

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities

Submission from the
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

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Acronyms

ABS – Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA – Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
COAG – Council of Australian Governments
DEEWR – Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
EFL – English as a Foreign Language
ESL – English as a Second Language
ESL/D – English as a Second Language or Dialect
FaHCSIA – Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
HIPPI – Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters
IEP – Indigenous Employment Program
IETA – *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000*
LOTE – Language Other than English
LBOTE – Language Background Other than English
LLN – Language, Literacy and Numeracy
LSAY – Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth
MCEECDYA – Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PaCE – Parental and Community Engagement Program
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VET – Vocational Education and Training
WELL – Workplace English Language and Literacy

Word use

This submission uses the term 'Indigenous languages' to apply to all languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and those languages which were spoken in Australia by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations prior to European settlement.

This submission recognises that there is strong support for the use of the terminology 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'. Accordingly, the terminology 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' is used throughout this submission where possible.

Sources quoted in this submission use various terms including 'Indigenous Australians', 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders', 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' and 'Indigenous peoples'.

International documents frequently use the term 'Indigenous peoples' when referring to the Indigenous peoples of the world. To ensure consistency, these usages are preserved in quotations, extracts and in the names of documents.

The term 'English' is used to refer to 'Standard Australian English'.

The term 'first language' is used to refer to a person's first spoken language and in this document refers to the Indigenous language spoken by a person.

1. Introduction

Australian Indigenous languages are some of the oldest surviving languages in the world.¹ This group of languages faces particular challenges to 'stay alive'. Within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, there are languages that are 'sleeping'², being reclaimed and revived and some 18 which are commonly spoken.³ These languages reflect the diversity and distinctiveness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's heritage and their connection to country.

The Australian Government is supportive of action to maintain, reclaim, revive and strengthen Indigenous languages so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can connect with their language, culture and country. It is acknowledged that today, the survival of some Indigenous languages is in a fragile and precarious state. Action to support language learning requires a partnered approach across governments and with the language owners themselves.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, learning their own language is integral to their overall learning and achievements. It strengthens their own identity and ensures a wider recognition and understanding of their culture, language, land and country.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations supports the Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities and in this paper provides comments against the following Terms of Reference (TOR):

- **The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages** (in Education) (TOR 1);
- **The potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education** (TOR 3);
- **Measures to improve education outcomes in those Indigenous communities where English is a second language** (TOR 4); and
- **The educational and vocational benefits of ensuring English language competency amongst Indigenous communities** (TOR 5).

The above Terms of Reference have been selected as they relate to education policy and work to improve educational outcomes for all Australians. Terms of Reference not addressed in this submission will be addressed separately by Australian Government Departments better placed to provide a response, namely the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office of the Arts.

¹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet Office of the Arts, *Indigenous Languages - A National Approach*. At <http://www.arts.gov.au/topics/indigenous-arts/indigenous-languages-national-approach> (viewed 20 July 2011).

² A sleeping language is a language which currently has no fluent speakers.

³ Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages, *National Indigenous Languages Survey Report 2005*, Executive Summary. At http://www.arts.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/35637/nils-report-2005.pdf (viewed 22 July 2011).

2. Some challenges and responses in supporting Indigenous languages

The Australian Government commissioned report, the *State of Indigenous languages in Australia 2001*, noted that prior to European settlement, approximately 250 distinct languages flourished across Australia. It noted by 1980 that 25 per cent of these languages had disappeared. Within another decade by 1990 nearly 66 per cent were gone or nearly gone.⁴

This report showed that by 2001, only 17 Indigenous languages were classified as strong, meaning they were spoken by all age groups, with the majority of speakers living in the Top End, Kimberley and Central desert regions of Australia. It was noted, however, that community remoteness was not a precondition for a language remaining alive.⁵

National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS) Report 2005

The most recent report on Indigenous languages in Australia, the *National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS) Report 2005*, found that of the 145 Indigenous languages still spoken in Australia, 110 are critically or severely endangered. Of these languages, 18 (one more than the 2001 report) were identified as being 'strong' languages.

Many Indigenous languages are no longer spoken in their entirety by anyone; rather, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples use words and phrases from them and there is no guarantee that languages will be passed down from generation to generation. The report predicted that based on current trends, by 2050, if allowed to remain unchecked, the situation of Australia's Indigenous languages would be such that there was unlikely to be any significant numbers of Indigenous languages spoken in Australia. It may be that of the current 18, only a small number of strong languages would be left by 2050.⁶

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008

In 2008, 19 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 15 years or over indicated they spoke an Indigenous language, with 11 per cent speaking an Indigenous language as their main language at home. The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 3–14 years who spoke an Indigenous language was 13 per cent, with eight per cent of children speaking an Indigenous language as their main language at home.

