the rich diversity of our nation.

Recently, Prime Minister Rudd reaffirmed his government’s 10 year goal to halve the education and work opportunity gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people.

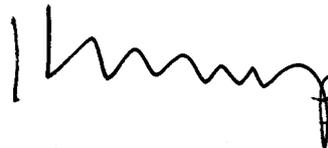
Let’s not only hold the government to its promise, but work together to improve on it.

“Keeping up” provides an analysis of the facts and figures behind the efforts to close the gap over the last decade, and reveals where some gains have been made despite an overall widening trend.

Based on the lessons learnt from the successes and failures, “Keeping up” offers strategies and recommendations as to how the situation can be significantly improved.

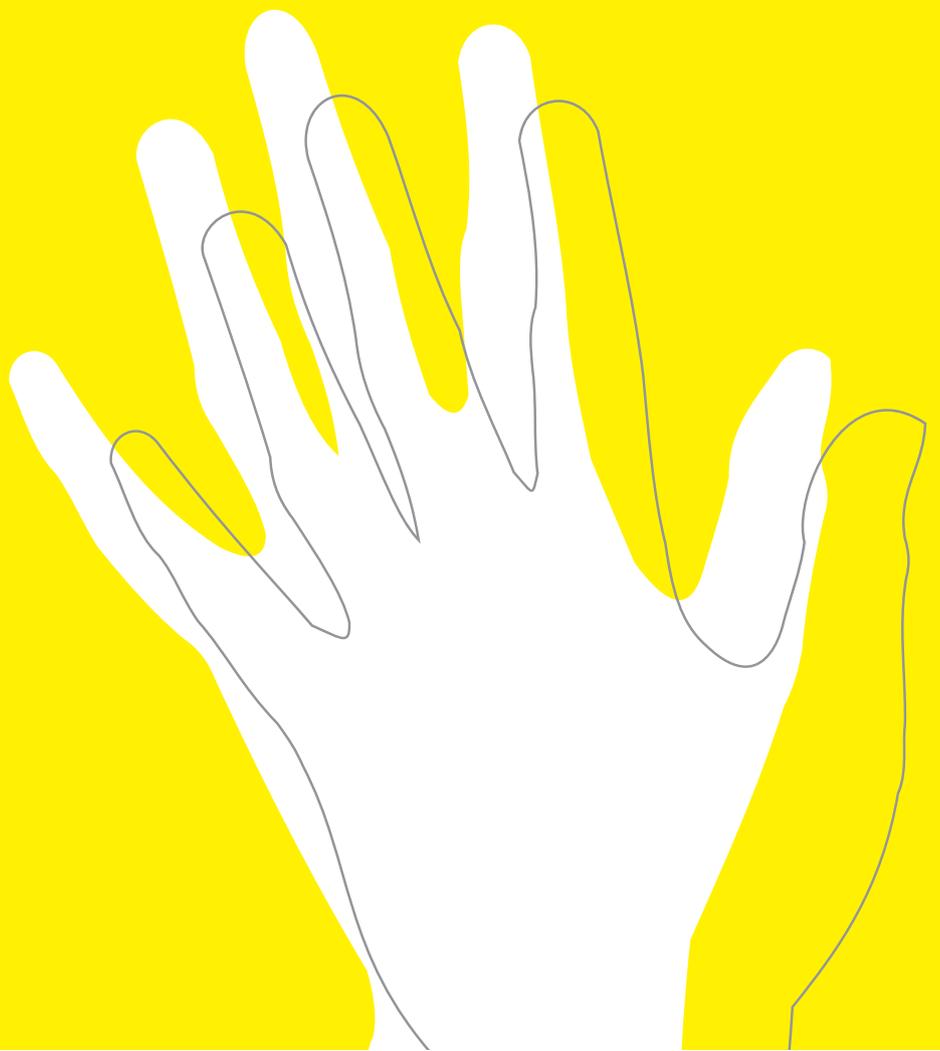
The statistical basis of the analysis is set out in the companion report, “How young Indigenous people are faring” which examines the changes in the education and labour force participation of young Indigenous people as reported in the 1996, 2001 and 2006 *ABS Censuses of Population and Housing*.

The Forum, in partnership with Reconciliation Australia, presents these two reports as a contribution to the process of closing the gap, and I would like to thank Regina Hill of Effective Philanthropy and Mike Long from CEET at Monash University for their work in compiling them.



Jack Dusseldorp  
Chair  
Dusseldorp Skills Forum

# Summary of findings



Indigenous Australians continue to be disadvantaged in work and life choices by their limited access to appropriate education and training. Compared with non-Indigenous Australians, there are continuing gaps across most measures of participation in education, educational attainment and employment. These gaps have been the focus of recent policy undertakings by the current Australian government. The need to close those gaps goes without question. However, that requires moving beyond rhetoric and ensuring changes occur. It requires understanding of what is and is not working for Indigenous young people and using evidence and experience to identify what needs to be done. Serious consideration needs to be given to government policies and funding as they both set the tone and facilitate the processes.

## The continuing gaps

The report *How young Indigenous people are faring: Key indicators 1996-2006*<sup>1</sup> shows that although there have been some improvements in Indigenous educational participation, there has been no significant improvement in the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people in educational attainment or work.

Where there are improvements in Indigenous schooling, these do not appear to have translated into reductions in the gaps in participation in higher education or work. In many cases the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes have worsened as improvements in non-Indigenous outcomes have not been matched in the Indigenous population.

Compared to the non-Indigenous population, Indigenous men and women aged 15-29 years are still:

- less likely to have completed Year 12 or have a post school qualification;
- more likely to be outside of the labour force;
- more likely to be unemployed and seeking work;
- over-represented in part-time jobs and education;
- under-represented in full-time jobs and education; and
- significantly less likely to be engaged in both work and education.

## Labour force participation

Gaps in overall labour force participation remain significant in all geographic areas, highlighting the need for ongoing efforts to engage Indigenous young people who are outside of the labour force in work and education across the 15-29 year old age group.

1. HIYPAF 2008.



## School participation, attendance and performance

Although school participation has increased, the gap still remains large. The difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups is relatively small but worse for young people in capital cities (particularly males)—as well as in regional and remote areas. Indigenous drop off rates in the transition from primary to secondary schooling and at the end of compulsory schooling continue to be an issue, making it crucial to focus on these key transition points. Educational attainment (reflected in performance against basic literacy and numeracy benchmarks) remains significantly lower for Indigenous students. There is also a need to address basic skill gaps that limit the ability of post school age groups to access work or education opportunities.

## Higher and further education

University participation and qualification levels remain low. Fewer Indigenous students completing Year 12 enter university, increasing the need for bridging course options to support access to this level of education as well as mentoring and other supports. Although Indigenous participation in vocational education is relatively strong compared to the non-Indigenous population, Indigenous students still tend to participate in lower level qualifications and completion rates tend to be lower. This indicates the need to provide increased support to students to complete vocational qualifications and to progress to higher certificate level qualifications. There is also a need to increase understanding of how these qualifications can be used and how they articulate into tertiary education.

## Work

Indigenous participation in full-time jobs remains low across all areas for 20–24 and 25–29 year olds, indicating that ongoing focus needs to be placed on supporting young Indigenous men and women in full-time jobs. In doing that, there is also a need to start work with secondary school students to better position them to make the transition into further education.

## Recommendations

The fact that significant disadvantage continues to exist indicates that the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people will not close unless strategies are adopted that provide young Indigenous Australians with stronger and more enduring access to education and work opportunities.

The *How young Indigenous people are faring* analysis confirms that there is not a “one size fits all” solution and that policy must be nimble and responsive enough to take into account the variations that exist across different age groups, sexes and geographies.

A key task is for governments to work with industry and support agencies in Indigenous communities to align supply and demand side factors to ensure that young Indigenous people receive the skills needed to move into jobs and that jobs are available for them.

A comprehensive Indigenous education and job policy involves eight crucial steps to improve education participation and attainment.

1. Promotion of holistic schooling approaches.
2. Targeted school participation programs.
3. Primary to secondary school transition support.
4. Education incentives at school and post school.
5. Early engagement with paid work while still at secondary school including targeted work experience and related VET training.
6. Targeted job generation and work placement opportunities for those out of school.
7. Targeted transition support.
8. Regional and remote access to education and work opportunities which are delivered flexibly and appropriately.

There are examples of local communities setting up local plans and collaborations, and it is important that these are encouraged with policy and sustained with funding that takes a long-term view.

## Holistic schooling approaches

Schooling provides the basis for civic engagement and work. The adoption of a holistic schooling approach that covers students' basic material, personal support, school engagement and learning requirements is generally accepted as being the best model through which to engage Indigenous (and other high need) students in school and to promote school attendance and learning.

The National Partnership Agreements in education funding, signed in November 2008's COAG, can be used in such ways. They emphasised increased school based decision making which may be able to explore these possibilities. These initiatives need to be followed up with State and Territory Governments to explore how such changes may be implemented. It would require COAG to examine how to integrate its Closing the Gap initiatives with the National Partnerships, particularly in the commitment to funding improved outcomes for under-performing schools.

There is a need for governments to review the adequacy of template staffing and funding levels for schools with Indigenous students. Schools could have the ability to access other existing sources of government funding (e.g. through health and family services) to better coordinate student access to support services.

There is also the need to fund, maybe under Closing the Gap programs, appropriate training for school principals and teaching staff, including the design and delivery of culturally and capability appropriate curriculum, remedial and extension learning programs and English as a second language teaching. A teaching/school environment must recognise and value the strength of local and wider Indigenous cultures. This process should also provide high quality professional development and career paths for the thousands of Indigenous Education Workers in primary, secondary, and TAFE settings.

## Targeted school participation

Considerable focus has been placed on improving school participation in regional and remote areas. There is also a real need to address Indigenous under-representation in school participation in capital cities. Focus needs to be placed at the school level on school engagement and support programs targeting (particularly male) student participation in those areas. Engagement strategies should be tailored to meet the specific needs of different communities and should draw on a mix of strategies.

## Primary to secondary school transitions

Considerable focus is currently being directed at promoting Indigenous engagement in early childhood education, transitions into primary school and secondary school retention. Focus also needs to be placed on maintaining Indigenous engagement in late primary school and reducing Indigenous drop out rates between primary and secondary school and in early secondary school.

School engagement, intensive learning support and alternative learning strategies should be leveraged to support student retention at the primary school level and targeted transition support strategies provided to students identified as being at risk of disengagement to support their transition into secondary school. This needs to involve families and local communities as well as students.

## Engagement with work while still at secondary school

Indigenous student participation in casual and part-time work could strengthen continued engagement in learning and work. Schools should be funded to develop programs that provide support to students to access, both as part of VET and more generally:

- part-time and casual (after school) work;
- holiday cadetships;
- structured volunteering opportunities; and
- short term work placements.

