



## POLICY REVIEW

### **The evolution of Indigenous higher education in Northern Territory, Australia: A chronological review of policy**

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Current policies that guide Indigenous higher education in the Northern Territory (NT) of Australia focus on the importance of achieving ‘outcomes’. These policies include the Universities Australia (UA) *Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020*, the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015* and the NT Department of Education’s *A Share in the Future Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2024*. Looking back at various Indigenous higher education policies over the past fifty years, however, it appears that achieving ‘outcomes’ was not always the goal. To understand why approaches to Indigenous higher education policy in the NT and at the national level exist as they do today, and to understand what has and has not worked in the context of historical change, it is important to reflect on how policy has evolved. Changing governments, shifting socio-political discourses, and various Indigenous advocates have all had considerable and cumulative effects on Indigenous higher education policy. In this paper, we use a discursive narrative approach to chronologically outline the evolution of Indigenous higher education policy in the NT.

*Keywords:* Indigenous; education; higher education; policy; history; Northern Territory

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### **Introduction**

Higher education policy in Australia has evolved over the past sixty years. This has grown to include a focus on under-represented groups, with various initiatives to increase participation in higher education of these groups implemented and reviewed over time. The seminal work of Lyn Martin in 1994 resulted in indicators (now known as the Martin Indicators) for prioritising access and participation for vulnerable or disadvantaged students, including Indigenous<sup>1</sup> students (Martin, 1994). In more recent times, the *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008) saw significant additional resourcing for low socioeconomic status (SES) populations through the establishment of the Higher Education

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this article, Indigenous refers to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and/or Australian First Nations people.

Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) in 2010 (Department of Education and Training, 2017). This included support for Indigenous people from low SES backgrounds. Whilst enrolment, success and completion numbers continue to increase, they are below parity with the non-Indigenous population (Department of Education and Training, 2015). The *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012) outlined recommendations to improve Indigenous higher education outcomes in Australia. These recommendations have been echoed through the recent work of relevant national bodies including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council (ATSIHEAC) (abolished in 2016) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC). However, it would be wrong to imply that these investments are the sole reason we are starting to see incremental changes; changes in Indigenous higher education are more complex and have involved decades of advocacy efforts and step-wise policy reform. This paper summarises the evolution of Indigenous higher education policy in the NT since the 1960s. The NT context is explored as a case study due to its large proportion of Indigenous residents; approximately twenty-five percent of NT residents identify as Indigenous (ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016a). The influence of historical higher education policies in the Territory also provides a unique perspective on policy influences due to most Indigenous residents residing in areas outside of Darwin (ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016a). The discussion below provides an outline of successive national and NT governments and how their approaches to policy were influenced by their ideological positions, dominant policy discourses, active Indigenous consultative groups, and other relevant social and political events. Education policy (focused on schooling) has been included in the discussion due to its relevance to entry pathways into higher education.

## **Background**

A dearth of literature exists regarding government education policy for Indigenous people prior to the 1960s. Policy approaches before this time centred on extermination from the time of British settlement in 1788 until the late 1880s, and then segregation until the 1950s (see, for example, Australian Law Reform Commission, 1986; Bleakley, 1928; Cameron, 2005). In the NT in the early 1900s, for example, institutions and colonial constructed staging outposts were established as part of legislation that classified Aboriginal people according to the amount of 'native' blood a person was deemed to have (Cummings, 1990; MacDonald, 1995). Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families under the *Aboriginals Act 1910* and placed in these institutions, which eventually became reserves, towns and then communities (Parliament of Victoria, 1910). According to government documentation of the time, the children received a basic education (McEwan, 1939). In the NT, 'education' focused on training boys and girls in unskilled roles, such as domestic work and stock work, to add to the labour force to assist white settlers (Parry, 1996). This approach continued until Indigenous people began to be included within Australian Government policy in the 1960s.

It is only from after this time that government educational strategy for Indigenous people in the NT became visible – at least from a policy point of view. Most available policies and policy documents over the past fifty years have, and continue to, target Indigenous people from regional or remote areas, even though approximately half of Indigenous people in the NT reside in urban centres (ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016b). Two recent examples of this include Wilson's (2014) *Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory* and the NT Government's response (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2015), which claim to develop or review education policy for Indigenous people in the NT. Both documents, however, have an explicit focus on remote Indigenous community schools. As a result, the authors

acknowledge that the following account of Indigenous education policy in the NT, for the most part, relates to the schooling sector in remote Indigenous communities. Indigenous higher education policy initiatives have largely been driven by the Australian Government.

