

*Equity Works: Achieving the Target of 2% Aboriginal  
Employment in the South Australian Public Sector*

**FINAL REPORT**

presented to

**The Don Dunstan Foundation**

by

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- ⇒ Respect for Indigenous peoples and protection of their rights
- ⇒ Democratic and inclusive forms of governance.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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(This Executive Summary has been designed as a stand-alone document for the benefit of those who are unable to read the report in its entirety.)

## Project purpose

Since 2003 there has been significant effort by the South Australian government to enhance Aboriginal peoples' employment outcomes in the public sector. Objective 6 of the South Australian Strategic Plan has an accompanying target to increase the employment of Aboriginal employees in the public sector from 1.2% to 2% by 2009. The Don Dunstan Foundation (DDF) allocated funding for a project to identify the factors which are assisting and the factors which are impeding progress towards the achievement of the 2% Target.

## Project methodology

A five part methodology was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative methods of information collection.

- 1 Review of the literature.
- 2 Review and analysis of SA public sector Aboriginal employment data.
- 3 Interviews and focus groups with key Aboriginal stakeholders (within the SA public sector and externally).
- 4 Case Studies exemplifying good practice.
- 5 A survey with **173** Aboriginal employees from the SA public sector, distributed on the project team's behalf to SAPSIEN (South Australian Public Sector Indigenous Employees' Network). A very high response rate was achieved - SAPSIEN's membership fluctuates between approximately 250 and 300 people, giving a response of between **57.7%** and **69.2%**. Many of those participating in the survey thanked the DDF for the opportunity to provide feedback to a trusted source that guaranteed confidentiality.

## Project Findings

### Aboriginal employment outcomes (refer Section 2)

The past three years (2003 to 2006 inclusive) are notable for specific policies and initiatives designed to increase Aboriginal employment in the South Australian public sector and to provide a culturally inclusive public sector workplace. During this period -

- o The number of Aboriginal employees has increased from **784** in 2003 to **1,276** in 2006, as has the proportion – from **0.92%** to **1.37%** of the public sector workforce. During the same period non-Aboriginal employees grew from 84,792 to 91,572.
- o In terms of total appointments, Aboriginal employment has increased during this period by **62.8%** while non-Aboriginal appointments have increased by 8.1%.

Therefore, the South Australian public sector has been successful in increasing the total number of Aboriginal employees and is moving closer to the 2% target of representation. This is a positive foundation from which enhanced quantity and quality of Aboriginal employment becomes increasingly possible.

However, in the interests of continuous learning and improvement, it is important to scrutinise the nature of the employment outcomes attained. In doing so, it is evident that more specific **sub-targets** need to be set in order to measure both the **quantity** and **quality** of increased Aboriginal employment. Project findings show that measuring progress solely in terms of a proportion of the SA public sector workforce at a given point in time does not indicate differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employees regarding –

- 1 type of appointment
- 2 level of appointment
- 3 retention as well as recruitment.

There are also differences in relation to **contracts of employment**, with Aboriginal trainees and apprentices being less likely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to complete, despite increases in commencements. Non-completions have been consistently higher for Aboriginal participants (compared with non-Aboriginal participants) in all the years 2001-2006, despite commencements being higher in most of those years for Aboriginal people (*see Section 2.1.4 and Accompanying Report II*). Contract of training commencements (but not completions) are reflected in the 2% Target.

The reliance on an absolute target does not differentiate between Aboriginal-specific roles and units and may not necessarily mean that discernible change is occurring in the ‘mainstream’ public sector appointments. At present, reporting does not require agencies to separate their achievement of the Target in terms of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal specific units.

### *Type of appointment*

The shift from long term and ongoing appointment towards **short term contracts** has been a feature of South Australian public sector employment as a whole, but this trend has been more pronounced for Aboriginal employees. The shift reflects broader workforce employment policy designed to achieve resource efficiencies. However, our findings indicate that this reduces the effectiveness of South Australian Aboriginal employment policy initiatives (*see Section 3.7*).

A key finding of this Project has been that Aboriginal public sector employees are committed to a long term future with their employer and are frustrated by the limited availability of ongoing employment opportunities. While Aboriginal employment outcomes

are increasing from a quantitative perspective, this does not necessarily imply that quality of employment is being achieved (*refer Section 2.1.2 and Accompanying Report II*).

### *Level of appointment*

Although a global target of 2% Aboriginal employment has been set, it is also important to augment that benchmark by aiming to achieve this **across all levels** of appointment. At present, there are no data that report on the achievement of the target at different levels of appointment in the South Australian public sector.

The Project has used salary as an indicator of appointment level in analysing South Australian public sector workforce data. Our findings show an unequal distribution with lower proportions of Aboriginal employees in the higher salary groupings and a higher incidence in the lower salary groupings, relative to non- Aboriginal employees. This is likely to reflect differences in age profile and lengths of service between both groups of employees (*refer Section 2.1.5 and Accompanying Report II*).

### *Focus of employment*

Aboriginal-specific units and services form an extremely important part of the South Australian public sector. It is likely that a significant part of the 2% Target will be met through employment with such a focus. At present, reporting does not require agencies to separate their achievement of the Target in terms of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal specific units or services, and without this information, it is difficult to determine whether discernible change is occurring in 'mainstream' public sector appointments (*Section 2.1.6*).

### *Retention and recruitment*

In determining the effectiveness of Aboriginal employment strategies it is important to distinguish between **recruitment and retention** outcomes. Public sector workforce data have shown that increases in Aboriginal employment have been successful in terms of recruitment.

However, analysis of data regarding length of service with employing agency and length of service with the South Australian public sector highlight a number of differences between the retention of Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal employees. Perhaps reflecting the younger age profile and greater likelihood of short term contractual appointment, Aboriginal employees have shorter length of stay with their employing agency and with the public sector as a whole.

Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal employees generally leave their employing agency or the South Australian public sector for similar reasons, but two important differences are evident. These involve more non-Aboriginal employees leaving due to retirement (reflecting their older age profile) and more Aboriginal employees resigning due to family responsibilities and ill health.

It is likely that Aboriginal employees will face a range of family care-giving responsibilities that are not necessarily shared by non-Aboriginal employees, and that their younger profile

is likely to bring greater work-family-balance issues. Health data tell a story of significant disadvantage of Aboriginal Australians relative to non-Aboriginal Australians, and one of the Project's key findings (see Section 3.6.1) has been that the unique demands placed on Aboriginal employees in balancing the often contradictory expectations of their community and the public sector creates stress that can lead to 'burn-out'. The importance of continuing with a range of support mechanisms to increase the quality of the employment experience for Aboriginal employees, and continued effort to create culturally inclusive workplaces that promote work-life-balance is highlighted by these findings (see Section 3.2.2).

### The quality of the Aboriginal employment experience (refer Section 2.2)

As part of the DDF Project survey of Aboriginal public sector employees, respondents were asked to provide a rating in relation to a number of statements about the experience of being an Indigenous employee in the SA public sector. A five point scale was provided, and an average rating was calculated for each statement. The Chart below summarises some of those findings, in order of frequency, ranging from the most to the least positive ratings.

Statement	Rating
<i>As an Indigenous employee in the SA public sector I have been able to contribute positively to the Indigenous South Australian community.</i> <sup>1</sup>	(Most positive)
<i>Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in my work unit.</i>	(Positive)
<i>Most of my colleagues in my work unit work sensitively with Indigenous employees.</i>	
<i>Most of the managers in my work unit work sensitively with Indigenous employees.</i>	
<i>Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees have the same opportunities for training and development.</i>	Neutral Rating
<i>Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in my agency/Department</i>	
<i>Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in the SA public sector</i>	Neutral-Slightly Negative
<i>Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees have the same opportunities for promotion and career development.</i>	
<i>Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees have the same opportunities to act in roles or positions that would advance their career prospects.</i>	
<i>In my experience non-Indigenous managers in the SA public sector have a reasonable understanding of Aboriginal culture.</i>	
<i>In my experience non-Indigenous employees in the SA public sector have a reasonable understanding of Aboriginal culture</i>	Negative Rating
<i>In my experience Indigenous employees experience racist behaviour</i>	Most negative

<sup>1</sup> Given that this was the main reason the majority had joined the sector, this is a positive finding.

The ratings indicate that Aboriginal employees are reasonably positive about the degree of sensitivity with which they are treated in their immediate work unit, but become progressively less positive in their assessment outside of the work unit and the least positive in their perception of the South Australian public sector as a whole.

A distinction has been drawn in their ratings between behaving with sensitivity and knowledge of Aboriginal history and culture. This reinforces the findings (refer Section 3.2) made about the need for significant improvement in managers', and more so employees', knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history, issues and needs, and in the process, developing the cultural competence needed to create fully inclusive work environments. The most negative rating was applied to the experience of racist and discriminatory behaviour, a finding that was supported by the public sector's *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* and by the DDF Project interviews with Aboriginal employees, which identified as a key barrier a tradition of systemic exclusion (rather than overtly racist behaviour) that will take considerable time and effort to overcome.

### **Barriers to achieving the 2% Target and current strategic response by the SAPS** (refer Section 3)

Aboriginal people face a wide range of barriers in accessing employment in the SA public sector. Many of these barriers are intertwined, highlighting the importance of strategies with multiple components and operating across government agencies. Eight main barriers have been identified by the Project survey and interviews, with some of these having several elements.

- 1 Negative or misinformed perceptions and attitudes.
- 2 Under-developed workforce cultural competence and culturally inclusive workplaces.
- 3 Gaps in educational attainment.
- 4 Work-life-balance challenges.
- 5 Under-developed culturally inclusive recruitment processes.
- 6 Under-developed support mechanisms.
- 7 Insufficient ongoing employment opportunities.
- 8 Insufficient use of exit strategies and succession planning.

#### *Negative perceptions and attitudes*

Perceptions and attitudes form a powerful set of barriers to the employment of Aboriginal people in the public sector and are manifest across all stages of the employment spectrum, from recruitment to exit. Of all the barriers identified, perceptions and attitudes represent the most difficult challenge. Project findings indicate that these involve two sets and sources of negative perceptions by –

- ⇒ Aboriginal people about the public sector as an employer, and
- ⇒ employers and colleagues about Aboriginal people in the workplace.

Negative perceptions held by Aboriginal people have two strands. The first is based on the past role of government (and therefore, of its public service) in abusing its authority in

relation to Aboriginal Australians, originating with British colonisation, and including the role played in relation to the *Stolen Generation*. The second is based on perceptions of the public service being regarded as overly bureaucratic and involving excessive administrative work, and being too formal in its work style. Compounding this view is the reputation for under-developed cultural competence based on the reported experiences of Aboriginal employees. Taken together, these perceptions form a barrier to the **recruitment** of Aboriginal people into the public sector.

Equity-promoting measures that encourage Aboriginal people to become public sector employees can bring the unintended consequence of some non-Aboriginal employees perceiving their Aboriginal colleagues as having been appointed on the basis of race rather than for the knowledge and abilities they can contribute. This was reported as a barrier in both the Project interviews and survey responses, and is also identified in the literature review. This includes a perception by some that Aboriginal peoples' educational qualifications have been attained by favourable treatment rather than by merit. Negative perceptions and attitudes form a barrier to both the **recruitment and retention** of Aboriginal people in the public sector, and are closely related to the second barrier identified – under-developed workforce cultural competence and the need for more culturally inclusive workplaces.

#### *Under-developed workforce cultural competence and culturally inclusive workplaces*

Project findings indicate that both the recruitment and particularly retention of Aboriginal employees are limited by under-developed workforce cultural competence and the subsequent need to continue to develop culturally inclusive workplaces. Five separate but intertwined factors have been isolated and these involve the need to –

- o further develop the cultural competence of the South Australian public sector workforce;
- o continue to strive for culturally inclusive workplaces that create a climate of inclusion rather than exclusion;
- o reduce discrimination and racism in the workplace;
- o continue to increase the Aboriginal workforce in order to achieve 'critical mass'; and
- o ensure that Aboriginal employees' abilities are fully utilised and that they feel valued for their contribution.

Under-developed cultural competence was identified as involving a widespread lack of knowledge of Aboriginal issues and history, as well as of more specific cultural understanding (for example, in relation to death and associated rites and ceremonies). It also was seen to involve a tradition of systemic exclusion that shapes workplace climates, where the impact of ongoing public sector reconciliation and equity promotion for Aboriginal people has brought increased tolerance, but not necessarily acceptance.

Project findings indicate that under-developed cultural competence has multiple effects, impairing the provision of flexible working conditions that support Aboriginal employees in meeting family and cultural obligations (*see Section 3.4*) and underpinning discriminatory and racist behaviour by some members of the non-Aboriginal workforce (*see Section 3.2.3*). It also limits the ability of senior management to commit to achieving a culturally inclusive

workplace and to lead by example in doing so. The likelihood of Aboriginal public sector employees experiencing racism and discrimination, as well as bullying and harassment has been confirmed by South Australian and Australian public sector workforce surveys (*see Section 2.2*) and by international research findings.

Working in an environment without discrimination was a retention influencing factor for **43.4%** of those surveyed. Among the most frequently cited factors influencing retention were having a good manager or supervisor (**65.3%**) and working with managers who understand, or try to understand, Aboriginal culture (**59.0%**). This highlights the important role **managers** have to play in creating a culturally inclusive workplace.

The Aboriginal employee's work life can be one of extreme isolation. They are often recruited and placed in roles which isolate them from other workers (Purdie *et al*: 2006; Williams *et al*: 2003) and even mainstream roles can continue the separation when the predominant workplace culture acts as a source of exclusion. For some of those surveyed, feeling outnumbered and overwhelmed by a single, predominant workplace culture acted as a barrier to recruitment and retention. The 'critical mass' principle (that is, reaching a proportion where minority group members do not feel isolated because of their small numbers) does not appear to have been applied in any of the Australian government strategies reviewed (*see Section 3.2.4*).

Two important factors influencing retention were found to be working in an environment where the Aboriginal person feels valued (**51.4%**) while having knowledge, skills and experience under-utilised (**43.4%**) works against retention (*see Section 3.2.5*). It is important for retention strategies to address these factors. Aboriginal employees also reported that their main motivation for seeking employment in the public sector had been to contribute to the well-being of Aboriginal people. This was also identified as one of several key factors considered to influence their retention. Workplaces that are not culturally inclusive and whose employees have limited cultural competence are less likely to value the contribution of Aboriginal employees and to under-utilise their expertise. It will be important for future recruitment strategies to take this finding into account.

### *Gaps in educational attainment*

Apart from the need to continue to build the capacity of the public sector workforce in terms of cultural competence, the matching need is to build the capacity of Aboriginal people seeking to enter or employed in the public sector. This issue has two components -

- ⇒ continuing to build pathways into the public sector for Aboriginal recruitment through opportunities for skill development and the acquisition of required credentials, and
- ⇒ broadening the recognition of individual capacity beyond 'mainstream' qualifications to include the specific expertise offered by Aboriginal people, while also supporting Aboriginal employees to participate in professional and career development opportunities.

Project survey participants expressed strong support for these pathway and capacity building strategies - the **Aboriginal Employment Program** and the various programs that

support **Aboriginal apprenticeships, traineeships, and particularly, cadetships and scholarships**. Traineeships are a key pathway into the public sector but the Project identified widespread concern that they do not lead to ongoing employment yet are counted in measuring progress to the 2% Target. Both the Project's literature review and survey of Aboriginal employees identified structured work experience as a means of introducing young Aboriginal people to public sector employment. This provides an earlier point of intervention than other recruitment strategies and those consulted called for wider application of this strategy.

The high value placed by public sector organisations on formal qualifications and particular forms of experience can work against Aboriginal peoples' access to employment, either because many lack those formal credentials and experience, or because the expertise they bring to the role is not recognised against mainstream accreditation and qualification frameworks. Two key retention-promoting factors identified by those surveyed were having opportunities for training and development (**64.7%**) and for career development (**54.3%**).

Aboriginal advocates consulted for the Project also argued that an **early intervention approach** is needed in building pathways into the public sector for Aboriginal people. This would complement existing initiatives designed to increase the retention of Aboriginal school students by providing career development strategies that link young Aboriginal people to a public sector career path. Several of those interviewed emphasised the importance of early intervention in building pathways for Aboriginal people into the public sector and called for a coordinated approach across the sector to provide pre-employment work experience (including pre-traineeship and pre-apprenticeship) and linkages to secondary schools.

