



**Senate Employment, Workplace  
Relations, Small Business and  
Education References Committee**

**Inquiry into the capacity of public  
universities to meet Australia's higher  
education needs**

**Submission for and on behalf of the  
NTEU Indigenous Tertiary Education  
Policy Committee**

**May 2001**

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## **Recommendations**

- 1. That the Commonwealth, in consultation with ATSIC and Indigenous Units within Universities, undertake a review of the effects of ABSTUDY changes on patterns of participation and success. This review should, in the first instance, be informed by existing literature such as the Review of ABSTUDY undertaken by ATSIC in 1998.**
- 2. That the Commonwealth Government urgently address the decline in Indigenous Australian participation in higher education by restoring ABSTUDY entitlements to levels applying prior to alignment with Youth Allowance (estimated cost: \$19.53 million p/a) <sup>1</sup>, at no disadvantage to the minority of recipients who benefited from those changes.**
- 3. That a thorough review of the effects of changes to the Away-From-Base component of ABSTUDY be undertaken by DETYA in close co-operation with Indigenous Units/Centres within universities, aimed at identifying measures to improve Indigenous participation and educational outcomes.**

**In addition, the Commonwealth should examine measures additional to the ABSTUDY scheme aimed at increasing participation and success rates of Indigenous Australian students. These measures should include (but not be confined to):**

- provision of Commonwealth funded occasional child care on campus;**
- construction of more suitable accommodation for students on block release (currently many students have no alternative than to stay in motels where alcohol is provided, while many of these students come from “dry communities”);**
- ensuring that counsellors (both men and women) are available to students on campus, recognising the sensitivity of issues faced by Indigenous Australian men and women students;**
- mechanisms to allow a greater degree of centralised coordination of programs offered by universities for Indigenous Australian students, aimed at overcoming barriers to participation posed by restrictions on interstate travel under “away-from-base” arrangements;**

**4. The Commonwealth Government should increase Indigenous Support Funding so that the level of funding per student is increased to at least the level provided in 1996.**

**5. In light of the recent decline in participation in higher education by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Commonwealth should ensure that the actual level of Indigenous Support Funding provided to each university does not decrease in real terms within the current triennium.**

**6. That the Commonwealth make provision for improving and adding value to participation in higher education, including:**

- developing a merit-based, HECS-exempt scholarship scheme to encourage high achieving students into targeted undergraduate courses.**
- a 1% growth in student load, whereby growth places are allocated to universities on the basis of their performance in enrolling students from Indigenous, low SES backgrounds and rural and isolated regions. These places would be reserved for**

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, estimates cost saving of changes to ABSTUDY as \$18.8 million (expressed in 1999 dollars).

students from under-represented groups and would attract a loading to assist the student to meet ancillary costs.

7. The Commonwealth should closely examine research conducted by universities that impacts on Indigenous communities, with a specific emphasis on examining the role of Indigenous Australian scholars in postgraduate research.

8. The Commonwealth should undertake a specific inquiry into career development of Indigenous Australian academics.

In addition, the Commonwealth should institute an Indigenous Australian postgraduate fellowship scheme, aimed at addressing the severe under-representation of Indigenous Australian scholars in postgraduate research while increasing the involvement of Indigenous Australian researchers in research which impacts on their communities.

9. That the Commonwealth Government through DETYA consult with the Office of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment (NSW), Heads of Indigenous Units/Centres and the AVCC, with a view to developing consistent methods of collection of data about Indigenous Staff.

10. The Commonwealth should provide funding to public and private sector employers (including universities) aimed at increasing the level of employment of Indigenous Australians to reflect the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the general population.

11. The Commonwealth should provide specific funds to higher education institutions aimed at improving opportunities for Indigenous Australian staff development. These funds should be targeted to programs which are consistent with the recommendations of the report "*Career Development in Aboriginal Higher Education*", (AGPS, Canberra, 1991).

12. That the Commonwealth in collaboration with universities, ATSIC and State and Territory Governments develop a framework for the development of regional agreements relating to the role of universities aimed at:

- ensuring that teaching, learning and research of relevance to Indigenous Australian peoples is appropriately informed by Indigenous Australian communities;
- more closely involving universities in redressing social and economic disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- involving appropriate acknowledged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons as co-supervisors of Indigenous Australian postgraduate students; and
- putting in place practical initiatives such as the return of Indigenous artefacts and objects, and land use agreements aimed at furthering reconciliation.

13. That the Commonwealth facilitate a review by State and Territory Governments of the statutes establishing and governing universities, with the aim of amending those statutes to provide for Indigenous Australian representation on university governing bodies.

## **Introduction**

The NTEU Indigenous Tertiary Education Policy Committee (ITEPC) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Senate Inquiry. Our role in this area is best represented by the Terms of Reference of our Committee, which appears as Appendix One to this submission.

In addition to the matters raised herein, the ITEPC would welcome the opportunity for a representative of our Committee to address a public hearing of the Inquiry.

Our submission concentrates on the Inquiry Terms of Reference which are of most direct relevance to our role as set out in our Terms of Reference. The material presented herein therefore seeks to address the Inquiry Terms of Reference (a) (i), (d) (i)(iii) & (iv), and (g) (ii) & (iii). The remaining Inquiry Terms of Reference are addressed by the substantive submission of the National Tertiary Education Union.

## **Background**

The role of education of Indigenous Australians in colonised Australia has historically been aligned to government priorities and policies. During the twentieth century, government policies and priorities in relation to Indigenous Australians have begun to shift away from policies of separation and assimilation towards policies of reconciliation, and this has begun to impact on education.

Early attempts to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in westernised education were in some cases spurned by elders and parents, on the basis that the participation of their children in westernised education would prevent participation in more traditional and time-honoured learning methods, and would ultimately undermine the operation of traditional law. Within the mission context, this was a particularly valid concern, however the consideration of whether or not to allow a child to be educated by non-Indigenous people has been and in some cases remains difficult, with serious consequences accompanying the choices.

More recently, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have embraced non-Indigenous education as a tool for social and economic mobility, although with some reservations. Increasingly, as more and more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff move into universities, issues of appropriate course content, adequate funding and the accommodation of community and cultural responsibilities have come to the fore.

The importance of education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was acknowledged by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Recommendation 202 of which states:

*That where such course are not already available, suitable training courses to provide necessary administrative, political and management skills should be available for persons elected to regional councils of ATSIC, elected to, appointed to, or engaged in Aboriginal organisations involved in the delivery of services to Aboriginal people and other community organisations. The content of such training courses should be negotiated between appropriate education providers (including Aboriginal education providers) other appropriate Aboriginal organisations and government. Such course should be funded by government and persons undertaking such course should be eligible for such financial assistance in the course of studies as would be available under ABSTUDY guidelines.<sup>2</sup>*

With the advent of the modern reconciliation movement, the role of education as one of the most important areas where reconciliation can be given some substance is becoming more

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<sup>2</sup> Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths In Custody, Recommendation 202.

apparent. There is increasing acknowledgement of the need to balance family and tribal education with the more formal educational structures of Australian society. The huge social and economic disadvantages that attach to so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys and girls, men and women mean that education, in both its aspects, is even more important for such individuals.

