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

Summary Report

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Project Purpose

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

Project Methodology

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

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

Project Findings

Aboriginal employment outcomes

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

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

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

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

- type of appointment;
- level of appointment; and
- retention as well as recruitment.

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

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

Type of appointment

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

A key finding of this Project has been that Aboriginal public sector employees are committed to a long term future with their employer and are frustrated by the limited availability of ongoing employment opportunities. While Aboriginal employment outcomes are increasing from a quantitative perspective, this does not necessarily imply that quality of employment is being achieved.

Level of appointment

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

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

Focus of employment

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

Retention and recruitment

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

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

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

It is likely that Aboriginal employees will face a range of family care-giving responsibilities that are not necessarily shared by non-Aboriginal employees, and that their younger profile is likely to bring greater work-family-balance issues. Health data tell a story of significant disadvantage of Aboriginal Australians relative to non-Aboriginal Australians, and one of the Project's key findings has been that the unique demands placed on Aboriginal employees in balancing the often contradictory expectations of their community and the public sector creates stress that can lead to 'burn-out'. The importance of continuing with a range of support mechanisms to increase the quality of the employment experience for Aboriginal employees, and continued effort to create culturally inclusive workplaces that promote work-life-balance is highlighted by these findings.

The quality of the Aboriginal employment experience

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

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

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

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

A distinction has been drawn in their ratings between behaving with sensitivity and knowledge of Aboriginal history and 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. The most negative rating was applied to the experience of racist and discriminatory behaviour, a finding that was supported by the public sector's *Workforce Perspectives Survey 2006* and by the DDF Project interviews with Aboriginal employees, which identified as a key barrier a tradition of systemic exclusion (rather than overtly racist behaviour) that will take considerable time and effort to overcome.

Barriers to achieving the 2% Target and the Current Strategic Response in the SA Public Sector

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

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

Negative perceptions and attitudes

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

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

Negative perceptions held by Aboriginal people have two strands. The first is based on the past role of government (and therefore, of its public service) in abusing its authority in relation to Aboriginal Australians, originating with British colonisation, and including the role played in relation to the *Stolen Generation*. The second is based on perceptions of the public service being regarded as overly bureaucratic and involving excessive administrative work, and being too formal in its work style. Compounding this view is the reputation for under-developed cultural competence based on the reported experiences of Aboriginal employees. Taken together, these

perceptions form a barrier to the recruitment of Aboriginal people into the public sector.

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

Under-developed workforce cultural competence and culturally inclusive workplaces

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

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

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

Project findings indicate that under-developed cultural competence has multiple effects, impairing the provision of flexible working conditions that support Aboriginal employees in meeting family and cultural obligations and underpinning discriminatory and racist behaviour by some members of the non-Aboriginal workforce. It also limits the ability of senior management to commit to achieving a culturally inclusive workplace and to lead by example in doing so. The likelihood of Aboriginal public sector employees experiencing racism and discrimination, as well as bullying and harassment has been confirmed by South Australian and Australian public sector workforce surveys and by international research findings.

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

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

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

Gaps in educational attainment

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

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

Project survey participants expressed strong support for these pathway and capacity building strategies - the *Aboriginal Employment Program* and the various programs that support Aboriginal apprenticeships, traineeships, and particularly, cadetships and scholarships. Traineeships are a key pathway into the public sector but the Project identified widespread concern that they do not lead to ongoing employment yet are

counted in measuring progress to the 2% Target. Both the Project's literature review and survey of Aboriginal employees identified structured work experience as a means of introducing young Aboriginal people to public sector employment. This provides an earlier point of intervention than other recruitment strategies and those consulted called for wider application of this strategy.

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

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

Work-life-balance challenges

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

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

Under-developed culturally inclusive recruitment processes

This barrier has two components:

- o The need for wider use of culturally relevant methods to promote the public sector to Aboriginal people rather than relying solely on traditional recruitment approaches such as, advertising through non-Aboriginal media outlets.

o The need to continue efforts to make the recruitment and induction processes more culturally inclusive by ensuring that applicants are informed about employment in the sector and the process of application, and supporting them during the processes of application, selection and induction.

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

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

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

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

Under-developed support mechanisms

Having Aboriginal employees as visible members of the public sector workforce sends a positive message to Aboriginal communities. However, this positive outcome brings its own costs as many Aboriginal workers are placed in the role of straddling their own communities' needs and those of their public sector employing organisation. They can be expected to represent all Aboriginal peoples even though it is possible only to represent themselves. There are often high expectations placed on them in terms of providing role models and mentors to other Aboriginal employees, and in providing time to be official representatives on a range of committees and other

structures. These create significant time and personal pressures that are rarely acknowledged in public sector support strategies, despite being continuously identified by Aboriginal people.

