

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

**ACCOMPANYING REPORT III –
SURVEY OF ABORIGINAL EMPLOYEES IN THE SOUTH
AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SECTOR**

presented to

The Don Dunstan Foundation

by

Dr Kate Barnett

The Australian Institute for Social Research



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Project Team

The Project has been undertaken by the Australian Institute for Social Research (AISR), The University of Adelaide, on behalf of the Don Dunstan Foundation by -

Associate Professor John Spoehr, Executive Director, AISR
Dr Kate Barnett, Senior Research Fellow (Project Coordinator), AISR
Mr Eric Parnis, Senior Research Associate, AISR
Ms Alicen McNaughton, Research Associate, AISR
Ms Monica Redden, Research Associate, AISR

Project Reference Group

Mr George Lewkowicz, Executive Director, Don Dunstan Foundation
Mr David Rathman, Executive Director, Aboriginal Employment & Education Strategies, Dept Further Education Employment Science & Technology/Dept Education & Children's Services
Mr Andrew Smith, Senior Project Manager, Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation Division Dept of the Premier & Cabinet (replacing Ms Marsha Uppill who played a key role in the Project's initial stage)
Ms Joyleen Thomas, Principal Aboriginal Cultural Consultant, Dept of Treasury & Finance
Prof Roger Thomas, Director, Wilto Yerlo, University of Adelaide
Ms Sonia Waters, Senior Policy Advisor Indigenous Affairs, Social Inclusion Unit, Dept of the Premier & Cabinet
Ms Margaret Wallace, Don Dunstan Foundation Board Member

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KEY FINDINGS

- ◇ A total of **173** members of the *South Australian Public Sector Indigenous Network* (SAPSIEN) participated in the Don Dunstan Foundation Project survey. They represent between 57.7% and 69.2% of SAPSIEN membership which is estimated to fluctuate between 250 and 300 people.

Recruitment-related findings - Motivating Factors to work in the SA public sector

- ◇ The most common motivation to seek employment in the SA public sector was to *'make a difference for Indigenous South Australians'* (68.2% of the sample).
- ◇ The second most common motivation was to obtain secure employment (52.6%).
- ◇ Both of these findings were evident in responses to other survey questions, reinforcing their importance to Aboriginal public sector employees, and the need to take these findings into account in designing recruitment and retention strategies. (Refer Section 3.1)

Barriers to recruitment

These were the barriers to recruitment most frequently identified –

- ◇ Negative perceptions of government (and therefore, of the public service) as abusing their authority in relation to Aboriginal Australians, originating with British colonisation, and including the role played in relation to the *Stolen Generation*.
- ◇ Negative perceptions of government as an employer, with the public service being regarded as overly bureaucratic and involving excessive administrative work, and an overly formal work style.
- ◇ The need for improved cultural competence on the part of non- Aboriginal public sector employees. This includes a general lack of knowledge of Aboriginal issues and history as well as more specific cultural understanding.
- ◇ Intimidating application and selection processes that are lacking in cultural sensitivity and do not acknowledge the need by many Aboriginal applicants for information about the public sector and its workplace.
- ◇ Insufficient information about the public sector and how it operates, and the need for improved communication to Aboriginal communities about employment in the sector.
- ◇ Racism and discrimination against Aboriginal public sector employees.
- ◇ A lack of understanding of the unique pressures faced by Aboriginal employees in representing their communities in the public sector workplace and representing the public sector (and by association, government) in Aboriginal communities.
- ◇ The training and qualifications required for many public sector positions, together with insufficient recognition of (non-credentialed) Aboriginal expertise prevent many applicants from seeking and attaining public sector positions. It is often the case that Aboriginal people are not aware of the training and professional development available to public sector employees.

- ◇ Insufficient permanent or ongoing positions and the trend for the public sector to offer short term contract work also acts as a deterrent.
- ◇ An important component of equity promotion involves recruiting minority groups in sufficient numbers to create 'critical mass' and so prevents them from feeling isolated in the workplace. For some of the survey sample, feeling outnumbered and overwhelmed, especially if they were the only Aboriginal person in their work setting, acted as a barrier to both recruitment and retention.

In most instances, the barriers faced by an individual will be multiple, often intensified by their combined impact. It is therefore important that no single strategy is adopted to address them (*Refer Section 3.2*).

Improving the recruitment process

The barriers associated with the recruitment process had been eased for those surveyed when –

- ◇ they knew someone in the unit where the position was based (38.7%)
- ◇ the selection panel included an Aboriginal person (38.2%) and/or
- ◇ had members who were sensitive to Aboriginal people and issues (37.6%).
- ◇ They were well informed – both about the position concerned (33.5%) and about the public sector (28.9%).

The four strategies most commonly proposed by the survey sample to attract Aboriginal recruits were –

- ◇ Ensuring that Aboriginal people are well informed about public sector employment opportunities and what is required of public sector employees, and promoting this through Aboriginal networks (rather than relying on mainstream advertisements and related approaches).
- ◇ A supported application, selection and induction process. This strategy provides support coupled with more specific information and advice about applying for a public sector position and the components of the selection process, and being appropriately inducted if the application is successful. It is also important that those managing the application, selection and induction of Aboriginal candidates are culturally sensitive and work to make these processes as inclusive as possible.
- ◇ Providing a culturally inclusive workplace that promotes cultural competence and addresses racism. Many Aboriginal people are deterred from applying for public sector employment because of the negative experiences of Aboriginal employees.
- ◇ Providing ongoing employment that provides career development opportunities. (*Refer Section 3.3*)

Retention-related findings

There are numerous factors that affect retention and the survey asked respondents to identify those that would cause them to discontinue their employment in the SA public sector and those that encourage them to remain.

Factors that discourage retention

- ◇ Although the SA public sector provides cultural awareness raising and some cultural competence training, this survey indicates that more effort is required here for both employees and managers.
- ◇ Three factors shared equal top place as deterrents to remaining in the SA public sector. Two of these involve **lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture** by non-Aboriginal employees (**43.4%**) and non-Aboriginal managers (**43.4%**).
- ◇ This may also be influencing the third most frequently cited deterrent to retention, having **knowledge, skills and experience under-utilised (43.4%)** – possibly because this is not being understood within culturally inclusive parameters. Feeling **undervalued (39.3%)** would also relate to lack of recognition of individual capacity. Consequently, it is important to regard the first three barriers to retention as inter-dependent.
- ◇ More material factors that relate to seeking higher salaries (27.7%) and career opportunities elsewhere (23.1%) have been less important than these barriers.
- ◇ Interestingly, although the survey sample had identified the experiences of bullying (13.3%), harassment (13.3%) and discrimination (13.3%), they regarded them as less significant in influencing their decision to remain in the SA public service. The fourth excluding experience – racism – emerged as more significant than these three (16.8%), but not as important to retention as a culturally inclusive workplace that enabled the use and recognition of Indigenous employees' expertise. However, this does not lessen the negative impact of such experiences on job satisfaction, personal happiness and retention outcomes. (Refer Section 4.1)

Factors that encourage retention

There are a number of factors that are considered to influence retention.

- ◇ Those that are given the highest priority involve **secure, ongoing employment (78%)**, followed by **being able to contribute to the well-being of other Aboriginal people (71.1%)** – this finding reinforces the finding about the main reason for joining the SA public service which was to make a contribution to the Indigenous community.
- ◇ The third and fourth most frequently cited factors were having a **good manager or supervisor (65.3%)** and **opportunities for training and development (64.7%)**.
- ◇ The next most important factors were **salary (60.7%)**, **flexible working conditions (59.5%)** and working with **managers who understand, or try to understand, Aboriginal culture (59.0%)**. Interestingly, working with employees who understand, or try to understand, Aboriginal culture was less frequently cited (49.1%) – highlighting the important leadership role of management.

- ◇ One interesting finding is that being in a workplace where the Aboriginal person **feels valued** (51.4%) emerges as more important than being valued for being Aboriginal (38.7%).
- ◇ Other factors of importance include having opportunities to use skills and expertise (56.1%) and for career development (54.3%), being supported in the workplace (54.9%) and being part of an Aboriginal employee network (56.6%) – which highlights the valuable role of SAPSIEN. (Refer Section 4.2)

Rating the Aboriginal public sector employment experience

Survey respondents were asked to provide a five-point rating of a number of statements about the experience of being an Aboriginal employee in the SA public sector. An average rating was calculated for each statement, in order to compare the ratings and to identify trends in the survey sample's assessment of the Aboriginal employment experience in the SA public sector. (Refer Section 4.3)

- ◇ On this basis, survey respondents gave their **most positive rating** to this statement –

As an Indigenous employees in the SA public sector I have been able to contribute positively to the Indigenous South Australian community.

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

- ◇ The **second most positive** ratings were given to these three statements –

Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in my work unit.

Most of my colleagues in my work unit work sensitively with Indigenous employees.

Most of the managers in my work unit work sensitively with Indigenous employees.

The strong level of agreement with these three statements is encouraging, because it indicates that in their immediate work unit, Aboriginal employees are being treated with sensitivity and that good working relationships exist. This becomes less positive outside of the work unit with less agreeing with these statements. In part this is likely to reflecting the negative perceptions of government and the public service held by many Aboriginal people and stands in contrast to the assessment given to immediate work units.

- ◇ It is also likely to reflect the **most negative** assessment given, which again sees the SA public service as a whole being racist to Aboriginal employees –

In my experience Indigenous employees experience racist behaviour.

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

*In my experience, non-Indigenous **employees** in the SA public sector have a reasonable understanding of Aboriginal culture.*

*In my experience, non-Indigenous **managers** in the SA public sector have a reasonable understanding of Aboriginal culture.*

This reinforces the findings made about the need for significant improvement in managers', and more so employees', knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history, issues and needs, and in the process, developing the cultural competence needed to create fully inclusive work environments.

- ◇ Finally, the survey sample was more positive about Aboriginal employees having the same opportunities for training and development as non-Aboriginal employees, but less positive about their opportunities for promotion and career advancement and about their opportunities to act in roles that would advance their career prospects.

Anticipated retention in the SA public sector

Although 28.9% of those surveyed are unsure of the length of time they would wish to remain as SA public sector employees, the trend was for a **long term** commitment, involving more than 20 years (**23.7%**), 6 to 10 years (**16.8%**) and between 11 and 20 years (**9.1%**).

This finding is interesting in light of the barriers being experienced to retention, and the reduced availability of ongoing appointments in comparison with short term contracts. Respondents consistently identified **ongoing employment** as the factor most likely to encourage Aboriginal employees to remain in the SA public sector. (Refer Section 4.4)

Achieving the 2% Target - barriers

The sample was asked to identify in their own words the barriers to achieving the 2% Target (refer Section 5.1). These were the most frequently identified barriers–

- ◇ The need for more culturally inclusive application, selection and induction processes. This includes strategies that address low levels of confidence and self-esteem, and enhanced information about and promotion of the SA public sector.
- ◇ The need to increase the cultural competence of the non- Aboriginal workforce, in order to recruit and retain Aboriginal employees.

- ◇ Insufficient support provided to Aboriginal applicants and employees, including skilled mentors and coaches. This support needs to begin prior to selection process, to extend to early phase of employment and continue as part of career development.
- ◇ Insufficient long term, secure employment available. Aboriginal employees are more likely than non-Aboriginal employees to receive short term contracts.
- ◇ Insufficient commitment on the part of many in senior management. This includes under-usage of the Aboriginal Employment Program for recruitment.
- ◇ The need for increased attention to Aboriginal employees' professional and career development.
- ◇ The need to address the lack of formal qualifications by many Aboriginal applicants/employees by providing more training and development opportunities to employees and taking into account Aboriginal-specific expertise that does not necessarily translate into recognised credentials.
- ◇ The need to address racism, discrimination and bullying by some public sector employees.

Strategies that appear to be assisting the meeting of the 2% Target

A considerable amount of work has been undertaken by the SA public sector in order to address the significant challenge involved in creating culturally inclusive workplaces. Perhaps the most difficult obstacle is changing attitudes that may be based on ignorance of Indigenous history and culture or that are due to a resistance to change, racist beliefs and a tradition that reflects a single predominant culture. The survey asked participants (again with an open-ended response format) to identify any strategies in place that appear to be helpful in reaching the target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the SA public sector (*refer Section 5.2*). The two most frequently identified strategies were –

- ◇ the **Aboriginal Employment Program** and
- ◇ the various programs that support **Aboriginal apprenticeships, traineeships, cadetships and scholarships** (with particular mention made of the Department of Health scholarship initiative).

Throughout the survey, there has been strong support for the Aboriginal Employment Program but with some qualifying this because they believe the service could provide a wider range of support (if funded to do so). There was also a very small minority who were critical of the Program.

These were followed by –

- ◇ the provision of **support** through mentoring, Aboriginal networking and work shadowing, together with

- ◇ agency-specific Aboriginal employment strategies and
- ◇ the recently released *Cultural Inclusion Framework* (however, there were almost as many who view this cynically).

Achieving the 2% Target – recommended strategies

The sample then identified in their own words the strategies needed to address these barriers (refer Section 5.3).

- ◇ The two most frequently recommended strategies involve capacity building – of Aboriginal employees in terms of professional and career development and of non-Aboriginal employees in terms of cultural competence.
- ◇ These are followed by the provision of support of various kinds (including mentoring, coaching and networking), re-designing recruitment processes to be culturally inclusive and providing more opportunities for secure, ongoing employment.

Other strategies recommended involve –

- ◇ enabling Aboriginal people to design the strategies needed to address recruitment and retention issues;
- ◇ avoiding ‘tokenistic’ employment and aiming to achieve ‘critical mass’;
- ◇ increasing the commitment to and accountability of senior management for Indigenous employment outcomes; and
- ◇ acknowledging the expertise of Aboriginal applicants and employees without relying only on formal qualifications.

Concluding comments

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

The feedback provided indicates that while the public sector as a whole is regarded as a place where Aboriginal people can experience racism and discrimination, the immediate workplace is seen as one where Aboriginal people are treated with sensitivity by both other employees and managers. At the same time, there is a strong recommendation to address limited knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history and issues as part of a wider strategy to increase the cultural competence of the public sector non-Aboriginal workforce. It is interesting that this gap in capacity has not clouded the respondents’ judgement about the capacity for sensitive behaviour in the workplace. That this exists means that a strong

foundation exists from which to develop cultural capability by filling a significant knowledge gap and further developing cross-cultural skills.

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

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

There have been numerous equity-promoting strategies developed by the South Australian and other Australian public services and while the intentions are positive, their implementation is often compromised. In part this is a reflection of the sheer difficulty involved in achieving access and equity and cultural inclusion goals. In part it is also due to the commitment to those strategies not being shared by all and by the resistance of some to any change in the *status quo*.

Setting a target is a positive step because it calls agencies to account against a measurable outcome. However, it is important to ensure that sufficient resources exist to meet that target, and survey respondents have commented that this does not appear to be occurring.

1 Introduction – the Don Dunstan Foundation Project

The *South Australian Strategic Plan 2004* set a target to increase the employment of Aboriginal employees in the public sector from 1.2% to 2% by 2009. The updated target makes this provision –

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

In June 2005 the level reached was 1.14% of the total public sector workforce, increasing to 1.37% by June 2006, with variations from one agency to another. There is significant scope to improve current employment and management practices so that Aboriginal people are attracted to and retained within the public sector. The Don Dunstan Foundation (DDF) allocated funding to support a project with this purpose –

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

The Project has these two objectives –

- 1 to identify examples of successful practice in the SA public sector and elsewhere and
- 2 to identify barriers to employment in the SA public sector for Aboriginal¹ people.

This report presents findings from a survey of Aboriginal employees in the South Australian public sector, undertaken as part of the Project, and is an Accompanying Report to the main Project report.

The survey was designed in collaboration with the DDF Project Reference Group and distributed by one of its members, Mr Andrew Smith, who is the Coordinator of the *South Australian Public Sector Indigenous Employee Network* (SAPSIEN) with an accompanying letter from him that encouraged members to participate. Survey participants were offered the choice of completing on-line (which all did), by hard copy, or by telephone interview. Those choosing to complete the survey on-line responded to an email with an embedded link to the AISR network, where their responses were processed using the facilities of GISCA which is part of the AISR. This guaranteed that responses were seen only by AISR staff from the DDF Project and by Margaret Young from GISCA who processed the survey.