### *Work-life-balance challenges*

Critical to work-life-balance is the provision of *flexible workplace organisation* and ready access to *leave provisions* that acknowledge the importance of cultural beliefs and practices (Purdie *et al.*: 2006; SA Government: 2005). Flexible working conditions are part of good practice in employment as a general rule, as Australians face increasing work-family-life balance challenges. For Aboriginal people, the challenge is compounded by the greater likelihood of carer responsibilities and community responsibilities (Rotumah *et al.*: 2005). Such responsibilities are important to Aboriginal people but take time away from the workplace and tend to be perceived as not being supported through existing leave provisions (Purdie *et al.*: 2006).

The Project has found that although flexible working conditions and cultural leave provisions are a feature of South Australian public sector employment, Aboriginal employees are less likely to take advantage of them (*see Section 3.4*). Aboriginal employees were also found to be more likely than non-Aboriginal employees to resign due to family responsibilities and ill health, both of which are extremely relevant to work-life-balance (*see Section 2.1.3*).

### *Under-developed culturally inclusive recruitment processes*

This barrier has two components –

- ⇒ The need for wider use of culturally relevant methods to promote the public sector to Aboriginal people rather than relying solely on traditional recruitment approaches such as, advertising through non-Aboriginal media outlets.
- ⇒ The need to continue efforts to make the recruitment and induction processes more culturally inclusive by ensuring that applicants are informed about employment in the sector and the process of application, and supporting them during the processes of application, selection and induction.

The need to promote the public sector as an employer and to inform Aboriginal people about pathways to that employment is recognised by most jurisdictions in Australia as requiring more than advertising through mainstream recruitment sources, with most building into their Aboriginal employment strategies the development of effective working links and relationships with Aboriginal stakeholders. Another component to pathway building, which is far less recognised, involves addressing the information gap of many Aboriginal applicants regarding the public sector, how it operates and what is expected of employees and those seeking employment.

Those surveyed for the Project point to the need to demystify public sector employment and to ensure that Aboriginal people are well informed about opportunities for work in the sector and what is required of public sector employees. A strategy suggested by them and evident in the literature review is that of information sessions targeting Aboriginal communities. Promoting public sector employment was seen to require **multiple** approaches, including specific Career Expos, providing information at Aboriginal events, targeting schools and the VET and higher education sectors, and profiling Aboriginal public sector employees. These approaches also indicate the need to use multiple communication techniques, including word of mouth through trusted intermediaries.

Application and selection processes can be intimidating because of their formality and lack of familiarity, and when they are lacking in cultural sensitivity. Project interviews emphasised the importance of culturally inclusive recruitment processes, and of ensuring that this is part of standard HR policy and practice. Specific mention was made of the difficulties posed for many Aboriginal applicants by existing Job and Person Specifications and the need for user-friendly wording. The survey also identified the importance of Aboriginal membership on selection panels and of providing information that enables a level playing field for Aboriginal applicants who lack knowledge of the public sector and how it operates. These findings are supported by existing research (*see Section 3.5 and Accompanying Report I*).

It is important to note that many of the proposed actions provided by the survey and interview samples are of potential benefit to **all** candidates, not just those from an Aboriginal background.

### *Under-developed support mechanisms*

Having Aboriginal employees as visible members of the public sector workforce sends a positive message to Aboriginal communities. However, this positive outcome brings its own costs as many Aboriginal workers are placed in the role of straddling their own communities' needs and those of their public sector employing organisation. They can be expected to represent all Aboriginal peoples even though it is possible only to represent themselves. There are often high expectations placed on them in terms of providing role models and mentors to other Aboriginal employees, and in providing time to be official representatives on a range of committees and other structures (see Section 3.6.1). These create significant time and personal pressures that are rarely acknowledged in public sector support strategies, despite being continuously identified by Aboriginal people (Purdie *et al*: 2006; Williams *et al*: 2003).

Aboriginal employees consulted for the Project have identified that a range of support mechanisms exist for them and have been positive about its impact. The survey asked participants to identify any strategies in place that appear to be helpful in reaching the target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the SA public sector. The third most frequently identified strategy was the provision of support through mentoring, Aboriginal networking and work shadowing. Being supported in the workplace (54.9%) and being part of an Indigenous employee network (56.6%) were identified as key factors influencing their retention (see Section 3.6).

Missing, however, is specific support that recognises the unique pressures they face in representing their communities in the public sector workplace and representing the public sector (and by association, government) in Aboriginal communities. It is also important to structure support as a coordinated process that begins with informing and recruiting Aboriginal people to the public sector workforce and continues across the employment spectrum, including to its exit (see Section 3.8).

### *Insufficient ongoing employment opportunities*

A continuing theme in the Project findings was the importance attached by Aboriginal people to secure ongoing employment in the face of a trend for the public sector to offer short term contract work. There are a number of factors that are considered to influence retention and the highest priority was given by the Project survey sample to **secure, ongoing employment (78%)**. This was nominated as the factor most likely to encourage Aboriginal employees to remain in the SA public sector while obtaining secure employment had been the second most frequently identified recruitment influence (refer Section 3.7). The survey sample also expressed a long term commitment to remaining in the SA public sector.

However, the reduced availability of ongoing appointments in comparison with short term contracts and the introduction of new FTE caps was expected by most of those consulted to have a negative impact on Aboriginal employment. Some of those consulted believe that the simultaneous setting of a 2% Target and the reduction in available long term employment sends mixed messages about the South Australian Government's commitment to its Indigenous Employment Strategy, and was seen to encourage a tokenist approach.

### *Insufficient use of exit strategies and succession planning*

Missing from most public sector Aboriginal employment strategies is the use of *exit surveys and succession planning* which can be significant in improving both recruitment and retention outcomes.

#### Existing provision to address these barriers

The *South Australian Indigenous Employment Strategy (2003)* is supported by a wider raft of state-based programs under the *SA Works* initiative. Of specific relevance to public sector recruitment and retention is the *Aboriginal Employment Program (AEP)* which provides support to people on the *Aboriginal Employment Register*, to current public sector employees and to agencies, as well as the *South Australian Public Service Indigenous Scholarships* which provide a study allowance for Aboriginal people studying at a university and in some VET courses. Once studies are completed, the person is eligible to gain employment in the public sector.

The Project has identified the need for apprenticeships and traineeships to be linked to ongoing and long term employment, and for greater use of structured work experience and secondment programs across a range of agencies for Aboriginal people. Cadetships were regarded as positive strategies because they are linked to ongoing employment. The *Work Shadowing* initiative was identified as a positive strategy because it enables Aboriginal employees to shadow people in positions across the sector, which was considered to be particularly important for employees working in Aboriginal-specific units. Several governments, including the South Australian government, have included in their Aboriginal employment strategies individualised training and career development plans that are tailored to employee needs. These best practice approaches were strongly supported by those consulted but were seen as requiring specific **resourcing** to be effective.

Concerns were expressed by some about traineeships because of their strong bias towards administrative occupations and because of their gender imbalance (being very popular with young women, creating the need to develop other pathways for young men). Traineeships were reported as no longer attracting additional funds for employers which is expected to have a negative impact on the number of traineeships taken on across the public sector.

The Project survey asked participants to identify any strategies in place that appear to be helpful in reaching the target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the SA public sector. The third most frequently identified strategy was **agency-specific Aboriginal employment strategies** together with the *Cultural Inclusion Framework* (however, there were almost as many who viewed this cynically or as too recently implemented to judge its impact).

Both the *South Australian Indigenous Employment Strategy (2003)* and the *Cultural Inclusion Framework (2006)* provide for cultural awareness raising and some cultural competence training. However, the Project findings indicate that this may not be progressing beyond the stage of raising awareness and sensitivity to developing cross-cultural knowledge and skills, and diversity management expertise. It is important that the

development of cultural competence is an **ongoing** rather than once-off process because of the time taken to change attitudes and to develop cross-cultural expertise.

Cultural competence can be seen as developed in two mutually reinforcing ways – by formal training and by the direct experience of working with people from a diversity of cultures. However, the relatively low numbers of Aboriginal employees (especially those working outside of Aboriginal-specific units or services) means that the opportunity for developing cultural competence is restricted, as is the opportunity to develop a critical mass of Aboriginal employees. Strategies that could be pursued to achieve critical mass include recruitment in small groups (including traineeships, apprenticeships and cadetships) rather than as individuals and clustering Aboriginal employees wherever possible. These would augment existing, positively evaluated support strategies such as, mentoring, buddying and the provision of Aboriginal networking opportunities.

The *Cultural Inclusion Framework* requires agencies to audit or self-assess current arrangements and initiate action planning to support the functional areas within their own agencies. It is expected that its five core elements should be readily incorporated into organisational quality improvement mechanisms. Each agency now has an action plan for cultural awareness and Chief Executives now have responsibility to increase cultural awareness within their agency. This accountability-promoting strategy received strong support from some of those consulted for the Project but the reliance on self-assessment has been criticised by others.

There was also support for the recently introduced requirement that the filling of public service positions be based on re-deployee availability followed by Aboriginal Employment program availability prior to advertising. However, recent changes involving the former Office of Public Employment were considered by some to threaten the ongoing evolution of Aboriginal workforce development. Some of those consulted believe that the principle of Indigenous people leading Indigenous-specific units must be upheld as an important part of wider promotion of Indigenous capacity in the SAPS. When this does not occur, it can be seen as sending a mixed message from government about its commitment to making the SAPS an employer of choice for Aboriginal people.

The design of recruitment strategies can benefit from acknowledgement of the powerful motivation to make a difference to the well-being of Aboriginal South Australians while retention strategies will be strengthened by strategies that ensure Aboriginal employees' skills and knowledge are fully utilised and valued. In part this relies on building workforce cultural competence and more inclusive work environments, but it also relies on evaluating Aboriginal expertise within culturally relevant paradigms and not relying solely on mainstream credentialing systems.

While those consulted for the Project supported the various strategies that have been established to achieve the 2% Aboriginal employment target, they believe that they are limited by the trend in the South Australian public sector for appointments to be of a **short term** nature. Ongoing and long term employment was seen as critical to individual professional and career development, and to the development of broader public sector workforce cultural competence.

The South Australian government has a strong commitment to enabling work-life-balance and this is a key feature of its workforce development initiatives in the public sector. Consequently Aboriginal employees have the opportunity to access various forms of flexible working arrangements but this will vary with individual workplaces. However, the particular challenges faced by Aboriginal employees in balancing work and life commitments, their conflicting responsibilities as public servants and Aboriginal community members, and the degree to which workplaces are culturally inclusive and the public sector workforce is culturally competent, are all crucial to the effectiveness of flexible working arrangements.

### Conclusions - meeting the 2% Target

The following **fifteen** public sector agencies have already met the target of 2.0% Aboriginal employment:

#### *Aboriginal-specific agencies*

- o National Aboriginal Cultural Institute (Tandanya), 100.0%
- o Aboriginal Lands Trust, 75.0%
- o Pika Wiya Health Service, 72.7%
- o Tauondi Incorporated, 47.8%

#### *Not Aboriginal-specific*

- o Office of Public Employment, 8.5%
- o Carclew Youth Arts Centre Incorporated, 7.5%
- o Northern and Far Western Regional Health Service, 6.3%
- o Department of Families and Communities, 5.6%
- o Correctional Services, 3.4%
- o HomeStart Finance, 3.4%
- o Legal Services Commission, 3.2%
- o Wakefield Regional Health Service, 2.6%
- o Department of the Premier and Cabinet, 2.5%
- o Department of Health, 2.3%
- o Courts Administration Authority, 2.3%
- o Environment and Heritage, 2.1%

Setting the 2% Target is a positive step because it calls agencies to account against a measurable outcome. However, it is important to ensure that sufficient resources exist to meet that target, and feedback expresses concerns that this does not appear to be occurring.

Apart from seeking to address diversity management issues and to address the significant disadvantages of Aboriginal South Australians, the 2% Target and *Indigenous Employment Strategy* can be seen as a proactive approach on the part of the South Australian government to broader workforce skill shortages. Both strategies would be strengthened if linked to a specific *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy* that could be part of the existing *SA Works* initiative. This would pursue the goal of recruiting and retaining Aboriginal employees while building capacity that addresses the consequences of an ageing public sector workforce. In combination, the 2% Target, *Indigenous Employment Strategy* and

*Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy* would be mutually reinforcing, seeking equity-related, individual and workforce development outcomes (see *Recommendation 13*).

An *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy* would require the establishment of a series of structures and processes that would include –

- ⇒ an *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Unit* located in the Department of Premier and Cabinet to support the development, implementation and ongoing evaluation of the Strategy.
- ⇒ an *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Advisory Group*, supported by and providing support to the *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Unit*.
- ⇒ the employment of *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Liaison Officers* who would advise and work with agency workforce planning teams.

The Strategy would be based on consultation with Aboriginal public sector employees and their representatives with an in-built evaluative feedback loop (see *Recommendation 14*). It is most important that the Strategy combines workforce planning and development expertise with Aboriginal knowledge and expertise. Those consulted for the DDF Project have expressed strong support for the opportunity to provide feedback to the South Australian government and to public sector leaders, about the strengths and gaps of the *Indigenous Employment Strategy* and the meeting of a 2% Target. They have also identified the need for their feedback to remain confidential and to be provided to an independent, external source. For this reason and to monitor the proposed *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy*, there is a need to establish a process for this to occur.

There have been numerous equity-promoting strategies developed by the South Australian and other Australian public services for Aboriginal people, and while the intentions are positive, their implementation is often compromised. In part this is a reflection of the sheer difficulty involved in achieving access and equity and cultural inclusion goals. In part it is also due to the commitment to those strategies not being shared by all and by the resistance of some to any change in the *status quo*. Change of this magnitude takes time because of the need to educate, to change attitudes and to move away from entrenched beliefs, practices and traditions. However, the gains that this change brings can benefit Aboriginal people, and the public sector workforce as a whole.

## Summary of recommendations

### **Recommendation 1 (page 32)**

It is recommended that the Target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the South Australian public sector be accompanied by sub-targets that measure quality as well as quantity of employment outcomes. These would apply to –

- a) retention as well as recruitment rates;
- b) all levels of appointment;
- c) short term as distinct from ongoing employment;
- d) contracts of training as distinct from other employment;
- e) employment in Aboriginal-specific units as distinct from employment in broader agency roles.

**Recommendation 2 (page 40)**

It is recommended that existing strategies to increase workforce cultural competence be continued and with greater attention to developing knowledge of Aboriginal culture and history. It is also recommended that cross-cultural training be designed to develop skills as well as raising awareness and sensitivity, and that training be ongoing.

**Recommendation 3 (page 41)**

It is recommended that training to enhance cultural competence include specific attention to the role of managers in promoting culturally secure work environments that actively discourage racism and discrimination. It is also recommended that strategies be developed to further encourage Aboriginal employees to report experiences of racism and discrimination.

**Recommendation 4 (page 42)**

It is recommended that greater attention be paid to recruitment and work placement that achieves 'critical mass' for Aboriginal employees.

**Recommendation 5 (page 42)**

It is recommended that recruitment and retention strategies reflect the importance placed by Aboriginal employees on having the opportunity to enhance the well-being of Aboriginal South Australians, and on having their expertise valued and utilised more effectively.

**Recommendation 6 (page 44)**

It is recommended that existing strategies designed to build pathways for Aboriginal people into the South Australian public sector are continued, and that a stronger emphasis is placed on an early intervention approach that involves developing pathways from secondary school onwards.

It is also recommended that Aboriginal traineeships and apprenticeships are linked to ongoing employment in the public sector, and that increased numbers of Aboriginal cadetships and scholarships are provided.

**Recommendation 7 (page 52)**

It is recommended that a specific communication strategy is developed in collaboration with Aboriginal community representatives to promote the South Australian public sector as an employer to Aboriginal people and that this strategy addresses information gaps about how the sector operates and what is expected of its employees. The strategy should have multiple components and communication techniques, including word of mouth through trusted intermediaries, including existing Aboriginal public sector employees.

