



Career Trackers - Closing the Gap with Indigenous Students

A Strengths Based Approach

Despite various government policies and initiatives, there is a persistent gap in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Australia. Progress has been slow, and significant disparities remain.

Recent 'Closing the Gap' reports clearly show that supply driven, service delivery models of the past are not working. The report warns that State and Territory governments are still making decisions that exacerbate disadvantage for Indigenous Australians three years after a landmark national agreement on Closing the Gap.

The [Productivity Commission](#)'s review of the 2020 national agreement says some governments continue to make choices that "disregard or contradict" their commitments: "Current implementation raises questions about whether governments have fully grasped the scale of change required to their systems, operations and ways of working to deliver the unprecedented shift they have committed to," it said.

Too many government agencies are consulting with Indigenous people on a pre-determined solution rather than "collaborating on the problem and co-designing a solution". But while governments grapple with these issues, [CareerTrackers](#), along with its ecosystem of partner universities and workplaces, has been quietly smashing the educational and employment barriers preventing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from achieving their full potential since 2009.

CareerTrackers internship program has demonstrated that a comprehensive community approach, co-created with students, families, community, universities and partnering employers is, and will always be needed to make a lasting impact and difference.

In a [recent announcement](#) the Hon. Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education, pledged to guarantee degree places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students regardless of geographical location, with the aim of more than doubling the number of Indigenous

students undertaking university degrees from 5,000 to 10,000 places over the coming years.

Under this new initiative, universities have vowed to set aside a specified number of places exclusively for Indigenous students in various academic programs. While the initiative is a significant step forward, if recent history tells us anything, it's that challenges are likely to arise in implementation. The success of CareerTrackers highlights that in order for students to achieve their potential, aspirations and the results that these initiatives seek to achieve is that we must simultaneously address education, employment and strength in culture and identity:

- both the education and employment environments must acknowledge and instill a sense of confidence and pride in identity and cultural understanding - these create benefits for organisational culture, recruitment, retention and individual and collective productivity.
- success in education and success in employment go hand in hand - our experience is that students who gain experience during their studies have greater success and quicker completion of studies
- introducing young people to employment options as young as early high school and before entering tertiary education leads to greater chance of success in tertiary education.

One of the issues faced by many Indigenous students is the lack of cultural relevance in the mainstream curriculum. While efforts are being made in this area, the education system has historically often failed to acknowledge and integrate Indigenous history, culture, and languages, often leading to a lack of engagement.

Strength in Indigenous identity and culture encompasses a diverse range of knowledge and experiences – kinship laws, lore, family, connections to land, sea and community, collective obligations and responsibility, reciprocity. Also, as a result of past removal and other assimilation policies, some may be on a personal identity journey to understand what it means to be Indigenous in this country. On the other hand, Australia's dominant culture emphasises and values independence, self-reliance, and the individual.



CareerTrackers recognises the importance of encouraging a strong sense of identity. Our efforts to prepare students for the world of work also includes incorporating Indigenous perspectives to prepare students for the university and workplace environments they will enter as part of their internship placement. We aim to create more inclusive and relevant learning and workplaces supportive of Indigenous students and their values. Strengthening a student's cultural identity and providing a sense of pride and belonging, positively influences educational and workplace outcomes.

In addition, the [Universities Accord Interim Report](#) calls for increasing the number of university students from underrepresented backgrounds. This aligns with the core mission of CareerTrackers which is supporting growing numbers of students in their journey from the classroom to the boardroom. The CareerTrackers network includes a community of over 1000 experienced Indigenous professionals from over 200 workplaces and 30 universities.

Compared to the average Australian university student, CareerTrackers interns take significantly less time to complete their bachelor degrees. According to the Department of Education figures 42% of university students complete their degree within 4 years, and 62.5% within 6 years. In comparison CareerTrackers interns have a 4-year completion rate of 59% and 6-year rate of 95%.

CareerTrackers programs focus on developing understanding and competency at all stages of student life and career. Matching students with employment partners to create meaningful internships that build skills, knowledge, and connection with other First Nations talent in diverse fields and industries helps students from high school through to university and beyond to progress their individual career goals and achieve their own success.

CareerTrackers challenge the status quo, by asking employers what can workplaces do differently to better support First Nations careers? For students, it is an opportunity to be part of the broader collective – as part of the CareerTrackers network, students are supported and encouraged with mentoring and on-the-job support throughout their internship.

On graduation from the program, CareerTracker interns become part of the CareerTackers alumni community – a powerful network of individual First Nations

achieving their own career success. This provides an opportunity to stay connected with the CareerTrackers program and participate in ongoing career development in the field and employer of their choice. Alumni, drawing on support when needed to become change makers and leaders in their field and inspiring and supporting the future generations.

In closing, the commitment by the Minister and universities to guarantee degree places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students marks a pivotal moment in the journey towards educational equity and inclusion. CareerTrackers, employers and universities all play a key role in providing access to workplaces and educational support where Indigenous students and alumni can excel. Together they can work to strengthen confidence, engagement, enrich cultural identity and sense of pride to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, interns and graduates achieve their ambitions and potential.

CareerTrackers continue to close the gap with Indigenous students using a strengths based and culturally supportive approach, aiming to build a brighter and more equitable future for all Australians and support the careers of the leaders of today and tomorrow.