Speaking an Indigenous language was more common among people living in remote areas, with 42 per cent of people aged 15 years and over speaking an Indigenous language as their main language at home, compared with just one per cent of people in non-remote areas.⁷

⁴ Department of the Environment and Heritage, *State of Indigenous Languages in Australia – 2001*, p17. At <http://www.environment.gov.au/soe/2001/publications/technical/indigenous-languages.html> (viewed 20 July 2011).

⁵ Purdie, N., Frigo, T., Ozolins, C., Noblett, G., Thieberger, N., Sharp, J., *Indigenous Languages Programmes in Australian Schools A Way Forward*, p1. At <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/FBEAC65B-3A11-41F0-B836-1A480FDD82F9/25487/LPfinal130109NP.pdf> (viewed 1 August 2011).

⁶ Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages, *National Indigenous Languages survey Report 2005*. At http://www.arts.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/35637/nils-report-2005.pdf (viewed 19 July 2011).

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *4704.0 - The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, Oct 2010. At <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/1CE3A61A53F9843ACA257839000FA89B?opendocument> (viewed 18 July 2011).

National Indigenous Languages Policy 2009

The national policy *Indigenous Languages – A National Approach*⁸ was announced jointly by the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and the Hon Peter Garrett AM MP, in his role as Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts at the Garma Festival on 9 August 2009.

The policy is aimed at keeping Indigenous languages alive and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to connect with their language, culture and country. Through this policy the Australian Government is providing funding under the National Education Agreement and the School Languages Program to support the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in schools.

National Plan and Statement for Languages Education in Australian Schools

The Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs' (MCEECDYA) *National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools* (2005-2008 currently being updated) acknowledges the importance of, and requires all states and territories to communicate their expectations surrounding, the teaching of these Indigenous languages in schools.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Education Action Plan 2010–2014

MCEECDYA's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Education Action Plan 2010–2014* (Action Plan)⁹, brings together a number of mainstream and Indigenous-specific actions aimed at improving learning outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

The importance of culture and language were themes voiced by many of the submissions made on the draft of the Action Plan issued for public consultation. The Action Plan was revised after considering the information provided through consultations and was launched by Education Ministers on 9 June 2011 following endorsement by COAG.

The Plan draws on activity under MCEECDYA's National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools (Action 13) and the National Indigenous Languages Policy (Action 12). Additionally, the Action Plan commits education providers to develop and maintain a national database of effective, evidence-based literacy and numeracy strategies to support the sharing of best practice, including bilingual and bi-dialectal strategies (Action 28).

In addition, as part of the implementation of the Australian Government's National Indigenous Languages Policy, a study will be commissioned into the feasibility of a national panel of experts framing the teaching of Indigenous languages, including consideration of out-of-school involvement.

Other actions contained in the Action Plan seek to better support students that speak a traditional language as their first language as well as their teachers. For example, it is noted in the Action Plan that "A sense of cultural and linguistic identity, and the active recognition and validation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages by schools, is critical to student wellbeing and success at school. Increasing the involvement of principals, leaders and staff in

⁸ Department of the Environment and Heritage, *State of Indigenous Languages in Australia – 2001*, p17. At <http://www.environment.gov.au/soe/2001/publications/technical/indigenous-languages.html> (viewed 20 July 2011).

⁹ MCEECDYA *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Education Action Plan 2010–2014*. At http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/atsieap_action_plan_201014_press_release,33444.html (viewed 12 August 2011).

cultural and community activities signals a valuing of cultural identity and community assets. A two-way approach to community engagement that results in interaction of school and community in locations both in and out of school will build social capital in the school community to enable authentic engagement and connection".¹⁰

Recognising the cultural needs of students are a common feature of good personalised learning strategies (Action 21). The Action Plan commits education providers to ensuring teachers going to remote communities are appropriately prepared to teach English to multilingual students (Action 30) and school leaders are to be given more flexibility to tailor school operations to meet the needs of communities, including co-located or onsite multilingual programs (Action 44).

Under the Action Plan, governments have committed to "maintaining appropriate advisory arrangements to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, cultures and languages can be considered when the developing policy and programs" (Action 10).

Local school and community partnerships are to be extended through the Action Plan (Action 19) and these partnerships are to be sustained through family forums (Action 20). MCEECDYA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan provides many opportunities to support language owners in their decisions regarding the teaching and maintenance of their traditional languages.

¹⁰ MCEECDYA *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Education Action Plan 2010–2014*. p12. At http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/atsieap_action_plan_201014_press_release,33444.html (viewed 12 August 2011).