## Federal Government responsibilities

The Commonwealth Government must link its desire to Close the Gap with an Indigenous education and training strategy that recognises the importance of a more highly skilled and larger Indigenous workforce in all areas, including the health and education sectors. There is wide recognition, if not enough action, that private sector work must be expanded. However, there is less awareness of the need to fill public and community services jobs with Indigenous workers and skills.

This expansion works in two ways: one provides jobs and inclusion; the other is to make use of Indigenous skills and networks to increase the effectiveness of government services. Targeted programs are needed to attract students as well as commitment to the further skill development and career paths of Indigenous workers.



## Financial study incentives

There is a need to address the increasing gap in post school qualifications. Providing financial support and other incentives to encourage stronger Indigenous participation in part-time and full-time post school vocational and tertiary education is crucial. This is clearly a Federal responsibility and requires attention to Youth allowances and eligibility for Abstudy.

Current Abstudy payment levels should be reviewed to support stronger Indigenous engagement in post school education.

Consideration should also be given to offering HECS discounts/waivers for part-time study while at work to encourage more Indigenous young people to access vocational and university qualifications.

## Special funding for programs at the tertiary level

Education support programs that provide intensive support to assist Indigenous students to access and participate in higher certificate and tertiary qualification courses are vital. One-on-one support to assist students to meet basic material, personal and learning support needs and assist students to negotiate the education system would improve learning outcomes.

## Closing the Gap — COAG oriented collaborative programs needed

The following programs would require collaborations between all three levels of government, plus local communities and employers. They would be good candidates for the COAG processes which involve funding partnerships between the different levels of government. Some current local initiatives can offer models of how these changes can operate bottom up, but with access to appropriate funding for training, job seeking, job creation and other costs.

## Funding for targeted job generation

Work based training, work placement connected to study and local work opportunities for Indigenous young people are central to building a strong economic and social future in communities. To do this there needs to be stronger engagement with local industry and employers. Policy must be woven around local mechanisms to engage industry and develop sustainable work based training and work placement opportunities that enable Indigenous young people to transition into jobs at the completion of training. Local communities must be provided with the funding, resources, skills and capabilities to develop strategies and projects through which to provide training and work on an ongoing and widespread basis.

Focus should be placed in the COAG process on policy and funding programs that will:

- improve the coordination of Indigenous education, training and job support pathways through better local support agency networking;
- provide employers with targeted incentives tied to work based training, work placement and job opportunities to Indigenous young people, and assist local support agency networks to work with industry; and
- set up long term funding, not pilots, to ensure trust is built and efforts rewarded.

Local job generation, ensuring there are jobs for Indigenous young people to transition into when they complete school and further education, is crucial. For that to happen there needs to be funding for stronger coordination between government and non-government support agencies. While there has been some attention paid to private sector jobs through groups like the Aboriginal Employment Strategy or big banks, there has been little attention paid to the community services' sector jobs. Care jobs and other community located paid work in environmental and social services need to be added to the mix.

Particular focus needs to be placed on funding job planning that meet the needs of regional and remote communities where market constraints limit education, training and work options. Fundamental barriers that continue to inhibit the ability of young Indigenous people (particularly in regional and remote areas) from accessing work, including driver licenses, access to transport and availability of supported accommodation must also be a feature of local job strategies.

## Discrimination

Racism and discrimination is also an issue which affects both the availability of work based training and job places and the experience that young people have at work. It is an issue many Australians like to ignore, but it needs to be addressed.

Remedies at both Federal and State level need to be included in training and awareness sessions.

## Conclusion

Government cannot meet the challenge of closing the gap alone. It needs to leverage local service providers and industry to close the gaps. There are no easy solutions—but there are constructive actions that can be taken. The improvements that have been made in Indigenous school participation and completion and post school qualification over the last ten years demonstrate that change is possible. Importantly the failure to translate those improvements in education into significant reductions in the employment gap will also discourage further change and even undermine current performance.

The figures demonstrate that significant changes need to be introduced. We suggest that these issues and appropriate recommendations become part of the considerations at the next COAG meeting in 2009. They offer examples of how an agreed partnership approach could significantly improve the options for young Indigenous people.

# 1. Context

“Our challenge for the future is ... closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities. ...within a decade to halve the widening gap in literacy, numeracy and employment outcomes and opportunities for Indigenous children.”

“... symbolism is important but, unless ... accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong. It is not sentiment that makes history; it is our actions that make history.”<sup>2</sup>



This section looks at the context in which discussion about the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation has been cast. It provides some general background on the outcomes of Indigenous young people compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts and looks at approaches that appear to be working to improve Indigenous outcomes.

## What is the context for the current policy focus on “closing the gap”?

Significant focus has been placed on closing the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes in recent years. That focus has been strengthened by the commitment the current Australian government has made—on behalf of the Australian people—to closing the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous education and work outcomes.

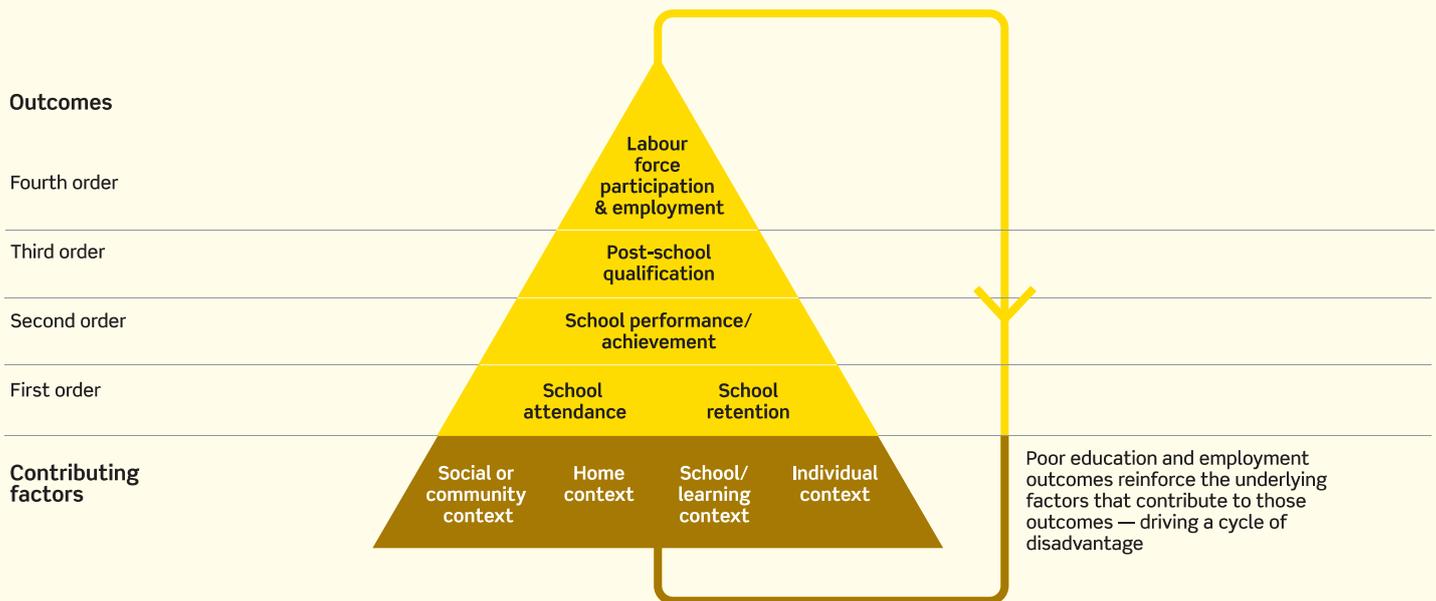
The need to close those gaps goes without question. In order to do that, however, there is a need to move beyond rhetoric, to understand what is and is not working to improve Indigenous outcomes and to identify with some precision what needs to be done to close the gaps.

There has been improvement in Indigenous education and work outcomes over the last ten years. Indigenous participation in education has increased across all education levels (schools, universities, and vocational education and training) as has the number of students graduating from Year 12 and attaining post school qualifications.<sup>3</sup> There have also been improvements in labour force participation and work.<sup>4</sup>

2. Hon. K Rudd, Prime Minister of Australia., Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples, House of Representatives Parliament House, Canberra, 13 February 2008.

3. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Schools Report. Cat. no. 4221.0. Canberra: ABS, 2006. (ABS 4221.0)., Australian Bureau of Statistics. The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Cat. no. 4704.0. Canberra: ABS, 2005. (ABS 4704.0); Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs AESOC Senior Officials Working Party on Indigenous Education. Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008 MCEETYA, 2006, pp.4, 11. (MCEETYA 2006)

4. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Labour Force Characteristics of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Cat. no. 6287.0. Canberra: ABS, 2006. (ABS 6287.0)

FIGURE 1 Factors contributing to Indigenous education and employment outcomes<sup>10</sup>

However, progress has been slow and in many cases the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes have not closed. Improvements in schooling do not appear to have translated into improvements in relative participation in higher education or work. In many cases the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes have actually worsened rather than improved as improvements in non-Indigenous outcomes have been greater than improvements in Indigenous outcomes.

The result is that Indigenous Australians continue to be disadvantaged compared with non-Indigenous Australians across most education and work indicators<sup>5</sup>. Indigenous students have lower school attendance, retention and achievement across all age groups in all States and Territories.<sup>6</sup> Indigenous post school qualifications, labour force participation and work rates are lower than those of non-Indigenous Australians<sup>7</sup>. Indigenous employees are more likely to be employed in lower skilled occupations than non-Indigenous employees and their incomes are likely to be lower.<sup>8</sup>

Their health is generally poorer, their life expectancy is lower and they are more likely to live in communities that are subject to social dysfunction.<sup>9</sup>

The factors negatively impacting on successful engagement, summarised in **Figure 1**, include:

- social issues (such as health, housing and community function);
- home based issues (such as family stability and mobility, family and parental education and participation in employment);
- school and learning based issues (such as access to education, the appropriateness of teaching approaches and curriculum, the availability of appropriate scaffolding and extension learning supports and the involvement of students, parents and families in school/learning activities); and
- individual issues (such as basic material and personal support needs, behaviour, academic and vocational learning requirements, experiences of, and attitudes towards, school and work, life goals and aspirations).

5. HIYPAF 2008.

6. Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision. *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2007*. Canberra: Productivity Commission SCRGSP, 2007, pp.13–14. (SCRGSP 2007)

7. SCRGSP 2007., pp.14–16, 13.2, 13.11.

8. Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Labour Force Characteristics of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander Australians*. Cat. no. 6287.0. Canberra: ABS, 2006. (ABS 6287.0)

9. Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision. *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2007 Overview*. Canberra: Productivity Commission SCRGSP, 2007, pp.12, 18–23 (SCRGSP Overview 2007); ABS 4704.0.

