



**SUBMISSION  
TO  
THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUAL  
OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION  
INQUIRY INTO  
RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION IN  
AUSTRALIA**

**From**

**THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT  
ISLANDER COMMISSION**

**NOVEMBER 1999**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2. EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE .....</b>	<b>10</b>
EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES .....	10
PRIMARY EDUCATION .....	11
SECONDARY AND POST COMPULSORY SECONDARY EDUCATION.....	12
DISTANCE EDUCATION AND SCHOOL OF THE AIR PROGRAMS .....	16
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET).....	17
RURAL AND REMOTE VET .....	17
COMMUNITY/ADULT EDUCATION .....	18
<b>3. BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE EDUCATION .....</b>	<b>21</b>
RELEVANCE OF EDUCATION .....	21
RACISM/DISCRIMINATION .....	23
BI-LINGUAL EDUCATION/ESL/LOTE .....	23
LACK OF INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES.....	24
LAW AND JUSTICE .....	26
MOBILITY OF FAMILIES.....	26
SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS .....	27
UNEMPLOYMENT.....	27
HEALTH.....	27
TEACHERS .....	28
ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY .....	29
<b>4. KEY ISSUES OF HUMAN RIGHTS .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>5. CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>6. REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>APPENDIX - RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES.....</b>	<b>39</b>

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ABS	Australian Bureau Of Statistics
ABSTUDY	Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme
AEP	An abbreviated acronym for NATSIEP (see below)
AGPS	Australian Government Publishing Service
ANU	Australian National University
ASSPA	Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness program
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
ATSIPTAC	Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Peoples Training Advisory Council
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CERD	Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CofA	Commonwealth of Australia
CROC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DETYA	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DSP	Disability Support Pension
ESL	English as a Second Language
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IT	Information Technology
LOTE	Languages Other Than English
MCATSIA	Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
NATSIEP	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy
NATSIS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey
NT	Northern Territory
NSW	New South Wales
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PES	Pensioner Education Supplement
QLD	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SPP	Sole Parent Pension
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TAS	Tasmania
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VIC	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

There is a strong commitment by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to advancing their educational outcomes. Indigenous communities recognise that education can improve their economic and social well-being.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have achieved many positive educational outcomes over the last few decades. Today, there are Indigenous judges, magistrates, lawyers, politicians, accountants, educators, university graduates and post-graduates in many disciplines.

This has been the result of greater commitments by Governments towards Indigenous education, and especially, tremendous efforts by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in overcoming their disadvantages and many barriers to get to this level.

However, there is still a lot to be done. Participation in education by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is still very low at all educational levels, in absolute terms, as well as in comparison with other Australians. The levels of literacy and numeracy are not adequate to equip many of them for the labour market. There is very limited involvement by parents and communities in the education of their children, at all levels, due to the lack of education of the parents themselves. A lack of exposure to a learning culture from early childhood also hinders the learning progress in later life.

The situation in rural and remote areas is worse than urban areas.

The general condition of the school facilities available to Indigenous people in rural and remote Australia is poor. There is an inadequate number of secondary schools and the distance education and school of the air programs seem to fail to meet the needs of Indigenous students.

The poor retention and attendance rates particularly in secondary and post-compulsory secondary schooling are reflected in poor achievements in literacy and numeracy.

The failure of the education system is seen to manifest itself in various ways, including, lack of relevance to Indigenous needs, culture, knowledge and experience; failure to effectively address the issues of racism and discrimination experienced by Indigenous students both in the school environment and in the job market; failure to effectively involve parents and communities in their children's education; and inadequate number of teachers with appropriate skills and cultural knowledge.

Indigenous students have developed an alternative pathway to education which helps to address some of their employment and other development as mature adults. However, this should not be seen as the optimum pathway for Indigenous education, given that a greater proportion of people who do not go down this path are left with poor literacy and numeracy skills, as well as deficits in other necessary skills and resources.

Such factors as poverty, poor housing, health, domestic violence and unemployment etc adversely affect educational outcomes.

This suggests a deep and systemic problem which requires a concerted approach by governments, communities and education providers. Unless the problems are addressed collectively, efforts to achieve sustainable improvements in education outcomes for Indigenous Australians will be ineffective. The scope of the shortcomings also suggests that a holistic approach is needed to address and remove the barriers identified in this report.

There have been instances where some human rights principles and requirements of State Education Acts have not been complied with. The low literacy level and poor attendance appear to breach the State Education Acts and various articles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially those articulating the right of every child to education and protection against discrimination.

### **Principles**

Acceptance of the following three principles would provide a basis for progress in Indigenous education:

- Community self-determination within the education system is integral to realising education outcomes for Indigenous children. This is necessary to ensure acceptance and involvement of Indigenous people in the education system;
- Respect for Indigenous knowledge and the recognition of the need for cultural maintenance should be apparent in education provided to Indigenous children. This would provide a foundation and make the education system relevant and appropriate; and
- Education needs should be seen in relation to, and integrated with, other requirements of the community such as health, housing and general community infrastructure. This will ensure the effectiveness of education strategies by taking into consideration the range of other factors impinging on educational participation and achievement.

### **Benchmarks**

Indigenous peoples' basic human rights with regard to education will be better attained when the aspirations and needs of Indigenous people are met at a level, as a minimum, in accordance with some basic human rights benchmarks.

These benchmarks should:

- Provide the overall framework for setting short to medium term goals and targets for Indigenous education;
- Help make the links between the inputs of resources by education systems and the outcomes for Indigenous people more transparent and
- Be the basis for developing better strategies to improve education outcomes.

In addition to benchmarks there would need to be a mechanism for involving key stakeholders, monitoring performance and identifying actions and strategies to

achieve better results. This could be achieved by establishing a national consultative body in a form that would be supported by government and community groups.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendation are placed within the context of accepting the need for a holistic and integrated approach to providing better education outcomes for Indigenous people.

### **ATSIC recommends:**

***1. Adoption of a small set of key guiding principles for Indigenous education planning and services.***

All the parties involved in the provision of education to Indigenous people should adopt the three principles outlined above. The principles should guide the development and implementation of strategies for improving Indigenous education outcomes.

***2. A national forum, funded by DETYA, to consider options for a national Indigenous education organisation.***

Such an organisation should enable direct access by Indigenous people to Ministers for Education and other decision makers, and allow Indigenous people greater input, at a national level, into decision making on matters affecting Indigenous education.

***3. Establishment of human rights benchmarks as a basis for monitoring and assessing the achievements of Indigenous education.***

Principles<sup>1</sup> identified in a major recent workshop on service delivery to Indigenous people could guide the development of benchmarks. These include:

- That benchmarking recognise the different elements of the education system, education providers, parents/communities and students;
- Benchmarks be relevant and understood by indigenous client groups so the educational system can be accountable to both Indigenous clients and the community as a whole;
- Indigenous people be involved in the setting of benchmarks and the evaluation phase.

***4. Increased research effort, in particular on:***

- ***The relationship between education outcomes and the various sectors including housing, health, infrastructure.*** This should form the basis for (i) resource and funding allocation at the Federal and State governments and (ii) how best can the integration of education with other deliverers of services be undertaken.

---

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 1998, *Towards A Benchmarking Framework for Service Delivery to Indigenous Australia*, Proceedings of the Benchmarking Workshop, 18-19 November 1998.

- ***Good practice in Indigenous rural and remote education.*** This research could also involve assessment of how these examples could be adapted or could inform efforts in State and Territory systems to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous children.
  
- 5. ***An inventory or audit of primary and secondary school facilities available to Indigenous people in rural and remote Australia be undertaken by DETYA and State Education departments and the results reported to MCATSIA and MCEETYA.***
  
- The inventory should report on the conditions of the physical facilities, such as school buildings and equipment, and on the availability, or lack, of infrastructure, including teachers, homework centres, appropriate literature, etc

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This is the submission by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education.

The submission, in addressing the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry<sup>2</sup>,

- discusses the experience of Indigenous students at the different levels of education
- identifies the barriers to effective education for Indigenous students; and
- discusses the key issues of Indigenous children's human rights.

There is a strong commitment by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to advancing their own educational outcomes. Indigenous communities recognise education can improve the economic and social well being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. This educational experience encompasses pre-school, primary school, secondary and post-secondary schooling, vocational education and training and higher education.

ATSIC endorses the sentiment expressed by Mr Francis Tapim, President of the National Secretariat of Torres Strait Islander Organisations, on the importance of education to Indigenous people.

