



Australians Working Together – Helping people to move forward

Working Together for Indigenous Youth

A N A T I O N A L F R A M E W O R K



Providing Support for
Indigenous students to
stay on and complete
Year 12 and go on to
further education and
training or move into
paid employment

A Commonwealth Government Initiative
through the National Indigenous English
Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS)

Introduction

Indigenous people are the most disadvantaged group within Australia across the full spectrum of socioeconomic indicators.

The reasons are varied and complex; nevertheless, the lack of outcomes from education and training and the high level of unemployment are major contributing factors.

This makes improving Indigenous education and employment outcomes a national priority. This is a challenging task, given the record shown in the following table:

	Achieved Year 3 Reading Benchmark (2000) ¹	In 2000, stayed in schooling till ² :		
		year 10	year 11	year 12
Indigenous	76.9	83.0	53.6	36.4
Non~Indigenous	92.5	98.0	86.2	73.3

1. MCEETYA National Report on Schooling in Australia ~ 2000 Year 3 Reading National Benchmark Results
2. Commonwealth Government 2000 School Census

Furthermore the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research reports:

- completing year 10 or 11 increases an Indigenous person's chance of employment by 40%; and
- completing year 12 increases employment prospects by a further 13%.³

3. Taylor, J., 1998, *The importance of education in improving Indigenous employment*, Speech to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council, 28 April, Brisbane

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To help address this unacceptable situation, the Commonwealth Government has made available \$6 million for the period 2002~04 to provide specific support for Indigenous students to stay on to complete year 12 or move into further education, training or paid employment.

The additional funding is part of the Commonwealth Government's *Australians Working Together ~ Helping people to move forward*, a \$1.7 billion support package announced at the 2001~02 Budget.

From the Minister, the Honourable Dr Brendan Nelson MP,

Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training.

"Despite the goodwill and significant efforts of many individuals and organisations, young Indigenous people still do not enjoy the same education, training or employment opportunities as other Australians. Addressing this unacceptable situation is a national priority.

The Commonwealth Government is committed to working in partnership with local Indigenous communities, education providers and industry to assist young Indigenous Australians make a successful transition from school to independence.

This commitment is underpinned by our belief that all young Australians are entitled to equal education, training and employment opportunities. It also recognises the importance of governments and support agencies working with the local Indigenous communities, education providers and industry to develop local solutions to locally identified challenges. This will ensure the solutions are targeted, relevant and better co-ordinated.

The Commonwealth Government has developed the *Working Together for Indigenous Youth ~ A National Framework* to stimulate interest and guide local partnerships. I encourage interested local communities and industry to use the framework to promote the importance of working together in partnership for the benefit of young Indigenous people and guide the establishment and implementation of the local partnership."

The \$6 million will be allocated to projects involving community, business and education partnerships to empower Indigenous young people and their communities. It will bring key local stakeholders together to discuss the barriers to a successful education experience for Indigenous students and their families and try to work out collaborative solutions to overcome the barriers.

Project Aims

The project aims to assist 1,600 Indigenous students to stay on and complete Year 12 or move into further education, training or paid employment.

National Policy Context

The Commonwealth Government, in collaboration with other governments and the wider community, has developed policy solutions to improve Indigenous learning outcomes. The following reports contain government policies that are relevant to the goals of 'Working Together for Indigenous Youth'.

National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century

The preamble to this report states that the achievement of the common and agreed national goals requires a commitment to collaboration where teachers, students and their families work in partnership with business and the wider community.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy

The main goals of this policy are that:

- Indigenous parents and community members are involved in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of education services for their children.
- Indigenous students successfully complete Year 12 or equivalent at the same rate as other Australian students.

National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

A key aim of this strategy is the active engagement of students, parents, the school community and businesses through local partnerships. The partnerships provide the opportunity for local leadership and cross~portfolio collaboration to rapidly improve the educational outcomes for Indigenous youth.

New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools

This report focuses on many important issues relating to collaborative strategies. These include:

- the whole community fostering collaboration and sharing responsibility for improving the educational outcomes for Indigenous students and supporting the transition to independence;
- helping Indigenous students develop a broad range of life skills as well as work and study skills;
- improving the level of knowledge about post~schooling choices for Indigenous students and parents; and
- involving the local community in determining the structure and operations of the partnerships and the indicators of success.

Working Together for Indigenous Youth: The National Framework

Local Partnerships

Working Together for Indigenous Youth provides a national framework for the promotion and ongoing operations of local partnerships between key stakeholders in Indigenous education.

The key stakeholders are Indigenous students, parents and caregivers, schools, community groups, businesses and governments.

Aim

The partnerships aim to provide a mechanism for the key stakeholders to come together to work collaboratively to encourage and assist Indigenous students to stay on and complete Year 12 or move into further education, training or paid employment.