3. The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages in education

The Australian Government acknowledges that attention and recognition to Indigenous languages provides opportunities for all Australians to participate in the unique heritage of Australia. In the school education sector, attention to and recognition of Indigenous languages can assist in developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people's sense of wellbeing and connection to country. For all students who may learn an Indigenous language, there exist opportunities to contribute actively to reconciliation at the school community and student level.¹¹

The opportunity to learn Indigenous languages is important as these languages represent a core element of the culture and history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. By studying these languages, students learn about the history, culture, land and environment of the country in which they live. High level outcomes of learning Indigenous languages in the school sector include the maintenance and revitalisation of languages as well as providing cultural outcomes that focus on kinship, country and the environment.

In 2008, the Australian Government released the *Indigenous Language Programs in Australian Schools — A Way Forward* report.¹² The report revealed that between 2006 and 2007 over 16,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and 13,000 non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students located in 260 Australian schools were involved in Indigenous language programs, covering over 80 different Indigenous languages. The report found that learning an Indigenous language can enhance social and academic outcomes for all students.

3.1 Recognition of language learning – policy directions

The Australian Government together with Australian schools have committed to addressing the loss of language in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for all Young Australians*, agreed to by all Education Ministers in December 2008, recognises languages learning as an integral part of the educational experience of all Australian students. Languages, including Indigenous languages, are included as one of the key learning areas in the Australian Curriculum.

The Australian Curriculum: Languages recognises the unique status of Indigenous languages as the languages of the first peoples of Australia. This recognition includes and values the learning of these languages as the first languages of this country and the cultural heritage and property of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of Australia.

¹¹ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages*, 2011. At http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/_resources/Draft+Shape+of+the+Australian+Curriculum++Languages++FINAL.pdf (viewed 5 August 2011).

¹² Purdie, N., Frigo, T., Ozolins, C., Noblett, G., Thieberger, N., Sharp, J., *Indigenous Languages Programmes in Australian Schools A Way Forward*. At <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/FBEAC65B-3A11-41F0-B836-1A480FDD82F9/25487/LPfinal130109NP.pdf> (viewed 1 August 2011).

Learning Indigenous languages also introduces students to new skills of language learning and linguistics. These can include the opportunities to develop the skills of doing linguistic work (for example collecting, describing and recording language) while learning Indigenous languages.¹³

The Australian Curriculum: Languages considers issues of program types particular to the study of Indigenous languages in Australian schools, such as:

- Second language learning;
- Home use language maintenance and development;
- Language revival (including language revitalisation, renewal and reclamation); and
- Languages ecology (learning about the target language, learning about the languages in the region and learning about other Indigenous languages).

To support the development of the Australian Curriculum, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has established an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expert advisory panel to provide advice on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture can be best incorporated into the Australian Curriculum and to provide advice on the inclusion of an Indigenous languages framework in the Australian Curriculum.

The Australian Curriculum also provides students with the opportunity to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures as one of three cross-curriculum priorities embedded across all learning areas in the Australian Curriculum. This priority seeks to ensure that all young Australians have the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the histories and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the significance of these histories and cultures for Australia.

Advance Australia Fair translated into an Indigenous language

The Australian Government has provided funding of \$130,000 to support the distribution of a new resource to Australian schools. Advance Australia Fair has been translated into the Luritja language of central Australia and an educational kit will be distributed to all Australian schools, helping students learn about and appreciate the language and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The resource includes the singing of *Advance Australia Fair* by the children of Ntaria (Northern Territory) and Killara (New South Wales) schools in both Luritja and English. A book includes a translation of Advance Australia Fair - Kutju (go forward) Australia in Luritja - as well as a sing-along guide and the musical score. The kits will be used in the teaching of subjects such as Australian history, and socio-cultural studies.

The national policy *Indigenous Languages – A National Approach*, aims at keeping Indigenous languages alive and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to connect with their language, culture and country. Through this policy the Australian Government is providing funding under the National Education Agreement and the School Languages Program.

¹³ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages*, 2011. At http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/_resources/Draft+Shape+of+the+Australian+Curriculum++Languages+-+FINAL.pdf (viewed 5 August 2011).

Through the National Education Agreement (2009-2012), the Australian Government will provide \$64.9 billion in direct funding to states and territories to support education provision in government schools. This provides state and territory education authorities with the flexibility to determine how funding is allocated. This funding can be used to support the teaching of languages, including Indigenous languages.

In addition, the Government is also providing \$62.4 million over 2010–2011 to 2013–2014 through the *Schools Assistance Act 2008* (School Languages Program) to support the teaching of languages, including Indigenous languages, in non-government schools.

Decisions around how schools offer learning programs are made by state and territory education authorities.