10. R Hill & L Doyle., *Our Children, Our Future—Achieving Improved Primary and Secondary Education Outcomes for Indigenous Students: An Overview of Investment Opportunities and Approaches*, AMP Foundation, Effective Philanthropy & Social Ventures Australia., May 2008. (Hill & Doyle 2008), p.26.



### South Australian Aboriginal Sports Training Academy.

SAASTA is a Centre for Excellence in Aboriginal Sports and Education. It is an initiative of the SA Government's Social Inclusion Unit that caters for students who want to make a career from their sporting pursuits, either as professional athletes or as professionals working in the sporting arena. The Department of Education and Children Services is the lead agency for the initiative.

Their vision is Tirkandi Mukandi Mukarta, a Kurna phrase for learning to play smart.

[www.saasta.org](http://www.saasta.org)

Other external factors have a negative impact on Indigenous peoples' participation in workforce and education: prejudice, racism, family experiences, the effect of past policies and failure to recognise the contributions their culture and knowledge have made to current Australian society have disrupted the capacity of many Aboriginal people to reach their undoubted potential. This report does not attempt to cover the complexity of these issues, but focuses on practical aspects of improving educational outcomes.

The need to address adverse factors is well recognised and a number of initiatives with a demonstrated capacity to help improve Indigenous education and work outcomes have been undertaken at a government and a non-government level.<sup>11</sup>

These programs are aimed at:

- improving access to school;
- actively engaging Indigenous parents, families and communities in the delivery of education;
- tailoring school curriculum and staffing to make it culturally appropriate;
- strengthening scaffolding literacy and numeracy programs to meet learning requirements, strengthening Indigenous participation in teaching and student support roles; and
- training principals and teaching staff to support the delivery of tailored curriculum

These have played an important role in encouraging school attendance and completion.

11. Hill & Doyle 2008.

The adoption of a more holistic approach to education—that seeks to address not only students' academic and vocational learning requirements, but also their underlying material and personal support requirements and basic behavioural and skill development needs—has generally been accepted as the best method for engaging and supporting high need students to learn. Examples of such schooling approaches have shown significant results in supporting improved learning and education outcomes for Indigenous students.<sup>12</sup>

Ancillary programs that use sports and arts based activities to engage students in learning and get them to come to school, and that provide intensive learning support both in and outside of school, have also played an important role in supporting improved educational outcomes.

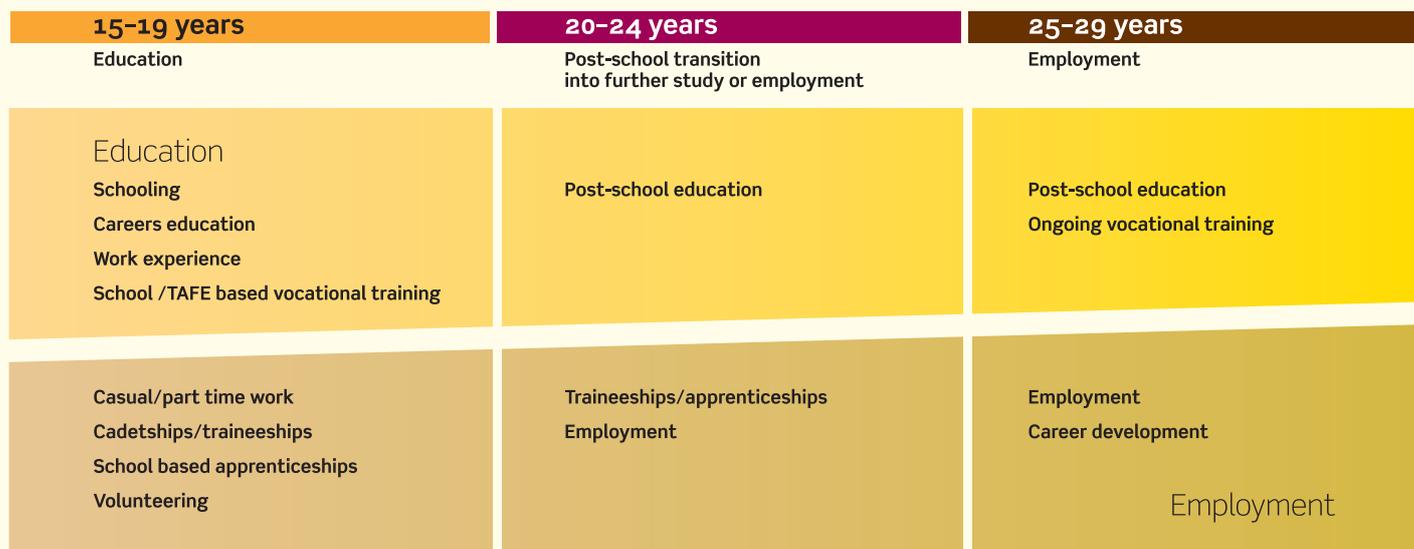
School based vocational training and school and non-school based alternative learning programs have played a role in assisting students to transition from school into further vocational pathways and work (see **Figure 2** on page 12).

Mature aged/adult education and work placement and employment support options have also shown some success but have generally proved to be more challenging.

The strongest outcomes have tended to be achieved where support has been provided both to:

12. Hill & Doyle 2008., pp. 56-57, 59

FIGURE 2 Stages in the transition from education to employment



- address community, home and personal barriers; as well as
- working with local education, training and employment providers to improve the availability of, and Indigenous access to, education and work opportunities.

The key has been to work with both the supply and demand side factors to make sure that improvements in education and training are linked to better access to work opportunities.

Closing the gaps demands a deeper and richer approach to providing education and work opportunities for Indigenous young people.

## What does this report look at?

This paper interprets patterns in what is happening for Indigenous young people that can inform social policy and action.

The experiences of Indigenous 15-19 year olds, 20-24 year olds and 25-29 year olds in education, and the pathways through school and into post school learning and work, are an important indicator of long-term wellbeing. **Figure 2** describes the broad stages of transition from education to work, and the major learning and work activities as young people journey to adulthood.

## 2. How big are the gaps?



This section discusses the factors that need to be taken into consideration when analysing what is happening for Indigenous young people. It sizes the gaps in school completion, post school qualification, university qualification, labour force participation and engagement in full and part-time study and work.

### How should we measure the gaps?

It is possible to look at the “gaps” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation in education and work in different ways.

You can look at the difference between the percentage population participating in full or part-time engagement in work or study—and think about the gaps in percentage terms.

You can look at the ratio of the Indigenous versus the non-Indigenous population—and think about the gaps in relative terms.

Considered in either manner, the difference in Indigenous versus non-Indigenous participation is significant.

This report uses both of the above approaches—the former, because it is important to understand the actual magnitude of the gaps, and the later, because it is important to understand the implications of the gaps on the relative outcomes of Indigenous young people compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Using a relative measure (or ratio)—that divides the Indigenous population by the non-Indigenous population—is useful because it gives a clear indication of how advantaged or disadvantaged the Indigenous young people are compared to non-Indigenous young people. We have used the ratio between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population as a **Relative Status Indicator** at different points throughout this report. Where the ratio is one it indicates that the status of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population is the same, values less than one mean that the Indigenous population is under represented compared to the non-Indigenous population and values more than one mean that the Indigenous population is over represented.



#### **It's Up 2 U: Townsville Flexible Learning Centre.**

The Edmund Rice Education Australia Flexible Learning Centre Network operates two mobile education programs in the Upper Ross and Mt Isa, Qld. A teacher and a youth worker run the programs, which are built around community infrastructure, engagement, social connection, and literacy and numeracy outcomes linked to state curriculum frameworks. With high attendance rates and strong community connection and support, these programs are offering educational pathways and social connectedness to disenfranchised young people.

[www.erefllc.org.au](http://www.erefllc.org.au)

## **Beyond the gap**

Irrespective of the measure that is used to size the gaps, consideration still needs to be given to the underlying driver for changes in the gaps over time.

Changes in the gaps can occur because there is an improvement in the outcomes of Indigenous young people or because there is a decline in the outcomes of non-Indigenous young people. We need to beware of situations where changes in the gaps are driven by movements in non-Indigenous rather than Indigenous outcomes unless those movements constitute long term, structural changes in the underlying condition of the population.

It is not enough to close the gaps—they need to be closing for the right reasons.

To do that we need to analyse what is happening at a national and regional level based on the five “Remoteness Areas”<sup>13</sup> used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (capital cities, inner and outer regional areas, remote and very remote areas). (References to “geography” or “areas” in this report should be read as references to the ABS definitions.)

13. The remoteness structure is based on the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) used by the ABS. There are five major categories of Remoteness Area: Major Cities of Australia, Inner Regional Australia, Outer Regional Australia, Remote Australia and Very Remote Australia, together with a residual Migratory category.



## Indigenous population overview

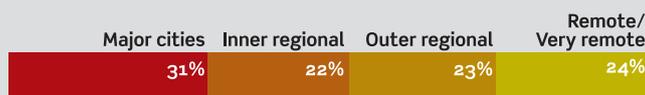
2006 Census data indicates that Australia has an estimated Indigenous population of slightly over half a million (517,200) people, equating to approximately 2.5 percent of the total Australian population.<sup>14</sup> The majority of Indigenous people in Australia live in major cities and urban centres. The balance of the Indigenous population is reasonably evenly distributed across regional and remote areas.

Just under a quarter (24 percent) of the Indigenous population lives in remote or very remote locations.<sup>15</sup>

The largest Indigenous populations live in New South Wales (29 percent), Queensland (28 percent), Western Australia (15 percent) and the Northern Territory (13 percent).