**Recommendation 8 (page 52)**

It is recommended that recruitment processes targeting Aboriginal people include information sessions that provide them with an informed approach to applying for public sector employment.

**Recommendation 9 (page 54)**

It is recommended that culturally inclusive processes, including informed application and interview preparation, user-friendly wording of Job and Specification statements, and Aboriginal membership of selection panels, be part of established HR policy and practice.

**Recommendation 10 (page 58)**

It is recommended that existing support strategies (particularly mentoring, 'buddying' and the provision of opportunities for structured Aboriginal networking) be continued and that additional strategies are developed to assist Aboriginal employees in meeting the specific challenges arising from being representatives of the public sector and of their own communities.

**Recommendation 11 (page 59)**

It is recommended that a strategy is developed by the South Australian public sector to ensure that current caps on full time equivalent positions and the reducing availability of ongoing appointments do not reduce the quantity and quality of Aboriginal employment.

**Recommendation 12 (page 59)**

It is recommended that succession planning be established in relation to existing Aboriginal employees and that exit interviews are conducted with all Aboriginal employees who leave the South Australian public sector, in order to continuously improve future recruitment and retention strategies.

**Recommendation 13 (page 65)**

It is recommended that an *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy* be planned and implemented to complement the *Indigenous Employment Strategy* and the Target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the South Australian public sector. It is further recommended that this is supported by the establishment of an *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Unit*, an *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Advisory Group*, and a network of *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Liaison Officers*.

**Recommendation 14 (page 65)**

It is recommended that a regular survey of South Australian public sector Aboriginal employees be undertaken by an external, credible source and that this feedback be considered part of the accountability process associated with meeting the 2% Target, and with informing the *Indigenous Employment Strategy* and the proposed *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy*.

# 1 Introduction

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*“Working in the Public Sector as an Aboriginal person is hard - we are part of the community, we are voters, we are an extension of our people, we are always compromising who we are to satisfy government decisions and we are often used by government organisations to carry out the business particularly when visiting communities. Non-Aboriginal people do not understand this and it's hard for Aboriginal people to explain this or describe what it means.”*  
(Project interviewee)

*“If you are treated fairly, valued and respected in a workplace the chances are you will stay there for a long time.”* (Project survey respondent)

## 1.1 Project context

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The public sector can play an important role in contributing to reduced employment disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and in leading by example to reduce discriminatory work practices. In reviewing the international and Australasian literature it is evident that the challenge is significant and barriers persist, despite a range of policy and program interventions. Nevertheless, there is much to be learned by sharing the lessons arising from both success and failure. The Don Dunstan Foundation (DDF) project has been designed to capture those lessons and in the process, to provide an information base from which to progress an agenda for Aboriginal employment reform.

As an employer, the public sector can also be proactive in addressing the dual challenge of an ageing workforce and projected skill shortages by creating entry and career pathways for population groups who are under-represented in the labour force, and/or under-employed. Labour market participation rates are generally lower for Aboriginal Australians, indicating potential for stronger growth in the Aboriginal labour force. In contrast to the general Australian population, the Aboriginal population has higher fertility rates and a younger age profile that is likely to see its share of the total potential labour force grow into the future.

The younger age profile of Aboriginal Australians is reflected in the SA public sector workforce, with 81% of Aboriginal employees being less than 50 years of age, compared with 65.5% of non-Aboriginal employees. In the next five to ten years more than a third of South Australia's public service will approach retirement. Given the ageing of the public sector workforce, this presents a potential opportunity to increase the diversity of the workforce by growing its Aboriginal membership. This has been recognized by the Australian Public Service -

*... it will be increasingly important for agencies to address employment barriers that prevent them from drawing on the full range of skills and capacity and potential capacity available in the Australian labour force, from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (APS: 2005).*

Consequently, it is important for the South Australian public sector to increase the quantity and quality of employment for Aboriginal people, both as a workforce development

strategy and as a diversity management strategy. This involves developing workforce strategies that are able to address both its needs as an employer and those of its Aboriginal employees.

In response to identified inequities, the Australian government and all State and Territory governments have implemented an Aboriginal employment strategy (although these range from rudimentary to relatively comprehensive). Typically these involve the development of pathways through the provision of scholarships, traineeships and similar entry schemes, work experience programs, training and development opportunities for Aboriginal employees, cross-cultural training for non-Aboriginal staff and working in partnership with Aboriginal communities to develop appropriate employment strategies. Most support the creation of support mechanisms such as, mentoring and formalised networks for Aboriginal employees, and have strategies for recruitment and retention, career development and initiatives to enable access by Aboriginal peoples to senior roles (Rotumah *et al.*, 2005: 10). Few involve pre-recruitment information and preparation (for example, familiarisation with the nature of public sector work and public sector functioning) and few involve exit information gathering and succession planning. (*Accompanying Report I and its Appendices have further details of these initiatives.*)

Most Australian jurisdictions apply targets as a means to focus and measure the impact of their Aboriginal employment initiatives. These targets usually take the Aboriginal population's representation in the wider population as their benchmark, with most setting at a level slightly above that representation and applying these across the public sector as a whole. The most common targets fall between **2% and 3%**.

### **1.1.1 The South Australian government Aboriginal employment initiatives**

The *South Australian Strategic Plan 2004* provides a framework for action and measurement in relation to a number of population groups. It calls for a reduction in –

*“... the gap between the outcomes for South Australia's Aboriginal population and those of the rest of South Australia's population, particularly in relation to health, life expectancy, employment, school retention rates and imprisonment” (Objective 6 - Expanding Opportunity).*

Objective 6 has an accompanying target to increase the employment of Aboriginal employees in the public sector from 1.2% to 2% by 2009.

*Aboriginal employees (existing –modified): increase the participation of Aboriginal people in the South Australian public sector, spread across all classifications and agencies, to 2% by 2010 and maintain or better those levels through to 2014. (Target T6.24)*

In June 2005 the level reached was **1.14%** of the total public sector workforce, and by June 2006 it had reached **1.37%**, with variations from one agency to another. There is significant scope to improve current employment and management practices so that Aboriginal people are attracted to and retained within the public sector.

In pursuit of the SA Strategic Plan target, the South Australian government's *Indigenous Employment Strategy for the SA Public Sector* (Government of South Australia: 2003) has four key result areas –

- 1 “The SA public sector is to be an employer of choice for Indigenous South Australians.”
- 2 “Increased employment of Indigenous South Australians in all agencies and at all levels within the SA public sector.”
- 3 “Indigenous public sector employees will be actively supported and encouraged to develop to their fullest potential.”
- 4 “Effective evaluation and reporting.”

*Further information about the Strategy appears in Section 3 of this report and in Section 3.5 of Accompanying Report I.*

The *Indigenous Employment Consultative Committee* was established to oversee the implementation and evaluation of the Strategy. This comprises executive level Aboriginal leaders from the public sector and the community. Outcomes are documented in the Commissioner for Public Employment's Annual Report to Parliament.

The enhancement of Aboriginal employment in the South Australian public sector is further supported by the cross-government *Cultural Inclusion Framework* (Government of South Australia: 2006). The Framework is designed to assist State government agencies to develop services that are culturally inclusive and more accessible to Aboriginal people.

## 1.2 Project purpose

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Since 2003 there has been significant effort by the South Australian government to enhance Aboriginal peoples' employment outcomes in the public sector. The Don Dunstan Foundation allocated funding to support a project to identify the factors which are assisting and the factors which are impeding progress to meet the 2% Target. The Project has this stated purpose –

*“To assess current employment and management practices and improvement initiatives and recommend strategies to achieve the SA government's target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the SA Public Sector by the year 2009.”*

More specifically, the Project has been guided by these two objectives –

- 1 to identify examples of successful practice in the SA public sector and elsewhere and

- 2 to identify barriers to employment in the SA public sector for Aboriginal<sup>2</sup> people.

### 1.3 Project methodology

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The Project has been designed to capture the lessons learned with regard to challenges that have and have not been met, and to ensure that the methodology supports the perspective of Aboriginal employees in the South Australian public sector workforce. A five part methodology was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative methods of information collection.

#### 1 Review of the literature

A review was undertaken of research and other initiatives with a focus on improving Aboriginal recruitment and retention, in Australia and internationally, focusing on public sector initiatives for Aboriginal employees. The review informed other parts of the project methodology.

*(Accompanying Report I provides details of the Literature Review and its Appendix section summarises the Aboriginal employment strategies of Australian and State/Territory governments.)*

#### 2 Review and analysis of SA public sector Aboriginal employment data

A review was undertaken of available SA public sector workforce data collated by the Office of Public Employment, disaggregating where possible to provide a more specific analysis of the Aboriginal employee profile than exists currently. Access to this information was granted by the Office to the Australian Institute for Social Research for the purposes of the Project.

1. Using *Workforce Information Collection* data, a **profile** of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participation in the public sector workforce was developed that identified the number of individual and FTE (full time equivalent) employees, their gender, age and employing agency. A comparison was undertaken of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employees in relation to the following **employment characteristics** - type of appointment (ongoing, long term contract, short term contract, other), retention (as measured by the length of service of employee in current agency and length of service of employee in the public sector), recruitment to current position, (distinguishing between recruitment internally and externally to the public sector), reasons for separation from the most recent position within the public sector, and salary profile as an indicator of level of appointment.
2. The *Workforce Perspectives Survey* has been conducted regularly by the South Australian Commissioner for Public Employment and measures the

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'Aboriginal' is used throughout this report to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, irrespective of their Country origins. This was considered to be more appropriate than the broader term 'Indigenous'.

perceptions of Public Service employees across 19 administrative units. To date, the survey has been undertaken in 2003, 2004 and 2006. The 2006 survey was based on 6,270 responses, giving a rate of some **32%** of eligible employees. As part of the Project methodology, an analysis of the *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* on an Aboriginal basis was prepared on behalf of the Commissioner by officers from the Public Sector Workforce Division of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

This obtained responses from **108** people who identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, or both, and represented 1.7% of the total sample for 2006. In general, there were few differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal responses, with a few exceptions, which are outlined in this report. Where appropriate, survey findings from the Project (see Step 5 below) have been compared against those of the Aboriginal *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006*.

3. Using DFEST (Department of Further Education Employment Science and Technology) Contract of Training data made available by the Department for the Project, a comparative analysis was undertaken of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal **contracts of training**, for commencements and recommencements, completions, non-completions (that is, cancellations and withdrawals), and numbers in-training.

*(Accompanying Report II provides details of the analysis undertaken of SA public sector workforce data.)*

### **3 Interviews and focus groups with key Aboriginal stakeholders (within the SA public sector and externally)**

These were designed to identify, from the perspective of Aboriginal employees, barriers to the employment of Aboriginal people in the SA public sector and strategies seen as appropriate to addressing those barriers, and the relevance of those barriers and strategies to achieving the 2% employment target. *(See Appendix A for details of those consulted.)*

### **4 Case Studies exemplifying good practice**

The information from interviews and the literature review was used to prepare several Case Studies that illustrate strategies that represent good practice in addressing barriers to the employment of Aboriginal people in Australia.

### **5 A survey with a sample of Aboriginal employees**

Aboriginal employees were contacted by the Coordinator of the *South Australian Public Sector Indigenous Employees Network* (SAPSIEN) and asked to participate in the Project survey. The survey was informed by the key stakeholder interviews, the review of literature and our overview of public sector data. Respondents were offered a choice of on-line completion of the survey (via the AISR website to ensure

security and confidentiality of responses), a telephone interview, or written administration of the survey. Information was sought about the barriers encountered by Aboriginal people in obtaining employment in the public sector, and specific issues that need to be addressed in relation to recruitment and retention, and meeting the 2% Target.

The sponsoring of the survey by SAPSIEN and the protection of responses by directing them through the AISR website has been responsible for the high response rate achieved, with **173** people participating giving a response rate of between **57.7% and 69.2%** (SAPSIEN membership fluctuates between approximately 250 and 300 people). Many of those responding have commented that they were eager to provide their feedback to an independent and trusted source, with the confidentiality of their responses assured.

*(Accompanying Report III provides details of the survey and its findings.)*

This final report will be distributed to SA public sector managers in order to obtain their response to the issues identified and recommended strategies.

## 2 Aboriginal employment – quantitative and qualitative perspectives

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### *The concept of employment*

The employment process encompasses a range of activities in which both employer and employee are involved. This includes the recruitment process, retention of the employee, career pathways, experience of training and development, and exit. In terms of employment process, disadvantage may be experienced at any or all of these stages. (Hunter Kinfu & Taylor, 2004: 12). In developing strategies to increase the employment of Aboriginal people it is important to address the different stages of the employment spectrum from entry (including pre-entry to ensure adequate preparation for entry) to exit.

This report identifies issues to be addressed and strategies for progressing the employment of Aboriginal people across all stages of this spectrum.

### 2.1 The Aboriginal employment experience – quantitative perspective

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The Project has reviewed three sources of South Australian public sector data – the *Workforce Information Collection*, the *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* (both provided by the then Office of Public Employment, Department Premier and Cabinet) and Contract of Training information (see *Accompanying Report II – Public Sector Workforce Data Analysis*). This information has been reviewed in terms of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal demographic characteristics, employment and over time.

The gender profile of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employees shows a similarly feminised workforce with approximately **35%** being male and **65%** being female in both groups, but an age profile that is significantly younger for the Aboriginal workforce. Almost **81%** of Indigenous employees are aged **less than 50 years** compared with some 65% of non- Indigenous employees.<sup>3</sup>

#### 2.1.1 Recruitment outcomes

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The past three years (2003 to 2006 inclusive) are notable for specific policies and initiatives designed to increase Aboriginal employment and to provide a culturally inclusive public sector workplace. During this period –

- o The number of Aboriginal employees has increased from **784** in 2003 to **1,276** in 2006, as has the proportion – from **0.92%** to **1.37%** of the public sector workforce.
- o The number of non-Aboriginal employees has increased from **84,792** in 2003 to **91,572** in 2006.
- o In terms of total appointments, Aboriginal employment has increased during this period by 62.8% while non-Aboriginal appointments have increased by 8.1%.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Refer Accompanying Report II, Sections 3.1.3 and 3.1.4

<sup>4</sup> Refer Accompanying Report II, Section 3.1, Table 3.

Therefore, the South Australian public sector has been successful in increasing the total number of Aboriginal employees and in moving closer to the 2% target of representation. This is a positive foundation from which improvement becomes increasingly possible.

However, in the interests of ongoing learning and improvement, it is important to scrutinise the nature of the employment outcomes attained. In doing so, it is evident that more specific sub-targets need to be set in order to measure both quantity and quality of enhanced Aboriginal employment (*see Recommendation 1*).

### 2.1.2 Type of employment

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Public sector workforce data for the period 2000 to 2006 show that Aboriginal employment growth has been concentrated more in short-term contractual appointment than in ongoing employment. While the shift from long term and ongoing appointment towards short term contracts has been a feature of South Australian public sector employment as a whole, the trend has been more pronounced for Aboriginal employees.

- o The percentage of Aboriginal employees in **ongoing** employment has decreased from **55.0% to 50.5%** while the percentage of non-Aboriginal employment growth has decreased from 64.7% to 63.2%.
- o The percentage of Aboriginal employees in **short term contractual** employment has increased from **21.1% to 30.4%** compared with an increase from 15.3% to 19.9% for non-Aboriginal employees.
- o The percentage of Aboriginal employees in **long term contractual** employment has decreased from **14.8% to 8.1%** compared with an almost steady rate from 7.9% to 7.6% for non-Aboriginal employees.<sup>5</sup>

The shift reflects broader workforce employment policy designed to achieve resource efficiencies. However, this reduces the effectiveness of South Australian Aboriginal employment policy initiatives and questions the meaningfulness of setting a broad numerical target (*see Section 3.7*) without accompanying data that measure the quality of the outcomes achieved. A key finding of this Project has been that Aboriginal public sector employees are committed to a long term future with their employer and they and their advocates are frustrated by the limited availability of ongoing employment opportunities. While Aboriginal employment outcomes are increasing from a quantitative perspective, this does not necessarily imply that quality of employment is being achieved. *These issues are discussed further in Section 3 of this report.*

### 2.1.3 Retention

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Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employees generally leave their employing agency or the South Australian public sector for similar reasons, with the most common reason for both groups being expiry of their contract. The most apparent differences occur in relation to resignation, with more non-Aboriginal employees leaving due to retirement (reflecting their older age profile) and more Aboriginal employees resigning due to family responsibilities

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<sup>5</sup> Refer Accompanying Report II, Section 3.2, Table 11, and Figures 5 and 6.