“There is a strong connection between education, language and culture. Thus education is about a sense of Indigenous identity. Unless identity gains prominence alongside other educational issues, we are swamped, and our language and culture will die out. A sense of Indigenous identity must be integrated in the education system.

Education underpins our economic participation and contributes to our equality in mainstream society. It is bound up with how mainstream society understands and recognises us. It is bound up with being prepared to take our position in society on the basis of equity. It prepares us for jobs and therefore for economic development opportunities to lift us out of the poverty cycle and dependence on government assistance.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> namely:

- The availability and accessibility of both primary and secondary schooling;
- The quality of education services, including technological support services; and
- Whether the education available to children with disabilities, Indigenous children and children from diverse cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds complies with their human rights.

<sup>3</sup> Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board News, April 1999, *Education Strengthens Sense of Indigenous Identity*.



Education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have improved greatly in the last 20 years. However, there is still a huge job to be done to bring the level of education of Indigenous Australians to a satisfactory standard and to a comparative level with non-Indigenous Australians. Educational achievements by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to some extent is a reflection of the disadvantage experienced in terms of health, housing and levels of economic independence resulting from colonisation, dislocation and historical circumstances. There are also significant shortcomings within the education system that leads to this absolute and relative disparity such as lack of relevance, discrimination, lack of involvement in decision making by Indigenous parents and communities. Failure to effectively address poor outcomes for Indigenous people must be seen as a non-compliance with their basic human rights.

ATSIC identifies three Principles which should inform HREOC's analysis and assessment of education for Indigenous students in rural and remote areas:

- Community self-determination within the education system is integral to realising better education outcomes for Indigenous children;
- Respect for Indigenous knowledge and the recognition of the need for choice with regard to cultural maintenance should be apparent in the education provided to Indigenous children;
- Education needs should be seen in relation to, and integrated with, other requirements of the community such as health, housing and general community infrastructure.

The acceptance of these Principles is considered crucial as the basis for ensuring the ownership of the education system and processes by Indigenous people and for the achievement of better education outcomes for Indigenous people.

## **2. EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

There has been significant commitment by Australian Governments to more effectively provide education services to Indigenous children. This commitment has resulted in improvements as measured by a number of key indicators over the past two decades.

However there is great concern about the continuing disparity between the educational outcomes achieved by Indigenous Australians compared to non-Indigenous Australians:

- The retention rate for Indigenous students is 33 per cent compared to 75 per cent for all students.
- Only 5.5 per cent of the Indigenous school aged population are participating in years 11 and 12. The participation rate for non-Indigenous people is more than double the Indigenous rate.
- In 1996 the overall employment rate for Indigenous people was 30.8 per cent of Indigenous people of working age, compared to 55 per cent of the non-Indigenous population.<sup>4</sup> The unemployment rate at the time was 41.4% for Indigenous people as compared to 8.5% for all Australians.

In addition:

- Nearly half of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over had received no formal education.
- The year 10 certificate was the highest educational qualification achieved by almost 30 per cent of Indigenous people.
- Only one in six Indigenous people had obtained a qualification after leaving school.

Poor or inadequate education contributes directly to poor employment outcomes. With half the Indigenous population being less than 25 years of age there is a great need for effective Indigenous education programs simply to maintain the current situation. The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), ANU, has estimated that, under a worst case scenario, unemployment rates amongst Indigenous people could increase to 47 per cent by 2006.<sup>5</sup> Education is clearly an issue that needs to be addressed to relieve this situation.

### **Early Childhood Services**

In the NT Department of Education report, *Learning lessons – an independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, it is stated that “Given that for many Indigenous students, the school is the predominant and in some cases the only

---

<sup>4</sup> This excludes Indigenous employment associated with the Community Development Employment Projects Scheme.

<sup>5</sup> Taylor, J and Hurter, B. 1998 *The Job Still Ahead: Economic costs of continuing Indigenous employment disparity*, A Report for ATSIIC, Office of Public Affairs, ATSIIC.

site of literacy and numeracy practice, it is crucial that every effort is made to introduce the precursors to literacy and numeracy in all available environments”.

In Indigenous communities where there are multi-purpose child care centres, it was found that the pre-school children were given access to nutrition, family support, and exposed to a learning culture. In some cases, parents are also involved in the activities.

The review found that “children of parents involved in early literacy development are more confident learners with a greatly enhanced ability to take up reading and greater familiarity with classroom practices and expectations, by the time they are enrolled in primary schools.”

The report recommends that “new facilities for infants and toddlers should be designed with the aim of establishing multipurpose early childhood centres that offer infant health and other early childhood services.”

### **Primary Education**

Primary education provides the foundation for higher levels of education.

While participation of Indigenous children in primary education is generally considered to be relatively high, contradictory evidence is also available, particularly for the rural and remote areas. Also there is considerable doubt concerning the accuracy of the enrolment data used because of limited information available on school attendance. “Anecdotal evidence suggested that large groups of school aged students in some major centres did not attend school regularly; with overall attendance in some places being as low as 60-70%.”<sup>6</sup> A CAEPR study in Maningrida identified that “school attendance records show an average combined attendance for the hub and homeland centre schools of around 64%, but some weeks the attendance can drop as low as 20%”<sup>7</sup>.

If greater numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were to attend school it is unclear if the necessary facilities would be available in sufficient quantity and quality. For example, the review of education in Northern Territory ‘Learning lessons – An independent review of Indigenous education in Northern Territory’ reports:

- that approximately 80% of the facilities (those constructed prior to the 1990’s) “have not been designed with an appropriate level of acoustic treatment or with integrated disabled access...” In addition the upgrades and replacements of the communications and facilities infrastructure – grounds, toilets etc “are not being

---

<sup>6</sup> Starley, Owen and Harner Geoff, 1998 *ABSTUDY: An Investment for Tomorrow’s Employment – A Review of ABSTUDY for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission*, Commonwealth of Australia, Pg 45

<sup>7</sup> Schwab, R.G., 1998 *Educational ‘failure’ and educational ‘success’ in an Aboriginal community*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research Discussion Paper No. 161/98, ANU, Pg 5

undertaken as part of an overall strategy related to population growth or age of facility”<sup>8</sup>; and

- As estimated by the NT Public Accounts Committee (PAC) “if all enrolled students attended regularly, an additional \$5m would be required to meet their needs (PAC 1996:5) This leaves aside any estimate of the impact of eligible school age children who are not currently enrolled”<sup>9</sup>.

There is less ambiguity about the lower levels of achievement by Indigenous students in primary schools compared with non-Indigenous students. “Data derived from several studies on literacy and numeracy achievement in primary school for Australia show that approximately 45% of Indigenous students have significantly lower achievement<sup>10</sup> levels in these areas compared with 16% of other students”<sup>11</sup>. Yirara College, Alice Springs has as one of its objectives to provide a program of accelerated pre-secondary and secondary learning to enable students, drawn from traditional communities in rural and remote areas, access to mainstream secondary or TAFE programs. Of the 200 students who enter Yirara College, approximately 130 would enter the school with numeracy and literacy levels equivalent to those of an average five to seven year old non-Aboriginal child.

### **Secondary and Post Compulsory Secondary Education**

The low retention and attendance rates of Indigenous students at the post-compulsory secondary level have long been recognised as a significant problem. In addition low levels of achievement at the primary school level flows on into poor achievement at the secondary level.

Table 2.1 below compares apparent retention rates for Indigenous students and all Australian students for Years 10, 11 and 12 for the period 1989 to 1996 and clearly shows the level of Indigenous disadvantage.

**Table 2.1: Comparative Apparent Retention Rates to Years 10, 11 and 12 for Indigenous Students and All Australian Students, 1989 to 1996<sup>12</sup>**

<b>School Year</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Indigenous Students<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>All Australian Students</b>	<b>Retention Rate Gap</b>
Year 10 <sup>2</sup>	1989	70.1	97.1	27.0
	1990	71.7	98.2	26.5
	1991	78.7	98.8	20.1
	1992	83.0	99.1	16.1
	1993	78.5	98.3	19.8

<sup>8</sup> Northern Territory Department of Education, 1999, *Learning Lessons – An Independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory, Darwin* Pg 63

<sup>9</sup> Ibid Pg 65

<sup>10</sup> Refers to the proportion of Indigenous students with scores equal to one standard deviation below the mean score of other students.

