



Australian Government
Department of Education



NATSIEC
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Education Corporation

Formal Partnership Agreement

Australian Government
Department of Education
and the National Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander
Education Corporation
(NATSIEC)



The Parties acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and Elders past and present.

The artwork was commissioned by the Department of Education and created by Trevor Eastwood from Dalmarri with department staff during 2023 NAIDOC Week celebrations. Titled *Guwanyj wingara yirabana*, it means 'learning journey' in Dharug/Darug language. Trevor is a descendant of the Ngamba people on the Barwon River, part of Kamiloroi Country.

Preamble

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration sets a joint vision for a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face.

The Australian Government Department of Education (the department) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC) recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and knowledges are integral to reforming and enriching education systems, enhancing opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement) sets out commitments to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, prioritising self-determination and shared decision-making to achieve outcomes that are equitable and reflect community-identified goals. It includes a specific focus on Closing the Gap in educational outcomes, ensuring that education initiatives align with the aspirations and needs of communities.

This Partnership Agreement builds on the commitments under the National Agreement, reaffirming a collaborative approach to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples — an approach that prioritises empowerment, respect, and shared leadership across the lifecycle of education.

Closing the gap in educational outcomes and delivering an education system that supports young Australians of all backgrounds to achieve their full educational potential are priorities for the department.

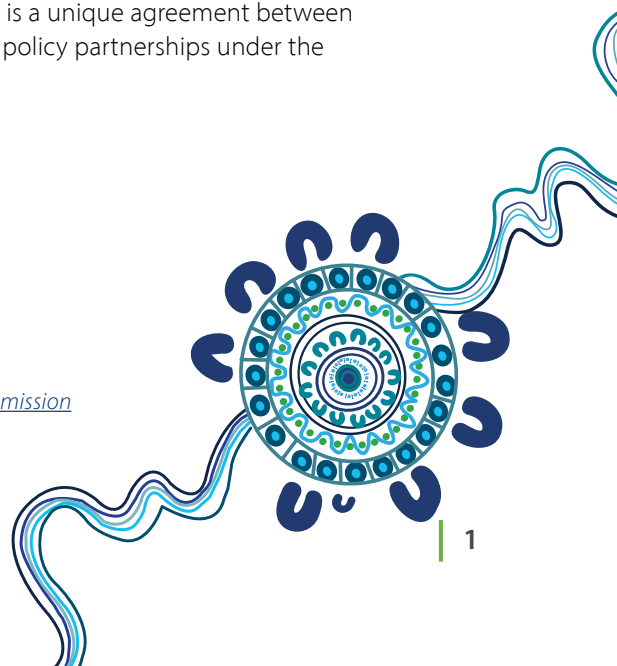
The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples¹ (UNDRIP) emphasises the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning; and having access to all levels and forms of education without discrimination.

Further, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) emphasises the right of children to access education that develops each child's personality and talents to their full extent, the right of children to enjoy their own culture in community with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and that all organisations concerned with children, including governments, should work towards what is best for each child.

This Partnership Agreement affirms the Parties' commitment that the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will be considered in decisions made about education policy in Australia, consistent with the principle articulated in the National Agreement '*When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a genuine say in the design and delivery of services that affect them, better life outcomes are achieved* (clause 6, page 2)'.

This Partnership Agreement will give effect to the vision of the National Agreement, the UNDRIP and the UNCRC by formalising partnership arrangements between the department and NATSIEC, the peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. This Partnership Agreement is a unique agreement between the department and NATSIEC and will complement other place-based and policy partnerships under the National Agreement.

1 [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples | Australian Human Rights Commission](#)



1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this Partnership Agreement is to:

- 1.1.1. Formalise the partnership between the department and NATSIEC, the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education across the lifelong learning cycle including early childhood education, primary and secondary schooling, and the skills and training, and higher education sectors.
- 1.1.2. Strengthen the relationship between the department and NATSIEC.
- 1.1.3. Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, aspirations and solutions, as represented through NATSIEC, are considered in education policy decisions, including, but not limited to, policies targeted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and students.
- 1.1.4. Ensure accountability and commitment to the Priority Reforms and education outcomes under the National Agreement, specifically outcomes 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 14 and 16 (detailed in Scope).
- 1.1.5. Complement core funding for NATSIEC by supporting the accountability of the department and NATSIEC to progress Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education outcomes in partnership.

2. Objectives

2.1. The objectives of this Partnership Agreement are to:

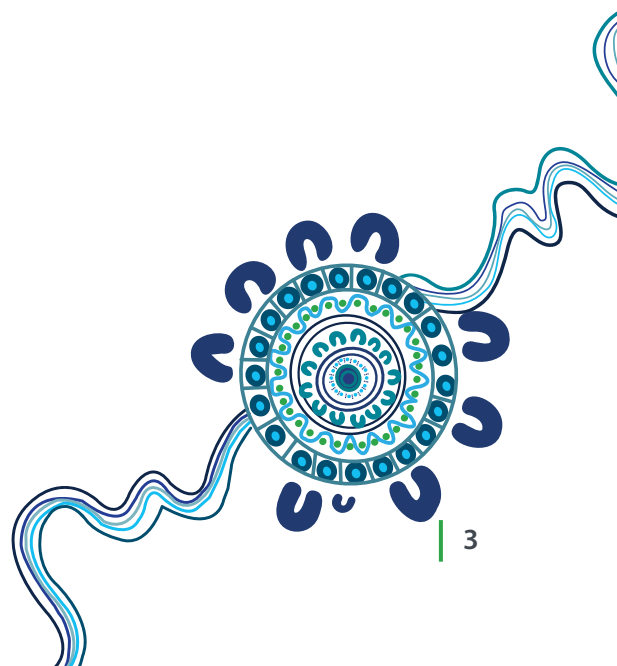
- 2.1.1. Transform the way the department and NATSIEC work together to realise a collaborative and in-partnership approach to address lifecycle educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- 2.1.2. Formalise governance between the department and NATSIEC to ensure both Parties can work effectively in partnership on policy and program design, implementation and evaluation.
- 2.1.3. Support efforts for NATSIEC and the department to implement the National Agreement commitments and improve progress against education targets under the National Agreement.

3. Parties

- 3.1. The Parties to this Partnership Agreement are the Australian Government Department of Education and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC) (together, the Parties).

4. Scope

- 4.1. Noting the interrelated nature of several socio-economic outcomes, as defined in the National Agreement, this Partnership Agreement will focus on issues and actions that will deliver progress in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education outcomes.
- 4.2. This Partnership Agreement covers matters affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in education, with a particular focus on efforts to achieve the following outcomes in the National Agreement:
- Outcome 3: Children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.
 - Outcome 4: Children thrive in their early years.
 - Outcome 5: Students achieve their full learning potential.
 - Outcome 6: Students reach their full potential through further education pathways.
 - Outcome 7: Youth are engaged in employment or education.
 - Outcome 14: People enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing.
 - Outcome 16: Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing.
- 4.3. NATSIEC, as the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, will work closely with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies working across the education lifecycle, including SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association (NATSIPA). This may include entering into agreements or Memoranda of Understanding where appropriate, to ensure effective working partnerships.
- 4.4. This Partnership Agreement will build on, not displace, existing partnership agreements between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies and the Australian Government or state and territory governments, such as Policy Partnerships or individual partnership arrangements.



5. Roles and Responsibilities

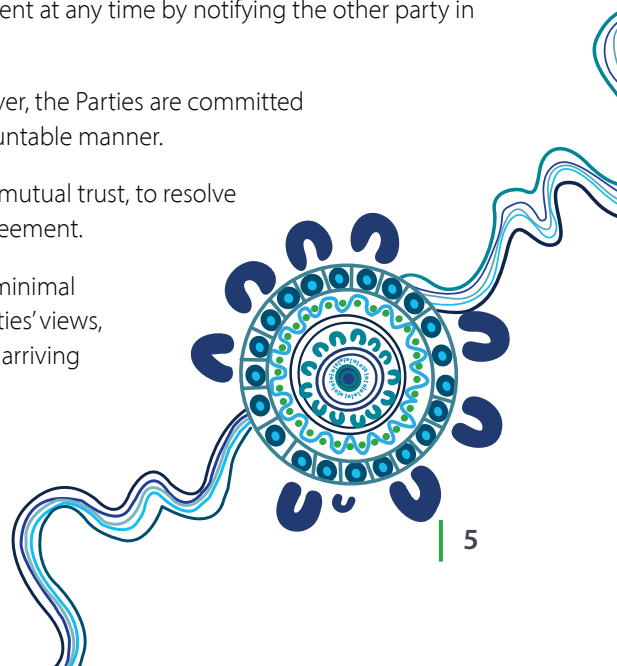
- 5.1. The Parties are jointly responsible for working together to support the objectives of the Agreement, including identifying opportunities for shared decision-making aimed at improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational opportunities and outcomes.
- 5.2. Both Parties will:
 - 5.2.1. Work together to strengthen this formal partnership, in line with the details outlined in this Partnership Agreement and the commitments made in the National Agreement, including, but not limited to, the strong partnership elements at National Agreement clause 32.
 - 5.2.2. Work transparently in the development of policies and programs that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational opportunities and outcomes.
 - 5.2.3. Build strong and trusting relationships with each other and regularly communicate with each other. This will include communicating any changes to each Party's staffing, relevant processes and timeframes that may affect engagement opportunities with the other, so that Parties are equipped to forward plan and prioritise commitments.
 - 5.2.4. Consistent with the strong partnership elements outlined in clause 32 of the National Agreement, develop and implement formal processes of shared decision-making on relevant policy and program reform, design and implementation, including shared decision-making on relevant:
 - (a) new policy development and policy reform
 - (b) policy frameworks and strategies
 - (c) legislative reform
 - (d) regulatory reform
 - (e) program design and redesign
 - (f) grants and procurement processes, noting that funding decisions remain the responsibility of the Australian Government, and noting the commitment of both Parties to ensure probity in funding decisions.
 - (g) communications activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sector and community audiences.
- 5.3. The department will:
 - 5.3.1. Provide core funding to NATSIEC as announced in the 2024-25 Federal Budget, to facilitate its ongoing operations as the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.
 - 5.3.2. Ensure NATSIEC's independent policy advice to the Australian Government is considered in policy and program design.
 - 5.3.3. Actively share with NATSIEC data held by the department where the Australian Government is the owner of that data, and privacy, or other requirements, allow, to support shared decision-making and align with Priority Reform 4 of the National Agreement.
 - 5.3.4. Actively support NATSIEC staff to engage with departmental staff at all levels regarding the development, delivery and communication of policy and programs, where lawful and appropriate. The department and NATSIEC will work to develop a separate engagement protocols document that will complement and give effect to this agreement.
 - 5.3.5. Engage NATSIEC early and in an ongoing capacity in relevant policy and program design, implementation and evaluation and draw on NATSIEC's expertise across the educational lifecycle.

5.4. NATSIEC will:

- 5.4.1. Build and maintain a nationally representative NATSIEC membership network that incorporates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education stakeholders, including community-controlled education organisations, peak bodies, and professional organisations.
- 5.4.2. Proactively bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, their expertise and lived experience, drawing on engagement with the NATSIEC membership network and communities as appropriate, to provide advice to the department on matters affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education across the life cycle, particularly those that are of national or cross-jurisdictional relevance.
- 5.4.3. Regularly communicate and share emerging issues with the department, including on any new challenges/ barriers experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations), and any key initiatives led by NATSIEC (for example across states and territories) that the department may not be aware of.
- 5.4.4. Provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations to inform it of their concerns and how they might be addressed through education policy reform.
- 5.4.5. Engage with the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peaks to support provision of advice and input to the department regarding the development of policy positions for Australian Government decisions, in recognition of the impact education has on Closing the Gap outcomes.
- 5.4.6. Support the department to uphold their commitment to embed the Priority Reforms into the work of the department and to meet the targets within the National Agreement.
- 5.4.7. Share data and information with the department where safe, legal and ethical to do so to support shared decision making, where NATSIEC deems data and information is relevant and appropriate to share to support collaboration.
- 5.4.8. Engage SNAICC on matters affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in the early years.

6. Governance

- 6.1. Relationships between the department and NATSIEC will grow and mature over the life of the Partnership Agreement.
- 6.2. To support effective engagement and ensure improvements can be made, this Partnership Agreement will be reviewed regularly (as per Section 9.2).
- 6.3. The Partnership Agreement can be amended at any time by written agreement of the Parties.
- 6.4. Either Party can terminate their participation in this Partnership Agreement at any time by notifying the other party in writing, with 30-days notice.
- 6.5. This Partnership Agreement is not legally binding or enforceable, however, the Parties are committed to implementing the Agreement in good faith, and a positive and accountable manner.
- 6.6. The Parties will endeavour, in the spirit of co-operation, good faith, and mutual trust, to resolve all difficulties or misunderstandings with respect to this Partnership Agreement.
- 6.7. The Parties will attempt to resolve all disputes in the first instance with minimal conflict and without unnecessary formality by listening to the other Parties' views, through yarning, phone calls, informal meetings or workshops, towards arriving at agreement.



7. Probity

- 7.1. The department and its staff must act in accordance with the [Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013](#) and the [Public Service Act 1999](#) respectively, as well as other relevant instruments such as the [Commonwealth Procurement Rules](#) and the [Commonwealth Grant Rules and Principles](#). These documents require officials to act with honesty, integrity, impartiality and accountability when making decisions about Commonwealth funds. This may include through:
 - 7.1.1. Establishing procedures for officials and potential grantees to declare any actual or perceived conflict of interest and developing procedures to manage potential conflicts of interest.
 - 7.1.2. Seeking probity advice where appropriate and necessary.
 - 7.1.3. Ensuring funding decisions are impartial, appropriately documented and reported, publicly defensible and lawful.
 - 7.1.4. Ensuring officials do not make an improper use of their position.
- 7.2. NATSIEC will:
 - 7.2.1. Declare any actual or perceived conflicts of interest at the outset and if/as they arise when consulting on any policy or program activities or measures, including grant programs or procurements.
 - 7.2.2. Comply with any reasonable requests from the department with respect to probity, including managing conflicts of interest and confidentiality of shared information.

8. Interactions with other national initiatives

- 8.1. The Partnership Agreement will encourage joined up approaches with other Commonwealth agencies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and partners to resolve issues faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, acknowledging the shared responsibility across the Australian Government, and aligned national initiatives that will contribute to improved outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, families and communities.
- 8.2. Parties commit to aligning priorities and supporting the important work already underway within the department and across the Commonwealth to improve outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

9. Term

- 9.1. The Partnership Agreement comes into effect on the date of signing and continues for an initial period of 5 years from the date of signature.
- 9.2. The Partnership Agreement will be reviewed after 2 years (or earlier by agreement), and then regularly at three-year intervals, with a view to being extended or renewed to drive ongoing progress. The process for this review will be established by the Parties.

10. Data Sharing

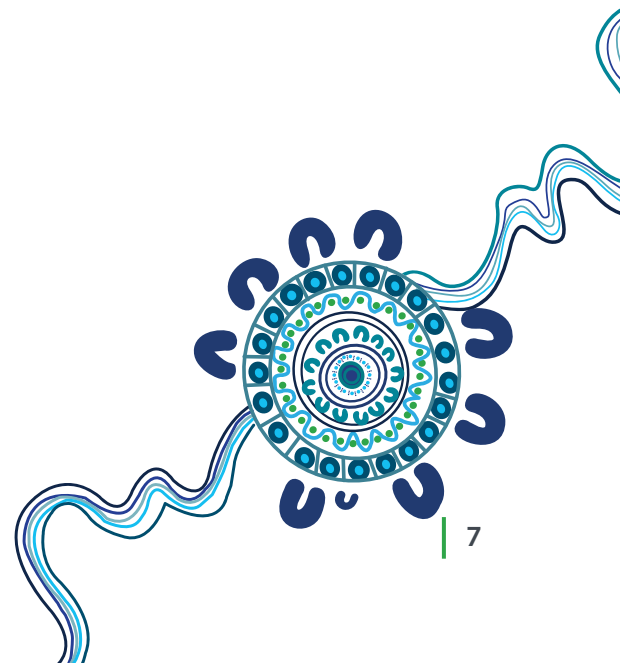
- 10.1. Priority Reform 4 of the National Agreement is about shared access to data and information.
- 10.2. The Parties acknowledge the commitments and actions outlined in Priority Reform 4 and will endeavour to share available data, where safe, legal, and ethical, to ensure clear understanding of context, to make evidence-based recommendations and to gauge progress toward the targets.

11. Resourcing

- 11.1. In Accordance with Clause 33 of the National Agreement, the Parties acknowledge that NATSIEC needs to be provided with adequate and ongoing financial support to enable it to engage as an equal partner.
- 11.2. Operational funding of \$12.5 million over 4 years, to enable engagement under this Partnership Agreement, will be provided to NATSIEC by the department as announced in the 2024-25 Budget. Arrangements to facilitate the provision of this funding are detailed in a separate grant funding agreement between the department and NATSIEC.
- 11.3. The department recognises that the financial support referred to in 11.2 will be separate to any other funding to NATSIEC for other project-based arrangements and does not limit the department's consideration of funding to NATSIEC for additional activities.

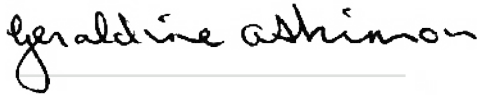
12. Publication of the Partnership Agreement

- 12.1. The Parties agree that, upon signing, this Partnership Agreement will be published and will remain publicly available, including reflecting any future changes.



Schedule A: Parties to the Agreement

Signed for and on behalf of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC)



Aunty Geraldine Atkinson
Co-Chair, NATSIEC



Professor Peter Buckskin PSM FACE
Co-Chair, NATSIEC

Signed for and on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Education



Tony Cook PSM
Secretary, Department of Education

7 March 2025

