

# Whole of Community Engagement Initiative

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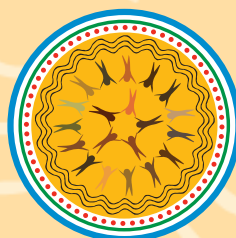
## ABORIGINAL ADULT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LITERACY AND NUMERACY IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

### A STATISTICAL OVERVIEW

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Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor Indigenous Leadership  
Charles Darwin University

11 September 2017



Whole of Community  
**Engagement**  
Initiative



Figure 1: WCE initiative logo

The WCE logo was created at the beginning of the initiative to represent unity and a shared vision. The design was created by Darwin based Indigenous artist Jessica Sariago, who has Djaru heritage from the WA Kimberley region.

The narrative, on which the design is based, is available on the WCE initiative website . The logo was co-developed by Dr. Lisa Watts, Ms. Donna Stephens and Ms. Aurelie Girard in consultation with other WCE staff.

Go to: <https://remotengagetoedu.com.au/about/>

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Wendy Kennedy and Lorraine Sushames have been core members of the Consultative group on LLN for the past two years. Combined, they have over forty five years of experience in the LLN sector. WCE thanks them for their generous and patient sharing of knowledge and understanding, for their fortitude and determined effort to try to make things better.

## DISCLAIMER

This document reports objectively on the statistical analysis of a sample of available data. The information presented was written by the stated authors in consultation with a working group and does not necessarily represent the views or opinions of the WCE initiative as a whole or of the Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership at Charles Darwin University.

## Suggested citation

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## Statement of support

Adults are the first teachers of our children. By the time a young person is 15 years old they need to know their own language at a different level. They need to have a level of understanding, of the meaning of words, and of the power of knowing. As leaders in our communities, we want our people to have a deep understanding of their own languages, our cultures and our traditions.

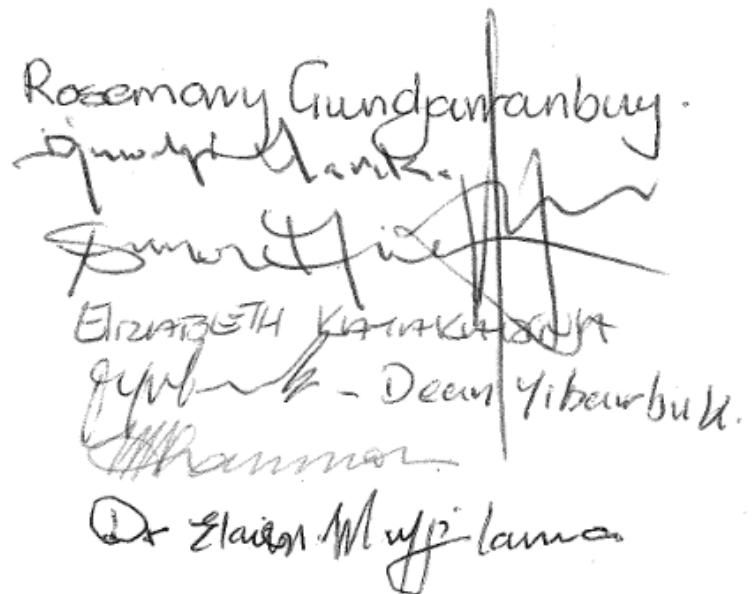
We also know that our people need this understanding of English Language, Literacy and Numeracy to help enable a future that we can see together, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

These skills are needed so that we can

- Continue to care for our country
- Fully participate in all the jobs in our communities
- Go on to further education
- Talk confidently to government and services about our issues and negotiate our needs
- Grow our own businesses that will make the future bright in our communities
- Support our children and grandchildren in their education so they will have all the successes they deserve

This Report provides our people, the Commonwealth, NT and local governments, universities and other education and training organisations with some data that shows this is a big issue for Aboriginal people in the NT.

We ask all these people to read this Report and join with us to work through the solutions that will help improve our English Language, Literacy and Numeracy skills.



Rosemary Gundjarranbuy.  
Djuwalpi Marika.  
Simon Fisher.  
Elizabeth Katarinja.  
Dean Yibarbuk.  
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Whole of Community Engagement initiative, 1 September 2017

## Foreword

The first point that I would like to make comes from my experience with a rural boarding school for boys where 98% of the students were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. The leadership that comes from that school is fantastic, and encourages students to speak their own languages in the school, all the time. What that school showed me is that you don't have to sacrifice your language or your culture to get an education. Neither should we make that choice for Aboriginal communities.

This Report grew out of a strategic priority project on LLN and a successful pre-conference workshop on adult Aboriginal English LLN during the Indigenous Leaders Conference here at CDU in 2016. The collective Action Statement arising from that workshop called for a strengthening of the research evidence base and the need for a statistical overview of English LLN in the NT. This Report describes the situation in the NT as best we can at the moment. The data comes from multiple sources including from organisations that have generously shared their LLN assessment findings.

My second point is that the data contained in this Report is stark. What it clearly identifies is that there is a gap in the education spectrum for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the NT. While we may seem to have looked after the young, looked after the teenagers - built their English literacy - this Report shows that (despite best efforts) they are not getting the English and numeracy they need in school. Therefore, we have this massive literacy problem when they become adults. The data shows the majority of Aboriginal adults in the sample don't have the LLN skill levels needed to participate in vocational education, the workforce or higher education and English LLN has implications across many aspects of life, in today's world, not only work and education.

Governments have been voicing commitment to Aboriginal control and increased participation in, and contribution to, society and the economy. But if they truly want to hear the Aboriginal voice to inform policy decisions and action and - to benefit from that voice, from that rich knowledge and essential contextual understanding - then it has to be recognised that English LLN is a core issue. Till now it has never been given priority here in the NT. We see a lack of responsibility for policy direction and there is no leadership or coordinated effort in the adult space. Solutions require collective, inter-sectoral, multi-partisan and community level responses. It is a long-term goal which will require leadership across all sectors – governments, business, university and other education and training providers, informing and informed by Aboriginal leaders. There are successful models in other states and countries from which we can also draw direction.

My final point is that targeted research is required to investigate, develop, collate and evaluate LLN implementation and delivery models that are appropriate to the needs and circumstances of individuals and communities. We also need to investigate community-wide approaches and build the capacity of Aboriginal communities to deliver LLN services themselves so that they can provide assistance to individuals when they need it, and at the level they need it. I believe building community capability is fundamental to any success and the transferability of successful models could benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia. I encourage you to read this Report, digest the data and be part of discussing potential solutions.

Professor Adrian Miller  
Pro Vice Chancellor – Indigenous leadership,  
Charles Darwin University

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## Definitions

**ASGC – Remoteness Structure.**<sup>1</sup> Provides a standard structure for defining remoteness associated with the road distance to a range of services defined by the ABS. The NT does not have any areas defined as ‘major cities’ or ‘inner regional Australia’. Rather, the Greater Darwin area is defined as “outer regional Australia”, and the remainder of the NT is classified as either remote or very remote. A map has been provided in *Appendix 4*

**Indigenous Areas** are medium sized geographic areas that are created by adding together Indigenous locations. These locations generally represent small Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with a minimum population of 90 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander usual residents.

**Foundation skills**<sup>2</sup> encompass learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy skill development and also include “employability” skills such as problem solving, using technology, organising and team work.

**Language, literacy, and numeracy (LLN)**<sup>3</sup> are skills that relate to how we communicate with each other. **Language** is the use of words, verbal structures and gestures to convey meaning including the communication forms of speaking, listening, reading, writing and visual communication. **Literacy** is being able to read and use written information, including being able to contextualise writing in appropriate ways. It involves bringing together speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing. **Numeracy** is the practical application of mathematical skills to understand, use and evaluate information in numerical and graphical forms. It includes basic number skills, spatial and graphical concepts, use of measurement and problem solving.

**NT Region** – a geography used by the NT government to divide the NT into broad regional areas. These are: Greater Darwin Region (consistent with the ABS area), Rest of Darwin Region, East Arnhem Region, Katherine Region, Barkly Region, Alice Springs Region. A map has been provided in Appendix 4.

**Median age** – the age where half the population is older, and the other half is younger. If you line ages from youngest to oldest it will be the age in the exact middle.

**Proportion (or percentage)** – converts the count of something into a proportion out of 100. This makes it easier to compare quantities that are different from each other. The count is always part of the population. In most cases this will be the NT adult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

**Employed**<sup>4</sup> – ABS defines “employed” as those people aged 15 years and over who over the last week: worked for one hour or more for pay, profit, commission or payment in kind in a job or business or on a farm; worked for one hour or more without pay in a family business or on a farm; or were employees, employers or own account workers who were temporarily not at work.

**Unemployed** – ABS defines “unemployed” as those people aged 15 years and over who were not employed but were actively seeking work and were available for work.

**Not in the labour force** – ABS defines “not in the labour force” as those people aged 15 years and over who were neither employed nor unemployed. This could include people who were caring for others, who were in full time education, who were on government benefits or payments associated with caring, sickness, disability or old age, or who were disengaged such that they were not registered as seeking work and available to work.

<sup>1</sup> ASGS is the Australian Statistical Geography Standard which provides a statistical framework for geographic areas used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

<sup>2</sup> Definition taken from the *National Foundation Skills strategy for Adults* (2012)

<sup>3</sup> LLN definition from Adult Learning Australia, Department of Education and Training, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Definition taken from ABS Labour Force, Australia (6202.0)

## Terminology

*The terms 'Aboriginal', 'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' have been used throughout this report. The authors recognise these terms are not universally accepted and we acknowledge the diversity of languages, cultures and connections to lands and regional and language groups that make up the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.*

In the report, generally:

- 'Aboriginal' is used to describe the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the NT
- 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' is used to describe the Australian population as a whole
- 'Indigenous' is used to describe things such as collective languages
- 'Non-Aboriginal' and 'non-Indigenous' are used to describe populations that are not Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander nor both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

## List of Acronyms

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
LLN	Language, literacy and numeracy
SPP	Strategic Priority Project
NT	Northern Territory
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NATSISS/NATSIHS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SEE	Skills for Education and Employment (Program)



# PART ONE

## Introduction

### 1.0 Purpose and limitations

The Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative received a clear message when working closely with Aboriginal leaders, six remote NT communities, and other stakeholders over the past three years. **Being able to speak, read, write, learn and communicate in English and to apply these skills in life is viewed as essential by those Aboriginal adults who have educational aspirations for themselves, their family and community.** From the broad consultation processes associated with the initiative we know that there is much work to be done in relation to English LLN policy and provision for Aboriginal people in the NT.

On the recommendation of stakeholders the Action Statements on Indigenous adult English LLN (March and September 2017, *refer to Appendix 1*). identified the need for a stronger evidence base to shine the light on the issue, and this consensus statement has provided the impetus for this Report.

Information sources point to low levels of Adult English LLN capability as being a barrier to NT Aboriginal adults accessing and advancing in post school education and training. Low levels of LLN also hinder the extent of participation in other areas of life such as: working and having a career; developing businesses; engaging with public services (such as health, the law, and housing); having a voice in policy-making; and social networking.

However, there are a number of data sources that can help us to gain a better understanding of the issue. These sources include statistical indicators around economic / social wellbeing and participation that have been found to have an association with levels of competency in English LLN, and assessments of English LLN skills that have been undertaken in association with education and training courses or at the request of employers or community organisations. All current data sources have limitations and there has been no comprehensive evidence base on which to build holistic policy responses and to confirm the extent of the need for long term funding and sustained resourcing. The limitations around data include:

- Insufficient scope and coverage of surveys to adequately represent the adult Aboriginal population;
- assessment processes that do not accommodate people with English as a 'second' language;
- data collected is not generally shared or "pooled" to increase its use and value;
- low survey participation rates; and
- self-reported responses that may not be accurate.

Despite the implementation of successful models, tools and resources there is also no single repository or sharing space for this important information in the NT.

This Report presents statistics about the NT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **adult population**, who we define as being **aged 15 years and over**. It uses multiple data sources that can provide information about parts of the picture showing NT Aboriginal adult competency in English LLN. This includes:

- The population and geographical context;
- the cultural and language diversity of NT Aboriginal peoples;
- an investigation of characteristics that are related to LLN competency;
- an assessment of English language, literacy and numeracy levels from different sources;
- a socio-economic overview.

The Report's purpose is to increase insight and understanding of the extent of low levels of adult Aboriginal LLN, who it is affecting, and areas of greatest need. It provides a basis for consultation to inform collective action and to inform or prompt further research.

Our vision is a long-term joint commitment to policy and action, and the resourcing of workable models and systems for those individuals, families and communities who aspire to learn and use English and maths in their lives.

### **In summary:**

- In each section of the Report we take a look at the data and then comment on what the data tells us.
- The evidence base presented on NT Aboriginal adult LLN skill levels is not comprehensive.
- Data from statistically representative sources indicate that low English LLN is likely to be a significant issue across the population of NT Aboriginal adults.
- There has been no sample of literacy and numeracy assessments that represent the whole population of NT Aboriginal adults. Definitive conclusions based on this sample of 660 assessments drawn from multiple sources cannot be made about the entire population.

## 2.0 Background

### The Strategic Priority Project on adult English LLN

WCE and the Strategic Priority Project (SPP) have been funded through the Australian Governments' Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) and implemented through the Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor of Indigenous Leadership at CDU. This SPP has focussed on building momentum for system-wide strategic change in the NT through increased engagement around LLN within government, non-government, academic, business, Industry and RTO sectors.

Our aim has been to:

1. Catalyse support for and interest in the development and implementation of an NT adult English LLN policy framework/strategy
2. Increase understanding of the related issues, including: of the social and economic impacts of low levels of English LLN and the flow on benefits of improvement for individuals, children and families, organisations and society
3. Foster and facilitate Indigenous-led responses and amplifying the Indigenous voice in relation to this issue
4. Implement, document, promote and support innovative LLN delivery models

A workshop on adult LLN was held at CDU in November 2016. This workshop resulted in *an Action Statement on Indigenous adult LLN in the NT*. This Statement has been refreshed at a pre-conference Symposium in September 2017 and re-released as the *Updated Action Statement on English Language Literacy and Numeracy for Aboriginal adults in the NT (Sept. 2017)*. Refer to Appendix 1.

The need for a statistical overview such as this was clearly expressed in the March 2017 Action Statement. As a result, the SPP employed a Research Fellow, Fiona Shalley to work together with Allison Stewart (SPP Manager) to collect and analyse data from multiple sources and to prepare this Report and a pictorial presentation which can be used for consultation and educational purposes.

### Language Literacy and numeracy: Context

Young people and adults who struggle with reading, writing and working with numbers are more vulnerable to poverty, social exclusion, unemployment, poor health, demographic displacement and migration, and the impacts of manmade and natural disasters (UNESCO, 2013)<sup>5</sup>. As the economy continues to change, skill requirements to get employment become more complex as people are expected to operate in a world that is more digital, more technologically based, and where good communication is fundamental to operating effectively and being heard (OECD, 2013). A longitudinal study of adult learning found that adults need to keep improving their literacy and 'essential skills' after they finish school. Their continued improvement has substantial economic benefits both to the individual and to society (Reder, 2011).

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<sup>5</sup> From UNESCO's 2nd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education, *Rethinking Literacy*, Chapter 1 – Literacy as a Foundation for adult learning.

Academic research supports the importance of being English literate and numerate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote contexts (Australian National Training Authority Research Advisory Council 1998; Guenther 2006; 2010; Kral & Falk 2004; Kral & Schwab 2012; Young, Guenther & Boyle 2007). These studies reinforce that learning English and being confident with numbers are important not only for getting a job but also for full participation in the social and economic contexts in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live, including individual and community capacity building and being able to operate effectively in “two worlds” (Kral & Falk 2004, Sushames 2006; Guenther et al. 2011; Guenther, Gurruwiwi & Donohoe 2010).

*Why do you need English? “Because I need to understand the language that governments use. The language that we don’t, that we haven’t... We don’t understand. True story. The words that they use is higher higher hierarchy language. And most of us we don’t understand what they say and sometimes they just do it, they just talk in like a speed...speed..like too fast for us to understand.*

*For me, I need to go into do my literacy skills in in speaking and listening to understand the words that they use. Words that I don’t know. The words that I don’t understand. The words that I haven’t heard, ever, since in my life. The hardest words mala, so I need to go into it and learn more, the meanings, to make me understand.”*

(Evonne Mitjarrandi 20-7-17, WCE Transcript from Galiwin’ku)

Currently there is no comprehensive source of English Adult LLN data for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of NT. The Commonwealth and other States/Territory governments use results from the 2011/12 *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies* (PIAAC) survey to help them understand literacy and numeracy competency for their adult population. The PIAAC survey however did not sample adults in very remote Australia, and did not cover populations living in discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This significantly impacts the usefulness of the data for the NT and has an even bigger impact on the contribution of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population to the NT results – that is, the English LLN skills of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Territorian are masked in the results released for the NT. The implications of this deficit for policy development and socio-economic research are broad.

*“I’ve got little bit skills that I could speak in English, and reading, and writing but...I can learn more so...Sometimes I always not confident to talk to other Balanda mob, because I always putting in front shame and I don’t like, feel like to talk. That’s why. If I learn more in L&N, I get more and more talent to speak to all the Balanda in confident way. So I can think and I’ll be proud myself. But sometimes I always put the shame into the front. Maybe that’s not good for me or for my kids, in future. So...maybe my kids will not confident like me...So I need to ask you people to come to visit Galiwinku to learn teach us for more LN so I can be strong leader in this community... And, I’ll be...one day I’ll be talking to Balanda in confidence...speaking...yeah.”*

(Chris Wanambi 20-7-17, WCE Transcript from Galiwin’ku)

# PART TWO

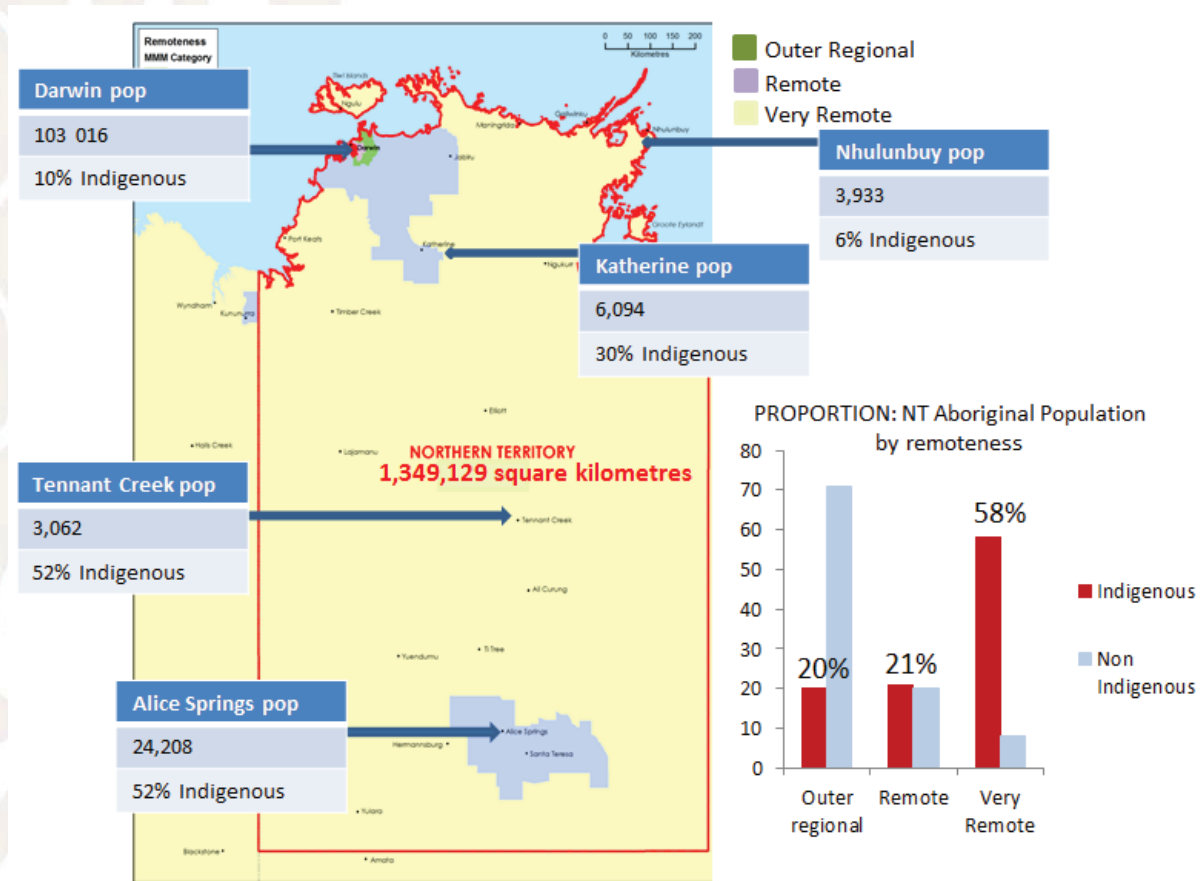
## Demography and culture

### 1.0 The Population context – the NT is vast and sparsely populated

The Northern Territory (NT) is the third largest Australian State/Territory (after Western Australia and Queensland) covering an area of over 1,349,129 square kilometers. However, it is the least populated and has fewer than half as many people as Tasmania.

Sparse populations and large distances mean delivery of services is challenging, logistically more complex and takes longer. This factor is often compounded by weather conditions.

FIGURE 1: Population Summary, NT



Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2011

## Population numbers and remoteness

In 2011 there were 68,850 people in the Northern Territory who identified as being Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander – that is about 30% of the total NT population (231,292) (ABS, Census, 2011).

Australia's Indigenous population is defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as the number of people who said they were of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin in the Census. In the NT, 96% of the Indigenous population identified as Aboriginal, 2.5% as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and the remaining 1.5% as Torres Strait Islander. For this reason, this report will use "Aboriginal" to refer to the NT population as a whole. We recognise this term is not universally accepted and we acknowledge the diversity of languages, cultures and connections to lands and regional and language groups that make up Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population grew by 21% between the 2006 and the 2011 Census. An ABS analysis <sup>6</sup> of the population increase found that 30% could not be explained by natural increases (more people being born than people dying) and that 90% of the increase was in non-remote areas of Australia. The analysis concluded that a change in people's decision to identify as being Indigenous was a significant contributor to the increase in the population size. This had less impact on the size of the NT population (which grew only modestly - 8%) than it did for the Indigenous populations in other states. This means the NT Aboriginal population has had relatively stable growth between the 2006 and 2011 Censuses whilst the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population outside the NT has grown significantly.

The 2011 Census also found that in the NT, one in five Aboriginal people lived in the greater Darwin region (20%), slightly more lived in remote areas (21%) and the remaining 58% lived in areas described as very remote Australia.

Since the 2006 Census, there has been a population shift from very remote regions into remote areas and greater Darwin. However, **nearly 3 out of every 5 Aboriginal people in the NT still live in areas classified by the ABS as very remote Australia.**

TABLE 1: PROPORTION OF NT'S ABORIGINAL POPULATION, by Remoteness Areas

	Greater Darwin region (Outer Regional)	Remote Australia	Very Remote Australia
2006	19%	18%	63%
2011	20%	21%	58%

Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing 2006, 2011

<sup>6</sup> ABS, Census of Population and Housing: Understanding the increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Counts, 2006 – 2011.(2077.0)

## Age profile of the NT Aboriginal Population

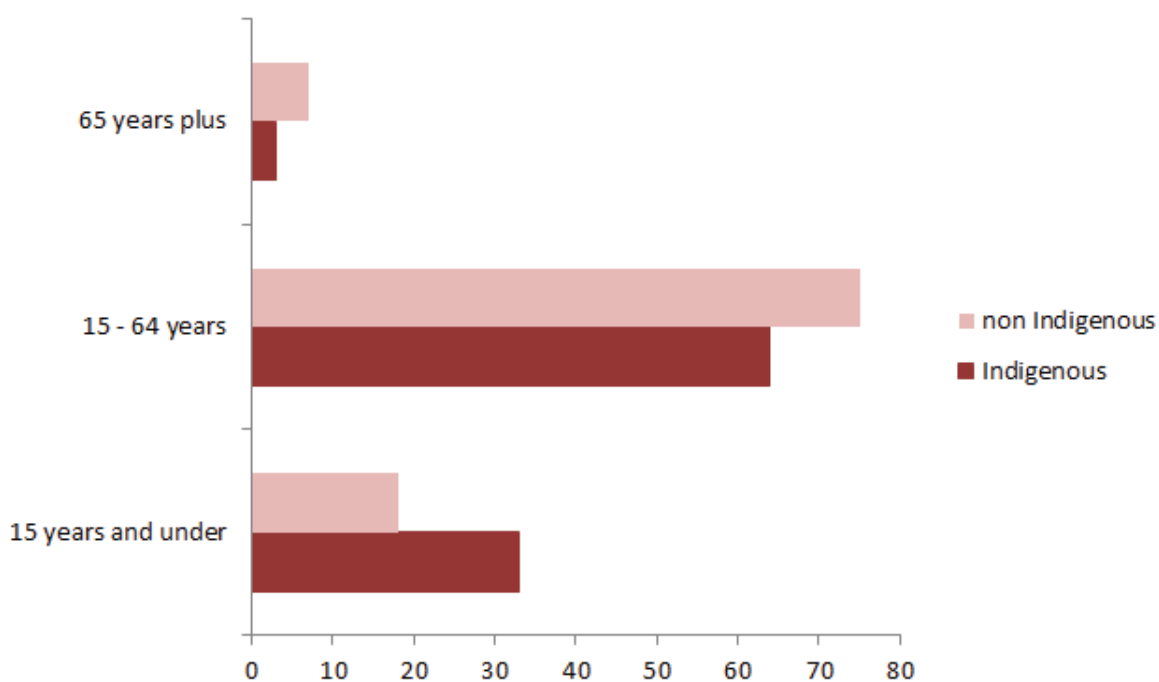
Children under the age of 15 years made up a third (33%) of the Aboriginal population (Census, 2011), almost double that of the non-Indigenous population (18%).

