

5. Education and training

There are two broad perspectives against which the purpose and performance of education in the region may be assessed. The first is culturally-grounded and considers what Indigenous people want from education. According to one analyst, many Indigenous people selectively procure aspects of Western education and ignore others that do not suit their needs and aspirations (Schwab 1998). Consequently, what is desired from education in general, and from schools in particular, can be very different to what these western institutions expect. These desires have been conceptualised in terms of the acquisition of core competencies to deal with the non-Indigenous world, the capacity for cultural maintenance, and access to material and social resources (Schwab 1998: 15). Such acquisitions might be construed as part of an Indigenous social capital model that sees schooling as a means to reinforce capacities within the Indigenous domain.

The second perspective derives from an economic development model and stresses a need to acquire human capital skills in order to participate in the mainstream economy. From this perspective, educational outcomes are measured in terms of participation rates, grade progression, competency in numeracy and literacy skills, and (for the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector) course completion. Given the focus here on developing a statistical profile of the regional population, consideration is given solely to this second perspective. In part, this is recognition that the human capital model of educational outcomes reflects more closely the platform required if local Indigenous aspirations for enhanced participation in mainstream employment are to be realised. It is also recognition that culturally-grounded educational outcomes are more difficult to quantify and lack readily accessible data sources.

Participation in schooling

A total of 36 schools are located in the Pilbara region administered by three different education sectors – government, catholic, and Aboriginal independent. Collectively, they incorporate five high schools, two colleges, 21 primary schools, five Aboriginal community schools, and two education support centres, along with the Port Hedland School of the Air (Table 5.1). In addition, significant education initiatives built into certain mining agreements, and into the community relations practices of major companies such as Pilbara Iron, Woodside, Dampier Salt, and BHP Billiton, include the provision of scholarships and local educational enrichment programs. Of particular note are the Partnership for Success programs managed by the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation at Karratha and Roebourne (Gumala Mirnuwarni) and Port Hedland (Kurtakalku Maya) with outreach at Newman and Tom Price. Table 5.1 indicates the number of Indigenous enrolments in each government and non-government school. In the case of

government schools, the number of Indigenous enrolments is shown, along with the Indigenous percentage of all enrolments in parentheses.

Table 5.1. Distribution of government and non-government schools by Pilbara SLAs, 2005

Ashburton SLA	East Pilbara SLA	Port Hedland SLA	Roebourne SLA
Tom Price senior high 33 ^a (17) ^b	Rawa independent community school	St Cecilia's college	St Paul's primary
Onslow primary 79 (67)	Parnngurr independent community school	Hedland senior high school 206 (31)	St Luke's college
Paraburdoo primary 15 (6)	Newman senior high school 37 (14)	Port Hedland primary 38 (8)	Karratha senior high 111 (16)
Tom Price primary 52 (15)	Jigalong remote community school 83 (100)	South Hedland primary 248 (77)	Dampier primary 5 (3)
Pannawonica primary 6 (7)	Marble Bar primary 57 (85)	Baler primary 147 (28)	Roebourne primary 253 (98)
North Tom Price primary 34 (13)	Nullagine primary 48 (86)	Cassia primary 87 (25)	Karratha primary 63 (14)
	Newman primary 40 (15)	Port Hedland school of the air 7 (22)	Wickham primary 71 (21)
	South Newman primary 83 (22)	Cassia education support centre	Pegs Creek primary 47 (22)
	Yandeyarra remote community school 58 (100)	Strelley independent community school	Millars Well primary 25 (7)
	Kiwirrkurra remote community school		Tambrey primary 63 (16)
			Karratha education support centre 18 (72)

^aNumber of Indigenous enrolments at the school.

^bIndigenous percentage of total school enrolments in parentheses.

Source: Western Australia Department of Education.

As can be seen, given the demographic make-up of the Pilbara, many of the government schools are also predominantly Indigenous in terms of their enrolments. Leaving aside the remote community schools, Table 5.1 reveals other major concentrations of Indigenous students throughout the Pilbara school system. It also shows some notable voids. For example, Roebourne primary is essentially an Indigenous school, with Indigenous children accounting for 98 per cent of its enrolments. The primary schools at South Hedland, Marble Bar, Nullagine and Onslow also have high percentages of Indigenous children enrolled. Schools where Indigenous students are more notable for their relative absence include Paraburdoo, Pannawonica, North Tom Price, Millars Well, Tambrey and Dampier. At the high school level, as much as one-third of enrolments at Hedland senior high are Indigenous, providing it with a significant Indigenous profile, certainly compared to Karratha or Tom Price.