<sup>11</sup> Starley, Owen and Hansen Geoff, 1998 *ABSTUDY: An Investment for Tomorrow's Employment – A Review of ABSTUDY for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission*, Commonwealth of Australia, Pg 45

<sup>12</sup> CofA 1994(b), p.58 and data provided by DEETYA. Extracted here from Starley and Hansen Pg 46

Year 11 <sup>3</sup>	1994	78.6	97.0	18.4
	1995	76.5	96.4	19.9
	1996	75.8	96.7	20.9
	1989	33.9	77.2	43.3
	1990	36.8	80.5	43.7
	1991	41.6	86.0	44.4
	1992	45.5	87.8	42.3
	1993	52.0	87.4	35.4
	1994	47.5	85.3	37.8
	1995	48.7	83.3	34.6
Year 12 <sup>4</sup>	1996	47.2	83.4	36.2
	1989	14.4	60.3	45.9
	1990	17.6	64.0	46.4
	1991	21.8	71.3	49.5
	1992	24.9	77.1	52.2
	1993	25.2	76.6	51.4
	1994	32.5	74.6	42.1
	1995	30.6	72.2	41.6
	1996	29.2	71.3	42.1

Notes: 1 States/Territories started collecting data on Indigenous students in different years. See below. Retention rates for NSW, Vic, Tas and the ACT are calculated from a Year 7 base. Rates for Qld, SA, WA, and the NT are calculated from a Year 8 base.

2 1989 to 1990 - 6 State; 1991 - 7 State; and from 1992 - 8 State.

3 1989 to 1991 - 6 State; 1992 - 7 State; and from 1992 - 8 State.

4 1989 - 3 State; 1990 to 1992 - 6 State; 1993 - 7 State; and from 1994 - 8 State.

The overall issue that emerges is the significant gap in retention between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and the worsening of this gap in later years.

This poor educational experience has a compounding effect on outcomes:

- an adverse flow-on effect to employment prospects is likely. An analysis of data from the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS) data<sup>13</sup> as well as by CAEPR showed there is a clear underlying trend for increased employment for people with increased educational attainment. More particularly, they found that people whose educational attainment was below Year 10 had reduced chances of employment.

<sup>13</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996, *1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey: Australia's Indigenous Youth*, Catalogue No. 4197.0, AGPS., Pg 70

- The decline in the trend of educational outcomes, is both in sharp contrast to the experience of non-Indigenous students and contrary to the equity principles that underpins NATSIEP goals and MCEETYA priorities.

Furthermore, the averaged data on retention rates hide much worse outcomes in some parts of Australia. For example, 1993 retention rates for Years 10, 11 and 12 in the Northern Territory were 41.2%, 22.2% and 10.3% respectively compared with New South Wales where the rates were 84.8%, 51.9% and 30.2%.<sup>14</sup>

The misleading impact of averaging also occurs in aggregate data for States and the Northern Territory where large regional variations exist. Comparative data on Indigenous youth in each ATSIC Region and the Torres Strait Area who, in 1994, did not complete Year 10 show non-completion rates varied greatly between the States and the NT and against the national average of 36.3% (ABS 1996(a), pp.25-26).<sup>15</sup> These contrasts are illustrated in Table 2.2 below where the Northern Territory had the worst rate for non-completion (52.8%) and Tasmania the best (10.8%). Intra State/NT variations were also substantial.

**Table 2.2: Indigenous Youth (Aged 15 to 24 Years) Who did not Complete Year 10, for Australia, States and the Northern Territory, 1994 (Showing Best and Worst Outcomes<sup>1</sup> by ATSIC Regions)<sup>16</sup>**

<b>Location (States/Territories and ATSIC Regions)</b>	<b>Population (15-24 Years) No.</b>	<b>Did Not Complete Year 10 %</b>
<b>Australia</b>	<b>62,500</b>	<b>36.3</b>
<b>NSW</b>	<b>16,400</b>	<b>45.2</b>
Bourke Region	1,500	63.4
Sydney Region	4,800	28.6
<b>Victoria</b>	<b>3,700</b>	<b>37.5</b>
Ballarat	2,200	36.9
Wangaratta	1,600	34.7
<b>Queensland</b>	<b>17,000</b>	<b>23.7</b>
Cooktown Region	1,300	46.0
Townsville Region	3,200	22.2
<b>South Australia</b>	<b>3,600</b>	<b>33.2</b>
Port Augusta	1,200	40.8
Adelaide	2,300	27.1

<sup>14</sup> CofA 1994(a), p.68. Extracted here from Starley and Hansen Pg 47

<sup>15</sup> Starley, Owen and Hansen Geoff, 1998 *ABSTUDY: An Investment for Tomorrow's Employment – A Review of ABSTUDY for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission*, Commonwealth of Australia Pg 47

<sup>16</sup> Adapted from ABS, 1994 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey: Australia's Indigenous Youth*, 1996, pp.25-26. Extracted here from Starley and Hansen Pg 48

<b>Western Australia</b>	<b>9,500</b>	<b>34.4</b>
Derby	900	38.4
Kalgoorlie	400	15.8
<b>Tasmania / Hobart Region</b>	<b>2,300</b>	<b>10.8</b>
<b>Northern Territory</b>	<b>9,600</b>	<b>52.8</b>
Aputulu	1,700	84.2
Darwin	1,500	21.9

Notes: <sup>1</sup> Data assessed by ABS as not reliable has been excluded.

-.

Relatively, there is abundant data available with regard to the retention and attendance rates of Indigenous secondary education students as compared to non-Indigenous students. However, what is generally less discussed is the lack of school facilities in rural and remote areas and the implication of this for access to secondary schooling.

Lack of secondary schools in rural and remote areas means that significant numbers of children generally either:

- have to leave their communities to pursue secondary schooling;
- Pursue secondary schooling through distance education schools; or
- Not pursue such education at all.

Dr Christine Nicholls, in appearing before the Senate Inquiry into Indigenous Education made just this point:

“...there was no high school at Lajamanu, despite the fact that the same 200 to 250 children could have attended a high school. There was in place a situation called post primary. Unfortunately, we were never given high school teachers to service the post primary area, so often they would have, through no fault of the internal arrangements of the school, a grade 2 or 3 teacher, trained for early primary or possibly even infants, to teach these kids when they got to so-called high school, which was post primary. That situation has improved a bit since then. Things called community education centres have been put in place, where some TAFE style courses are offered, but I believe those are being phased out at the moment.”<sup>17</sup>

The consequences for children having to travel and live vast distances away from their families and communities are stark:

“So, in order to pursue a secondary education, those kids would have to go at least 800 kilometres away to the nearest large centre. At one point in the late 1980s—from

---

<sup>17</sup> *Committee Hansard*, 27 July 1999, Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, Adelaide, p 96

about 1986 to 1989—I had about 100 kids away from Lajamanu. A fairly substantial number were at Yirara College at Alice Springs. It was a state school at that point but has since become a Lutheran college. Another fairly strong contingent went to Kormilda College in Darwin. Another strong contingent went to Slade school at Warwick in Queensland. And I gave testimony to the deaths in custody inquiry about the incredible homesickness felt by these children after a while. Having lived all their lives in an environment where all their kinfolk were around them, suddenly to be plucked out and sent 1,000 kilometres away was really too much for many of the kids, and so the attrition rate was great. And when they came back, there was a total dashing of hopes and aspirations, because there was nothing for them to do. At best they would have a primary trained teacher, teaching a bit more of primary school level to kids in groups of 30. Basically, the kids did not go on.”<sup>18</sup>

“Leaving home to attend school in a capital city or regional centre can be a traumatic experience for Indigenous children from both rural and remote locations. According to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody as many as 10,000 to 12,000 Indigenous students aged between 12 and 15 years living in remote communities do not attend education facilities because of a lack of post-primary schooling facilities within a reasonable distance of their home. The reluctance of Indigenous students to leave their home town is due to a lack of financial and emotional support in the cities”<sup>19</sup>.

### **Distance Education and School of the Air Programs**

These programs are available to students in their homes or in community locations. Students are not actively recruited to the School of the Air but are self-nominated. Distance education programs at the lower secondary school level also pre-suppose a level of education on the parts of the parents in order to supervise lessons, as well as housing or accommodation for students of a certain level with privacy and resources with which to study.

Indigenous students appear to be disadvantaged with respect to this program. Consultations with a small sample of communities show that:

- Aboriginal people often do not know about these programs or do not think it is for them; and
- Many parents perceive their lack of resources and skills, especially literacy and numeracy skills as barriers to their children’s participation in such programs and thus would be uncomfortable with having to participate in such programs without additional support.

Also housing and general living conditions are often not conducive to such programs given the overcrowding situation.