Nearly two thirds (64%) of Aboriginal people were aged between 15 and 64 years compared with three quarters (75%) of non-Indigenous people – this is commonly called the ‘working age’ population.

The small proportion of Aboriginal people aged 65 years and over was less than half that of non-Indigenous people (3% compared with 7%).

**This paper defines the adult population as being aged 15 years and over, which is exactly two thirds (66%) of the NT’s Aboriginal population.** Therefore, compared to the non-Indigenous population, NT’s Aboriginal people are young, there are fewer working adults and these adults are likely to have greater caring responsibilities for children.

FIGURE 2: NT AGE PROFILE by Indigenous status

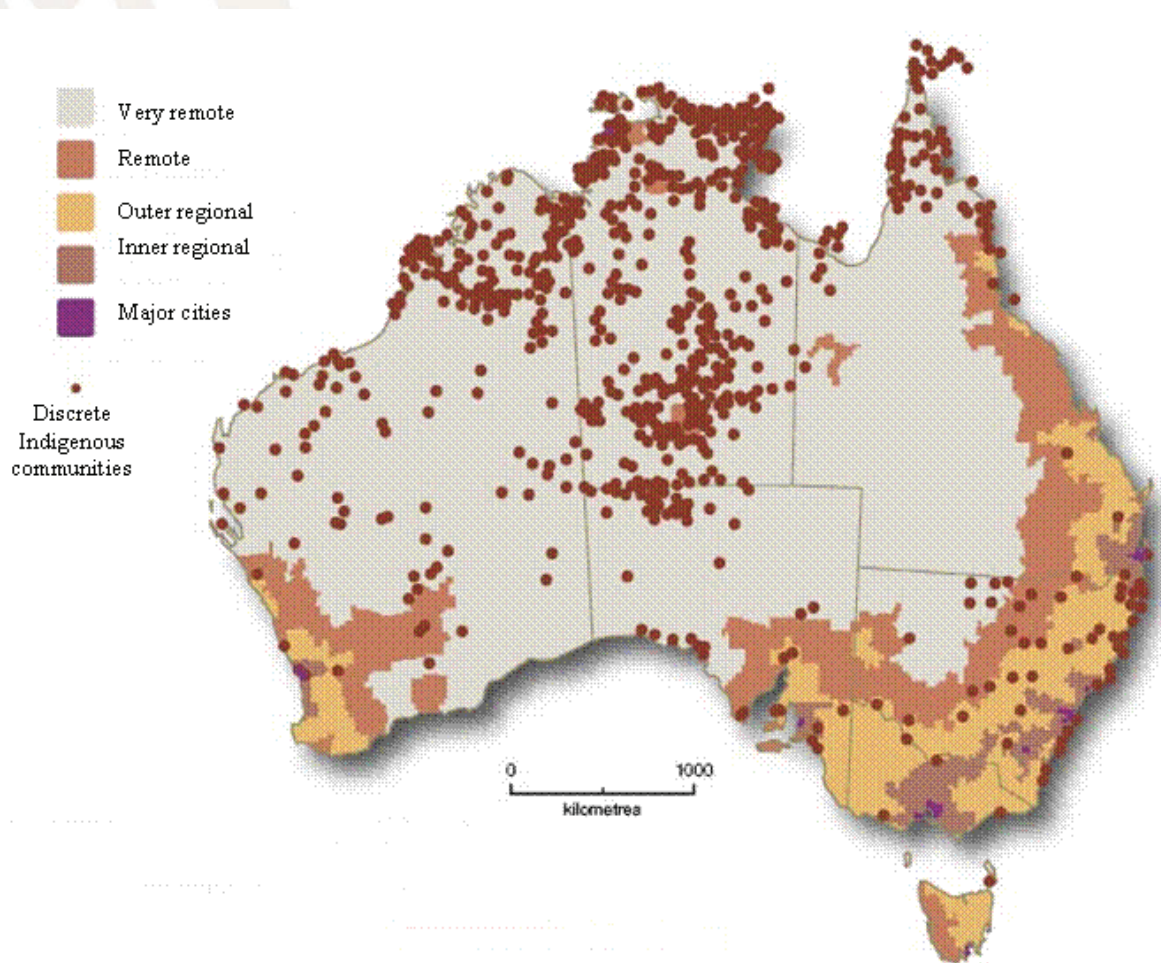


Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2011

## Population spread

The Northern Territory has around 600 discrete (separate) Aboriginal communities/homelands and outstations. Ninety percent of these are located in very remote Australia. Of these communities, only six have populations greater than 1,000 people. These remote communities and outstations generally have small populations and are dispersed across a large land mass.

FIGURE 3: MAP – Australia's Indigenous communities, 2006



Source: ABS, *Housing and Infrastructure Needs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities (4710)*



TABLE 2: 2011 Census population for NT major communities outside Darwin and Alice Springs

Major communities	Population 2011 Census	Major Communities	Population 2011 Census
Ali Curung	486	Milikapiti	406
Alpurrulam	415	Milingimbi	1,017
Amanbidji	83	Milyakburra	156
Amoonguna	267	Minjilang	269
Angurugu	794	Minyerri	441
Areyonga	218	Mt Liebig	166
Atijere	164	Naiyu Nambiyu	391
Barunga	285	Nganmarriyanga (Palumpa)	343
Belyuen	173	Ngukurr	973
Beswick (Wugular)	496	Nturiya	95
Binjari	224	Numbulwar	625
Bulla	125	Nyirrip	376
Bulman (Weemol)	275	Papunya	376
Canteen Creek (Wutunugurra)	399	Peppimenarti	162
Daguragu	192	Pigeon Hole	116
Engawala	136	Pirlangimpi	331
Eva Valley (Rum Jungle)	538	Pmara Jutunta	192
Finke (Aputula)	150	Ramingining	766
Galiwin'ku	1,890	Rittarangu	88
Gapuwiyak	825	Robinson River (Mungoorbada)	240
Gunbalanya	1,040	Santa Teresa (Ltyentye Purte)	502
Gunyangara	139	Tara	53
Haasts Bluff	147	Titjikala	187
Hermannsburg (Ntaria)	537	Umbakumba	430
Imangara	90	Wadeye	1,927
Imanpa (Mutitjulu)	421	Wallace Rockhole	63
Jilkminggan	272	Warruwi	399
Kalkarindji	279	Willowra	203
Kaltukatjara (Docker River)	266	Wilora	110
Kintore (Walungurru)	412	Wurrumiyanga (Nguiu)	1,349
Pine Creek (Kybrook Farm)	80	Yarralin	246
Lajamanu	586	Yirrkala	649
Laramba	229	Yuelamu	189
Maningrida	2,036	Yuendumu	585

## Population growth by age and 'region-ality'

According to population projections produced for the NT Government the Aboriginal working age population will grow to more than 67,000 in 2041. They estimate that the growth rate of the population aged 65 years and over will be even faster. These population projections forecast there will be about 76,500 Aboriginal adults in the Territory by 2041.

Over the next 25 years, the total Aboriginal population will age by about 5 years (to a median age of 28.4 years) and the growth rate for the "working adult population" will be higher for Aboriginal people (1.4%) than for the non-Indigenous population (1.2%). These social changes will have implications for policy around increasing economic participation such as getting people jobs or developing local businesses, and for providing care and services for the larger population of elderly people.

TABLE 3: POPULATION ESTIMATES AND PROJECTIONS, by Age Cohort, NT, 2011 to 2041

	2011	2016	2021	2026	2031	2036	2041	Average annual growth rate 2011-41
<b>Aged under 15 (no.)</b>								%
<i>Indigenous</i>	22 519	23 196	24 057	25 985	27 877	29 518	31 165	1.1
<i>non-Indigenous</i>	30 115	33 586	37 063	39 893	42 181	44 252	46 448	1.5
<i>Total population</i>	52 634	56 782	61 120	65 879	70 057	73 771	77 613	1.3
<b>Aged 15-64 (no.)</b>								
<i>Indigenous</i>	44 185	48 268	52 528	55 849	59 340	62 958	67 250	1.4
<i>non-Indigenous</i>	121 632	129 486	136 740	144 850	153 907	163 409	173 377	1.2
<i>Total population</i>	165 817	177 754	189 268	200 699	213 247	226 367	240 628	1.2
<b>Aged 65 and over (no.)</b>								
<i>Indigenous</i>	2 146	2 800	3 700	4 939	6 255	7 939	9 433	5.1
<i>non-Indigenous</i>	10 695	15 994	21 040	25 853	29 974	33 580	36 533	4.2
<i>Total population</i>	12 841	18 794	24 741	30 791	36 229	41 518	45 967	4.3
<b>Median age (years)</b>								
<i>Indigenous</i>	23.7	25.0	25.9	26.7	27.5	28.2	28.4	
<i>non-Indigenous</i>	34.7	35.0	35.6	36.1	36.6	36.9	37.0	
<i>Total population</i>	31.4	32.2	32.9	33.5	34.0	34.4	34.7	

Source: Northern Territory Population Projections, Main Update (2014 Release)

The NT government has divided the population into broad regions – the regions of Greater Darwin, Rest of Darwin, East Arnhem, Katherine, Barkly and Alice Springs. Their population projections suggest that Aboriginal populations in the regions with the largest urban centres (Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine) will continue to grow at stronger rates and have the largest populations of Aboriginal people (2.9% in the Darwin Region and 1.4% in the Alice and Katherine Regions in 2025).

## Population mobility: moving to live in another place

Analysis by Biddle (2009) using Census data from 2001 and 2006 pointed to a stark difference in the patterns of migration for Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people in remote and very remote Australia.

Non-Indigenous people are much more likely to move from one place to another to live or work. In 2006, Aboriginal people living in remote towns, town camps and in communities had the lowest likelihood of permanently moving house over the previous five years.

Biddle also found that in general when Aboriginal people did move, they moved to an area that was in the same State or Territory, and capital cities were amongst the most common destinations. His investigation shows that Aboriginal people living in remote Indigenous areas<sup>7</sup> between 2001 and 2006 were:

- less likely to move to an area relatively far away
- more likely to move to an area next to the area they came from
- less likely to move to an area in a different state or territory, and
- more likely to move to an area with an already high Aboriginal population.

By contrast, generally the movement of non-Indigenous people was very 'one way' - from remote to non remote areas. Biddle's analysis suggests the NT Aboriginal population will be a more stable population source for population growth in the NT than the non-Aboriginal population.

## The importance of the Aboriginal population to regional development in the 'North'

In July 2016 the then opposition (and now incumbant Government) announced it's strategy for "the most extensive return of local decision making to local Aboriginal communities"<sup>8</sup>. They pledged a 10 year road map that will see Aboriginal communities take control of: housing; local government; education and training; health; looking after children; and law and justice. Their plan recognised that "building, supporting and investing in strong Indigenous governance is necessary to ensure local people drive local solutions and Indigneous organistaions are supported."

This position is now coupled with the following statement from the 2017 NT Economic Development Framework<sup>9</sup> – "Aboriginal Territorians, the perspectives they bring, the land and resources they own, and the unique oppourtunities they pursue, are a key driver and partner in the Territory's economic future."

These statements acknowledge the importance of NT's Aboriginal peoples to the NT Government's strategies associated with developing the NT economy and increasing communities' control over their local economic context.

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<sup>7</sup> Indigenous areas are geographic groupings of one or more Indigenous locations. They form part of the Indigenous Geography in the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS).

<sup>8</sup> Taken from Media Release "The most extensive return to local control in the Territory's History", 25 July 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Taken from the *Northern Territory Economic Development Framework* website, <https://edf.nt.gov.au/>

The Australian government's White Paper on Developing the North <sup>10</sup> also states that "The north will only truly achieve its potential with the participation of all people who live there, including Indigenous Australians". Recognition of the importance of Aboriginal economic engagement, maximised employment, and participation in business development is also key to the current Australian Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy.<sup>11</sup>

## What does this tell us?

### NT Aboriginal people:

- Are a highly significant population group (30% of the total NT population);
- own significant land and resources, and are integral to economic development in the NT and Northern Australia;
- are much more likely to be living in areas described as very remote Australia;
- are living in dispersed communities across the NT, many of which are small - a challenge to external service delivery;
- are more likely than the non-Aboriginal population to be young, however the working age population (15 to 64 years) and the older population (65 years and over) are expected to grow at faster rates over the next 25 years; and
- are a more stable supply of population contributing to the growth of the NT because they are more likely to remain in the NT.

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<sup>10</sup> *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia*, <http://northernaustralia.gov.au/files/files/NAWP-FullReport.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> The *Indigenous Advancement Strategy* is the Commonwealth Government's primary policy on Indigenous Affairs

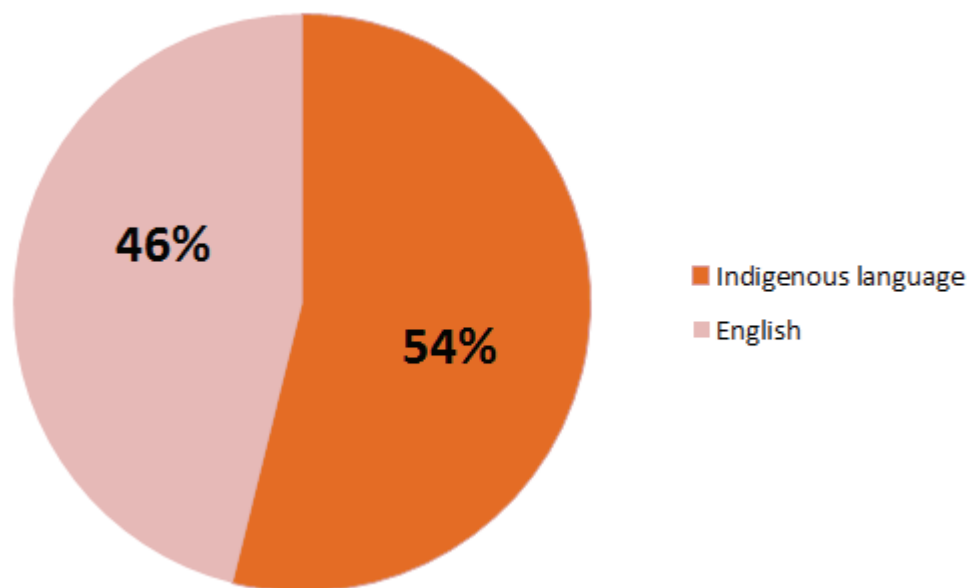
## 2.0 Cultural and language diversity

The Northern Territory is not a monolingual community. Census data from 2011 identifies that nearly a third (31%) of the *total NT population* speaks a language other than English as their main language spoken at home.

Around 85% of Aboriginal people in the NT identify with a clan, tribal or language group and more than half (54%) also speak an Indigenous language as their main language (NATSISS 2014/15) - in many cases they speak multiple Indigenous languages

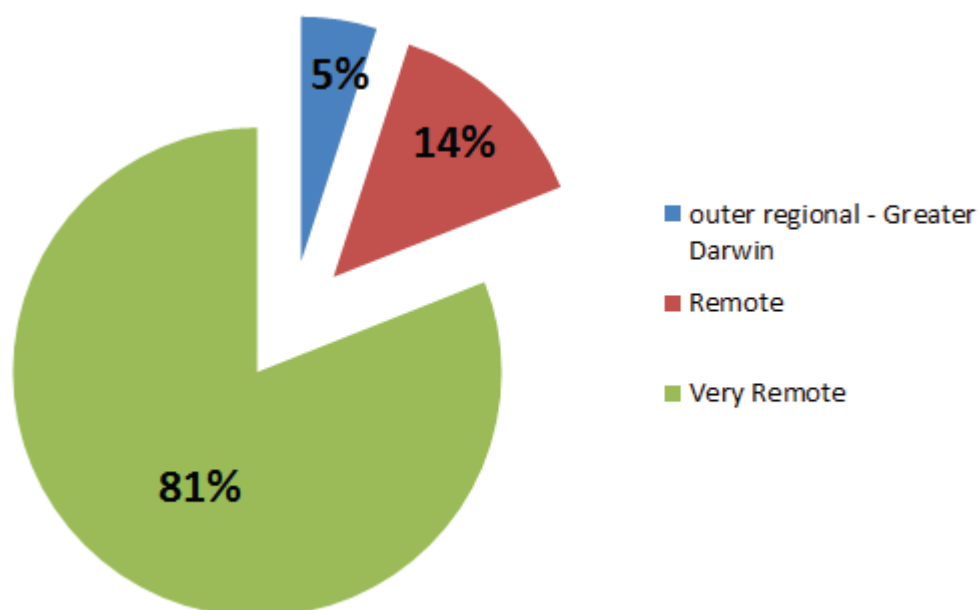
The proportion of people speaking an Aboriginal language as their main language at home is higher as remoteness increases. More than 8 in 10 Aboriginal people living in very remote NT speak an Indigenous language as their main language compared to 1 in 25 in Greater Darwin, and about 1 in 7 in remote NT (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 4: PROPORTION – Aboriginal people NT, main language spoken at home



Source: ABS, 2014/15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey

FIGURE 5: PROPORTION – Indigenous language spoken as main language, by remoteness



Source: ABS, 2014/15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey

## Language and wellbeing

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultural heritage, identity and knowledge is passed through each generation by language and it is integral in affirming and maintaining wellbeing, self-esteem and a strong sense of identity<sup>12</sup>.

An analysis of NATSISS 2008 data by the Commonwealth Government Office of the Arts found positive associations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people speaking Indigenous languages and general wellbeing and other positive socio-economic variables:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who speak an Indigenous language had markedly better physical and mental health, were more likely to be employed, and less likely to abuse alcohol or be charged by the police.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (15 – 17 years) in urban and regional areas were more likely to attend school if they spoke an Indigenous language.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who spoke, understood or were learning an Indigenous language were more likely to have a post school qualification.

<sup>12</sup> From the House Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities – Our Land Our Languages, 2012.

*“Our language is like a pearl inside a shell. The shell is like the people that carry the language. If our language is taken away, then that would be like a pearl that is gone. We would be like an empty oyster shell.”*

*(Yurranydjil Dhurrkay, Galiwin’ku, North East Arnhem Land<sup>13</sup>)*

In the book documenting the history of Bilingual education in the Northern Territory, Gale (2017) describes the importance of first language literacy and numeracy to the successful learning of English. “Research in bilingual education programs emphasise the enrichment of education success through recognition of the importance and interaction of both languages. “Valuing students’ first language and facilitating first language, literacy and numeracy inevitably enhances learning capacity and language maintenance, but it also enhances learning and capacity in English”.<sup>14</sup> During WCE community consultations Aboriginal people reiterated the centrality of their own languages to their cultural practice, identity and connection to country, however many understood the importance of supporting their children to learn English and wanted to improve their own (whether in employment or not). This is supported by findings from Collins and Lea (1999) in their review of Indigenous Education in the NT where they concluded that parents generally wanted their children to develop competence in English, but not at the expense of their Indigenous languages.

Following are some records of conversations within WCE:

*“...We want our children to have their language and English, side by side.”*

*(Rosemary Gundjarranbuy, Galiwin’ku community, 2017 WCE Transcript)*

*“Our passion is to try and bring our Yolŋu children to be literate in both Yolŋu matha and English...in my experience I see kids who can read and write in Yolŋu matha so we expect from that, Yolŋu matha is a driving force to English.”*

*(Yalmay Yunipingu, Yirrkala community, 2017 WCE Transcript)*

## What does this tell us?

### NT Aboriginal people:

- Are likely to speak a language other than English as their main language, and this is even more likely in remote and very remote areas’;
- have strong and enduring connection to culture and identity through their own languages; and
- choose both their own languages and English as important to their children’s education.

<sup>13</sup> From the House Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities – Our Land Our Languages, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Gale, K. (2017). *Lessons Learned from Bilingual Education* (pages 49 -60) in *The History of Bilingual Education in the Northern Territory* edited by Devlin, B., Disbray, S., & Friedmane, N. Springer, Page 53.

## PART THREE

### Building the evidence: Aboriginal adult LLN in the NT

There are no comprehensive sources of information on NT Aboriginal adult competency in English LLN to provide an overall understanding of the situation. In order to make conclusions about the likely LLN skills of the NT Aboriginal adult population we need to draw on sources of information that either assess the competency levels of the whole of the population, or represent the whole population through a statistically designed sample of people who are randomly chosen.

This section of the report uses data from representative data collections (data that can talk about the whole population) to start to build the picture of what the LLN issue looks like for the NT.

#### 1.0 The Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)

The PIAAC is an international survey that provides comparable measures of literacy, numeracy (using numbers) and problem solving in technology rich environments (PSTRE) in a country's main language. The survey was conducted in Australia by the ABS in 2011/12.

In the survey scores are generated for each measure (literacy, numeracy and PSTRE). For literacy and numeracy proficiency, scores were grouped into 6 skill levels (below Level 1 through to Level 5). PSTRE scores were grouped into four skill levels (below Level 1 through to Level 3).

The measures have been designed to identify the number/percentage of adults with appropriate skills to function effectively in the current world – this is, at least Level 3 for literacy and numeracy, and at least level 2 for PSTRE.

The survey included people aged 15 to 74 years who lived in a 'private dwelling' and **excluded people who lived overseas, who lived in very remote areas of Australia, and who lived in discrete Indigenous communities.**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) generally says that these exclusions are “unlikely to impact on national estimates, and will only have a minor impact on any aggregate estimates that are produced for individual states and territories, except the Northern Territory where the excluded population accounts for over 20% of persons.”<sup>15</sup> However, they disproportionately impact the accuracy and reliability of results representing the NT Aboriginal population who are even likely to live in very remote areas (58%), and in discrete communities (estimated to be between 60% - 70%).

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<sup>15</sup> ABS, General Social Survey 2010 (4517.0)



Therefore, the Aboriginal population is not properly reflected in the published results for the NT and the results mask the real skill levels of the NT population as a whole.

Although Indigenous status was collected in the survey, no results for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, nationally or at State/Territory levels, have been publically released by the ABS.