3.2 Benefits of language learning

Learning an Indigenous language provides the opportunity for students to learn how to communicate in another language and develop an understanding of the relationship between language and culture which are interdependent. Through learning a language, students come to understand the diverse, rich and dynamic world around them and can assess their own ethical engagement with this diversity. There are benefits for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in learning an Indigenous language.

The inclusion of Indigenous languages in schools has resulted in benefits of student cultural awareness and understanding, greater acceptance of difference and meaningful community engagement. For the sharing of language to be possible in a school setting, school communities need to work closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with much of the language sharing undertaken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the community.

Dhurga at Vincentia High School

In 2007, Vincentia High School on the New South Wales South Coast introduced a 100 hour course of Dhurga for students. The introduction of the course had taken lengthy negotiation, strong leadership and the community valuing the learning of Dhurga. One of the benefits reported by the school was the engagement of students with learning language and about the culture and heritage of the local Aboriginal peoples and land. A case study of the school indicates that students were proud and felt a sense of personal achievement in their capacity to learn vocabulary and grammar and engage with Dhurga.¹⁴

Other schools report that learning local languages has resulted in communities building reconciliation.

Wiradjuri at Parkes East Public School

At Parkes East Public School in western New South Wales, the introduction of some Wiradjuri language learning and Wiradjuri culture was welcomed by teachers and

¹⁴ Lane, K., 'Developing the Dhurga Program at Vincentia High School: the language teacher's perspective', in *Re-awakening Languages: Theory and practise in the revitalisation of Australia's Indigenous Languages*, Hobson, J. Et al (eds), Sydney University Press, Sydney, 2010, p188 –193.

students. The Wiradjuri language became heard in the school playground and the school assembly was translated. The Principal at Parkes East Public School '*noticed that the Koori Kids' attendance and pride was rising*' with further benefits acknowledged regarding acceptance of other cultures.

*'With the school children in Parkes East Public School speaking some language, we have a school boasting zero racism. The parents have accepted the language and we find that it's breaking down the invisible wall of racism within the community.'*¹⁵

The learning of Indigenous languages and cultures also provides benefits through increased student engagement and parental and community engagement.

The Australian Government's Parental and Community Engagement Program (PaCE) focuses on the development and implementation of creative and innovative approaches to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people through enhancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parental engagement with schools and education providers and with their children's education at home.

3.4 Bilingual education

The Australian Government recognises the important role that Indigenous language learning currently has in some schools, including bilingual schools.

Australia's signature to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by General Assembly Resolution 61/295 on 13 September 2007¹⁶ which specifically addresses children's right to education in their first language supports this.

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students do not speak English as their first language. Their home language is often Aboriginal English, a Creole, or one or more Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages, or any combination of these. In addition, many parents and relatives may not speak English at home. For some students, English may even be a third or fourth language.

There is, therefore, a tension between maintaining the benefits of bilingual education with the need for all Australian students to have the opportunity to speak, read and write in English to interact across and within contemporary Australian society. Models exist across Australia of highly successful bilingual schools that offer students the opportunity to interact in an additional language as well as English.

Bilingual programs in Indigenous languages are designed to help students transition into learning in English, and provide for the development of bilingual literacy. For some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, bilingual education has been highly valued in maintaining and revitalising their local languages.

¹⁵ Anderson, G., 'Introducing Wiradjuri language in Parkes', in *Re-awakening Languages: Theory and practise in the revitalisation of Australia's Indigenous Languages*, Hobson et al (eds), Sydney University Press, Sydney, 2010, p71.

¹⁶ *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, GA Resolution 61/295 (Annex), UN Doc A/RES/61/295 (2007), art 14. At <http://www.un-documents.net/a61r295.htm> (viewed 1 August 2011).

4. The potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education

The Australian Government provides funding for a range of early childhood initiatives to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to give their children a good start in life.

Children who attend preschool for more than a year show a statistically significant performance advantage in later school achievement than those without preschool attendance.¹⁷

Participation in culturally inclusive, high quality early childhood education programs and care can assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to have the best start in life. These programs build upon the rich cultural, linguistic and conceptual skills that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children bring to early childhood education and:

- promote early engagement with learning;
- provide a strong foundation for future educational achievement;
- encourage the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of children from birth; and
- support children in their transition to school.

The Early Childhood Language and Literacy Parents Project - PaCE project on Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory

The Early Childhood Language and Literacy Parents Project is being delivered by the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF) working closely with parents, carers and community members of Umbakumba, Angurugu and Milyakburra.

The project includes the delivery of workshops that teach parents foundational pre-literacy and language learning platforms that they can use to support the early learning of their children. The project runs from April 2010 – December 2012 and supports parents, carers and community members to stimulate children's early developmental language and pre-literacy skills so that they are ready to learn and thrive when they start Pre-school or transition to formal schooling.

