

## Chapter 4

# Report on Activities in Support of the Plan at the National Level

The Action Plan identifies national, systemic and local level action in six priority domains. This chapter provides details about the implementation of the 27 national level actions listed across each of the six domains.

These national actions are described in the Action Plan as national collaborative actions and are divided into those led by MCEECDYA; those led by the Australian Government; and those led by the Australian Government and education providers.

There are 16 actions that ministers of education, through MCEECDYA, have agreed to lead. The MCEECDYA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Working Group will take a Work Plan to ministers of education for their consideration and endorsement. The Work Plan will identify activity and progress against each of the MCEECDYA-led actions. The remaining 11 actions will be led by either the Australian Government and/or in conjunction with education providers. As 2010 is the first year of activity under the Action Plan, MCEECDYA, the Australian Government and individual education providers have commenced implementation of the national collaborative actions to varying degrees.

Some examples of this activity in the various jurisdictions are included in the introduction to the reporting on each of the six domains. The collaborative activity is then more broadly described under each action in the domain.

## Readiness for School

### Intended Outcomes:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under 5 years of age benefit from inter-agency actions to improve their social, physical and cognitive development.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are developmentally ready to benefit from schooling (e.g. in their physical health, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, communication skills and general knowledge).

### Targets:

- Increased proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children participating in quality early childhood education and development and child care services.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students perform at equivalent or better rates to Other students in school on-entry assessment.

## Activity in the Jurisdictions

Under the domain, 'Readiness for School', there is activity in many jurisdictions to support the development of a national Early Years Development Workforce Strategy and the Early Years Learning Framework. For example, all preschool educators in the Department of Education and Children's Services, South Australia, are required to implement the Framework; and a significant component of this mandated curriculum is cultural competence. In the Northern Territory, consideration is being given to mandating the Framework for Territory programs including preschool and transition.

In Tasmania, the Department of Education has developed a birth to 5, *Launching into Learning* initiative, with support in some cases from Aboriginal Early Years Liaison Officers, to assist families and students in their preparedness for school. Data will be collected on the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young children and families involved, and a longitudinal study is underway.

Work is underway with Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to put in place seamless services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and their children under the age of five years through: Koorie Maternity Services (antenatal to postnatal); Aboriginal Best Start, through Maternal and Child Health Services; and In Home Support, in areas with large numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Within the Victorian Catholic system, Koorie Education Workers have been involved in making connections and building service relationships with preschool centres in each of the Catholic dioceses, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

## Action 1

MCEECDYA will support the development of a national Early Years Development Workforce Strategy. This Strategy will address the skills and capacity of the current and future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's workforce, including the early childhood educational and care sector in rural and remote areas. Connections will be made with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educator Workforce Strategy (Action 33).

The Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) is currently working on the development of a national Early Years Workforce Strategy, in consultation with State and Territory governments.

This Workforce Strategy will complement and build upon existing Australian, State and Territory government measures aimed at building a qualified and sustainable early childhood workforce. Development of the Workforce Strategy will be informed by the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educator Workforce Strategy* and the *National Indigenous Employment Strategy*.

A workshop, held in May 2010, was attended by key Commonwealth and jurisdictional representatives to identify key themes to be addressed by the Workforce Strategy. As at 31 December 2010, the Workforce Strategy was in draft form and further work is to be undertaken with a view to finalising the Strategy in 2011.

Mechanisms to review progress will be incorporated in the final document and will provide information on where the Workforce Strategy has succeeded and identify any challenges in implementation. The *National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census*, which was conducted for the first time in 2010, will be an important input into future reviews.

Various studies will provide useful information to review the Workforce Strategy and its effectiveness in building the capacity of the early childhood workforce. These include:

- the Productivity Commission's *Education and Training Workforce Study* (The Early Childhood Development Workforce) to be finalised in late 2011
- a review of the early childhood education and care workforce required under the National Partnership on the

*National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care* in 2013.

## Action 2

MCEECDYA will support the use of the Early Years Learning Framework in all early childhood settings to ensure the delivery of quality early education programs through partnerships with families. The Framework also supports the cultural competence of early childhood educators in developing and delivering programs for young children. An *Educators' Guide* and other resources will also support educators in developing their cultural, linguistic and contextual knowledge about the communities in which they teach and support them in engaging with these communities.

The Early Years Learning Framework was released by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) on 2 July 2009 and disseminated to early childhood services across Australia. The *Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework* was released on the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' (DEEWR) website on 6 December 2010, after extensive consultation and feedback from stakeholders. It will be disseminated to services in 2011.

The *Early Years Learning Framework* and the *Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework* promote the delivery of quality and nationally consistent early learning programs. The implementation of the *Early Years Learning Framework* will develop the cultural competency of educators and assists educators to work in partnership with families and communities to plan their children's learning.

When the *National Quality Standard for Education and Care Services* is introduced on 1 January 2012, early childhood services will be required to demonstrate their use of the Framework in the design and delivery of their education programs.

Further assistance is being provided through training and support delivered by the Australian Government-funded *Professional Support Co-ordinators Program*, the Indigenous Professional Support Units, Inclusion Support Agencies and Early Childhood Australia. Delivery of professional development to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in remote communities is proposed for 2011–2012.

### Action 3

MCEECDYA will reference, synthesise and report on longitudinal studies into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care in the annual report on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–14. Research will consider integrated approaches for children aged 0–8 years, examining barriers to and enablers of success and curricula and resources that provide skill development in the foundations for learning essential for the first year of formal schooling.

Early work on this action has commenced with the Australian Government supporting two longitudinal studies:

- 1 SAX Institute — Study of Environment of Aboriginal Resilience and Child Health (SEARCH)  
The Institute will conduct a long term study on the health of urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children attending Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services to examine the impact of early childhood health and development on educational outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, with a first progress report due in 2011.
- 2 University of Melbourne — E4KIDS longitudinal study  
E4Kids includes children and families from many backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. While the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is small (fewer than 50), due to survey non-response, they can be tracked over time. Wave 1 (baseline) data collection was completed in 2010.  
E4Kids operates in selectively chosen regional and remote sites, which have a population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people significantly higher than the national average, in Shepparton (Victoria) and Mount Isa (Queensland). This study is designed to explore the benefits of Early Childhood Education and Care programs. For example, it:
  - examines which components contribute to the learning and development of Australian children
  - identifies environments that result in positive (or negative) learning experiences
  - estimates the cost to achieve these positive effects on learning behaviours.

### Action 4

MCEECDYA will commission further development of on-entry assessment frameworks and guidelines for their use in particular settings.

Jurisdictions currently use a variety of on-entry diagnostic tools and/or testing in pre-primary education. These enable schools to identify at the earliest possible stage students for whom a specific case-management plan is required. Students can then be tracked and monitored throughout their schooling, and this approach provides opportunity for more targeted and purposeful planning and implementation of programs.

Further work is required in 2011 and 2012 to identify the processes and frameworks that work best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is an initiative of the Australian Government, working in partnership with State and Territory governments; the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, and the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth.

The AEDI is a population measure of children's development as they enter school, providing information on children's physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills (school-based), communication skills and general knowledge.

Information for the AEDI is collected by teachers. However, results are reported for the community in which children live. This enables governments and communities (early childhood service providers, schools, parents, non-government organisations and local government) to use the AEDI results to develop and evaluate efforts to improve outcomes for local children.

## Engagement and Connections

### Intended Outcomes:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are engaged in and benefiting from schooling.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities are empowered through the promotion of their identity, culture and leadership in community partnerships with providers of early childhood and school education.

## Targets:

- Increased number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students involved in personalised learning.
- Active school-community partnership agreements in place within focus schools.

## Activity in the Jurisdictions

Under the 'Engagement and Connections' domain, school and early childhood education providers that work in partnership with families and communities can better support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The priority of inter-sectoral connections between agencies is becoming more evident. The Children and Family Centres, for example, provide easy access to family support, childcare, education and health services for children from birth to eight years, and their families.

The involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at all levels of educational decision-making is strengthening. For example, in collaboration with the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (NSW AECG), the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities will implement in 2011–2012 the *Connecting to Country* initiative. This is a quality teaching initiative, funded by the Australian Government, that focuses on enhancing teacher leadership by engaging teachers and principals in a learning journey which manifests a deep-centred understanding and knowledge of the cultural, historical and socio-political contexts relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, locally and generally. The initiative involves teachers and principals engaging in a localised three-day, in-the-field, Cultural Immersion Program facilitated by Regional and Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups. The Cultural Immersion element is followed by a two-day professional learning experience that concentrates on translating the local cultural knowledge and information into classroom practice, pedagogy and effective school leadership.