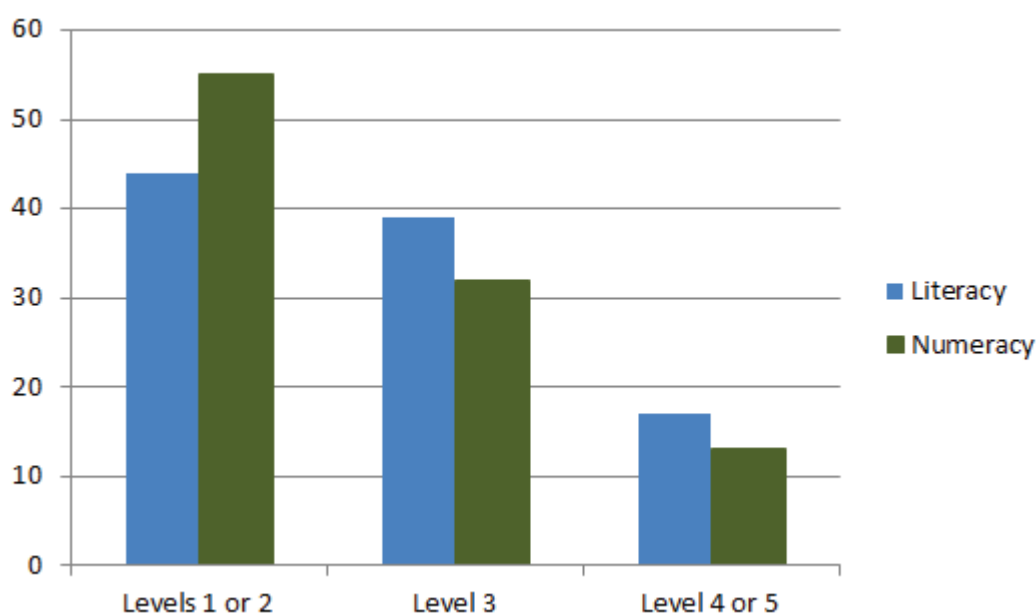
### PIAAC national findings

The 2011/12 PIAAC data showed that of the Australian population aged between 15 and 74 years:

- 44% had literacy at Levels 1 or 2
- 39% had literacy at Level 3
- 17% had literacy at Levels 4 or 5
- 55% had numeracy at Levels 1 or 2
- 32% had numeracy at Levels 3
- 13% had numeracy at Levels 4 or 5

This is shown in the figure below:

FIGURE 6: PROPORTION – Skill level in numeracy and literacy, all Australian adults 2011/12



Source: ABS, Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies 2011/12

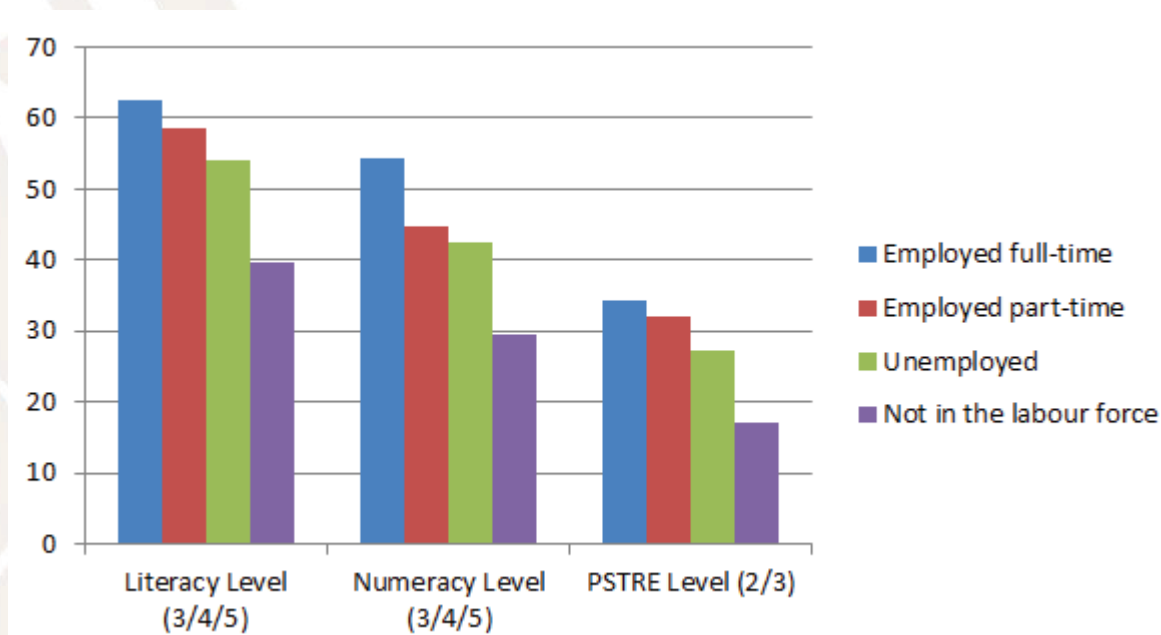
### The link between overall PIAAC findings and whether people have a job

Despite these limitations, PIAAC data can help us to understand other things that may influence or be influenced by levels of English LLN capability, such as whether people have a job or not. Results from the 2012/13 survey show:

- “employed” people generally have higher levels in all three skills compared to people who were not in the labour force (see definitions)

- “unemployed” people generally have higher skills than the people who are not in the labour force (see definitions)
- people who are “not in the labour force” had the lowest skills (see definition).
- **The highest skills in literacy, numeracy and PSTRE were from people who were working full time.**

FIGURE 7: PROPORTION at each skill levels, literacy, numeracy and PSTRE – by labour force status, 2011/12



Source: ABS, Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies 2011/12

#### Definitions of words and terms used to describe labour force status

**Employed** – ABS defines “employed” as those people aged 15 years and over who over the last week: worked for one hour or more for pay, profit, commission or payment in kind in a job or business or on a farm; worked for one hour or more without pay in a family business or on a farm; or were employees, employers or own account workers who were temporarily not at work.

**Unemployed** – ABS defines “unemployed” as those people aged 15 years and over who were not employed but were actively seeking work and were available for work.

**Not in the labour force** – ABS defines “not in the labour force” as those people aged 15 years and over who were neither employed nor unemployed. This could include people who were caring for others, who were in full time education, who were on government benefits or payments associated with caring, sickness, disability or old age, or who were disengaged such that they were not registered as seeking work and available to work.

## What does the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSIS) tell us about this topic?

NATSISS 2014/15 data showed that more than half of NT's Aboriginal adults were not in the labour force (53%) compared with 16% of NT's non-Indigenous adults.

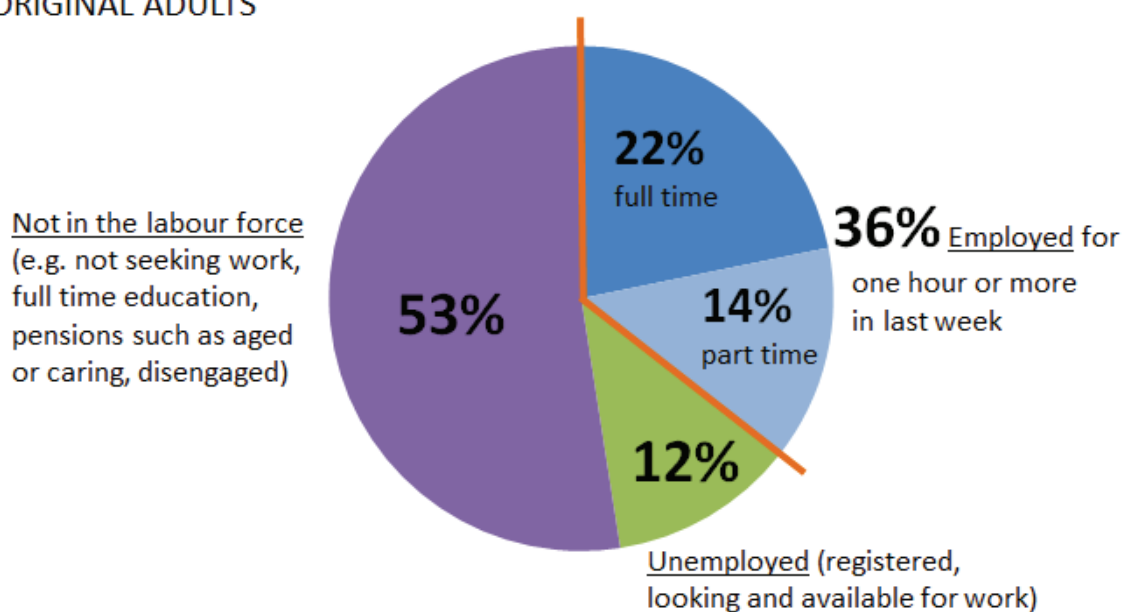
That is, there is a significant proportion of the adult population who are not in employment or actively seeking employment. It covers people who:

- Are studying full time and not in any employment;
- are on government benefits for sickness, caring, disability or old age;
- have no source of income (e.g. people who are disengaged from seeking employment and/or who are provided for by others in the community).

Just over one third of NT's Aboriginal adults were employed (36%) with 22% in full time work and 14% in part time work (equivalent to at least one hour of work in the last week). This compares to 82% of NT's non-Indigenous adults. The remaining 12% were unemployed. To be counted as unemployed, people need to be registered with Centrelink, and seeking or available for work. These differences are illustrated in the graphs below:

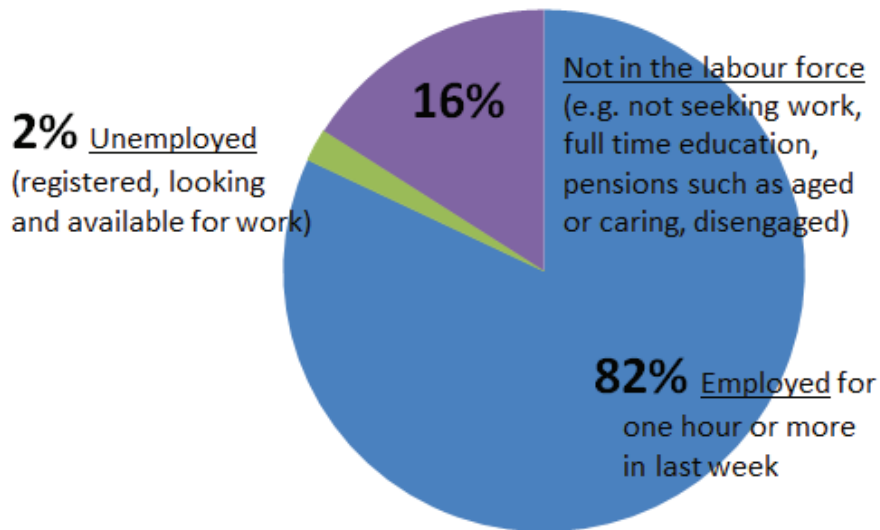
FIGURE 8: PROPORTION, NT Adult population by labour force status

### ABORIGINAL ADULTS



Source: ABS, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2014/15

## NON-INDIGENOUS ADULTS



Source: ABS, General Social Survey 2014

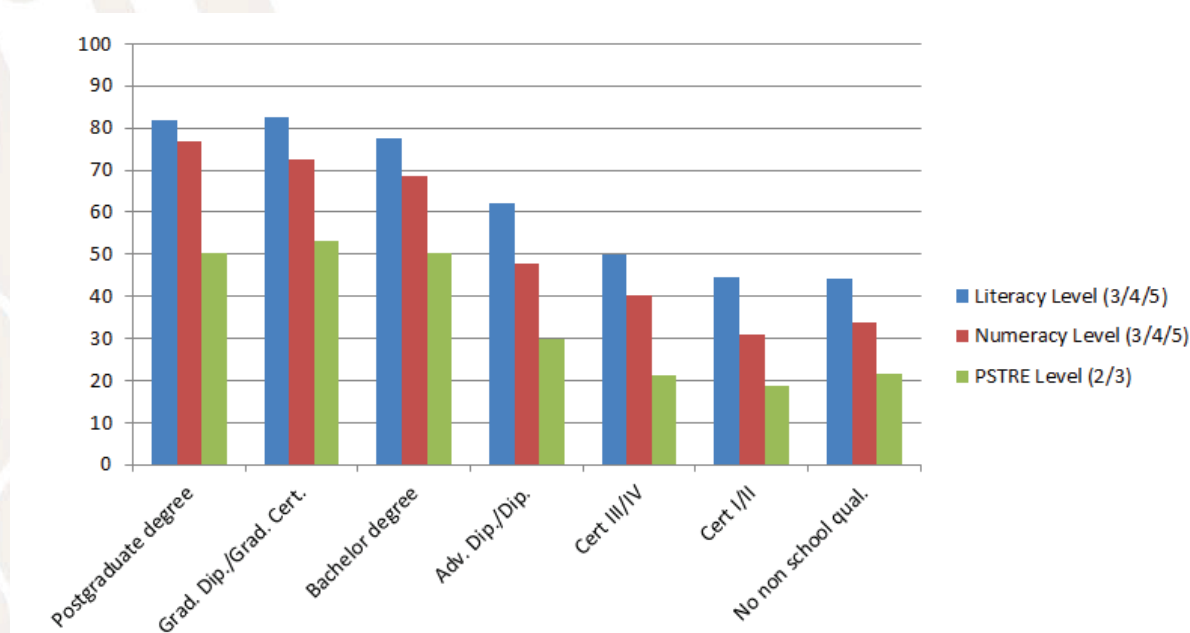
### What does this tell us?

- People who are employed full time are more likely to have higher skills levels in literacy, numeracy and PSTRE as measured by the PIAAC, followed by people employed part time, people who were unemployed, and then people who were not in the labour force.
- Most of NT's Aboriginal adult population is not in the labour force. The strong association between labour force status and English LLN competencies suggests this part of the adult population are likely to have lower literacy, numeracy and PSTRE skills compared to those who are employed or unemployed.

## The link between PIAAC findings and education qualifications

As expected, PIAAC data also shows that **people who have a higher education qualification (Bachelor degree or above) were more likely to have achieved a score at Level 3 or above in literacy and numeracy, and Level 2 or above in PSTRE.** The highest assessed skill levels were generally achieved by people holding the highest post-school qualification.

FIGURE 9: PROPORTION at each skill level - by highest non-school qualification, 2011/12

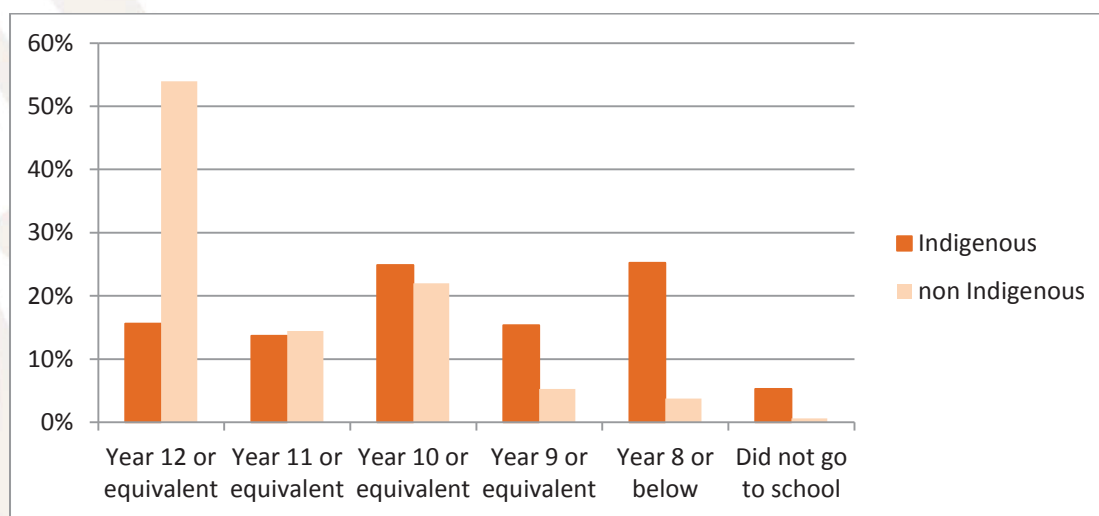


Source: ABS, Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies 2011/12

Data taken from the 2011 Census show that of Aboriginal adults (15 years and over) living in the NT:

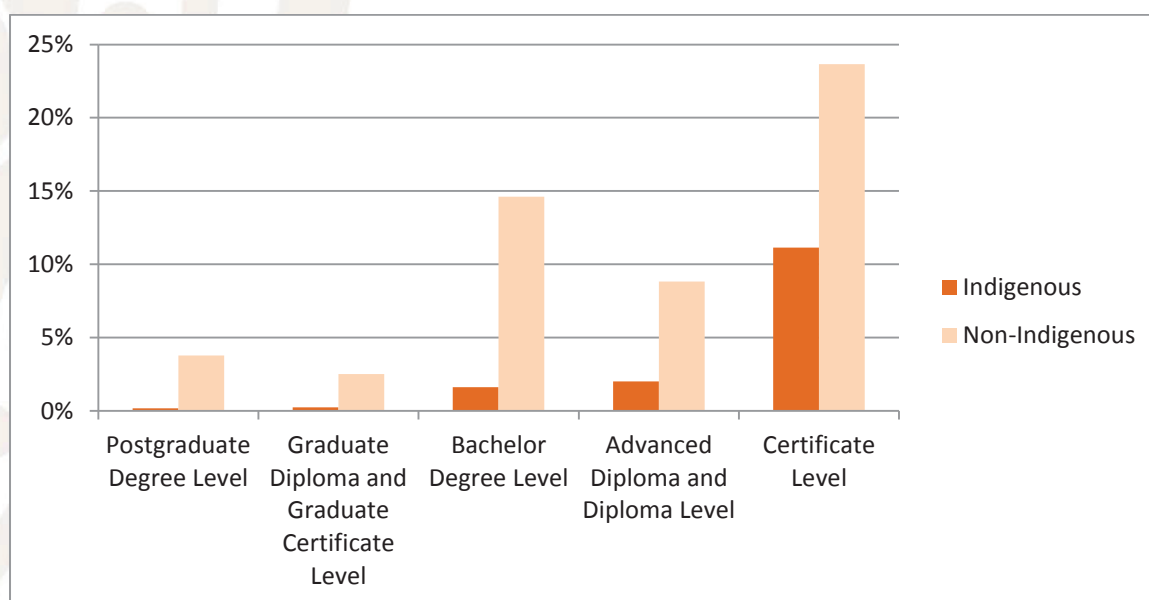
- 16% have completed Year 12 (or equivalent), compared with 54% of the non-Indigenous population; and
- one quarter (25%) completed Year 8 schooling or below, compared with 4% of the non-Indigenous population;
- two percent (2%) had a Bachelor degree qualification, or above compared with 21% of non-Indigenous adults.

FIGURE 10: PROPORTION Adult NT population: Highest level of schooling by Indigenous status



Source: 2011 Census of Population and Housing

FIGURE 11: PROPORTION Adult NT population: Highest level of post school qualifications, by Indigenous status



Source: 2011 Census of Population and Housing

## What does this tell us?

- People who have higher education qualifications are more likely to have higher skills levels in literacy, numeracy and PSTRE as measured by the PIAAC.
- People holding degrees at the Bachelor level and above have the highest skill levels.
- People holding Certificate level qualifications and people with no post school qualifications have the lowest skill levels.
- Less than 5% of NT's Aboriginal adult population has a Higher Education qualification. Given the strong relationship between education qualifications and literacy and numeracy skills, the NT Aboriginal adult population is likely to have lower capability in English LLN.

## 2.0 NAPLAN results for NT Aboriginal students

**National Assessment Program – English Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)**<sup>16</sup> is an annual assessment of all Australian students in years 3, 5, 7, and 9. The tests are designed to measure the essential competency levels required for children to progress through school. The testing programme covers skills in English numeracy and literacy (mathematics and reading) that are developed over time through the school curriculum.

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) manages the development, and oversees the delivery, of NAPLAN testing. An expert Advisory Group is responsible for monitoring the reliability of NAPLAN tests so they can be compared over time.

Procedures are in place to try to ensure tests are administered consistently across all Australian schools. The tests are designed to show the relationship between the areas being tested and the nationally agreed learning. They are reviewed by specialists with respect to curriculum content differences between states and territories and for potential cultural and other biases. They are also trialled in each state and territory to ensure they are age-appropriate and that they measure the curriculum in the intended manner. NAPLAN testing in relation to Aboriginal students in the NT continues to be an area of contention.

Freeman (2013) challenges the fairness of NAPLAN tests for students who speak 'English as a second language' (ESL). He argues that the tests cannot provide useful data on the literacy and numeracy skills of learners who have not yet mastered English sufficiently to access the test, and that the tests use contexts that are unfamiliar and heavily biased towards western cultural norms. Freeman quotes research from Hakuta (2000) and Simpson and Wigglesworth (2009) that shows the development of proficiency in a second language is much longer than the NAPLAN testing schedule allows, and that ESL learners need to be tested to identify where on the English language continuum they lie, rather

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<sup>16</sup> Information about NAPLAN has been sourced from the website of the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority who are responsible for NAPLAN testing, <https://www.acara.edu.au/>

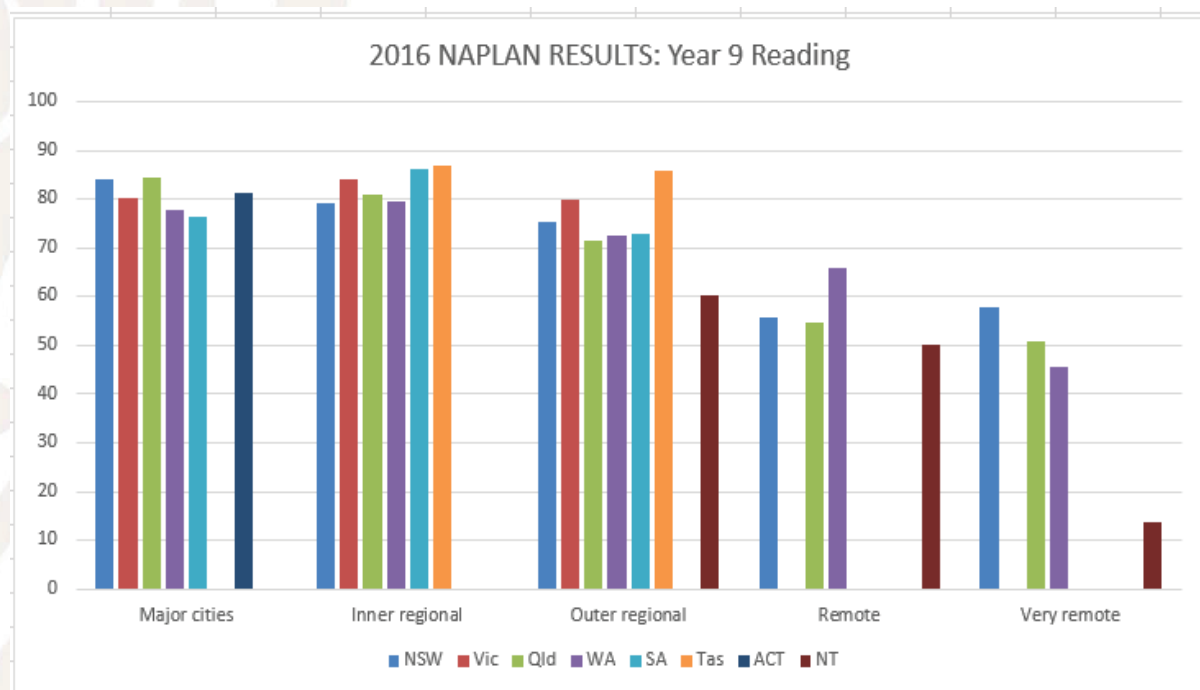
than assume a level depending on their age/school year. There is evidence from the *Indigenous Languages and Culture Report (2004/05)* that student who proceed through a 'Step Model' bilingual program overtake their counterparts who learn through English-only after Year 5 on English tests.

There is also significant evidence of the impact of hearing loss on the educational outcomes of Aboriginal children. Research studies, large-scale surveys and hospitalisation figures all confirm that Indigenous children are disproportionately impacted by middle ear diseases such as Otitis Media. Studies have found that up to 90% of Indigenous children living in remote/very remote areas suffer from some form of ear health issue (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2009) Researchers have found that the associated hearing loss from ear diseases has significant implications for the development of language and communication skills, and subsequent school performance (Partington & Galloway (2005); Howard (2004)). Howard (2004) has also suggested that the negative impacts of conductive hearing loss increase as students are challenged by the increasingly difficult language centred curriculum in the upper grades.

NAPLAN results are presented here with these limitations and issues acknowledged. They are provided because they are a piece of the puzzle and describe at least some part of English LLN competency when students are in the school system. Year 9 results on English reading, writing and numeracy are used. Students in Year 9 are aged between 14 and 16 years. When they are 15 years old they are included as part of the adult population in the NT.

The graphs presented below show the proportion of Year 9 Indigenous students who were assessed as 'at or above the minimum standard' for Reading, Writing and Numeracy.

**FIGURE 12: 2016 NAPLAN RESULTS for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 9 students - Reading**



Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority



FIGURE 13: 2016 NAPLAN RESULTS for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 9 students - Writing

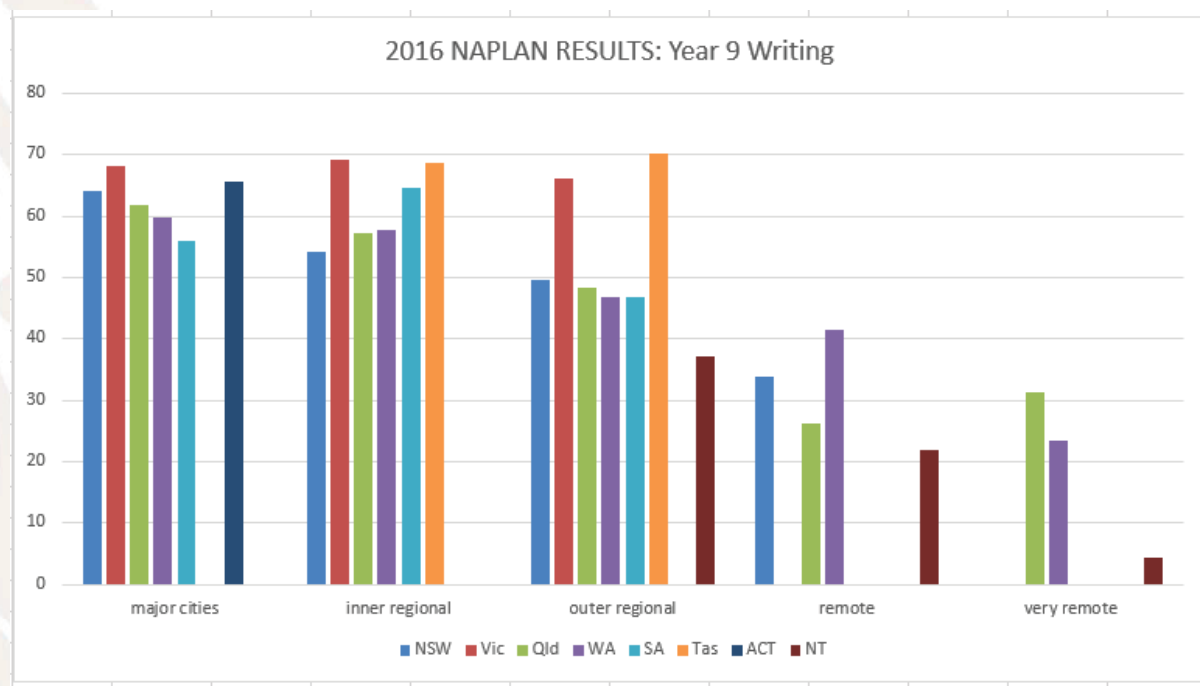
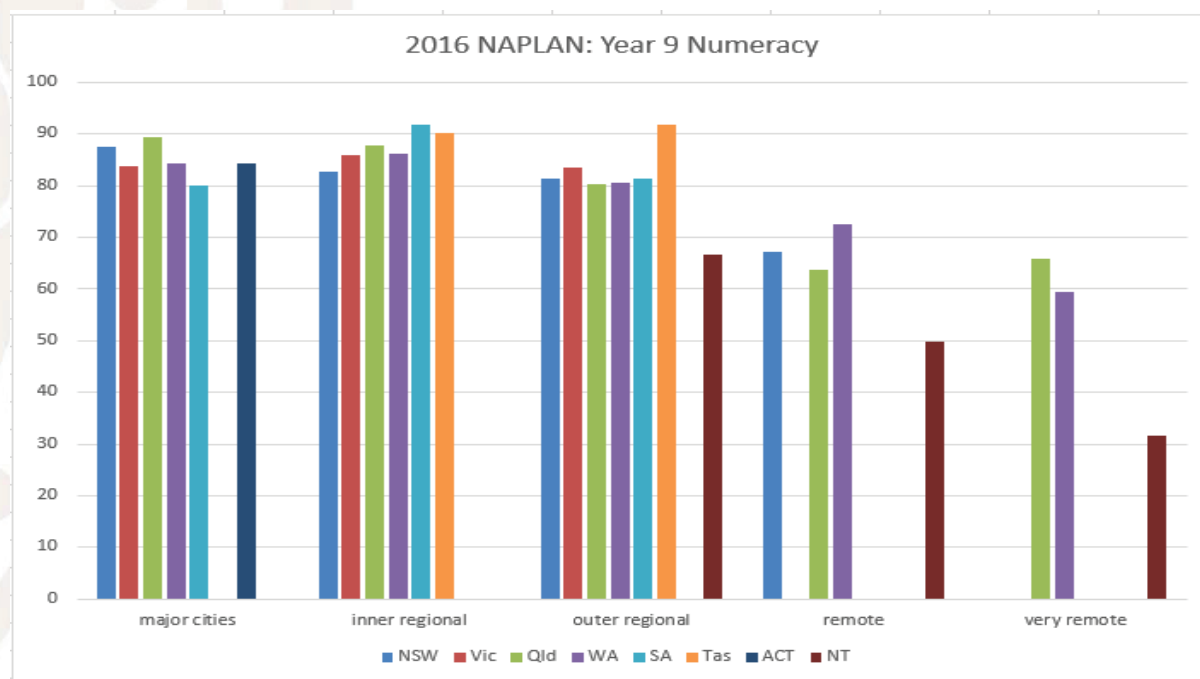


FIGURE 14: 2016 NAPLAN RESULTS for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 9 students - Numeracy



Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

Results show differences in student achievement between states/territories, but also within states/territories. There is a clear relationship between assessed competency and remoteness, with students generally less likely to achieve the minimum standard as their school becomes more remote, particularly for remote and very remote schools.

