



NAB-DCA Research Project
Engaging Aboriginal Australians in the Private
Sector:

A Consultative Report into Aboriginal
Employment Strategies and Initiatives

Final Report

July 2009

By Janis Constable

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This research project was conceptualised and designed by Nareen Young, Chief Executive Officer, DCA. The research methodology was based in part on that devised and designed by Dr Graeme Russell, DCA Non-Executive Director, for DCA's "Grey Matters: Engaging Mature Age Workers" research project. The research was conducted and the report authored by Janis Constable, DCA Researcher, with overarching project responsibility held by Jane O'Leary, DCA Research Director.

About DCA

DCA is the independent, not-for-profit diversity advisor to business in Australia resourced solely by member subscriptions, partnership projects and advisory services. In partnership with our member organisations our mission is to:

1. understand and achieve leadership in diversity thinking and practice in an Australian context
2. realize business improvement through successful diversity programs
3. implement effective compliance management in a changing legislative environment, and
4. publicly demonstrate commitment to diversity.

DCA members have access to a range of free or discounted services that support and enhance their internal diversity and inclusion capabilities and external profile.

DCA research

DCA works in partnership with members to conduct research, which generates evidence-based information and guidance on workplace diversity.

DCA's infrastructure and capacity to produce this high level Australian business diversity research is enabled by its members, Australia's leaders in business diversity.

For more information on DCA's research projects visit www.dca.org.au or call (02) 9035 2852.

About the Author

Janis Constable is a well-regarded research consultant engaged by DCA to work on the project "Engaging Aboriginal Australians in the Private Sector" for NAB. Janis has extensive social research, project design, policy analysis and program evaluation

skills built on senior policy and research roles for federal and state governments, including a range of think tanks. Janis also possesses extensive consultation experience including experience working with Aboriginal communities and organisations.

Janis has been a senior advisor to two federal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioners on Indigenous human rights issues and has led a number of key research projects. Her Indigenous employment policy and program related experience includes:

- Conducting a review of the federal government's Welfare to Work and CDEP reforms for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, including leading consultations with CDEP providers, Indigenous stakeholders, DEWR, FACSIA, Job Network providers, other relevant training providers, and relevant non-government community/welfare support agencies.
- Coordinating the Economic Development Stakeholder Group under the NSW Government's Two Ways Together Aboriginal Affairs Plan, and reporting to Department Director General, Minister, Cabinet and Premier.
- Examining the impacts of proposed CDEP reform in the Northern Territory on Indigenous communities including considering ways in which Job Network providers could improve delivery of employment and training services to remote Indigenous communities.
- Evaluation of the North Coast Aboriginal Employment Strategy which sought to increase Aboriginal employment in public sector agencies located on the North Coast of NSW.

Janis also has extensive experience in researching and evaluating Indigenous criminal justice policy and programs at state and federal levels.

Janis has a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) majoring in Politics and International Relations from the University of New South Wales (2000).

Executive Summary

The innovative research project, 'Engaging Aboriginal Australians in the Private Sector' is a partnership initiative between the NAB and DCA.

DCA is the independent, not-for-profit diversity advisor to business in Australia. In partnership with our member organisations our mission is to:

1. understand and achieve leadership in diversity management and practice in an Australian context
2. realize business improvement through successful diversity programs
3. implement effective compliance management in a changing legislative environment
4. publicly demonstrate commitment to diversity alongside leading organisations.

Fundamentally, NAB and DCA acknowledge that employment provides not only an income to individuals and families, but can have direct positive results for Aboriginal communities generally. It also makes good business sense, enabling organisations to tap into a broader talent pool of labour, experience the benefits of new perspectives, and generate stronger links with Aboriginal communities

This project aimed to facilitate employment outcomes for Aboriginal people by identifying what actions employers could take to better engage Aboriginal people in Australian private sector workplaces.

Importantly, the project aimed to do this through asking Aboriginal Australians about their experiences of and attitudes towards employment in the private sector. This contrasts with customary approaches, which tend to focus on employer perspectives and experiences of employment of Aboriginal people (as was identified in the project's preliminary literature review).

To address this significant oversight, a series of representative national consultations with Aboriginal people were conducted. Through focus groups and face to face interviews Aboriginal people were asked to discuss what actions employers could take to improve employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in the private sector.

The focus groups and interviews were enhanced by an initial literature review, which aimed to identify current themes in relation to attracting and retaining Aboriginal Australians, including current understandings of leading Indigenous employment practice and limitations of these understandings and the literature more generally.

Literature Review Findings

The literature review clearly affirmed the importance of this project, including its leading edge nature, finding a conspicuous absence of information based on Aboriginal Australians' experiences of and attitudes about employment. In seeking to capture Indigenous Australians' views on, and experiences of, employment in the private sector, this project therefore represents a genuine and real step forward in hearing what Aboriginal Australians have to say about Indigenous employment strategies.

The literature review highlighted a trend for private sector employers to increasingly embrace the concept of Indigenous employment, and identified leading practice as it

is currently understood and undertaken among public and private sector employers. Here, employers are aspiring to engage with Aboriginal people and communities, implement initiatives that contribute to the overall wellbeing of Aboriginal communities, create pathways to work including transitions from training to workplaces and pre-employment training, and provide some kinds of development and mentoring opportunities.

The review also identified a number of limitations in the literature, including:

- A tendency for employers, particularly in the private sector, to be at preliminary stages of implementation in which the focus is on public statements of commitment rather than substantive organisational change,
- The prevalence of a deficit approach to Aboriginal employment, which focused on the 'deficiencies' of Aboriginal Australians and overlooked the significant role employers have in generating inclusive workplace practices and environments,
- A lack of evaluative information assessing the impact of various programs, strategies and initiatives on Indigenous employment short- and long-term, and
- Insufficient collaboration between employers, Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal employees to share leading practice.

National Consultation Findings

To address the absence of information on Aboriginal Australians' experiences of employment, this project conducted national consultations with Aboriginal Australians.

Overall, the findings indicated that while many employers have a basic awareness of the challenges facing Aboriginal people seeking employment, and have subsequently developed and implemented strategies to address these, the perception among Aboriginal people is that a lot more can be done.

Of critical importance is the need for employers to develop closer relationships with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations, in order to better understand the social and economic challenges experienced by Aboriginal people and better partner with Aboriginal people to implement strategies that address these.

Additionally and more specifically the findings indicated that leading diversity employers could take a number of actions (see below) to better attract, engage and retain Aboriginal employees. Participants indicated that while many employers felt they were already undertaking these actions, there was often substantial room for improvement in their day-to-day practice. The consultation findings indicated that leading diversity employers could make improvements to the way:

- Employment opportunities were advertised,
- Identified/Designated positions were established, supported and monitored,
- Employment targets were set and monitored,
- Employment opportunities in particular industry sectors were marketed,
- Pathways to employment were developed and implemented,
- Types of mentoring schemes were developed, resourced, and implemented,
- Racism in the workplace was prevented and managed,

- Cultural awareness education was conducted,
- Wage subsidy programs provided continuity of employment,
- Career development and progression opportunities were provided, and
- Workplace flexibility was understood and practised.

Recommendations

On the basis of this participant feedback, and findings from the literature review, a number of employer- and research-focused recommendations were made. Common to all recommendations was the need for actions taken to be predicated on thorough and genuine consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders.

Employer Recommendations: General

- When developing Indigenous employment strategies, employers authentically engage with Aboriginal communities, including undertaking thorough and genuine consultation and collaborative work arrangements with Aboriginal people so as to better develop and implement appropriate and sustainable training and employment outcomes.
- Employers include monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms in their Indigenous employment strategies to provide an evidence-base in relation to the impact and outcomes of their Indigenous employment strategies.
- Employers take actions to address the full range of factors adversely impacting upon Aboriginal Australians' ability to access and retain meaningful work. This should include addressing 'deficit' attitudes about Aboriginal employment and considering what internal organisational changes need to be made to effectively engage and retain Indigenous staff.
- Employers commit to sharing outcomes, both positive and negative, of Indigenous employment strategies and initiatives with other employers and sectors to generate a body of leading practice.

Employer Recommendations: Attraction

- Employers implement additional, more informal ways to promote employment and training opportunities such as through informal community gatherings and building closer affiliations with local Aboriginal community organisations.
- Government encourages mainstream Job Network services to employ Aboriginal people and to ensure Job Network employees are educated about cultural issues impacting upon Aboriginal communities.
- Employers introduce/continue using Identified and Designated positions, including traineeships, and consider identifying other areas within the organisation where such positions may be created.
- Employers establish Aboriginal employment targets across their organisation, including developing accountability measures that require transparent reporting on employment outcomes.
- Various industry sectors consider ways in which to promote to Aboriginal people a positive image of a career in their sector, including the diverse nature of employment opportunities.

- Various industry sectors consult with Aboriginal communities in order to identify and better respond to Aboriginal Australians' attitudes towards working in these sectors.
- Employers across all industry sectors implement School Based Traineeship programs and, where these programs are already underway, consider extending them.
- Employers currently participating in the School Based Traineeship program provide training and work experience in a broader range of business areas such as in Human Resources, Information Technology, and Financial Planning and so on.
- Employers develop employment training programs similar to the School Based Traineeship program targeting older Aboriginal people.
- Employers from across all industry sectors develop Indigenous Scholarship programs to facilitate work experience and career development for Indigenous university students.

Employer Recommendations: Retention

- Employers conduct exit interviews with departing Aboriginal staff to identify what workplace factors are contributing to staff turnover and what actions can be taken to improve retention rates.
- Employers implement formal professional mentoring schemes that are adequately resourced, including ensuring participants are provided with culturally responsive training on effective mentoring
- Employers implement formal cultural mentoring schemes in partnership with Aboriginal organisations.
- Employers establish a buddy system for all new Aboriginal employees to support initial social integration into the workplace.
- Employers conduct confidential employee attitude surveys to monitor levels of harassment, discrimination and exclusionary workplace behaviours.
- Employers conduct regular harassment and discrimination workplace training to educate all managers and employees about their rights and responsibilities in relation to racism at work.
- Employers consider linking managers' remuneration to their ability to provide a harassment- and discrimination-free work environment for all staff.
- Employers implement accredited Cultural Education Courses for all new employees and comprehensive Cultural Education courses for all employees with responsibility for managing Aboriginal employees.
- The Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) investigates employment outcomes for Indigenous people post-Indigenous wage subsidy program period, with a view to considering introducing greater incentives to retain Indigenous program participants over the longer term.
- Employers monitor career progress over time of Aboriginal staff, including in Identified positions, to ensure they have access to clear, meaningful and

achievable career pathways and are provided with development opportunities that position them well for promotion.

- Employers develop and implement, in consultation with Indigenous employees, flexible work practices to better meet the specific work/life balance needs of Indigenous employees.

Research Recommendations

- Quantitative and qualitative outcomes of purported 'best practice' Aboriginal employment initiatives be examined to generate evidence-based guidance on leading edge practices.
- Leading benchmarks for Indigenous employment be established.
- Effective Aboriginal community engagement in the private sector for the purposes of improving Indigenous employment be examined. Consider how lessons learned from the mining sector could be applicable to other industry sectors.
- The extent and impact of racism and other forms of discriminatory behaviours in specific sectors of the labour market be examined.
- The current scope and impact of available Aboriginal cultural awareness training courses be assessed.
- The elements of successful Indigenous mentoring programs be identified.

1. Project Overview

Many aspects of work affect people's wellbeing, such as hours worked, job satisfaction and security, levels of remuneration, opportunities for self-development and interaction with people outside the home. Having a job or being involved in a business activity not only leads to improved incomes for families and communities (which has a positive influence on health, education of children etc), it also enhanced self esteem and reduces social alienation.¹

1.1 Objective

This innovative research project aimed to facilitate Aboriginal employment outcomes by identifying what actions employers could take to better engage Aboriginal people in Australian private sector workplaces.

Significantly, the project aimed to do this through asking Aboriginal Australians about their experiences of and attitudes towards employment in the private sector labour market. This contrasts with customary approaches, which tend to focus on employer perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal employment. In keeping with self-determination principles, this project sought to instead 'go the source' and ask Aboriginal Australians about their perspectives and experiences of seeking and attaining employment in contemporary Australian workplaces. In doing so, the project aims to identify those factors contributing to successful employment outcomes.

1.2 Partners

The project is a partnership initiative between NAB and DCA. NAB and DCA acknowledge that employment provides not only an income to individuals and families, but can have direct positive results for Aboriginal communities generally. This is particularly important in remote regional areas – here, ensuring local people have access to meaningful paid work is critical for economic development of the area.

Importantly, the project partners were also cognizant that investing in Aboriginal employment delivers positive business outcomes:

- Indigenous Australians represent a young and enthusiastic talent pool.
- Employing Indigenous Australians may open up a growing market for products or services.
- Depending on the industry or location, higher retention rates may apply with Indigenous employees than for the general employee population, particularly in remote areas.
- Demonstrating strong corporate citizenship may assist gain a market edge with key clients and enhance the public reputation of the organisation.
- Organisations will gain new skills and knowledge from training and working with Indigenous employees.
- Pre-employment training provided for Indigenous applicants can be beneficial to non-Indigenous applicants as well.