Another example of the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision-making can be seen in South

Australia. Here, the Department of Education and Children's Services has established formal partnerships with five South Australian Aboriginal language groups in order to promote a community-led approach to the teaching of languages in government schools, including associated professional learning and materials development.

In the Australian Capital Territory, a joint initiative involving the Directorates for Education and Training and Community Services and Health is being implemented to co-ordinate services being accessed by vulnerable and/or at risk Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

### Action 9

*MCEECDYA will seek support from the Australian Health Ministers' Conference and Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference to strengthen connections between schools and health, welfare, family support, and youth and community services at local and systemic levels. Consideration will also be given to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with disabilities.*

During 2010, officials representing MCEECDYA, the Australian Health Ministers' Conference and the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference met and agreed upon three themes of collaborative work:

- (i) Otitis media (hearing issues)
- (ii) Supporting young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers
- (iii) Early childhood education with an emphasis on connection to, and of, services at a local level.

A strategy to advance this work is being actively considered by officials. There will be consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities, and organisations, and all stakeholders will be involved in the planning for implementation.

### Action 10

*Governments commit to maintaining appropriate advisory arrangements to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, cultures and languages can be considered when developing policy and programs.*

Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECBs) provide an important link between the Australian, State and Territory

governments on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues across education sectors, including early childhood, primary and secondary schooling, vocational education and training and government and non-government education providers.

IECBs in each State and Territory are funded under the *Indigenous Education Targeted Assistance Act, 2000* to:

- promote engagement between the Australian Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and education providers to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education outcomes; and
- provide advice and comment to the Minister for Education on:
  1. strategies to improve education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students focusing on school readiness, schools, and transition from school to work or further education
  2. the effectiveness of mainstream and supplementary education policies and programs in improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
  3. specific matters as referred by Ministers.

The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, established in 2004, provides policy advice to the Australian Government on enhancing higher education participation and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (see Action 45).

## Action 11

*The Australian Government and education providers will work together to promote the cross-cultural value of formal education in contemporary Australia to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and families. This will help to create partnerships with families to build from and strengthen their capacity to be involved in their children's education.*

At the national level, there is activity under this action for both parents and teachers.

The Parental and Community Engagement Program is a community driven program for parents and carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. With the aim of improving the educational outcomes of their children, this

program supports initiatives that assist families and communities to:

- 'reach-in' to schools and other educational settings to engage in their children's education through participation in educational decision making
- develop partnerships with education providers
- support and reinforce their children's learning at home.

In 2010, 193 projects aimed to contribute to the development of school community partnerships through formal, and sometimes informal, agreements with parents and communities. Future reports will provide more detailed information on these projects and on the number and nature of formal agreements entered into.

The Stronger Smarter Learning Communities project aims for deep and significant change from a 'high-expectations' and relational approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. A range of targeted school/community sites are networked to others within their regions and to those elsewhere across the nation.

The goals of this project are to:

- transform networked schools through the building of leadership capacity
- achieve higher levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement – including the active involvement of parents and community Elders in the school
- ensure the effective deployment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers
- support sustained improvement of student outcomes within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Each Stronger Smarter Learning Community is committed to a high-expectation, high-performance and relational approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, and is led by a principal who has successfully completed the Stronger Smarter School Leaders Program. The project is working collaboratively with schooling authorities across Australia to develop and sustain a gradually developing national network of up to 60 Stronger Smarter Learning Communities.

In existence since 2000, the *What Works, The Work Program – Improving outcomes for Indigenous students* project comprises professional development resources and materials, for use by teachers, principals and schools, designed to assist in planning and taking action to improve education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

By participating in *What Works*, teachers are supported in: building their cultural awareness; forming partnerships with parents and communities; and systematically working through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education issues. Twelve new partnerships in four States were established during 2010, and a further five partnerships have commenced negotiations towards implementation.

In 2010, the *What Works* website was used to publicise the new Health Core Issues, the Indigenous Education Resource Update and the new Workbook. Four new case studies were developed, with three from Queensland and one from Western Australia. By November 2010, this resource had 1,200 subscribers and an online evaluation survey had been developed, with 120 responses to the survey submitted by the end of the year.

The Indigenous Education Ambassadors Program provides for successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to visit educational settings all over Australia to help promote achievement in early learning, schooling and higher education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Ambassadors attend events wherever there are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, such as children's services, schools, TAFE colleges, universities and community organisations. Ambassadors share their personal stories and explain how they overcame obstacles to achieve their own success. They also promote positive messages about education as a pathway to a higher education, a job, or starting a business.

Ambassadors enjoy strong support from schools, parents, teachers and communities across Australia because they:

- motivate students
- reinforce the importance of school attendance, and the need for English literacy and numeracy
- promote education as an important tool for the next generation of leaders
- help to progress reconciliation within schools.

Ambassadors come from a broad range of backgrounds and include people across diverse age groups, trades and professions. They are positive role models who can speak confidently and motivate students. They also possess proven leadership skills, a commitment to education and are recognised and respected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## Action 12

*As part of the implementation of the Australian Government's National Indigenous Languages Policy, a study will be commissioned into the feasibility of a national panel of experts framing the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, including consideration of out-of-school schemes.*

The Australian Government is supporting the directions of the National Indigenous Languages Policy through its advice to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) on the development of the *Australian Curriculum: Languages*.

ACARA has developed the draft *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages Paper* (Shape Paper) that recognises the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages as the languages of the first peoples of Australia. The *Australian Curriculum: Languages* will include the development of language-specific curricula and a Framework for Australian Languages (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages).

To support this and wider work, ACARA has established two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expert advisory panels to provide expertise and advice on draft curriculum documents. The Australian Languages Expert Advisory Panel will focus on, and review, the work of the languages curriculum writers. The second panel will provide advice on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures can be best incorporated into the *Australian Curriculum*.

The development of an Australian Languages Framework will be implemented within agreed community protocols and will establish, maintain and extend language programs in schools that are responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's needs and aspirations for the revitalisation of their languages.

While a feasibility study is yet to be commissioned, the work of ACARA will assist in framing the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

Significant funding for languages education is being provided to the States and Territories through the National Education Agreement for languages, allowing jurisdictions flexibility to determine how funding is allocated according to the needs of the schools, and more importantly, the students. Funding can be used to support and maintain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages programs operating in government schools.

In addition, \$62.39 million is being provided from 2010–11 to 2013–14 financial years through the *Schools Assistance Act 2008* to support the teaching of languages, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, in non-government schools.

In collaboration with other Australian Government departments, the Office of the Arts at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet is developing a practical plan to implement this policy. This will involve consultation with State and Territory government agencies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language organisations to link strategic initiatives to the policy's key objectives.

### **Action 13**

*MCEECDYA's National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools will acknowledge the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and require all States and Territories to communicate their expectations surrounding the teaching of these languages to schools.*

The 2008 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* commits Australian schools to build on the local cultural knowledge and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The *National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005–2008* (National Plan) is currently being reviewed and updated, and a *National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2011–2014* has been drafted. The draft National Plan contains a specific element about supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australian schools.

The 2005–2008 National Plan and the draft National Plan for 2011–2014 encourage education authorities to support the development and implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australian schools. Elements focus on building social capital among young people, and harnessing

community capacity to engage with, and in, the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority has released the draft *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages* paper which acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives will be included across learning areas in the new national curriculum. The draft paper also makes specific reference to the cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

### **Action 14**

*The Australian Government and education providers will work together to develop options to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in regional and remote areas to access high quality secondary schooling while retaining links with their communities.*

The Australian Government and education providers currently have a number of agreements and national programs in place to provide quality secondary schooling options while retaining links with communities. These include:

- The National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions
- Compact with Young Australians
- Youth Connections Program
- School Business Community Partnership Brokers
- The Indigenous Youth Leadership Program
- Sporting Chance Program
- Trade Training Centres in Schools Program
- Reducing Substance Abuse Program
- No School No Play Initiative
- Boarding Facilities in the Northern Territory
- ABSTUDY.

The National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions between the Australian Government and respective States and Territory governments commit all parties to work towards achieving a Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate of 90 per cent by 2015, and to halve the gap between Year 12 or

equivalent attainment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people by 2020.