The sponsoring of the survey by SAPSIEN and the protection of responses by directing them through the AISR website has been responsible for the high response rate achieved.

¹ *The term ‘Aboriginal’ is used throughout this report to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) peoples, irrespective of their Country origins. This was considered to be more appropriate than the broader term ‘Indigenous’.*

2 Profile of survey participants

There has been a positive response to the DDF Project survey of Aboriginal public sector employees, with **173** people participating. All members of the *South Australian Public Sector Indigenous Network* (SAPSIEN) were invited to respond to the survey. This has between 250 and 300 members² giving a response rate of between **57.7%** and **69.2%**.

In addition, there were numerous comments added to the survey that indicated a welcoming of the opportunity to provide feedback, and to an independent (non public sector) source.

The South Australian Workforce Perspectives Survey

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

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

2.1 Age and gender

As *Figures 1 and 2* indicate, **120** survey respondents were **male** (69.4%) and 53 were female (30.6%). The majority are aged **under 45 years** (67%) and the most common age group was 35 to 44 years (30.6%).

This age profile is very similar to that of the *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* Aboriginal sample.

² Based on advice from the SAPSIEN coordinator and the current email address list.

FIGURE 1: GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

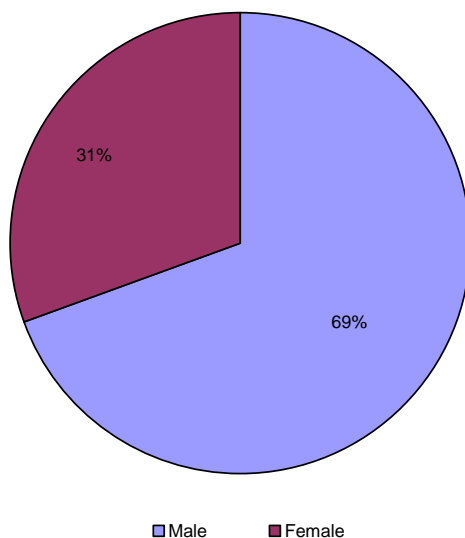
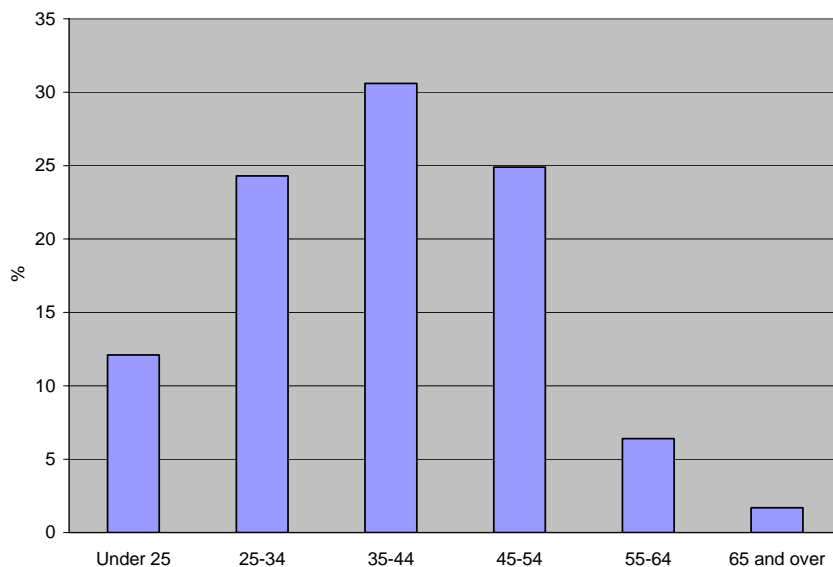


FIGURE 2: AGE OF RESPONDENTS

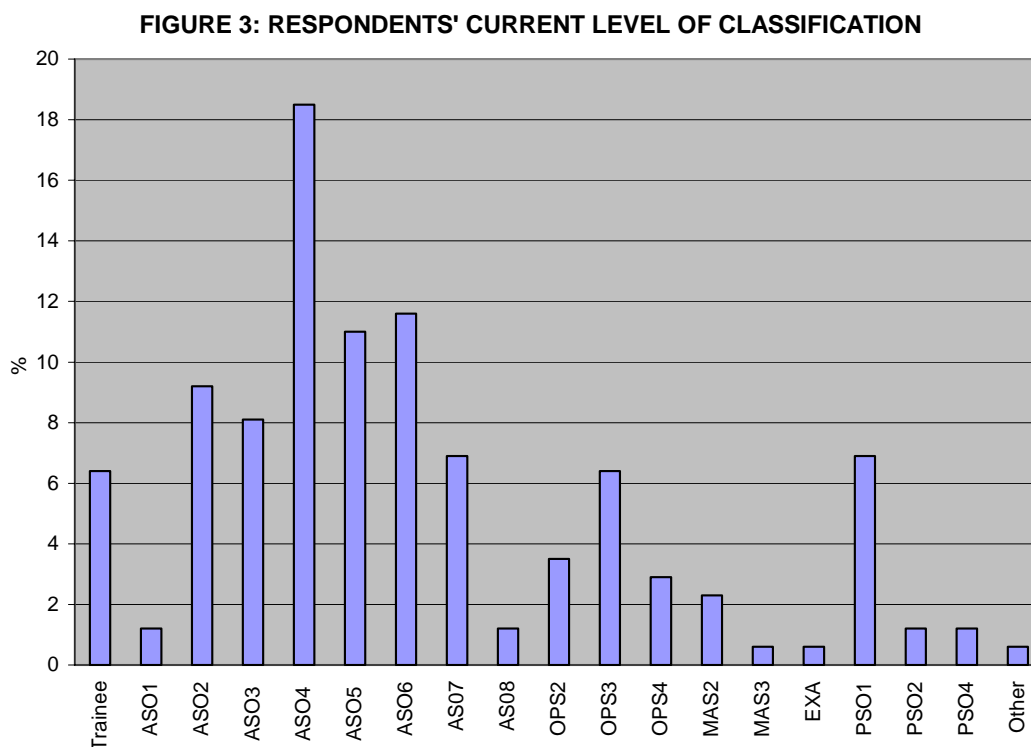


2.2 Level of classification

The survey participants' most common classification levels fall within the **ASO range** involving **117** people or **67.6%** of the sample. Within this range the most frequent classification is **ASO4** involving nearly one in every five of those surveyed (see Figure 3).

There are **22** people (12.7%) employed at the **OPS2 to OPS4** classification and **16** people (9.2%) at the **PSO1-PSO4** level. **Five** people (2.9%) are **MAS2 to MAS3** level.

This profile differs from that of the *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* Aboriginal sample in a lower proportion employed in the Trainee to ASO2 range (16.8% against 24.9%), and a higher proportion employed in the ASO4 to ASO6 range (41.1% against 30%).

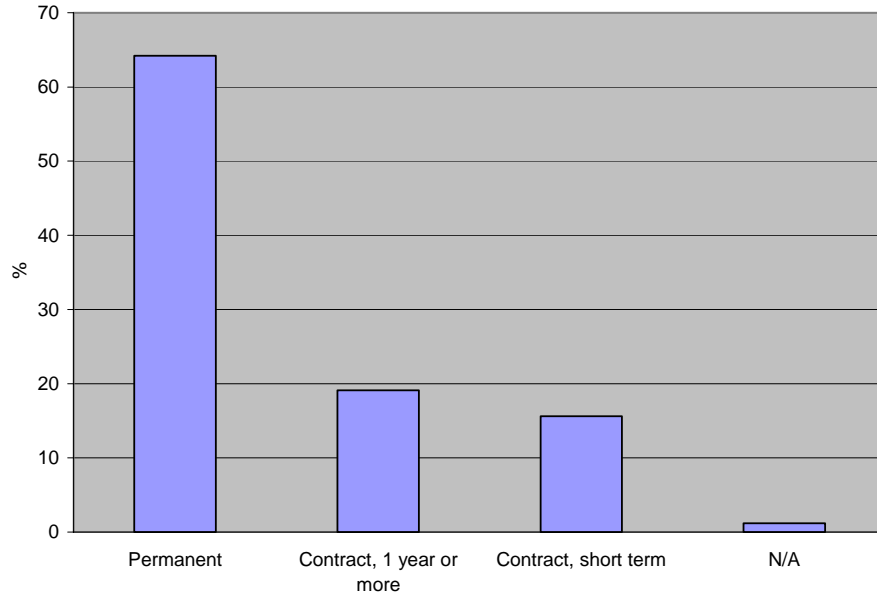


2.3 Employment status

Figure 4 provides details of the sample's employment status, and shows that **64.2%** are **permanent** employees, **19.1%** are on a contract of one year or more and **15.6%** are employed on a short term contract.

The *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* Aboriginal sample had 71% people employed in permanent or ongoing employment, and 28% in contract positions. This contrasted with non-Aboriginal employees of whom 81% were employed in ongoing roles and 18% in contract positions.

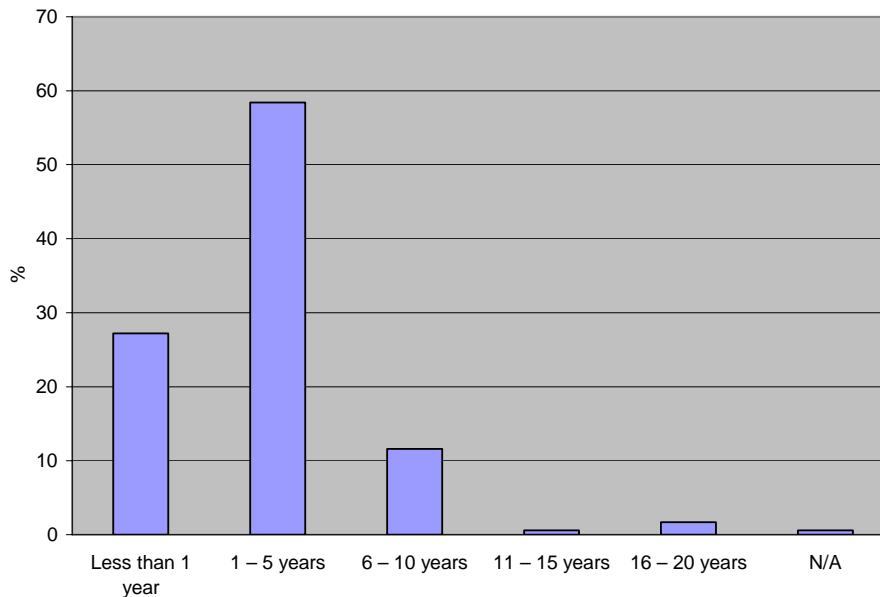
FIGURE 4: RESPONDENTS' EMPLOYMENT STATUS



2.4 Length of time in current position

The majority of survey participants have been in their current position for relatively brief lengths of time – **85.6%** involving **less than five years** (*Figure 5*). The most frequently cited period was one to five years (58.4%).

FIGURE 5: RESPONDENTS' LENGTH OF TIME IN CURRENT POSITION

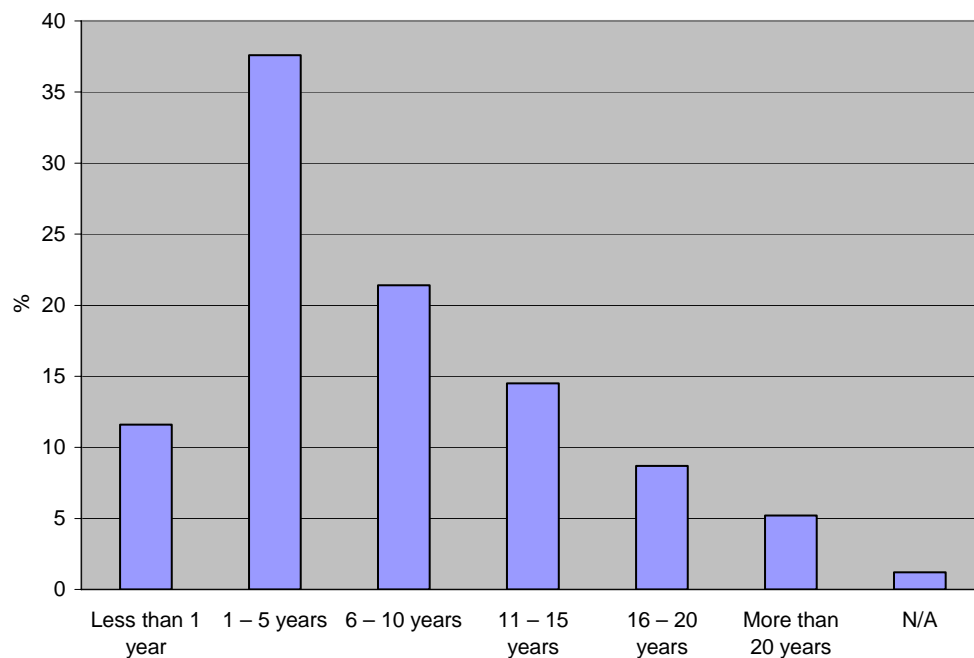


2.5 Years working in the SA public service

Again, the most frequently cited length of time of employment in the SA public service was **one to five years (37.6%)** but there were much longer periods of time involved in relation to length of public sector employment, compared with length of time in current position (see Figure 5). As Figure 6 indicates, **44.5%** of the sample have been SA public service employees for between **six and twenty years**, and a further **5.2%** for **more than twenty years**. The most common length of time in the public service involves one to five years (37.6%).

This profile is very similar to that of the *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* Aboriginal sample, with the exception that 11% had been in the SA public service for more than 20 years compared with some 5% of the DDF Project survey sample. There was a clear trend in the Workforce Perspective Survey for Aboriginal respondents to have been working in the SA public service for shorter periods than non-Aboriginal respondents.

FIGURE 6: RESPONDENTS' LENGTH OF TIME IN PUBLIC SECTOR



2.6 Aboriginal-specific work role

Less than half of the sample (**46.8%**) are working in an **Aboriginal-specific unit** in the public sector – see Figure 7.

More than half (**61.3%**) are working specifically **with Aboriginal people** – see Figure 8.

