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Summarising: Arthur & David-Petero (2000), *Education, training and careers: Young Torres Strait Islanders, 1999*
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.

Title of Research:
Education, training and careers: Young Torres Strait Islanders, 1999

Research Publication:

Name of Researcher(s):
W.S. Arthur and J. David-Petero

Time period:
1999

Geographic location:
Torres Strait islands

Methodology:
In 1999, 105 Indigenous people aged between 15 and 24 years and with equal numbers of males and females were surveyed about their career aspirations and generally using open-ended survey questions. The sample was also split equally between Thursday Island (representing the Inner Islands) and Badu Island (representing the Outer Islands. The sample represented 17 per cent of the age cohort living on Thursday island, 70 per cent of the age cohort living on Badu and overall the sample represented about 10 per cent of the Torres Strait islander population of 15-24 year olds. Due to the nature of the sampling, the study suggests some caution in the interpretation of results. However the survey is sufficiently robust to identify trends and insights into the career aspirations of Torres Strait Islanders.

Aims:
The aim of this paper is to determine what role, if any, education and training appear to play in Torres Strait Islanders' perceptions of their future careers. Specifically the paper analyses:

- The pattern of secondary schooling of Torres Strait islanders, including completion rates, reasons for leaving secondary school and reasons for staying on at secondary school;
- Participation in training and apprenticeships; and
- The role education and training play in the future careers of Torres Strait Islanders.

Selected findings and insights:
School attendance is largely determined by accessibility to secondary schooling. In 1999, for those living on Badu Island where there was no secondary education provision, most students attended mainland secondary schools and these were generally in northern Queensland. In contrast, most students living on Thursday Island, which has a secondary school, attended the local secondary school or a combination of local and mainland secondary schools.
The number of secondary schools attended by the 105 respondents was extensive, numbering 37 schools—one on Thursday Island and 36 on the mainland, of which 14 were non-government schools and generally church schools. Overall half the respondents had attended more than one secondary school and 15% had attended 3 or 4 secondary schools.

About 80% of those respondents living on Thursday Island had completed Year 12 whereas the proportion fell to 30% for those living on Badu Island. Females were slightly more likely to complete Year 12 than males.

The main reasons for leaving school early before completing Year 12 were either due to access issues or to personal reasons. Those moving schools often tended not to complete Year 12.

Females tended to have family commitments such as caring for their parents or the infirm, or else due to pregnancy (67%); males tended to leave school early due to problems and disinterest experienced at school (43%). Relatively few left because of job opportunities.

The main reason for staying on at school was generally to get a good education and improve one's job prospects. Secondary schooling was generally found to be useful by 79% of respondents, especially in regard to: improved literacy, mathematics and science skills and knowledge; relevance to the world of work in areas such as administration, business studies, computing, and, for males, trade related courses; and life skills.

Just over 40% of respondents had undertaken, or were undertaking, some form of training, the most common being office and administration courses and trade training. To a somewhat lesser extent, training was also undertaken in the caring, education and health areas, and these were more so for females.

Community Councils and State government agencies were the major sponsors of training, with only a small involvement of Commonwealth government agencies or the private sector.

A small number of apprentices were attached to Community Councils rather than government agencies or the private sector, suggesting the greater flexibility of Community Councils in supervising apprentices and linking apprenticeship training with CDEP.

Educational implications:

Access to and retention in secondary schooling in areas of the Torres Strait, other than Thursday Island, appears the greatest challenge facing the education of Islanders. The dependence on mainland Queensland for secondary schooling by those residing on the outer islands highlights the importance of effective primary to secondary transition arrangements. However the many secondary schools attended by the students from particularly Badu Island limits the effectiveness of transition arrangements which could be set in place. The significant number of students who attend more than one secondary school further complicates this. Not only does this create practical difficulties in the transfer of relevant educational information, it also affects the ongoing stability of social networks for Islander students and the development of a stable and cohesive learning environment for the students and their teachers. These difficulties are exacerbated by the relatively small size of the Islander student numbers, which are likely to be in any secondary school compared to either other Indigenous or non-Indigenous students. In addition, it may reduce the likelihood of Islander parents becoming involved with the school community unless special measures are set in place to welcome their participation. These difficulties are brought into stark reality by the different Year 12 completion rates for those students from Thursday and Badu Islands. [culture] [policy]

The finding that Islander students were generally positive about their secondary education is encouraging and it would seem that Islanders place a high value on education in terms of creating pathways to further...
education, training and employment. The study did not identify any significant educational issues impacting negatively on students’ experiences of secondary schooling. Rather influences on not completing schooling were largely due to family, or personal or social issues.

- This in itself creates a difficulty for secondary schooling and suggests a need for greater emphasis upon personal counselling to help address personal and social issues before they lead to students leaving school. As noted below it also may require special arrangements to ease the transition pressures for these students from one school to another. [student counselling] [support services]

The tension between students meeting family commitments and in, the case of females, early child-rearing and them continuing with education is another challenge for educational institutions. It may require the development of a much more flexible schooling arrangement on the Islands; however that is not likely to be the way forward for those mainland secondary schools enrolling Islander students (where a similar issue often also exists for other Indigenous students). In those cases the extent to which the curricula can be adapted to cater for their needs at any point is more limited. Perhaps it does suggest the development of transition strategies for early school leavers, who have had their schooling interrupted due to external pressures, back into secondary schooling. However such strategies would need to differ from those already designed for those early school-leavers who have ‘dropped out’ of the secondary education due to lack of interest or behavioural problems. [pathways]

The lack of involvement of Commonwealth agencies and the private sector in sponsoring trainees is of concern, as is the general lack of government and the private sector involvement in the apprenticeship scheme. Without such involvement then regional planning and development is likely to be restricted. [job creation] [traineeships]

Relevance:

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education

Student aspirations and key transition points
Participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory schooling, training and higher education

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