Although there are no incentives directly linked to the halving the gap target, the Compact with Young Australians includes a requirement that all young people participate in schooling (or an approved equivalent) to Year 10, and then participate full-time (at least 25 hours per week) in education, training or employment, or a combination of these activities, until age 17.

Youth Connections assists young people who are at risk of disengaging from secondary education, or who have left school, to continue with their education and ultimately gain a Year 12, or equivalent, level education. It does so through individualised, case-managed and youth-focused outreach activities. In 2010, 3,791 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people received support from the Youth Connections program, with 38 per cent (1,456) achieving re-engagement or a sustained improvement in their engagement with education, training or employment, while a further 25 per cent (941), were assessed as making progress towards addressing their barriers to full engagement in education.

School Business Community Partnership Brokers foster a whole-of-community approach, needed to support young people as they learn and develop, with the key goal of ensuring that young Australians attain Year 12 or equivalent qualifications. Partnership Brokers build partnerships that aim to empower the community to take ownership of relevant issues and drive change through community leadership.

The Indigenous Youth Leadership Program provides scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (chiefly from remote and very remote regions) to attend high performing schools. Through the delivery of 240 secondary three-year scholarships per year (and 60 tertiary level scholarships), the program supports students to achieve academically, develop leadership skills and become positive role models in their communities.

This program is delivered through eight Partnership Brokers who work with partner schools to approve students who are eligible to receive a scholarship and facilitate the enrolment of scholars at the schools, where appropriate. Partnership Brokers identify high performing schools that have:

- demonstrated excellent academic results for their students

- established a culturally sensitive and appropriate environment
- a proven capacity to engage with community and students' families.

In 2010, 64 high performing schools provided education to 362 secondary scholars and 73 students completed Year 12. Between 2006 and 2010, there were 198 Year 12 completions by Indigenous Youth Leadership Program scholars, with a retention rate of 84 per cent.

Following successful completion of Year 12, scholars are able to continue their pathway to further study with support from the Indigenous Youth Mobility Program (see Action 45) or a tertiary-level Indigenous Youth Leadership Program scholarship.

The Sporting Chance Program uses sport and recreation as a vehicle to increase the level of engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their schooling to encourage positive educational outcomes. The program has two elements: school-based sports academies and education engagement strategies.

School-based sports academies target secondary school students at risk of not successfully completing their schooling through the provision of:

- innovative and high-quality sports-focused learning
- opportunities to develop leadership
- enhanced education and career opportunities
- activities to improve the health and wellbeing of learners, including self-esteem and confidence, as well as the promotion of positive learning experiences that foster success.

Education engagement strategies deliver a range of sport and recreation-based activities to engage students in education, including those with a focus on developing healthy and positive lifestyles; mentoring; promotion of leadership skills; and exposure to community and sports role models.

In 2010, under the Sporting Chance Program, there were 54 school-based sports academies and five education engagement strategies targeting some 10,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary and high school students across Western

Australia, the Northern Territory, South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.

Outcomes of the Program in 2010 include:

- 77 per cent average attendance rate for academy students, compared to 73 per cent for the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student cohort in participating schools
- average attendance rates of academy students ranging from 45 per cent to 100 per cent
- participating schools reporting that, on average, over 55 per cent of academy students improved in their literacy and numeracy performance
- qualitative reporting from both providers and classroom teachers indicating significant improvement in self-esteem, attitude and behaviour of academy students
- by December 2010, a total of 189 participants completing Year 12.

The Trade Training Centres in Schools Program provides \$2.5 billion over 10 years to enable all secondary students to access vocational education training through these centres. The program provides school trade training facilities to help improve completion of Year 12 or an equivalent qualification, and enhances career options for students. A key funding priority is to support school communities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students from regional or other disadvantaged communities including remote communities. By the end of 2010, approximately 60 per cent of funding allocated under the program supported projects in regional and remote Australia.

The Reducing Substance Abuse Program provides \$3.5 million over 2009–2012 to deliver diversionary education activities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people at risk of, or engaging with substance misuse, who are disengaged from formal learning environments. These education activities include:

- delivering accredited learning programs in non-school settings
- developing life and employability skills
- providing training and individual support
- supporting young people to re-engage with school or other mainstream activities.

Five small projects were funded in 2009–2010 to provide localised, diversionary education activities in each of the five petrol-sniffing strategy priority zones. Attendance rates of participants in the projects varied, and ranged from 20–90 per cent. Some participants gained accreditation towards a Certificate I or III and one participant secured employment.

In 2010, the Australian Government Minister for School Education approved a new approach to delivering projects as part of the program by partnering with the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' (DEEWR) mainstream Youth Connections Program to run pilot projects in 2011 and 2012. It is anticipated that better outcomes will be achieved across a broader service area through this partnership.

The No School, No Play Initiative aims to build strong partnerships between sporting organisations, parents and communities of secondary school students to promote the benefits of school attendance. The Australian Government has provided a total of \$2 million to implement the initiative from July 2010 to December 2012. Funding will assist the sporting organisations to include a focus on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students.

As at December 2010, contracts were in place with eight national sporting organisations, and implementation plans are in development to deliver school-based projects across Australia.

The Boarding Facilities in the Northern Territory initiative aims to provide accommodation options that assist young people from remote areas to access secondary schooling. These facilities are not boarding schools or colleges, but supervised accommodation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, designed to be close to an existing school, enabling young people from each of the targeted regions to access a quality, full-time secondary education.

In 2010, \$28.9 million was made available for the construction and operation of three new boarding facilities in the Northern Territory for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students. The Indigenous Land Corporation has committed an additional capital contribution of \$15 million towards the facilities, bringing total investment to \$43.9 million over four years.

The sites for these boarding facilities are: Wadeye, East Arnhem and the Warlpiri Triangle. By the end of 2010, the construction

process for the facility in Wadeye was underway, Aboriginal Hostels Limited was engaged to manage the construction and operate the boarding facility and a local advisory committee (that meets every six weeks) was providing cultural and community advice on the construction and operating model for the facility.

In East Arnhem, Garrthlala was announced as the location for the facility. A regional advisory committee was established and meets every six weeks and the site selection is nearing finalisation. It will be followed by a technical feasibility study, development of design options and land lease negotiations.

In the Warlpiri Triangle, a preferred location has been identified. However, final negotiations are yet to be determined. The Australian Government is committed to building and ensuring broad-based community support for the initiative, with further negotiations required with the Northern Territory Government and the Warlpiri Triangle communities to progress this site.

Financial assistance can facilitate access to secondary schooling for students who may otherwise not be able to complete their education. The ABSTUDY Scheme is an on-going special measure to assist in addressing the educational disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In addition to the primary benefit, living allowance, ABSTUDY includes a number of supplementary benefits, which recognise the unique circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and are provided to address particular areas of disadvantage. These include: provisions to help meet the costs of tuition fees for students who leave home to attend secondary school; assistance to help students pay for general expenses; assistance with fares, meals and accommodation, if students undertake part of their course away from their normal place of residence; and assistance with on-campus residential costs.

## Attendance

### Intended Outcomes:

- All compulsory school-aged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are enrolled in school and progressing through schooling at the same rate as non-Indigenous students.

### Targets:

- Attendance rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are equivalent to non-Indigenous student attendance rates.
- All compulsory school-aged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are enrolled in school.
- Increased retention rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Increased grade progression ratios for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

*Source: MCEECDYA, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014.*

## Activity in the Jurisdictions

Under the 'Attendance' domain, jurisdictions have developed various strategies to monitor and track students. For example, Western Australia and Queensland have agreed to collaborate with New South Wales to establish a consistent approach to the measurement of school attendance.

A further example is the Tri-Border Attendance Strategy Project, which commenced in August 2008. This is a collaborative agreement between South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The project will have a Central Schools' Database to enable sharing of information about student mobility, but will also ensure successful practice is promoted to schools (see Action 24).

In Tasmania, the Department of Education is implementing an initiative called Launching into Learning (LiL), which is aimed at families with children from birth to five years of age. LiL is supported by Aboriginal Early Years Liaison Officers who work with Aboriginal families to assist their children's preparedness for school. Data will be collected on the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young children and families involved, and a longitudinal study is underway.

The South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services has a web-based data system, the Indigenous Student Support System, which enables regions and central office to keep track of Aboriginal students' movements between schools, while focusing on behaviour management, attendance

and educational achievement to ensure that district support strategies are informed by the latest available data. The Task Force on Absenteeism simultaneously provides policy direction in relation to attendance.