¹ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Services (SCRGS), *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage, Key Indicators 2007 Report*, Canberra, 2007, p.11.1

1.3 Terminology

In this review, the terms 'Aboriginal people', 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' and 'Indigenous' are used interchangeably. For the purposes of this report, these terms refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia. These terms however do not reflect the diversity of Indigenous Australians and it is important to remember that many Indigenous Australians prefer to be known by their specific group names (for example Noongar or Koori).² Moreover, for the purposes of educating non-Aboriginal Australians, DCA notes that many Aboriginal Australians prefer this (i.e. 'Aboriginal Australians') or other terms (e.g. 'Aboriginal people') rather than Indigenous. While Indigenous is a term that is used internationally, in Australia it seems to have developed as a term that encompasses both Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Island people. These groups are of course separate and distinct.

1.4 Methodology

The project methodology consisted of two key components, a literature review and national consultations with Aboriginal Australians.

1.4.1 Literature Review

The literature review aimed to provide a backdrop to the findings from the national consultation, by identifying current themes in relation to attracting and retaining Aboriginal Australians, including current understandings of leading Indigenous employment practice and limitations of these understandings and the literature more generally.

The review began by considering literature relating to Indigenous labour market participation, before turning to examine literature concerning private and public sector programs, strategies and initiatives that seek to increase and improve Indigenous employment outcomes and government policy and programs that encourage employers to develop employment and training/development opportunities for Aboriginal people.

1.4.2 National Consultations

A series of national consultations with Aboriginal people and organisations was undertaken to gain a better understanding of people's experiences in relation to employment.

Consultations were conducted in Sydney and the Illawarra region south of Sydney (NSW), Shepparton (Victoria), Townsville (Queensland), Perth (Western Australia) and Alice Springs (Northern Territory).

Consultations consisted of focus groups and face to face interviews with Aboriginal people, in which participants were asked to provide their opinions on practices that could improve employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in the private sector.

² Office of Equal Opportunity, *Insights: Strategies for Success – Indigenous and non-Indigenous people on work*, OEO, Western Australian Government, 2001.

Focus Groups

A total of five focus groups were conducted with a broad range of Aboriginal people to seek their views and experiences on issues relating Aboriginal employment in the private sector. Table 1.1 below details these focus groups and participants.

Table 1.1

Location	Participants
Illawarra region	11 x young job seekers
Sydney	12 x young and older job seekers
Townsville	7 x local inter-agency network of employment and training related services providers
Perth	6 x local inter-agency network of employment and training related service providers

Interviews

A total of 16 interviews were conducted with a range of people and agencies. Table 1.2 below details these individual and participants.

Table 1.2

Location	Participants
Illawarra region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 x interviews staff members, Warrigal Employment (formerly Illawarra CDEP)
Sydney	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 x interviews Aboriginal Employment Strategy - National Manager, Group Training (School Based Traineeship Program), Manager Employment Services and School Based Trainees Field Officer 1 x interview TAFE NSW Aboriginal Programs Manager
Townsville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 x interviews IPA Recruitment 1 x interview Aboriginal Employment Strategy, State Manager
Perth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 x interview Indigenous Participation Manager, Worley Parsons 1 x interview Indigenous Employment Advisor, Rio Tinto 1 x interview Peel Development Commission, Aboriginal Engagement Consultant
Alice Springs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 x telephone interview with Manager, Employment Services 2 x interviews Aboriginal Employment Strategy

The focus groups and interviews were unstructured and informal allowing participants to freely draw upon their own labour market experiences, as well as to offer any opinions they wished to provide in relation to improvements that could be made to recruitment, engagement, and retention. Although unstructured, prompt questions were asked to elude information about people's specific experiences in relation to finding work, services and supports required, retention issues, career progression, and cultural awareness.

Demographics

A diverse range of people participated in the consultations. Focus groups and interviews included:

- A fairly even balance between female and male participants
- Young job seekers ranging in age from 17-24
- Older job seekers i.e. above 35 years of age
- Some participants (mainly those aged 24 and under) currently undertaking vocational studies or participating in other employment related training programs
- A large percentage of participants possessing one or more vocational and/or tertiary qualification
- People currently employed in the private sector, including people employed in recruitment, training and management positions
- People employed by Aboriginal community organisations.

1.5 Project Outcomes

The recommendations in the report aim to facilitate Aboriginal employment outcomes with private sector employers by:

- Identifying what actions employers need to do to attract and retain Aboriginal people in the private sector workplace;
- Providing employers an awareness of the challenges facing Aboriginal people seeking employment and training;
- Identifying the need for employers to engage with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations, in order to work in genuine partnership and deliver outcomes that bring real change for Aboriginal people and the private sector.

The report will be a web-based publication.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review aims to identify current themes in relation to attracting and retaining Aboriginal Australians, including current understandings of leading Indigenous employment practice and limitations of these understandings and the literature more generally.

To meet these objectives, the review considers literature relating to:

- Indigenous participation in the labour market,
- Government policy and programs that encourage employers to develop employment and training/development opportunities for Aboriginal people,
- Public sector initiatives, programs and strategies that seek to improve Indigenous employment outcomes, and
- Private sector initiatives, programs and strategies that seek to improve Indigenous employment outcomes.

2.2 Current State-of-Play: Indigenous Employment

It is well known that for all social indicators Aboriginal Australians, as a group, are more disadvantaged than other Australians.³ Aboriginal Australians have poorer health and education outcomes, including poorer access to health and education services. Many Aboriginal Australians experience poorer levels of housing and related infrastructure, as well as poorer access to government and community services. Indigenous people experience higher incarceration rates as compared with non-Indigenous Australians, and higher rates of violence, including family violence. It is not surprising therefore that Indigenous people in Australia also experience high rates of unemployment.

Population

As at the 2006 Census the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Australia was 455, 031 or 2.3 percent of the Australian population.

The Indigenous population is a young and growing one with those aged 0-14 years comprising 37.6 percent of the overall Indigenous population as compared with 19.8 percent for the general population. Those aged 15-24 years comprise 18.9 percent of the Indigenous population as compared with 13.6 percent for the general population.⁴

Labour Market Participation

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated that 183,800 Indigenous people were in the labour force in 2007. This represents a labour force participation rate of 56 percent, considerably lower than that of the general Australian population (83 percent).⁵ Of the Indigenous people in the labour force, more lived in regional areas (80,500) than in major cities (58,200) or remote areas (45,100).⁶

³ SCRGS, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2006 Census of Population and Housing*, B01 Selected Person Characteristics by Sex, ABS, Canberra, 2007.

⁵ Reconciliation Australia, *ABS Social Trends 2008*, www.reconciliation.org.au

Over the past five years the labour force participation for Indigenous people has fallen, from 59 percent in 2002 to 56 percent in 2007⁷.

Employment

In 2007 there were an estimated 158,000 Indigenous people in employment, representing 48 percent of the Indigenous population over the age of 15 years.⁸ This figure includes those people classified as working for Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP)

The employment to population ratio for Indigenous men was higher than that for Indigenous women - 56 percent versus 44 percent.⁹

Over the past five years the employment to population ratio for Indigenous people has remained largely constant, standing at 48 percent in 2002 and in 2007.¹⁰

Unemployment

The 2006 Census revealed an Indigenous unemployment rate of approximately 18 percent. This figure does not include those people classified as working for CDEP. However, if CDEP participants are taken into account the Indigenous unemployment figure is higher, standing at 25.3 percent.¹¹

Over the past five years the unemployment rate for Indigenous people has remained largely constant, standing at 18 percent in 2002 and in 2007¹².

Employment by Industry Sector

A breakdown of statistics by industry sector indicates that the top five sectors of employment for Aboriginal people are:

- Public administration and safety (3.3%),
- Mining (2.3%),
- Health care and social assistance (1.8%),
- Arts & recreation services (1.5%), and
- Administrative & support services (1.5%)¹³.

The bottom sectors for Indigenous employment are:

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force Characteristics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, Estimates from the Labour Force Survey 2007*, ABS, Canberra, Cat.No.6287.0, 22 May 2008.

⁷ Purdie, N., Frigo, T., Stone, A. & Dick, W. *Enhancing Employment Opportunities for Indigenous Victorians*, ACER, Camberwell, 2006.

⁸ ABS, *Labour Force Characteristics*, 2007

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Purdie *et al*, *Enhancing Employment Opportunities for Indigenous Victorians*.

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing, I27 Selected Person Characteristics by Sex*, ABS, Canberra, 2006.

¹² Purdie *et al*, *Enhancing Employment Opportunities for Indigenous Victorians*.

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2006 Census of Population and Housing, I32 Selected Person Characteristics by Sex*, ABS, Canberra, 2007.

- Financial and insurance services (0.3%),
- Professional, scientific and technical services (0.4%),
- Wholesale trade (0.7%),
- Information, media and telecommunications (0.7%), and
- Renting, hiring and real estate (0.7%).¹⁴

Table 2.1 below outlines Indigenous employment in various industry sectors. It is derived from ABS 2006 Census data.

Table 2.1

Sector	Indigenous	% of Indigenous people in sector	Non-Indigenous	Indig status not stated	Total
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	3,620	1.2%	274,488	2,809	280,917
Mining	2,488	2.3%	103,673	732	106,893
Manufacturing	9,104	0.9%	933,880	9,031	952,015
Electricity, gas, water, waste services	1,118	1.2%	87,790	548	89,456
Construction	8,386	1.1%	695,233	6,224	709,843
Wholesale trade	2,985	0.7%	390,354	3,023	396,362
Retail trade	9,225	0.8%	1,015,274	8,697	1,033,196
Accommodation & food services	7,659	1.3%	561,917	5,537	575,113
Transport, postal & warehousing	4,828	1.1%	419,301	3,664	427,793
Information media & telecommunications	1,244	0.7%	174,575	1,007	176,826
<i>Financial & insurance services</i>	<i>1,380</i>	<i>0.3%</i>	<i>345,518</i>	<i>1,690</i>	<i>348,588</i>
Renting, hiring, real estate	1,186	0.7%	151,787	928	153,901
Professional, scientific & technical services	2,785	0.4%	596,193	3,041	602,019
Administrative & support services	4,478	1.5%	279,975	2,351	286,624
Public administration & safety	20,588	3.3%	584,623	3,390	608,601

¹⁴ *ibid*

Education & training	10,162	1.4%	684,042	3,601	697,805
Health care & social assistance	17,642	1.8%	931,538	6,962	956,142
Arts & recreation services	1,917	1.5%	124,616	863	127,396
Other	4,030	1.1%	331,614	2,564	338,208
Not stated	7,924	3.3%	222,100	6,462	236,486
Total	122,749	1.3%	8,908,311	73,124	9,104,184

Education

In relation to education, students completing Year 12 are much more likely to undertake additional tertiary education than those who do not complete Year 12. The Productivity Commission notes that:

- In 2006, 21 percent of 15 year old Indigenous people were not participating in school education (versus 5% of non-Indigenous 15 year olds),
- In 2006, Indigenous students were half as likely as non-Indigenous students to continue to Year 12, and
- In 2004-05, 22 percent of Indigenous people had completed Year 12, compared with 47 percent of non-Indigenous people.¹⁵

The number of Indigenous people attending post secondary education has increased from 5 percent in 1994 to approximately 11 percent in 2004-05. The proportion of Indigenous people with a qualification of certificate level 3 or higher increased from 8 percent in 1994 to 21 percent in 2004-05. However, non-Indigenous people are still more than twice as likely as Indigenous people to have completed post-secondary education.¹⁶

While the statistics reveal significant gaps in higher education and post-secondary education participation rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, one area where Indigenous participation rates are above that of non-Indigenous is in the VET sector¹⁷. (Research suggests this may be because year 12 Indigenous students are less likely than non-Indigenous students to attain sufficient scores to enable admission to university.)¹⁸. Statistics indicate there is a significant and growing pool of Indigenous people with vocational qualifications, many with multiple qualifications. Between 1994 and 2005 the proportion of Indigenous people with Certificate level 3 or above increased from 8.3 per cent to 20.8 per cent¹⁹. Moreover National Centre for Vocational Education Research highlights multiple enrolments and qualifications, with

¹⁵ SCRGS, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*, p.13

¹⁶ *ibid*, p.15

¹⁷ *ibid*, p.31

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ *ibid*, p.35

data showing that while there were 79,600 Indigenous course enrolments in 2002, there were only 62,000 Indigenous clients²⁰.

According to the 2006 Census, the top five fields of study for Indigenous students were management and commerce; society and culture; engineering and related technologies; education; and health (see Table 2.2 below).²¹

Table 2.2

Field of Study	No. of Indigenous students	% of Total Indigenous students
Management and commerce	11,140	19.2%
Society and culture	9477	16.4%
Engineering and related technologies	9,313	16.0%
Health	6,326	10.9%
Education	5,621	9.7%
Architecture and building	4,786	8.3%
Food hospitality and personal Services	4,650	8.0%
Agriculture, environmental and related	2,781	4.8%
Creative arts	2,252	3.9%
Information technology	936	1.6%
Natural and physical sciences	583	1.0%

The top five fields of study in terms of largest proportion of Indigenous students relative to all students were agriculture, environmental and related studies; society and culture; food, hospitality and personal services; architecture and building; and education (see Table 2.3 below).

Table 2.3

Field of Study	No. of Indigenous students	% of total student	No of Non-Indigenous students	Indig status not stated	Total students
Agriculture, Environmental and related studies	2,781	1.6%	164,999	1,253	169,033
Society & Culture	9,477	1.3%	731,142	4,832	745,451

²⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Year Book 2004*, Indigenous education and training, Cat No. 1301.0, 2005.