The project will facilitate home/school communication about the children's language and pre-learning experiences and ongoing needs. Some of the areas that will be covered in the workshops are:

- information about early childhood developmental steps that a child needs to master in order to be 'ready for school';
- practise in playing games and activities that relate to the 7 steps of listening development;
- practise in stimulating visual perception skills that relate to the ability to discriminate letter shapes and patterns; and
- techniques in how to model early word and sentence development as well as articulation for clear speaking; and techniques that support neurological bridging/scaffolding from first language to English.

¹⁷ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Results from the Program for International Assessment*, OECD, Paris 2004.

This project includes:

- delivery of an initial 5 day workshop for parents, carers, community members and interested stakeholders such as health clinic workers, pre-school teachers, assistant teachers and childcare workers;
- parent and community outreach visits 4 times per year; and
- mentoring and tutoring visits to support parents and community members and other stakeholders who can support early learning and development of children.

The first year (2010) of the project is dedicated to learning Early Childhood Language and Literacy (ECL&L) skills and practising them, and preparing for first language literacy.

The second year (2011) involves continued mentoring of the ECL&L skills plus the inclusion of first language work. This would involve a Coding Aboriginal Languages for Indigenous Literacy (CALIL) workshop to identify the first language elements and production of resources for a WRAP Learning to Read and Write in First Language course.

The third year (2012) is where these elements and skills are consolidated.

Project outcomes include:

- parents will develop basic speech pathology knowledge and skills in order to support their children's pre-literacy and language skills development;
- parents, children, teachers and the school will become connected through shared positive pre-literacy and language skill building activities and a common shared language and understanding of early learning;
- staff who support early childhood development and learning will develop skills and knowledge of selected developmental speech pathology pre-literacy and language concepts that can contribute to early years education practice; and
- children will be supported to develop the pre-literacy and language developmental foundation skills in first language and English needed to support their entry to preschool and transition to formal schooling.

4.1 The Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY)

The Australian Government has committed \$32.5 million over five years (2008-2012) to roll-out the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) to 50 communities nationally and support around 3,000 families.

The ability to adapt HIPPY to individual community needs is central in ensuring participating children, parents and carers successfully complete the program.

Adaptations to the program may include:

- employment of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tutors;
- flexibility in the mode of delivery and taking time to break down concepts and stories. For example in group settings over an extended period rather than the usual 30 minute individual family session;
- program delivery in a mix of English and traditional language;
- inclusion of extended family/clan members in program delivery; and
- inclusion of translated materials.

These adaptations to the program not only support the children, but also support the wider community through exposing the parents and extended families to the learning materials.

Adaptations to the HIPPY model in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities provide a supported environment and basic tools to help teach English not only to the children but also to the parents and carers. This provides a foundation that builds on the confidence and skills of parents and carers, which can feed into the wider community.

HIPPY Yipirinya

At Yipirinya the HIPPY program is delivered to parents and children in their Indigenous language, however most of the materials are in English. The Yipirinya School where HIPPY is based is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school which offers two-way (bilingual and bicultural) education. It teaches literacy and numeracy using the Northern Territory curriculum and Indigenous languages and culture. Using these principles the teachers and elders have adapted HIPPY to support parents by providing a supported environment and basic tools to help teach English to the children but also to the parents and carers where necessary.

5. Measures to improve education outcomes in those Indigenous communities where English is a second language

This paper has previously outlined some Australian Government education initiatives which improve education outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where English is a second language.

Specific education measures which focus on improving education outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where English is a second language are mentioned below.

5.1 Parental and Community Engagement Program

As previously stated, the Australian Government's Parental and Community Engagement Program (PaCE) focuses on the development and implementation of creative and innovative approaches to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people through enhancing parental engagement with schools and education providers and with their children's education at home.

PaCE supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to 'reach-in' to schools and education providers and to develop partnerships with them, with the aim of enhancing their children's educational outcomes.

This includes projects to deliver workshops around enhancing parents' ability to engage with their children's school with either a language component or delivered in traditional languages. Other projects focus on language training for early childhood learners or the development of school reading materials in traditional languages for children.

These initiatives help to improve education outcomes in those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where English is a second language.

Bonding, Bopping and Books (BBB) PaCE Project

Bonding, Bopping and Books (BBB) is an arts-based family literacy approach to increase family and community involvement with early childhood learning opportunities. The Northern Territory Library has recruited a project coordinator and two local community liaison people to plan and deliver BBB sessions at Angurugu.

BBB is an engaging early-learning program that aims to provide a context to build parental confidence and understandings of non-Indigenous ways of teaching and learning in schools alongside Indigenous cultural priorities for early childhood development, care and knowledge building. This will increase the level of engagement between families, the school and early childhood learning services through empowering parents and carers to reach in to schools and early childhood learning services with a shared language about children and their learning.

