# Final report

## Evaluation of the Indigenous Cadetship Support (ICS) and Tailored Assistance Employment Grants (TAEG) Cadets Programs

24 June 2020

**Evaluation of the Indigenous Cadetship Support (ICS) and Tailored Assistance Employment Grants (TAEG) Cadets Programs**

## Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by Inside Policy Pty Ltd on behalf of the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) for the sole use of NIAA and for the purposes for which it was commissioned. The contents of this paper do not reflect the views of NIAA.

## Intellectual property

Inside Policy grants NIAA a fee free, non-exclusive, irrevocable, world-wide licence to exercise the intellectual property rights in relation to this report. The licence granted to NIAA includes a right to sub-licence those rights, including to the public under an open access licence.

Inside Policy warrants that it is entitled to grant this licence; and that the provision of this report and its use by NIAA will not infringe any third-party's intellectual property rights.

## Third-party reliance

The information, statements and commentary contained in this Report (collectively, the **"Information"**) have been prepared by Inside Policy based on material publicly available, information provided by NIAA, interviews with service providers, and otherwise from sources indicated within this report.  Inside Policy has not sought to independently verify those sources unless otherwise noted within this Report.  Inside Policy does not give any guarantee, undertaking or warranty in relation to the accuracy, reliability or completeness of the Information contained in this Report, the assumptions made by the parties that provided the Information or any conclusions reached by those parties. Inside Policy does not accept or assume any liability arising from any actions taken in response to this Report (including investment or strategic decisions made as a consequence of the Information contained in the report).

Inside Policy does not accept or assume responsibility for any reliance that may be placed on this Report by any third-party.  Any reliance placed is that party's sole responsibility.

## Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| **AIATSIS** | Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies |
| **AIME** | Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience |
| **CGS** | Commonwealth Grants Scheme |
| **COAG** | Council of Australian Governments |
| **CPI** | Consumer Price Index |
| **CSA** | Cadetship Study Allowance |
| **CSR** | Corporate Social Responsibility |
| **DESE** | Department of Education, Skills and Employment |
| **EAG** | Evaluation Advisory Group |
| **ESO** | Employment Services Outcomes |
| **ESS** | Employment Services System |
| **GOS** | Graduate Outcomes Survey |
| **GPA** | Grade Point Average |
| **HELP** | Higher Education Loans Program |
| **HREC** | Human Research Ethics Committee |
| **IAP** | Indigenous Apprenticeships Program |
| **IAGDP** | Indigenous Australians Government Development Program |
| **IAS** | Indigenous Advancement Strategy |
| **IBA** | Indigenous Business Australia |
| **ICS** | Indigenous Cadetship Support program |
| **ISSP** | Indigenous Student Support Program |
| **JLEP** | Jobs, Land and Employment Program |
| **LDI** | Leadership Development Institute |
| **NIAA** | National Indigenous Australians Agency |
| **OECD** | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| **PM&C** | Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet |
| **RAP** | Reconciliation Action Plan |
| **TAEG** | Tailored Assistance Employment Grants |
| **TVET** | Technical and Vocational Education and Training |
| **WEX** | Work Exposure in Government |

## Terminology

| | |
|---|---|
| **ABSTUDY** | The main Commonwealth funded social security payment to support Indigenous Australians in full-time study |

**Direct employer**     An organisation that employs cadets in a direct contractual relationship with the Commonwealth.

**FEE-HELP**     Australian Government higher education loans program (previously HECS)

**Indigenous**     A person who is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, who identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted in their community as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

**Intermediary**     See provider

**Provider**     An organisation engaged by the Commonwealth to facilitate aspects of the Cadetships program on behalf of employers (also referred to as an intermediary, third-party provider or third-party sponsor)

**Sponsor**     See provider

**University-employer** A university that employs cadets (i.e. is also a direct employer)

# Table of contents

# 1. Executive summary

The Australian Government has supported Indigenous Cadetships since 1999. The Indigenous Cadetship Support (ICS) program was designed to support Indigenous tertiary students to complete their undergraduate degrees and progress onto ongoing employment. The progression of Indigenous undergraduates to professional employment aims to both 'close the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and contribute to Australia's national wellbeing and economic prosperity more broadly.

NIAA engaged Inside Policy to conduct an evaluation of the former ICS and current TAEG Cadetships programs in November 2019. The purpose of the evaluation is to provide evidence-based advice on the effectiveness of the program in meeting its objectives and to highlight possible future program improvements.

This report details the findings of the evaluation, including:

- the experience of cadets, providers, universities and employers; and
- implications for future program design and implementation.

## Evaluation objectives

Evaluation of ICS and TAEG Cadetships is both process (assessing implementation) and outcome (assessing what was achieved) in nature. The evaluation objectives are:

1. Understand the design and implementation: Understand how the Cadetships programs have been designed and implemented.
2. Understand the impact: Understand the outcomes of the Cadetships programs and the factors that influence these outcomes.
3. Understand the policy implications and potential for future impact: Understand how the Cadetships programs supports Indigenous participation in education, the workforce and career development/progression.

## Methodology

The evaluation methodology was guided by an evaluation strategy, developed by NIAA and refined by Inside Policy. The evaluation is a theory based evaluation drawing upon program logic and theory of change to inform understanding of program improvements and impacts within a development evaluation approach. It addresses the three evaluation objectives (above) through the following evaluation questions:

**Table 1:** Evaluation objectives and questions

| Evaluation objective | Evaluation questions |
| --- | --- |
| Understand the design and implementation | 1.1 How has the program been implemented?<br>1.2 How was the program designed? |
| Understand the impact | 2.1 Who are the cadets and what variables impact on their success or otherwise?<br><br>2.2 To what extent did the program meet the needs and expectations of cadets and stakeholders?<br><br>2.3 Which universities have been most successful in engaging and retaining cadets? |

| Evaluation objective | Evaluation questions |
|---|---|
| | 2.4 Which employers have been most successful in engaging and retaining cadets? |
| Understand the policy implications and potential for future impact | 3.1 What do the outcomes tell us about the efficiency and effectiveness of this program?<br>3.2 How does the program compare/relate to other programs? |

## Scope

The evaluation is limited in scope to the five-year period before the ICS transitioned under TAEG (approximately 2014), and offerings under TAEG-cadets since 1 January 2018.

## Data collection

The evaluation methods included a literature review, analysis of administrative data, review of program documentation and semi-structured interviews with cadets, employers and universities.

Semi-structured interviews were completed through sampling. 50 cadets (100% of intended scope), 12 employers (60% of intended scope), 2 providers (40% of intended scope, however there were only 2 providers in the program), and 4 universities (40% of intended scope) were interviewed in the evaluations.

## Limitations

The evaluation is limited by the availability and reliability of administrative data. Reasons for limited data availability and reliability include loss of program knowledge, varied data entry practices, limitations with the database design and low response rates in the post-program monitoring survey.

## Demographic context

For demographic context, the cadets interviewed were more likely to be female (62.5%), 22.5 years old, live in Sydney or Brisbane and enrolled in Health (31%), followed by Management and Commerce (17%), Society and Culture (16%) and Law (10%). Cadets engaged by CareerTrackers (the largest cadetship service provider) were more likely to be younger (median age of 22) than cadets engaged directly by employers (median age of 25).

## Findings and recommendations

### Understand the design and implementation

The available evidence did not reveal how Indigenous Australians were engaged in the program's design process, nor how the program was designed to meet the needs of Indigenous students. In implementation, there is evidence that a small number of Aboriginal-led organisations employed cadets, and the two providers had historical experience working closely with Aboriginal people, but are not Aboriginal-led organisations.

In implementation, there were a number of design elements that did not meet the needs of Indigenous students including the cultural safety of the non-work placement components of the program, the allowable time of the cadetship, and restrictions on deferring the cadetship.

### Understanding the impact

The qualitative findings from this evaluation indicate this program contributes to meaningful academic, employment and individual outcomes, however design modifications are required to strengthen participant engagement and experiences.

The positive outcomes of achieving professional experience, career direction and financial support were significant, indicating that the cadetship has contributed to the intermediate outcome of encouraging 'more Indigenous students to graduate'. Analysis of the educational outcomes of the 50 cadets interviewed suggests the Cadetships programs helped enabled degree completion as cadets' applied the skills and insights they gained during the work placement to their university assignments and were able to reduce additional work burdens as a result of the cadetship study allowance. However, the cadets' individual financial circumstances determined the extent to which they were able to reduce or cease additional work burdens, and in turn dedicate additional time to their study.

The evaluation found the program increased the likelihood of university completion and obtaining a job. For the sample group, it found a cadetship increases a student's chances of graduate employment and also provides an incentive to increase academic performance and degree completion. Furthermore, there is developing evidence to suggest that a cadetship may act as an incentive for Indigenous students to make the transition from secondary school to university, by ameliorating financial and motivational barriers.

### Understand the policy implications and potential for future impact

Commonwealth support for Indigenous Cadetships is an effective and worthwhile policy, however there are areas in which the Cadetships programs, and their future impact, could be improved. The evaluation's recommendations are based on the experiences of cadets participating in the program and the experience of employers, providers and universities in implementing it.

While the program contributes to a number of positive outcomes, this evaluation has uncovered the need for some program design improvements.

The key findings and recommendations for each evaluation criteria are summarised below.

**Evaluation criteria 1: Understand the design and implementation**

*Understand how the Cadetships programs have been designed and been implemented*

**Finding:**

There was no evidence to suggest Indigenous Australians had been consulted in the design and implementation of the Cadetships programs (see discussion at page 38). The design and implementation of the programs did not appear to fully cater to the diverse needs of Indigenous students.

**Recommendations**:

1. That NIAA consult with First Nations stakeholders to co-design the form and implementation of the cadetship program to ensure it is culturally safe, relevant and responsive to the complex needs of students across remote, regional and urban contexts, differing age ranges, as well as enlarging the scope to cater for carers and those cadets who have community, familial and cultural obligations.
2. That NIAA include broader KPIs for providers to ensure a culturally safe environment for cadets, including establishing minimum standards to guide the selection of providers (e.g. Indigenous representation in the organisation's governance and leadership, commitment to a Reconciliation Action Plan, presence of a cultural safety strategy etc.)
3. That NIAA require providers to establish an accessible and transparent feedback and complaints process and the number and nature of complaints received from cadets be monitored through provider progress reports.
4. That NIAA require providers to commission an independent evaluation of their Cadetships programs at least once during every contract period (as defined by NIAA), and that the costs of the evaluation be included in the provider's funding contract.
5. That NIAA explore opportunities to attract new providers to the program, including Aboriginal businesses, Aboriginal controlled organisations, Indigenous peak bodies and potentially universities, under the leadership of the Indigenous Student Support Centres.

**Finding**:

Current program rules around the allowable time for degree completion and prohibiting the deferral of cadetship are not meeting the needs of some cadets, whose preference is to reduce their study loads to 75% or may need to defer university for a range of reasons (see discussion at page 37).[1]

Some cadets (n=6), especially those who completed end of semester work placements, reported feeling 'burnt out' by the lack of leisure time. Students who had relocated to attend university often had to choose between spending their summer working or reuniting with their families and maintaining connection to country (see discussion at page 59).

**Recommendations**:

6. That NIAA consider changing the definition of allowable time to read 'the time required to complete the cadet's degree studying at least 75% of the standard full-time study load'.
7. That NIAA consider changing the program rules to allow cadets to defer their cadetship for up to 6 months in extenuating circumstances.

---

[1] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2015) The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: 2015. [Accessed 25/03/20].

**Evaluation criteria 2: Understand the impact**

*Understand the outcomes of the Cadetships programs and the factors that influence these outcomes.*

**Finding**:

Participation in the cadetship was found to contribute to two intermediate educational outcomes - improved academic performance and faster degree completion (see discussion at page 44).

- Improved academic performance occurred for a range of reasons, including being able to apply skills and insights from the cadet's work placement to their university assignments, and being able to reduce other work burdens due to the study allowance.
- Eight cadets reported the cadetship provided an incentive for them to complete their degree sooner. CareerTrackers prioritises the academic progress of students, which is why Cadetships placements are usually completed in the university holidays so as to not conflict with students' university studies.
- Participation in the cadetship was found to contribute to several intermediate employment outcomes that are likely to increase the chance that cadets will gain employment and experience faster early-career progression, than non-cadets. These employment outcomes were exposure to work routines, improved 'soft' skills, professional experience, networks and career clarity. All the cadets interviewed who completed their degree had gone onto graduate employment of some kind, including those who had withdrawn from the cadetship.

Key challenges and factors that influenced the outcomes are summarised on page 51.

The above factors may reflect a lack of recognition of diversity in the circumstances of Indigenous cadets and a lack of program flexibility and is reflected in recommendations 1-6.

**Finding**:

Cadets felt the potential for a job offer at the conclusion of the cadetship was not always clearly communicated by the employer (see discussion at page 64), which could lead to dissatisfaction with the program.

**Recommendation**:

8. That NIAA consider changing the employer obligations to strengthen the obligation to identify a realistic pathway to graduate employment within their organisation and use their best endeavours to offer cadets a permanent position at the conclusion of the cadetship.

**Finding**:

While most cadets found the 60-day work placement manageable, some found it difficult. Cadets who were their children's primary caregivers, cadets in degrees that require a practical placement, and/or cadets who relocated to attend university found the 60-day work placement difficult.

**Recommendation**:

9. That NIAA consider reducing the minimum days required for the work placement from 60 to 40 to meet the needs of primary caregivers and those studying away from home, and to prevent burn out and poor work/life balance among cadets.

**Finding**:

Financial stress is a key barrier to engagement with the program, particularly those with dependent children; those who were ineligible for social security payments; those who

**Evaluation criteria 2: Understand the impact**

*Understand the outcomes of the Cadetships programs and the factors that influence these outcomes.*

were living independently with no other financial support, and those who were responsible for supporting family members (see discussion at page 61).

**Recommendations**:

10. That NIAA consider a small increase to the cadetship study allowance (base rate) and create an independent rate of CSA, benchmarked to the independent rate of ABSTUDY and using the same definitions.
11. That NIAA retain the book and equipment allowance at the current rate.
12. That NIAA develop a fact sheet that is provided to all prospective cadets that provides more information on how the cadetship study allowance is treated under various social security payments so that they can make informed decisions about how to maximise their social security entitlements.

**Evaluation criteria 3: Understand the policy implications and potential for future impact**

*Understand how the Cadetships programs supports Indigenous participation in education, the workforce and career development/progression.*

**Finding**:

The interaction between welfare payments and cadetship payments is unclear to students, particularly Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY (see discussion at page 77).

**Recommendation**:

13. That NIAA obtain formal advice from DSS on how the CSA interacts with other social security payments, including ABSTUDY, Youth Allowance and the Single Parenting Payment. It is also suggested that clarifications are made to the ABSTUDY Policy Manual to ensure consistency in decision making.

**Finding**:

Some employers and providers expressed some dissatisfaction with the way the program has been designed and managed by the Commonwealth. Particular areas of focus included contracting arrangements and program eligibility criteria, payment of invoices in arrears, as well as declining funding for direct employers and at times difficulty in general communications (see discussion at page 65).

**Recommendations**:

14. That NIAA increase the efficiency of the program by having relationships with fewer stakeholders (including providers and potentially larger employers) that are capable of facilitating a greater number of cadetships.
15. That NIAA explore a greater role for universities as providers, placing cadets within the university and external partners.

**Finding**:

There are also a number of Indigenous study and work support programs in place offered through the Commonwealth Government, this can create confusion among all parties to sift through the programs and determine what support is available to cadets more broadly (see discussion at page 78).

**Evaluation criteria 3: Understand the policy implications and potential for future impact**

*Understand how the Cadetships programs supports Indigenous participation in education, the workforce and career development/progression.*

**Recommendation**:

16. That NIAA explore the opportunity for the Australian Public Service Commission to coordinate Cadetships for Commonwealth Government agencies and departments to reduce the number of contractual relationships within the program.

**Finding**:

The design of the administrative database and contract manager's varied interpretations and data entry practices between contract managers contributed to a lack of available program data on student outcomes. In addition, the ICS and TAEG Cadetships' contracting arrangements and method of data collection were not conducive to measuring program outcomes.

**Recommendations**:

17. That NIAA adopt a fit-for-purpose administrative database capable of capturing the recommended minimum data set by making changes to the current ESS Web interface.
18. That NIAA develop a data dictionary to ensure consistent interpretation of administrative data across the program.
19. That NIAA adopt an outcomes-measurement approach for Cadetships programs, including ensuring the necessary technical capability to collect data on program outcomes.

## 2. Introduction

In November 2019, National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) engaged Inside Policy to conduct an evaluation of the former Indigenous Cadetship Support (ICS) and current Tailored Assistance Employment Grants (TAEG) Cadetships programs. The purpose of the evaluation is to provide evidence-based advice as to the effectiveness of meeting the programs' objectives and inform policy makers about possible future improvements to a cadetship support program.

The evaluation was guided by an evaluation strategy, developed by NIAA and refined by Inside Policy [**Annex A**]. At the conclusion of the evaluation, a revised program logic was developed outlining the key outputs, outcomes and assumptions underlying TAEG Cadetships [**Annex E**]. The program logic sets out clearly what the project intends to achieve and how it will achieve it. It is envisioned this logic will be the basis of future evaluation activities.

The evaluation is limited in scope to the five-year period before the ICS transitioned under TAEG (approximately 2014), and placements funded under TAEG-cadets since 1 January 2018. The two programs were evaluated together as TAEG Cadetships evolved from the former ICS program and two programs are similar in their design.

### Purpose

The purpose of this report is to document the finding, implications and recommendations against the evaluation objectives:

1.  Understand the design and implementation: Understand how the Cadetships programs have been designed and implemented.
2.  Understand the impact: Understand the outcomes of the Cadetships programs and the factors that influence these outcomes.
3.  Understand the policy implications and potential for future impact: Understand how the Cadetships programs supports Indigenous participation in education, the workforce and career development/progression.

### Methodology

The evaluation methodology was guided by an evaluation strategy, developed by NIAA and refined by Inside Policy. The findings for the evaluation were based on the three evaluation objectives (see above) that were answered through eight evaluation questions.

The evaluation included a literature review, analysis of administrative data, review of program documentation and semi-structured interviews with cadets, employers and universities.

The evaluation objectives, questions, and extent each objective could be answered based on data can be found in **Annex J**.

### Structure of the report

The report follows the structure as detailed in the following Table 2. The *Executive Summary* provides an overview of the report, findings and recommendations as per the evaluation objectives as detailed in the above Table 1.

The *Overview* section gives a detailed outline of the programmes being evaluated (TAEG and ICS) as well as their administration, performance to date and a profile of the Indigenous undergraduates who participate in the programs.

The *Methodology* section details the implementation of the evaluation and the framework and methods used to undertake the project. This section also illustrates any limitations identified during the project.

The *Findings and Recommendations* section provides a detailed discussion of the findings of the evaluation as well as recommendations for future actions arising from the detailed analysis of the findings. This section also provides a table summarising the findings against the evaluation questions (detailed in the above Table 1).

The *Conclusion* provides a summary of the project and there are eleven Annexes providing detailed information related to and supporting the project.

As such, the report can be read lineally from front to back, skimmed for information as required, or just accessed via the *Executive Summary* for a high level view of the project and its outcomes.

**Table 2:** Structure of the report

| Section | Purpose |
|---|---|
| Executive summary | Overarching summary of the evaluation objective, methodology and findings and recommendations by the evaluation objectives. |
| Introduction | Overview of the purpose and structure of the report. |
| Overview of the ICS and TAEG | Overview of the ICS/TAEG: objectives, administration, performance to date and profile of cadets. |
| Methodology | Overview of the evaluation framework, methods used to undertake the evaluation and any limitations. |
| Findings and Recommendations | Discussion of the findings by evaluation question and the resulting recommendations. |
| Conclusion | Concluding summary of the evaluation's findings. |
| Annexes | The following annexes accompany this report<ul><li>Annex A – Final ICS evaluation strategy</li><li>Annex B – AIATSIS ethics approval</li><li>Annex C – Final literature review</li><li>Annex D – Stakeholder list</li><li>Annex E – TAEGC revised program logic</li><li>Annex F – ICS-TAEG Cadets map</li><li>Annex G – Recommended minimum dataset</li><li>Annex H – Administrative data field</li><li>Annex I – SSI guides</li><li>Annex J – Evaluation data matrix</li><li>Annex K – Operating models of providers</li></ul> |

# 3.   Overview of the ICS and TAEG

For the last two decades, the Commonwealth Government has supported Indigenous cadetships in various forms. The Indigenous Cadetship Support (ICS) program was delivered as a standalone program under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) – Jobs Land and Economy Programme (JLEP). On 1 January 2018, the ICS program ceased and transitioned to the Tailored Assistance Employment Grants (TAEG), which is part of a suite of Commonwealth-funded Indigenous Employment Programs (IEPs).

## ICS/TAEG objectives

The ICS program contributed to the IAS JLEP objective of increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have employment by supporting Indigenous tertiary students to complete their undergraduate degrees and progress onto graduate employment.

The objectives of the ICS and the subsequent TAEG programs are to improve Indigenous tertiary students' professional employment prospects, by supporting them to complete their undergraduate degree and transition into employment.

These programs link Indigenous undergraduate students to a Cadetship arrangement with an employer.[2] The Australian Government provides the employer with a study allowance and book and equipment allowance, which is forwarded to the cadet, and an administrative allowance which is retained by the employer.

The employer provides the cadet with no less than 12 weeks of paid work each calendar year and uses 'best endeavours' to offer the cadet full-time employment when they successfully complete their studies.

## ICS/TAEG program structure

Through the program, employers that are interested in providing a 12-week paid work placement to an Indigenous university student receive payments of up to $14,100 (GST incl.) per annum, per Cadetship. The payment comprises of:

- up to $12,000 Cadetship study allowance, passed on in fortnightly payments of $600 per fortnight to the cadet,
- $1,000 book and equipment allowance, passed on to the cadet in two payments of $500 at the start of each semester, and
- an $1,100 administrative allowance retained by the employer.