FIGURE 7: WORKING IN INDIGENOUS-SPECIFIC UNIT

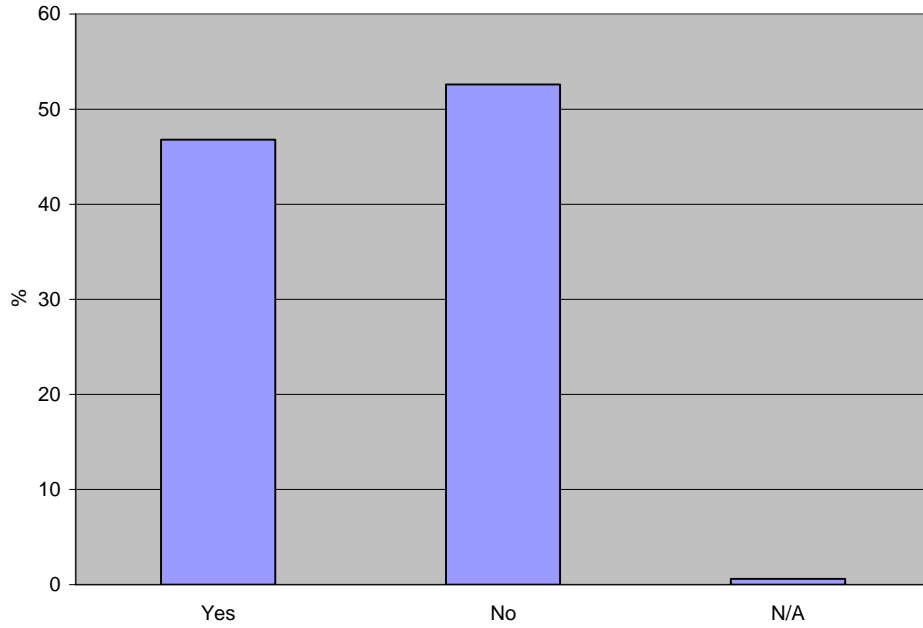
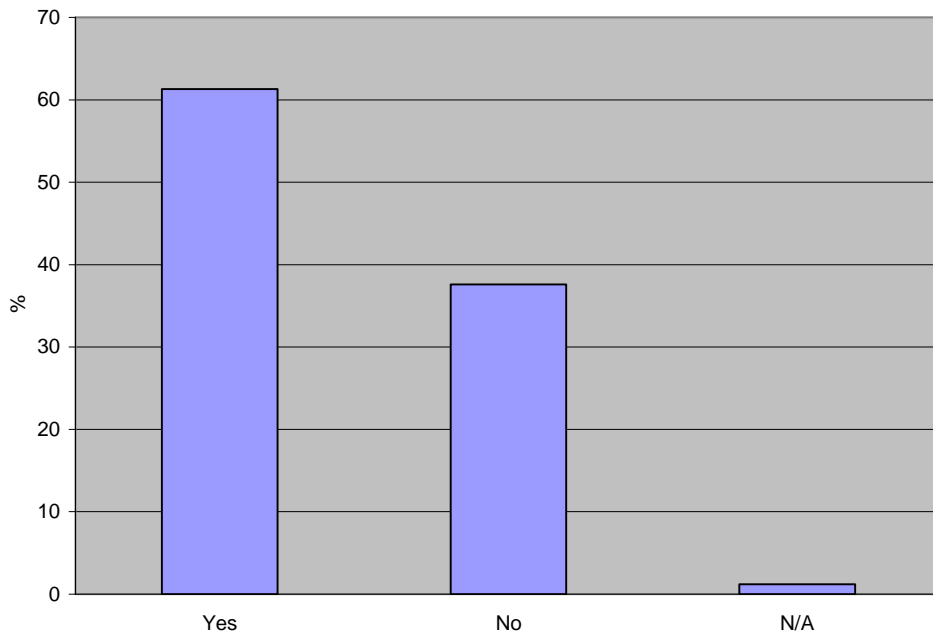


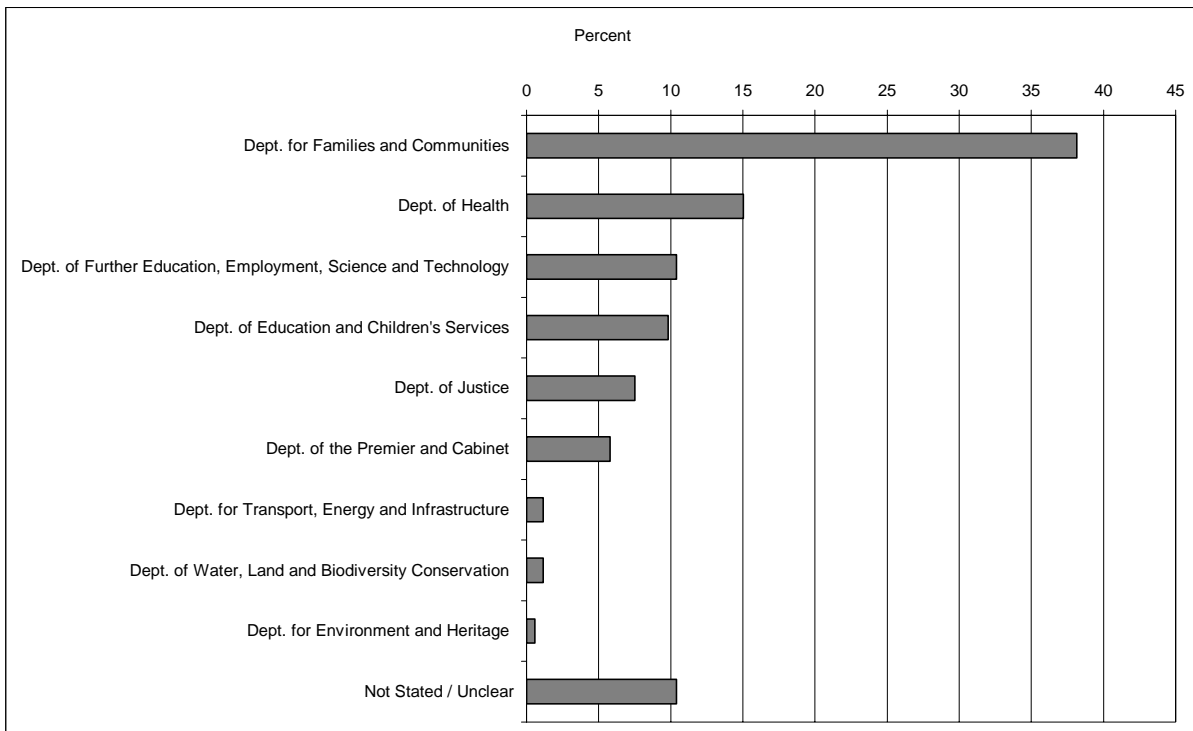
FIGURE 8: WORKING SPECIFICALLY WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLE



2.7 Employing agency

As Figure 8A indicates, the agency employing the highest number of survey participants is the Department for Families and Communities (38.2%). This was followed by the Department of Health (15.0%), Department of Further Education Employment Science and Technology (10.4%), Department of Education and Children's Services (9.8%) and the Department of Justice (7.5%).

FIGURE 8A: EMPLOYING AGENCY



3 Recruitment issues

3.1 Original reasons for entering the SA public service

Survey participants were asked to identify from a list of options the factors that had attracted them when they first applied for a position in the SA public service. There was also scope for them to add to this list with an open-ended response. Details appear in *Table 1*. (More than one response was possible so totals will exceed 100%.) It can be seen that the most common motivation to seek employment in the public sector was an altruistic one - **‘to make a difference for Indigenous South Australians’ (68.2%)**. This finding was reinforced by many of the additional comments made in response to this and other questions in the survey.

*Encouraged by elders to help those in prison to stay out and be responsible / supportive of immediate/ extended family. Be part of the solution not the problem.
While we are hurting ourselves how are we going to heal self and family to once again be proud, dignified, respectful (to each other) Aboriginal people?*

It will be important for future recruitment strategies to take this finding into account. The second most frequently identified motivator was **to obtain secure employment (52.6%)** and the importance of this was reflected in responses to other survey questions – for example, offering ongoing employment rather than short term contracts as a means of both recruiting and retaining Indigenous employees (see Sections 3.3, 4.2 and 5.3.) The third most common reason for entering the SA public service was simply that the position was available when the person needed employment (46.2%). Salary and conditions of employment were less likely to have been a source of attraction compared with the first three factors.

Table 1: Original reasons for entering the SA public service

Reason	No	%
To make a difference for Indigenous South Australians/to help my community	118	68.2
Security of employment	91	52.6
Needed work and the position was available	80	46.2
Better salary than previous job	49	28.3
Better salary prospects	33	19.1
Better employment conditions than private sector	38	22.0
Better employment conditions than non-government, not-for-profit sector	27	15.6
Better career development prospects	50	28.9
Employment conditions suited family responsibilities	35	20.2
Other – had a cadetship, traineeship	4	2.3
Total	173	100.0

3.2 Recruitment barriers for Aboriginal people

In their own words, survey respondents were asked to identify the main barriers that prevent or discourage Aboriginal people from seeking work in the SA Public Service. There were strong trends in the responses given and these are summarised in order of frequency, in *Table 2*.

Table 2: Recruitment barriers for Aboriginal people

Barrier (in order of frequency)
Negative perceptions of government in abusing its authority
Cultural insensitivity and need for improved cultural competence
Lack of information about public sector employment, poor communication of this to Indigenous people
Intimidating, culturally excluding selection processes, associated with a lack of confidence in applying for public sector employment
Negative perceptions of government as an employer
Lack of understanding of the unique pressures faced by Aboriginal employees/lack of support to address this
Racism and discrimination against Aboriginal employees
Training and qualifications issues
Insufficient permanent positions for Aboriginal people
Lack of critical mass in Indigenous employment

Although identified separately, it is important to remember that the barriers faced by an individual will be multiple, often intensified by their combined impact. The issues are best understood in the words of Aboriginal employees themselves, as the examples below illustrate.

- o **Negative perceptions of governments (and therefore, of its public service) abusing their authority in relation to Aboriginal Australians, originating with British colonisation, and including the role played in relation to the *Stolen Generation*.**

... previous grievances with the government on the issue of the stolen generation and the continuation of removal by government sectors often prevents Aboriginal people from being involved.

Government ... can be seen by the Aboriginal Community to be ... part of the unresolved historical factors of Stolen Generation, Death in Custody, Abuse in Care... the amendment to granted title of land and no right of veto. Of course the list goes on. Then there are the basic differences which can be language colour etc.

The stereotype that government is very lazy and stuck up.

The stigma attached to Governments' past actions against Aboriginal people.

Authority figure, power controller (we know what you want and need without even asking).

- o **Negative perceptions of governments as employers, with the public service being regarded as overly bureaucratic and involving excessive administrative work, and an overly formal work style.** The negative experiences of Aboriginal employees were described as also affecting those perceptions.

What they are told by people who are already in the Public sector - because of their own experience in dealing with Government Departments.

Bad experiences of other Indigenous people in the Public service.

Coming into the sector from an Aboriginal community sector was a bit of a shock to my system. Working in an Aboriginal agency, there was support and a strong connection with colleagues, coming into the public sector was very impersonal, cold and unfriendly.

Possibly too much red tape issues.

Bureaucratic/political agendas, past experiences, paper work.

- o **Need for improved cultural competence on the part of non-Aboriginal public sector employees.** This includes a general lack of knowledge of Aboriginal issues and history, as well as more specific cultural understanding (for example, in relation to death and associated rites and ceremonies). Under-developed cultural competence is seen to impair the provision of flexible working conditions that support Aboriginal employees in meeting family and cultural obligations. Finally, equity-promoting measures that encourage Aboriginal people to become public sector employees bring the unintended consequence of some non-Aboriginal employees perceiving their Aboriginal colleagues as having been appointed on the basis of race rather than skill.

... there is often a lack of appropriate and experienced staff who are culturally aware or sensitive to the cultural needs of Aboriginal hence the appropriate supports are often not put in place.

Lack of empathy - lack of knowledge on Aboriginal issues

Lack of knowledge - do not feel they will be seriously considered if they are not 'white-looking' - cultural customs and how they will be considered in the PS - issues related to dealing with regular funeral attendances, deaths and the manifestation of their social standing -especially regionally.

Attitudes of ignorant co-workers around why Indigenous services are needed.

Feeling uncomfortable eg. people looking at you because you have different skin colour or knowing that you are Aboriginal and treating you differently to others.

Not flexible and organisations do not believe in cultural ceremonies or bereavement that has cultural practices that need to be adhered to.

Expectations of the non-Aboriginal staff - you are expected to know everything and everyone and have answers for all issues and perceived problems Having to "educate" everybody about Aboriginal culture all the time - it is so exhausting.

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

- o **The application and selection processes can be intimidating because of its formality and lack of familiarity, as well as lacking in cultural sensitivity.** For those who are not familiar with the workings of government and the public service, applying for a position is daunting, and this is exacerbated by high levels of formality and the assumption of a set of skills that are presumed, but not necessarily present without specific information and support. Lack of confidence to apply for a government position is also a part of this barrier.

I think the interviews that you have to go through can be pretty stressful and could be a deterrent for indigenous people.

Information is not provided in plain English ... concepts and language is difficult to understand if coming from outside the government service sector.

The application process seems too hard for them to do. The application writing is a big task for people who are not confident in applying for jobs and having to go for interviews can be a deterrent also.

Lacking the confidence. Intimidated by the fear of discrimination.

Applicants are not job ready (no resume, not familiar with interview processes, never addressed a J&P before).

Not knowing/able to 'sell' myself (something Aboriginal people are not good at), I seldom got the job.

Positions that advertise "Aboriginal people are strongly encouraged to apply" doesn't mean anything. The application process is often cumbersome.

Red tape, takes so long to apply and find out if successful.

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

- o **Insufficient information about the public sector itself and the need for improved communication to Aboriginal communities about employment in the sector.** As Section 3.2 illustrates, the strategies used to advertise and promote public sector employment cannot be expected to be appropriate for Aboriginal applicants. Instead, specific communication processes and promotion through Aboriginal networks is

important. Without this, most Aboriginal applicants are disadvantaged, and many potential Aboriginal employees are deterred from applying.

Understanding the role of the position, deciphering the jargon in job descriptions, addressing essential criteria - too many, access to vacancies limited, reluctance to work for government, bad experiences.

Afraid of ... being rejected due to not understanding the questions.

Basically lack of knowledge of the SA Public Service.

Lack of information about how to enter the public service sector, lack of understanding of Aboriginal cultural issues, burn out, unrealistic expectations from the Aboriginal community and exploitation.

Not having any idea where to begin, and what is available.

- o **Racism and discrimination against Aboriginal public sector employees.** Lack of cultural competence is regarded as one significant barrier, and is a precursor to discriminatory behaviour. Those surveyed have identified that racism on the part of non-Aboriginal public sector employees acts as a deterrent to both the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal people.

Systemic racism in the way departments don't have mechanisms for valuing/assessing Indigenous people's cultural skills they bring to the job.

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

Being judged, having to be disempowered and most of the time not having any direction.

Being treated different, not given a chance.

Direct and indirect racism. It's boring. It's not obvious what government does. Some work places aren't sensitive to family issues or don't understand the significance.

Institutionalised racism where if you don't look like us, sound like us, think like us, talk like us, require more support than us, have specific program to assist you

Unfortunately I have experienced harassment and bullying from both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal managers thus, the issue for me is a lack of ethical practice not racism.

- o **A lack of understanding of the unique pressures faced by Aboriginal employees in representing their communities in the public sector workplace and representing the public sector (and by association, government) in Aboriginal communities.** Associated with this is a lack of support to address this issue.

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

Expectation from the Indigenous community is quite high on Indigenous staff within the SA Public Service. Expectations of [my]employer are regularly at odds with my beliefs and values and culture in general.

Facing racism within the system by other employees, fear of government services and in turn being penalised by your own community for working in Government.

People not understanding that Aboriginal people don't have the opportunity to 'knock off'. That often they are the ones supporting the rest of the family. Working in the Public Sector as an Aboriginal person is hard - we are part of the community, we are voters, we are an extension of our people, we are always compromising who we are to satisfy government decisions and we are often used by government organisations to carry out the business particularly when visiting communities. Non-aboriginal people do not understand this and it's hard for Aboriginal people to explain this or describe what it means.

- o **Training and qualifications for the public sector.** This issue has two components. The first refers to lack of formal qualifications for many public sector positions and the second refers to a lack of recognition of Aboriginal expertise that may not necessarily involve a formal credential. It is often the case that Aboriginal people are not aware of the training and professional development available to public sector employees.

All the young ones think that you need a degree before you can work for the government. Something to let people know that training is available on the job would be great for people, a lot of people think that they would never get a job in the government because of that reason.

Certificates. Indigenous people may know the work and what is involved but don't have the certificate to get that position.

Generally for Aboriginal people, education is a barrier; job and person specifications can often be too overwhelming, [and] need to be simplified or opportunity to have it explained,

I think that some believe that they don't have the "skills" to be accepted. I went through this process, I was just lucky that I had encouragement and persistence from my family to apply.

Qualifications, you may not have them but have the experience and this would turn people off from applying for jobs especially when they want qualified people (eg University degrees etc).

- o **Insufficient permanent positions for Aboriginal employees.** A continuing theme in the survey responses was the importance attached to secure ongoing employment and the trend for the public sector to offer short term contract work. Some respondents also identified the need for more career development for Aboriginal employees, especially those completing traineeships. Others perceive that the

employment of Aboriginal people is not valued because of the need for more ongoing appointments and career development.

Contract work with the continual re-application for positions.

Promotional pathways are limited for Indigenous specific positions.

Lack of career pathing -traineeships offered then no security of a permanent placement after the traineeship. Why not offer full time employment, with on the job training?

[Government] ... does not seem to appreciate or value its Aboriginal staff and their knowledge and experience. When there is a policy change or lack of money - Aboriginal affairs is one of the first affected/amended.

- o **Lack of critical mass.** An important component of equity promotion involves creating opportunities for minority groups that aim for a level that reaches 'critical mass'. This access and equity concept refers to a level that prevents minority group members from feeling isolated because of their numbers. Strategies to achieve critical mass include employment placement in small groups rather than as individuals. For some of those surveyed, feeling outnumbered and overwhelmed by a single, predominant workplace culture acted as a barrier to recruitment and retention. One person described lack of critical mass in this way -

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

To a lesser degree, there was a perception that public sector employment of Aboriginal people was more tokenist than genuine.

Because they rely on having a black face but refuse to take advice when dealing with Indigenous families.

One person commented that private employment agencies lack the required cultural competence to recruit Aboriginal employees and recommended that they not be engaged by government unless they themselves employed Aboriginal staff.