²¹ These percentages are calculated ignoring the largest category "Field of study not stated" (41,805, equivalent to 41.2% of Indigenous students), and categories "Field of study inadequately describe" (1,470), and mixed field study (316).

Food, Hospitality & Personal Services	4,650	1.2%	384,970	3,782	393,402
Architecture and Building	4,786	1.0%	447,952	4,476	457,214
Education	5,621	0.9%	609,406	4,084	619,111
Health	6,326	0.89%	691,690	5,147	703,163
Creative Arts	2,252	0.89%	248,508	1,985	252,745
Management & Commerce ²²	11,140	0.8%	1,333,996	8,108	1,353,244
Engineering and related technologies	9,313	0.68%	1,330,343	11,460	1,351,116
Information Technology	936	0.42%	218,670	1,369	220,975
Natural & Physical Sciences	583	0.26%	223,220	1,202	225,005

More Detailed Information

For a general statistical picture of Indigenous participation in the labour market the Productivity Commission releases *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*, a report on the status of Indigenous people, every three years.²³

For more detailed analysis on Indigenous economic development issues, including employment, the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University, is the leading research centre dedicated to examining Aboriginal economic issues. CAEPR predominantly focuses on the relationships between Indigenous communities²⁴ and government, with a particular focus on economic development and employment related policy and programs. CAEPR provides a rich data source for understanding the issues at the heart of Indigenous people's engagement with the Australian labour market and beyond that and intrinsic to, the broader Australian community more generally.

²² The figure for Management and Commerce has been included here as it is relevant to this project.

²³ SCRGs, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage, Key Indicators 2007 Report*.

Overview

This brief review of the state-of-play of Aboriginal employment indicates Indigenous Australians represent a largely untapped talent pool for Australian employers. Aboriginal Australians have lower labour force participation rates than non-Aboriginal Australians, despite being a growing population, with increasing vocational qualifications. The review highlighted in particular that younger Aboriginal Australians and Aboriginal women represent under-accessed pools of labour: younger Aboriginal Australians, as a demographic group, are growing at a faster rate than the general Australian population, while Aboriginal women have a considerably lower employment to population ratios than Aboriginal men.

2.3 Government Policies and Programs

Over the past three decades various federal governments have introduced a range of policy and program measures aimed at addressing Indigenous economic disadvantage. Currently, the major federal government program initiatives available to assist private sector employers increase Aboriginal employment are:

- National Indigenous Cadetship Project
- Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment Project
- Structured Training and Employment Program (STEP)
- Community Development Employment Project (CDEP)
- Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES)

A large proportion of the federal government measures have focused on creating vocational training and employment opportunities (predominantly through CDEP) and more recently an emphasis on accessing mainstream (or off-CDEP) employment.

Traditionally, strategies to reduce Aboriginal unemployment have relied heavily on accessing employment opportunities in public sector agencies including local government, as well as the not-for-profit non-government sector including employment with locally owned Indigenous enterprises and organisations. Currently, a disproportionate amount of Aboriginal people are employed in government funded positions: It is estimated that almost 70% of all jobs held by Indigenous people are reliant to some extent on public funding.²⁵

More recently, there has been a major policy push to encourage the private sector to become part of the solution to Indigenous unemployment and training. This is evident in the way the way governments are engaging with corporate sector organisations in relation to wage subsidy programs and other programs aimed at supporting employers to take on more Indigenous employees.

A brief description of some of the major federal government program initiatives available to assist private sector employers in increasing the level of Aboriginal employment is provided below.

²⁵ Dockery A.M. & Milsom, N. (2007) *A review of Indigenous employment programs*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), Adelaide, p.19. p.29.

Community Development Employment Project (CDEP)

The CDEP program, the first mutual obligation scheme to operate in Australia, was established in several remote Aboriginal communities in northern Australia in 1977 to address community concerns that the then social security system would undermine traditional community life.

In exchange for unemployment benefits community members undertook work in the community. This exchange was considered an innovative means to reducing the ill-effects of passive welfare. The government lifted the requirement for activity testing (evidence of job seeking activity) in remote areas where CDEP operated to relieve the burden of seeking work in areas where there was clearly no viable labour market. Community members participating in the CDEP undertook a range of activities in the community including building maintenance, rubbish removal, gardening, conducting Night Patrols²⁶ and other cultural activities such as painting. The CDEP quickly expanded to other Aboriginal communities including major regional centres and urban areas where Aboriginal people experienced difficulties in accessing employment.

At June 2004 approximately 220 Indigenous organisations and 36,000 people were participating in CDEP, accounting for 25% of Indigenous employment in Australia.²⁷ CDEP participants are not officially counted as unemployed (thus reducing the Indigenous unemployment figures dramatically).

There have been several raft of reform measures to CDEP in recent years. The emphasis of the reform measures is on directing CDEP participants off CDEP and into mainstream employment. Another emphasis has been on the development of community business enterprises that aim to provide the community with a sustainable source of employment and income.

In late 2007, the newly elected Australian Government called a halt to the closure of all CDEPs in the Northern Territory (NT). A review of the viability of CDEPs in the NT is currently underway, with reporting due later this year.

While the operating future of CDEP in the NT is not yet known, for other CDEPs in other states and territories many changes have taken place, with most CDEPs having closed their doors completely. The remaining CDEPs are now required to deliver employment and training services that focus on obtaining mainstream employment outcomes for their clients, including the delivery of Structured Training and Employment Programs or 'STEP' (see below).

Of the CDEPs that remain, they are an important hub for those in the community wanting to improve and increase their vocational skill levels (including literacy and numeracy skills). They also represent an important conduit to the mainstream employment market. CDEPs continue to provide a safe and culturally appropriate space for Aboriginal job seekers, providing mentoring and other forms of support. For many communities they are a critical part of the wellbeing of the community.

Structured Training and Employment Program (STEP)

The Structured Training and Employment Program (STEP), is part of the broader federal government's Indigenous employment program that provides wage subsidies

²⁶ Night Patrols are a form of community policing conducted at night with the aim of keeping communities safe and peaceful.

²⁷ Dockery A.M. & Milsom, N. *A review of Indigenous employment programs*, p.19.

to employers. While any employer from any sector is eligible to access this program, there is an emphasis on private sector employers. The amount of the subsidy depends on the type of organisation and services needed to ensure ongoing employment. The program provides tailored packages to employers to support Aboriginal employees taking into account such things as job readiness, training required, duration of the job and location.²⁸ The key criterion for funding, according to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, is that “the participant’s job must be ongoing after the funding period has finished.”²⁹

Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment Project

Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment Project encourages private sector organisations to increase Aboriginal employment opportunities in their organisations through a specially tailored package of funding. While government funding programs are accessible to non-signatories, Corporate Leaders make a public commitment to improving and increasing Indigenous employment opportunities, enhancing their reputation as a good corporate citizen.³⁰

Although the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) website notes that by becoming a Corporate Leader, “you will become part of a team of innovative private sector organisations who have access to the best Indigenous employment strategies and practices³¹”, there is little detailed information on the individual strategies or employment provided on the website. Some case studies are provided, including brief outlines of past winners of Corporate Leaders awards, but this information does not seem to have been updated for quite some time, with the last awards cited being in 2004.

National Indigenous Cadetship Project

The National Indigenous Cadetship Project is a program that links full-time students undertaking a diploma, advanced certificate or a first degree, with employers who can provide workplace experience and ongoing employment once the person’s studies have been completed. The program provides paid work placements for 12 weeks for each year of the cadetship to support cadets with a living allowance and study-related costs, as well as providing the employer with off-set costs for administration.

Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES)

The Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES) has been identified by the Productivity Commission as one initiative that can provide some insight into improvements being made in Aboriginal employment. The 2007 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report states that in 2005 the AES placed 500 Aboriginal people into jobs.³² Improving on this figure the AES 2007 Annual Report claims placement of 1028 Aboriginal

²⁸ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website
<http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Programmes/IndigenousProgs/STEP/STEPforemployers.htm>. Accessed 23 July 2008.

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website -
<http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Programmes/IndigenousProgs/Corporate+Leaders+for+Indigenous+Employment/CorporateLeadersforIndigenousEmploymentProject.htm> Accessed 23 July 2008.

³¹ *ibid*

³² SCRGs, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage, Key Indicators 2007 Report*, p.11.4

people into jobs throughout Australia.³³ The AES cites its engagement with the corporate sector as a major component of its success which currently contribute 19 percent of the AES funding, predominantly through the utilisation of the AES group training, talent management and sponsorship.³⁴

Another program operated by the AES is the School Based Traineeship (SBT) program. The AES is a registered Group Training Organisation (GTO) in NSW, QLD, NT & WA and through this operates the SBT program. The program places Aboriginal students, while completing years 11 and 12, into a training program with an employer with a view to permanent employment after completing their studies.³⁵

At end June 2007, 80 students had been placed into the program throughout Australia.³⁶ As the program has only been operating for three years, it is too early to claim sustainable employment outcomes, but indications are that by providing training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal students, not only encourages completion of high school, but contributes to self-esteem and career aspirations that only sustainable employment options can bring.

Overview

The range of Commonwealth government programs demonstrates government's commitment to addressing the inequalities and disadvantage faced by Indigenous people in relation to employment. Many of the programs focus on engaging the private sector in developing solutions to create sustainable employment for Aboriginal people, including training and vocational education.

A number of oversights are however evident in some of the programs discussed. Many tend to focus on the 'deficiencies' of Aboriginal job seekers and equivalent attention needs to be paid to identifying and responding to employer- and industry-related 'deficiencies' or barriers that inhibit Aboriginal employment.

Also of concern is the relative lack of evaluative data assessing the success of these programs long-term. The key source of available information appeared to be a review of Indigenous employment programs by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. This suggests that since the introduction of a competitive employment services market, namely Job Network, there appears to have been some improvement in assisting Indigenous job seekers enter the Australian labour market:

Patchy as it is, evidence suggests that a mix of on-the-job work experience, achieved through wage subsidies or brokered placements, combined with other appropriate support, such as mentoring and training, offers the most successful approach to achieving labour market employment outcomes for Indigenous job seekers.³⁷

Having said this, the report notes that taken collectively, these policies, programs and approaches have not achieved a state of Indigenous wellbeing over which Australia

³³ Aboriginal Employment Strategy, *Annual Report 2007*, AES, Sydney, p.7.

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ *ibid*, p.19.

³⁶ *ibid*., p.24

³⁷ Dockery, A.M. & Milsom, N. *A review of Indigenous employment programs*, p.9.

as a nation can be satisfied.³⁸ This finding, in company with this literature review's finding there is limited evaluative data available, point to the need for more work on evaluating the success of these programs long-term. Any evaluation of programs needs to include consultation with all stakeholders, especially Aboriginal stakeholders, to better understand the impact of the programs.

2.4 Public Sector

A desktop examination of public sector websites reveals all Australian governments including most major state and federal government departments have Indigenous employment policies. Some include an employment action plan establishing defined approaches and targets. Others consist of statements acknowledging Indigenous disadvantage and commitments to improve Aboriginal employment approaches and outcomes.

The public sector is the largest employer of people and so also the largest employer of Aboriginal people throughout Australia. For many years, governments have been cognizant that, as large employers and public entities, one of their key responsibilities is to pro-actively address Indigenous employment and model as well as advocate leading practice. With this in mind, it is not surprising that traditionally the public sector has been the innovator in developing employment strategies including creating Identified Indigenous positions³⁹ to increase the Indigenous employment profile and building mandatory reporting requirements into action plans.

A brief description of public sector initiatives is provided below, with examples being drawn from the Australian Commonwealth Public Service, Victoria and Western Australia. Strategies from these particular governments were chosen on the basis that some analysis and evaluation of Indigenous employment strategies had been undertaken and was available. Additionally, it was considered appropriate and sufficient to include examples from a selection of federal and state government bodies.

Australian Commonwealth Public Service

The *2003-2004 State of the Service* report (a report into the Australian public sector) revealed 'a trend of declining recruitment levels and falling retention rates for Indigenous employment'.⁴⁰ In response, the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) developed the Employment and Capability Strategy. The strategy aims to stabilise the number of Indigenous people employed by the public service, as well as better use the existing and potential skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

³⁸ *ibid*, p.10

³⁹ *Indigenous Identified or Designated positions* require specific skills and knowledge of the Indigenous community. Identified and Designated positions originated in the state and commonwealth public sectors several decades ago, and have more recently been adopted by the private sector. Positions designated as Indigenous entry level positions such as cadetships and traineeships are open to Indigenous applicants only and are known as special measures provisions under the *Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act 1975*. Identified positions are jobs which require specific Indigenous knowledge and/or experience. These jobs are open to anyone, including non-Indigenous people, but relevant and specific experience must be demonstrated.

⁴⁰ Australian Public Service Commission, *State of the Service Report 2003-04*, State of the Service Series, APSC, Canberra.

As there is an increasing demand for graduate qualifications by the Australian Public Service (APS), one of the elements of the strategy is to focus on attracting Indigenous graduates by:

- Transferring responsibility to the APSC to conduct annual bulk recruitment exercises under the National Indigenous Cadetship Project connecting Indigenous recruits to employers,
- Promoting the Australian Public Service as an employer of choice, and
- Identifying and promoting existing pathways for Indigenous employees, including conducting further research into same.