---

<sup>18</sup> *ibid* p.96

<sup>19</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, July 1996 *Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Indigenous Education*, ATSIIC Pg 21



## **Vocational Education and Training (VET)**

Currently, the VET sector and its principal component, TAFE, enrolls more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than any other post compulsory education provider. The numbers participating are increasing significantly year by year:

“The patterns of VET participation show a substantial increase in the involvement of Indigenous people in TAFE courses and other VET programs.... This increase has occurred across all age groups.

Indigenous VET participation rates are comparable with non-Indigenous VET participation rates in the 21 to 24 age group and are actually much higher for Indigenous people than for other Australians in the 16 to 17-year-old and 25 years and over cohorts. It is only amongst 18 to 20 year olds that the non-Indigenous VET participation rate greatly exceeds the VET Indigenous participation rate.”<sup>20</sup>

Undertaking VET training clearly improves employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – 80 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with VET qualifications are in the labour force whereas amongst those without a qualification, only 49 per cent are participating in the labour force. However, there is a disparity between the employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people completing VET compared to non-Indigenous people – in 1996 52 per cent of Indigenous VET graduates were in employment the year following their graduation compared to 71 per cent of non-Indigenous graduates. However, this situation should not downgrade the importance of VET.

## **Rural and Remote VET**

It is important to recognise the often unique problems that face Indigenous VET participants or potential participants:

- In 1994 64 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in rural areas lived more than 50 kilometres away from a TAFE.
- Thirty four per cent of Indigenous people live in urban areas, where access to education will tend to be comparatively easier, compared to 70 per cent for the population as a whole.
- Indigenous people comprise a higher proportion of those enrolled in VET in remote areas – 26 per cent of Indigenous people compared to 3 per cent for non-Indigenous people.

---

<sup>20</sup> Robinson, Chris and Bamblett, Lionel, 1998, *Making A Difference: The Impact of Australia's Indigenous Education and Training Policy*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research .

- Only 12 per cent of Indigenous VET students had completed Year 12 compared to 36 per cent of non-Indigenous students.<sup>21</sup>

VET can be successful in delivering education and training programs to Indigenous communities, particularly in remote communities. Batchelor Institute in the Northern Territory, like a number of independent Indigenous VET institutions, specialises in professional and para professional education and training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from remote communities. The Institute's Remote Area Tertiary Education system delivers programs to remote communities through a mix of on-campus and community based teaching. This enhances the learning process of Indigenous students who may find it difficult to be away from their communities for extended periods because of family and community responsibilities. The diversity of languages, educational levels and aspirations of students means that an institution such as the Batchelor Institute must deliver courses that are flexible in curriculum and delivery.

Batchelor Institute emphasises community driven curriculum development and teaching methods based on 'both ways' learning between students and teachers. This method is orientated towards individuals incorporating the traditional methods of imparting knowledge such as face-to-face contact, where learning is activity based and takes place in small groups using a team teaching approach.

Some colleges such as the Cairns College of Technical and Further Education are able to deliver programs such as Remote Area Teacher Education Program through community based tutors and interactive multi-media technology using computer aided learning packages. The use of computer aided learning has its advantages in that students are able to learn at their own pace and as a result student retention rates have increased. The main disadvantage of the computer aided learning is that the initial development of information technology packages is very time consuming and expensive. There is a need for further research on the impact of computer aided learning for remote Indigenous communities.

The promotion of VET for Indigenous people by ATSIC and in particular its support for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Training Advisory Council's (ATSIPTAC) Vet Strategy *Partners in a Learning Culture* should not be seen as the solution to Indigenous education problems. Both the academic education pathways and the VET pathways should be provided together and as a choice that the students could make rather than streaming them in any predetermined manner.

### **Community/Adult Education**

The age demographic of Indigenous people participating in education and training is very different to that of the wider Australian community. As a consequence Indigenous people are more likely to be participating in education at older ages and at lower levels than the non-Indigenous population.

---

<sup>21</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Training Advisory Council, February 1999, *Partners in a Learning Culture*, Australia's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1999-2003.

Many participants in post-school education and training and higher education, rather than being young school leavers, are mature age men and women with dependents. They often have low levels of formal schooling during childhood and adolescence and have pursued other means of obtaining the necessary levels of attainment to proceed to further training or higher education, or to obtain employment.

In the 1996 Census about 14 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25 and over were attending an educational institution compared to 8 percent of non-Indigenous people.

This suggests that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are in fact leading the way towards a community culture of lifelong learning. This has come about largely because Indigenous Australians are catching up on education and training opportunities, which have not been available to many due to past and present educational and economic disadvantages.

In communities and families where Indigenous adults are actively engaged in enhancing their skills and education attainment, young people may have an enhanced awareness of such opportunities and their value. Removing incentives to participate will curtail the potential benefits of mature age role models.

ATSIC considers it important that due attention be afforded to the adult community sector of the post-secondary training field. In particular Adult Community Education (ACE) fosters and provides a focus for life-long learning in communities across Australia. It is a significant source of training in Indigenous communities because of ACE relationships to life-long education and community development.

Recent changes to ABSTUDY are expected to adversely affect mature age students and have long term implications for the pursuit of education and training by this group.

In December 1998 the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs announced changes to ABSTUDY to come into effect on 1 January 2000, aligning ABSTUDY benefits to existing income support and entitlement schemes.

A study<sup>22</sup> commissioned by ATSIC found significant implications flowing from the changes, which are of concern. It also concluded that alternative programs would not act as a safety net for losers.

Changes to ABSTUDY will affect new mature age students most. Indigenous students on Sole Parents Pension (SPPs) and Disability Support Pensions (DSPs) will have reduced entitlements under the changes to ABSTUDY. Currently some pensioners are entitled to a PES payment of \$120 per fortnight as full time students or \$60 per fortnight as part time students. Sole Parents make up 58% and Disability Support Pensioners 42% of pensioners currently in receipt of maximum PES. Under the proposed changes to ABSTUDY, these SPPs and DSPs will lose \$60 per fortnight as

---

<sup>22</sup> Brabham, W., and Herry, J., 1999, *Analysis of the proposed changes to ABSTUDY on Indigenous students*, ATSIC.

full-time students and \$30 per fortnight as part-time students in Pensioner Education Supplement (PES).

The reduction in PES may provide an additional disincentive to these classes of pensioner, which may discourage them from pursuing educational and training opportunities.

### **3. BARRIERSTO EFFECTIVE EDUCATION**

ATSIC acknowledges that:

- there has been consistent recognition from people involved in education that there are enormous problems facing Indigenous education;
- various policies have been developed to address the need; and
- there have been some improvements in terms of retention rates and educational outcomes over a period of 30 years.

However, there are significant barriers to access and to effective learning by Indigenous children in both primary and secondary education. These barriers include the lack of relevance of the curriculum and education generally, racism and discrimination at all levels in society including the school environment and the classroom, poor health, lack of opportunity for the involvement of parents and community in school based delivery of education, levels of incarceration, unemployment and availability of suitable teachers. These exacerbate the already poor quality or lack of availability of the physical school environment.

The inherent failure of the education system to meet the needs of Indigenous education and the failure to address the identified barriers in an integrated way and within the overall framework of the key Principles identified earlier constitute a non-compliance of the basic human rights of Indigenous children.

#### **Relevance of Education**

As stated earlier Indigenous people have a strong commitment to advancing their education outcomes. However, as seen above, the education provision is not achieving the outcomes for Indigenous people that are more or less taken for granted by the non-Indigenous population.

Students, parents and communities have time and again identified that the schooling system is not relevant. When assessing the effectiveness of the school system in delivering better outcomes for Indigenous students, governments and education providers should consider as to what is perceived as relevant by Indigenous people.

There are several important aspects to this.

1. The Western education system needs to deliver outcomes to students and communities so that they are accomplished in skills that would allow them to operate in and interface with the mainstream white/dominant society in an equitable way. This can range from being able and skilled to get jobs, and not just in the low paid jobs, being able to undertake business to getting “competence in non-Aboriginal culture...[such as] understanding the cultural and bureaucratic

logic of the non-Aboriginal world, and is necessary for negotiating with the Government,...

Ms Davis (Regional Senior Lecturer and Campus Coordinator, Central Australian Campus, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education) addressed the same issue recently at the Senate Inquiry into Education:

“I watch the students who come to Batchelor and move into this realm, or who go from Yuendumu to the Top End to learn, who mix in different situations, and I think that is the intent, that they can move in and out of different cultural situations with confidence and with ease.”

2. It is important that in the education environment, community experience of students is acknowledged and seen as relevant to the on going development of individuals and community.

