Job-searching and careers: Young Torres Strait Islanders, 1999

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Foreword

In 1998, The Australian National University (on behalf of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR)) and the Department of Family and Community Services (Indigenous Policy Unit (IPU)) signed a five-year research agreement. As part of this agreement, CAEPR and IPU negotiated to undertake research seeking to examine how the aspirations of young Indigenous people in remote regions match the Commonwealth government’s income support programs for the unemployed. The project aims to be longitudinal: it is scheduled to run over five years (1999 to 2003) and will consist largely of an analysis of data obtained from standard surveys of the same sample of Indigenous males and females aged between 15 and 24 in two remote locations, the Kimberley and Torres Strait. The study will attempt to reinterview the same cohort over the research period.

The initial survey was carried out Torres Strait in late 1999 and this paper is one of a set of three interrelated papers resulting from that work. The other two CAEPR Discussion Papers are numbers 206 and 207. These deal respectively with the career aspirations and the education and training issues amongst young Torres Strait Islanders. These three papers are closely related and readers are encouraged to consider them holistically as a set.

The set of three discussion papers is based on a close collaboration between Bill Arthur, a CAEPR academic and Josephine David-Petero, a Torres Strait Islander, who is a member of the Hammond Island Council. Such collaboration is a very important element in CAEPR’s Indigenous Engagement Strategy. Additional collaboration also occurred, of course, between the two researchers and the young Torres Strait Islanders who greatly facilitated the research by their availability for interview: it is hoped that the policy outcomes of the research are of direct benefit to them.

These discussion papers address very important and topical issues very evident in key words in their titles: job-searching, careers, aspirations, orientation to work, education and training. This research is based on primary data collection in the Torres Strait and should be of invaluable benefit in policy formulation.

Professor Jon Altman
Director, CAEPR
December 2000
# Table of Contents

Foreword ............................................................................................................ iii
Summary ........................................................................................................... vii
Acknowledgments ............................................................................................. viii

**Introduction** ................................................................................................. 1

**Methodology and analysis** ............................................................................ 1

**Torres Strait and the sample** ......................................................................... 2

A note on job-search literature .......................................................................... 6

**Formal strategies** ........................................................................................... 7

Centrelink ........................................................................................................... 7
Centrelink: perceptions of success and satisfaction ............................................. 9
Knowledge of Centrelink .................................................................................... 11
The Job Network ............................................................................................... 12

**Informal strategies** ....................................................................................... 13

Employers and employees – direct contact......................................................... 14
Friends and family ............................................................................................ 15

**Perceived strategies for the future** ................................................................. 17

**Residence and career** .................................................................................. 17

**Relative perceptions of alternative strategies** ............................................... 19

**Perceived obstacles to achieving goals** ......................................................... 21

**Conclusions and policy recommendations** .................................................. 23

**Appendix A. Abridged questionnaire** ............................................................ 27

**References** ................................................................................................... 30
Tables
Table 1. Population of Torres Strait, 1996.................................................................4
Table 2. The composition of the sample, 1999.........................................................5
Table 3. Employment/education status, 1999 .....................................................5
Table 4. Main source of income, 1999......................................................................6
Table 5. Use of Centrelink, 1999..............................................................................8
Table 6. What people use Centrelink for, 1999a....................................................9
Table 7. Payments received during the last year, 1999.............................................9
Table 8. Perceptions of lack of success at Centrelink, 1999.................................11
Table 9. Centrelink payments people are not familiar with, 1999......................12
Table 10. Use of Job Network, 1999.......................................................................13
Table 11. Purpose of visit to Job Network, 1999....................................................13
Table 12. Perceived nature of success at Job Network, 1999.........................14
Table 13. Strategy which resulted in present job or activity, 1999......................16
Table 14. Strategies intended to help achieve next year’s goal, 1999.............17
Table 15. Where people most wanted to live, 1999.............................................18
Table 16. Qualities which influence choice of residence, 1999.......................19
Table 17. Possible job-search strategies ranked by perceived usefulness, 1999.................................................................22
Table 18. Perceived obstacles to achieving goals, 1999......................................23

Figures
Figure 1. The Torres Strait Region..........................................................................3
Summary

The principal aim of this paper was to examine the strategies young people adopt to further their careers. Young people in Torres Strait are likely to use informal strategies when searching for jobs or training; these include approaching employers and trainers directly or using the contacts of family or friends. They are less likely to use the formal job-search facilities of Centrelink and Job Network. Payments such as Newstart seem to lack the flexibility to allow people to move on and off payments quickly to take up occasional job opportunities, for example in commercial fishing. Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) appears to present fewer such difficulties. People do not always know what and where formal labour market services are available. If the aim is to improve young people’s access to the labour market and career options through Centrelink and Job Network, then possibly these agencies should do more to advertise their services. This could possibly occur through the secondary school system.

The fact that Centrelink payments such as Newstart exist in remote areas alongside CDEP mean that these two systems of payment effectively compete for customers. Therefore, a policy initiative might be to redesign Centrelink payments and the CDEP system so that they complement one another rather than compete with one another and so help create more career opportunities.

People do not necessarily see CDEP as something that can help them achieve their career goals partly because they feel that much of the part-time CDEP work is boring or pointless. Community councils also provide people with full-time work and training positions that are subsidised by CDEP and these are viewed very positively by participants. Related to this, people place a high value on training and further study and the services of TAFE. A challenge for policy makers and communities is to derive ways of creating more, and more interesting, CDEP work and/or training positions.

People often feel that their family can help them achieve their aspirations. However, fulfilling family commitments can also present something of a barrier to them furthering their careers and represents a form of tension. Because people may have to put family responsibilities before their careers when they are young, they may also wish to restart their careers at a later date after they have fulfilled some of these responsibilities.

As noted in the foreword, this is one of a set of three papers from an initial survey in Torres Strait. The other two papers in the set deal respectively with people’s career aspirations (CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 206) and with the relationship between their education and training, and their careers (CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 207). The initial survey that provided the data for this paper is part of a larger study. The study utilises the concept of career which facilitates an exploration of what people think about their future and embodies the idea of change over time. The project aims to determine what may assist or deter people from fulfilling their
aspirations, and how and why their ideas about their futures may change. In an attempt to capture these aspects of people’s lives, those who were part of this initial survey will be interviewed again.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the following people in Torres Strait for their assistance: members of the Tamwoy, Rose Hill, Aplin, Abednego, Waiben, Quarantine (TRAWQ) Community Council and Badu Island Council, the staff of Job Network on Thursday Island and on Badu Island, the Centrelink staff, the Principal and staff of Thursday Island State High School, and of course to all of those who gave their time to be interviewed. Special thanks must go to the CDEP and office staff of TRAWQ and of Badu Island for their help in making time and space available to interview their participants. Special thanks also to the Torres Strait Regional Employment Committee which provided invaluable office space, advice and support during the survey.

Thanks to Boyd Hunter and Matthew Gray of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) who generously allowed me to use their review of the international literature on job-search strategies. Also thanks to Boyd Hunter and Will Sanders of CAEPR for useful comments on this paper, to Hilary Bek, Frances Morphy and Linda Roach for their usual high standard editorial input, and to Wendy Forster for layout.
Introduction

The Indigenous Policy Unit of the Department of Family and Community Services (DFACS) has negotiated with the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Research (CAEPR) to carry out research aimed at answering the following questions for the remote regions of Australia:

a) To what extent do the objectives of the 15 to 24 year-old Indigenous clients match the objectives of the Commonwealth Government’s programs related to income support for the unemployed?

b) What are the particular local conditions which might be limiting or affecting the program objectives?

c) In what ways might the programs be modified to make the objectives more compatible?