In addition, cadets are paid a salary for the duration of their work placement. Some employers partition the cadet's salary in equal payments across the year at their discretion. Unlike social security payments such as ABSTUDY, the Cadetship study allowance is not means tested nor subject to annual increases in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

---

[2] Employers included state government (combined), Commonwealth Government, non-government organisations, private sector, and universities.

## How ICS/TAEG are administered

### ICS

In the original iteration of ICS, staff at PM&C (and prior to that, the former Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) brokered the relationship between employers and suitably qualified and interested students. Students and employers interested in participating in the program could register their details on the PM&C website. Once a successful relationship was brokered, the employer signed a contract with the Commonwealth for the length of the cadet's degree and were provided with the annual payment, which was passed on to the student, minus the administration fee retained by the employer to cover the costs of administering the cadetship. If required, employers could negotiate a contract extension or variation if the circumstances of the cadet changed (e.g. they extended their degree or withdrew from the program).

Around 2011-2012 *CareerTrackers Indigenous Internship Program* (CareerTrackers) brokered a role as the program's first provider. This provided a second pathway into the ICS whereby CareerTrackers promoted the ICS program to universities, prospective cadets and employers and facilitated connections between them. The cadet then signed an agreement with CareerTrackers (referred to as the sponsor), which was submitted to PM&C on behalf of the employer. Under this arrangement the administrative allowance was retained by CareerTrackers (instead of the employer), which was made viable by the larger number of Cadetship applications submitted.

### TAEG

On 1 January 2018, the ICS program ceased and transitioned to the Tailored Assistance Employment Grants (TAEG) Cadetships. During the transition from ICS to TAEG Cadetships no substantive changes were made to the external-facing elements of the program design (e.g. eligibility criteria, amount of study allowance etc.), however there were some changes made to the program design through the contracting arrangements with employers and providers to streamline program administration and reporting.

Under the TAEG Cadetships program, employers and providers sign a contract with the Commonwealth (formerly PM&C and now NIAA) for several cadetships, which are individually negotiated with the employer based on their individual needs. Unlike ICS, employers do not have to identify an eligible cadet at the time of signing the contract, therefore funding is guaranteed prior to recruitment. In most cases TAEG Cadetship contracts are for three years, which is the maximum amount of time a cadet is eligible for funding under the program. The NIAA then pays employers the Cadetship payment each semester in arrears, once the employer produces an invoice and necessary supporting documents to confirm the cadet's enrolment and academic performance. Providers are paid in advance (due to the larger number of cadets) and then reimburse, or carry forward, any unspent funds. As with ICS, applications for contract variations and extensions under TAEG can be made to NIAA, however they are subject to funding being available.

In late 2018 AFLSportsReady joined the program as the second provider, creating various possibly entry pathways into the program (i.e. one of two providers or by direct engagement with an employer). At the time of the evaluation ICS funding was almost completely phased out with only a small number of cadets still on ICS funded cadetships, which were due to expire in early 2020. It is at this point in time when the decision was made to conduct an evaluation of the ICS/TAEG Cadetships programs to inform the design of future Commonwealth support to Indigenous cadetships.

## Performance to date

Between 2014 and mid-2019, 1,905 cadetship placements were facilitated by employers and providers across ICS and TAEG combined. Figure 1 shows the program grew considerably from 2017 onward following the transition from ICS to TAEG Cadetships, as did CareerTrackers' share of the program. Almost all the Cadetships beginning in the 2018 calendar year were engaged by CareerTrackers. The other provider, AFLSportsReady, began facilitating Cadetships in mid-2019, however only 1 case had been recorded for AFLSportsReady at the time the data was extracted.

**Figure 1:** *Number and percentage of ICS and TAEG Cadetship placements 2014-2019 (n=1905)*
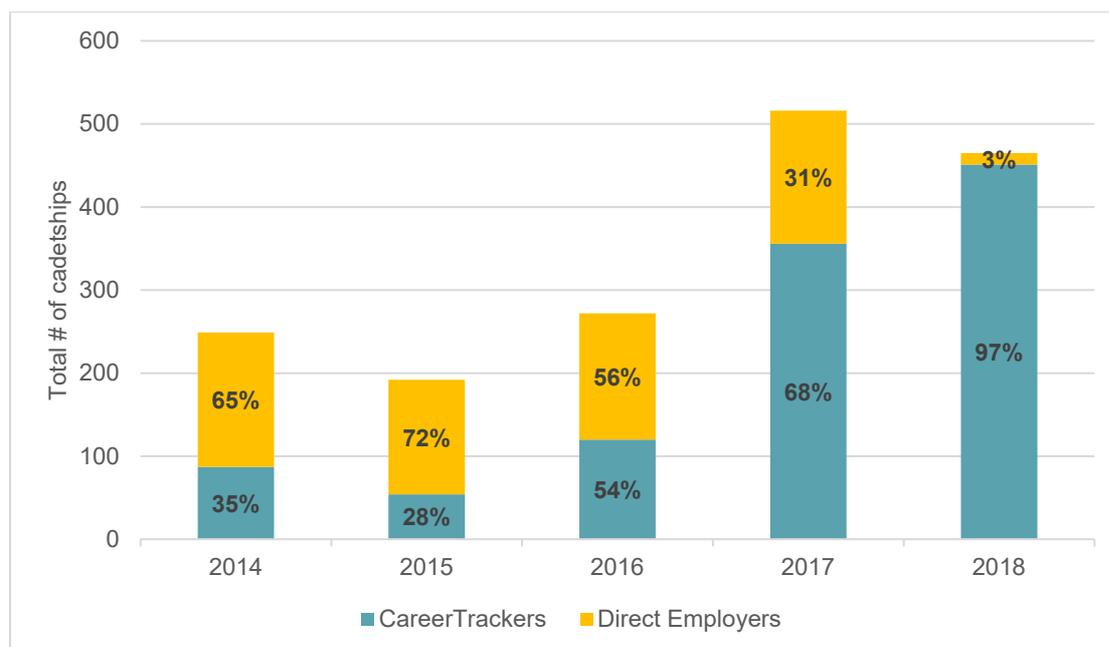


The increase in providers' share of the total Cadetships from 2017 onwards is because direct employers' applications for additional TAEG funding (and in some cases any TAEG funding at all) were declined by the Commonwealth.

## Profile of Indigenous undergraduates in Australian universities

### Characteristics of Indigenous undergraduates

The profile of Indigenous undergraduates in Australian universities is unique and increasingly constituted by intra-diversity, including by age, socio-economic, cultural and educational background.[3] Overall, Indigenous undergraduate applicants are more likely to be older and female than non-Indigenous applicants, especially in regional areas.[4] In 2018, one-third of Indigenous applicants were aged 25 or older, compared to 22% of non-Indigenous applicants, and 68% were female compared to 59% of non-Indigenous applicants.[5]

---

[3] Andrew Day, Vicky Nakata, Martin Nakata & Gregory Martin (2015) Indigenous students' persistence in higher education in Australia: contextualising models of change from psychology to understand and aid students' practices at a cultural interface, Higher Education Research & Development, 34:3, 501-512

[4] Ibid, page 27.

[5] DET (2018) Undergraduate Applications Offers and Acceptances, unpublished data cited in Universities Australia (2019) Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy First Annual Report. A [Accessed 07/11/19]

A recent cohort analysis of Indigenous undergraduates in two regional Australian universities found that they were also significantly more likely to come from a lower socio-economic background, be studying part-time, taking their classes externally and be the first in their family to attend university.[6]

There are also trends evident in the types of courses that Indigenous undergraduate students are studying. For example, Indigenous students are more likely than non-Indigenous students to study undergraduate courses related to Society and Culture (33% of all Indigenous enrolments), Health (22% of all Indigenous enrolments) and Education (14% of all Indigenous enrolments) and less likely to enrol in Management and Commerce (10% of all Indigenous enrolments), Natural and Physical Sciences (6% of all Indigenous enrolments) and Engineering (3% of all Indigenous enrolments).[7]

## Tertiary education outcomes

University enrolments for Indigenous undergraduate students have more than doubled (by 113%) in the past decade and since 2015 have tripled that of non-Indigenous students.[8] This is largely a result of improved secondary school retention rates for Indigenous students and an increase in programs than enable the transition from secondary school to university.[9] Despite significant growth in Indigenous enrolments, Indigenous Australians currently comprise around 1.8% of all university enrolments, which remains below the population parity rate (approximately 3%) and significantly below that of non-Indigenous Australians.[10] Most concerning is that only 47% of commencing Indigenous students complete their degree over a 9-year timeframe (compared to 74% of non-Indigenous students); and a large (although declining) number of Indigenous students (almost 1 in 6) leave after their first year and never return.[11]

The poorest outcomes are experienced by Indigenous students living in rural and remote areas, who face additional barriers to course completion.[12]

Cohort analysis, which examines the pathways for students over various time periods, is essential to understanding Indigenous student pathways, because research has shown they are more likely to complete their degree over a longer period of time, often exiting and re-entering study numerous times.[13]

## Barriers and enablers to course completion

The literature highlights a number of key barriers and enablers that affect Indigenous students' enrolment and completion of tertiary education. In their research exploring the enrolment and retention of Indigenous law students, Hobbs and Williams (2019) suggest that a range of interlinked factors may negatively affect Indigenous students' entry into and

---

[6] Shalley, F., Smith, J., Wood, D., Fredericks, B., Robertson, K. & Larkin S. (2019). Understanding completion rates of Indigenous Higher Education Students from two regional universities, A cohort analysis. Final Report for Student Equity in Higher Education Research Grants Program, 2017. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education.

[7] DET 2018, Unpublished HEIMS data cited in Universities Australia (2019) Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy First Annual Report, page 14.

[8] Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2018) Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2017 Student Data cited in Universities Australia (2019) Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy First Annual Report. [Accessed 07/11/19]

[9] Ibid, page 6

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Shalley, F., *Op. cit.*

[13] Ibid.

completion of their studies, including feelings of isolation and alienation; overt and covert racism by university staff and fellow students; financial hardship, and competing demands of work and study.**[14]** Venn and Crawford's 2016 census paper on post-school education in Australia highlights the myriad of reasons why Indigenous young people are less likely to attend university than non-Indigenous young people. These include:

- the relatively high proportion of Indigenous people living in remote and regional areas where education options are fewer (which affects university participation much more than vocational participation),
- low average household income,
- low levels of parental education,
- high levels of caring responsibilities, and
- lower rates of year 12 completion.[15]

Additionally, living in regional and remote areas is often associated with barriers related to access to education, such as communication technology. Research of Indigenous student outcomes in regional Australian universities found that flexible study options, such as studying through a multi-mode design (combining both internal and external elements of coursework) was associated with higher completion rates for Indigenous students.[16]

## Graduate employment outcomes

Once Indigenous Australians navigate the immense challenges of completing secondary school, and enrolling in and completing a university degree, they generally experience strong employment outcomes. In 2018, four months after completion of an undergraduate degree, Indigenous and non-Indigenous graduates were equally likely (72.9%) to be in full-time employment and experienced an almost identical labour force participation rate.[17] Employed Indigenous graduates were also less likely than non-Indigenous graduates to report that their skills or education were not being fully utilised (30.4% compared to 39%).[18]

In 2018, Indigenous undergraduates continued to earn more than non-Indigenous undergraduates immediately upon graduation, with median salaries of $65,600 and $61,000 respectively,[19] however longitudinal data shows that this salary gap narrows three years after completion.[20] This is likely because the courses and professions that Indigenous students are more likely to pursue (e.g. teaching and health) are likely to be lower paid.

As well as being one of the three clear priorities the Government has set in the IAS for Indigenous Australians, education has a clear influence on the goal of Indigenous Australians having "equal opportunity to participate in all aspects of society". [21]

---

[14] Hobbs, H & Williams, G (2019). The Participation of Indigenous Australians in Legal Education 2001-2018. NSW Law Journal Vol 42(4), pp. 1294-1327.
[15] Venn D and Crawford H (2018), Post-school education, 2016 Census Paper no. 11, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra.
[16] Shalley, F., *Op. cit.*
[17] Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2019). 2018 Graduate Outcomes Survey National Report [Accessed 07/11/19]
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2019). 2018 Graduate Outcomes Survey – Longitudinal (GOS-L) Medium-term graduate outcomes. [Accessed 07/11/19]
[21] Indigenous Advancement Strategy Grant Guidelines

# 4.  Methodology

The evaluation is guided by the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) Evaluation Framework. This aims to generate high quality and ethical evidence to inform decision-making on Commonwealth-funded policies and programs affecting Indigenous Australians. The IAS Evaluation Framework holds the Commonwealth to the highest standards of ethical evaluation practice. In keeping with these standards, ethical clearance for the evaluation was sought and provided by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) [**Annex B**].

Key internal stakeholders include the NIAA Employment Branch and Evaluation Branch, who may use the evaluation findings to inform the future design of Commonwealth support to Indigenous Cadetships. External stakeholders such as employers, providers and universities may also use the evaluation findings to improve the implementing of the program.

The purpose of the ICS/TAEG Cadetships evaluation is to provide evidence-based policy advice as to the effectiveness of meeting the programs' objectives and inform policy makers about possible future improvements to a cadetship support programs. The evaluation will achieve this through three interconnected evaluation objectives, shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Objectives of the ICS/TAEG Cadetships Evaluation

| Evaluation Objective | Evaluation Questions |
|---|---|
| Understand the design and implementation | How has the program been implemented?<br>How was the program designed? |
| Understand the impact | Who are the cadets and what variables impact on their success or otherwise?<br><br>To what extent did the program meet the needs and expectations of participants and stakeholders?<br><br>Which universities have been most successful in engaging and retaining cadets?<br><br>Which employers have been most successful in engaging and retaining cadets? |
| Understand the policy implications and potential for future impact | What do the outcomes tell us about the efficiency and effectiveness of this program?<br>How does the program compare/relate to other programs? |

The evaluation questions form the structure of this report. A data matrix [**Annex J**] aligns the evaluation questions and collection methods, identifying where there were gaps in data (if any) that may have prevented some of the evaluation questions from being answered.  The data collection methods are outlined in table 4.

**Table 4:** Data collection methods

| Code | Method |
|---|---|
| SSI (P) | Semi-structured Interview (Participant) |
| SSI (U) | Semi-structured Interview (University) |

| Code | Method |
|------|--------|
| SSI (E) | Semi-structured Interview (Employer/Third Party) |
| LR | Literature Review |
| AD | Administrative Data Review (including Program Documentation) |

The matrix at **Annex J** outlines which combination of evaluation methods were used to generate data to answer the agreed evaluation questions and were there were data gaps which prevented the evaluators from completely answering the evaluation questions.

## Methodological approach

A qualitative, post-test only evaluation design was used, drawing on both primary and secondary data from a range of stakeholders to draw conclusions. Defining elements of the methodological approach included:

### *Theory-based*

Given the limitations to determining the extent to which the program had achieved its intended impact, evaluators a theory-based approach was used to determine the extent to which the program had achieved intermediate outcomes and the likelihood that these may have *contributed* to desired impact. This included aligning the evidence gathered to the intermediate outcomes of the original program theory,[22] testing and articulating connective assumptions between outcomes and updating the program logic [**Annex E**] to reflect additional or unintended outcomes and assumptions.

### *Culturally sensitive*

Inside Policy took the following practical steps to increase the cultural sensitivity of a given evaluation consistent with the principles of the IAS evaluation framework:

- Noel Niddrie is a Dharug and Kamilaroi man and is the most senior evaluator in the team, who reviewed all documents (including methodologies, interview guides, reports etc.) prior to use or submission to the client; and
- ensured that non-Indigenous evaluators involved in the project were knowledgeable about culturally sensitive evaluation and personally committed to reconciliation and justice for First Nations Australians
- sought and received letters of support from Indigenous owned and/or controlled organisations for conducting the evaluation
- sought and received ethical clearance from an Indigenous-led HREC (AIATSIS) and upheld all ethical obligations requested of them
- recorded and transcribed interviews verbatim, thereby minimising interviewer bias and ensuring that the opinions of Indigenous service-users were portrayed with a high level of accuracy
- centred the voices of Indigenous service users in the final report by using verbatim quotes from semi-structured interviews to demonstrate key points.

---

[22] Clear Horizon (2017) Mapping the Indigenous Employment Programs. Prepared for the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Pp. 13-15.

## Data collection and analysis

### Literature Review

A literature review [**Annex C**] was conducted at the outset of the evaluation. The purpose of the literature review was to draw on what is already known about similar kinds of programs, domestically and internationally and to better understand the characteristics, educational and employment outcomes (including trends) for Indigenous students in Australia. The literature review sought to contribute data to the following evaluation questions specified in the evaluation strategy:

- What other programs exist to support Indigenous participation in education, workforce participation and career development/progression?
- What evidence is there about the effectiveness of similar programs, both domestically and internationally?
- What constitutes best practice in supporting Indigenous educational and employment outcomes, both domestically and internationally?
- What does the data tell us about Indigenous education and employment outcomes in Australia?

Peer-reviewed journal articles; evaluations and reviews of similar programs/services; data sets produced by reliable government sources and other reports and relevant publications from reliable sources, all less than 10 years old, were considered in-scope for inclusion in the literature review. Given the relative dearth of information available, a wide scope of documents was considered. Documents more than 10 years old and those relating to programs targeting non-Indigenous students or other disadvantaged groups (e.g. migrants, refugees, people with disabilities) were considered out of scope.

### Administrative Data

Administrative data for the Cadetships programs was extracted from the Employment Services System (ESS) and de-identified by NIAA, then provided to Inside Policy in an Excel spreadsheet. The parameters of the administrative data provided is outlined in Table 5 below:

**Table 5:** Parameters of administrative data used to inform the evaluation

| Program | Total cases | First case* | Last case* |
|---|---|---|---|
| ICS | 956 | 09/01/2014 | 30/03/2018 |
| TAEG Cadetships | 949 | 01/07/2017 | 14/05/2018 |

\* The activity start date for the first and the last case.

It is not possible to determine the total number of Cadetship employers from administrative data. Information is available for employers that directly engaged cadets, and is not available for employers that engage cadets through a provider (see page 28 for data limitations).

Inside Policy met with NIAA in the early stages of the evaluation to discuss the administrative dataset, including data entry protocols, key terminology and data limitations. Following this, the administrative data was reviewed for reliability and validity, and determined which fields were useful in informing the evaluation findings [**Annex H**]. Some minor data cleaning was performed to ensure that the entry formats were consistent. In some cases, variables were subjectively recoded into new fields and values to provide further insights into the program

(for example, Cadetship employers were recoded into sectoral categories). Administrative data was analysed in Excel, however SPSS, a specialist statistical package for quantitative data, was also used to produce descriptive statistics and transform data into new variables.

## Program Documentation

Additional administrative data analysed included:

- a sample of employer and provider progress reports,
- Cadetship employer and sponsor agreement form templates,
- a TAEG Fact Sheet, and
- the 'Indigenous Cadetships Terms and Conditions.'
- a document entitled 'Mapping the Indigenous Employment Programs' prepared by Clear Horizon[23] in 2017, which included a theory of change for the Indigenous Cadetship Support program.

Program documentation *not analysed* as part of the evaluation included:

- Commencement and Acquittal Advice Forms as the data was not considered relevant to the evaluation questions;
- Employment Services Outcomes Report for JLEP were reviewed, however the data is not disaggregated to the program level and is therefore not useful for the evaluation;
- data from the post-program monitoring survey (conducted by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment), as it was not provided due to survey responses being too low to be useful;
- relevant Australian Government data linkage projects, as they are not yet available;
- data collected independently by employers and providers was not analysed as part of the evaluation as it was not readily available and was not in the right format and scale

## Semi-structured Interviews

Primary data was collected from cadets, employers, sponsors, and universities through semi-structured interviews (SSIs) conducted by telephone. A full list of stakeholders consulted (with names omitted) is included at **Annex D.** This method was chosen because it provided evaluators with rich qualitative data on the experiences of program participants and stakeholders.

It was also considered the most cost-effective and practical method, given that data collection occurred during the university exam period and/or holidays and those cadets who had graduated were almost exclusively working in professional roles during the day (which would have precluded an alternative method such as focus groups). Interview Guides were developed, with questions aligned to the evaluation questions to ensure sufficient data was collected to inform the reason to each question [**Annex I**]**.**

### Sampling

SSIs were conducted with the beneficiaries (cadets) and other stakeholder groups outlined in Table 6 below. Employers who engaged cadets via a provider were out of scope.

---

[23] *ibid*.

**Table 6:** Beneficiaries and stakeholders consulted as part of the evaluation

| Group | Total intended | Total actual | Percent of total intended | Reason for variation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cadets | 50 | 50 | 100% | No variation |
| Employers | 20 | 12 | 60% | All employers provided to Inside Policy by NIAA were contacted by phone and email (several times) to participate in the evaluation. All those who responded were interviewed.<br><br>Employers engaged through a provider were out of scope. |
| Providers | 5 | 2 | 40% | There were only two providers engaged in the program, both were interviewed. |
| Universities | 10 | 4 | 40% | A limited number of university contacts (email only) were provided to Inside Policy by one of the providers. All universities provided were contacted for interview, however the response rate was extremely low. Towards the end of the evaluation Inside Policy attempted to gather more data from Universities by 'cold calling' Indigenous Support Units, which yielded an additional interview. By this time many people were working from home due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. |

Purposeful criterion sampling was used to enable further exploration of the different variables that may affect participant outcomes. Criteria of interest included but were not limited to the cadet's gender, age (school leaver/mature age) and completion status (completed, withdrawn, current). From a qualitative analysis perspective, a sample size of 50 was required to give representativeness of cadets involved in the program and after which no new themes emerged from interviewing.