Students in the NT are the least likely to achieve the minimum level of competency set by ACARA. For students attending schools in very remote areas who participated in the testing:

- 12% achieved the minimum benchmark for English reading
- 4% achieved the minimum benchmark for English writing
- 31% achieved the minimum benchmark for English numeracy

### NAPLAN results over time – have there been improvements?

NAPLAN was first introduced in 2008. Results for the NT have been mapped over time and the graphs below show the proportion of student at or above the minimum standard, with Aboriginal student assessments compared with non-Indigenous students.

FIGURE 15: PROPORTION of NT Year 9 students at or above minimum standard – Reading

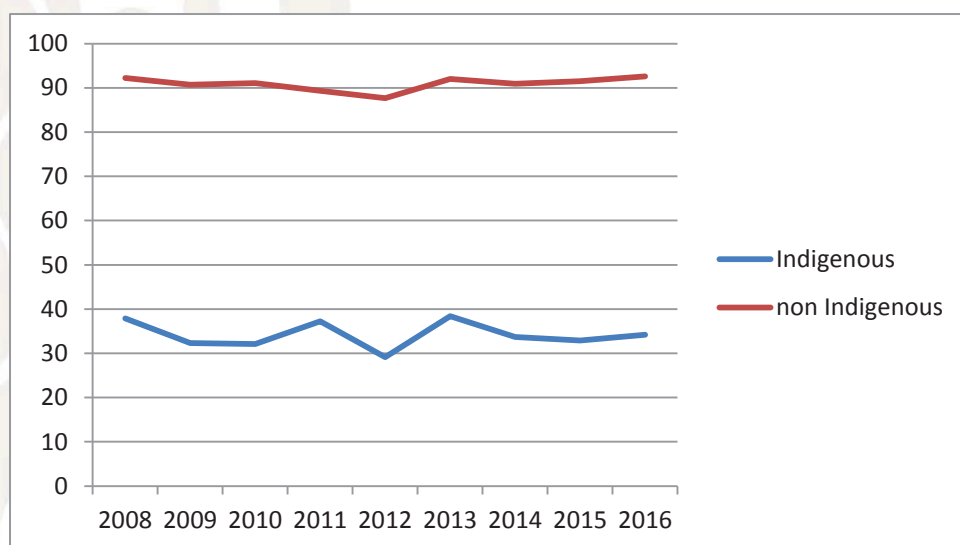


FIGURE 16: PROPORTION of NT Year 9 students at or above minimum standard – Writing

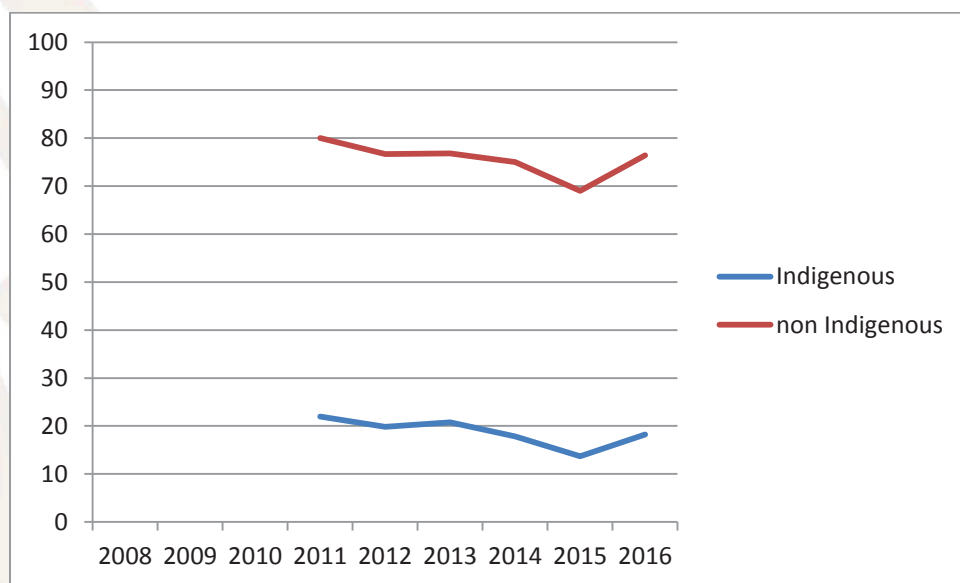
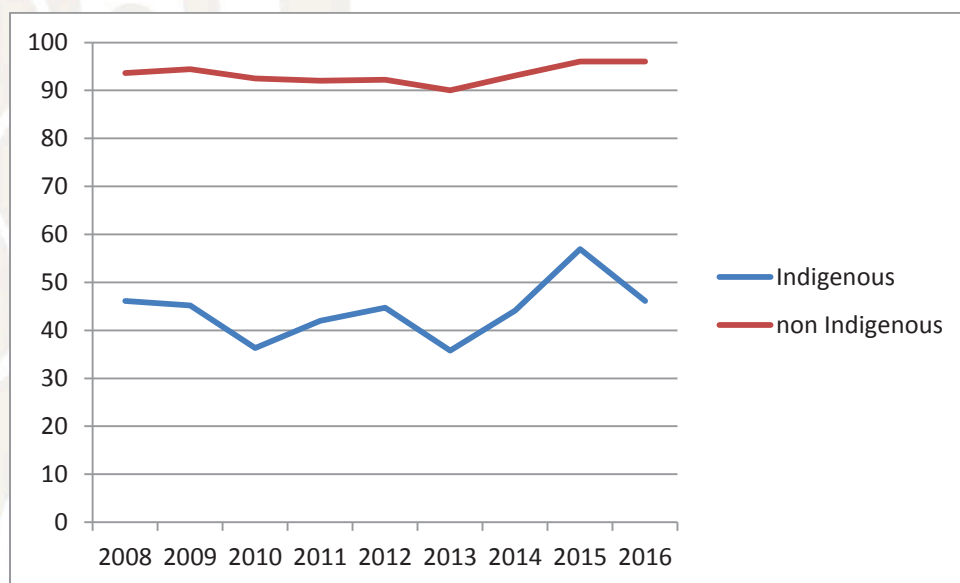


FIGURE 17: PROPORTION of NT Year 9 students at or above minimum standard - Numeracy



Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

These time trend results cover the period where NT school education policy enforced mandatory English instruction for the first four hours of the teaching day (2008 until 2012)<sup>17</sup>

The findings reinforce the conclusion that Aboriginal students in the NT tested as significantly below the competency level of the non-Indigenous students in the NT in English literacy and numeracy.

<sup>17</sup> Policy announced on October 14, 2008, “Compulsory Teaching in English for the First Four Hours of Each School Day”.

Although there have been some year on year improvement in assessed levels over time, there has been little real change when comparing 2016 results with 2008 results. These differences remains: 58 percentage points lower for Reading and Writing, and 50 percentage points lower for Numeracy.

### What does this tell us?

Students in Year 9 are usually aged between 14 and 16 years. When they are 15 years old they are considered part of the adult population in the NT.

- For year 9 Aboriginal young people who participated in NAPLAN testing in 2016:
  - 34% met the minimum benchmark set by ACARA in English reading
  - 18% met the minimum benchmark set by ACARA in English writing
  - 46% met the minimum benchmark set by ACARA in English numeracy
- NAPLAN data shows that these Aboriginal students will contribute to the population who move from school into adulthood with low English LLN capability.

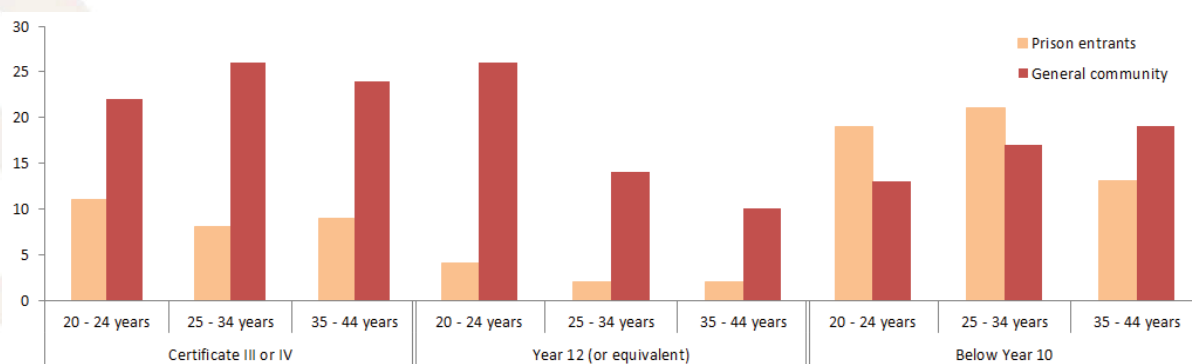
### 3.0 Data about the prisoner population

The National Prisoner Census for 2016 tells us that 83.6% of prisoners in the NT are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (1,393 people) which is the highest proportion of all states and territories (ABS, Prisoners in Australia). The majority of these were men (92.4%) and they are a significant population of adult Aboriginal men who are generally not covered by ABS household surveys such as the NATSISS.

The 2015 AIHW report *The Health of Australia's Prisoners* shows that nationally, Indigenous prisoners across all age groups were:

- Less likely than the comparator general Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander age group to have completed Year 12 (or equivalent);
- less likely to have a Cert III or IV qualification; and
- more likely to have their highest level of education below year 10 (see Figure 18).

**FIGURE 18: PROPORTION Indigenous adults – by highest level of education**



Source: AIHW, 2015 NPHDC, ABS 2014/15 NATSISS

### What does this tell us?

There is a significant proportion of Aboriginal men in prison in the NT (around 1,280 in 2016, or about 5% of NT Aboriginal adult men)

Census data has shown that Aboriginal adults in the NT have lower levels of education compared to non-Aboriginal adults

AIHW data shows that Indigenous prisoners are likely to have even lower levels of education when compared to the rest of the adult Indigenous population

## PART FOUR

### Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) Assessments

In this section we look at the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) which assesses LLN skill levels, including what it is, and how it works. More information is available at:

[https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/acsf\\_document.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/acsf_document.pdf)

We asked organisations who assess LLN using the ACSF tool whether they were willing to share de-identified or combined (aggregated) assessment data for this project so that we can gain some picture of assessed levels of LLN skills for Aboriginal adults in the NT. We thank them for their willingness to assist with this important task. As far as we are aware this has not been done before. The findings are for a non-representative sample of **660 Aboriginal adults**. The results are summarised in this section of the Report.

#### What is the ACSF and what is it used for?

The ACSF is the Australian Government tool designed to describe an individual's performance in the five core skills in English: learning, reading, writing, speaking (oral communication), and numeracy. This tool which is used across Australia provides a consistent measurement process so that core skills can be described, benchmarked and monitored across time.

The ACSF is very useful for understanding a person's LLN skill levels and for tailoring teaching and learning to meet their specific needs in each area. Adults learn more effectively when what they are taught is matched to what they want to learn about, their level of competency in reading, writing, learning and numeracy, and when it is delivered in a way that suits their circumstances and learning 'style'.

With the recent addition of Pre Level 1 (a) and Pre Level 1 (b), the ACSF now provides six levels of performance ranging from pre-level (very low level performance) to level five (high level performance). Since there are many people in Australia with very low levels of literacy this addition has made the ACSF much more useful and progress can be measured more accurately at the lower levels.

## OVERVIEW OF LEARNER COMPETENCY FOR EACH ACSF LEVEL

### Pre-level

At pre-level a person needs full support to complete LLN tasks. The learning context must be highly familiar, concrete and immediate. Any text must be very short and simple with limited and familiar vocabulary. A person can complete LLN tasks that are a single step only (e.g. copying, naming, matching and ordering).

#### *For example a person can:*

- *link familiar pictures and signs with corresponding words*
- *write limited personal information on a form*
- *ask simple questions such as “Me?” “Now?”, and*
- *know and state own age*

### Level 1

A person assessed at Level 1 needs significant support to complete LLN tasks. The context must be highly familiar, concrete and immediate. Any text must be short and simple using limited and highly familiar vocabulary. A person can complete LLN tasks that are concrete with one or two processes (e.g. locating and recognising).

#### *For example a person can:*

- *recognise familiar words and symbols to follow ATM instructions*
- *hold a pencil well enough to write*
- *continue to count when given a number less than 100*
- *use common greetings in English such as “hello”*
- *arrange letters in alphabetical order*
- *log on and off a computer website*
- *send a short SMS to a work supervisor*
- *read and understand simple diagrams*
- *write a brief message on a card*
- *respond to questions about personal information like name, age, address etc.,*
- *locate and add the whole dollar amounts of two items*

## Level 2

A person assessed at Level 2 needs support to complete LLN tasks. The context must be familiar and predictable. A text must be simple and use familiar vocabulary with a clear purpose. A person can complete LLN tasks that are explicit, and involve a number of familiar processes (e.g. identifying, interpreting).

### *For example a person can:*

- *read a public notice*
- *write a paragraph*
- *follow instructions on a familiar activity such as borrowing a DVD*
- *read and discuss data from a simple chart or table*
- *identify the main points in a job advertisement*
- *write out a favorite recipe for a friend*
- *record casual hours of work and calculate expected pay*

## Level 3

A person assessed at Level 3 can operate independently on LLN tasks however they will actively ask for support when needed. They are starting to use support materials that are familiar to them such as a dictionary or online resources, and have some ability to self-edit. A person can work with a range of familiar contexts and some less familiar, with some specialisation. They can read and understand routine texts that may include some unfamiliar elements, embedded information and specialised vocabulary, They can also complete LLN tasks that include a number of steps (e.g. sequencing, basic inferencing, extrapolation and integration).

### *For example, a person can:*

- *read and respond to an online chat posting*
- *use dictionaries and online reference materials*
- *start to edit their own work*
- *interpret diagrams to assemble flat pack furniture*
- *respond to a self-complete survey*
- *actively participate in a small group discussion*
- *read and explain information on an electricity bill about charges, usage and comparison with last bill*
- *create a personal budget on a spreadsheet*
- *understand and interpret a 24 hour clock*



## Level 4

A person assessed at Level 4 is operating independently and can confidently use support materials from a range of established sources to complete LLN tasks. They can deal with a range of contexts including some that are unfamiliar or unpredictable. They can understand texts that are complex with embedded information and specialised vocabulary including abstraction and symbolism, and deal with complex analysis involving application of a number of processes (e.g. extracting, comparing and interpreting information).

### *For example, a person can:*

- *read a text and form an opinion*
- *document roles and responsibilities and organise a community fundraising BBQ*
- *deal with conflict using appropriate strategies*
- *develop a detailed budget for their household*
- *take detailed and accurate minutes of a meeting*
- *follow diagrams and text to install computer software*

## Level 5

A person assessed at Level 5 needs no support to complete LLN tasks. They are autonomous learners who can deal with a range of contexts and adapt across contexts with specialisation in more than one. They can read and understand highly complex texts with highly embedded information and highly specialised language, and they can complete LLN tasks requiring sophisticated analysis including interpretation, reflection, synthesis, evaluation and recommendation.

### *For example, a person can:*

- *prepare an evaluation and respond to documents of public concern*
- *write a story or play*
- *participate in a formal debate*
- *work in a team to establish a small business or community enterprise including creating a business plan, budget requirements etc.*
- *write a risk management plan for a workplace*
- *provide a materials list that requires trigonometric calculations*

(26TEN Tasmania contributed additional examples for the above table)

## Comments on the table

LLN professionals advise that ACSF assessors need significant skills, experience and qualifications to perform ACSF assessments well and then design individual programs to assist people according to their individual needs and wants. Further, that materials used for testing should be validated against the ACSF levels, and ideally the assessment should be independently moderated to validate the resulting level score.

The examples of ACSF level competency provided in the above table establish that a person operating at ACSF pre-Level would be unable to confidently write a sentence in English. At Level 1, a person could put together a simple sentence in English but would struggle with a paragraph. Although adults at pre-Level and Level 1 may be able to pass the practical component of a VET Certificate I or II course, they would struggle significantly with any English written assessment tasks. This may be contributing to the poor Certificate I and II completion rates found in a recent NCVET report on Indigenous peoples' participation in VET<sup>18</sup>.

### What does this tell us?

- To operate independently on literacy and numeracy tasks in education and the workforce people need to be at Level 3.
- To have the competency level needed to complete Certificate Level I and II courses adults generally need to be at ACSF Level 2.

### What approach have we used to ACSF analysis in this report?

For this Report, a sample of 660 ACSF assessments have been compiled for the adult Aboriginal population tested in the NT over the period 2009 through to 2017. Results have come from various sources, including assessments undertaken for the purposes of participation in education and training courses, or on request from an employer or community organisation to assess the English LLN skills of their employees. The assessments were undertaken before participation in any subsequent training program. Some assessments have been through a moderation process but not all.

The data in our sample are generally from the *group of people who are already employed or who have made a decision to participate in further education or training activities*. It is unlikely that many adults with high LLN skills will have been included in the sample, however data presented previously in this report indicate these will be low numbers. On balance, we believe that the people in our sample **are likely to have higher skill levels when compared to the total adult Aboriginal population in the NT**. Information about the sample, the limitations of the sample, and our approach to compiling the data has been included as *Appendix 2*.

**NOTE: Because the sample of people included in the results does not represent the whole population of NT Aboriginal adults, conclusions can only be made about the people in the sample.**

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<sup>18</sup> Windley, G. (2017) Indigenous VET Participation, completion and outcomes: Changes over the past decade. NCVET Research Report.

## Results for the total NT adult Aboriginal sample – see Figures 19 - 23

- Level 3 skills are needed to engage fully in the dominant English speaking society and work
- **Large proportions of adults in the sample had core skill levels below Level 3** – 87% in Reading, 91% in Writing, 87% in Speaking, 86% in Listening and 94% in Numeracy.
- For each core skill, the largest proportion of adults in the sample were assessed at Level 1 (between 38% and 45% of the sample). At this skill level adults would have trouble participating in Certificate Level I and II training.
- In the sample, 1 in 5 adults had pre-level skills in Reading (20%), more than 1 in 5 adults had pre-level skills in Writing (22%) and more than 1 in 4 adults had pre-level skills in Numeracy (28%). Being assessed at this level means they would need to be fully supported to complete any English LLN tasks.
- The sample of adults had strongest overall skills in Speaking and Listening.

*Note:* Not all adults in the sample were assessed in all skills. Adults were least likely to have assessments in Listening (35% not assessed) and Speaking (31% not assessed), and most likely to have assessments in Reading (10% not assessed) and Writing (11% not assessed). Readers of this report should be aware that this means there will be less records contributing to some of the results.

FIGURE 19: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, READING

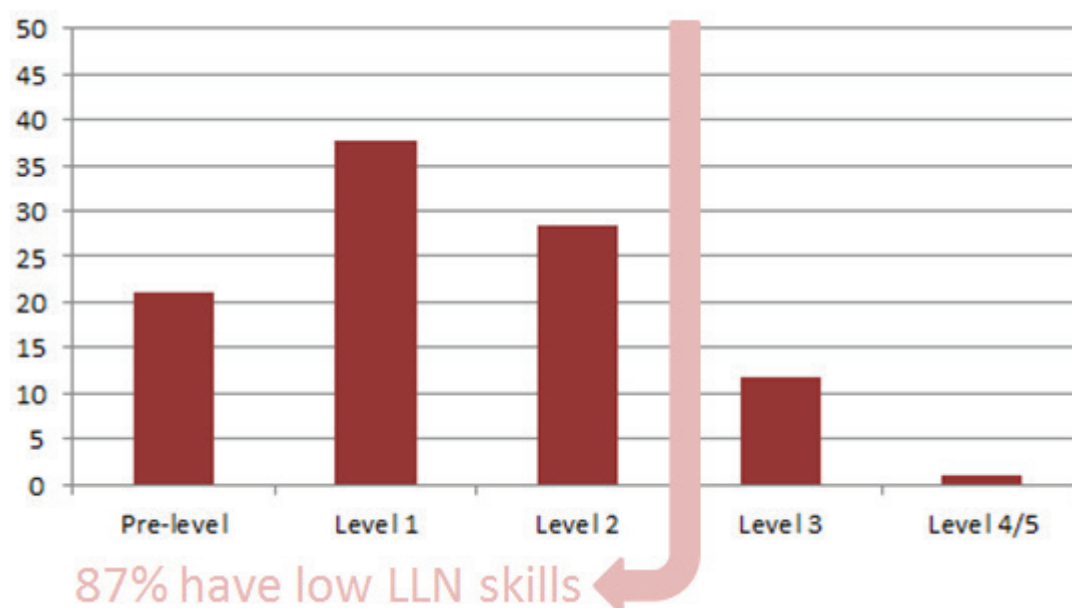


FIGURE 20: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, WRITING

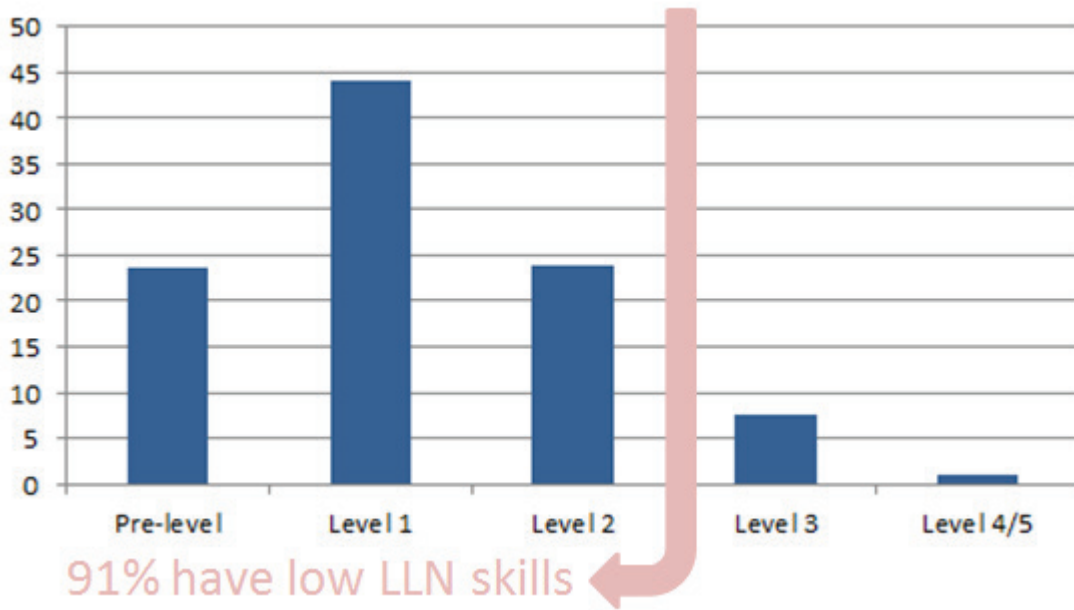


FIGURE 21: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, SPEAKING



FIGURE 22: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, LISTENING

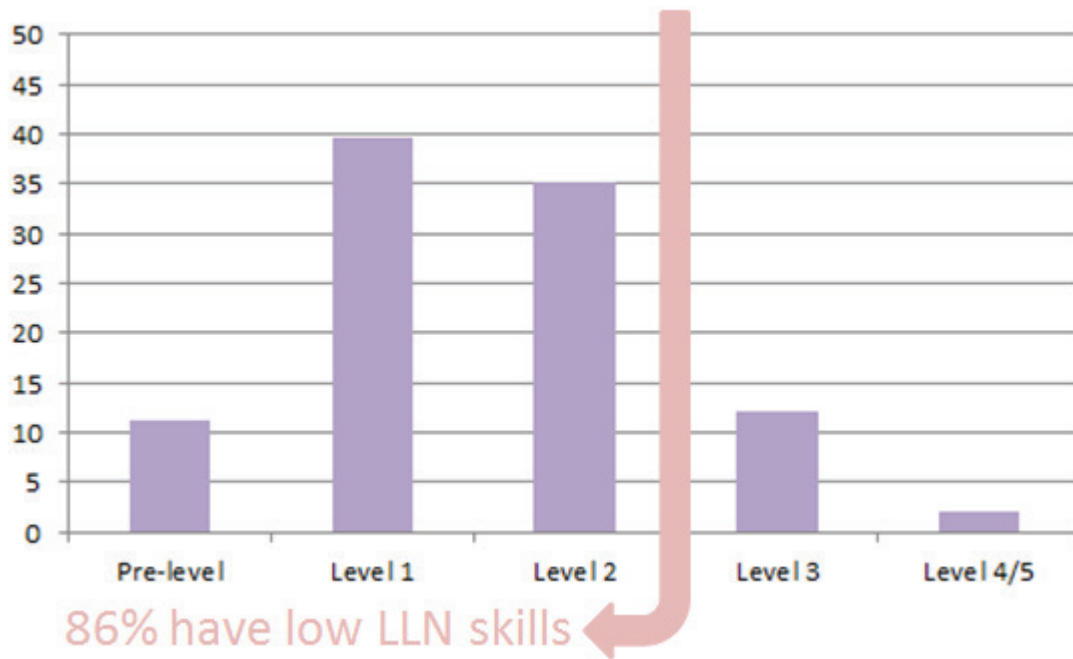


FIGURE 23: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, NUMERACY



## Results for the NT adult Aboriginal sample by gender (men and women)

(See Figures 23 through 27)

- In the sample, generally women did better than men at the assessment tasks across all skills: Reading (15% at Level 3 or above, compared to 9%); Writing (10% at Level 3 or above compared to 6%); Speaking (17% at Level 3 or above compared to 10%); Listening (17% at Level 3 or above compared with 11%) and Numeracy (7% compared to 4%).
- There were consistently smaller proportions of women assessed at pre-level than men, particularly in Writing (17%, 27%) and Numeracy (20%, 34%).