According to the most recent *State of the Service* report the decline in the level of Indigenous employees has ceased, with a slight increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed. This slight increase, the report notes, is a result of the employment strategy. Currently, the proportional figure of Indigenous employment is 2.1% for the APS.⁴¹

Example

One initiative to enhance retention of Aboriginal employees in Australian public sector agencies is the development of the *Indigenous Career Trek*⁴². The program aims to support all Aboriginal and Torres Strait employees by providing a range of learning and development opportunities to enhance their professional development. The program delivers workshops that help employees assess their strengths, plan career moves, address selection criteria and practice interview skills in a safe environment. The program also offers scholarships to build leadership capacity.

Victoria

In 2005, Aboriginal people accounted for approximately 0.65 percent of Victorian public sector (VPS) employees. Most Indigenous people employed in the VPS are located in regional areas, predominantly in the areas of human services, justice, natural resources and environment.⁴³

Wur-cum barra is the Victorian Government's Indigenous employment strategy for the public sector. *Wur-cum barra* encourages individual agencies to develop and implement their own action plans. A discussion paper examining Indigenous employment in the VPS provides some factors identified by individual public sector agencies cited as critical to successful employment outcomes for Aboriginal people. These strategies and associated factors are listed in Table 2.4 below:

⁴¹ Australian Public Service Commission, *State of the Service Report 2006-07*, State of the Service Series, APSC, Canberra, p.82.

⁴² Australian Public Service Commission, *Indigenous Career Trek* www.apsc.gov.au/indigenous/careertrek.htm Accessed 17 October 2008.

⁴³ Rotumah, P. et al, *Achieving Equality and Optimal Participation: Indigenous Employees in the Victorian Public Sector – Discussion Paper*, Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, 28 January, 2005.

Table 2.4

Agency and Strategy	Success Factors
Victorian Legal Aid – <i>Summer and Articled Clerkship Program</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with students about their requirements and interest • Formal mentoring • Cross cultural awareness training for mentors
Department of Justice – <i>Koori Tertiary Scholarship Program</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careful consideration and planning of program criteria, logistics and students support • Production of culturally appropriate promotion material • Consultation with Aboriginal community
Parks Victoria – <i>Indigenous Recruitment Program</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong communication links with local communities • Flexibility when locating and placing successful candidates • Regional Indigenous Team Leaders
Echuca Regional Health – <i>Cultural Diversity Project</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior management leadership and support • Seeking feedback from staff • Consultation with Koori Liaison Officer, other Koori staff, and community representatives • Inclusion of the Action Plan within the organisation wide quality plan

The discussion paper makes a range of recommendations to build upon the success of *Wur-cum barra* including proposing that pathway to employment planning needs to commence school to encourage retention and completion rates; the development and implementation of accredited cross cultural training; full-time study leave to assist professional development and career progression; and, establishing a central Indigenous Employment Unit.

A Deakin University discussion paper on Indigenous employment in the VPS⁴⁴ suggests that Indigenous employment is progressing reasonably well. According to this paper, the proportion of total Indigenous employees, across all government public sectors, increased by 11.6 percent between 1976 and 2001, while the proportion of employment for the total population in this sector declined by 7.7 percent. The discussion paper also noted that, “conversely, Indigenous employment in the private sector declined, while that for the total population increased.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.2.

⁴⁵ *ibid*

Western Australia

The Western Australian Government employs over 110,000 people. The number of Aboriginal people employed in the WA public sector is approximately 2.2 percent. Aboriginal people comprise 2.9 percent of the Western Australian population.

The Western Australian public sector Indigenous Employment Strategy consists of four key result areas including:

- Creating and environment of cultural security and equitable employment outcomes;
- Utilising effective recruitment and induction practices;
- Providing career development opportunities; and
- Identifying and developing Indigenous leaders in the workforce.⁴⁶

Some example case studies provided in the strategy encourage individual agencies to consider innovative ways in which to increase their Aboriginal workforces.

Example - Department of Housing and Works

The Department of Housing and Works has employed an Aboriginal Career Development Officer. The role of this person is to assist in identifying career objectives and development needs for Indigenous employees and to facilitate the ongoing recruitment of Indigenous trainees to the organisation. A further aspect of the role is maintaining support networks for all Indigenous employees and particularly trainees. Employment of Indigenous Australians in the Department of Housing and Works is currently at 7.6% and across all levels.⁴⁷

The success of the Western Australia strategy is to be measured against the number of discrimination/harassment claims, cross cultural training, equity and permanency rates and an Indigenous Satisfaction survey, with results being reported annually to the Director of Equal Opportunity.

Overview

Australian public sector organisations have been at the forefront of developing Aboriginal employment opportunities for several decades, with much success in creating sustained career pathways for Aboriginal people. Public sector efforts have provided many Aboriginal people with a range of training and professional development opportunities, as well as flexible work practices. Most notable have been programs focused on professional development and career progression of Aboriginal employees.

That being said, it is difficult to obtain detailed information on outcomes of strategies implemented. Evaluative information appears to be limited to some analysis of leading practice (the Victorian Government's *Wur-cum barra* for example) and the publication of workforce profiles by some governments.

⁴⁶ Office of Equal Employment Opportunity, *Indigenous Employment in the WA Public Sector – Valuing the Difference*, Perth, 2002, p.6.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p.11.

2.5 Private Sector

A desktop analysis was undertaken of Australia's largest employers (as based on a list identified in *Business Review Weekly*)⁴⁸ to examine to what extent and how Indigenous employment was being addressed. This exercise revealed that the level of commitment to increasing Aboriginal employment varied greatly, with some corporations having Aboriginal employment strategies, some being accompanied by actions plans, and others making no reference to Aboriginal employment at all.

Some of the major corporations that do have Indigenous employment strategies are also signatories to the Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment program, with others having developed *Reconciliation Action Plans* in partnership with Reconciliation Australia.

Reconciliation Australia's (RA) *Reconciliation Action Plan* initiative is to encourage and support Australian organisations to develop individual reconciliation strategies. One aim of many of the RAPs is to increase and improve employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians. RA provides tools and support for organisations to develop action plans in order to articulate how they will go about achieving desired outcomes. The RAPs also are a public statement committing the organisation to address the undertakings made. As most of the RAPs have only been recently developed, most organisations have not undertaken a progress reports at this stage. According to RA:

A RAP formalises your contribution by encouraging you to identify clear actions and realistic targets, as well as lessons learnt. While each organisation shapes their own RAP, all plans include a creative blend of relationships, respect and opportunities.⁴⁹

The Reconciliation Australia initiative has been important in raising the profile of how individual organisations can progress reconciliation through the development of Reconciliation Action Plans. One of the main thrusts of a Reconciliation Action Plan is the development of Indigenous employment strategies, including monitoring and reporting commitments for those strategies. This kind of commitment may go some way to making quantitative data on the outcomes Aboriginal employment strategies more publicly available.

Some of the private sector employers to have developed an RAP are⁵⁰:

- Arnold Bloch Leibler – Lawyers and Advisers
- ANZ Bank
- Australian Financial Counselling and Credit Reform Association
- BHP Billiton
- Canberra Investment Corporation
- Credit Union Foundation of Australia

⁴⁸ Thomson, J. 'Recruiting trends at Australia's biggest employers', *Business Review Weekly*, 9 November, 2006.

⁴⁹ Reconciliation Australia, *What is a RAP?* <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/i-cms.isp?page=256> Accessed 29 August 2008.

⁵⁰ *ibid* <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/i-cms.isp?page=258>

- Foxtel
- National Rugby League and Australian Rugby League
- Qantas

A brief description of private sector initiatives is provided below, with examples in drawn from a range of sectors, in particular from the mining and banking sectors. Mining was chosen as this industry is one of the biggest employers of Aboriginal Australians (2.3 percent of staff are Indigenous). Additionally it has faced industry-specific legal imperatives, such as Native Title legislation which require negotiations with Traditional Owners, and business imperatives such as the lack of an available local skilled workforce. The finance and insurance sector was selected as this industry has been one of the smaller employers of Aboriginal Australians (0.3 percent of staff are Indigenous).

Mining Industry

The Australian mining industry is an example of a sector that has been able to increase and retain an Indigenous workforce through innovative diversity and human resource management practices. Employment strategies developed by some organisations in the mining industry and described below provide examples of innovative measures being developed to address lack of relevant skills and experience among local Aboriginal people, while also contributing to the overall wellbeing of communities.

In the mining sector there is a critical imperative to work with Aboriginal communities, arising from Indigenous traditional ownership of the land and mining companies needing to access that land. Mining companies view consultation and partnership with Aboriginal communities as not only legally necessary in some cases, but as also making good business sense. Having good relationships with Traditional Owners and other relevant local Indigenous groups means gaining access to the land and resources, as well as accessing local pools of labour - though in many locations the amount of 'job ready' people is poor. This large pool of unskilled and inexperienced labour has led the industry to develop strategies to remedy this.

A 2007 report examining Indigenous employment in the mining industry, conducted by the Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSR) at the University of Queensland and Rio Tinto, revealed that obstacles to employment included lack of education and relevant training, lack of exposure to mainstream workforce, geographical isolation, the challenges involved in balancing family and community obligations with the demands of full-time work, and poor health.⁵¹

Example – Zinifex Century Mine and Doomadgee CDEP

A partnership initiative between Zinifex Century Mine and the Doomadgee CDEP provides an example of a strategy to address high rates of poor education and skills levels including work experience in remote and regional areas. Here the CDEP participants undergo induction training and health checks and then go into a 'pool' that is used for short term labour. Participants in the scheme work one week on and one week off and receive a substantial 'top up' to their regular CDEP payment. The

⁵¹ Tiplady, T. & Barclay, M.A. *Indigenous Employment In the Australian Minerals Industry*, Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSR), University of Queensland, Brisbane, 2007.

pool of Indigenous labour sourced from Doomadgee CDEP varies between 12 and 25 people. In 2006 six participants transitioned to full-time permanent employment.⁵²

Example – Newmont Tanami’s Pre-Vocational Program

This program was developed by Newmont, several government departments and the Central Land Council⁵³. It recognised that traditional recruitment methods resulted in few local Indigenous people being employed. There was an extensive review of what worked and what didn’t, including an analysis of training courses, identifying community based impediments and consulting with on-site contractors to identify the base requisite skills required. The review resulted in the development and implementation of a pre-vocational program comprising:

- A collaborative approach with local Indigenous communities and relevant government departments,
- An assessment process undertaken by an experienced language, literacy and numeracy assessor using assessment materials specifically designed for Indigenous people,
- The course being delivered by trainers with extensive experience working with Indigenous students,
- Those successfully completing the course being offered long-term employment,
- Mentoring support being provided, and
- Central Land Council Employment Unit working with the program to ensure trainees return to work after R&R breaks at home.

The report also provides detailed information on the ‘hows and whys’ in relation to leading edge recruitment and retention of Aboriginal employees, developed in response to the observations of the Indigenous participants of the study.

Example – Argyle Mines

One of the retention strategies highlighted in the report is a mentoring program developed by Argyle Diamonds. At the time of the research, Argyle had more than 60 Indigenous trainees and apprentices. The mentors are available to all trainees and apprentices 24 hours a day, 7 days per week in recognition that problems that can affect performance at work often happen out of work hours. The program also involves the person’s family.

While many of the challenges facing the mining industry in relation to working with Aboriginal people and communities are particular to that industry, there are many shared issues that impact on other sectors of the corporate arena, such as access to job ready job seekers, providing solutions for Aboriginal employees to support the challenges involved with balancing family, community and work responsibilities and racism in the workplace.

⁵² *ibid*, p.33

⁵³ *ibid*, p.34

Finance and Insurance Sector

In the Finance and insurance sector, arguably Australian banks have been most visible with respect to considering Indigenous employment. They have to varying degrees developed strategies to address Indigenous employment and other aspects of Indigenous economic development. While some are unequivocal in their objective to increase their Indigenous employee levels, others are less explicit.

Example – NAB

NAB launched its Reconciliation Action Plan in December 2008.

The action plan aims to address areas of disadvantage through:

- Improved access to financial products and services to promote financial inclusion;
- Access to valuable, long-lasting and meaningful employment opportunities that are delivered in a sustainable way;
- Building a greater organisational understanding of and respect for Indigenous Australians, their culture and aspirations.

NAB has employed an Indigenous Employment Program manager to build and deliver on employment & training plans, and an Indigenous Affairs Manager to co-ordinate NAB's Indigenous initiatives across the organisation and delivery on the commitments in the RAP.

Among the specific employment related actions are a commitment to:

- Provide 20 School Based Traineeships per year – 40 trainees at any one time;
- Continue to support a full MBA scholarship Indigenous student at Melbourne Business School;
- Support 20 Indigenous tertiary & leadership scholarships each year;
- In 2009 support an additional 10 positions in other areas of NAB specifically for Indigenous employees;
- 'On the job' training experiences for Indigenous students either through traineeships and/or more comprehensive apprenticeship programs, graduates and cadetships.

Progress of the action plan is being monitored by an internal Steering Committee and an external Advisory Board comprising NAB senior executives and independent external members. Both groups will involve Indigenous employees or community members. Outcomes of the RAP will be published in annual reports.

