Jumbunna Institute

Making our words and actions meet

Understanding the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators in the workforce

Australian Education Union
2023

Executive Summary

The Australian Education Union (AEU) is the federal body for the representation of educators, from schools, TAFE institutions to early childhood centres. The AEU has over 185,000 members nationally and includes associated bodies within the States and Territories.

In 2020, *Yalukit Yulendj,* the AEU's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education committee, committed to a survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and their experiences of work. The overall question the survey sought to answer is:

'How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public education workers in Australia perceive and experience racism in their workplaces and across the system more broadly?'

In congruence to the AEU educator survey, the Jumbunna Institute, in partnership with the Diversity Council of Australia, conducted a national survey of over 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their experiences of work. The report was entitled *Gari Yala*, meaning 'Speak the Truth' in Wiradjuri. The report detailed racism within the workplace, cultural load and identity strain faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and the impacts of this for Aboriginal and Torres Strait employees and their employers. For the purposes of this report, we have used the Gari Yala report as a national benchmark to compare the AEU survey against.

What we found was consistent across the Gari Yala survey and the AEU survey is how culturally unsafe workplaces are, with 28% of Gari Yala respondents noting this, compared to 25.2% of AEU respondents. 44% of AEU respondents felt that they were responsible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues in the workplace, which is higher than the Gari Yala cohort of 39% feeling a high cultural load.

Perhaps the most concerning trends from the AEU results is an inherent finding that other educators provide the most racist burden to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues, more than students, parents, and the community. This is despite 36.4% (strongly agree and agree) of respondents noting that their workplace (and 42.3% for the department) provides access to professional development on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture to all staff. This suggests that existing training needs to go further to better provide cultural awareness of other educators.

The impacts of racism in the workplace were prevalent when responders were asked about their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues. 48.6% noting poor mental health and 37.2% noting poor physical health, of their co-workers due to racism.

The impacts of racism and culturally unsafe workplaces also mean that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are likely to leave the workplace or sector, with 20.8% of AEU respondents having previously left a role because of discrimination. A further

35.6% of respondents were aware of a colleague moving positions due to racism. This is common for staff experiencing racism, who were 2.5 times more likely to leave their current employer in 12 months if they experienced racism in the workplace.

The findings of this report used the Gari Yala ten truths to frame the required next steps. Significantly, this report recommends that enterprise bargaining clauses must be adopted to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, with proposed clauses adopted and modified from the Australian Education Union Victorian Branch detailed in Appendix 2. The recommendations from this report are provided in the table below.

Table 1: Recommendations from AEU Findings, based on Gari Yala ten truths.

Gari Yala Ten Truths	Recommendation based on AEU Findings
1. Commit to unearthing and acting on workplace truths – however uncomfortable this might be	• Commit to engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members across the nation to explore truths in more detail. This should be done on a regional scale.
2. Ensure any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-related work is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led and informed	• Ensure engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members and enterprise bargaining provisions are developed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.
3. Develop organisational principles to make it clear how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement and employment should work in practice	• Develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led enterprise bargaining provisions (Appendix 2) that reflect the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and legitimising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's needs. This should include leave, anti-racism procedures as enforceable industrial concerns, payment for cultural knowledge and cultural concerns.
4. Focus on workplace readiness (cultural safety) rather than worker readiness	• Advocate for a baseline survey on cultural responsiveness across the sector and enforce training in workplaces with low levels of awareness. • Build cultural responsiveness across the sector through further training, particularly for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues.
5. Recognise identity strain and educate non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff about how to interact with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues in ways that reduce this	• Build identity strain considerations into workplace cultural responsiveness training. • Find industrial solutions to address identity strain, where necessary.

6. Recognise and remunerate cultural load as part of an employee's workload	• Redevelop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholder role descriptions to include cultural load considerations. These must also be considered in future enterprise bargaining provisions.
7. Consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff on how to minimise cultural load while maintaining organisational activity	• Build cultural load considerations into workplace cultural responsiveness training. • Find industrial solutions to address cultural load, where necessary.
8. Focus on sustainable careers and career development, rather than just short-term appointments	• Use engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members to listen and develop a real understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. • Develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led enterprise bargaining clauses. • Provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors to employees entering the workforce for the first time, remunerated at the appropriate rate. • Promote and develop career plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to move into leadership roles at a local, state, and federal level.
9. Take action to address workplace racism	• Test and evaluate the effectiveness of racism complaint procedures. • Redesign complaint procedures to meet the requirements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. • Ensure racism complaint procedures are regularly tested and evaluated. • Provide anti-discrimination compliance training for staff. • Create a positive duty on employers to ensure the workplace is free from racism (built into enterprise bargaining provisions). • Explore the possibility of workplace anti-racism advocates.
10. Look to high-impact initiatives – those that research shows are linked to better wellbeing and retention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff	• Develop formal career development programmes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. • Develop and test the awareness and effectiveness of racism complaint procedures.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement of Country

The authors of this report wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the nations across Australia and pay our respect to Elders past and present. We recognise that all Elders and mobs in locations across Australia have their own experiences of work and education. We hope this report encourages mob to keep sharing our stories, particularly noting the importance of the education sector and the need to continue all types of learning for future generations.

Introduction

Education is a cornerstone activity of Indigenous cultures across the world, with particular importance in the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context. Education takes many forms, with formal institutions now providing physical domains for educators to teach youth across our diverse communities. This provides an important domain for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators to share their culture and instil values at a young age. This is increasingly important given the growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth demographic across the country.

The Australian Education Union (AEU) has a proud history of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members and communities. The AEU advocates and campaigns for a high-quality public education system that recognises the unique and inherent rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – as First Nations peoples of this land – to ensure a culturally responsive and safe education. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation has been embedded into the key decision-making structures of the AEU, through the federal rules of the organisation, for over two decades.

Testament to these decision-making structures, *Yalukit Yulendj,* the AEU's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Committee, committed to a survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and their experiences of work. The survey explored five inter-related categories in which racism manifests. These are:

1. Workplace – perceptions and experiences in the current workplace;
2. Professional – perceptions and experiences of professional support and structures;
3. Personal – perceptions and experiences of personal occurrences and impacts;
4. Colleagues – perceptions and experiences of occurrences on colleagues and impacts; and;
5. Systems – perceptions and experiences of systems responsiveness.

This report provides the aggregation of two significant datasets. The first is *Gari Yala*, which provides a nationwide and sector-wide examination of the current state of play for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers. This report's second and primary focus is to examine education-specific experiences based on an AEU wide member survey. This report's final components provide an understanding of the current education sector state of play, contextualised by the broader Gari Yala data

set. It concludes with recommendations for the AEU to advocate for in future negotiations and enterprise bargaining provisions toward best practice across Australia.

The intent of this document is to be released as a public document for educators, unions, and the human resources industry to reflect upon and act.

Who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators?

There were almost 9,200 fully qualified and registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff across Australia, making up approximately 2% of the educators across the nation. This is broken up across the education sector as per Table 2.

Table 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation per education area

Education area	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation
Preschool	2.36%
Primary School	2.13%
Secondary School	1.75%
Special Education	1.32%

The statistics in Table 2 above demonstrate a lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators in Australia compared to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population at large, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples constitute 3.3% of Australia's total population. Further, there is a growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth demographic, which means that classrooms will continue to have higher Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation, which should be further replicated by educators.

Despite an underrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators across all education areas, the concern is exacerbated when comparing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principals. Of the 9,200 educators across the country, just 100 (1.08%) principals are members of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association (NATSIPA). This shows that there is much work to be done in increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership across our education system.

Terminology

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. In this report, we use the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. However, we recognise that this approach is not without contention. First, these terms do not reflect the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and it is important to remember that many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people prefer to be known by their specific group or clan names, and some by 'First Nations'.

Community. Where the report refers to 'community' it is referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Racism. This report recognises that for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, racism at work is endemic. It manifests in structural and interpersonal ways, and has a real and dramatic impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reading this report, the experiences relayed by our respondents may be distressing. However, we felt that this behaviour needed to be named and so we made a conscious choice to call out racism where we heard it from our respondents.

Respondents. Where the report refers to 'respondents' it is referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents only.

Yalukit Yulendj. The AEU's national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education committee

Gari Yala Context

Gari Yala (speak the truth) was an Australian wide survey of 1,033 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The report, developed by the Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research and Diversity Council Australia, revealed some shocking realities about experiences of racism, the lack of cultural safety and identity strain experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australian workplaces. The project was led and overseen by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts, including a multi-disciplinary expert panel.

The report was ground-breaking, in that it was the first opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to narrate their experiences of work firsthand, rather than being aggregated in mainstream reports or examined and interpreted by non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The report perhaps noted this sentiment best, stating:

"We hope this report enables our mob to tell our own stories. Gari Yala, speak the truth".

There were four key areas that the online survey sought to answer:
1. What are workers' experiences sharing their identity at work?
2. How culturally safe are workplaces?
3. What is the state of racism in workplaces?
4. What makes a difference?

Key findings

The key findings of the Gari Yala report are highlighted in Image 1 below. The report demonstrated that despite over 1 in 4 workplaces being culturally unsafe and workplaces often meaning a high cultural load and identity strain for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, a high number (78%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people said it was important to identify.
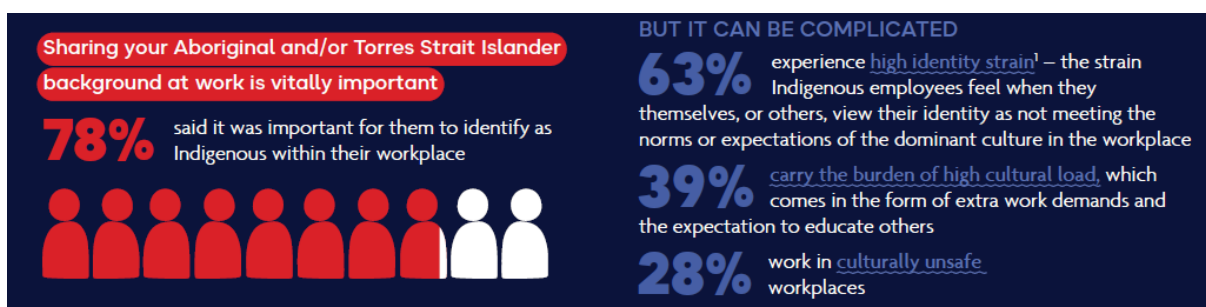

Image 1: Gari Yala key findings

Identity strain, a term coined by the research team, was evident through many forms in the workplace. This can be summarised through the key themes in Image 2.

Identity strain takes the form of...

I have to work harder to prove than an Indigenous person can do the job
65%

I am asked to do something that has made me feel I am compromising my cultural integrity
44%

I am told to 'tone it down' or be less outspoken about Indigenous issues
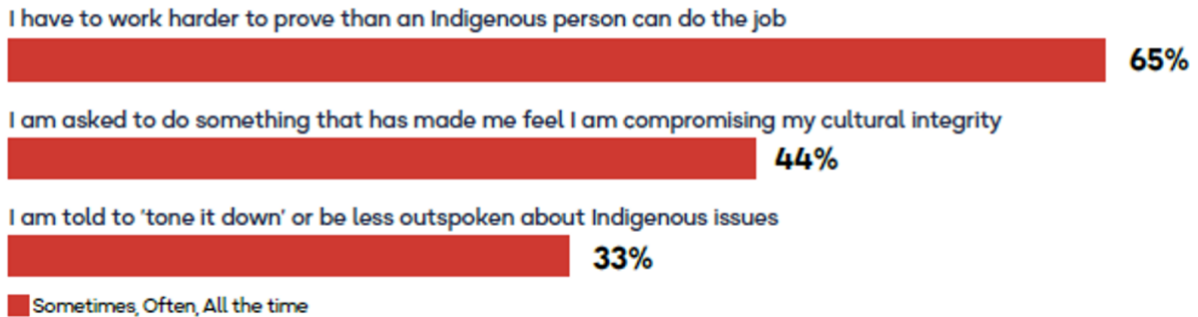**33%**

■ Sometimes, Often, All the time

Image 2: Gari Yala identity strain

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers also noted that they commonly (39%) receive a high cultural load within the workplace. Again, the burden of cultural load showed up in various ways as demonstrated in Image 3 below.

Cultural load takes the form of...

I am expected to educate my non-Indigenous colleagues about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culture
71%

I am expected to talk on behalf of all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples
69%

I have extra Indigenous-related work demands placed upon me that non-Indigenous colleagues don't (e.g. organise NAIDOC Week, do cultural awareness training)
66%

■ Sometimes, Often, All the time

Image 3: Gari Yala cultural load

The second area that the project focused on was how culturally safe Australian workplaces are. Cultural safety is defined as the means being able to practise your culture free of ridicule or condemnation. It occurs when a workplace acknowledges respect and accommodates difference. Concerning, of the over 1000 respondents, 28% of respondents noted that they worked in a culturally unsafe workplace and the further 33% in a somewhat culturally safe workplace. This manifests in different ways as seen in Image 4 below.

Lack of cultural safety takes the form of...

My workplace values the skills, perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
45%

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are appointed in any internal roles with an Indigenous focus
50%

I am comfortable expressing my cultural and personal beliefs at work
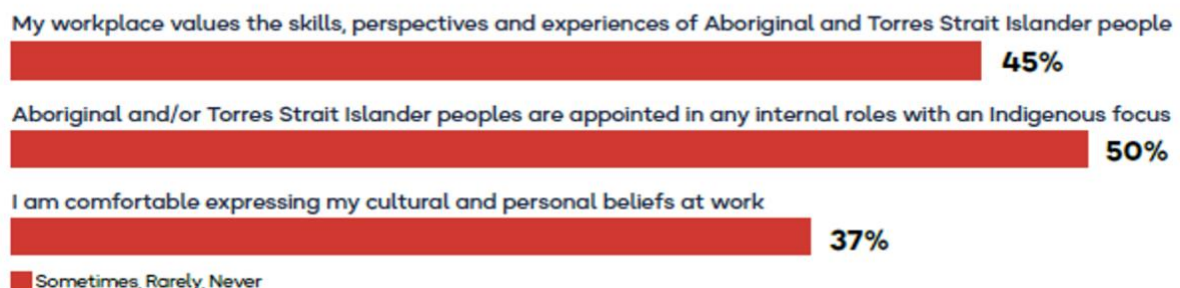**37%**

■ Sometimes, Rarely, Never

Image 4: Gari Yala lack of cultural safety takes the form of….

One of the main drivers of workplace racism was appearance racism, followed by assumptions and stereotypes and then racist slurs and jokes experienced at work. The commonality of these racist events in the workplace demonstrates a clear lack of cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers across the workforce (as evident in Image 5).

THE STATE OF WORKPLACE RACISM

APPEARANCE RACISM
In previous workplaces due to having fairer skin I've been told I'm not a real Aborigine or that the real Aborigines live in the top end.

59%

ASSUMPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES
It was my manager in my most recent job that said, "you people don't work do you?"

56%

RACIST SLURS AND JOKES
In some work situations there had been blatant racism - being called a "mongrel breed" or "you abos get everything for free", "how did you get this job?" and more.

44%

Image 5: Gari Yala state of workplace racism

The Gari Yala project also sought to quantify the impact of workplace racism. It is obvious from the findings below (Image 6) the impacts of racism has a direct impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity in the workplace and the future career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This demonstrates a concerning trend regarding racism, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff noted they were:
- 3 times less likely to be satisfied at work;
- 3 times less likely to recommend their workplace to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and;
- 2.5 times more likely to intend to leave their current employer in the coming year.
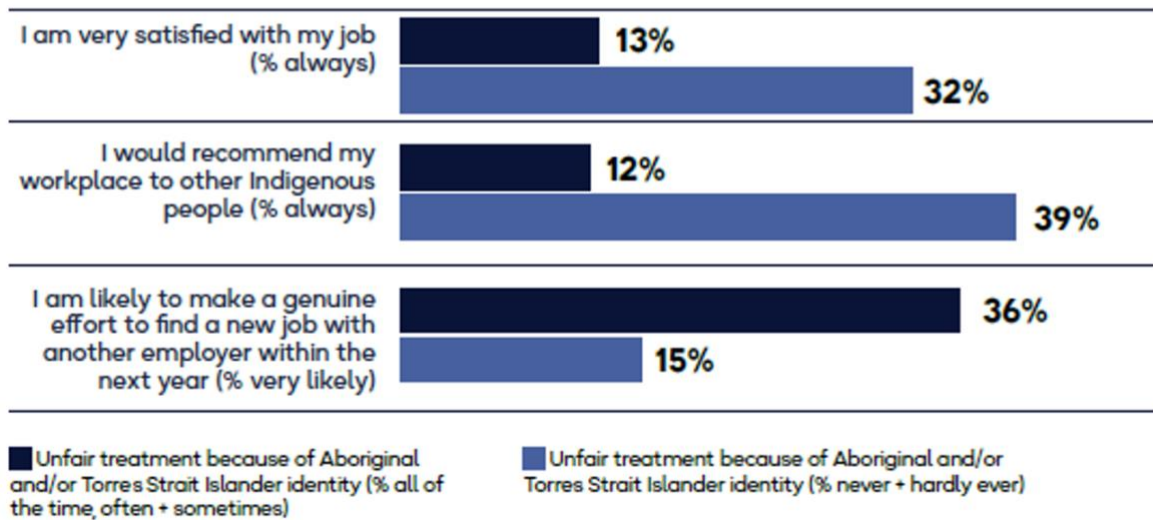
THE IMPACT OF WORKPLACE RACISM

	Unfair treatment (% all of the time, often + sometimes)	Unfair treatment (% never + hardly ever)
I am very satisfied with my job (% always)	13%	32%
I would recommend my workplace to other Indigenous people (% always)	12%	39%
I am likely to make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year (% very likely)	36%	15%

■ Unfair treatment because of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity (% all of the time, often + sometimes)

■ Unfair treatment because of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity (% never + hardly ever)

Image 6: Gari Yala impact of workplace racism

The report also provides ten truths (Image 7) for organisations to improve workplace inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff based in evidence and designed for workplaces that are ready to listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and willing to act on what they tell them.

Image 7: Gari Yala ten truths

Education Sector Specific Findings

Around the same time of the data collection for the Gari Yala survey, the AEU's *Yalukit Yulendj* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee conducted a survey into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educator's experiences at work. *Yalukit Yulendj* is the AEU's national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education committee.

In 2019, the committee noted the prevalence and impacts of their experiences of racism in the education sector and began investigating the literature regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences across the workforce more broadly. At the time, there was very little research in this space, particularly with an education focus. Following this investigation, the committee recommended to the AEU's Federal Executive that a national survey of the AEU's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members be conducted. The Federal Executive passed this recommendation unanimously.

The overall question the survey sought to answer is:
> *How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public education workers in Australia perceive and experience racism in their workplaces and across the system more broadly?*

Purpose
To answer the above question, the survey had specific aims which include:
- Make explicit the lived experiences and voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in the public education system in Australia;
- Quantify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators' perceptions and experiences of racism in the workplace and its impacts;
- Centre the voices and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators working in the public education sector across Australia;
- Encourage non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues in the education sector to critically engage with, discuss and reflect on the issue of racism in the workplace in order to respond to the concerns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and challenge and change existing models; and;
- Inform and frame further research on racism in the workplace and other issues impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public education sector workers.

Methodology
This survey was designed by the AEU and was distributed to the AEU's approximately 2,400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members in late October 2019. It was open for approximately six weeks, closing in mid-December 2019.

The survey was structured in 5 key survey areas:
1. Workplace – perceptions and experiences in the current workplace;
2. Professional – perceptions and experiences of professional support and structures;

3. Personal – perceptions and experiences of personal occurrences and impacts;
4. Colleagues – perceptions and experiences of occurrences on colleagues and impacts; and;
5. Systems – perceptions and experiences of systems responsiveness.

A total of 493 responses were received. It was not a requirement for questions to be answered before moving on to the next, which has resulted in the number of people who answered each question is different. We have indicated the total number of respondents to each question in the report. A total of 399 (81%) surveys were completed, meaning that approximately 16% of the AEU's total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander membership completed the whole survey.

Findings

The findings of this report have been broken down into seven (7) sections, with demographic data available in Appendix 1:
1. Workplace
2. Racism in the workplace
3. Colleagues
4. Representation
5. Access to professional development and training
6. Workplace impacts
7. Union involvement and experience

Concerningly across the broader data set are significant responses noting "Undecided/Not Sure". These have been included in this report for transparency and to ensure that the baseline information accurately tells the story of respondents. These responses have also been considered in the analysis, with commentary on the significance of this information.

Workplace

The preliminary questions asked in the survey was to identify whether the workplace (school, TAFE, preschool, etc.) was a welcoming place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Across the data set, there were significant representations made by respondents to note that the workplace was generally welcoming for them and their communities 63.2% (n=310).

My workplace is continuing to create an inviting place for all members and especially reflecting Aboriginal representation of artworks within the building.

The people at my workplace are welcoming to Aboriginal people however a lot more could be done.

Concerningly, 17.5% (n= 86) of respondents noted that they strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that their workplace was welcoming for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is significantly concerning that Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander workers do not feel that their workplaces are welcoming for either themselves or their communities.

There is a perception that it is because we have very high numbers of Aboriginal students, but most staff don't even talk to the families when they are here. I don't actually know if they feel welcomed here.

I have tried to talk about my culture and have been criticised- "You're not a native. You have white skin."

There was a significant sample that noted they were unsure as to whether their workplace was welcoming for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This was reflected in some of the commentary which noted that events, such as NAIDOC week or Reconciliation Week provided an opportunity for schools to connect with the local community however this was not reflective across the broader school terms.

Obviously depends on the occasion. Events such as NAIDOC is usually noticeable when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are welcomed. It is more welcoming at certain times of the year.

Questions regarding welcoming were also extended to other employees and students were welcoming to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the workplace. Both responses garnered quite heavily positive confirmation that employees and students were welcoming (strongly agree and agree) with 74.1% (n=363) stating that employees are welcoming and 72.2% (n=351) stating that students were welcoming.

I believe my work colleagues have a genuinely good feeling.

The students embrace and enjoy learning Aboriginal ways, technologies, name origins of local areas and dreaming stories.

Worryingly respondents found that employees were more likely to be unwelcoming (12%, n=59) than students (10.1%, n=49). This statistic emphasises the need for more cultural awareness training targeted at employees within the workplace.

The school was told they were getting an Aboriginal Graduate, so when a young white skinned girl turned up, some people found it difficult to understand my Aboriginality. I was asked what percentage I was.

Perhaps the most worrying statistic is that those in paid leadership or managerial positions in the workplace where the least welcoming when compared to students and other employees. 16.8% (n=82) disagreed or strongly disagreed that leadership were welcoming. This was extensively evident with comments made by respondents, with experiences of racism and a lack of cultural awareness.

Patronising to say the least. Unaware and not interested. Only acknowledged to tick their procedural checklist for a promotion application.

Comments such as "Just because you're Aboriginal doesn't mean people are going to want to work with you, they'll just have to." Made by Principal

Image 8: Distribution of whether the workplace is a welcoming place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

When looking at the respect in the workplace for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity, unfortunately the statistics share a very similar story to that seen regarding the welcoming of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These statistics are concerningly saying across all levels whether it be other employees, students, or leadership.

While the majority of responded noted respect (agree and strongly agree) held towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity by employees (63.4%, n=310), there was a strong view that there was no respect (disagree and strongly disagree) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity (18.6%, n= 91). This is matched in regard to students (10.6%, n= 52 disagree and strongly disagree) and more concerningly for those in leadership roles (18.2%, n=89 disagree and strongly disagree).

Because they think I have a choice not to identify because I am fair skinned and tell me to my face why would I want to identity when I could pass as white. These kinds of statements are made by a regional director.

Most don't say anything. I have a fair complexion, so people tend not to realise I have Aboriginal family heritage. This can make it tricky because then they say something quite racist, expecting that I will agree.

I am a fair skinned person, and I am constantly overlooked for tasks that require an Aboriginal person. These tasks are given to darker skinned colleagues even though I am an executive.

You still hear the comments of darky, nigger and 'why don't you wash' every 6 months from some child.

Being Aboriginal is not acknowledged at my site. My principal once said to me, "I grew up around Aboriginal people too". I get the feeling that I am the wrong type of Aboriginal.

These comments demonstrate clear appearance racism and the lack respect that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees find themselves receiving. This again highlights the inherent need for further cultural awareness insights targeted at leadership/managerial roles across education.
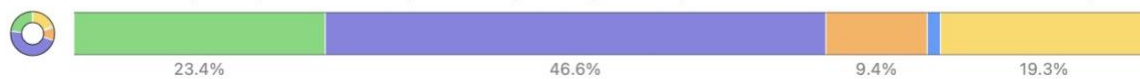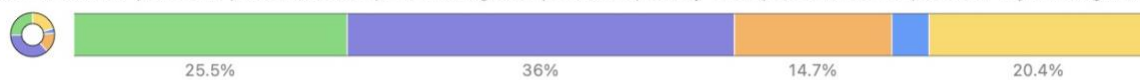

Image 9: Distribution of whether respect is shown for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity.

When asked whether respondents felt like their employers were generally committed to improving relations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 56.4% (n=275) felt they were. Concerningly, 23.6% (n=115) felt that their employees were not committed noticing that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. A further 20.1% (n=98) said that they were unsure or undecided as to whether their employer was committed. This demonstrates an inherent need for employers to commit, through activities and statement, to improving the relations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the education domain.
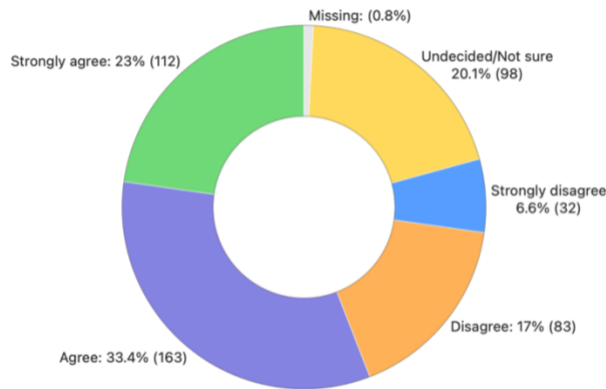
Image 10: Distribution of my workplace is genuinely committed to improving relations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I agree that there is a genuine belief that our school is inclusive and respectful of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures, however I think the school is not ready to really be open to moving forward and really looking at our school to address the work that needs to be done and the change that is required.

Tokenism rules. Some leadership/management staff no nothing of the culture of our local mobs. This concerns our local Elders.
Everything was left to me, the token Aboriginal teacher. There was never any mention of inviting elders to assemblies held or any celebrations days, other than NAIDOC celebrations.

Racism in the workplace

Concerningly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators noted that they commonly experienced racism within the workplace, with one in two experiencing offensive actions or objects directed at their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity yearly or more persistently (51.2%, n=211). Perhaps more worrying is the 12.4% (n=51) of respondents who felt that they had racism directed towards them at least weekly.
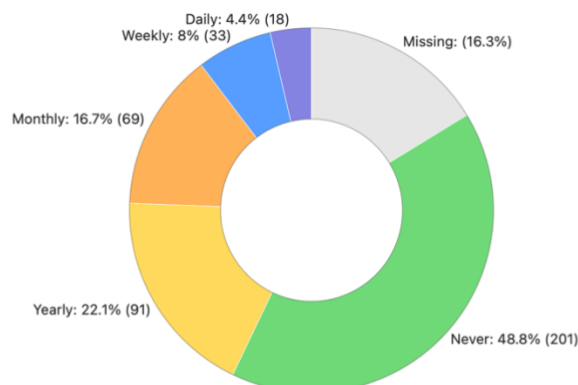

Image 11: Distribution of in my workplace, I encounter offensive actions and/or objects directed at my Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity.

The harrowing examples of this racism is provided through commentary provided by respondents in the quotes that follow.

I had a naked black doll waved in my face and was told this is our new black mascot. When I reported to the regional director, I was told get over it and move on.

It's generally quite subtle, for example a "joke" or not being included in something.

Racist comments were written on doors and windows.

Often colleagues will want me to verify their racist views. "Why is it that Aboriginal students don't want to come to school?" or "Why is it that Aboriginal parents want us to do everything for them, can't they get it together?".

Mainly based on assumptions: people assuming I can do basket weaving, people assuming that I know a certain language.

I hide (my identity) from parents for fear of being harassed.

The types of direct racism experienced by respondents can be depicted in Image 12 below. The most common type of racism includes verbal comments or abuse (strongly agree and agree- 28.6%, n=119) and being put down intellectually because of their identity (strongly agree and agree- 33.1%, n=138). Respondents also noticed that they had experienced exclusion from social events or gatherings (strongly agree and agree- 9.6%, n=40), have received insulting phone calls or social media posts (strongly agree and agree- 11.5%, n=48) and some stated that they had been physically threatened or attacked (strongly agree and agree- 7.9%, n=33) all because of their identity.

Image 12: Types of racism experienced.

The experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators are captured in the following quotes. Most quotes provided by respondents noted appearance racism.

As I am a lighter colour, many people have commented on that and questioned my culture.

A staff member asked if my grandmother was African as I had an African nose. I was extremely embarrassed.

I am a fair skinned Aboriginal. I was asked by a colleague about my Aboriginal background. She said I don't look Aboriginal and wanted to know how far back it went.

I often have people check with the non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person in the room if I am correct.

The (racism) contributed to my depression which resulted in me seeking medical support as I became suicidal.

I have been threatened with dismissal from my workplace for attending a rally (in my own time on a Saturday) to support respect for sacred sites.

Some people think we got our job "just" because we are Aboriginal not because we are educated in this area.

By people who do not realise what they are saying is offensive. "You're not one of those Aboriginals".

Concerningly, respondents also felt like they had to minimise aspects of their culture within the workplace, with 44.3% (n=193) noting they had to minimise aspects such as language and ways of being and knowing to fit in. This can cause identity strain for educators in the workforce.
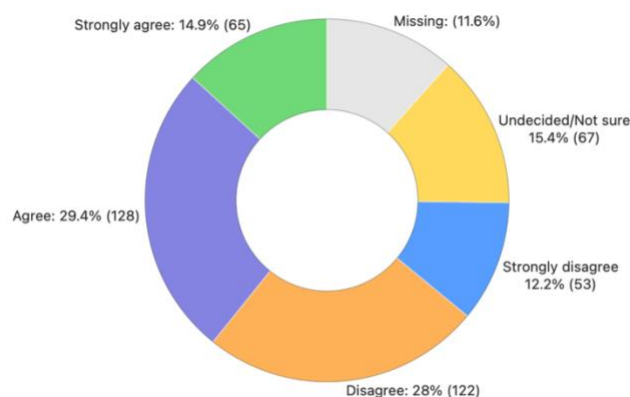

Image 13: Distribution of as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employee, I feel I have to minimise aspects of my Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture (such as language and ways of being, knowing and interacting) in order to be able to "fit in" with my colleagues.

Respondents also notes a high level of being expected to speak on behalf of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or were responsible for everything to do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. One in two (55.9%, n=244) felt they were expected to speak on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, noting comments such as:

I constantly have to educate colleagues that I don't speak for everyone.

I am frequently called on when anything 'Aboriginal' needs to be done, displayed, consulted, or achieved.

44% (n=192) of respondents also felt they were responsible for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues in the workplace, noting:

I'm on the Aboriginal education team but everything that has the word Aboriginal or Indigenous gets sent to me.

As an Aboriginal person in the workplace, I get called upon to deal with issues that is not in my position description.

Image 14: Distribution of whether the workplace is a welcoming place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

36.6% (n=153) of respondents also had been asked questions regarding their qualifications because of their identity. Respondents shared:

I was told that if I want to be Aboriginal, I will need to "put in the groundwork."

I was asked to bring in my teaching qualifications by the Principal to show parents that I was qualified to teach their children.

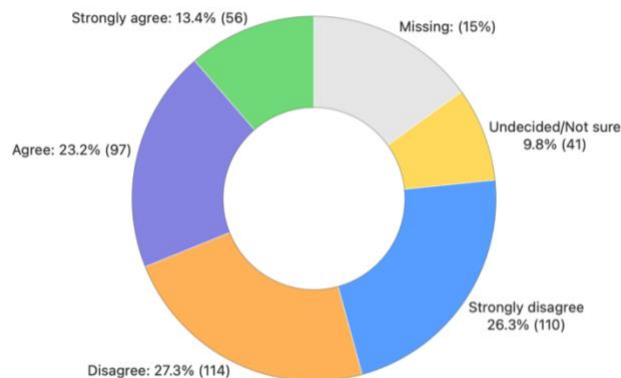*People always assume I'm not an actual teacher or that I became a teacher easier than others.*

Image 15: Distribution of I have been questioned about my qualifications in my workplace because of my Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural identity.

17.5% (n=73) of respondents also felt they had been overlooked or excluded from leadership opportunities in their workplace because of their identity. Respondents noted:

I have been excluded because they assume that I have no other skills outside of my knowledge of Aboriginal education.

Passed over for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coordinator role at my last school in favour of a non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman who 'didn't really want it'.
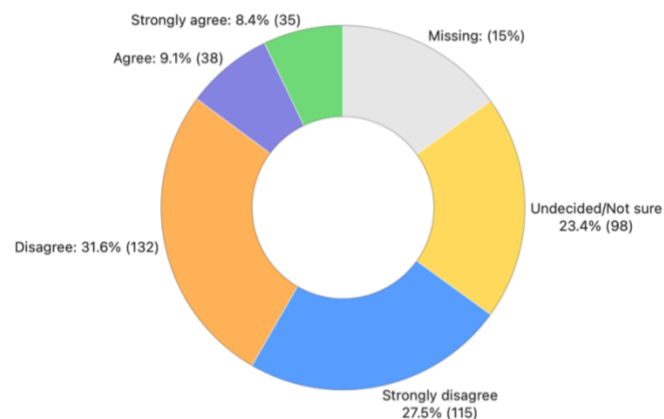

Image 16: Distribution of I have been excluded from leadership opportunities in my workplace because of my Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity.

Approximately two in three respondents (64.6%, n=326), felt that the work they did was consistent with their position description, whilst 17.8% (n=78) noted that it was inconsistent. Educators noted their inconsistencies as:

I became a Koorie Liaison Support on top of my teaching title at same wage.

I am the Head Teacher of TAS, however my role also, due to my Aboriginality, is also (unofficially) Head Teacher Goori stuff.

Often Aboriginal teachers take on extra roles to teaching to ensure that staff and children have access to and an understanding of Aboriginal Education.
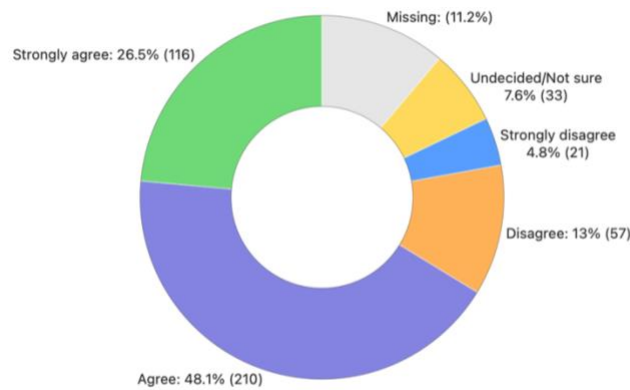
Image 17: Distribution of the work I do is consistent with my job title and the position-description of the role I was hired to do.

Colleagues

Respondents were also asked to comment about their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues and their experiences. Comments were shared regarding these experiences and environment, with respondents sharing:

A light skinned, but very proud brother, always questioned on his Aboriginality.

They only got the job cause they had a' black' scholarship.

They say- "black teacher black problems".

A student might say something like 'I don't like Aboriginals' or they will ask to be excluded from Aboriginal themed events.

The commonality of seeing racism and its impacts in the workplace occurred across a variety of domains, with the most common being aware of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues experiencing poor mental health (48.6%, n=199). Respondents also noted that colleagues were more likely to be embarrassed, patronised, or treated negatively by workplace colleagues, than students, parents, or the community (44.5% compared to 34.3%, 37.6% and 42.3% respectively).
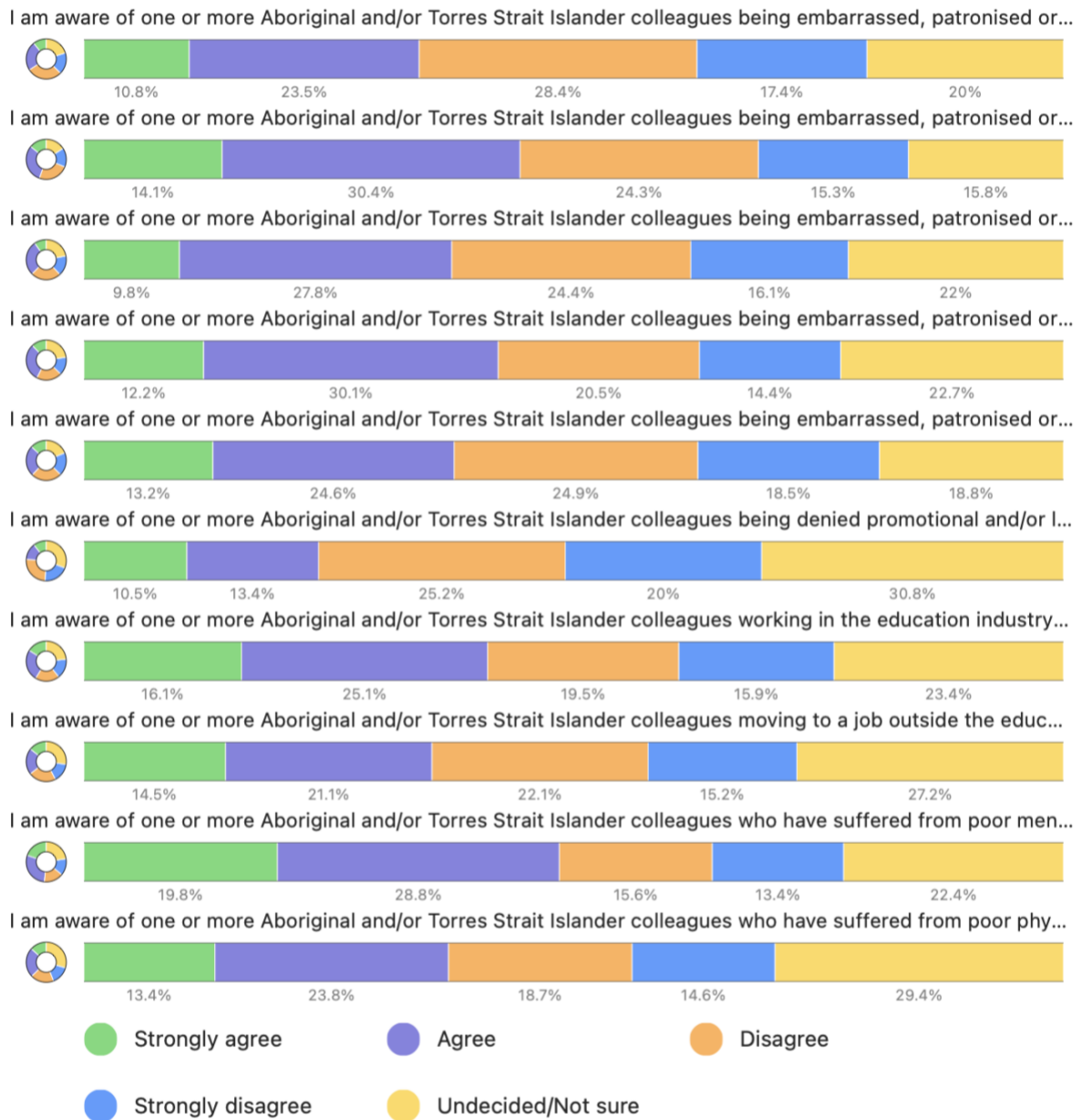
I am aware of one or more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander colleagues being embarrassed, patronised or...

10.8% | 23.5% | 28.4% | 17.4% | 20%

I am aware of one or more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander colleagues being embarrassed, patronised or...

14.1% | 30.4% | 24.3% | 15.3% | 15.8%

I am aware of one or more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander colleagues being embarrassed, patronised or...

9.8% | 27.8% | 24.4% | 16.1% | 22%

I am aware of one or more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander colleagues being embarrassed, patronised or...

12.2% | 30.1% | 20.5% | 14.4% | 22.7%

I am aware of one or more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander colleagues being embarrassed, patronised or...

13.2% | 24.6% | 24.9% | 18.5% | 18.8%

I am aware of one or more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander colleagues being denied promotional and/or l...

10.5% | 13.4% | 25.2% | 20% | 30.8%

I am aware of one or more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander colleagues working in the education industry...

16.1% | 25.1% | 19.5% | 15.9% | 23.4%

I am aware of one or more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander colleagues moving to a job outside the educ...

14.5% | 21.1% | 22.1% | 15.2% | 27.2%

I am aware of one or more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander colleagues who have suffered from poor men...

19.8% | 28.8% | 15.6% | 13.4% | 22.4%

I am aware of one or more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander colleagues who have suffered from poor phy...

13.4% | 23.8% | 18.7% | 14.6% | 29.4%

- 🟢 Strongly agree
- 🟣 Agree
- 🟠 Disagree
- 🔵 Strongly disagree
- 🟡 Undecided/Not sure

Image 18: Distribution of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Colleagues in the workplace

Representation

Almost one in three (30.6%, n=122) noted that their workplace employed an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person at a senior or executive level, lower than State/Territory agreement to the same extent being 37.2% (n=148). Respondents also commonly noted that they were unsure, with over 50% (51.5%, n=205) as to whether an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person was employed in an executive level within the State/Territory department.

My workplace employs at least one Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person at a senior/executive level

| 9.8% | 20.8% | 28.8% | 21.8% | 18.8% |
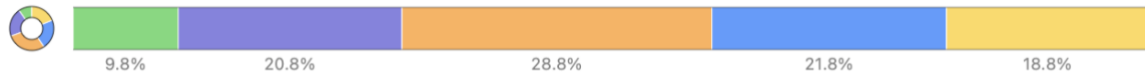
My state/territory education/training department employs at least one Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander p...

| 7.3% | 29.9% | 8.3% | 51.5% |

🟢 Strongly agree   🟣 Agree   🟠 Disagree

🔵 Strongly disagree   🟡 Undecided/Not sure

Image 19: Distribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander executives in workplaces and state/territory departments.

The trend of uncertainty followed in terms of formal representation on governance structures, with 48.9% (n=194) unsure at a departmental level and 30.5% (n=122) unsure at a workplace level. Just 29.5% (n=118) were aware of this representation within workplaces, yet this was higher in departments at 36.7% (n=146).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have formal representation on the governance structures in my wo...

| 7.5% | 22% | 26% | 14% | 30.5% |

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have formal representation on the governance structures in my sta...

| 5% | 31.7% | 11.3% | 48.9% |

🟢 Strongly agree   🟣 Agree   🟠 Disagree

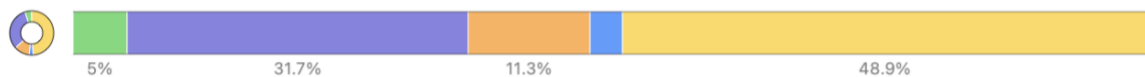🔵 Strongly disagree   🟡 Undecided/Not sure

Image 20: Distribution of formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in governance structures in workplaces and state/territory departments

Respondents were also unsure/uncertain about workplace or departmental workforce development plans, with almost 1 in 2 again noting they were not sure (43.9%, n=175 and 47.5%, n=190 respectively). Respondents were also more likely to strongly agree or agree that these existed at a departmental level, rather than workplace level (40.5%, n=162 compared to 22.3%, n=89). Respondents were also more likely to disagree or strongly disagree that their workplace had an employment plan, compared to a departmental plan (33.9%, n=135 compared to 12%, n=48).

Respondents noted:
> I think there is one, but I've never seen it and am unsure of how to find it.

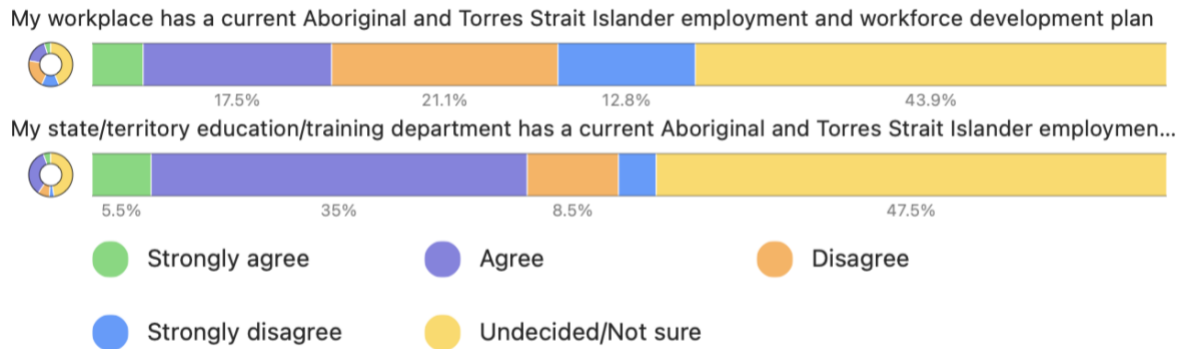> I think they would probably have one, but I have never seen it.

My workplace has a current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and workforce development plan

17.5%   21.1%   12.8%   43.9%

My state/territory education/training department has a current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employmen...

5.5%   35%   8.5%   47.5%

● Strongly agree   ● Agree   ● Disagree

● Strongly disagree   ● Undecided/Not sure

Image 21: Distribution of employment and workforce development plans in workplaces and state/territory departments

Again, similar trends exist when exploring whether workplaces or departments have a current organisational plan on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education/engagement. A large cohort of respondents were undecided or unsure (33.4%, n=133 and 40.8%, n=162) as to whether these existed, while there was still uncertainty as to whether these existed (strongly disagree and disagree, 24.7%, n=98 and 10.8%, n=43 respectively). Respondents noted the following in terms of organisational plans:

It is tokenistic at best, with little input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I would strongly agree, but if I wasn't driving it, there would be no plan at all.

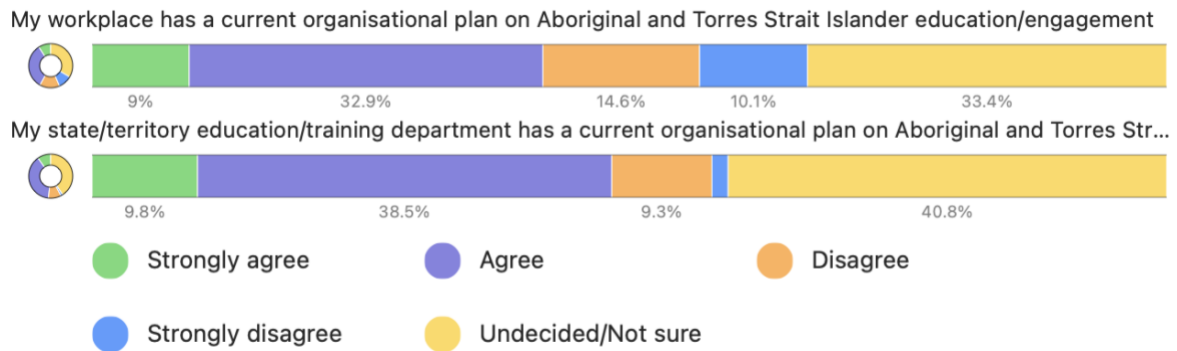*This has been going on for years, but never filters down to school.*

My workplace has a current organisational plan on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education/engagement

9%   32.9%   14.6%   10.1%   33.4%

My state/territory education/training department has a current organisational plan on Aboriginal and Torres Str...

9.8%   38.5%   9.3%   40.8%

● Strongly agree   ● Agree   ● Disagree

● Strongly disagree   ● Undecided/Not sure

Image 22: Distribution of organisational plans on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement in workplaces and state/territory departments

Access to professional development and training

Respondents were asked whether their workplace provides professional development to assist staff (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) to develop skills and competencies for working effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While one in three (37.9%, n=166) noted that they agreed or strongly agreed that training was provided, 45% (n=197) of stakeholders noted that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed it was provided.

Respondents noted the following concerns in their commentary about this question:

High turnover of staff means this will be an ongoing issue for my current workplace.

I wish they would focus on developing my colleague's skills and competencies - sorely lacking!
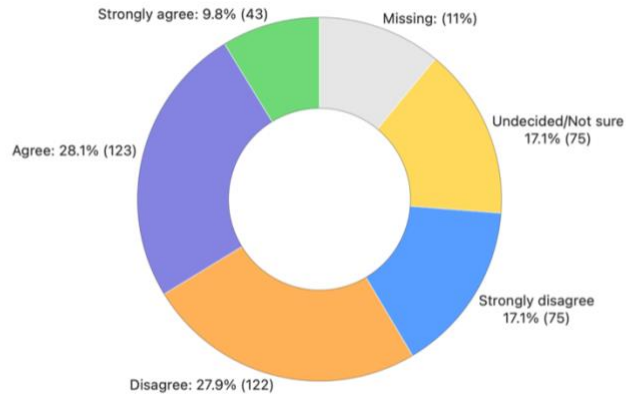

Image 23: Distribution of my workplace provides professional development opportunities to assist staff to develop skills and competencies for working effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Respondents were also asked as to whether their employer provides adequate professional development programmes and services to ensure success as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. Respondents were almost split between those who strongly agreed/agreed that this was provided and those who disagreed/strongly disagreed that it was not. In the comments, respondents noted:

I am only offered courses related to Aboriginal content.

My Professional Development focuses on upskilling those around me in relation to cultural competence and awareness. The focus is on how the school can improve, but little is done to address my recommendations or suggestions.

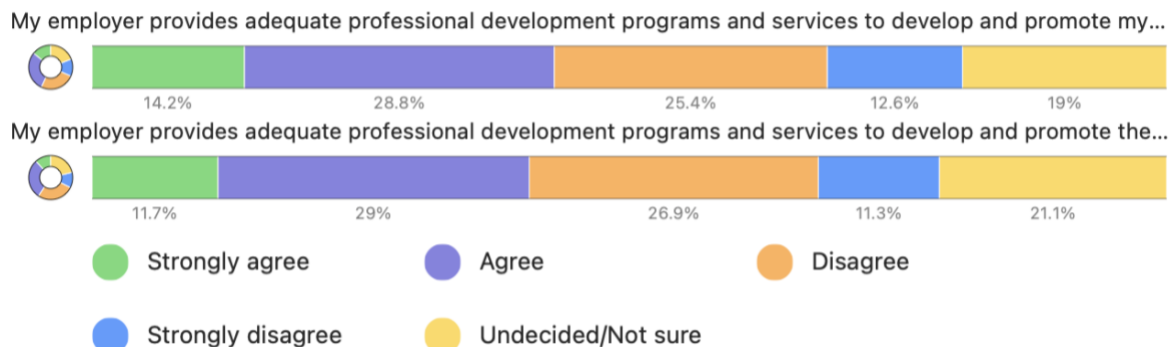*We have to really plead our case at times.*

Image 24: Distribution of whether adequate professional development programs and services to develop and promote the success of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees is provided.

Perhaps one of the most worrying statistics to come from this survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators is a lack of or perceived lack of professional development or training provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, education, histories, and issues.

27.3% (n=109) noted that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that their State/Territory education department provided access to professional development on these issues. Though this is significantly better than the 44.1% (n=176) who noted that their workplace did not provide this training. These statistics are worrying given the lack of respect and/or welcome that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees felt by other employees, students and executive. There is significant work to be done which needs to be approached at all levels as noted by the findings of these questions.

A significant portion (30.3%, n =121 and 19.5%, n=78 respectively) noted that they were undecided or unsure as to whether this training is provided. This demonstrates that there is significant work to be done regarding the awareness of any training that currently exists (if it exists) for employees based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.
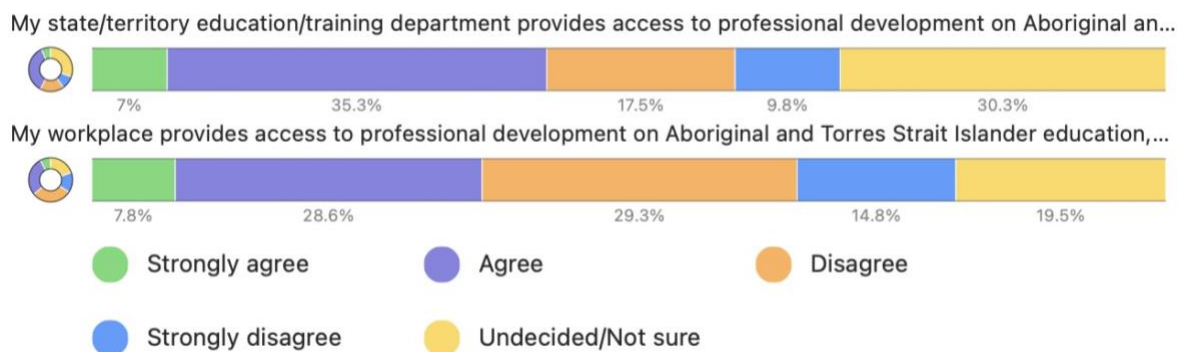
Image 25: Distribution of access to professional development

Workplace impacts

Interestingly, respondents noted that the workplace was more supportive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students than what it was for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. The impact of workplaces due to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences were also quantified through the survey, with just 56.7% (n=277) noting that they would recommend their workplace as a supportive environment. This is higher than the 66.3% (n=322) or one in two who said it would be supportive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
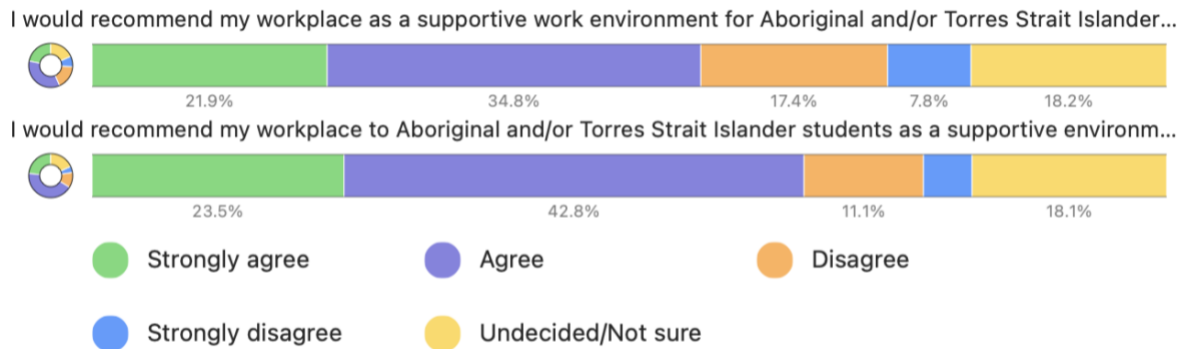
I would recommend my workplace as a supportive work environment for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander…

21.9%   34.8%   17.4%   7.8%   18.2%

I would recommend my workplace to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students as a supportive environm…

23.5%   42.8%   11.1%   18.1%

● Strongly agree   ● Agree   ● Disagree

● Strongly disagree   ● Undecided/Not sure

Image 26: Distribution of whether the workplace would be recommended as a supportive place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People to work and to learn.

In terms of support for other staff, respondents noted:

Many programs in schools and the department are tokenistic.

I feel that there is a lot of bias and assumptions made because of my Aboriginal background. There are comments made that are inappropriate and make me very uncomfortable.

You are excluded, isolated, and discriminated against.

For students, respondents noted that this would often depend on the educator.

This depends entirely on which teachers would be teaching Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students.

There is no real spirit in the school when it comes to Aboriginality at my school. Many students choose not to identify.

Respondents were also asked whether they had genuine involvement in strategic and operational matters, whether their opinion is valued by their workplace and whether they had been ignored when expressing their views because of their identity. Interestingly, one in two (54.6%, n=237) respondents said that they feel their opinion is valued within the workplace, with a further 40.9% (n=178) noting that they had genuine involvement in strategic and operational matters.

However, almost one in three (32.4%, n=135) felt that they had been ignored in the workplace because of their identity. Respondents often noted that this felt tokenistic, sharing:

I genuinely feel tokenistic only.

Any input is an afterthought. I am not included or consulted in decision making processes until after decisions are made by executive staff.

My opinion might be sought, but it is often ignored or overlooked. So, I feel that that act of finding my opinion is tokenistic.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees have genuine involvement in strategic and operational matte...

| 14% | 26.9% | 24.6% | 14% | 20.5% |

As an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employee, I feel my opinion is valued in my workplace

| 15.7% | 38.9% | 14.1% | 10.8% | 20.5% |

I have been ignored after expressing my ideas or sharing my comments in my workplace because of my Aborigi...

| 8.4% | 24% | 24.7% | 25.9% | 17% |

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Disagree
● Strongly disagree ● Undecided/Not sure
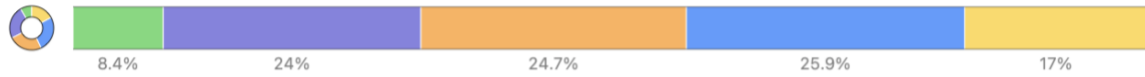
Image 27: Distribution of involvement and voice within the workplace

The most significant workplace impact for the education sector is that one in five (20.8%, n=97) respondents noted that they had left a job or workplace due to the discrimination they have felt.

Strongly agree: 10% (42)
Agree: 10.8% (45)
Missing: (15%)
Undecided/Not sure 6.2% (26)
Disagree: 33.3% (139)
Strongly disagree 39.7% (166)
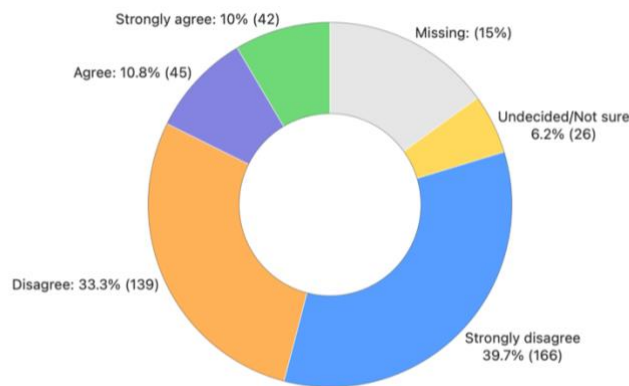
Image 28: Distribution of over my career in education, I have previously left a job and/or workplace due to the discrimination I have faced because of my Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity.

Respondents shared openly their experiences of discrimination within the workplace, providing insights as follows.

I am on the verge of quitting the Department and teaching because of the way I am treated and not valued within the organisation or school.

Am looking to leave my current role due to having to constantly work and fight for the same things and burnout.

I transferred from my last position because I couldn't escape this discrimination.

I left a teaching position that was predominantly due to the fact that I perceived the Principal treated me like property of the school opposed to an Aboriginal person.

I am seriously considering leaving my current workplace because of poor treatment and lack of opportunities, but am scared to, because there are no other Aboriginal people on staff to keep an eye out for our Aboriginal students.

Union involvement and experience

Respondents were asked about their union involvement and how long they had been a member. 28.6% (n=113) or one in four noted that their union membership had lasted at least 16 years. A further 41% (n=162) had been in the union for at least six years. Almost a third (30.4%, n=120) had been a member of the union for less than five years.
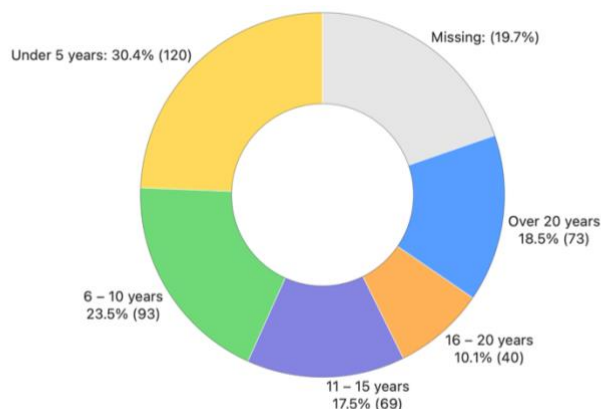

Image 29: Distribution of how long have you been a member of the union.

Respondents were also asked whether they were actively involved in the union, with almost 60% of educators (57.2%, n=231) stating that they agreed or strongly agreed that they were active. One in four respondents (25.3%, n=102) noted that they were not active with commentary provided as to why this is not the case.

I was an active member of the NSWTF but had my Aboriginal Identity, credibility, and motives for being actively involved in the union questioned by the NSWTF Aboriginal Education Officer.

Not allowed to attend union meeting as management make sure other afternoon meetings are on at this time.

I don't feel comfortable (to participate) at a local level.
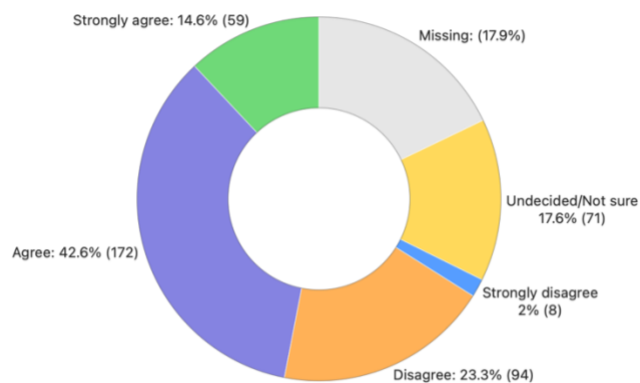

Image 30: As an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander teacher/educator, I am actively involved in the union.

One in four educators noted that they had sought advice and received support from the union regarding their experiences of racism within the workplace (for strongly agree and agree- 31.7%, n=128 and 25%, n=100 respectively).

Those who had sought advice provided commentary as to their experiences, depicted by the quotes highlighted below.

Through peer support /talking and sharing at Aboriginal conference each year.

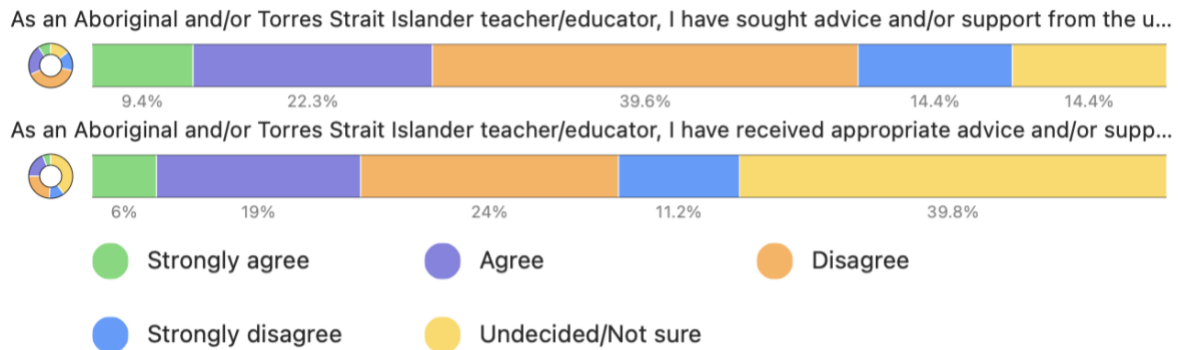*I would not have made it through without my union, the NSWTF.*

As an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander teacher/educator, I have sought advice and/or support from the u...

| 9.4% | 22.3% | 39.6% | 14.4% | 14.4% |

As an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander teacher/educator, I have received appropriate advice and/or supp...

| 6% | 19% | 24% | 11.2% | 39.8% |

● Strongly agree   ● Agree   ● Disagree

● Strongly disagree   ● Undecided/Not sure

Image 31: Distribution of having sought advice.

Respondents noted that the union was a strong advocate and are a credible voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with 65.4% (n=265) or almost 2 in 3 respondents stating they were a strong advocate and 60.8% (n=246) noting their credibility confronting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues.

The union is a strong advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education

| 26.4% | 39% | 8.1% | 24.4% |

The union is a credible voice for the issues confronting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander teachers/educat...

| 23% | 37.8% | 6.2% | 30.9% |

● Strongly agree   ● Agree   ● Disagree

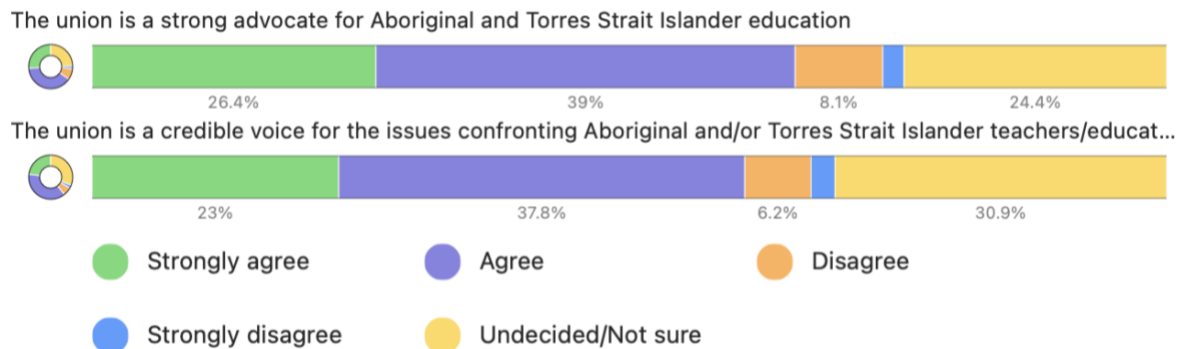● Strongly disagree   ● Undecided/Not sure

Image 32: Distribution of union advocacy and voice

Some highlighted their experiences as an advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education:

The Union has helped me out and were fantastic. I really appreciate the work that they do.

While other respondents noted some of the difficulties about being heard:

You must be a strong Aboriginal person to take the steps needed to contact the union, many Aboriginal staff in education are very batted by the time it get to this point.

It needs to be a strong advocate for Aboriginal people who are capable of doing the role they are in and if not, they need to be supported in doing something else.

Favourably, respondents made quite strong statements regarding awareness of structures and union policies. 59.3% (n=240) noted that they agreed or strongly agreed that they were aware of union policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, the same as those who noted they were aware of the structures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement at a local level. Respondents became less aware of the structures at a state level (49.6%, n=201), and less so at a national level (34.6%, n=140). One respondent noted:

The local level union involvement was very handy to me as an early career teacher. It was a platform that allowed me to get Aboriginal mentoring not available in my school. It was honestly a life saving experience and supported me to stay and succeed in education.
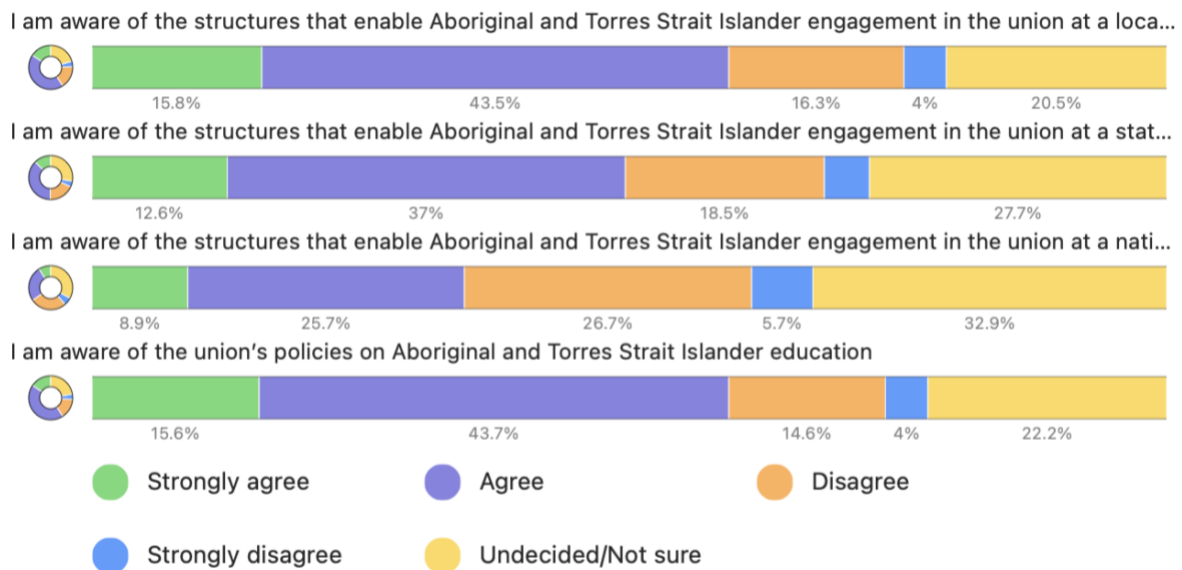
Image 33: Distribution of whether the workplace is a welcoming place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Two in three respondents acknowledged that the union was a safe and supportive place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (strongly agree and agree- 67.7%, n=274). There were low levels of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed to this comment (6.1%, n=25). Concerningly one in four (26.2%, n=106) noted that they were undecided or unsure as to whether the union was a supportive place. This provides an opportunity for future action for the unions.
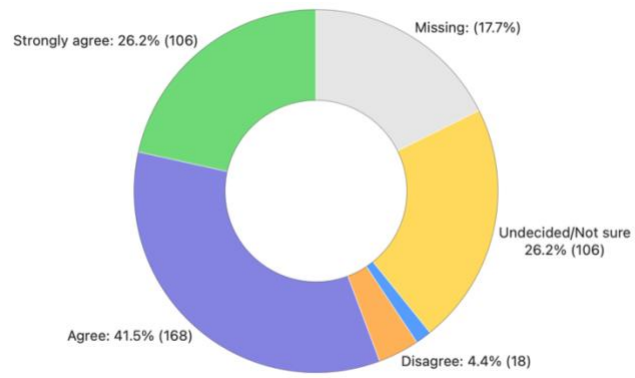
Image 34: Distribution of the union is a safe and supportive place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Understanding the intersection of the surveys

We have heard consistently from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that it is important for people to identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander within the workforce, with 78% of respondents in the Gari Yala survey noting that his was vitally important. It is important to note that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do this, even though it is not safe for them to do so and even though it places a high identity strain and or cultural load upon them. Unfortunately, the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff within the education sector even struggle to do this with one responded noting:

I hide (my identity) from parents for fear of being harassed.

What is consistent across the Gari Yala survey and the AEU survey is how culturally unsafe workplaces are, with 28% of Gari Yala respondents noting this, compared to 25.2% of AEU respondents. 44% of AEU respondents felt that they were responsible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues in the workplace, which is higher than the Gari Yala cohort of 39% feeling a high cultural load.

When considering cultural load, 55.9% of respondents of the AEU survey stated that they were expected to speak on behalf of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace, significantly better than the 69% finding in the Gari Yala report. Potentially, education workplaces are more welcoming for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, with 63.2% of respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing to this statement.

In terms of racism, the education department fares somewhat better compared to mainstream Australia. 28.6% of respondents noted that they had been called names or subject to racist slurs, compared to 44% of Gari Yala respondents. Appearance racism (which impacted 59% of respondents in the Gari Yala survey), was highly motioned in commentary provided back by respondents in the AEU survey. It is probable that this trend is also evident in the education sector.

Perhaps the most concerning trends from the AEU results is an inherent finding that other educators provide the most burden to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues, more than students, parents, and the community. This is despite 36.4% (strongly agree and agree) of respondents noting that their workplace (and 42.3% for the department) provides access to professional development on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture to all staff. This suggests that existing training needs to go further to better provide cultural awareness of other educators.

The impacts of racism in the workplace were prevalent when responders were asked about their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues. 48.6% noting poor mental health and 37.2% noting poor physical health, of their co-workers due to racism.

The impacts of racism and culturally unsafe workplaces also mean that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are likely to leave the workplace or sector, with 20.8% of AEU respondents having previously left a role because of discrimination. A further 35.6% of respondents were aware of a colleague moving positions due to racism. This is common for staff experiencing racism, who were 2.5 times more likely to

leave their current employer in 12 months if they experienced racism in the workplace.

57.2% of educators noted that they were actively involved in the union with one in four noting that they had sought advice and receive support from the union regarding their experiences of racism within the workplace. Two in three respondents stated that the union was a strong advocate and 60.8% noted their credibility for confronting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. However, there is work to do with more work being needed on the awareness of the structures to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement at a national and state level. One in four (26.2%) said that they were uncertain or unsure as whether the union was a supportive place. This provides further opportunity for the union to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at a local, state, and national level.

The following section of this report identifies the key opportunities and recommendations based on the findings detailed here and above.

Key Recommendations

Based upon the findings of the AEU survey, contextualised by the broader Gari Yala survey, the research team proposes the following recommendations grounded within the 10 truths identified through the Gari Yala report (Image 35).

Image 35: Gari Yala ten truths

Table 3: Recommendations from AEU Findings, based on Gari Yala ten truths.

Gari Yala Ten Truths	Recommendation based on AEU Findings
1. Commit to unearthing and acting on workplace truths – however uncomfortable this might be	• Commit to engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members across the nation to explore truths in more detail. This should be done on a regional scale.
2. Ensure any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-related work is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led and informed	• Ensure engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members and enterprise bargaining provisions are developed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.
3. Develop organisational principles to make it clear how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement and employment should work in practice	• Develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led enterprise bargaining provisions (Appendix 2) that reflect the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and legitimising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's needs. This should include leave, anti-racism procedures as enforceable industrial concerns, payment for cultural knowledge and cultural concerns.
4. Focus on workplace readiness (cultural safety) rather than worker readiness	• Advocate for a baseline survey on cultural responsiveness across the sector and enforce training in workplaces with low levels of awareness. • Build cultural responsiveness across the sector through further training, particularly for non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues.
5. Recognise identity strain and educate non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff about how to interact with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues in ways that reduce this	• Build identity strain considerations into workplace cultural responsiveness training. • Find industrial solutions to address identity strain, where necessary.
6. Recognise and remunerate cultural load as part of an employee's workload	• Redevelop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholder role descriptions to include cultural load considerations. These must also be considered in future enterprise bargaining provisions.
7. Consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait	• Build cultural load considerations into workplace cultural responsiveness training.

Islander staff on how to minimise cultural load while maintaining organisational activity	• Find industrial solutions to address cultural load, where necessary.
8. Focus on sustainable careers and career development, rather than just short-term appointments	• Use engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members to listen and develop a real understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. • Develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led enterprise bargaining clauses. • Provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors to employees entering the workforce for the first time, remunerated at the appropriate rate. • Promote and develop career plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to move into leadership roles at a local, state, and federal level.
9. Take action to address workplace racism	• Test and evaluate the effectiveness of racism complaint procedures. • Redesign complaint procedures to meet the requirements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. • Ensure racism complaint procedures are regularly tested and evaluated. • Provide anti-discrimination compliance training for staff. • Create a positive duty on employers to ensure the workplace is free from racism (built into enterprise bargaining provisions). • Explore the possibility of workplace anti-racism advocates.
10. Look to high-impact initiatives – those that research shows are linked to better wellbeing and retention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff	• Develop formal career development programmes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. • Develop and test the awareness and effectiveness of racism complaint procedures.

Conclusion

This report provides an understanding of the current state of the education sector from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective contextualised by mainstream society through the Gari Yala report. It provides a fundamental insight into the attitudes and experiences faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, the impact of this and the support provided by unions.

The final components of this report provide next steps for the AEU to consider and endorse to better improve the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in the workplace. This is the education sector's opportunity to make our words and actions meet.

Appendix 1: AEU Survey Demographic Data

Appendix one provides the demographic data from the AEU national survey. It has been included as an appendix to note the cohort of respondents to this survey and draw current insights from existing staff within the sector. It is important to note that across the dataset, 1 in 5 respondents (approximately 20%) did not complete this information, with this information included below as "missing".

As shown in Image 36, most respondents to this survey identified as Aboriginal (94.7%, n=373). 3.8% (n=15) of respondents identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and 1.5% (n=6) identified as Torres Strait Islander.
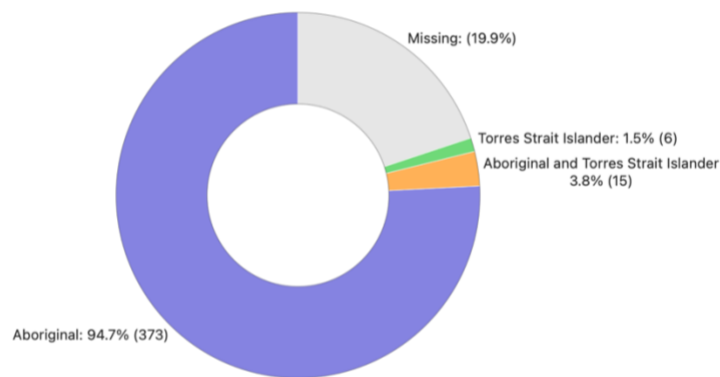
Image 36: Distribution of whether the workplace is a welcoming place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Most respondents also identified as female (74.6%, n=296), with 95 respondents identifying as male (23.9%) and five (1.3%) preferring not to say. This breakdown can be seen in Image 37 below.
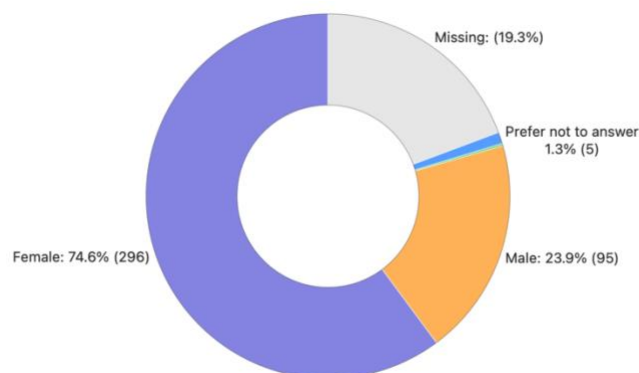

Image 37: Distribution of whether the workplace is a welcoming place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

It's also important to note the large percentage of the cohort identified as being over the age of 51 (38%, n=151), with 10.8% (n=43) noting they were over the age of 61. 16.1% (64) of respondents identified in the 21 to 30 age group, 18.9% (n=75) in the 31-40 age group and 27% (n=107) in the 41-50 age group. The distribution ages can be seen in Image 38 below.

21 – 30: 16.1% (64)
Missing: (19.3%)
31 – 40: 18.9% (75)
61 – 70: 10.8% (43)
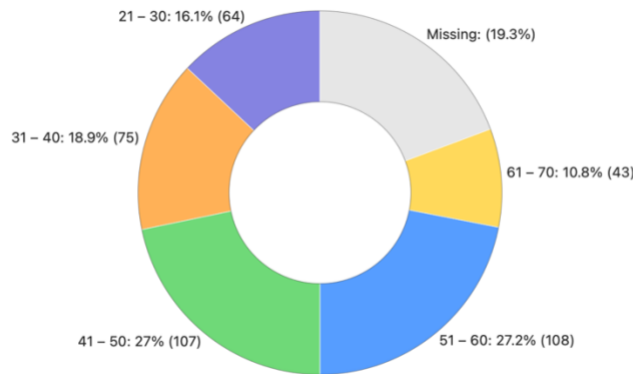41 – 50: 27% (107)
51 – 60: 27.2% (108)

Image 38: Distribution of whether the workplace is a welcoming place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

There was also a stark over representation of respondents from New South Wales, where almost two-thirds (67.3%, n=267) noted they lived in the State. There was relatively low representation from other States, which provides an opportunity for future surveys and potentially yarning circles into the future for further engagement. The state distribution can be found in Image 39 below.

Australian Capital Territory: 1% (4)
Missing: (19.3%)
Western Australia 3.3% (13)
Victoria: 4.3% (17)
Tasmania 2% (8)
New South Wales 67.3% (267)
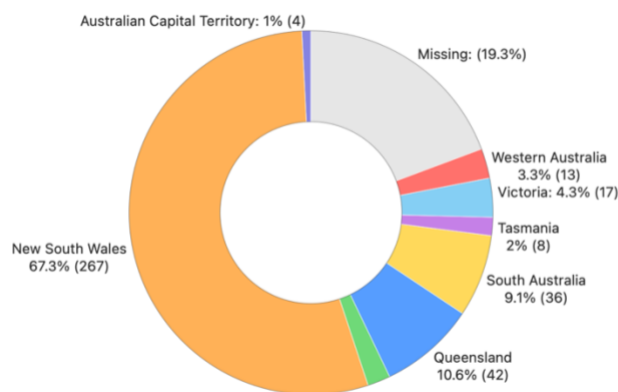South Australia 9.1% (36)
Queensland 10.6% (42)

Image 39: Distribution of whether the workplace is a welcoming place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

The survey respondents also came from a wide variety of workplace locations with outer regional locations being the most common (36.3%, n=144), major cities (31.7%, n=126) and inner regional areas (18.9%, n=75) commonly represented. Remote (11.3%, n=45) and very remote (1.8%, n=7) were also represented. The breakdown can be seen in Image 40 below.

Inner regional: 18.9% (75)
Missing: (19.3%)
Very remote 1.8% (7)
Major city: 31.7% (126)
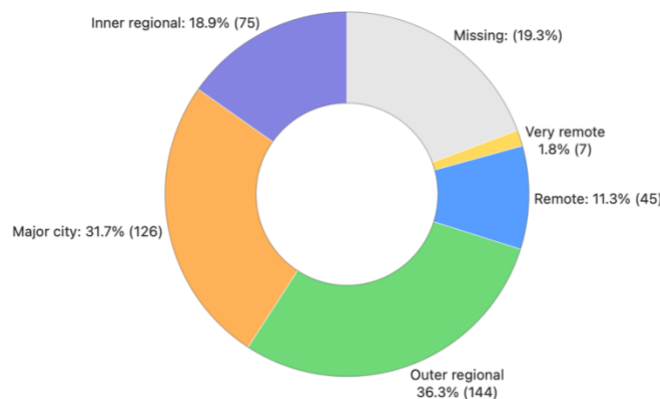Remote: 11.3% (45)
Outer regional 36.3% (144)

Image 40: Distribution of whether the workplace is a welcoming place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Respondents were also asked about their length of employment. The findings of this question reflected the age of respondents with the majority noting their experience as over 11 years (54.4%, n=216). There was also a large cohort with less than five years working within the education department where almost a quarter or one in four noted their experience as less than five years (24.2%, n=96). The distribution of time in the role is shown below in Image 41.
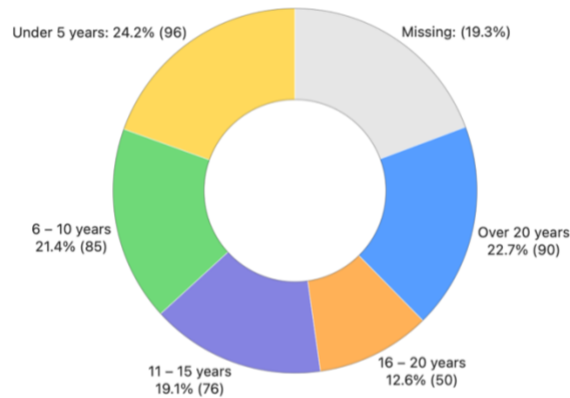

Image 41: Distribution of whether the workplace is a welcoming place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Perhaps the most surprising information provided in the distribution of demographic data was most staff who identify as working in primary schools (Image 42). Almost half (47.8%, n=189) noted that they were primary school educators, with a further one in three (37.2%, n=147) working in secondary schools. Few responses (5.3%, n=21) noted they were in central or regional office, 6.6% (n=26) were in TAFE institutions and 0.5% (n=2) were in a Union office.
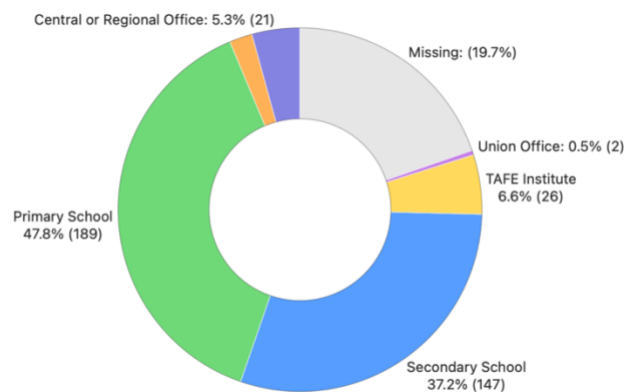

Image 42: Distribution of whether the workplace is a welcoming place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

The demographic data also noted that most respondents identify as teachers with 4 in 5 respondents noting this description (82.3%, n=297) (see Image 43). There was an overrepresentation of principals, with 5.3% (n=19) of respondents. Support staff and/or teacher aides made up almost 1 in 10 respondents (8.6%, n=31).
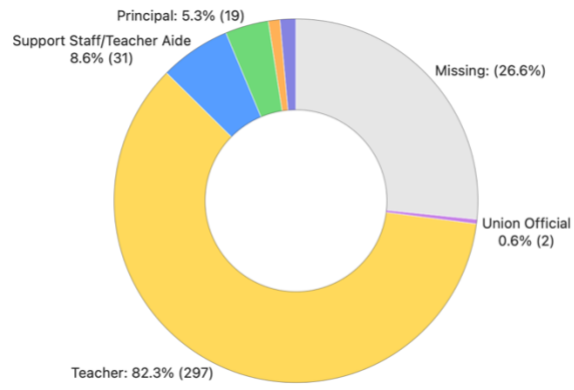
Image 43: Distribution of whether the workplace is a welcoming place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Appendix 2: Enterprise Bargaining Clauses

Acknowledgement of Country

1. This agreement was written on the land of the Worimi people and includes the voices and contributions of First Nations educators from Nations across Australia. We acknowledge and pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Traditional Custodians across this country, including Elders past and present. We particularly note that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been educating youth for millennia and acknowledge their role and insights in this practice.

Commitments

2. The Employer and its representatives commit to and are accountable at the school, regional, and central Department levels for consulting with, listening to, respecting, planning for, and implementing advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and relevant stakeholders (including but not limited to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal owned and controlled organisations), when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curriculum, employees and student welfare, and cultural issues that concern First Nations peoples.

3. The Employer has a positive duty to take all reasonably practical measures to eliminate racism in the workplace as reasonably practicable.

4. The Employer commits to the principles of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as the minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the state.

5. Priority placement will be granted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees on Country, being the land in which they are connected to. This also extends to partners of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who may seek to raise their children on their ancestral country.

6. The Employer commits to undertaking a cultural awareness training audit and mandatory cultural awareness training for all staff on a yearly basis.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees

7. Having regard to the objective of the progressive realisation of equality in the workplace and recognising that the achievement of substantive equality requires the taking of special measures.

   a. By the Nominal Expiry Date of this Agreement, the Employer will ensure that the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees employed under this Agreement is no less than the number of employees that is in direct proportion (calculated to the nearest whole number) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are taught in the Employer's schools (ascertained by reference to the Employer's most current statistics prior to the Nominal Expiry Date of this Agreement) (Equitable Ratio Requirement);

   b. The Equitable Ratio Requirement applies in relation to each class of employees employed under this Agreement.

c. The Employer agrees that the commitments are not merely aspirational but are binding upon the Employer.
d. The Employer will, so far as is practicable, endeavor to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees on an ongoing basis.
e. The Employer will ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees are offered a suitable mentor who will be made available to individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees to facilitate their professional development.
f. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees who are teachers are entitled, on request, to a 10% reduction in their face-to-face teaching load to attend to further professional development. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees who are Educational Support are entitled, on request, to a 10% reduction in their regular scheduled duties to attend further professional development. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees who are education support class employees who are training to become teachers, are entitled to request such measures that are necessary to be taken to ensure that they can meet the requirements to become a registered teacher. Such measures include being absent with no reduction in pay to undertake student placements.
g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees are entitled to five (5) days per annum, non-accruing paid leave, and other relevant support, to attend courses to learn the language of their country and connect with community on national days of significance where this is connected to their duties.

Leave for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees
8. Subject to notice and evidence requirements clauses, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees are entitled to apply for paid Cultural and/or Bereavement Leave.
    a. An application for this will not be unreasonably refused.
    b. An employee must provide notice of their intention to take leave as soon as is practicable.
    c. The Employer may request evidence that would satisfy a reasonable person that the leave is for Cultural and/or Bereavement Leave purposes.
    d. In considering applications for Cultural and/or Bereavement Leave and its duration, the Employer must do so in a culturally sensitive manner considering:
        i. the closeness of the association between the applicant and the deceased; this association need not be a blood relationship;
        ii. whether the applicant has to take significant responsibility for any or all of the arrangements to do with the ceremonies;
        iii. the amount of time needed to discharge properly any responsibilities or obligations;
        iv. adequate travelling time; and;
        v. the need to make a decision as quickly as possible so that the applicant is given maximum time possible to make any arrangements necessary. In most cases the necessary decision

will be made immediately, but may be made retrospectively where appropriate.

  e. For the avoidance of doubt an employee who is on approved Cultural and/or Bereavement Leave is not required to undertake their normal duties.

No adverse action

9. The Employer and its agents must not take adverse action against an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Employee because that employee has, has not, or proposes to or not to exercise their rights under this clause, or to prevent the exercise of their rights under this clause.

Cultural Safety

10. The employer recognises that:
  a. racism is a serious health and safety hazard; and
  b. no worker should experience racism at work.
11. The employer and its representatives have a positive duty to provide a working environment that is culturally safe and without risk to health. This obligation includes a requirement to take all reasonably practicable steps, in a timely manner, to remove racism from schools, and create inclusive workplaces, including through the provision of ongoing Cultural Understanding and Safety Training across the workforce.

Allocation of work to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees

12. Where an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander employee agrees to undertake work that requires a cultural responsibility their work and/or duties will be adjusted to consider the work and/or duties associated with that cultural responsibility in context of their other duties, and/or paid an allowance/special payment at the daily rate of a casual teaching rate to recognise that responsibility.

Definitions

In this Section:

- "**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander**" refers to any person/s who:
  - o Is a member of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander race of Australia; and;
  - o Identifies as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person; and;
  - o Is accepted by the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person.
- "**Cultural and/or Bereavement Leave**" for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees refers to leave to:
  - o attend or take part in treaty processes as a representative or associated meetings as a member or attendee;
  - o attend to Sorry Business, including funeral business of Family (funeral business applies to the process of mourning and paying respect to a deceased person and their family);

- o fulfil ceremonial/cultural responsibilities including to perform a service to the community and attend community meetings, including Traditional Owner group meetings;
  - o fulfil Family cultural obligations; and;
  - o celebrate cultural national days related to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture with which the employee identifies, including NAIDOC and Reconciliation Week.
- **"Family"** has a meaning that recognises that extended families exist within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society and obligations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees may exist regardless of the existence of a bloodline relationship or not. Family also extends to cover relationships where there is a close association, which need not be a blood relationship.