Principles

Working Together for Indigenous Youth outlines the overarching goals and guiding principles for the partnerships and is made up of five key elements:

- working together in partnership;
- local commitment and ownership;
- effective intervention strategies;
- effective funding arrangements; and
- measuring success and achieving accountability

Many of the key elements, guiding principles and themes of the National Framework are drawn from the results of extensive community consultations, particularly those reported in the *Report from the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce 2001 – Footprints to the Future*, and *The Allen Consulting Group, Indigenous Communities and Australian Business – from little things, big things grow – a report to the Business Council of Australia*.

Key Element 1

Working Together in Partnership

There are numerous dedicated and talented individuals and organisations, as well as significant resources, devoted to helping Indigenous young people to successfully negotiate the transition from school to independence and to actively participate in their communities.

Despite this, the current inequity between educational achievements and employment levels for Indigenous youth compared with non-Indigenous youth shows existing support structures and programs are often not providing the impetus for substantial and sustained improvements.

Local attempts to drive change and increase the opportunities for Indigenous youth are often complicated by:

- limited information about the full range of assistance offered to support Indigenous students;
- lack of effective coordination between the key stakeholders and funding bodies;
- limited provision of holistic support to accommodate the full range of issues requiring attention;
- limited cultural understanding between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities;
- not enough two-way information sharing between the Indigenous and general communities; and/or
- restricted real involvement of the local recipients in the decision-making process.

Communities and business must work together in partnership to overcome these obstacles. This can only happen if the stakeholders have common objectives and a commitment to making the partnership work.

Working together in partnership recognises:

- No one person or organisation can implement the change required to dramatically improve education outcomes for Indigenous students.

- No one person or organisation can improve the retention rate of Indigenous students in schools and expose them to the diverse range of training and employment options.
- No one person or organisation has the resources or information to make the necessary changes.
- We need to develop and implement integrated holistic intervention strategies involving a wide range of stakeholders.
- Local stakeholders are best placed to identify the barriers requiring attention, develop local flexible intervention strategies, coordinate local implementation of intervention strategies and determine the success factors.
- Schools are not the sole place for learning so Indigenous students must have greater exposure to other learning settings, including culturally significant places and workplaces.
- Improving the post-school opportunities for Indigenous young people is a shared responsibility.

The establishment and support of local partnerships will require significant and sustained efforts from a variety of stakeholders. It will also require some additional resources, especially in the embryonic stage of the partnership.

The Commonwealth Government will work with community and business interests to identify areas which have the right mix of support infrastructure, business commitment and community support, and help key stakeholders to formulate and successfully implement community partnerships.

The Commonwealth will focus support on those geographical areas where chances of successfully establishing the partnership arrangements are high, so that the relevant elements of success are better understood, translated and transferred to other regions. Factors influencing the chances of success include:

- a critical mass of Indigenous students in secondary school in the area;
- evidence of low participation rates for Indigenous students in post-school studies, training or employment;
- strong commitment from Indigenous students and parents;
- strong commitment from all secondary education providers in the area;
- strong commitment from businesses operating in the region;

- existence of an individual or organisation with the commitment, expertise and local support to act as an advocate for the development of the partnerships; and
- sustainability of the partnership.

Key Element 2

Local Commitment and Ownership

Any initiative or relationship will not be successful if those involved do not have a sense of ownership or belonging.

Strategies, rules and regulations should not be imposed from afar, but identified and agreed locally. Consequently, local commitment and ownership of the partnerships are vital.

Existing successful local partnerships have a number of common features including:

- Partnerships are developed and sustained by local stakeholders ~ the partnership is not imposed and driven from above.
- All stakeholders are equal partners.
- Stakeholders develop, agree to and are committed to the objectives of the partnership.
- Relevant roles and responsibilities are negotiated and clearly defined during the establishment phase of the partnership.
- The local community is empowered through the provision of information, especially given the complexity of today's education, training and employment environments.
- Stakeholders' commitment to the partnership, their roles and their responsibilities are transparent. This may be achieved through compacts/contracts or memorandums of understanding.
- Partnerships acknowledge, respect and, where appropriate, accommodate the great diversity of cultures that exist in our communities. The cultures may be based on race, religion, sex, age and philosophical positions.
- Two-way communication and information sharing is critical. This increases each stakeholder's understanding of the other stakeholders, creates trust and builds respect.

Working Together for Indigenous Youth: The National Framework

(continued)

Key Element 3 Effective Intervention Strategies

A primary task for the members of the partnership is to help identify and remove local barriers to Indigenous students staying on at school.

