



Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
The Australian National University

Education, Training and Indigenous Futures
CAEPR Policy Research: 1990-2007

Research Summaries

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Reference No. 20

Summarising: Biddle (2006), *The age at which Indigenous Australians undertake qualifications: A descriptive analysis*

Responsibility for the preparation of this research summary rests with the authors of the MCEETYA report *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990-2007* and not the original author(s) of the summarised material.

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Title of Research:

The age at which Indigenous Australians undertake qualifications: A descriptive analysis

Research Publication:

Australian Journal of Adult Learning Vol.46, No.1, April 2006

Name of Researcher(s):

N. Biddle

Time period:

2001

Geographic location:

The analysis is undertaken at the national level.

Methodology:

This is a statistical analysis of the 2001 Census of Population and Housing and the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, both undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Aims:

This paper is concerned with the learning paths of Indigenous Australians compared to non-Indigenous Australians. It provides a descriptive analysis of the age at which Indigenous Australians are currently undertaking education, and the age at which Indigenous Australians obtained their qualifications.

The paper also examines characteristics of students currently enrolled in post-school education.

Selected findings and insights:

Except for certificate level qualifications, **post-secondary qualifications** such as diplomas, degrees and post-graduate degrees held by Indigenous Australians were proportionally less than for non-Indigenous Australians, regardless of gender. Furthermore, for those who had not completed year 12 there was a greater proportion of non-Indigenous Australians who had attained a certificate level qualification than non-Indigenous Australians.

Indigenous students who were undertaking **post-secondary studies** in 2001:

- Were older than non-Indigenous students. The median age was 29 years for those attending university and 27 years for those attending TAFE, compared to 23 and 26 years respectively for non-Indigenous students. This was despite the overall Indigenous population being younger.
- Whilst smaller differences existed in regard to part-time studies, Indigenous full-time students at university and in TAFE were 4-5 years older than non-Indigenous full-time students.

The paper examines the extent to which Indigenous students of different ages enrolled in a post-secondary institution differ.

- Younger Indigenous students (aged 15 to 29 years) compared to Indigenous students aged 30 years or more tended - more often to have completed Year 12, less frequently to have a disability or long-term health condition, less likely to be a main carer for someone aged 12 or less, more likely to have participated recently in sport and more likely to have been arrested in the previous year;

- Some 40% of students aged 30 years or more had a disability or long-term health condition, or were the main carer for someone aged 12 or less.
- Some 18.5% of younger students aged 15 to 29 years had been arrested in the previous five years.

Indigenous Australians who had qualifications were more likely to have:

- obtained them at an older age than the non-Indigenous population. This was especially true for females whose highest qualification was a diploma, and males whose highest qualification was a degree; and
- spent more years between high school and commencing their highest qualifications than the non-Indigenous population. While the differences were generally not large between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students on whether they had completed Year 12 or not, one difference was substantial - Indigenous females who did not complete Year 12 spent 10 years not studying before recommencing studying compared to 4 years for non-Indigenous females who had not completed Year 12.

Educational implications:

Indigenous tertiary students have particular support requirements when undertaking further studies, with significant numbers being away from family and social support networks. They also tend to be older, having had possibly quite different life experiences than non-Indigenous tertiary students. **[support services]**

Health services and child-care provision would seem particularly important for older tertiary students due to their increased probability of having significant health problems or having child care responsibilities. With fewer older Indigenous students having completed Year 12, and the often found length of delay in commencing degree or diploma courses, educational support services such as adult literacy courses oriented towards tertiary study would seem necessary. **[support services]**

Relevance:

Domain 5: *Pathways to training, employment and higher education*

Participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory schooling, training and higher education

Adult return to education or training

Related papers:

N. Biddle, 'Employment and income benefits of VET for Indigenous Australians: Variation by geography' (in press).

N. Biddle, 'Does it pay for Indigenous youth to go to school? Variation in the predicted economic benefits of high school', *Australian Journal of Labour Economics*, Vol.9 No.2, June 2006, pp173-199.

N. Biddle, 'If I finish high school will it help me get a job – variation in predicted benefits of education by geography and Indigenous status', unpublished manuscript, 2007.

N. Biddle, 'Health benefits of education in Australia: Indigenous/non-Indigenous comparisons', *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 17, No.1, 2006.