### Recruitment

Contact details for employers and providers were provided to Inside Policy by NIAA. Contact details (email only) for 10 universities were provided to Inside Policy by a provider at NIAA's request. NIAA does not keep contact details for universities as they have no contractual relationship with them under the program.  For SSIs with employers, providers and universities, a sampling technique was not required, due to the small number who were engaged in the program within the scope of the evaluation. All the contacts provided were approached to be interviewed as part of the evaluation (multiple times in multiple ways) and those who responded were interviewed. No incentives were provided to employers, providers or universities to participate in the evaluation.

Cadets were selected from a database provided to the evaluation team by NIAA. The database included past and current cadets who participated in the program during the timeframe in scope for the evaluation. Cadets were invited by SMS or email to participate in the evaluation and were informed that they would be provided with an incentive to participate consisting of a $50 gift card. Those who responded were interviewed, until the target of 50 was met and all criteria were sufficiently included. Targeted email and SMS communications were used to include cadets who withdrew from the program as they were considered unlikely to respond. The sample of cadets was well-matched to the overall data set on all variables and is therefore considered to provide a reliable indication of all cadets (although the sample cannot be considered statistically significant in quantitative terms).

### Analysis

SSIs were recorded on an audio device, transcribed and analysed using Dedoose software for analysis of qualitative data. Inside Policy conducted a thematic analysis of interview transcripts using emergent coding, whereby codes were developed and iterated as key themes emerged in the data and then applied to excerpts (passages of text). In some instances, thematic codes are quantified to provide an indication of strength of a given theme.

There are some important considerations to be made when interpreting quantified codes extracted from qualitative data. The frequency of a theme does not necessarily reflect its relatively importance, and needs to be considered within the framing of the discussion and in its linkages to program theory.[24]

As Elliott explains, coding is a "decision-making process, where the decisions must be made in the context of a particular piece of research". [25]  As evaluators, we have made judgements based on a variety of contextual factors in this project, to inform the significance of the themes, including, but not only quantum.

## Limitations

The main limitation of the methodology was the availability and reliability of administrative data, which prevented evaluators from drawing definitive conclusions regarding program outcomes. Table 7 below outlines some of the key data limitations encountered in the evaluation.

---

[25] Elliott, V. (2018). Thinking about the Coding Process in Qualitative Data Analysis. The Qualitative Report, 23(11), 2850-2861. Available at: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss11/14

**Table 7:** Key data limitations encountered in the evaluation

| Data not available | Data not reliable |
|---|---|
| *Data was not available for analysis, because it was not provided, or it did not exist* | *Data existed, but did not provide a reliable indication of the truth for various reasons* |
| • Some loss of program knowledge in the transition between PM&C and NIAA or due to staff turnover. | • Data from the post-program monitoring survey published annually in [Employment Services Outcomes] reports was not analysed because it was combined across all Commonwealth funded employment programs (i.e. not disaggregated to the program level) |
| • Some data needed to answer the evaluation questions (e.g. cadet's university) was not routinely collected in ESS Web (database used for TAEG) as it was not designed for education programs. | • There was some inconsistency on data entry practices between contract managers, which affected the reliability of findings (e.g. cases coded with the outcome of 'Other' in the 'ICS Agreement End Reason' field but 'Successfully Completed' in the 'ICS Combined Outcomes' field). |
| • Data was collected independently from some larger employers (such as CareerTrackers and NSW Department of Health), however this data was not provided to Inside Policy and while some requests were made to employers, none offered to share this data for analysis. | • Data on cadet employment outcomes was not collected at the correct point in time and was therefore not a reliable indication of graduate employment outcomes (and could not be triangulated with secondary data such as the Graduate Outcomes Survey) |
| • Raw data from the post-program monitoring survey (also known as the [Jobseekers Survey]) was not analysed because the response rates were too low to be considered useful and the survey questions were not specifically tailored to the Cadetships programs.[26] | • 'Quirks' in the ESS Web database, for example: if the 'auto-close' function was not manually disabled, the case would automatically close at the conclusion of the contract and the outcome of 'successfully completed' would be recorded, regardless of the actual cadet outcome. Additionally, certain fields (including the name and industry of the employer) had to be completed before the Cadetship agreement could be finalised, despite the fact that they may have been unknown at the, contract managers circumvented this issue in various ways which effected data reliability - e.g. by entering the name of the third-party in place of the employer name or entering 'Finance/Accounting' in the employer industry field for all CareerTrackers cadets. |

---

[26] Note: these conclusions were drawn in NIAA and the data was not made available to Inside Policy

# 5.   Findings and recommendations

## How has the program been implemented?

| Evaluation question 1.1: How has the program been implemented |
|---|
| **Finding:** The program has been implemented through universities, direct employers and providers. Universities played a role in promoting the program and some universities facilitated cadetships as a direct employer. There were 116 direct employers since mid-2014. At time of writing there were two providers.<br><br>The total unit cost per cadetship is $14,100, of which $13,000 is passed directly onto the student and $1,100 is retained by the employer. In addition to universities, some providers and direct employers partnered with schools and school-based programs to recruit cadets while they were still in secondary school.<br><br>Providers were assessed as being better able to promote the program and recruit prospective cadets, facilitate administrative efficiency for NIAA and leverage additional corporate and philanthropic funding. Some provider also established sophisticated approaches to measuring cadet outcomes, however there were instances of some direct employers also collecting data on program outcomes.<br><br>Some providers were according to interviewees lacking policies or approaches for ensuring cultural competency. There were some examples of direct employers taking steps to ensure a culturally safe environment, as well as examples of direct employers lacking culturally appropriate approaches. Direct employers were more likely to provide relevant work placements for cadets, while providers could struggle with matching the demand for and supply of cadets to deliver relevant work placements. |

*Which universities and employers have facilitated/provided Cadetships?*

### Employers

116 different organisations have been engaged as direct employers in the program since mid-2014. The sector or industry of cadetship employers was not accurately captured in the ICS database or ESS Web (used for TAEG Cadetships). In order to provide more insight on the type of employers who engaged cadets, a new variable of 'employer sector' was created and entries were transformed based on the employer trading name. The results are shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2:** ICS/TAEG Cadetship placements (direct employer only), by sector (n=800)
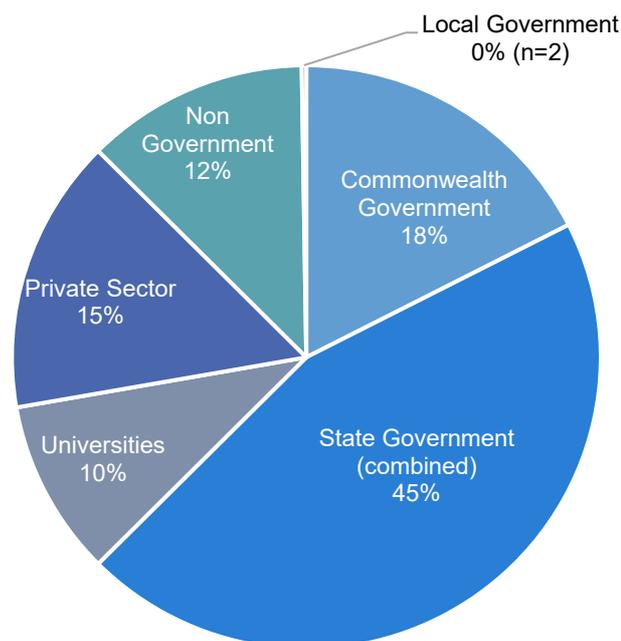


Commonwealth and State/Territory governments engaged cadets in multiple agencies and departments. For example, the 140 cadetship placements offered by Commonwealth Government in Figure 7 were dispersed across 16 departments and agencies. The largest state government employer was the NSW Government, which offered 250 cadetship placements across 6 departments and agencies (the vast majority being in NSW Health's Nursing and Midwifery cadetship program).

Cadetships facilitated by providers are excluded from this graph, as the employer name was not recorded in either administrative database therefore could not be recoded. Anecdotal information suggests that providers place a large number of cadets with employers in the private sector, therefore this category is likely to be under-estimated.

### Universities

Despite some data limitations, administrative data does show that across both programs, 10 Universities were also direct employers, facilitating 78 cadetship placements during the time period of the evaluation. It is possible that providers also placed cadets within universities, so the total number of university-employers may be greater. One-on-one Interviews revealed universities who were *not* cadetship employers, played a minor role in the program, which was often limited to circulating opportunities to their Indigenous students.

*How are Indigenous students, universities and prospective employers made aware of the Cadetship?*

### University Students

University Indigenous Student Support Centres play an important role in raising awareness about the Cadetships programs and are the first point of call for employers and sponsors wishing to promote the program. At least 30% of cadets interviewed (n=15) said they found out about the program through their university's Indigenous Student Support Centre, including through regular emails, brochures displayed in the Centre and conversations with support staff. Most employers made contact with universities, albeit to different degrees, ranging from indirect contact (e.g. emailing the cadetship advertisement to the Aboriginal

support unit or posting it on the campus jobs board) to more proactive strategies (e.g. attending on-campus events such as career fairs and "O" week):

> *…and then also this year, prior to recruitment I went out to each of the universities and held information sessions. I organised that through the school of Indigenous Studies for each university…and met with possible students and the coordinators.* **(excerpt from interview with provider)**

While some employers and providers limited their engagement to the campus' Aboriginal support unit, others noted that individual faculties were also an important entry point for recruiting cadets.

32% of cadets interviewed (n=16) said they had found out about the program through word of mouth, including friends, family and university staff. Word of mouth played an important role in program promotion, for both direct employers (especially in the government sector) and providers.

> *Aboriginal employment for us is, in terms of placing people into roles it's 90 percent word of mouth and community engagement and that's where we get candidates from, that's where we have our credibility.* **(excerpt from interview with provider)**

Other ways that students found out about the Cadetship included:

- on-campus events such as O-Week or a careers fair,
- school-based 'enabling' programs designed to encourage students from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups to attend university, and
- searching online using key word such as 'Indigenous cadetships'.

## Secondary-school students

A small number of cadets interviewed found out about the cadetship opportunity while they were still in secondary school. Interviews with employers and sponsors revealed that CareerTrackers, as well as a smaller number of direct employers, were partnering with schools and school-based programs to recruit students into cadetships. For example CareerTrackers partner with the [Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)](#) and the [Aurora Project,](#) to market the program to secondary school students aspiring to attend university.

> *…we know that we need to get them in year 11, dreaming about work and careers and understanding pathways to achieve those. They do their first internship the summer before university, so we want to capture them in this net as early on [as possible] because if we can get them linked up with a company, we can link them up with another student at their Uni, studying the same course. And we can get, you know, cash in their bank account before they start Uni…then we just stripped away, you know, eight out of 10 of those big challenges that stop them from graduating high school.* **(excerpt from interview with provider)**

Some direct employers also included schools as part of their community outreach strategies, although this is not necessarily a direct recruitment strategy for Cadetships.

## Employers

Not all employers interviewed were aware of how their organisation first became involved in the program due to staff turnover or organisational change since it was first introduced. Those who were aware, reported a number of ways in which their organisation first became involved. Some examples included:

- Commonwealth government employers generally reported becoming aware of the program via internal promotion through Commonwealth departments and agencies.
- At least four employers interviewed reported that they were made aware of the program by prospective cadets looking for opportunities, or by past cadets now working for the organisation.
- In South Australia, PriceWaterhouseCooper's Indigenous Consulting was commissioned by the state government to establish a private sector network to promote Aboriginal employment, including opportunities for Indigenous cadetships. This arrangement occurred independently of the ICS/TAEG programs.

Both providers reported awareness amongst employers about the ICS/TAEG Cadetships programs is generally low, in part due to the fact the programs are not independently marketed by the Commonwealth Government. While CareerTrackers is in high demand because of the reputation and brand they have built over the past decade, AFLSportsReady reported they have to invest a lot of resources in marketing and relationship-building to attract employers to the program.

### Universities

Knowledge of the Cadetships programs among universities was found to be limited. No university representatives interviewed could recall how they were first made aware of the ICS/TAEG programs and most 'inherited' knowledge of them from previous staff. One representative interviewed had previously established an internal cadetship program at Macquarie University (a university-employer) and then moved to Adelaide University, where they established a similar program. All universities interviewed were aware of the program's providers, especially CareerTrackers. Some universities have committed to 10-year partnerships with CareerTrackers, which provides access for CareerTrackers staff to hold on-campus presentations and for Student Advisors to meet with interns

### *How much funding has been allocated to the program and what is the unit cost per participant? How does this compare to programs with a similar aim?*

The total unit cost per cadetship is $14,100, of which $13,000 is passed directly onto the student and $1,100 is retained by the employer. Data on ICS cadets provided to Inside Policy did not include program expenditure. Data on TAEG cadets provided to Inside Policy shows that $23,665,350 had been approved for 20 direct employers and two providers, of which $12,506,435 had been expended at the time the data was extracted. Approximately $12,292,500 of these approved costs were awarded to CareerTrackers, who has the largest share of the program.

### *What added value (if any) do providers bring to the program?*

At the time of writing, there were two providers (also referred to as sponsors and intermediaries) engaged in the Cadetships programs: CareerTrackers and more recently, AFLSportsReady. A synopsis of the different operating models used by each of these providers is provided at **Annex K**. The utility providers bring to the Cadetships programs was explored with direct employers, universities and providers themselves. Employers who engaged cadets via a provider were considered out of scope, and therefore conclusions drawn do not reflect their perspectives. It was concluded that providers brought added value to the Cadetships programs in the following areas:

### Recruitment

Providers were often better able to promote the program and recruit prospective cadets through their large national networks.

The majority of direct employers (with some exceptions) used relatively passive recruitment strategies, such as word of mouth and emailing cadetship opportunities to universities. Consequently, many direct employers found recruiting a qualified field of Indigenous candidates for cadetships to be challenging.

> *We get quite a lot of graduates generically, but not Indigenous candidates at all, which is the problem.* **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

A smaller number of direct employers were able to adequately recruit their own cadets, including universities, who had direct access to Indigenous undergraduates, and other employers who had longstanding and well-regarded cadetships programs and strong community links. On the other hand, CareerTrackers and AFLSportsReady are able to actively market cadetship opportunities through partnerships with employers, universities and word of mouth, thereby generating demand for the program.

### Administrative efficiency

An obvious benefit of providers is their ability to deliver the program at scale, creating administrative efficiencies for NIAA by allowing for fewer contracts. For example, CareerTrackers and AFLSportsReady combined are contracted to provide up to 375 cadetships annually, while the majority of direct employers had contracts for less than ten cadetships. While CareerTrackers receives the same per cadet administrative allowance as employers ($1,100), the time cost of managing the relationship with one organisation as opposed to many is likely to be significantly less. Additionally, given that the administrative requirements of the program are inherently cumbersome for employers (even after being streamlined in the transition from ICS to TAEG) providers are also able to make the program more efficient for employers, who might otherwise see the administrative requirements as a disincentive.

### Leveraging other funding sources

One of the ways that providers add value to the program is through their ability to attract additional corporate and philanthropic funding, largely due to their not-for-profit status. For example, CareerTrackers receives sponsorship fees from cadet employers which allows them to provide a much more intensive program of support to cadets, including access to 1-1 support from a student advisor, as well as an annual Leadership Development Institute (LDI) and Gala Awards

### Data collection

CareerTrackers had built a highly sophisticated database and approach to measuring program outcomes for cadets, while AFLSportsReady, which was still in the early stages of establishing their cadetships program, was still in the process of developing their approach to data collection. Direct employers also collect data on program outcomes for cadets, albeit at a smaller scale. While providers and most direct employers were willing and capable to collect data on cadets, the 'rolling' contracting model and capacity of providers may be more amendable to a data collection system. Findings and recommendations relating to data collection are explored from page 78.

### Cultural safety

While there were a number of examples of direct employers taking steps to ensure a culturally safe environment for cadets (see page 76), some providers and/or direct employers lacked policies or approaches for cultural competency resulting in some cadets feeling there was not a culturally safe environment.

**Relevant work placements**

The direct employer model was inherently more likely to result in relevant work placements for cadets, as the matching process occurred primarily at the point of recruitment. On other hand, a challenge facing providers was matching demand for and supply of cadets.

> *…the target is sort of trying to rework the balance between getting student to be interested, and talking to businesses about generating interest [in the program] because if you get one too far ahead of the other you run the risk of losing one or the other.* **(excerpt from interview with provider)**

Program delivery through the third parties has enhanced the Cadetships programs in several ways, including generating the demand and efficiencies to operate the program at scale. However, program delivery could be improved by developing more robust cultural policies and procedures. Additionally, while most direct employers found the prospect of working through a provider to be appealing, a smaller number were adamant they were better able to administer the program directly. This was particularly the case for universities (who had direct access to eligible students) and employers that required cadets with specific technical attributes or degrees, as opposed to a broader skillset.

> *We do a better job of looking after our cadets in-house than through an intermediary organisation…we tailor support and mentoring to the individual. Not all our cadets need the same amount of personal, professional or academic support.* **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

## How has the program been designed?

| Evaluation question 1.2: How has the program been designed? |
| --- |
| **Finding**: The available evidence did not reveal how Indigenous Australians were engaged in the program's design process, nor how the program was designed to meet the needs of Indigenous students. In implementation, there is evidence that a small number of Aboriginal-led organisations employed cadets, and the two providers had historical experience working closely with Aboriginal people, but are not Aboriginal-led organisations. <br><br> In implementation, there were a number of design elements that did not meet the needs of Indigenous students including the cultural safety of the non-work placement components of the program, the allowable time of the cadetship, and restrictions on deferring the cadetship. |

*To what extent was the program design relevant to the needs of Indigenous students?*

The available evidence-base did not reveal how the program was designed to meet the needs of Indigenous students.

In implementation there are a number of elements of the program design that did not meet the needs of Indigenous students. This includes course preference, age of entry into university, mode of entry into university (e.g. use of pathway programs) and time taken to complete their degree. In addition, Indigenous students are more likely to have children at a younger age, have more children, live in a rural or remote area, experience certain chronic

health conditions, and have the responsibility for caring or financial supporting other family members.[27]

Ensuring cultural safety, increasing allowable time and permitting deferrals are key steps that NIAA could take to increase the relevancy of the program.

### Ensuring cultural safety

Over one third of cadets engaging in the program through providers expressed concerns for cultural safety outside the work placement elements of the program, such as weekly contact with an 'advisor' and networking opportunities and celebratory events for cadets and employers. This gap in cultural safety may reflect an initial program design focus on cultural safety within work placements rather than cultural safety at a broader level. This points towards a broader accountability mechanism required for cultural safety.

| Recommendation: |
| --- |
| That NIAA include broader KPIs for providers to ensure a culturally safe environment for cadets, including establishing minimum standards to guide the selection of providers (e.g. Indigenous representation in the organisation's governance and leadership, commitment to a Reconciliation Action Plan, presence of a cultural safety strategy etc.) |
| Recommendation: |
| That NIAA require providers to establish an accessible and transparent feedback and complaints process and the number and nature of complaints received from cadets be monitored through provider progress reports. |
| Recommendation: |
| That NIAA require providers to commission an independent evaluation of their Cadetships programs at least once during every contract period (as defined by NIAA), and that the costs of the evaluation be included in the provider's funding contract. |

### Increase allowable time

Indigenous students often take longer than non-Indigenous students to complete their degrees and often take one or more breaks during their studies. This was confirmed by interviews with cadets, which revealed that many preferred the option of a 75% (3-unit study load) instead of a 100% (4-unit study load), which was allowable under the program rules. While the cadetship rules permit the cadet to reduce their study load to 75%, it states this may result in the cadet running out of 'allowable time' to complete their degree and therefore becoming ineligible for further funding. The Cadetship rules define the allowable time as 'the minimum time required to complete a degree studying a standard full-time study load'. The findings indicate that the definition of allowable time in the cadetship rules does not take into account the unique needs and realities of Indigenous Australians and the changing nature of university study in Australia.

---

[27] Venn D and Crawford H (2018), Postschool education, 2016 Census Paper no. 11, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra.

> **Recommendation:**
>
> That NIAA consider changing the definition of allowable time to read 'the time required to complete the cadet's degree studying at least 75% of the standard full-time study load'.

### Permitting deferrals

Several cadets interviewed withdrew from the cadetship because of mental health and physical health reasons, including pregnancy. Interviews with cadets also showed that there was a high co-occurrence between cadets who withdrew from the cadetship and those who withdrew from or deferred their degree. Under the program rules, should a student need to defer their studies for any reason, the cadetship must cease. The rules state that the employer can consider recommencing the cadetship when the student returns to their studies, if they have cadetship placements available. The program rules in regard to deferrals do not take into account the unique needs and realities of Indigenous Australians, which include higher overall prevalence of mental health issues[28] and likelihood of being primary caregivers at a younger age.[29]

> **Recommendation:**
>
> That NIAA consider changing the program rules to allow cadets to defer their cadetship for up to 6 months in extenuating circumstances.

*To what extent have Indigenous Australians been involved in the design and implementation of the program? What effect did this have on the program relevance?*

The available evidence base did not indicate if Indigenous Australians (either individuals or organisations) had been consulted in the design of the Cadetships programs. In the programs implementation, there is evidence that a small number of Aboriginal-led organisations employed cadets (both of which were not available to be interviewed as part of the evaluation). Both AFLSportsReady and CareerTrackers have historical experience working closely with Aboriginal people, however neither are Aboriginal controlled organisations.

> **Recommendation:**
>
> That NIAA explore opportunities to attract new providers to the program, including Aboriginal businesses, Aboriginal controlled organisations, Indigenous peak bodies and potentially universities, under the leadership of the Indigenous Student Support Centres.

