

Scholarship program graduates double



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THE number of indigenous students graduating from a national scholarship program has almost doubled in one year, with retention rates now at about 90 per cent for both high school and tertiary graduates in the program.

According to the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation annual report released yesterday, the number of scholarships issued under the foundation's program grew by 41 per cent last year compared to the previous year.

The AIEF was established with the support of the federal government and a range of private companies in 2008, and now supports 416 students.

The foundation issued 294 scholarships in 2012 at 30 different schools and universities, and last year began a series of new partnerships with schools including Brisbane Boys College and Sydney's prestigious Cranbrook School and Scots College.

Retention rates of foundation students in Year 12 are at 90 per cent, the same percentage as tertiary scholarship recipients going on to graduate or continue their university degrees.

Yesterday's launch of the annual report was hosted by

Qantas and attended by a bevy of high-profile business leaders including David Gonski, former Australia Post chairman David Mortimer and Qantas chief executive Alan Joyce.

AIEF chief Andrew Penfold said 84 indigenous students had now completed Year 12 with the support of the foundation, and the Year 12 completion rate for those on scholarships was exceptional, compared with a 50 per cent national average.

"These are the reasons we get out of bed every day," Mr Penfold said.

"When we see these results it gives us more determination to keep on going."

The foundation's chairwoman, Ann Sherry, who delivered a video address, said fundraising targets, which had at first seemed "outrageous", had already been surpassed, allowing the AIEF to achieve its 20-year plan in just two years.

"We can now look to educating 7000 students," Ms Sherry said.

"We believe fundamentally that the way to change indigenous disadvantage in Australia is to change educational outcomes. Our mission is clear."

The finances of the foundation have grown from a \$20 million commitment by the federal government between 2009-12, which was initially set to be matched by another \$22m over 20 years from the private sector.

But in just four years the private sector has contributed \$33m, with cumulative cash and pledges now worth \$55m to the foundation across 20 years.