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**Indigenous TAFE graduates:  
patterns and implications**

**R.G. Schwab**

**No. 138/1997**



**DISCUSSION PAPER**

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Director, CAEPR  
The Australian National University  
September 1997

# **Indigenous TAFE graduates: patterns and implications**

**R.G. Schwab**

**No. 138/1997**

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## Summary

Technical and Further Education is now recognised as one of the most significant and popular avenues for Indigenous participation in education, yet a reliable statistical portrait of Indigenous participation in TAFE has never been readily available. Even less has been known about the success stories in this sector; the Indigenous students who have completed TAFE studies. The Graduate Outcomes Technical and Further Education Australia 1995 provides for the first time a range of important insights into the experience of Indigenous TAFE graduates, yet the findings of that survey have not been widely accessible and the analysis of data related to the Indigenous graduates has thus far been negligible.

This paper focuses on comparisons between indigenous and non-indigenous TAFE graduates and reveals some important similarities and differences between the two graduate groups. Among the key findings are:

- a wide variation in the distribution of indigenous TAFE graduates, often disproportionate to the indigenous population, among the various States and Territories;
- an over-representation of indigenous graduates among recipients of basic Certificates, coupled with an under-representation among recipients of more specialised Trade Certificates, Advanced Certificates, and Associate Diploma and Diploma qualifications;
- a comparatively higher likelihood of employment among non-indigenous graduates;
- increased employment opportunities for indigenous TAFE graduates when compared to other indigenous people;
- somewhat more indigenous respondents indicated they were looking for full-time work than did non-indigenous graduates;
- relatively low levels of institutional recognition of prior learning for both indigenous and non-indigenous graduates;
- a relatively higher proportion of indigenous graduates who indicated they undertook their course of study for 'personal development' reasons;
- a higher likelihood for indigenous graduates to have received some form of support from an employer or business during the final semester of study; and
- nearly half of the non-indigenous graduates were undertaking further study at the time of the survey.

The survey shows that while it is certainly useful, a TAFE qualification does not provide a guarantee of a job for indigenous people or anyone else. Though the chances of employment increase, there is still a marked lag in indigenous employment in comparison to the experience of non-indigenous graduates. Policy makers will need to have a much better understanding of the individual factors (and their interplay) that are relevant to not only the successful completion of

TAFE courses but the employment outcomes of the individuals involved in order to address this issue. Survey instruments such as the Graduate Outcomes Technical and Further Education Australia 1995 Survey will be useful in that regard but cannot provide all the answers.

One factor that needs to be better understood is the role of employer support in TAFE completion. The survey data suggest the possibility of a link between support and educational success. Policy makers searching for approaches to increasing the success of indigenous TAFE students would benefit from additional insight into the various forms of support currently available to employed indigenous students in urban, rural and remote areas.

One of the most visible differences between indigenous and non-indigenous TAFE graduates was the emphasis placed on TAFE as an avenue for personal development. The educational interests and aspirations of indigenous people are diverse, and that diversity could well create new opportunities to encourage indigenous participation in education. In the educational policy arena it may well be worth adapting the focus of outreach activities for some segments of the indigenous community to highlight not jobs, but personal development.

The study indicates that unemployed indigenous TAFE graduates are more likely to remain in the labour force, searching for work, than their non-indigenous counterparts. There is clearly a solid interest on the part of unemployed graduates in employment and, though their numbers are small, labour market programs targeting this group might have a higher probability of succeeding.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank John Taylor and Boyd Hunter for assistance in understanding some of the complexities of interpreting employment status data. They were kind in providing some guidance though I take responsibility for any errors in my interpretations. I would also like to acknowledge helpful critical comments on an earlier draft of this paper from Beverly Sibthorpe and John Taylor. Finally, I want to express my appreciation to Hilary Bek for her editorial assistance and to Jennifer Braid for her layout and production efforts.



In recent years it has become increasingly apparent that technical and further education institutions are the key provider of post-compulsory education for indigenous Australians. Data collected by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) show that indigenous enrolments in TAFE rose rapidly during the late 1980s and early 1990s so that by 1992 the indigenous participation rate in TAFE courses was almost twice that of other Australians (Commonwealth of Australia 1995: 73). The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs' recent National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs: 1996) includes a range of strategies and identifies a variety of outcomes appropriate for the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector of which TAFE is the largest part. It is clear from that document that TAFE is seen to be not only a key to continuing increases in participation of indigenous people in education, but it is also envisaged to be a significant pathway to employment for many indigenous Australians.

However, surprisingly little is known about the details of indigenous participation in this significant educational arena. It has been difficult to develop a profile of indigenous participation in the TAFE sector for two reasons. First, TAFE students tend to enrol in multiple modules and teasing apart the module enrolments has not always been possible. Second, the quality of data collection has varied tremendously; for example, not only have very large numbers of TAFE students declined to provide information, but many institutions have not collected information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. The sector is moving toward a standardised statistical collection procedure that should soon alleviate the problem of collection inconsistencies, but a precise depiction of indigenous students enrolled in TAFE is not currently possible (Teasdale and Teasdale 1996: 23; Australian Committee on Vocational Education and Training Statistics 1996; Australian National Training Authority [ANTA] 1996a).

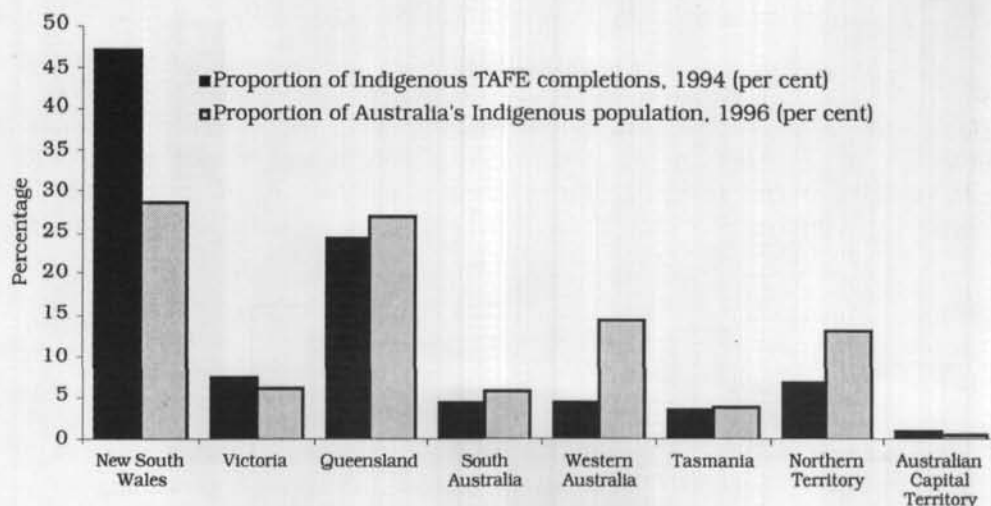
There is, however, a very useful data set that provides an overview of indigenous graduates of the TAFE system. The Graduate Outcomes Technical and Further Education Australia 1995 Survey was conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) for the Australian Committee on Vocational Education and Training Statistics (ACVETS). Funded by ANTA, this survey of 106,000 graduates of TAFE courses in 1994 sought information related to labour market success and the role of vocational education (ABS 1995a).<sup>1</sup> The survey addressed a variety of topics ranging from general characteristics of graduates to reasons for enrolling, to relevance of course to current employment status. Significantly, the survey included an indigenous identifier that allows comparisons between indigenous and non-indigenous graduates. It is surprising that little attention has been given to the results of this important study. While there is some related research currently underway focused on indigenous Australians as one of seven equity groups (see Golding and Volkoff 1997), there has only been a single and partial analysis of the available data focused on indigenous graduates (ANTA 1996b).