In terms of the two perspectives on educational purposes and outcomes posited above, the existence of an Aboriginal independent community sector in the Pilbara is also significant and flags an important socio-economic distinction between populations in the (mostly) coastal towns and interior Aboriginal

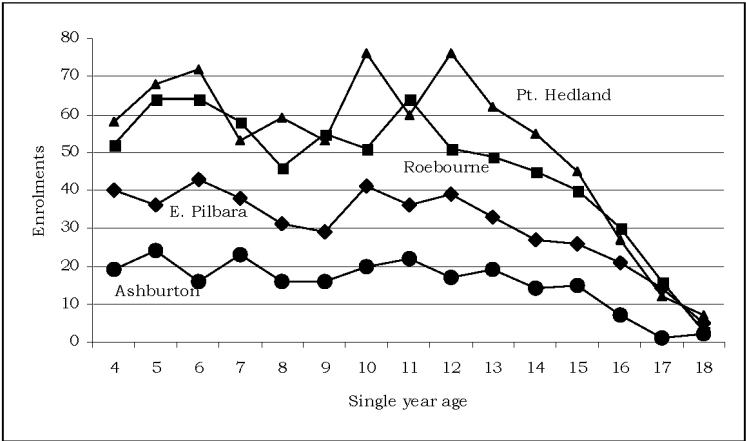
communities. All of these independent schools (Strelley has annexes at Woodstock and Warralong), are bilingual, with Aboriginal teachers trained on site to teach in the vernacular. They are run by school committees comprised of representatives from local family groups. Their aims (and outcomes) are cast much more in terms of the Indigenous social capital model posited above. For example, the aims of Strelley school include the teaching of survival skills, community involvement, maintenance of Nyangumarta traditions, learning about Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures, self-identity, and keeping the school and children close to parents. Inevitably, this produces a different set of outcomes to those sought from the mainstream education system with its greater stress on English literacy, numeracy, individual achievement and mobility. Thus, the distribution of student enrolments by school type provides some measure of the relative importance of social versus human capital outputs from the regional education system.

Composition of enrolments

In the second semester of 2004, a total of 6374 students were enrolled in Pilbara schools between Years 1 and 10, which approximates the compulsory school age range of 5–17 years. Of this number, 1684 were Indigenous students representing 26 per cent of the total compulsory enrolment. An additional 672 students were enrolled in Years 11 and 12, and 127 (19%) of these were Indigenous. While Indigenous population estimates by single year of age do not exist for 2004, if the Indigenous ERP for broad age groups provides any guide these enrolment levels would yield high rates at close to 100 per cent, at least for the compulsory school years.

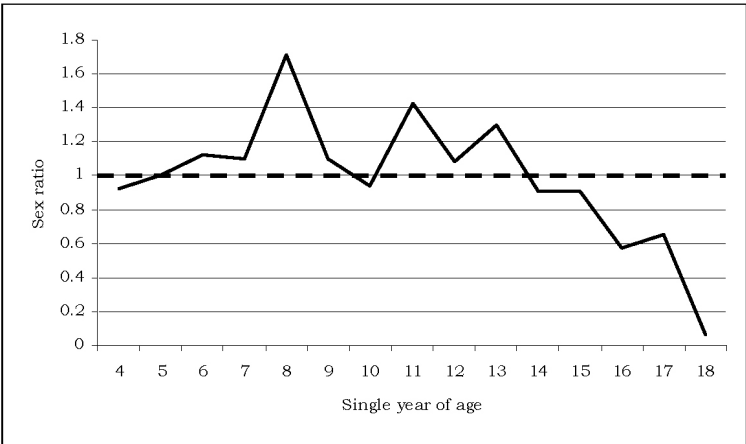
Most Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) enrolments are at schools located in the Port Hedland and Roebourne SLAs as indicated in Fig. 5.1. Also shown is the fact that enrolments start to fall away quite sharply in all regions as the secondary school years progress, especially beyond age 15. As a consequence, in the second semester of 2004, only 21 Indigenous males were enrolled in Year 12 (with none in Ashburton schools), and only 24 Indigenous females. Indigenous students comprised just 9 per cent of all Year 12 school enrolments.

Figure 5.1. Indigenous school enrolments in Pilbara SLAs by single year of age, 2004



Source: Western Australia Department of Education and Training

Figure 5.2. Ratio of male to female Indigenous school enrolments in Pilbara schools by single year of age, 2004



Source: Western Australia Department of Education and Training

One reason for this reduced Indigenous participation in formal education appears to be a relatively higher attrition among male students. Fig. 5.2 shows the sex ratio of Indigenous enrolments by single-year age group. The higher ratio of males in the 5–14 age groups is broadly consistent with the ERP sex ratio for those ages (1.08 for the 5–9 age group and 1.09 for the 10–14 age group), but at older school ages the ERP sex ratio is much closer to parity (0.99) than the observed school enrolment sex ratio. This suggests that Indigenous males drop out of schooling at a higher rate than their female counterparts after age 14.

Retention rates

Table 5.2 shows apparent retention rates for Indigenous students in Pilbara schools from Year 8 to Year 10, and from Year 10 to Year 12. These rates are compared with those recorded for Indigenous students generally in Western Australia, as well as with all non-Indigenous students in the state. The state-wide data are shown for 2003, this being the latest year for which data are available. The rates represent the proportion of those previously in Year 8 who were retained by Year 10 two years later (2001 to 2003 for the state-wide figures, and 2002 to 2004 for the Pilbara figures). The same calculation is made in respect of those previously in Year 10 who were retained by Year 12.