**FIGURE 3 Indigenous population distribution<sup>16</sup>**

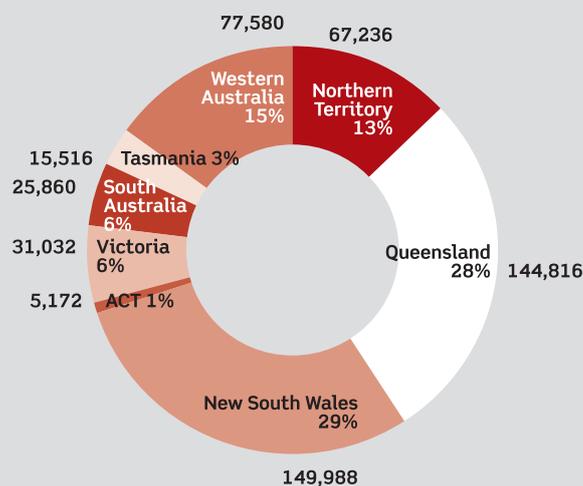
### Majority live in major cities



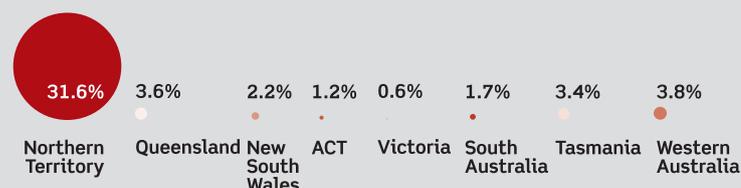
**FIGURE 4 Indigenous population by State and Territory<sup>17</sup>**

### Most live in New South Wales and Queensland

Percentage of Australian Indigenous population



Percentage of State/Territory population



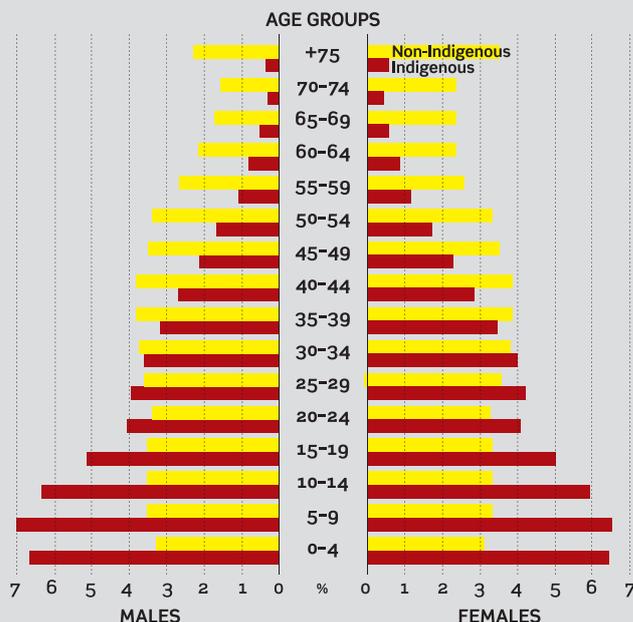
The Indigenous population is younger than the non-Indigenous population and is growing at approximately two percent per annum, twice the rate of the general population.<sup>18</sup>

The median age of the Indigenous population (21 years) is considerably lower than that of the non-Indigenous population (36 years), which means that almost half of the Indigenous population is approaching or of school age.<sup>19</sup> The lower age profile of the Indigenous population has implications for the proportion of the population that is (or should be) at school.<sup>20</sup> It also makes it important that we get the right policy settings in place to support those students if we are to close the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous education and work outcomes going forward.

**FIGURE 5 Comparison Indigenous and non-Indigenous population age profile<sup>21</sup>**

### Younger and growing

Estimated resident population by age



18. MCEETYA, 2006, pp.11, 15.

19. ABS 4713.0; ABS 4704.0; Department of Health and Ageing. Department of Health and Ageing Factbook 2006. (DHA 2006)

20. MCEETYA 2006, p.11.

21. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Population Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Cat. no. 4713.0. Canberra: ABS, 2001. (ABS 4713.0)

14. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Population Distribution, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Cat. no. 4705.0. Canberra: ABS, 2006. (ABS 4705.0)

15. ABS 4705.0.

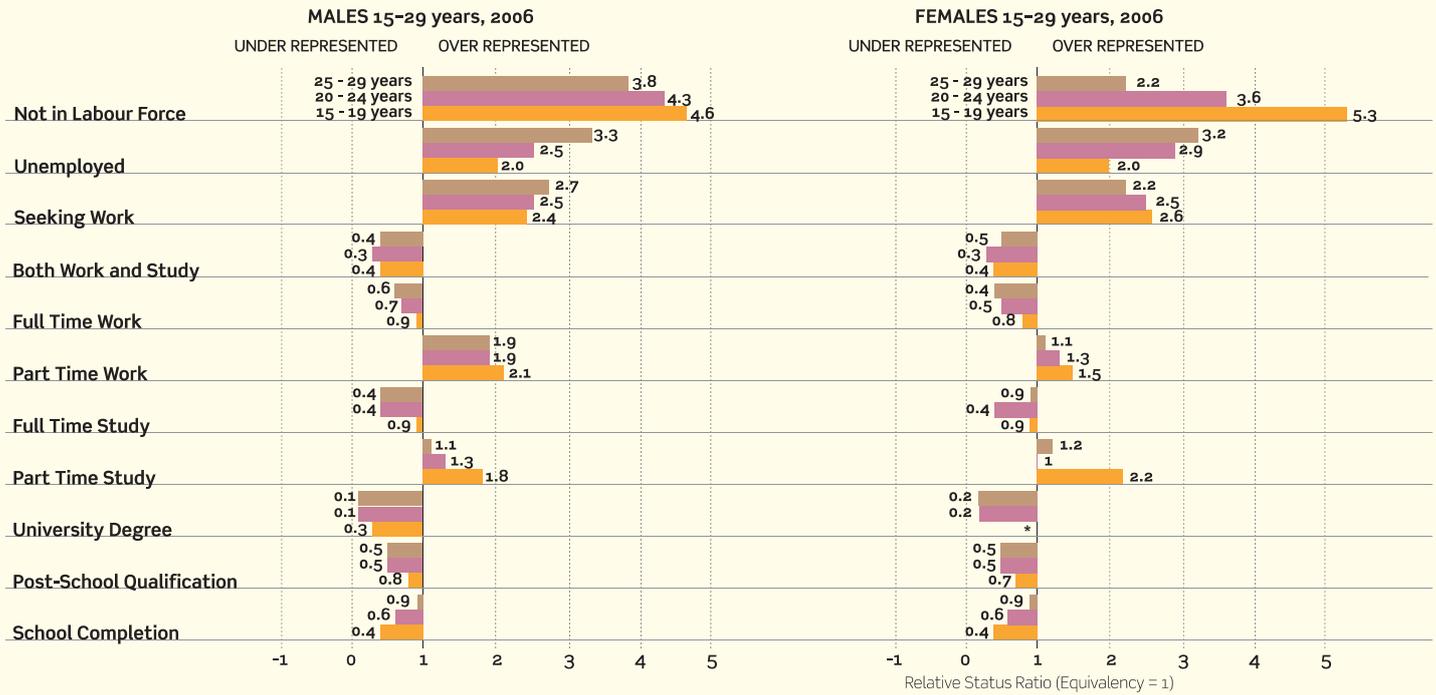
16. ABS 4705.0.

17. ABS 4705.0.

**FIGURE 6 Relative status of the Indigenous population versus the non-Indigenous population against key participation parameters by sex and age group<sup>22</sup>**

**More likely to be outside the labour force**

Percentage Indigenous population/percentage non-Indigenous population



## So...how big are the gaps?

Gaps in key indicators such as school completion, post school qualification, university qualification, labour force participation and engagement in full and part-time education and work vary by age group, sex and geography.

**Figure 6** summarises the relative status of Australian 15-29 year olds across key dimensions of learning and work. Compared to the non-Indigenous population, Indigenous men and women are:

- more likely to be outside of the labour force;
- more likely to be unemployed and seeking work;
- over-represented in part-time work and education;
- under-represented in full-time work and education;
- less likely to have completed Year 12 or have a post school qualification; and
- significantly less likely to be engaged in both work and education.

In many cases the size of the gaps between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population is significant—with the gaps ranging from 10 percent to 50 percent across a number of key parameters.

22. HIYAF 2008., Tables A2—A4, Table A22, Table A30 (ABS, 2006 Census of Population and Housing adapted from Customised Tables). Throughout this paper “Seeking Work” refers to those people looking for work that are not engaged in work or study. Persons still attending school are excluded from Year 12 Completion, No Post School Qualification and University Qualification data for 15 to 19 year-olds. No Post School Qualification includes persons still at school for 20 to 24 year-olds and 25 to 29 year-olds.





# 3. Is Australia closing the gaps?



Section 3 identifies where there have been improvements in Indigenous outcomes and where Indigenous outcomes have gone backwards, as well as the detailed reasons for this.

In general, the improvements that have occurred in the learning and work outcomes of Indigenous 15-29 year olds over the last decade have often been small. In many cases the changes have not matched improvements in the non-Indigenous population and so have not reduced the size of the gaps between the two groups.<sup>24</sup>

These trends are brought together in **Figure 8** (on page 20), which identifies various improvements in outcomes, reductions in some gaps, gap increases, and whether these increases are related primarily to declining Indigenous outcomes, or not matching improvements in non-Indigenous outcomes.

## Where have there been improvements in Indigenous participation?

There have been improvements in teenage and young adult school completion and attainment of post school qualifications.

There have also been some improvements in labour force participation and work, more strongly among females than males. And more in capital cities and regional areas than in remote areas.

A scorecard summarising where there have been improvements in Indigenous outcomes against key education and employment indicators is set out in **Figure 9** (on page 21). Colour coding is used to show where there has been an improvement or decline in Indigenous outcomes (only movements of more than one percent are shown).

**FIGURE 8 Key movements in the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes 1996–2006 (and 2001–2006 for school completion)<sup>25</sup>**