The BBB sessions will also provide parents with knowledge, confidence and practical ways (competence) to improve the educational outcomes of their children through support and reinforcement of children's learning at home.

The outcomes of the project are:

- parents connect with their local early childhood services and community library;
- parents develop skills and knowledge in early childhood care, development and education and learn about ways to support their children's early literacy learning; and
- Indigenous families and early learning service providers learn new ways to be involved in developing a shared language and understanding about children's education.

5.2 Smarter Schools National Partnerships

The Smarter Schools National Partnerships aim to lift the quality of education and target resources to those areas most in need. The Australian Government and state and territory governments have entered into three Smarter Schools National Partnerships aimed at addressing disadvantage, supporting teachers and school leaders and improving literacy and numeracy.

Over a quarter of all Australian schools (2,500) are participating in the National Partnerships for Low Socio-economic Status School Communities and Literacy and Numeracy, whilst all teachers and school leaders are targeted under the National Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality.

Australian Government funding of \$540 million is being provided under the Smarter Schools National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy to drive accelerated improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes for students, especially those most at risk of falling behind.

Through the Smarter Schools National Partnership for Low Socio-economic Status School Communities, schools are working with their local communities and education authorities to identify activities that will generate the best educational outcomes for their disadvantaged students, including Indigenous students, students from non-English speaking backgrounds and students with disabilities.

The Australian Government is providing \$1.5 billion over seven years (2008-09 to 2014-15) to support activities in approximately 1,700 low socio-economic status schools around the country. This funding will be matched by co-investment from state and territory governments over the life of the partnership.

Cable Beach Primary School Languages other than English (LOTE) program

Cable Beach Primary School in Broome is receiving funding from the Australian Government and the Western Australian Government under the Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership.

Cable Beach Primary has a LOTE program that includes both Indonesian and the Indigenous language of the area – Yawuru. Yawuru is taught in years 3 to 7. Yawuru – the traditional language of the Broome Rubibi – may be a dying language but under the leadership of language teacher Dalisa Pigram-Ross, it is cemented in Cable Beach Primary School.

“There are only a handful of fluent Yawuru speakers in Broome, so we need to give every opportunity for young people to learn this traditional language,” says Principal Suzanne Temple. As part of the language program, all school assemblies start in three languages – Yawuru, Indonesian and English. “Dalisa is also beginning work on an electronic dictionary so that words are not lost. She is working with one of the elders, Doris Edgar, to record her speaking the language,” Suzanne says. With nearly 500 students in the school – about half being Aboriginal students – the Yawuru language program is just one of many exciting initiatives underway.

As a Low Socio-economic Status national partnership school, Cable Beach Primary School will receive about \$120,000 a year for the next four years to support its work. “My vision is for the school to become a one stop shop where we have a range of services for families and children on site,” Suzanne says. “We already have a fully set up room for children up to four years old, a special learning centre for students, a program for students at risk and an ambitious attendance plan – which I am delighted to say resulted in Aboriginal student attendance increasing by 3.2 per cent last year.”¹⁸

5.3 Expansion of Intensive Literacy and Numeracy Programs

The Australian Government is providing funding of \$51.5 million over four years for ‘Closing the Gap – expansion of intensive literacy and numeracy programs’. There are 22 active projects in schools implementing intensive literacy and numeracy programs to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are not meeting national minimum standards. This funding is provided under the *Indigenous Education Targeted Assistance Act 2000* (IETA).

This funding is supporting schools to develop a whole-of-school approach to the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy and outline activities to be undertaken at the local level. At a national level these projects will assist to identify innovation, evaluate the impact of strategies on Indigenous students and support expansion of the evidence-base of high impact literacy and numeracy strategies and programs.

¹⁸ Department of Education, Western Australia, *School Matters Edition 4 June/July 2011*, p14-15 At <http://det.wa.edu.au/edenews/detcms/navigation/school-matters-features/> (viewed 12 August 2011).

Literacy and English as a Second Language in the Early Years Project

In Western Australia the 'Literacy and English as a Second Language in the Early Years Project' operates across the Government, Catholic and Independent schools sectors. The project's aim is to improve the literacy outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students whose home language is not English.

To achieve its goal, the project is addressing three key elements:

- teacher professional learning; school leadership; and
- advanced professional learning.

Bridging the Language Gap Project

In Queensland, the 'Bridging the Language Gap' project is building school capacity for identifying, supporting and monitoring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning English. Participating schools gain a school-based Language Leader, who gathers base-line language data and develops school-based responses. In addition, school staff are engaged in English language training whereby teachers (from participating schools) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are provided with professional development to assist English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Second Dialect (ESD) students who require explicit English language support in order to access the literacy and numeracy demands of the curriculum.