## **1960s**

### ***Government***

For the majority of the 1960s, assimilationist policies dominated Aboriginal affairs (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1986; Hasluck, 1961). Racist assumptions and colonialist agendas were the foundation for these policies, which had ultimate motivations to avoid developing diversity and cultural difference within ‘white Australia’ (Moran, 2005). Although Assimilation Policy formally came to an end late in this decade, in reality the transition from ethnic nationalism to national inclusion was a slow process (McGregor, 2009). At this time, the conservatives held power in the Australian Parliament. Harold Holt of the Liberal Party [1966-1967], John McEwan from the National Party [1967-1968], and John Gorton, also from the Liberals [1968-71], oversaw the nation’s governance. Prior to establishment of self-government in 1978, the NT in the 1960s was overseen by the Administrator of the Northern Territory, who represented the Australian Government.

### ***Key Events***

Human rights advocacy had begun to feature internationally in the 1960s. Australia ratified the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) convention against discrimination in education in 1966, which states that every person has the right to education and promotes “equality of opportunity and treatment for all in education” (UNESCO, 1960, p. 3). This also included the right of free choice of minority groups to use or teach their own languages.

Once Assimilation Policy was abandoned, several events marked a stronger presence of Indigenous rights advocacy nationally. These included the right of Indigenous people to vote in Australian Government elections as of 1962, the 1965 freedom rides in New South Wales (NSW) and the passing of the National Referendum to grant Indigenous people full citizen rights in 1967 (Cadzow, 2010). The Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee was established in 1963, although at this time non-Indigenous people were still speaking on behalf of Indigenous people (Holt, 2016; Williams, 2013).

### ***National Indigenous Education and Higher Education Policy***

The Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme (ABSTUDY) was introduced in 1969. The aim of this scheme was to assist Indigenous students to access tertiary education through provision of financial support, with the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme (ABSEG) coming shortly after in 1970. The latter policy acknowledged the need for Indigenous students to first complete high school to transition into university. Highlighting the early development of Indigenous studies as a discrete field of education, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) was established in 1961 and legislated in an Act of Parliament in 1964 as a primarily academic body to “strengthen and promote understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage” (AIATSIS, 1989, p. 4).

### ***Northern Territory Indigenous Education and Higher Education Policy***

A speech by Hasluck (1961) on the Policy of Assimilation made clear how, at the time, the role of schools was perceived as one of the “methods of advancing the policy” (p. 2). This policy was still apparent in NT education policy documents such as *An investigation into the curriculum and teaching methods used in Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory* (Watts

& Gallacher, 1964). The Watts and Gallacher report recommended English as the language of instruction in all schools and encouraged training of Aboriginal Teaching Assistants. It was only in the 1950s that the first Aboriginal Teaching Assistants had been employed, although they did not receive accredited training. For most of the 1960s, there were no tertiary education institutions in the NT.

## **1970s and 1980s**

### ***Government***

Early in the 1970s John Gorton was succeeded by another Liberal, William McMahon [1971-72]. Gough Whitlam, of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), became Prime Minister in 1972 and, in a historically significant gesture, poured a handful of red soil into Vincent Lingiari's hand at Daguragu. This act represented the start of the Aboriginal land rights movement in the NT and self-determination policy in Aboriginal affairs nationally. Successes for human rights advocates continued under Liberal leader Malcolm Fraser [1975-83], who established the Australian Human Rights Commission and was a proponent of multiculturalism. Labor's Bob Hawke held office from 1983 until 1991. Under Hawke the possibility of a treaty was investigated, with some commentators (Foley, 2013, for example) suggesting that the momentum was lost with the push for native title recognition. The first elected Chief Minister of the NT when self-government began was Paul Everingham of the Country Liberal Party (CLP), who retained this position until 1984. Three CLP representatives successively held power in the NT parliament: Ian Tuxworth [1984-86], Stephen Hatton [1986-88] and Marshall Perron [1988-95].

### ***Indigenous Consultative Groups***

During this period, several Indigenous consultative bodies were established. The Aboriginal Consultative Group (ACG) was established in 1974. The *Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission* by the ACG released in 1975, asserted the need for Indigenous educational policy making to be informed by advice from Indigenous people. It spurred the formation of the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) in 1977. The NAEC became a full-time operational body that sat within the Australian Government's Department of Education. The NAEC released a discussion paper titled, *Rationale, aims and objectives in Aboriginal education* in 1980, which was a primary focus for consultation with key Indigenous stakeholders in the coming years. This document was also the precursor for the NAEC (1986) *Philosophy, aims and policy guidelines*.