As part of the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training's, Every Child Every Day Initiative, evidence-based strategies are being implemented.

In Victoria, the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) tutors from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and Monash University commenced supporting Indigenous students in government and independent secondary schools in Melbourne's north and south-east in 2010. AIME partners university student volunteers in a one-on-one mentoring relationship with a secondary school Indigenous student, for an hour each week over the course of a 17-week program. Further information about this program is available online: <http://www.aimementoring.com/about/>

## Action 22

*MCEECDYA will dedicate National Project Funds in 2011 to further develop a better evidence base of what works in improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student attendance. The evidence base will consider a range of contextual information, including the way in which schools respond to the diverse linguistic, cultural and geographical contexts in which they operate.*

MCEECDYA funding will become available in the 2011–2012 financial year to progress an 'evidence base of successful strategies to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school attendance and engagement'.

The evidence base will:

- draw on international, national, State and Territory sources
- include consideration of a range of contextual information impacting on attendance
- identify practical strategies that could be adopted by school communities and practitioners to improve attendance rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- explore approaches to sustain collections of research, case studies and other relevant information on improving attendance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

so that this information can continue to be used by schools, school systems and policy makers.

A key objective of this project is that the evidence base is utilised and shared widely and effectively to drive improvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school attendance.

## Action 23

*MCEECDYA will initiate work to establish mechanisms for tracking individual students (enrolment and attendance) from at least the first year of compulsory schooling to post-school destinations.*

At the June 2010 MCEECDYA meeting, Ministers agreed to the establishment of the Strategic Cross-Sectoral Data Committee. Part of the Committee's brief is to support the work of the Universal Student Identifier (USI) Sub-committee around mechanisms across jurisdictions for furthering approaches to student identifiers.

The aim of the USI Sub-committee is to provide advice and recommendations to the Strategic Cross-sectoral Data Committee on options for data linkage across all education and training sectors to facilitate improved monitoring of student performance both within and across jurisdictions. The committee will:

- bring together the USI relevant work currently being undertaken in education sectors
- canvass the perspectives from the wide range of public and private providers in each education and training sector
- consider funding arrangements, governance issues and privacy concerns.

During 2010, the USI Sub-committee developed its terms of reference, a work plan, membership and a two-tier structure to continue its work. The two tiers comprise:

- a core group of experts from relevant education sectors and data collection agencies from government and non-government bodies
- a reference group which will provide advice on particular aspects of work as they arise.

Under the Digital Education Revolution, a project has commenced regarding the implementation of a Systems

Interoperability Framework for Australia. This model provides a protocol for linking together education data systems through a set of rules and definitions, which enable disparate systems to be employed from one school to the next, to share information.

In mid-2010, a consultation paper on the introduction of a Unique Student Identifier for the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector was prepared by the VET National Data Strategy Action group. Flowing on from this, the Data and Performance Measurement Principal Committee, of the Ministerial Council on Tertiary Education and Employment, has developed a preparatory business case for the Unique Student Identifier, which was considered by the Ministerial Council in late-2010.

At the MCEECDYA Strategic Cross-sectoral Data Committee meeting on 30 November 2010, the Committee agreed to take the Unique Student Identifier work forward and in 2011 will undertake broad public consultation, costing, risk assessment and mitigation, including required quality assurance mechanisms, technological solutions and governance and legislation requirements. Members noted the need to carefully consider what work is underway regarding the development of a Unique Student Identifier, as there is potential for duplication of effort, for example, in relation to metadata.

## Action 24

*The Australian, Western Australian, South Australian and Northern Territory Governments will continue working with non-government providers to develop strategies to better record enrolment and attendance of highly mobile students from remote communities.*

The Tri-border Attendance Strategy Project commenced in August 2008 after the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, now MCEECDYA) identified a need to address the high levels of absenteeism among highly mobile students. Funding has been provided by the Australian Government and the project will be finalised in December 2011.

The objective of the project is to share information on student enrolment and attendance across government, independent and Catholic schools in the border regions of Northern Territory,

South Australia and Western Australia, with the view to improving student learning outcomes and engagement practices.

The Central Schools Database is the centrepiece of this project. Data from participating schools (404) are uploaded to the database system by using the Systems Interoperability Framework.

Information fields available on the database include:

- student contact information
- student enrolment and attendance information from participating schools
- language/s spoken by the student
- availability of student learning plans
- indications of student learning area progress
- indicators of student pastoral care needs.

Project outcomes include:

- development of the Central Schools Database
- a communication protocol for principals
- provision of online training for all participating schools
- development of an evaluation strategy.

## Literacy and Numeracy

### Intended Outcomes:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are meeting basic literacy and numeracy standards and overall levels of literacy and numeracy achievement are improving.

### Targets:

- Halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous students by 2018.
- Increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student participation rates in NAPLAN.

Source: MCEECDYA, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014*.

## Activity in the Jurisdictions

Under the 'Literacy and Numeracy' domain, jurisdictions have focused on various approaches to improve the literacy and numeracy outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. New South Wales has employed a specialist English as an Additional Language Senior Education Officer to support teachers with English as an Additional Language methodology and practice. New South Wales is also contributing to a national, English as an Additional Language online resource for teachers in remote locations. In the Northern Territory, the Menzies School of Health Research has completed a research paper on bilingual education.

A collaborative partnership between the Aboriginal Education Services of the Department of Education, Tasmania and Education Services, South Australia has been established. Partners share and develop quality digital curriculum resources about Tasmanian Aboriginal people and culture. The South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services is implementing the Learning Together Initiative, which focuses on the importance of children's oral language development and the critical role parents play in supporting their children. The Aboriginal Children and Family Centres play a key role here.

### Action 27

*The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) will regularly review NAPLAN tests to ensure that they are not culturally biased against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.*

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority has established committees with relevant expertise to review test items at specific points in the test development process to ensure they are free of bias. In the item development stage of NAPLAN tests, the subject matter is carefully selected so as to be inclusive of all students. Once test items are developed, a panelling process takes place to examine them.

Education practitioners in States and Territories, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, provide specific feedback on the suitability of the test items and the appropriateness of the stimulus materials for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Test trials are then carried

out using a sample of students, and analysis of the results is undertaken to ensure that all items are culturally appropriate and free of bias.

### Action 28

*The Australian Government will work with education providers to develop and maintain a national database of effective, evidence-based literacy and numeracy strategies to support the sharing of best practice. Bilingual and bidialectal evidence-based strategies will be considered for inclusion in the database.*

The Australian Government, under the guidance of the National Partnership Literacy and Numeracy Evidence Base Expert Reference Group, is currently developing an evidence base of effective literacy and numeracy strategies.

The Expert Reference Group was established with representatives nominated by each jurisdiction, the Australian Government, the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) and the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA). It includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and special education representatives with expertise in literacy and numeracy.

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) has been contracted to assess and refine the submission and assessment framework, as well as the standards of evidence for the evidence base. Final versions of these documents, incorporating feedback from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and the Expert Reference Group, were provided by the ACER to the Department on 27 October 2010, and will be provided to the selected consultants to inform the development and construction of the evidence base.

The objectives of the evidence base are to:

- support greater information sharing and transparency about literacy and numeracy interventions that demonstrate success
- explore how successful approaches can be built on and replicated
- ensure a focus on the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, special needs and English as a Second Language students
- lead practitioners to adopt better informed and evidence-based decisions about approaches to improving the literacy and numeracy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Consistent with the National Partnership, the Australian Government will co-ordinate and manage the evidence base and facilitate access by State and Territory government and non-government education authorities, including practitioners.

## Action 29

*The Australian Government and education providers will work together to support access to family literacy and numeracy programs, including multilingual family programs, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and target participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in intensive support playgroups and other family support services.*

Under Element One of the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development, the Australian Government has provided funding for the establishment of 38 Children and Family Centres across Australia by June 2014. The centres will deliver integrated services, including early learning, childcare and family support programs.

The Children and Family Centres are targeted at addressing the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and their young children, and will also provide services to all families in the community. The design and operation of the facilities will differ from centre to centre so that services meet local needs. While the final service mix for each centre will be subject to community consultation, it is envisaged that each centre will:

- bring together important services for children and families including child care, early learning, parent and family support programs
- use existing community strengths and resources to help establish the centres and make sure every centre responds effectively to its community
- connect with other services in the community to ensure families can easily access the services they need, for example, maternal and child health services, playgroups or family literacy programs.