NAB will also initiate a longitudinal study of outcomes for Indigenous people who participate in any of NAB's employment-based programs.⁵⁴

Example – ANZ

⁵⁴ www.nab.com.au/indigenous

According to ANZ's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), the organisation is committed to the recruitment of 100 Indigenous school-based trainees each year with at least 33% being offered full-time employment at the completion of training. ANZ also commits to developing and retaining Indigenous employees for leadership positions with a specified target of 20 Indigenous employees in management positions by December 2014. ANZ has a dedicated Indigenous Employment and Training Team which focuses on achieving these outcomes.

Progress is reported both internally via a RAP governance group to key stakeholders on a bi-monthly basis and externally via ANZ's Corporate Responsibility Report, quarterly reporting to the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations and periodical Reporting to Reconciliation Australia.

ANZ has established an Indigenous Network to raise Indigenous cultural awareness within ANZ. It is open to all ANZ staff who are interested in finding ways to better support our Indigenous employees and customers.⁵⁵

Example – Commonwealth Bank

According to its Reconciliation Action Plan, by early 2009 the Commonwealth Bank aims to establish two working pilot programs in Cairns and Tamworth, which will offer career pathways to Indigenous students in tertiary education through developing partnerships with tertiary education institutions.

The bank will also continue to participate in the Aboriginal Employment Strategy's School-Based Traineeship program aiming to have an intake of 40 students per year from 2009 to 2011.

Additionally, the bank will develop a comprehensive Indigenous Employment Strategy that aims to improve the recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees. One of the initial activities will be to develop a profile of existing Indigenous employees.

The progress of the RAP will be published on Reconciliations Australia's website.⁵⁶

Example – Westpac

Westpac's approach to Indigenous employment is multi-dimensional. It includes a decade of commitment to the Cape York region through a secondment program of Westpac employees since 2001. This program has contributed to solutions for greater financial self-sufficiency and economic independence. Westpac has facilitated the Indigenous Capital Assistance Scheme (ICAS) since 2004 providing loans to eligible Indigenous businesses as part of the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations Indigenous Employment Program. In addition Westpac sought to attract Indigenous employees through direct employment and through the School Based Trainee program in partnership with Aboriginal Employment Services. Independently the Westpac Foundation has also supported Indigenous organisations

⁵⁵ ANZ, *Reconciliation Action Plan* – see www.anz.com.au/aus/values/community/Reconciliation.asp. Accessed 29 August 2008. Updated on basis of additional information provided by ANZ 13 November 2008.

⁵⁶ Commonwealth Bank, *Reconciliation Action Plan* http://www.reconciliation.org.au/downloads/258/CBA_RAP.pdf. Accessed 20 July 2008. Updated on basis of additional information provided by Commonwealth Bank 13 November 2008.

like the Wunan Foundation and Boys from the Bush in Indigenous employment initiatives. Further information is available at

<http://www.westpac.com.au/internet/publish.nsf/Content/WIWCAN+Indigenous+issue>

⁵⁷

Other Industries

Below is a brief snapshot of some other strategies developed and implemented by other large private sector companies to increase the number of Aboriginal employees.

Example - Qantas

Qantas has had an Indigenous Employment Strategy in place since 1988. As at 2005 Qantas had approximately 38,000 employees, 93 per cent employed in Australia.⁵⁸ As at November 2007 Qantas employed 161 Indigenous people (or approximately 0.4 percent of workforce). In a speech to launch Qantas' Reconciliation Action Plan, Qantas CEO Geoff Dixon announced that by the end of 2008 Qantas hoped to have 360 Indigenous employees.⁵⁹ Qantas are currently in the process of recruiting 80 Indigenous employees to a range of positions, including the recruitment of a National Indigenous Employment Coordinator.

Example - Woolworths

Woolworths Limited is Australia's largest employer, employing approximately 180,000 people (including 18,000 in New Zealand).⁶⁰ While not indicating how many Indigenous employees are employed, the company's Responsibility Report highlights Woolworths's participation in the Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment Program, including the development of an Indigenous Employment Strategy in 2006/07. The report also describes a pilot program which placed eight Aboriginal employees in Canberra. The program focused on retention strategies to "ensure the needs of indigenous Australians within our business."⁶¹

An additional Woolworths' initiative is the Indigenous Stores program. This initiative aims to enable Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory to operate local retail outlets, while also aiming to improve the availability of fresh, nutritional food. The program is supported by the federal government as well as other major retailers.⁶²

Overview

Commendably there appears to be a trend for private sector organisations to increasingly participate in the Aboriginal employment programs, with many large organisations creating training programs, including participation of School Based Traineeship programs. There is a strong emphasis on the provision of training, with

⁵⁷ Westpac Information provided by Westpac 20 November 2008.

⁵⁸ Qantas Corporate Media, Media Release, *Qantas Reports Profit Before Tax of \$1,027.2 Million*, Sydney, 18 August, 2005

⁵⁹ Geoff Dixon (CEO Qantas), *Launch of Qantas Reconciliation Action Plan*, 29 November, 2007 <http://www.qantas.com.au/infodetail/about/employment/GeoffDixonRAPSpeech.pdf>

⁶⁰ Woolworths Limited, *Responsibility Report 2007- Workplace*, Woolworths, Sydney, p.11.

⁶¹ *ibid*, p.11

⁶² Woolworths Limited, *Corporate Responsibility Report 2007- Society*, Woolworths, Sydney, p.15.

many organisations engaging with Aboriginal organisations to provide training and mentoring. The mining sector is a notable example of an industry partnering with community and government to achieve positive outcomes for Aboriginal people. Other sectors have engaged with Commonwealth government programs in their efforts to support Aboriginal employment but have yet to develop long-term strategies or meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal organisations or communities.

While many private sector employers promote their commitment and activities related to Aboriginal employment and associated economic development projects, there is a significant absence of literature pertaining to outcomes of these initiatives. The lack of available data makes it difficult to assess the degree of progress and/or success of these strategies. It also makes it difficult to determine what works and what doesn't in relation to Indigenous employment initiatives in the private sector.

2.6 Key Findings

2.6.1 Contributions

Building momentum

This literature review highlights a general movement towards embracing Indigenous employment strategies, particularly in the private sector. Some companies have directed considerable resources to developing and implementing Aboriginal employment strategies. Many organisations have taken advantage of the federal government's Indigenous employment programs which provide wage subsidies and other forms of support such as access to training and mentoring.

Leading practice

The literature review also paints a picture of leading practice as it is currently understood and undertaken amongst public and private sector employers. Here, employers are seeking to:

- Engage with Aboriginal communities,
- Implement initiatives that contribute to the overall wellbeing of Aboriginal communities,
- Create pathways to work including transitions from training to workplaces and pre-employment training, and
- Provide some kinds of development and mentoring opportunities.

2.6.2 Limitations

This review of key literature has also revealed a number of limitations, as outlined below.

Lack of Indigenous Voices

The key oversight in the available literature is the scarcity of Indigenous voices in relation to employment strategies and outcomes. Although many of the strategies purport to have engaged with Indigenous people and communities during development, there is little evidence of this occurring. This is significant, given leading diversity practice indicates successful initiatives are developed and implemented on the back of consultation with individuals from the very groups they seek to engage. It is of particular importance in relation to Indigenous employment specifically, given growing recognition of the need to ensure self-determination.

The findings demonstrate the importance of this project, including its leading edge nature. In seeking to capture Indigenous Australians' views on, and experiences of, employment in the private sector, this project represents a genuine and real step forward in hearing what Aboriginal Australians have to say about Indigenous employment strategies.

Descriptive Versus Evaluative

Also of concern is that much of the literature focuses on 'high level' descriptions of employer initiatives that rarely demonstrate the impact of these initiatives on the engagement of Indigenous Australians, including positive employment outcomes (e.g. increased Indigenous workforce, increased retention of Indigenous workers, better career outcomes for Indigenous workers etc).

The literature review findings therefore alert us to the need for more detailed information on the impact of Indigenous employment initiatives, including positive employment outcomes. The review revealed not only a lack of data on the outcomes of employment strategies but also a lack of feedback from Indigenous employees and communities impacted by the strategies and programs. Consequently, there is a need not only to document outcomes from an employer perspective but also to include in the reporting opinions from Aboriginal employees' feedback. Additionally, public commitment and the initial development of Indigenous employment strategies need to be followed up with detailed action plans, including accountability measures such as monitoring and reporting.

Public Commitment Versus Organisational Change

The literature review also suggests many private sector employers are in early stages of externally-focused action, focusing on public statements of commitment and considering how to recruit Indigenous workers, rather than considering what substantive internal organisational changes need to be made to engage and retain Indigenous staff.

This finding points to the importance of employer guidance focusing on what internal organisational changes need to be made to effectively engage and retain Indigenous staff and how these can best be made.

Employers' Deficit Approach

What was also apparent from a review of the literature was an assumption on the part of many employers and government policy makers that Indigenous people lack the necessary skills and qualifications to successfully enter the labour market. This model prescribes a remedial approach to addressing the perceived inadequacies of Indigenous job seekers. It diminishes the responsibilities and attitudes of employers and policy makers, overlooking the fact that a range of leading practices increase a person's chances of accessing and remaining in employment, not just those that concentrate on the perceived deficits of the job seeker.

In particular, equivalent attention needs to be given to employer attitudes towards Aboriginal employment. Research has demonstrated that Indigenous employment is adversely affected by senior executives' negative attitudes about Indigenous peoples' level of education, skills, commitment, absenteeism and retention, and availability⁶³.

⁶³ Sammartino, A. 'The employer perspective of Indigenous employment', *Economic Papers*, Economic Society of Australia, Dec, 2002.

This research also found that very few organisations had explicit diversity management and Indigenous employment policies in place and there was little evidence organisations were seeking to tap into the Indigenous labour market. As the author notes:

The absence of such policies and practices...[and the] lack of activity, coupled with the poor perception of Indigenous labour, serves as a substantial barrier to greater employment of Indigenous Australians. In fact, the perception of Indigenous employees as underperforming and prone to absenteeism and flight may well be exacerbated by the ongoing inaction of Australian employers in terms of modifying their HRM [Human Resource Management] practices to better address any differentials needs of Indigenous employees.⁶⁴

Such findings are particularly powerful when considered in company with research that indicates some of the most common reasons for Indigenous Australians not seeking work include lack of available jobs and employer and employee attitudes⁶⁵.

Need to Share Leading Practice

This review suggested that, while information can be patchy, many Australian employers appear to be genuinely committed to improving and increasing Aboriginal employment outcomes. This commitment needs to be harnessed and experiences shared in order to continue to develop positive employment experiences for employers and Indigenous employees alike. If organisations, government and the private sector, are to benefit from each others experiences in relation to Indigenous employment strategies, then outcomes, both successes and failures, must be shared and built upon. There is a need therefore for employers and employees, from public and private sector organisations to come together to discuss and examine experiences of Indigenous employment.

To address the previously discussed limitations, the following recommendations are made.

Recommendation 1

When developing Indigenous employment strategies, employers authentically engage with Aboriginal communities, including undertaking thorough and genuine consultation and collaborative work arrangements with Aboriginal people so as to better develop and implement appropriate and sustainable training and employment outcomes.

Recommendation 2

Employers include monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanisms in their Indigenous employment strategies to provide an evidence-base in relation to the impact and outcomes of these strategies.

Recommendation 3

⁶⁴ *ibid*, p.7

⁶⁵ Hunter, B. & Gray, M. 'Family and social factors underlying the labour force status of Indigenous Australians', *Family Matters*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, No.62, Winter, 2002.

Employers develop Indigenous employment strategies that address the full range of factors adversely impacting upon Aboriginal Australians' ability to access and retain meaningful work, including addressing 'deficit' attitudes about Aboriginal employment and considering what internal organisational changes need to be made to effectively engage and retain Indigenous staff..

Recommendation 4

Employers commit to sharing outcomes, both positive and negative, of Indigenous employment strategies and initiatives with other employers and sectors to generate a body of leading practice.

3. National Consultations

The focus of this research was a series of national consultations with Aboriginal people and organisations undertaken to better understand people's employment experiences. Consultations were conducted in Sydney and the Illawarra region south of Sydney (NSW), Shepparton (Victoria), Townsville (Queensland), Perth (Western Australia) and Alice Springs (Northern Territory). Consultations consisted of focus groups and face to face interviews with Aboriginal people, in which they were asked to share their views on actions employer could take to improve employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in the private sector.

This section reports on the findings of these focus groups and interviews. A number of major themes emerged, which are described and discussed below under the two headings *Attraction* and *Retention*. Participants indicated that while some employers felt they had already 'done' what was being suggested, their experience was that there was often substantial room for improvement in day-to-day practice. Accordingly, the consultation findings provide rich guidance on how to build on and advance existing strategies and initiatives.

3.1 Attraction

Strategies to attract, recruit and select employees vary greatly among employers, depending on the size of the organisation, geographical location and the type and number of job opportunities available. The organisation's particular approach also depends on whether the employer is seeking to attract a group of potential trainees or someone with a specialist skill.

Aboriginal Australians participating in this research shared their experiences of attraction initiatives and their thoughts on how these could be improved. These experiences and thoughts fell into five key areas, these being:

- Advertising employment opportunities,
- Identified/Designated positions,
- Establishing targets,
- Attitudes towards working in particular industry sectors, and
- Developing pathways to employment.