The NAEC consulted widely with Indigenous people nationally throughout its lifespan (Holt, 2016). This was, in part, operationalised through State and Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Committees (AECGs) throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s. The NT AECG was established in 1978. Soon after it was formed its name was changed to 'Feppi', meaning 'rock' or 'foundation' in Nganmariyanga language of the Palumpa region of the NT (Collins, 1999). Feppi's (1986) *12 point plan to improve the level of Aboriginal student achievement* outlined recommendations that would assist in advancing Indigenous school student outcomes. The NAEC was abolished in 1989 due to perceptions by non-Indigenous government representatives that an Indigenous education committee was no longer needed, given the increasing number of senior Indigenous people in government (Holt, 2016).

### ***National Indigenous Education and Higher Education Policy***

Several national initiatives occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. NAEC sponsored the *Education & Employment of Aboriginal Teachers* Report (Hughes & Willmot, 1979). It recommended the training of 1000 Indigenous teachers by 1990. In 1985, the Aboriginal Participation Initiative, which included funds for additional places to assist in increasing access

for Indigenous higher education students, commenced. During this same year, three key reports were released: the Miller report (Miller, 1985), which led to the reframing of programs around increasing Indigenous economic independence, and the Blanchard and Jordan reports (Blanchard, 1985; Jordan & Howard, 1985), both of which influenced increases in funding to support Indigenous tertiary education student participation (Gale, 1998). Hughes' (1988) *Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce* proposed objectives for a national Aboriginal education policy; the report describing the "educational disadvantage" (p. 16) of Aboriginal people for the first time, which was a precursor to Indigenous 'equity' featuring in educational policy during the 1980s and beyond (Guenther, 2017).

In 1989, the National Aboriginal Education Policy (NAEP), later to become the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP), was released (Department of Employment Education and Training, 1989). This policy, endorsed by State, Territory and Federal governments, identified 21 goals focusing on inclusion of Indigenous people in educational decision making, equitable access and participation, and equitable outcomes. It was the Australian Governments first adopted formal policy position that had been developed by Aboriginal people. Programs introduced through NATSIEP included the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) Program, the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS) and the Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program (AESIP). Also in 1989, the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) was introduced in response to the Australian Government's *Higher Education: a policy statement* (Dawkins, 1988). The scheme introduced fees for higher education courses, however, allowed deferred payment through taxation. *Higher education: a policy statement* outlined existing and proposed spending that would be used to target higher education access and success in tertiary education for equity groups, including Indigenous Australians.<sup>2</sup> The Higher Education Equity Program (which currently exists as HEPPP) was proposed within Dawkins' report and is discussed below. Marking the first moves towards a nationalised school system, in 1989, State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers for Education agreed to the *Hobart Declaration on Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling*. The Declaration outlined 10 national goals that were intended to assist schools to develop objectives and strategies in relation to curriculum and assessment.

### ***Northern Territory Indigenous Education and Higher Education Policy***

The NT Government first introduced bilingual education in 1973 (Northern Territory Department of Education, 1981). By 1974, 11 schools were already operating bilingual programs (Department of Education, 1974). There was some confidence based on emerging evidence that bilingual programs would improve English language literacy and numeracy outcomes and recognition that team teaching strategies were required. By 1990, however, some commentators were questioning bilingual education. Tom Harris (1990), for instance, in his report *A review of the education of traditionally oriented Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory* asserted that "the dogmatic view that bilingual education is good for all is naive, paternalistic and likely to get a good idea a very bad name" (p. 16).

Formalised secondary schooling was just becoming established around remote parts of the NT at this time, with a number of boarding schools set up to provide secondary education for Indigenous students throughout the 1970s (Lee, Fasoli, Ford, Stephenson, & McInerney, 2014). The commitment to secondary schooling for Indigenous students from remote locations anticipated increased participation in VET and higher education in the two institutions that were

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<sup>2</sup> The inclusion of Indigenous peoples within equity frameworks has been contentious (see Bunda, Zipin, & Brennan, 2012, for example). This discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.

involved in training of Aboriginal teachers in the NT. These were Batchelor College and Darwin Community College - the predecessors of Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) and Charles Darwin University (CDU).

## **1990s**

### ***Government***

The ALP's Paul Keating, who was Prime Minister from 1991 until 1996, delivered the historic 1992 Redfern speech, which was an attempt to rebuild trust between the government and Indigenous Australian people. This speech introduced 'reconciliation' into Australian Indigenous Affairs discourse. In 1996, Keating was succeeded by the conservative Liberal John Howard who stayed in power until 2007, and who forged a 'practical reconciliation' approach. In the NT, the CLP's dominance continued with Shane Stone serving as Chief Minister for four years [1995-99] and Dennis Burke for two years [1999-2001].

### ***Key Events***

The *Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* emphasised improved literacy and language as a mechanism to reduce Indigenous incarceration rates (Johnson & Muirhead, 1991). This led the Australian Government to increase funding for the AESIP in 1993. Also in 1993, the *Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Rights in Education* was released, which was a powerful declaration of unity among First Nations peoples around the world (Task Force of the World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education, 1993).