Table 5.2. Apparent retention rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Western Australian and Pilbara schools: 2003 and 2004

	Apparent retention rates	
	Year 8 to Year 10	Year 10 to Year 12
WA Indigenous (2003)	93.2	29.3
WA Non-Indigenous (2003)	98.6	72.5
Ashburton Indigenous (2004)	65.0	22.2
Ashburton Non-Indigenous (2004)	71.7	48.7
East Pilbara Indigenous (2004)	105.0	48.4
East Pilbara Non-Indigenous (2004)	87.5	53.7
Port Hedland Indigenous (2004)	80.7	39.5
Port Hedland Non-Indigenous (2004)	75.2	56.4
Roebourne Indigenous (2004)	102.4	35.5
Roebourne Non-Indigenous (2004)	85.3	60.4

Sources: Western Australia Department of Education and Training; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) 2005: Table 3A:22, 32.

Taking the state-wide situation first, this reveals that for all students in Western Australia, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, retention rates from Year 8 to Year 10 are high and generally close to 100 per cent. In the Pilbara regions, however, the retention of Indigenous students is more varied with only 65 per cent retained in Ashburton and 81 per cent in Port Hedland, while the rates in East Pilbara and Roebourne suggest problems with numerator/denominator concordance. As a general observation, retention to Year 10 is lower in the Pilbara than in Western Australia as a whole. When it comes to school retention beyond the compulsory years from Year 10 to Year 12, Indigenous youth generally in Western Australia tend to opt out, and the Pilbara is no exception. Once again, schools in the Ashburton SLA record very low Indigenous retention rates. From a labour market perspective, retention to Year 10 is a significant step for Indigenous students with evidence from the 1994 NATSIS indicating that it almost doubles the chances of Indigenous employment. Further retention to Year 12 increases these chances further still, though more so for females (ABS & CAEPR 1996: 70–5).

The impact of these retention rates is reflected in census data on the highest levels of schooling completed as reported by all adults (those over 15 years). These levels are shown in Table 5.3 for Indigenous adults in the Pilbara, while figures for non-Indigenous adults are also provided for comparative purposes. As much as 10 per cent of the Indigenous adult population of the Pilbara has not been to school. From a labour market perspective, this may not be significant as these people are concentrated in older age groups and reflect the legacy of past exclusionist policies.

Table 5.3. Highest level of schooling completed: Indigenous and non-Indigenous adults^a in the Pilbara SD, 2001

	Indigenous			Non-Indigenous		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Year 8 or below	20.2	15.8	18.0	5.6	5.0	5.4
Year 9 or equivalent	13.0	11.8	12.4	7.0	6.0	6.5
Year 10 or equivalent	31.8	35.0	33.4	35.9	31.9	34.2
Year 11 or equivalent	12.3	12.8	12.6	16.1	15.6	15.9
Year 12 or equivalent	13.2	12.3	12.7	35.0	41.1	37.6
Did not go to school	9.5	12.2	10.8	0.5	0.4	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

^aRefers to population >15 years of age and excludes highest level of schooling not stated.

Source: ABS 2002b.

Of more interest are the relatively low proportions who have completed Year 10 or above. As much as 88 per cent of non-Indigenous adults counted in the Pilbara finished school at Year 10 or above, with 54 per cent completing beyond Year 10. The comparable figures for Indigenous adults are just 59 and 25 per cent. In terms of current numbers (2005), and assuming that these census rates still hold, this would mean that an estimated 571 Indigenous adults in the Pilbara would have completed schooling to Year 12. No doubt most of these are already currently employed, meaning that most of those who might be sought for employment positions would have school attainment levels below Year 12. As numerous studies have shown (Daly 1995; Hunter 1996, 2004; Hunter & Schwab 2003), this contrast in levels of schooling completed is highly significant in terms of explaining overall differentials in the rate of Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation in mainstream employment.

One very tangible response to this situation has been the establishment of the Gumala Mirnuwarni and Kurtakalku Maya Partnership for Success programs in conjunction with select students and their families in Karratha, Roebourne, Port Hedland, Newman and Tom Price. In addition to these, Woodside supports the Warrgamugardi Yirdiyabura 'pathways to employment' program at Roebourne. The aim of these programs is to prepare students to compete for employment, apprenticeships, traineeships and/or tertiary entrance after leaving school. To achieve this, students with identified capacity to complete school are targeted and then provided with a range of intensive support structures including trained

mentors, access to after school hours support and a school resource centre/library for study, a comprehensive leadership/study skill program from Year 8 to Year 12, a full-time program coordinator, family and home support, industry support, and access to a tertiary motivational program.

The Gumala Mirnuwarni program at Karratha and Roebourne was the first of these initiatives, commencing in 1997. By 2004, a total of 110 students had participated with 31 of these still in the program. The Port Hedland-based Kurtakalku Maya program started in 2002 and has had a similar up-take rate, with 46 students involved up to 2004 and 21 enrolled as at 2004. While some evidence exists of increased high school retention rates as a consequence of these programs (Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation 2004), the telling information concerns post-school outcomes. Of the 104 students who have been through these programs, 15 are now enrolled in University or Technical and Further Education (TAFE) programs, 21 are in trade apprenticeships, and 10 have found direct employment (McCorry 2004). Presumably, the impact of these initiatives is incorporated in the aggregate profiles presented here, and while they clearly demonstrate positive outcomes for those students involved it has to be said that, numerically, their overall impact to date is limited. However, to the extent that these initiatives continue to raise Indigenous educational participation and outcomes and, more importantly, to the extent that they expand in terms of student numbers participating, then they are likely with time to contribute to an overall positive shift in aggregate indicators.