The project aims to be longitudinal: it is scheduled to run over five years (1999 to 2003) and will consist largely of an analysis of data obtained from standard surveys of a sample of Indigenous males and females aged between 15 and 24 in two remote locations, the Kimberley and Torres Strait. The study will follow this cohort over the period.

In effect, the above questions are aimed at assessing the relevance of programs and at proposing how they might be made more relevant. The particular programs under consideration are Newstart and Youth Allowances. The approach to the project has been to adopt the concepts of ‘career’ and ‘orientation to work’ which facilitates an inquiry of what people want to do and why they want to do it (see Arthur 1999). This in turn allows an assessment of the relevance of the programs to people’s careers in remote areas.

This paper is based on the results of a survey of 105 young people in Torres Strait carried out in late 1999. The survey results have revealed information that is usefully divided into three major categories:

- Job-searching and careers: young Torres Strait Islanders, 1999;
- Career aspirations and orientation to work: young Torres Strait Islanders, 1999; and
- Education, training, and careers: young Torres Strait Islanders, 1999.

This paper focuses on the first of these categories which deals with the formal and informal networks used by young people to achieve their (labour market) goals or careers. This approach provides information on two of the major labour market investments that economic theory suggests workers make, namely the search for new jobs and relocation (Gray and Hunter 2000: 5).

Methodology and analysis

Based on a sample of only just over 100 people, the survey is small and this places in doubt the conclusions that can be drawn from individual questions. However, some general trends and patterns are shown in the paper.
Questions in the survey were generally left open rather than being multiple choice. This creates the difficulty of coding but it has the advantage that it allows people to give their own replies. This is in the spirit of the project which is directed at finding out how young people perceive their future and the relevance of the government services. People were asked to answer all of the questions and the interviews were administered by the authors.

An abridged version of the questionnaire is included in Appendix A. Where applicable, a note is provided with each of the tables indicating from which question or set of questions the results are derived.

**Torres Strait and the sample**

Torres Strait is an archipelago lying between the tip of Cape York and the Western Province of Papua New Guinea. Approximately 7,500 people live in Torres Strait of whom around 80 per cent are Indigenous. The two major industries are commercial fishing and a public sector servicing the population. The region is often considered as made up of three sub-regions: the Inner Islands, the Outer Islands and the Cape Islander communities (Fig. 1). The islands and communities and their populations are shown by sub-region in Table 1. (For a full description of the region and the socioeconomic status of Torres Strait Islanders see Arthur 1999.)

The Torres Strait sample was split equally between males and females (Table 2) and between two locations in Torres Strait. These were the regional centre of Thursday Island located in Inner Islands, and on Badu Island which is one of the Outer Islands. These are akin to a regional town or service centre on the mainland and a remote Indigenous community. These two locations have very different socioeconomic environments (Arthur 1999). In brief, Thursday Island has a recognised labour market as well as a medium-sized Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme, while Badu has virtually no labour market and a significant CDEP scheme under the control of an island community council. The area offices of Centrelink and Job Network are on Thursday Island. On Badu there is a community agent of Centrelink and a Job Network agency was being established only during the survey. The respective area offices for both agencies are on Thursday Island.

Taking the 1996 Census as a base, the sample represents 17 per cent of Indigenous people aged 15 to 24 years on Thursday Island, 70 per cent of those on Badu, and 10 per cent of those in all of the Torres Strait. Where relevant and where the data allow, the analysis provided here describe males and females separately and Thursday Island and Badu separately. However, because the sample is small (105 people) and not all people responded to all of the survey questions, this procedure is not always possible or valid in the tables.
Figure 1. The Torres Strait Region

Of the sample on Thursday Island, 16 were still at school there. Only one of the sample was married, 84 were single and the remaining 20 were in de facto relationships. More than one-third of the women in the sample had children. It is unclear how representative the sample is. More than half of those not in school were involved in CDEP in some way while only three of the sample were unemployed (Table 3). Centrelink on Thursday Island were unable to give an accurate assessment of the number of people on Newstart Allowance on Thursday Island. However their estimate ranged from five to ten people. If this is the case, then the sample may not be too unrepresentative. Only two people in the sample gave their main source of income as Newstart or Youth Allowances, while almost half (48 people) were part of a CDEP scheme (Table 4). This accords with other data provided below and indicates that labour market oriented payments
(Newstart and Youth Allowances) are relatively insignificant in the lives of people aged 15 to 24 years, and that CDEP is extremely significant.

### Table 1. Population of Torres Strait, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Island</th>
<th>Indigenous population</th>
<th>Total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inner Islands</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday Island</td>
<td>1657</td>
<td>2472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horn Island</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince of Wales Island</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammond Island</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner Islands sub-total</td>
<td>2158</td>
<td>3248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outer Islands</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boigu Island</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dauan Island</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saibai Island</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badu Island</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moa Island</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mabuiag Island</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorke Island</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warraber Island and Coconut Island</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yam Island</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray Islands</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darnley Island</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephens Island</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outer Islands sub-total</td>
<td>3133</td>
<td>3381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cape Islander communities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamaga Islander Community</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seisia Island Community</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Islander Communities sub-total</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>6017</td>
<td>7567</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: From Sanders (1999a).
### Table 2. The composition of the sample, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Tl Male</th>
<th>Tl Female</th>
<th>Total Male</th>
<th>Total Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| At school | 9       | 7         | 16         | 0            | 0     |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Tl Male</th>
<th>Tl Female</th>
<th>Total Male</th>
<th>Total Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De facto</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 children</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 childrena</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:  
- a. Pregnant women were counted as having one child.  
- b. TI = Thursday Island.  

Source: Derived from question 1, see Appendix A.

### Table 3. Employment/education status, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed CDEP</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed non-CDEP</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary workers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Derived from questions 17 and 46, and 47 see Appendix A.
Table 4. Main source of income, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Income</th>
<th>Thursday Island</th>
<th>Badu</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From main job (CDEP or non-CDEP work)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other part-time, casual work</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstudy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newstart Allowance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Allowance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Allowance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable/stated</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. of responses 55 51 106

Note: Includes those at school on Thursday Island.
Source: Derived from questions 42, 46 and 47, see Appendix A.

A note on job-search literature

The material in the following section is drawn substantially from a review of the literature on the theory of job-searching carried out by Gray and Hunter (2000). It is customary to consider two principal channels through which people get information about job opportunities: formal channels and informal channels (Norris 1996). Formal channels would include Centrelink, Job Network, and advertisements while informal channels would include information obtained through word-of-mouth, from friends and family, and from notice boards posted internally on business premises (Gray and Hunter 2000: 5). Both formal and informal channels are used by the people in the survey and are detailed below. However, here they are referred to not as channels for obtaining information about jobs but as strategies for achieving goals.