3.1.1 Advertising Employment Opportunities

While most employers use traditional formal methods of advertising job opportunities (e.g. newspapers, internet job sites, Job Network services), the consultations revealed other non-traditional, less formal methods may generate better outcomes for both the employer and the job seeker. Formal methods, depending on the type of job and the geographical location of the job, were not considered as accessible as other forms of information dissemination in relation to work opportunities for Aboriginal people. Many people thought that in addition to mainstream methods of advertising, employers interested in employing Aboriginal people, especially businesses that are located near significant Aboriginal populations, could consider using additional, more culturally appropriate methods of advertising work opportunities.

Many participants said that 'word of mouth' or being directly referred to a job by a current employee is a very common way Aboriginal people come to find out about work opportunities. While these methods are informal, employers could take

advantage of this communication approach and develop ways to participate in the informal dissemination of information about work opportunities. Some participants suggested flyers or posters on community notice boards.

Participants from regional communities (e.g. Shepparton and Townsville) indicated it would be advantageous for employers to approach Aboriginal community representatives or organisations to discuss the best way to let potential candidates know more about employment opportunities. It was thought this method would be extremely beneficial when employers have multiple positions to fill or have upcoming training opportunities.

Participants also suggested that employers who are genuine in their attempts to employ Aboriginal people could come together to present an expo style jobs fair in communities, designed to specifically inform and attract a range of Aboriginal job seekers, not only school leavers.

Quite a few participants also suggested that employers should not only rely on training and recruitment organisations to identify Aboriginal trainees (e.g. Aboriginal Employment Strategy) - they should also arrange to have a social gathering like a barbeque or an information evening in the community so as to better inform people about the opportunities being offered.

“By coming down and having a sausage sizzle and having a chat with families about the job, it’s the best way of them getting to know us and us getting to know them.” (Participant, Townsville consultations)

This approach provides a less formal and intimidating means of information gathering for potential candidates, as well as an opportunity for the employer to develop a rapport with the community. In addition it allows the employer to develop an understanding of any issues that may need to be considered when employing a young person from that community.

Participants stressed the importance of community organisations, such as CDEPs and other Indigenous employment services, in assisting people to identify employment opportunities. Most participants suggested that local employers need to develop better relationships and networks with these organisations and not merely rely on non-Indigenous mainstream employment services when wanting to employ Aboriginal people. Several participants expressed concern that many mainstream Job Network services do not employ Aboriginal people and do not have an awareness of the cultural issues impacting many communities. They stressed that many mainstream Job Network services are only interested in fulfilling their quotas and meeting Key Performance Indicators.

“They’re (Job Network service) not interested in what I wanted to do, they just said take this job or you lose your dole.” (Participant, Shepparton consultations)

“All they (Job Network) are interested in is getting their bonus for putting someone in a job, doesn’t matter if it doesn’t last, cos they get the money anyway. At least here (the CDEP), they look after you once you get a job.” (Participant, Illawarra consultations)

Participants also suggested that employers need to develop closer relationship with the community more generally, not only when wanting to promote employment or training opportunities. It was suggested that employers could benefit from participating and supporting community activities such as NAIDOC week events and

sporting carnivals. By participating in and supporting community activities an employer can develop closer relationships with the community as well as identify ways in which the employer can assist in social and economic development activities, apart from employment.

Recommendation 5

Employers implement additional, more informal ways to promote employment and training opportunities such as through informal community gatherings and building closer affiliations with local Aboriginal community organisations.

Recommendation 6

Government encourages mainstream Job Network services to employ Aboriginal people and to ensure Job Network employees are educated about cultural issues impacting upon Aboriginal communities.

3.1.2 Identified/Designated Positions

The majority of participants agreed that employers should definitely consider specific Indigenous Identified positions and that their creation was important in establishing career pathways for Aboriginal people. Some participants thought that such positions demonstrated employers were genuine in their attempts to address Indigenous under-representation in the workforce, as well as acknowledging Aboriginal people's specific knowledge and experience, and what this can bring to an organisation. Many participants indicated the success of Aboriginal people in the public service and said that many of these people had started off in Identified positions. Indeed, some consultation participants reported they will only consider applying for Identified positions:

"I only go for Aboriginal designated positions. Then you know you have a chance." (Participant, Sydney consultations)

Having said this, some participants provided an additional cautionary note, stating Identified positions can 'lock' people into specific roles which are difficult to move out of or progress from.

It is important for employers to consider the creation of Indigenous Identified positions as an entry opportunity for Indigenous people. However, the creation of Identified entry positions need to be supported by career progression plans.

Recommendation 7

Employers introduce/continue using Identified positions, including traineeships, and consider identifying other areas within the organisation where such positions may be created. Employers monitor career progress over time of people in Identified positions to ensure they have access to meaningful career pathways.

3.1.3 Establishing Targets

Some employers have established targets in relation to Indigenous employment. Employment targets are often a major component of Action Plans and Aboriginal employment strategies. Most targets aim to achieve Aboriginal representation in the workforce as a reflection of the national or local Aboriginal population.

Participants agreed that setting of targets and associated strategies to achieve those targets is generally a good idea. However, they also expressed some concern that

employers may be at risk of developing positions that are not sustainable for the sake of reaching a target.

“Targets should not be the primary focus - it’s what underpins the focus of improving and increasing the Aboriginal workforce that is most important.” (Participant, Perth consultations)

Some participants also expressed concern that employers will ‘rest on their laurels’ if they achieve a target and fail to continue to develop opportunities for Aboriginal people once a target has been reached. Some people were concerned that because most employers have no accountability measures built into Aboriginal employment strategies, establishing targets and action plans becomes meaningless.

“For many employers it’s a feel good exercise, so they look as though they are doing the right thing.” (Participant, Perth consultations)

Recommendation 8

Employers establish Aboriginal employment targets across their organisation, including developing accountability measures that require transparent reporting on employment outcomes.

3.1.4 Attitudes towards Working in Particular Sectors

As NAB was the key research partner, DCA and NAB were interested in exploring potential and current Aboriginal Australians’ attitudes about working the banking sector.

A number of participants commented on the poor image banks have in the community. Banks are not considered by many people as a good place to work. Many young people participating in the consultations said they would never consider going to work for a bank – many saying that it would be a ‘shame’ job.⁶⁶ This potential ‘shame’ factor impacts on some job seekers, especially young job seekers, when considering work in particular sectors of the labour market.

When asked further about why it would be considered shameful to work in a bank, some of the participants said that they would feel uncomfortable wearing a bank uniform or that having a job as a teller means having to behave in a certain way when friends and relatives come in to the bank. Others thought that they might be the only Aboriginal person in the workplace and that this would make them feel ‘token’.

Another issue raised by participants in relation to working in a bank was that of the money handling. Some said that jobs where handling money is a key aspect, is something that Aboriginal people have not historically been trusted with.

“If it’s a job with money responsibilities they keep you out the back, away from sight.” (Participant, Sydney focus group)

For the banking sector to attract Aboriginal employees, these notions need to be overcome. One approach that may go some way to addressing this is by banks becoming more involved in community activities, as discussed above.

⁶⁶ Shame is that strongly negative sense of stepping outside one’s limits: to an outsider it might first be interpreted as shyness. (Referenced from Vallance, R. & Tchacos, E. *Research: A Cultural Bridge*, Paper presented at Australian Association of Research in Education, University of Notre Dame, Fremantle, 2001.)

There also needs to be awareness-building about the broad scope of career opportunities the banking sector can offer. Most people participating in the research thought of bank tellers when they thought of working for a bank. When asked to think about other areas of employment within a bank such as human resources, training, investment and other financial services, communications, information technology services and community-based projects, most participants said they had not thought of a career in banking as being that diverse. Some participants noted they would consider employment with a bank if opportunities in these areas were available.

What this discussion reveals is that the banking sector (and by implication other sectors too) needs to be more proactive in promoting a range of careers to Aboriginal people, as well as being innovative in creating training and other employment opportunities in all aspects of banking and financial services.

Recommendation 9

Various industry sectors (including the banking and finance sector) consider ways in which to promote to Aboriginal people a positive image of a career in their sector, including the diverse nature of employment opportunities.

Recommendation 10

Various industry sectors consult with Aboriginal communities in order to identify and better respond to Aboriginal Australians' attitudes towards working in these sectors.

3.1.5 Developing Pathways to Employment

A range of programs aim to create pathways for Indigenous students from school or TAFE to employment. These programs are usually partnership arrangements between local employers and/or government agencies that address the challenges facing young Aboriginal people leaving school and seeking employment. Such programs include school-based traineeships and scholarship programs.

Consultation participants agreed that these types of programs were important for young Aboriginal people, in that they provided employment opportunities as well as valuable training and work experience. Many participants noted that the key to addressing Aboriginal unemployment in the long term was to focus on young people and accordingly, they valued the contribution these programs could make in achieving this goal.

"If young people are given opportunities it can really change their futures, it's the kids we have to think about now." (Participant, Perth consultations)

School Based Traineeships

The School Based Traineeship (SBT) program delivered by the Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES) in partnership with the private sector is producing early indicators of positive employment outcomes for participating students.

One sector that has embraced the SBT program is the banking sector with approximately 180 students having participated in the program. Although it is too early to tell whether sustainable long-term employment outcomes are to be achieved from the program, the AES, participating students, and parents report that the program provides an opportunity for young Aboriginal people to gain valuable work experience, as well as to receive relevant training, mentoring and support from a range of professionals.

“The benefits of the program is that it provides a holistic approach to employment by a range of stakeholders playing a role in the student’s work experience.” (Participant, Perth consultations)

Participants thought the SBT program could be expanded to other sectors of the labour market such as tourism, health and retail. All participants with experience or knowledge of the SBT program agreed that it is one of the most innovative and valuable programs available, believing it will make a positive impact on the employment prospects of the students taking part.

“The kids learn skills that are transferable. Skills that they take with them wherever they find work.” (Participant, Perth consultations)

Although there are some issues with retention with some participants of the program, the AES reports that overall the students have adapted well to the workplace and most continue to do well with their studies at school. The National Co-ordinator of the program reports that the students participating in the program appear to have improved in their studies, believing this is because students have the incentive of gaining ‘real’ employment when they complete the studies.

Several participants suggested that employment programs similar to the School Based Traineeship program need to be developed that address the employment barriers facing older Aboriginal job seekers. Participants at the Sydney workshop for example suggested that older Aboriginal women, especially those women living in rural and regional areas women would benefit greatly from similar training schemes.

“A lot of women have a lot of experience and skills, but because they been raising their families haven’t been working for a while. Working in a bank would be good way to get back into the workforce.” (Participant, Sydney consultations)

Another participant offered:

“Be great if training opportunities were available for older people, it’d give them a second chance. Some people just give up after a while you know, cos no-one will give them a chance.” (Participant, Sydney consultation)

Recommendation 11

Employers across all industry sectors implement School Based Traineeship programs and, where these programs are already underway, consider extending them.

Recommendation 12

Employers currently participating in the School Based Traineeship program provide training and work experience in a broader range of business areas such as in Human Resources, Information Technology, and Financial Planning and so on.

Recommendation 13

Employers develop employment training programs similar to the School Based Traineeship program targeting older Aboriginal people.

Scholarship Program

The National Indigenous Cadetship Project is a program that links full-time students undertaking a diploma, advanced certificate or a first degree, with employers who can provide workplace experience and ongoing employment once the person’s studies

have been completed. The program provides paid work placements for 12 weeks for each year of the cadetship to support cadets with a living allowance and study-related costs, as well as providing the employer with off-set costs for administration.

Building on this program, several participants thought that employers, especially large private sector employers, could play a more active role in supporting university students by providing work experience, summer placements and specific Indigenous graduate positions. While many organisations do offer such opportunities, participants thought that more could be done to support Indigenous students and graduates.

Recommendation 14

Employers from across all industry sectors develop Indigenous Scholarship programs to facilitate work experience and career development for Indigenous university students.

3.2 Retention

Retention of valued employees is a significant issue for organisations, particularly in a business context marked by skills shortages. Like all workers, the reasons Aboriginal workers leave their jobs are many and varied. However much of the literature tends to apply a deficit model that attributes turnover to the employee rather than considering the role the employer may have played. Experiences shared by participants in the national consultations reflected this, indicating employers could do much to better invest in their Aboriginal staff and thus maximize retention rates. In particular, participants indicated the following key areas could be improved upon:

- Mentoring schemes including professional and cultural mentoring and buddy systems,
- Racism in the workplace,
- Cultural awareness education,
- Wage subsidies,
- Career development and progression, and
- Flexible work practices.

Recommendation 15

Employers conduct exit interviews with departing Aboriginal staff to identify what workplace factors are contributing to staff turnover and what actions can be taken to improve retention rates.

3.2.1 Mentoring

Mentoring was raised throughout the consultations as a critical element in the retention of Aboriginal people in the workforce. Most people indicated that mentoring was particularly advantageous for young Aboriginal people entering the workforce for the first time. Participants also noted that mentoring played an important role in supporting career development and progression.

Participants discussed a range of mentoring approaches that could be considered by employers. Some types of mentoring programs are currently offered by a number of employers and where this was the case participants were able to provide feedback on the effectiveness of these.

Professional Mentoring

Professional mentoring is the provision of professional support and advice to the mentoree by someone in the workplace or within the industry. It is provided by someone with relevant professional experience, as well as management experience, but should not be the person's direct manager. The professional mentor provides counseling and support for the person's professional development and other work-related issues that may arise.

Aboriginal people participating in the research, employed as recruiters and providers of training, agreed that mentoring is a crucial factor towards successful employment outcomes for Aboriginal employees. They asserted that for many Aboriginal people there is not a large pool of available role models in relation to career development that they can draw upon. Participants said mentoring and other professional and personal supports were a valuable and inspirational resource for the person entering a workforce or profession as many participants did not have parents, grandparents, siblings, other family members, neighbours or access to other social networks with sufficient depth of knowledge and experience of professional and personal development through work.

Participants expressed concerns that employers often provided mentoring on an ad hoc basis and did not appear to recognise the importance of providing participants with training on effective mentoring. One participant suggested that mentors should be required to undertake an accredited course in mentoring that includes aspects of counseling and conflict resolution skills. The participant also suggested that a formal agreement between the employer (or manager), the mentor and the employee needs to be established which defines the roles and responsibilities of each party.

“By developing a really meaningful mentoring program the organisation could become a leader in the field, which would go a long way in attracting quality Aboriginal candidates.” (Participant, Perth Consultations)

Another issue raised in relation to mentoring was that most employers do not attach adequate funding or other resources to mentoring programs. Participants stated that mentoring programs need to be considered just as necessary as other forms of training provided. They also noted that mentoring needs to be supported by all levels of management so that it becomes a successful tool in the retention of Aboriginal employees.

“Employers need to commit to providing mentoring. They need to ensure the right resources are available as well being supported from the top down.” (Participant, Perth Consultations)

One Indigenous recruitment manager said employers could consider engaging mentors through specialist recruitment consultancies who have an understanding of the needs of employers and Aboriginal employees. An example of this is the way the Aboriginal Employment Strategy supports participants of the School Based Trainees, as well as providing support and advice to the employer.

Reiterating this position, another participant highlighted the important role that some organisations (e.g. CDEPs and similar Aboriginal employment organisations) play in mentoring Aboriginal people in the workplace and suggested that employers could think of developing closer ties with these organisations.

The Indigenous Employment Coordinator from Rio Tinto cited the mentoring approach that is employed for Aboriginal people working at Rio Tinto's (and affiliated companies) mining sites throughout Australia. Rio Tinto has a small team of Aboriginal people that are responsible for providing mentoring to Aboriginal employees and who visit employees monthly. In addition to Aboriginal mentors visiting, there are also mentors appointed at every mine site. The mentors work closely with the person, as well as their family (if required), to ensure that if any issues arise that may jeopardise the person's employment, they can be addressed quickly and culturally appropriately to assist in the retention of the employee.

Recommendation 16

Employers implement formal professional mentoring schemes that are adequately resourced, including ensuring participants are provided with culturally responsive training on effective mentoring

Cultural Mentoring

Cultural mentoring entails having a mentor from the Aboriginal community who is a role model for the employee. The person, generally an Elder or a Respected Person, is available for the employee to talk with and discuss issues that may arise in the workplace or that are happening in their personal life that may impact on the person's employment. This type of mentoring recognises there are some issues the employee feels more comfortable discussing with someone from their community and some issues the employee feels they cannot discuss in the first instance with their professional mentor or manager. For example, issues relating to interactions with people in the workplace or how to address conflicts between family and cultural responsibilities and employment responsibilities.

Participants agreed that the cultural mentor needs to be able to have access to the employer and the professional mentor to discuss any issues if required. They also agreed that the role of cultural mentor should not be marginalised and their role needs to be given the same respect and status of the professional mentor.

Many of the participants said that cultural mentoring for young people currently exists in informal ways in most communities. Participants thought that young people in the workforce could benefit from this role being formalised in some way, so as better support the person in their workplace relationships.

"Often young people are left to their own devices and don't receive a lot of support from the community. If this happens the young person is bound to fail. Support from the community is vital." (Participant, Perth consultations)

Another participant noted:

"Having someone in the community to talk with is essential. There are just some things you just can't talk with your boss about." (Participant, Shepparton consultations)

As with professional mentoring, cultural mentoring could also be provided by an Aboriginal community organisation, which may have access to more resources to better support the person in their employment. Many Aboriginal organisations with established relationships with employers may be better placed than others in the community to understand the issues that may arise in the workplace. Many Aboriginal organisations already provide this type of support, but the relationship between employers and the mentoring provider is not formalised, and according to some

participants, employees and employers could benefit from the role of cultural mentor being recognised as a critical element in achieving a successful employment outcome.

Recommendation 17

Employers implement formal cultural mentoring schemes in partnership with Aboriginal organisations.

Buddy System

Buddy systems provide new employees with someone in the workplace who takes on day-to-day responsibilities for the person's integration and acceptance into the workplace.

Some participants said that Aboriginal people, especially if they are the only Aboriginal person in the workplace, may feel isolated and find it difficult to make friends in the workplace. Others said this can be exacerbated by non-Indigenous people sometimes being unsure how to approach an Aboriginal person on a social level. A workplace buddy would be someone working directly with the person and who can help with day-to-day socialisation in the workplace, like having lunch with colleagues and being included in after work activities.

It is important to note that 'buddying' is not formal mentoring and those who become workplace buddies should not be expected to be responsible for training and employment issues. Having said this, participants did note that it was important professional mentors touch base with the buddy to see if there are concerns that may need to be addressed in a more formal way.

Recommendation 18

Employers establish a buddy system for all new Aboriginal employees to support initial social integration into the workplace.

3.2.2 Racism in the workplace

Experiences of racism in the workplace emerged as a major concern for most consultation participants. Most participants relayed experiences of racism in the workplace. These experiences ranged from overt instances of racism (e.g. name-calling) to more subtle systemic forms of racism (e.g. exclusionary practices). Participants said that racism is often a primary reason for leaving a job.

Participants throughout the consultations raised the issue of racism and discrimination in the workplace as something that needs immediate attention. They said many non-Aboriginal people have preconceived notions of what Aboriginal people are like and these notions negatively influence the way they interact with Aboriginal people.

Some participants said that preconceived negative stereotypes impact upon whether an employer will even consider an Aboriginal person for a job in the first place, let alone be proactive in seeking to attract Aboriginal employees. Some participants acknowledged that some employers probably have had negative experiences with Aboriginal people, but that it would only take one good experience to change their opinion.

Example

One participant told of his experiences of racism in one workplace, in which he worked for three years. He said he experienced racist barbs from his colleagues, including his manager on a regular basis. He said that the workplace, largely made up of men, had a culture of not complaining and not making trouble. After one particularly nasty incident he approached his manager to discuss the issue but was ignored and nothing was done about his complaint. He even approached the relevant union, of which he was a member, and they were also unable to assist in remedying the situation. The participant said he eventually left the job because he could no longer tolerate the racist attitudes and lack of management support.

This example indicates that some workplaces have an entrenched culture of ignoring and failing to address offensive (including unlawful) behaviour. While many workplaces have policies that indicate racist attitudes and offensive behaviours will not be tolerated and procedures for preventing and responding to such workplace behaviours, some Aboriginal people who have experienced racism in mainstream workplaces continue to be reluctant to consider employment where they feel they may experience racist behaviours.

“I used to work at [major retail organisation] on the checkout. Often the customers were really blatant about not wanting to be served by me, cos you know ... I was black. The manager would see what was going on but never said anything. Some of the other girls were also rude to me, she still didn’t do anything, so I just thought, I don’t need this, so I left.” (Participant, Shepparton consultations)

Managers, including Human Resource Managers, need to be mindful of how racism impacts on Aboriginal people. It would be beneficial for managers to receive regular Cultural Awareness training, as well as other people skills training such as conflict resolution training.

Recommendation 19

Employers conduct confidential employee attitude surveys to monitor levels of harassment, discrimination and exclusionary workplace behaviours.

Recommendation 20

Employers conduct regular harassment and discrimination workplace training to educate all managers and employees about their rights and responsibilities in relation to racism at work.

Recommendation 21

Employers consider linking managers’ remuneration to their ability to provide a harassment- and discrimination-free work environment for all staff.

3.2.3 Cultural Education

Many participants indicated that negative workplace issues often occur because non-Aboriginal managers and employees do not have a good understanding of Aboriginal culture. They noted that cultural education played an important part in preventing and eliminating racism in the workplace, as well as assisting staff to develop a better understanding of Aboriginal culture.

Nearly all participants expressed reservations about cultural awareness sessions commonly conducted in organisations. In particular, they noted that many cultural awareness courses only provide a basic understanding of Aboriginal culture and, problematically, are not usually delivered by an Aboriginal person (but rather a non-Indigenous person brought in to deliver 'diversity' training generally). Additionally, many participants thought most employers undertook cultural awareness training simply to 'tick a box' of the things that an organisation should be seen to be doing and that cultural awareness training was merely a formality and not afforded the positive and significant impact it could provide.

Participants unanimously agreed that Indigenous cultural awareness training needs to be delivered by an Indigenous person or organisation, and importantly, someone with local knowledge who is able to provide information about local Indigenous issues and concerns, not just a general overview. One participant from the Perth consultations noted that:

"The benefits of cultural education is that it can go some way towards eliminating stereotypes and therefore reduces discrimination, but it needs to be supported by management. There needs to be an organisational culture of understanding."

An example of such an approach is the course developed by TAFE NSW. TAFE NSW have developed an accredited Cultural Education course which can be delivered to organisations seeking to enhance their understanding of Aboriginal culture so as to be better employers of Aboriginal people. Although cultural awareness training has been delivered in a range of forms for the benefit of employers and their workers for some time, NSW TAFE recognised the need for an accredited Cultural Education course to be developed and adapted to the needs of employers in specific locations.⁶⁷

Recommendation 22

Employers implement accredited Cultural Education Courses for all new employees and comprehensive Cultural Education courses for all employees with responsibility for managing Aboriginal employees.

3.2.4 Wage Subsidies

A common concern among many of the participants was that some employers are only interested in employing Aboriginal people while generous wage subsidies are available. Many participants articulated a suspicion that once the subsidy period ends the employer will terminate the employment.

"Sometime an employer will only employ you because they get a subsidy from the government. Once that runs out you're finished."
(Participant, Sydney consultations)

"When the subsidy runs out the employer will find any excuse not to keep you – it's goodbye and good luck." (Participant, Sydney consultations)

Some participants suggested there be some kind of compulsion for employers to keep people on after a subsidy period comes to an end, especially if the person has proved themselves to be a good employee (e.g. good attendance record,

⁶⁷ Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate *Aboriginal Cultural Education*, NSW TAFE, Sydney, 2005.

demonstrated ability to learn required skills etc). Some participants suggested an agreement between the government (the funding suppliers) and employer be made in which the employer is required to retain the employee for a certain period of time after the subsidy period concludes. Participants suggested that if there is no good reason to cease the employment the employer should reimburse the government for the subsidy received. (Though it was acknowledged that any penalties imposed for not keeping a person on after the subsidy period ends may result in employers not considering employment in the first instance).

Recommendation 23

The Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) investigates employment outcomes for Indigenous people post-Indigenous wage subsidy program period, with a view to considering introducing greater incentives to retain Indigenous program participants over the longer term.

3.2.5 Career Development and Progression

Most participants indicated providing opportunities for career development and progression played an important part in retaining Aboriginal staff and that more opportunities need to be created for Aboriginal people in the workplace. Some participants attributed people leaving jobs to them not being offered opportunities for career development and promotion.

Participants suggested career development and progression opportunities could be improved by employers providing more on-the-job training opportunities and supporting suitable external studies by offering study leave and/or study allowance.

Some participants noted that many Aboriginal people are employed through initiatives that provide positions at entry level (or as a trainee) and they do not progress far beyond these lower grade positions. Participants also indicated that if a person is employed in an Aboriginal Identified/Designated role there is a risk the person may never progress from this position.

“I had a job with [private sector employer] but after two years was still doing the same stuff as I was when I started, I was bored, so I looked for another job that would pay more money and be a bit more interesting.” (Participant, Shepparton consultations)

To address these issues an organisation needs to work closely with the Aboriginal employee to develop clear career pathway strategies and assist the employee to gain the required training and experience needed to be competitive for higher positions.

Recommendation 24

Employers monitor career progress over time of Aboriginal staff, including in Identified positions, to ensure they have access to clear, meaningful and achievable career pathways and are provided with development opportunities that position them well for promotion.

3.2.6 Flexible Work Practices

Flexible work practices such as flexible working hours, part-time hours, job sharing, working from home and flexible leave options play a critical role in improving retention of all employees, including Aboriginal employees. As one participant noted:

“I’d consider going back to work if I could start at 10 and leave early enough to pick up the kids from school, but there aren’t that many jobs out there that will do this.” (Participant, Sydney consultations)

Many participants cited workplace inflexibility as a reason many Aboriginal people do not stay in employment. This was particularly pertinent for older female participants of the focus groups. Some participants indicated they would not consider private sector employment because of the perception of inflexible work hours and leave arrangements. Many cited the public sector as a preferred employer as they considered this sector more responsive to employees’ personal needs in relation to family and community responsibilities.

Example

A 21 year old Aboriginal woman had been working full-time for an insurance company for about 18 months. When her grandmother, who lived in far-west NSW, became gravely ill, the young woman and her family went to stay with her to care for her during her last days. The young woman informed her employer that she would need extended time off work, which was granted. She used up all her holiday and sick pay and thereafter, leave without pay. Grandmother was ill for six weeks before she passed. The funeral and family responsibilities after the funeral meant she had to take a further week off. She returned to work but shortly after her Aunt fell ill and she was required to take more time off work to visit and care for her Aunt. The employer did not grant further time off and her employment was terminated.

