

## **To what extent have we moved beyond the 'soft bigotry' of low expectations?**

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### **Abstract:**

To what extent, over the past year, have we moved beyond the 'soft bigotry' of low expectations'?

Firstly, some background:

In December 2018, the current author presented a paper to the annual AARE conference of that year entitled:

"Towards embedding a narrative of high expectations and positive thinking into the policy framework regarding the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children".

In that presentation, the author noted that Ken Wyatt, Australia's first Indigenous member of the House of Representatives, and (now) Australia's first Aboriginal Minister for Indigenous Australians, once wrote,

"I know what it is like to be denigrated for my race, to be told to leave school and to get a job on a farm because 'Aboriginal kids don't succeed'".

Nicola Berry, in an article published by The Australian of 12 June 2019, observes that whilst that phrase, the 'soft bigotry' of low expectations, which is credited to former George W. Bush speech writer Michael Gerson, and is one originally used to describe the detrimental effects of societal attitudes towards people of colour, it can also be applied to other people.

The widespread nature of the practice is illustrated in the aforementioned article by Nicola Berry in which she, as a person from a foster care background, recalled tutors who have said they 'never expected anyone from my background to be in this class, because outcomes are so poor'.

The paper answers the question asked in the opening, by placing in context a number of events that occurred during the past year, some positive, some negative.