(5% compared with 1.6% of non-Aboriginal employees) and ill health (2.8% compared with 1.2%).<sup>6</sup>

These two differences require further exploration. It is likely that Aboriginal employees will face a range of family care-giving responsibilities that are not necessarily experienced by non-Aboriginal employees, and that their younger profile is likely to bring greater work-family-balance issues. Health data tell a story of significant disadvantage of Aboriginal Australians relative to non-Aboriginal Australians, and one of the Project's key findings (*see Section 3.6.1*) has been that the unique demands placed on Aboriginal employees in balancing the often contradictory expectations of their community and the public sector creates stress, or even burn-out. The importance of a range of support mechanisms to increase the quality of the employment experience for Aboriginal employees, and the creation of culturally inclusive workplaces that promote work-life-balance is highlighted by these findings (*see Section 3.2.2*).

#### 2.1.4 Recruitment vs Retention

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In determining the effectiveness of Aboriginal employment strategies, including the setting of a 2% Target, it is important to distinguish between recruitment and retention outcomes. Public sector workforce data have shown that recruitment has been relatively successful in terms of drawing an increase numerically and proportionately of Aboriginal employment. However, the reduced availability of ongoing appointments, particularly for Aboriginal employees, brings a corresponding reduction in retention outcomes.

Analysis of data regarding length of service with employing agency and length of service with the South Australian public sector highlight a number of differences between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employment experience. Perhaps reflecting the younger age profile and greater likelihood of short term contractual appointment, Aboriginal employees have shorter length of stay with their employing agency and with the public sector as a whole<sup>7</sup>.

- o 24.6% of Aboriginal employees have been with their employing agency for **less than 12 months**, compared with 13.1% of non-Aboriginal employees.
- o 16.1% of Aboriginal employees have been with their employing agency for **more than 12 months but less than 2 years**, compared with 11.6% of non-Aboriginal employees.
- o 12.7% of Aboriginal employees have been with their employing agency for **more than 2 years but less than 3 years**, compared with 9.4% of non-Aboriginal employees.

The greatest similarity between both groups of employees occurs for appointments in the 5 to 10 year range.

- o 0.9% of Aboriginal employees have been with their employing agency for **25 years or more**, compared with 12.7% of non-Aboriginal employees.
- o 2.8% of Aboriginal employees have been with their employing agency for **more than 20 years but less than 25 years**, compared with 7.4% of non-Aboriginal employees.

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<sup>6</sup> Refer Accompanying Report II, Section 3.2.4, Table 17

<sup>7</sup> Refer Accompanying Report II, Section 3.2.2, Tables 12 & 14 and Figures 7 & 10

- o 4.6% of Aboriginal employees have been with their employing agency for **more than 15 years but less than 20 years**, compared with 9.7% of non-Aboriginal employees.

There are also differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employees in relation to how they are recruited to their current position. As at June 2006 -

- o **Internal** recruitment (that is, appointment to a position from within the public sector) was the source for **19.1%** of Aboriginal employees compared to 27.5% of non-Indigenous employees.
- o **External** recruitment was the source for **80.9%** of Aboriginal employees compared to 72.5% of non-Indigenous employees.<sup>8</sup>

Contract of Training data (provided by the Department of Further Education Employment Science and Technology) show a trend towards lower rates of retention for Aboriginal apprentices and trainees, despite higher rates of commencements. As a percentage of those who were categorised as 'in-training' -

- o **Commencements** have been consistently **higher** for Aboriginal apprentices and trainees than for non- Aboriginal apprentices and trainees during the years 2002 to 2005 with the gap between both groups reducing in 2006.
- o **Completions** have been **lower** for Aboriginal apprentices and trainees in 2001, 2003, 2004, and 2005, but higher in 2002 and similar in 2005 when compared to non-Aboriginal apprentices and trainees.
- o **Non-completions** (that is, the sum of cancellations and withdrawals) have been **higher** for Aboriginal apprentices and trainees in all of the years 2001-2006.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.1.5 Level of appointment

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Although a global target of 2% Aboriginal employment has been set, it is also important to augment that benchmark by aiming to achieve this across **all levels** of appointment. At present, there are no data that report on the achievement of the target at different levels of appointment in the South Australian public sector.

The Project has used salary as an indicator of appointment level in analysing South Australian public sector workforce data. Our findings show an unequal distribution with lower proportions of Aboriginal employees in the higher salary groupings and a higher incidence in the lower salary groupings, relative to non-Aboriginal employees.<sup>10</sup> This is likely to reflect differences in age profile and lengths of service between both groups of employees.

<sup>8</sup> Refer Accompanying Report II, Section 3.2.3, Table 16

<sup>9</sup> Refer Accompanying Report II, Section 3.3.2, Figures 19 - 21 and Table 23

<sup>10</sup> Refer Accompanying Report II, Section 3.2.5, Figure 13 and Table 19.

## 2.1.6 Focus of employment

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Aboriginal-specific units and services form an extremely important part of the South Australian public sector. It is likely that a significant part of the 2% Target will be met through employment with such a focus. At present, reporting does not require agencies to separate their achievement of the Target in terms of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal specific units or services, and without this information, it is difficult to determine whether discernible change is occurring in 'mainstream' public sector appointments.

(Less than half of the DDF Project survey sample (46.8%) were working in an **Indigenous-specific unit** in the public sector and more than half (61.3%) were working specifically **with Aboriginal people** – see *Accompanying Report III*.)

### **Recommendation 1**

**It is recommended that the Target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the South Australian public sector be accompanied by sub-targets that measure quality as well as quantity of employment outcomes. These would apply to –**

- f) retention as well as recruitment rates;**
- g) all levels of appointment;**
- h) short term as distinct from ongoing employment;**
- i) contracts of training as distinct from other employment;**
- j) employment in Aboriginal-specific units as distinct from employment in broader agency roles.**

## 2.1.7 The nature of the employment experience

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While policy development has a key role to play in engineering change in the employment outcomes of Aboriginal employees, the industrial relations culture of workplaces is equally influential and can affect the degree to which policy intentions become reality. Most of the available research uses qualitative methodologies to document the employment and workplace experience of Aboriginal Australians. However, the Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Employment Policy Research (CAEPR) has undertaken a significant amount of research that is based on quantitative methods (see *Appendix B, Bibliography*). This includes analyses of ABS data, the *Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey* (AWIRS) 1995, the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey* (NATSISS) and the *Longitudinal Survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Job Seekers*.

In analysing quantitative information about Aboriginal employment patterns, it is important to add to this, data that acknowledge the role of cultural, social, political and less easily measured influences on the employment experience and subsequent outcomes. Most contemporary research into the employment outcomes of Aboriginal people fails to do this (Rotumah *et al*, 2005: 4-5) but the CAEPR's research is an exception. One of their researchers makes this important point -

*Much of the empirical work on Indigenous labour market outcomes perpetrates the belief that education and other socioeconomic outcomes are more important than discrimination and*

history. In the rush to quantify Indigenous disadvantage, existing empirical studies may be implicitly biased against finding racial discrimination (Hunter: 2003).

A consistent theme in the CAEPR discussion papers has been that there are significant underlying forces that discriminate against Aboriginal Australians in terms of employment and labour force participation (Purdie *et al*, 2006: 58). *Chart 1* summarises the findings of two major CAEPR studies about the key features of the workplaces in which Aboriginal Australians are employed and of their industrial relations experience.

*Chart 1: Aboriginal Australians' industrial relations experience and workplace characteristics: summary of research findings*

Features of the industrial relations experience of Aboriginal Australians (Hunter & Hawke: 2000a).	Characteristics of workplaces employing Aboriginal Australians (Hunter & Hawke, 2000b)
More likely to be in short term employment	Operate 24 hours a day
More likely to have a fixed term contract	Have a more pronounced use of contractors, but a similar incidence of casual employment
More likely to prefer more hours of work per week (indicative of under-employment)	Employ young workers, people with a short tenure in their current workplace, non English speaking background workers and workers with a disability
Less likely to receive holiday pay and paid sick leave	Have employees working shift or on-call work, who are consequently more likely to get paid for overtime work
Less likely to be able to access maternity or paternity leave or bonuses for job performance	Try new management practices such as, team building, staff appraisals and evaluation schemes
Less likely to report that they had control over their work environment	
Less likely to report that they had been consulted about work-related changes in the previous twelve months	Have experienced industrial action in the last year
More likely to regard their managers as trustworthy	Have managers trained in EEO, affirmative action and anti-sexual harassment procedures
Less likely to have received work-based training despite being in workplaces that are more likely to provide such training	Have a written policy on racial harassment and a formal grievance procedure to resolve disputes that arise on either racial or sexual harassment grounds
More likely to have days off for work-related injury or illness despite being employed in workplaces that were more likely to have occupational health and safety policies and procedures	Indicate that occupational health and safety and equal employment opportunity issues are more prominent in the workplace culture

The CAEPR findings support the DDF Project findings regarding -

- o the trend in South Australian public sector employment of Aboriginal people to be in short-term rather than ongoing employment;
- o a preference for longer working hours/ongoing rather than short term appointment (from the Project's survey of Aboriginal public sector employees);
- o a generally positive assessment of their managers findings (from the Project's survey of Aboriginal public sector employees).

## **2.2 The Aboriginal employment experience – qualitative perspective**

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As part of the Project survey of Aboriginal public sector employees, respondents were asked to provide a rating in relation to a number of statements about the experience of being an Aboriginal employee in the SA public sector. A five point scale was provided, ranging from *Strongly Agree* (1) to *Neither Agree/Disagree* (3) to *Strongly Disagree* (5). They were also able to indicate *Don't Know*.

An average rating was calculated for each statement, in order to compare ratings and to identify trends in the survey sample's assessment of the Aboriginal employment experience in the SA public sector. On this basis, survey respondents gave their **most positive rating** to this statement –

- ⇒ *“As an Indigenous employees in the SA public sector I have been able to contribute positively to the Indigenous South Australian community”* (average rating **2.0** equating to 'Agree').

Given that this was the main reason the majority had joined the sector, this is a positive finding.

The **second most positive** ratings (average rating of **2.3** each) were given to these three statements –

- ⇒ *“Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in my **work unit**”.*
- ⇒ *“Most of **my colleagues** in my work unit work sensitively with Indigenous employees”.*
- ⇒ *“Most of **the managers** in my work unit work sensitively with Indigenous employees”.*

The strong level of agreement with these three statements is encouraging, because it indicates that in their immediate work unit, Aboriginal employees perceive that they are being treated with sensitivity and that good working relationships exist. This becomes progressively less positive outside of the work unit with less agreeing with these statements (average ratings of **2.6** and **3.2** respectively) -

- ⇒ *“Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in my **agency/Department**.”*

⇒ *“Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in the SA public sector”.*

In part this is likely to reflecting the negative perceptions of government and the public service held by many Aboriginal people (see Section 3.1) and stands in contrast to the assessment given to immediate work units. It is also likely to reflect the **most negative** assessment given, which again sees the SA public service as a whole being racist to Aboriginal employees –

⇒ *“In my experience Indigenous employees experience racist behaviour.”* (Average rating **2.2** indicating Agreement).

Having assessed the behaviour of colleagues and managers as sensitive to Aboriginal employees, a distinct difference is apparent in the assessment given to cultural competence. The **second and third most negative** assessments were applied to these statements –

⇒ *“In my experience, non-Indigenous **employees** in the SA public sector have a reasonable understanding of Aboriginal culture.”* (Average rating **3.6**, that is, disagreement)

⇒ *“In my experience, non-Indigenous **managers** in the SA public sector have a reasonable understanding of Aboriginal culture.”* (Average rating **3.4**, that is, disagreement)

A distinction has been drawn between behaving with sensitivity and knowledge of Aboriginal history and culture. This reinforces the findings (refer Section 3.2) made about the need for significant improvement in managers’, and more so employees’, knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history, issues and needs, and in the process, developing the cultural competence needed to create fully inclusive work environments.

The most negative rating was applied to the experience of racist and discriminatory behaviour, a finding that was supported by the public sector’s *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* and by the DDF Project interviews with Aboriginal employees, which identified as a key barrier a tradition of systemic exclusion (rather than overtly racist behaviour) that will take considerable time and effort to overcome.

Finally, the Project survey sample was more positive about Aboriginal employees having the same opportunities for **training and development** as non- Aboriginal employees (average rating **2.5**), but less positive about their opportunities for **promotion and career advancement** (average rating **3.2**) and about their opportunities to **act in roles or positions** that would advance their career prospects (average rating **3.3**). Further information from the survey and interviews with Aboriginal advocates and employees follows in Section 3.

The *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* found that a significantly higher proportion of Aboriginal respondents reported that they had experienced **racial harassment** in the workplace in the previous twelve months (**23%** as against **3%** of non-Aboriginal respondents). This was more likely to have been initiated by a **colleague** than a manager. Interestingly, Aboriginal respondents in that survey were less likely than other respondents to identify managers as the source of bullying or harassment. However, they were also less likely to formally report that they had been bullied or harassed, with the main reason given being *'I wasn't confident that any good would come of it'*, followed by *'I thought I might be further victimised'*.

Aboriginal respondents were significantly more likely (**31%**) to report that they had experienced workplace **bullying and harassment** than were non-Aboriginal respondents (22%). There were also differences in the nature of the bullying and harassment, with Aboriginal respondents more frequently reporting that this took the following forms -

- o 'persistent nit picking or unjustified criticism' (67% as against 52%);
- o 'withholding information from me so I am less able to do the job' (57% as against 44%);
- o 'being isolated and ostracised' (54% as against 36%).

Recent survey information from the Australian Public Service found that -

- o **18%** of Aboriginal employees had experienced discrimination in the workplace in the previous twelve months compared with 6% of the total APS workforce; and
- o **23%** had been bullied or harassed compared with 17% of the total workforce.

## 3 Closed and open gateways to Aboriginal employment in the SA public sector

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This section brings together findings from the literature review, structured interviews and focus groups and survey with South Australian public sector Aboriginal employees. It identifies the main barriers to Aboriginal employment in the public sector and to achieving the 2% Target, as well as strategies suggested by Project findings to overcome these obstacles.

Aboriginal people face a wide range of barriers in accessing employment in the public sector. Many of these barriers are intertwined, highlighting the importance of strategies with multiple components and operating across government agencies. Stand-alone and agency-specific initiatives are neither effective nor sustainable.

The international literature indicates that the barriers to employment experienced by Aboriginal peoples are not specific to Australia but also occur in other countries such as Canada and New Zealand, which like Australia, have government initiatives designed to address those barriers, and are doing so with varying degrees of success.

*While Canada is recognized internationally as a humanitarian country and while policies of the Canadian Government are routinely adopted by other countries as model policies for promoting equity, Canadian NGOs are all too aware of the real struggles we face within our country. Despite the official rhetoric, racism is alive and well in Canada, and is indicative of the failure of our Government to address this fundamental problem (National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, 2002: 4).*

### 3.1. Negative or misinformed perceptions and attitudes

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Perceptions and attitudes form a powerful set of barriers to the employment of Aboriginal people in the public sector. Of all the barriers identified, perceptions and attitudes represent the most difficult challenge and are manifest across all stages of the employment spectrum, from recruitment to exit (Kemmis *et al*, 2006, Canadian Human Rights Commission: 1997, Purdie *et al*: 2006; Lovett: 2003). The DDF Project findings indicate that these involve negative perceptions by –

- ⇒ Aboriginal people about the public sector as an employer, and
- ⇒ employers and colleagues about Aboriginal people in the workplace.