**The gaps remain**

Age group	REDUCTION IN GAP		INCREASE IN GAP	INCREASE IN GAP
	Improvement in Indigenous outcomes		Linked to a decline in Indigenous outcomes	Linked to a failure to match improvements in non-Indigenous outcomes
15–19 years	• School participation	• School participation	—	—
	• School completion	• School completion (males in inner regional areas, females in capital cities, outer regional and very remote areas)	—	• School completion (males in very remote areas)
	• Post-school qualification (all areas, but not in university level qualifications)	• Post school qualification (males only in all except capital cities)	—	• Post-school qualification (females in all except capital cities)
	• Labour force participation (capital cities and regional areas)	• Labour force participation (capital cities and regional areas)	• Labour force participation (males in very remote areas)	• Labour force participation (females in remote areas)
	• Employment increase (regional and remote areas)	• Employment (males in regional areas)	• Employment (in very remote areas)	—
	• Unemployment decline (all areas)	• Unemployment decline (capital cities and regional areas)	—	• Unemployment decline (females in more remote areas)
20–24 years	• Participation in education (mainly capital cities and regional areas)	—	—	• Participation in education
	• School completion (all except remote areas)	• School completion (males in capital cities, females in inner regional areas)	—	• School completion (males in inner regional areas, females in very remote areas)
	• Post-school qualification (all areas) (but not in university level qualifications)	• Post school qualification (males in capital cities, outer regional and remote areas, females in capital cities)	—	• Post-school qualification (males in very remote areas, females in outer regional areas) • University level qualification (males in capital cities, females all except inner regional areas)
	• Labour force participation (females only, capital cities and regional areas)	—	• Labour force participation (males in all except very remote areas, females in very remote areas)	• Labour force participation (females in remote areas)
	• Employment (mainly capital cities and regional areas)	• Employment (capital cities and regional areas)	• Employment (in very remote areas)	• Employment (males in remote areas)
	• Unemployment decline (females only, unemployment also declined for males but is likely to be linked to movements out of the labour force)	—	—	• Unemployment decline (females in more remote areas)
25–29 years	—	—	• Participation in education (males in all except very remote areas, females in inner regional areas)	• Participation in education (females capital cities)
	• School completion (all areas)	• School completion (males in more remote areas)	• School completion (males in outer regional areas)	• School completion (males capital cities and inner regional areas, females all except very remote areas)
	• Post-school qualification (all areas) • University level qualification (males in inner regional and remote areas, females in all areas)	• Post-school qualification (males in remote areas)	• University level qualification (males in capital cities)	• Post-school qualification (males in very remote areas, females all areas) • University level qualification (all except males in capital cities and remote areas)
	• Labour force participation (females only, capital cities and regional areas)	—	• Labour force participation (males all areas, females in more remote areas)	• Labour force participation (females in capital cities and regional areas)
	• Employment (males in capital cities, females except in very remote areas)	—	• Employment (in very remote areas)	• Employment (males in all except very remote areas, females in capital cities and remote areas)
	• Unemployment decline (males in more remote areas, females in capital cities and regional areas)	• Unemployment decline (females in inner regional areas)	—	• Unemployment decline (females in outer regional and remote areas)

25. HIYPAF 2008., Tables A2–A4, Table A22, Table A30.


**FIGURE 9 Change in Indigenous outcomes against key participation indicators<sup>26</sup>**
**A shift out of the labour force**

Changes of more than one percent in the proportion of the Indigenous population between 1996 and 2006 (or 2001 and 2006 for School Completion)

■ Improvement in Indigenous outcomes ■ Decline in Indigenous outcomes

Age group	Area	Transition into the Labour Force		Unemployment		Participation in Education		Participation in Employment		School Completion		Post-School Qualification		University Degree	
		MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
15-19 years	Australia	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Capital Cities	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Inner Regional	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Outer Regional	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Remote	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Very Remote	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
20-24 years	Australia	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Capital Cities	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Inner Regional	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Outer Regional	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Remote	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Very Remote	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
25-29 years	Australia	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Capital Cities	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Inner Regional	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Outer Regional	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Remote	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Very Remote	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

In the case of Indigenous 15-19 year olds there has been an increase in both male and female Indigenous participation in education, mainly in school. This has occurred in all ABS regions with only very small increases shown in vocational education and no movement in overall university participation.<sup>27</sup> The increases in school participation and vocational education appear to have translated into improvements in school completion and post school vocational qualification evident across all three age groups. In the 25-29 year old age group this has included small increases in university participation and qualification.

In capital cities and regional areas the increased Indigenous participation in **education** appears to have been driven by the movement of young people outside of the labour force or unemployment into study. In more remote areas the increase seems to be largely driven by young people moving from unemployment into study.

The situation in very remote areas appears to be quite different. In those areas males have shifted away from work and seeking work either into education or out of the labour force. The shift out of the labour force is reflected in the red shading in **Figure 9**. By contrast non-Indigenous males have shifted more into full-time work or combinations of work and education.

There has been a similar shift either into study or work or out of the labour force for male 20-24 year olds, and females in more remote areas. In less remote areas female participation has generally increased and has been reflected in improvements in participation in education and work.

The shifts into education, work or out of the labour force (particularly in the case of males) may—or may not—be related to changes in welfare arrangements associated with the revision of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme under the previous government.

The shifts out of the labour force suggest that although current work preparation and transition support is working for some Indigenous men and women, it is not working for others. The issue applies to regional and remote areas, and capital cities as well. Care also needs to be taken to ensure that the shifts into full-time study (particularly in more remote areas) constitute constructive training and development pathways—rather than holding patterns—for young people seeking to transition into work.

Participation in **ongoing education** improved in some areas for 20-24 year olds. However, those improvements have not continued through into the 25-29 year old age group and, in the case of 25-29 year old males, participation in ongoing education has actually declined in all except very remote areas.

26. HIYPAF 2008., Tables A2—A4, Table A22, Table A23.

27. HIYPAF 2006., Table 5., p.13.

FIGURE 10 Genuine gap reductions<sup>28</sup>**Movements in the right direction**

Changes in the gap of more than one percent between 1996 and 2006 (or 2001 and 2006 for School Completion)

■ Gap decrease linked to an improvement in the status of the Indigenous population per se

Age group	Area	Transition into the Labour Force		Unemployment		Participation in Education		Participation in Employment		School Completion		Post-School Qualification		University Degree	
		MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
15-19 years	Australia	■	■	■	■	■	■			■	■				
	Capital Cities	■	■	■	■	■	■			■	■				
	Inner Regional		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				
	Outer Regional	■	■	■		■	■	■		■	■	■			
	Remote					■	■				■	■			
	Very Remote					■	■				■	■			
20-24 years	Australia			■	■			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Capital Cities			■	■			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Inner Regional			■	■			■	■		■				
	Outer Regional		■	■	■			■	■			■			
	Remote			■	■						■	■			
	Very Remote			■	■										
25-29 years	Australia			■	■										
	Capital Cities			■	■										
	Inner Regional			■	■	■	■								
	Outer Regional			■	■										
	Remote									■	■	■	■		
	Very Remote									■	■				

■ Unemployment rate declined but likely to be linked to movements out of the labour force and so not recognised as an improvement in overall status

Participation in **work** has generally increased for 20-24 year olds in all except more remote areas, where it has declined. However, improvements in male workforce participation have been limited to capital cities, suggesting that rising rates of school completion and post school qualification have not been translated into increased work for this age group. The failure to translate improvements in educational attainment into work suggests that more comprehensive and timely work preparation and transition support arrangements are needed.

Where have improvements in Indigenous outcomes translated into reductions in the gaps?

Notwithstanding the above, there has not been significant improvement in reducing the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes over the past ten years. In many cases the gaps have actually worsened rather than improved as improvements in non-Indigenous outcomes have not been matched in the Indigenous population.

In essence, reductions in the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes have been largely limited to school participation (and related changes in labour force participation and unemployment), school completion and post school qualification among 15-19 year olds (see **Figure 10**).

There has also been a reduction in the gaps in participation in young adult employment in capital cities and regional areas. These appear to be matched by reductions in the gaps in Year 12 completion and post school qualification in some of those areas. However, improvements in school completion and post school qualification in more remote areas do not appear to have translated into reductions in the gaps in employment for that age group or for the 25-29 year old age group.

## Reductions in the gap in school participation for 15-19 year olds

Increases in school participation have reduced the education participation gap for Indigenous 15-19 year olds.<sup>29</sup> It has also contributed to reducing gaps in labour force participation and unemployment in capital cities and regional areas.

However, the gap in **participation in education** itself remains large (22.2 percent for males and 22.5 percent for females)<sup>30</sup>. Indigenous young people continue to be under represented in education in all areas. For males the disparity in overall participation is higher in capital cities than in more remote areas.

Participation in full-time education is lower in capital cities for Indigenous young people but they experience slightly higher participation in work, with a bias to part-time rather than full-time work.

28. HIYPAF 2008., Tables A2–A4, Table A22, Table A23.

29. HIYAF 2008., Tables A2.

30. HIYAF 2008., Tables A2.



#### Attentive young learners at Zillmere State School, Brisbane.

Zillmere State School, in a northern Brisbane suburb, has actively engaged with the *Stronger Smarter* philosophy espoused by the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute. The school has shown significant improvements in student attendance and outcomes as they practice high expectations for all students and actively pursue engagement with their school community. [www.strongersmarter.qut.edu.au](http://www.strongersmarter.qut.edu.au)

Both males and females have a higher representation in **full-time education** in more remote areas than their non-Indigenous counterparts. This may reflect the fact that a higher proportion of non-Indigenous young people either move out of those areas to access study and/or that they are more likely to transition into work post school.

Indigenous males and females are over represented in **part-time education**, although that only accounts for a relatively small proportion of the population (2.2 percent of males and 2.8 percent of females).<sup>31</sup>

Significantly, fewer Indigenous young people aged 15–19 years undertake a **mix of work and education** than their non-Indigenous counterparts. As a result fewer Indigenous young people gain exposure to work during their schooling years. Indigenous students tend not to participate in casual and part-time work or volunteer activity while at school. This has potentially significant implications for post school transitions into work. Research indicates that young people are more likely to make a successful transition into work post school if they have had workplace experience through participation in casual or part-time jobs, volunteer work or work experience of some type.<sup>32</sup>

Although the proportion of both Indigenous males and females taking up a mix of work and education is increasing, the trend is significantly stronger amongst non-Indigenous young people and so the gap is getting larger. In the case of Indigenous young people the trend to take up a mix of education and work generally appears to be stronger among young women than men.

Indigenous **school attendance** rates continue to be lower than non-Indigenous students<sup>33</sup> and significant gaps continue to exist in educational attainment. Although the proportion of Indigenous students meeting literacy and numeracy benchmarks may have increased slightly between 1996 and 2006 there is no evidence that the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students has closed.

31. HIYPAF 2008., Table A2.

32. H Stokes, A Wierenga and J Wyn., *Preparing for the Future and Living Now: Young People's Perceptions of Career Education, VET, Enterprise Education and Part Time Work.*, Youth Research Centre, The University of Melbourne., March 2003.

33. HIYPAF 2008., p.14.



#### **Yunggullungalla gardens, Christies Beach High School – Reconciliation Action Plan.**

The centre-piece in the school's efforts to promote reconciliation is the Yunggullungalla Medicinal Garden, which is used as a site of healing and reconciliation. The native garden was designed with considerable support from local organisations and the local Indigenous community who helped with the design and naming of the garden, planting and maintaining the garden, and sharing their expertise around Indigenous plants and their uses.