The findings of the survey have been largely inaccessible until now. Though completed by the ABS, the actual report was never available as a standard ABS publication through their Products and Services outlets; the only easily accessible ABS output was a four-page summary document. This paper is intended as initial exploration of the ABS/ANTA data with a focus on comparisons between the indigenous and non-indigenous graduates and provides some broad contrasts of a range of variables including location, qualifications, employment status and the like. It is also intended to provide a baseline depiction of indigenous TAFE graduates for comparison with data expected to be available from a follow-up survey to be completed by the end of 1997. As might be expected, the 1995 survey highlights some important contrasts between indigenous and non-indigenous TAFE graduates, but perhaps most surprisingly the 1995 data show some striking similarities.

## **Indigenous TAFE graduates: some patterns**

### **Completions by States and Territories**

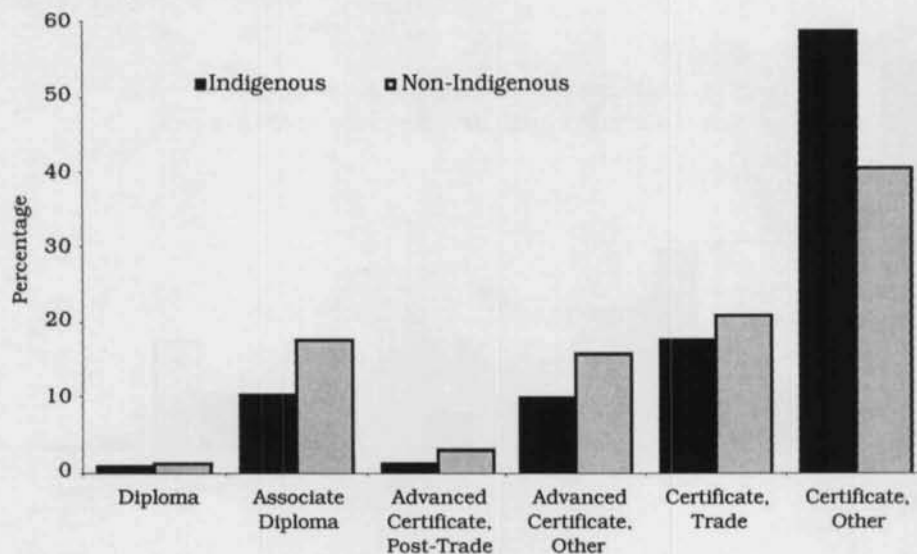
The patterns of TAFE completion by State and Territory are depicted alongside the 1996 Census data for the indigenous population in Figure 1 and Table A1. The highest proportion of TAFE graduates for both indigenous and other Australians were from New South Wales, the most populous of all Australian States. Nearly half of both the non-indigenous (49.5 per cent) and indigenous (47.3 per cent) graduates were from this State. While the second highest proportion of non-indigenous graduates were found in Victoria (19.9 per cent), the second highest proportion of indigenous graduates (24.2 per cent) resided in Queensland. Also of note is the contrast between these two groups in the Northern Territory. While 7.1 per cent of indigenous graduates were from the Northern Territory, less than one in 100 (0.7 per cent) non-indigenous graduates resided there. The low proportions of indigenous graduates relative to population in the Northern Territory and Western Australia raise some important questions about the success of individuals and programs that need attention.

**Figure 1. Completions by States and Territories**

Source: Adapted from the ABS 1995a, and ABS 1996 Census of Population and Housing

## Qualifications

Graduates earned a range of qualifications on completion of their courses of study (see Figure 2 and Table A2). A variety of TAFE qualifications were possible, but most graduates obtained Certificates of some type. About three out of five (59.1 per cent) indigenous graduates and two out of five (40.6 per cent) non-indigenous graduates received a Certificate-Other qualification. The higher proportion of indigenous graduates in this qualification category offset their relatively lower proportion in each of the other qualification categories. For example, nearly one in five (21.2 per cent) non-indigenous graduates earned Certificates in the Trades, while the proportion of indigenous graduates obtaining this qualification was only slightly lower (17.9 per cent). Similarly, while 19.3 per cent of non-indigenous graduates held Diplomas or Associate Diplomas, only 11.5 per cent of indigenous respondents held these same qualifications. What is most striking about the relative qualifications is that while indigenous graduates are clearly over-represented in the Certificate—Other category, the ratio of indigenous to non-indigenous in the other qualifications is relatively stable; indigenous graduates are not dramatically underrepresented in any single category except possibly the Associate Diploma.

**Figure 2. Qualifications**

Source: Adapted from ABS 1995a

### Employment status

Among the questions asked of TAFE graduates was one pertaining to employment status. Respondents were asked to indicate if they were employed, unemployed, or not in the labour force. The survey showed that non-indigenous graduates were more likely to be employed than their indigenous counterparts; nearly three out of four (72.9 per cent) non-indigenous graduates were employed at the time of the survey (31 May 1995) while only about half (48.8 per cent) of the indigenous graduates were employed. However, among those employed the proportions employed full-time were similar; about two-thirds (66.1 per cent) of the indigenous graduates were employed full-time compared to 71.1 per cent for other graduates (see Figure 3 and Table A3).

**Figure 3. Employment status**

Source: Adapted from ABS 1995a

The difference in employment between indigenous and non-indigenous graduates contrasts with differences in both the proportions unemployed and not in the labour force. At the time of the survey, almost one in four (24.2 per cent) indigenous graduates were unemployed compared to 14.7 per cent of non-indigenous graduates. Among the unemployed graduates, more indigenous respondents indicated they were looking for full-time work (81.2 per cent) than did non-indigenous graduates (71.5 per cent). The contrast between the employment status of indigenous and other Australian graduates is most striking when the relative proportions of graduates who indicated they are not in the labour force are considered. Indigenous graduates were nearly twice as likely to be out of the labour force (26.6 per cent compared to 12.1 per cent).