This will require a mapping exercise to identify:

- the barriers inhibiting dramatic and sustained improvements in the opportunities for Indigenous students beyond the compulsory years of education;
- existing services and programs available to the local community through the public, private and community sectors;
- proposed intervention strategies to address the barriers;
- leverage/collaborative opportunities for other agencies in the region to help support the holistic intervention strategies; and
- other potential and viable funding or support sources.

A critical success factor of the partnership arrangement is the local identification and implementation of effective intervention strategies. Effective intervention strategies will:

- package support to offer a 'safety net' for Indigenous students through the provision of cross-portfolio assistance; and
- ensure the program is sustainable beyond the establishment period.

The objective of the safety net approach is to package assistance to individual students based on the differing needs and aspirations of each student, rather than use a 'one solution for all' approach.

Successful safety net support packages will draw from the full range of intervention strategies available for young people. Support should be:

- flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances;
- client-focused, as opposed to program-focused; and
- holistic through the provision of cross-portfolio support ~ for example, in the areas of health, self-esteem and family.

Government organisations and businesses play a key role in the provision of a safety net for Indigenous students. These bodies are not only important funding sources, but bring to the partnership a wealth of very useful networks with other service providers and potential support bodies. Commitment from business is more than dollars; it includes work experience opportunities, promoting the benefits of employing Indigenous youth and encouraging success at school through visible local career options.

Just as the commitment of government and business to support the intervention strategies is critical, so too is the commitment of the local Indigenous people to fully participate in the strategies and actively contribute to the partnership. In many cases, the contribution may also be financial.

The stakeholders can demonstrate this commitment through formal funding contracts, compacts or statements of intent such as memorandums of understanding.

The longer-term effectiveness of the intervention strategies ~ and therefore the partnerships ~ will be reliant on the sustainability of the strategies beyond the establishment phase. Stakeholders can increase the sustainability of the strategies through:

- providing additional resources;
- including additional funding bodies;
- re-prioritising existing funding to support the strategies; and/or
- redeploying existing resources to areas of maximum effectiveness.

Key Element 4

Effective Funding Arrangements

The Commonwealth and other governments make significant financial contributions to improve the circumstances of Indigenous people. These contributions are primarily in two parts: mainstream programs and services, and supplementary Indigenous-specific programs and services. Furthermore, community and business interests also provide significant support to many sectors of the Indigenous community.

It is clear and generally agreed that sufficient funds already exist for committed people to make a difference. To accelerate the rate at which the collective efforts and resources are making a difference, funding bodies should use the local partnerships to:

- provide information about the full range of support available;
- gather local intelligence from the recipients of their services and/or programs;
- review existing support and, if necessary, redeploy resources to maximise their effectiveness;
- coordinate local services and support programs better;
- collaborate with other funding providers and service providers to develop more cross-portfolio support packages;
- remove the structural rigidity that currently exists with many funding programs so the focus is on the client, not the program; and
- streamline the diversity of funding initiatives and reporting requirements so the local partnerships are not bound by unnecessary administrative workloads.

Key Element 5

Measuring Success and Achieving Accountability


Despite significant goodwill and resources from a variety of sources over a long period of time, Indigenous secondary retention rates and post-schooling opportunities remain at unacceptable levels.

It is therefore essential that any process developed to improve the educational outcomes for Indigenous students and provide the opportunity for increased life choices, includes a transparent and measurable performance framework.

Although many of the sponsoring bodies will have set accountability and reporting requirements, the following principles should apply to the performance framework for each partnership:

- The primary goals are increased secondary retention, completion and graduation rates, and improvements in further education, training and employment opportunities.
- Additional goals, if required, are identified locally with input from the full range of local partners.
- The performance framework is clearly defined at the commencement of the project.
- Data related to the performance framework complies with relevant privacy legislation.
- The performance framework enables an assessment of the improvements in the key indicators compared with the wider Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations of the same age.
- The performance framework includes locally identified measures of success, including social and cultural measures.
- The performance framework includes the capacity to measure attitudinal changes relating to active participation in community business partnerships.
- Where possible, existing performance measures and reporting requirements are used to avoid unnecessary workloads and double reporting.
- Performance and financial reporting is transparent to the local community.

Supporting Statement from the Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project Steering Committee



“Working together as equal partners to achieve a common goal is not only a very effective way of achieving our individual objectives, it is also a powerful symbol of commitment to our Aboriginal students, to each other and the community generally. We believe working in partnership with the Aboriginal community, schools, industry and government has significantly increased our capacity to make a real difference.”

Gumala Mirnuwarni (Coming Together to Learn) Education Project. Members of the Partnership include:

- The Indigenous community of Roebourne and Karratha (WA)
 - Hammersley Iron Pty Ltd
 - Woodside Energy Ltd
 - Dampier Salt
 - The Polly Farmer Foundation
 - Department of Education (Western Australia)
 - Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training.
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