### ***Indigenous Consultative Groups***

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was established in 1990 as a statutory body to serve both representative and administrative functions relating to Aboriginal Affairs policy making and service delivery (Cunningham & Baeza, 2005; Pratt & Bennett, 2004). ATSIC, abolished in 2005, increased political participation of Indigenous people and was a platform for them to have a voice in the years that it was active (Sanders, 2004). The Aboriginal Higher Education Association was formed in 1994, eventually evolving into the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIEHC). After the NAEC was abolished, Feppi underwent numerous restructures until it also was dissolved in the mid-1990s. The Indigenous Education Council, the most recent iteration of a peak body for Indigenous education in the NT, was dissolved in 2014.

### ***National Indigenous Education and Higher Education Policy***

In the mid-1990s, the *Final report of the national review of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples* was released (Yunupingu, 1995). Chaired by the late Dr. Mandawuy Yunupingu, this report observed the emergence of 'self-management' in education policy as opposed to self-determination and referred to the importance of achieving 'outcomes'. The report stated that the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1989) had lost the genuine aspirations outlined in the Hughes report (1988) and was silent about supporting alternative and community controlled education initiatives. The Australian Government's response to this review included increased funding for the Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program (AESIP) and tutorial assistance, and increased funding for higher education providers to increase Indigenous enrolments. The revised *National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2002* was released shortly afterwards in 1995 (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 1995). This new strategy amended the original goals outlined in the 1989 NATSIEP into seven priority action areas, including Indigenous Studies for all Australians and literacy and numeracy.

Schwab's (1995) *Twenty years of policy recommendations for Indigenous education: overview and research implications* noted that there had been gains in access and participation, however, that "equity remains far more problematic" (p. 23). He argued that continuing assumptions underlying education policy – that is, that the purpose of improved education outcomes is to ultimately improve economic outcomes – over the previous twenty years suggest that statistical equity may never be achieved. The *Review of Support Funding of Indigenous Australian Students in Higher Education* (Ham, 1996) recommended closer links between funding, student outcomes and student load, which was followed by funding being injected into the Australian Government's *Strategic Results Projects* (Price, 2012). This shift included a restructure of the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP; formerly AESIP) to encompass infrastructure upgrades, research and teacher training. In 1998, the formula for the Indigenous Support Funding program was revised. Institutions would thereafter be allocated funding based on enrolments, student load and award courses completed (Kinnane et al., 2014). The HECS contribution amount was also increased around this time, as was the threshold for repayment. Funding was cut to the ABSTUDY program in 1997 (Kinnane et al., 2014). After around ten years of debate, entry-level literacy and numeracy requirements for tertiary study were increased.

### ***Northern Territory Indigenous Education and Higher Education Policy***

In the Northern Territory during the early 1990s, some suggested that an increase in entry-level literacy and numeracy requirements for tertiary study was required in order to raise the quality of graduates. Others argued that the need for flexibility in the delivery of Indigenous teacher training was, in contrast, critical to ensure that entry pathways were responsive to the needs of Indigenous students. Harris (1990) highlighted Batchelor College's pivotal role in this area but supported the notion that learning standards for Indigenous students must be on par with standards for the broader community. Harris also stated that courses delivered through NTU's Centre for Aboriginal and Islander Studies (CAIS) should continue to follow normal standards for accreditation and registration.

*Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the NT* (Collins, 1999) found deteriorating educational outcomes for Indigenous students "from an already low base" (p. 2) and recommended an overhaul in financial management and information systems. This report introduces a discourse of 'cost-effectiveness', adding weight to what has now developed into a strong focus on institutions being able to demonstrate performance against performance indicators. In 1999, the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty First Century* added to arguments for an increased focus on accountability and outcomes in educational policy, advocating for high standards for all students nationally (COAG Education Council, 1999). The same year, the NT Government withdrew support for bilingual education because, it was reported, Indigenous community representatives were concerned about weak literacy and numeracy achievement among students educated in bilingual schools compared with those attending other schools. However, the Department of Education's claims could not be supported by evidence when requested (Devlin, 1999; Lee et al., 2014).