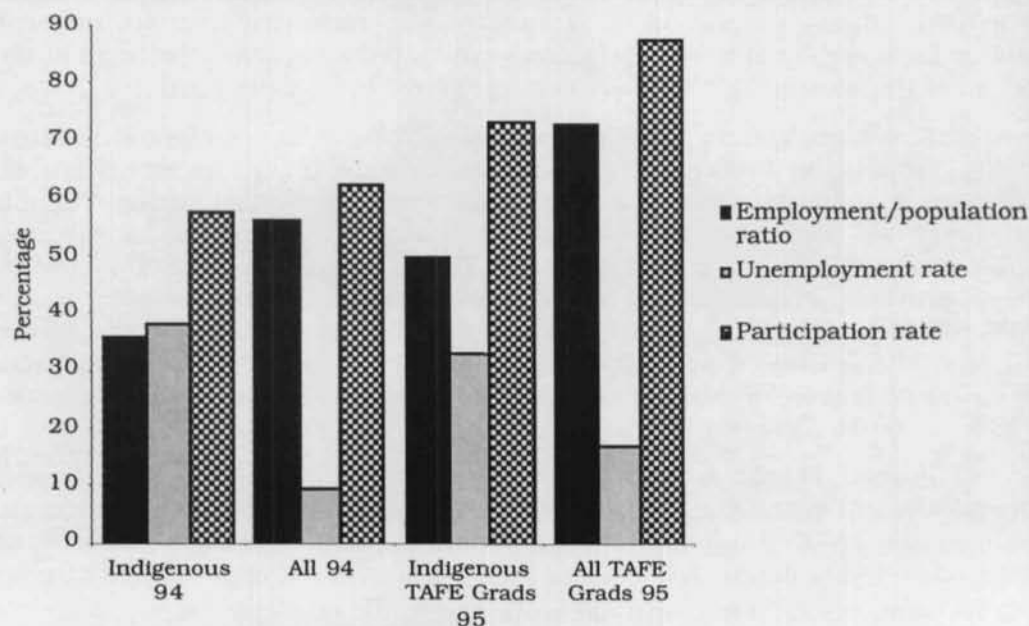
It is not possible to make direct comparisons of the employment status of TAFE graduates in 1995 to the employment status of other indigenous and non-indigenous Australians because no data are available for that period. There are, however, two other sources of data that allow for a qualified but still useful comparison. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS) 1994, provides unique data on indigenous employment status for 1994, and the ABS routinely collects and publishes monthly data on the labour force status of all Australians without an indigenous identifier. Consequently, the most recent comparable figures for indigenous and non-indigenous employment status are for 1994.

Figure 4 (Table A4) portrays the employment/population ratios, the unemployment rates and the participation rates of both indigenous and non-indigenous TAFE graduates in 1995 and the wider indigenous and total Australian population in 1994. There are several interesting patterns that emerge in this comparison.<sup>2</sup> First, and not surprisingly, the employment population ratio is higher for both indigenous and all (indigenous plus non-indigenous) TAFE



graduates; a qualification such as this would be expected to increase the possibility of employment as found in a previous analysis of NATSIS data (ABS/CAEPR 1996: 36–7, 70–5). The employment dividend of that credential, however, appears to be similar for non-indigenous and indigenous people: while the indigenous employment/population ratio increases from about 35.9 to 50.0 per cent with a TAFE credential, the all-Australian ratio increases from 56.7 to 72.8 per cent. As might be expected, the unemployment rate of the general indigenous population is higher than that of indigenous TAFE graduates, yet for other Australians the unemployment rate increases for those holding a TAFE qualification. While that pattern cannot be conclusively explained with available data, it seems probable that this pattern may be related to the different levels of unemployment experienced overall by indigenous and non-indigenous people. Non-indigenous people who study at TAFE are more likely to be unemployed to begin with than the rest of the population and so may be more likely to remain unemployed than the rest of the population. The reason this pattern does not hold for the indigenous sample might be that indigenous people reap a much higher dividend from education because unemployment for indigenous people is so high to begin with. Indigenous completion of a TAFE course not only increases the likelihood of employment, it decreases the likelihood of unemployment, a pattern that differs from that of the general population. One possible explanation is that non-indigenous TAFE students are more likely to be drawn from the 'not in the labour force' category than indigenous TAFE students. Finally, the participation rate, a ratio of the number of people in the labour force to the number of people in the population, increases for TAFE graduates of both groups.

**Figure 4. Employment, unemployment, participation, 1994 and 1995**

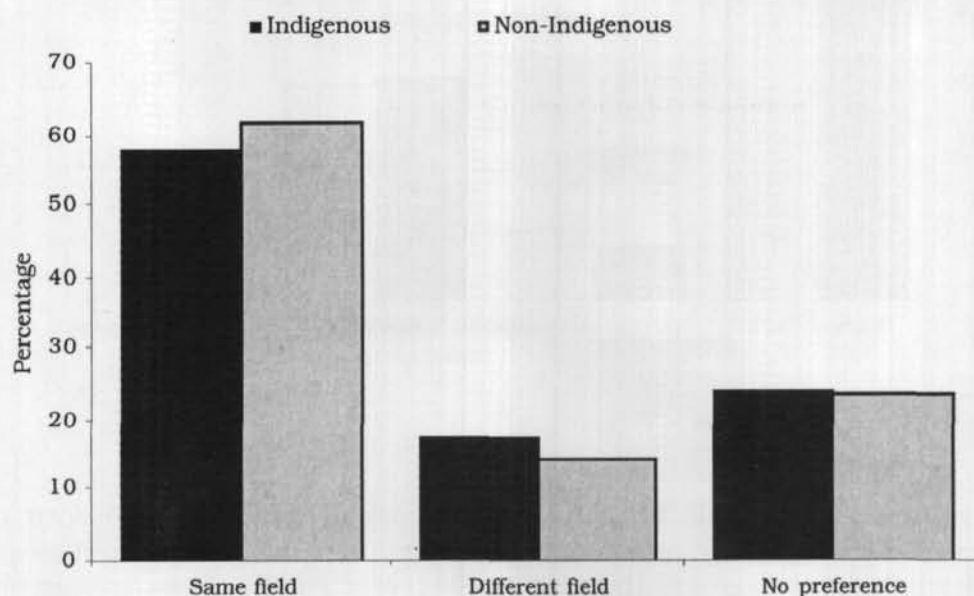


Source: Adapted from ABS 1994, ABS 1995a, and ABS 1995b

### Unemployed graduates

The survey asked graduates who were unemployed and searching for work if they were looking for employment in the same field as the one in which they had earned a qualification. As indicated in Figure 5 (and Table A5), the differences between indigenous and non-indigenous graduates were minor. There was a slightly higher proportion of non-indigenous graduates (62.0 per cent) looking for employment in the same field versus a different field, but very similar proportions expressed no preference for work in one or the other (24.4 per cent of indigenous and 23.6 per cent of non-indigenous).