FIGURE 23: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, READING by gender

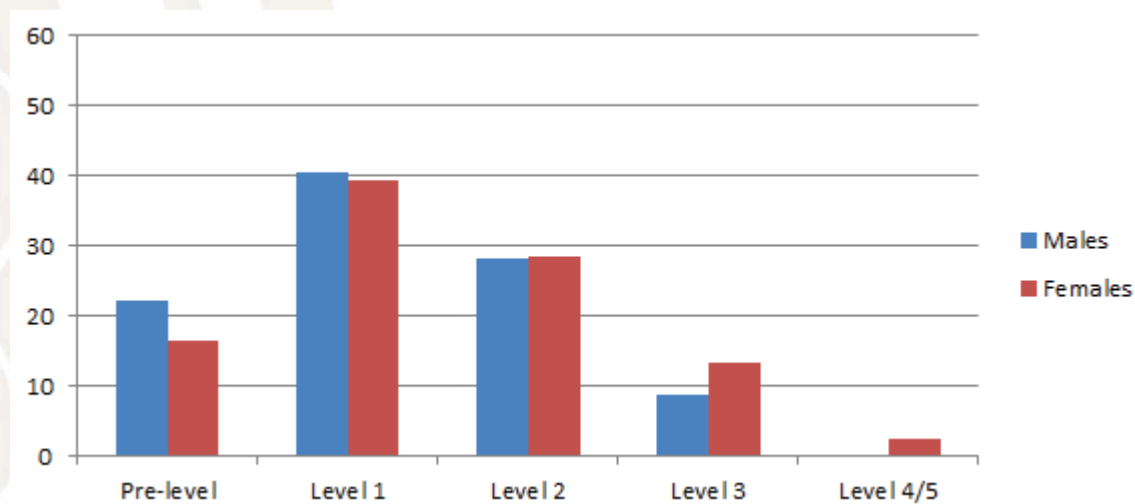


FIGURE 24: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, WRITING by gender

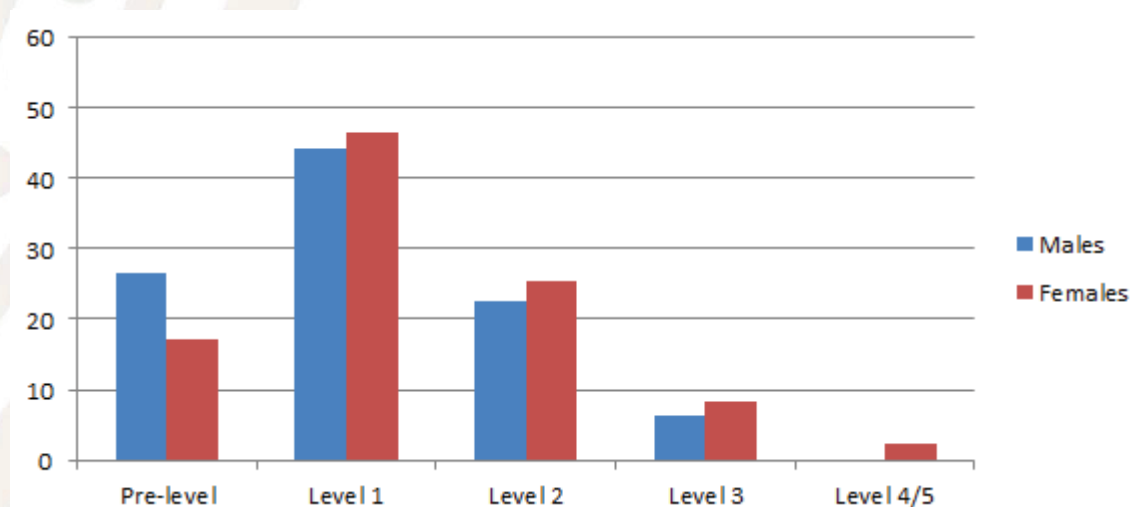


FIGURE 25: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, SPEAKING by gender

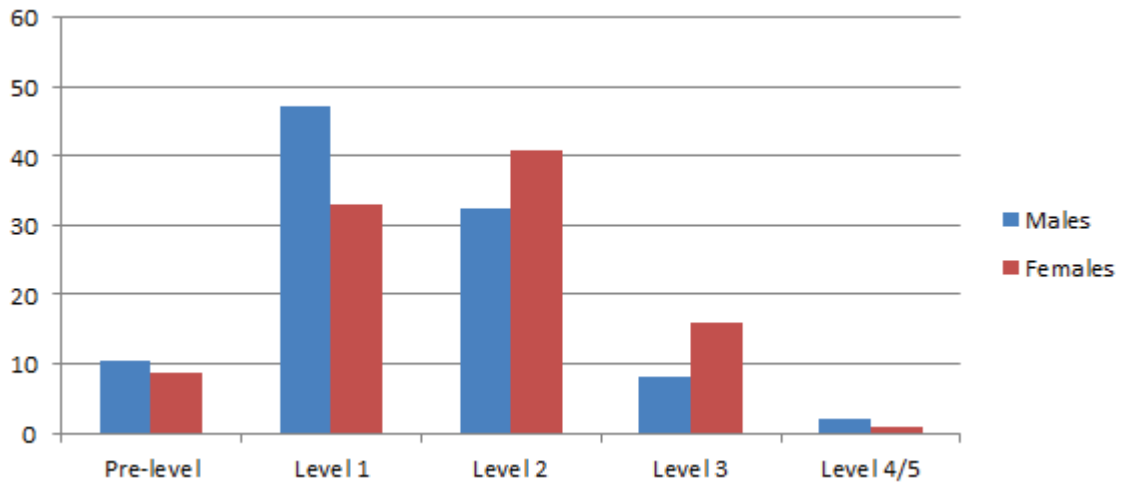


FIGURE 26: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, LISTENING by gender

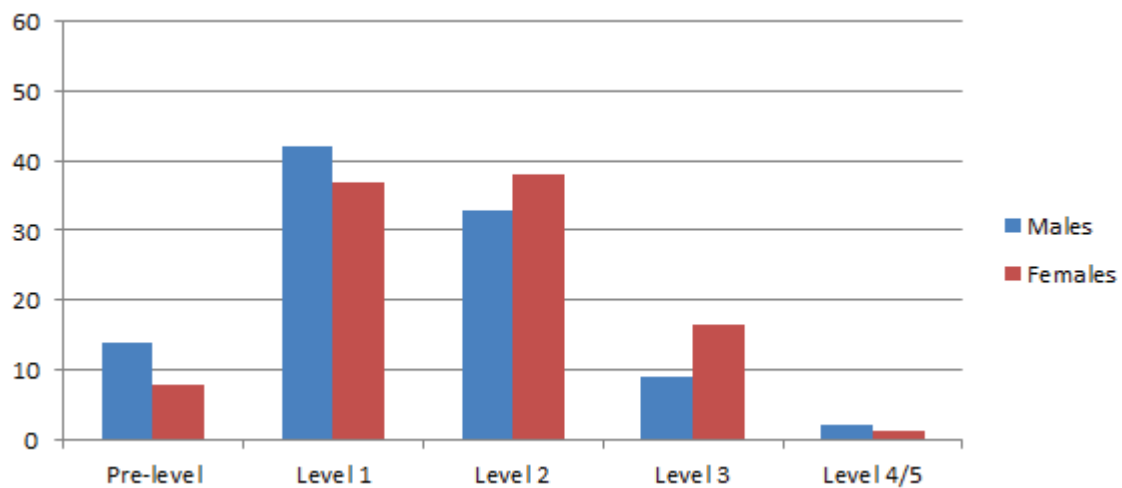
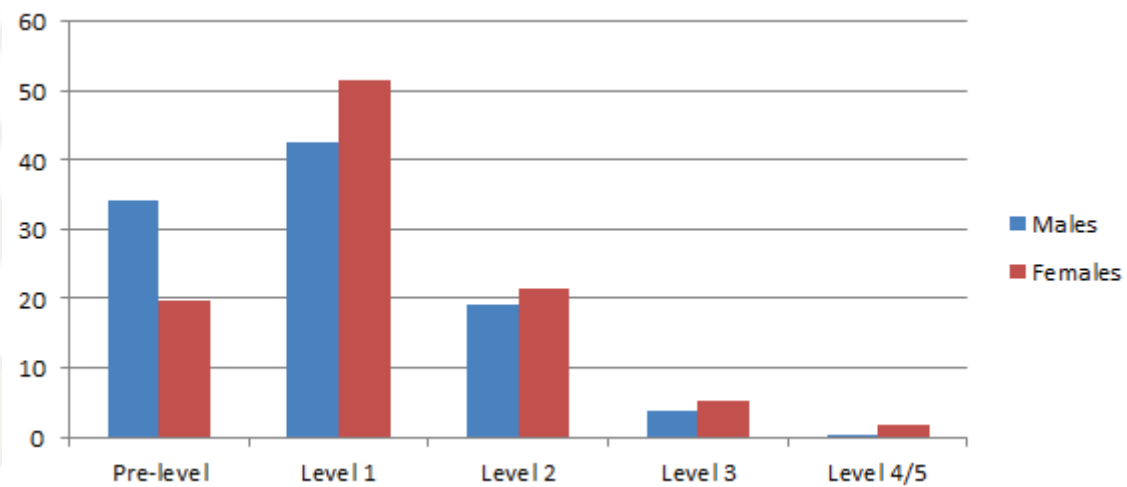


FIGURE 27: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, NUMERACY by gender



## Results for NT adult Aboriginal sample by age groupings - see Figures 28 through 32

Age groupings used in this analysis: under 20; 20 – 29 years; 30 – 49 years; and, 50 years plus

With the exception of Numeracy, there were larger proportions of older adults (50 years plus) in the sample with higher skills assessed across all core skills when compared with other age groups:

- 18% had Reading skills at Level 3 or above
  - 16% had Writing skills at Level 3 or above
  - 28% had Speaking skills assessed at Level 3 or above, and
  - 6% had Listening skills assessed at Level 3 or above.
- Almost all older adults (50 years plus), had Numeracy skills assessed at below Level 3 (98%)
  - In the sample, almost all young adults (under 20 years) were assessed with skills below Level 3 in Speaking (98%) and Listening (96%) - a significantly larger proportion when compared with adults in older age groups.

FIGURE 28: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, READING by age group

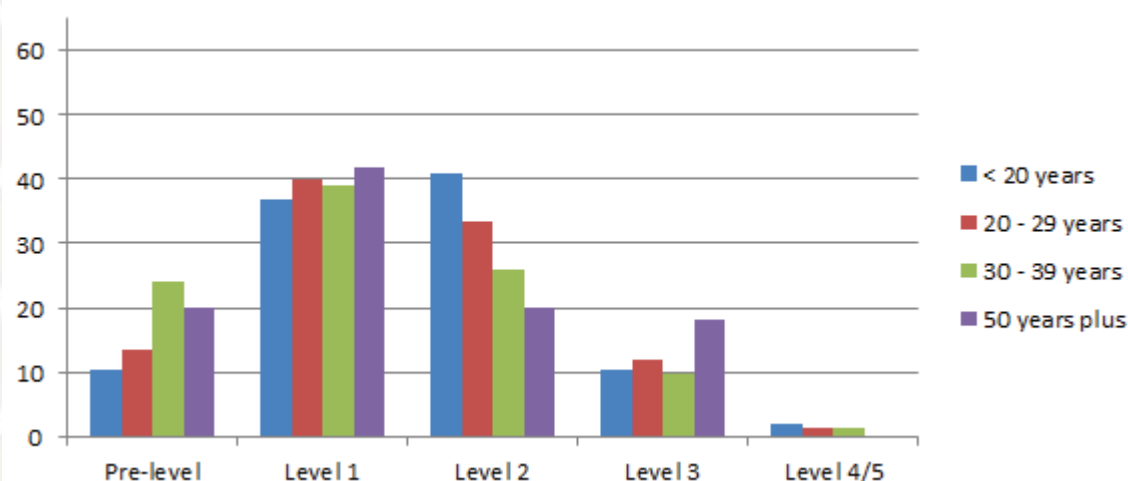


FIGURE 29: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, WRITING by age group

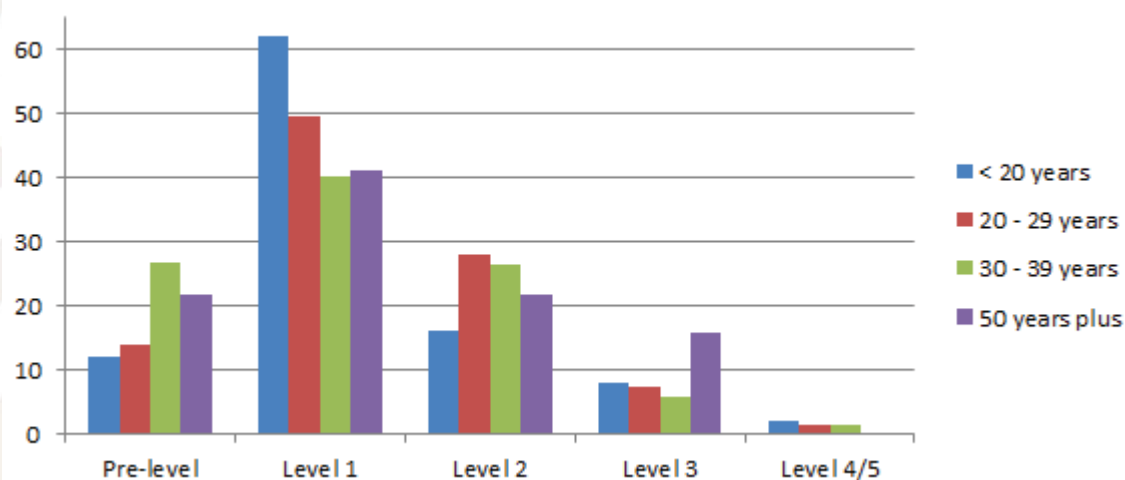




FIGURE 30: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, SPEAKING by age group

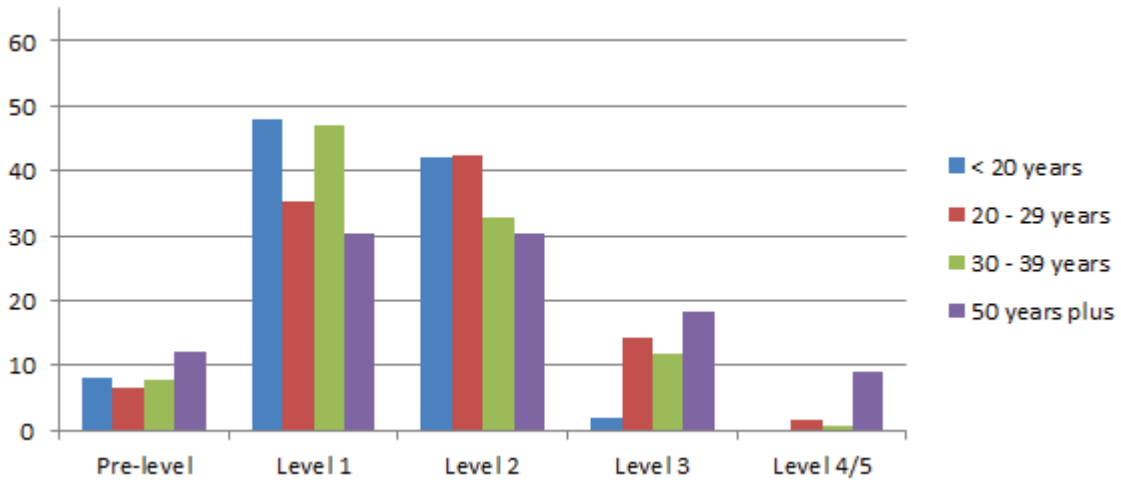


FIGURE 31: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, LISTENING by age group

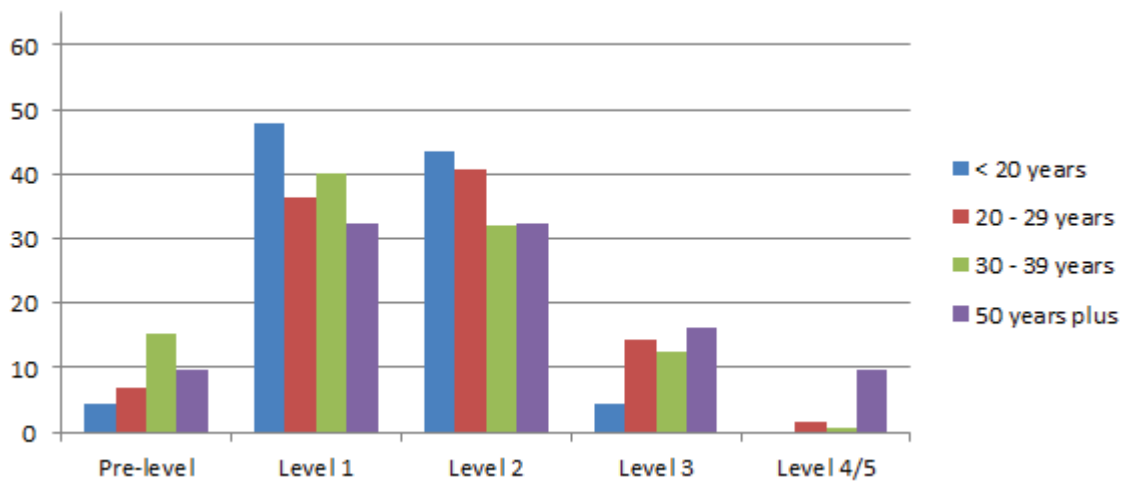
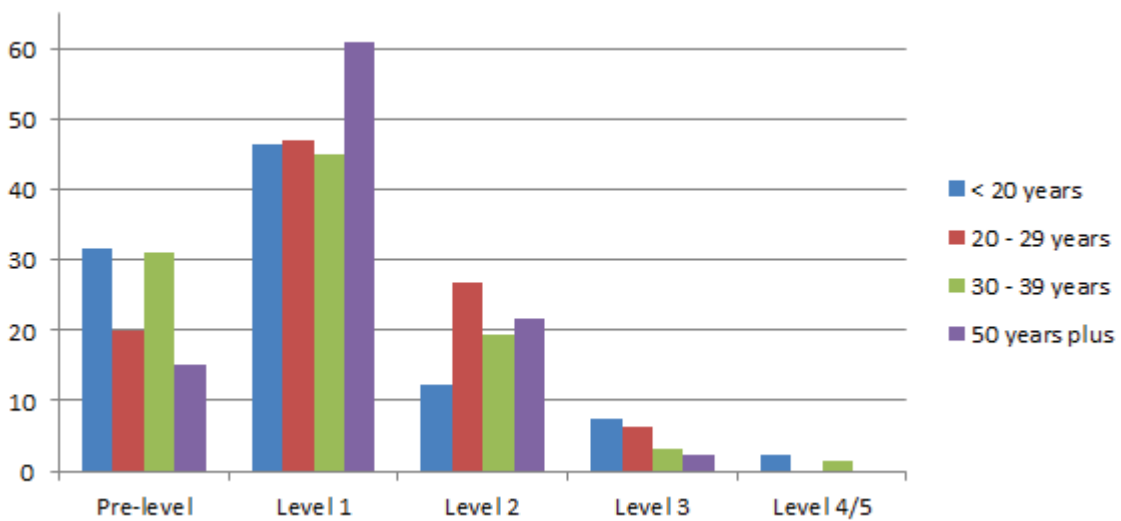


FIGURE 32: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, NUMERACY by age group



## Results of the NT adult Aboriginal sample by NT Regions (Appendix 3) See Fig. 34 - 38

- In the sample, people living in the Greater Darwin Region were more likely to be assessed at Level 3 and above in Reading, Writing and Numeracy. Following Greater Darwin, adults living in the Katherine or Alice Springs Regions had relatively higher skills levels (as assessed by the ACSF) compared to those living in the Rest of Darwin and East Arnhem Region.
- In the sample, people living in the East Arnhem Region were more likely to be assessed at pre-Level across all skills. At least half of the sample adults from the East Arnhem Region were assessed at pre-Level in Reading (59%), Writing (52%) and Numeracy (both 51%).

*Note:* Speaking and Listening results for the Barkly and Greater Darwin Regions have been suppressed because of low numbers in the sample. Sample sizes for the some regions are small and the authors caution readers about using these results to talk about the whole population of these areas.