## **2000s**

### ***Government and Key Events***

The Howard Government was in power throughout most of this decade. Under Howards' reign the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), informally known as 'the Intervention', was implemented. It was the Federal Government's answer to the *Little Children are Sacred Report* (Wild & Anderson, 2007), which stated that:

...the cumulative effects of poor health, alcohol, drug abuse, gambling, pornography, unemployment, poor education and housing and general disempowerment lead inexorably to family and other violence and then on to sexual abuse of men and women and, finally, of children. (p. 6)

The NTER was controversial and involved initiation of several rapidly-designed and implemented measures to reduce sexual abuse and neglect in Aboriginal communities in the NT. Several evaluation reports have demonstrated that the NTER has failed to improve outcomes, including educational outcomes, and has had detrimental impacts on Indigenous communities in the NT (Australian Institute of Criminology et al., 2011; Gray, 2015).

In 2007, when the ALP came into power under Kevin Rudd, he delivered the National Apology to express, on behalf of the Australian Government, regret for the hugely damaging effects of the Assimilation Policy to the Stolen Generation and their descendants. Around this time the 'Closing the Gap' discourse emerged, and it remains the common discursive approach in Indigenous Affairs. 'Closing the Gap' terminology has been criticised by some as being underpinned by a deficit viewpoint and, moreover, as representing an exclusionary and Western-centric way of looking at Indigenous issues (Altman, 2009; Guenther, 2017; Hogarth, 2017; Sarra, 2005; Vass, 2013). In parallel with broader neoliberalist pressures to maximise performance and accountability, an emphasis on improving 'outcomes' is seen across the board. In 2001 Labor Party won government in the NT with Clare Martin as Chief Minister. Martin served until 2007 when Paul Henderson (ALP) was elected. He remained Chief Minister until 2012.

### ***Indigenous Consultative Groups***

A 2003 review of ATSIC stated that although it was in need of urgent reform due to governance issues, the Commission should continue to serve its very important role as a "primary vehicle to represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' views" (Hannaford, Huggins, & Collins, 2003, p. 8). Despite this recommendation ATSIC was abolished in 2004 (Pratt & Bennett, 2004). Thereafter, Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) was created in 2004 to provide strategic advice to the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research. IHEAC, produced a number of key documents such as the *Improving Indigenous Outcomes and Enhancing Indigenous Culture and Knowledge in Australian Higher Education* (see IHEAC, 2006), which included the *2006-2008 IHEAC Strategic Plan*.

### ***National Indigenous Education and Higher Education Policy***

Changes to ABSTUDY eligibility and payment rates occurred in 2000. The *Katu Kalpa - Report on the inquiry into the effectiveness of education and training programs for Indigenous Australians* (Senate Employment Workplace Relations Small Business and Education References Committee, 2000) was also released in this year. The report recommended that funding should be directed to higher education providers for Indigenous education. Subsequently the Indigenous Support Program was established, which provides financial support to higher education institutions for Indigenous student support activities such as study skills and counselling (Australian Government, 2003).

After an annual review by the Department of Education, Science and Training (2004), increased accountability measures were applied in the school, VET and higher education sectors (MCEETYA, 2006). Resources were redirected to programs demonstrating improved outcomes and there was an explicit focus on students in remote locations. MCEETYA's (2006) *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education* recommended initiatives to improve post school transitions

into further study and work, such as development of individual pathway plans and vocational learning opportunities like traineeships.

The *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley et al., 2008) emphasised the benefits that improved higher education outcomes for all Australians brings to the nation's wellbeing and recommended sector-specific targets for all underrepresented groups in higher education, including Indigenous students. It also recommended that the Australian Government regularly review the effectiveness of Indigenous higher education access and outcomes measures. The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (COAG Education Council, 2008) built on the goals put forward in the Adelaide and Hobart Declarations and articulated renewed goals in the context of "major changes in the world that are placing new demands on Australian education" (p. 4). MCEETYA's *Review of Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008* (Buckskin et al., 2009) then recommended a revised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan be developed, with outcomes specific to teaching and learning. Over the next few years significant changes to national educational policy occurred including a nationalised curriculum, the National Assessment Program (NAPLAN), and professional teaching standards. The National Education Agreement was also developed in 2008 (COAG, 2008), in addition to a series of other National Partnerships and 'Closing the Gap' priorities, specific to Indigenous Australian people.

### ***Northern Territory Indigenous Education and Higher Education Policy***

The NT Department of Employment, Education and Training's *2000-2004 Indigenous Education Strategic Plan*, built on Collin's (1999) *Learning Lessons* review and focused on school attendance, student capability, educational service delivery, monitoring of learning outcomes, accountability and a shared responsibility for education between families, communities and government. The 'Secondary Education Review' (Ramsay, 2003) also recommended systems to monitor the quality of education providers and the quality of education services. The *2006-2009 Indigenous Education Strategic Plan* (Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training, 2006) noted increases in Indigenous retention between 2001 and 2005 and continued on with several of the previously articulated action areas. It supported revitalisation of bilingual programs – a backflip from the former CLP government's decision in 1999 to withdraw funding from bilingual education. Other key changes were the inclusion of strategies for Indigenous teacher training and student jobs and career pathways. After significant shifts in educational strategy nationally and in the NT, the *Structural Review of the NT Department of Education & Training: Delivering the Goods* (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009) report made recommendations to the NT Government that aimed to maximise efficiency and effectiveness of educational service delivery. A significant change that emerged from COAG's set of agreements in 2009 included designation of approximately 20 'Growth Towns' in the NT as part of the government's *Working Future* Strategy (Northern Territory Government, 2009). These growth towns were designated as hubs where services and infrastructure would be focused – including provision of education (Macklin, 2009).