When learning a different kind of knowledge ie Western concepts and pedagogy, it is important that the traditional values and knowledge continue to be not only valued and respected but also drawn into all aspects of the education environment. For example, when teaching history from the perspective of white explorers (eg exploring up the sunshine coast of Queensland), students would normally get the dominant/white cultural view of the expedition. However, there are several diverse Indigenous communities along that very coast who would have had different perspectives and experiences of that same event. These perspectives are currently not valued or captured in any formal learning situation. Indigenous students loose a basic grounding/link that is relevant to their experiences and values.

Another example, cultural sensitivities often arise when Indigenous students who have recognised qualities and skills in their own culture are ignored by non-Indigenous educators. Senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women with proven Indigenous management skills having the wisdom to teach and pass on Indigenous cultures are not always recognised as being sufficiently skilled to teach these lessons. They are often expected to recreate their management styles to suit Western perceptions.

In addition, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report reiterated what numerous research and Government reports had suggested and that is, that cultural differences do impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learning processes. Historically, schools have failed to reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values and learning styles. Consequently, Indigenous students enter an educational institution where they and their parents have limited or no experience and if any experience, it is usually a negative one. Often the value systems and style of the institutions do not reflect the values of Aboriginal

---

<sup>23</sup> Schwab, R.G, 1998 *Educational 'failure' and educational 'success' in an Aboriginal community*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research Discussion Paper No. 161/98, ANU Pg 15

<sup>24</sup> *Committee Hansard*, 6 August 1999, *Inquiry into Indigenous Education: Public Hearing*, Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Reference Committee, Alice Springs p 240

and Torres Strait Islander societies and do not always take account of the home experience of Indigenous students. In addition, the language used in educational institutions is often not the everyday language of Indigenous students<sup>25</sup>.

Cultural differences are also evident in the links between culture and cognitive style, in the forms of culturally preferred knowledge, in cross-cultural communication and in culturally relevant teaching and learning strategies.

3. The inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and values, however, needs to be undertaken in a manner that is not seen or perceived to be an appropriation and assimilation of the very values and knowledge into the Western education system.

### **Racism/Discrimination**

Racism is a reality for Indigenous people and for Indigenous students. Racism in educational institutions is experienced in a number of ways including racial abuse and vilification, being treated as children at an educational institution when they are treated as adults in their homes, being spoken to in a domineering manner and being made to feel personally guilty for getting extra money and 'special' benefits. There is also an inherent structural or institutional racism perpetuated in many educational institutions. This characteristic is frequently ingrained in staff members so that they are unaware of its existence. Institutional racism is expressed in many ways; the most common form is the failure to acknowledge the presence of Indigenous students and their culture in the educational setting. In order to succeed students need to feel a sense of worth about their identities. Students who live in two cultures, where one is stigmatised as inferior by the dominant group, have great difficulty in resolving the conflict of loyalties which ensues and, as a result, their academic progress is placed at risk<sup>26</sup>.

### **Bi-lingual Education/ESL/LOTE**

In December 1998 the Northern Territory government announced a decision to phase out long established bilingual education programs for Aboriginal schooling of students over three years to be replaced with classes in English as a Second Language (ESL).

The ATSIC Board strongly supports bilingual education programs and condemns the Northern Territory Government's decision. The removal of the program is considered by the ATSIC Board as a denial of the right of Aboriginal people to equitable educational services and an attack on Aboriginal cultures.

By removing the bilingual education program, the NT Government is contravening the Indigenous Education Agreement entered into with the Commonwealth Government for the third triennium from 1997-1999. Under this agreement, the NT government has made a commitment to the progressive introduction of Indigenous language teaching in more schools over the current triennium.

---

<sup>25</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, July 1996 *Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Indigenous Education*, ATSIC Pg 12

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid* Pg 22

While the Northern Territory Government's initiative to provide improved ESL instruction is applauded given that Indigenous students learn English as a foreign language rather than as a second language, the decision to phase out bilingual education is seen by many Aboriginal communities as a direct attack on the relatively few remaining 'strong' Aboriginal languages.

It is considered that bilingual programs contain significant educational advantages for Indigenous persons whose first language is not English. A bilingual program implicitly recognises and respects the individual's culture and language. In this regard the school or educational setting becomes an agent of cultural continuity. The educational curriculum becomes more accessible to the student who is operating in a familiar language area and therefore feels more secure. The student's language identifies them with their language group and the use of their own language enhances their self-confidence and self-concepts that improves their educational prospects. ATSIC believes that the decision to phase out bilingual languages sends a message that Indigenous culture and traditions are not valued highly in the education system.

As Dr Christine Nicholls, a Senior Lecturer in Australian Studies at Flinders University, previously a teacher linguist and later principal of Lajamanu School, a large Warlpiri Aboriginal bilingual school in the Northern Territory has stated:

"Aboriginal controlled bilingual programs give Aboriginal parents and their extended families a real place in their children's education. Indigenous controlled bilingual education programs put Aboriginal teachers into Aboriginal classrooms as "real" teachers; assist the Aboriginalisation of schools, thereby acting as circuit-breakers to continuing welfare dependence; improve relations between community members and schools; increase school attendance; legitimate and strengthen Indigenous languages thereby raising the self-esteem of both adults and children."

Schools where bi-lingual education has strong local Aboriginal community support, the community should have the right to choose bi-lingual education as the most appropriate form of education for their children. This is just a reflection of the diversity of Indigenous communities and their different needs and views and helps to demonstrate one of the key underlying Principles of self determination and effective involvement of parents and communities in the education design and delivery.

### **Lack of Involvement of Parents and Communities**

The involvement of Indigenous parents in their children's education is one of the key ways in which the schooling system can be made more relevant to Indigenous communities. Parents promote student learning through encouragement, expending resources, imparting their own knowledge as to how the education system works and making decisions in regards to the education options that should be pursued.

Great self-determination and strength has been shown by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents who have taken the initiative to gain complete control of the education of their children. For example, parents who were in despair of their children gaining an effective education in existing government and church schools in the local region set up independent Indigenous schools. At present, there are around a dozen



independent Indigenous schools in the country. Independent schools strive to develop a total and unique education program that incorporates Indigenous languages, history, and pedagogy. The schools also reflect the Indigenous community's desire for self-determination in the education system. These schools have remained small and have encountered immense problems particularly in regards to registration, enrolment fluctuations and funding from the State and Territory Education Departments. Not surprisingly, these schools are always battling the possibility of closure.

It is recognised that there are also several state schools throughout the country that have a majority of Indigenous staff, including principals. These schools reflect community concerns more closely in their curriculum and teaching strategies. Other education initiatives have also been launched such as 'two way' schooling where there is an integration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge and values in the curriculum.<sup>27</sup>

However, these remain in the minority. Unfortunately, many Indigenous parents are hampered in their desire to aid and direct the schooling of their children by lack of experience, knowledge and resources.

According to the House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education, many parents, as a result of their own educational experiences, have mixed reactions to schools. If they failed at school they often see school as a waste of time and do not support their children in school. However, many parents want their children to achieve at school, but are reluctant to become involved themselves because schools often make few concessions to the issue of Aboriginality and parents feel uncomfortable and shy about going into the school as they tend to see teachers as 'figureheads' and consequently may find the school situation threatening.<sup>28</sup> Further, the extended family network is crucial to the nurturing role of students and kin members are often ignored in the school setting, which often assumes nuclear families to be the norm.

Attempts to facilitate involvement by Indigenous parents in their children's education through the local Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) committees have met with mixed success in terms of input into the education decision-making processes.

Most parents did support the concept of ASSPA but few saw this as giving them a voice in school decision-making or facilitating that outcome. At one of the schools visited during community consultations, a workshop was being conducted with committee members to advise them of their rights to decide how to spend grant moneys. Although there had been a committee for over five years, the school principal had usually decided how to spend ASSPA funding. One member advised that they *'were usually told before the funds were spent and could complain if [they] didn't agree'*, but that they *'hadn't realised the committee was actually in charge of the funding'*.

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> *Australia House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education*, September 1985, p75.

This highlighted the concern that money being provided under the ASSPA programme is being used, in many cases, by the schools to buy new equipment, such as computers, software, photocopiers etc. without the agreement of Indigenous parents. What good is the equipment if the students are not attending in the first place? The money is there, but it needs to be spent out in the field, encouraging parents to become interested in their children's education and taking a more active role in their education. This is certainly a problem right across the Barkly Region.

It has also been commented that there is money available to schools, but still a lack of teachers. In the NT the statistics are 1 teacher for 26 students who are all at different levels and often the teachers have no cultural awareness.

