

Beyond attraction and retention:

Indigenous career advancement in the public sector

*Institute of Public
Administration
Australia – Victoria*

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Executive Summary

PwC were honoured to take on this project with the Victorian Division of the Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) and in collaboration with Indigenous consultants Jason Eades and Karen Milward, whom we wish to sincerely thank for their invaluable contribution. After many years working in the field, both IPAA and the consultants had observed the phenomenon whereby a host of agencies speak of a desire to promote and advance their Indigenous public servants but were challenged in most instances, to achieve the outcomes they desired. There has been an informal debate over recent years on the reasons why this might be the case, but there was a gap in terms of published literature.

For this reason, IPAA and PwC felt it was critical that this was not just another piece of research. Extensive surveying and face to face consultation meant that participants opened up to us in a way that obliged us to capture the ‘real’ issues and ensure that people’s input actually translated into making a difference. Participants often expressed concern for this not becoming ‘another report that gets shelved’. As a result we express great thanks to the well over 100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research participants who not only shared personal observations, but who also produced valuable ideas as to what IPAA can specifically do to transform its own program delivery – and importantly, influence its most senior management member cohort within all three levels of Government: Commonwealth, State and Local Government.

Specifically, IPAA, jointly funded by the PwC Foundation, commissioned PwC to conduct an investigation:

- Identifying the role that professional development has played in career advancement outcomes for a number of individual Indigenous public sector employees in Victoria, based on their disclosed professional development and career advancement experiences.
- Recording and documenting perceptions of links between professional development and career advancement among Indigenous public sector employees in Victoria.

Adopting a combination of survey, consultation and literature review processes, a number of key themes emerged. These related to:

- A differing perception in many instances of what ‘career advancement’ means for many Indigenous public sector employees. ‘Progressing up the public sector ladder’ was not seen by the majority of participants as encapsulating their view of career advancement. 66 out of the 107 survey respondents (67%) stated an alternate view as to what constituted career advancement for themselves, with the majority of this cohort identifying ‘working in another area of government’ as the key method by which to advance their career.
- The more general barriers to, and enablers of, career advancement for Victorian Indigenous public sector employees. Most notably, a confirmation of the literature that many Indigenous public sector employees perceive their skill set has been ‘pigeon holed’ into identified Indigenous program and policy positions.¹ Many of these positions are capped at the Victorian Public Service (VPS) Grade 5 and therefore provide limited opportunity for further career advancement.
- The key modes of professional development that Indigenous public sector employees viewed as vital to their career advancement centred on formal study resulting in a qualification. This squarely related to the issue of professional development. Many saw that without the attainment of a formal tertiary qualification supported by their employer, it would be difficult to secure a position outside of an Indigenous ‘identified’ or ‘specified’ program/policy area.
- The diversity of issues raised by, and the insights gained from, participants opened up a wide range of new questions deserving of further investigation – which we have attempted to highlight while acknowledging that much of this is unfortunately beyond the scope of this current project. Given this context and the above findings, it is likely that there is an opportunity for IPAA to play a role in contributing to better Indigenous employment outcomes – including career advancement – through professional development. This role may not be limited to delivery of programs; it may involve other elements such as research to help develop effective programs; facilitation and promotion of appropriate and effective programs among agencies; and advice and support for agencies seeking to improve their professional development approaches. However, in order to realise this role, better evidence about professional development and career advancement is also required.

¹ ‘Identified positions’ will be used as a term in this report that includes positions commonly referred to as ‘identified’ or ‘designated’. These are positions within Indigenous specific policy or program areas and/or positions with a Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal exemption which means that only Indigenous people can apply for such positions.

A summary of the key recommendations from this study under key headings is as follows:

Professional development

1. Government departments and agencies should proactively seek out ways to increase access to, and participation in, professional development for Indigenous staff.
2. An Indigenous professional development participation reporting framework should be created through *Kareeta Yirramboi* and the Aboriginal Partnership Group.
3. The promotion of Indigenous scholarships should be increased and greater flexibility provided for Indigenous staff to undertake formal study as aligned with the objectives of *Kareeta Yirramboi*.
4. An Indigenous student support network should be established and supported to share the information that is available and encourage positive working relationships with academia.
5. Subsidised opportunities should be provided for Indigenous staff to participate in future IPAA conferences and seminars.
6. Allowance should be made for cohorts of Indigenous staff to undertake professional development together.

Career advancement

7. Government departments should implement formal mentoring, coaching and job shadowing opportunities for Indigenous staff.
8. Secondment opportunities should be actively considered for Indigenous employees as a vehicle for demonstrating the variety of career paths that are available in the public sector.
9. Regional Management Forums should include conversations about Indigenous community issues and provide an opportunity for Indigenous staff to participate.
10. A toolkit should be developed for mapping career pathways for Indigenous public sector employees.
11. Indigenous public sector employees should be targeted to join the YIPAA Peer Plus Mentoring Program.
12. Government departments and agencies should provide stronger recognition and profiling of high performing Indigenous staff.

Peer support

13. A Victorian cross-government Indigenous Staff Network should be created.
14. Regional cross-government Indigenous staff networks should be created to collectively problem solve issues around professional development availability and the development of local opportunities.

Cultural safety

15. Departments should use their respective Aboriginal Inclusion Action Plans (reported on in the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework) as a mechanism to measure their progress in providing a culturally safe workplace.
16. Departments should support Indigenous cultural and bereavement leave policies.
17. Culturally responsive advertisements and position descriptions should be used to better target Indigenous people.
18. Managers of Indigenous staff should be provided with resources, information and training to build their understanding and capacity to contribute more strongly to Indigenous career advancement.
19. More culturally inclusive workplaces should be created through acknowledging and communally celebrating Indigenous days of significance and other cultural events .

Future research

20. Future research is needed to understand the strategies to overcome the inter-related issues of jealousy, lateral violence and shame and their impact on career advancement.

Sharing best practice

21. Government departments and agencies should more actively promote 'best practice' approaches in relation to supporting the career advancement of Indigenous public sector employees.

In conclusion, it is important to note that some circumstantial factors have affected the findings of this investigation. First, the implementation of the Victorian Government's Sustainable Government Initiative (SGI) was coincident with this study, and may have had an impact upon workplaces stress, as well as career development and advancement opportunities. Secondly, the great majority of participants secured through IPAA and PwC networks were Indigenous employees from the Victorian Government (as opposed to Commonwealth or local government employees). This might indicate that undertaking this research more broadly, even at the national level, would be highly useful to both Victoria and the other divisions of IPAA and the governments they serve.

Background and Context

Context and Drivers

Governments have taken a range of actions aimed at improving Indigenous employment outcomes in the public sector. These are often located within broader policy approaches for improving Indigenous employment more generally. Some of these actions have identified the potential role of professional development in improving Indigenous employment and career advancement.