#### 3.1.1 Perceptions held by Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal employees

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Negative perceptions held by Aboriginal peoples have two streams. The first is based on the past role of government (and therefore, of its public service) in abusing its authority in relation to Aboriginal Australians, originating with British colonisation, and including the role played in relation to the *Stolen Generation*. As one of the Project's survey respondents said –

*“Government ... can be seen by the Aboriginal Community to be ... part of the unresolved historical factors of Stolen Generation, Death in Custody, Abuse in Care... the amendment to granted title of land and no right of veto. Of course the list goes on. “*

The second is based on perceptions of the public service being regarded as overly bureaucratic and involving excessive administrative work, and being too formal in its work style. Compounding this view is the reputation for under-developed cultural competence based on the reported experiences of Aboriginal employees. Negative perceptions form a barrier to the **recruitment** of Aboriginal people into the public sector.

### **3.1.2 Perceptions held about Aboriginal employees**

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Equity-promoting measures that encourage Aboriginal people to become public sector employees bring the unintended consequence of some non-Aboriginal employees perceiving their Aboriginal colleagues as having been appointed on the basis of race rather than skill. This was reported as a barrier in both the Project interviews and survey responses, and is also identified in the literature review (Kemmis *et al*: 2006, Canadian Human Rights Commission: 1997, Purdie *et al*: 2006; Lovett: 2003).

*.. when a visible minority person secures a job in the federal public service it is seen as a favour offered by the white 'establishment', not a right of citizenship or an achievement based on merit (Canadian Human Rights Commission: 1997).*

Such perceptions form a particular barrier to both the **recruitment and retention** of Aboriginal people in the public sector.

## **3.2 Under-developed workforce cultural competence and culturally inclusive workplaces**

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Project findings indicate that both the recruitment and particularly retention of Aboriginal employees are limited by under-developed workforce cultural competence and the subsequent need to continue with existing efforts to develop culturally inclusive workplaces. Five separate but intertwined factors have been isolated and these involve the need to –

- o further develop the cultural competence of the South Australian public sector workforce
- o continue to strive for culturally inclusive workplaces that create a climate of inclusion rather than exclusion;
- o reduce discrimination and racism in the workplace
- o continue to increase the Aboriginal workforce in order to achieve ‘critical mass’ and
- o ensure that Aboriginal employees’ abilities are fully utilised and that they feel valued for their contribution.

### 3.2.1 Further developing workforce cultural competence

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“Cultural competence’ involves the development of knowledge, skills and sensitivity to overcome the barriers associated with cultural difference. It recognises that the provision of culturally inclusive workplaces requires more than goodwill and is based on knowledge and skill, as well as a commitment to valuing diversity.

*“Cultural competency means becoming aware of the cultural differences that exist, appreciating and having an understanding of those differences and accepting them and being prepared to guard against accepting your own behaviours, beliefs and actions as the norm”*  
(Cited in SA Cultural Inclusion Framework, 2006: 13).

Feedback from the Project interviews and survey identified as a key barrier to achieving the 2% Target, the need for improved cultural competence on the part of non-Aboriginal public sector employees. This has been identified more specifically as involving a widespread lack of knowledge of Aboriginal issues and history, as well as of more specific cultural understanding (for example, in relation to death and associated rites and ceremonies). It also was seen to involve a tradition of systemic exclusion that shapes workplace climates, where the impact of ongoing public sector reconciliation and equity promotion for Aboriginal people has brought increased tolerance, but not necessarily acceptance. As one of those interviewed commented –

*“Instead of acceptance we have tolerance.”*

Under-developed cultural competence impedes both **recruitment and retention**.

Two major deterrents to **retention** in the South Australian public sector identified by the Project survey sample are **lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture** by non-Aboriginal employees (**43.4%**) and by non-Aboriginal managers (**43.4%**). More material factors that relate to seeking higher salaries (27.7%) and career opportunities elsewhere (23.1%) have been less important than these barriers.

Under-developed cultural competence has multiple effects. Project findings indicate that it impairs the provision of flexible working conditions that support Aboriginal employees in meeting family and cultural obligations (*see Section 3.4*) and underpins discriminating and racist behaviour by some members of the non-Aboriginal workforce (*see Section 3.2.3*). It also limits the commitment of senior management to achieve a culturally inclusive workplace and the ability to lead by example in doing so.

### 3.2.2 The need for more ‘culturally safe’ and inclusive workplaces

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‘Cultural security’ or ‘cultural safety’ is a term used to denote the creation of an environment where individuals feel the freedom to express cultural values and beliefs. This is a feature of what has become known as a ‘culturally inclusive’ workplace. In practice, this requires both competence as well as organisation of the workplace to be flexible and responsive to the needs of individual employees.

*“Cultural safety involves actions that recognise, respect and nurture the unique cultural identity of Aboriginal people and safely meet their needs, expectations and rights. It is how Aboriginal people are perceived and treated that is relevant, rather than the different things they think or do. It is working from the cultural perspective of the client not from your own perspective” (SA Department of Human Services: 2002 - cited in SA Cultural Inclusion Framework, 2006: 13)*

There are numerous studies that have documented the need for culturally inclusive workplaces, both in Australia and internationally, and this is an issue that is well understood but **extremely** difficult to address. As indicated in the Project’s review of literature (*Accompanying Report 1*), the provision of training designed to raise cross cultural awareness and to manage cultural diversity is a key feature of most public sector workplaces, including those in South Australia.

However, Project findings indicate that this may not be progressing beyond the stage of raising awareness to developing cross-cultural competence and diversity management expertise. As discussed in *Section 2.2*, Aboriginal employees have given positive ratings to the ability of non-Aboriginal colleagues and managers to treat them with sensitivity. This is differentiated from actual cross-cultural competence in relation to Aboriginal people, and the provision of culturally inclusive work environments. The experience by some of racist behaviour further highlights the difference between cultural awareness or sensitivity and cultural competence.

### **Recommendation 2**

**It is recommended that existing strategies to increase workforce cultural competence be continued and with greater attention to developing knowledge of Aboriginal culture and history. It is also recommended that cross-cultural training be designed to develop skills as well as raising awareness and sensitivity, and that training be ongoing.**

### **3.2.3 The need to reduce discrimination and racism in the workplace**

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*“It is difficult to define racism. It is often an accumulation of experiences and incidents that if they were described in isolation would be considered to be petty and of minor relevance. However, the ever-present nature of the minor incidences accumulates into an erosion of confidence.” (Project interviewee)*

The likelihood of Aboriginal public sector employees experiencing racism and discrimination, as well as bullying and harassment has been confirmed by South Australian and Australian public sector workforce surveys (*see Section 2.2*) and by international research findings.

*Despite a notion that Canada is a ‘tolerant’ and welcoming country where overt forms of racism are unacceptable, there are many systemic ways in which racism operates under the guise of other issues, such as the consideration of credentials, exclusion in workplace networks, and more favourable treatment of people from the dominant group (National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, 2002: 30).*

Although the Project survey sample identified that they had experienced bullying (13.3%), harassment (13.3%) and discrimination (13.3%), they regarded these as less significant in influencing their decision to remain in the SA public service. Racism emerged as more significant than these three (16.8%), but not as important to retention as a culturally inclusive workplace that also enabled the use and recognition of Aboriginal employees' expertise. In part, this could be due to their rating of the capacity of the non-Aboriginal workforce to work well with Aboriginal employees being most positive in relation to their immediate work environment, becoming less positive when applied to the Department or agency level, and least positive in relation to the public sector as a whole (*see Section 2.2*). However, this does not lessen the negative impact of such experiences on job satisfaction, personal happiness and retention outcomes.

As discussed in *Section 2.2*, the most negative ratings of the South Australian public sector Aboriginal employment experience concerned racist behaviour by non-Aboriginal employees, followed by the limited understanding of Aboriginal culture by non-Aboriginal employees and managers. Working in an environment without discrimination is a **retention** influencing factor for **43.4%** of those surveyed. Among the most frequently cited factors influencing retention were having a **good manager or supervisor** (65.3%) and working with **managers who understand, or try to understand, Aboriginal culture** (59.0%). *This highlights the important role managers have to play in creating a culturally inclusive workplace.*

### **Recommendation 3**

**It is recommended that training to enhance cultural competence include specific attention to the role of managers in promoting culturally secure work environments that actively discourage racism and discrimination. It is also recommended that strategies be developed to further encourage Aboriginal employees to report experiences of racism and discrimination.**

### **3.2.4 The need to achieve 'critical mass' in Aboriginal employment**

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A key equity principle is that of '*critical mass*'. This refers to a proportion that prevents minority group members from feeling isolated because of their numbers. One survey respondent described lack of critical mass in this way -

*"Often being the only black face in a sea of white."*

The Aboriginal employee's work life can be one of extreme isolation. They are often recruited and placed in roles which isolate them from other workers (Purdie *et al*, 2006: 57; Williams *et al*: 2003) and even mainstream roles can continue the separation when the predominant workplace culture acts as a source of exclusion. For some of those surveyed, feeling outnumbered and overwhelmed by a single, predominant workplace culture acted as a barrier to **recruitment and retention**.

Cultural competence can be developed in two mutually reinforcing ways - by formal training and by the direct experience of working with people from a diversity of cultures. However, the relatively low numbers of Aboriginal employees (especially those working

outside of Aboriginal-specific units or services) means that the opportunity for developing cultural competence, and for applying cross-cultural training lessons, is restricted.

The absence of critical mass acts as a barrier, particularly to **retention** (Kemmis *et al*, 2006: 9) and does not appear to have been addressed in any of the Australian government strategies reviewed (*see Accompanying Report I*). Isolation is not addressed in a preventive way (for example, by recruiting and placing Aboriginal employees in groups) and there is a reliance on Aboriginal networking structures, mentors and ‘buddy’ systems to provide support and guidance.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**It is recommended that greater attention be paid to recruitment and work placement that achieves ‘critical mass’ for Aboriginal employees.**

#### **3.2.5 Feeling under-valued and under-utilised**

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Two important factors influencing **retention** are being in a workplace where the Aboriginal person **feels valued** (51.4%) while having **knowledge, skills and experience under-utilised** (43.4%) works against retention. *It is important for retention strategies to address these factors.*

Aboriginal employees reported that their main motivation for seeking employment in the public sector had been to contribute to the well-being of Aboriginal peoples. This was also identified as one of several key factors considered to influence their **retention**. Workplaces that are not culturally inclusive and whose employees are lacking in cultural competence are less likely to value the contribution of Aboriginal employees and to under-utilise their expertise. *It will be important for future recruitment strategies to take this finding into account.*

#### **Recommendation 5**

**It is recommended that recruitment and retention strategies reflect the importance placed by Aboriginal employees on having the opportunity to enhance the well-being of Aboriginal South Australians, and on having their expertise valued and utilised more effectively.**

The *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* identified that Aboriginal respondents were more likely than non-Aboriginal respondents to leave the SA public sector because of lack of recognition (47% versus 37%).

The Australian Public Service Commission’s *State of the Service* report found that Aboriginal employees placed more importance than other employees surveyed on opportunities to develop and utilise their skills (Australian Public Service Commission: 2004).

The Commission’s Census of Aboriginal employees (2006) found that the most common reason for leaving the APS was feeling under-valued.

Focus groups with Aboriginal employees undertaken as part of the Australian Public Service Commission's research found that they were attracted to the APS by factors that included the opportunity to work with Aboriginal people on issues affecting Aboriginal Australians (Australian Public Service Commission: *Connecting Government: Whole of government response to Australia's priority challenges*, undated).

### 3.3 Gaps in educational attainment

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The need to build the capacity of the public sector workforce in terms of cultural competence has been discussed in *Section 3.2* and the matching need is to build the capacity of Aboriginal people seeking to enter or employed in the public sector. This barrier has two components involving the need to –

- o continue building pathways into the public sector through opportunities for skill development and the acquisition of required credentials for entry, and
- o broaden the recognition of individual capacity beyond 'mainstream' qualifications to include the specific expertise offered by Aboriginal people, while also supporting Aboriginal employees to participate in professional and career development opportunities.

#### 3.3.1 Building pathways into the public sector

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The Project survey asked participants to identify any strategies in place that appear to be helpful in reaching the target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the SA public sector. The two most frequently identified strategies were the **Aboriginal Employment Program** and the various programs that support **Aboriginal apprenticeships, traineeships, cadetships and scholarships** (with particular mention made of the Department of Health scholarship initiative). Those interviewed for the Project gave their strongest support to **scholarships** and **cadetships**, with the latter's provision of structured work experience and linkage to ongoing employment seen as particularly valuable.

Throughout the survey, there has been strong support for the Aboriginal Employment Program but with some qualifying this because they believe the service could provide a wider range of support (if funded to do so). There was also a very small minority who were critical of the Program. Traineeships are a key pathway into the public sector but the Project identified widespread concern that they do not lead to ongoing employment yet are counted in measuring progress to the 2% Target.

Aboriginal advocates consulted for the Project argued that an **early intervention approach** is needed that would complement existing initiatives designed to increase the recruitment of Aboriginal school students by providing career development strategies that link young Aboriginal people to a public sector career path. The VET-in-Schools program and School Based Apprenticeships were identified as existing strategies that can be used to develop pathways into the public sector, and this is a strategy being developed by the Department of Education and Children's Services. Several of those interviewed called for a coordinated

approach across the sector to provide pre-employment work experience (including pre-traineeship and pre-apprenticeship) and linkages to secondary schools.

*“There could be a coordinated effort across the Public Sector to provide pre-employment work experience and expose them to a system at an earlier age.” (Project interviewee)*

*“Connect Year 9, 10 and 11 into the pre-employment traineeship employment program where they make a connection to a workplace, attend at the workplace, get used to it, make contacts and learn some of the basics. Many people have not been exposed to a work environment before and the traineeships are their first point of entry to a workplace which is often very intimidating. They don’t know what’s involved in being in a workplace.” (Project interviewee)*

Both the Project’s literature review and survey of Aboriginal employees identified **structured work experience** as a means of introducing young Aboriginal people to public sector employment. This provides an earlier point of intervention than other recruitment strategies.

*“I would also encourage Aboriginal young people from year 10 upwards to undertake work experience for up to two weeks within a government department (suggest partner up with an Aboriginal worker).”*

### **Recommendation 6**

**It is recommended that existing strategies designed to build pathways for Aboriginal people into the South Australian public sector are continued, and that a stronger emphasis is placed on an early intervention approach that involves developing pathways from secondary school onwards. It is also recommended that Aboriginal traineeships and apprenticeships are linked to ongoing employment in the public sector and that increased numbers of Aboriginal cadetships and scholarships are provided.**

The important role to be played by scholarships with an inbuilt program of support is evident in *Case Study 1* below.

#### **CASE STUDY I: DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH – INDIGENOUS SCHOLARSHIP WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE**

The South Australian Department of Health’s Aboriginal Health Division supported the development of two scholarship programs for Aboriginal people – the *South Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Scholarship Investment Fund* and the *Australian Rotary Health Research Fund Indigenous Health Scholarship*. The initiative has been a key component of broader Aboriginal health workforce reform in South Australia and provides a long term strategy for building the Aboriginal health workforce capacity by creating supported pathways from study to employment.

The Aboriginal Health Division identified that the number of Aboriginal people enrolling in health profession courses was low, as were their completion rates. Many students were mature aged and needed to combine study with paid work. There were few support structures in place for these students and students were experiencing financial difficulties that were exacerbated by changes to *Abstudy*. The existing health scholarship scheme had never involved a nomination for an Aboriginal person, nor had it been specifically promoted to Aboriginal people.

The *South Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Scholarship Investment Fund* developed from a working relationship between the Aboriginal Health Division and Rotary Australia. The Initiative has four main goals –

- o Encourage Aboriginal people to undertake health degrees.
- o Motivate and support students through their degree.
- o Assist with employment opportunities on completion of their degree.
- o Celebrate and provide recognition for their achievements.

The *Australian Rotary Health Research Fund Indigenous Health Scholarship* involves a contribution of \$2,500 by Rotary Australia which is matched by the State Government to provide a total of \$5,000 to the recipient. This has since become a national scholarship program coordinated by Rotary Australia.

The Initiative has had an extremely positive impact, with a significant increase in the number of qualified Aboriginal health workers since its inception. In 1998 there were only 4 identified Aboriginal Nurses, 2 Aboriginal Allied Health professionals and no Aboriginal doctors or dentists. In 2006 there were 37 scholarship recipients, representing a wide range of health roles and there had been 34 graduates from the scholarship program, covering a wide range of health professions and being employed in a wide range of occupations.