The involvement of parents and communities in the school environment and decision making is considered crucial to the improvement of participation, achievement and outcomes for Indigenous students. It is crucial that parents be provided with the skills and resources to effectively participate and to be active partners in the education of their children. This means ensuring that parents of students have access, where necessary, to education or training to ensure adequate literacy and numeracy skills, an understanding of how schools and education systems operate, and most importantly what parental rights are in advocating on behalf of their children in the school environment.

### **Law and Justice**

Indigenous Australians are grossly over-represented in the law and justice system and particularly of being incarcerated in prisons. An examination<sup>29</sup> of the determinants of educational attainment of young Indigenous Australians has shown that arrest had a powerful effect. The experience of arrest reduced the likelihood of a young person being in secondary school by about 26% for males and around 18% for females. Given that Indigenous people are more like to be involved with police and incarcerated, the implications of this are disturbing.

Living in households where others have been arrested or a history of arrest also has an impact on a young Indigenous person being in school. For a male the probability of being in school is reduced by an additional 23% while for a female, this has a negative impact of about 20%.

### **Mobility of families**

Mobility for the purposes of work, maintaining family obligations or to attend ceremonial obligations can have a detrimental effect on educational outcomes for Indigenous students. Indigenous students can also be highly mobile in their socialising if they spend nights at the homes of friends and relatives instead of returning home. In other instances young people will stay with friends or relatives for lengthy periods if their own home life is particularly stressful due to excessive substance abuse or violence. Evidence also suggests that seasonal movements of people, from settlements

---

<sup>29</sup> Hurter, Bart and Schwab, R. 1998 *The determinants of Indigenous educational outcomes*, CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 160, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU.

and towns with schools to outstations without schools, resulted in a lack of full year schooling for students involved.

### **Socio-Economic Factors**

One of the major concerns that has been identified by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and numerous other reports is the high incidence of poverty experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Indigenous people are 2-3 time more likely to be below the poverty line than non-Indigenous people.

Poverty is both a cause and consequence of poor educational achievement and is reflected in other social indicators such as health, housing, employment and income levels. As seen earlier average Indigenous income is approximately a third less than for the non-Indigenous people. Overcrowding is also a very common problem. The 1996 Census report has the average number of persons per household as ranging from 4.2% to 4.9% for Indigenous households in rural and bounded localities. This compares to 2.9 to 2.6 respectively for non-Indigenous households. Indigenous households also have greater proportion of 2 and 3 family households with higher average number of persons than non-Indigenous households.

Poverty adds considerably to the difficulties of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children seeking to cope with schooling. The home environment can be linked with low educational achievements of Indigenous students. Overcrowding, lack of furniture and poor lighting impact on the Indigenous students' capacity to complete homework. In turn, many Indigenous families in these situations experience difficulties when trying to support their students in matters such as regular attendance at school, homework and wearing school uniforms.

### **Unemployment**

The unemployment rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults affects their children in several ways. Boys, especially, have few models of success and regular employment to encourage them to attend school. School is often seen as a waste of time and not relevant to their lives. There is the realisation that not enough Indigenous students have achieved good jobs. Not surprisingly, there is a significant number of Indigenous school-age students, some as young as 10 years of age, who are permanent non-attendees at schools. Peer pressure is also very strong as students who do attend school may be lobbied to leave their school by those who choose not to attend school.<sup>30</sup>

### **Health**

As a direct result of poverty many Indigenous children suffer from acute health problems such as under nutrition, hepatitis B and anaemia which affects their ability to learn at school as well as their attendance. Vision and hearing difficulties occur very commonly and Indigenous children are susceptible to a broad range of infectious

---

<sup>30</sup> Groomer, Harold Hamilton A, *Meeting the Educational Needs of Aboriginal Adolescents*, April 1995, Commissioned Report No 35, National Board of Employment, Education and Training.

diseases. Major ear diseases such as Otitis Media impair learning ability. Hearing problems may account for some of the classroom ‘disruption’ where hearing impaired Indigenous children make use of their peers (often seated adjacent) to ‘translate’. In conventionally structured class situations, such activity is likely to be interpreted by teachers as disruptive behaviour and the removal of this source can disadvantage a child’s progress. Otitis Media and other health problems also account for frequent absences from school for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## **Teachers**

A persistent line of questioning pursued in the recent Senate Inquiry into Indigenous Education has been that of the availability of suitably trained teachers to deliver education programs to Indigenous children.

The questioning has shown that there is concern at the lack of suitably qualified and effective teachers for Indigenous children. The lack of this teaching resource stems from difficulties in the following areas:

In the area of teacher training there appears to be considerable variation between States and Territories in the relationship between the universities which provide teacher training and the employers of teachers. In turn each State and Territory has different requirements for the training of teachers to work with Indigenous children, with some systems requiring formal training and others requiring little or none. As a consequence there is considerable variation in the skills and abilities of newly trained teachers, many of whom provide teaching services to communities in remote or rural areas.

Indigenous people have been trained to teach and manage in each of the education systems which operate across Australia. However, as pointed out by David Curtis ATSIIC Commissioner for Education and Training, Indigenous teachers and administrators go through teacher training and through university “to achieve their qualifications, yet that is not really recognised and they are not engaged in the positions they ought to be in”.<sup>31</sup>

This point was reinforced in ATSIIC’s presentation to the Senate Inquiry on Indigenous Education, with the point made that:

“...people coming out of teacher training are usually older – mature age – Aboriginal people who are having to go to schools and start at the bottom level of teacher and then have to progress through the senior levels of teachers. This is a long process...During that time...a lot of people do approach Indigenous teachers and ask them to work for them, so there are quite a number of changes that go on where people do move across to other areas of employment.”<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> *Committee Hansard*, 30 August 1999, Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Refererces Committee, Canberra, p 318

<sup>32</sup> *ibid* p. 319

Concern is also expressed about the number of teachers and principals, who do not have English as a Second Language qualifications and who work in schools that have a high Aboriginal population where the students' vernacular is an Aboriginal language. There is also a lack of pre-teacher training and in-service Aboriginal cultural awareness training provided to teachers and principals. The study, *Desert Schools* (National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, 1996) emphasised that this lack of specialised training for teachers and principals had a negative effect on Aboriginal children's acquisition of English literacy skills<sup>33</sup>.

### **Access to technology**

Information Technology (IT) is available in many schools and the State/Territory Education Departments have strategies in place to support the development and implementation of IT throughout rural and remote areas. Basic problems exist with the availability of telecommunications in more remote locations in terms of cost and availability. For example, as the NT government believes *'the basic services that are available in many [remote] areas of the NT have insufficient capability or capacity to attach any computing network device, consequently can provide audible service only'*.<sup>34</sup> This limits the opportunities and access for children in remote communities in the NT and other States with large remote communities to be able to gain the same levels of skills as their urban counterparts.

One of the potential strategies for ameliorating the effects of living in rural and remote communities is information technology (IT), which has been progressively made available in schools. In its 1997 submission to the Commonwealth Grants Commission, the Northern Territory government observed that satellite communication systems might be the only viable means in many cases of getting sufficient capacity in systems servicing most remote communities. However, the costs of installing terrestrial systems (copper, optic fibre) over vast distances to small communities are prohibitive. They assert that students in 12 remote communities are linked to their teachers at the Secondary Correspondence School by computers and telephone but that, although the technology works well, the impact is less than was anticipated. The NT has been using videoconferencing since 1993 as a Commonwealth supported Aboriginal Education Program (AEP) project. The impact in terms of student outcomes has not been as significant as anticipated, nor has the number of participating communities.

In Western Australia, the Education Department has trialed district networking and video conferencing. It also provides broadcast services including telematics, satellite dishes for schools in remote areas, computers for School of the Air students, and a range of support services for administrative and educational computing.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Batten, M; Frigo, T; Hughes, P. and McNamara, N. (1998). *Enhancing English Literacy Skills in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students*. A Review of the Literature and Case Studies in Primary Schools. ACER Research Monograph No. 54. Victoria: Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

<sup>34</sup> Commonwealth Grants Commission Review of General Revenue Grant Relativities, 1997, NT Submission

<sup>35</sup> Commonwealth Grants Commission 1997, *Submission to the Commonwealth Grants Commission 1999 Review*, Treasury Department, Western Australia p. 93

So, while IT is said to be available, the infrastructure in remote and rural areas is not necessarily effective. Where computers are available, Indigenous children are embracing technology. Communities too are able to articulate their needs but need much more training in its use. In this regard, the Open Access College Council, Marsden Education Centre submitted that:

“At the moment in South Australia, the infrastructure for technology in rural and remote areas is poor. The college has successfully trialed the use of the Internet for conferencing with distance education students. Parents and teachers have indicated that using technology has motivated students, has improved the interaction between the teacher and student and has reduced the isolation as students can communicate through e-mail. The problem for remote and rural families is the cost of provision of appropriate hardware and software and the lack of easy access to one work station per family with a modem and printer and individual software licenses.”