A few respondents took the opportunity to provide positive feedback about the work being done by the SA public service to address barriers to Aboriginal employment.

I think the Public Service has done a lot of work in breaking down the barriers. Most of the negative experiences I have had have nothing to do with my race but it has been used by others to give themselves permission to practice in an unethical manner.

3.3 Improving the recruitment process

The survey sample was asked to reflect on their own recruitment experience, and to identify the factors that had assisted them. The experience was less daunting when –

- o they knew someone in the unit where the position sought was based (38.7%)

Support from Aboriginal people that were in the Department.

- o when the selection panel included an Indigenous person (38.2%) and/or
- o had members who were sensitive to Indigenous people and issues (37.6%).

Knowing who and how many people were on the interview panel.

- o Being informed was also important – both about the position concerned (33.5%) and about the public sector (28.9%).

Researching the Company I was applying for and finding relevant information.

Table 3 summarises the five most frequently identified factors that had made a difference for them.

Table 3: Factors that improved the recruitment process experienced by the survey sample

Strategy	No	%
Knowing someone in the unit where position was based	67	38.7
Having an Indigenous person on the selection panel	66	38.2
Having a selection panel sensitive to Indigenous people/issues	65	37.6
Having sufficient information about the position	58	33.5
Having sufficient information about the SA public sector	50	28.9
Total	173	100.0

The combination of relevant information, preferably from people with direct experience (and it is assumed who are considered to be trusted sources) and a selection process that is culturally inclusive so that the person feels comfortable, has emerged as critical to effective recruitment. As such, these approaches assist in creating a ‘level playing field’ for the Indigenous applicant.

Any advice and information is helpful. Also feeling comfortable during the interviews is important.

Several participants commented that the recruitment process had been relatively smooth for them, usually because the above factors had been taken into account.

In their own words, survey respondents were asked to recommend recruitment strategies to encourage Indigenous people to work in the SA public service. There were strong trends in the responses given and these are summarised in order of frequency, in Table 4.

Table 4: Recommended recruitment strategies for Aboriginal people

Strategy
Informing Aboriginal people about public sector employment and promoting this through Indigenous networks
Supported application, selection and induction processes
Providing a culturally inclusive workplace that addresses racism and promotes cultural competence
Providing ongoing employment that provides career development opportunities

Respondents have provided a considerable amount of feedback on the issue of recruitment and this is also best presented in their own words.

Strategy 1: Informing Aboriginal people about public sector employment and promoting this through Indigenous networks.

Those surveyed point to the need to demystify public sector employment and to ensure that Aboriginal people are well informed about opportunities for work in the sector and what is required of public sector employees.

[Provide]better explanations of what is expected of you as government employee.

Demystify how the public sector works and its processes to the general public. It seems all too hard to get in when you are a member of the general public.

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

Develop a short course on [the] SA Public Service and make it available to Aboriginal people....

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

Careers Expo, proactive approach to Aboriginal community organisations and Aboriginal College, and pathways from the VET sector to attract Indigenous people.

Set up at the Croc Festival? - Let people know that there are plenty of opportunities for jobs that help all Aboriginal people. There is not enough promotion about the Public Service.

Forums at the Universities using Indigenous cadets/scholars already on cadetship ... to assist in its facilitation – inclusiveness.

Targeting schools and unis and Aboriginal job agencies, Aboriginal newspapers.

Opportunities for graduates or targeting those that are already studying or have studied because it's important to have qualified Aboriginal employees in the public service especially in senior positions.

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

Set examples of benefits that they can receive from working in the SA Public Service.

Relevant promotional material eg showcasing Aboriginal SA Public Sector employees, job opportunities, supports available, connections to stakeholders etc

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

The use of Indigenous recruiters and/or staff to market individual departments/business units.

Indigenous people may feel that they will not be accepted or that they will not be good enough for the job. I think this can be overcome by information sessions with all the Kooris and Nungas attending and sharing how they first entered the sector, the opportunities to learn within their roles, and how far they have come since joining the sector. Every one of us Indigenous people feel the same before we come into these roles and we need to spread awareness of this ...

The vacancies should clearly state "ATSI people are encouraged to apply" and positions need to be advertised throughout the community - not just NOVA & the Advertiser (such as TAFE, Aboriginal newspapers, radio, employment agencies and community groups). Most ATSI people don't read the newspapers or use the internet.

*There should be a **clearing house** so that Aboriginal people who want to work in the Public Service can send their resumes. They can be processed and if training needs to be done eg mandated reporting etc, police checks, this can be done before the applicant is sent onto AEP or other programs for employment.*

Strategy 2: Supported, culturally inclusive application, selection and induction processes

This Strategy builds on the first strategy which encourages an informed recruitment process and involves providing **support** coupled with more specific information about applying for a public sector position, undergoing an interview or other selection process, and being appropriately inducted if the application is successful. It is also important that those

managing the application, selection and induction of Aboriginal candidates are **culturally sensitive** and seek to make these processes as inclusive as possible.

Many of the proposed actions provided by the survey sample are of potential benefit to all candidates, not just those from an Aboriginal background – for example, plain wording of Job and Persons Specifications, making interviews as comfortable as possible for applicants, and ensuring that applicants are fully informed about the position and the public sector working environment.

The written application and formal interview can be fairly daunting for Indigenous applicants these days. It has been a good idea to have an Aboriginal person on panels interviewing other Aboriginal people.

Write up the J&P Spec so that Aboriginal people do not have to have University degrees to understand the jargon re write up of the J&P - Aboriginal people can and always had to adapt due to life skills, mainly in ... positions/fields that they are interested in, etc.

Culturally inclusive processes, including minimal application process based on essential criteria (user friendly), wider promotion/advertising, selection process eg. composition of panel, information sessions or individual staff available to talk about the role, quicker timeframes, better feedback mechanisms, ensure referees are contactable.

A number of people commented on the **number of essential criteria** associated with some positions.

The application process (meeting the selection criteria of the job description) was a little overwhelming.

The number of selection criteria was 23. This is far too large.

It would have been easier to not have had to address over 20 essential criteria. Perhaps 10 would have been sufficient.

Less formalised selection processes were also recommended, for example, alternatives to formal interviewing, providing information beforehand about the interview questions.

... an alternative process than a straight face to face interview. Such as a question sheet provided 15 minutes prior to the interview outlining questions that you can take into the interview with you.

Non-formalised selection process. More sensitivity/awareness of Indigenous people and issues.

Get the questions that are going to be asked on the interview 30 minutes before interview

... having support with my resume, i.e. having someone help me write a good one so I can be given interviews for the positions I [apply for]

Some survey respondents recommend that **one on one support** be provided to those Aboriginal applicants who lack confidence and/or experience in applying for employment. This includes assistance with resumé and application writing and interview preparation. **Aboriginal membership of selection and interview panels** is also considered to be important as well as having members with cross-cultural sensitivity and competence.

Assistance with the interview process - ie mock interviews and how to present at an interview.

I think that all Indigenous people should be either sent on resume writing course or given professional support to have a good c.v. regardless of if they are applying in the public or private sector. It is the first thing a employer sees and if it is not good enough they can miss out right at the start and they may be the right person for the job.

Interview processes could be less like interviews and more like conversations. Keep the language simple.

An informal selection process. Awareness of questions and expectations before the interview, so that you don't just feel on the spot.

Having an Indigenous person on the interview panel. Having an Indigenous person who knows about the position so that you can get correct information regarding the position.

People taking young Aboriginals through the recruitment process and assisting them to get through a selection process ... must be a one on one support.

As part of the selection process, it was also recommended that there be less reliance solely on formal qualifications and more **recognition of expertise** from within an Aboriginal frame of reference.

Better acknowledgement of experiential learning.

Aboriginal people have a wealth of knowledge and information that isn't often tertiary obtained and therefore they are considered not qualified! I think more notice should be taken of the person and their ability not just their academic status.

More emphasis on life skills as opposed to academic skills.

In light of the difficulties experienced by Aboriginal employees who face isolation because of 'critical mass' issues, it was considered important to recruit and place new employees in small groups rather than individually, or at the least, to ensure that they are linked to other Indigenous employees. This also provides broader support to Aboriginal employees.

When recruiting Aboriginal staff more than one position [it is] appropriate for Aboriginal staff coming into government to be assisted by another Aboriginal person.

A **supported approach to induction** was also recommended, ensuring that new Aboriginal employees receive the information they need for their work role and about the public sector

as a whole. Work experience was also seen as a means of introducing young Aboriginal people to public sector employment.

Culturally appropriate induction processes.

Confidence increasing initiatives - initiatives to welcome and facilitate cultural customs within the PS.

Induction that includes an introduction to the workplace on day one.

There should be an Aboriginal specific induction (as part of general induction) to allow workers to meet other Aboriginal staff so that they can develop a support network for each other.

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

The support provided to recruit and induct Aboriginal employees was also seen as the beginning of a wider process of support and guidance designed to retain and enable Aboriginal employees to develop and maximise their abilities.

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

Being able to show that they are going to be supported.

Ongoing support by other Aboriginal staff that were released by managers to give that support, not just adding this to their other duties.

Strategy 3: Providing a culturally inclusive workplace that addresses racist behaviour and promotes cultural competence

A strong strategy to deal with workplace racism.

Cultural awareness training for all non- Indigenous staff.

I believe there needs to be a more knowledge of our culture, at a basic level with out being judged, knowing ours is a very different culture and having us to make the changes.

Culturally appropriate employer / work place, when it comes to funerals and Indigenous employees wishing to attend funerals of cousins, aunties and uncles.

That the work environment is family friendly, understands the history of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people, cross cultural training for all staff members, training for all new workers, mentoring or buddy system once in employment, given the chance to act in higher position after 12months in the one position.

The criterion "knowledge and understanding of Indigenous issues" etc is now tokenistic. Having strategies to make senior executives accountable to government for achieving set targets is a better way to go.

Making sure that HR areas within the different departments are culturally appropriate & seek information from the appropriate people when looking to recruit Indigenous people to their departments, & then to continue these culturally appropriate practices when dealing with prospective or new Indigenous employees.

Sometimes I feel like I don't fit in anywhere because I am very light skinned. I identify as an Indigenous Australian and I am very proud of my culture and people. I also experience white Australians who say I am not allowed to be Indigenous because I am so white. ... I experience more discrimination from the white Australians than anyone else, I am made to feel like a joke by them.... some days are harder than others and I don't know where I fit most of the time. When I come to work in the public sector and people ask you where did you come from and I say I was referred by Aboriginal Employment Programs, ... the reactions make me feel ... like I shouldn't be allowed to access work in the public sector. I feel there needs to be more awareness in the community that there are a lot of blonde Aboriginals and different shades of colour and that we can identify with our cultural group.

A culturally inclusive workplace is also one that recognises the importance of family and community obligations and ceremonies and ensures that Aboriginal employees are informed about and can access cultural leave.

*We do not have leave entitlements for funerals for our close relatives - who are not our parents, or siblings. In the guidelines of the SA Government Public Sector do not class as "family". *I do not agree with that, as I have a big extended family, in which I have moved between the families my life, and for them to not be classed as my family is not fair.*

Access to special leave for cultural/community and family obligations is essential.

I wasn't aware we had special leave for Indigenous ceremonies etc.

...make sure we get paid leave for ceremonies and other cultural leave, within reason.

Strategy 4: Ongoing employment that provides career development opportunities

Offer 12 months contracts at the minimum.

Indigenous people working in PS on contracts need to be given priority over redeployees when permanent positions become available.

There should be more permanency. I have been in and out of contracts for 5-6yrs as many others have.

Traineeships that continue onto permanent work (based on probation periods); increase more Indigenous people to work within SA Public Service - therefore showing the Indigenous community the commitment from the SA govt to want to employ more Indigenous people.

A clear pathway, with increased opportunities to grow.

Aboriginal people provided with non-Aboriginal specific positions to allow for broader professional development.

Creation of opportunities to shadow senior public sector employees to increase skills and work place experience.

The barriers to recruitment are multiple and mutually reinforcing, and for this reason, it is important that no single strategy be adopted to address these barriers.

A range of strategies would be helpful access to mentoring, work shadowing, greater access to information about career opportunities available, one to one support with job applications, greater support from Aboriginal Employment Programs re finding work/placements/coaching re recruitment.

These issues are discussed in greater detail in *Section 5.1*.

4 Retention issues

There are numerous factors that affect retention and the survey asked respondents to identify those that would cause them to discontinue their employment in the SA public sector (see Table 5) and those that encourage them to remain (see Table 6). Multiple responses were possible for both Tables 5 and 6.

4.1 Factors that work against retention of Aboriginal employees

Table 5: Factors that would cause Aboriginal employees to leave the SA public sector

Factor	No	%
Lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture by non-Aboriginal employees	75	43.4
Lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture by non-Aboriginal managers	75	43.4
Having my knowledge, skills & expertise under-utilised	75	43.4
Feeling under-valued	68	39.3
End of my contract	66	38.2
Lack of a personal support network in my work environment	65	37.6
Being made to feel my position was not earned or based on merit	59	34.1
Work-life-balance difficulties	55	31.8
Lack of job satisfaction	55	31.8
Assuming that I can only contribute to Aboriginal-related issues	54	31.2
Not enough Aboriginal employees to make me feel secure or supported	52	30.1
Family or care-giving responsibilities	52	30.1
Feeling marginalised, excluded because of being Aboriginal	49	28.3
Higher salaries outside the SA public sector	48	27.7
Opportunities outside the SA public sector	40	23.1
Better career development prospects outside SA public sector	36	20.8
Experiencing racism because I am Aboriginal	29	16.8
Wanting to study	23	13.3
Wanting to retire	23	13.3
Experiencing discrimination	23	13.3
Experiencing harassment or bullying	23	13.3
Starting a family	11	6.4
Voluntary redundancy	3	1.7

Although the SA public sector provides cultural awareness raising and some cultural competence training, this survey indicates that more effort is required here for both employees and managers. Three factors shared equal top place as deterrents to remaining in the SA public sector. Two of these involve **insufficient understanding of Aboriginal culture** by non-Aboriginal employees (43.4%) and non-Aboriginal managers (43.4%). This may also be influencing the other most frequently cited deterrent to retention, having **knowledge, skills and experience under-utilised (43.4%)** – possibly because this is not

being understood within culturally inclusive parameters. Feeling **under-valued (39.3%)** would also relate to lack of recognition of individual capacity³. Consequently, it is important to regard the first three barriers to retention as inter-dependent.

More material factors that relate to seeking higher salaries (27.7%) and career opportunities elsewhere (23.1%) have been less important than these barriers. Interestingly, although the survey sample had identified the experiences of bullying (13.3%), harassment (13.3%) and discrimination (13.3%), they regard them as less significant in influencing their decision to remain in the SA public service. The fourth excluding experience – racism – emerged as more significant than these three (16.8%), but not as important to retention as a culturally inclusive workplace that enabled the use and recognition of Aboriginal employees' expertise. However, this does not lessen the negative impact of such experiences on job satisfaction, personal happiness and retention outcomes. As *Table 6* indicates, working in an environment without discrimination is a retention influencing factor for 43.4% of those surveyed.

Other deterrents to continuing in the SA public sector were the perceived tokenistic treatment of Aboriginal employees, lack of flexible working conditions, and blaming of individual Aboriginal employees by some members of Aboriginal communities for government actions.

Being consulted but having my advice not actioned.

Being forced to stay at your desk all day with little to no allowances for delay, breaks, errors and unable to take flexi or unable to have flexible working conditions.

Feeling pressure from own community - as Aboriginal workers in the field we are the face of the service we represent and when something happens in the community eg removal of a child, refusal of financial assistance, some members of the community blame Aboriginal workers not the service or policy that we are employed to carry out.

It's hard to be a Public Servant and part of the Aboriginal community because I feel most of the time I am forced to compromise my beliefs because of Government decisions made for Aboriginal people particularly when I don't agree.

Some respondents took the opportunity to provide positive feedback about their employment experience.

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

I am well supported within my work environment, working with other Aboriginal staff.