### ***Inquiry Term of Reference (d): Equality of Opportunity to participate in Higher Education***

Equality of opportunity to participate in higher education needs to be examined in the context of the economic and social disadvantage experienced by various groups within the population. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are no exception, and face a particular set of difficulties which they must consider in deciding whether or not to pursue university study.

The marginal position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is evidenced by a number of social indicators identified in the 1996 census:

- i) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are less likely than their non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander counterparts to have a post school qualification (11% versus 31%);
- ii) Only 31% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households lived in owner or purchaser occupied homes compared to 71% for other households;
- iii) Almost a third of all households living in improvised dwellings are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander households;
- iv) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in the juvenile justice system, with 40% of children in 'corrective institutions for children' identified as Aboriginals or Torres Strait Islanders;
- v) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are more likely than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults to have contact with legal or correctional services, with almost 19% of the adult prison population in 1997 being identified as Aboriginals or Torres Strait Islanders;
- vi) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely than other Australians, to be victims of violence and to suffer intentional injuries resulting in hospitalisation;
- vii) In 1991-96, life expectancy at birth was estimated to be 56.9 years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males and 61.7 years for females, compared to 75.2 years and 81.1 years respectively for the rest of the population;
- viii) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people die at younger ages than do non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and this is true for almost every type of disease or condition for which information is available;
- ix) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers give birth at a younger age than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers, and in most States and territories their babies are about twice as likely to be of low birth weight and more than twice as likely to die at birth than are babies born to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers.

In addition, Indigenous Australians face severe disadvantage in employment relative to non-Indigenous Australians:

- i) Less Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers are employed full time (60 %) than their non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander counterparts (72 %).

- ii) In 1996, the overall average income for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was \$14,200 which was 30 % less than the average of \$21,100 for the total population.
- iii) In aggregate terms, it is estimated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander incomes would have to increase by \$1.6 billion (in 1996 dollars) to achieve income equality.
- iv) To achieve employment equality with the rest of the Australian population, an additional 77,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would have to be employed by 2006.
- v) In 1996, one fifth of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers were participating in the CDEP scheme. As a consequence of this scheme, a form of "work for the dole", the official level of employment among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples grew during the 1990s at 3% per annum. If this were to continue, the employment/population ratio for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders would decline from 39% in 1996 to 38% in 2006. By counting CDEP scheme participants employed, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults in work would remain at just over one third. In the absence of CDEP scheme work, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will rise from 41% of the labour force to 48% by 2006<sup>3</sup>.

These indicators of social and economic disadvantage represent both a deterrent to and a reason for improving the participation of Indigenous Australians in higher education. At the same time as the factors outlined above are likely to affect the relative accessibility of higher education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as well as success rates and retention rates, they underline the importance of higher education as a tool for social, economic and community development.

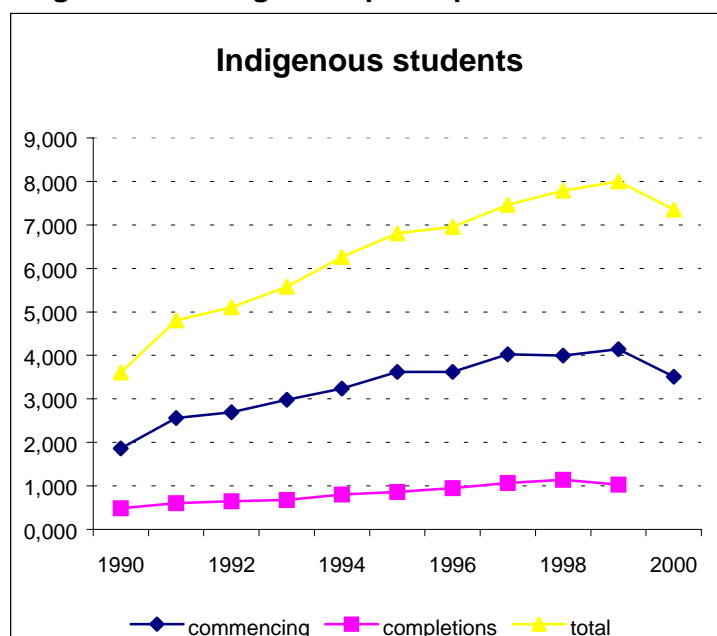
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<sup>3</sup> *The job still ahead: Economic costs of continuing Indigenous employment disparity.* ATSIC, 1998.

## ***Inquiry Term of Reference (d)(i): Levels of Access Among Social Groups Under-represented in Higher Education***

According to the census data, Indigenous people now comprise 2% of the population as a whole, with the percentage of those aged between 15 and 64 having grown from 1.3% to 1.7% between 1991 and 1996. However, statistical data released by DETYA shows that Indigenous students remain severely under-represented in higher education.

**Figure One: Indigenous participation 1990 – 2000**



• Source: DETYA Higher Education Student Statistics, 2000.

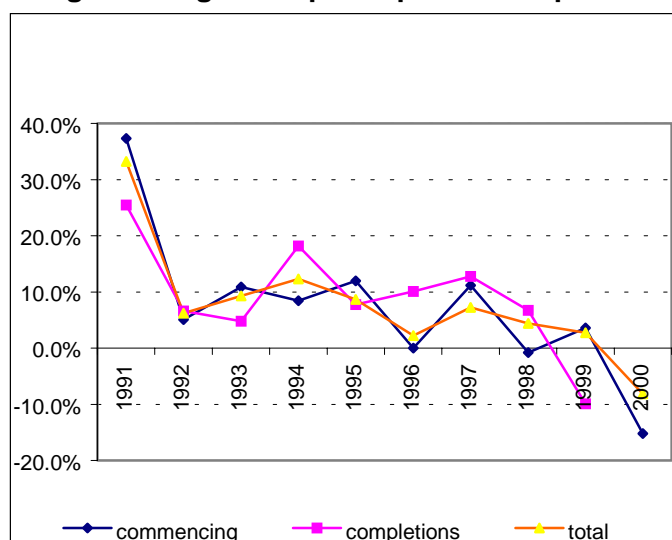
Figure one shows that in all areas: commencements, completions and total number of students, Indigenous participation increased between 1990 and 1998. Since 1998 however, this trend has reversed. **In 1999, completions decreased by 9.9% on the previous year. In the year 2000, the overall number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students fell by 8.14%, while the number of Indigenous Australian commencing students fell by a staggering 15.2%. Indigenous students now comprise only 1.23% of the non-overseas student cohort: the lowest such percentage since 1996.**

The decline in participation mentioned above is even more disturbing when viewed in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population demographics. While the percentage of commencing students is approaching the percentage of Indigenous Australians in the population as a whole, total student numbers and completions remain comparatively low. **While the Indigenous Australian population is growing at a rate of 2% per annum, and the number of Indigenous Australian adults is expected to increase by 28% by 2006 (compared to 12% for the rest of the adult population)<sup>4</sup>, Indigenous participation in higher education is decreasing.** Figure Two shows the percentage by which commencements, completions and total number of Indigenous Australian students changed on the preceding year, from 1991 to 2000.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



**Figure Two: Change in Indigenous participation compared to previous year.**



• Source: DETYA Higher Education Student Statistics, 1999.