The literature suggests that informal job-search strategies are widely used and are effective. In the United States the most used and most effective job-search strategies are through the contacts of friends and family (Holzer 1988; Montgomery 1991). Similarly, friends and family are utilised by job seekers in United Kingdom and in Australia (Heath 1999; Jones 1989; Young and Wilmott 1957). A relevant point for this paper is that Heath estimates that 60 per cent of Australian teenagers obtain jobs through friends and family while only 30 per cent get them through formal channels. One suggested advantage of using friends and relatives, is that it can provide a form of screening, both for the employee and the employer. That is to say, information from friends and family can give prospective employees good information about the nature of the job and the employer, and it can also allow the employer to find out more about the qualities of the applicant (Montgomery 1991).

People will utilise other informal job-search methods. For example, in the United States the most effective means of getting a job, after using friends and family, is
through contacting employers personally (Holzer 1988; Masih 1998). A study in London revealed that parents will often find jobs in their own place of work for their children and in some cases children will take over or inherit their parent’s job (Young and Wilmott 1957). In a similar way, it has been noted that when Indigenous people in central Australia leave a job, they may pass it on to someone that they know (Myers 1986).

In general, the literature suggests that, where the informal contacts can provide useful information about the availability and quality of potential jobs, they are used more than, and can be more effective than, formal strategies. This distinction will be explored and commented on in the analysis of the survey data that follows.

However, the literature also suggests that there are disadvantages to informal strategies. For instance, some people may have poorer networks than others and so the informal method that relies on contacts may limit their access to jobs and information about jobs. Also, because many Indigenous people are unemployed, it is less likely that they will have contact with friends or family members who are themselves in jobs; these people would have fewer potential contacts than non-Indigenous people (Daly and Hunter 1999; Mortensen and Vishwanath 1994). Militating against this is the fact that Indigenous people are likely to have much wider family or kin networks than non-Indigenous people and so the possibility of having a ‘useful’ friend or relative would be increased. Another suggested disadvantage of using friends and relatives as contacts is that the information and help that they can give may only be for their local area and, in those areas where there is high unemployment, this could be very limited (McGregor 1983). This last point may be particularly relevant to remote areas where there are limited job opportunities. In fact, in remote areas where there are few job or career opportunities, it may be that the focus should move from job-search strategies to job-creation strategies.

**Formal strategies**

This section of the paper presents data from the survey and describes the formal networks that people use to achieve their career goals.

**Centrelink**

Following from the above, Centrelink is part of the formal network that people might utilise to achieve their goals. About half of those in the survey had used Centrelink’s services at some time (Table 5). People were slightly less likely to use Centrelink on Badu, probably because a Centrelink agency has only recently been established there and because Badu is a ‘CDEP community’ and there is little formal labour market. Females were rather more likely to have used Centrelink than were males and this probably relates to the fact that many people use Centrelink to get family related payments as discussed below (see Tables 6 and 7).
Table 5. Use of Centrelink, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Thursday Islanda %</th>
<th>Badu %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have used</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not used</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of responses</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a. Thursday Island figures include 16 people at school, several of whom used Centrelink for Abstudy.

People used Centrelink fairly evenly for three main purposes: to get family related payments; for labour market related services; and to get education related payments (Table 7). However, the single most often mentioned reason given for visiting Centrelink was to obtain Abstudy. Badu people were less likely to use Centrelink for labour market issues, probably because there is no labour market there, as discussed above. A similar pattern for the use of Centrelink is revealed in the payments that people had received over the last year. Of the 64 payments made to people in the sample only a small percentage were for Newstart or Youth Allowances, whereas more than 70 per cent were family and Abstudy type payments (Table 7).

It appears that one reason why people may not approach Centrelink for payments like Newstart Allowance is because they view these payments negatively. In several (5) cases, people said they had been unemployed but had never applied for or received ‘the dole’ or Newstart or Youth Allowances. They said they were determined never to be ‘on the dole’. It was suggested that this was because there was some stigma attached to getting such payments. There appears to be no such stigma attached to CDEP. The information from Tables 6 and 7 suggests that Centrelink’s principal role or impact in the region is not in the labour market programs of Youth Newstart Allowances.

Another interpretation can be placed on these data. In remote areas like Torres Strait where CDEP is prevalent, there are notionally two kinds of provider of labour market related payments. One is Centrelink and the other are the CDEP communities. These two providers effectively compete for clients. This is much less the case in non-remote areas where there are fewer CDEP schemes and Newstart Allowance is the norm. An earlier paper arising from this project indicated a suggestion by Centrelink staff that there should be some provision to increase the Newstart Allowance in much the same way that CDEP wages were ‘topped-up’ (Arthur 1999). This, it was argued, would enable Newstart Allowance to attract more clients—or to compete more successfully with CDEP. An alternative approach might be to design the two programs so that they complement one another. In this way, the relationship would be changed from one of competition to one of cooperation. The exact form that any redesign might
take would be negotiated between the relevant policy agencies (DFACS and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission).

Table 6. What people use Centrelink for, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of service</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family related payments$^b$</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour market related issues$^c$</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstudy</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. of responses: 72

Notes:  
- a. People gave more than one use.  
- c. Newstart Allowance, Youth Allowance, registering/job seeking, resume assistance.
Source: Derived from question 4, see Appendix A.

Table 7. Payments received during the last year, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of payment$^b$</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstudy$^c$</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Allowance</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Allowance</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newstart Allowance</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total no. of payments: 64

Notes:  
- a. Some people received more than one payment over the year.  
- b. Of the sample of 105 people, 49 said they had received none of the payments.  
- c. While at post-school education/training 28 per cent, while at school 15 per cent.
Source: Derived from question 42, see Appendix A

Centrelink: perceptions of success and satisfaction

Generally, people who use Centrelink are satisfied with the service they receive. Of those who had used Centrelink, 80 per cent (58 people) thought that their visit had been totally or partly successful while only 20 per cent felt it was not successful (see questions 4 and 43 in Appendix A). People were asked to say why they felt their contact with Centrelink was not successful and the problems they had receiving payments. Given the high perception of success noted above, there were only a small number of responses to this question. People did not generally express their view of success in terms of finding a job (Table 8), but in terms whether they received the payment for which they were applying.
Eighty-nine people said there should be no changes to the Centrelink payments (reflecting the high level of satisfaction already noted) and therefore there were very few comments about lack of success or dissatisfaction. Fewest comments were made about Newstart Allowance while the greatest number were made about Abstudy, again a reflection of the types of payments being made (see Table 7). Of the cases where people did propose changes to Centrelink, these included reducing the means test or raising rate of payment, improving the way income was calculated, improving the general level of service, and reviewing the Abstudy conditions.

The problem people raised most frequently in relation to Centrelink had to do with the nature of the procedures and the application forms. Negative comments about forms suggested that they were hard to understand, there were many forms to fill out, and the structure of the forms was continually changing. The comments suggested that in some cases people became frustrated with the forms and ‘gave up’ with the result that they did not receive payments.

In other cases, people had been unable to correctly inform Centrelink of changes in their status or income and this led to overpayments and when the fault was discovered, they had to make substantial repayments. This appears to apply in particular to part-time and seasonal cray fishers. These people may be away fishing and the catch paid for with chits by fish buyers which are later redeemed. If their partners are on Newstart Allowance the total income for the period may result in an overpayment. Other part-time and casual workers also appear to have difficulty recording their incomes correctly. A similar problem occurs when those on Abstudy fail to correctly inform Centrelink that their status has changed. This appears related to the complexity or understanding of the forms and the system. One person indicated they no longer applied for Parent Allowance for fear of incurring such an overpayment.