With regard to such initiatives, there is clearly a sense among some local Indigenous people of a need for some targeting of educational resources, particularly towards younger age groups, to ensure that future school leavers are equipped with a skill-set that will widen their life choices (see Interview segment 12, p. 61; Interview segment 27, p. 93; Interview segment 29, p. 93). Others see such targeting as too narrowly focussed (see Interview segment 10, p. 60).

Attendance

For most schools in the Pilbara, the educational impact of relatively low levels of Indigenous school enrolment is compounded by low Indigenous school attendance (Table 5.4). According to these data, in all parts of the Pilbara, less than 80 per cent of Indigenous children enrolled in primary school years actually attend school on a regular basis, with this figure falling to as low as 60 per cent in East Pilbara schools. In Years 8 to 10, the rates are even lower with fewer than half of enrolled students in Ashburton attending. These rates are far lower than those recorded for non-Indigenous students in Pilbara schools.

Table 5.4. Indigenous and non-Indigenous attendance rates in Pilbara schools: primary and secondary years, 2004^a

	Indigenous Yr 1–Yr 7	Non-Indigenous Yr 1–Yr 7	Indigenous Yr 8–Yr 10	Non-Indigenous Yr 8–Yr 10
Ashburton	65.4	87.9	43.3	85.9
East Pilbara	59.9	91.5	54.1	89.0
Port Hedland	77.3	92.8	75.1	90.3
Roebourne	72.1	92.5	60.6	92.0

^aSecond semester, per cent of enrolments attending on a regular basis.

Source: Western Australia Department of Education.

We can use the attendance rates shown in Table 5.4 against the numbers enrolled in each school year to produce estimates of numbers actually attending classes (Table 5.5). This is an important device when set against the labour demand and supply issues outlined in chapter 3. Thus, in terms of potential Indigenous labour supply emanating from the Pilbara school system in the next couple of years, only 286 individuals have been in regular school attendance, with a large proportion of these located in schools in the Port Hedland Shire.

Table 5.5. Estimates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students attending Pilbara schools: Primary and secondary years, 2004^a

	Indigenous Yr 1–Yr 7	Non-Indigenous Yr 1–Yr 7	Indigenous Yr 8–Yr 10	Non-Indigenous Yr 8–Yr 10
Ashburton	83	553	20	106
East Pilbara	161	375	50	136
Port Hedland	363	905	126	290
Roebourne	263	1354	90	566
Total	870	3187	286	1098

^aSecond semester.

Source: Western Australia Department of Education and Training.

All of these official data and estimates regarding school access and participation are based on averages. What they do not show, and what would be more important to reveal (although it is well-nigh impossible), are the day-to-day levels of individual attendance at school. Given the variability in attendance and high levels of short-term population mobility among the Indigenous population it cannot be assumed that aggregate data refer consistently to the same individuals. Since children often accompany adults in their movements across, into and out of the region it seems likely that some mobile children may be overlooked as part of the regular school population. Moreover, since attendance registers are taken each morning, no records exist regarding student participation beyond morning sessions. The prospect thus exists that the attendance rates presented here, especially those for Indigenous students, are overly-favourable. Certainly, some locals consider school participation and attendance levels to be less than satisfactory (see Interview segment 25, p. 92; Interview segment 28, p. 93).

Outcomes

As already noted, from the standpoint of participation in regional economic development, educational achievement is a key prerequisite. While studies reveal a clear positive relationship between economic status and level of educational achievement (as measured by standard indicators such as highest level of schooling completed, and post-school qualifications), an important shortcoming is their lack of measurement of the quality of education outcomes. For example, age at leaving school or highest level of schooling completed does not necessarily equate with school-leaving grade level achievement. In fact, for many Indigenous students in remote areas, age or grade level is a poor indicator of achievement as many Indigenous students perform substantially below their age and grade levels in terms of literacy and numeracy competencies. Thus, while data on participation in the education system provide an important indication of access and utilisation, it should be noted that they are less revealing about outcomes in terms of demonstrated ability, no matter from what perspective this might be measured.

In Western Australia, outcomes from education are measured using benchmarks devised by the Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment program (WALNA). This is a curriculum-based assessment that tests students' knowledge and skills in numeracy, reading, spelling and writing. The WALNA test is administered annually to all students in Western Australian schools (including Catholic schools) in Years 3, 5 and 7, although a few exemptions are made. The test gathers information on the performance of school children in relation to nationally agreed benchmarks in numeracy, reading, spelling and writing, and in relation to that of other Year 3, 5 or 7 students across Western Australia. The national benchmark standard is an agreed standard of performance that professional educators across the country deem to be the minimum level required for students at particular key stages in their educational development in order to make adequate progress. By providing an indication of how students are faring against the national benchmark and in relation to state performance, the WALNA assessment assists in identifying those students who would benefit from extension, as well as those not meeting the minimum expected standard.