---

[28] Jorm, A., Bourchier, S., Cvetkovski, S and Stewart, G. (2012). Mental health of Indigenous Australians: a review of findings from community surveys. Medical Journal of Australia, Vol. 196 (2): 118-121.
[29] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2015) The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: 2015. [Accessed 25/03/20]

## Who are the cadets and what variables impact on their success or otherwise?

**Evaluation question 2.1: Who are the cadets and what variables impact on their success or otherwise?**

**Finding:** Indigenous cadets are more likely to be women (62.5%), young school leavers, and list their home address as urban locations on the eastern seaboard. The most popular course categories for ICS cadets was Health (31%), Management and Commerce (17%), Society and Culture (16%) and Law (10%). Cadets engaged through providers were more likely to be younger than cadets engaged directly by their employers, and providers were more likely to engage cadets in the first year of their degree.

Cadets were motivated to join the program to gain professional experience, career clarity and direction, and to alleviate financial stress. The program contributed to a number of positive educational and employment outcomes for cadets. Cadets gained skills and insight in their work placements that they could apply to their university assignments and were incentivised to complete their degrees. Positive intermediate employment outcomes included exposure to work routines, improving 'soft' skills, and facilitating professional experience, networks and career clarity. All the cadets interviewed who completed their degree had gone onto graduate employment of some kind, including those who had withdrawn from the cadetship.

Cadets reported higher satisfaction when their work placement provided meaningful work, was relevant to their degree and career goals, facilitated a diversity of experience and allowed for a sense of belonging. Cadets were also more satisfied when they received structured supervision, access to mentors and a culturally safe work environment. Issues that affected participation in the program included homesickness, burn-out (commonly from difficulty in maintaining a work/life/study balance), mental health issues (more serious than burn out) and parenting, caring and pregnancy.

*Which students are more likely to participate in the program? Which students are not accessing the program? How do variables such as study area, gender, and location effect the extent to which students access the program?*

### Demographic characteristics

More women (62.5%) than men (37.5%) participated in the Cadetships programs. The overrepresentation of women in the programs can be explained by the larger number of cadetships offered in course disciplines dominated by women (see commentary in the next section page 41 for further analysis).

The median age of cadets at the time of placement was 22.5 with only minor differences between men and women, however cadets engaged through CareerTrackers were likely to be younger than cadets engaged directly by employers (median age of 22 vs. 25 respectively). Figure 3 below shows that female cadets in both ICS and TAEG Cadetships outnumbered male cadets across all age groups.

**Figure 3:** Age of cadet at placement, by gender [ICS and TAEG combined] (n=1905)
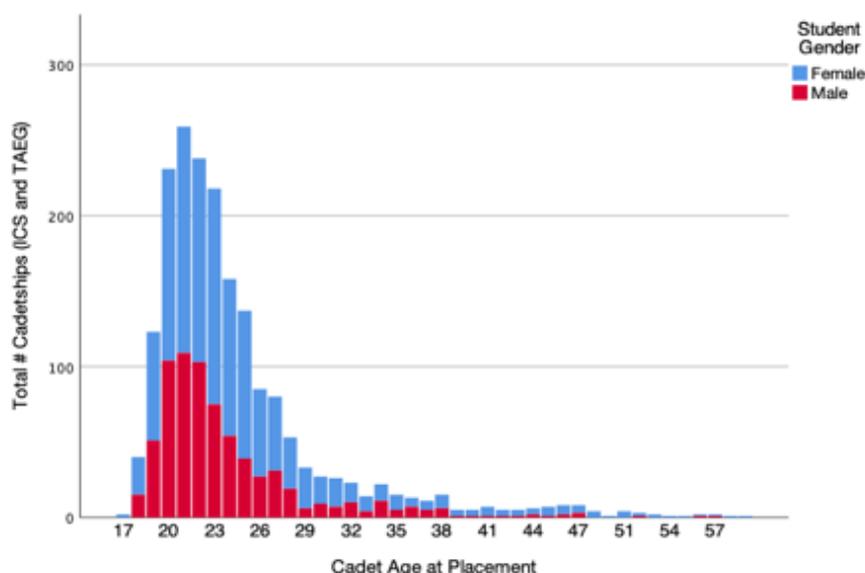


Administrative data shows the vast majority of cadets listed their home address as being in Sydney, followed by Brisbane, with smaller numbers from other capitals and some regional and remote areas. This data should be treated with caution as it is likely that at least some cadets will have listed their home address as the location at which they were living at the time they completed the cadetship commencement form. A map of cadets by program and suburb is included at **Annex F**.

The demographic characteristics of cadets are broadly consistent with other data, which shows that Indigenous undergraduate students are more likely to be older and female than non-Indigenous students[30] and the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians live on the Eastern seaboard.[31]

## Course of study

Information on a cadet's course was captured in a free-text field, resulting in over a hundred unique responses. These responses were grouped into categories, as shown below in Figure 4. The most popular course category for ICS cadets was Health (31%), followed by Management and Commerce (17%), Society and Culture (16%) and Law (10%).

---

[30] Universities Australia (n.d.) Universities Australian Indigenous Strategy First Annual Report, page 16.
[31] Australian Bureau of Statistics, Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2016. [Accessed 13/03/2020]

**Figure 4:** Percentage of ICS cadets by course category enrolled (n=956)
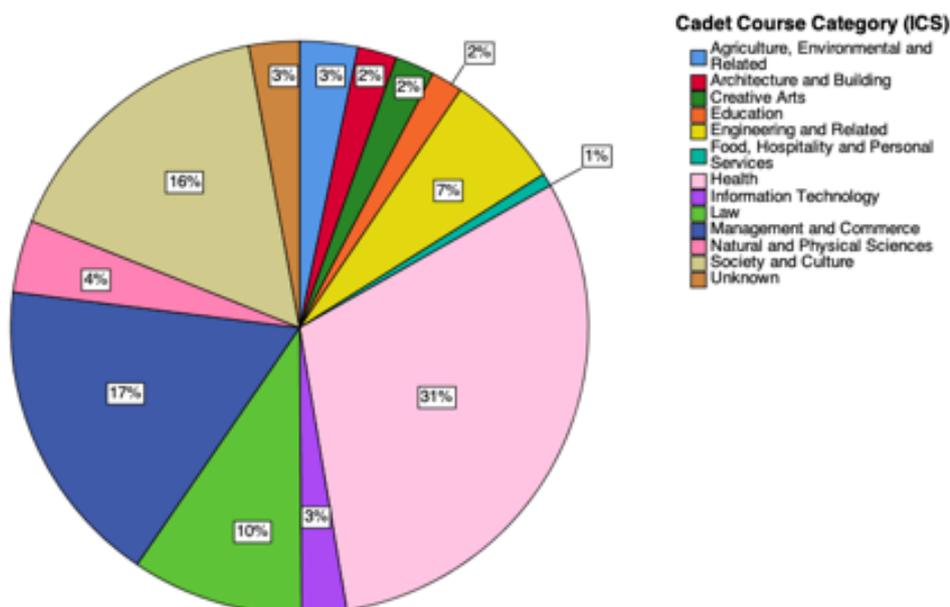


Cadet course choice was highly gendered. Women comprised 83% of the 'Society and Culture' and 'Health' course categories combined (n=553), but only 31% of 'Engineering and Related' and 'Natural and Physical Sciences' course categories combined (n=102). Further, 96% of ICS Nursing cadets were women (n=159).

The ICS administrative database captured the study mode of students. Almost all students (97%) were enrolled as full-time students (as part-time students were generally ineligible for cadetships).

Fifteen cadets were listed as studying part-time and three students were listed as studying by correspondence (it is not clear whether these were full or part-time). These sub-sets were considered too small for reliable analysis against cadet outcomes.

The majority of cadets (52%) were enrolled in a 3-year degree, however a substantial number of cadets (40%) were enrolled in a degree of more than 3 years duration, as shown in Figure 5 below. It is important to note that external data shows Indigenous undergraduates take longer on average to complete their degree, therefore the length of a degree is not an accurate estimate of the actual time taken to complete it.

**Figure 5:** *ICS Cadets by length of degree enrolled (n=956)*
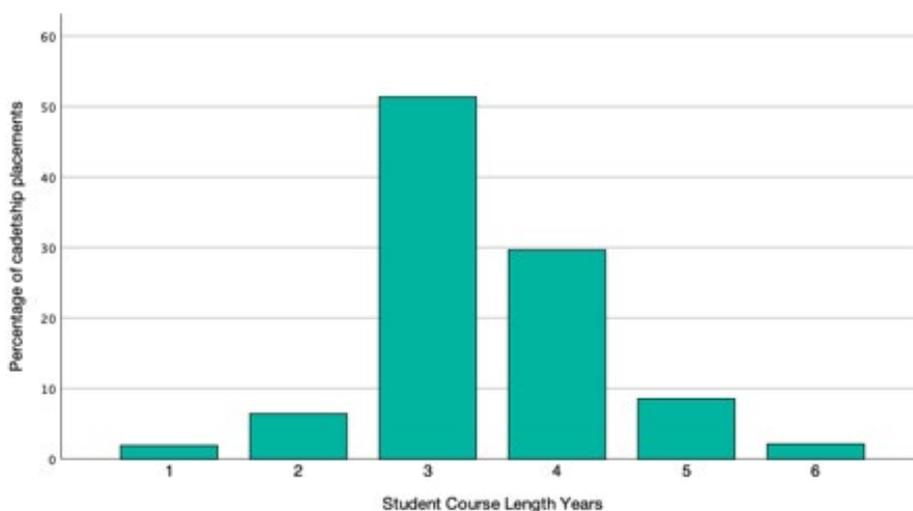
By comparing the student's course start date with the start date of the cadetship, evaluators were able to determine the percentage of ICS cadets who began their cadetship in their first year of their degree (this data was not captured for TAEG Cadetships). This was considered relevant to the evaluation considering that 1 in 6 Indigenous undergraduate students leave after their first year and do not return. Figure 6 shows that CareerTrackers are more likely to recruit cadets in the first year of their degree, which is reflected in the fact that their cohort tend to be younger than cadets engaged directly by employers.

**Figure 6:** *Percentage of ICS cadets for each cohort who began their cadetship in the first year of their degree, by employer (n=956)*
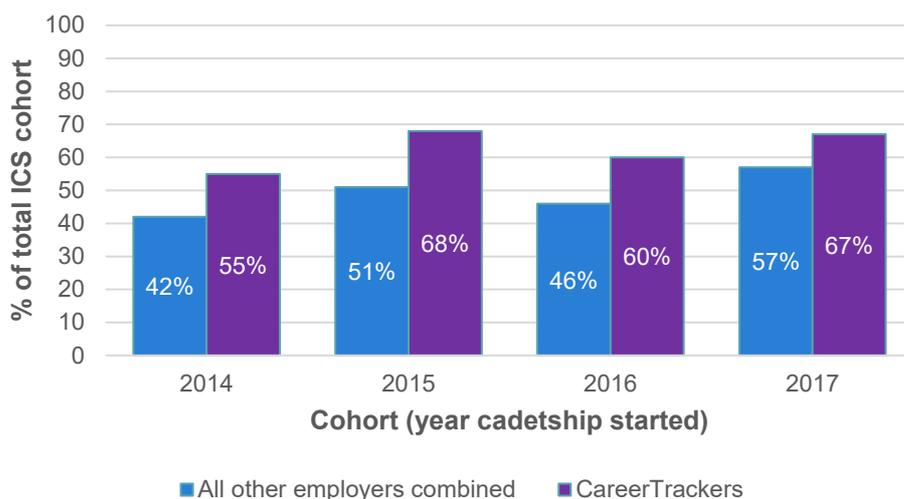


In conclusion, program administrative data suggests Indigenous students accessing cadetships are more likely to be young school leavers from urban locations on the Eastern seaboard. There are fewer cadets from regional, rural and remote areas and mature aged students. Students studying part-time or by distance are also excluded from the program due to the eligibility criteria.

## What motivates participants to take part in the program?

Cadets expressed three main motivations for applying for a cadetship. The primary motivation was a desire for professional experience in an employment market that is perceived as being competitive. The two secondary motivations (of relatively equal frequency) are to gain career direction and alleviation of financial stress.

### Desire for professional experience

The most common reason why cadets applied for a cadetship was the desire to gain professional experience while studying, to improve their chances of graduate employment. This theme was mentioned by over half of all cadets interviewed (n=26) and more often by mature age students who felt pressure to compete with younger graduates.

> *Well, for one thing, I didn't have any work experience and it seemed like a great opportunity…and also, I just felt like getting a degree isn't enough to get a job. I feel like you need work experience so I [thought] I'll take the opportunity since it presented itself to me.* **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)**

### Career clarity and direction

20% of the cadets interviewed (n=10) were motivated to apply for a cadetship because they saw it as an opportunity to gain clarity on their career direction.

*I thought getting experience while studying was just going to be so much more valuable and kind of get me a good head start in terms of what the industry was going to be like, you know, engineering, if I really, really hated it, it was going to give me the opportunity to pick something else quite early on.* **(excerpt from interview with male cadet)**

### Financial stress

20% of the cadets interviewed (n=10) were motivated to apply for a cadetship because of acute financial stress. Many of these reported that they were responsible for supporting other adult family members in their household.

*And at the time, there were four of us and just mum. So, it was pretty tough for her to sort of have us all in school and get into uni and do all that stuff. So, I applied for ICS to help with living expenses.* **(excerpt from interview with male cadet)**

*I was living on campus in the residential college, so I was at university a lot, I got really concerned because I literally had no money. So, I went to one of the Indigenous student support officers and they suggested CareerTrackers to get a job.* **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)**

Other, less common reasons cadets applied for a cadetship were for the social and personal development opportunities provided by CareerTrackers and to give them 'something to do' during the semester break.

*What are the educational outcomes of Cadets? Did they complete their degree? If not, at what point did they drop out and why? How does this compare to non-cadet Indigenous dropout rates?*

### Degree completion

The original ICS program theory of change[32] theorised that the cadetship would result in the intermediate outcome of 'more Indigenous students graduate' and the similar end of program outcome that 'more Indigenous students have professional qualifications'. Analysis of the education outcomes for the 50 cadets interviewed supports this for the majority of participants.

Figure 7 below shows the program participation, education, and employment pathways for the 50 cadets interviewed. As the interview sample was large and well-matched to overall program participation in terms of gender, means of engagement (direct employer vs. third-party) and program completion, the outcomes provide some insights into the likely program outcomes for other cadets.

---

[32] Clear Horizon (2017) Mapping the Indigenous Employment Programs. Prepared for the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Pp. 13-15.

**Figure 7:** Program outcomes for cadets interviewed (n=50)
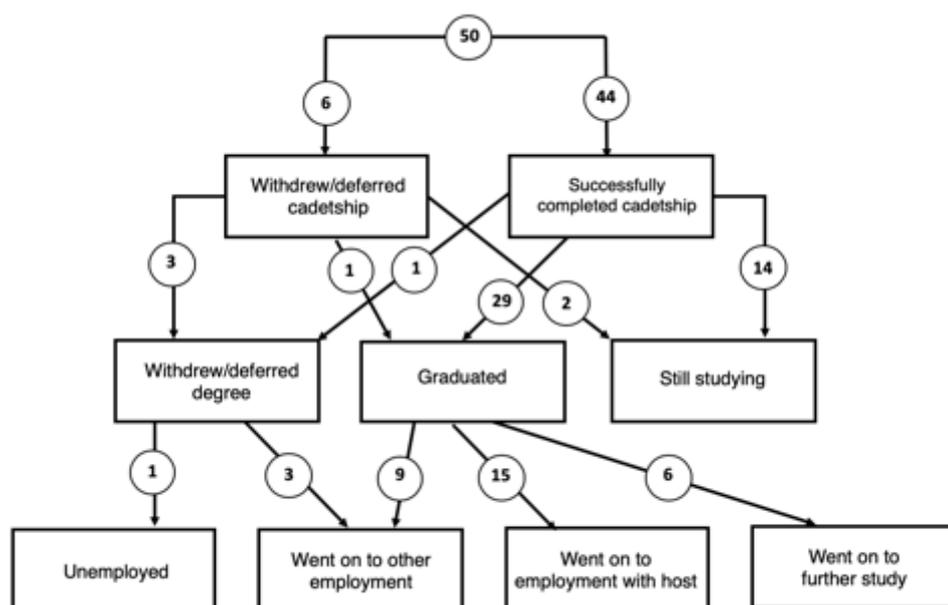


Of the 50 cadets interviewed, 58% of all cadets (n=29) had graduated from their degree. Of these, at least 6 had gone onto post-graduate study. One third of cadets interviewed (n=17) were still studying and expected to complete their degree within the allowable time. 88% of cadets (n=44) successfully completed the cadetship. 12% (n=6) withdrew from or deferred the cadetship prior to completing because of poor mental health (3), physical illness (1), pregnancy (1) and for financial reasons (1). There was a high co-occurrence of students withdrawing from their cadetship and their degree, with similar circumstances and factors causing this (see page 50 for further discussion).

Analysis of semi-structured interviews with cadets revealed that two main factors that enabled degree completion:

### Improved academic performance

Twenty per cent of cadets (n=10) interviewed said the cadetship had a positive effect on their academic performance. The most common reason cadets gave for why the cadetship improved their academic performance was that it enabled them to apply skills and insights they gained during the work placement to their university assignments. This included technical knowledge and skills relevant to their industry or degree, as well as 'soft' skills, such as presentation skills and self-confidence.

> *I did my entire last semester project on the Westgate tunnel project, which I got a phenomenal mark for, because you have great industry insight and understanding of these issues.* **(excerpt from interview with male cadet**

> *I went from trying my hardest to get a credit in primary teaching to easily getting distinctions in the business degree, which was considered probably a much harder subject, like finance and like all these things, and I was getting like HDs [High Distinctions] because I was just so motivated, because I could see what I was doing at uni I was able to apply in my work.* **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)**

Almost all cadets interviewed were engaged in casual work while studying at university. Cadets discussed how the cadetship study allowance enabled them to reduce their

additional work burdens and gave them more time to focus on their study thereby facilitating better academic performance.

> *The finance definitely helped. I was working part time as well. But it allowed me to just do one or two shifts a week and focus on study.* **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)**

> *…when I wasn't with CareerTrackers and on ICS, I was on ABSTUDY, but that obviously meant I also had to work casually, and it really negatively affected my university…And so, when I was put on ICS, and then I was [also] on Youth Allowance, I didn't have to work. I went into university every single day of the week and treated it like a full-time job. And that's the only way I got through university. Otherwise I would have left ages ago, the financial aspects of it was amazing to me because my family was never there to help me financially.* **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)**

It is important to note that cadets' individual financial circumstances determined the extent to which they were able to reduce or cease additional work burdens, and in turn dedicate additional time to their study. For example, one Nursing student who had increased her study load from part-time to full-time to become eligible for a cadetship was interviewed. As a single parent, she was unable to reduce her additional work burdens because the cadetship allowance was insufficient to support her and her family. Therefore, in addition to an increased study load, she had to undertake casual work, her work placement *and* her practical nursing placement. This student eventually withdrew from her cadetship as it was impractical for her to continue.

Interviews with cadets revealed that once they accepted the cadetship, a number of students reduced their study load from four units to three units to allow them to achieve a better balance between work, life and study. This in turn improved their academic performance. In this context, students made this decision to reduce their study load knowing they would still meet the eligibility criteria for the cadetship (which states the student must be studying at least three units per semester).

> *I think personally, I find a lot of benefit in working while studying. It took me a little while to realise I was actually a lot better off doing, which is still a full-time load, three units and then working two days a week or three days a week…I improved dramatically in terms of actual presentation [skills] and confidence, and skill level by working in a professional environment.* **(excerpt from interview with male cadet)**

This finding is an *unintended outcome* of a program. While students reducing their workload from four units to three units would ultimately mean they took longer to complete their degree (which could be considered an unintended negative outcome), this was assessed as a positive unintended outcome, because cadets reported that it ultimately improved their academic performance. It is important to note the interviews with cadets also revealed examples of students who had *increased* their study load as a result of taking the cadetship, however this was not related to improved academic performance.

It is important to note that a number of other factors that may have influenced cadets' academic performance were also found. For example, the majority of cadets interviewed had received academic tutoring through their university's Indigenous Support Centre. Some government employers also paid for cadets' course fees through the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) if they achieved a pass or above, which may have provided an incentive for students to improve their academic performance. Measuring changes in students' grade point average (GPA) as part of the program's minimum dataset would provide greater clarity on the contribution of the cadetship to academic performance (see page 80 for further discussion).

## Faster degree completion

A number of cadets interviewed reported the cadetship provided an incentive for them to complete their degree sooner.

> …anyone that asked me I will rave about this. I said the cadetship really helped me get through my degree. And it really, not inspired, but helped me to aspire to finish my degree. **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)**

> I was taking things a bit slower, and probably not putting as much of my mind into university…once I underwent the cadetship, I picked up a full uni load. And, you know, I started focusing much more, and did significantly better than I ever did beforehand. So, I think that was more of like an incentive. **(excerpt from interview with male cadet)**

Furthermore, when asked how things might have been different if they never did a cadetship, several students (n=12) said they would have taken longer to complete their degree or not completed their degree at all.

> I don't think I would have finished as early as I did… I've been able to focus and get through. A lot of people were surprised at how early I finished or that I actually went to uni. So, I am pretty glad for ICS and the support around it. **(excerpt from interview with male cadet)**

> I honestly don't know that I would have completed the degree. I don't know that I would have wanted to continue studying because I didn't feel like I had an outlook on what work would be while I was studying. **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)**

---

[33] Ibid.

> **Links to Program Theory:**
>
> While the original ICS theory of change[34] included the assumption that Indigenous students were motivated to complete their degree, it did not clearly articulate a causal pathway between the cadetship and the time taken to complete the degree, or include contextual information about the longer time taken by Indigenous students to complete their degree. The revised theory of change [**Annex E**] was updated to include an end of program outcome of degree completion within allowable time. It was further recommended that this is considered as a priority for measurement in future programs, however there are some complexities associated with measuring degree completion.