Indigenous student commencements, completions and overall numbers increased rapidly in 1991, at 37.6%, 25.5% and 33.2% respectively. These growth rates have shown an overall decrease to -1.8%, 6.7% and 4.4% in 1998, and for 1999, commencements rose to 5.0% and enrolments to 4.2% while completions fell to -9.9%. In late 2000, in our submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into the needs of Urban Dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, we warned:

*“If this trend continues, it is possible that Indigenous student commencements, completions and overall numbers will reduce in the near future.”<sup>5</sup>*

The recent release of the DETYA Higher Education Students Statistics 2000 has validated our fears. **On all three measures of participation, the most recent statistics reveal severe decline. Indigenous participation in higher education is now contracting and urgent action is necessary to reverse this damaging trend.**

Another important measure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in higher education is retention and progress. National retention rates for Indigenous students (defined according to the numbers of students who re-enrol at that particular institution) and progress rates (defined in terms of units successfully completed in a particular year) remain of significant concern. The Indigenous students success rate is 74% of the success rate enjoyed by the rest of the population, while the retention rate is 76% of that for other Australians. Roughly speaking, this means that Indigenous Australian students are about three quarters as likely as non-Indigenous students to successfully complete the units they undertook each year and to return to the next year of study.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Inquiry Term of Reference (d)(iv) Growth Rates in Participation by level of Course and Field of Study Relative to Comparable Nations***

Indigenous Australians are also severely under-represented in particular segments of the student population. During 2000, 14.5% of Indigenous students were enrolled in enabling courses, compared with 0.6% of non-overseas students. Indigenous students comprised

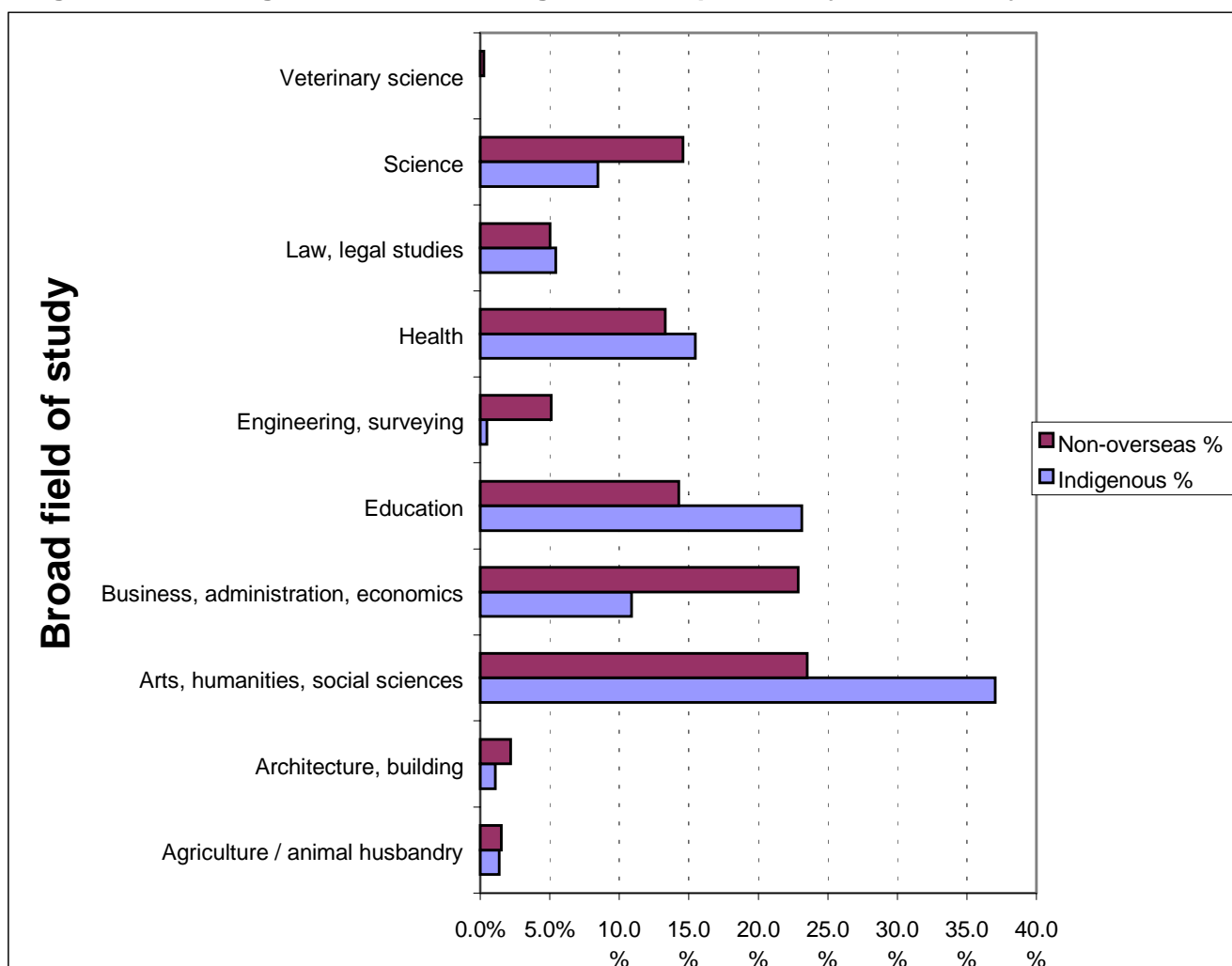
<sup>5</sup>NTEU, *Submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into the needs of Urban Dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Indigenous Participation in Higher education*, Higher Education Division Occasional Papers, DETYA, 2000, p. 13.

30.1% of non-overseas students enrolled in enabling courses, and 9.4% of non-overseas students in award programs below bachelor level. By contrast, Indigenous Australians represent only 0.9% of all Australians commencing Bachelor degree courses.<sup>7</sup> Indigenous Australian students were also severely under represented in postgraduate studies, comprising 0.7% of commencements and 0.6% of all students in postgraduate degrees.<sup>8</sup>

Analysis of student participation by broad fields of study shows a pattern of under-representation of Indigenous students in some fields of study and an over-representation in others, as compared to non-Indigenous students. Figure Three shows this comparison for completions, relevant to 1999.

**Figure Three: Indigenous and Non-Indigenous completions by field of study, 1999**



• Source: DETYA Higher Education Student Statistics, 2000.

The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students completing courses in the fields of education, arts and health, affects employment outcomes for those students. Indigenous Australian students are more likely to be employed by the public sector than their non-Indigenous counterparts. The private sector absorbs about half of all non-Indigenous graduates, but less than a third of Indigenous graduates.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16 and *Students 2000, Selected Higher Education Statistics*, p. 50.

<sup>8</sup> *Students 2000, Selected Higher Education Statistics*.

<sup>9</sup> *Indigenous Participation in Higher education*, Higher Education Division Occasional Papers, DETYA, 2000, p.14.