Unfortunately, the Western Australia Department of Education advises that the relatively small numbers of Indigenous students who sit for these tests in Pilbara schools prevents the construction of reliable estimates of Indigenous student achievement specifically for that region. As a consequence, it is not possible to establish precisely the number of Indigenous students within the Pilbara school system who are likely to progress with, or without, difficulty towards an outcome that would satisfy the requirements for a successful engagement with the mainstream labour market (at least as determined by benchmark achievements). However, for the first time, the 2004 National Report on Schooling reports

estimates of the proportion of students achieving benchmark scores at the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) geolocation level, and the data for reading achievement for Western Australia are shown in Table 5.6. In this classification, the Pilbara falls entirely within the 'very remote' category, except for Karratha and Port Hedland which fall under the 'remote' category.

Table 5.6. Proportion of WA students achieving the national benchmarks in reading: Total and Indigenous populations and MCEETYA geolocations, 2004

	Year 3	Year 5	Year 7
All students ^a	95.6% ± 1.4%	93.7% ± 1.0%	88.9% ± 1.1%
Indigenous students	84.1% ± 5.0%	74.2% ± 3.9%	57.6% ± 3.9%
Metropolitan students	96.4% ± 1.2%	94.9% ± 0.9%	91.0% ± 1.0%
Provincial students	95.1% ± 1.9%	92.4% ± 1.3%	87.0% ± 1.6%
Remote students	92.0% ± 3.2%	90.1% ± 2.3%	81.4% ± 2.6%
Very Remote students ^b	85.7% ± 4.9%	76.8% ± 4.7%	59.4% ± 4.7%

^aAll Year 3, 5 and 7 students in Western Australia tested in both government and non-government schools in 2004, plus students who are exempt from testing (education support students) who are classified as not meeting the benchmarks

^bVery remote category includes the Pilbara except for Karratha and Port Hedland which are included in 'remote'.

Source: Western Australia Department of Education and Training.

While the data shown by geolocation are for all students, the Pilbara (very remote) estimates appear to align quite closely with the sState-wide estimates for achievement among Indigenous students. Ultimately, the true levels for Indigenous students in the Pilbara remain unknown, but we can assume they do not exceed those implied in Table 5.6. Thus, for Indigenous students in Pilbara schools outside of Karratha and Port Hedland between 80.8 per cent and 90.6 per cent achieve Year 3 national reading benchmarks. By Year 5 this range had fallen to between 72.1 per cent and 81.5 per cent, and by Year 7, somewhere between just over half and two-thirds of all students (54.7% and 64.1%) were achieving national benchmarks (see Interview segment 23, p. 75). If the rates shown for 'remote' schools apply to the Karratha and Port Hedland student body, then achievement in those places would be higher, but still ranging between 78.8 per cent and 84 per cent by Year 7. Whether these same rates are achieved by Indigenous students in these locations remains unknown, at least in terms of publicly-available information.

Participation in vocational education and training

School-based and post-secondary education and training leading to the acquisition of formal workplace qualifications is available in the Pilbara from a variety of public and private providers, ranging from the Pilbara College of TAFE (with delivery points at South Hedland, Karratha, Roebourne, Wickham, Tom Price,

Newman, Paraburdoo, Pannawonica, Pundulmurra, Roebourne Regional Prison, Cheeditha community, Onslow, Jigalong, Port Hedland, Boodarie and across discrete communities), to industry-based training providers such as ATAL based in Dampier.

Table 5.7 shows the number and proportion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous enrolments in TAFE courses in the Pilbara by course level in 2004. These data refer to publicly funded providers (TAFE and universities) as well as private providers receiving public funds. Enrolment data for private providers undertaking VET activity on a fee-for-service basis are not collected by the Department of Education and Training. Overall, a total of 4740 enrolments were recorded, with Indigenous enrolments accounting for just over one-third (36%) of these. Indigenous males are more represented than Indigenous females in the TAFE sector, with Indigenous males accounting for 40 per cent of all male enrolments, and Indigenous females accounting for 31 per cent of all female enrolments. Indigenous males and females are more likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to be enrolled in short miscellaneous enabling courses with no formal certification attached (11% and 15%, compared to 6% and 11%). Also evident is the fact that Indigenous enrolments are concentrated in Certificate level I and II courses, while non-Indigenous enrolments are far more likely to be in Certificate levels III and IV. One variation from this pattern is the slightly higher proportion of Indigenous males enrolled in diploma courses, although this only amounts to 38 persons.

Table 5.7. Indigenous and non-Indigenous VET enrolments by course level: Pilbara SD, 2001^a

Course level (see key)	Indigenous				Non-Indigenous			
	Males		Females		Males		Females	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No level	120	11.2	97	15.6	106	6.5	152	10.8
1	432	40.3	184	29.6	164	10.0	170	12.1
2	333	31.1	205	33.0	608	37.1	437	31.1
3	142	13.2	101	16.2	473	28.8	467	33.2
4	7	0.7	27	4.3	247	15.1	133	9.5
5	38	3.5	8	1.3	43	2.6	46	3.3
Total	1072	100.0	622	100.0	1,641	100.0	1,405	100.0

^aExcludes Indigenous status not stated. Includes all VET enrolments collected by the Western Australia Department of Training from publicly funded providers (TAFE colleges and universities) and from private providers receiving public funds. Enrolment data for private providers undertaking VET activity on a fee-for-service basis are not collected by the Department of Training.