There were some other factors that may have influenced the length of time taken by cadets to complete their degree. The majority of cadets interviewed received some psycho-social support from their university's Indigenous Support Centre. CareerTrackers prioritises the academic progress of students, which is why Cadetships placements are usually completed in the university holidays so as to not conflict with students' university studies. Taking these other factors into account, it is concluded that the cadetship made a substantial contribution to cadets completing their degree sooner by providing material and non-material incentives to pass subjects and discouraging students from withdrawing or deferring from their degrees.

*What are the employment outcomes of Cadets? Did they complete their cadetship and obtain employment on graduation? If so with whom? How does this compare to non-cadet (including those who did not complete their cadetship) Indigenous employment outcomes?*

Data from the Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) suggests that rates of employment for Indigenous graduates are relatively high (In 2018, 72.9% of Indigenous graduates, equal to that of non-Indigenous graduates, were employed 4 months after graduation). The program administrative data for either ICS or TAEG did not capture an accurate measure of graduate employment.

Participation in the cadetship was also found to contribute to several intermediate employment outcomes that are likely to increase the likelihood that cadets will gain employment and experience faster early-career progression than non-cadets.

### Exposure to work routines

Twelve of the 50 cadets interviewed reported the cadetship had given them important exposure to work routines and the realities of their industry. This included things such as working a 7-hour day, attending team meetings and appropriate communication and presentation in a professional environment. This was particularly salient for younger cadets, most of who had limited prior work experience.

> *When I first initially started, I found quite hard to get into the routine. It took me maybe, you know, a month to you know, not be like, I have to go to work tomorrow…But also, I feel like having that routine was really good for me, because it allowed me to, to know what to expect when it came around. (excerpt from interview with male cadet)*
>
> *I've realised I've gotten a lot of skills just from being in a workplace, that were really obvious to me that weren't obvious to a lot of my peers who never worked at all or haven't worked in a*

---

[34] Ibid.

*workplace…I feel like applying for graduate roles now. **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)***

## Improved 'soft' skills

Cadets said the cadetship had provided them with important 'soft' skills that had prepared them for graduate employment. This included greater self-confidence and improved interpersonal and communication skills.

*I definitely had that greater experience, to know what I was doing. And obviously developing those other skills, the soft skills, being able to articulate myself well and being well presented and just not having that awkward nervousness about me…I was definitely much more prepared for full time work once I graduated. **(excerpt from interview with male cadet)***

*And I can say from experience over the last two years, how much like for example, my confidence has grown, and my ability, like one of the things that I really struggled with, especially at the beginning of my internship was asking questions and asking for feedback. I absolutely hated the idea of it. I didn't want to be seen to be dumb, so I think it is so beneficial to gain those transferable skills that you can use anywhere else... **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)***

*I like developing my skills and getting experience in how different workplaces work [such as] team dynamics and how to engage with managers and how to bring up an issue, things around that has been very useful…**(excerpt from interview with female  cadet)***

## Professional experience and networks

The majority of cadets believed experience gained through the cadetship substantially improved their chances of graduate employment, either with their cadetship host or another employer.

*I think it definitely helped because [my employer's] internship program is extremely competitive…So, I think my experience definitely helped. **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)***

*Well, I guess the Cadetship program built my resume with work experience in a corporate office…just getting good enough grades is not enough these days. You need to have work experience as well. So, the Cadetship program gave me that opportunity. **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)***

Nine cadets reported the cadetship enabled them to build professional networks that would improve their chances of graduate employment. This included with their colleagues and other cadets.

*… even after the internship finished, for a few of the places [I worked] I got asked to come back and work for a few weeks. I got published in a few of them…I got contracted to do another project for two of them. **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)***

*I guess it was good in developing like a network sort of thing, a few of the references that I put down on applications for some graduate positions were the ones that I met through the internship. **(excerpt from interview with male cadet)***

## Career clarity

Approximately 1/3 of cadets interviewed (n=16) reported they had greater clarity on their career pathway as a result of participating in a cadetship. This included better understanding of what career they wanted to pursue on graduation, as well as eliminating potential career paths. For a smaller number of cadets, the career direction gained through their cadetship was so profound that they changed degree entirely.

> *My whole life I was told I was going to be a teacher…I had no idea about business, so I had never been exposed to what that involves. And the reason I went with CareerTrackers is literally because I moved to Sydney and then I had no money and I just wanted a job…and in the interview for that, they were like 'you're not gonna be a teacher'…and over that month there it just completely blew my mind. I just loved the opportunity for progression, the recognition for what you did and the opportunities to do so many things. So, over that month or six weeks, I did start to realise that I wanted to change degrees. But I also started volunteering in a local primary school to make sure that I was making the right decision at that point. Then I made that transition.* **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)**

| Links to Program Theory: |
|---|
| The original ICS theory of change[35] theorised that the cadetship would provide students with 'job experience'. This was found to be a correct assertion, however the revised theory of change [**Annex E**] was updated to provide more detail on some of the specific aspects of job experience outlined above. |

*What is the rate of participation in the full 12-week work placement, and what issues affect participation? What is the relationship between participation in the 12-week work placement and participant's educational and employment outcomes?*

### Participation (completion) rates

As shown by the quantitative data (Figure 8) 50% of all cadetships were recorded as successfully completed. The level incompletion was 20% 17% student withdrawal, 2% employer withdrawal and 1% poor performance. cases. In 21% are recorded as 'outcome unknown' as nil data was entered. The remaining cases (9%) are thought to be ongoing.

---

[35] Ibid.

**Figure 8:** ICS cadetship completion status (n=954)



Legend:
- Student Withdrew
- Employer Withdrew
- Successfully Completed
- Terminated
- Other
- Outcome not known
- Ongoing

(Pie chart values: 17%, 2%, 50%, 1%, 1%, 21%, 9%)
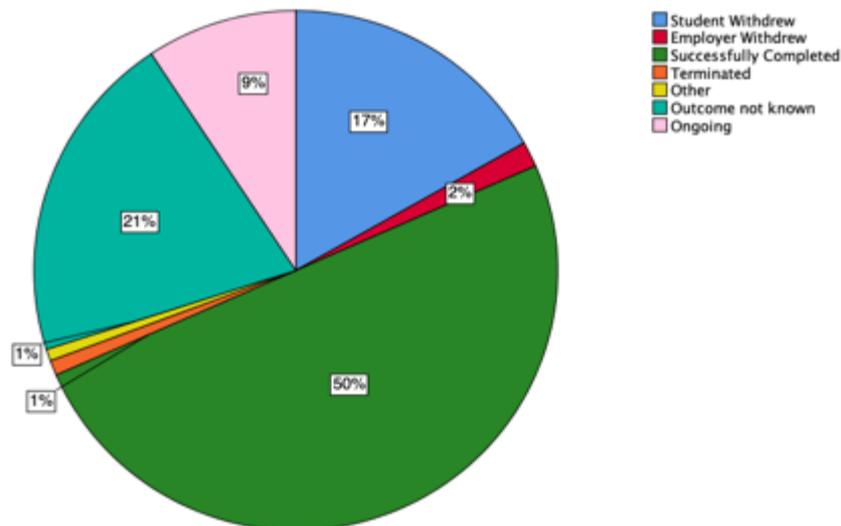
## Issues affecting participation

### Homesickness

The most common issue that affected cadets' participation in the work placement was homesickness. Four out of the five people who mentioned this theme were from rural and remote areas and had relocated to an urban area to go to university. However, in some cases, ICS also helped cadets manage their homesickness.

> I think when I first moved and it was like a big step and I'd miss my family, because to go home it is close to $2,000 roughly and at the time I knew I was never going to get a real opportunity…In terms of family time, I feel like I missed that a lot, like I'd go up to see my brother, like my family and stuff every six months and then like, I can see my brother just shooting up from being like a nine year old to being like 16...**(excerpt from interview with male cadet)**

> For me, I'm pretty big with family, so the challenging part was like, knowing where family is, and where they are at and getting a little bit homesick but yeah, with ICS, I was able to focus, I had like free time to make phone calls and I wasn't always working. I was able to have free time to study and make phone calls and always being like connected. Yeah, that would have been a challenge if I didn't have ICS, just constantly working and losing touch with your family. **(excerpt from interview with male cadet)**

### Burn-out

The next most common issue affecting cadets' participation in the work placement was burn out, which often resulted from inadequate leisure time and difficulty maintaining a work/life/study balance.

> So, the thing I've struggled with is burnout because I went from semester, volunteering and doing a TAFE course in winter, semester, full time work, semester, volunteering, and it meant that there were other things that I might have been interested in doing… **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)**

*I kind of wish that I had really kind of committed to the cadetship rather than taking on the additional Student Union role, because that on top of the full-time studies was just far too much.* **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)**

## Mental health issues

Mental health issues (i.e. more serious in nature than the burnout described above) were mentioned by at least 5 cadets interviewed. For three out of five of these cadets, it resulted in them withdrawing from their cadetship and failing to complete their degree. There was also a co-occurrence between mental health issues and relationship breakdown.

*It was a range of things. So, I had a relationship breakdown. And we were living together. So, I then had, like a really bad mental health crisis. So, I have bipolar, and it was undiagnosed at the time, it was thought to be major depression with, you know, intermittent psychotic episodes, but a couple of years later down the track, figured out what actually was going on. And there was also probably the biggest contributing factor, which was after all the major things are happening, it was drug use and abuse that kind of compounded the situation and meant that I couldn't secure housing let alone ensure that I was fit for my study or work commitments.* **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)**

*…it wasn't actually me withdrawing as such, but I had a relationship breakdown at the time, which affected me and impacted my ability to study. So, I withdrew from Law, and by virtue of me withdrawing from the Law course, I was removed from the program much to my protest.* **(excerpt from interview with male cadet)**

## Parenting, caring and pregnancy

Parenting, including caring for children and pregnancy during the cadetship was mentioned by three cadets, all of whom were female mature age students.

*I had a seven-year-old daughter and I was a single mom and yeah, just found out I was pregnant again. So yeah, I was trying to juggle uni, my child...* **(excerpt from interview with female cadet who withdrew from her cadetship)**

### Relationship between participation and cadet outcomes

All the cadets interviewed who completed their degree had gone onto graduate employment of some kind, including those who had withdrawn from the cadetship.

Interviews with 50 cadets who participated in the program showed that there was a high co-occurrence between withdrawal from the cadetship and withdrawal from the degree. It is likely that increasing efforts to retain cadets at risk of withdrawing from their cadetship may also increase their changes at continuing their degree.

### *What is the relationship between the model used by employers/providers to identify, recruit and support cadets, and the level of satisfaction and/or outcomes achieved by participants?*

Analysis of the qualitative data from the 1-1 Interviews with cadets revealed that a number of factors determined whether or not cadets were satisfied with their work placement. These are shown in Figure 9 below.

**Figure 9:** Key determinants of cadets' work placement satisfaction, according to cadets
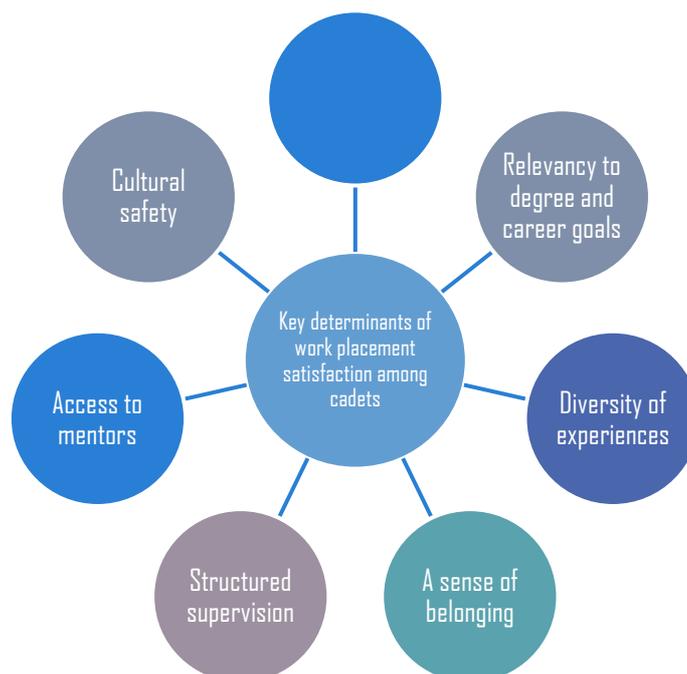


## Meaningful work

Cadets were more likely to report a satisfactory work placement when they felt like the work, they were performing was meaningful. Meaningful work was defined by cadets as 'real' work that genuinely fulfilled the business needs of the employer. When cadets performed meaningful work, they felt like they were both trusted and valued by their employer:

> *[my employer] funded me to present at two conferences last year. They weren't just garbage [sic] conferences, they were real conferences. I got to talk to real scientists, to talk seriously, and they asked me real questions about my real research.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

> *…they trust me that I'm capable enough to deliver on certain things. So, I actually lead a few projects on my own, which are quite significant business projects within our team. So, I'm trusted to deliver on those, which is fantastic, and it feels good to have my name associated to pieces of work and I can see where my work is, and I can see the pay-off.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

Conversely, cadets were less likely to enjoy their work placement when they felt like the tasks they were performing were menial or there was not enough work for them to do. This theme was found to be highly salient and was mentioned by 30% of all cadets interviewed (n=15) and was more commonly mentioned by men (65% of cases) and mature age students (68% of cases).

> *It was kind of like [they were] babying me, I guess. You know, and they would sort of modify things so that I felt like I was doing something.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

> *It kind of annoyed me in periods where it was quiet, and I just felt like I was just kind of sitting there, just for the sake of their diversity numbers...not really getting anything out of it. So, I tried to be as polite about addressing that as possible, I never really phrased it in that way, I just kind of asked around until someone finally gave me something…* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

*I didn't find that I had a lot of work, and the work that I had was to research certain things, like it wasn't necessarily contributing, like value adding to the organisation. And so, from that, I guess, I wasn't doing anything meaningful, and the days turned out to be longer and yeah, it wasn't actually contributing to anything worthwhile while I was there.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

Cadets were more likely to report feeling like the work they performed was menial or there was not enough work when they felt their employer or team was not adequately prepared to host a cadet.

### Relevancy to degree and career goals

Cadets were more likely to be satisfied with their work placement when they felt like it was relevant to their degree and career goals.

*A lot of it is so relevant to my degree, like doing environmental reports, making sure that we're keeping in line with the environmental legislation and stuff like that…* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

*I was pretty lucky. They gave me quite a lot of support…if I knew I had a statistics course coming up the next semester, they would get me out with people that have done statistics before and could help me.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

Many cadets said, in hindsight, they were uncertain or naïve about their career goals in the early stages of their degree and reported the cadetship had broadened their understanding of how their degree could be used in the workforce. Some 'unlikely' examples of cadets finding relevancy in seemingly irrelevant work placements, as demonstrated in this excerpt from a cadet with the Australian Taxation Office who was studying a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Screen Studies.

*Well surprisingly, it was really tailored to what I was studying. They had me sitting with the learning and development team…I was actually part of a little film crew. And we would go around to all the different sites in Brisbane, filming educational training videos and filming webinars…It was really closely aligned with my screen studies major.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

Conversely, the feeling that the work of their employer or team was irrelevant to their degree or career goals was a strong determinant of an unsatisfactory work placement. This theme was mentioned by 20% of all cadets interviewed (n=10) and was more commonly mentioned by men (67% of cases) and cadets engaged through CareerTrackers (63% of cases). This theme was also more common among students studying degrees in Arts and Health, where comparatively fewer cadetships are offered.

*There was one team I was really interested in, but they could never get me an internship there. It was the social inclusion and diversity team, and that's the team, if I did stay at [my employer], that I saw myself working in…Yeah. I couldn't see myself with a position there basically.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

Providing cadets with relevant and meaningful work was identified as an element of best practice amongst cadetship employers (see page 74 for further discussion).

## Diversity of experiences

Cadets were more likely to enjoy their work placement when they had the opportunity to experience different facets of the employer's core business. This theme was mentioned by 30% of all cadets interviewed (n=15). Some cadets who were engaged through a provider achieved this by undertaking multiple cadetships with different employers, while others had the opportunity to undertake rotations with different teams, either within a single work placement or across consecutive cadetships with the same employer.

> *Having like a diversity of the people that were there, so like, you know, there was the policy team, there was the anthropology team, there were people and researchers, people in mining like that diversity, and the ability to talk and engage with those people was awesome.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

## A sense of belonging

Cadets were likely to report higher levels of work placement satisfaction when they felt a sense of belonging within their team. This was a highly salient theme mentioned by 32% of all cadets interviewed (n=16) and was more commonly mentioned by those who completed their cadetship (73% of cases) as opposed to those who withdrew or deferred, and those who had to relocate from their hometown to attend university (69% of cases).

> *My team's gotten to know me; we've built quite a good relationship. The culture, the team is incredibly supportive and understanding, and they want the best for me, they want us to succeed and to achieve and to feel accomplished and all those things. That's number one to me, that my team is fantastic.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

> *It's nice being able to come here and come back to the same place. I know the employees, I know what it looks like, I know who the boss is, whereas other employees that come in for one summer make connections and then leave. So, it's been really good being able to come back to the same workplace over and over again.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

> *I think the Cadetship program really provided that place where I was able to become my own and actually feel part of a community that I don't necessarily have outside of work…I don't have any other connection with other Aboriginal communities or group or places outside of work. It's mainly more so the cadets and the Aboriginal grads around that are my mob and my community, it really reinforced and created that that family for me outside of home.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

Cadets were less likely to report a sense of belonging within their team when they felt like the tasks they performed were not meaningful or when they felt like the employer was not prepared for hosting a cadet.

## Structured supervision

Cadets were more likely to report they were satisfied with their work placement when they received structured supervision from a superior.

> *…my manager would set out a daily plan, like what time I would sit in on this counselling session, or what time I'd do this, I really liked the structure of that, whereas my last placement, it was a bit more 'all over the place'. I guess, it wasn't as structured, and the structure kept me a lot busier this time around.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

> *…it was great, and like we had regular check ins, but they weren't like formal, it was kind of like just a chat. It was good because it gave me the opportunity to hash out problems ...* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

Conversely, cadets were less likely to enjoy their work placement when they felt like their employer was unprepared, too busy or otherwise not committed to hosting a cadet.

> *…it's my understanding that I was one of the first interns at the [employer's] office. And so, the manager that was there…who was looking after me, they didn't really know what I was going to be doing or what I was actually there for, they just knew I was there for 12 weeks and they had to find something for me to do.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

> *There was still quiet periods and I wasn't exactly accountable to one person, like on paper I am accountable, like no one's accountable to me specifically, to give me work, it was kind of distributed and it was just ad hoc…No one had like taken the time to plan through like what my week would look like.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

Providing cadets with structured supervision, including through the use of performance management processes, was considered to be an element of best practice amongst cadetship employers (see page 74 for further discussion).

## Access to mentors

Cadets who were able to identify a workplace mentor were much more likely to be satisfied with their work placement than those who were not. Workplace mentors took a variety of forms. In some cases, cadets were formally assigned a mentor or 'buddy' (usually someone more junior in the organisation, in some cases a past cadet) through a structured program, however most of the time cadets described their mentoring relationship as one that evolved organically.

> *…my big boss who manages like 200 people, she took me under her wing, she was like 'I'm going to set you up with meetings with different companies in the business and different lines in the business' and stuff like that. And just taking that time out of her week to do that. I really loved that.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

> *I had a manager and I had kind of like, another kind of supervisor, it wasn't an official thing, but he kind of just looked after me because my manager was too busy most of the time… he was a good bloke, he was one of the people that I put down my for my references and yeah, and he introduced me to a lot of people around and he set me up to shadow people to see what they do…***(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

> *One person in particular stands out in my mind. And that's [name omitted]…I just remember her, basically bending over backwards to figure out, you know, what is it that you need, what is it that kind of, you know, allowed you to overcome these barriers that you're facing and how can we help you every step of the way. She just wanted to know, how she and the hospital could help. Yeah, that stays with me as well.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

It should be noted that this finding regarding workplace mentors did not include the 'student advisor' assigned to cadets engaged through CareerTrackers. While a good relationship with a student advisor contributed to a more positive impression of the provider and overall cadetship experience, it appeared to be less relevant in determining work placement satisfaction.

## Cultural safety

Cultural safety was a small but significant theme amongst cadet interviews. While cadets were not explicitly asked about cultural safety, several identified examples from their work placement where they felt like their needs were not met by their employer, which detracted from their work placement satisfaction.

*…after a little bit of time I got a feeling of being, a bit of the token Aboriginal and being used to report 'hey, we've got this many [Aboriginal] people we've employed'… (excerpt from interview with cadet)*

*[My employer] is still very green [sic] in terms of understanding Indigenous culture. There's still a lot of... it's not outright [racism] but just small micro stereotypes that exist, comments, questions that no-one needs to answer. (excerpt from interview with cadet)*

*I was there for a year and a half in the cadetship. And I only met other Indigenous staff after that year and a half. Well, I did find out that there were 12 Indigenous staff people working of the floor above me, that I had just never met. (excerpt from interview with cadet)*

*I think initially what they're meant to do is…introduce me to the Aboriginal liaison officer or all the other [Aboriginal] staff members…But I just never really met them until…maybe eight or nine months into the cadetship…I definitely felt like, once I found that out, I knew you had the people who can give you that cultural support. I should have met them day one, when I started here. (excerpt from interview with cadet)*

A lack of cultural safety was also a common reason for cadets reporting dissatisfaction with their cadetship provider (see page 76 for further discussion).

## To what extent did the program meet the needs and expectations of cadets and stakeholders?

**Evaluation question 2.2:** To what extent did the program meet the needs and expectations of participants and stakeholders?

**Finding:** Overall, the vast majority of cadets were satisfied with what they gained from the program, but in some cases looked for more flexibility in program design.