Progress made during 2010 includes:

- the commencement of consultations in 35 locations
- agreement with communities on 25 physical sites
- commencement of construction at two sites

- commencement of limited service delivery in 10 locations from interim premises.

Some of the programs delivered through this integrated service model include:

- In the Australian Capital Territory, supported playgroups and home visiting to support child development, maternal and child health, service promotion and education on parenting topics
- In Tasmania, Launching into Learning, a preschool program associated with local schools, and Child and Family Centres are supporting families to help their children achieve success and improve quality of outcomes for those living in vulnerable circumstances.
- In the Northern Territory, the Families as First Teachers: Indigenous Parenting Support Services Program, and in New South Wales, the Schools as Community Centres (SACC) Program provide wrap-around service delivery to Aboriginal parents and young children.

The Families as First Teachers: Indigenous Parenting Support Services Program is a strategy to support remote Aboriginal families and communities to give children the best possible start in life. The program engages families from the very early stages of their child's life and builds child development knowledge, skills and confidence in parenting. In partnership with the Northern Territory Department of Health and Families, community agencies and local organisations, qualified early childhood professionals and Aboriginal staff work together with the community to build community assets, and coordinate and develop appropriate services for families with young children.

The Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters is a two-year, home-based parenting and early childhood enrichment program that empowers parents and carers to be their child's first teacher.

This program:

- targets families from disadvantaged communities and sites that have a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families enrolled
- builds the confidence and skills of parents and carers to create a positive learning environment to prepare their child for school

- offers some parents and carers a supported pathway to employment and local community leadership.

The Australian Government initiated the program in 35 communities across Australia in 2010. The national roll-out of the program is managed by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and is usually delivered in the community by a partner organisation. Funding of \$32.5 million over five years (2008–2012) has been made available.

Parents and children enrol in the program in the year before the child is due to commence formal schooling, and participate for two years. Program activities are designed to be integrated into the family's daily life, to ensure parents and carers are able to successfully complete the program with their child/children.

The first year of the program provides children with activities that support pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills. The second year extends these activities and provides parents and carers with additional information about children's learning and development.

Program materials and delivery are adapted to suit local needs. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants this may include:

- employment of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tutors
- flexibility in the mode of delivery and taking time to break down concepts and stories (for example, in group settings over an extended period, rather than the usual 30 minute individual family session)
- program delivery in a mix of Standard Australian English, Aboriginal English and/or Aboriginal language
- the involvement of extended family/clan members
- in some cases, translated materials.

Data for the period, 1 January to 30 June 2010, shows that 266 mothers (12 per cent) and 223 fathers (10 per cent) who identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander participated in the program across 35 sites.

The sites with a high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants include: Pioneer (Queensland), Inala (Queensland), Rockingham (Western Australia), North Dubbo

(New South Wales), La Perouse (New South Wales), Bidwell (New South Wales), Fitzroy (Victoria), Burnie (Tasmania), and Alice Springs (Northern Territory).

The Australian Government has three specific programs: the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program; the Indigenous Employment Program and the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program, that contribute to improving the literacy and numeracy skills of adult job seekers.

The Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program seeks to improve adult job seekers' English language, literacy and/or numeracy skills with the expectation that such improvements will enable them to participate more effectively in training or employment and lead to greater gains for them and society in the longer term. Through this program, eligible job seekers can obtain up to 800 hours of free training.

The Language Literacy and Numeracy Program has operated since January 2002 and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the program has increased over time, reaching a seven per cent share of all commencements in 2009–2010. Completion rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients in the program have increased significantly: from 0.6 per cent (2006–2007) to a peak of 2.4 per cent (2009–2010), which represents a doubling of the completions in 2009–2010, compared to those in 2008–2009.

Improved access to the Language, Literacy and Numeracy program means there will be an additional 30,000 places (\$143.1 million) over the next four years. The additional places will target youth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mature age in high priority employment areas and commence from 1 July 2011.

The program is available to all eligible job seekers and does not specifically provide family literacy or school literacy.

The Indigenous Employment Program supports activities that develop the capacity of employers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities, in order to increase opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through employment, business and other economic development activities.

Language Literacy and Numeracy Program training may be included, where appropriate, as part of packages of tailored assistance available under the Indigenous Employment Program,

and is incorporated into contracting arrangements with employers or providers on an 'as needs' basis.

The measured outcomes under this program are commencements into training and employment. Between 1 July 2009 and 31 December 2010, 17,105 employment outcomes were achieved, and a total of 19,085 commencements made into training.

From 1 July 2009, 6,000 additional places over four years were made available in the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program administered by Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, for pre-employment Indigenous Employment Program participants, as part of the reformed program. As a result of this initiative, the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program is the first port of call for participants who need assistance to build their English language, literacy and/or numeracy skills. Program funding runs from financial year to financial year and as at the end of June 2010, 653 pre-employment Indigenous Education Program participants had commenced in the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program.

## Leadership, Quality Teaching and Workforce Development

### Intended Outcomes:

- High performing principals and teachers are effective in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students benefit from school leaders who have a strong understanding of their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

### Targets:

- Increase in professional development hours in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and cultural and

linguistic competence training undertaken by principals and teachers.

- Increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, principals and education workers (AIEWs and equivalents).
- Increase retention of principals and teachers in hard-to-staff schools with high enrolments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

*Source: MCEECDYA, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014.*

## Activity in the Jurisdictions

Under the 'Leadership, Quality Teaching and Workforce Development' domain, the National Professional Standards for Teachers is driving reform. Jurisdictions have entered into collaborative partnerships to improve training and professional learning in schools.

The Queensland Department of Education and Training and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) will work in partnership during 2011 and 2012 to assist universities to adequately prepare pre-service teachers in Australia to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. They will do this by providing training courses covering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and perspectives in accordance with the National Professional Standards for Teachers.

The Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, in collaboration with Charles Darwin University, has established a Centre for School Leadership, Learning and Development. The Centre promotes the learning and development of current and aspiring educational leaders and their communities, by utilising current local evidence and international research, to improve the outcomes of all students and educators in the Northern Territory.

The South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services has developed partnerships with the Stronger Smarter Institute and Dare to Lead to incorporate high performance outcomes in the work of school leaders. The department has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Stronger Smarter Institute to implement Learning Communities in South Australia. The project aims to build a critical mass of Stronger Smarter

schools and communities, developing seven hub schools to support, develop and challenge other affiliate schools.

To support Action 33 of the Plan, the Australian Capital Territory government launched the Australian Capital Territory Public Service Employment Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, in 2010.

Many jurisdictions have identified actions to address various workforce issues with initiatives to progress the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

### **Action 33**

*MCEECDYA will develop a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educator Workforce Strategy to assist education providers to make progress towards an equitable ratio of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to students. The Strategy will support aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education leaders, include initiatives to attract more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians into the education workforce and bureaucracies and provide pathways through the workforce. The Strategy will also help to recognise and clarify the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers and support their professional development and career aspirations.*

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educator Workforce Strategy aims to achieve long-term participation in the labour market. A collaborative approach to develop this strategy is required, involving government, employers, training providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The objectives of the strategy are to:

- increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school principals, teachers and education workers
- improve pathways into the early childhood and school education workforce for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- clarify the roles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators
- support appropriate training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators to fulfill required roles and support career pathways.

The Australian Government is taking a lead role in developing the strategy, through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Working Group. The strategy will complement the National Indigenous Employment Strategy and the National Early Childhood Workforce Strategy. In addition, the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership Agreement, under the Smarter Schools National Partnerships, includes reforms to improve career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the education sector.

Other relevant Australian Government programs that support the strategy include:

- Governor-General's Scholarships for Indigenous Student Teachers
- Remote Service Delivery Traineeships
- Commonwealth Development Employment Program – Education Transitions Program.

### **Action 34**

*MCEECDYA has agreed to the development and implementation of an Australian Curriculum by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority that will include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives to ensure that all young Australians have the opportunity to learn about, acknowledge and value the cultures and languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.*

All Australian governments are committed to the development and implementation of an Australian Curriculum from Foundation to Year 12, beginning with the learning areas of English, mathematics, science and history. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has been established to oversee this work.

On 8 December 2010, all education ministers endorsed Australia's first national curriculum from Foundation to Year 10 (F–10) in the first four learning areas. The recently released Australian Curriculum can be viewed online at: <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au>

All education ministers have agreed that the Australian Curriculum should include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures as one of three cross-curriculum priorities, along with Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and

Sustainability. Each of these priorities is represented in learning areas in ways that are appropriate to those areas.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority has been incorporated into the F–10 Australian Curriculum in English, mathematics, science and history, and was endorsed by all Ministers on 8 December 2010.