## **2010s**

### ***Government***

In 2010 the ALP's Julia Gillard became Prime Minister, however, prior to the 2013 federal election, Kevin Rudd once again took leadership. The ALP was overthrown by Tony Abbott's Liberals in 2013. After another leadership spill in 2015, Malcolm Turnbull assumed the role of Prime Minister for the Coalition. After over a decade in opposition, the CLP returned to power in the NT. Terry Mills [2012-13] and Adam Giles [2013-16] were Chief Ministers. In the 2016 election, the ALP won government and Michael Gunner became Chief Minister of the NT.

### ***Indigenous Consultative Groups***

In 2011 IHEAC developed the National Indigenous Higher Education Workforce Strategy (IHEAC, 2011), and proposed and established the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, chaired by Professor Larissa Behrendt (Behrendt et al., 2012). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council (ATSIHEAC), as IHEAC became known in 2013, operated with a focus on Indigenous higher education workforce strategies and ‘whole-of-university’ approaches to improving Indigenous higher education outcomes, amongst others (ATSIHEAC, 2015a; 2015b; 2015c; 2015d). Despite a strong mandate for its continuing role in implementing the recommendations outlined in the Behrendt Review, ATSIHEAC was abolished by the Australian Government in 2015. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIEC) now plays a proxy role in providing ministerial and government advice on matters relating to Indigenous higher education in Australia.

### ***National Indigenous Education and Higher Education Policy***

The *2010-2014 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan* (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2010) was built on the *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008* policy and was written in the context of the recent COAG reforms and ‘Closing the Gap’ targets (COAG, 2009). It includes reforms designed to increase access to quality early childhood education, improve literacy and numeracy achievement, address disadvantage, improve teacher quality and increase the number of students completing year 12. This plan was evaluated by Professor Mark Rose (2014), who found that it provided consistency and focus for jurisdictions and school sectors, however, he also reported a time lag for implementation and that some jurisdictions had focused more on State or Territory policy priorities rather than those in the Action Plan. At the time of writing, the current relevant national strategic plan for Indigenous education is the *2015 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy* (COAG Education Council, 2015). It names three foundational areas for action to be the basis of improved outcomes in other priority areas. These include leadership, quality teaching and workforce development; culture and identity; and partnerships. Since the ‘Closing the Gap’ targets were established, annual ‘Closing the Gap’ reports have been published to detail progress on achieving these targets (COAG, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017). These reports have demonstrated that Year 12 attainment targets are on track to be met by 2020. However, targets relating to early childhood, school attendance and reading and writing are not. The reports do not contain targets for higher education.

The *More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative* (MATSITI) was implemented between 2011 and 2016. It aimed to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people entering and remaining in the teaching profession in Australian schools (Buckskin, 2016). A number of positive developments were brought about through MATSITI, however, an evaluation of the initiative noted the difficulty in assessing impact over a four-year timeframe (Johnson, Cherednichenko, & Rose, 2016).

The *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* was announced in 2011 (Behrendt et al., 2012). A series of background discussion papers were commissioned at this time. For example, the *Indigenous Higher Education Reform and Indigenous Knowledge Review* (Rigney, 2011). The Behrendt Review (2012) recommended parity targets for access and participation be set to match those of non-Indigenous students; and shifting responsibility of Indigenous student support from Indigenous Education Units to “a whole-of-university effort” (p. xii). These recommendations heavily

influenced reforms to, and subsequent reporting frameworks associated with, the Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP). The new funding formula placed increased weight on progression and completion outcomes, in addition to enrolment outcomes (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2016).

In early 2017 Universities Australia developed its inaugural *2017-2020 Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy* in consultation with NATSIHEC (Universities Australia, 2017). This plan intends to act as “a sector wide initiative that binds all universities with common goals” (p. 10). With regards to the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP), an evaluation was conducted in 2016 and a report published in 2017 (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2017). The Australian Government has since committed to maintaining current HEPPP funding to the program through its 2017 *Higher Education Reform Package* (Australian Government, 2017), although the partnership component will be discontinued.