Employers also felt the program objectives were valuable and important but expressed that recent changes to financial, contracting arrangements and eligibility had adversely impacted them

The extent the work placement and the study allowance met the needs of cadets varied depending on the cadets' circumstances. In design, the 60-day work placement was flexible. Direct employers tended to provide the work placement by allowing cadets to work 1-2 days per week, and this structure suited cadets who lived independently and required a more regular income in addition to the cadetship study allowance. In comparison, cadets engaged through a provider almost always completed their 60-day work placement in a 12-week 'summer internship' and an optional 4-week 'winter internship'. This suited cadets still living at home as they were able to focus on their studies during semester.

More than half the cadets interviewed felt the study allowance was adequate to meet their basic needs. However, cadets with dependent children; ineligible for social security payments; living independently with no other financial support; and responsible for supporting family members, could experience financial stress during their cadetship.

Cadets were dissatisfied with a lack of opportunities in their desired sector and a lack of opportunities for graduate employment. Employers and providers were dissatisfied with elements of the program's management, particularly in regard to contracting arrangements, funding, communication and eligibility.

As the work placement component of the cadetship was flexible, it was implemented differently by different employers depending on their business needs and interpretation of the program objectives. CareerTrackers' cadets almost always completed their 60-day work placement in a 12-week 'summer internship' at the end of the university year and an optional 4-week 'winter internship' in the middle of the year. In-semester work placements were viewed by CareerTrackers as a potential distraction from study, especially in the first few years of a student's degree. On the other hand, most direct employers felt that allowing cadets to work 1-2 days per week throughout the year was more conducive to their business needs.

The different work placement structures also suited cadets in different circumstances. For most cadets still living at home, an end-of-year work placement allowed them to focus on their studies during the semester. For many cadets in this situation, working during the semester was seen as an optional extra, but not strictly necessary since the cadetship study allowance met most of their needs. On the other hand, the cadetship study allowance was often insufficient to meet the needs of cadets who lived independently and required a more regular income. For the majority of these students, an 'in-semester' work placement gave them more income throughout the year and was in most cases still manageable alongside their study load.

While most cadets found the 60-day work placement manageable, some found it difficult. Several cadets who completed end of semester work placements reported feeling 'burnt out' by the lack of leisure time (see page 50). This was particularly pertinent for those who had relocated to attend university and who often had to choose between spending their summer working or reuniting with their families and maintaining connections to country. Cadets who were the primary caregivers for their children also found 60-days difficult to manage, as did cadets in industries such as teaching, nursing and other human services and heath sectors which also require a practical placement.

These concerns were echoed by several employers, who felt that the minimum length of the work placement (60 days) was too long and could result in poor work-life balance among cadets.

> *…when our cadets finish their academic year, they go straight from work placement into work, and they have no downtime, and that creates disconnection from country, as they are often in a location away from home... we have put supportive measures in place for a beneficial experience…There's been some discussion amongst coordinators about whether 60 days is even the right number. A lot of students struggle to do 60 days, and we've been talking about whether there becomes a minimum number that they have to do, which is maybe, we've talked about 45 days.* **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

It is worth noting some employers also said cadets often work more than 60 days per year, however since there is no maximum length of work placement stipulated by the program rules, this has no bearing on the eligibility criteria. One cadet was asked by her employer to work three days per week during the semester, which took a negative toll on her studies. This raises the question of whether or not a maximum cap on days worked is required to ensure the cadetship does not detract from the cadet's academic performance.

*What are participants' experiences with the study and equipment allowance, including the amount, frequency and method of payment, and impact on other payments, such as social security and scholarships?*

## Study allowance

More than half of cadets interviewed (n=26) felt like the amount of study allowance was adequate to meet their basic needs, however the extent to which cadets felt the study allowance was adequate depended on their personal circumstances, which varied greatly within the cadet cohort.

Cadets who were living at home felt like the study allowance was adequate, because they often were not required to pay for rent and utilities.

> *At that time, it was enough, I mean, it's not enough if I was living out of home. So, I had to stay home…I was trying to move out and unless I got another job, so working two jobs and the cadetship, I wouldn't have had enough to actually move out.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

The majority of cadets 'topped up' their study allowance with some other form of work, although their additional work burdens generally decreased when they started receiving the allowance (see page 45 for a further discussion). Cadets who had another source of income (and no dependants) also found that the study allowance was adequate.

> *I think given the fact that I had another job on the side, it was enough for me…I guess would probably just be dependent for everybody individually. But for me, at the time it was enough.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

> *I topped it up with other casual work, but I was in a very good financial position to be honest, like compared to other students. I think that yeah, for me, it was enough. But I think I imagine other people would struggle.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

Most cadets received some form of scholarship or bursary while studying. These ranged from one-off bursaries provided by their university for Indigenous, rural or socio-economically disadvantaged students, usually valued at a few thousand dollars, to more significant scholarships to campus residential colleges (covering rent and board) or high-value academic fee scholarships offered by the university, state government or various non-government organisations and philanthropic foundations. Cadets who received one or more high-value scholarships generally found the study allowance adequate.

> *I'm really lucky because I was receiving a scholarship outside of the cadetship. Anyway, and so you know, that ought to have been plenty and well enough, you know, to meet my needs and cover my expenses. But as I said, with the relationship breakdown, and then having the bills suddenly double and the rent double, that put that extra strain.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

The terms and conditions of the ICS program require students to declare scholarships over $6,000, however none of the cadets interviewed mentioned that they had advised the Commonwealth of the additional scholarships and bursaries.

There were, however, some cadets who experienced significant financial stress during their cadetship, in particular: those with dependent children; those who were ineligible for social security payments; those who were living independently with no other financial support, and those who were responsible for supporting family members.

> *I still struggled a little bit financially, obviously with rent with everything like that…and yes, receiving the extra, I think was $600 a fortnight helped, but it kind of still ended up feeling a lot like living pay check to pay check…And it might be good for people who have lower rent or maybe still living at home, or can get other subsidies, like I couldn't access anything through Centrelink because of the payments.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

> *I was literally the only income receiver other than my mum and the few sole Centrelink payments she could get. No, that's just not enough to really maintain a mortgage and two adults, so yeah, I was definitely working as hard as I could on the side, I was doing almost full-time hours, kind of thing, but it definitely decreased by how many hours I did, it was very beneficial.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

> *I was a single parent and I was receiving single parenting benefit and also the cadetship [allowance]…So, in relationship to being able to survive. It's tough. Like you'd have to move back in to home with my parents. Because I just couldn't afford bills, rent all that sort of thing. So, like, my plan is, I do have to live here with my parents until I finish my study.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

| Recommendation: |
|---|
| That NIAA consider a small increase to the cadetship study allowance (base rate) and create an independent rate of CSA, benchmarked to the independent rate of ABSTUDY and using the same definitions. |

### Book and equipment allowance

The cadets unanimously believed the book and equipment allowance was useful and adequate to purchase study materials at the beginning of each semester. Students' expenses varied greatly depending on the nature of their degree and a number of cadets accessed additional supports to purchase materials, such as university equity bursaries or second-hand textbooks provided by the Indigenous Student Support Centre or residential college.

| Recommendation: |
|---|
| That NIAA retain the book and equipment allowance at the current rate. |

### Interaction with social security payments

At least 20% of cadets interviewed (n=10) were not eligible for any form of social security benefit while studying, usually because their own or their parents' income exceed the income threshold. The majority of those who were in receipt of a social payment prior to the cadetship allowance were receiving ABSTUDY or Youth Allowance, with a smaller number who had dependent children receiving a single parent pension.

Approximately 1/3 of cadets interviewed (n=16) transferred completely from ABSTUDY to the cadetship study allowance. These cadets unanimously believed the cadetship study allowance was a preferable option to ABSTUDY, the main reason being that it was not means tested and therefore allowed them to yield a higher total income.

*So, like my mum was unemployed, and I was like, supporting her essentially at the same time. So more financial stability and being able to work more hours without, like that payment getting affected or anything was a huge drawcard.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

*The payments that ICS provides are better than what I was getting on Centrelink. Centrelink, it was four hundred and twenty dollars a fortnight, whereas ICS is six hundred before tax, I think it doesn't matter. But obviously that's a massive difference for groceries.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

*It was because you could work and still get the payments. So, with ABSTUDY, obviously, if you earn over a certain amount of money, your payment would be reduced. Okay with ICS you still get that fortnightly payment no matter what you earn.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

Students were motivated to take up the cadetship study allowance because it allowed them to avoid the compliance requirements of ABSTUDY, which most believed were arduous.

*…ABSTUDY's a nightmare. It's like you have to call them every week, like, it's just a whole nightmare. I think Indigenous services were like the only ones that didn't have an online portal, so you had to literally be on hold to them for an hour every week trying to submit your few hours and then get your payment like decreased because you work too much according to them…* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

*Yeah, I had a whole issue with them, ABSTUDY was the worst experience of my life…I had so much fighting constantly with them, payments not getting approved or withheld and it was just so much crap and they stuffed up paperwork on me, which results with just lots of problems.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

One unexpected insight from the semi-structured interviews with cadets was that some cadets received the cadetship study allowance *alongside* another social security payment. This appeared to be under the rules of Youth Allowance instead of ABSTUDY, resulting in some students switching from ABSTUDY to Youth Allowance so they could receive both payments.

*While I was at university, I was on ICS and Youth Allowance. Two payments together. I covered my expenses, so while I was at university, I didn't want to work at all* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

*I was receiving ABSTUDY and then I stopped it. And then because someone said to me, this was kind of like hidden knowledge…obviously you can't be on ABSTUDY and ICS, well that was my understanding but my friend she's like you know what, get off ABSTUDY and if you get on Youth Allowance, you can have both payments, because Youth Allowance is not an Indigenous payment. So that's what I did, yeah, I know a number of other students were doing that so that they could receive both.* **(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

*But when I went to Uni, I only worked during the semester break and things. The degree just didn't allow for it and the [cadetship] allowance wasn't adequate for living expenses, so I had to go on Centrelink as well, which proved me no end of trouble, they don't seem to be aware of how the scholarship works and keep raising debts, and it's been quite a nightmare years on, and they are still hassling me even though I was completely honest…***(excerpt from interview with cadet)**

> ### Recommendation:
> That NIAA develop a fact sheet that is provided to all prospective cadets that provides more information on how the cadetship study allowance is treated under various social security payments so that they can make informed decisions about how to maximise their social security entitlements.

*What is the overall level of satisfaction by participant, universities, employers, providers in the program? What factors influence participant/employer satisfaction?*

**Participant Satisfaction**

The vast majority of cadets interviewed were broadly satisfied with the Cadetships programs. Even those who had one or more negative experiences with the study allowance or work placement, agreed the experience was worthwhile and resulted in improved education and employment outcomes. The two main reasons for dissatisfaction with the program were:

### Fewer opportunities in certain sectors

A common theme in cadet interviews was the belief that there were fewer opportunities for students studying degrees in 'the Arts' as opposed to degrees more suited to a corporate environment. This was mentioned by 20% of all cadets interviewed and was more common among students engaged through CareerTrackers.

> *…I knew going into this program that it's designed for corporate students, not arts students. So, I went in knowing that this isn't going to perfectly cater to me, but I'll just make the most of it. And then I got a good couple of internships. But towards the end, the final internship, I had, it was a bit of, a bit of a flop.* **(excerpt from interview with male cadet)**

### No opportunity for employment with host

A small number of cadets interviewed (n=6) felt that there was lack of opportunities for graduate employment with their host organisation.

> *…it didn't really make sense that I got really good references, and everybody liked the stuff I was doing and said I did a great job but then they weren't willing to put me on in a job. Which, you know, it's very stressful and I feel like a waste as a resource.* **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)**

> *No, so that was probably this one area where I feel like there needs to be some improvement because there was other cadets there and nobody got jobs out of it and so it did start to feel a little bit like we're being exploited…It was almost like they were just... kind of just using cadets as cheap labour.* **(excerpt from interview with female cadet)**

This was more common among cadets whose host organisation did not have a graduate employment program and a key reason why cadets pursued employment with an organisation other than their host.

> ### Recommendation:
> That NIAA consider changing the employer obligations to strengthen the obligation to identify a realistic pathway to graduate employment within their organisation and use their best endeavours to offer cadets a permanent position at the conclusion of the cadetship.

## Sponsor/Employer Satisfaction

Employers and providers felt the program objectives were valuable and important, however were unsatisfied with elements of the program's management, including contracting arrangement, funding, communication and eligibility.

### Contracting arrangements

In the transition from ICS to TAEG, program contracting arrangements changed to streamline the process for employers and to achieve administrative efficiencies. An unintended consequence of the new contracting arrangements was employers were able to offer less job security to cadets, which affected their ability to retain them for the life of their degree and on graduation.

> *Previously before TAEG we used to direct-hire them as a fixed term part-time employee…We used to do it for the term of their degree. Now because we are subject to funding, we can only do it for the term of the grant which is a bit of an issue for me as well…That's what I don't like about the way the program is run now.* **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

Other aspects of the contracting arrangements that employers found inconvenient included being paid in arrears (instead of in advance), late payment or invoices, and the misalignment between the financial and calendar years, which affected program acquittals.

> *And since we're being paid in arrears, it's been really in arrears. Like, our 2018 semester two payment, I only got paid in December 2019.* **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

> *…the funding that's come through the Commonwealth, it's based around cadets who complete the studies over the academic year. We, as a government department, operate on a financial year…(so) we're actually going into deficit. And it would be good to have a simpler budgeting process or payment process because the administration this is quite arduous.* **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

### Declining funding for direct employers

A number of employers were disappointed about being declined additional TAEG funding to grow their cadetship programs.

> *A couple of years ago, we tried to seek some additional funding for some additional cadets that we wanted to offer placements to. And that wasn't available. But the whole process seemed to be very convoluted…And I don't think in the end we were ever told that the funding was refused. I didn't get an answer. So, at that point, we just started to fund the cadets ourselves anyway.* **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

> *I was told we're going to bundle all your individual agreements together into one contract then just apply to ask for a variation and we'll extend it…and you can add new people on as they start…I applied for my first variation and I got a letter back…saying no, you can pay [for the program yourself] which was a complete misunderstanding.* **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

### Communication with the Commonwealth

Five employers interviewed mentioned that they were dissatisfied with the impersonal nature of communication and the time taken to receive a response from the Commonwealth on contracting matters, particularly through the generic email, and including requests for extensions and contract variations.

*There is no direct line to the Indigenous support unit. So, you will make a phone call or send an e-mail. It goes to a generic e-mail address. It could be six weeks until we get a response. Sometimes it might be the next day...the service level isn't that great, when you get someone, they're usually really helpful and all the rest of it but it's a bit ad hoc...* **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

*Probably my only comment for the record, and it's retrospective really, is that the process around informing us of the changing funding was very poor.That was disappointing really for what's been a long-term relationship. To be honest it wasn't at all clear to us what the plan was going forward…that created some challenges for us in trying to manage our stakeholders and keep confidence in the program.* **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

When employers were able to speak to someone from the department in person, they generally found them to be helpful, however those who had a dedicated contact point were more satisfied with the service they received from the Commonwealth.

### Program eligibility criteria

A consistent theme throughout the evaluation was that employers felt that the eligibility criteria for the program is restrictive, exclusionary and does not always meet the needs of their industry. Employers also felt the eligibility criteria had not kept pace with the changes in university education over the past two decades.

A number of employers and providers interviewed believed the three-year limit on program funding excluded students studying longer degrees, such as architecture, engineering, medicine and combined degrees (e.g. arts/law). Analysis of program administration data for the ICS program shows 40% (n=382) of all cadetship agreements were instigated for students who were enrolled in a degree of 4, 5 or 6 years. In some cases, it meant employers were not accepting cadetship applications for four-year degree students until the second year of their degree (thereby ensuring that the student could be supported until their year of graduation).

*Another limitation with it is the three years of funding, because the thing is, for nursing it works because the nursing degree is a three year degree, but a lot of the allied health degrees are actually four years: social work, physiotherapy, occupational therapy etc. and what the public hospitals found that they weren't admitting students until the second year of their degree for that reason. But if you think about it, if somebody really needs the support and assistance to go through university, then why should they have to wait until their second year before they offer it.* **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

Approximately one third of employers interviewed (n=4) believed not extending eligibility to postgraduate students made it difficult to address the underrepresentation of Aboriginal students in certain professions, especially in the health sector and other areas where post-graduate education was either a requirement or alternative pathway to practice.

*Right now, there's no Aboriginal dieticians in Australia and we actually started a dietitians' cadetship program. We wrote to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and requested permission to and unfortunately were declined because, basically the rules of the Cadetship program say that its only for three years' worth of funding for undergraduate degrees. How you get the qualifications to become a dietician is to do a Bachelor of Science majoring in human physiology and biochemistry and then a Master of Nutrition and Dietetics. A lot of those programs are combined into one but it's still technically two separate industries and degrees.* **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

*We want them to be able to practice. There's no use having a degree in Psychology if you can't have your master's in psychology and that's been limiting. **(excerpt from interview with employer)***

Employers were unanimous that the program should be more flexible for students who were temporarily required to study part-time due to personal crises. It is worth noting that most employers reported NIAA was usually flexible in accommodating their requests for contract extensions for cadets who were taking longer than usual to complete their degree, however most felt that the eligibility criteria could be made more explicit so as to provide more certainty to cadets.

*If we've got a male cadet who is the father of two kids, he's supporting his family, he's also studying medicine and doing academic programs. If he doesn't complete a unit because he is raising his kids, then he becomes ineligible. Let's give this guy a bit of slack. It is so rare to have Indigenous medical students; we want to support him to keep studying and coming to work so we need to meet his needs a bit more. It requires consideration in the scope of the project eligibility criteria, so the employer has the opportunity to enable them to carry on even amongst everything that's happening in their life. Within reason, because we need them to be an employee as well. **(excerpt from interview with employer)***

*…we did actually have one student who actually failed a couple of subjects and needed to go part time, but we didn't actually find that to be a problem because we actually wrote to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and they allowed an extension and they said that even though the rules were quite strict, they bent the rules and were quite accommodating. I do still have that question of what they will say 'yes' or 'no' to {when requesting contract extensions). **(excerpt from interview with employer)***

*If you're part time they say you're not eligible although we did have one person returned from maternity leave and the department were flexible about her receiving a good allowance which was good. I think the connection was because of the maternity leave. I think if it had been something else, they might not have been as supportive... **(excerpt from interview with employer)***

Some employers also felt the program should be made available to students who intended to study entirely part-time.

*I think they should be able to get it part-time. Why not? It could be any reason whether it's you've got a kid…you could have some kind of disability; you could be going through family (problems) or trauma and only able to do two subjects a semester. I think it should be it should be open at least at the 50 percent rate. **(excerpt from interview with employer)***

## Which universities have been most successful in engaging and retaining Cadets?

**Evaluation question 2.3:** Which universities have been most successful in engaging and retaining Cadets?

**Finding:** Universities typically engaged cadets by circulating cadetships opportunities to them; and supporting cadets through the Indigenous Student Support Centre on campus, faculty members, services not specifically targeted to Indigenous students and by providing financial support. The level of support provided by universities to cadets was no greater than the level of support provided to Indigenous university students more broadly.

Some universities were also employers under the Cadetships programs. The interview process revealed that one university was also acting as an unofficial intermediary by placing cadets both within the university faculty and with the university's partner organisations.

### How do the universities support their Indigenous cohorts more broadly and Cadets specifically?

As previously discussed, the role of universities in the program (excluding those who were also cadet employers) was relatively minor and was mostly limited to circulating cadetship opportunities to cadets (see page 31). Some universities were not aware of the TAEG or former ICS program at all. Cadets reported that most of the support they received came from the Indigenous Student Support Centres on campus, with some cadets reporting that they received support directly from members of their faculty or program and services not specifically targeted at Indigenous students. The level of support provided by universities to cadets was no greater than the level of support provided to Indigenous university students more broadly.

### Does the university have a Cadetship intake into employment? If so, have they employed Cadets through the ICS/TAEG Cadets program?

Some universities were also employers under the Cadetships programs. Program data shows that twelve (12) universities facilitated 78 cadetships across ICS/TAEG combined, which amounts to almost 10% of all cadetships engaged by employers directly. Participation by university employers declined from 12 universities facilitating 56 placements in ICS to three universities facilitating 22 in TAEG. Figure 10 below shows the biggest university employers of cadets were the University of Adelaide (23) followed by the University of Newcastle (19) and Macquarie University (20).

**Figure 10:** *University cadetship employers, ICS/TAEG combined (n=78)*
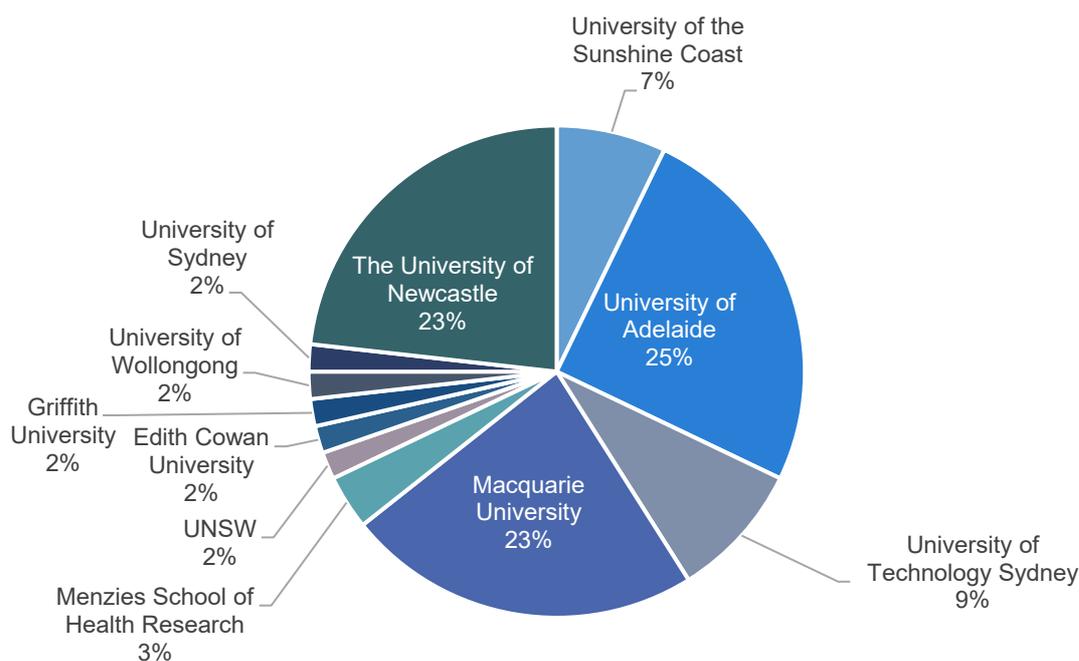


### How do universities promote Cadetships and utilise Cadets as role models?

Employers usually send cadetship opportunities to the Indigenous Student Support Centre on campus who circulates the opportunities to Indigenous students via a mailing list or physical noticeboard. At least 30% of cadets interviewed (n=15) said they found out about the program through their university's Indigenous Student Support Centre, including through regular emails, brochures displayed in the Centre and conversations with support staff. Some universities interviewed also had 10-year partnerships with CareerTrackers, some of whose cadet's received ICS/TAEG funding, however these partnerships involved universities providing space for CareerTrackers to recruit and support students on campus, not necessarily provide support to cadets directly. There were no examples of universities specifically using cadets as role models, although this was a key practice of CareerTrackers who nominated 'student ambassadors' at universities to support program recruitment.