Key: 1. Certificate I; 2. Certificate II; 3. Certificate III; 4. Certificate IV; 5. Diploma.

Source: Western Australia Department of Education and Training.

For some age groups, the rate of enrolment in VET courses is very high. Table 5.8 shows the enrolment rate by broad age-group in 2001 and reveals that almost three-quarters of Indigenous youth aged 15–19 were enrolled in VET courses,

almost two-thirds of those aged 20–24, and half of those aged 25–29. Even in prime working-age groups, up to age 50, participation remains reasonably high. Overall, the Indigenous participation rate in 2001 was around 39 per cent, which is similar to the rate for 2004.

Table 5.8. Indigenous VET enrolments by broad age group: Pilbara, 2001

Age group	Enrolments	Per cent of age group ^a
10–14	76	9.7
15–19	430	71.7
20–24	331	61.6
25–29	303	50.4
30–39	419	40.7
40–49	228	32.0
50–64	80	15.4
Total	1867	39.0

^aBased on ERP.

Source: Western Australia Department of Education and Training.

Outcomes

To measure performance in the VET sector, the Western Australian Department of Education and Training has identified a number of key performance measures relating to efficiency, effectiveness and quality. In relation to the effectiveness of the training system, the key indicator is the rate of successful completion of modules – the components from which courses are constructed. Table 5.9 compares the rates of successful module completion for Indigenous and non-Indigenous males and females enrolled in Pilbara training courses in 2004. Clearly, outcomes for Indigenous females are the least favourable. Less than two-thirds of enrolled Indigenous females successfully completed their module, with 37 per cent failing or withdrawing before completion. Indigenous males performed somewhat better, with only 29 per cent failing or withdrawing, although compared to non-Indigenous males (who had a 94% success rate) this was a very poor outcome. Nonetheless, in terms of regional labour demand and supply, these data indicate that substantial numbers of Indigenous people in the Pilbara, and especially males, are participating and achieving in vocational education, mostly at Certificate I and II levels.

Table 5.9. Indigenous and non-Indigenous VET module outcomes in the Pilbara, 2004^a

Outcome ^b (see key)	Indigenous				Non-Indigenous			
	Males		Females		Males		Females	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	2908	62.0	1576	55.3	5731	80.1	3,718	71.7
2	3	0.1	16	0.6	707	9.9	580	11.2
3	403	8.6	192	6.7	288	4.0	464	9.0
4	655	14.0	482	16.9	116	1.6	299	5.8
5	718	15.3	583	20.5	316	4.4	123	2.4
Total	4687	100.0	2849	100.0	7158	100.0	5,184	100.0

^aExcludes those enrolled in modules who are continuing studies into the next collection period and Indigenous status not stated.

^bCategories 1–3 represent successful outcomes.

Key: 1. Competency Achieved/Pass; 2. Recognition of Prior Learning; 3. Non-Assessable Enrolment – Satisfactorily Completed; 4. Competency Not Achieved/Fail; 5. Withdrawn.

Source: Western Australia Department of Education and Training.

The module load completion rate (MLCR) provides another measure of performance, and with this indicator it is possible to compare the Pilbara with data for all of Western Australia (Table 5.10). The MLCR represents the sum of student curriculum hours for successfully completed modules expressed as a proportion of the total student curriculum hours across all module enrolments. In 2004, this rate was only 58 per cent for Indigenous module enrolments in the Pilbara – less than two-thirds of the level reported for non-Indigenous students in the Pilbara, though more favourably placed in regard to the overall Western Australia average.

Table 5.10. Indigenous and non-Indigenous average MLCR (%): Pilbara and Western Australia, 2004

Pilbara Indigenous	Pilbara Non-Indigenous	Western Australia total
58.0	82.9	72.7 ^a

^a2001 figure.

Source: Western Australia Department of Education and Training.

Qualifications

A key human capital requirement in the regional labour market, and a primary product of the education and training system, is the acquisition by individuals of formal qualifications. While program data can reveal numbers passing through courses, it remains the case that the five-yearly census provides the most comprehensive source of data on the number of individuals within the region who are likely to hold post-secondary qualifications.

At the 2001 Census, a total of 11 705 adults in the Pilbara reported having some form of post-school qualification, but Indigenous adults accounted for just 3 per cent of these. With 43 per cent of all adults holding a post-school qualification,

the population of the Pilbara is relatively skilled (the equivalent figure in Western Australia as a whole is 39%), although this clearly does not apply to the Indigenous population. Table 5.11 shows the distribution of Indigenous and non-Indigenous non-school qualifications by qualification level. Fully 88 per cent of Indigenous adults hold no qualification compared to 53 per cent of non-Indigenous adults, although males tend to be more qualified than females. Of those with qualifications, Indigenous people are far less likely to have diplomas and degrees.