Three important lessons have emerged from the Initiative.

- o It is important to provide support as well as financial assistance to Aboriginal students. This support includes emotional support and guidance for study and managing study related responsibilities, as well as addressing the need to study in environments that do not necessarily provide cultural security.
- o Partnerships play a key role, with linkages developed between the health sector, the Department of Health and Universities. The initial partnership between Rotary and the Department has been critical to the development of the Initiative.
- o Scholarships provide both an incentive and a recognition of Aboriginal students that had been missing when Aboriginal people had to compete in generic scholarship processes.

### 3.3.2 Recognising uncredentialed skills and knowledge and providing specific opportunities for professional and career development

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*Best practice in the professional development of Indigenous employees is considered to involve alignment with career counselling to encourage informed choices about the kinds of professional development to be pursued (Kemmis et al, 2006: 61).*

The high value placed by public sector organisations on formal qualifications and particular forms of experience can work against Aboriginal peoples' access to employment, either because many lack those formal credentials and experience, or because the expertise they bring to the role is not recognised against mainstream accreditation and qualification frameworks (Purdie et al: 2006; Kemmis et al: 2006; Canadian Human Rights Commission: 1997, Lovett: 2003).

The absence of a structured approach to training and career development, (that is, one that involves identifying individual training need and providing a tailored program of training and career development), and difficulties in accessing professional and career development opportunities (for example, opportunities to act in more senior roles) are factors that have been identified by several researchers as blocking the employment of Aboriginal people in the public sector (Kemmis et al, 2006, Canadian Human Rights Commission: 1997, Purdie et al: 2006; Lovett: 2003).

Negative perceptions, stereotyping and discriminatory behaviour also reinforce the barrier to public sector employment represented by educational attainment entry requirements. Aboriginal employees surveyed for the Project noted that some non-Aboriginal employees assume that Aboriginal applicants receive favourable treatment due to their racial status rather than for the knowledge and abilities they can contribute. This includes a perception that Aboriginal people have benefited from positive discrimination rather than 'earned' the right to particular public sector positions, or that qualifications have been attained by favourable treatment rather than by merit.

*"There is an assumption that you only have your position because you are Indigenous. There appears to be no respect for the qualifications that you have even though you have worked really hard to get them."*

*"Racism also plays a role with staff stereotyping how I got a job in the sector. They feel I got the position purely because of my racial status and not by my skills."*

Once employed in the public sector, Aboriginal people can benefit significantly from the professional and career development opportunities that are available, including the provision of tailored professional and career development plans, provided that they can access them and that they are supported to do so. A number of factors were identified by the DDF Project survey sample as influencing their **retention** and frequently cited factors were having **opportunities for training and development** (64.7%) and for **career development** (54.3%).

Aboriginal people consulted for the Project note that most are not aware of the training and professional development available to public sector employees, including specific programs

for Aboriginal employees, and are deterred from applying for employment because of low levels of existing educational credentials. Aboriginal employees participating in the Project survey recommended that there be less reliance solely on formal qualifications and more recognition of expertise from within an Aboriginal framework. They also made the point that while they regard the range of professional development opportunities available to Aboriginal employees as extremely positive, the trend in the South Australian public sector for appointments to be of a short term nature limits their impact. By contrast ongoing and long term employment enables ability and career development. The need for such employment is discussed in *Section 3.7*. They also identified the need for apprenticeships and traineeships to be linked to ongoing and long term employment (see *Recommendation 6*), and for greater use of structured work experience and secondment programs across a range of agencies for Aboriginal people. As discussed, cadetships were regarded as positive strategies because they are linked to ongoing employment.

*"This [strategy] ... is positive because it guarantees employment at the end and both parties are engaged – staff become part of the agency profile."* (Project interviewee)

Traineeships were reported as no longer attracting additional funds for employers which is expected to have a negative impact on the number of traineeships taken on across the public sector. Concerns were also expressed about traineeships as a sole entry strategy because of their strong bias towards administrative occupations and because they are less attractive to young Aboriginal males. There was a need to further develop apprenticeship opportunities and to enhance the occupations covered by traineeships. As one interviewee noted -

*"There is a need to introduce specific traineeships to attract more males and to target across a range of occupations."*

A good practice example of supporting young Aboriginal people to obtain a relevant qualification is evident in a Department of Families and Communities initiative that is summarised in the box below.

**GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE OF SUPPORTED RECRUITMENT: DEPARTMENT OF FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES *IN-SERVICE INTENSIVE TRAINING (ISIT)* YOUTH WORKER RECRUITMENT PROGRAM**

Aboriginal people are supported to enter the Department of Families and Communities via the *In Service Intensive Training (ISIT) Recruitment* program specifically for positions in Youth Work at Magill/Cavan Secure Care Units, Transitional Accommodation sites and Community Residential Care sites.

Participants undertake a 6 week course which includes structured observation, shifts in a variety of units and completion of a *Job Fit Profiling Assessment*. The program's completion provides participants with a Certificate IV in Youth Work.

Once an applicant passes all stages of the recruitment preparation process they are then eligible to apply for Youth Worker vacancies through the usual selection processes.

Aboriginal respondents in the *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* reported that they had their training and development needs identified and agreed to with their manager, and had received all or most of what had been agreed, but were significantly less likely to report that those needs had been documented formally.

The Survey also found that Aboriginal respondents were more likely than non-Aboriginal respondents to leave the SA public sector because of 'lack of career or promotional opportunities'.

Focus groups with Aboriginal employees undertaken as part of the Australian Public Service Commission's research found that they were attracted to the APS by factors that included –

- o Access to learning and development
- o In the case of Aboriginal graduates – the opportunity to use the knowledge and skills they had gained through their education, and to accumulate additional skills and experience through participation in the graduate program (Australian Public Service Commission: *Connecting Government: Whole of government response to Australia's priority challenges*, undated).

### 3.4 Work-life-balance challenges

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Work-life-balance is difficult to achieve, especially for those with family care-giving responsibilities. Increasingly, work-life-balance is a major goal of workforce development strategies, particularly in the public sector. Difficulties associated with achieving work-life-balance are compounded by disadvantage, and this includes being of Aboriginal background.

Critical to work-life-balance is the provision of *flexible workplace organisation* and ready access to *leave provisions* that acknowledge the importance of cultural beliefs and practices (Purdie *et al*, 2006; SA Government: 2005). Flexible working conditions are part of good practice in employment as Australians face increasing work-family-life balance challenges. Flexible working conditions were identified by **59.5%** of the DDF Project survey sample as a key factor for their **retention**. As discussed in *Section 2.1.3*, Aboriginal employees are more likely than non-Aboriginal employees to resign due to family responsibilities and ill health, both of which are extremely relevant to work-life-balance.

For Aboriginal people, the work-life-balance challenge is compounded by the greater likelihood of carer responsibilities and community responsibilities (Rotumah *et al*, 205: 3).

Such responsibilities are extremely important to Aboriginal people but take time away from the workplace and tend to be perceived by them as not being supported through existing leave provisions (Purdie *et al*, 2006: 57). The DDF Project has found that although flexible working conditions are a feature of South Australian public sector employment, Aboriginal employees are less likely to take advantage of them. Re-analysis of the *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006*<sup>11</sup> found that compared with non-Aboriginal employees -

- o A significantly lower proportion of Aboriginal employees reported having used 'flexitime' in the previous 12 months (71% against 81%).
- o A higher proportion of Aboriginal employees reported that they would like to, but could not, use purchased leave (16% as against 5%), compressed weeks (15% as against 10%), and working from home arrangements (33% as against 25%). Demands in their work area was the most frequent reason given for not being able to use these forms of flexible working conditions. This was followed by having insufficient employee numbers in their work area to do so.
- o However, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents gave similar and positive responses to rating their satisfaction with work-life-balance regarding employment in the public sector as a whole, but Aboriginal employees were less satisfied than non-Aboriginal employees about the work-life-balance associated with their current job.
- o Of those signalling the intention to leave the South Australian public sector in the next five years, Aboriginal respondents were more likely than non-Aboriginal respondents to nominate work-life-balance considerations as an influencing factor.

The South Australian government has a strong commitment to enabling work-life-balance and this is a key feature of its workforce development initiatives in the public sector. Consequently Aboriginal employees have the opportunity to access various forms of flexible working arrangements but this will vary with individual workplaces.

The findings of the DDF Project indicate that work-life-balance for Aboriginal employees needs to be understood from a cultural perspective. There is a greater likelihood that they will face pressures to achieve this balance due to their sometimes conflicting responsibilities as public servants and Aboriginal community members, with these often leading to ongoing stress and ultimate 'burning out' (*see section 3.6.1*). Family and community obligations that differ from those of non-Aboriginal employees will also alter the way in which work-life-balance is affected.

The degree to which workplaces are culturally inclusive and the public sector workforce is culturally competent are both crucial to developing flexible working arrangements. Greater support to assist Aboriginal employees in reconciling their unique dual role as representatives of their community and of their employer is also critical (*see Section 3.6*).

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<sup>11</sup> Undertaken for the Project by the Public Sector Workforce Division of the Department of Premier & Cabinet on behalf of the Commissioner for Public Employment

The *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* identified that Aboriginal respondents were more likely than non-Aboriginal respondents to be influenced to leave the SA public sector because of work-life-balance issues (43% versus 37%).

The Australian Public Service Commission's Census of Aboriginal employees (2006) found that 45% had been challenged by seeking to balance family or community obligations with the requirements of their job and that flexible working arrangements were rated as one of the most important factors impacting on their job satisfaction.

Concerns about balancing work, family and community responsibilities was the second most frequently cited reason for not pursuing promotion identified in the Census (2006: 19). Family or caring commitments constituted the second most commonly cited reason given at exit interview for leaving the APS.

### **3.5 Under-developed culturally inclusive recruitment processes**

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*"It is a daunting experience going into a workplace, particularly for some individuals where there are not prior role models, or exposure to the workplace."* (Project interviewee)

This barrier has two components -

- o The need to promote the public sector to Aboriginal people using culturally relevant methods, and not relying solely on traditional recruitment approaches such as, advertising through non-Aboriginal media outlets. This involves providing information about the public sector itself as well as about specific vacancies, and improving communication between the sector and Aboriginal communities.
- o The need to make the recruitment and induction processes more culturally inclusive by ensuring that applicants are informed about employment in the sector and the process of application, and supporting them during the processes of application, selection and induction.

#### **3.5.1 Informed recruitment and culturally relevant promotion**

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Aboriginal employees consulted for the Project identified a number of strategies to assist in reaching the 2% Target. Two of these involve -

- o Informing Aboriginal people about public sector employment and promoting this through Aboriginal networks.
- o Supported, culturally inclusive application, selection and induction processes.

The usual strategies for advertising and promoting public sector employment cannot be expected to be appropriate for Aboriginal applicants. Instead, specific communication

processes and promotion through Aboriginal networks is important. Without this, most Aboriginal applicants are disadvantaged, and many potential Aboriginal employees are deterred from applying. This finding has emerged from the Project's review of literature and interviews and survey of Aboriginal public sector employees.

The need to promote the public sector as an employer and to inform Aboriginal people about pathways to that employment is recognised by most jurisdictions in Australia as requiring more than advertising through mainstream recruitment sources, with most building into their Aboriginal employment strategies the development of effective working links and relationships with Aboriginal stakeholders.

Those surveyed for the DDF Project point to the need to demystify public sector employment and to ensure that Aboriginal people are well informed about opportunities for work in the sector and about what is required of public sector employees. A strategy suggested by them and evident in the literature review is that of **information sessions** targeting Aboriginal communities.

*"I think that information sessions are critical for encouraging Indigenous people to work in the public sector. A lot of Indigenous people may not have enough information or feel they will not fit in the public sector environment so I think if information sessions are run they can relax with other Indigenous employees and be encouraged by them to apply and also find out more about the sector." (Survey respondent)*

The strategy adopted by Families SA and the University of Sydney (see Case Study II, below, and Case Study III at the end of Section 3.5.2) provide examples of good practice in this area. The Northern Territory government's strategy (2002) makes provision for pre-recruitment assistance to Aboriginal applicants for its employment register –see *Accompanying Report I, Appendix section*.

Promoting public sector employment was seen to require **multiple** approaches, including specific Career Expos, providing information at Aboriginal events, targeting schools and the VET and higher education sectors, and profiling Aboriginal public sector employees. These approaches also indicate the need to use multiple communication techniques, including word of mouth through trusted intermediaries. In the words of those consulted for the Project -

*"Having more Indigenous public servants go out to schools and other places of learning to show that we are here. Have an Indigenous person as part of the recruitment process from start to finish. Aboriginal people tend not to "promote" themselves."*

*"Sending Aboriginal people out into the community to give information sessions on entering the Public Service. Visiting schools, Universities and community groups. Having support information ready to hand out, pamphlets and posters with an Aboriginal feel about them, pictures and artwork. Also establishing a web site where people can be directed to information about jobs that is constantly updated. Having a hotline where Aboriginal people can ring up and enquire about positions."*

### **Recommendation 7**

**It is recommended that a specific communication strategy is developed in collaboration with Aboriginal community representatives to promote the South Australian public sector as an employer to Aboriginal peoples and that this strategy addresses information gaps about how the sector operates and what is expected of its employees. The strategy should have multiple components and communication techniques, including word of mouth through trusted intermediaries, including existing Aboriginal public sector employees.**

### **Recommendation 8**

**It is recommended that recruitment processes targeting Aboriginal peoples include information sessions that provide them with an informed approach to applying for public sector employment.**

#### **CASE STUDY II: FAMILIES SA – INFORMED RECRUITMENT STRATEGY**

Families SA has developed a recruitment process based on informing and supporting Aboriginal people to seek public sector appointments. The strategy has multiple elements that include the following:

- o Information sessions for vacancies are provided in a culturally appropriate venue that focuses on providing information about the department, sites/locations, role, expectations, support mechanisms and answer any questions potential applicants may have. Existing Aboriginal staff also present, giving their perspective of working in the department.
- o An Application Form was developed in user friendly language.
- o Care is taken to use plain and easy to read language in position descriptions when advertising vacancies.
- o Aboriginal artwork is used when advertising positions.
- o Specific care is taken in advertising and promotion, taking into account Aboriginal communication networks.
- o If positions are high profile/high level they are advertised in culturally appropriate media outlets, such as, the Koori Mail and National Indigenous Times to encourage high calibre applications on a national basis.
- o Evaluation has identified a high level of quality in applications, that applicants have put more time into writing applications, and that a higher number of Aboriginal people are being short-listed and interviewed. Other public sector agencies have approached the Department for information with the view to applying it in their agencies.
- o A key lesson learned is that the process requires strong management commitment.

### 3.5.2 Culturally inclusive recruitment and induction

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Application and selection processes can be intimidating because of their formality and lack of familiarity, and when they are lacking in cultural sensitivity. For those who are not familiar with the workings of government and the public service, applying for a position is daunting, and this is exacerbated by the assumption of a set of skills that are presumed, but not necessarily present without specific information and support. Lack of confidence to apply for a government position is also a part of this barrier. As one of the DDF Project's survey respondents commented -

*"I think a main barrier is the fear and lack of self esteem, maybe feeling they can not fulfil a role within the sector or that they will not fit in."*

Throughout the Project survey and interviews, particular mention was made of the difficulties posed for many Aboriginal applicants by existing **Job and Person Specifications** and the need for them to be written using plain English and in a user-friendly style.

*"The barrier is the Job & Person Specification document. It is prohibitive and unless a person has been exposed to positions in the public service before it is a considerable barrier."*

The survey also identified the importance of Aboriginal membership on **selection panels** and of providing information that enables a level playing field for Aboriginal applicants who lack knowledge of the public sector and how it operates. These findings are supported by existing research (Kemmis *et al*: 2006; Canadian Human Rights Commission: 1997; Purdie *et al*: 2006; Lovett: 2003). Research undertaken with Aboriginal employees in the VET sector (Kemmis *et al*, 2006: 53-56) identified these recruitment and induction-related lessons in good practice:

- ⇒ selection criteria that involve both formal qualifications and a recognition of life experience;
- ⇒ development of 'Aboriginal sensitive' job descriptions;
- ⇒ marketing to Aboriginal communities and networks;
- ⇒ provision of opportunities to encounter the workplace prior to applying for a position;
- ⇒ use of selection panels that are aware of cultural issues and include Aboriginal members; and
- ⇒ recognition that Induction is a critical aspect of the employment cycle, especially in large and bureaucratically complex organisations, and should be designed to assist new employees' understanding of both the culture and practices of the employing organisation.