## ***Inquiry Term of Reference (d) (iii) the Adequacy of Current Student Income Support Measures***

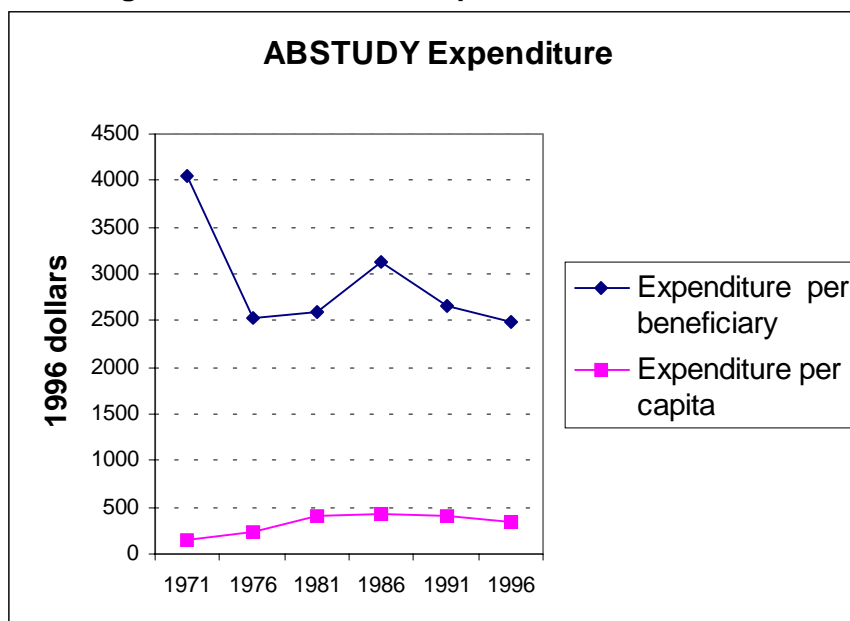
Of critical importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in higher education is the provision of appropriately targeted support. This section examines the various Commonwealth funded schemes that are available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the universities at which they study.

### **ABSTUDY**

The ABSTUDY Scheme since its introduction in 1969 has provided essential income support to Indigenous Australian students. The review of ABSTUDY undertaken by ATSIC in 1998 described the relationship between ABSTUDY and participation in higher education in these terms:

*Since assistance has been provided by ABSTUDY and its forerunners, there have been notable improvements in Indigenous educational outcomes but recently, the momentum has faltered and declines are occurring in some key education outcomes. More generally, much more remains to be done before equality is achieved for Indigenous people at all levels of education.<sup>10</sup>*

**Figure Four: ABSTUDY expenditure 1971 to 1996.**



• Source: ABSTUDY: An Investment for Tomorrow's employment. A Review of ABSTUDY for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

Figure Four shows the level of ABSTUDY expenditure per beneficiary and per capita, for census years from 1971 to 1996.<sup>11</sup> On both measures, government commitment to maintaining levels of funding adequate to ensure Indigenous Australian participation in higher education keeps pace with population growth, has reduced significantly since 1986. In 1997, significant changes were introduced to the ABSTUDY scheme, particularly to the "away from base" component. When Census data becomes available following the 2001 Census, it is likely that a continuation of the trend shown in Figure Four will be evident.

<sup>10</sup> *ABSTUDY: An Investment for Tomorrow's employment. A Review of ABSTUDY for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. Owen Stanley and Geoff Hansen, 1998.*

<sup>11</sup> *ABSTUDY: An Investment for Tomorrow's employment. A Review of ABSTUDY for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. Owen Stanley and Geoff Hansen, 1998.*

Changes introduced by the Commonwealth Government effective January 1 2000, correspond with the recent decline in Indigenous commencements, completions and overall enrolments. The alignment of ABSTUDY benefit levels with Youth Allowance and other support schemes was predicted to lead to a reduction in benefits to the vast majority of ABSTUDY recipients. Research undertaken on behalf of ATSIC by Deakin University examined the likely effects of the changes on the 1998 cohort, and concluded that the changes would advantage significantly Indigenous higher education students who are under 21 years of age, independent and single (730 students), and those students 21 years or older and living at home (165 students). The study concluded that the changes would disadvantage significantly students who were 21 years and older, independent, single or with partner, with or without children (9950 students) and those students in receipt of either a Sole Parent Pension, or a Disability Support Pension, or who were studying as part time pensioner students (4810 students). **In summary, the analysis undertaken by Deakin University on behalf of ATSIC concluded that based on the 1998 cohort, the changes to ABSTUDY would benefit 5.7% of Indigenous students, while 94.3% would be significantly disadvantaged.<sup>12</sup> In light of this research, the recent 15.2% decline in commencements is tragically unsurprising.**

The “Away-from-Base” component of ABSTUDY is of particular importance to the progress and success of students from Indigenous Australian communities. “Away-from-Base” has provided an important way of maintaining contact between students and their communities, and changes to the administration of the “Away-from-Base” component of ABSTUDY may affect participation and success rates. From January 2000, the “Away-from-Base” component will be administered under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program, and will be paid in block grants direct to institutions delivering ABSTUDY approved courses. This change will need to be monitored closely to ensure that the “Away-from-Base” component continues to provide essential support for Indigenous Australian students.

NTEU members involved in the administration of ABSTUDY have identified a number of negative effects of the changes to “Away-from-Base”. These include:

- the number of funded return trips has been reduced from five to four in any year, meaning that in many courses the number of residential schools has reduced correspondingly;
- whereas students released from their workplace on leave without pay to attend study could apply for benefits for the whole of the calendar year, they must now apply for each residence with a supporting letter from their employer and if under 25 years of age, must supply their parents details;
- if applicants for benefits work in the industry in which they study, (e.g. health), they are not entitled to the living allowance for block release;
- whereas previously students were able to enroll in a course in any state or territory and remain entitled to air travel, accommodation and meals allowances; eligibility for airfare allowance is now limited to circumstances where the student lives more than 36 hours by surface travel from the university, and the university must be in the state in which the student resides;
- students approved for receipt of travel allowance and meals allowances are required to use accommodation provided by the university, or pay their own travel expenses. (e.g. a mature age student with two children who decides to stay with his or her mother is not entitled to accommodation assistance, but is entitled to meals allowances).

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<sup>12</sup> *Analysis of the Proposed Changes to ABSTUDY on Indigenous Students, Final Report, May 1999.*  
Deakin University

The difficulties outlined above point to a need to examine the most effective ways in which support can be provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Strong evidence is emerging to support the contention that the changes to the “away-from-base” component of ABSTUDY have effectively reduced the level of support provided to Indigenous Australian students, necessitating a re-think of those changes or an examination of alternate measures to provide the level of support necessary to improve outcomes. Some suggested initiatives are recommended on p. 12 of this submission.

A number of issues associated with the administration of ABSTUDY have also created difficulties for students and prospective students. These issues include:

- lengthy delays in processing applications for benefits consequential to reductions in numbers of expert staff arising from devolution of administration to institutions and changes to Centrelink;
- lost correspondence resulting in further delays, with students being required to submit duplicates in some cases up to four times;
- reports of Centrelink staff deferring to the expertise of Aboriginal staff, resulting in issues not being addressed if Aboriginal staff are not present;
- the location of call centres in the Northern Territory and Western Australia (for example) means that problems arising with applications from students in New South Wales require the student to submit a paper application, thus increasing turnaround time.

These issues underline the need for properly considered changes to the ABSTUDY scheme, and the related administrative arrangements within Centrelink. A useful starting point would be the publication of the results of the most recent review of ABSTUDY, which was undertaken in 1997/98 prior to implementation of the changes to ABSTUDY in the 1997 / 98 Budget.