Some learning areas relate more explicitly to some cross-curriculum priorities than others. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Priority, for example, relates strongly to history. The Australian Curriculum: History (F–10) provides students with opportunities to, for example, to:

- study the importance of country and place to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who belong to a local area (Year 3)
- study the status/rights of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people (citizenship) and their contribution in areas such as the economy, education, science, the arts, and sport (Year 6)
- undertake an in-depth study in Year 10 with a strong emphasis on the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for rights and freedoms.

*Primary Connections: Linking Science with Literacy* is an initiative led by the Australian Academy of Science aimed at improving science teaching and learning in primary school years. It includes an Indigenous Perspective Framework and a pilot unit using this Framework has shown clear potential to improve the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other students.

The Framework aims to accelerate science and literacy learning outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and increase other students' and teachers' awareness and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. The Framework includes:

- a teaching and learning guide
- curriculum unit links to relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives
- a professional learning module to support teachers' development and implementation of relevant, contextualised and embedded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

## Action 35

*Education providers in Northern and Central Australia will work more closely together to provide professional learning for staff and to share staff and resources where mutually beneficial. Providers will work with the Australian Government to establish a coordinated approach to support sustained improvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous contexts.*

The National Alliance for Remote Indigenous Schools, led by the Northern Territory, collaborates with education providers in Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales. The National Alliance is working to improve teacher quality and retention in remote schools through the development of specific attraction, recruitment and retention strategies. It is anticipated that activity under this action, led by the National Alliance, will commence in 2011.

## Action 36

*MCEECDYA will consult with the VET and higher education sectors to develop and introduce core components on good practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including those from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, in all pre-service teacher education courses across Australia.*

The National Professional Standards for Teachers were endorsed by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs in late-December 2010.

The standards, to be applied from 2012, include the following two graduate standards:

### 1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

### 2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians

Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of, and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

The approach for the national accreditation of initial teacher education programs is linked to the achievement of these graduate standards. Education Ministers have agreed to work with universities and VET providers to ensure teacher training includes mandatory course elements, which can assist new teachers to fulfil these new graduate standards.

It is anticipated that the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership will undertake a project, which will contribute to this Action by developing strategies that will articulate Standards 1.4 and 2.4.

### **Action 37**

*Education providers will consult with teacher registration boards to ensure that completion of core components on good practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including those from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, in pre-service teacher education courses are a condition of registration. Where teachers completed their pre-service training before these requirements were introduced, education providers will ensure the provision of appropriate professional learning.*

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership is developing a system of nationally consistent teacher registration. This approach has been undertaken with the co-operation of all Deans of Education, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Deans, teacher employers, the teaching profession and other key stakeholders.

Teacher registration will include standards-based requirements for registering and renewing teachers to demonstrate their capacity to meet the National Professional Standards for Teachers, which include references to teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, as well as understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and promotion of reconciliation.

The funding, allocated for the implementation of nationally consistent teacher registration and agreement on accreditation of initial (pre-service) teacher education programs, is distributed through the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership by contractual agreements with jurisdictions up to the 2012–2013 financial year.

### **Action 38**

*MCEECDYA will ensure that requirements for teachers to have knowledge and understanding of the learning needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including those from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, are included in the forthcoming National Professional Standards for Teachers. This requirement will be made at graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead teacher levels. The Standards will inform reforms in pre-service education course accreditation and national consistency in teacher registration.*

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership has been working closely with key education stakeholders to develop the National Professional Standards for Teachers, which make explicit what effective teachers should know and be able to do.

Within the standards, two focus areas explicitly require teachers to have capacity to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students effectively, as well as demonstrate an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

The implementation of the Standards will commence in 2012, and the Institute is managing the development of resources underpinning the Standards and scoping the transitional arrangements required for implementation by jurisdictions.

### **Action 39**

*MCEECDYA will consult with the higher education sector to establish a coalition of universities, based on the New Zealand model, to provide evidence-based culturally and linguistically authenticated research that can directly inform classroom pedagogy.*

This work will be progressed in 2011–2012 and will be informed by activities being undertaken by the following organisations:

- Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)
- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)
- Closing the Gap Clearinghouse (supported through the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)

- What Works project (supported through National Curriculum Services)
- Stronger Smarter Institute (supported through the Queensland University of Technology)
- Dare to Lead project (supported through Principals Australia).

In addition, several universities will undertake research on the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It is expected that the higher education sector will be consulted on this issue to assist officials with the development of implementation strategies for this action.

### Action 40

*The Australian Government and education providers will provide access to high quality, highly effective professional learning and research for current and aspiring school leaders for the purposes of improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership will oversee and facilitate the delivery of national flagship programs.*

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership is developing a National Professional Standard for Principals and working with jurisdictions to develop a National Professional Learning Framework with an emphasis on flagship programs for school leaders.

The principals' Standard, Professional Practice 5 – Engaging and working with the community, stipulates that principals must make a concerted effort towards reconciliation and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education expert from the Stronger Smarter Institute is a member of the Expert Steering Group providing advice about the Standard. This Standard is expected to be finalised in 2011.

The new National Professional Learning Framework for Teachers and School Leaders includes consideration of principles for effective high-quality professional learning, learning design and a model for the framework, more broadly. The objectives are to achieve an increase in:

- the professional development hours in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and cultural and linguistic competence training undertaken by principals and teachers

- the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, principals and education workers (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers and equivalents)
- the retention of principals and teachers in hard-to-staff schools with high numbers of enrolments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

## Pathways to Real Post-School Options

### Intended Outcomes:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students make a successful transition from school to work and further study.

### Targets:

- Halve the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.

*Source: MCEECDYA, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014.*

## Activity in the Jurisdictions

Under the 'Pathways to Real Post-school Options' domain, jurisdictions are working collaboratively, creating initiatives and using approaches to flexible learning to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in upper secondary schooling. The South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services is implementing an initiative, *Keeping Them On Track*, which provides clear information to secondary educators, Aboriginal parents, caregivers and students to assist Aboriginal students to engage, complete and transition from the South Australian Certificate of Education into real-life pathways of training, employment or higher education.

In the Australian Capital Territory, the Department of Education and Training has developed the Student Aspirations Program, which facilitates activities to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to visit universities and become more aware of the subject requirements for pursuing tertiary courses. This program also ensures timely career advice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in senior secondary schools.

The Open Access College is a South Australian Government distance education school providing learning opportunities for students who are unable to attend a local school or access curriculum in their own school. New South Wales bodies, including the Board of Vocational Education and Training New South Wales and TAFE New South Wales, are working collaboratively to develop pathways and promote opportunities for Aboriginal students to remain at school until Year 12, undertake TAFE courses, enter university, or make the transition into work. Through the University of Tasmania Riawunna unit, the Re-engaging in Schooling Bursary and Job Link Project are available.

The Learn, Earn, Legend! Year 12 Destinations initiative (LEL) is aimed at assisting all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 12 students, across all sectors, to successfully transition from schooling to further education, training and/or meaningful employment. The LEL is jointly funded between the Queensland and Australian governments, and commenced in August 2010.

## Action 45

*MCEECDYA will seek advice from Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies, the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, Universities Australia and other strategic stakeholders to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who make a successful transition to university in conjunction with new national reforms to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in higher education.*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to be under-represented in the higher education sector, across many indicators such as student access, participation and completion rates, and employment of research staff.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' access and participation rates, and retention and success ratios for transitioning to university have been stable over the past decade. While numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have increased since 2001, the gap in participation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other students has widened over the past decade, due to increasing participation by other Australians.

The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council was established in 2004 to provide policy advice to the Australian Government on enhancing higher education participation and

outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Third Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (the current Council) was established in October 2009 and provides advice to the Minister for Tertiary Education and Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research.

The key outcomes, up to 31 December 2010, were:

- development of strong relationships with the National VET Equity Advisory Council, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (formerly NIHEN), the Australian Research Council and Australian Learning and Teaching Council
- maintenance of strong relationships with the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research and Centrelink, through representation on working groups and participation in Australian Government reviews
- maintenance of a strong relationship with Universities Australia through the joint Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council – Universities Australia Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities Project, and development of a National Indigenous Higher Education Workforce Strategy
- provision of advice to the Departments on the terms of reference and scope of the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People
- development of a proposal for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Researcher Network for consideration by the Australian Research Council.