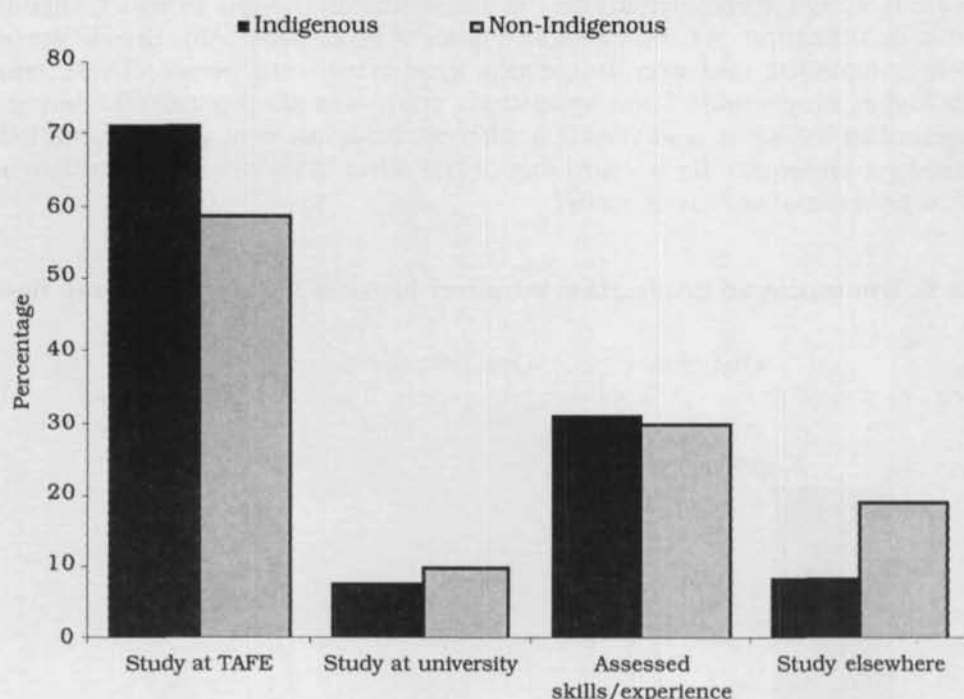
**Figure 5. Unemployed graduates: whether looking for work in same field**



Source: Adapted from ABS 1995a

### Recognition of prior learning

TAFE students sometimes qualify for recognition of prior learning of some form. If recognised, prior learning can be credited toward completion of a course of study. In general, there was little difference between indigenous and non-indigenous graduates in terms of recognition by TAFE institutions of prior learning; for both groups, less than one in three graduates received credit for prior learning (31.2 per cent of indigenous and 27.0 of non-indigenous). When the experience of those receiving credit is examined more closely, some differences appear between the two groups.

**Figure 6. Recognition of prior learning**

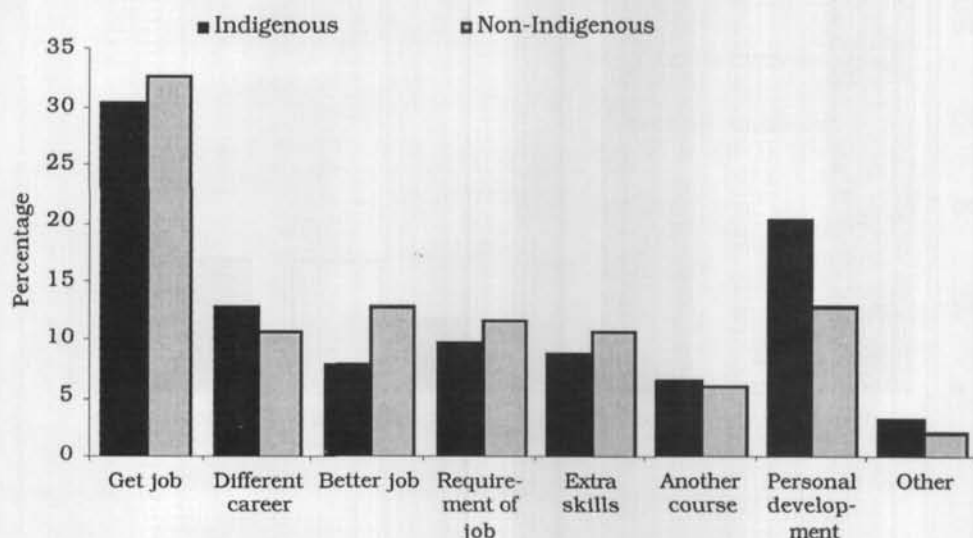
Source: Adapted from ABS 1995a

Figure 6 (and Table A6) depicts the types of recognition afforded the graduates.<sup>3</sup> Previous study at TAFE was the most commonly recognised form of prior learning for both groups though a higher proportion of indigenous than non-indigenous students had such prior learning recognised (71.2 per cent versus 58.7 per cent). While there is nothing in the data set to explain this pattern, it may be that indigenous students in the TAFE sector withdraw and re-enrol to a greater degree than do their non-indigenous counterparts. This would parallel the pattern of indigenous students in universities (Schwab 1996). Few in either group indicated they received recognition of university study (7.8 per cent and 9.8 per cent of indigenous and non-indigenous, respectively). This pattern is not surprising given the traditional, though shifting, pattern wherein there is little cross-over between the University and Vocational Education and Training sectors (Golding, Bluer, and Keating 1996). On the other hand, more non-indigenous graduates (18.9 per cent) received prior learning recognition for study in other types of settings than did indigenous graduates (8.6 per cent). Assessed skills and experience were recognised for similar proportions of both groups (31.1 per cent of indigenous graduates and 27.0 per cent of non-indigenous graduates).

### Reasons for doing course

The TAFE graduates were asked to indicate their main reasons for undertaking the course of study they completed. The responses, as depicted in Figure 7 (and Table A7) are striking for the high degree of similarity between the two groups. The primary reason for both indigenous (30.4 per cent) and non-indigenous (32.8 per cent) graduates was to get a job. Personal development was the only reason cited where the differences were dramatic. One in five (20.5 per cent) indigenous graduates undertook their course of study for personal development compared with slightly more than one in ten (12.8 per cent) of the non-indigenous graduates. While the available data do not provide an explanation for this difference, one possible explanation may be that indigenous students in the post-compulsory areas have sometimes viewed study as not necessarily an investment that will pay a dividend in employment. For many, post-compulsory study has been viewed and experienced as an opportunity to 'catch-up' and re-enter the educational arena rather than an investment in time that will lead to employment (Schwab 1996). The responses, for a different career, to get a better job, a requirement of the job, to get extra skills, or for another course of study indicated relatively small differences between the groups.