³ The *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* found that Aboriginal employees were more likely to cite feeling undervalued as a reason to leave their public sector job than were non-Aboriginal employees. Australian Institute for Social Research (2007) *Achieving the Target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the South Australian Public Sector. Accompanying Report III - Survey of Aboriginal Employees in the SA Public Sector*. Report to the Don Dunstan Foundation 37

These findings are interesting when compared with the *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* which identified that Aboriginal respondents were more likely than non-Aboriginal respondents to be influenced to leave the SA public sector because of **poor management** (49% versus 38%), **lack of recognition** (47% versus 37%), and **work-life-balance issues** (43% versus 37%). Other factors that were important influences for Aboriginal respondents were 'bureaucracy' (46%) and 'lack of career or promotional opportunities' (41%).

4.2 Factors that encourage retention of Aboriginal employees

As is evident in *Table 6*, there are a number of factors that are considered to influence retention and all of those listed are important to **30% or more** of the survey sample. Those that are given the highest priority involve **secure, ongoing employment (78%)**, followed by **being able to contribute to the well-being of other Aboriginal people (71.1%)** – this finding reinforces the finding about the main reason for joining the SA public service which was to make a contribution to Aboriginal communities (*see Section 3.1, Table 1*).

The third and fourth most frequently cited factors were having a **good manager or supervisor (65.3%)** and **opportunities for training and development (64.7%)**. The next most important factors were **salary (60.7%)**, **flexible working conditions (59.5%)** and working with **managers who understand, or try to understand, Aboriginal culture (59.0%)**. Interestingly, working with employees who understand, or try to understand, Aboriginal culture was less frequently cited (49.1%) – highlighting the important leadership role of management.

One interesting finding is that being in a workplace where the Aboriginal person **feels valued (51.4%)** emerges as more important than being valued for being Aboriginal (38.7%). Other factors of importance include having opportunities to use skills and expertise (56.1%) and for career development (54.3%), being supported in the workplace (54.9%) and being part of an Aboriginal employee network (56.6%) – which highlights the valuable role of SAPSIEN.

The Indigenous mail out list SAPSIEN through DPC helps me feel connected to the community and what's happening around the place, as I work in a rural area with a low Aboriginal population I feel quite isolated.

Table 6: Factors that encourage Aboriginal employees to remain in the SA public sector

Factor	No	%
Being employed, ongoing or permanent	135	78.0
Having a chance to make a contribution to other Aboriginal people	123	71.1
Having a good manager or supervisor	113	65.3
Opportunities for training and development	112	64.7
Salary	105	60.7
Flexible working conditions	103	59.5
Working with managers who understand (or try to) Aboriginal culture	102	59.0
Being part of an Aboriginal employee network	98	56.6
Opportunities to use skills, knowledge or expertise	97	56.1
Having a chance to make a contribution to society generally	97	56.1
A workplace where I am supported	95	54.9
Opportunities for career development	94	54.3
A workplace where I feel valued	89	51.4
Working with employees who understand (or try to) Aboriginal culture	85	49.1
Having access to special leave (eg cultural leave)	80	46.2
Being treated fairly and without discrimination	75	43.4
Being valued because I am Aboriginal	67	38.7
Having a reasonable workload	65	37.6
Having a mentor or a coach	58	33.5
Being provided with regular feedback	52	30.1

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

Flexible working arrangements emerged as important to Aboriginal respondents in the *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* but were being used at a significantly lower level (across all leave types except purchased leave) than was the case for the sample as a whole, and a significantly higher proportion of Aboriginal respondents reported that they would like to use purchased leave and part-time or job share arrangements but were unable to do so. The usual reason given was that the demands in their work area prevented them from utilising flexible leave.

4.3 Rating the Aboriginal public sector employment experience

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

Table 7 provides a summary of the ratings given to twelve statements. Individual ratings to each statement appear in Figures 9 to 20.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- ⇒ *Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in my agency/Department.*
- ⇒ *Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in the SA public sector.*

In part this is likely to reflecting the negative perceptions of government and the public service held by many Aboriginal people (see Section 3.2) and stands in contrast to the assessment given to immediate work units. It is also likely to reflect the **most negative** assessment given, which again sees the SA public service as a whole being racist to Aboriginal employees –

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

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

- ⇒ *In my experience, non-Indigenous **employees** in the SA public sector have a reasonable understanding of Aboriginal culture.* (Average rating **3.6**, that is, disagreement)
- ⇒ *In my experience, non-Indigenous **managers** in the SA public sector have a reasonable understanding of Aboriginal culture.* (Average rating **3.4**, that is, disagreement)

This reinforces the findings (*refer Sections 3.2, 4.1 and 5.3*) made about the need for significant improvement in managers', and more so employees', knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history, issues and needs, and in the process, developing the cultural competence needed to create fully inclusive work environments.

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

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

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

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

Table 7: Rating the Aboriginal employment experience in the SA public sector

Statement	Agree		neither	Disagree		DK
	% of respondents					
Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees have the same opportunities for <i>training and development</i>	15.6	41.6	16.8	18.5	5.8	0.6
Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees have the same opportunities for <i>promotion and career advancement</i>	9.2	15.0	27.2	28.3	16.8	0.6
Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees have the same opportunities for acting in positions or roles that <i>advance their career prospects</i>	9.8	14.5	23.1	34.7	15.0	1.2
Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in my <i>work unit</i>	21.4	42.8	19.7	10.4	4.0	0.6
Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in my <i>agency/Department</i>	11.0	36.4	28.9	16.2	4.0	1.2
Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in the <i>SA public sector generally</i>	4.6	23.7	45.7	16.8	4.0	3.5
As an Indigenous employee in the SA public sector I have been able to contribute positively to the Indigenous South Australian community.	30.1	43.4	16.2	5.8	0.6	2.3
In my experience, non-Indigenous <i>employees</i> in the SA public sector have a reasonable understanding of Aboriginal culture.	2.9	9.8	22.5	43.4	18.5	1.7
In my experience, non-Indigenous <i>managers</i> in the SA public sector have a reasonable understanding of Aboriginal culture.	2.9	16.8	29.5	27.7	20.2	1.7
In my experience, Indigenous employees experience racist behaviour	22.0	38.7	24.3	9.8	1.7	2.3
Most of my <i>colleagues</i> (in my work unit) work sensitively with Indigenous employees.	12.7	52.6	20.8	8.1	4.0	0.6
Most of the <i>managers</i> (in my work unit) work sensitively with Indigenous employees.	14.5	49.7	22.5	9.2	1.7	-

Figure 9: Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees have the same opportunities for training and development

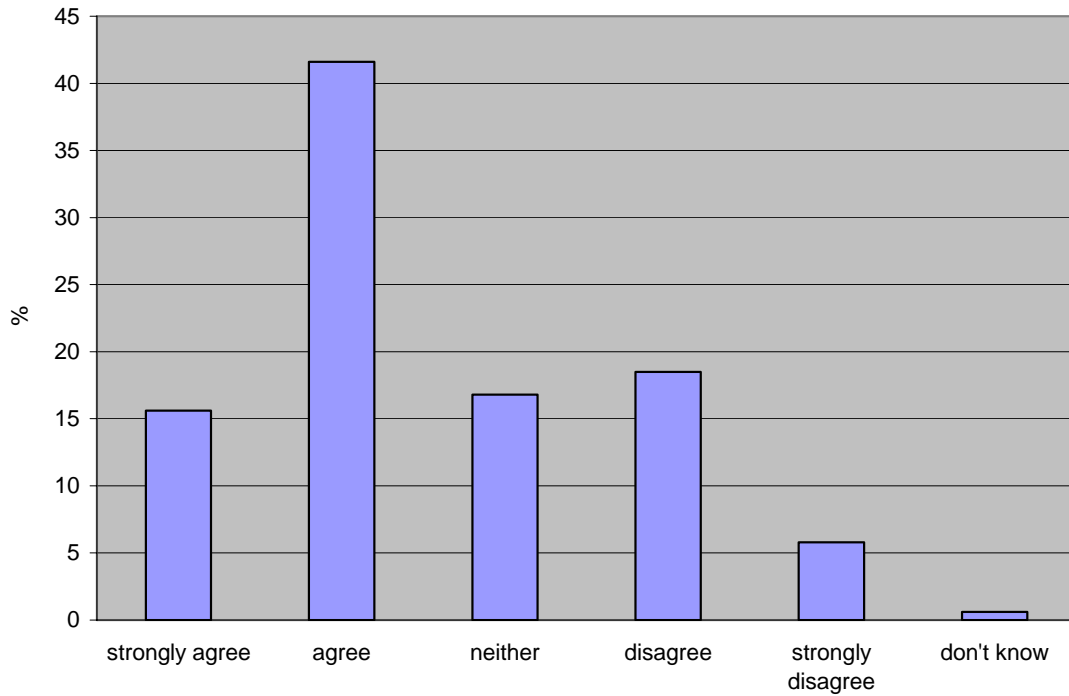


Figure 10: Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees have the same opportunities for promotion and career advancement

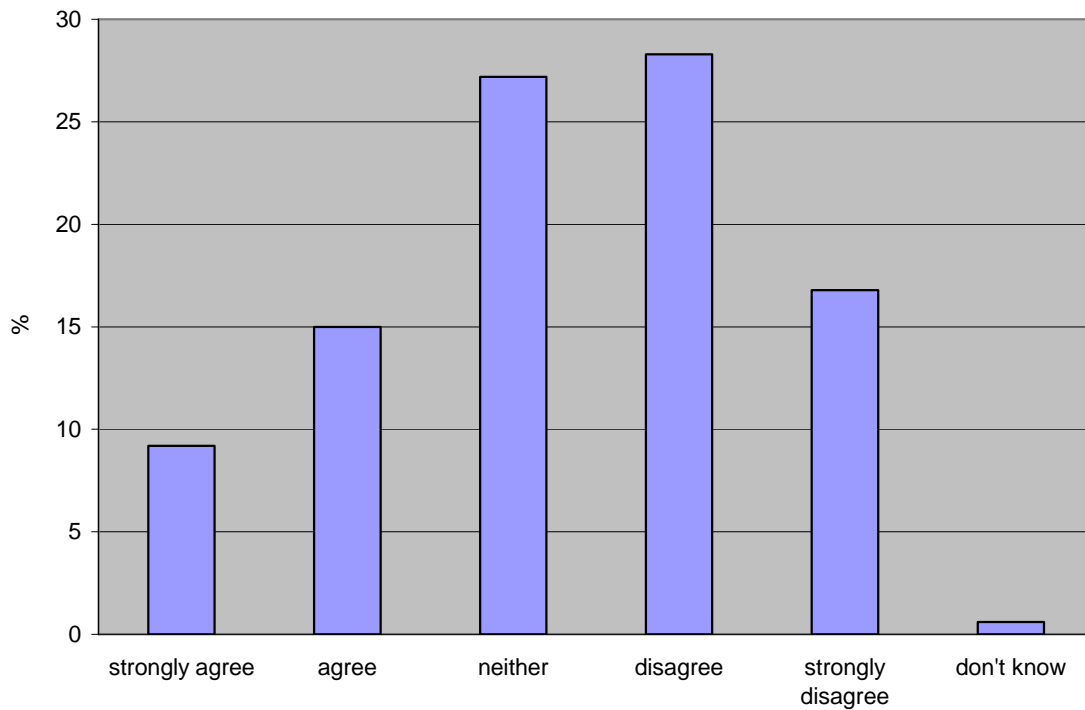


Figure 11: Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees have the same opportunities for acting in positions or roles that advance their career prospects

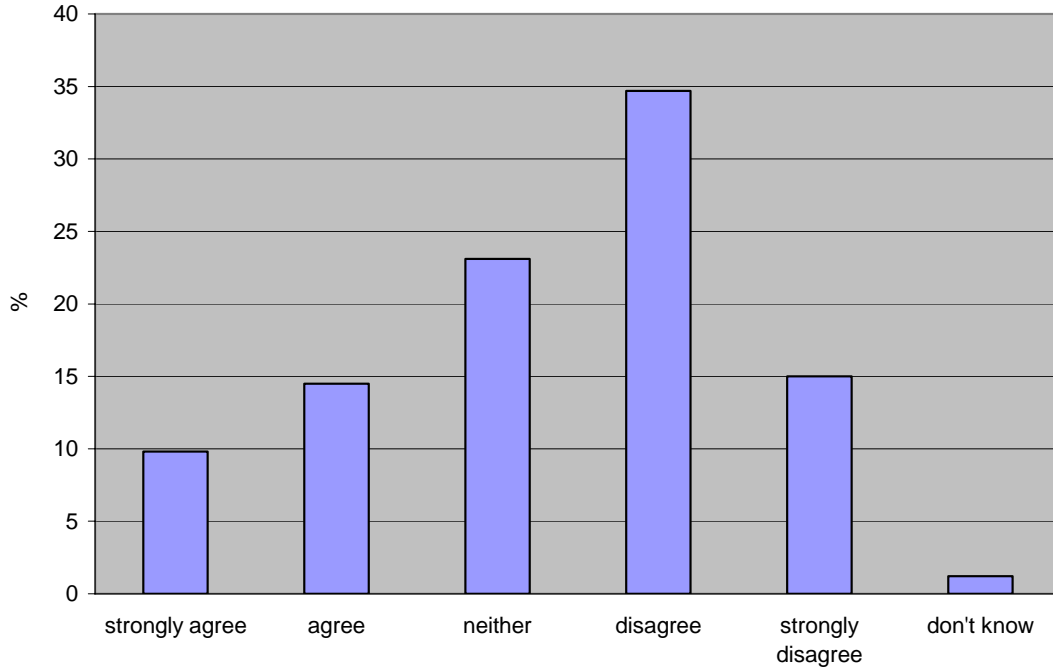


Figure 12: Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in my work unit

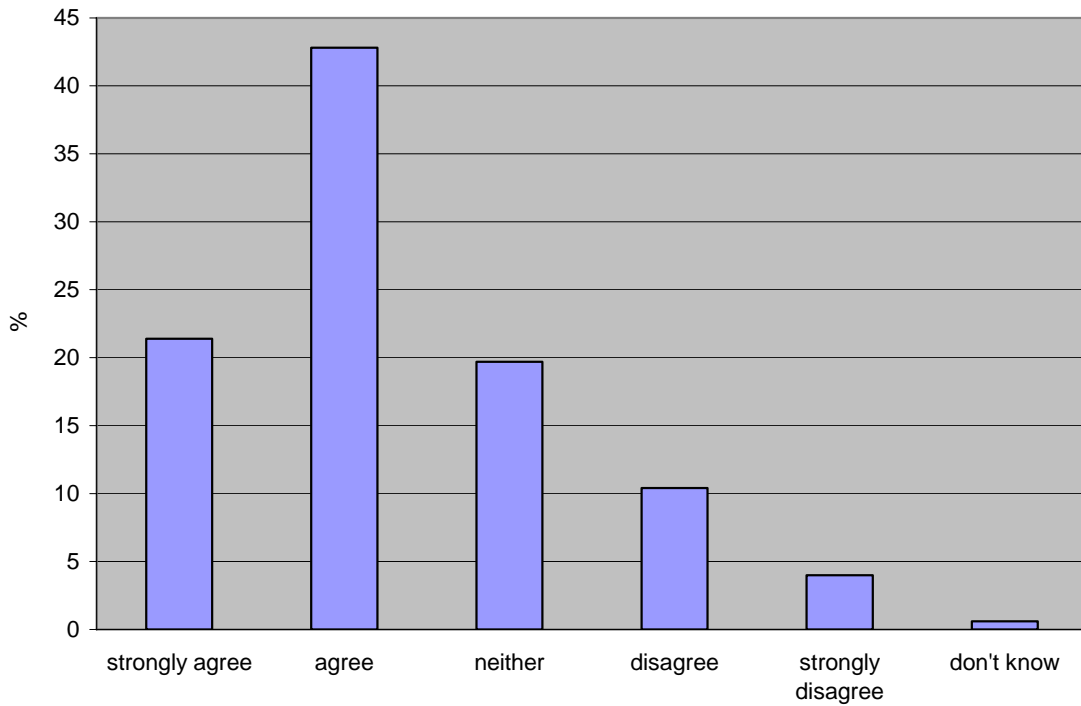


Figure 13: Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in my agency/Department