[www.cbhs.sa.edu.au/yunggullungalla/](http://www.cbhs.sa.edu.au/yunggullungalla/)

## **Reductions** in the gap in school completion for 15–19 year olds and 20–24 year olds

The gap in **school completion** among 15–19 year olds has reduced modestly at a national level. Reductions in the gap have not been consistent across regions and have occurred more with females than males. In highly remote areas there has been a significant reduction in the gap for females; however, that has been driven largely by reductions in non-Indigenous completion rates rather than changes in Indigenous outcomes. The gap for males in highly remote areas has increased. Overall the gap between 15–19 year old Indigenous and non-Indigenous Year 12 completion remains high (32 percent for males and 39 percent for females).<sup>34</sup>

The gap in Year 12 completion of 20–24 year olds in capital cities for males and inner regional areas for females, but again the overall gaps remain high (34 percent for males and 38 percent for females).<sup>35</sup>

## **Improvements** in post school qualification for 15–19 and 20–24 year olds

There have been some reductions in the gap in **post school qualifications** for **teenage males** apart from the capital cities. The failure to keep pace with improvements in non-Indigenous post school qualifications in the capital cities, however, has meant that at a national level the gap in post school qualifications has actually increased.

The gap in female post school qualifications also increased in all areas except capital cities—improvements in Indigenous qualification rates did not keep pace with increases in non-Indigenous qualifications.

There have been reductions in the gap in post school qualifications for 20–24 year olds in capital cities, and males in outer regional and remote areas. Notwithstanding those improvements, the gaps in post school qualification remain high (18 percent for males and 22 percent for females).<sup>36</sup>

Indigenous young people in these age groups are still less likely to hold degree and diploma qualifications compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts in all areas. They are also under represented in certificate level qualifications in all areas except capital cities where females are over represented and males are broadly equivalent to their counterparts.

34. HIYPAF 2008., pp.21 and 36

35. HIYPAF 2008., Table A22.

36. HIYPAF 2008., Table A22.



### Banking on Indigenous trainees.

Kodey and Darcy work at ANZ Charlestown branch in Newcastle, New South Wales, as part of the ANZ Indigenous Traineeship Program. Throughout the two year traineeship, they spend one day per week working at ANZ, half a day at TAFE and the remainder of the week completing their HSC. There are more than 100 Indigenous trainees currently working at ANZ and building their careers.

[www.anz.com.au/indigenousemployment](http://www.anz.com.au/indigenousemployment)

## Reductions in the gap in employment for 15-19 and 20-24 year olds

There have been small increases in Indigenous **15-19 year olds participation in work** in all except highly remote areas. As a result there have been small reductions in the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation in work in capital cities and regional areas. In capital cities overall Indigenous participation in work is actually higher than that of the non-Indigenous population, although it is strongly biased towards part-time rather than full-time work.

In contrast, Indigenous participation in both full-time and part-time work dropped in highly remote areas between 1996 and 2006. That drop, combined with an increase in non-Indigenous work has led to a significant increase in the employment gap in highly remote areas (up from 12 percent to 23 percent for men and 12 percent to 24 percent for women).<sup>37</sup>

This shift suggests that work is available in highly remote and remote regions but that the Indigenous population has been less successful in accessing it than the non-Indigenous population, and is perhaps driven in significant part—but not solely—by the gap in qualifications and work ready skills.

In capital cities there is a higher proportion of Indigenous young people moving into work—rather than study—than in the non-Indigenous population.

There has been a small increase in Indigenous **20-24 year olds participation in work** in all except highly remote areas. Overall male participation has increased from 46 percent to 49 percent and female participation from 32 percent to 34 percent.<sup>38</sup>

There is still a gap in participation in work in all geographic areas except capital cities. The gap is widest in highly remote areas and reduces in less remote areas. In capital cities Indigenous male participation in work is broadly equivalent to the non-Indigenous population; however, Indigenous males are more likely to be employed in part-time rather than full-time work compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

The gap in **full-time work** in all areas is large: 17 percent for young adult men and 15 percent for young adult women.<sup>39</sup> The full-time employment gaps are widest in more remote areas.

Men are over represented in **part-time work** in all areas with 17 percent of Indigenous males and 16 percent of females aged 20-24 working part-time. The difference is greatest in highly remote and remote areas.

As shown in **Figure 11** on page 26, gaps are increasing on two dimensions, one is the decline in education and work participation, and the other is where the participation of young Indigenous people in education and work has not kept pace with that of young non-Indigenous people.

38. HIYPAF 2008., Table A2.

39. HIYPAF 2008., Table A3.

37. HIYPAF 2008., Table A22.

FIGURE 11 Increases in the gaps<sup>40</sup>**Movements in the wrong direction**

Changes in the gap of more than one percent between 1996 and 2006 (or 2001 and 2006 for School Completion)

- Increase linked to a *decline in the status of the Indigenous population per se*
- Increase where the Indigenous population has not matched increases in the non-Indigenous population

Age group	Area	Transition into the Labour Force		Unemployment		Participation in Education		Participation in Employment		School Completion		Post-School Qualification		University Degree	
		MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
15-19 years	Australia														
	Capital Cities														
	Inner Regional														
	Outer Regional														
	Remote														
	Very Remote														
	20-24 years	Australia													
Capital Cities															
Inner Regional															
Outer Regional															
Remote															
Very Remote															
25-29 years	Australia														
	Capital Cities														
	Inner Regional														
	Outer Regional														
	Remote														
Very Remote															

■ Unemployment rate declined but likely to be linked to movements out of the labour force and so not recognised as an improvement in overall status

## Increases in the gap in labour force participation

Reductions in labour force participation for Indigenous 20-24 and 25-29 year old males have increased the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous labour force participation. The same appears to be true of Indigenous females in more remote areas.

In capital cities and inner regional areas in the 25-29 year old age group the gap in participation has actually increased as improvements in Indigenous participation have not matched those of the non-Indigenous population.

## Increases in the gap in post school education and qualification

At a national level improvement in post school qualification by Indigenous 15-19 year olds have not kept pace with non-Indigenous 15-19 year olds and the gap has actually increased rather than closed.

There have been some improvements in the gaps in post school qualification for 20-24 year olds but the rate of improvement has not kept pace with the non-Indigenous population. Gaps in participation in post school education have increased.

Gaps in education and work have also generally increased in the 25-29 year old age group. Gaps in university degree level qualifications for both males and females in the 20-24 and 25-29 year old age groups have also increased.

The increasing gaps in participation in further education and post school qualification are particularly significant because of the increasing economic importance of knowledge and skills gained through vocational training and academic scholarship. Indigenous unemployment rates are generally lower where there are higher levels of educational qualification.<sup>41</sup> There is an urgent need to strengthen post school qualification rates in order to deliver increases in Indigenous employment over time.

Progress has been made in starting to close the gaps for teen-age school participation and completion. In general, however, improvements in Year 12 completion and post school qualification have not delivered as strong an increase in work as would be hoped and progress has not been made in more remote areas.

For progress on school completion to be effective, it will be important to:

- engage Indigenous 15-19 year olds who continue to remain outside of the labour force;
- support students to transition from school into vocational and tertiary education and promote stronger take up of higher level qualifications; and
- focus on the labour force participation gaps in the older age groups.

40. HIYPAF 2008., Table A3.

41. HIYPAF 2008., Tables A2–A4, Table A22, Table A23.



## State and Territory based trends

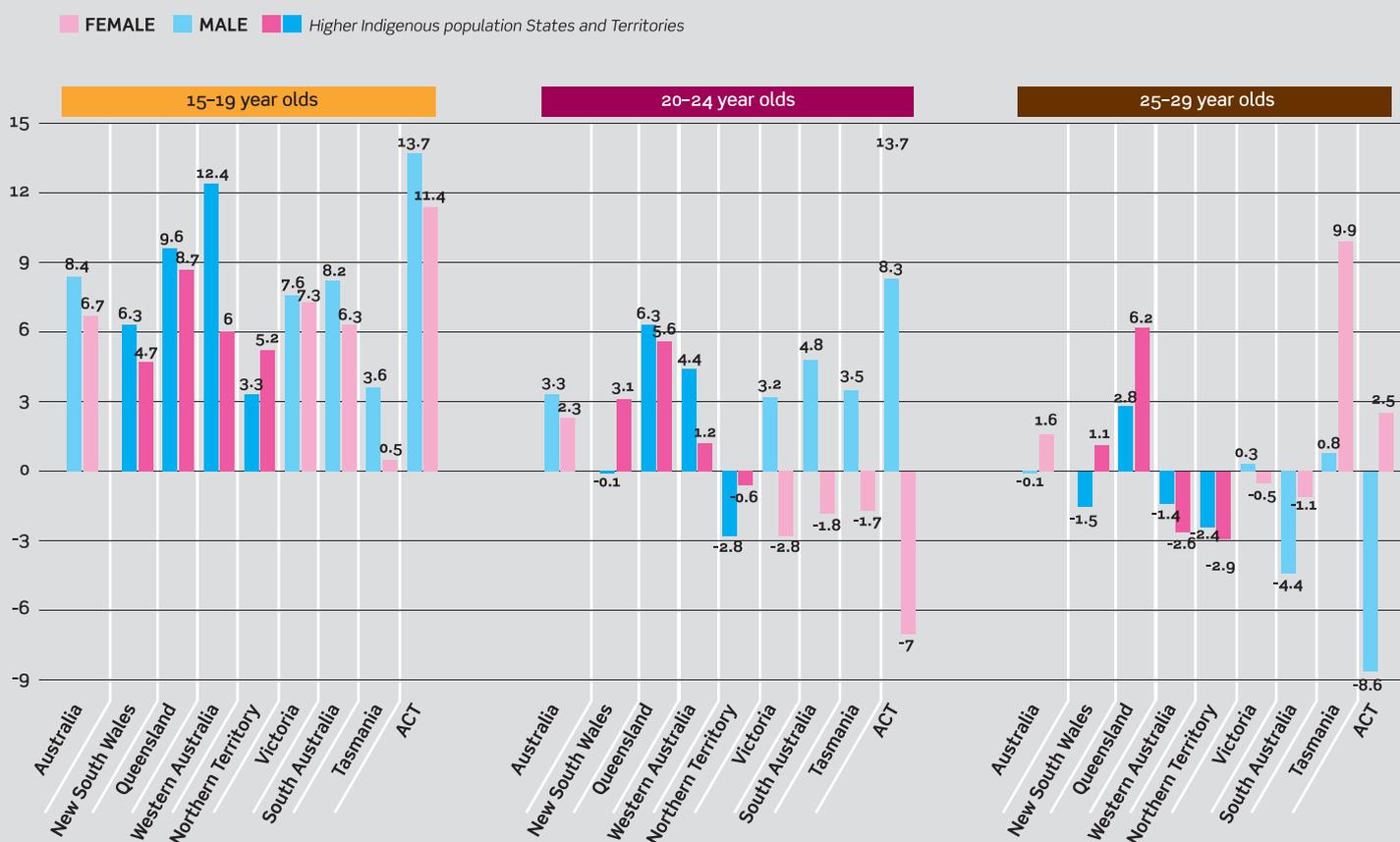
On a State and Territory basis, improvements in full-time participation in work and education have been achieved across all jurisdictions in the 15–19 year old age group. Of the States and Territories with the largest Indigenous populations (New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory) the strongest improvements have been in Queensland and Western Australia. In all except the Northern Territory improvements were stronger for males than females.