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families this experience is compounded by the lack of computer facilities in the home environment.

#### 4. KEY ISSUES OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Australian governments are wedded to policies of formal equality. That is services and opportunities will be provided equally to all and some “special measures” of a temporary nature may be employed to overcome disadvantage. In this context the disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ceases to exist when parity is reached with non-Indigenous people on socio-economic benchmarks. Such an approach provides for “special treatment” for as long as any group is formally unequal and takes it away when it is considered that the pendulum has swung to far.

A broader understanding of equality, and one which ATSIC supports, is that of substantive equality. Substantive equality provides that opportunities, services and structural responses (eg “different treatment”) should be provided on the basis of people’s specific needs and rights.

“Differential treatment may be necessary to respond adequately to the particular circumstances of a person or a group or to reflect the special character of their interests. ...Substantive equality recognises that different treatment is not only permitted, but may be required to achieve real fairness in outcome”<sup>36</sup>

Of particular relevance here is the international jurisprudence of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the Human Rights Committee on the principles of equality and non-discrimination. This body of jurisprudence establishes that not all differences in treatment are discriminatory; that is, equality does not mean identical treatment. Distinctions are not discriminatory where they pursue a legitimate aim. Special measures -or affirmative action - are sometimes required to redress inequality and to secure for members of disadvantaged groups full and equal enjoyment of their human rights. And particular regimes of minority rights are consistent with, and sometimes required to achieve factual or substantive equality<sup>37</sup>.

Thus, the protection of Indigenous peoples’ distinct rights is also implicit in the concept of substantive equality. Positive measures of protection are necessary to achieve substantive equality and to accommodate the inherently different and distinct Indigenous identities. When considering equality for Indigenous peoples in the exercise and enjoyment of the right to education an assessment must be made in an Indigenous human rights context.

As outlined above there are a number of barriers which contribute to continued unequal outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. It is asserted that in view of above, the basic human rights of Indigenous students are not being met. They are voting with their feet by not attending and not participating.

---

<sup>36</sup> *HREOC Native Title Report, 97/98*

<sup>37</sup> CERD General Recommendations XIV (1993), XXI (1996), XXIII(1997), General Comments of the Human Rights Committee: 12 (1984), 17 (1989), 18 (1989), 23 (1994).

Currently legislation in all Australian States and the Territories demands compulsory schooling for all children up to a certain age.<sup>38</sup> As their low attendance rates indicate however, corrective action to ensure that Indigenous children receive equitable educational opportunities and outcomes is long overdue. Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child articulates the right of every child to education.<sup>39</sup> Article 28.1(a), (b) and (c) refer mostly to their right to access education, while (e) calls for States to *'Take measures to encourage regular attendance and the reduction of drop-out rates'*.

ATSIC has demonstrated the stark reality of the education system failing to engage Indigenous children in the learning process, particularly beyond the compulsory years.

The right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to ensure that their children receive a culturally appropriate education and the rights of all children to have a voice in the various aspects of their lives, provides the context against which to evaluate the success of mechanisms to provide compulsory free education. Education systems with compulsory attendance regimes therefore face the challenge of ensuring that the service provided meets human rights imperatives in terms of cultural and children's rights. As provided by Article 29 of CROC, a child's education must be directed toward the development of respect for ... *'his or her cultural identity, language and values'*. Further, as *Article 27* indicates, education cannot be isolated from the rest of a child's life and must be provided within a larger context of the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

From the community consultations another view of successful outcomes for Indigenous people with regard to education, begins to emerge. When community people were asked on their views on what education and/or school was for, *'to be able to compete with mainstream kids and hopefully get a job'* was the desire most had for themselves/their children. It also became clear that this should not be gained at any cost, and that Indigenous cultural values should not be disregarded.

Article 15 of the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (currently under the consideration of a working group of the Commission on Human Rights) states that “... Indigenous children have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State. All indigenous peoples also have this right and the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning....Indigenous children living outside their communities have the right to be provided access to education in their own culture and language.....States shall take effective measures to provide appropriate resources for these purposes.” Articles 27 and 28 of ILO 169 are also relevant.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>40</sup> likewise embodies such concepts as seeing children as not only the recipients of an education imposed without their consultation, but also as having rights to decide what that education encompasses. For

---

<sup>38</sup> See eg *Education Act (NSW) 1990* No 8 Part 5 s22.

<sup>39</sup> See also Article 13 (1) (a) ICESCR

<sup>40</sup> See Article 12 (1), 14 eg.



Indigenous children this means respecting and incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural values and involving communities in the design and delivery of education. As one Aboriginal Education Worker remarked however *'It's free education but only so long as you define education the same as non-Indigenous society'*.

The process and timing of acquiring an education presented challenges according to Aboriginal cultural values. Indigenous people saw little value in forcing children to attend Western schools when much of the information taught was seen as irrelevant. Differing perspectives, culturally and historically exacerbate the general lack of curriculum choice cited in *Bush Talks*<sup>41</sup> as a major problem of living in rural and remote areas. The unequal bargaining power generally between schools and parents appeared to be even more pronounced with the Aboriginal parents that were spoken to. It is apparent that very few schools see themselves as a part of their community or genuinely interested in listening to community views.

Equity of educational outcomes means not just providing strategies to raise retention or graduation rates, but also incorporating Indigenous perspectives and raising awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and promotion of human rights generally within the education system. *'Aboriginal children need to be strong in their own cultural identity first'* was how one parent expressed the need to counter *'some of the [misinformation] still being taught about Australian history and Indigenous cultures'*. Again this is supported by Article 29 of CROC where it states that the education that is compulsorily provided is to instil respect in all children for cultural identity and values.

The common complaint about the racist attitudes of teachers, peers and the broader community attitudes being a major factor for inhibiting access to education, weakens the claims that schools are non-discriminatory. This is supported not only by the low participation/high truancy rates but also by the educational outcomes of Indigenous children as a particular group in the community. This suggests that the fundamental principle of non-discrimination enshrined in CERD, ICCPR, ICESCR and Article 2 of CROC in relation to education being *'available to all children without discrimination based on race ..... or other status'* is being breached in covert ways.

In summary, ATSIC believes that the current provision of education by governments to Indigenous Australians infringes their human rights in a number of ways.

The right to education as provided in Article 28 of CROC is breached both directly and indirectly. Some of the indirect breaches are breaches of other basic children's rights such as the right to an adequate standard of living - Article 27 and right to health - Article 24.

In order to promote equality and the distinct rights of Indigenous peoples Australian governments should:

- acknowledge the relative need of the Indigenous peoples in the allocation of resources;

---

<sup>41</sup> HREOC Issues Paper Rural and Remote Education Issues Paper (June 1999)

- implement education policies that take into account the cultural, social, economic and demographic characteristics of the indigenous population; and
- adopt appropriate measures to address systematic discrimination against indigenous children in education.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The following highlights and summarises the main issues with regard to the experience of Indigenous people in education:

- The general condition of the school facilities available to Indigenous people in rural and remote Australia is poor. An inventory of the conditions of these facilities is urgently required. This includes both the basic structures and internal services.
- An inadequate number of secondary schools, the lack of teachers with appropriate skills and cultural experience, and the failure of the distance education and school of the air programs to meet the needs of Indigenous students mean that Indigenous young people do not have adequate access to secondary and post compulsory schooling. Young people either have to go to boarding school at great distance, which is traumatic for many of them or not go to school. This suggests that greater effort should be focussed on how best to provide educational services in rural and remote communities.
- School attendance and retention rates are poor, resulting in low literacy and numeracy skills.
- In many places, the education system is seen as irrelevant to Indigenous needs, culture, knowledge and experience . It is perceived as failing Indigenous students by not adequately addressing discrimination at educational institutions and not involving parents and communities in the education system.
- The disadvantage to Indigenous students in education arising from such factors as poverty, poor housing, health, domestic violence and unemployment etc is significant. An integrated and cohesive approach to delivery of services across all these areas is crucial.

The above suggests a deep and systemic problem. An integrated and cohesive approach to delivery of services across all these areas is crucial.

Unless the problems are addressed collectively, efforts to achieve sustainable improvements in education outcomes will be ineffective. Any strategy for Indigenous education must be part of an integrated approach to development.

In addition, acceptance of the three principles identified in the submission is crucial for progress in Indigenous education.