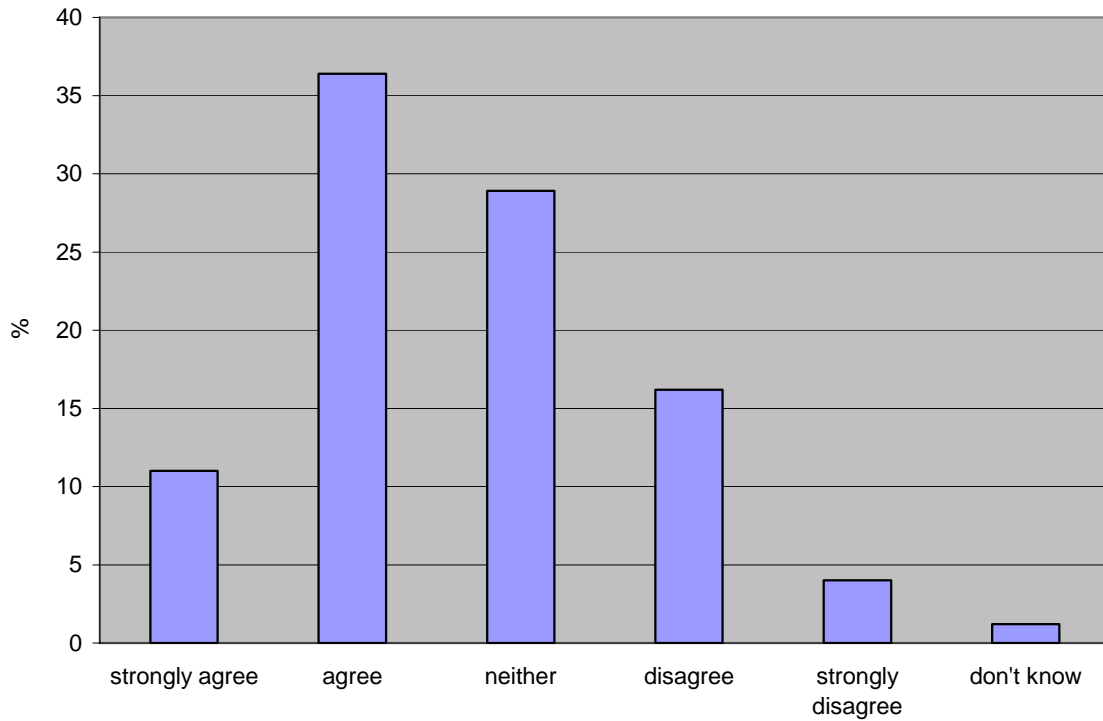


Figure 14: Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in the SA public sector generally

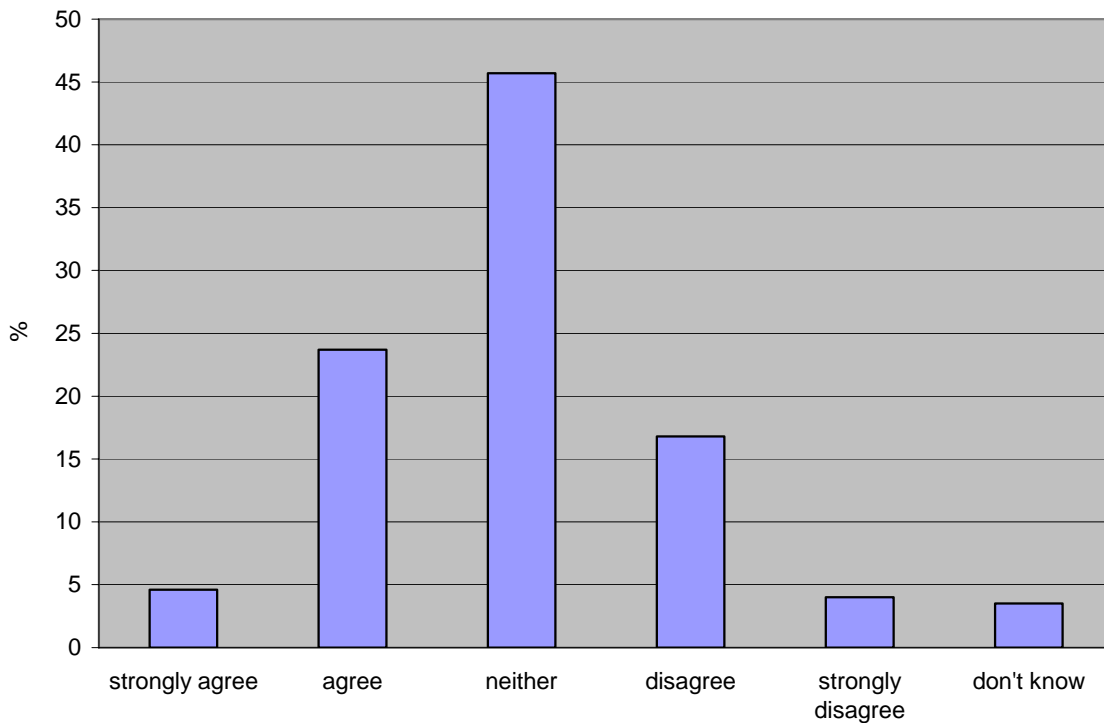


Figure 15: As an Indigenous employee in the SA public sector I have been able to contribute positively to the Indigenous South Australian community

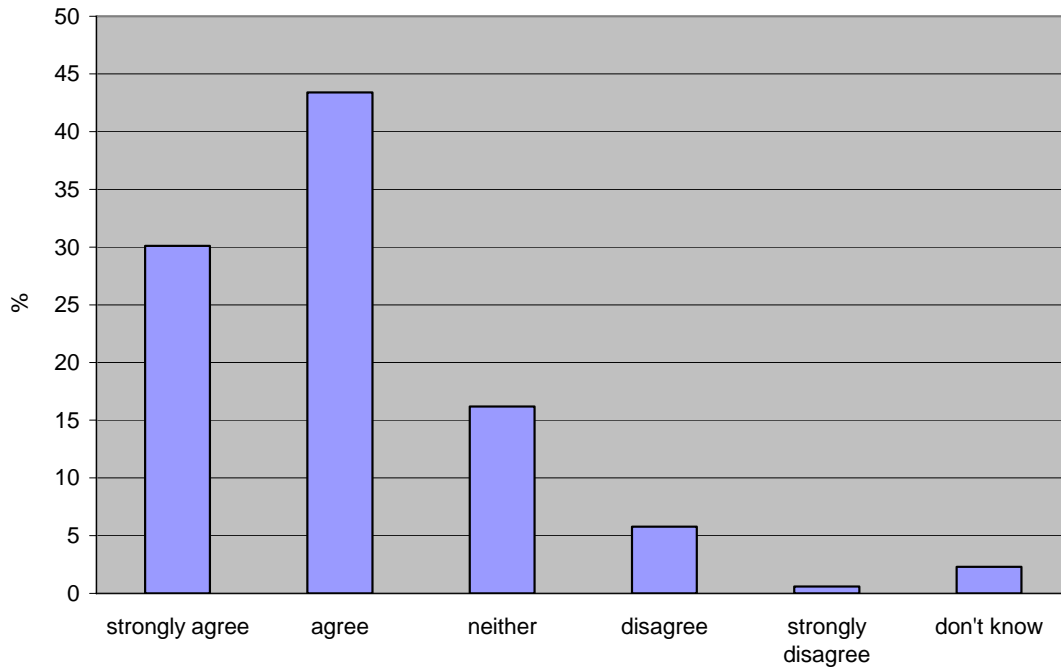


Figure 16: In my experience, non-Indigenous employees in the SA public sector have a reasonable understanding of Aboriginal culture

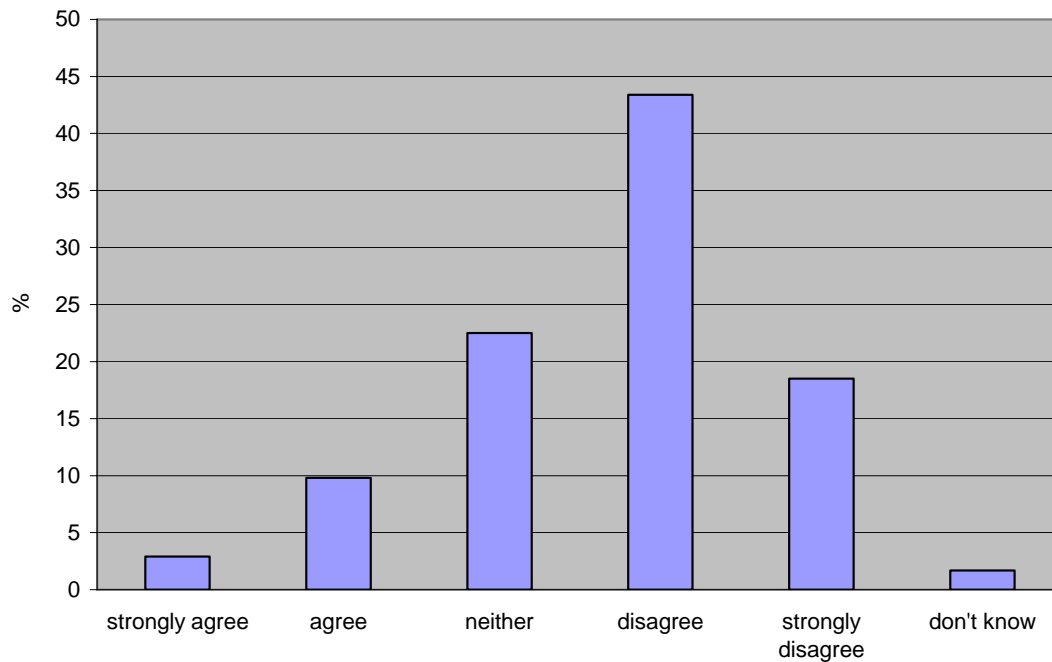


Figure17: In my experience, non-Indigenous managers in the SA public sector have a reasonable understanding of Aboriginal culture

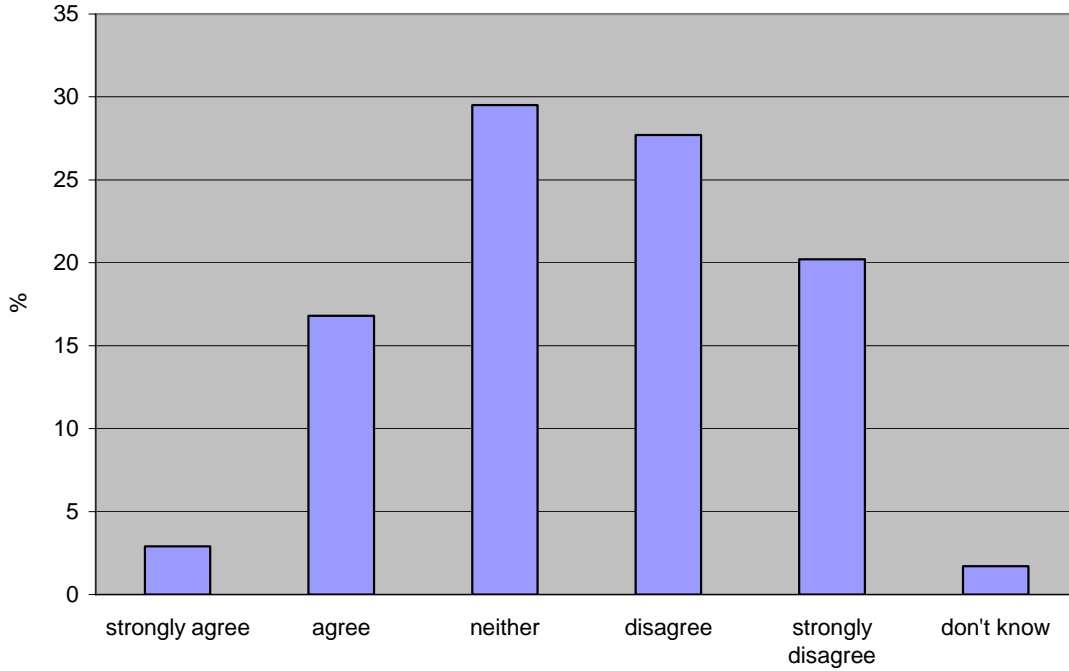


Figure 18: In my experience, Indigenous employees experience racist behaviour

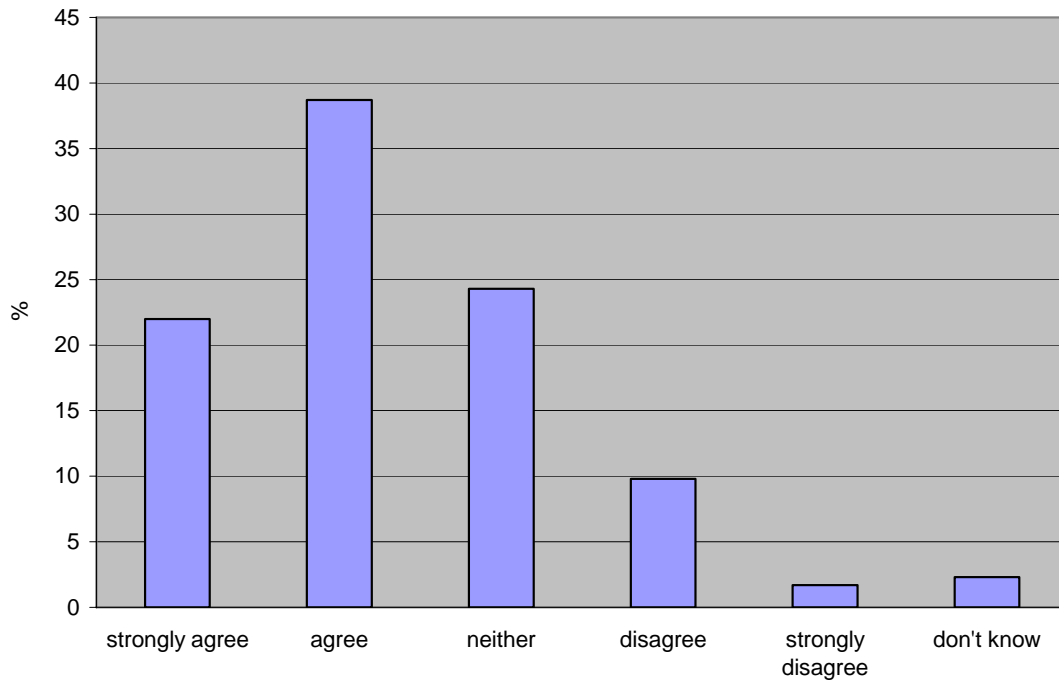


Figure 19: Most of my colleagues (in my work unit) work sensitively with Indigenous employees