In 2010, the Victorian Government released *Karreeta Yirramboi*, a public sector career development action plan. The Action Plan outlines five 'action areas', one of which is 'making the public sector an employer of choice for Aboriginal people'. One of the policy and program directions identified under this action area is "supporting the career development of Indigenous public sector employees". The Action Plan notes that this will assist with both attraction and retention of Indigenous employees. The specific actions taken under the plan, while well targeted, appear limited in their scope and reach.

At the Commonwealth level, the Australian Public Service Commission's 'APS Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees' aims to increase the number of Indigenous employees in the APS, and contribute to the fulfilment of the Commonwealth's Indigenous employment target. The Strategy outlines professional development as a key objective, and is associated with tailored professional development workshops for APS 1-6 and Executive Level employees identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Key performance indicators associated with this initiative relate to participation and participant satisfaction.

However, at both the State and Commonwealth levels, the effectiveness and impact of these initiatives in relation to attraction, retention and advancement is unclear. Hence, IPAA Victoria set out to investigate these linkages and determine its own role in promoting implementation of the report findings.

It is important to note that this research project has been undertaken at a time when the Victorian Government has been implementing its 'Sustainable Government Initiative'. As detailed below, the majority of consultation and survey participants were members of the Victorian Public Sector. It was made

clear by their responses that many of the current stressors affecting professional development and career advancement were impacted by an environment in which positions were reduced, available resources were low in relation to current work requirements and a level of uncertainty impacted morale. It is with this lens that many participants provided their input and thus it is possible that some information provided could be directly attributed to the general public service environment, as opposed to some of the unique factors that affect Indigenous public sector employees specifically.

What was PwC asked to do?

IPAA engaged PwC to undertake a research project examining the links between professional development and career advancement for Indigenous people in the Victorian public sector. The purpose of the project was to generate recommendations for IPAA Victoria and its member organisations aimed at increasing Indigenous employment and career advancement in the sector.

The findings of the project and this report will support IPAA Victoria in playing an effective role in relation to professional development for Indigenous public sector employees in Victoria, through both advocacy of professional development approaches and delivery of programs.

This project will contribute to a stronger understanding of the links between professional development and career advancement for Indigenous people in the Victorian public sector, as a basis for developing and advocating professional development approaches that have a meaningful impact on career advancement. It will do this through:

- identifying the role that professional development has played in career advancement outcomes for a number of individual Indigenous public sector employees in Victoria, based on their disclosed professional development and career advancement experiences, and
- recording and documenting perceptions of links between professional development and career advancement among Indigenous public sector employees in Victoria.

Methodology and Scope

Key Areas of Investigation

The following research questions and sub-questions were developed and agreed between PwC and IPAA-Victoria at the commencement of the Project in defining the scope of the investigation.

1. **In what ways and to what extent does professional development currently support the career advancement of Indigenous employees in the Victorian public sector?**
 - a. What current professional development opportunities are available to Indigenous employees in the Victorian public sector?
 - b. To what extent are these existing professional development activities effective in relation to career advancement?
 - What kinds of professional development are most effective in supporting career advancement?
 - What are the reasons for this? (e.g. participation, types of programs on offer, relevance)
 - What other support programs/structures are required to sit around professional development programs to enable career advancement?
 - What is the level of participation in existing professional development opportunities?
 - What are the barriers and enablers of participation in existing professional development opportunities?
2. **How should current professional development offerings be expanded and/or improved to better support career advancement?**
 - a. What is the logic through which professional development activities should contribute to career advancement for Indigenous Victorian public sector employees?
 - b. What new approaches should be developed and how should existing professional development approaches be changed to better support career advancement of Indigenous employees within the Victorian public sector?

As detailed later in this report, the authors additionally hypothesised that issues relating to low personal and/or professional confidence and that the problem of lateral violence might surface as notable barriers to Indigenous public sector advancement generally. While this was not borne out by the surveys or consultations explicitly as major issues, as explained below, this may relate to some of the methodological limitations that relate to the scope of the investigation.

It is important to also note that this research was *not* designed to assess barriers and enablers of recruitment of Indigenous people to the public sector (a subject which has been covered extensively by literature to date). Professional advancement – and the role of professional development in relation to enabling it to occur, were the real foci of the research.

Methodology

We adopted three data collection methods in order to establish findings that would go beyond the limited scope of existing literature on the issues. These were:

- A brief **literature review**, including review of cross-jurisdictional sources. As expected, there was not a deal of literature targeted at answering the above questions.
- To build the quantitative component of the methodology and reach as many Victorian Indigenous public sector employees as possible, we **conducted a survey** which offered an iPad (kindly supplied by IPAA) as its prize. The purpose of the prize was to ensure that a more randomised sample was attained (as opposed to only attaining responses from people who exclusively held strong views on the issue). In total we achieved a response of 107 surveys from Victorian Indigenous public sector employees, which we understand to represent approximately 10% of Indigenous Victorian public sector employees. The survey itself contained both quantitative and ‘free text aspects’.
- Given the importance of qualitative commentary in respect of this research topic, and the impersonal nature of survey processes, **consultation with Indigenous Victorian public sector employees** was one of the most critical aspects of the research method. In total, we met with approximately 37 Indigenous public servants across the junior and senior levels. These were spread across Melbourne CBD, Ballarat and the La Trobe Valley. Although we sought out the involvement of Australian Public Sector employees, the interviews were largely attended by Victorian Public Servants, closely followed by Local Government employees.

Literature review

The literature review covered a range of existing publications including:

- ‘Karreeta Yirramboi – the Victorian Aboriginal Public Sector Employment and Career Development Action Plan 2010-2015’
- ‘Indigenous Employment – Victorian Public Sector’ – Data collection undertaken to support development of *Karreeta Yirramboi*
- ‘Indigenous Employment – A way forward’ – State Services Authority report on the findings of research and analysis aimed at identifying ways for the Victorian Government to achieve improved outcomes for Indigenous people
- ‘The APS Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Employees’
- Evaluations of the Commonwealth strategy, including Dominic Downie and Associates 2008, ‘An Evaluation of the Australian Public Service Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees’
- State Services Authority’s ‘The State of the Public Sector in Victoria’ series
- Sources relating to Indigenous public sector employment and professional development in other jurisdictions, in particular those such as Queensland with a high proportion of Indigenous employees.

Survey

The survey was conducted prior to consultations in order to heighten awareness of the project amongst Victorian Indigenous public sector employees, and therefore boost ability to secure participants for the consultations.

Using IPAA networks and its membership base, the consultants created a survey that was distributed using the ‘survey monkey’ tool, for which the aforementioned prize was offered as incentive for completion. The consultants were pleased with the response of 107 participants and wish to express thanks to every person that took the time to complete their response.

The purpose of the survey was to capture the views of a larger sample of Indigenous employees, as the basis for quantitative analysis. It also allowed those Indigenous employees who are not able to participate in the face to face interviews or focus groups on the scheduled dates and times to actively participate in the project.

The survey enabled a degree of ‘triangulation’ or verification of information collected through consultation.