Table 5.11. Percentage distribution of Indigenous and non-Indigenous adults in the Pilbara with non-school qualifications, 2001^a

Non-school qualification	Indigenous			Non-Indigenous		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Postgraduate Degree	0	0	0	1.4	0.7	1.1
Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate	0	0	0	0.8	1.9	1.3
Bachelor Degree	0.5	1.6	1.1	8.0	11.4	9.4
Advanced Diploma and Diploma	0.9	2.3	1.6	5.0	7.0	5.9
Certificate	12.6	5.8	9.0	40.8	13.1	29.2
No qualification	86.1	90.3	88.3	44.0	66.0	53.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

^aExcludes non-school qualification not stated.

Source: ABS 2002b.

If we assume that these 2001 rates remain constant, we can produce an estimate of the numbers in the resident Indigenous adult population by 2006 (4760) who would hold a qualification. This yields a figure of 557 with a qualification, 428 of whom would have certificate level, 76 diploma level, and 52 degree level, although these are minimum estimates as they are based on rates calculated net of individuals who did not indicate their qualification status. Overall, this 2006 level would represent an increase of 60 Indigenous adults since 2001 with a qualification. Set against the scale of output from the VET sector, and the numbers passing through mining company traineeships, this estimated increase in qualified individuals appears far too low and suggests that the overall Indigenous regional rate of post-school qualification is likely to have risen since 2001.

Differences are also evident in the field of qualification reported, both by sex and by Indigenous status (Table 5.12). Although high non-response to the census question on field of qualification undermines the quality of the data, it appears that most qualifications held by Indigenous males are in engineering and building, similar to their non-Indigenous counterparts. Among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous females, on the other hand, qualifications in health, education and management predominate. These differences in field of qualification are broadly in line with occupational variations already highlighted between males and females, regardless of Indigenous status.

Table 5.12. Non-school qualification by field of study: percentage distribution of Indigenous and non-Indigenous males and females in the Pilbara SD, 2001^a

Non-School Qualification (see key)	Indigenous			Non-Indigenous		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
1	1.4	0.0	0.7	3.2	3.0	3.1
2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.9	0.7
3	54.9	1.6	29.9	64.2	5.1	44.9
4	14.0	1.6	8.1	11.1	0.5	7.6
5	6.0	2.1	4.2	2.1	2.1	2.1
6	7.0	20.5	13.3	2.4	20.4	8.3
7	2.3	12.6	7.2	3.2	19.4	8.5
8	1.9	37.4	18.5	5.1	25.3	11.7
9	5.6	12.1	8.6	2.5	9.9	4.9
10	4.2	4.7	4.4	0.9	2.4	1.4
11	1.4	4.2	2.7	3.5	10.5	5.8
12	0.0	1.6	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
13	1.4	1.6	1.5	1.0	0.5	0.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

^aExcludes non-school qualification not stated.

Key: 1. Natural and Physical Sciences; 2. Information Technology; 3. Engineering and Related Technologies; 4. Architecture and Building; 5. Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies; 6. Health; 7. Education; 8. Management and Commerce; 9. Society and Culture; 10. Creative Arts; 11. Food, Hospitality and Personal Services; 12. Mixed Field Programmes; 13. Field of Study inadequately described.

Source: ABS 2002b.

Given the relative skills profile of Indigenous people portrayed here, a question arises as to whether they will have the requisite qualifications necessary to assume positions within the expanding Pilbara labour market. At one level, this requires knowledge of future labour demand, both in terms of size and composition. One set of estimates that provides this, though with heavy caveats as previously indicated, is available from the December 2004 version of the biannual labour market forecasts produced by the Centre of Policy Studies at Monash University (Table 5.13). These suggest that growth will occur mostly at the top and the bottom of the skills range, which is encouraging for Indigenous employment prospects given the relatively low Indigenous skills profile, but potentially constraining in terms of subsequent advancement into higher occupational levels. At the very least, it points to the need for continuing on-the-job training for Indigenous workers. Equally, there appear to be no illusions about the limitations of training opportunities given the depth of prevailing disadvantage in terms of basic human capital skills and the circumstances in which many Indigenous youth and families find themselves (see Interview segment 10, p. 60; Interview segment 16, p. 62; Interview segment 34, p. 94; Interview segment 57, p. 143).

Table 5.13. Estimates of labour demand by qualification: Pilbara SD 2004/5–2011/12

Qualification	2004/05	2011/12	Change	%
Post-graduate degree	342	450	108	4.4
Graduate diploma	474	603	129	5.2
Bachelor degree	2348	2982	634	25.6
Diploma	1567	1876	309	12.5
Certificate III or IV	4936	5220	284	11.5
Certificate I or II	227	279	52	2.1
Year 12	4932	5331	399	16.1
Year 11 and below	7639	8196	557	22.5
No educ attain	18	19	1	0.0
All qual. levels	22 483	24 956	2473	100.0

Source: Centre of Policy Studies, Monash University.

Indigenous perspectives

Interview segment 25

If I am sick of town I can close this house and get back to the block, but we got four kids at school, for my two daughters living here. We are trying hard for Aborigine kids to go to school. We gotta need that, we gotta put our children on their toes, I tell 'em to 'go to school, go to school, don't be ducking around', some kids might be just ducking around the gully here, and when they come back they say, 'I been to school', but it's not, they bin hiding in the bush here! The school comes to see you if your kids been missing, and they sit down and talk to the kids and really tell them, 'you must go to the school!'