Project findings emphasised the importance of culturally inclusive recruitment processes, and of ensuring that this is part of standard HR policy and practice. One of the examples given involved a large agency with a significant Aboriginal target group, whose HR unit refused to include Aboriginal membership in a selection panel that was interviewing people for appointment to an Aboriginal-specific position. The HR team argued that there

was no written policy that required them to do so. This occurred within an agency with an Aboriginal employment strategy and a significant number of Aboriginal employees where it could have been expected that culturally inclusive processes were part of accepted practice, regardless of policy to enforce this. Some of those interviewed noted that the advice and support available from Aboriginal staff was often under-utilised by HR personnel.

*“HR Consultants in generic roles need to be open to input/support and advice from Aboriginal staff to help them fulfil their duties and understand some of the issues.”*

Some survey respondents recommended that one-on-one support be provided to those Aboriginal applicants who lack confidence and/or experience in applying for employment. This includes assistance with resumé and application writing and interview preparation. Less formalised selection processes were also recommended, for example, providing alternatives to formal interviewing, and providing information beforehand about the interview questions.

### **Recommendation 9**

**It is recommended that culturally inclusive processes, including informed application and interview preparation, user-friendly wording of Job and Specification statements, and Aboriginal membership of selection panels, be part of established HR policy and practice.**

It is important to note that many of the recommended actions provided by the survey and interview samples are of potential benefit to **all** candidates, not just those from an Aboriginal background – for example, plain wording of Job and Persons Specifications, making interviews as comfortable as possible for applicants, and ensuring that applicants are fully informed about the position and the public sector working environment.

### **CASE STUDY III: THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY – INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY (2003)**

The University of Sydney’s *Indigenous Australians Employment Strategy* (2003) has a strong focus on culturally inclusive **recruitment**. Strategies include –

- ⇒ the provision of Information Forums by the University’s Indigenous Employment Officer working with local Aboriginal Australians Job Network Providers to educate job seekers in applying for positions at the University. The forums include information on how to prepare an application, resumé and covering letter, on the interview presentation and the selection process.
- ⇒ The provision of Information Packages for Aboriginal applicants that consolidate verbal information given at the Forums.
- ⇒ The conducting of mock interviews by the Indigenous Employment Officer for applicants who are not familiar with the interview process.
- ⇒ Where appropriate, a tour of the University campus, including where the interview will take place.

- ⇒ The establishment of a database of Aboriginal people with qualifications suitable for appointment to potential vacancies within the University, together with a mailing list and network of employment contacts to whom information on vacancies is disseminated.
- ⇒ The interview process itself is designed to be culturally inclusive. Where Aboriginal applicants are expected to apply for a position, the Interview Panel is provided with guidelines that highlight relevant cultural issues. Selection panels are informed about diversity management and culturally inclusive questioning, and are provided with guidelines on what to expect from Aboriginal Australian applicants in terms of cultural and behavioural factors that need to be taken into account.
- ⇒ An Induction Package for new Aboriginal employees provides a range of information about the University and includes personal orientation by the Indigenous Employment Officer.
- ⇒ Culturally friendly duty statements, selection criteria and advertising.
- ⇒ Targeted entry level recruitment – an affirmative action initiative that commits each academic college and administrative unit to identify of a minimum of five entry level mainstream general staff positions per year for Aboriginal Australians.

The Strategy is also designed to enhance the **retention** of Aboriginal employees and includes these strategies –

- ⇒ Cross cultural awareness training to enable non-Aboriginal employees to develop the skills and knowledge needed to work in a culturally inclusive way with Aboriginal employees. This is available to all staff and facilitated by the Indigenous Employment Officer.
- ⇒ Encouraging Aboriginal staff to participate in training relevant to enhancing their career development. The Indigenous Employment Officer, Aboriginal employees and their managers to meet regularly to identify the training and job rotation required for career development.
- ⇒ Indigenous Australian Employee Networks – support networks facilitated quarterly by the Indigenous Employment Officer.
- ⇒ A skills based Mentor for all new recruits, facilitated by the Indigenous Employment Officer. An academic mentoring program based on pairing junior Aboriginal academic employees with senior academic staff.
- ⇒ Peer buddying system facilitated by the Indigenous Employment Officer to provide emotional support rather than work or career oriented support.
- ⇒ Flexible work policies to enable balancing of career and family promoted to Aboriginal employees.

A full description of the Strategy can be found at - [www.usyd.edu.au/eeo](http://www.usyd.edu.au/eeo).

### 3.6 Under-developed support mechanisms

The previous section has highlighted the importance of a supported approach to the recruitment of Aboriginal people to the public sector. Support needs to begin with

recruitment and continue across the spectrum of employment, including to its exit (see Section 3.8).

A number of factors were identified by the DDF Project survey sample as influencing their **retention** and these included being **supported in the workplace** (54.9%) and being part of an **Indigenous employee network** (56.6%). The survey asked participants to identify any strategies in place that appear to be helpful in reaching the target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the SA public sector. The third most frequently identified strategy was the provision of **support through mentoring, Indigenous networking and work shadowing**. A supported approach to induction was also recommended, ensuring that new Aboriginal employees receive the information they need for their work role and about the public sector as a whole. The support provided to recruit and induct Aboriginal employees was also seen as the beginning of a wider process of support and guidance designed to retain and enable Aboriginal employees to develop and maximise their abilities.

*"I don't think there is a problem recruiting, where there is a problem, is the value and importance [placed] on induction, mentoring, and supporting Aboriginal staff. In some Indigenous services we do this really well, but not always, and it is a lot worse in mainstream, as often management don't understand the need for Aboriginal staff to meet and network."*  
(Project survey respondent)

### **3.6.1 The special, unrecognised demands of being an Aboriginal public servant**

*"You are expected to know everything and everyone and have answers for all issues and perceived problems .... Having to "educate" everybody about Aboriginal culture all the time - it is so exhausting."* (Project survey respondent)

Having Aboriginal employees as visible members of the public sector workforce sends a positive message to Aboriginal communities and as one Project interviewee noted –

*"... brings a cultural richness to the system, and provides a connection between the community and the public sector."*

However, this positive outcome brings its own costs as many Aboriginal workers are placed in the role of straddling their own communities' needs and those of their public sector employing organisation. They can be expected to represent all Aboriginal peoples even though it is possible only to represent themselves. There are often high expectations placed on them in terms of providing role models and mentors to other Aboriginal employees, and in providing time to be official representatives on a range of committees and other structures. These create significant time and personal pressures that are rarely acknowledged (Purdie *et al*, 2006: 57) despite being continuously identified by Aboriginal people.

*"... as Aboriginal workers in the field we are the face of the service we represent and when something happens in the community eg removal of a child, refusal of financial assistance, some members of the community blame Aboriginal workers not the service or policy that we are employed to carry out."* (Project survey respondent)

*"Aboriginal managers are expected to maintain the integrity of Aboriginal culture and practice and ... operate in a system that is not honouring of Aboriginal culture or values."*  
(Project interviewee)

A South Australian study of the relationship between culture and the employment experience measured the stress experienced by Aboriginal workers employed to work directly with other Aboriginal people (Williams, Thorpe & Chapman: 2003). These included Aboriginal Health Workers, Aboriginal Education Workers and Aboriginal workers in the criminal justice system. All groups were found to experience exceptionally high levels of stress and 'burnout', which can be expected to have a negative impact on health. The highest levels involved Aboriginal managers, all of whom had a significant level of chronic illness and injury.

*They could be described as the most 'at risk' group in terms of high and ongoing levels of stress. They were the most emotionally drained and exhausted of all the Aboriginal people interviewed in the study. This is worrisome because they form an official and unofficial stratum of Aboriginal leadership. They have successfully obtained their positions as Managers ... or been invited to be CEOs of organizations ... because they are respected Aboriginal figures with appropriate expertise (Williams, Thorpe & Chapman, 2003: 98).*

For the Aboriginal worker, especially those employed in a liaison or Aboriginal-specific role, there is a constant need to operate in what Williams *et al* call a 'cultural borderland', with the worker playing a crucial role in mediating two cultural worlds (2003: 65). In terms of time, workers in Aboriginal-specific roles were found to have little separation between work and other hours because of the constant contact from members of their communities. In most instances this contact was attributed to the trust placed in them, and the difficulties experienced by Aboriginal people in accessing mainstream services (2003: 65-66). Another factor which was found to add to the workload and stress of workers in Aboriginal-specific roles was the passing over by non-Aboriginal staff to them of any case or situation involving an Aboriginal person. This has also been identified during interviews undertaken for the Project.

*Every problem concerning Aboriginal clients ... was often 'handballed' to [them] .... This results in mainstream workers failing to engage with the necessary learning to develop cultural awareness .... The inappropriate demands made ... could be intrusive and prevent the ... workers doing their core task.... (Williams et al, 2003: 65).*

Aboriginal employees consulted for the Project have identified that a range of support mechanisms exist for them but missing is specific support that recognises the unique pressures they face in representing their communities in the public sector workplace and representing the public sector (and by association, government) in Aboriginal communities.

*"At times there is a lack of support for Aboriginal staff; generally they are the ones who need to respond to every Aboriginal issue, and we can cop the flack from our own people, but no-one then de-briefs with us - it is just accepted."* (Project survey respondent)

### **Recommendation 10**

**It is recommended that existing support strategies (particularly mentoring, ‘buddying’ and the provision of opportunities for structured Aboriginal networking) be continued and that additional strategies are developed to assist Aboriginal employees in meeting the specific challenges arising from being representatives of the public sector and of their own communities.**

In research undertaken by the Australian Public Service Commission some Aboriginal employees reported that the requirement to operate simultaneously as an Aboriginal employee in the APS and as a representative of government within their own community, created complexities that were not adequately recognised by their management (Australian Public Service Commission: *Connecting Government: Whole of government response to Australia’s priority challenges*, undated).

### **3.7 Insufficient ongoing employment opportunities**

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A continuing theme in the DDF Project survey and interview findings was the importance attached to secure ongoing employment in the face of a trend for the public sector to offer short term contract work.

There are a number of factors that are considered to influence **retention** and the highest priority was given by the Project survey sample to **secure, ongoing employment (78%)**. This was nominated as the factor most likely to encourage Aboriginal employees to remain in the SA public sector, and the second most frequently identified motivator for joining the sector.

In response to a question about the length of time they would wish to remain as SA public sector employees, the trend among survey participants was for a **long term** commitment, involving more than 20 years (**23.7%**), 6 to 10 years (**16.8%**) and between 11 and 20 years (**9.1%**). This finding is interesting in light of the barriers being experienced to retention, and the reduced availability of ongoing appointments in comparison with short term contracts.

*“Where I currently work the environment is excellent for Indigenous employees – you’re valued & your contribution & experience/advice is listened to & valued. I would love to stay on but am only on contract, yet management constantly say that more Indigenous people within the office would be great....”* (Survey respondent)

*“Through out my time with in the public sector having worked only contract (mainly short term) positions, I would like to be given an opportunity to grow within the dept, to be given a fair chance, to be given PROPER training when starting the new position, be given the chance to work over-time and gain flexi.”* (Survey respondent)

The introduction of new FTE caps was expected by most of those consulted to have a negative impact on Aboriginal employment. One of those interviewed commented -

*“Usually we can attract Aboriginal people at the entry point via short term contracts, traineeships and projects-specific contracts.... However, the FTE caps include trainees and contract staff ... which results in there being very limited scope to convert these positions to additional permanent positions.”*

Some of those consulted believe that the simultaneous setting of a 2% Target and the reduction in available long term employment sends mixed messages about the South Australian Government’s commitment to its Indigenous Employment Strategy, and encourages a tokenist approach. One survey respondent commented -

*“How long does a 'special project' go for?? It encourages tokenism positions, not long term real employment prospects, where Indigenous people can have a real go at a job or career.”*

### **Recommendation 11**

**It is recommended that a strategy is developed by the South Australian public sector to ensure that current caps on full time equivalent positions and the reducing availability of ongoing appointments do not reduce the quantity and quality of Aboriginal employment.**

Aboriginal respondents in the *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* also identified the importance to them of **secure employment**. Findings showed slightly lower levels of satisfaction with ‘job security’ by Aboriginal respondents (67%) compared with non-Aboriginal respondents (71%). This was considered to be consistent with their relatively lower levels of ongoing employment.

## **3.8 Insufficient use of exit strategies and succession planning**

Missing from most public sector Aboriginal employment strategies is the use of *exit surveys and succession planning* which can be significant in improving both recruitment and retention outcomes. Exit surveys represent an important part of the evidence base for recruitment and retention strategy development. As one of those interviewed for the DDF Project commented -

*“Give Exit Interviews – retention issues will be perpetuated if the system does not understand why people are leaving. Exit interviews will provide such a perspective.”*

### **Recommendation 12**

**It is recommended that succession planning be established in relation to existing Aboriginal employees and that exit interviews are conducted with all Aboriginal employees who leave the South Australian public sector, in order to continuously improve future recruitment and retention strategies.**

## 4 Conclusions: Achieving the 2% Target

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The people who have participated in the DDF Project's interviews, survey and analysis of workforce data have been extremely generous with their thoughtful input, and the amount of input, they have provided. Despite the number of surveys and other forms of consultation in which Aboriginal public sector employees have participated, often without being able to see the benefit, they have agreed to provide feedback to the Don Dunstan Foundation for this Project. Several have thanked us for the opportunity to provide survey feedback to an independent source, with the confidentiality of their responses protected.

*"It was really good to have the opportunity to comment in an open way without fear. Felt like we could address a range of issues in the survey. Previous on-line surveys have requested details that indicate the source could be traced."*

The feedback provided has supported the various initiatives implemented to increase Aboriginal employment in the South Australian public sector and the recommendations made are seen as building on this positive beginning. Some of those consulted took the opportunity to provide positive feedback about the work being done by the SA public service to address barriers to Aboriginal employment.

*"I am very happy working in my role within [name of agency] ... because the non-Aboriginal staff are very understanding and supportive whereby they get an insight re our culture and the wider Aboriginal community. I am of retiring age and hopefully continue to work and help support my people in the Aboriginal community for a few more years to come."*

### 4.1 Existing SA public sector provision to address identified barriers

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The *South Australian Indigenous Employment Strategy (2003)* is supported by a wider raft of state-based programs under the *SA Works* initiative. Launched in 2003, these have six priority areas, one of which is known as *Indigenous Works*. This and another priority area – *Regions at Work* – include specific strategies to enhance Aboriginal employment in South Australia. *Indigenous Works* includes provision for the *Aboriginal Apprenticeship Program* which provides incentives for the employment of Aboriginal apprentices in the private sector.

Of specific relevance to public sector recruitment and retention is the *Aboriginal Employment Program (AEP)* which provides support to people on the *Aboriginal Employment Register*, current public sector employees and agencies. The Program operates under the *South Australia Works* initiative. Other components are –

- ⇒ the *Recruitment Program*, which assists those on the Aboriginal Employment Register to gain employment in the SA public sector;
- ⇒ the *Career Enhancement Program*, which provides development opportunities for SA public sector Aboriginal employees that may include financial assistance to update skills, specific training for current and future positions and development workshops;

- ⇒ the *Skills Development Program*, which provides a number of programs including computer training, pre-employment training, application writing and interview techniques;
- ⇒ the *South Australian Public Service Indigenous Scholarships* scheme which provide a study allowance for Aboriginal people studying at a university and in some VET courses. Once studies are completed, the person is eligible to gain employment in the public sector. Aboriginal students can also access national Aboriginal cadetships provided by the Australian government.