**Figure 7. Main reason for doing course**



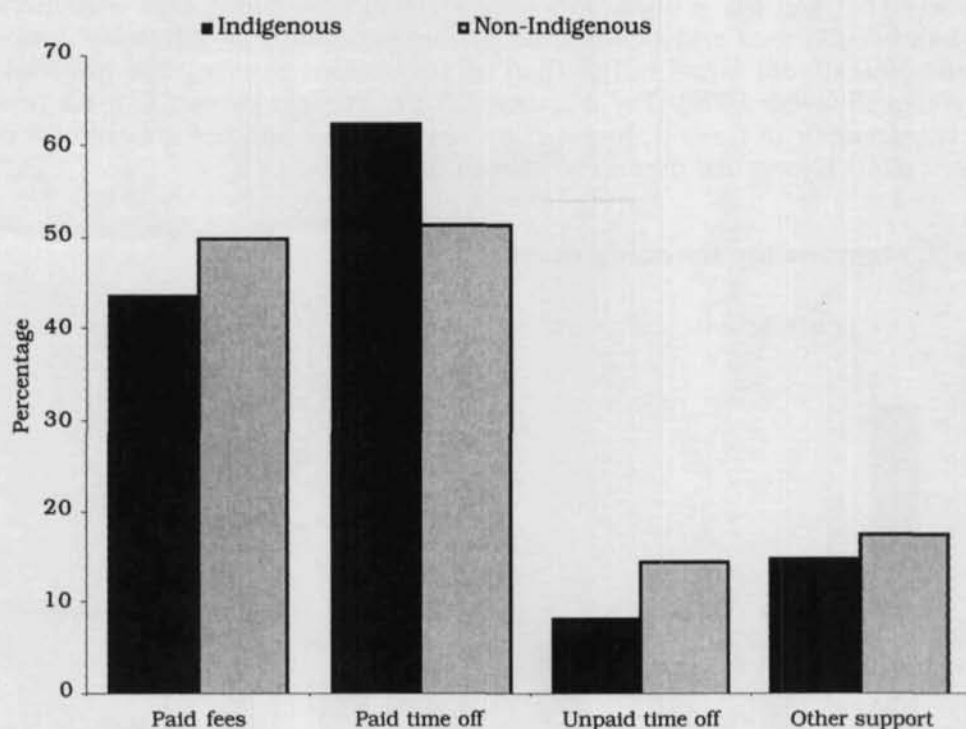
Source: Adapted from ABS 1995a

### Support from employer or business

The individuals surveyed were asked to indicate the nature of any support they received from an employer or business during the final semester of the course they completed in 1994. The majority of graduates received support (53.6 per cent of non-indigenous graduates and 67.7 per cent of the indigenous

graduates). Figure 8 (and Table A8) shows the various types of support graduates received.<sup>4</sup> Indigenous graduates were somewhat more likely to have received support in the form of paid time off work (62.4 per cent compared to 51.5 per cent of non-indigenous graduates) and somewhat less likely to have received support in the form of paid fees (43.8 per cent compared to 49.8 per cent of non-indigenous graduates). Indigenous graduates were also less likely to have received assistance in the form of unpaid time off (8.1 per cent compared to 14.6 per cent of non-indigenous graduates) or other forms of support (14.8 per cent compared to 17.4 per cent for non-indigenous graduates).

**Figure 8. Types of support received**



Source: Adapted from ABS 1995a

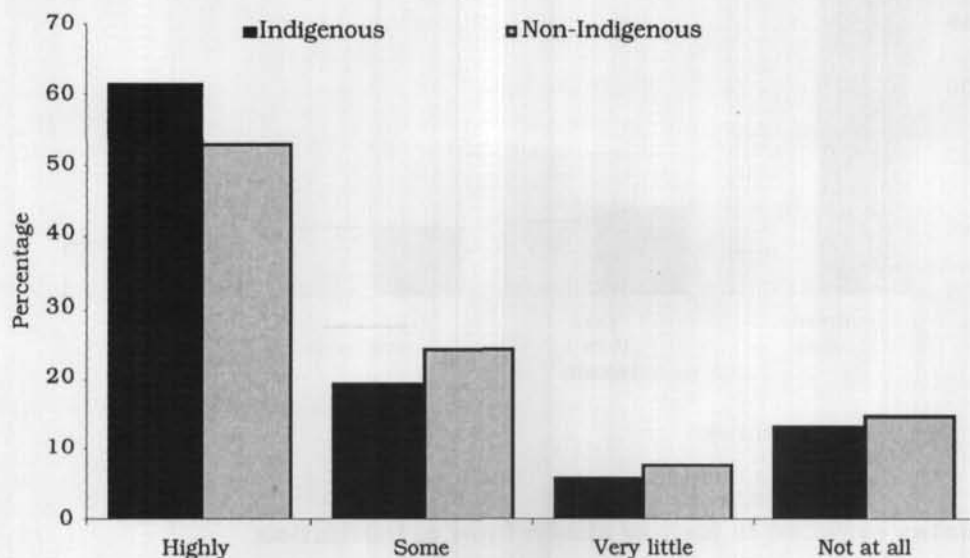
### Relevance of course

Perceptions by graduates of the relevance of the course completed to the job held at the time of the survey show little difference between indigenous and non-indigenous respondents (Figure 9 and Table A9). While a somewhat higher percentage of indigenous graduates (61.5 per cent) considered their course of study 'highly relevant' than did non-indigenous graduates (52.9 per cent), when the responses 'highly' and 'somewhat' relevant are combined, there is little



difference between the two groups; 80.6 per cent of indigenous graduates considered their studies relevant as did 77.3 per cent of non-indigenous graduates. The percentages of graduates who found no relevance of their studies to the job they held at the time of the survey are similar for both groups: 13.3 per cent of indigenous and 14.6 per cent of non-indigenous.

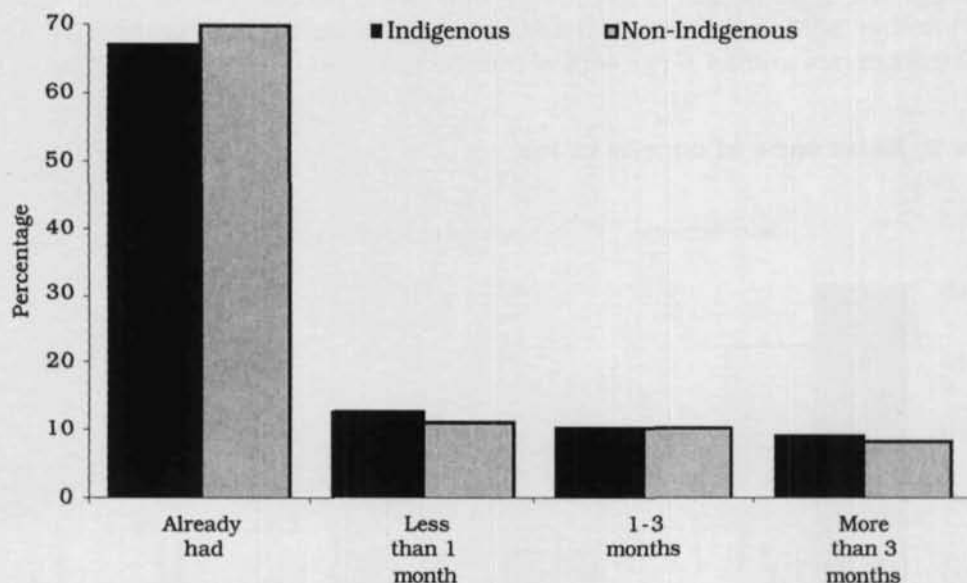
**Figure 9. Relevance of course to job**