Some respondents expressed problems in terms of the time it took to get a payment and also the responsiveness of the system. For example, people might be offered work on fishing boats and must be available to take up the offer quickly. One man said he would not ‘go on the dole’ as the inability to get off and on it quickly meant that he could lose such opportunities.

It appears that personal need and initiative may be another factor influencing the use of Centrelink. For example, one person had completed the paperwork for Youth Allowance but had simply not taken the time to deliver this to the office. This may equate with data from other parts of the survey which suggest that some young people rely on their families for financial support.

However, it has to be repeated that people view success with Centrelink very much in terms of whether they do or do not receive their payment. Comments made during the survey, and with Centrelink independently, suggest that in many cases this success depends on the efforts of the Centrelink staff to mediate for clients when they cannot comply with the formalities of the paperwork. Therefore, the high level of client satisfaction noted above cannot be taken as an indication that there are no problems with the system—these problems may have been ironed out by the efforts of the local staff and remain hidden from the clients.
(see Sanders 1999b). Initial interviews with Centrelink staff indicated that they provided considerable assistance with the necessary paperwork. Evaluation of any poor adaptation between regional or local conditions and centrally designed programs might best be determined through interviews with local staff rather than with clients (see Sanders 1999b). This will be carried out further in later stages of this study.

**Table 8. Perceptions of lack of success at Centrelink, 1999**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paperwork and forms</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over payment, means tests</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service, low payments</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No suitable jobs</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. who expressed lack of success 24

Source: Derived from questions 4 and 43, see Appendix A.

It should also be noted that in this Centrelink area office the requirements for completing a Jobseeker diary and other aspects of the ‘mutual obligations’ are relaxed. This is due largely to the limited job market. It is a situation that is negotiated with the Townsville regional office. Similarly, school leavers might do some work when they are on Youth Allowance, but as they continually fail to keep the details of this, the question is overlooked.

**Knowledge of Centrelink**

It was noticeable that a number of people did not know the nature of Centrelink’s business. In addition, they were unfamiliar with the names of Centrelink payments, particularly of Newstart and Youth Allowances (Table 9). It was suggested during the survey that one reason that younger people do not know Centrelink is that they move straight from school to CDEP and completely bypass the job-search system; certainly people were less familiar with these agencies on Badu where this is likely to be the case. People are also confused and unsure about the names of the payments and some felt that this was because the names are continually changing. Further, people are not always aware of the particular rules which apply to payments. For example, 84 per cent of people did not know that they could work part-time and still be eligible for a proportion of the Newstart Allowance. It seems logical to suggest that if people do not know what Centrelink do, they are less likely to utilise their services. A similar lack of awareness of these forms of payment has also been noted amongst the general young Australian population (Australian Department of Sport and Recreation 1984: 61). A suggestion for improving people’s knowledge of the formal system was that
Centrelink and Job Network could visit secondary schools to explain their services to school-leavers.

### Table 9. Centrelink payments people are not familiar with, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Payment Type</th>
<th>Thursday Island %</th>
<th>Badu %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newstart Allowance</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Allowance</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Allowance</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstudy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. of responses 23 50 73

Source: Derived from questions 4 and 42, see Appendix A.

### The Job Network

The majority (64%) of people interviewed had never used Job Network and, as with Centrelink, a proportion (2%) did not know what Job Network did (Table 10). Given that the people in the survey are in an area where the real rate of Indigenous unemployment is quite high (see Arthur 1999), it seems significant that 20 per cent of people did not know the function of the principal job-search agency.

Females were more than twice as likely to have used Job Network as males (48% of females had used Job Network compared to 21% of males). One reason for this may be that more males than females are involved in CDEP and may not see the need to visit Job Network.

People on Badu were much less likely to have used Job Network. A principal reason for this may be that, as noted earlier, Job Network’s agency on Badu (which is a CDEP community) only opened during the survey and so people were not yet using it to any great extent. On the other hand, it was noticeable that even during just the first week of the agency’s operations both males and females were beginning to ‘drop in’ and register. The intention is that this agency will service the Outer Islands which prior to this had been visited occasionally by Job Network from Thursday Island. It should be remembered here that it is considerably more difficult to provide such services to an archipelago than to remote communities on the mainland (Arthur 1999). Officials mostly use light aircraft to travel between the islands. Visits are constrained by the airline schedules and by the significant cost of this mode of travel.

As only a limited number of people had used the Job Network agency, the survey revealed limited information about it. However, those who had used Job Network had done so to get a job or organise some training (Table 11). Although it was noted earlier that many people do not know what Job Network did, obviously some people do understand its function. The vast majority (88%) of people who
visited Job Network did so seeking work and to register. In addition, several people had visited Job Network just to look at the 'job-board'. Responses to the survey indicated that people had also looked at advertisements in the newspaper and on community notice boards and this may be a quite effective form of transmitting local information about work.

**Table 10. Use of Job Network, 1999**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Thursday Island %</th>
<th>Badu %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have used</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have not used</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| No. of responses       | 42                | 51    | 93      |

Notes:  
a. Includes three males and one female on Thursday Island who were still at school.  
Source: Derived from question 5, see Appendix A.

**Table 11. Purpose of visit to Job Network, 1999**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job-search</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare resume</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking training course</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| No. of responses       | 40      |

Source: Derived from question 5, see Appendix A.

Almost half of those visiting Job Network thought that their visit had been totally or partly successful, in that they were offered job interviews or training options (Table 12). In two cases, Job Network had found employees for employers in the government sector. The Job Network in Torres Strait is part of a longstanding State government instrumentality and is staffed and managed by Indigenous people. One respondent suggested that Job Network was easy to access because the staff were approachable and easily understood.

**Informal strategies**

This section of the paper describes the informal strategies that people use to achieve their career goals.
Table 12. Perceived nature of success at Job Network, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offered job or traininga</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply as yet, problems with paperworkb</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No jobs, no suitable jobsc</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. of responses 28

Notes:  
a. Offered a job or placement (8 of all 12 responses), traineeship, training course or interview.  
b. Have had no reply (7 of all 11 responses), and problems meeting paperwork requirements.  
c. No suitable job(s) available/offered.

Source: Derived from question 5, see Appendix A.

Employers and employees – direct contact

It was common for people to approach employers and trainers directly when applying for jobs, traineeships or apprenticeships (Table 13). This included approaching employers in the private sector, the government sector, and Technical and Further Education (TAFE), and registering with the community council for CDEP work and training. A point to note here is that people seem to consider their councils as approachable and the natural place to go for work and for training. Several people in the survey had approached their community council for training, which is often subsidised by the CDEP scheme. In one case, someone registered for CDEP while they looked for other work and in other cases young people were encouraged by their parents to sign up with CDEP as a matter of course when they became old enough to join the scheme.

Associated with this, a significant proportion of people have their present positions because they were approached by their employers, often their community councils. Many of the trainees and apprentices in the survey had been asked by community councils if they wanted to take on training positions. Sometimes this involved serving a probationary period to see if the person was suitable. In some cases, when councils became aware that people had experience in certain fields, often gained outside the community sector, they recruited them for council positions. In other instances, the council had offered work that people were not initially attracted to but which they had come to like after some experience in the position.

There seems little doubt that the community council provides a significant avenue for people to obtain training and employment. This is largely because of the CDEP scheme. In this regard, the community council acts as an employer, an employment/training agency, and as a development agency. Importantly, the community council is viewed as approachable. Therefore, as CDEP employers, community councils appear to be an accessible entry point to people’s career
paths. It is notable that all of the apprentices in the survey were in communities and none were in the private sector (see Arthur 2000a).