The joint Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council – Universities Australia Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities Project enabled the successful completion of cultural competency projects at four Australian universities. These projects and other examples of best practice in the sector will be highlighted in a National Best Practice Framework that is due to be released in late 2011 as a resource for the higher education sector.

The aim of the National Best Practice Framework will be to:

- provide universities with the tools to embed cultural competency at the institutional level so that they are

encouraging, supportive environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff

- produce well-rounded graduates with the ability to provide genuinely competent services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Australian Government provides support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the tertiary sector through a number of programs.

The purpose of the Indigenous Support Program, which began in 2005, is to assist higher education providers to meet the special needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and further the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. The Program supports activities aimed at improving the access, participation, success and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff numbers in universities have increased over the past decade, although the increase is predominantly for general non-academic staff. The growth in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academic staff numbers from 2001 onwards still falls around 10 per cent, below that for other academic staff.

The significant majority of universities in recent years report at least some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on high-level decision-making bodies, such as the University Senate, University Council or Academic Boards.

The Commonwealth Scholarships Program assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from low socio-economic backgrounds, particularly those from rural and regional areas, with costs associated with higher education. Three of the five scholarships in the program are designed to assist students undertaking enabling courses as a pathway to higher education. These are:

- the Indigenous Access Scholarship, which provides eligible commencing students at both the undergraduate and enabling level with a one-off payment to assist with accommodation costs (\$4,321 in 2010)
- the Enabling Commonwealth Education Costs Scholarship, which assists with general education costs for up to two semesters for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students undertaking an eligible enabling course (\$2,254 in 2010)

- the Enabling Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarship, which assists with accommodation costs for up to two semesters for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote areas who need to leave home to undertake an eligible enabling course (\$4,508 in 2010).

If eligible, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are able to access additional assistance through Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme – Tertiary Tuition, or the Away from Base for mixed-mode delivery program. The Tutorial Assistance Scheme provides funding to support eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying university award level courses at eligible institutions, by meeting the costs of engaging tutors to deliver supplementary tuition. Away From Base provides funding to cover costs including fares, meals and accommodation for eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying approved mixed-mode courses, when they are required to travel away from their permanent home for a short period of time to undertake approved activities. This includes attendance at short courses, field trips, occasional residential schools or practical placements. The primary objective of Away From Base is to increase access and participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from rural and remote areas in tertiary study.

The Indigenous Youth Mobility Program helps young Indigenous people move away from home to gain the skills they need to get a job in their community or elsewhere. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 16 to 24, from remote areas can relocate to an Indigenous Youth Mobility Program host location to undertake post secondary education and training options. Training options include Australian Apprenticeships, vocational education and training and/or higher education that leads to qualifications, for example, in nursing, teaching, business administration and accounting.

#### **Action 46**

*MCEECDYA will request that the Ministerial Council on Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE) develop a companion document to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014 that outlines actions to close the gap in training, university and employment outcomes. This companion document would improve links between the school sector and the training, tertiary education and employment services sectors and support the development of innovative cross-sectoral approaches to programs and pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.*

It is intended that MCEECDYA write to request that the Ministerial Council on Tertiary Education and Employment develop a companion document to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014*. The development of a companion document will outline actions to close the gap in training, university and employment outcomes.

### **Action 47**

*MCEECDYA will institute an investigation into how new technologies can increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' access to education and training, collaborate with relevant bodies such as the Learning Federation and Education Services Australia in extending these technologies to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for use in education and training programs, and monitor the results of innovative developments in the use of interactive technologies.*

The Australian Government is committed to harnessing the potential of technology to transform teaching and learning in our schools. In that context, the National Secondary School Computer Fund is helping schools to provide new computers and other information and communication technology (ICT) equipment for students in Years 9 to 12, as well as providing the necessary infrastructure to support the installation and maintenance of additional ICT. The primary aim of the Fund is to achieve a computer to student ratio of one to one for students in Years 9 to 12 in Australian secondary schools by the end of 2011.

The Australian Government will provide funding for over 786,000 computers needed to achieve the target ratio. Implementation is progressing in line with agreed implementation plans. Over 413,000 or 53 per cent of the computers required to achieve the target ratio had been installed, as at 31 December 2010. Education authorities report that increased access to computers, coupled with increased integration into classroom learning, is having a positive impact.

Under the Digital Education Revolution Online Curriculum Resources and Digital Architecture Initiative, all jurisdictions have initiatives and resources that could be used or redirected to support the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. One of the benefits of an Australian Curriculum is that, over time, national as well as State and Territory resources can be pooled and shared to support all teachers.

Thousands of resources (including many with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus) already exist in respective States and

Territories, or as part of the National Digital Resource Collection managed by Education Services Australia and elsewhere. These are being progressively mapped, and where possible linked, to relevant topics covered by the Australian Curriculum.

The Australian Government committed \$28.6 million in the 2008 Budget, to support the development of high-quality digital tools, resources and infrastructure. The Digital Education Revolution Online Curriculum Resources and the Digital Architecture Initiative aim to enable jurisdictions and the broader education community to implement national reform in the schools sector, including: the online delivery of the Australian Curriculum; projects and pilots to support a nationally consistent approach to eLearning; and support for the national service provider Education Services Australia. The Australian Government is also working with the publishing, copyright, digital content and creative industries in implementing the Initiative.

Completed projects and resources are, or will be, searchable through the National Digital Learning Resources Network architecture. This includes the Success for Boys materials and the World Of Values materials. There is strong research behind both projects, which demonstrate their effectiveness as strategies in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. There is a full unit on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys and ICT in those materials. There is a wide range of resources in the National Digital Learning Resources Network website repository, R11658: Embedding Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum.

Through the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Innovation Fund, the Australian Government is investing over \$16.3 million to fund four projects that will assist teachers and school leaders to better use ICT in the classroom. These projects, commencing in early 2011, aim to increase teacher proficiency in the use of ICT in teaching and learning to, among other things, support the effective delivery of the new online Australian Curriculum, provide tools for ongoing professional development in ICT and give principals and school leaders the tools and skills to plan for the use of ICT in their schools.

Three of the funded projects also designed to facilitate better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are:

- Teaching Teachers for the Future, which aims to transform the delivery of teacher education in Australian universities, helping pre-service teachers to become proficient in the

use of ICT to improve student learning. This project is being implemented in the 39 higher education institutions that provide teacher education. The lead consortium member is Education Services Australia.

- Leading ICT Learning in Technology Enabled Schools, which aims to enable current and aspiring school leaders to lead school communities to understand the role and potential of ICT to extend and transform their school. The lead consortium member is Principals Australia.
- ICT in Everyday Learning: Teacher Online Toolkit, which aims to enhance the capacity of in-service teachers by showing them how to incorporate ICT into teaching the Australian Curriculum key learning areas of English, history, science and mathematics. The lead consortium member is Education Services Australia.

## Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies' (IECB) Feedback

The Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECBs) bring unique perspectives and community view points and make the following comments and recommendations on the six domains of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014*.

### Readiness for School (National Actions 1–4)

#### IECBs' comment

IECBs contributed to the development of an Indigenous Early Years Learning Framework and now question what has happened to it. IECBs feel that the current framework is not representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

There is currently no standardised culturally appropriate tool available to accurately measure readiness for school in a consistent manner throughout Australia.

### MCEECDYA Response

The work on the Indigenous Early Years Learning Framework was considered in the development of the national Early Years Learning Framework, as well as in the development of the educator's guidebook assisting early childhood services to implement the framework. This guidebook includes a chapter entitled, 'The Journey for Educators: growing competence in working with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures', as well as other information on cultural competence. The Australian Government is currently augmenting this with a training package being delivered in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. To support the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) commitment to universal access to early childhood education by 2013, MCEECDYA has endorsed an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Universal Access Strategy, which is expected to be released in 2011.

Work in implementing Action 4 of the Plan will consider assessments of readiness for school. In addition, specific work was undertaken to ensure the cultural appropriateness of the Australian Early Childhood Development Index for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

### Engagement and Connections (National Actions 9–14)

#### IECBs' Comment

IECB representatives have had very limited or no exposure to many of the initiatives mentioned in this domain.

With regard to engagement, IECBs note that they play an important role and should be engaged fully. This is not currently taking place. An example of where better engagement could be achieved is through reporting mechanisms for programs and initiatives. IECBs could be engaged to provide comment on progress/annual reports.