#### **Recommendations: ABSTUDY**

**That the Commonwealth, in consultation with ATSIC and Indigenous Units within Universities, undertake a review of the effects of ABSTUDY changes on patterns of participation and success. This review should, in the first instance, be informed by existing literature such as the Review of ABSTUDY undertaken by ATSIC in 1998.**

**That the Commonwealth Government urgently address the decline in Indigenous Australian participation in higher education by restoring ABSTUDY entitlements to levels applying prior to alignment with Youth Allowance (estimated cost: \$19.53 million p/a),<sup>13</sup> at no disadvantage to the minority of recipients who benefited from those changes.**

**That a thorough review of the effects of changes to the Away- From-Base component of ABSTUDY be undertaken by DETYA in close co-operation with Indigenous Units / Centres within universities, aimed at identifying measures to improve Indigenous participation and educational outcomes.**

**In addition, the Commonwealth should examine measures additional to the ABSTUDY scheme aimed at increasing participation and success rates of Indigenous Australian students. These measures should include (but not be confined to):**

- **provision of Commonwealth funded occasional child care on campus;**
- **construction of more suitable accommodation for students on block release (currently many students have no alternative than to stay in motels where**

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, estimates cost saving of changes to ABSTUDY as \$18.8 million (expressed in 1999 dollars).

alcohol is provided, while many of these students come from “dry communities”);

- ensuring that counsellors (both men and women) are available to students on campus, recognising the sensitivity of issues faced by Indigenous Australian men and women students;
- mechanisms to allow a greater degree of centralised coordination of programs offered by universities for Indigenous Australian students, aimed at overcoming barriers to participation posed by restrictions on interstate travel under “away-from-base” arrangements;

### ***Inquiry Term of Reference (a) (i) The Adequacy of Current Funding Arrangements With Respect to the Capacity of Universities to Manage and Serve Increasing Demand.***

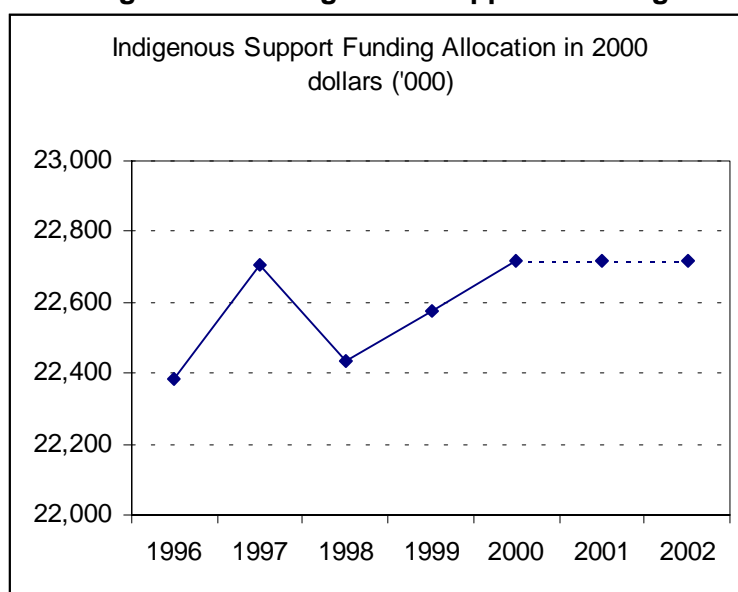
While the substantive submission of the National Tertiary education addresses this term of reference in detail, our submission is confined to an examination of funding arrangements relevant only to Indigenous programs. Our principal focus in this section is the provision of Indigenous Support Funding, Equity Scholarships, and funding for Indigenous postgraduate research.

### **Indigenous support funding**

Specific funds are provided to higher education institutions in operating grants to meet the needs of Indigenous Australian students and to pursue the objectives of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. Activities which are provided through support funding include the establishment of Indigenous Education / Support Units, assistance with study skills, personal counselling, and cultural awareness activities.

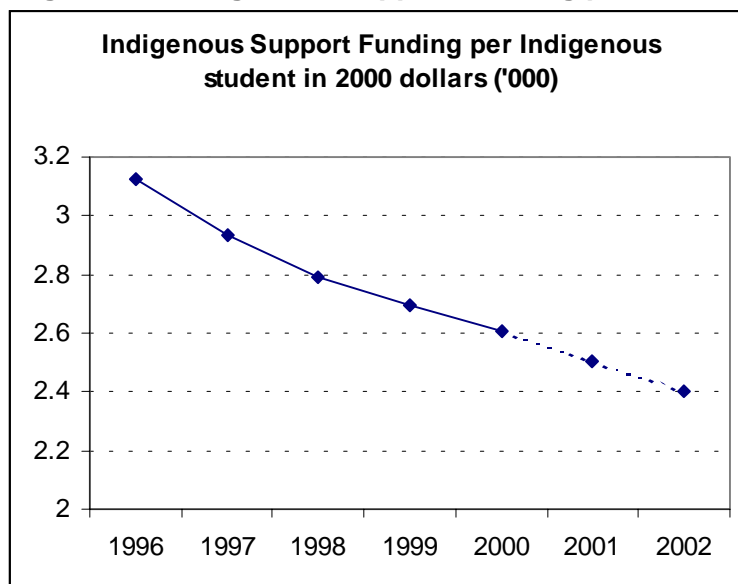
Prior to the recent decrease, the number of Indigenous Australian students in higher education had increased steadily through the 1990's and was projected to increase further in 2001 and 2002. At the same time the level of Indigenous Support Funding had not increased correspondingly. Figure Five shows the allocations of Indigenous Support Funding for 1996 – 2000, and the projections for 2001 and 2002 expressed in year 2000 dollars.

**Figure Five: Indigenous Support Funding**



The level of Indigenous Support Funding for the year 2000 has returned to around the level it was in 1997, and will remain static in real terms over the next two years. A consequence of this is that the level of Indigenous Support Funding per student decreased steadily since 1996. Figure Six shows this decline in funding per student.

**Figure Six: Indigenous Support Funding per student**



The figures for 2000, 2001 and 2002 are projections based on the increase in Indigenous Australian students between 1998 and 1999, and assume that this growth will continue in 2000 and 2001. As mentioned earlier in this submission, the total number of number of Indigenous Australian students actually fell by over 8% from 1999 to 2000, and commencements fell by over 15% during the same period. This poses a significant problem for universities reliant on Indigenous Support Funding to maintain and improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students, since the funding is now performance based. The maintenance of a performance-based system of funding in the current environment will very likely penalise institutions financially for declines in participation and outcomes which are outside of their control. Specifically, the recent declines in enrolments, completions and overall participation are more closely related to changes to ABSTUDY and HECS, than they are to institutional administration of Indigenous Support Funding. In light of this, the continuation of the performance based funding model will likely exacerbate the recent decline in participation and outcomes.

### **Recommendation**

**The Commonwealth Government should increase Indigenous Support Funding so that the level of funding per student is increased to at least the level provided in 1996.**

**In light of the recent decline in participation in higher education by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Commonwealth should ensure that the actual level of Indigenous Support Funding provided to each university does not decrease in real terms within the current triennium.**

### **Merit-based Equity Scholarship scheme**

Another area of funding, which has been of historical importance to Indigenous Australian participation in higher education, is the Merit-based Equity Scholarship scheme. These scholarships are allocated to institutions, on the basis of the number of non-overseas commencing undergraduate students in bachelor or other award courses at each university.