There's no school bus, nothing, they only got school bus going to Wakathuni, but they should do the rounds and do town too. My daughter asked for that, she went to the meeting. They reckoned funding, but you'd think the mining company could donate something to the school you'd think they would be rich enough, eh? Don't know if anybody asked them. Surely they would have a spare bus that they could donate, and they could take the kids on excursions and things like that. But a lot of kids these days haven't got a chance of going to school, because of drugs and alcohol.

Interview segment 26

There is a school bus that comes through. Getting kids to school is one of the few things that works around here. The buses aren't too worried about taking other people from the community to work. Now and again someone will get on the school bus if they miss a lift. And its really good for kids to see people going off to work.

Interview segment 27

I think something has to be attached to not so much everyday school, but something attached to the school and the first step into the Gumala Mirnuwarni program. That's one area, because we can't give much to our 20 to 30 year olds. There is a limit to what you can give to them as they have already gone through the gate. But the 6 to 13 years of age you can start developing, and as they develop they will come back to what is hoped to be a fairly stable family life. The horse has bolted in the other age groups. And the generation gap is too big. You need to develop parenting and work ethics now.

Interview segment 28

Lots of our kids are dropping out of school. A lot of them think, 'well what's the point?' They don't think there is any need for school, and a lot of peer pressure and that sort of thing. Ganja [marijuana] and alcohol are a real problem with young people who should be at school. If you go around South Hedland about 11 pm you'll see heap of young boys and girls out on the street smoking ganja and fighting, young people. The Government has forgotten about them people, its sad real sad.

Interview segment 29

Most of the key to the future lies with young people, because they are the generation who will benefit from increased employment in this region. If they aren't ready, or have no commitment towards changing, its pretty obvious what the future will be like. Some 14 year-olds are already just looking towards their pension. They are limited in what they can feed into. Woodside and Hamersley Iron have done some work with those sort of age groups and they given them skills and employment, but their percentages of employed Aboriginal people are still really small. But it's not impacting on young kids. If we don't get that generation ready there will be a big gap which is already showing.

Interview segment 30

One of the other obstacles for our kids is education. Accessing education and the way in which education is being provided and all the tests that kids have to do to keep with the national level. Most Aboriginal kids can't get up there, they are lower than the benchmark. It's the way it's set up, a communication breakdown, and because there is policy set up by the government and Aboriginal people don't have any input into those things. All the policy is done down there in Perth and no community people are involved. They don't know what it's like out here. And they make a lot of recommendations for education but it's not including the community itself. There should be more local input into education, and for older Aboriginal people to be involved as an advisory council. People in the south have a different perspective and different ideas.

Interview segment 31

The reason kids aren't getting through the education system is social stuff, social issues, basically that's what it is. All that social economic problems, like housing, appropriate education. Well for example – I worked out at a small community for many years, I helped to administer that community. I worked a lot with the education the X society who are full on with their education, but language was first, English was second. Now that I've grown old and I've seen them children grow older, they didn't learn nothing, because they forgot that they have to exist out in the urbanised area, as well as in their community. And that's when the problem came, there were also problems with families who didn't know how to budget their money, didn't know how to maintain their Homeswest home, all those issues. Putting language first was a big problem, language should be born and bred into us, it's not part of a learning process. And those are the traditional people I am talking about. The urbanised ones are all fine because they've had that education opportunity, but traditional people haven't and they are the ones that matters most of all in a mining world, because they're the first ones.

Interview segment 32

Access to education the main barrier. At the community, I am the teacher, but I'm not qualified yet. If I get through the certificate 3 they will fast track me to a degree. It will be four years of study off campus, I can't leave my family. I want my kids to get a good education so they can get a good job. My son has a really good job. He is working with Newcrest mining. He's still training. I got six kids and he is the eldest. He helps me out with some money too.

Interview segment 33

Law and culture is important, same like education. We just got back from law meeting at Jigalong. Its good it still happens, and its going to be around for a long way down the track with all the young fellas coming through. At the moment I am writing down all the songs, and words of our songs.

Interview segment 34

I see there are a lot of opportunities by Pilbara Iron for traineeships, and that's the only way we can get them, but because three-quarters of them are illiterate, that's where the downfall is. Being illiterate and having drug and alcohol problem because of their home base. I reckon it's the home base that creates all of those. If you gave a good home environment to one of those boys or girls, jeez, you know, they could blossom and flourish and be quite intelligent. You have to give some confidence to people to look at what needs to be changed in their community. See, over the years when I have worked with community people, well before any infrastructure was placed on their land, some of them weren't

given any decisions to say, 'well this is the type of house that we want and these are the type of things we need'. It was just like Homeswest, or State Housing as it was in those days, just went bang 'here it is', and bang 'there you go'. And there are these people left standing there going, 'well I come from the desert I don't know anything about this'. That's where the social problem, lack of confidence and low self esteem that all came into play. It's like anybody, give them a good home environment and God they feel good about themselves and get up in the morning and say, 'great my home is clean and I've got a house that I like, I've got a nice car standing up in my driveway, I've got money in my account whenever I need to buy food', there's that confidence, that self esteem of wanting to go and learn more and more. And that's what I've come from, and I am really speaking a lot about myself.