The Survey Tool can be located in Appendix A.

Summary Graphs cross-analysing the survey findings can be located in Appendix C.

Consultation

Key stakeholder groups for consultation and data collection included:

- Indigenous employees of VPS departments
- Indigenous employees of Victorian-based APS departments
- Indigenous local government employees.

However, as mentioned, the majority of people who chose to attend were from the Victorian Public Service.

Our choice of consultation methods sought to balance a range of considerations including:

- resource constraints on the number of consultations that can be undertaken
- the need to engage enough participants to identify a sufficiently comprehensive number of issues and themes
- the benefits of ‘group’ consultation approaches, which may facilitate participant engagement through conversation and exchange of ideas
- the benefits of individual consultation approaches, which may facilitate participant engagement through enabling confidentiality and privacy, and may also facilitate deeper exploration of issues.

Taking into account each of the considerations, we adopted a consultation approach that combined both ‘collective conversations’ and individual interviews.

‘Collective conversations’ are small group consultations (6-10 participants) in which a facilitator guides and directs conversation with and between participants. This will enable us to collect information from a large number of individual participants, while ensuring that the information is relatively rich. Where appropriate, telephone or email may be used to undertake ‘follow-up’ conversations.

Key dimensions of interest among our consultation participants included:

- location
 - urban/regional
- professional seniority
- more junior (e.g. APS3-6, VPS 2-5)/more senior (e.g. EL1 and above, VPS5-6 and EO1-3)
 - employment type
- Indigenous-specific role/non-Indigenous-specific role
 - sub-sector of employment
- Commonwealth/State/Local Government

Given both resource constraints and considerations of practicality, for consultation purposes we aimed to segment participants by the first two of these dimensions only – location and seniority. The regions chosen outside of the CBD were Ballarat and the La Trobe Valley, on the basis of their perceived diversity on outcomes. We therefore conducted six group consultations, as follows:

- Melbourne, senior participants
- Melbourne, junior participants
- La Trobe Valley, senior participants
- La Trobe Valley, junior participants
- Ballarat, senior participants
- Ballarat, junior participants

In addition, we undertook at least one individual consultation following each group consultation. These participants were selected from participants in the group consultation, with the aim of exploring emerging issues of interest more deeply.

Finally, we undertook individual consultations with a small number of senior, metropolitan-based Indigenous public servants identified through this process.

Given the limited resources available, the purpose of consultation was not to develop data that may be quantitatively analysed and form the basis for statistically significant conclusions; rather, it was to better understand, survey findings and to identify key themes or issues of interest that may be further developed and explored through both theoretical approaches and analysis subsequent to this project.

A sample of the interview guide used can be found in Appendix B.

Methodological limitations and implications

The consultants were pleased with the response rate and sample size for the survey and consultations. As earlier mentioned, based on State Service Authority data, we understand the survey response rate may represent up to 10 per cent of the number of self-identifying Victorian Indigenous public sector employees.²

The scale and resources allocated to this project did not enable the engagement of a ‘non-Indigenous’ control group against which to compare responses. It is possible that some of the findings may be applicable to a non-Indigenous cohort as well. Without repeating the same exercise with non-Indigenous public servants in Victoria, it may be hard to conclude that *some* of the issues raised were restricted to Indigenous public servants. However, we believe that other points are fairly clear.

² In a 2011 State Services Authority survey, the total number of Victorian Public Sector employees that self identified as Indigenous was 775. The number of active Victorian Public Sector employees recorded in this survey was 255,844. This equates to 0.3% of Victorian Public Sector employees identifying as Indigenous. See http://www.ssa.vic.gov.au/images/stories/product_files/277_Indigenous_employment_vps.pdf [accessed 1 September 2012].

Key findings

A comprehensive literature review of professional development and career advancement for Indigenous public sector employees indicated that career advancement is limited across the Indigenous workforce. However, limited evidence has been captured to support this. Hence, some of our key findings focus on the need for data collection outside of this study. The literature review did yield a range of interesting information:

- Consultations and increased historical participation rates suggest that the implementation of an Indigenous Employment Plan / Strategy is an imperative to improve employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians across the public sector.
- Consultations identified factors that have been identified as barriers to career advancement, including the trend for ‘identified’ and ‘designated’ positions for Indigenous people plateauing at around a VPS 5 level. This often means that in order for someone to progress beyond this point they will need to transition into a ‘mainstream’ position and there can be challenges in making that transition.
- A number of strategies have been identified that could potentially contribute to career advancement including mentorships, traineeships and secondments to Indigenous organisations.
- Extensive sources of literature exist regarding the factors that inhibit Indigenous workforce participation and business development. Likewise there is significant literature that investigates the reasons for low employment levels amongst the Indigenous population; however, there is limited evidence to identify the barriers to career advancement across the Indigenous workforce.

An advantage of both the commissioning of this research by IPAA and the method adopted, is that a number of barriers and enablers relating to Indigenous public sector advancement generally were raised, all of which are deserving of equal attention. A critical observation made by our team in analysing the literature is that, while a host of research has been undertaken into the attraction of Indigenous people into the public sector in Australia, little investigation has taken place into the basis behind poor professional advancement, or indeed professional development opportunities for Indigenous people in the public sector.

Consequently, our key findings have been structured thematically and have been divided in the following order, so as to ‘build the case’:

What does ‘career advancement’ mean to Victorian Indigenous Public Sector employees?

Overarching Barriers and Enablers to Professional Advancement for Indigenous Public Sector Employees in Victoria

The contribution of professional development towards professional advancement for Victorian Indigenous Public Sector employees

The capacity for Victorian Indigenous Public Sector employees to maximise professional development opportunities in aid of career advancement.

The authors had also hypothesised another major finding would arise from this study that was not borne out perhaps as strongly as was expected. The issue of ‘lateral violence’ was anticipated by the researchers to arise as a significant barrier to Indigenous professional advancement throughout the survey and consultation process. We had hypothesised that to at least a noticeable extent, ‘lateral violence’ may play a role in preventing people ‘seeking a promotion’.

Lateral violence has been defined in Australia as:

The organised, harmful behaviours that we do to each other collectively as part of an oppressed group: within our families; within our organisations and; within our communities. When we are consistently oppressed, we live with great fear and great anger and we often turn on those who are closest to us.³

Informally, ‘lateral violence’ has been used to describe the verbal, emotional and even physical threats, insults or intimidation levelled by one Indigenous person, either explicitly or implicitly in the ‘professional environment’ to another who may either be seeking promotion or who has achieved a particular promotion or even ‘high’ performance. The authors do not at all assert that this is general behaviour or the ‘norm’. However it has been noted and discussed by a number of Indigenous authors. The current Social Justice

³ Frankland, R Presentation to Social Justice Unit staff, Australian Human Rights Commission, 14 March 2011

Commissioner, Mr Mick Gooda explores the issue in great detail in the 2011 *Social Justice Report* (Australian Human Rights Commission, see Chapter 2).