### Are Cadets eligible for other financial support from the university?

Almost all of the cadets interviewed were in receipt of some other financial support from their university. This ranged from one-off bursaries provided by their university for Indigenous, rural or socio-economically disadvantaged students, usually valued at a few thousand dollars, to more significant scholarships to campus residential colleges (covering rent and board) or high-value academic fee scholarships. These scholarships were available to all students and being in receipt of a cadetship did not preclude students from applying for them.

### Is there a best practice model that other universities could replicate?

Two of the universities interviewed (University of Adelaide and the University of Newcastle) were also employers of cadets. The interviews revealed that both were motivated to grow their cadetship programs should the resources be made available. University of Newcastle had historically placed cadets in cadetship roles within the university that were not degree-specific, such as in customer service roles in the Student Services Centre. Cadets were engaged as casual staff and were able to accept shifts according to their study schedule, which would count towards their 60-day work placement. At the time of the interview, the

staff responsible for the cadetship program were newly appointed and were motivated to reinvigorate the program with a greater focus on placing Indigenous students in cadetships within the university's academic faculty.

On the other hand, the University of Adelaide had a more established cadetship program that placed cadets both within the university faculty and with the university's partner organisations, including engineering company Santos. In this regard, University of Adelaide were not only employing cadets but acting as an unofficial intermediary, an arrangement they believed worked well. University of Adelaide strongly believed they were best placed to manage their own cadetship program and that working with providers in the past had created an unnecessary duplication of roles. Representatives from University of Adelaide were frustrated at what they saw as an attempt to 'sideline' universities out of the Cadetships programs in favour of providers.

> *…we've noticed over the duration of the program that it's gone from being entrusted funding to use in a responsive way for our students to maybe more of an intermediary model, like AFLSportsReady or CareerTrackers, and that removes for us the connection that we have with our students and the responsiveness that we can provide as an education provider [so] just to reinforce that this is an important program and that we can run it really well if we're given the resources.* **(excerpt from interview with university employer)**

Representatives from University of Adelaide envisaged a much greater role for themselves and other universities in the future Cadetships programs. They believed that universities, under the leadership of the Indigenous Students Supports Centres, were well placed to manage Cadetships programs in a way that was culturally safe and student-centred (see discussion and recommendation on page 78). They also noted that universities had the advantage of having direct access to data on students' academic performance and degree completion. This potentially points towards an appropriate university based model for cadetships, incorporating principles of cultural competency.

## Which employers have been most successful in engaging and retaining Cadets?

**Evaluation question 2.4:** Which employers have been most successful in engaging and retaining Cadets?

**Finding:** The majority of employers' foundational motivation to join the program was to contribute to 'closing the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In addition, employers in the private sector were primarily motivated by the desire to demonstrate corporate social responsibility, while public sector employees, especially those offering community-facing cadetships, saw Indigenous cadets and employment as a strategy to offer a more effective service to Indigenous service users.

The two most common strategies employers used to support cadets in the workplace were mentoring and performance management. Best practice for engaging and retaining cadets comprised of providing relevant and meaningful work; nominating a program focal point such as a mentor, supervisor or representative from the organisation's human resources department; providing flexibility and compassion in times of crisis; supporting transition into employment within the organisation or elsewhere; and ensuring cultural safety.

## What motivates employers to take part in the program?

The majority of employers interviewed acknowledged the importance of employment in 'closing the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This was the foundation of their motivation for taking part in the program:

> … we want to have more Aboriginal teachers specifically to get in front of these non-Aboriginal kids to share and have a relationship with kids who are non-Aboriginal and have those discussions that no one ever has. **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

> [Our organisation] offers a mixture of public-private hospitals and also aged care facilities…We sort of had the opinion that Aboriginal people should be working both public and private. Whereas I think in the past there's been a leaning towards more government sector type employment. **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

For almost all of the employers interviewed, the Cadetships programs was part of a broader policy or strategy, such as the organisation's Reconciliation Action Plan or Aboriginal Employment Strategy.

> Yeah, I think so. We've had a Reconciliation Action Plan for at least the last 10 years. So, we're fairly well advanced. You know, it's an ongoing challenge to try and meet the objectives we have in there, but we've been relatively successful. You know, taking on cadets, undergraduates and graduates, if we can find them, and even experienced professionals if we can find them, is all part of that program. **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

> As a whole of health system, we are still growing the Aboriginal workforce, it is a priority for the organisation. So, we have a suite of quite robust policies and strategies that we're complying with. We have a mandatory workforce target. We have a mandatory Aboriginal workforce policy. We have an Aboriginal workforce strategy, so the cadetship is one of those...It's a program that we have identified as going to contribute to the target…**(excerpt from interview with employer)**

The nature of an employer organisation's sector significantly influenced their motivations to employ more Indigenous Australians. Employers in the private sector were primarily motivated by the desire to demonstrate corporate social responsibility (or perhaps Enduring Community Value is a more accurate reference[36]), while public sector employees, especially those offering community-facing cadetships, saw it as necessary to offer a more effective service to Indigenous service users.

> In Western Australia, Catholic Ed [sic] started on the basis of educating Aboriginal people, but our people left in the eighties and nineties when we got, sort of self-determining more. If we want to get these families back and be educated within our system, that's what we have to do, Aboriginalise [our workforce]. **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

Finally, for one employer the Cadetships programs was also seen as an important strategy in incentivising students to return home, after studying in another location.

---

[36] Fordham A.E, Robinson G.M, Blackwell B.D, *Corporate social responsibility in resource companies – Opportunities for developing positive benefits and lasting legacies* in Resources Policy Volume 52, June 2017, Pages 366-376

*Also, because they are local, they have the local context, they're got their own family connections and also then it's another initiative to bring them back home again. Whether it be working in urban or remote settings. **(excerpt from interview with employer)***

Employers were aware that Indigenous graduates were in high demand and while some said they would ideally like to retain cadets in the organisation at the conclusion of the cadetship, most were resigned to the fact they may choose employment with another organisation.

*I couldn't tell you what the percentage is…but it isn't high, but they've gone on to better things and we've encouraged them to start looking for jobs at the end of their degree and giving them time off so that they can go out and actively seek work. So, the majority of them leave and get jobs right away. **(excerpt from interview with employer)***

### How do employers support their Indigenous employees during the work placement?

The two most common strategies employers used to support cadets in the workplace were:

### Mentoring

The most common strategy used by employers to support cadets in the workplace was mentoring. Approaches to mentoring varied between employers, however it was more common for the mentor to be assigned to the cadet based on professional relevance, as opposed to cultural relevance (i.e. the mentor being an Indigenous person). This was due to the lack of Indigenous employees in some organisations or locations where the cadet was based. Some employers deliberately avoided asking Indigenous staff to mentor Indigenous cadets so as to avoid placing an additional burden on Indigenous staff.

*I'm the program manager and mentor. We're on a tight budget here. So that's one element of my job and it's a significant part, and it's important. But they have a mentor at the school and that is usually the teacher that they work with. And if they've got assignments and they need to reflect with somebody that's been there before them. But I tend to do more of the…if they have any, I suppose personal or emotional things, I think they are more comfortable with me as an Aboriginal person. **(excerpt from interview with employer)***

### Performance management

To ensure cadets had structured supervision in the workplace, some employers supported cadets in the workplace through performance management activities. In some cases, this involved extending the organisation's existing performance management procedures to cadets, however other organisations developed their own activities specific to the Cadetships programs.

*…every 12 months we do a development review where I go and talk to people they've worked with. I ask them what are their strengths and what are their weaknesses…we call it a development review because they're ongoing employment isn't tied to the outcome of it. It's all about objective feedback and working on trying to improve. And it also develops their soft skills around receiving feedback. **(excerpt from interview with employer)***

*They're put on a performance evaluation management program, so they have KPI (Key Performance Indicators) that they actually have mapped out and treated just like any other employee. **(excerpt from interview with employer)***

Other, less common strategies for supporting cadets in the workplace included:

- sending students to conferences
- arranging a formal induction or orientation to the workplace

- bringing cadets together for support and professional development at key points in time
- connecting cadets with external professional networks.

### *What specific career advancement opportunities do they provide Cadets/Indigenous employees?*

This evaluation question is addressed above.

### *How do outcomes vary by participant and between direct employer and provider models?*

Figure 11 below shows a sub-set of completion rates for cadets disaggregated by program model (means of engagement). Here, cases where no data was entered (outcome unknown) or where the outcome of 'other' was recorded (which represented a very small proportion of all cases) are excluded.

**Figure 11:** Estimated ICS cadetship participation outcome, by means of engagement (n=663)
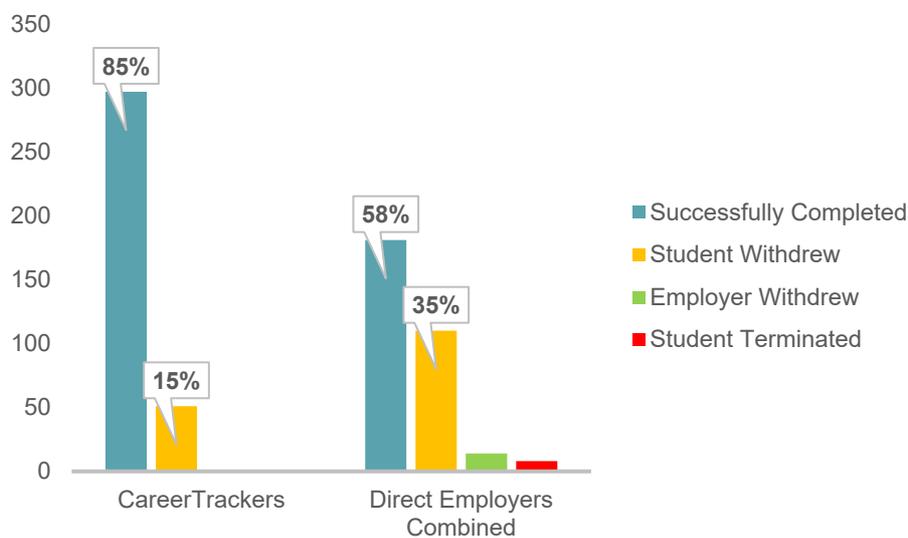


### *How many Cadets are placed into graduate employment programs?*

Among cadets interviewed, the most common pathway into the organisation was through a graduate development program. Cadets whose employer had a graduate development program were often able to progress to full employment, with many employers fast tracking cadets through the application process or waiving it altogether. Cadets whose host organisations did not have a graduate development program were less likely to gain employment with their host and more likely to feel frustrated about the lack of employment options (see page 64 for further discussion and recommendation).

### *Is there a best practice model that other employers could replicate?*

Building on the key determinants of work placement satisfaction among cadets (see page 53), the evaluation evidence indicates the following best practice evidence.

#### Providing relevant and meaningful work

Employers who demonstrated best practice provided cadets with meaningful and relevant work placements that were aligned with their field of study, professional interests and capacity. A meaningful work placement also required the work performed to be 'real', in other words, to give the cadet an opportunity to genuinely contribute to the needs of the host organisation.

*…we don't just sort of 'make up' projects [to give cadets] something to fluff around with over summer, these guys work here during the during the year and they fill needs in the business.* ***(excerpt from interview with employer)***

### Nominating a program focal point

Employers demonstrated best practice when they identified a focal point for the Cadetships programs. This person was sometimes also the cadet's mentor or supervisor (but not both) but was more often someone from the organisation's human resources department. The focal point fulfilled an important role in ensuring the administration of the program ran smoothly for cadets.

*…we're in quite a lot of contact. I usually catch up with them after their first month. So, it might be in the workplace and then after that it's on a quarterly basis as needed. Some of them need, I guess you can identify that they need a little more (support).* ***(excerpt from interview with employer)***

### Being flexible in times of crisis

Interviews with cadets revealed it was not uncommon for cadets to experience personal crises during their cadetship. When this occurred, best practice employers demonstrated flexibility and compassion and doing their utmost to ensure the cadet was able to maintain the cadetship or defer and return at a later date.

One employer discussed the sorry business facing one of their cadets. The employer said the relationship goes further than usual employer/employee role and often they were called on to support their cadets through sorry business and the financial hardships that may result. This employer understands this is an expected and necessary step in the partnership with people suffering through intergenerational trauma.

*Yeah, they gave me a lot of options like I could, you know, if I ever needed a break or whatever, I could talk to my manager. And like I discussed it with both CareerTrackers and my manager at the same time. And like, if I needed to come in late or end a bit earlier, I could set that up with my manager. So maybe I could miss like the peak hour and just come in at maybe like nine or 10 o'clock instead of having to get there at eight or whatever, yeah, just like different options to help me work around it.* ***(excerpt from interview with cadet)***

### Supporting transition into employment

Not all employers had the capacity to guarantee cadets a job after their cadetship. Similarly, not all cadets wanted to obtain employment with their host employer after their cadetship. Program providers expressed different perspectives on this issue, which may be influenced by the different types of employers they were working with.

*…I think the primary thought of most [employers] to give them the experience…very few of them who look at it and say I'll guarantee them a job regardless, they always have to get them in and see how they go first.* ***(excerpt from interview with provider)***

*Within the host companies, the conversion rate in CareerTrackers is 89%, and you know, it should be because, you know, we're investing in these students right out of high school…we want it to be that high, it needs to be that high. Because if not, then CareerTrackers is some charitable thing that looks good in a Reconciliation Action Plan that has no sustainability to it.* ***(excerpt from interview with provider)***

Demonstrating best practice did not necessarily mean employers had to guarantee cadets a job at the conclusion of the cadetship, rather, it mean that they should be clear about their capacity to do so, and actively support cadets to transition into graduate employment, whether that be with their own company or another. This included helping cadets identify and apply for suitable roles, or supporting their transition onto other programs, such as graduate programs or clerkships.

> *Unfortunately, we can't guarantee them a job, but we do try our hardest to get them jobs, but they have to prove themselves…and it just depends on what degree they're doing, we'll assist them to get into the graduate program if it's into nursing or other graduate programs we have, but we'll always assist them to find employment.* **(excerpt from interview with employer)**

### Ensuring cultural safety

Employers demonstrated best practice when they took steps to ensure cadets had access to a culturally safe workplace, without unintentionally 'out grouping' cadets. In this context, out grouping refers to efforts that aim to promote inclusion and workplace diversity but inadvertently isolate or create embarrassment for Indigenous staff (for example, identifying staff as being Indigenous when they do not want to be identified, or always expecting Indigenous staff to perform welcome or acknowledgement to country or speak at Indigenous celebrations). Strategies used by employers to ensure cultural inclusive and safety included:

- celebrating and including cadets in Indigenous events,
- ensuring cadets have access to psychological support services, such as culturally sensitive Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs),
- connecting cadets with Indigenous elders,
- providing cultural competence training to teams hosting cadets, and
- linking cadets with existing Indigenous networks within their organisation.

*What percentage of employers are government – local, state and federal?*

This evaluation question is addressed in Figure 2 on page 31.

## What do the outcomes tell us about the efficiency and effectiveness of this program?

**Evaluation question 3.1:** What do the outcomes tell us about the efficiency and effectiveness of this program?

**Finding:** The funding model could be improved by improving interactions with social security payments. Further efficiencies could be delivered by having fewer stakeholders that are capable of facilitating a greater number of cadetships.

While the cadets interviewed usually experienced good employment prospects, program withdrawals and allowing employers to offer cadetships when they are unlikely to offer a graduate job can cause dissatisfaction. Redesigning program elements to limit withdrawals and better facilitate graduate roles may improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the program.

Improving data collection through a fit-for-purpose database and measuring program outcomes through contracting arrangement will facilitate more effective evaluation in the future.

*How can the funding model be improved? (For example, could the same outcomes have been achieved with less funding? Could additional resources have enhanced the program outcomes? If so, how?*

Inside Policy identified several ways in which the funding model to be improved to increase efficiencies and coherence with other Commonwealth payments.

### Improve interaction with other payments

If a student transfers from another social security payment such as ABSTUDY to the Cadetships programs, there is little or no overall cost difference to the Commonwealth (assuming the amounts received by the student are relatively similar). However, about 1/3 of all cadets interviewed were not eligible for another social security payment, while others received the cadetship study allowance *in addition* to another social security payment (such as Youth Allowance or Single Parenting Payment) so in many cases the program comes at an additional cost to the Commonwealth.

| Recommendation: |
| --- |
| That NIAA obtain formal advice from DSS on how the CSA interacts with other social security payments, including ABSTUDY, Youth Allowance and the Single Parenting Payment. It is also suggested that clarifications are made to the ABSTUDY Policy Manual to ensure consistency in decision making. |

### Streamline contracting arrangements

One opportunity to increase the efficiency of the program is to have relationships with fewer stakeholders that are capable of facilitating a greater number of cadetships. This may include *only* using providers (or some other intermediary) to deliver cadetships, or only continuing to work with employers who are able to deliver a larger number of cadetships (including in consortium with other organisations). Most small employers would be willing to transition to a provider model, and those that are not may be able to grow their programs or act as a quasi-intermediary by placing cadets with their partner organisations. While consolidating and reducing the number of providers/employers would not result in lower administration fees, there would be savings in time taken to manage contracts with, and field enquiries from, multiple stakeholders.

| Recommendation: |
| --- |
| That NIAA increase the efficiency of the program by having relationships with fewer stakeholders (including providers and potentially larger employers) that are capable of facilitating a greater number of cadetships. |

There are several issues that need to be considered if NIAA is to transition from contracting employers directly to contracting providers to deliver cadetships. Firstly, the current support to cadetships is significantly over-invested in one provider (CareerTrackers) which facilitates almost 60% of all Commonwealth supported cadetships. While CareerTrackers' 'employer pays' operating model is the most cost effective, it is not suitable for all cadetships, as some employers that are otherwise able to offer a meaningful cadetship experience would be unable or unwilling to pay a sponsorship fee. This is especially the case for employers in the public and not-for-profit sector. AFLSportsReady's operating model, which does not require employers to pay a sponsorship fee, comes at a greater cost to the Commonwealth but is important in ensuring that students have access to cadetship employers who cannot pay a

sponsorship fee, including smaller businesses and those in the public and not-for-profit sectors.

There are some cadetship employers for whom it might not be feasible to transfer to one of the two-providers. This includes Commonwealth Government employers, university employers and potentially some other employers who feel that they are better placed to manage their own programs. In these cases, it is recommended that NIAA explore opportunities to create efficiencies by reducing the total number of contracts with direct employers. For example, cadetships with Commonwealth Government employers could be facilitated through a single entity such as the Australian Public Service Commission. Universities may be enabled to grow their programs and take on the role of quasi-providers by also placing cadets with partner organisations (as University of Adelaide and Macquarie University have done in the past).

| Recommendation: |
| --- |
| That NIAA explore the opportunity for the Australian Public Service Commission to coordinate Cadetships for Commonwealth Government agencies and departments to reduce the number of contractual relationships within the program. |

| Recommendation: |
| --- |
| That NIAA explore a greater role for Universities as providers, placing cadets within the university and external partners. |

*What improvements can be made to the collection of data for future evaluation?*

**Adopt a fit-for-purpose database**

One of the key challenges for data collection within the program was that ESS Web, the database used by Indigenous Employment Programs, including TAEG Cadetships, is primarily designed for employment programs (as opposed to education programs) where payments are made based on outcomes. Because of this, several fields that may have provided useful insights into the program were missing (e.g. name of the cadet's university) and some data (such as the name of the employer) was required at a time when it was unknown. Assuming that it is unlikely that the Commonwealth can revert to a custom-made database similar to that used for ICS, the most practical way to ensure that the database is fit for purpose would be to request changes to the ESS Web interface to enable the collection of a complete and accurate minimum dataset.

| Recommendation: |
| --- |
| That NIAA adopt a fit-for-purpose administrative database capable of capturing the recommended minimum data set by making changes to the current ESS Web interface. |

Once a fit-for purpose administrative database exists, NIAA should consider capturing the minimum data set outlined in **Annex G**. The new recommended measures not previously collected in either ICS or TAEG are highlighted in red.

Any limitation faced by evaluators was that the accuracy and reliability of program data was limited by inconsistent interpretations and data entry practices between contract managers.

> **Recommendation:**
>
> That NIAA develop a data dictionary to ensure consistent interpretation of administrative data across the program.

## Measure program outcomes

The ICS and TAEG Cadetships' contracting arrangements and method of data collection were not conducive to measuring program outcomes. Program outcomes are defined as the changes achieved by program beneficiaries (in this case, cadets) that occur as a result of their participation in the program, but do not describe their participation in the program itself. As the program outcomes may occur during or after the program has concluded (ex-post outcomes), they cannot always be accurately captured by a contract management system such as ESS Web. While fields in the administrative databases referred to program outcomes (e.g. "went onto further employment", "went onto further education" etc.), the data entered provided an unreliable measure of program outcomes as many of the outcomes had not yet been achieved.

Measuring program outcomes for cadetships is complex because the nature and design of the program means that most of the outcomes, with the exception of the cadet's academic performance, will not yet be evident at the conclusion of the cadetship. The fact that the conclusion of the cadetship also marks the conclusion of the contract between NIAA and the employer/provider, means that a contract management database such as ESS is not capable of effectively capturing ex-post outcomes in this context, because the required point at which data needs to be captured occurs after the conclusion of the contract. It is important to note that other IEPs that use ESS pay providers based on outcomes. In this context, payment milestones are a reliable proxy measure of employment outcomes, however this is not the case for cadetship employers/providers who are paid in advance or in arrears, depending on their individually negotiated contracts. While measuring program outcomes for cadetships is complex, it is not impossible, concluding that adopting an outcomes-measurement approach would support NIAA to demonstrate the impact of the program on cadets' employment and educational outcomes.

> **Recommendation:**
>
> That NIAA adopt an outcomes-measurement approach for Cadetships programs, including ensuring the necessary technical capability to collect data on program outcomes.

Evaluators recommend that NIAA focus on measuring three priority outcomes for cadets, highlighted in red on the revised program logic in Annex E. These outcomes have been recommended based on what is feasible in the given context, working within current constraints.

### Academic performance

Measuring academic performance will support NIAA to know whether the program is reaching those most at risk of not completing university. Measuring academic performance will also enable NIAA to monitor the possible negative unintended outcomes of the program. The most reliable way to measure academic performance is by the change in GPA between the start and end of the cadetship. Cadets are already required to produce a transcript of results at the beginning of the cadetship; however, a student's GPA is not recorded in the database. Measuring academic performance would require cadets to produce an academic transcript at the conclusion of the cadetship. A baseline measure would not be possible for students securing a cadetship in the first semester of their first year, however program data

shows that this only represents a very small number of cadets. Different GPA scales (7 point vs. 4 point) used by Australian universities would also need to be taken into account.

### Likely degree completion (within allowable time)

This measure is proposed as an alternative to measuring degree completion, which will be difficult within current constraints (except for university employers). The proposed measure is not whether or not the cadet completed their degree, but whether they are on track to complete their degree within the 'allowable time' parameters. It is important to remember that this does not provide a reliable measure of degree completion. This would require the actual course start date and the actual course length to be measured at the inception of the contract and a measure of actual or revised estimate course end date to be collected at the close out of the contract.

### Graduate employment

In order to be accurate, this data must be captured after the completion of the cadetship. It is recommended to use the same data point as the Graduate Outcomes Survey to allow for benchmarking. This would either require the contracting arrangements to be changed to obligate employers/providers to collect data after the end of the cadetship, or an alternative method of measuring outcomes will be required (see below for recommended options).

## Methods for measuring outcomes

Two of these measures (academic performance and degree completion within allowable time) can be measured through a fit-for-purpose administrative database, while the outcome of graduate employment requires a data point approximately four months after the conclusion of the cadetship. One option is to change the program contracting requirements so that contracts with employers/providers extend four months past the cadetship end date and/or obligate them to collect ex-post data.

### Job-seeker Survey

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) monitors outcomes for people participating in Commonwealth-funded employment programs through the Job Seeker Survey (also known as the post-program monitoring survey). The survey is sent by DESE to employment program participants, three months after exiting from any Commonwealth funded employment program, including cadetships. Results from the Job Seeker Survey are available in the quarterly Employment Services Outcomes (ESO) reports. While a stand-alone ESO report is available for employment programs under the Jobs, Land and Economy (JLE) program[37], data is not disaggregated to the program-level (i.e. for cadetships). NIAA may consider how employment outcomes could be measured through the Job-seeker Survey, which would require improved collaboration and information sharing between NIAA and DESE.

### Customisable outcomes measurement software

NIAA may consider using a customisable outcomes measurement software, such as Social Suite to measure program outcomes after the conclusion of the cadetship. In doing so, NIAA should take into account the willingness and capacity of employers/providers to collect program data, and seek ways to complement, not duplicate any existing data collection

---

[37] 2018 ESO report for JLE

systems. The option to automate data collection based on certain data points could also be explored.

## How does the program compare/relate to other programs?

**Evaluation question 3.2:** How does the program compare/relate to other programs?

**Finding:** CareerTrackers was reportedly modelled on the INROADS program, which was established in the USA in 1970, and currently operates in the USA, Canada and Mexico. The CareerTrackers model has been expanded to New Zealand where it is operated by Maori and Pacifika Islander Elders under the name TupuToa. Aside from the 'INROADS model', cadetships and internships in Australia have historically been most popular in the health sector, where increasing Indigenous employment is essential to increasing service uptake by Indigenous people.

In addition to the Cadetships programs, the Commonwealth Government provides the Indigenous Apprenticeship Program, Indigenous Australian Government Development Program, Away from Base, Indigenous Student Success Program, Work Exposure in Government, Indigenous Business Australia and Commonwealth Scholarships Programs for South Australia. There are also state and territory government programs, school-based programs and university enabling programs.

### *What evidence is there about the effectiveness of similar international/national programs?*

In undertaking the literature review, there was very little independent evidence of best practice from other comparable countries. The most notable example was the INROADS internship program, which is the program on which CareerTrackers was reportedly modelled. In addition, it is this program model that is the foundation for other Cadetship/internship programs in New Zealand and Papua New Guinea.

The INROADS internship program was established in the USA in 1970 and currently has 18 offices across USA, Canada and Mexico. The program offers paid, multi-year internships to college students from underrepresented groups, including American First Nations, African American and Latino/a. The organisation estimates that approximately 1,300 students participate in the program annually and 28,000 have graduated from the program as of 2017. In addition to a paid internship, the program also provides students with mentoring, training and development, and access to the program's vast alumni network. The INROADS program also includes a 'college links' program that supports underrepresented groups in secondary schools to go to college. The INROADS program is almost identical to the CareerTrackers program in most ways, even sharing common names for events such as 'Leadership and Development Institute' and 'Gala Dinner'.

The most recent (2017) 'Impact Report' available on the INROADS website[38] refers to an impact assessment commissioned by INROADS and completed by a consulting company called 'Changing Our World'. According to INROADS, the impact assessment found that:

- 96% of participants said the program had an impact on their overall career, 96% of participants said the program had an impact on helping them to understand how to behave in the workplace,

---

[38] INROAD Report to the Community (n.d.) [Accessed 25/03/20]

- 91% of participants said that the program had an impact on helping get their first job after college, and
- 76% of participants said the program had an impact on them advancing in their career or being promoted in the workplace.

INROADS was contacted for a copy of the impact assessment but did not reply, therefore the results listed above here cannot be independently verified. CareerTrackers also recently produced a 10-year 'Impact Report' (which was made available to evaluators). The Impact Report consists of a series of 10 impact statements but does not include a methodology or references. The impact statements include:

- CareerTrackers has facilitated 5,397 internships since 2009.
- The total CareerTrackers alumni is projected to reach 1073 in 2020.
- 1 in 3 participants have a family member who is currently or has previously participated in the program.

While self-published Impact Reports provide a useful indication of the effectiveness of a program, they do not provide the same standard of evidence as an independent evaluation.

Aside from the 'INROADS model', cadetships and internships in Australia have historically been most popular in the health sector, where increasing Indigenous employment is essential to increasing service uptake by Indigenous people. The largest publicly available evaluation of these programs was conducted in Victoria, covering various Indigenous traineeships, cadetships and graduate program placements in the heath workforce between 2010-2015. A key finding of the evaluation was that the employment status of program participants at completion and ex-post was not routinely collected, making it difficult to ascertain the impact of the program on employment outcomes and career progression.[39] A 'deep dive' in one region where the program was implemented found, of those who participated in the programs (79 in total), 88% of those who completed the program were employed in the health workplace at the time of evaluation compared to only 50% of those who withdrew from the program prior to completion.[40]

The lack of independent evaluations, for example of the 'INROADS model', and more importantly a lack of good quality data to enable rigorous evaluation with clear findings on cadet employment outcomes such as the above Victorian program, are barriers to understanding national and international best practice in the area of cadetships and internships for Indigenous people.

---

[39] DHHS. (2016). Evaluation of Traineeships for Aboriginal workforce development in Victoria. Final Report. Australian Healthcare Associates: Melbourne. Available at:
https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/Api/downloadmedia/%7BAA5BF304-C145-4BA1-952E-8A1E67CD5381%7D [Accessed 05/11/19]
[40] Ibid.

*What other programs could Cadetships leverage off to support Indigenous participation in education, workforce participation and career development/progression?*

**Commonwealth Government programs**

Indigenous Apprenticeships Program (IAP)

The IAP is facilitated by the Department of Human Services and is an entry level program offering Indigenous apprentices a nationally recognised certificate IV or diploma qualification and an opportunity to work for government at the APS2 or APS3 classification level. Apprentices are provided with a number of support mechanisms throughout the program including an Indigenous buddy and mentor. Upon successful completion of the program apprentices will advance to the APS3 or APS4 classification level. Better linkages between the Cadetships programs and the IAP could improve pathways for apprentices to gain a university level qualification.

Indigenous Australian Government Development Program (IAGDP)

The IAGP is facilitated by the Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, and is an 18-month program that provides employment opportunities across the APS. Participants complete a Diploma in Government and the opportunity to work at the APS 3 level (or equivalent), and advanced to the APS 4 level (or equivalent) upon successful completion of the program. Better linkages between the Cadetships programs and the IAP could improve pathways for apprentices to gain a university level qualification.

Away from Base

The cadetship opportunities for students studying outside of Australia's east coast capitals was limited. Cadets studying in Adelaide, Brisbane, Armidale and Darwin who travelled to other capital cities (mainly Sydney and Melbourne) to complete cadetships in their chosen field were interviewed. The costs of cadets' interstate travel were borne by employers (either directly or through the cadets' sponsorship fee paid to providers). To ensure that employer's willingness to pay for additional travel does not limit opportunities for students studying in rural and regional areas, NIAA may consider whether additional financial support could be made available to employers and sponsors to assist with the costs of interstate travel, for example through the Away from Base (AFB) program.

Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP)

The ISSP provides supplementary funding to universities to offer Indigenous students tailored support such as scholarships, tutorial assistance, mentoring, safe cultural spaces and other personal support services. The ISSP includes minimum standards for Indigenous staffing and governance to ensure that the program is accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. NIAA may consider how the ISSP could be leveraged to provide a greater role for universities within the program.

Work Exposure in Government (WEX)

The Work Exposure in Government program is an opportunity for high-performing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 10, 11 and 12 across Australia to learn about careers in the Australian Government. NIAA may consider how TAEG Cadetships could support WEX program participants to commence a cadetship with a Commonwealth Government agency or department from the outset of their university degree.

Indigenous Business Australia (IBA)

Program administrative data shows Indigenous owned businesses account for a relatively small proportion of cadetship employers. Additionally, the program's definition of employment outcome as being employed by an organisation does not necessarily align with the interests of graduates who may aspire to become entrepreneurs themselves. Better collaboration with Indigenous Business Australia may result in greater involvement of Indigenous business in the program and better pathways for aspiring Indigenous entrepreneurs.

### Commonwealth Scholarships Program for South Australia

The Commonwealth Scholarships Program for South Australia is a program that offers support for undergraduate, postgraduate and vocational education and training students to undertake study, training and internships in South Australia. The program aims to improve skills and employment opportunities for any student studying both vocational, undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications linked to priority industries and those experiencing structural adjustment and retrenchment in South Australia. Scholars are required to undertake (where appropriate) a paid internship equivalent to 20 business days. While this program is not Indigenous-specific, NIAA may further consider opportunities to collaboration between these two programs.

## State and Territory Government programs

State and territory governments offer various Indigenous cadetship opportunities in different sectors. Some of these programs advertise that students are eligible for ICS or TAEG funding, while others don't. Most of these employers do not appear in the ICS/TAEG administrative data, so it is unclear whether the programs are still operating without the funding. Examples include:

- The Victorian Public Sector Commission Barring Djinang Internship Program is a 12-week, paid work placement in a public sector department or agency for second and third year Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students undertaking their first undergraduate degree. Cadets get access to mentors, senior Aboriginal public sector employees and the Aboriginal Graduate Network and when they finish their cadetship and degree, get fast-tracked to the interview stage of the public service graduate development programme.
- The South Australian Public Sector Aboriginal Traineeship Program provides a Certificate III level qualification and the opportunity of ongoing employment within the SA public sector for Indigenous people. The program is targeted at mature age jobseekers who haven't previously worked in the public sector and who don't have a Certificate III level qualification. Each trainee will be supported with a dedicated mentor who is a public sector employee and has undertaken an Indigenous Mentoring Course.
- The Government of Western Australia Indigenous Cadetship Program for the Department of Communities, Child Protection and Family Support, which provides a fortnightly allowance and a 12-week work placement for Indigenous students studying social work, psychology or other human services qualifications. The Queensland Government also operates a similar program.

## Other programs

### School-based programs

The Cadetships programs are currently being utilised as a method of retaining Indigenous undergraduates in university and improving employment outcomes. What is less known is the effectiveness of Cadetships programs in encouraging Indigenous secondary school students to make the transition to university to ensuring financial support from the outset of their degree. Exploring collaborations with organisations working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students, including Indigenous led organisations such as the GO! Foundation, Ganbina and Yalari, as well as mainstream programs working with Indigenous youth such as the Aurora Internship Program, the Australian Indigenous

Mentoring Experience (AIME), Engineering Aid Australia (EAA) and the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation may be beneficial at increasing the reach of the program.

University enabling programs

Up to half of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enter university through alternative entry pathways such as special or alternative entry programs and enabling programs.[41] Enabling programs are generally foundation courses of one or more units of study designed to get potential students ready for higher education by helping them to build the skills they need for university such as literacy, numeracy and critical thinking. Better collaboration with enabling and special entry programs could improve the targeting of the Cadetships programs to students at greater risk of poor academic performance.

# 6. Conclusion

The Commonwealth Government supports Indigenous cadetships in various forms one of which is the ICS program, delivered as a standalone program under IAS JLEP. On 1 January 2018, the ICS program ceased and transitioned to the TAEG, which is part of a suite of Commonwealth-funded Indigenous Employment Programs (IEPs).

The objectives of the ICS and the subsequent TAEG programs are to improve Indigenous tertiary students' professional employment prospects, by supporting them to complete their undergraduate degree and transition into employment.

These programs link Indigenous undergraduate students to a Cadetship arrangement with an employer. The Australian Government provides the employer with a study allowance and book and equipment allowance, which is forwarded to the cadet, and an administrative allowance which is retained by the employer. The employer provides the cadet with no less than 12 weeks of paid work each calendar year and uses 'best endeavours' to offer the cadet full-time employment when they successfully complete their studies.

The number of Indigenous Australians who graduate university is below population parity and significantly below that of non-Indigenous Australians.

This evaluation included a literature review, analysis of administrative data, a review of program documentation and semi-structured interviews with cadets, employers, providers and universities. The goal was to:

- Understand the design and implementation
- Understand the impact
- Understand the policy implications and potential for future impact

*Design and Implementation*

The program contributes to a number of positive outcomes including:

- Providing an allowance that was considered adequate in meeting most cadet's basic needs, particularly those cadets living at home, those with another source of income or those with no dependants.
- The 60-day work placement requirement suited cadets still living at home, and the end-of-year work placement allowed them to focus on their studies during semester.
- The use of providers brought value to the recruitment process, administrative efficiency, creating awareness and scale of the programs through their extensive networks,

---

[41] Behrendt et. al. (2012). Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Final Report. [Accessed 07/11/19]

leveraging other funding sources and undertaking data collection. Providers were also able to make the program more efficient for employers, who may otherwise be disincentivised by the administrative requirements.

- The use of providers was also found to reduce the administration burden on NIAA, by having fewer contracts to manage. The university Indigenous Student Centres played a core role (but a relatively minor ongoing supporting role) in raising awareness of the program.
- Best practice employers offered flexibility when cadets experienced a personal crisis and enabled cadets to defer their work placement and return at a later time.
- Cadets who received mentoring and structured support in the workplace reported higher levels of satisfaction with the program.

However, this evaluation has uncovered the need for some program design improvements.

- The design of the programs did not appear to fully cater to the diverse needs of Indigenous students. There was no evidence to suggest Indigenous Australians had been consulted in the design and implementation of the Cadetships programs.
- One third of cadets interviewed expressed concern the providers were not able to provide a culturally safe environment outside of the work placement.
- This evaluation has identified financial stress as a key barrier to engagement with the program, particularly those with dependent children; those who were ineligible for social security payments; those who were living independently with no other financial support, and those who were responsible for supporting family members.
- Some cadets, especially those who completed end of semester work placements, reported feeling 'burnt out' by the lack of leisure time, particularly those who had relocated to attend university and who often had to choose between spending their summer working or reuniting with their families and maintaining connection to country.
- Program rules around the allowable time for degree completion and prohibiting the deferral of cadetship are not meeting the needs of some cadets, whose preference is to reduce their study loads to 75% or may need to defer university for a range of reasons including mental health, physical health, pregnancy and the likelihood some cadets will also be primary caregivers at a younger age.
- Employers found the program had not kept pace with changes in universities over the last two decades, and that the program design needed updating, to include things like an extended program beyond three years for longer degrees, customising the cadetship now that some universities are offering courses over trimesters, and considering extending courses to postgraduate degrees.
- There are a number of Indigenous study and work support programs in place offered through the Commonwealth Government, discussed in detail at the end of the report. This can create confusion among all parties to sift through the programs and determine what support is available to cadets more broadly.
- The interaction between welfare payments and cadetship payments is unclear to students, particularly Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY.
- There were fewer opportunities in certain sectors (particularly for students studying degrees in the 'Arts') and at times no opportunity for graduate employment with the host employer. This can have an unintended gender bias.
- While employers and providers felt the program was valuable and important, they expressed some dissatisfaction with:
  o contracting arrangements and program eligibility criteria,
  o payment of invoices in arrears,
  o declining funding for direct employers, and
  o at times difficulty in general communications.
- While the findings from qualitative interviews indicate that the program is valuable to participants and contributes to improved education and employment outcomes, this evaluation was limited by the lack of availability of program data on student outcomes.

The overall conclusion is the program is generally effective in meeting the objectives of assisting cadets to complete study and gain employment (as stated above) but not for all students and not in all circumstances.

The recommendations for improvements are to be read in the context of improving an already effective program.

Whilst the design of the programs did not appear to fully cater to the diverse needs of Indigenous students, the positive outcomes of achieving professional experience, career direction and financial support were noteworthy, indicating that the cadetship has contributed to the intermediate outcome of encouraging 'more Indigenous students to graduate' and 'more Indigenous students have professional qualifications'. Analysis of the education outcomes for the 50 cadets interviewed suggests the cadetship enabled degree completion.

There is no documented evidence to suggest Indigenous Australians had been consulted in the design and implementation of the Cadetships programs. This is a shortcoming that must be addressed moving forward to ensure the program is culturally safe, relevant and responsive to the complex needs of students across remote, regional and urban contexts, differing age ranges, as well as enlarging the scope to cater for carers and those cadets who have community, familial and cultural obligations.

### Understanding the Impact

The evaluation found the program is meeting the objectives of increasing the likelihood of university completion and obtaining a job. It found a cadetship increases a student's chances of graduate employment and also provides an incentive to increase academic performance and complete their degree. The benefits provided by the cadetship are both financial and non-financial.

Whilst the financial benefits are clear, less so are the so-called 'soft-skills' gained by the cadet during the placement. These include:

- The most common reason cadets gave for why the cadetship improved their academic performance was that it enabled them to apply the technical knowledge and skills gained in the work placement to their university assignments, as well as gaining presentation skills and self-confidence.
- Cadets said the cadetship had provided them with greater self-confidence and improved interpersonal and communication skills which they assessed as important skills that prepared them for graduate employment.
- Nine cadets reported the cadetship enabled them to build professional networks that would improve their chances of graduate employment.

Furthermore, there is developing evidence to suggest that a cadetship may act as an incentive for Indigenous students to make the transition from secondary school to university, by ameliorating the financial and motivational barriers that currently prevent them from doing so. A greater investment in rigorous data collection on cadets' education and employment outcomes would add strength to these claims.

The vast majority of cadets interviewed were broadly satisfied with the cadetship program. Even where cadets had one or more negative experiences with the study allowance or work placement, they almost exclusively agreed the experience was worthwhile and resulted in improved education and employment outcomes.

More than half the cadets interviewed felt the study allowance was adequate to meet their basic needs. However, those cadets with dependent children; who were ineligible for social security payments; were living independently with no other financial support; and/or were responsible for supporting family members, could experience financial stress during their cadetship.

Employers and providers felt the program objectives were valuable and important. Whilst they were initially dissatisfied with elements of the program's management, this has improved since the program has transitioned from PM&C to NIAA.

*Understand the policy implications and potential for future impact*

While there is no doubt Commonwealth support for Indigenous cadetships is an effective and worthwhile policy, there are areas in which the Cadetships programs, and their future impact, could be improved. The evaluation's recommendations are based on the experiences of cadets participating in the program and the experience of employers, providers and universities in implementing it.

One opportunity to increase the efficiency of the program is to have relationships with fewer stakeholders that are capable of facilitating a greater number of cadetships. This may include only using providers (or some other intermediary) and those employers who are able to deliver a larger number of cadetships (including in partnership with other organisations). While consolidating and reducing the number of providers/employers would not result in lower administration fees, there would be savings in time taken to manage contracts with, and field enquiries from, multiple stakeholders. Any further transition to a provider or intermediary model should be balanced with ensuring cadets have access to meaningful and culturally appropriate work placements.