Source: Adapted from ABS 1995a

### **Time taken to find employment**

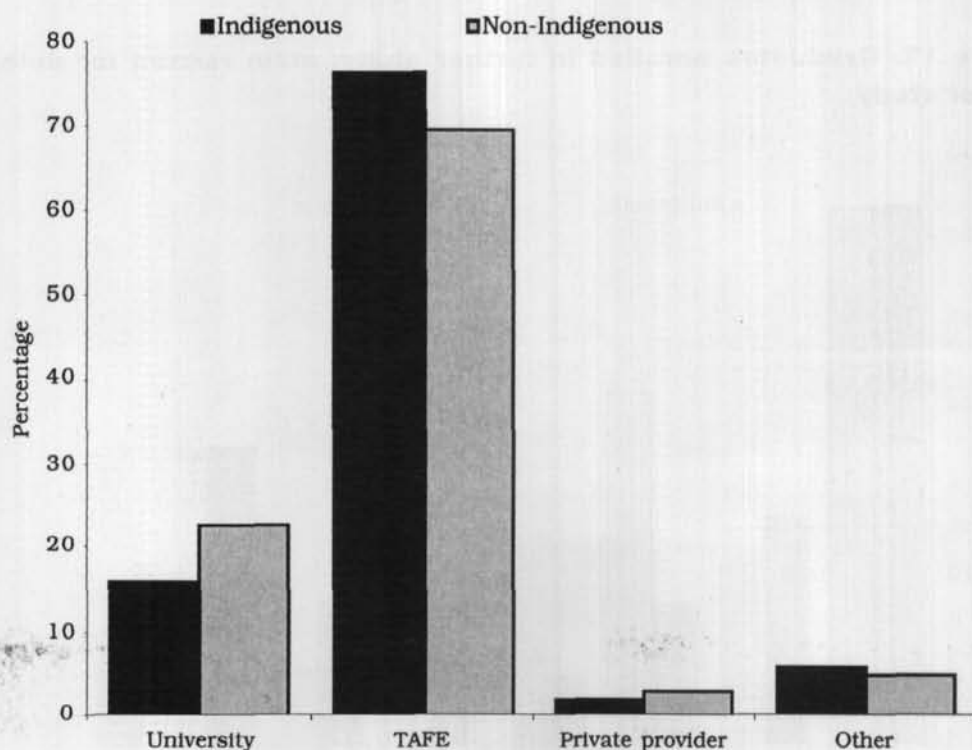
Figure 10 (and Table A10) depicts the responses of employed TAFE graduates to a question related to the time required to find employment after their completion of studies. The responses are notable for the consistency between the indigenous and non-indigenous graduates. Over two out of three employed graduates in both groups (67.2 per cent of indigenous and 70.0 per cent of non-indigenous) already had jobs when they completed their studies. The rest of the employed graduates, roughly a third of both indigenous and non-indigenous respondents, took similar amounts of time to find employment.

**Figure 10. Time taken to find a job**

Source: Adapted from ABS 1995a

### **Graduates enrolled in further study: type of institution**

A sizeable proportion of both the indigenous and non-indigenous graduates had enrolled for further study. Of the 834 indigenous graduates surveyed, 383 (45.9 per cent) indicated they were undertaking additional studies; 25,108 (39.4 per cent) of the 63,814 non-indigenous graduates were similarly enrolled. Figure 11 (Table A11) illustrates the type of institution chosen by the graduates for further study. The majority of enrolled graduates for both groups were undertaking additional studies in the TAFE sector, though there was a slight preference among indigenous graduates for the TAFE sector (76.3 per cent as opposed to 69.6 per cent for non-indigenous) over the University sector (22.7 per cent non-indigenous versus 16.1 per cent indigenous). Enrolments in courses provided by private or other providers were few for both groups.

**Figure 11. Graduates enrolled in further study: type of institution**

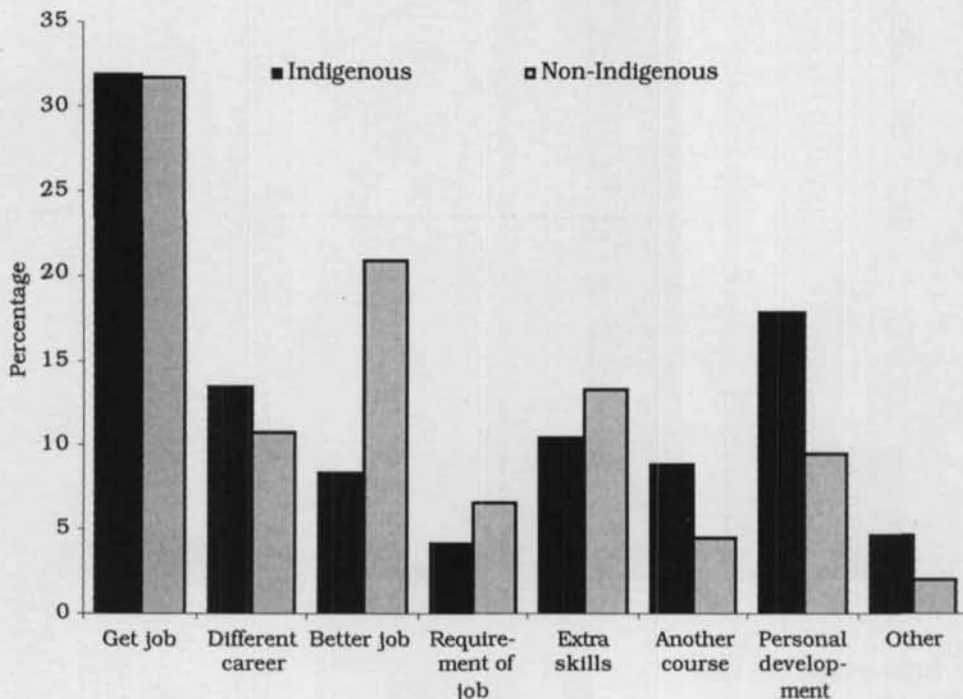
Source: Adapted from ABS 1995a

### **Motivation for further study**

Those graduates who were enrolled for further study at the time of the survey were asked to indicate their main reason for undertaking that study. Figure 12 (Table A12) displays the responses of the indigenous and non-indigenous graduates. Immediately apparent is the fact that the most common reason for both groups was to get a job (31.9 per cent of respondents in both groups). Presumably, most of these responses were from individuals who were unemployed. The other reasons cited were not markedly different for the two groups with two exceptions: more non-indigenous graduates undertook additional study in hopes of eventually obtaining a better job (21.0 per cent versus 8.4 per cent for indigenous graduates). In addition, it appears that indigenous graduates were more likely to have undertaken additional study for personal development (17.8 per cent as opposed to 9.6 per cent for non-indigenous graduates). The latter parallels the earlier pattern where personal development was the second most highly cited reason among indigenous graduates when asked why they undertook their course of study in the first place (see Figure 7 above). The

distribution of responses among the other cited reasons vary little between the two groups of respondents.

**Figure 12. Graduates enrolled in further study: main reason for doing further study**



Source: Adapted from ABS 1995a

## Summary

A comparison of the experience of indigenous and non-indigenous TAFE graduates indicates there are some important similarities and differences between the two graduate groups. The key survey data findings relevant to indigenous education policy planning can be summarised as follows:

- Nearly half (47.3 per cent) of the indigenous TAFE students who completed courses in 1994 were in New South Wales. This number is very high given the fact that the most recent ABS figures show New South Wales is home to only 28.8 per cent of Australia's indigenous population (ABS 1997). At the same time, indigenous TAFE graduates are markedly under-represented in Western Australian where they comprise 4.7 per cent of all such indigenous

graduates yet the State is home to 14.4 per cent of the total indigenous population.