There have been evidence that a number of human rights principles have not been complied with, either directly or indirectly. For example, the poor level of literacy among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children might be seen as a breach of Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This article articulates the right of every child to education. Literacy is a basic outcome of education.

Indigenous peoples' basic human rights with regard to education will be better attained when the aspirations and needs of Indigenous people are met at a level, as a minimum, that matches basic human rights benchmarks, which:

- Provide the overall framework for setting short to medium term goals and targets for Indigenous education;
- Help make the links between the inputs of resources by education systems and the outcomes for Indigenous people more transparent and
- Be the basis of developing better strategies to improve education outcomes.

Currently there is a lack of transparency as to how the inputs into Indigenous education links up with the outcomes. The benchmarks, and measurement of results against them, would provide greater transparency, ensure effective accountability and lead to improved outcomes for Indigenous children. Indigenous people must be involved in the process to ensure ownership of the education system by Indigenous people.

The process of monitoring achievements must be transparent and timely. It is suggested that reporting against benchmarks be published at least triennially. There should be a particular emphasis on the delivery of educational services and the outcomes to Indigenous communities in remote and rural Australia.

The current data set available for monitoring and reporting on Indigenous education service and outcomes is inadequate and needs to be expanded. The benchmarking process should include the identification of minimum data requirements to ensure the integrity and quality of information used to assess results. This information should be regularly and publicly available and should be consistent across each of the States and Territories.

In addition to benchmarks there would need to be a mechanism for involving key stakeholders, monitoring performance and identifying actions and strategies to achieve better results. This could be achieved by establishing a national consultative body in a form that would be supported by government and community groups.

ATSIC's recommendations, contained in the Executive Summary, attempt to address some of the problems encountered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and improve their educational achievements.

## 6. REFERENCES

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, July 1996 *Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Indigenous Education*, ATSIC.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Training Advisory Council, February 1999, *Partners in a Learning Culture*, Australia's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1999-2003.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996, *1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey: Australia's Indigenous Youth*, Catalogue No. 4197.0, AGPS.
- Australia House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education*, September 1985,
- Batten, M; Frigo, T; Hughes, P. and McNamara, N. (1998). *Enhancing English Literacy Skills in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students*. A Review of the Literature and Case Studies in Primary Schools. ACER Research Monograph No. 54. Victoria: Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd
- Brabham, W., and Henry, J., *Analysis of the proposed changes to ABSTUDY on Indigenous students*, ATSIC, 1999
- Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 1998, *Towards a Benchmarking Framework for Service Delivery to Indigenous Australians*, Proceedings of the Benchmarking Workshop, 18-19 November 1998.
- Committee Hansard*, 27 July 1999, Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, Adelaide.
- Committee Hansard*, 6 August 1999, *Inquiry into Indigenous Education: Public Hearing*, Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Reference Committee, Alice Springs
- Committee Hansard*, Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, Canberra 30 August 1999
- Commonwealth of Australia, 1994(a), *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Final Report*, AGPS.
- Commonwealth of Australia, 1994(b), *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Statistical Annex*, AGPS.
- Commonwealth Grants Commission Review of General Revenue Grant Relativities, 1997, NT Submission
- Commonwealth Grants Commission 1999 Review, Treasury Department Submission, Western Australia, 1997

Groome, H and Hamilton, A, *Meeting the Educational Needs of Aboriginal Adolescents* (April 1995) Commissioned Report No 35, National Board of Employment, Education and Training

HREOC, June 1999, *Rural and Remote Education Issues Paper*

Hunter, B and Schwab, R. 1998, *The determinants of Indigenous educational outcomes*, CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 160, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU.

Northern Territory Department of Education, 1999, *Learning Lessons – An Independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Darwin

Robinson, Chris and Bamblett, Lionel, 1998, *Making A Difference: The Impact of Australia's Indigenous Education and Training Policy*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

Schwab, R.G, 1998, *Educational 'failure' and educational 'success' in an Aboriginal community*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research Discussion Paper No. 161/98, ANU.

Stanley, Owen and Hansen, Geoff, 1998 *ABSTUDY: An Investment for Tomorrow's Employment – A Review of ABSTUDY for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission*, Commonwealth of Australia.

Taylor, J and Hunter, B. 1998 *The Job Still Ahead: Economic costs of continuing Indigenous employment disparity*, A Report for ATSIC, Office of Public Affairs, ATSIC

Taylor, John and Hunter, Boyd, 1998, *The Job Still Ahead: Economic costs of continuing Indigenous employment disparity*, A Report for ATSIC Office of Public Affairs, ATSIC.

Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board News, April 1999, *Education Strengthens Sense of Indigenous Identity*.

## **APPENDIX- RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES**

- Indigenous people, compared to all other Australians, continue to be over-represented in rural areas. In 1996, more than one-quarter (35 per cent) of Indigenous people lived in rural areas compared to only 14 per cent of all other Australians. Furthermore, many of these Indigenous rural dwellers are far removed from urban centres and remote from many urban-type services and labour markets.
- The Indigenous population counted in rural areas increased by 13 per cent between 1991 and 1996. Over the same period, the rest of the rural population recorded no growth.
- As a consequence, the Indigenous share of Australia's rural population increased from 3.6 per cent in 1991 to 4.1 per cent in 1996.
- The Indigenous population is younger than the rest of the Australian population with 40% of the population being under 15 years of age.
- Life expectancy for Indigenous Australians is shorter, 56.9 years for males and 61.7 years for females compared with 61.7 years and 81.1 years for other Australians. The incidence of heart disease, eye diseases and severe respiratory conditions are much higher. The incidence of sight and hearing loss is a continuing health problem, particularly in remote and rural Australia. Indigenous Australians are twice as likely to suffer from diabetes.
- Approximately one third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote and isolated rural locations speak an Indigenous language as their first language – many speak more than one Indigenous language, and though they also speak English it is usually not standard Australian English.
- Family sizes are larger and housing is often overcrowded. A significant proportion of the Indigenous population live in improvised dwellings. Home ownership rates are less than 30% compared to more than 75% for other Australians in remote and rural locations.
- In 1996 the overall average income for Indigenous people was \$14,200 which was 30% less than the average of \$21,000 for the total population. the average individual income for Indigenous people in rural areas was \$11,600. This was almost half the figure of \$20,400 recorded for all other males in rural areas. Indigenous rural incomes appear lower again compared to average incomes of \$23,600 in major urban areas.
- Approximately 51% of working Indigenous people in remote and rural localities have only part-time work. This includes approximately one third of the Indigenous labour force in remote and isolated rural locations who are employed on CDEP Projects, on part time wages roughly equivalent to a Centrelink Unemployment Allowance.

- Work for Indigenous people in remote and rural locations is predominantly in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations, with employment in health and community services the most significant skilled occupations.
- Employment growth for Indigenous people in rural areas in recent years has almost entirely been accounted for by increased participation in the Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) scheme. Without this, employment levels would be much lower and unemployment would be higher.
- In 1996, 52 per cent of Indigenous male adults in rural areas were employed. This compared to 75 per cent of all other male adult. The Indigenous male employment rate was thus less than three quarters of that recorded for other males. Employment levels for females were generally lower. Only 35 per cent of Indigenous female adults in rural areas were employed. The equivalent rate for all other females in rural areas was 58 per cent. Thus, the employment rate for Indigenous females in rural areas was less than two-thirds that recorded for other females.
- In 1996, the unemployment rate for Indigenous males in rural areas was 17 per cent. This compared to a rate of 9 per cent for all other rural-based males. The Indigenous male unemployment rate was thus almost twice that recorded for other males. The unemployment rate for Indigenous females was 15 per cent while for all other females it was 7 per cent. Thus, the unemployment rate for Indigenous females in rural areas was also around twice the level recorded for other females.
- In 1996, more than one-third of Indigenous adult males in rural areas (37 per cent) were neither working nor looking for work, This compared with only 18 per cent of all other males. For Indigenous females, the figure was much higher at 58 per cent compared to 37 per cent of all other females.
- Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples do not experience the levels of health, education, employment and economic independence enjoyed by most Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as a group, fall far behind the level of wellbeing enjoyed by the wider community. This disadvantage is in part a result of the colonisation, dislocation and historical circumstances unique to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- While the above gives a brief snapshot of the circumstances of Indigenous people in rural and remote communities, ATSIC notes that these are just averages and that the circumstances would vary greatly across the communities and regions. ATSIC acknowledges the diversity of the Indigenous communities across Australia, the diversity of provisions/situations across States and Territories, and diversity in responses given the educational responsibilities of individual state and Territory systems. As such the addressing of problems or disadvantage must take into account this diversity.