In turn, universities award the scholarships to students from equity groups based on institutional priorities. In 1999, 3000 such scholarships were allocated to universities, and while a detailed breakdown by institution is not yet available, anecdotal evidence suggests that a significant proportion of these scholarships were allocated by universities to Indigenous Australian students.

The Commonwealth Government decided to abolish the Merit-based Equity Scholarship scheme, effective January 2000. The abolition of this program removed an important area of support for not only Indigenous Australian students, but also students from other disadvantaged groups.

## **Recommendation**

**That the Commonwealth make provision for improving and adding value to participation in higher education, including:**

- **developing a merit-based, HECS-exempt scholarship scheme to encourage high achieving students into targeted undergraduate courses.**
- **a 1% growth in student load, whereby growth places are allocated to universities on the basis of their performance in enrolling students from Indigenous, low SES backgrounds and rural and isolated regions. These places would be reserved for students from under-represented groups and would attract a loading to assist the student to meet ancillary costs.**

## **Funding for Postgraduate Research**

Involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in research about themselves, their history, their needs and aspirations is essential to making that research relevant, meaningful and appropriate within Indigenous Australian contexts. Research undertaken by Indigenous Australian scholars about their peoples by its very nature provides a catalyst to extending the involvement of Indigenous Australians in decision-making. At the same time, research undertaken in this way can provide Indigenous Australian perspectives on such matters as the needs of young people in urban areas, while also addressing academic norms and standards. In addition, such research is more likely to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural paradigms than research undertaken by non-Indigenous Australian scholars, and in this sense assists in the maintenance of culture. Involvement in research also represents an important career development opportunity for Indigenous Australian scholars.

Australian Research Council (ARC) funded research projects of interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities<sup>14</sup> for the year 2000 are examining a wide range of areas such as:

- Natural hazard vulnerability, awareness and mitigation strategies for remote and indigenous communities in Northern Australia;
- GIS for Natural and Cultural Resource Management by Indigenous People;
- Research Training Project Examining Leadership in Indigenous Early Childhood Settings in Northern NSW;
- Accountability and Indigenous Service Delivery: Mechanisms, Policy and Process in Aboriginal Accountability;
- Rethinking Indigenous Self-determination: Politics, land and law in Australia;
- A demographic and socio-medical history of the Aboriginal people of Victoria, 1800-2000: colonisation and epidemiological transitions;

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<sup>14</sup> "Of Interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples" definition is drawn from AIATSIS, *Research of Interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*, National Board of Employment, Education and Training, Australian Research Council, June 1999, p.3.



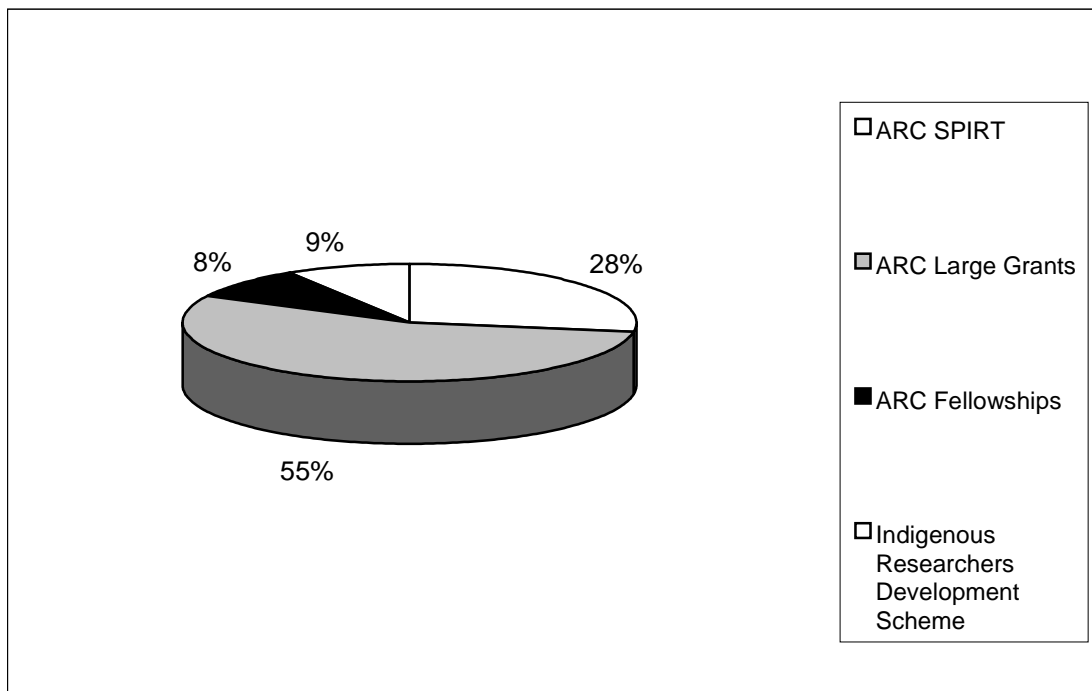
- The impact of premature mortality on Aboriginal men's constructs of risk and health;
- A study of Aboriginal children removed in Australia, mainly twentieth century.

In all, the ARC funded two fellowships, twenty-three large grants and eleven SPIRT<sup>15</sup> Grants of interest to Indigenous Australians in 2000. The total amount of funding allocated to these projects was \$1,578,396<sup>16</sup>

The low percentage of Indigenous postgraduate researchers (0.6% of all postgraduate researchers in 1999) means that the involvement of Indigenous Australian researchers in projects such as those outlined above is limited. One measure aimed at addressing the under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars in research is the Indigenous Researchers Development scheme. This scheme involves targeted research grants as a means of support for early career researchers and outstanding individual researchers, and is the only form of targeted government financial assistance for Indigenous Australian researchers.

An allocation of \$155,567 for 2000 has been made to the Indigenous Researchers Development Scheme, representing some 9% of total funds provided by DETYA and ARC for research of direct relevance to Indigenous Australians. Figure seven shows the sources of funding for research of direct relevance to Indigenous peoples.

**Figure Seven: Research of Interest to Indigenous Peoples**



Source: ARC Website & Higher Education Report for the 2000 to 2002 Triennium. DETYA.

No data is available about the extent to which Indigenous Australian scholars are involved in the research projects funded by the ARC. There is a pressing need to more closely examine this area, in order to assess the extent to which research about Indigenous Australians is informed from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. One observation which can be made about the data in Figure seven above, is that the amount of money specifically allocated to Indigenous Australian researchers is equal to 9 % of all ARC and DETYA funds allocated to research projects of interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Strategic Partnerships Industry - Research and Training Scheme (SPIRT)

<sup>16</sup> ARC Website. Includes projects relating to Indigenous peoples, languages, history, culture and art, and includes projects approved in 1998 and 1999 where funding continues to year 2000.

The importance of appropriate targeted assistance to increase the involvement of Indigenous Australian scholars in research cannot be understated. The severe under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars in research can in part be attributed to the fact that the socio-economic conditions that underpin undergraduate study do not suddenly disappear simply because indigenous people become graduates. While employment opportunities may broaden with the successful completion of undergraduate study, the opportunities toward further study and contribution to R& D are limited.