- Indigenous graduates are over-represented as recipients of basic Certificates, and as a consequence they are slightly under-represented as recipients of more specialised Trade Certificates, Advanced Certificates, and Associate Diploma and Diploma qualifications.
- The survey indicates non-indigenous graduates are more likely to be employed and indigenous graduates are twice as likely to be out of the labour force.
- Indigenous graduates certainly appear to benefit in terms of increased employment opportunities when compared to other indigenous people. Non-indigenous graduates, however, do not appear to benefit to a greater degree from holding a TAFE qualification when compared to indigenous graduates though non-indigenous TAFE graduates have a higher unemployment rate than do other non-indigenous Australians.
- Most unemployed TAFE graduates, both indigenous and non-indigenous, who are looking for work are focusing on employment opportunities in the field in which they earned a qualification.
- Fewer than one in three TAFE graduates received recognition of prior learning by the institutions that awarded them qualifications in their courses of study. This is true for both indigenous and non-indigenous graduates.
- With a single exception, the main reasons cited by both indigenous and non-indigenous graduates for undertaking the particular course of study leading to their qualification differed little between the two groups; the exception was that a relatively higher proportion of indigenous graduates indicated they undertook their course of study for 'personal development' reasons.
- Indigenous graduates were more likely to have received some form of support from an employer or business during the final semester of study than were non-indigenous graduates. There was also a slightly greater chance that indigenous graduates received support in the form of paid time off work, and a slightly lower chance they received assistance in the form of payment of course fees.
- High proportions of employed graduates from both groups viewed their courses of study as relevant to the jobs they held at the time of the survey.
- About two out of three employed graduates from both groups had jobs at the time of completion of their courses; the remaining employed graduates took similar amounts of time to find work.
- A large number of indigenous (45.9 per cent) and non-indigenous (39.4 per cent) graduates were undertaking further study at the time of the survey.
- Among those undertaking further studies, similar proportions (about a third) in both group cited 'getting a job' as the primary reason for additional



study. When other reasons were considered, most striking was the propensity for indigenous graduates to undertake additional studies for 'personal development'.

## Policy considerations

The Graduate Outcomes Technical and Further Education, Australia 1995 survey provides a unique glimpse of indigenous participation in the largest segment of the Vocational Education and Training sector (ABS 1995a). It is important because it provides solid comparable data, something that has been difficult to obtain for the sector, but it is also a rare overview of indigenous people who have completed courses of study. In this sense, the graduates who are the focus of this study represent an educational success story, a story that tends to get less attention than the stories of individuals who are struggling at the opposite end of the educational journey. Until now little has been known about the nature of that success, and while there are still many important questions that need to be asked, there are some valuable insights for policy development available in the findings of the survey.

Indigenous graduates of the various TAFE systems represent a small but very significant proportion of indigenous participants in post-compulsory education in a sector that is popular with indigenous people and will most likely be the focus of increasing indigenous participation given the low retention levels in school and the continuing growth of the indigenous population. One feature of these individuals as a group is their higher than average employment rate when compared to other indigenous Australians. This pattern provides some confirmation of the findings of other studies suggesting that post-secondary education correlates with increased chances of employment (ABS/CAEPR 1996); it is likely, though no published data are available from the survey, that as projected by Daly and Liu (1995), income of the TAFE graduates increased with education as well. Yet the survey reports a very high proportion of employed indigenous graduates who already had jobs at the time of completion of study. Given the high unemployment rate among indigenous people in general, it is obvious that these graduates represent a select group. This sheds some light on an important issue that has been raised pertaining to the relationship between TAFE training and employment: 'attendance at training programs was associated with employment, but it was not clear whether training increased the probability of employment or the other way around' (Daly 1996: 104). In the case of TAFE graduates, it appears likely the qualification assisted some indigenous graduates with obtaining employment, but for many more it did not. The survey shows that while it is certainly useful, a TAFE qualification does not provide a guarantee of a job for indigenous people or anyone else. Though the chances of employment increase, there is still a marked lag in indigenous employment in comparison to the experience of non-indigenous graduates. Policy makers will need to have a much better understanding of the individual factors (and their interplay) that are relevant to not only the successful completion of TAFE courses but the

employment outcomes of the individuals involved in order to address this issue. Survey instruments such as this will be useful in that regard but cannot provide all the answers.

One such factor that needs to be better understood is the role of employer support in TAFE completion. The survey data suggest this might contribute to educational success. Roughly two-thirds of the indigenous graduates indicated they had received some type of support from an employer or business. It may be that some of that support was underwritten by government directly or indirectly through programs such as CDEP or local apprenticeship support programs. Policy makers searching for approaches to increasing the success of indigenous TAFE students would benefit from data highlighting the various forms of support currently available to employed indigenous students in urban, rural and remote areas.

One of the most visible differences between indigenous and non-indigenous TAFE graduates was the emphasis placed on TAFE as an avenue for personal development. Nearly 20 per cent of indigenous TAFE graduates indicated they undertook their course of study primarily for personal development; this is nearly double the proportion of non-indigenous graduates who cited personal development as the main reason for study. This finding should highlight for policy makers the fact that individuals undertake study for a wide range of reasons, and sometimes these reasons may not be propelled by economic considerations (see Schwab 1997). The educational interests and aspirations of indigenous people are diverse, and that diversity could well create new opportunities to encourage indigenous participation in education. In the educational policy arena that opportunity might involve adapting the focus of outreach activities for some segments of the indigenous community to highlight not jobs, but personal development.

Comparisons between the employment/population ratio and unemployment rates of indigenous and non-indigenous TAFE graduates and the wider indigenous and non-indigenous populations suggest that unemployed indigenous TAFE graduates are more likely to remain in the labour force, searching for work, than their non-indigenous counterparts. This pattern should suggest to policy makers a solid interest on the part of unemployed graduates in employment and though their numbers are small, labour market programs targeting this group might have a higher probability of succeeding.

While there are clearly some significant contrasts between indigenous and non-indigenous graduates, one of the most striking in many ways is the similarity of their experiences. With the exception of employment outcomes, indigenous graduates appear very similar to their non-indigenous counterparts in many important ways. This similarity raises several questions that require further consideration. For example, do only indigenous students who have views and experiences similar to the non-indigenous majority succeed in the TAFE system? To what degree did those students benefit from indigenous-focused special programs or assistance? The available data do not answer these questions but

they are crucial to policy development. There is a growing body of practical research related to the educational needs and experiences of students currently enrolled in the VET sector (New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group 1994; Buchanan and Egg 1996; Teasdale and Teasdale 1996) and the University sector (Bourke, Burden, and Moore 1996), but there is so far nothing focused on graduates of such programs. This is a significant gap and may reflect an urge to address pressing needs rather than recognise existing success.