### ***Northern Territory Indigenous Education and Higher Education Policy***

The revision of the 2007 ‘Intervention’ legislation saw the *Stronger Futures Act* legislated in 2012 under the Gillard Labor government (Northern Territory Government, 2009). Although the bulk of measures implemented through the Intervention remained in place, minor amendments were made. These included land lease reform and introduction of the Improving School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure (SEAM) policy, which linked school attendance with welfare payments.

The *Review of Indigenous Education in the NT*, led by Bruce Wilson (2014), is the most recent review of education policy in the NT. Wilson recommended defunding remote secondary schools, and was against bilingual education. He proposed phonemic awareness, phonics and vocabulary for improving English literacy. The NT Government’s *Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2024* (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2015) was built on the Wilson Review and initially included strategies around transitioning remote Indigenous secondary students into boarding schools in urban centres. It also led to the trialling of Direct Instruction – a teaching method for reading developed in the United States in the 1960s.

Perhaps most significantly in the higher education space in the NT during this decade was the development of a partnership between Charles Darwin University (CDU) and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), the NT’s two higher education institutions. The Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE) was established in 2012 when the Federal Government provided funding to both institutions on the condition that they would work in partnership for the delivery of higher education. Some of the funding was utilised for construction of new facilities and additional student accommodation at the CDU campus in Casuarina. The ACIKE partnership is currently under consideration in response to a recent review.

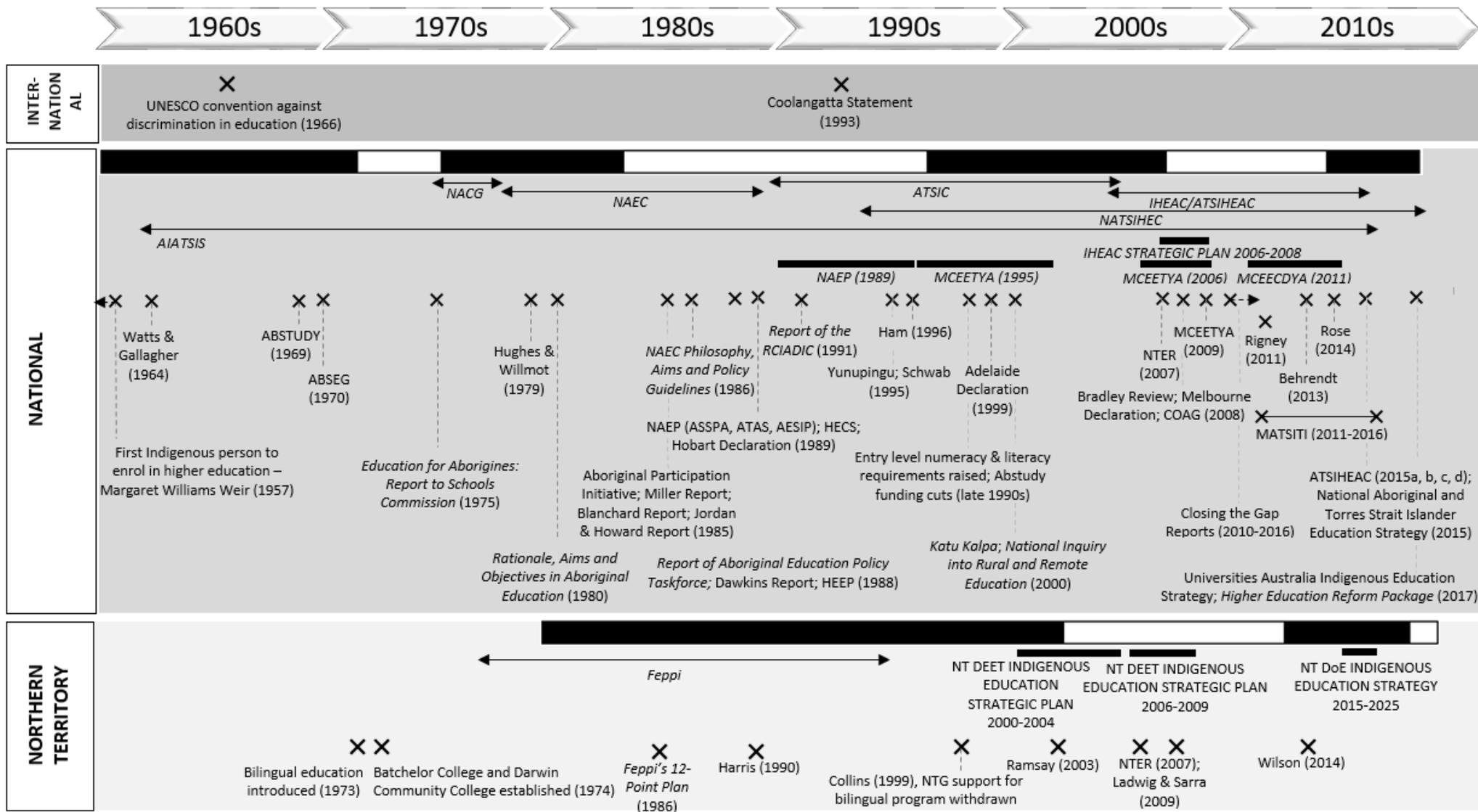


Figure 1: National and Northern Territory Indigenous higher education policy timeline