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

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

Insufficient ongoing employment opportunities

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

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

Insufficient use of exit strategies and succession planning

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

Existing provision to address these barriers

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

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

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

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

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

Cultural competence can be seen as developed in two mutually reinforcing ways – by formal training and by the direct experience of working with people from a diversity of cultures. However, the relatively low numbers of Aboriginal employees (especially those working outside of Aboriginal-specific units or services) means that the opportunity for developing cultural competence is restricted, as is the opportunity to develop a critical mass of Aboriginal employees. Strategies that could be pursued to

achieve critical mass include recruitment in small groups (including traineeships, apprenticeships and cadetships) rather than as individuals and clustering Aboriginal employees wherever possible. These would augment existing, positively evaluated support strategies such as, mentoring, buddying and the provision of Aboriginal networking opportunities.

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

There was also support for the recently introduced requirement that the filling of public service positions be based on re-deployee availability followed by Aboriginal Employment program availability prior to advertising. Concerns were expressed by those interviewed about the appointment of a non-Aboriginal head of the Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation Division. This did not imply criticism of the current appointee, but was seen as a sending a mixed message about the South Australian Government's commitment to placing Aboriginal people in decision-making roles and was likened to appointing a male to head the Office of Status of Women. Recent changes involving the former Office of Public Employment were considered by some to threaten the ongoing evolution of Aboriginal workforce development.

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

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

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

Meeting the 2% Target: Project Conclusions

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

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

Not Aboriginal-specific
o   Office of Public Employment, 8.5%
o   Carclew Youth Arts Centre Incorporated, 7.5%
o   Northern and Far Western Regional Health Service, 6.3%
o   Department of Families and Communities, 5.6%
o   Correctional Services, 3.4%
o   HomeStart Finance, 3.4%
o   Legal Services Commission, 3.2%
o   Wakefield Regional Health Service, 2.6%
o   Department of the Premier and Cabinet, 2.5%
o   Department of Health, 2.3%
o   Courts Administration Authority, 2.3%
o   Environment and Heritage, 2.1%

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

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

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

o   An *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Unit* located in the Department of Premier and Cabinet to support the development, implementation and ongoing evaluation of the Strategy.

- o An *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Advisory Group*, supported by and providing support to the Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Unit.
- o The employment of *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Liaison Officers* who would advise and work with agency workforce planning teams.

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

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

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1
The Target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the South Australian public sector should be accompanied by sub-targets that measure quality as well as quantity of employment outcomes. These would apply to –

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

Recommendation 2
Existing strategies to increase workforce cultural competence should be continued with greater attention to developing knowledge of Aboriginal culture and history. Cross-cultural training should be designed to develop skills as well as raise awareness and sensitivity. This training should be ongoing.

Recommendation 3

Training to enhance cultural competence should be extended to include specific attention to the role of managers in promoting culturally secure work environments that actively discourage racism and discrimination. Strategies should also be developed to further encourage Aboriginal employees to report experiences of racism and discrimination.

Recommendation 4
Greater attention should be paid to recruitment and work placement that achieves 'critical mass' for Aboriginal employees.

Recommendation 5
Recruitment and retention strategies should reflect the importance placed by Aboriginal employees on having the opportunity to enhance the well-being of Aboriginal South Australians, and on having their expertise valued and utilised more effectively.

Recommendation 6
Existing strategies designed to build pathways for Aboriginal people into the South Australian public sector should be continued, and a stronger emphasis placed on an early intervention approach involving developing pathways from secondary school onwards. Aboriginal traineeships and apprenticeships linked to ongoing employment in the public sector, and increased numbers of Aboriginal cadetships and scholarships should also be provided.

Recommendation 7
A specific communication strategy should be developed in collaboration with Aboriginal community representatives to promote the South Australian public sector as an employer to Aboriginal people. This strategy should address information gaps about how the sector operates and what is expected of its employees. The strategy should have multiple components and communication techniques, including word of mouth through trusted intermediaries, including existing Aboriginal public sector employees.

Recommendation 8
Recruitment processes targeting Aboriginal people should include information sessions that provide them with an informed approach to applying for public sector employment.

Recommendation 9
Culturally inclusive processes, including informed application and interview preparation, user-friendly wording of Job and Specification statements, and Aboriginal membership of selection panels, should be part of established HR policy and practice.

Recommendation 10
Existing support strategies (particularly mentoring, 'buddying' and the provision of opportunities for structured Aboriginal networking) should be continued and extended, and additional strategies should be developed to assist Aboriginal

employees in meeting the specific challenges arising from being representatives of the public sector and of their own communities.

Recommendation 11
A strategy should be developed by the South Australian public sector to ensure that current caps on full time equivalent positions and the reducing availability of ongoing appointments do not reduce the quantity and quality of Aboriginal employment.

Recommendation 12
Succession planning should be established in relation to existing Aboriginal employees and exit interviews should be conducted with all Aboriginal employees who leave the South Australian public sector, in order to continuously improve future recruitment and retention strategies.

Recommendation 13
An *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy* should be planned and implemented to complement the *Indigenous Employment Strategy* and the Target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the South Australian public sector. This strategy should is supported by the establishment of an *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Unit,* an *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Advisory Group,* and a network of *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy Liaison Officers.*

Recommendation 14
A regular survey of South Australian public sector Aboriginal employees should be undertaken by an external, credible source and this feedback should be considered part of the accountability process associated with meeting the 2% Target, and with informing the *Indigenous Employment Strategy* and the proposed *Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy*.