Queensland and Western Australia also showed the strongest improvement in the 20–24 year old age group, although improvements in the female population in Western Australia were low. There was no overall change in full-time participation status for males in New South Wales.

Participation in the over twenties in the Northern Territory declined over the period. Female Indigenous participation declined in all of the lower population States and Territories.

Improvements have been shown in full-time Indigenous male participation in the 25–29 year old age group in Queensland and for females in Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory. However, outcomes declined across Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

FIGURE 12 Change in Indigenous full-time participation in work and study 1996–2006 by State and Territory<sup>42</sup>



42. HIYPAF 2008., pp.28–29.



# 4. How can Australia close the gaps?



The following section offers ideas and guidelines for work and training issues. It draws on many sources to offer options that can inform policy and strategies.

So what does that mean in terms of where we should be focusing our attention to close the gaps?

**Figure 13**, on page 30, identifies areas of relative disadvantage by mapping where the Indigenous population is over or under represented compared to the non-Indigenous population against key learning or earning parameters. The mapping can be used to help understand what the key gaps are for age, gender and geographic groups and what is needed to close them.

The following section defines and explains the various issues that need to be focused on:

- **Labour force participation;**
- **School participation, attendance and performance;**
- **Further education;**
- **Work;** and
- **Job access and availability.**

**FIGURE 13 Summary of where Indigenous men and women are under or over represented against key economic participation parameters (based on Relative Status Ratio)<sup>43</sup>**

**Gender and age breakdown**

Parameter	Representation	15-19 year olds		20-24 year olds		25-29 year olds	
		MALES	FEMALES	MALES	FEMALES	MALES	FEMALES
Not in Labour Force	OVER	All	All	All	All	All	All
Seeking Work	OVER	All	All	All	All	All	All
Part Time Study	OVER	All	All	All	Capital Cities	All	Capital Cities
					Inner Regional		Inner Regional
					Outer Regional		Outer Regional
					Remote		Very Remote
	UNDER				Very Remote		Remote
Full Time Study	OVER						Inner Regional
		Outer Regional	Outer Regional	Outer Regional		Outer Regional	Outer Regional
		Remote		Remote		Remote	Remote
		Very Remote	Very Remote	Very Remote	Remote	Very Remote	Very Remote
	EQUAL	Inner Regional	Inner Regional				Capital Cities
			Remote				
	UNDER	Capital Cities	Capital Cities	Capital Cities	Capital Cities	Capital Cities	
Part Time Work	OVER	All	All	All	Capital Cities	All	
					Very Remote		Very Remote
	EQUAL				Outer Regional		Capital Cities
	UNDER				Inner Regional		Inner Regional
					Remote		Outer Regional
						Remote	
Full Time Work	OVER	Capital Cities	Capital Cities				
	UNDER	Inner Regional	Inner Regional	All	All	All	All
		Outer Regional	Outer Regional				
		Remote	Remote				
		Very Remote	Very Remote				
Both Study & Work	UNDER	All	All	All	All	All	

## Labour force participation

Gaps in overall **labour force participation** remain significant in all areas, highlighting the need for ongoing efforts to engage Indigenous young people who are outside of the labour force in work and education across all three age groups.

## School participation, attendance and performance

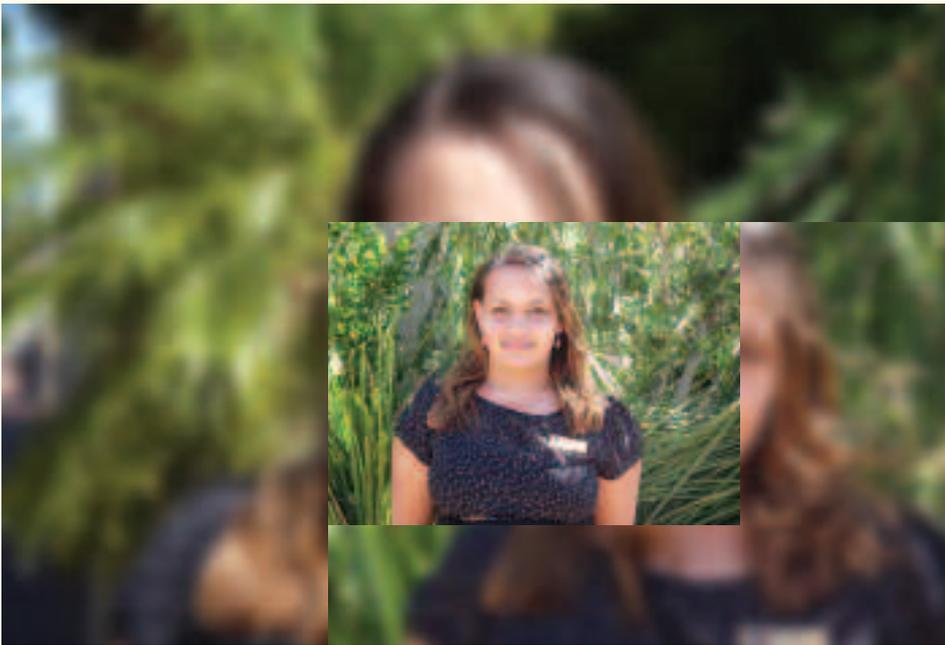
Although **school participation** has increased, the gap still remains large. Particular focus needs to be placed on young people in capital cities (particularly males)—as well as in regional and remote areas—to address gaps in participation.

Indigenous drop off rates in the transition from primary to secondary schooling and at the end of compulsory schooling continue to be an issue, making it crucial to focus on these key transition points.

**Educational attainment** (reflected in performance against basic literacy and numeracy benchmarks) remains significantly lower for Indigenous students—further work is required to support basic learning requirements and ensure that Indigenous students have the support that they need to be able to learn.

There is also a need to address basic skill gaps that limit the ability of post school age groups to access work or education opportunities.

43. HIYPAF 2008., Table A5.



**The Midland Indigenous Youth Project - Beacon Foundation & Swan View SHS (as well as other schools in the area).**

“After graduating from High School, Tania Cavanagh (IEW) and the Midland Indigenous Youth Project helped me get into University to undergo a Bachelor of Teaching Degree. I enjoyed my time studying but I could not cope with my living arrangements and having to travel a lot. So I put that on hold until I can obtain a drivers license, a car and housing. Working at Jobs Australia has changed my life. I have been working here and completing a traineeship at the same time for over 5 months” — Candice Ross, MIYP participant.

<http://www.beaconfoundation.net> <http://samekidssamegoals.dsf.org.au/>

## Further education

**University participation and qualification** levels remain low. Fewer Indigenous students completing Year 12 enter university, increasing the need for bridging course options to support access to this level of study. Improved personal and financial support is needed to assist Indigenous students to access tertiary education and complete their qualification.

Although Indigenous participation in vocational education is relatively strong compared to the non-Indigenous population, Indigenous students still tend to participate in lower level qualifications and completion rates tend to be lower, indicating that there is a need to provide increased support to students to complete **vocational qualifications** and to progress to higher certificate level qualifications.

## Work

Indigenous **participation in full-time jobs** remains low across all areas for 20-24 and 25-29 year olds, indicating that ongoing focus needs to be placed on supporting young Indigenous men and women to participate in full-time work.

In doing that there is a need to work with 15-19 year olds at school to better position them to transition into further education and work when they complete school, as well as with young people no longer at school and currently outside of the labour force, unemployed or in part-time education or part-time work.



#### **Daintree Eco Lodge & Spa.**

Aboriginal culture is infused into the experiences on offer for guests at the Daintree Eco Lodge & Spa where more than 50 local Aboriginal people have trained and worked over the last decade. It has been a stepping-stone, enabling them to build their confidence and become employment ready through on the job and external training. There are many success stories including career advancement within the Lodge & Spa, financial independence with car and home ownership and branching into successful owner-operated businesses. [www.daintree-ecolodge.com.au](http://www.daintree-ecolodge.com.au)

## Early exposure to paid work

Working while still at school or in other education is an important ingredient in successful transition strategies for many young Australians—and the relative lack of work experience and vocational skilling for Indigenous young people is a major policy failure. Addressing this gap is arguably an important part of the puzzle in enabling young Indigenous people to make the transition from education into work.

The use of part-time work as a mechanism to introduce Indigenous young people to work may be a useful step for those at school. Part-time work may also assist Indigenous young people who are no longer at school and outside the labour force or unemployed. However, as most students find first jobs through personal/familial contacts, these are often not available in Indigenous student networks and so needs to be supported.

Increasing female participation in part-time work and education may indicate that there is an opportunity to provide a stronger, staged pathway into full-time work through part-time work and education. This could also be due to the prevalence of young mothers among Indigenous teens that may make part-time education and/or work necessary.

Similarly, there may be an opportunity to support both men and women to transition from part-time work into a mix of work and education or full-time work as a means of gradually increasing participation in work (especially for older age groups).

## Job access and availability

In order to translate improvements in education into work there is a need to make sure that there are sufficient jobs for young Indigenous people to move into once they complete their education and training. As education outcomes for Indigenous people improve there is a real need to improve access to job opportunities through workplace training, work placements and ongoing work.

The availability of work opportunities (particularly in regional and remote areas) is often limited. Access to work based training can be further limited by the hesitancy of some employers to provide training or work opportunities to Indigenous young people based on their personal background, their education or their (lack) of work experience.



#### TAFE's North Coast Aboriginal Learning Partnerships.

TAFE's NCALP has introduced two initiatives to increase the retention and engagement of young Aboriginal learners in secondary schooling and further education, employment and training. *Deadly Days* combines hands-on vocational workshops and career expos with traditional and contemporary cultural activities, and *V Tracks* provides TAFE tasters, school-based vocational learning and work readiness programs to junior secondary students. More than 1500 students have benefited from these initiatives.

[www.nci.tafensw.edu.au](http://www.nci.tafensw.edu.au) [www.deadlydays.net](http://www.deadlydays.net)

## Job generation

Incentives are needed to encourage industry to play a stronger role in closing the gaps. Resourcing needs to be put in place to allow existing support service networks to work with industry at a community—rather than a provider—level. Employment strategies need to be tailored to meet the needs of Indigenous young people in different regions and communities. Flexible rather than programmatic pathways into work are required.

As part of that, part-time work options need to be looked at as a way of promoting industry engagement, engaging Indigenous young people in the workplace while they are at school and as a transition pathway into work for those outside of the labour force or seeking work.