The various Aboriginal employment strategies adopted by Australian governments, including that of the South Australian government, reflect an understanding of the importance of building pathways for Aboriginal people into the public sector through cadetships, scholarships, traineeships and apprenticeships. Most of these initiatives are focused on building skills and gaining credentials to meet standard public sector requirements. The *National Indigenous Cadetship Project* assists organisations to offset the costs of cadet placements and is accessed by all government jurisdictions in Australia (Australian Public Service Commission: 2005). The South Australian government has also acknowledged the need to provide pre-vocational programs in literacy and numeracy in order to access education and training opportunities (SA Government: 2005).

Several governments have included in their Aboriginal employment strategies individualised training and career development plans that are tailored to employee needs (SA Government: 2003; Northern Territory Government: 2002; WA Government: 2002; NSW Government: 2000; Queensland Government: 2002). The South Australian government has formally acknowledged the importance of individual development plans as part of professional and career development.

*We need to see Indigenous employees in decision making and policy development areas, and ensure that all Indigenous employees in the public sector have meaningful individual development plans which are properly supported (SA Indigenous Employment Strategy: 2003).*

The DDF Project has identified the need for apprenticeships and traineeships to be linked to ongoing and long term employment, and for greater use of structured work experience and secondment programs across a range of agencies for Aboriginal people. Cadetships were regarded as positive strategies because they are linked to ongoing employment. The *Work Shadowing* initiative was identified as a positive strategy because it enables Aboriginal employees to shadow people in positions across the sector, which was considered to be particularly important for employees working in Aboriginal-specific units.

All of these best practice approaches to the professional and career development of Aboriginal public sector employees were strongly supported by those consulted but were seen as requiring specific **resourcing** to be effective. For example, the Australian Public Service established the *APS Indigenous Capability Fund* for this purpose. It gives eligible agencies additional annual funds to enhance career development opportunities for Aboriginal employees. The Fund is part of the APS' broader Indigenous employment initiative.

The DDF Project survey asked participants to identify any strategies in place that appear to be helpful in reaching the target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the SA public sector. The third most frequently identified strategy was **agency-specific Aboriginal employment strategies** (with particular mention made of the Department of Education and Children's Services and the former Department of Administrative and Information Services), together with the *Cultural Inclusion Framework* (however, there were almost as many who viewed this cynically or as too recently implemented to judge its impact).

Both the *South Australian Indigenous Employment Strategy (2003)* and the *Cultural Inclusion Framework (2006)* provide for cultural awareness raising and some cultural competence training. However, the Project findings indicate that this may not be progressing beyond the stage of raising awareness and sensitivity to developing cross-cultural knowledge and skills, and diversity management expertise. It is important that the development of cultural competence is an **ongoing** rather than once-off process, and that cross-cultural training goes beyond awareness-raising and builds skills and knowledge because of the time taken to change attitudes and to develop cross-cultural expertise. Some of those consulted for the Project believe that such training should be mandatory rather than voluntary.

Cultural competence can be developed in two mutually reinforcing ways – by formal training and by the direct experience of working with people from a diversity of cultures. However, the relatively low numbers of Aboriginal employees (especially those working outside of Aboriginal-specific units or services) means that the opportunity for developing cultural competence is restricted, as is the opportunity to develop a critical mass of Aboriginal employees. Strategies that could be pursued to achieve critical mass include recruitment in small groups (including traineeships, apprenticeships and cadetships) rather than as individuals and clustering Aboriginal employees wherever possible. These would augment existing, positively evaluated support strategies such as, mentoring, buddying and the provision of Aboriginal networking opportunities (in particular, the *South Australian Public Sector Indigenous Employees' Network – SAPSIEN*).

The *Cultural Inclusion Framework* requires agencies to audit or self-assess current arrangements and initiate action planning to support the functional areas within their own agencies. It is expected that its five core elements should be readily incorporated into organisational quality improvement mechanisms. Each agency now has an action plan for cultural awareness and Chief Executives now have responsibility to increase cultural awareness within their agency. This accountability-promoting strategy received strong support from some of those consulted for the Project because it encourages ownership of Aboriginal employment strategies, but the reliance on self-assessment has been criticised by others. There was also support for the recently introduced requirement that the filling of public service positions be based on re-deployee availability followed by Aboriginal Employment program availability prior to advertising. Recent changes involving the former Office of Public Employment were considered by some to threaten the ongoing evolution of Aboriginal workforce development.

Some of those consulted believe that the principle of Indigenous people leading Indigenous-specific units must be upheld as an important part of wider promotion of Indigenous capacity in the SAPS. When this does not occur, it can be seen as sending a

mixed message from government about its commitment to making the SAPS an employer of choice for Aboriginal people.

The South Australian government has a strong commitment to enabling work-life-balance and this is a key feature of its workforce development initiatives in the public sector. Consequently Aboriginal employees have the opportunity to access various forms of flexible working arrangements but this will vary with individual workplaces. However, the particular challenges faced by Aboriginal employees in balancing work and life commitments, their conflicting responsibilities as public servants and Aboriginal community members, and the degree to which workplaces are culturally inclusive and the public sector workforce is culturally competent, are all crucial to the effectiveness of flexible working arrangements.

While those consulted for the Project supported the various strategies that have been established to achieve the 2% Aboriginal employment target, they believe that they are limited by the trend in the South Australian public sector for appointments to be of a **short term** nature. Ongoing and long term employment was seen as critical to achieving both increased quantity and enhanced quality of Aboriginal employment.

## 4.2 Meeting the 2% Target

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The following **fifteen** public sector agencies have already met the target of 2.0% Aboriginal employment:

### *Aboriginal-specific agencies*

- o National Aboriginal Cultural Institute (Tandanya), 100.0%
- o Aboriginal Lands Trust, 75.0%
- o Pika Wiya Health Service, 72.7%
- o Tauondi Incorporated, 47.8%.

### *Not Aboriginal-specific*

- o Office of Public Employment, 8.5%
- o Carclew Youth Arts Centre Incorporated, 7.5%
- o Northern and Far Western Regional Health Service, 6.3%
- o Department of Families and Communities, 5.6%
- o Correctional Services, 3.4%
- o HomeStart Finance, 3.4%
- o Legal Services Commission, 3.2%
- o Wakefield Regional Health Service, 2.6%
- o Department of the Premier and Cabinet, 2.5%
- o Department of Health, 2.3%
- o Courts Administration Authority, 2.3%
- o Environment and Heritage, 2.1%.

Nine of these agencies are Administrative Units or Health Units and four are Aboriginal-specific agencies. (*Refer Accompanying Report II*)

The setting of a Target for Aboriginal employment brings the advantage of creating a benchmark against which progress can be measured, but the disadvantage of being seen as tokenistic if not accompanied by other equity-promoting mechanisms. It is important to set a target that is low enough to be achievable and high enough to prompt innovative responses. The target must have breadth so that it is relevant across government agencies and depth so that it can encompass all phases of the employment spectrum. It must also avoid the trap of disguising the quality of the employment experience by focusing only on quantity, and must capture both recruitment and retention outcomes (*see Recommendation 1*).

Targets, unless designed to do so, do not specify whether employment involves long term or secure work or short term and casual appointments (National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, 2002: 17). The literature review identified the need to avoid the trap of 'target based tokenism', as the Canadian Human Rights Commission indicated in its report of a survey of public sector employees (Canadian Human Rights Commission: 1997), and was a recurring message in our interviews with South Australian Aboriginal public sector employees.

Setting the 2% Target is a positive step because it calls agencies to account against a measurable outcome. However, it is important to ensure that sufficient resources exist to meet that target, and feedback expresses concerns that this does not appear to be occurring.

Apart from seeking to address diversity management issues and to address the significant disadvantages of Aboriginal South Australians, the 2% Target and *Indigenous Employment Strategy* can be seen as a proactive approach on the part of the South Australian government to broader workforce skill shortages. Both strategies would be strengthened if linked to a specific *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy* that could be part of the existing *SA Works* initiative. This would pursue the goal of recruiting and retaining Aboriginal employees while building capacity that addresses the consequences of an ageing public sector workforce. In combination, the 2% Target, *Indigenous Employment Strategy* and *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy* would be mutually reinforcing, seeking equity-related, individual and workforce development outcomes (*see Recommendation 13*).

An *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy* would require the establishment of a series of structures and processes that would include –

- ⇒ an *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Unit* located in the Department of Premier and Cabinet to support the development, implementation and ongoing evaluation of the Strategy.
- ⇒ an *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Advisory Group*, supported by and providing support to the Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Unit.
- ⇒ the employment of *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Liaison Officers* who would advise and work with agency workforce planning teams.

The Strategy would be based on consultation with Aboriginal public sector employees and their representatives with an in-built evaluative feedback loop (*see Recommendation 14*). It is most important that the Strategy combined workforce planning and development expertise with Aboriginal knowledge and expertise.

### **Recommendation 13**

**It is recommended that an *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy* be planned and implemented to complement the *Indigenous Employment Strategy* and the Target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the South Australian public sector. It is further recommended that this is supported by the establishment of an *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Unit*, an *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Advisory Group*, and a network of *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Liaison Officers*.**

Those consulted for the DDF Project have expressed strong support for the opportunity to provide feedback to the South Australian government and to public sector leaders, about the strengths and gaps of the *Indigenous Employment Strategy* and the meeting of a 2% Target. They have also identified the need for their feedback to remain confidential and to be provided to an independent, external source. For this reason and to monitor the proposed *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy*, there is a need to establish a process for this to occur.

### **Recommendation 14**

**It is recommended that a regular survey of South Australian public sector Aboriginal employees be undertaken by an external, credible source and that this feedback be considered part of the accountability process associated with meeting the 2% Target, and with informing the *Indigenous Employment Strategy* and the proposed *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy***

## **4.3 Concluding comments**

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Aboriginal people consulted for the DDF Project report that the public sector as a whole continues to be regarded as a place where Aboriginal people experience racism and discrimination. However, it has been encouraging to find that the likelihood of this occurring is seen to be reduced at the agency level and further reduced at the level of the immediate workplace which is considered by many of those surveyed to be one where Aboriginal people are treated with sensitivity by other employees and by managers. At the same time, there is a strong recommendation to address the limited knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history and culture as part of a wider strategy to increase the cultural competence of the public sector non-Aboriginal workforce. It is reasonable to conclude that a strong foundation exists from which to further develop cultural capability by filling a significant knowledge gap and ensuring that training goes beyond cultural awareness-raising.

Apart from building non-Aboriginal capacity, it is also recommended that opportunities continue to be made available for Aboriginal employees to develop their skills and career pathways. Supported learning is part of this process, with mentors, coaches and others supporting Aboriginal employees across the employment spectrum – by providing information in a supported way to those interested in seeking public sector employment, to re-designing selection, application and induction processes so that they are culturally sensitive and enable more informed participation by Aboriginal people, and providing various forms of support and supported learning, throughout the working years and through to retirement.

One of the Project's interesting findings is one that has been voiced consistently by Aboriginal people but is rarely identified in the research literature, and is not a feature of most public sector Aboriginal employment strategies in Australia or elsewhere. This is the need for support that recognises the unique pressures faced by Aboriginal employees. These arise both from being caught between the expectations and standards of the public service and those of Aboriginal families and communities. The Aboriginal public sector workforce can work hard for both in a '24/7' experience and this is not often understood, either by their communities, or by their employer. Compounding the pressure is that, in common with all minority groups being judged by the majority, every failure is magnified even if it is a failure that also applies to members of the majority group. As one person said:

*... The reality of employing Indigenous people is that there are also failures as there is with the community at large. But an extra spotlight is placed upon us and we are tarred with the same brush when a failure happens. They don't individualise with us.*

Despite the negative perceptions held of the public service as an entity, Aboriginal people are seeking long term involvement with the sector, partly because of their motivation to contribute positively to Aboriginal communities, and partly because of their own need for secure employment and the benefits this brings (for example, ongoing opportunities for professional and career development). The trend to provide more short term contracts of work and less long term employment is seen as one of the major barriers to achieving the 2% Target in a way that is sustainable, and therefore, meaningful.

There have been numerous equity-promoting strategies developed by the South Australian and other Australian public services for Aboriginal people, and while the intentions are positive, their implementation is often compromised. In part this is a reflection of the sheer difficulty involved in achieving access and equity and cultural inclusion goals. In part it is also due to the commitment to those strategies not being shared by all and by the resistance of some to any change in the *status quo*. Change of this magnitude takes time because of the need to educate, to change attitudes and to move away from entrenched beliefs, practices and traditions. However, the gains that this change brings can benefit Aboriginal people, and the public sector workforce as a whole. One person surveyed pointed this out in their concluding comments, saying -

*"Departments need to take the long term approach, changing mind sets and developing exceptional employees does not happen overnight."*

## Appendix A: People consulted for the Project

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Ms Meg Barnett, Director, Public Sector Workforce Division, Dept Premier & Cabinet  
Ms Natalie Brandon, Project Officer, Office for Public Employment, Dept Premier & Cabinet  
Ms Catherine Bullock, Aboriginal Employment Program-Southern Suburbs of Adelaide  
Mr Bill Cinnamond, Manager, Workforce Strategy, Office for Public Employment, Dept Premier & Cabinet  
Mr Doug Clinch, Employment Broker, Aboriginal Employment Program  
Mr Bill Cossey, Chair, Don Dunstan Foundation Board  
Ms Vickie Dodd, HR Strategy and Consulting, Aboriginal Employment Consultant, Dept Families & Communities  
Ms Tiffany Downing, Manager, Public Sector & Indigenous Initiatives, DFEEST  
Ms Chris Galloni, Manager, Business Intelligence, Planning and Evaluation, DFEEST  
Ms Angela Goldsmith, Senior Consultant, Apprenticeship Team, DFEEST  
Ms Karen Grogan, Director, SACOSS  
Ms Donna Harden, Manager, Workforce Evaluation, Dept Premier & Cabinet  
Ms Jenny Lauritsen, Principal Policy Officer, Workforce Development, DFEEST  
Mr Ken Liddle, Employment Broker, APY Lands and Mining Industry in the North  
Ms Sarah Marshall, Executive Officer, National VET Disability Advisory Taskforce, DFEEST  
Ms Isabel Maurer, Manager, Traineeship & Apprenticeship Management, DFEEST  
Ms Marg Mibus, Principal Policy Officer, Aboriginal Education and Employment Services, DFEEST/DECS  
Ms Jeanette Milera, Employment Consultant-Northern Area (Pt Augusta, Whyalla)  
Ms Christel Murray, Manager of Public Sector and Indigenous Unit of DFEEST  
Ms Simone Oliver, Senior Consultant, Office for Public Employment, Dept Premier & Cabinet  
Mr Norm Pickett, Aboriginal Apprenticeship Program, DFEEST  
Mr David Rathman\*, Executive Director, Aboriginal Employment and Education Strategies, DFEEST  
Mr Tim Ritchie, Employment Consultant, Aboriginal Apprenticeship Program  
Ms Nerida Saunders, Director, Aboriginal Culture and Heritage, Aboriginal Affairs & Reconciliation Division, Dept Premier & Cabinet  
Mr Andrew Smith\*, Senior Project Manager, Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation Division, Dept Premier & Cabinet  
Mr Kuang Tan, Principal Policy Officer, Traineeship & Apprenticeship Services, DFEEST  
Ms Misty Taylor, Indigenous Scholarships Project Officer, HR Strategy and Consulting, Dept of Families and Communities  
Ms Joyleen Thomas\*, Principal Aboriginal Cultural Consultant, Dept of Treasury & Finance  
Prof Roger Thomas\*, Director, Wilto Yerlo, University of Adelaide  
Ms Marsha Uppill, Principal Consultant Indigenous Employment, Office of Public Employment\*  
Ms Sonia Waters\*, Senior Policy Advisor Indigenous Affairs, Social Inclusion Unit, Dept Premier & Cabinet  
Mr Jeff Walsh, Commissioner for Public Employment  
Ms Judith Welgraven, Aboriginal Education, TAFESA

\* Member of the Project Reference Group

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ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AEP	Aboriginal Employment Program
APS	Australian Public Service
AWIRS	Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Employment Policy Research
DDF	Don Dunstan Foundation
HR	Human Resources
LFS	Labour Force Survey
NATSISS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Social Survey
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NGO	Non Government Organisation
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
SAPS	South Australian Public Sector
SAPSIEN	South Australian Public Sector Indigenous Employees Network
VET	Vocational Education and Training