5.4 Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory National Partnership

The Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory National Partnership includes a number of measures which aim to improve educational outcomes in Indigenous communities. Measures that fall under this partnership include the *Quality Teaching and Enhancing Literacy* measure, whereby the Australian Government has committed \$44.3 million over three years (2009-10 to 2011-12) to Northern Territory education providers to:

- develop career pathways for Indigenous staff;
- increase the number of Indigenous staff with education qualifications; and
- provide support and programs to enable teachers and students achieve improved outcomes in literacy and numeracy in 73 targeted remote communities.

This National Partnership is supporting effective delivery of literacy and numeracy learning to Indigenous English as Second Language learners. This continues to be a challenge, however enhanced in-school support to assist teachers and school leaders better develop and monitor work in this area is being implemented.

5.5 Additional teachers

The Australian Government is supporting Northern Territory remote schools with an additional 200 teachers, to be recruited by the end of 2012, at a total cost of \$107.8 million. Funding has been provided to support the recruitment, placement and retention of teachers in both government and non-government schools.

The Northern Territory Department of Education and Training report that the additional staffing is enabling schools to better engage with local communities and target education reform effort to cohorts of students identified as being most at risk. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in these remote schools English can be their fourth or fifth language.

6. The educational and vocational benefits of ensuring English language competency amongst Indigenous communities

The Australian Government's Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) program provides information on the educational and vocational benefits of ensuring English language competency amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

LSAY is a program of annual telephone surveys that track groups of young people between the ages of 15 (or Year 9 for earlier cohorts) and 25 as they move from school to post-school study, work and other destinations. The LSAY survey population includes a small sub-sample of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A recent LSAY briefing paper titled *Early post-school outcomes of Indigenous youth: the role of literacy and numeracy*¹⁹ has examined aspects of the role of English language literacy in improving outcomes for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The paper finds that raising English literacy and numeracy levels contributes significantly to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outcomes, particularly in terms of increasing Year 12 completion rates.

Higher literacy and numeracy levels are also associated with higher rates of post-school study such as Vocational Education and Training pathways and university study among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. The paper also emphasises the importance of addressing the multiple disadvantages faced by young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including poor access to post-school education and poor health.

International evidence demonstrates that educational attainment is related to work outcomes.

*Those with low educational attainment are both less likely to be labour force participants and more likely to be unemployed. On average among OECD countries, males without upper secondary education are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as males with upper secondary education and three times as likely to be unemployed as males with tertiary education.*²⁰

The Australian Council for Educational Research (2004)²¹ found that achievement levels in literacy and numeracy have a strong relationship with unemployment incidence. Following through the experiences of four cohort groups, those with low achievement levels had a much higher unemployment rate and were also more likely to have longer periods of unemployment and to experience long-term unemployment.

There is a strong link between parents' educational attainment and childhood educational outcomes. In Australia today, there are educational and vocational benefits of ensuring English language competency in order for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to fully engage in the vocational and further education systems, and to effectively participate in the workplace.

¹⁹ National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd, *Early post-school outcomes of Indigenous youth: the role of literacy and numeracy 2010*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, Briefing Paper 22.

²⁰ OECD *Education at a Glance 2010*, Pg 101. At <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/45/39/45926093.pdf> (viewed 8 August 2011).

²¹ Australian Council for Educational Research, *The Case for Change A review of contemporary research on Indigenous education outcomes*, 2004, p30.

In addition, according to the 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey²² conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), approximately 60 per cent of job seekers (or 300,000 people), 40 per cent of workers (or 4.5 million people) and up to 70 per cent of those not in the labour force do not have the necessary English language, literacy and numeracy skills to operate effectively in a modern workplace or to complete a Certificate III qualification. While the ABS survey does not provide reliable data on the relative skill levels in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it is estimated that the level of English language, literacy and numeracy skills is likely to be lower than that estimated for the population as a whole.

The 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALLS) Survey measured literacy and numeracy skills against a five point scale where levels one (the lowest level) and two, are below the minimum level deemed necessary to participate in a knowledge-based economy. Level three is regarded by the ALLS survey developers as the 'minimum required for individuals to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work in the emerging knowledge-based economy.

Research undertaken by the Productivity Commission²³ estimates that improving literacy and numeracy skills from Level one to Level three would:

- increase the likelihood of labour force participation by about 15 percentage points for women and about five percentage points for men; and
- increase hourly wage rates by about 25 per cent for women and 30 per cent for men.

The research also suggests that increasing the literacy skills of adults will have a direct and positive impact on labour productivity and in GDP per capita - the greatest impact is achieved by improving the skills at the lower levels.