Recommendation 25

Employers develop and implement, in consultation with Indigenous employees, flexible work practices to better meet the specific work/life balance needs of Indigenous employees.

4. Future Research

In the course of undertaking this project it became apparent that understandings of Aboriginal employment would benefit from further research in a number of areas. These areas are outlined below. Importantly, the NAB and DCA suggest that any such research be predicated on thorough and genuine consultation process with Aboriginal stakeholders to ensure the presence of a distinct Aboriginal voice.

4.1 Evidence-Based Leading Practice

As indicated in the literature review there is very little detailed information available on outcomes of Aboriginal employment initiatives. Research examining quantitative (e.g. workforce representation rates, employee opinion/climate survey data 'cut' by Aboriginality) and qualitative (e.g. interviews and focus groups with Aboriginal people) outcomes of purported 'best practice' Aboriginal employment initiatives would generate evidence-based guidance on leading edge practices.

Recommendation 26

Conduct research that examines quantitative and qualitative outcomes of purported 'best practice' Aboriginal employment initiatives to generate evidence-based guidance on leading edge practices.

4.2 Leading Benchmarks

The lack of evaluative data on the impact of Aboriginal employment initiatives had flow on consequences. It also means that benchmarking data in relation to Indigenous employment in the private sector is not currently available. The development of benchmarking data and setting of targets is critical to developing and obtaining clear objectives and results. Additionally, employers wanting to establish themselves as leading Indigenous employers need to be able to access benchmarks in order to make these claims.

Recommendation 27

Conduct research to generate leading benchmarks for Indigenous employment including for example:

- *Overall representation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in the workforce,*
- *Retention rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in the workforce,*
- *Promotion rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in the workforce, and*
- *Employee attitudes about workplace culture for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.*

4.3 Effective Community Engagement

Currently some organisations in some sectors are seeking to develop partnerships with Aboriginal communities to ensure productive employment outcomes for employers and Aboriginal people. However, these efforts appear to be largely concentrated in sectors that have a legal imperative to develop closer ties with Aboriginal people (e.g. the mining sector). There is considerable research examining

how mining companies have gone about engaging Aboriginal people⁶⁸. Perhaps such research could be examined to consider lessons learned both for industry sectors beyond the mining sector. What can be learned from those communities and organisations that have developed partnerships? How is the role of the private sector different from that of government initiatives operating in communities?

Findings from such research would encourage organisations to consider how they might go about developing closer relationships with Aboriginal communities. In turn, this would facilitate not only improved communication about upcoming training and employment opportunities but also provide opportunities for employers to participate and support local community based initiatives.

Recommendation 28

Conduct research into effective Aboriginal community engagement in the private sector for the purposes of improving Indigenous employment. Consider how lessons learned from the mining sector could be applicable to other industry sectors.

4.3 Racism in the Workplace

Given that participants in this research project indicated that racism and other forms of discriminatory behaviour continue to occur in Australian workplaces and is a critical impediment to retention, further research examining the economic and social impact of racism in the workplace is suggested.

Recommendation 29

Conduct research on the extent and impact of racism and other forms of discriminatory behaviours in specific sectors of the labour market.

4.4 Effective Cultural Education

Participants expressed a number of concerns in relation to the effectiveness of customary cultural education programs. This, in company with frequent experiences of racism in the workplace, suggest future research could usefully evaluate the effectiveness of cultural education programs with a view to identifying what factors are associated with effective programs.

⁶⁸ Banerjee, S. B. 'Whose land is it anyway? National interest, Indigenous stakeholders and colonial discourses: the case of the Jabiluka uranium mine', *Organization & Environment*, Vol.13, No.1, pp.3-38, 2000.

Howitt, R. *Rethinking Resource Management: Justice, Sustainability and Indigenous Peoples*, Routledge, New York, 2001.

Kapelus, P. 'Mining, corporate social responsibility and the "community"': The case of Rio Tinto, Richards Bay Minerals and the Mbonambi', *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol.39, No.3, pp. 275-296, 2002.

O'Faircheallaigh, C., & Corbett, T. 'Indigenous participation in environmental management of mining projects: The role of negotiated agreements', *Environmental Politics*, Vol.14, No.5, pp.629-647, 2005.

Tedesco, L., Fainstein, M., & Hogan, L.. *Indigenous People in Mining*. ABARE eReport 03.19. Australian Government Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources, Canberra, 2003.

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Recommendation 30

Conduct research to identify current scope and impact of available Aboriginal cultural awareness training courses.

4.5 Effective Mentoring

Much has been said about the benefits of mentoring for Aboriginal people in the workforce. However, there is little research available on what are the characteristics of successful professional mentoring programs for Aboriginal people. There is however a body of knowledge available on mentoring and its outcomes for women in the workforce that may provide further insights into the qualities required for the development of Aboriginal professional mentoring programs. It is recommended that further research be undertaken to identify leading edge examples of Indigenous mentoring as well as identify how other examples of mentoring may benefit Aboriginal people. This is particularly pertinent given concerns expressed by many participants about the inadequacy of mentoring approaches in many organisations.

Recommendation 31

Conduct research on current Indigenous mentoring programs to identify the elements of successful mentoring approaches with a view to developing sector specific professional development mentoring programs. Include an investigation of other mentoring and leadership programs, such as women in leadership programs, to identify approaches that may be useful in developing specific Indigenous mentoring programs.

5. Conclusion

This innovative research project aimed to facilitate Aboriginal employment outcomes by identifying what actions employers could take to better engage Aboriginal people in Australian private sector workplaces.

A literature review had revealed a conspicuous absence of information or guidance premised on Aboriginal Australians' experiences of and attitudes about employment – instead customary approaches tended to focus on employer perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal employment.

This project aimed to address this significant oversight by asking Aboriginal Australians about their experiences of and attitudes towards employment in the private sector labour market. Through focus groups and face to face interviews Aboriginal people were asked to provide their opinions and suggestions about strategies and practices that could improve employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in the private sector.

Overall, the findings indicated that while many employers have an awareness of the challenges facing Aboriginal people seeking secure employment and have developed and implemented strategies to address these, many Aboriginal Australians feel there is often substantial room for improvement in day-to-day practice.

In particular, participants indicated that employers need to better engage with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations, in order to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal people to implement strategies that address these and benefit all.

Additionally and more specifically the findings indicated that leading diversity employers could make improvements to the way:

- Employment opportunities were advertised,
- Identified/Designated positions established, supported and monitored,
- Employment targets were set and monitored,
- Employment opportunities in particular industry sectors were marketed,
- Pathways to employment were developed and implemented,
- Types of mentoring schemes were developed, resourced, and implemented,
- Racism in the workplace was prevented and managed,
- Cultural awareness education was conducted,
- Wage subsidy programs provided continuity of employment,
- Career development and progression opportunities were provided, and
- Workplace flexibility was understood and practiced.

On the basis of such participant feedback, and findings from the literature review, a number of employer- and research-focused recommendations were made.

Common to all recommendations was the need to be predicated on thorough and genuine consultation process with Aboriginal stakeholders.

The project partners acknowledge the valuable contribution of the Aboriginal people participating in the research. All participants were generous with their time and opinions, and enthusiastic to assist in the aims of the research project, namely to better understand the issues and challenges facing Aboriginal people in accessing sustainable employment, as well as providing advice on the steps that need to be taken to provide better employment outcomes.

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APPENDIX A

Australia's Biggest Employers

Air New Zealand	Rinker Group
Ancor	Rio Tinto
Ansell	SingTel Optus
ANZ Banking Group	Skilled Group
Australia Post	Sonic Healthcare
Australian Taxation Office	South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Area HS
BHP Billiton	Spotless Group
BlueScope Steel	Sydney South West Area Health Service
Boral	Sydney West Area Health Service
Brambles Industries	Symbion Health
Centrelink	Tabcorp
Coca-Cola Amatil	Telstra
Coles Myer	Tempo Services
Commonwealth Bank Group	Toll Holdings
Competitive Foods	Transfield Services
Downer EDI	United Group
Fletcher Building	Wesfarmers
Fonterra Co-op Group	Westpac Banking Corporation
Healthscope	Woolworths
Insurance Australia Group	WorleyParsons
Leighton Holdings	
National Australia Bank	
Orica	
Paul Ramsay Holdings	
Publishing & Broadcasting Ltd	
Qantas	
Queensland Health	
Queensland Rail	
RailCorp	
Ramsay Health Care	

APPENDIX B

EMPLOYER RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 1

When developing Indigenous employment strategies, employers authentically engage with Aboriginal communities, including undertaking thorough and genuine consultation and collaborative work arrangements with Aboriginal people so as to better develop and implement appropriate and sustainable training and employment outcomes.

Recommendation 2

Employers include monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms in their Indigenous employment strategies to provide an evidence-base in relation to the impact and outcomes of their Indigenous employment strategies.

Recommendation 3

Employers take actions to address the full range of factors adversely impacting upon Aboriginal Australians' ability to access and retain meaningful work. This should include addressing 'deficit' attitudes about Aboriginal employment and considering what internal organisational changes need to be made to effectively engage and retain Indigenous staff.

Recommendation 4

Employers commit to sharing outcomes, both positive and negative, of Indigenous employment strategies and initiatives with other employers and sectors to generate a body of leading practice.

EMPLOYER RECOMMENDATIONS: ATTRACTION

Recommendation 5

Employers implement additional, more informal ways to promote employment and training opportunities such as through informal community gatherings and building closer affiliations with local Aboriginal community organisations.

Recommendation 6

Government encourages mainstream Job Network services to employ Aboriginal people and to ensure Job Network employees are educated about cultural issues impacting upon Aboriginal communities.

Recommendation 7

Employers introduce/continue using Identified positions, including traineeships, and consider identifying other areas within the organisation where such positions may be created.

Recommendation 8

Employers establish Aboriginal employment targets across their organisation, including developing accountability measures that require transparent reporting on employment outcomes.

Recommendation 9

Various industry sectors consider ways in which to promote to Aboriginal people a positive image of a career in their sector, including the diverse nature of employment opportunities.

Recommendation 10

Various industry sectors consult with Aboriginal communities in order to identify and better respond to Aboriginal Australians' attitudes towards working in these sectors.

Recommendation 11

Employers across all industry sectors implement School Based Traineeship programs and, where these programs are already underway, consider extending them.

Recommendation 12

Employers currently participating in the School Based Traineeship program provide training and work experience in a broader range of business areas such as in Human Resources, Information Technology, and Financial Planning and so on.

Recommendation 13

Employers develop employment training programs similar to the School Based Traineeship program targeting older Aboriginal people.

Recommendation 14

Employers from across all industry sectors develop Indigenous Scholarship programs to facilitate work experience and career development for Indigenous university students

EMPLOYER RECOMMENDATIONS: RETENTION

Recommendation 15

Employers conduct exit interviews with departing Aboriginal staff to identify what workplace factors are contributing to staff turnover and what actions can be taken to improve retention rates.

Recommendation 16

Employers implement formal professional mentoring schemes that are adequately resourced, including ensuring participants are provided with culturally responsive training on effective mentoring

Recommendation 17

Employers implement formal cultural mentoring schemes in partnership with Aboriginal organisations.

Recommendation 18

Employers establish a buddy system for all new Aboriginal employees to support initial social integration into the workplace.

Recommendation 19

Employers conduct confidential employee attitude surveys to monitor levels of harassment, discrimination and exclusionary workplace behaviours.

Recommendation 20

Employers conduct regular harassment and discrimination workplace training to educate all managers and employees about their rights and responsibilities in relation to racism at work.

Recommendation 21

Employers consider linking managers' remuneration to their ability to provide a harassment- and discrimination-free work environment for all staff.

Recommendation 22

Employers implement accredited Cultural Education Courses for all new employees and comprehensive Cultural Education courses for all employees with responsibility for managing Aboriginal employees.

Recommendation 23

The Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) investigates employment outcomes for Indigenous people post-Indigenous wage subsidy program period, with a view to considering introducing greater incentives to retain Indigenous program participants over the longer term.

Recommendation 24

Employers monitor career progress over time of Aboriginal staff, including in Identified positions, to ensure they have access to clear, meaningful and achievable career pathways and are provided with development opportunities that position them well for promotion.

Recommendation 25

Employers develop and implement, in consultation with Indigenous employees, flexible work practices to better meet the specific work/life balance needs of Indigenous employees

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 26

Conduct research that examines quantitative and qualitative outcomes of purported 'best practice' Aboriginal employment initiatives to generate evidence-based guidance on leading edge practices.

Recommendation 27

Conduct research to generate leading benchmarks for Indigenous employment including for example:

- Overall representation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in the workforce,
- Retention rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in the workforce,
- Promotion rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in the workforce, and
- Employee attitudes about workplace culture for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

Recommendation 28

Effective Aboriginal community engagement in the private sector for the purposes of improving Indigenous employment be examined. Consider how lessons learned from the mining sector could be applicable to other industry sectors.

Recommendation 29

The extent and impact of racism and other forms of discriminatory behaviours in specific sectors of the labour market be examined.

Recommendation 30

The current scope and impact of available Aboriginal cultural awareness training courses be assessed.

Recommendation 31

The elements of successful Indigenous mentoring programs be identified.