### **Recommendation**

**The Commonwealth should closely examine research conducted by universities that impacts on Indigenous communities, with a specific emphasis on examining the role of Indigenous Australian scholars in post-graduate research.**

**The Commonwealth should undertake a specific inquiry into career development of Indigenous Australian academics.**

**In addition, the Commonwealth should institute an Indigenous Australian postgraduate fellowship scheme, aimed at addressing the severe under-representation of Indigenous Australian scholars in postgraduate research while increasing the involvement of Indigenous Australian researchers in research which impacts on their communities.**

### **Indigenous Higher Education Centres**

In the 1996 budget, the Commonwealth allocated \$10.5m over three years for the establishment of five Indigenous Higher Education Centres. An additional Centre was added in 1998, however no further funding allocations have been made to this program.

### ***Inquiry Term of Reference (e): The Factors Affecting the Ability of Australian Public Universities to Attract and Retain Staff***

On the basis of available DETYA data, Indigenous Australian Staff comprise only 0.67% of university staff: to achieve proportional representation current Indigenous Australian staff numbers would need to more than double.

Reliable data does not exist in relation to the numbers, work roles, classifications, and employment status of Indigenous Australian staff in universities. The principal reason for this is that prior to 1997, the DETYA staff statistics collection did not make provision for data relating to Indigenous Australian staff.

In 1997, the DETYA Staff Collection was amended, and since then universities have been required to provide data relating to Indigenous Australian staff in annual statistical returns to DETYA.

A survey conducted by the NTEU of university Indigenous Australian staff data collection methods, showed wide disparity in the data collection methods used, and in the definition of "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander" used by institutions. The preliminary results of the survey indicate that in New South Wales, data may be more reliable than elsewhere because data collection methods are generally more consistent. The obligations placed on public institutions by equal employment opportunity legislation require universities in New South Wales to submit annual statistical returns to the Office of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment. These returns are in a standard form, and use the more commonly accepted definition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status. (i.e. the person must be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, identify as such and be accepted by their community as such)

Another NTEU initiative, which will yield more reliable data relating to Indigenous Staff, is the Indigenous Unit Mapping Exercise. This research project involves gathering data relating to staff of Indigenous Units / Centres, and Indigenous Australian staff in universities generally, and will document the profile of Indigenous Australian employment in universities. The data being collected includes the numbers of Indigenous Australian staff as compared to non-Indigenous staff in Indigenous Units, the incidence of contact employment, hours worked, gender, duties, classifications and career mobility. Returns have been obtained from sixteen universities.

Preliminary data emerging from this mapping exercise supports claims that DETYA data relating to Indigenous staff is inaccurate. A comparison between the data emerging from the mapping exercise and the DETYA data relevant to the same institutions shows that more Indigenous staff are employed within Indigenous Units at certain universities than the DETYA data shows are employed at the university as a whole. For example at one university, the DETYA data indicates that there are no Indigenous staff, while the NTEU has located five such staff within the Indigenous Unit at that university. At another university, the DETYA data showed four Indigenous staff, while the NTEU data showed eight.

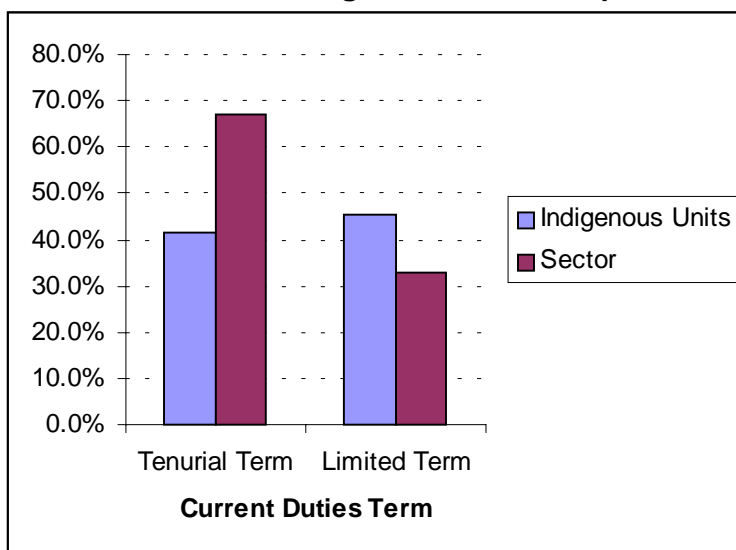
### Recommendation

**That the Commonwealth Government through DETYA consult with the Office of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment (NSW), Heads of Indigenous Units / Centres and the AVCC, with a view to developing consistent methods of collection of data about Indigenous Staff.**

### Staff Tenure

Figure 8 below shows the percentages of tenured and limited term staff in Indigenous Units Centres compared to the percentages relevant to the sector.

**Figure 8: Staff Tenure in Indigenous Units Compared to Sector**

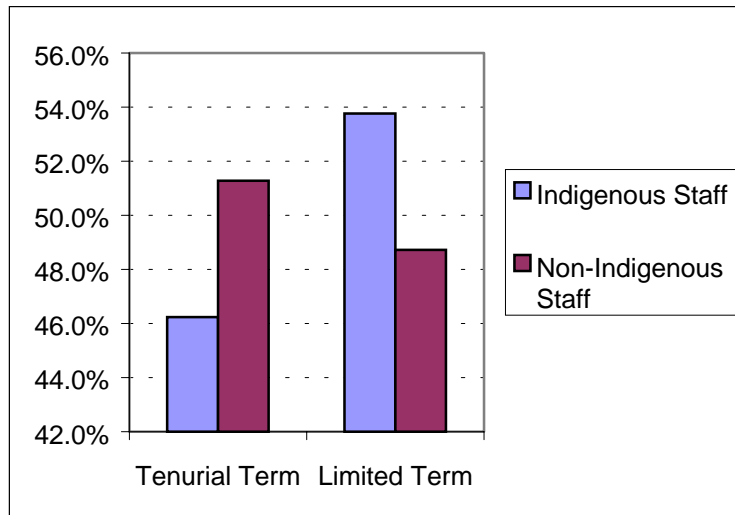


• Source: NTEU Survey of Indigenous Units, and DETYA Staff Statistics 2000.

The table clearly shows that limited term employment in Indigenous Units / Centres is much more prevalent than in the sector generally. Within Indigenous Units, an estimated 45.4% of staff are employed on a limited term basis, compared to 32.7% within the sector. Clearly, staff employed in Indigenous Units / Centres do not enjoy the same security of tenure as staff within the sector generally.

Figure 9 shows the relative percentages of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff employed on tenure and limited term.

**Figure 9: Tenure of Indigenous Unit Staff**



Within Indigenous Units / Centres, Indigenous staff are more likely to be employed on limited term than their non-Indigenous counterparts. In some cases, Indigenous staff within Indigenous Units / centres have been employed on contract for up to six years. While data analysis is continuing, and it is anticipated that more detailed information will be available later this year, it is clear that strong evidence exists of systemic discrimination against Indigenous staff in the area of tenured employment. This raises broader questions about the staff development opportunities available to Indigenous staff to enable them to achieve permanent appointments to positions within universities, and for retention of staff suitably qualified to address the needs of Indigenous students and to accurately represent Indigenous reality and identity.

Finally, the NTEU is an Industry Partner in an ARC / SPIRT funded study of stress among university staff. A detailed questionnaire, which asks Indigenous Australian staff to identify themselves as such, was administered to all permanent staff in seventeen universities during August 2000. It is anticipated that the survey will illuminate many of the workload concerns of Indigenous Australian staff.