IECBs note that there is a disconnect between what is stated in terms of community engagement and what takes place in reality. It is the feeling of IECB chairs that in terms of engagement with community there is an overwhelming attitude of doing things 'to us' rather than 'with us'.

There is concern about Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) implementing the National Languages Policy, as there has been no effective engagement with IECBs to date. The relationship with ACARA has made it difficult to provide the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the development and implementation of the Australian Curriculum.

Activity to promote real engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people needs to be made at both the government and community level. Collaboration is crucial with engagement meaning involvement, planning and working together to achieve outcomes.

The role of the IECBs appears to be different from what is described in Action 10 of Chapter 4. Both MCEECDYA and DEEWR need to give clear directions so that the role of IECBs is clearly understood across the country.

## MCEECDYA Response

IECBs have an important role in supporting the implementation of the Plan. IECBs were specifically consulted on the draft Action Plan prior to its release to the public. IECBs are represented on MCEECDYA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Working Group, which made recommendations on the incorporation of feedback from public consultations into the final draft of the Action Plan presented to Senior Officials and then to MCEECDYA for endorsement.

The Plan contains a number of Actions, which build a platform for greater local level community involvement in schools (for example, Actions 19 and 20 establishing school and community partnerships in focus schools, sustained by family forums; and Action 21 committing all schools to involve families in the development of personalised learning strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students). MCEECDYA sees these as examples of opportunities for IECBs to be engaged with their stakeholder bases to add value to local activity.

The National Indigenous Languages Policy is an Australian Government initiative being jointly co-ordinated by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous

Affairs. The National Plan for Languages Education in Australia is currently being revised by MCEECDYA and is expected to contain strengthened content on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Both documents have involved consultations with the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages and Culture (FATSILC).

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority is establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel to assist in the task of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across the Australian Curriculum.

MCEECDYA notes IECBs' comments requesting clearer directions on the roles of IECBs.

## Attendance (National Actions 22–24)

### IECBs' Comment

IECBs note that there are limitations to the data provided.

There are concerns about the figures reported for Sporting Chance. It was noted that all figures need to be substantiated, and that a high attendance figure does not necessarily reflect good engagement or high outcomes for students. Some members would find it difficult to substantiate the data as quoted in the Sporting Chance Program description. There are some suspension and truancy issues which should be mentioned in State and Territory chapters.

### MCEECDYA Response

Supporting improved attendance is one of a number of objectives of the Sporting Chance program. Data across 182 schools is indicating the effectiveness of this measure in school communities. An evaluation of the Sporting Chance Program is currently underway to validate the impact of the program.

MCEECDYA notes that the Sporting Chance program is only one of a wide range of approaches supporting regular attendance and effective in-class engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australia today.

## Literacy and Numeracy (National Actions 27–29)

### IECBs' Comment

Participation rates are of great concern, and IECBs ask the question: 'Are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children being discouraged from participating in the testing?'

Many IECBs have concerns about Child and Family Centres having been 'mainstreamed' and providing little support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. It was acknowledged that this is not the case Australia-wide, with some States having Aboriginal organisations responsible for the running of the centres. It is noted that there is no mention of Multi-Functional Aboriginal Children's Services, which are funded by the Australian Government.

IECBs also wish to express concern about the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework. When the National Quality Standard is introduced in January 2012, it will be important that assessors for the framework be given adequate cultural awareness training.

There are also concerns about the sustainability of professional development training. There does not appear to be a consolidated national strategy, and the focus on professional development for teachers does not build the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support staff.

A notable gap in early language development of children has been identified by IECBs.

Another issue worth exploring in the future is the eligibility of Year 12 students to make the transition to university. The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students entering university and those completing university are worthy of attention.

### MCEECDYA Response

The participation rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in NAPLAN testing is a specific performance indicator being monitored by MCEECDYA through this Action Plan. Education providers seek to involve as many eligible students in NAPLAN testing as possible.

Children and Family Centres under the Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership remain an Indigenous-specific measure, although some people from low socio-economic backgrounds may also use these services. Local reference groups are established for each centre, which include representation from local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the design and operation of the centres. MCEECDYA also acknowledges the work of Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services, which are one of a number of different service models assisting in the early learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

MCEECDYA supports the IECBs' comments regarding the need for cultural awareness training for assessors of the new National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care, which will be implemented from 1 January 2012, as part of the National Quality Framework. MCEECDYA will ensure such cultural competence training is built into the training program for assessors.

National co-ordination of professional development for teachers will be supported by the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership. Actions to improve professional development for teachers are contained in the Leadership, Quality Teaching and Workforce Development domain of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan, as well as in Action 1 and Action 32 of the Plan. A particular focus is provided on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school leaders, teachers and education workers through Action 33, which commits MCEECDYA to developing a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educator Workforce Strategy.

Early language development is supported through Action 29 (family literacy and numeracy strategies) and Action 31 (whole-of-school approaches to Standard Australian English Literacy and Numeracy). A number of the actions in the readiness for school domain also support early language development.

Action 45 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan commits MCEECDYA to seeking advice from IECBs, the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, and other stakeholders regarding increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who make the transition from school to higher education. Implementation of this Action is expected to occur during 2012. Increasing university completions is expected to be a consideration under Action 46 (Ministerial

Council on Tertiary Education and Employment companion document).

## Leadership, Quality Teaching and Workforce Development (National Actions 33–40)

### IECBs' Comment

IECBs have concerns with the lack of consultation from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), with no IECBs recalling any meaningful interaction with AITSL in 2010.

IECBs strongly argue that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency units should be compulsory for all students training to be teachers Australia-wide. These units should also be compulsory for teachers who already have teaching qualifications but not cultural competency. This training should be undertaken via ongoing professional development.

The National Professional Teaching Standards only refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in two specific areas, which are very broad in scope and appear to be somewhat voluntary. This issue has been highlighted by IECBs previously; however, these concerns do not appear to have been considered.

IECBs noted that while some of them had been involved with the Primary Connections Program, the National Committee providing advice appears to have ceased functioning, after very few meetings. There has been no real engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on this initiative.

### MCEECDYA Response

MCEECDYA notes IECBs' comments in relation to consultation with the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership and will seek to facilitate a meeting between representatives of and IECBs and the Institute.

Action 36 of the Action Plan outlines activity to improve pre-service teaching across Australia so that learning about good practice in the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is a core element for all new teachers.

When the National Professional Standards for Teachers are fully implemented, it will be a requirement for registration

and progression as a teacher, to demonstrate the appropriate knowledge and skills in the following focus areas:

- Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Over the six years of its operation, the Australian Academy of Science's Primary Connections: Linking Science with Literacy project team has: consulted extensively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, communities and representatives; committed to the incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the teaching and learning resources it has produced; trialled those resources in schools with large proportions of Aboriginal students; and undertaken research and presented evidence of the effectiveness of this approach in improving the Science learning outcomes of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. At the Academy's invitation, the IECB nominated a representative to the Reference Group for the Primary Connections Stage 4 Project in 2009. Two Reference Group meetings have since been held, and a further Reference Group meeting is scheduled for late-2011. The Reference Group meeting planned for 2010 was postponed pending the publication of the *Australian Curriculum: Science*. The Primary Connections project has benefitted greatly from the advice and guidance provided by Indigenous Education consultants, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives have been embedded within the Primary Connections curriculum units.

## Pathways to Real Post-School Options (National Actions 45–47)

### IECBs' Comment

IECBs believe that there needs to be a higher focus on providing timely career advice and counselling to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. More work experience opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students should be also be provided.

Whilst acknowledging the importance of providing teachers and school leaders with support to better use technology through the ICT Innovation Fund, IECBs would like to see a similar initiative focusing on developing the ICT skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and communities.

Most IECBs across Australia have had no dealings with the National VET Equity Advisory Council. VET sector consultation has occurred at the State level only. This is another example of a failure to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a meaningful manner.

## MCEECDYA Response

One of five objectives agreed by all governments under the National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and

Transitions is to develop a skilled and work-ready Indigenous workforce by increasing the educational attainment and engagement of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Actions in this Pathways to Real Post-school Options domain are also expected to place a greater focus on career advice and counselling for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, particularly Action 45. MCEECDYA supports IECBs' comments on the need for improved career advice and counselling.

MCEECDYA notes IECBs' comments on ICT skills for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and communities, and on consultation within the VET sector. MCEECDYA will ensure this advice is passed onto the Ministerial Council on Tertiary Education and Employment.