This will need local industry engagement officers with responsibility for:

- working with local industry to identify current and prospective employment requirements;
- working with local industry, education and support agencies to develop training, work placement and supported job strategies to support Indigenous participation in local jobs; and
- conducting local industry and economic development research to identify current and prospective work opportunities with funding for this research, and funding for local networks to bring together employers, education and support agencies.

The appointment of people at a local level to work with industry to generate work based training, work placement and more strategic and sustainable work pathways for Indigenous young people is required.

## Job development options

Targeted job generation programs also need to be funded to ensure that work placement and work opportunities are available to support Indigenous transitions from education into work. Work placements and work opportunities must be tailored to allow participants to work on an extended shift basis (akin to that applied in a fly-in fly-out staffing model) so that people can access work while maintaining regular contact with their communities. Appropriate incentive structures would need to be provided to encourage industry adoption of more flexible work models.



### Deadly Mob.

Deadly Mob (Flex-eLearning Centre, Youth Outbush, Youth Pathways and Deadly Jam) at the Gap Youth Centre in Alice Springs gave access and training to hundreds of young people from town camps and outbush. Students have created electronic portfolios, been mentored, improved communication and literacy skills, and been assisted to further education and work opportunities. Unfortunately Deadly Mob is also an example of a highly successful program that is no longer operational due to funding and other issues. It is hoped that the program will be able to continue under the auspices of another organisation.

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## Social enterprise development linked to productivity based wage structures

In more remote areas where standard business models are likely to be less sustainable because of the limited economic base in the community, there is an opportunity to reframe activities that have historically come under the banner of the CDEP through the establishment of social enterprises. Such enterprises would formally employ local Indigenous people. A supported wage based model (such as that used in relation to disability employment) could be applied that takes into account factors of remoteness, job availability and employability while providing both an incentive to develop work skills (and so improve employability) and a forum for vocational development and training.

## Tailored work placements

There is a need to review existing transition to work support for Indigenous young people. Indigenous young people often require high levels of support prior to participating in a work placement. Lack of experience with work, gaps in educational attainment and challenges associated with managing community, home, and personal issues often make the transition into work complex. Standard work placement structures are not currently funded or structured to allow for more flexible or staged transitions into work that allow young people to work through the above issues.

Existing transition support arrangements should be reviewed and provision made for more flexible transitions into work that better accommodate Indigenous young people's needs, including provision of:

- **short term work placements** (4 weeks) that provide a supported introduction to work and what it is like to be in the workplace;
- **longer term work placements** (20+ weeks) that allow participants to increase their hours gradually over time as they acclimatise to work and build work based skills;
- **part-time work placement options** that allow participants to manage work and family commitments; and



#### Pialla Garang 'Meeting Place' — MTC Work Solutions.

The Pialla Garang Indigenous Hospitality Training Program operates at two inner-Sydney locations. Program participants undertake self-paced vocational work experience, a Certificate II in Hospitality Operations. A number of community elders are involved with the program providing mentoring, support and guidance. The program also provides a vital daily food service for disadvantaged residents, as well as education on health and nutrition.

[www.mtcwork.com.au/innovation.php?file=innovation03.htm](http://www.mtcwork.com.au/innovation.php?file=innovation03.htm)

— **orbit based work placement options** (targeted at more remote and regional communities) that allow participants to participate in work on an extended shift basis (akin to that applied in a fly-in fly-out staffing model) so that they can access work while maintaining regular contact with their community.

In addition to revisiting the structure of Indigenous work placement options, employment service provider payment structures should also be reviewed to promote stronger work readiness preparation and ongoing placement support (e.g. through the adoption of up front work readiness support payments based on the specific work readiness preparation requirements of the placement candidate and then a trailing commission for an extended period to cover the provision of ongoing placement coordination and support).<sup>44</sup>

## Improved transitions between education and work

Currently Indigenous young people aged 20–24 and 25–29 years are generally:

- under represented in full-time work; and
- over represented in part-time education and work.

There is a need to strengthen transitions from part-time education and part-time work into full-time work. Part-time education and work placement programs could be tailored to encourage entry into the labour force as part of a broader work participation strategy.

Indigenous young people could be provided with active assistance to:

- access part-time work and education;
- transition from part-time education into work; and
- transition from part-time work into full-time work.

In implementing such a strategy there are some clear points of initial focus. Indigenous men in capital cities and regional areas and Indigenous women in part-time education in capital cities and regional areas would benefit most from these approaches.

44. D Hetherington., Unlocking the Value of a job: Market Design in Employment Services., Per Capita., May 2008., pp.7ff. (Hetherington 2008).



**Dr Chris Sarra, Director of the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute, engages with future leaders at Mt Margaret Remote Community School.**

IELI is working with remote schools at Wingellina, Blackstone and Mt Margaret in WA through their Stronger Smarter Leadership program. Principal Jenni Greenham described the keys to success as: “Bringing the parents on board, having them with us every step of the way, not getting involved in any community politics and having the parents understand that we weren’t prepared to accept differences in the standards of Aboriginal children and non-Aboriginal children at this school”.

[www.strongersmarter.qut.edu.au](http://www.strongersmarter.qut.edu.au)

An integrated package of education, training and work assistance is needed to enable Indigenous young people to shift from education into work and the challenges associated with moving from part-time to full-time given individual/family/carer responsibilities.

The combination of the above transition support strategies and the strategies promoting early exposure to work through part-time and casual (after school) jobs provides an opportunity to better leverage part-time and casual work as an important part of the pathway into work for Indigenous young people.

## Regional and remote access to education and job opportunities

To date, we have not gained traction in closing the gap in Indigenous education and work options in more remote and outer regional areas.

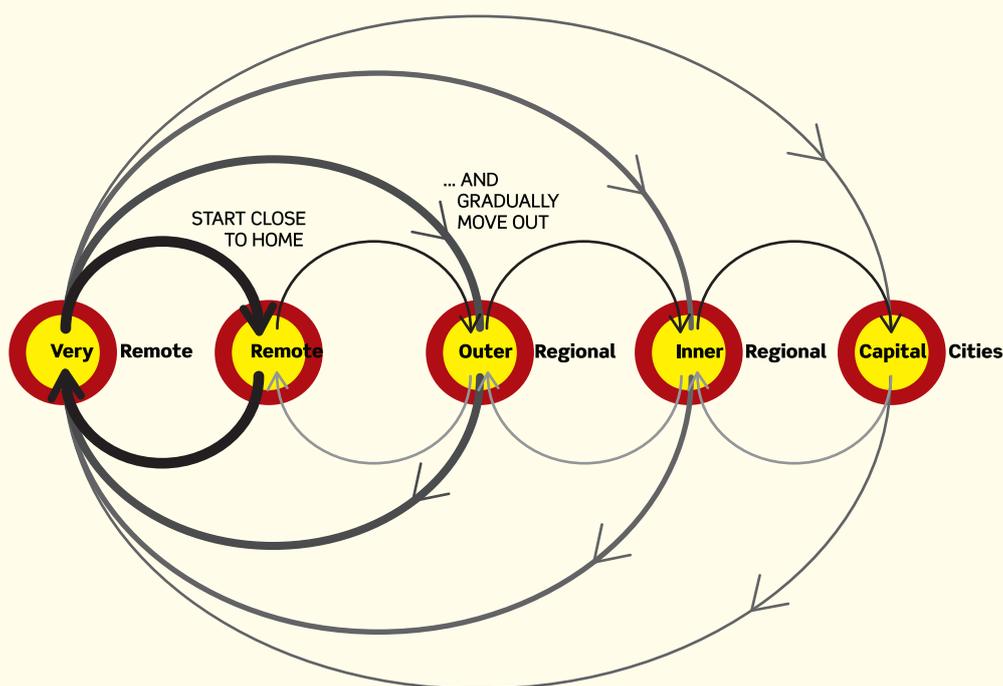
There is a need to improve regional and remote access to education and job opportunities and to make sure that education and training is translated into improvements in employment (rather than operating as a holding area for Indigenous young people for a period between school and unemployment or disengagement from the labour force).

To do that there is a need to:

- invest in job generation strategies to maximise the work opportunities available to Indigenous young people in those areas; and
- develop alternative options to allow Indigenous young people to access education and work opportunities.



FIGURE 14 “Stepping stone” orbit model



## Regional orbit education and employment models

(see **Figure 14**)

The question of how best to improve Indigenous access to education and work opportunities in remote and regional areas is a complex one. It is impacted by constraints in service and job availability and the desire of Indigenous young people to maintain a connection with their home community.

“Orbit” models that allow young people to cycle in and out of their home community to access education or work have been presented as a way of addressing this issue. Often when orbit models are talked about they relate to young people moving in and out of their communities to distant regional centres or capital cities. The distance involved often makes it difficult for young people to stay in contact with their family and community and increases the “culture shock” associated with moving away from home.

Those factors limit the breadth of the target group that can realistically access the programs and need to be addressed by both assisting movements of young people and increasing the flexibility of delivery modes.

There is an opportunity to take a more regional view when designing orbit programs. “Stepping stone” approaches that allow Indigenous young people to orbit close to home through schooling and gradually expand the range of their orbit (if desired) as they transition into post school education, training and work should be encouraged. Focus should be placed on developing regional education and job hubs that allow Indigenous young people in remote and regional areas to orbit in and out of their community to access education, vocational training, work placement and job opportunities in “adjacent” regional centres.

Program funding would need to be provided to establish the needed infrastructure for education, vocational training and work placement programs. Such programs would need to be designed to include an intensive support component to take into account the personal support needs of participating Indigenous young people (and their families) to assist them to manage being away from home, as well as providing support to engage effectively in education and/or work.



# 5. Conclusion



The improvements that have been made in Indigenous education participation and completion and post school qualification over the last ten years demonstrate that change is possible. The failure to translate those improvements in education into significant reductions in the employment gap demonstrates that a more comprehensive approach is needed.

Beyond putting in place the education fundamentals at school and in post school learning, a targeted Indigenous job generation strategy is needed. That strategy needs to partner with industry to generate jobs for Indigenous young people. Incentives are needed to encourage industry to play a stronger role in closing the gaps. Resourcing needs to be put in place to allow existing support service networks to work with industry at a community—rather than a provider—level. Employment strategies need to be tailored to meet the needs of Indigenous young people in different regions and communities. Flexible rather than programmatic pathways into work are required. As part of that, part-time work options need to be looked at as a way of promoting industry engagement, engaging Indigenous young people in the workplace while they are at school and as a transition pathway into work for those outside of the labour force or seeking work.

Government cannot meet the challenges alone. It needs to leverage local service providers and industry to work together to close the gaps.

There are no easy solutions—but there are constructive actions that can be taken. The key is to make sure that we get both the demand and supply side factors right. Our goal should be to deliver improvements in education and translate them into improvements in employment.

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