Certainly during the consultations a number of anecdotes emerged in relation to this issue – but perhaps not as prominently as expected. We have wondered if this might be just a question of the level of depth and scope of the research – and whether deeper inquiry might actually tease these issues out more.

What does ‘career advancement’ mean to Victorian Indigenous Public Sector employees?

For the vast majority of survey participants, ‘Career Advancement’ did not necessarily mean exclusively ‘going up a grade’. 67 per cent of respondents stated they would like to progress their career in a way other than ‘going up a level’. The most common types of desired progression related to changing career paths, formal education or training, and developing skills (see Figures 7 at *Appendix C*).

Consultation participants however, particularly in the junior regional groups, did identify ‘rank progression’ as a nonetheless important and desirable form of ‘career advancement’. Indeed one employee mentioned she had been in a VPS Grade 2 role for 15 years despite a longstanding desire to move into a VPS Grade 3 role.

However, this group also spoke to the definition of career advancement as ‘challenging work’ and ‘making a difference to the community’.

Most common amongst all group consultations and individual consultations was the perception that career advancement related to the attainment of a position in a *mainstream policy/program role*. Metropolitan senior Indigenous public sector employees centrally viewed gaining ‘broader skills and experience across other parts of the public sector as their conception of ‘career advancement’.

This was not a matter strongly considered by the literature, but one Victorian Government document dating back to 2005 appears to reflect a related sentiment. *Enhancing Employment Opportunities for Indigenous Victorians* (2005) identified that Victorian Indigenous people see the language within Indigenous Employment Plans as important, and specifically that key words should include: commitment; adaptability; and engage, and for participants to “have fun and grow”.

Overarching barriers and enablers to professional advancement for Indigenous public sector employees in Victoria

The literature identifies a number of barriers to the career advancement of Indigenous employees in the public sector, but the most common factor cited is a perceived limited number of vacancies or opportunities at a higher level, lacking self confidence and lower levels of qualifications and/or experience.

The survey data strongly supported the literature findings. Approximately 73 per cent of respondents identified as being in Indigenous identified positions – and 62 per cent of these people said they would like to progress into a broader, mainstream role.

Among VPS employees (90 per cent of respondents) in Aboriginal/Indigenous identified positions, senior employees were more likely to have aspirations to move into mainstream roles, compared to more junior employees.

Qualitative responses provided by survey participants further distilled the basis for the perception there is a ceiling on career advancement for Indigenous public sector employees because either or both of the two following factors are perceived as present. That:

- the employee feels ‘pigeon holed’ in respect of their skill set (that it ‘can’t be translated to mainstream’); and/or
- because the rank order of the identified position the employee occupies does not offer a higher grade.

(See Figures 4, 5 and 6 in *Appendix C*).

Consultations widely supported this finding with particular detailed qualitative commentary. Importantly this was a key point that arose regardless of seniority or regional location. As one of our team puts it, ‘*There is no distinction between the various levels when it came to skills sets being pigeon holed*’.

One focus group participant relayed his story of this situation: He works in a regional office where he is amongst the most senior people in that region – all of his equivalents have acted in their manager’s role or have acted in each other roles when they are on leave. Not once, however, was he asked to act in any of the roles. While that could be perceived as a situation unique to that individual, a large proportion of focus groups and conversations held by our team reinforced this story. This was also reflected in the survey data where 38 per cent of participants identified ‘job shadowing’ as a preferred mode of professional development and yet only 7 per cent of participants felt that it was actually available

to them. Job shadowing is a relatively cost efficient mode of professional development much like ‘one-one-one coaching sessions’ where again 43 per cent of participants nominated it as a preferred mode of professional development and only 16 per cent saw it was an option available to them.

Consultations amongst each of the grade levels and regions also identified a number of other prevailing barriers. Some of these perhaps obliquely referred to concepts of lateral violence. The survey queried whether employees felt ‘family and community’ support for their desire for and achievements of promotion. While survey responses very strongly indicated that people relied upon this as a catalyst for their current position and career aspirations, during consultations, an alternate view point was put forward. A number of those consulted suggested they would not seek higher ranking opportunities even if they were available, due to the way they would be perceived by their community if they took on the role. These particularly related to roles in social servicing and justice where decisions that may be adverse to family and kin may be required. Some who had in fact taken up such roles stated that it made it difficult for them to then socialise back within the community, and sometime they avoided particular family or community events as a result.

A further barrier to attempting promotional opportunities within the public sector specifically identified in the regional consultations was the limitation of available senior positions within the regions themselves. Due to family, community and land connections and obligations, participants felt it was simply not desirable or possible to move to Melbourne for promotional opportunities, and that in many cases promotion was only possible with relocation.

The contribution of professional development towards professional advancement for Victorian Indigenous Public Sector employees

In light of the strongly indicated desire for career advancement in the form of mainstream program and policy positions, combined with the perception that promotional opportunities are stymied due to ‘pigeon holing’ of skills into Indigenous program areas (or ‘identified’ positions), the question turns to what professional development opportunities might alleviate this.

The most valuably perceived modes of professional development

The extensive data analysis conducted in the Enhancing Employment Opportunities for Indigenous Victorians (2005) literature review did not clearly investigate or articulate the key factors associated with the lack of career advancement across the Indigenous workforce (as it largely focussed on the barriers associated with workforce participation), however it was able to identify the following factors can assist in the career advancement of Indigenous employees:

- Mentoring
- Traineeships
- Time allocation for additional studies
- Flexibility in working practices
- Cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous employees
- Indigenous and non-Indigenous leadership committed to Indigenous workforce participation and advancement

“ The uniform message delivered by both forms of data collection is that tertiary study resulting in a qualification is the most desirable form of professional development for Victorian Indigenous public sector employees, predominantly because it is seen as the most important tool in being able to progress in to a mainstream position – and therefore into a career which offers more diverse and higher ranking advancement. ”

More recently, the *Making It Our Business: Career planning guide for supervisors and managers of Aboriginal staff (2010)* identified (through consultation) the following factors that inhibited career progression for Indigenous Australians:

- Indigenous people were unsure about the opportunities available to them in the sector, and as a result did not actively seek out career progression opportunities. One of the flow-on effects is that managers and HR managers traditionally offer little active encouragement and support for career progression of Indigenous staff.
- Hearing about Indigenous staff who have had applications for study or professional development declined had dissuaded others from applying.
- There may be no clear paths for career progression in the organisation, because no training is offered or because there are limited numbers of higher grade positions to move into. There is a perception among Indigenous people that formal qualifications are required for higher grade positions which creates a 'glass ceiling' effect.

The survey data and consultation data from this investigation confirmed some of the aspects of the above literature, and offered some deeper insights.

As earlier stated – and as demonstrated by the survey findings, the most commonly desired form of professional development was formal study (see Figure 3 Appendix C). The consultations and surveys further explored the nature of this formal study. For many, this means the acquisition of a bachelor or certificate qualifications. In consultation, participants suggested this is closely related to the issue of being 'pigeon holed' into an identified position and that formal qualifications are often necessary for promotion.

Further, among those respondents who have experienced a 'significant professional development experience', the most commonly reported type of experience is formal education and training (36 per cent). Despite this, only 22 per cent of respondents indicated that formal study leading to a qualification was perceived as 'on offer' (see Figures 2 and 3). The next most desired professional development was short courses (31 per cent).

Amongst VPS staff, there is a correlation between seniority, and whether a respondent reports having experienced a significant professional development experience. This may provide some evidence that effective professional development is associated with high achievement in the Victorian Public Sector.

The capacity for Victorian Indigenous Public Sector employees to maximise professional development opportunities in aid of career advancement.

The question then turns to the capacity of Victorian Indigenous public sector employees to take advantage of the modes of professional development they see as critical to advancing their careers.

Viewing the survey data alone, it appears that there is some mismatch between the preferred mode of professional development, and the opportunities available. Approximately 70 per cent of survey respondents felt there to be at least one gap between the mode of professional development they wanted (or felt they needed) compared to what they were actually offered (see Figure 3 Appendix C). However to accept this at face value makes the presumption that all public sector employees have equal knowledge and access to the full range of professional development available to them and their entitlement to it – and indeed the same skill set in arguing for it or facilitating the personal development plans that enable access to it.

The consultations delved into this issue further; it became clear that some of the gaps between desirability and opportunity for particular modes of professional development existed possibly as a result of poor awareness of the professional development entitlements of staff and the methods required negotiating for these. Incidences were recounted where individuals had to present detailed arguments about why they should be provided with the professional development opportunities and more importantly how it was going to benefit the team in which they worked.

Another theme that has emerged is the role that managers play in facilitating access to professional development. Survey and consultation participants who felt their manager supported them in a general sense appeared to have better access professional development opportunities that led to the career advancement.

This may not be isolated as an issue to Indigenous public sector employees and raises a host of issues that are worthy of further exploration, not least of which relates to the capacity of managerial staff and the promotion of professional development entitlements.

Recommendations

Overview

The recommendations are directed to three main audiences:

- IPAA Victoria
- Victorian public sector departments and agencies
- Aboriginal Partnership Group (advisory body for *Karreeta Yirramboi*).

There are several barriers to Indigenous career advancement and uptake of professional development that have been identified in this report. It is important that Government departments acknowledge these barriers and proactively seek out ways to recognise the need to increase access to and participation in professional development for Indigenous people in the public sector. In order to achieve this there should be increased promotion of Indigenous scholarships and greater flexibility provided for people to undertake formal study. Furthermore, Government departments should implement formal mentoring, coaching and job shadowing opportunities for Indigenous staff. Finally the development of tools to map career pathways for Indigenous public sector employees could have a significant impact on career advancement.

Career advancement for Indigenous public sector employees cannot be achieved by an individual entity. Improvement in this space must be a collaborative effort across IPAA, government departments and agencies, and relevant government committees. It is important that the recommendations of this report are considered by a range of stakeholders. In particular, this report should be circulated for consideration by:

- Secretaries Group on Aboriginal Affairs
- Aboriginal Partnership Group
- Indigenous staff networks across government
- Executive Directors who oversee 'People and Culture' within each department.

Influencing government departments and agencies and creating real change could be tangibly realised by:

- Aboriginal Partnership Group to advocate for a Indigenous professional development participation reporting framework for state government departments
- IPAA (Victoria) could partner with another entity to develop an Indigenous career advancement mapping tool
- Profiling and promotion of Government departments and agencies that are seen as delivering 'best practice' in relation to supporting Indigenous public sector employee's career advancement.

IPAA (Victoria) have an influencing role with the three tiers of Government in Victoria, and through their recently launched Reconciliation Action Plan, have an intention to support career advancement of Indigenous public sector employees. Through their Indigenous Advisory Committee and strong relationships with Government Departments IPAA (Victoria) can provide information and resources, such as this report, to support other Government agencies to practically implement change. IPAA (Victoria) also has scope to model some of those changes in their own organisation. IPAA (Victoria) may want to consider:

- Creating a whole of government Indigenous Staff Network
- Target Indigenous public sector employees to join the YIPAA Peer Plus Mentoring Program
- Allow for cohorts of Indigenous staff to undertake professional development together
- Provide an additional Indigenous public sector employee achievement category in the IPAA Awards .

A common issue identified through consultations was that regionally based employees, particularly those in rural areas can face additional challenges in accessing professional development and achieving further career advancement. Therefore it may also be advantageous to form regional cross-government Indigenous staff networks to problem solve some of these issues collectively, and source local professional development opportunities as an alternative to the majority of professional development being offered in Melbourne.

Beyond the offering of professional development, is the need for the managers of Indigenous employees to have a stronger understanding of cultural protocols, culturally responsive professional development mediums and ways in which to think specifically about career advancement. Strong relationships between employees and their managers should be a priority. Part of how these relationships could be strengthened is through celebrating Indigenous days of significance together. Events like this provide the opportunity for learning and deeper inter-cultural understanding leading to stronger and more empathetic relationships. Such understanding can also be created through cultural awareness training.

This project also identified several issues that could be further explored in future research. In particular, it is advised that future research include within its scope, the need to further understand and try to overcome the inter-related issues of jealously lateral violence and shame. These are quite culturally specific issues, and would need to be explored through a consultation style which allowed time for trust to build between facilitators and participants and professional debriefing/ counselling being made available upon completion of any consultations.

It is vitally important that the recommendations of this report are actively considered, acted upon and implemented where practicable and that such changes are promoted to the Victorian public sector, such that the sector can increasingly see Indigenous career advancement as something which is important and a shared responsibility. It is also important that Indigenous employees particularly those who participated in the survey and consultation are aware of the changes which come about as a result of this report. Their time in participating is valuable and future engagement with similar projects is influenced by whether or not people feel that their reflections and advice are valued.

Recommendations

Professional development

1. Government departments and agencies should proactively seek out ways to increase access to, and participation in, professional development for Indigenous staff.
2. An Indigenous professional development participation reporting framework should be created through *Kareeta Yirramboi* and the Aboriginal Partnership Group.
3. The promotion of Indigenous scholarships should be increased and greater flexibility provided for Indigenous staff to undertake formal study as aligned with the objectives of *Kareeta Yirramboi*.
4. An Indigenous student support network should be established and supported to share the information that is available and encourage positive working relationships with academia.
5. Subsidised opportunities should be provided for Indigenous staff to participate in future IPAA conferences and seminars.
6. Allowance should be made for cohorts of Indigenous staff to undertake professional development together.

Career advancement

7. Government departments should implement formal mentoring, coaching and job shadowing opportunities for Indigenous staff.
8. Secondment opportunities should be actively considered for Indigenous employees as a vehicle for demonstrating the variety of career paths that are available in the public sector.
9. Regional Management Forums should include conversations about Indigenous community issues and provide an opportunity for Indigenous staff to participate.