FIGURE 34: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, READING by NT region

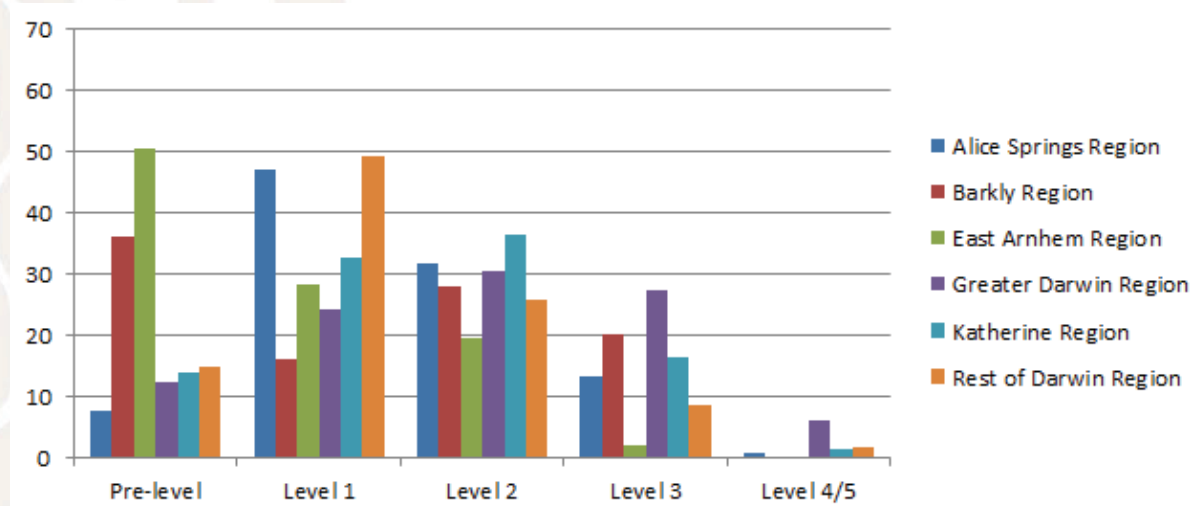


FIGURE 35: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, WRITING by NT region

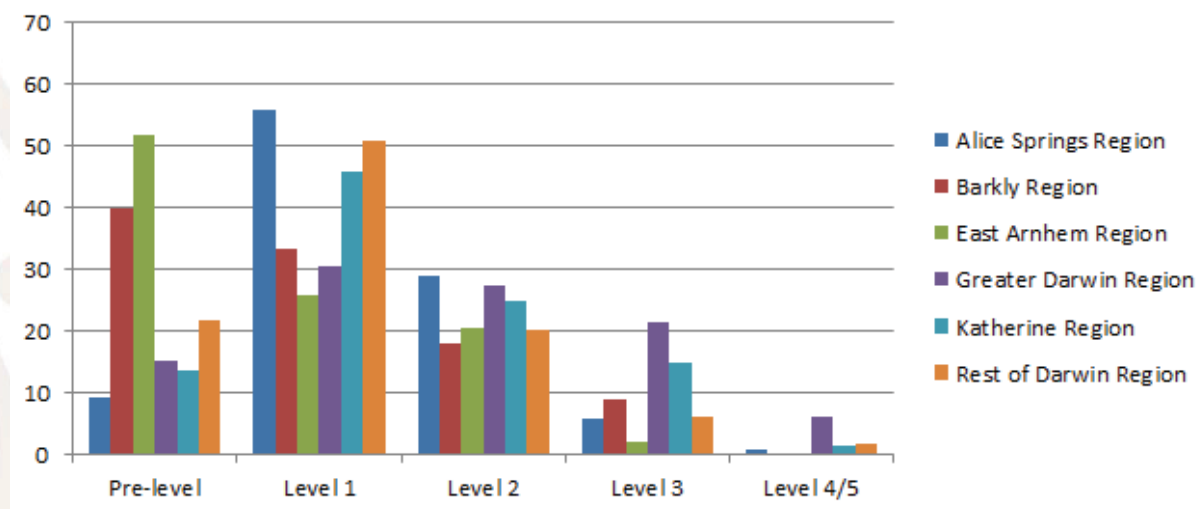
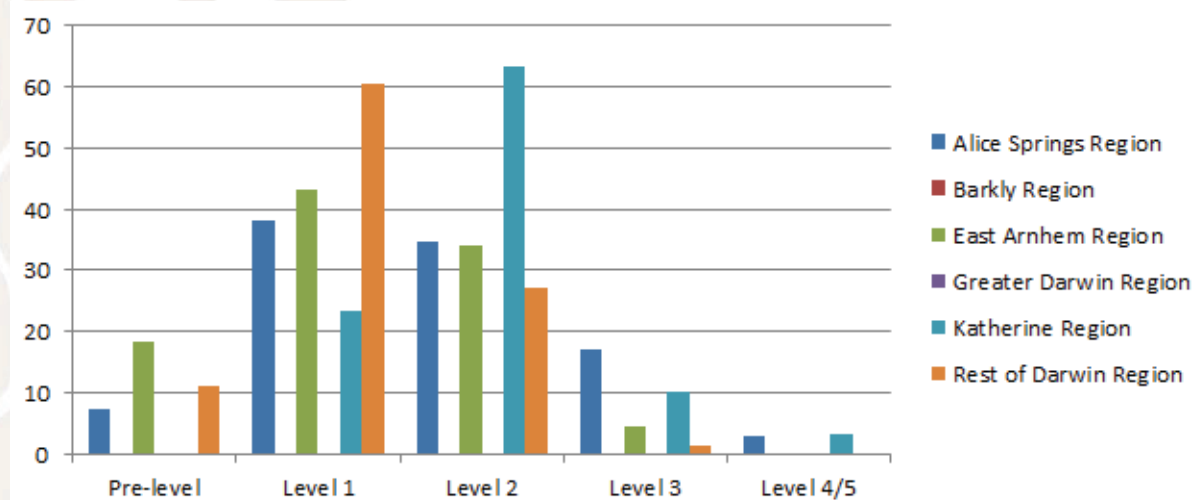
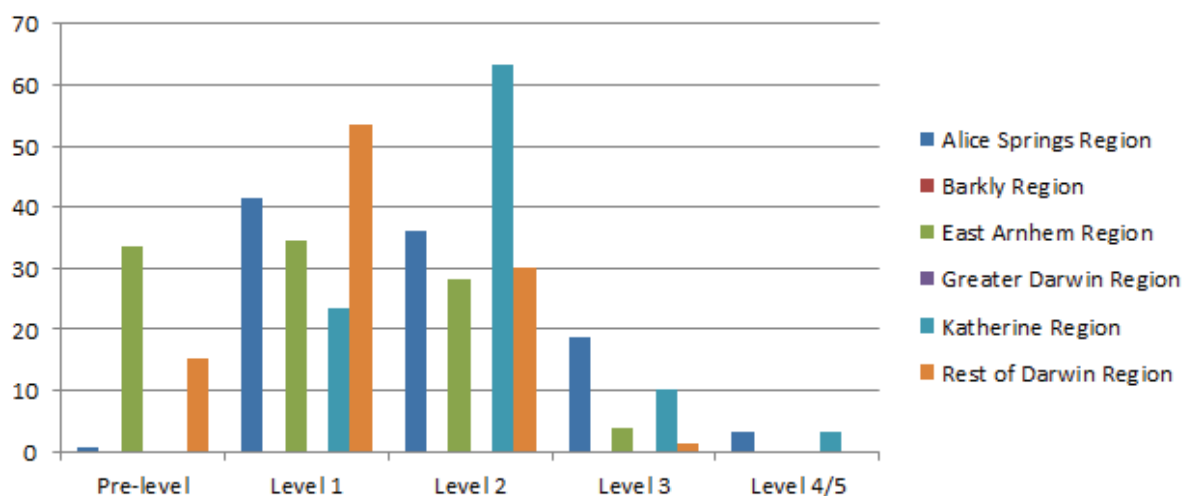


FIGURE 36: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, SPEAKING by NT region



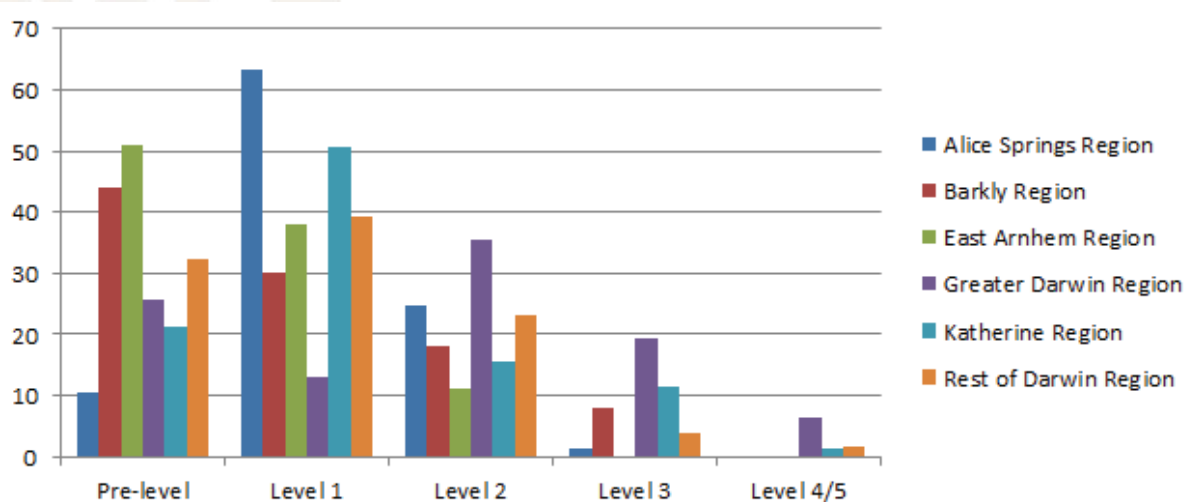
Note: Results for Barkly and Greater Darwin Regions have been suppressed because of small numbers

FIGURE 37: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, LISTENING by NT region



Note: Results for Barkly and Greater Darwin Regions have been suppressed because of small numbers

FIGURE 38: TOTAL SAMPLE – ACSF levels, NUMERACY by NT region



## SUMMARY: What do these results tell us?

Level 3 ACSF skills are needed to engage fully in the dominant English speaking society and the workplace. Most NT Aboriginal adults included in the sample of ACSF assessments were assessed with English LLN skills below Level 3 (ranging from 86% in Listening to 94% in Numeracy). Because the authors believe the sample will under-estimate the number of adults with very low skills conservatively this would mean that **at least 40,000 Aboriginal adults in the NT have low skills in at least one of the core skills of English Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening and Numeracy.**<sup>19</sup>

**The largest proportion of Aboriginal adults in the sample were assessed at ACSF Level 1** (need significant support to complete LLN tasks -see page 38). This was consistent across all core skills – and significant numbers were assessed at ACSF Pre-level. Using the same assumptions, this would mean that **more than 24,000 Aboriginal adults in the Northern Territory would not have the English LLN skills needed to successfully complete a VET Certificate I or II course.**<sup>20</sup>

Sample results also showed that:

- Adults generally had higher ACSF skills in Speaking and Listening and lowest skills in Numeracy
- Women generally had higher skill levels than men
- People aged 50 years and over generally had higher skill levels than the other age groups
- Young adults ( less than 20 years) had the lowest assessed skills in Speaking and Listening
- Adults living in the Greater Darwin Region generally had higher skill levels than people living in other NT regions.

Although the adults included in the sample are not representative of the population of NT Aboriginal adults, the results appear plausible and explainable and confirm the expectations of expert NT literacy practitioners<sup>21</sup>. These experts also say that:

- People who do not have English as a first language use their oral skills more than their writing skills.
- Aboriginal people rarely use numeracy skills as part of their daily life, with the exception of dealing with money – this is a skill that is easily lost when not practiced.
- Women who are in the workforce, or in training, are most likely to be those with stronger English LLN.
- The stronger results for people 50 years and over reflect the life experience of older Aboriginal people (particularly if they hold any leadership positions).
- People living in the Greater Darwin area use English more often and have more opportunities for English LLN support.

<sup>19</sup> Based on population projections found in Table 3 of this report

<sup>20</sup> Based on population projections found in Table 3 of this report.

<sup>21</sup> A panel of experienced literacy and numeracy practitioners have reviewed this report.

## PART FIVE

### The socio-economic context

#### Overview: LLN touches many parts of life

Adult understanding and use of English language, literacy and numeracy touches all parts of life and impacts individual, family and community wellbeing, and the ability to interact with and exert influence on the broader society.

The benefits of higher levels of LLN proficiency for individuals can be mapped across multiple social outcomes including improved health, increased ability to access services, higher employment rates, better social inclusion and strengthened political efficacy (OECD, 2013). We think this holds only if the interactions with, or the services delivered by the broader society, are delivered in the language/s spoken by those individuals.

The diagram on the following page draws on the research of Associate Professor Bob Boughton, (University of New England) who has identified the areas which are impacted directly by English language and literacy proficiency (community, culture, economy, housing etc.).

This diagram illustrates the centrality of establishment of language and literacy in first language/s to Aboriginal people as expressed during Whole of Community Engagement initiative.

The next circle outlines the foundational skill required by learners progressing through the ACSF levels. The outer part describes the areas of life affected by ones proficiency with the English language and associated foundational skills.

FIGURE 39: Diagram of relationship of foundational skills (including PSTRE) on other social and economic domains and the central place of establishment of first language.



### Data from national surveys and health datasets

Results from national surveys including the Census of Population and Housing, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS), as well as national health data sources provide a summary of the status of a range of indicators associated with health, social participation, community functioning and economic progress that are included in the diagram.

National surveys and summary reports such as the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework* show that results for the NT population indicate little real improvement on many wellbeing indicators over time.

When comparing NT Aboriginal adults with Indigenous adults living in other areas of Australia, people in the NT were relatively advantaged in the following areas:

- **A strong cultural connection:** They were much more likely to speak an Indigenous language as their main language, and to identify with a language, clan or tribal group
- **Suggestions of better mental health:** There were lower proportions of adults reporting high or very high psychological distress
- **Greater self-efficacy:** Although not statistically significant NT adults were consistently more likely to feel ‘able to have a say on things that mattered to them’

But, adults in the NT were more disadvantaged in a number of other areas:

Indicators	NT Aboriginal adults
Poor health	More likely to be hospitalised for assault
Law and justice issues	More likely to be imprisoned
Lower English LLN capacity	Less likely to have completed year 12 Less likely to hold a non-school qualification above the Cert II level
Lower economic participation	Less likely to be in the labour force (either employed or unemployed)
Overcrowding and associated housing stress	Much more likely to be living in a house that needs more bedrooms
Decreased ability to access information and to access online education materials	Less likely to have accessed the internet in the last 12 months, and if they did, less likely to have accessed it at home
Lower financial resources	More likely to be in the bottom 20% of households in terms of (equivalised gross) weekly household income
Transport disadvantage with a range of impacts	More likely to be in households with no motor vehicle

These conclusions are based on data from Table 4 and Figure 40 (next page).

General wellbeing outcomes across multiple domains have a relationship with confidence and skills in English.

Further research and consultation is required to better understand the interaction between low levels of English LLN NT and how adult Aboriginal people are doing across these dimensions of life.

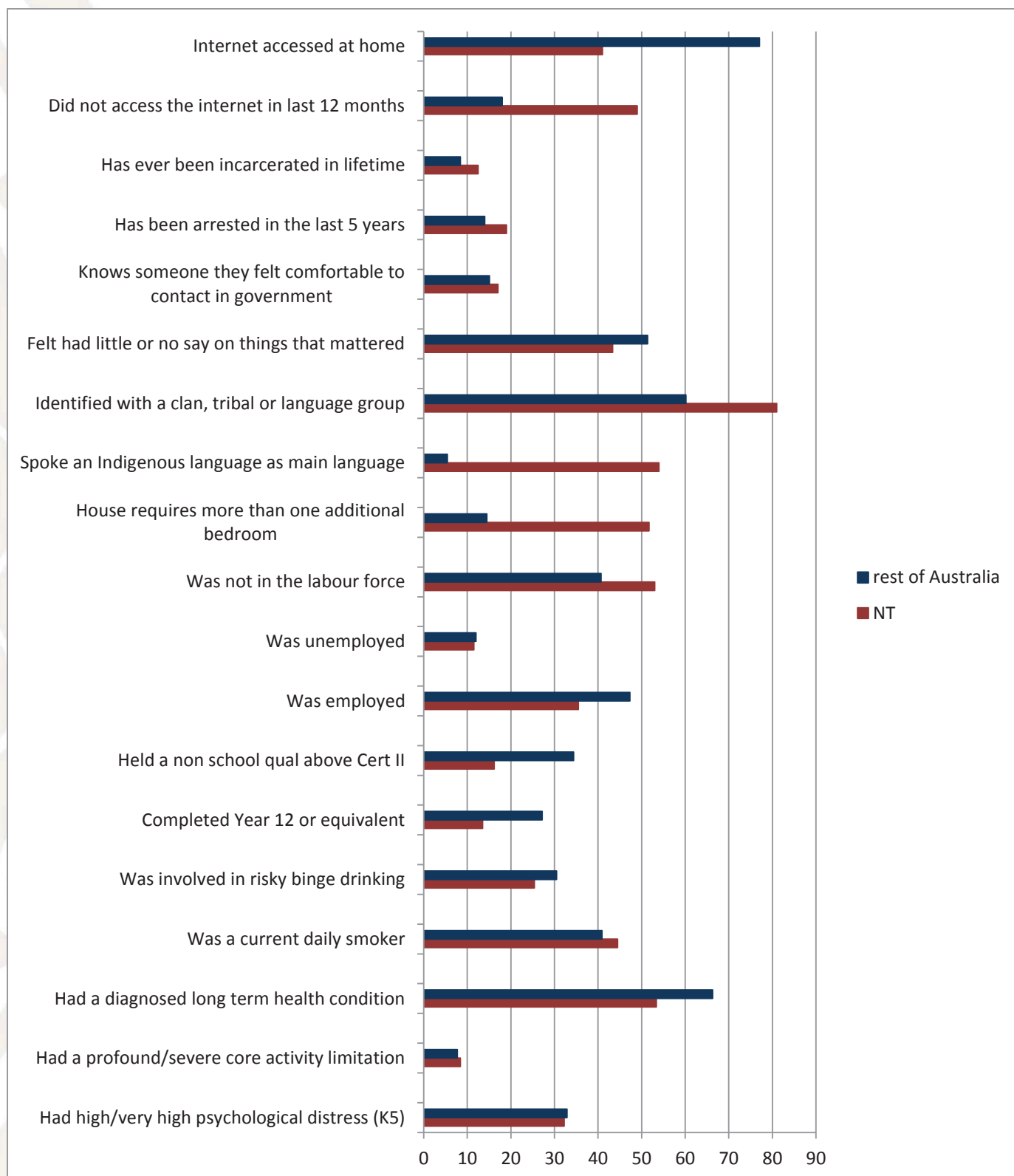


TABLE 4: SUMMARY MEASURES<sup>22</sup>

Topic	Measure	National	NT
Health	Age standardised mortality rate per 100,000 population (2009 – 2013)	985	1461.3
	Age standardised proportion of people with diabetes (2009 – 2013)	17.9	26.8
	Age standardised rate of treated end stage kidney disease per 100,000 (2010 – 2012)	61.7	151.9
Economy	Proportion of persons (18 years plus) in bottom 20% of equivalised gross weekly household income	42.5%	52.4%
Transport	Proportion of households with at least one motor vehicle	81.2%	61.7%
Law & Justice Community	Age standardised hospital rate for assaults per 1000 population (2011-12 to 2012-13)	9.8	25.1
	Imprisonment rate per 100,000 adults (2013)	2039.5	2793.3

<sup>22</sup> Sourced from Table S1 Key measures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, National and Northern Territory

FIGURE 40: PROPORTION Indigenous adult population: Summary socio-economic indicators for NT and rest of Australia, 2014/15



Source: 2014/15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, ABS

## Other factors which may impact language acquisition


For those with aspirations for themselves, their family or community there are other physical and psychological factors which can affect acquisition of language and literacy. For example: hearing loss, poor eyesight, the effects of trauma, presence of chronic disease, mental health conditions. This discussion does not fall within the scope of this Report. We have however included some information on ear health as one example of other factors which may impact on the potential for learning.

Research from the Menzies School of Health found that nine out of ten young Indigenous children who live in remote communities have some form of ear disease<sup>23</sup> and currently one in eight has burst eardrum(s). Long term middle ear damage causes hearing loss which impacts on the development of speech and language and is linked to education disadvantage and behavioural problems. Work by a numbers of researchers has found that early hearing loss, even when later rectified, has lifelong impacts on cognitive development and comprehension skills (Lowell, 2001; Holte, 2003; Howard, 2004; Nienbuys & Burnip, 1988,). Couzous (2003) found that Indigenous children with hearing loss were more likely to have poor school attendance; Galloway (2008) found that children with hearing loss or ear disease have poorer literacy outcomes at school; and Howard (2007) found that Indigenous adults with listening problems are more likely to avoid literacy support. The implication of these findings on the development of language and literacy skills is significant and should be considered in the development of education and training programs.

### What does this section tell us?

- The NT Aboriginal population are disadvantaged across a range of areas when compared with Indigenous people living in other areas of Australia, including education attainment, participation in the labour force, negative health conditions such as diabetes and renal conditions, overcrowding, access to transport and experiences of violence and incarceration.
- Low English LLN could be implicated in many of the areas of relative disadvantage. For example:
  - understanding health information, prescriptions and engaging in confident conversations with doctors and hospital staff
  - having a quiet space to do homework and study
  - having access to, and understanding of, online information and being able to use it for education, and in making decisions
  - understanding the law, charges, documents associated with offences, judicial processes and proceedings
  - understanding government information during a community visit, and online materials
  - understanding utility billing, rental and contractual agreements and other financial and legal information.

<sup>23</sup> <sup>23</sup> Cited from Menzies School of Health Research website:  
[https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Indigenous\\_Health/Child\\_Health\\_and\\_development/Ears/](https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Indigenous_Health/Child_Health_and_development/Ears/)

- 
- NT Aboriginal adults have strong cultural identity and language practice which may be associated with better mental health and greater self-efficacy.
  - Aboriginal children living in remote and very remote areas have significant levels of diagnosed ear diseases. The associated hearing loss has been shown to impact language and cognitive development that is life-long, has behavioural consequences and can lead to literacy and numeracy avoidance in adulthood.

## PART SIX

### Accessing English LLN support, education and training in the NT

Government policy on adult English LLN within Australia at this time equates skills and knowledge development with increased economic participation – i.e. education for employment or active job seeking. Within the NT this focus is evident in the way LLN is currently resourced, with much of the funding being designated to adults who are: “actively” unemployed (registered for, and seeking work); in the workforce, but who need help to improve their LLN or Foundation skills<sup>18</sup>; and, who are enrolled in, or have aspirations for post school qualifications generally Cert III in VET or above.

The purpose of this section is to provide a summary of where NT Aboriginal people can access English LLN training and learner support, how it is provided, and the main players. It is a broad overview, is not the primary focus of the Report, and is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis.

It is difficult to provide a comprehensive overview of English LLN delivery in the NT because it is not centrally coordinated, there is no single government department with overall responsibility for adult education, no active provider network, and no current mechanism for resource and information sharing which limits consistency of approach. The section points to the need for additional research, and an audit of the education and training that is actually available.

It is to be noted that research into the costs and benefits of improving English LLN in the NT Aboriginal population has never been attempted. Such a study would provide insight into the economic impacts of low levels of LLN and the potential benefits of long-term commitment to improvement.

#### Skills for Education and Employment (SEE programme)

The SEE programme<sup>20</sup> commenced in 2013 as a continuation of the Commonwealth government’s Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programme (LLNP). It is the primary commonwealth government funded programme for helping eligible job seekers to improve their LLN skills so they can participate better in training, and/or employment. The programme offers 600 hours of training over a two year period and it is free to people who are referred. SEE is designed to provide initial, basic and advanced accredited English language, literacy and numeracy.

The **eligibility criteria for the SEE programme** covers **people in receipt of Centrelink income support and registered as a job seeker with DHS but has also been opened to all young adults under the age of 21 regardless of their income support status**. People are not eligible if they are a current full-time student or have completed the SEE program within 6 months of the referral date or have been withdrawn or

suspended from the programme within 12 weeks of the exit date. Participants must be assessed as having the capacity to benefit from the programme.

Clients are referred by Centrelink to Job Placement Agencies and then to a training provider. People cannot access the SEE programme's training without this referral. When they have been referred, a client's needs are assessed against the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) so they can commence at the appropriate skill level in reading, writing, oral communication, learning skills and numeracy.

Clients are assessed throughout the programme to check on progress (generally after the first 100 hours, then every 200 hours). **Payments are made to the training providers when student progress has been identified.**

### SEE evaluation findings

The SEE programme was evaluated in 2015. The evaluation study found that NT had the highest level of assessed need (46%, compared with Australian average of 33%) and referral rates were second highest (21%) after SA (23%). However NT had below the average proportion of clients commencing SEE (8% compared with the national average of 10%).

Indigenous people made up less than 10% of SEE clients nationally, the lowest of all client groups defined by the evaluation study. However, **89% of SEE clients in the NT are Indigenous compared to the national average of 8%.**

**SEE programme completion is defined as a client who has commenced the program and completed or exited due to gaining employment or moving to further education.** Indigenous clients were the least likely identified group to complete the training, with:

- **3% completing** (compared with 18% nationally)
- **6% progressing to employment** (compared to 12% nationally) and
- **7% progressing to other training** (compared to 11% nationally).

Failure to attend was the main reason Indigenous participants did not complete SEE training (55%). Indigenous participants also completed the lowest number of hours in the programme compared to the other groups that were defined by the evaluation (117 hours on average, compared with 356 hours nationally).

Statistical information on current numbers of Aboriginal clients in the NT, and their assessed LLN level could not be accessed for this Report. However, issues have been raised in the programme evaluation associated with:

- the sufficiency of SEE programme resourcing to cover costs of remote travel,
- the availability of accommodation and training facilities,
- the adequacy of numbers of referrals to make the training viable for the providers,
- the appropriateness of the programme design for people with very low English LLN skills (i.e. pre-level)
- failures to encourage clients to commence, continue and complete the training.

The following observations were made about SEE at the November 2017 Workshop on Indigenous adult LLN held at Charles Darwin University:

*“Data tells us (and this data is quite loose because it depends on the referring agency’s view of the person) that over 50% of people who are registered by either job active or CDP or disability employment providers require LLN assistance. They don’t all get referred though. We know that because our program is not full of people. They may not get referred, or they might get referred and our engagement doesn’t get them in the door. So, whatever engagement strategy our providers are using, or our contract allows for, that doesn’t get them in the door. If they do get in the door only 17 % are likely to commence and continue on so we know there is some work to do. That is the context.”*

*“... of the [SEE] caseload here over 90% of all participants in the program are people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Of that number, most of those people access on average 117 hours of the 800 hours that they are entitled to per referral period.... We can do better than that...” (a SEE Program Manager)*

There is currently one SEE provider in the NT servicing three regions – Darwin, Top End NT and Central NT. There is however very little geographical coverage through this program – particularly given the extent of need.

As presented earlier in this Report, ABS data shows that more than half NT’s adult Aboriginal population are not in the labour force. If they are not a registered job seeker, this large proportion of the population is not eligible for the SEE programme under the current arrangements. ACSF results also point to a large proportion of NT adult Aboriginal population who do not have the English LLN skills needed to be successful in Certificate I and II courses.