**Recommendation: Indigenous Staff Development.**

**The Commonwealth should provide funding to public and private sector employers (including universities) aimed at increasing the level of employment of Indigenous Australians to reflect the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the general population.**

**The Commonwealth should provide specific funds to higher education institutions aimed at improving opportunities for Indigenous Australian staff development. These funds should be targeted to programs which are consistent with the recommendations of the report "*Career Development in Aboriginal Higher Education*", (AGPS, Canberra, 1991).**

## ***Inquiry Terms Of Reference (g)(ii) & (iii): External Mechanisms and Governance***

This section of the submission addresses Inquiry Terms of Reference (g) (ii) and (iii) which relate to external regulation mechanisms and university governance.

The primary focus of this section is the nature of governance within universities themselves, and the development of frameworks aimed at increasing Indigenous Australian involvement in ensuring valid representation of Australian Indigenous cultures, reality and identity. The NTEU thanks Victor Hart of the Oodgeroo Unit of the Queensland University of Technology, for his valuable input to this section.

Appropriate subject matter in university courses and for research projects of relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can only be informed from Indigenous perspectives. Teaching and research that is appropriately informed directly affects its value to Indigenous peoples, and is claimed as a right by Indigenous peoples internationally. The Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People asserts:

“Indigenous people have the right to have the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations appropriately reflected in all forms of education and public information.”<sup>17</sup>

Teaching and research about Indigenous Australian peoples that is not appropriately informed from Indigenous Australian perspectives is of questionable validity and credibility. The reform of Australian universities and how they view the world that surrounds them must first attend to how accessible and credible they are as banks of information and education to the subjects of their study. This is particularly important in Indigenous education, and needs to be addressed in partnerships between universities and Indigenous Australian communities, which are adequately supported by government.

University governance arrangements are an appropriate area to examine in the development of partnership models. The statutes establishing universities provide for various categories of representation on governing bodies to assist in ensuring that the role of the university within the community in which it is located is reflective of community aspirations. To date, the only statute which provides for specific Indigenous Australian representation on the governing body of any Australian higher education institution is the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education Act. All Australian universities have a role to play in ensuring the accurate representation of Indigenous Australian identity and reality, and in advancing the interests of the communities in which they are located. As a first step in seeking to implement partnership governance arrangements, the statutes of all universities should be examined more closely with the objective of identifying appropriate arrangements for the inclusion of Indigenous Australian representation on each governing body.

As a mechanism, regional agreements allow the opportunity for universities to gain the benefit of what local Indigenous Australian knowledges have to offer, to present appropriate material, and also to more closely involve Indigenous Australian communities in the work of universities. Regional agreements can also provide a vehicle for involving universities in redressing social and economic disadvantage through employment initiatives, collaborative research partnerships, mentoring schemes and initiatives aimed at reconciliation.

ATSIC, the peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authority in Australia believes the concept of regional agreements need not, and should not, be restricted to the native title context or to specific geographic regions of Australia. It can be applied to a varying extent in a range of circumstances in which Indigenous people live. The basic principles developed to inform a regional agreement policy should therefore be relevant to a range of regional

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<sup>17</sup> Article 15. Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people, July 1993.

circumstances and be able to accommodate a variety of Indigenous interests. Teaching and research should be seen as one of these primary interests in how communities self empower and equip themselves for both the national and global market while simultaneously attending to how they develop strategies that impact on their communities on a daily basis (Lui Jnr, 1994). Issues related to health, education and employment must begin to be seen as intimately related to other socio-economic variables. Universities have a unique place to play in how these outcomes may be achieved.

Addressing partnerships of this kind is not without its difficulties. In instances where postgraduate students may have located a suitable, highly qualified Indigenous person from the community to supervise their work, university regulations have often prevented the supervision arrangement from being formally recognised (Fredericks, 1996). Having completed a Ph.D, or being employed in the faculty through which the student is enrolled may be prerequisites for supervisors, which can effectively prevent postgraduate students from obtaining Indigenous supervision. With 0.3% of all post graduate students being Indigenous, but only 0.01% of tertiary sector workers (mostly non-academic) being Indigenous (CAPA, 1997, p.6; Runciman, 1994), there is no chance of all Indigenous experts meeting university criteria for postgraduate supervisors. As an example, at QUT, there are only two Indigenous academics who would meet the criteria for formally supervising postgraduate students. Yet, in 1997, 0.02% of all postgraduate research, identified by the QUT Ethics Committee, was conducted into Indigenous issues (Goninon, 1998). This only includes research which was self-described by the applicant as concerning Indigenous issues; Goninon (1998) concedes that the real figure would be much higher. The reliance on self-disclosure ensures that those applicants who have not fulfilled appropriate protocols may never have to! Additionally, this situation forces postgraduate students to seek out non-Indigenous academics with Ph.Ds who may or may not have had experience with the community or issue in question, which then perpetuates the cycle by portraying the supervisors as "experts" who will be sought out by, and recommended to, future post graduate students.

In addition to issues of appropriate teaching, learning and research, the histories of universities within the communities where they are located raise issues for Indigenous Australian communities which must be addressed in any partnership arrangements. The role of university academics in some fields of study means that universities are in possession of artefacts that were obtained without the consent of Indigenous owners and custodians. In addition, there may be matters of land tenure, which need to be addressed before Indigenous Australian communities see fit to become more involved in the role of universities. Regional agreements can provide a framework in which these issues can be addressed locally, taking into account the wide variety of circumstances within Australia.

## **Recommendation**

**That the Commonwealth in collaboration with universities, ATSIC and State and Territory Governments develop a framework for the development of regional agreements relating to the role of universities aimed at:**

- **ensuring that teaching, learning and research of relevance to Indigenous Australian peoples is appropriately informed by Indigenous Australian communities;**
- **more closely involving universities in redressing social and economic disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;**
- **involving appropriate acknowledged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons as co-supervisors of Indigenous Australian postgraduate students; and**

- putting in place practical initiatives such as the return of Indigenous artefacts and objects, and land use agreements aimed at furthering reconciliation.

**That the Commonwealth facilitate a review by State and Territory Governments of the statutes establishing and governing universities, with the aim of amending those statutes to provide for Indigenous Australian representation on university governing bodies.**

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## ***Appendix One: Terms of Reference, NTEU Indigenous Tertiary Education Policy Committee***

The Committee's terms of reference are as follows:

1. In conjunction with other committees of the Union, to formulate policy and advise the Executive on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in employment and education in tertiary education institutions
2. To provide advice and support on developing strategies to recruit and provide relevant services, training and representation to Indigenous Australians
3. To provide advice to the Executive, National Office and Divisions on liaison with Indigenous organisations and communities relevant to the work of NTEU.
4. To assist the union in lobbying Government and other organisations on issues relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students in tertiary education.
5. To assist NTEU's work with other Unions representing Indigenous Australians in order to increase our capacity to work together.
6. To assist and promote the NTEU's involvement in fora relating to the needs and interests of Indigenous Australians.

The Committee should be composed in the first instance of an Executive Convenor plus eight Indigenous members elected from the membership by Indigenous delegates to the National Indigenous Members' Forum, for two year terms. The Committee, in consultation with National Office, Branches and Divisions, will develop processes for future elections based on principles of Indigenous self-determination.