## Legend

Colour	Meaning
	Liberal Government in power
	Labor Government in power

## Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
ABSEG	Scholarship scheme for Aboriginal secondary students
ABSTUDY	Financial support scheme for Aboriginal secondary, further and tertiary education students
AESIP	Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ASSPA	Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness
ATAS	Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme
ATSIHEAC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
IHEAC	Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council
MATSITI	More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NACG	National Aboriginal Consultative Group
NAEC	National Aboriginal Education Committee
NAEP	National Aboriginal Education Plan
NATSIEP	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Plan
NATSIHEC	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Committee
NT DEET	Northern Territory Department of Education, Employment and Training
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response

## Discussion

An outline of historical political events and policy initiatives has been provided. It is now useful to summarise the key trends and what they mean for Indigenous higher education participation and outcomes in the NT currently and into the future. Firstly, it is crucial to be reminded that documented higher education policy in the NT pertains predominantly to the Indigenous population in regional and remote areas. As a result, there remains a large ‘gap’ in knowledge relating to the impacts of higher education policy on Indigenous students in urban locations.

Secondly, it is worth noting that with each change of government there has been a shift in direction and in the accompanying policy rhetoric. We can see clear changes in policy from assimilation<sup>3</sup> in the 1960s to self-determination at the time of the Whitlam government, and then to self-management with Fraser, to consultation and Aboriginal decision making with Hawke, to reconciliation with Keating, and to accountability with Howard. The last decade has seen a further shift of rhetoric to ‘Closing the Gap’ represented differently with Rudd, Gillard, Abbott and Turnbull. Accompanying these shifts have been changes in emphasis for higher education, starting with self-determination and access as the priority in the 1970s, through to participation in the 1980s, equity in the 1990s, to outcomes in the 2000s. In part, these shifts are a situational response. Once policy has effectively addressed access, then the emphasis needs to shift so that the mechanisms for improved outcomes, which in the 1980s and 1990s were seen to be equity and participation, can be achieved. While policy itself may be seen as a driver for change, in many cases what we have seen is that policy has in fact responded to activism and advocacy by

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<sup>3</sup> It must be noted that some contend that although Indigenous higher education policies and policy discourse have changed, the underlying assumptions of the Western education system remain assimilationist (Smith, 1999, for example), however this discussion is outside the scope of this paper.

Indigenous individuals and organisations to effect changes. The reference list for this paper includes several Indigenous commentators who have made significant contributions to Indigenous education (e.g. Rose, Bunda, Behrendt, Hughes, Yunupingu, Sarra, Buckskin, Rigney). These individuals, and others, continue to contribute to the Indigenous education policy space and their work should not be underestimated. This paper has described the various Indigenous education consultative groups that have functioned over time. We argue that a more thorough investigation of the impact of these groups on Indigenous education policy in the NT is now needed, particularly in the context of the gradual disbandment of many of these consultative groups in recent times.

Finally, the relative impact of activism or policy is difficult to disentangle because there have often been simultaneous efforts at Territory and Commonwealth Government level, which affect outcomes. Further, and what is not shown in this narrative, the impact of institutional responses to the higher education needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be considered. In the NT since the 1970s, the major higher education providers, BIITE and CDU have undergone evolutionary change, adapting both to policy and to the needs of the communities they serve.

## **Conclusion**

Over the course of its relatively short documented history, Indigenous education and higher education policy in the NT has seen marked changes. An increasing national focus on equity, and subsequently performance and accountability, has led to more attention being directed at achieving outcomes for Indigenous higher education students. Various Indigenous consultative groups have played an important role in policy directions at both the Territory and national levels. Indigenous education and higher education policy within the NT has also been strongly influenced by policy and socio-political events at national and international levels. This review has outlined key national and relevant international events, Indigenous consultative groups, and influential policies throughout various policy eras relevant to Indigenous higher education in the NT. Further qualitative research, and program and policy evaluations relating to the impact of Indigenous higher education in the NT – for urban, regional and remote communities – is urgently required to parallel what is presented here on the evolution of Indigenous higher education policy in the NT.

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