10. A toolkit should be developed for mapping career pathways for Indigenous public sector employees.
11. Indigenous public sector employees should be targeted to join the YIPAA Peer Plus Mentoring Program.
12. Government departments and agencies should provide stronger recognition and profiling of high performing Indigenous staff.

Peer support

13. A Victorian cross-government Indigenous Staff Network should be created.
14. Regional cross-government Indigenous staff networks should be created to collectively problem solve issues around professional development availability and the development of local opportunities.

Cultural Safety

15. Department should use their respective Aboriginal Inclusion Action Plans (reported on in the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework) as a mechanism to measure their progress in providing a culturally safe workplace.
16. Departments should support Indigenous cultural and bereavement leave policies.
17. Culturally responsive advertisements and position descriptions should be used to better target Indigenous people.
18. Managers of Indigenous staff should be provided with resources, information and training to build their understanding and capacity to contribute more strongly to Indigenous career advancement.
19. More culturally inclusive workplaces should be created through acknowledging and communally celebrating Indigenous days of significance and other cultural events.

Future research

20. Future research is needed to further understand the strategies to overcome the inter-related issues of jealousy, lateral violence and shame and their impact on career advancement.

Sharing best practice

21. Government departments and agencies should more actively promote 'best practice' approaches in relation to supporting the career advancement of Indigenous public sector employees.

IPAA (Victoria) is committed to implementing the following recommendations:

- The promotion of Indigenous scholarships should be increased and greater flexibility provided for Indigenous staff to undertake formal study as aligned with the objectives of *Kareeta Yirramboi*
- Subsidised opportunities should be provided for Indigenous staff to participate in future IPAA conferences and seminars
- Allowance should be made for cohorts of Indigenous staff to undertake professional development together
- A Victorian cross-government Indigenous Staff Network should be created
- Indigenous public sector employees should be targeted to join the YIPAA Peer Plus Mentoring Program
- More culturally inclusive workplaces should be created through acknowledging and communally celebrating Indigenous days of significance and other cultural events
- Government departments and agencies should more actively promote 'best practice' approaches in relation to supporting the career advancement of Indigenous public sector.

PwC and IPAA would like to acknowledge the ongoing support and leadership of the IPAA Indigenous Advisory Committee



Appendices

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Appendix A Survey tools

IPAA: Professional development and advancement for Indigenous public servants in Victoria

1. *At what level did you join the public service?*

.....

2. *How many years ago was this?*

.....

3. *What is your level in the public service today (if acting, please use your acting level)?*

.....

4. *Do you have any aspirations to progress above the level at which you are currently?*

Yes/No

If no, can you briefly say why not?

.....

.....

.....

5. *Would you like to progress your career in any other way? For example not just by ‘going up a level’?*

Yes/No

Please describe how, if you feel comfortable

.....

.....

6. *Do you feel your family and/or your community support you in your current role?*

Yes/No

Please describe, if you feel comfortable

.....

.....

7. *If you wanted to progress your career (either to the next public service level or in some other way) do you think your community and family would support you?*

Yes/No

Please describe, if you feel comfortable

.....

.....

8. Have you had any professional development opportunities offered to you in the last two years such as (please circle one or more):

- one-on-one coaching sessions
- any mentoring
- going to conferences
- attending short courses
- any form of study
- Any other form of professional development? If so, please describe:

.....
.....

- No – I haven't had any of the above opportunities offered to me.

9. If you have been offered these opportunities, did you decide to take them up?

Yes/No

(a) If no, why not?

.....
.....

(b) If yes, did you use this opportunity to help progress your career?

.....
.....

10. Are you in an 'identified' position, or one that is specifically for delivering Indigenous policy or programs?

Yes/No

If yes, do you have any aspirations to move into a position in mainstream program or policy areas?

Yes/No

If yes, why?

.....
.....

Thank-you

Appendix B Consultations

IPAA Research Project

Professional development and career advancement for Indigenous employees in the Victorian public sector

Consultation guide

What is this project about?

IPAA Victoria, in partnership with PwC, is undertaking a project to better understand the links between professional development and career advancement for Indigenous people working in the Victorian public sector.

The project will develop recommendations for IPAA Victoria and public sector agencies that aim to increase Indigenous employment and career advancement in the sector.

Your involvement

As part of the project, PwC and IPAA Victoria are conducting consultations with Indigenous employees currently employed in the public sector in Victoria. Participants have been invited from a range of locations, agencies and levels of experience.

The consultations aim to capture the views and experiences of current employees on career advancement and professional development, in particular any challenges, gaps and opportunities for improvement across the Victorian public sector.

Further information

For further information regarding the project or your participation, please don't hesitate to contact:

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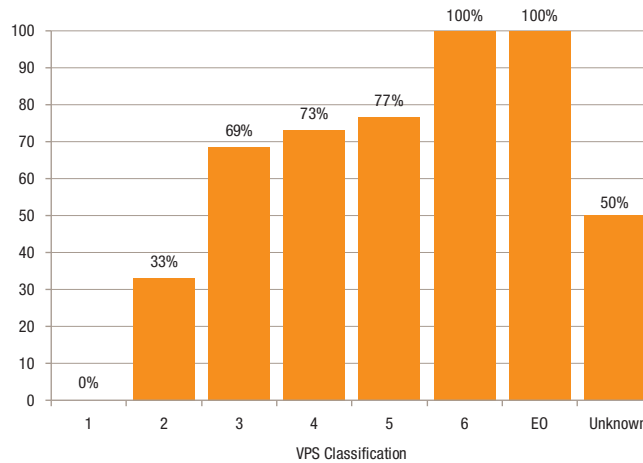
Discussion questions

- *What kinds of career goals and aspirations do you have? Do they relate to salary? Progression and promotion? Doing interesting work? Job security? Making a difference?*
- *What does 'career advancement' mean to you? Is it about progressing above your current level? What other types of career advancement are relevant to you?*
- *Do you have aspirations to progress above your current level?*
- *What kind of support have you received to help you achieve your career aspirations? Has this support been helpful? What kind of support would you like to receive?*
- *How important is support from your employer in relation to career advancement and meeting your career aspirations?*
- *How important is support from your community or other sources in relation to career advancement and meeting your career aspirations?*
- *What challenges have you experienced in career advancement or meeting your career aspirations? What can be done by you, your employer or others to help overcome these challenges?*
- *What kinds of professional development have you participated in (e.g. formal education and training, on-the-job training, mentoring, attending short courses or presentations etc.)?*
- *Which kinds of professional development activities have you found to be most helpful? Which have been less helpful? Why?*
- *To what extent have your professional development activities helped you achieve your career goals and aspirations?*
- *Based on your own experience and people you know, what specific issues do you think Indigenous public sector employees experience in relation to career advancement? Are there specific issues that relate to employees in Indigenous-specific positions?*