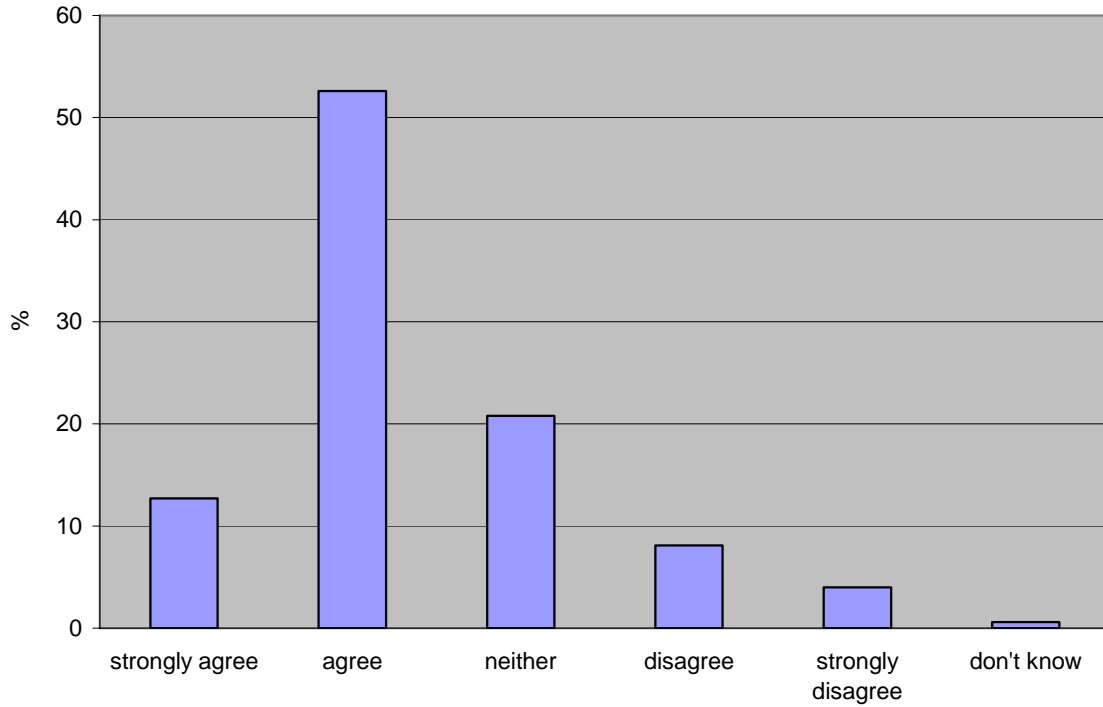
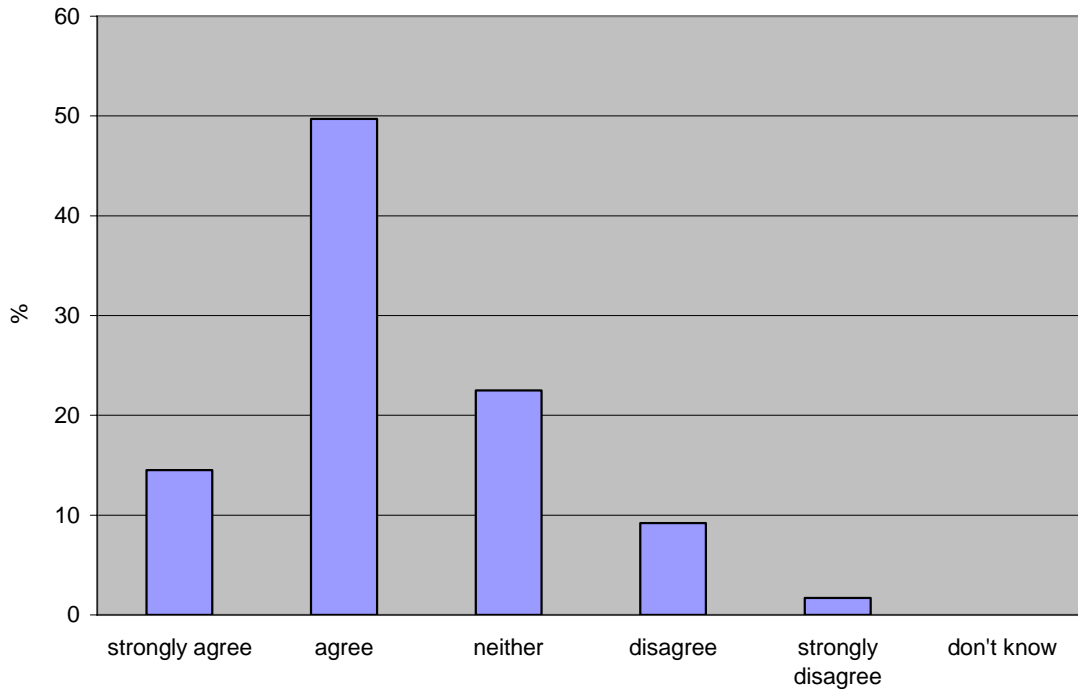


Figure 20: Most of the managers (in my work unit) work sensitively with Indigenous employees



4.4 Anticipated retention in the SA public sector

Although 28.9% of those surveyed are unsure of the length of time they would wish to remain as SA public sector employees, the trend was for a **long term** commitment, involving more than 20 years (**23.7%**), 6 to 10 years (**16.8%**) and between 11 and 20 years (**9.1%**) – see Table 8. This finding is interesting in light of the barriers being experienced to retention, and the reduced availability of ongoing appointments in comparison with short term contracts. Respondents also identified (Table 6) **ongoing employment** as the factor most likely to encourage Aboriginal employees to remain in the SA public sector.

Table 8: Time would like to work in the SA public sector

Length of time	No	%
Less than 1 year	1	0.6
1 year	1	0.6
2 years	3	1.7
3 years	5	2.9
4 - 5 years	7	4.0
6 - 10 years	29	16.8
11 - 15 years	17	9.1
16 - 20 years	17	9.1
More than 20 years	41	23.7
Unsure	50	28.9
Total	173	100.0

The *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* asked respondents if they were likely to retire or to leave the SA public sector, and to nominate a time period for this. A significantly higher proportion of Aboriginal respondents reported that they expected to resign or retire within the next year (12%) compared to non-Aboriginal respondents (6%), which may reflect short term employment status. Only 26% of the Aboriginal sample were planning to retire compared with 40% of the non-Aboriginal sample.

Of those intending to leave in the next five years, a significantly higher proportion of Aboriginal respondents were planning to seek employment with the Commonwealth government or in local government (34% as against 21%), perhaps indicating a wish to continue in comparable work but with greater job security.

5 Conclusion: Achieving the 2% Target

5.1 Barriers to achieving the Target

Using an open-ended response, survey participants were asked –

What would you say are the major barriers to reaching the 2% Aboriginal employment target in the SA public sector?

There were strong trends in their responses, and these reflect the recruitment and retention issues identified in *Tables 3 and 5*. They have been summarised, in order of frequency, in *Table 9*.

Table 9: Barriers to achieving the 2% Aboriginal employment Target in the SA public sector

Barriers to the 2% target (in order of frequency)

Need for more culturally inclusive application, selection and induction processes. This includes strategies that address low levels of confidence and self-esteem, and enhanced information about and promotion of the SA public sector

Need to increase the cultural competence of the non-Aboriginal workforce, in order to recruit and retain Indigenous employees

Insufficient support provided to Aboriginal applicants and employees, including skilled mentors and coaches. This support needs to begin prior to selection process, to extend to early phase of employment and continue as part of career development.

Insufficient long term, secure employment available. Aboriginal employees tend to receive short term contracts

Insufficient commitment on the part of many in senior management. Includes lack of use of Aboriginal Employment Program for recruitment.

Need for increased attention to Aboriginal employees' professional and career development

Need to address lack of formal qualifications by many Aboriginal applicants/employees by providing more training and development opportunities to employees and taking into account Aboriginal-specific expertise that does not necessarily translate into recognised credentials

Need to address racism, discrimination and bullying by some public sector employees

In their own words, here are some of the barriers identified.

Need for ongoing secure employment

Aboriginal people are usually put on contracts and aren't given on-going positions so at the end of their contract they will most likely leave.

Short term contracts or part time positions as the only choice for Aboriginal people seeking jobs (limited ongoing positions).

Ageing population not retiring and men in cardigans with archaic values.

Aboriginal traineeships ... [not] leading to ongoing employment.

Aboriginal employees NEED permanent positions to sustain a good life outside of work in the belief that they have security in work.

Many Indigenous staff are on contracts, not many have ongoing positions. Contracted staff count in the target but they need permanent jobs.

More permanent positions to enable stability for employees, to encourage workers that there is opportunity to work within [the]SA Public service for a long term period, this sets the employee to look at their long term future eg buying a house get ahead in life etc.

Commitment of senior management

Agencies not using the AEP register, lack of support from Executive down to HR in employing Aboriginal people.

Changing people's mind set. People are not prepared to change the way they recruit in their departments; they should be using the AEP and they don't.

Lack of commitment by Managers in SA Public Sector to utilise current positions to employ Aboriginal staff - may think they have to create new positions.

Coordinated commitment from agencies across the board to a broad scope of employment opportunities [is needed].

More support & commitment (not just in words, but actions also) from the top of departments for an increase & better practices regarding Indigenous recruitment, retention & employment.

Lack of real desire by departments or units to do this. Executive support the concept - however the implementation does not seem to match (it gets lost because the people implementing do not value the idea).

Professional and career development opportunities

Because you assume that all Aboriginal people can do some form of clerical work and you only concentrate on youth- it has to be broader.

The lack of positive structured training for new employees. It must be understood that a majority of Aboriginal families do not have the background or understanding of the requirements in most employment positions & this needs to be taken into account when training. Even the most basic, appropriate dress can be a problem.

Lack of real opportunities to train and develop workers to have ongoing positions. Too many short term contracts.

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

Aboriginal academic qualifications and skill recognition, and professional development

Lack of entry points for Indigenous people who don't have the required academic qualifications but more than make up for this in experience and cultural knowledge.

Not enough recognition of skills, experience, abilities gained "outside" the tertiary system.

Non-acknowledgement of Aboriginal skills and abilities that are outside the 'normal' skill set.

Increasing the cultural competence of the workforce, and providing flexible, culturally inclusive work environments that address racism and discrimination

A continued awareness of the true history and Aboriginal culture [is needed].

Ignorance towards Aboriginal culture and the employment of Aboriginal people.

Inflexibility of the public service to accommodate Indigenous people's issues that affect them daily. Also the formal structures put Indigenous people off.

HR areas within departments that are not culturally sensitive or appropriate, & who don't bother to use the resources or tools available (such as Indigenous HR staff or the AEP) to them regarding Indigenous employees or recruitment - being ignorant and having some positions just as 'token' positions.

Lack of understanding relating to cultural and social issues faced by Aboriginal people today. Not wanting to change the way things are done.

Lack of knowledge of our culture and judgmental attitudes.

Systemic racism and how poorly it is dealt with by managers and HR. - lack of system change.

Working environment is still uninviting to Aboriginal people - policies and systems still try to put a square peg in a round hole.

The importance of support, and supported learning and development

Dept not understanding the close connections between work and personal life and appropriate supports.

Do not have supportive learning environments to help develop Aboriginal staff.

I think Indigenous people need to feel that they will be supported by other Indigenous workers in the sector especially when they first enter it, and be evaluated and given training by Indigenous people and made to feel proud of their achievements within their work roles.

Also I think that more Indigenous people should be encouraged by other Indigenous people and be given better self esteem about themselves, that they can achieve anything they put their minds to, and that they will be given support and training within their positions to be able to achieve goals for them.

Lack of support and made to feel welcome; lack of understanding of the core business.

Mentors or coaches available for existing employees to encourage them to study or give feedback about their personal growth.

Enhanced recruitment processes

Having Aboriginal people who are work ready, in terms of their own social and emotional well-being.

I think every person that registers with Aboriginal employment should get a service to help with their resume and also interview techniques so that they can show their skills and attributes appropriately and be considered properly for the positions they are applying for. I think this should be a specific project funded by the government and not be taken out of funding for employment programs which they may need for future training.

More effort in making Aboriginal people feel confident in applying. The application process.

Needs to be more encouragement for people, informal inductions - before people apply for jobs so that they know what they are up against.

The way that job and person specifications need to be written up when applying for a job, or if you feel confident enough to even apply.

The 2% Target

2% still isn't a high enough target.

Because it is just a figure and looking at the past it won't be touched, or touched with a lack of follow up.

Believe the Target can be reached - it may not necessarily equate to "real" long term jobs though, ... [due to] contract employment and traineeships etc - job satisfaction and opportunity are retention issues which may undermine sustainability of the Target.

2% will be achieved but mainly consisting of entry level appointments.

It should not be limited to 2%. Recognise departments that achieve/surpass the benchmark.

5.2 Strategies that appear to be helping to reach the Target

A considerable amount of work has been undertaken by the SA public sector in order to address the significant challenge involved in creating culturally inclusive workplaces. Perhaps the most difficult obstacle is changing attitudes that may be based on ignorance of Aboriginal history and culture or that are due to a resistance to change, racist beliefs and a tradition that reflects a single predominant culture. The survey asked participants (again with an open-ended response format) to identify any strategies in place that appear to be helpful in reaching the target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the SA public sector.

Table 10 summarises the responses made, in order of frequency. Again, strong trends were evident and these are captured in that Table.

The two most frequently identified strategies were the **Aboriginal Employment Program** and the various programs that support **Aboriginal apprenticeships, traineeships, cadetships and scholarships** (with particular mention made of the Department of Health scholarship initiative). Throughout the survey, there has been strong support for the Aboriginal Employment Program but with some qualifying this because they believe the service could provide a wider range of support (if funded to do so). There was also a very small minority who were critical of the Program.

Aboriginal Employment programs do a good job of referring clients however I think they need to look at the simple points of why their clients may not be getting the interviews which is a good C.V, being supplied with necessary training and providing for this for their clients.... Don't get me wrong though employment programs are great. If it was not for them I would not have received any of the training I have had or ever had the opportunity to work in the public sector. I just think they may need more funding and specific strategies in place for their clients so they can help secure them employment.

These were followed by the provision of **support** through mentoring, Aboriginal networking and work shadowing, together with **agency-specific Aboriginal employment strategies** (with particular mention made of the Department of Education and Children's Services and the former Department of Administrative and Information Services), and the recently released **Cultural Inclusion Framework** (however, there were almost as many who view this cynically).

... each agency needs to have their own recruitment and retention strategy to achieve their target.

I don't know what the "Cultural Framework" is but anything addressing cultural values is a step in the right direction.

Too early to say if the Cultural Framework is going to make a difference at all.

... the Cultural Framework what a laugh even our department doesn't use it.

In my dept, we are continually reminding managers to access these programs, and they haven't even looked at the Cultural Framework.

Less frequently cited were the **provision of learning and career development opportunities**, mainly because of the need for their wider application.

It would be good to have more training on the job/study combined courses available to Indigenous staff - for e.g. departments liaising with the Unis to develop courses like Social Work with staff who work in relevant areas such as Families SA, to work & combine studies & receive credits for the course, depending on the work they have completed.

I do not know if there has been adequate resource allocation against... learning and development.

Table 10: Strategies in place that assist meeting the target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the SA public sector

Strategies in place that assist meeting the 2% target
The Aboriginal Employment Program
The provision of Aboriginal Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Cadetships, Scholarships
The provision of support through mentoring, work shadowing and networking
Agency-specific Aboriginal Employment Strategies (those mentioned were DECS, and the former DAIS)
The recently released Cultural Inclusion Framework is expected to assist.
The provision of learning and career development opportunities, although these need to be increased to be more effective

5.3 Strategies for achieving the Target

Again, using an open-ended question format, those surveyed were asked to identify strategies that can address the barriers that prevent achievement of the 2% Aboriginal employment target. In answering the question - *What strategies would you recommend for overcoming those barriers (to achieving the 2% target)?* - there were strong trends that are summarised in Table 11. These support the findings about factors that encourage retention in the SA public sector (refer Table 6) and recruitment (refer Table 4).

It can be seen from Table 11 that the two most frequently recommended strategies involve **capacity building** - of Aboriginal employees in terms of **professional and career development** and of non-Aboriginal employees in terms of **cultural competence**. These are followed by the provision of **support** of various kinds (including mentoring, coaching and networking), **re-designing recruitment processes** to be culturally inclusive and providing more opportunities for **secure, ongoing employment**.

Other strategies recommended involve enabling Aboriginal people to design the strategies needed to address recruitment and retention issues, avoiding tokenistic employment and aiming to achieve 'critical mass', increasing the commitment to and accountability of senior management for Aboriginal employment outcomes, and acknowledging the expertise of Aboriginal applicants and employees without relying only on formal qualifications.

Table 11: Strategies to address barriers to achieving the target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the SA public sector

Strategies to address barriers to the 2% target
Enhanced provision of training to increase cultural competence (eg beyond once-off cultural awareness raising training) among non-Aboriginal staff, including knowledge of Indigenous history and issues
Enhanced provision of training, professional and career development opportunities to Indigenous employees, including increased use of scholarships, cadetships, traineeships etc
Guaranteed provision of support through mentors, Talking Circles, coaching, Aboriginal networking and supported information through the various stages of employment (application through to retirement, including exit survey use)
A re-designing of recruitment processes (application, selection, induction) to make them more culturally inclusive.
Increased provision of on-going, secure employment and the reduced provision of short term contracts of work
Improved promotion of the public sector to Aboriginal people using Aboriginal networks and information sources. Advertising of vacancies through Aboriginal networks and sources. Includes stronger development of working links with Aboriginal stakeholders and communities.
Ensuring that Aboriginal people design strategies to address recruitment and retention barriers and that they manage their implementation.
Recruiting to achieve 'critical mass' and to avoid tokenism in the employment of Aboriginal people.
Ensuring commitment and accountability by senior management for Aboriginal employment outcomes.
Acknowledging the expertise of Aboriginal people without relying solely on formal qualifications that reflect non-Indigenous standards of recognition

In their own words, here are examples of the strategies suggested, including more specific examples of these using the categories in *Table 11*.

Building the capacity of the non-Aboriginal workforce regarding cultural competence

Appropriate training for non Aboriginal employees on Aboriginal issues, not a basic colonisation history but the real history, with real hard facts, hard hitting straight to the point facts and issues.