## **Community Development Programme (CDP)**

The Community Development Programme (CDP)[\[1\]](#) commenced on 1 July 2015 as the Australian Governments’ reformed remote employment services delivery system. The current iteration of the CDP program is described on the PM&C website as follows:

*“The CDP supports job seekers in remote Australia to build skills, address barriers and contribute to their communities through a range of flexible activities. It is designed around the unique social and labour market conditions found in remote Australia and is an essential part of the Australian Government’s agenda for increasing employment and breaking the cycle of welfare dependency. The CDP offers a broad range of flexible activities to not only increase job seekers’ skills but also contribute to their community.*

*Providers work with remote job seekers to ensure activities are meeting their needs and aspirations. They continue to work with remote communities to increase the number and range of activities available. They are also promoting these opportunities to the CDP participants while helping them to understand what they need to do to continue receiving income support.”*

In previous iterations of the CDP program, activity requirements were 16 hours per week (usually four mornings). They have since been increased to five-hours-a-day, five-days-a-week. Will Saunders, from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at ANU recently noted at a Northern Institute 'People. Policy. Place' seminar that "penalties imposed on participants [for non-attendance] within the scheme are rising rapidly" and that "funding of providers is currently linked to participant attendance".

The SEE program has a specific focus on LLN delivery, with measurement of participant ACSF levels at the beginning of training and tracking of progress at specific points throughout. The CDP program does not replace the SEE program in relation to LLN delivery. Some CDP providers however, recognise that low levels of LLN are holding participants back so they bring in Registered Training Organisations to deliver LLN training, or to provide 'learner support' for supervisors and/or participants. There are no designated funds within CDP specifically for LLN. Nor are there set expectations regarding the LLN development of CDP participants. If LLN is identified as a barrier for participation in activities and employment for CDP job seekers then the provider may choose to include it as an activity in their job plan. The intention of LLN training in CDP is to help job seekers become ready for employment.

CDP providers do not have Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) specifically related to LLN delivery. KPIs relate to "targeted assistance and quality training" to "overcome barriers to employment". There are no specific reporting requirements of CDP providers to the Commonwealth Government regarding LLN. CDP providers choose who will deliver the training, what kind of training will be delivered, when and where. Job seekers with CDP can access the SEE program, however it has been publically acknowledged that this program does not recognise the specific needs of delivering LLN training in remote Australia, and the government has stated that they are currently working on a solution to this issue.

At present there are no government requirements within CDP around the level of expertise and qualifications required to deliver LLN (specifically) to CDP participants. There are also no requirements around moderation and validation of assessments or of tools. It is the role of the CDP provider to ensure that activity supervisors are supported and provided with relevant training to enable them to fulfil their roles. Given the statistics on ACSF levels outlined in this report, it could be reasonably assumed that many CDP supervisors and participants may be in need of a level of assistance with English LLN which is far beyond the capacity, or role, of a CDP organisation regardless of the quality of LLN training provided.

## Foundation Skills training

Foundation skills<sup>24</sup> encompass learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy skill development (as described by the ACSF). They also include core skills for work such as problem solving, using technology, organising and team work (as described in the Core Skills for Work). Generally these skills are embedded within vocational programs such as pre-employment programs as well as certificate level courses in education and skills development.

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<sup>24</sup> Information sourced from the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults, Department of Education and Training, <https://www.education.gov.au/national-foundation-skills-strategy-adults>



The authors note that the national Foundation Skills Training Package is currently being revised and the Foundation Skills Workforce Development Project is underway, however it has been reported to the authors that few providers are using the training package because the funded 10 hours of English LLN support is insufficient to meet most needs.

Foundation Skills training is being delivered by a number of providers in the NT, responding to requests by employers to upskill their employees, supporting individual students who have higher education aspiration, and assisting communities or community corporations that recognise particular LLN needs of their people. These providers include:

- Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, including training provided to the Defence Force (the Defence Indigenous Development Program) and to Corrective Services NT
- Charles Darwin University, Faculty of VET, and learner support programmes for other Faculties.
- Registered Training Organisations (such as CARHDS, ALPA, Central Australia Training, Alana Kaye Training, Karen Sheldon Training)
- Philanthropic or not for profit training providers such as Mission Australia and Indigenous Community Volunteers

Training courses are resourced through recurrent funding from the NTG Department of Trade, Business and Innovation, the Commonwealth Department of Education, or on a fee for service basis. Some Indigenous corporations are also self-funding LLN workplace development through organisational profits, donations or grants.

## **Community-based delivery models**

The Warlpiri Learning Centres <sup>22</sup> model is an example of the application of a community-based education centre model that is providing adult education, formal and informal LLN support and accredited training. These learning centres are funded through the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT). These community- managed centres focus on meeting local individual and community-wide adult learning aspirations, strengthening local capacity and the pathways to education and employment. The model has been developed around responsive and sustainable learning and training centred on the community need, and real time delivery – rather than a fly in, fly out model – although accredited training is often purchased from external providers.

## **The NT LLN delivery environment**

The following section contains information and commentary around issues identified during the Strategic Priority Project on Indigenous LLN. It is not comprehensive and provides a starting point for consultation and requires further research in some areas

## Government policy (Commonwealth and NT)

The major policy framework for Adult LLN is the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults<sup>25</sup> which focuses on working age Australians with low levels of foundation skills. It is a 10 year strategy that commits to a target of two-thirds of working age Australians having literacy and numeracy skills at Level 3 or above by 2022 (as measured by the ABS delivered OECD International LN Survey). The strategy aims to achieve the target by “creating a nationally consistent environment where all Australian governments can work together through priority action” in the following areas:

- Building workplace and employer understanding of foundation skills and removing stigma associated with low LLN.
- Providing adult learner access to a variety of foundation skills development opportunities that can be tailored to their needs.
- Establishing partnerships between government, industry, employers and unions that will respond to employer and industry needs for foundation skill training.
- Strengthening the capacity of the education and training workforces to deliver foundation skills (including the skills of specialists LLN practitioners) and by helping them to better integrate foundation skills within vocational training.

Although the NT government is a signatory to this COAG policy framework, the NT remains the only jurisdiction without an explicit policy on Adult Community Education (ACE), nor any explicit references to adult LLN within policies on economic development and Indigenous affairs. At this point, NT has no direct application of government funding to the sector<sup>26</sup>

The Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults should be read within the broader National Agreement on Skills and Workforce Development<sup>27</sup>. This agreement focuses on supporting a vocational education and training system that “delivers a productive and highly skilled workforce” and “enables all working age Australians to develop the skills and qualifications needed to participate effectively in the labour market and contribute to Australia’s economic future”. One of the benchmarks in this agreement is to halve the proportion of adults without qualifications at Certificate Level III or above by 2020 – this translates to 76.5% of adults hold a qualification at Cert III or above. It was last measured in 2014 as being “not on track”<sup>28</sup>.

The authors have been told by LLN practitioners in the NT that: the target has effectively drawn funding away from Certificate Level I and II courses in preference for funding higher level courses and does not recognise the need for a pathway through the lower level Certificate courses to strengthen English LLN skills.

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<sup>25</sup> Information sourced from the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults, Department of Education and Training, <https://www.education.gov.au/national-foundation-skills-strategy-adults>

<sup>26</sup> (ALA 2013).7 *The Role of Adult and Community Education in Regional & Rural Australia*. Melbourne: Adult Learning Australia (2013)

<sup>27</sup> National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development

<sup>28</sup> Council of Australian Governments Report on Performance 2016

With a focus on working age adults and employment outcomes, the current policy framework does not support all adults to develop their language, literacy and numeracy skills. It is unclear to the how the COAG targets can be met within the timeframe given the lack of clarity regarding lead responsibility within the NT, the design and targeting of current programs and a range of other challenges.

### Workforce factors – a summary

Although there are no comprehensive statistics on the literacy and numeracy workforce, research conducted by Circelli in 2015 using convenience sampling of volunteer respondents found that 80% of the literacy and numeracy workforce were female and 79% were 45 years and over. More than half were employed full time and most were highly qualified (many holding several qualifications). Although a professional standards framework for the foundations skills workforce is under development concerns have been expressed about the real potential for qualifications to be lowered. A literature review of the workforce concluded the following:

*“Although the Australian survey results show that the existing foundation skills workforce is well qualified (Circelli 2015), the strong relationship between vocational education and training and the literacy and numeracy workforce could result in **a trend toward lower qualifications in the future**. The VET sector continues to require only a certificate IV level qualification (or in some cases no qualification if supervised by a person with a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment). For vocational teachers the certificate IV is coupled with occupational (industry area) expertise (Hodge 2015). However, challenges arise for literacy and numeracy practitioners, whose expertise is enhanced by high educational qualifications because teaching or education is their ‘industry’. Higher-level qualifications, particularly knowledge-based qualifications, develop metacognitive understandings or ‘access to the style of reasoning within disciplinary structures of knowledge’ (Wheelahan 2007, p.638). The risk is magnified by the age demographics of the workforce, which suggest many experienced and highly qualified practitioners will leave the workforce in the coming decades and may be replaced by practitioners who have competency-based certificate IV qualifications rather than knowledge-based higher-level qualifications, such as those from a university.”<sup>29</sup> (emphasis applied by authors).*

To enable a well skilled LLN workforce, courses like the *Graduate Diploma in Applied Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice* should be affordable, accessible and widely marketed. There also needs to be an accredited pathway into this Graduate Diploma from other Certificate courses. It is to be noted that the *Cert. IV in LLN* is not accredited in Australia at this time which limits training opportunities for non-graduates.

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<sup>29</sup> Medlin, J 2016, *The Australian literacy and numeracy workforce: a literature review*, NCVET, Adelaide, pg 16.

## **Funding programme delivery in remote and very remote programs**

Census data used in Section 2 of this Report indicate that around 80% of the NT Aboriginal population live in areas regarded as remote and very remote Australia. Challenges associated with external provision of remote services are well documented and include: distance, weather, accessibility, health and safety factors, planning and logistics at a distance, cost and availability of accommodation, competing cultural responsibilities and community/family events. These factors, among others, and often in combination, serve to make external training delivery and on-going support complex and very expensive. Feedback from service providers suggest that these overheads are not sufficiently factored into the current funding arrangements for LLN program delivery in the NT. Also, 'fly-in, fly-out' delivery models without building local capacity to deliver on-going real time support between visits is not a workable solution – particularly if it is the only model of service being supplied to a community.

Few government funded community-based adult education centres remain in NT communities today – these have largely been de-funded. Building local or organisational capacity to deliver on-site or in-house LLN support and/or training capacity is an area requiring further exploration<sup>30</sup>.

### **Building workplace and local LLN delivery capacity**

Although some organisations recognise the need, and invest in improvements, there are few resources available to organisations to develop and maintain the English LLN capacity of Aboriginal staff and supervisors within the workplace over time. This includes the building of in-house capacity to develop willing staff with higher levels of literacy to provide informal and ongoing mentoring support to staff with lower levels of literacy. In the current funding environment it is difficult to ensure longer-term follow up to maintain LLN learning, monitor an individual's progress, secure ongoing access to further training and develop continuity of relationship with a single RTO over time. Anecdotally, high levels of managerial support impacts positively on training delivery outcomes in the workplace.

### **Accommodation and training spaces in remote communities**

Given the overheads associated with servicing remote areas, collective support from communities in the provision of English LLN training through the reduced cost and increased availability of accommodation and training spaces has the potential to improve access to and ongoing arrangements for servicing the community's English LLN needs.

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<sup>30</sup> Refer to the November 2017 LLN workshop report for additional information on a community-based case study

## What does this section tell us?

Strategic Priority Project (SPP) research suggests that very few options and resources are available in the NT to improve levels of English LLN – particularly for those adults with assessed skills at ACSF Levels 2 and below.

The most significant Commonwealth funded LLN programme (SEE) has eligibility criteria attached that significantly limits participation. There is also government acknowledgement that the programme is not appropriate for the needs of people dwelling in remote and very remote communities.

COAG has set ambitious targets around the proportion of adults holding qualifications at Cert III level or above, and the proportion of adults who will have skills at Level 3 and above as measured by the next PIAAC (or its' equivalent). These targets are currently not on track for the NT adult Aboriginal population. An overview of the delivering environment points to: pressures on the English LLN workforce including access to appropriate qualifications, funding and logistical challenges associated with servicing remote and very remote communities; and a need for ongoing support to those individuals with high needs.

In general, funding appears to be “stop – start”, short-term, and very limited with little to no coordinated response. Resources flowing through the VET system are generally targeted at the provision of ‘learner support’ to achieve accredited training outcomes – generally through delivery of units of training rather than complete qualifications. The level of instruction provided, and the number of hours allocated to delivery does not generally prepare people with low levels of literacy to transition to higher VET levels. There are few options currently for adults with low/very low levels of literacy to attain Certificate III or IV and above.

*Refer to Appendix 1: the Action Statement on Aboriginal adult English LLN - broad stakeholder recommendations on approaches and action required to improve English LLN in the NT.*

## PART SEVEN: Conclusions and recommendations

### CONCLUSIONS

This Report is a response to calls from NT Aboriginal leaders of the six remote communities (where the Whole of Community Engagement initiative has been operating) who said that their people need better English Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) skills. They collectively agreed that strong skills were necessary for: post school education success; confident negotiation with government/s and in other business partnerships; responsibilities associated with caring for country; and greater employment opportunities and business development. However this was asserted alongside their recognition of the centrality of their own languages, traditions and cultures. English LLN was supported as a complimentary set of skills that sit alongside their traditional languages and solutions must recognise and respect this position.

Further, the Report arises from collective, cross sectoral and interagency agreement on the need for urgent action expressed through activities of the Strategic Priority Project (SPP) and documented in the Action Statement on Indigenous adult English LLN. This WCE initiative has been led by the Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor of Indigenous Leadership at CDU and funded through the Higher Education Partnerships and Participation Program (HEPPP).

Both the Commonwealth and NT governments have made statements about the importance of NT's Aboriginal population to economic development in Northern Australia, and have strategies that target stronger participation in local community decision making, greater education and employment success and improved health and safety. Adult LLN skills support these outcomes.

There is no comprehensive data source on the English LLN skill levels of NT Aboriginal adults. All current information sources have gaps and limitations associated with scope, coverage, quality and appropriateness. This Report acknowledges these limitations and brings multiple data sets together to start to build a picture of the size of the issue, who it is affecting and where there is greatest need.

These data say:

- Being an active part of the labour force is associated with better English LLN skills but more than half of all Aboriginal adults in the NT are not in the labour force (53%).
- Holding higher education qualifications is associated with better English LLN skills. Low numbers of Aboriginal adults in the NT hold qualification above Certificate Level II (16.2%), with a very few of these having a tertiary qualification (2%).
- Fewer NT Aboriginal students in year 9 achieve the minimum standard in English reading, writing and numeracy (as measured by the NAPLAN program) compared with Indigenous students in other parts of Australia - about one third meet the minimum benchmark in reading (34%); less than one in five in writing (18%); and less than half in numeracy (46%). These young people will contribute to the numbers of Aboriginal adults with low English LLN skills.

- There are significant numbers of Aboriginal men in NT prisons. This population is likely to have lower levels of year 12 attainment and lower levels of post school education qualification when compared to other NT Aboriginal adults.
- More than 85% of a sample of 660 NT Aboriginal adults assessed against the ACSF have English reading, writing, speaking, listening and numeracy skills below the level needed for independence in the workplace and for having the confidence to participate in all aspects of the broadest Australian society. The authors believe this could translate to more than 40,000 NT Aboriginal adults, with more than 23,000 having skill levels where they will struggle with VET Cert I or II level courses and would need significant support to complete any English LLN tasks.
- Aboriginal adults in the NT are relatively disadvantaged when compared to Indigenous adults in other parts of Australia across a range of indicators of socio- economic wellbeing. Many of these are likely to be impacted by low English LLN or influence levels of English LLN. Although more research in this area is required, the influence of ear health is apparent.

This data picture suggests that the issue of low English LLN skills in the NT Aboriginal adult population is highly significant and requires deliberate action from governments, service providers, education and training institutions, and Aboriginal leaders. If the target set in the Commonwealth Government's National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults is applied to the population much concerted effort will be required to improve outcomes. Although the NT has a unique context, the SPP has found there is rich evidence of things that work, and experience to be drawn on from other states, territories and countries – such as the Tasmanian model, the New Zealand model, community campaign, models, workplace capacity building, and community learning-centre models (adult education).

The authors of the report and expert reviewers again acknowledge that current data gaps are noteworthy. The data presented in this report however is starting to build the evidence base that can inform potential solutions. The issue needs to be supported by more research and greater commitments around data access and/or appropriate survey coverage. A simple agreement to share ACSF assessment data, which is a cost effective by-product of current assessment processes, would be a significant starting point to ongoing monitoring of the issue.

Current Adult Education/ LLN policy is focused narrowly and the data show that it misses substantial parts of the adult Aboriginal population in the NT. For the eligible adult population the process flow is dependent on joined up services, high levels of individual and community engagement, support from employers and sufficient resourcing in a challenging landscape associated with vast distances, accessibility and sparse populations.

Solutions are not simple and sustained effort of multiple players is required over time – a wide ranging commitment to Aboriginal-led policy and the implementation of diverse and appropriate models informed by LLN specialists and linked to related policy initiatives. Senior Aboriginal leaders from the WCE partner communities have expressed their concerns. The Strategic Priority project has identified high levels of interest to support change. It is hoped that this report will enliven and inform consultation about the impact of low levels of English LLN on peoples' lives, and on society as a whole and prompt innovative and collective action for change. There is much rich information and experience to draw on, and the time is right.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**These recommendations should be read together with the *Action Statement (Sept 2017) on English LLN for Aboriginal adults in the NT* which provides a broader set of recommendations around English LLN.**

The following recommendations are informed by the findings of this Report with input from a reviewing panel that has included Aboriginal leaders involved in the WCE program:

1. That governments acknowledge the size, extent and impact of low levels of English LLN in the NT Aboriginal and prioritise action and give priority to systematic improvements in this area.
2. That these data are used by Aboriginal leaders, governments, learning institutions, businesses, and service providers to inform the development of an adult English LLN policy and strategy appropriate to urban, remote and very remote settings.
3. That governments support a communication and education process to enable NT Aboriginal leaders and communities to understand the data in this Report and to consult together on what it means for their people, lives and organisations.
4. That organisations regularly undertaking adult Aboriginal LLN assessments be encouraged and supported to use the ACSF assessment method, collect and compile the results<sup>25</sup> and share (de-identified) data centrally so English LLN can be monitored over time. (This includes ensuring the results are accessible and that moderation and validation of tools and methods be of primary consideration to ensure data quality).
5. That a specialist working group consider how the evidence base can be further strengthened in the NT. For example: whether of a comprehensive survey of LLN levels is needed, how the next PIAAC survey is conducted in those areas previously excluded, and whether there is a need for an economic cost benefit analysis of low levels of LLN in the NT.



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## APPENDIX ONE:

# Updated Action Statement on Aboriginal adult English LLN in the Northern Territory

12 September 2017

*The Action Network on Aboriginal adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN)<sup>1</sup> met at a workshop at Charles Darwin University in November 2016, and 12 September 2017. This Statement is supported by a group of around 100 individuals and organisations committed to collective action for improved English LLN for Aboriginal adults in the Northern Territory (NT). Many Aboriginal people have aspirations for work, education and life which require English literacy and numeracy. The network suggests that no real progress can be made in this area without long-term government commitment, Aboriginal leadership, bi-partisan support and a collective approach. This entails government and non-government, community, business, and voluntary sectors working together (and separately) towards the same long-term vision with measurable goals. Literacy is everyone's business. In the Northern Territory however, no government department has responsibility for adult education or adult language, literacy and numeracy. Also there are no 'Closing the Gap' (COAG) Indicators addressing adult education or LLN – a significant policy gap given the scale of the issue, and the flow on effects to the NT and the nation as a whole.*

The Action Network agrees that literacy is a fundamental human right, essential to social inclusion, and peoples' ability to fully develop their knowledge and skills and realise their potential. English language LLN capability enables participation and progression along education and career pathways and is essential for interaction within business, the economy, social systems (like health, community services, the law) and broader society.

Census data from 2011 identifies that more than half of NT Aboriginal adults speak an Aboriginal language as their main language (54%). This figure increases to over 80% in very remote areas. During Whole of Community Engagement (WCE)<sup>2</sup> initiative community consultations Aboriginal people reiterated the centrality of their own languages to their cultural practice, identity and connection to country, however many understood the importance of supporting their children to learn English and wanted to improve their own. Level 3 Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)<sup>3</sup> skills are required to fully engage in English speaking society and work. The statistical overview report (Shalley and Stewart 2017, Appendix 1) shows that most adults included in the research were assessed at below Level 3 (ranging from 86% in skills for listening to English to 94% in numeracy). Improved adult LLN in the general population has proven flow on effects for children, parents, families, and society as a whole. Improved parental literacy benefits their children.

*The LLN Action Network would welcome the opportunity to work closely with all tiers of government and others on this critical issue, and is pleased to make the following **recommendations**:*

<sup>1</sup> **Although we use the term 'LLN' throughout this document we are also referring to the range of Foundation skills required in order to establish, apply and maintain LLN in life, on-line and in the workplace.**

<sup>2</sup> Funded through the Australian government's *Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program* (HEPPP) and implemented with six remote and very remote NT communities.

<sup>3</sup> The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) is a tool which assists both specialist and non-specialist English language, literacy and numeracy practitioners describe an individual's performance in the five core skills of learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy.

## 1. Responsibility and policy

- 1.1 That all tiers of government acknowledge the extent and impact of low levels of English LLN in the Aboriginal adult population of the Northern Territory (NT), and prioritise coordinated and sustained, bi-partisan commitment that endures beyond changes in government.
- 1.2 At present no Government department has primary leadership and implementation responsibility for adult education and adult English language, literacy and numeracy in the NT. It is therefore imperative that responsibility and leadership be clarified and actioned.
- 1.3 It is to be noted that the 'Closing the Gap' policy contains no Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for adult education or adult LLN. This is considered to be a significant policy gap with multiple flow on effects. COAG is encouraged to take action in this regard.
- 1.4 Develop an evidence-based, Indigenous-led, Aboriginal adult English LLN policy/ strategy for the NT informed by a broadly composed consultative group with significant involvement from sectors including: LLN specialists, education and training, legal, health, employment, business, voluntary, community services and media.
- 1.5 That government financially supports consolidation of the Action Network and information clearinghouse and recognise the leadership group and members (as a potential source of specialist knowledge, skills and experience) and a necessary force and resource at this time.
- 1.6 That the Aboriginal adult LLN policy (and any implementation plan/s) link with, and further the aims of, aligned Northern Territory, national and international policy and statements.

## 2 Long term funding commitment

- 2.1 Commitment is required to long-term, secure and flexible funding for accredited as well as non-accredited English LLN education and training for adults at all levels of the ACSF.
- 2.2 Develop contemporary funding models to enable increased access to unaccredited, informal and real-time learning opportunities for Aboriginal adults at the lower levels of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)<sup>4</sup> (those at pre-level, Level 1 and Level 2).
- 2.3 Acknowledging the aging LLN workforce, the need for more qualified practitioners and the cost of educational qualifications, commit to creating an enabling environment for maintaining a qualified, well-resourced and supported adult literacy workforce in the NT. This workforce should include a high proportion of Aboriginal people and local language speakers.
- 2.4 Reinstitution or re-invigoration of community/adult learning centres/spaces in Aboriginal communities as a matter of priority.

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) – the Australian Government's tool for measuring competency in reading, writing, numeracy, oral communication and learning skills.

### 3.0 Innovative and culturally appropriate delivery

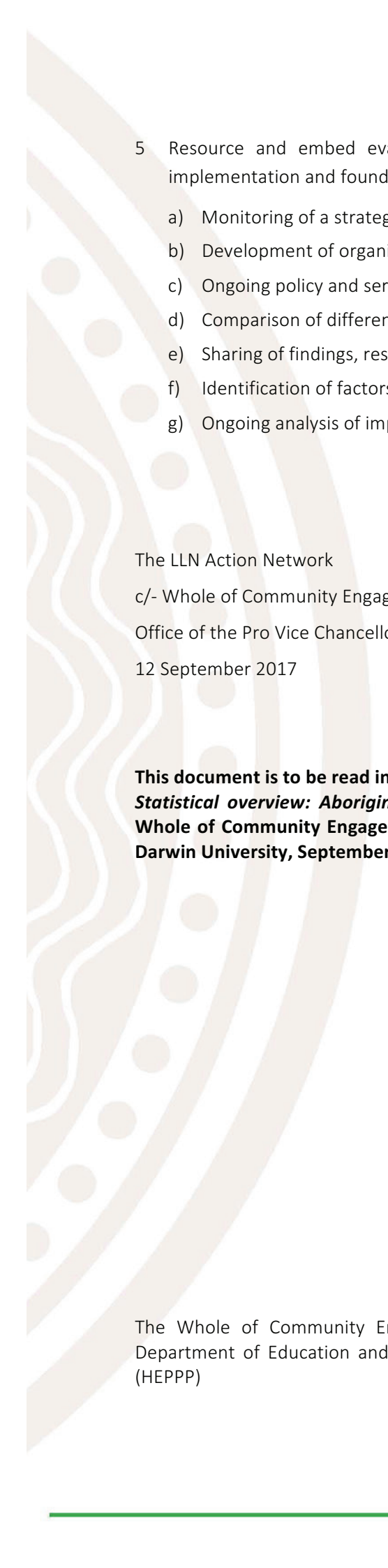
- 3.1 Expand and consolidate the evidence-base related to the design, implementation and evaluation of effective LLN service delivery models. This includes, but is not limited to:
- a) Community-wide and community-campaign models
  - b) Community/adult learning centre models
  - c) Organisational development models: workplace LLN capacity building and workforce development
  - d) State-wide and national delivery models e.g. Tasmania and New Zealand
  - e) English as an additional language (EAL) delivery for Aboriginal adults
  - f) Bilingual programs
  - g) Delivery to Pre-level, level 1 and Level 2 learners (specific)
- 3.2 Respect for Aboriginal language, history and culture, and the preference and need for establishment of Aboriginal language and literacy first in many parts of the NT should be reflected in the design and delivery of English LLN education and training for those populations, and in the qualifications and experience of those practitioners who deliver it. (e.g EAL, TESOL)
- 3.3 Ensure that policy statements include Aboriginal leadership in the design of: local programs (what is delivered, how and by whom); and, education and training resources with Aboriginal pedagogies and content.
- 3.4 Provide targeted training for Aboriginal staff and supervisors who wish to improve their English LLN and foundational skills in workplaces within communities to enable career progression.

## 4 Building a stronger evidence base

- 4.1 Investigate feasibility of conducting an NT-wide survey on ACSF levels of Aboriginal adults, including urban, regional, remote areas and correctional service settings.
- 4.3 Commit to a communication and education process to support NT Aboriginal leaders, urban and remote and communities, and organisations to understand the data contained in the Statistical overview Report (Shalley and Stewart, 2017) and to consult together on meanings for their people, lives and organisations.
- 4.4 Undertake a study of the economic costs of low levels of English LLN, and the economic benefits of improved levels in the Aboriginal adult population of the NT.
- 4.5 Establish an LLN clearinghouse which includes a comprehensive database of research evidence and for collection and distribution of free, culturally appropriate, LLN teaching and learning resources (including past and present and digital resources).
- 4.6 Consider funding arrangements to enable ACSF assessments and encourage organisations and agencies that regularly undertake adult ACSF assessments to collect and compile the results<sup>5</sup> and share (de-identified) data centrally so the issue of low English LLN can be monitored over time.

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<sup>5</sup> In accordance with the Australian Privacy Principles of the, Privacy Act 1988

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- 5 Resource and embed evaluation and use a 'collective impact' approach in NT LLN policy implementation and foundational work in order to enable:
    - a) Monitoring of a strategic multi-partisan, inter-sectoral collaborative approaches
    - b) Development of organisational and collective goals and KPIs
    - c) Ongoing policy and service refinement
    - d) Comparison of different implementation models, tools and methods
    - e) Sharing of findings, resources and approaches
    - f) Identification of factors contributing to success; and
    - g) Ongoing analysis of impact and outcomes (individual, family, social, economic etc.)

The LLN Action Network

c/- Whole of Community Engagement initiative - Strategic Priority Project on Indigenous adult LLN

Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor of Indigenous Leadership, Charles Darwin University

12 September 2017

**This document is to be read in conjunction with the report:**

***Statistical overview: Aboriginal adult LLN in the Northern Territory, Shalley F. and Stewart A., Whole of Community Engagement initiative, Office of the PVC of Indigenous Leadership, Charles Darwin University, September 2017.***

The Whole of Community Engagement Initiative (WCE) is funded through the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training's: Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP)

## APPENDIX TWO: Main data sources and limitations

Overview of main collections used	Data limitations
<p><b>ABS, Census of Population and Housing</b></p> <p>National survey of everyone in Australia on Census night undertaken every five years. Collects a small amount of socio economic information (such as age, gender, education, income, employment, ethnicity, housing), directly from individuals or a household spokesperson, or through a person with authority in dwellings where groups of people are staying e.g. hospitals, nursing homes etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online or paper Census form in English. Often completed by one person on behalf of the household therefore may include inaccurate answers. Face to face interviews were conducted in some areas to collect the information, particularly in Indigenous communities. Questions may or may not have been translated into local language in these interviews.</li> <li>• Some people are missed and adjustments are made to population counts based on <u>estimates</u> of missing people.</li> <li>• Some questions are left blank, including the question on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin which is used to define the population.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ABS, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS)</b></p> <p>A large national survey with a sample that represents the Australian Indigenous population who live in private dwellings (houses, flat, units etc). The survey is based on answers provided from the people selected to take part – i.e. it is self-report by adults. Data was collected face to face through an interview. The survey is conducted every 6 years and collects information about many parts of wellbeing such as health, housing, work, income, education, identity and participation in cultural events, language spoken, experiences of violence, and access to the internet.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status is identified through a screening question.</li> <li>• Sample survey with an 80% response rate. Not everyone was included, and not everyone who was selected, participated.</li> <li>• Data loses accuracy when it is disaggregated by characteristics such as remoteness, age, gender, education level etc.</li> <li>• Data is self-reported (based on answers provided by the respondent) for population aged 15 years and over that has not been validated by other sources.</li> <li>• Interview was conducted in English, but facilitated by a local Aboriginal person in most remote areas to help with language issues.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ABS, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS)</b></p> <p>A large national survey with a sample that represents the Australian Indigenous population who live in private dwellings (houses, flat, units etc). The survey is based on answers provided from the people selected to take part – i.e. it is self-report by adults. Data was collected face to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status is identified through a screening question.</li> <li>• Sample survey with an 80% response rate. Not everyone was included, and not everyone who was selected, participated.</li> <li>• Data loses accuracy when it is disaggregated by characteristics such as remoteness, age, gender, education level etc.</li> </ul>



<p>face through an interview. The survey is conducted every 6 years and collects information about health conditions, health risk factors, access to and experiences with the health system, and related socio-economic characteristics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data is self-reported (based on answers provided by the respondent) for population aged 15 years and over that has not been validated by other sources.</li> <li>• Interview was conducted in English, but facilitated by a local Aboriginal person in most remote areas to help with language issues.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ABS, Prisoners in Australia</b></p> <p>Count of all adult people in detention (including remand and police lock ups) on a consistent day every year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses information from the detention centre entry process. May not be updated with better quality information if subsequently collected.</li> <li>• Information collection process is generally in English.</li> <li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status is self-identified.</li> </ul>
<p><b>AIHW, Health of Australia's Prisoners</b></p> <p>Data collection on the health of Australia's prisoner population (18 years plus) either on remand or in sentence. Information is collected over a two week period each year by prison authorities in each State/Territory – data is based on self-reported answers. Participation is not mandatory.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation rates between 42% and 49%.</li> <li>• Data collection is in English.</li> <li>• Prisoners are 18 years and over. Police lock ups, court cells, periodic detention and juvenile detention centres are not included.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ABS, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIACC)</b></p> <p>Internationally comparable survey designed to measure adult language, literacy and numeracy competencies in a country's primary language. Australian data collected by the ABS from people aged 15 years and over. Data collection was via a face to face interview using computer assisted interviewing. The assessment tasks were completed on paper or using a notebook computer. There was no time limit however the participant was not allowed to get assistance from others. This is the third survey in the series (1996, 2006, 2011/12) and there are issues associated with comparing data across the surveys because of changes to questions and content. Results are released for literacy, numeracy and, Problem Solving in Technology Rich Environments (in 2011/12 only).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All data collection was undertaken in English.</li> <li>• The survey did not include people living in very remote Australia nor in discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. An estimate of between 60 and 70% of the NT Aboriginal population has been excluded.</li> <li>• Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander status was collected in the interview however no results have been published about the Indigenous population in Australia.</li> </ul>

<p><b>ACARA, National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)</b></p> <p>NAPLAN is an annual assessment of all Australian students in years 3, 5, 7, and 9. The tests are designed to measure the essential skills required for children to progress through school and provide results that can be compared across Australia and across time. Test results are released for reading, writing, grammar and punctuation, spelling and numeracy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students not at school during the assessment period will not be included in the results.</li> <li>• NAPLAN tests are not designed to monitor the English LLN progress of students with English as their ‘second language’ and do not assess skills and capability in their first language.</li> <li>• Some researchers suggest the context of the test questions are biased towards western cultural norms.</li> </ul>
<p><b>DET, Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) Assessments</b></p> <p>The ACSF provides a framework for the standardised assessment of core skills in English learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy. The score shows the level of competency achieved (from Pre-level through to Level 5). The test materials are not mandated and should be chosen or developed so that they are appropriate to the context of the participant and place., Assessments are often embedded in other education and training programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sample of 617 ACSF records analysed was ad hoc and does not represent the total population of NT Aboriginal adults. The sample has a regional skew towards the broader Alice Springs Region and a remoteness skew towards areas classified as very remote. People with very strong LLN skills and those with very weak skills are unlikely to have been included in the sample. Conclusions can only be made about those adults included in the sample.</li> <li>• Assessments are undertaken in English.</li> <li>• Assessors require significant training and experience, and their assessment of levels can vary.</li> <li>• Moderation processes should be undertaken to ensure consistency across different assessors and over time.</li> <li>• Tools should be validated against the ACSF levels.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Note:</b> there is no agreed mapping of competency levels between NAPLAN, the PIAAC and the ACSF.</p> <p>There is mapping between Foundation skills assessment and ACSF.</p>	

## APPENDIX THREE: ACSF sample information

ACSF assessments were sourced through initial conversations with organisations, followed by a formal data request that outlined the scope of this Report and the privacy and confidentiality provisions.

When data was received it was immediately de-identified in the cases where a name was attached, and each record was allocated a unique numeric identifier.

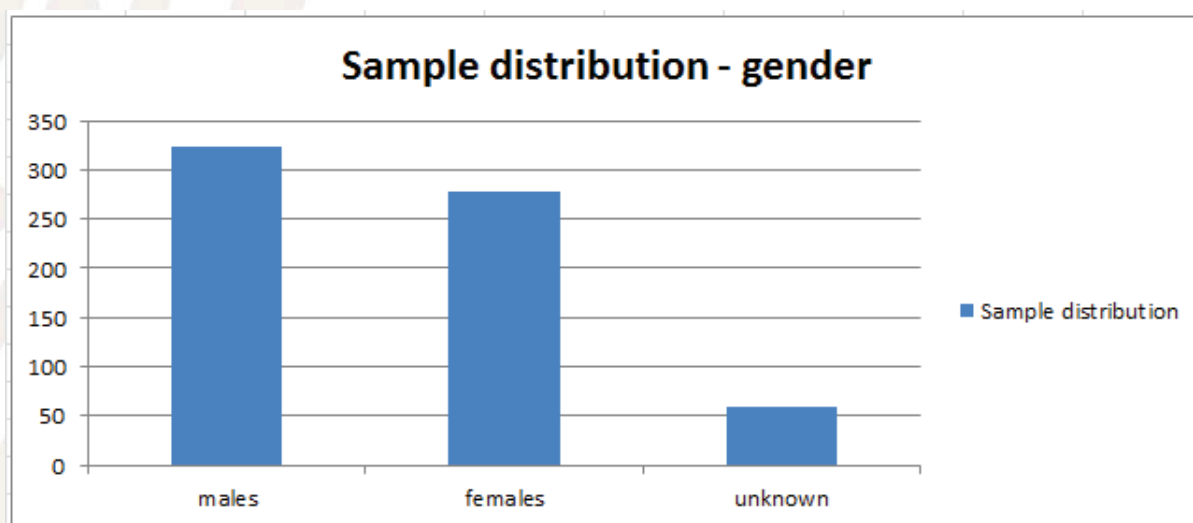
The data was cleaned and coded using a consistent coding methodology for assessment scores, nil assessments and where demographic and geographic characteristics were missing.

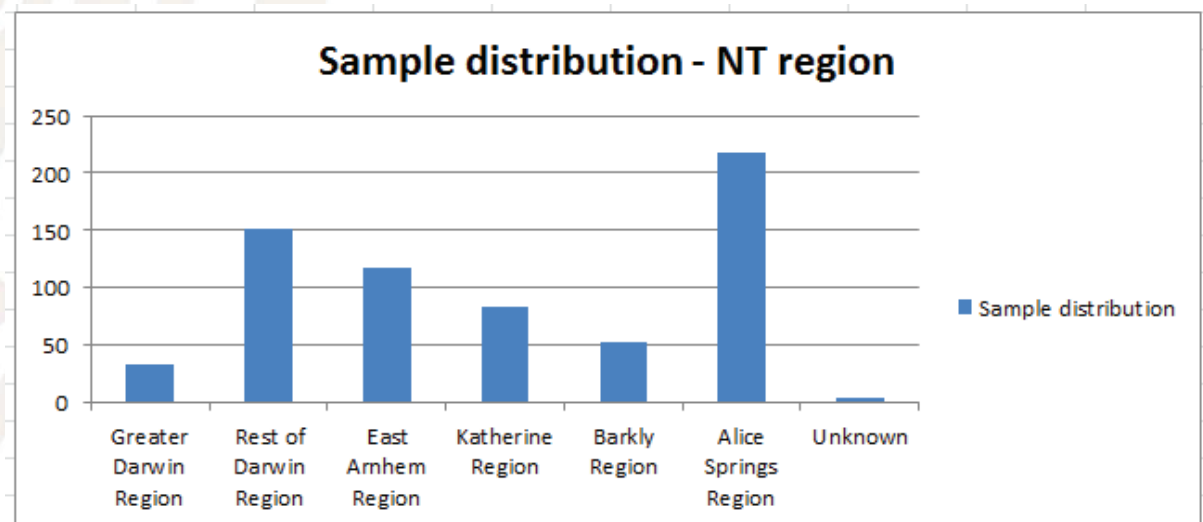
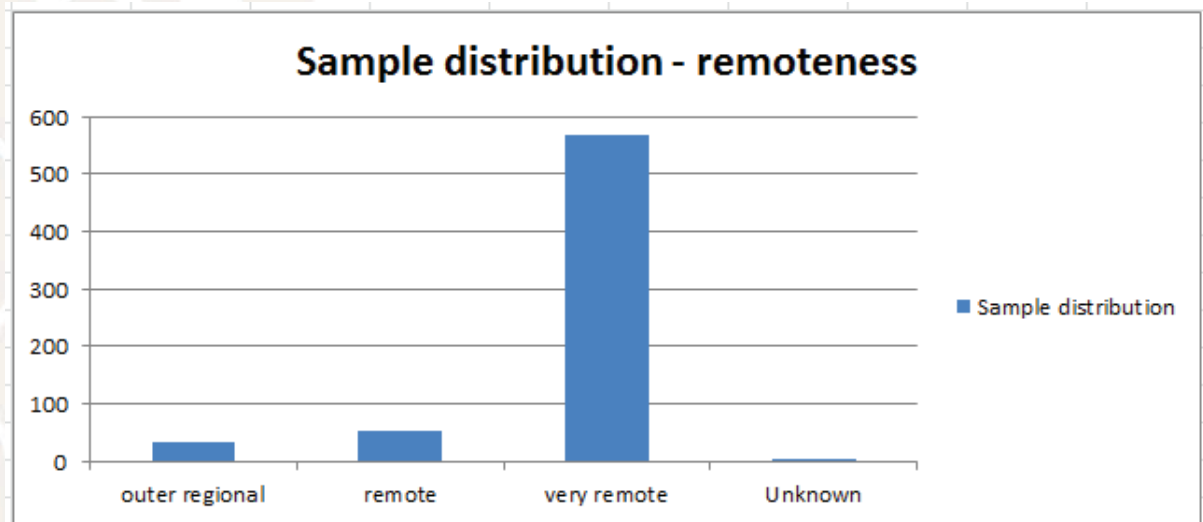
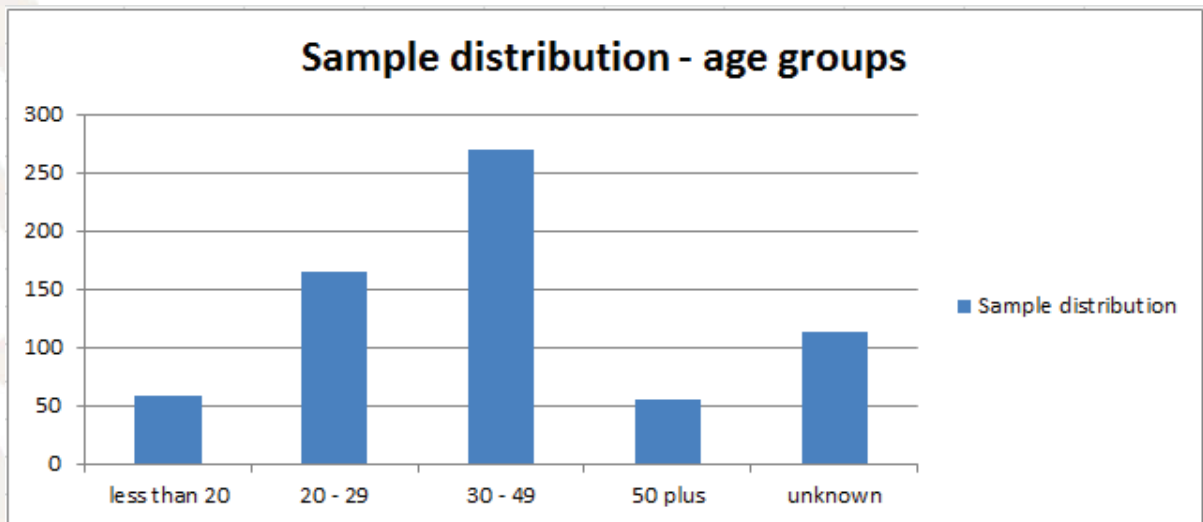
Based on advice of LLN specialists for the purposes of this Report we decided against using all ACSF indicators for each core skill. The ones that we have presented are the key (main) skill associated with English LLN – these are:

Reading .04	Reading strategies (locating, decoding, vocabulary)
Writing - .06	The mechanics of writing (vocabulary, grammar, structure)
Oral - .07	Speaking
Oral - .08	Listening
Numeracy - .10	Using and applying mathematical knowledge and problem solving processes (calculating)

In assessments from some sources all indicator levels were not included in the core skill assessment. In these cases the overall core skill score was used. This was informed by the observation that within skill indicators were highly likely to be assessed at the same ACSF level.

### What does our sample look like?





## Summary information about the sample:

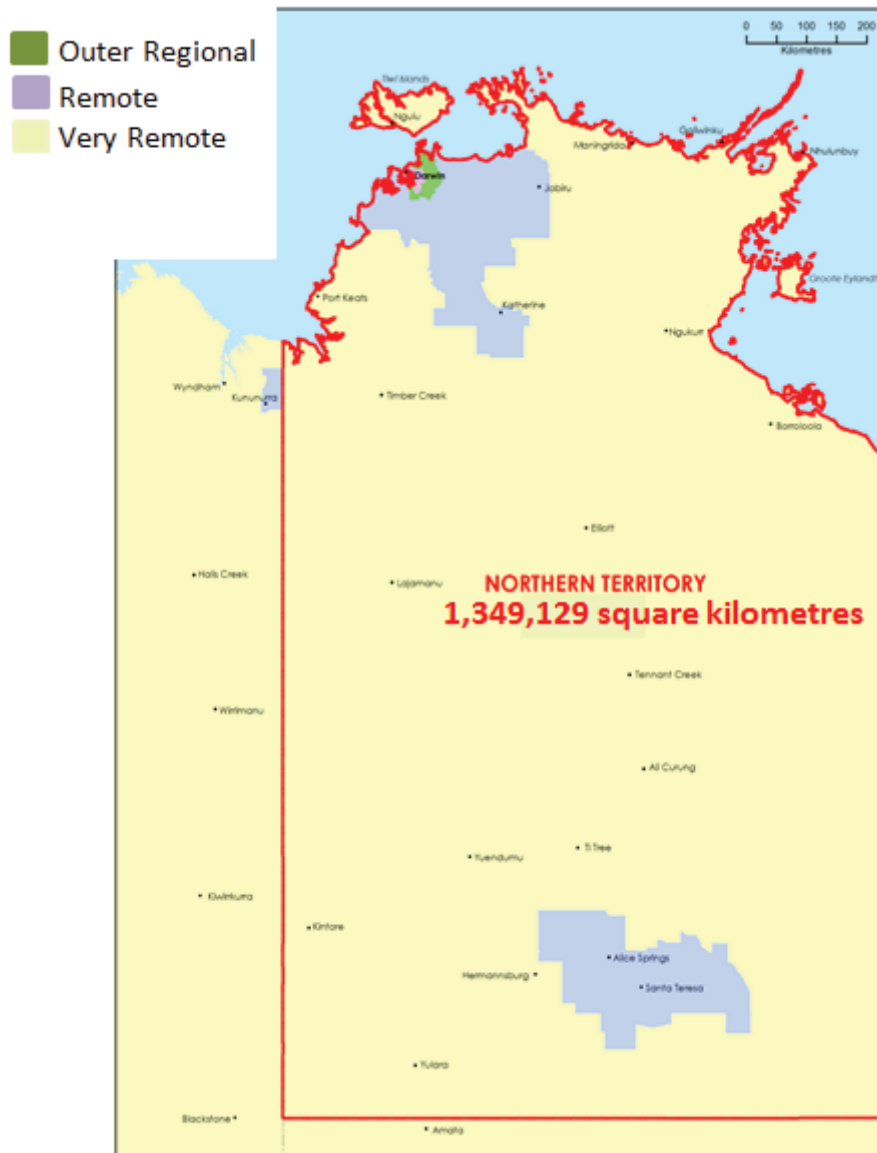
- Individual records for 660 Indigenous adults (from 15 years of age) were collected from ACSF assessments undertaken in the period 2009 through to 2017. Not all people were assessed on all core skills and in those cases assessments were coded to zero. The proportion not assessed against individual skill has been provided in the table below. Readers should note that this further minimises the sample of people for whom we can make conclusions. Speaking and Listening are the most affected core skills.
- Most of the sample records have come from the Alice Springs Region (33%). The Greater Darwin Region (5%) has the lowest number of records compared to the other Regions.
- Most of the sample included people living in very remote areas (86%) which is greater than the proportion of the NT Indigenous population who live in very remote Australia (58% according to Census 2011).
- There were more men (49%) in the sample than women (42%) with the remaining records having an unknown gender. 2011 Census data tells us that men are more likely than women to be employed or actively seeking work (75% of men compared with 68% of women) therefore they were likely to have a higher chance of being in this sample. Nine percent of the sample had an unknown gender therefore were excluded from the gender analysis.
- Age was calculated at the time of assessment. The distribution of age groups in the sample looks appropriate for the age structure of the NT. Seventeen percent of the sample had an unknown age therefore were excluded from the age group analysis

TABLE: Proportion of sample not tested against core ACSF skills

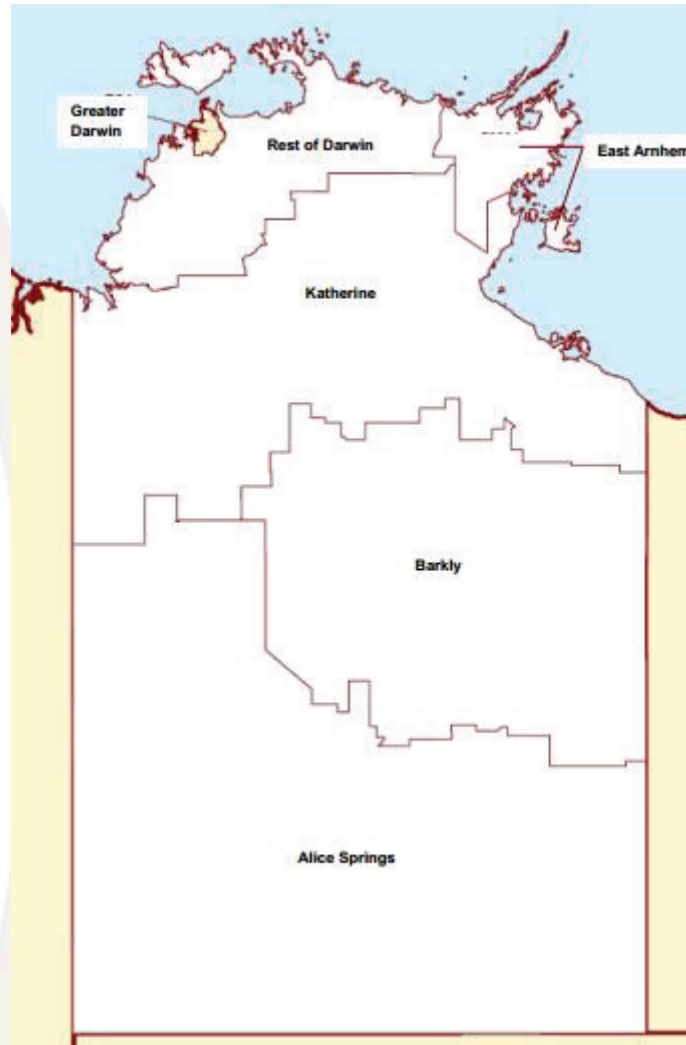
Core ACSF Skills	Proportion of sample not tested
Reading	10%
Writing	11%
Speaking	31%
Listening	35%
Numeracy	18%

# APPENDIX Four: Maps

## NT Remoteness Areas:



NT Regions:



**Funding for this project provided by the Australian Government's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme**



**Whole of Community  
Engagement  
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