An earlier section of this paper suggested that the present relationship between CDEP and Centrelink can be viewed as competitive. The discussion above highlights some further differences between the two payment systems. Newstart Allowance recipients are very much in an individual contractual relationship with the state (through its agents, Centrelink). The payments are income support and the client’s obligation within the contract is to undertake activities that will get them into employment. The state is not obliged to provide the employment. In CDEP on the other hand, the participants enter into a relationship with their community. With, in many places, the application of a ‘no work no pay’ rule, this becomes an employer/employee relationship (the community being the employer). Employer/employee relationships are also contractual, but here the contract is more ongoing and includes different expectations and obligations. One suggested outcome of the CDEP scheme is that (unlike the Centrelink payments) it has the potential to foster a stronger notion of ‘community’ due to the contractual relationship between the ‘workers’ and their employer, the community.

A second difference is that Centrelink has relatively little influence over the creation of opportunities. Its business is basically to provide payments and to ensure that rules and conditions are applied. Centrelink cannot create opportunities. CDEP communities on the other hand are obliged to find work for their members/employees. As noted above, they can do this to some extent by providing an accessible work place and, in some cases, training opportunities (see also Arthur 2000a, 2000c). It can be suggested that the Centrelink payments are applicable to the non-remote and developed part of the country where the emphasis is on job-matching. The CDEP system meanwhile seems more applicable to the remote regions where an emphasis must be on creating jobs and opportunities. While the Centrelink payments and culture could be characterised as forming a labour market and training approach, the CDEP system and culture appear to make up more of a development approach. In remote regions a development approach may have more potential for encouraging and fulfilling people’s career aspirations.

Friends and family

A significant proportion of people got their job or training position through contacts with friends, family, and by word of mouth (Table 13). For example, several people got their positions through contacts made by parents, aunts, and uncles. In some cases family members facilitate contact with organisations in which they are or have been employees. In other cases family members may be in positions of authority and will recruit relatives when a vacancy occurs. The use of similar informal strategies also appears to be common amongst the wider Indigenous population (see Hunter and Hawke (2000: 19)). People who are employed also inform their friends of vacancies with their employers. In fact, one person stated that they would always expect to get a job this way and never through Job Network. In other cases, people have taken over their friends or their
relative’s jobs when they retire or leave. For example, one man took over his father’s government job on an outer island and this led to him working in the regional office on Thursday Island. The job was not what he originally intended to do, but he became interested in it and is now in a senior position.

A smaller proportion of people got their present positions through the formal channels of Job Network (Table 12). Noticeably, no-one on Badu had used this strategy, and this accords with earlier comments about the use of Job Network. However, many on Badu had got their present position by looking at the community council notice board where job opportunities with the council are advertised. A proportion of people on Thursday Island scanned the advertisements in the local newspaper, the *Torres News*, as their job-search strategy.

The survey data suggested that links made between school and work also helped people get their present positions. For example, some people in training positions had been assisted to get these through their contacts in Thursday Island school. Similarly, some people had positions with firms where they had undertaken work experience when still at school.

Others had adopted the strategy of voluntary work to get a job. In one case someone working as a teacher’s aide had undertaken this work voluntarily when still at school. In other cases people did some voluntary work either to obtain a reference from an employer or to see if they liked that particular occupation.

Therefore, as suggested above by the literature, the informal network appears to be extremely important. However, the informal system is somewhat selective, for example, those people who have relatives with jobs may be more likely to get jobs themselves. It also seems that those who get in the ‘loop’ either through work experience or part-time work may benefit later. Any contact with the work force and employers seems to have a positive effect on people’s careers.

### Table 13. Strategy which resulted in present job or activity, 1999*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Thursday Island %</th>
<th>Badu %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approached employer, registered with CDEP</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>42 b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family contact, word of mouth etc.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advert’s, council notices</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Network</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approached by employer</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity arose</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| No. of responses | 62 | 56 | 118 |

Notes: a. People may have given more than one strategy.
       b. Of this number almost half (21 people) had approached their CDEP council as their potential employer.

Source: Derived from question 23, see Appendix A.
Perceived strategies for the future

The single most common strategy that people listed to achieve their career goals in the near future (over the next year) was to do some form of training or study (Table 14). Allied to this, 23 per cent of people said that they would personally approach trainers and employers directly to make this happen (as noted above). Indeed, several had already approached universities on the mainland about further study and someone who wanted an apprenticeship had approached the relevant Queensland Government department.

Approximately 20 per cent of people indicated that their strategy was to stick at the thing they were doing, to turn up for work, and to be punctual. This suggested that they recognised that their personal approach was important to determining their success. Males were more likely to raise this issue, especially those doing apprenticeships. It is likely that they were reflecting here the concerns of their supervisors, one of whom suggested to me that a lack of punctuality and poor attendance amongst apprentices had already arisen as an issue on Badu.

In only a few cases did people indicate that relocating to another area was their intended career strategy (at least in the sort term) (see below). Also, few people indicated they would use Centrelink and Job Network to achieve their goals and this lends support to what was said above comments about the use of these formal strategies.

Table 14. Strategies intended to help achieve next year’s goal, 1999a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Thursday Island</th>
<th>Badu</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training and study</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach employers and trainers</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stick at it, be punctual</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Job Network, Centrelink</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relocate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Save, get funding</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. of responses 72 54 126

Note: a. People gave more than one response.
Source: Derived from question 27, see Appendix A.

Residence and career

As suggested above, one of the investments people might make to improve their chances of getting a job and to further their career is to migrate or relocate (Gray
and Hunter 2000). Although the survey did not ask people directly whether they would relocate to further their career it did ask them where they would like to live in the short and long term, and why (see questions 33 and 35 in Appendix A). This information is provided here as a de facto measure of their willingness to relocate to achieve their career goals.

As we can see from Table 15, most people wanted to live in Torres Strait and indeed stay where they were located at the time of the survey. The reasons given for this often related to the quality of the social and natural environment (Table 16). For example, the local environment was recognised as easy going, whereas conditions on the mainland were considered harder to manage. This applied particularly to the Badu people, several of whom noted that it was easy to fish, camp and hunt on Badu. People said they had been raised in the Strait, regarded it as their home, and wanted to stay there because of family and friends.

A small number of people thought that there were career opportunities in Torres Strait. There was little difference in the responses of males and females and between Thursday Island and Badu (see footnote 5). However, Thursday Island people were a little more likely to say they wanted to live on the mainland than those on Badu (not shown in Table 15) and appeared more aware of the opportunities presented by moving.

If people did want to move, this was mostly to towns and cities on the mainland of Queensland, including Cairns, Townsville, and Brisbane. Reasons for this included the recognition that there were more facilities and opportunities in these locations with regard to education, training, and jobs. However, people also cited family connections as the reason for choosing a certain location. Earlier research has shown that these locations in Queensland are the mainland centres where a significant number of people identifying as Torres Strait Islanders now live (see Arthur 2000). Also, observations made by the Thursday Island Centrelink staff have indicated that a proportion of their clients move regularly between Torres Strait and Cairns for personal reasons (see Arthur 1999: 19).

### Table 15. Where people most wanted to live, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Next year %</th>
<th>Most like to live %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Torres Strait, Thursday Island and Badu</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld mainland</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other States or anywhere</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| No. of responses | 100 |

**Notes:**

a. Only a very small number of people wanted to live on another island in Torres Strait or wanted to move from Badu to Thursday Island.

b. Places most often mentioned were Cairns, Townsville, and Brisbane.

**Source:** Derived from questions 33 and 55, see Appendix A.
A few people expressed the desire to move to ‘anywhere’, simply to escape what they considered the claustrophobic atmosphere of the islands and to experience a change. Related to this, a small number of people said they wanted at some time to live overseas (i.e., outside Australia) so as to meet new people and experience different cultures (see Arthur 2000b).

### Table 16. Qualities which influence choice of residence, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Next year %</th>
<th>Longer term %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good environment and it is home</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family, friends</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience, facilities and opportunities</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To escape Torres Strait</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. of responses 122 129

Source: Derived from questions 33 and 55, see Appendix A.

### Relative perceptions of alternative strategies

People in the survey were presented with a number of alternative strategies or devices that they may or not perceive as useful to them in achieving their goals: these are listed in Table 17. To compare how useful people thought each device might be to them, they were asked to give each a score from one to four. Therefore if all people complied with this, the lowest score an item could get was 105 and the maximum score was 420. Most but not all people gave all items a score. Therefore, the scores have been averaged according to the number of people who did give each a score, and multiplied by 100. These results are shown in Table 17. In addition, people were asked to choose which single item from the list they considered would be most useful to them and explain why. These results are also shown in Table 17 and discussed below.

For both measures people felt that TAFE would be most the useful device for them. The qualities which people thought TAFE had and which made it useful to them as an institution were that it:

- was the holder of good and applicable information;
- was approachable, and had encouraging and useful teachers;\(^ {13} \)
- had a wide variety of courses; and
- had courses which applied directly to or could lead to traineeships and apprenticeships.

Those people who had been to school on Thursday Island also saw TAFE as the institution that continued to develop those skills and training that they were
introduced to at school, and this was valued. The school on Thursday Island and TAFE run joint courses for those in the last years at school. Therefore, it would appear that this device and the path of school-to-TAFE is important to young people who have experienced it. Again, as noted above, both institutions were also valued for their approachable teachers. Indeed, in several instances, people suggested that they would seek career advice and information on training from their Thursday Island school teachers. This applied also to people who had recently left school. On the other hand, several people indicated that they would value additional career information when at school, a finding also common amongst non-Indigenous students (Meade 1981: 108, 249).

People considered that their families could help them achieve their goals. And, confirming the data in Table 13, in many instances people say they would approach family members for jobs or for information about jobs. In other cases, people value their families for the general support that they provide. A similar study amongst the general population found that young people felt that their families would be very helpful in terms of furthering their careers (Evans and Poole 1991).

Although people appeared to see university as a device that would help them achieve their goals, very few were able to say why this might be the case. However, several people noted that university was the ‘highest’ and most ‘powerful’ form of education. I believe that the fact that people gave university a high score did not necessarily mean that they thought it would be useful for them personally, but rather indicated that they understood that an advanced education has the potential to be useful.

Of the formal job-search devices, people thought Job Network would be useful to them. However, few were able to say why. Those that could, indicated that they felt that Job Network could put them in contact with available jobs. People did not consider Centrelink as an agency that would be useful for them in achieving their career goals, but rather as one which would assist them receive financial support.

Of all the strategies people were asked to give scores to, CDEP achieved by far the lowest score. As noted, people were asked to give each device a score from one to four; only one person gave CDEP a score of four and several asked, somewhat sardonically, if it was possible to give it a score of less than one. The following comments made during this and other parts of the survey suggest why people appear to place such little value on CDEP.

Mostly people felt that CDEP work was boring. The element of boredom seems to take two forms. One was that the work done on CDEP was in itself uninteresting, hence people might say that CDEP is either picking up stones or sitting in the office doing nothing. People felt that they gained no skills and learnt nothing while doing this kind of work. The other form of boredom seemed to stem from the part-time nature of the work. CDEP is basically a form of ‘work for the dole’ and as people are normally paid at an award rate they need only work part-time. This feature is managed in different ways across the various CDEP schemes. In Torres Strait, the arrangement is for people to work on a week-on/week-off basis. People
in the survey said that they became bored during the week off and this dulled their motivation to work during their week on.

However, the survey identified another class of CDEP work which is full-time and may include a recognised training element. In the survey this class of CDEP work included traineeships, apprenticeships, and work at the community (primary) school, child care centre and health centre. In these situations the full-time wage is met from a combination of CDEP and other sources. For example, the cost of teacher aides and administrative assistants in the school was shared by the CDEP and the school. Apprenticeships and traineeships were similarly cross-subsidised. People value this kind of CDEP work; they find it interesting and the full-time work provides them with higher pay. The work including that in council is valued by some as pathways to other job opportunities. People engaged on full-time CDEP did not know that it was subsidised by the scheme—therefore when people gave CDEP a low score in the survey they were referring to part-time CDEP work. One person indicated that CDEP was not a real job and that he only joined it to be with his friends.14

Being bored at work is a complaint commonly found in the general studies of workers, especially those doing repetitive work (see Faunce 1963; Healy 1984; Klapp 1986: 12) and is therefore not restricted to CDEP workers. Furthermore, boredom is highly relative. People in the survey stated that they preferred any kind of CDEP work to staying at home and doing nothing. As one person said, ‘I get slack staying at home. It is good to be doing something’. The preference for doing something over nothing, can also be identified in more general work-related studies, particularly those which compare people’s perceptions of their work and leisure time (see Deem 1988).

It should be noted however, that not all people were critical of the part-time nature of the CDEP work and indeed, a few people actually valued the opportunity to go commercial fishing on their week off. As an indication of this, only six people on Thursday Island had done some commercial fishing in the last year, compared to 21 on Badu where CDEP predominates. Indeed, a total of ten people on Badu indicated that their incomes were derived from a mixture of part-time CDEP work and occasional commercial fishing. Therefore, as suggested previously (Arthur 1999) CDEP may provide a reasonable fit with commercial fishing. As noted earlier, the accommodation between commercial fishing and the system of Centrelink payments may not be so great.

**Perceived obstacles to achieving goals**

Forty-eight per cent of people in the survey said they were doing what they had planned to be doing 12 months previously while 25 per cent indicated that they were not. Similarly, 41 per cent of people thought that something would stop them doing what they planned to do in the coming year. Some people, though by no means all, were able to articulate what factors they felt had stopped them from achieving their goals and those factors which they thought might stop them achieving their goals over the next 12 months (Table 18). However, as only a small
number of people responded to this part of the survey, these data can only be used to suggest the most general of patterns.

Table 17. Possible job-search strategies ranked by perceived usefulness, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Scorea</th>
<th>Indicated as most useful strategy (no. of respondents)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Network</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrelink</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-CDEP work</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDEP</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of respondents</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a. People were asked to give each item a score of one to four. The Score is the total score divided by the number of responses relating to each item, multiplied by 100.

Source: Derived from question 28, see Appendix A.

Family commitments appear to be a significant obstacle to people fulfilling their plans (Table 18). This is especially so amongst females and one woman explained this by saying that girls had to take on more family duties than boys. This mirrors findings for Indigenous people in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey of 1994 (see Australian Bureau of Statistics/Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research 1996: 52). Family commitments are mostly to parents, grandparents, and children. The commitment to parents and grandparents invariably involves taking care of them when they are ill and in their old age. Hence, people suggested that they have often been stopped from doing things, or may be stopped in the future because of illness in the family or by the expectation that they must look after ageing parents and grandparents. For example, a young woman's family would not allow her to go south to university because her mother had become sick. As another woman explained, 'My family need me here and would miss me. They need the whole family here. This is the Island way'. In another case, a girl had to give up her studies and take a job because her brothers were not working and she felt obligated to help the family financially. In other instances women proposed that they might be hindered from following their careers because of the dictates of their partners or because they would not be able to afford child care and/or would have to look after their children. Generally therefore, and certainly amongst females, the expectation is that family obligations will take precedence over personal aspirations.

Furthermore, these obligations may fall to young people more than in non-Indigenous society. We can suggest that many non-Indigenous young people consider their late teens and early twenties as the time in their life when they are free to take up training and study (see Gray et al. 1998: 6–8). Comments from
the present survey indicate that this is not always the case for Islanders who would be expected to give time to their family when they are young, and this may result in people wanting to return to their personal career at a later date. The schedule of an Islander career may therefore look different from that of a non-Indigenous career and an Islander might require assistance with their career when they are young and/or when they are in their late twenties and early thirties.

Another factor (Table 18) that people felt had stopped them achieving their goals in the past and might do so again in the future, related to their personal approach and behaviour. This equates with the data in Table 14, which show that people feel that they must pay some attention to their personal attitude if they are to achieve their goal over the next year.

People also indicated that they might not be able to afford to follow their plan over the next year. In the main, this referred to being unable to afford to do various forms of study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>Last year %</th>
<th>Next year %</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family commitments</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation, self confidence, personal attributes</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available opportunities</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal finances</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. of responses 30 54

Source: Derived from questions 22 and 32, see Appendix A.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

The principal aim of this paper was to examine the strategies young people adopt to further their careers.

The data suggest that young people in Torres Strait are likely to use informal strategies when searching for jobs or training. These strategies include approaching employers and trainers directly or using the contacts of family or friends. Young people are less likely to use the formal job-search networks. (These findings are similar to those for job-search patterns among the general population both in Australia and overseas.) In particular, young people seem to have little contact with the Centrelink labour market related payments of Newstart and Youth Allowance. Also, the majority of young people surveyed had not used Job Network. There is only a very small amount of evidence that payments like
Newstart and Youth Allowance might hinder people interacting with the region’s industries. The evidence that does exist relates to the inability of the system to allow people to move on and off payments quickly to take up occasional job opportunities, for example in commercial fishing. CDEP appears to present fewer such difficulties. Despite the fairly low use of the formal strategies (of Centrelink and Job Network), clients seem generally satisfied with the service they receive. Most problems with payments related to complications within the paperwork and to overpayments due to errors recording income and changes of status. It is possible that such problems could be solved most easily by training staff rather than by modifying forms and policies (see Sanders 1999b).

Most people seem to gauge the success of their interaction with Centrelink in terms of getting the payment that they apply for, and not on the basis of getting a job or furthering their career. Centrelink, and it therefore it can be assumed Centrelink’s payments, are not necessarily associated in people’s minds with getting a job. On the other hand, people do associate Job Network with getting jobs and training. Possible reasons for the current perceptions of parts of the formal system may include that people do not always know what and where services are available. If the aim is to improve young people’s access to the labour market and career options through Centrelink and Job Network, then possibly these agencies should do more to advertise their services. This could possibly occur through the secondary school system.

The fact that Centrelink payments such as Newstart exists in remote areas alongside CDEP mean that these two systems of payment effectively compete for customers. This is much less the case in non-remote areas where there are fewer CDEP schemes and Newstart is the norm. While the Centrelink payments and culture could be characterised as forming a labour market and training approach (job-matching), the CDEP system appears to take more of a development approach (which includes creating opportunities (see also Arthur and David-Petero 2000b). In remote regions where there are fewer labour market opportunities, a development approach may have more success in encouraging and fulfilling people’s career aspirations. Therefore, a policy initiative for remote areas might be to redesign Centrelink payments and the CDEP system so that they complement one another rather than compete with one another. This may help create more career opportunities.

Despite the fact that many people are involved in CDEP, they do not necessarily see it as something that can help them achieve their career goals. However, this appears to result from the feeling that much of the part-time CDEP work is boring or pointless. Community councils also provide people with full-time work and training positions that are subsidised by CDEP and these are viewed positively by participants. Related to this, people appear to place a high value on training and further study and view the services of TAFE very positively (see also Arthur and David-Petero 2000a). As CDEP employers, community councils appear to be an accessible entry point to people’s career paths and it is notable that all of the apprentices in the survey were in CDEP communities and none were in the private sector. It would seem that a challenge for policy makers and communities
is to derive ways of creating more, and more interesting, CDEP work and/or training positions (see also Arthur and David-Petero 2000a, 2000b).

It would appear that although people often feel that their family can help them achieve their aspirations, fulfilling family commitments can also present something of a barrier to them furthering their careers (especially females). This represents a form of tension that is also noted with regard to education and careers (see Arthur and David-Petero 2000a). Because people may have to put family responsibilities before their careers when they are young, they may also wish to restart their careers at a later date after they have fulfilled some of these responsibilities. This suggests that there could be two periods when people may seek assistance with their careers from government agencies – one when they leave school and the other in their late twenties or thirties.

As noted in the foreword, this is one of a set of three papers from an initial survey in Torres Strait. The other two papers in the set deal respectively with people’s career aspirations (CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 206) and with the relationship between their education and training, and their careers (CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 207). The initial survey that provided the data for this paper is part of a larger study. The study utilises the concept of career which facilitates an exploration of what people think about their future and embodies the idea of change over time. The project aims to determine what may assist or deter people from fulfilling their aspirations, and how and why their ideas about their futures may change. In an attempt to capture these aspects of people’s lives, those who were part of this initial survey will be interviewed again.

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**Notes**

1. DFACS replaces the former Department of Social Security. DFACS now has the responsibility for designing and assessing the programs administered by Centrelink.

2. The other major labour market investment people make is education (Gray and Hunter 2000). For this aspect of the project see Arthur (2000a).

3. This is the region under the jurisdiction of the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA).

4. It should be noted that the CDEP scheme is predominantly an Indigenous ‘work for the dole’ scheme. Participation in it involves people working for those payments that would in other circumstance comprise their unemployment benefits, or Newstart.

5. For simplicity, and because the sample is relatively small, the gender split is not always shown in tables.

6. It is possible for CDEP participants to be allocated a wage top-up and so receive an income higher than that available from the standard unemployment benefit.

7. This problem appears to apply also to people of Papua New Guinean descent who are on Austudy.

8. The real rate of unemployment would be calculated by including as unemployed all those working on CDEP.
9. In 1999, the Job Network was part of the Islanders Board of Industry and Service office.

10. Hunter and Hawke's (2000) results are derived from the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS) conducted in 1995. Hunter and Hawke use the information from AWIRS to analyse the working conditions of Indigenous Australians.

11. The value of subsistence activities to people is detailed in another paper in this series (see Arthur 2000b).

12. Torres Strait Islanders began moving out of Torres Strait in the period following the Second World War. Presently an estimated 80 per cent of all Torres Strait Islanders now live on the Australian mainland (see Arthur 2000c).

13. People had similar perceptions of the value of secondary school teachers. This information will form part of a separate paper from the survey focusing on education (see Arthur 2000a).

14. People's aspirations and the qualities which they value with regard to jobs, will be detailed in a separate paper from the survey.

15. Research carried out in Sydney, Northam (Western Australia), and Galiwinku (Northern Territory) also noted that family commitments presented a barrier to Indigenous aspirations for education and careers (see Long et al. 1999; Morgan 1999).

16. Gray et al. (1998: 6–8) present data which show that Indigenous people generally are more likely to be attending tertiary educational institutions later in life than non-Indigenous people. Indigenous females seem particularly involved in their twenties and thirties and in their fifties. On the other hand, Gray et al. show that non-Indigenous involvement in tertiary education peaks around 24 years of age.
Appendix A. Abridged questionnaire

Age? Sex? Married?

1.0 How many children do you have or look after?
2.0 Who do you live with?
3.0 Do your parents have a job? If yes what is it? 3.1 Father? 3.2 Mother?
4.0 Have you ever used Centrelink? 4.1 What for? 4.2 Was that successful for you or not? 4.3 In what way?
5.0 Have you used Job Network? 5.1 What for? 5.2 Was this successful for you or not? 5.3 In what way?
6.0 What grade did you leave school?
   6.1 How old were you when you left school?
   6.2 Why did you leave then?
   6.3 If you stayed at school to year 12 or after, why did you do this?
   6.4 Where was your last school?
   6.5 Which secondary schools did you go to? (list them all and give location)
7.0 What qualifications did you get after you left school?
   7.1 What college or University did get these at? (list them all)
8.0 Have you ever been a trainee? 8.1 When? 8.2 Where?
9.0 Have you ever been an apprentice? 9.1 When? 9.2 Where?
10.0 Do you think your education has helped you? 10.1 If yes, in what way? 10.2 If not, why not?
11.0 Where were you last year at this time?
12.0 What were you doing last year at this time?
   12.1 Was it full-time part-time, casual?
   12.2 If you were you doing more than one thing, what were they?
13.0 What was the main reason you were doing this last year?
Mark below, the things you have done over the last year?
14.0 Which three of these things were best for you?
15.0 Why were they best?
16.0 What are the things you have done since you left school?
17.0 What are you doing now? You can give more than one thing.
18.0 About how many hours do you do these things (part-time, full-time, casual)
19.0 What is the main reason you are doing these things?
20.0 Is this what you planned to be doing a year ago?
21.0 If it is, what things did you do to achieve this?
22.0 If it is not, what stopped you doing what you wanted to do?
23.0 If you have a job now, how did you get this
24.0 What would you like to do over the next year?
25.0 What would you like to be doing this time next year?
26.0 What is the main reason you want to do this?
27.0 What things will you do to achieve this?
28.0 Do you think any of the following can help you achieve the thing you want to do next year?

Mark against each how useful you think they would be from 1 to 4 with 4 meaning that it would very useful, 1 meaning not useful at all.

28.1 Centrelink
28.2 Job Network
28.3 Family
28.4 TAFE
28.5 University
28.6 School
28.7 CDEP
28.8 Work Other than CDEP
28.9 Other

29.0 Of these, which one do you think would be most useful to you?
30.0 In what way?
31.0 If you do not think they can help you, why not?
32.0 Do you think there are things which would stop you doing what you want to do next year?
32.1 If so what are these?

33.0 Where would you most like to live next year? 33.1 Why?
34.0 What would you like to be doing when you are 30 years old?
34.1 Why?
35.0 Generally, would you rather work:
35.1 full-time
35.2 part-time/seasonal
35.3 not work at all?

36.0 Why?
37.0 Do you hunt, fish or make a garden for your own or family’s food?
37.1 If so, when?
37.2 If not why not?
38.0 Who do you most like to work with?
38.1 Why?

39.0 Give each of these things a mark from 1 to 4 depending on how important they are to you for work. A 4 means the thing is important, a 1 means it is not important at all:
39.1 Level of pay
39.2 Being with others you know
39.3 Working in an Indigenous controlled company/organization
39.4 Not to have stress or worries at work
39.5 Working part time
39.6 Making your own working hours
39.7 Getting promoted
39.8 Being your own boss
39.9 Having a secure job
39.10 One other thing that you can choose.

40.0 Say the first three most important for you?
41.0 Why are these important?

42.0 In the last year have you received?
   42.1 Abstudy
   42.2 Newstart Allowance
   42.3 Youth Allowance
   42.4 Parent Allowance

43.0 Did you have any problems meeting the requirements for any of these payments?
   43.1 If so what were they?

44.0 Did you know that you may still be able to get a reduced rate of Newstart or Youth Allowance even if you are doing casual, temporary or part-time work?

45.0 Are there any changes you feel should be made to these payments?
   45.1 If so can you say which payments what changes these could be?

46.0 What is the main way you make a living now?
47.0 What are the other ways you make a living now?
48.0 How much is your income each week from your jobs (to take home, after tax).
   48.1 Say if any loans, rent or other deductions are made from your pay.

49.0 Is this enough for you?
   49.1 If not, why not?

50.0 How much would you like to get now each week (to take home)?
   50.1 Why?

51.0 What are the three things you have to spend most money on each week?
   Make the biggest expense number 1

52.0 Tell me the three most important things for you in life.
53.0 Why are these important?

54.0 What would you most like to do in life?
   54.1 Why?

55.0 Where would you most like to live?
   55.1 Why?
   55.2 If you are not living there, why not?
References


Australian Department of Sport and Recreation and Tourism 1984. Young Australians Today, a report on a study of the attitudes of young Australians, by ANOP Market Research, AGPS, Canberra.


MONOGRAPH SERIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion Paper Series</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>177/1999</td>
<td>What’s new? The parliamentary Inquiry into Indigenous Business.</td>
<td>W.S. Arthur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180/1999</td>
<td>Northern Territory land rights: purpose and effectiveness</td>
<td>J.D. Finlayson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>182/1999</td>
<td>Shoe or stew? Balancing wants and needs in indigenous households: a study of appropriate income support payments and policies for families</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>184/1999</td>
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<td>W. Sanders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185/1999</td>
<td>The Ngurratjuta Aboriginal Corporation: a potential model for understanding Northern Territory royalty associations, J.C. Altman and D.E. Smith</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>187/1999</td>
<td>Feast, famine and fraud: considerations in the delivery of banking and financial services to remote Indigenous communities</td>
<td>N. Westbury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>188/1999</td>
<td>Women’s business: access to credit for Indigenous women entrepreneurs within Torres Strait</td>
<td>S. McDonnell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>189/1999</td>
<td>Changing places: Indigenous population movement in the 1990s</td>
<td>J. Taylor and M. Bell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190/1999</td>
<td>Career, aspirations and the meaning of work in remote Australia: Torres Strait</td>
<td>W.S. Arthur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>191/1999</td>
<td>The allocation and management of royalties under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act: options for reform</td>
<td>J.C. Altman and R.I. Levitus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>192/1999</td>
<td>Regionalisation of Northern Territory land councils</td>
<td>R.I. Levitus, D.F. Martin and D.P. Pollack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>193/2000</td>
<td>The economic status of Indigenous Australians</td>
<td>J.C. Altman</td>
</tr>
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</table>
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