## Notes

1. Of this number, 64,684 responded fully and identified themselves as either indigenous (834) or non-indigenous (63,814). The survey had an overall response rate of about 61 per cent and is thus subject to some degree of bias.
  - The results will be biased to the extent that the characteristics of those who responded differ from those who did not respond. The ABS has undertaken a limited examination of the response to the survey by comparing the selected characteristics of the graduate dispatch population with those of the fully responding graduate population. A comparison between the State/Territory, sex, field of study and qualification characteristics of the survey dispatch population and those of the fully responding population showed that the two populations were broadly similar (ABS 1995a: 49).
  - This bias will occur in the indigenous sample as well but there is no reason to assume comparisons between the indigenous dispatch population and the fully responding population would differ any more than the non-indigenous populations.
2. The various rates and ratios used here are standard labour force indicators used by the ABS. The employment/population ratio is derived from the number of employed persons in a group as a percentage of the population aged 15 years and over in the same group. The unemployment rate is calculated from the number of unemployed persons in a group expressed as a percentage of the labour force (the employed plus the unemployed) in the same group. The participation rate is the number of people in the labour force (employed plus unemployed) as a percentage of the population aged 15 years and over.
3. The respondents may have indicated they received recognition for more than one type of prior learning.
4. The respondents may have indicated they received more than one kind of support from their employers.

## Appendices

**Table A1. TAFE Completions and indigenous population by States and Territories**

	Indigenous TAFE graduates	Indigenous TAFE completions 1994 %	Indigenous population	Australia's indigenous population 1996 %
New South Wales	394	47.24	101,636	28.79
Victoria	65	7.79	21,503	6.09
Queensland	202	24.22	95,374	27.02
South Australia	39	4.68	20,421	5.79
Western Australia	39	4.68	50,699	14.36
Tasmania	28	3.36	13,929	3.95
Northern Territory	59	7.07	46,362	13.13
Australian Capital Territory	8	0.96	2,844	0.81
Other Territories	0	0.00	202	0.06
Australia	834	100.00	352,970	100.00

**Table A2. Qualifications**

	Indigenous total	Indigenous %	Non- indigenous total	Non- indigenous %
Diploma	7	0.84	826	1.29
Associate Diploma	89	10.67	11,470	17.97
Adv. Cert Post-Trade	12	1.44	1,990	3.12
Adv. Cert. Other	84	10.07	10,091	15.81
Certificate Trade	149	17.87	13,528	21.20
Certificate Other	493	59.11	25,909	40.60
Total	834	100.00	63,814	100.00



**Table A3. Employment status**

	Indigenous total	Indigenous %	Non- indigenous total	Non- indigenous %
Full-time	269	66.09	33,056	71.09
Part-time	117	28.75	11,485	24.70
Total/percentage all	407	48.80	46,501	72.87
Looking for full-time work	164	81.19	6,723	71.49
Looking for part-time work	38	18.81	2,681	28.51
Total/percentage all	202	24.22	9,404	14.74
Not in labour force	222	26.62	7,712	12.09
Not stated	3		198	
Total <sup>a</sup>	831		63,616	

<sup>a</sup>Total does not include not stated.

**Table A4. Employment, unemployment, participation, 1994 and 1995**

	Indigenous 1994	Non- indigenous 1994	Indigenous TAFE Graduates 1995	All TAFE Graduates 1995
Employment/population ratio	35.9	56.7	50.0	72.8
Unemployment rate	38.2	9.6	33.2	17.0
Participation rate	58.0	62.7	73.3	87.7

**Table A5. Unemployed graduates: whether looking for work in same field**

	Indigenous total	Indigenous %	Non- indigenous total	Non- indigenous %
Same field	112	58.03	5,589	61.95
Different field	34	17.62	1,306	14.48
No preference	47	24.35	2,127	23.58
Not stated	9		382	
Total <sup>a</sup>	193		9,022	

<sup>a</sup>Total does not include not stated.



**Table A6. Recognition of prior learning**

	Indigenous total	Indigenous %	Non- indigenous total	Non- indigenous %
Study at TAFE	183	71.21	10,071	58.72
Study at university	20	7.78	1,675	9.77
Assessed skills/ experience	80	31.13	5,138	29.96
Study elsewhere	22	8.56	3,236	18.87
Total <sup>a</sup>	257	31.15	17,152	27.03
No recognition	568	68.85	46,311	72.97
Not stated	9		351	
Total <sup>b</sup>	825		63,463	

<sup>a</sup> Can include more than one kind of learning.

<sup>b</sup> Total does not include not stated.

**Table A7. Main reason for doing course**

	Indigenous total	Indigenous %	Non- indigenous total	Non- indigenous %
Get job	252	30.36	20,871	32.79
Different career	106	12.77	6,890	10.82
Better job	67	8.07	8,201	12.88
Requirement of job	81	9.76	7,431	11.67
Extra skills	73	8.80	6,903	10.85
Another course	55	6.63	3,899	6.13
Personal development	170	20.48	8,120	12.76
Other	26	3.13	1,336	2.10
Not stated	4		163	
Total <sup>a</sup>	830		63,651	

<sup>a</sup> Total does not include not stated.

**Table A8. Types of support received**

	Indigenous total	Indigenous %	Non- indigenous total	Non- indigenous %
Paid fees	92	43.81	10,278	49.75
Paid time off	131	62.38	10,634	51.47
Unpaid time off	17	8.10	3,007	14.55
Other support	31	14.76	3,604	17.44
Total <sup>a</sup>	210	67.74	20,661	53.60
No support	100	32.26	17,887	46.40
Total <sup>b</sup>	310		38,548	

<sup>a</sup> Can include more than one kind of support.

<sup>b</sup> Total does not include not stated

**Table A9. Relevance of course to job**

	Indigenous total	Indigenous %	Non- indigenous total	Non- indigenous %
Highly	232	61.54	23,221	52.93
Some	72	19.10	10,674	24.33
Very little	23	6.10	3,549	8.09
Not at all	50	13.26	6,428	14.65
Total <sup>a</sup>	377		43,872	

<sup>a</sup> Total does not include not stated.

**Table A10. Time taken to find a job**

	Indigenous total	Indigenous %	Non- indigenous total	Non- indigenous %
Already had	258	67.19	31,082	69.98
Less than 1 month	50	13.02	4,982	11.22
1-3 months	40	10.42	4,550	10.24
More than 3 months	36	9.38	3,799	8.55
Not stated	23		2,088	
Total <sup>a</sup>	384		44,413	

<sup>a</sup> Total does not include not stated.

**Table A11. Graduates enrolled in further study: type of institution**

	Indigenous total	Indigenous %	Non- indigenous total	Non- indigenous %
University	61	16.05	5,682	22.69
TAFE	290	76.32	17,425	69.58
Private provider	7	1.84	756	3.02
Other	22	5.79	1,180	4.71
Not stated	3		65	
Total <sup>a</sup>	380		25,043	

<sup>a</sup> Total does not include not stated.**Table A12. Graduates enrolled in further study: main reason for doing further study**

	Indigenous total	Indigenous %	Non- indigenous total	Non- indigenous %
Get job	122	31.94	7,984	31.87
Different career	52	13.61	2,720	10.86
Better job	32	8.38	5,260	21.00
Requirement of job	16	4.19	1,666	6.65
Extra skills	40	10.47	3,359	13.41
Another course	34	8.90	1,144	4.57
Personal development	68	17.80	2,404	9.60
Other	18	4.71	516	2.06
Not stated	1		55	
Total <sup>a</sup>	382		25,053	

<sup>a</sup> Total does not include not stated.

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