Appendix C Survey data

Figure 1: Professional Development with significant impact by level

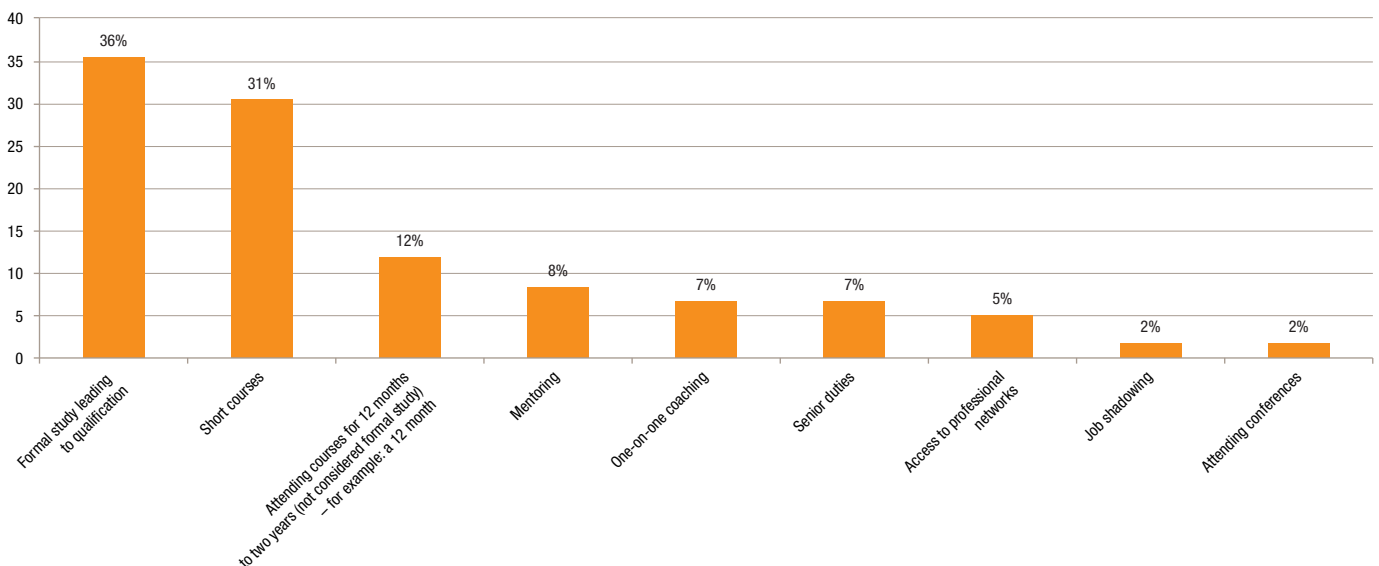
VPS employees reporting a PD experience that has had a significant career impact



- Among Victorian Public Sector (VPS) staff, there is a correlation between seniority, and whether a respondent reports having experienced a significant Professional Development (PD) experience.
- This may provide some evidence that effective PD is associated with high achievement in the VPS.

Figure 2: PD experiences that have a significant career impact

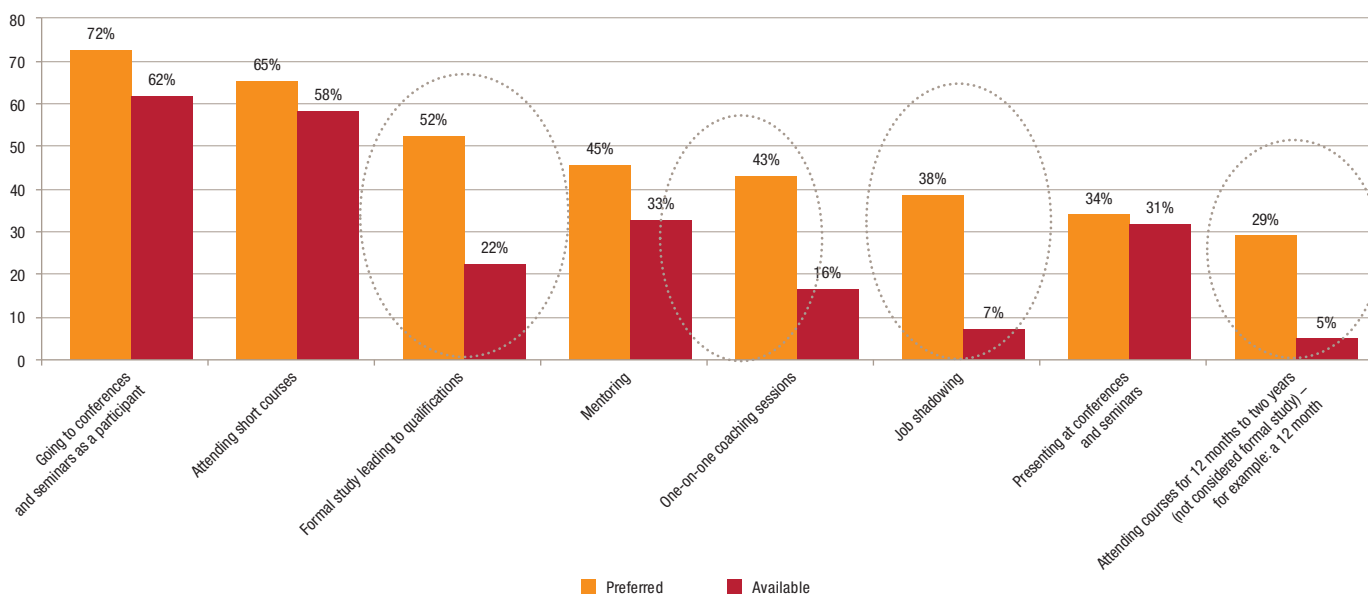
PD experiences that have had a significant career impact.



- Among those respondents who have experienced a significant PD experience, the most commonly reported type of experience is formal education and training (36%), followed by short courses (31%).
- This may provide some evidence regarding the modes of PD that are more and less effective.

Figure 3: Desired Professional Development as against perceived availability

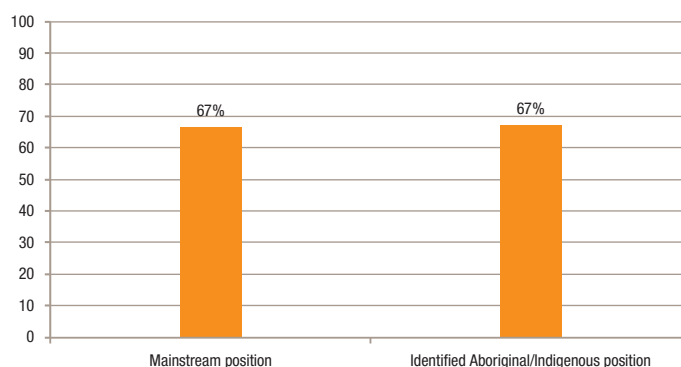
Modes of Professional Development



- There appears to be some mismatch between the preferred mode of PD, and the opportunities available.
- Comparing this chart to the previous slide, there may also be a mismatch between the modes of PD on offer, and those that are likely to be more effective – e.g. only 22% of respondents indicated that formal study leading to a qualification was on offer.

