

The Australian Financial Review
www.afr.com • Thursday 8 March 2012

17+

BP sets up \$1 million indigenous fund

Employment gap

Natalie Gerritsen

Energy giant BP has joined the corporate campaign to close the employment gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, committing \$1 million to scholarships for Aboriginal students.

BP has partnered with the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation to fund about 60 scholarships over five years for students from the communities in which it operates.

The company's corporate responsibility manager, Mark Glazebrook, said the program would include BP employees mentoring Aboriginal students, who would be given the opportunity to visit operations to try to "demystify" corporate culture and

encourage job seekers. "The support along the way is just as important as the job at the end," he said.

The foundation offers scholarships to some of the nation's best schools and universities in an effort to create a generation of indigenous Australians better prepared for the workforce.

Foundation chief executive Andrew Penfold said corporate demand for programs for indigenous Australians was growing rapidly and businesses were looking for organisations that could guarantee results.

"The way to make corporations feel comfortable is to focus on proven results and to have a seriously hard business head behind you," he said. "They are investing substantial money, so it will be analysed like any other business investment."

The foundation's corporate part-

ners include HSBC, KPMG, BHP Billiton, Leighton Holdings and Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

About 85 per cent of its students complete year 12, almost double the national average for indigenous students. Of those students, 60 per cent go on to university, while most of the rest pursue jobs or training.

The federal government's annual report *Closing the Gap* found a decade of strong economic growth has helped increase the number of Aborigines in steady employment.

The report, tabled in Parliament last month, found employment of adult Aborigines grew from 32.9 per cent in 1994 to 53.1 per cent in 2008.

The government expects figures from the last census will show another rise. The report found that completing year 12 was linked to better job out-

comes later in life. BP's contribution to the Indigenous Education Foundation is part of its reconciliation action plan, implemented late last year. It is targeting indigenous employment of 2.5 per cent of its workforce by 2013, roughly on par with indigenous numbers in the general population.

The plan includes a commitment to the introduction of Opal fuel in remote communities to reduce petrol sniffing. Research by the federal Department of Health has shown it cuts petrol sniffing by 94 per cent. BP plans to help indigenous staff move into management positions.

The not-for-profit organisation Aboriginal Employment Strategy's chief executive, Danny Lester, told *The Australian Financial Review* that companies needed to be thinking about careers, not just jobs.