The Australian Government through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations funds a number of programs for adults aimed at improving foundation skills, including the Language Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) program and the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program.

The LLN program provides language, literacy and numeracy training for eligible job seekers whose skills are below the level considered necessary to secure sustainable employment or pursue further education and training. It is designed to help remove a major barrier to employment and improve participants' daily lives.

The primary purpose of the WELL program is to assist organisations to train workers in English language, literacy and numeracy skills. Funding is available to organisations for English language and literacy training linked to job-related workplace training and is designed to help workers meet their current and future employment and training needs. The WELL program recognises the benefits of improving foundation skills, including English language competency, for workers and the occupational benefits of a skilled workforce.

²² Australian Bureau of Statistics, *4228.0 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey 2006*. At [http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4228.0Main%20Features22006%20\(Reissue\)?open=document&tabname=Summary&prodno=4228.0&issue=2006%20\(Reissue\)&num=&view=](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4228.0Main%20Features22006%20(Reissue)?open=document&tabname=Summary&prodno=4228.0&issue=2006%20(Reissue)&num=&view=) (viewed 19 July 2011)

²³ Shomos, A., *Links Between Literacy and Numeracy Skills and Labour Market Outcomes*, Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper, 2010 Melbourne.

The Australian Government's *Building Australia's Future Workforce* package announced in the 2011-12 Budget includes an expansion of the WELL program and the LLN program with additional training places becoming available over four years, from 1 July 2011. This package recognises the benefits in improving the language, literacy and numeracy skills of all Australians.

When referring to programs that are specifically designed to provide benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, English language and literacy training linked to job-related workplace training has been incorporated into Indigenous Employment Program projects.

The Indigenous Employment Program (IEP) supports a broad range of activities that are responsive to the needs of employers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities. Support is available for activities that may:

- encourage and support employers to provide sustainable employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- encourage and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to take up training and employment opportunities, stay in jobs and enhance their future employment prospects;
- assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples communities, industry bodies and groups of employers to develop Indigenous workforce and economic development strategies that support local and regional economic growth; or
- assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop sustainable businesses and economic opportunities in urban, regional and remote areas.

Due to the flexibility of the IEP, projects can be tailored to meet the needs of the participants to achieve employment or development outcomes. Literacy and numeracy skills have been identified as being beneficial to gaining and sustaining meaningful employment and therefore literacy and numeracy are identified components within IEP projects.

Building the Bridge, Breaking the Barriers, Brother to Brother (BTB) – a WELL/IEP project

BTB is the acronym used by the 13 Indigenous students who completed an eight-week intensive IEP project in Ceduna, South Australia. BTB was a pre-course targeting unemployed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youths aged between 17 – 24 years old. The course was focused around assisting participants to gain employability skills and for preparation to enter the Australian Defence Force (ADF) Indigenous Employment Development Course (IEDC), leading to employment opportunities with the ADF.

This IEP course was developed in partnership with the ADF, DEEWR, FaHCSIA and TAFE SA Adelaide South Institute and local indigenous agencies: Tjutjunaku Worka Tjuta (TWT) and Ceduna Indigenous Coordination Centre.

Throughout the eight weeks, the 13 Indigenous youths gathered in Ceduna for literacy and numeracy, job readiness and physical fitness training to prepare them to enter into the multiple employment opportunities within the Defence Force. The students had to overcome many challenges, but their determination to '*build the bridge*' for their careers, their courage to '*break their barriers*' to participation in employment and their peer support and bonding in '*brotherhood*' helped them to take a big step towards their career aspirations.

Major Pauline Mortensen, Project Manager of ADF IEDC and Max Lorenzin, Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) trainer, outlined the successes of the Pre-course:

- six participants were successful in the selection process for the ADF IEDC;
- two students gained employment in the building industry;
- one student gained employment in the mining sector; and
- students that participated in the ADF IEDC selection process showed greater confidence in the interviews and aspiration to further their careers than the previous group who applied for the 2009 IEDC at Dubbo, New South Wales when they did not have the opportunity to participate in a Pre-course.

In terms of literacy and numeracy skills development measured against the Australian Core Skills Framework, students achieved 14 macro-skills progression: four from Pre-level one to Level one and 10 from Level one to Level two.

Feedback from the students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and the community highlighted the positive impacts were, to a large extent, achieved through the trainer's flexibility and commitment, strong focus to maintain engagement, embedding literacy and numeracy and life skills enhancement in a broad range of activities and motivation appropriate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. At the graduation, the students shared their stories of improving in life skills, realising the benefits of learning, gaining confidence and self-esteem, building leadership and team skills and becoming more resilient and prepared for life challenges.

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