Figure 4: Perceived barriers to career advancement

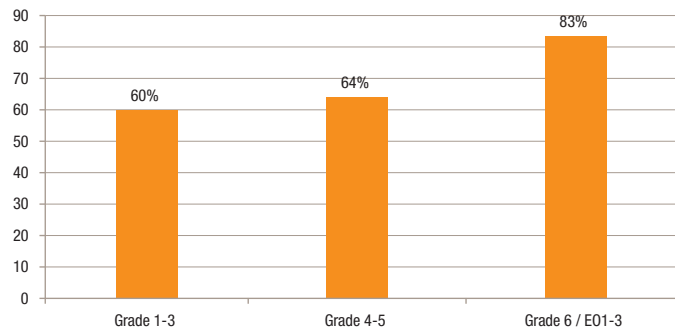
Are there any factors that have hindered or prevented you from seeking higher positions in the Public Service?



- Respondents in mainstream and identified Aboriginal/Indigenous positions are **equally likely** to report that specific factors have prevented them from seeking higher positions.
- ‘Free text’ responses from a small number of respondents (9) indicated that being ‘pigeon-holed’ in their current role or facing ceilings on advancement in their current role is a preventative factor. These respondents were split evenly between mainstream and identified Aboriginal/ Indigenous positions.

Figure 5: Desire to move into mainstream public sector employment by grade

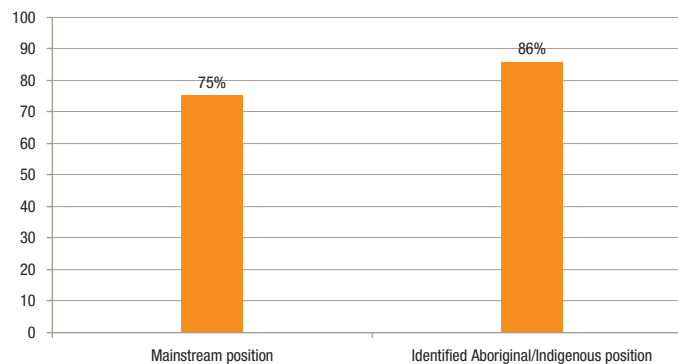
If you are in an Aboriginal/Indigenous identified position, do you have any aspirations to move into a broader public sector role?



- Among VPS employees (90% of respondents) employed in Aboriginal/Indigenous identified positions, senior employees were more likely to have aspirations to move into mainstream roles, compared to more junior employees.

Figure 6: Career Advancement as desire to 'progress a level'

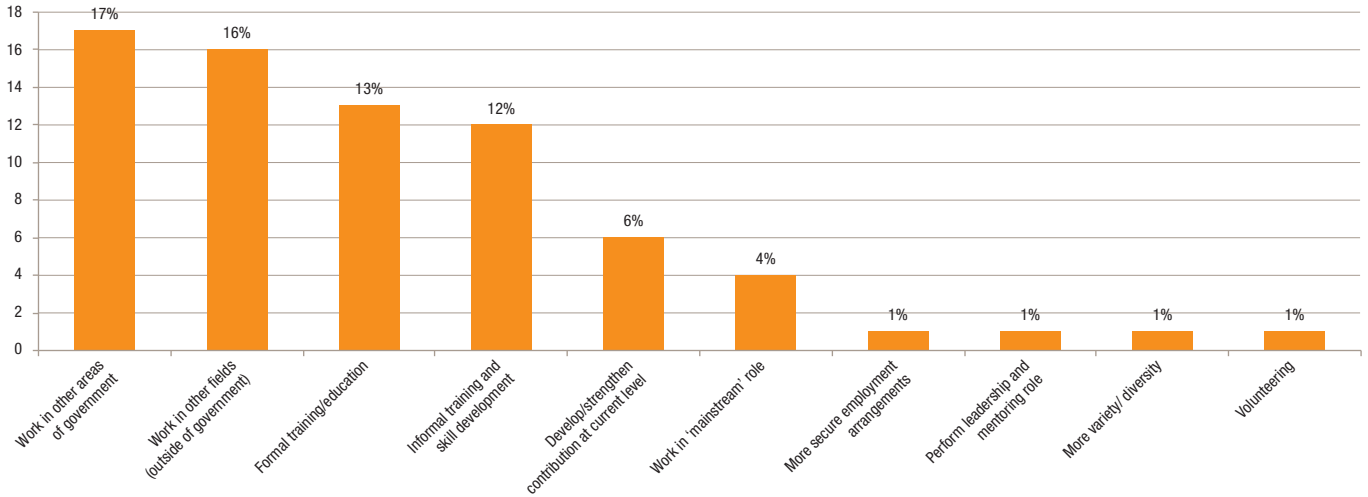
Do you have any aspirations to progress above the level at which you are currently?



- Respondents in identified Aboriginal/Indigenous positions were slightly more likely to report aspiring to progression, compared to respondents in mainstream positions.

Figure 7: Career Advancement as 'other than climbing a rung'

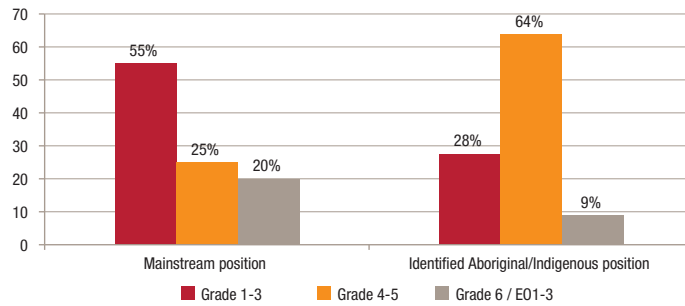
Would you like to progress your career in any other way? For example, not just by 'going up a level'. If yes, could you please describe.



- Among respondents who indicated they would like to 'progress' their career in a way other than 'going up a level' (72 out of 107), the most common types of desired progression related to changing career paths, formal education or training, and developing skills.

NB. Responses were provided as 'free text', and have been coded into the categories shown. Some individual responses fell into multiple categories.

Figure 8: Likelihood of being in a mainstream versus an identified position by grade



- Employees in mainstream positions are more likely to be in more senior (Grade 6/EO1-3) classifications or more junior (Grade 1-3) classifications.
- Employees in identified Aboriginal/Indigenous positions are more likely to be in intermediate (Grade 4-5) classifications.

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“

Governments have taken a range of actions aimed at improving Indigenous employment outcomes in the public sector. These are often located within broader policy approaches for improving Indigenous employment more generally. Some of these actions have identified the potential role of professional development in improving Indigenous employment and career advancement.

”



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