Compulsory Cultural Awareness - ongoing/refresher courses. Change embedded cultures of organisations, change mindsets of non-Aboriginal people.

Compulsory Cultural Awareness training for all SA Public Service employees at all levels - plus intensive C.A. training for all HR areas - therefore making staff accountable for any future actions or comments concerning Indigenous staff or employees.

Aboriginal HR specialist in each department with equal status to other senior HR officers.

If you are treated fairly, valued and respected in a workplace the chances are you will stay there for a long time.

Building the capacity of the Aboriginal workforce through professional and career development

Be creative about ongoing learning in the workplace, acknowledge people have different learning habits.

Greater career development planning for each Aboriginal employee - with a path that leads to senior position.

Structured career development plans facilitated and opportunities created. Also the development of a structured ATSI career development strategy that includes support for fulltime-study scholarships, placement options etc.

Ensuring that support processes are embedded across all stages of employment

Need to highly support Aboriginal workers in first year and intermittently throughout employment.

I think a lot of the time it may be underlying fear within the individual that they can not do the job so the appropriate training provided initially, and also appropriate evaluation of the person to give them an idea of what they may want to do with their lives and where their career may lie within the public service, and the steps they need to take to achieve their goals.... because once they come they may be pleasantly surprised with the opportunities available to them and the places they can go within the public service.

Mentors, talking circles.

Re-designing recruitment processes so that they are more culturally inclusive

Let people apply for positions in a non-threatening way by 'doing' rather than interviews.

Encourage non-Indigenous to be involved in the recruitment process, by this I mean - not taking over!

Making positions for work experience for Indigenous people, and letting the schools know that it is available and then when they get there don't have them just doing things like photo copying.

Provide people with information about our business prior to commencement date, induction needs to happen during the first week, not 3 months later or when the next intake is.

Re-write J&Ps that are inviting and use sensible words, not ramble on about nothing.

Providing ongoing, secure employment

People on all levels are afraid to talk, afraid to performance manage, and afraid to rock the boat for fear of their contracts not being extended, especially in light of too many excess permanent staff. It's a complex issue.

Where I currently work the environment is excellent for Indigenous employees – you're valued & your contribution & experience/advice is listened to & valued. I would love to stay on but am only on contract, yet management constantly say that more Indigenous people within the office would be great, not just for Indigenous specific positions - which is great, because I would feel just as comfortable working in this office in a mainstream position as I am working in a Indigenous specific position.

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

We have a low Status and Health Standards in Australia / South Australia and having a job gives people hope, pride and helps change lifestyles.

Promoting the public sector and employment opportunities in culturally inclusive ways

Aboriginal people need to make a presence in the workplace by say holding an event that gets attention or by creating an artwork that gets exhibited where it would get the most attention.

Community advertisement, local papers, advertiser going out to the communities and spreading the information by word of mouth.

Showcasing successful programs.

Self promote Indigenous Staff in commercials in a time slot that the youth can see & within the organisation.

Departments should hold employment stalls at major Aboriginal community events (Aboriginal sports carnival) with guaranteed follow up and support if a person signs up. They should feel like they are connected to the any information being put out regarding jobs.

Aboriginal parameters for and management of strategy development

Indigenous peoples should be involved with setting the standards for which they are employed. We should have the capacity to make and enforce decisions that affects the employment of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous people should be able to access resources and control the distribution of resources for employment opportunities. The Indigenous people should be able to define the parameters for discussion, determine the ideology framework within which debate takes place, that is, they define the problem and therefore determine the solutions that will be considered.

Aboriginal people need to be able to deal with Aboriginal business in an Aboriginal way.

Indigenous people to be included at the very beginning of any Indigenous initiatives, not just as a ring in advisor.

We need to rely on our culture to bring change and champion change starting within ourselves in spite of the dominant racist environment we live in. We, as Aboriginal people, have the solutions to the challenges we face and as a resilient people we can implement these solutions.

Achieving 'critical mass' and avoiding tokenistic employment

More than one Aboriginal person in the work place. One employee is still a token and it is hard for that person to change policies. There needs to be an authority or agency that mentors or visits the single employee and advocates on their behalf.

Placing Aboriginal employees in a team with one or more other employees (especially in the initial stages) this will give them appropriate support.

Offering opportunities of employment across whole of department or whole of agency and not necessarily "Aboriginal" specific pigeon holing - may need secondments to broaden skills base and career path development.

How long does a 'special project' go for?? It encourages tokenism positions, not long term real employment prospects, where Indigenous people can have a real go at a job or career. Tokenism positions should not be allowed, if only to make that department look better.

Ensuring commitment and accountability by senior management

Link this strategy and Cultural Inclusion Framework into each Directors/Managers J&P as an outcome.

Performance targets tied to CEOs' contracts.

Senior executives being made to pursue agreed targets to create a more amenable work environment for Aboriginal workers.

Developing culturally inclusive approaches to skill recognition and qualifications

Acknowledgement of these skills and abilities, also providing a 'common language' between understanding of skill sets.

Take on people who are not as educated as some of our population, who can learn on the job skills training, along with Indigenous people who have been educated.

Other strategies suggested

Establish a cross government employment taskforce with each agency obliged to report to cabinet on employment outcomes.

5.4 Concluding comments

The people who responded to the DDF Project survey have been extremely generous with their thoughtful input, and the amount of input, they have provided (particularly for the open-ended questions which are time consuming to complete). Despite the number of surveys and other forms of consultation in which they have participated, often without being able to see the benefit, they have agreed to provide feedback to the Don Dunstan Foundation. Several have thanked us for the opportunity, while several are cynical about its usefulness (a reasonable view given the degree of 'consultation-fatigue' many experience and the lack of observable changes following repeated consultation).

I have answered all types of survey involving Nungas over a twenty + year period and I would really like to see something more positive to come out of a survey like this.

Thank you, for implementing this survey! We hope that you can help make the changes that are so needed for our people.

This is just another survey (pick our brains AGAIN), like previous, an enormous amount of information is given, and it turns out maybe 10% (if we're lucky) of anything positive is put to use or actually implemented. ... Why is it, that I sit with my elders trying to deal with the same issues that they were 30 - 40 years ago continuously. It isn't any wonder my brothers sisters uncles aunties say 'WHATS THE USE' ...

The feedback provided indicates that while the public sector as a whole is regarded as a place where Aboriginal people can experience racism and discrimination, the immediate workplace is one where Aboriginal people are treated with sensitivity by both other employees and managers. That this exists means that a strong foundation exists from which to develop cultural capability by filling a significant knowledge gap and further developing cross-cultural skills. This includes increasing the knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history and issues as part of a wider strategy to increase the cultural competence of the public sector non-Aboriginal workforce.

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

Despite the negative perceptions held of the public service as an entity, Aboriginal people are seeking long term involvement with the sector, partly because of their motivation to contribute positively to Aboriginal communities, and partly because of their own need for secure employment and the benefits this brings (for example, ongoing opportunities for

professional and career development). The trend to provide more short term contracts of work and less long term employment is seen as one of the major barriers to achieving the 2% target in a way that is sustainable, and therefore, meaningful.

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

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

There have been numerous equity-promoting strategies developed by the South Australian and other Australian public services and while the intentions are positive, their implementation is often compromised. In part this is a reflection of the sheer difficulty involved in achieving access and equity and cultural inclusion goals. In part it is also due to the commitment to those strategies not being shared by all and by the resistance of some to any change in the *status quo*. As one respondent so accurately noted -

There are lots of strategies but often they are not implemented correctly or not at all.

Setting a target is a positive step because it calls agencies to account against a measurable outcome. However, it is important to ensure that sufficient resources exist to meet that target, and survey respondents have commented that this does not appear to be occurring.

Change of this magnitude takes time because of the need to educate, to change attitudes and to move away from entrenched beliefs, practices and traditions. It can be discouraging for those who have championed change to see their efforts blocked or slowed, and to fail to meet the goals set in place. One person pointed this out in their concluding comments, saying -

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

APPENDIX I

DON DUNSTAN FOUNDATION SURVEY OF ABORIGINAL EMPLOYEES

About the Don Dunstan Foundation Project

The South Australian Strategic Plan 2004 set a target to increase the employment of Aboriginal employees in the public sector from 1.2% to 2% by 2009. The Don Dunstan Foundation is supporting a project to identify barriers to achieving that goal and examples of good practice. It has the overall goal to –

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

The Project is being undertaken by the Australian Institute for Social Research at the University of Adelaide and is being managed by a Reference Group involving the following people –

Mr David Rathman, Executive Director, Aboriginal Employment & Education Strategies, DFEEST/DECS

Mr Andrew Smith, Principal Consultant, Indigenous Workforce Strategy, Dept Premier & Cabinet

Ms Joyleen Thomas, Principal Aboriginal Cultural Consultant, Corporate Services, DTF

Prof Roger Thomas, Director, Wilto Yerlo, University of Adelaide

Ms Margaret Wallace, Don Dunstan Foundation Board Member

Ms Sonia Waters, Social Inclusion Unit

Mr George Lewkowicz, Executive Director, Don Dunstan Foundation.

This survey is one of many parts of the project methodology. In addition the project has undertaken a review of the literature, interviewed a number of Aboriginal public sector employees (past and present), met with key Aboriginal networks and advisory groups in the public sector and re-analysed SA public sector workforce data. The project is to complete during 2007.

What is the purpose of this survey?

It is vital that the research team gets information from Indigenous employees. The survey explores a number of issues that have become evident from interviews and the review of the literature.

How long will it take to complete?

Depending on how much additional information you want to add to the questions, it should only take about **15 minutes**.

How was I selected to participate?

Mr Andrew Smith, Principal Consultant, Indigenous Workforce Strategy, Public Sector Workforce Division, Department of the Premier and Cabinet has kindly offered to distribute it to members of the *SA Public Sector Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees Network*, on behalf of the Don Dunstan Foundation.

Who is conducting the survey?

The Australian Institute for Social Research and GISCA at the University of Adelaide.

Will my answers be treated confidentially?

Yes, and they will be seen only by the research team.

Can my responses identify me?

No the response will be written up to show overall trends and will be structured to de-identify individuals or small agencies that can be recognised.

Who can I contact for further information about the survey?

You can call the Project Manager, Dr Kate Barnett from the Australian Institute for Social Research at the University of Adelaide, on 8303 3391 or you can email her at kate.barnett@adelaide.edu.au

When is the survey due?

We have a very brief timeframe, so need your response by **FRIDAY JUNE 29TH** 2007, or earlier if you are able to do.

What happens when the survey is completed?

We will share the findings with the *SA Public Sector Indigenous Employees Network* who will release them to you.

SECTION A: SOME BACKGROUND ABOUT YOU

1 What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

2 What is your age?

- Under 25 years
- 25-34 years
- 35-44 years
- 45-54 years
- 55-64 years
- 65 years or older

3 What is your current level of classification?

- Trainee
- ASO 1
- ASO 2
- ASO 3
- ASO 4
- ASO 5
- ASO 6
- ASO 7
- MAS 2
- MAS 3
- OPS 2
- OPS 3
- OPS 5
- PSO 1
- EXA
- Other (please specify)

4 Which of these best describes your employment status?

- Short term/contract position
- Contract of one year or more
- Permanent

5 How long have you been in your current position?

- Less than one year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- More than 20 years

6 How long have you been working in the SA public sector? *(if you have moved in and out of the sector, please give the total years)*

- Less than one year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- More than 20 years

7 Are you working in an Indigenous-specific unit?

- Yes
- No

8 Is your role to work specifically with Indigenous people or on Indigenous-specific issues (eg as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer)?

- Yes
- No

9 Which agency or department do you work for? *(optional)*

.....

PART B: RECRUITMENT

10 When you first applied to become an employee of the SA Public Service which of these reasons applied? *(you may choose more than one response)*

- Better salary than my previous job
- Better salary prospects generally
- Security of employment

- Conditions of employment are better than private sector
- Conditions of employment are better than non government/not-for-profit/community services sector
- Needed work and the position was available
- To make a difference for Indigenous South Australians
- Career development prospects seemed better than in other sectors
- Conditions of employment (eg flexible hours) suited family responsibilities
- Other (please specify)

11 Looking back on how you were recruited, what did or would have made the process easier? (you may choose more than one response)

- Being given sufficient information about the position
- Being given sufficient information about the SA public sector
- Having an Indigenous person on the Selection Panel
- Having people on the Selection Panel who were sensitive to Indigenous people and/or issues
- Knowing someone in the unit where the position was based (to get informal/background information)
- Other (please specify)

12 Based on your own experience, and/or that of other Indigenous employees, what sort of recruitment strategies should be in place to encourage Indigenous people to work in the SA Public Service?

13 What do you think are the main barriers that prevent or discourage Indigenous people from seeking work in the SA Public Service?

PART C: RETENTION

14 What are the factors that will, or could, stop you from continuing to work in the SA public sector? *(you may choose more than one response)*

- End of contract
- I would like to pursue opportunities outside of the SA public sector
- Family/caregiving commitments
- Work-life-balance difficulties
- Higher salaries outside of the SA public sector
- Better career development prospects outside of the SA public sector
- I want to study
- I want to retire
- I intend to start a family
- I will be taking voluntary redundancy
- Lack of job satisfaction
- Lack of personal support network in the work environment
- I feel under-valued
- I feel marginalised/excluded because I am Indigenous
- Lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture by non-Indigenous employees
- Lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture by non-Indigenous managers
- It is assumed that I can only contribute to issues that relate to Indigenous people
- My knowledge, skills and expertise are under-utilised
- I experience considerable amounts of discrimination because I am Indigenous
- I experience considerable amounts of harassment/bullying because I am Indigenous
- I experience considerable amounts of racism because I am Indigenous
- There are not enough other Indigenous employees to make me feel secure or supported
- Being made to feel that my position was not earned or based on merit and instead exists because of positive discrimination for Indigenous people
- Other (please explain)

15 What are the factors that encourage you to continue working in the SA public sector *(you may choose more than one response)*

- Being employed on an ongoing or permanent basis

- Flexible working conditions
- Salary
- Opportunities for training and development
- Opportunities for career development
- Opportunities to use my skills, knowledge or expertise
- A workplace where I feel valued
- A workplace where I am supported
- Having a good manager or supervisor
- Having a reasonable workload
- Having a chance to make a contribution to other Indigenous people
- Having a chance to make a contribution to society generally
- Being provided with regular feedback
- Being treated fairly and without discrimination
- Being valued
- Being valued because I am Indigenous
- Working with managers who understand (or try to) Aboriginal culture
- Working with employees who understand (or try to) Aboriginal culture
- Being part of an Indigenous employee network
- Having a mentor or coach
- Having access to special leave for indigenous ceremonies and/or community/family obligations
- Other (please explain)

16 Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements (*choose one option only*)

- 1 = Strongly agree
- 2 = Agree
- 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 = Disagree
- 5 = Strongly disagree
- 6 = Don't know

Statement	Agree		neither	Disagree		DK
	1	2		3	4	
Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees have the same opportunities for <i>training and development</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees have the same opportunities for <i>promotion and career advancement</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees have the same opportunities for acting in positions or roles that <i>advance their career prospects</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in my <i>work unit</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in my <i>agency/Department</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in the SA <i>public sector generally</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
As an Indigenous employee in the SA public sector I have been able to contribute positively to the Indigenous South Australian community.	1	2	3	4	5	6
In my experience, non-Indigenous <i>employees</i> in the SA public sector have a reasonable understanding of Aboriginal culture.	1	2	3	4	5	6
In my experience, non-Indigenous <i>managers</i> in the SA public sector have a reasonable understanding of Aboriginal culture.	1	2	3	4	5	6
In my experience, Indigenous employees experience racist behaviour	1	2	3	4	5	6
Most of my <i>colleagues</i> (in my work unit) work sensitively with Indigenous employees.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Most of the <i>managers</i> (in my work unit) work sensitively with Indigenous employees.	1	2	3	4	5	6

17 **Given the choice, for how long would you like to work in the SA public sector?**

- Less than one year
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years

- More than 20 years
- Unsure

PART D: ACHIEVING THE 2% TARGET

18 What would you say are the major barriers to reaching the 2% Indigenous employment target in the SA public sector?

19 What strategies would you recommend for overcoming those barriers?

20 Are there any strategies that seem to be helping to reach the target? (eg Aboriginal Employment Program, Aboriginal Traineeships, the new Cultural Framework)

21 Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey.