



## Australia

Julia Gillard  
Deputy Prime Minister  
Minister for Education, Employment & Workplace Relations  
and Social Inclusion



*The Honourable Julia Gillard MP has been Australia's Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion since December 2007. Ms Gillard was born in Wales in the UK and migrated to Australia with her family in 1966. She studied arts and law at university in Adelaide, Australia. Before becoming Deputy Prime Minister, Ms Gillard held a number of parliamentary positions, including Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations and Social Inclusion; Reconciliation and Indigenous Affairs; Health; and Population and Immigration. Before her parliamentary career Ms Gillard worked as a solicitor. She has always had a keen interest in social justice and (as a former national president of the Australian Union of Students) in education.*

### **Inclusive education: the way of the future**

Social inclusion is about making sure that all citizens have the opportunity to play a full role in the economic, social and civic life of the nation. It is about moving ahead, in terms of prosperity and social progress, and ensuring no-one is left behind.

The key to achieving this, as the 21st Century unfolds, will be inclusive education. Education, from early childhood through to higher education and beyond, is in many ways the gateway to full participation in our society. Those who for whatever reason do not finish—or even attend—school, or reach a minimum standard of literacy and numeracy, are badly disadvantaged throughout life. The challenge is to develop our education system and our social programs so that they not only meet the needs of the 'average' citizen, but also reach out to those excluded groups and individuals. In Australia this includes many of our Indigenous citizens, people with disabilities, and others living in poverty or in adverse social circumstances.

One of the highest priorities of the Australian Government is to bring about an 'Education Revolution'. Because the years from 0 to 6 are so important, achieving universal access for all four year olds to preschool is a key commitment. This includes Indigenous children living in remote areas—children who are among the most disadvantaged in Australia.

Increasing school completion rates among low socio-economic groups in Australia, and providing all children—including disadvantaged children—with access to computers and education resources are also significant priorities. Australia is working towards closing the 'digital divide' through additional funding for computers in schools and a tax rebate for educational expenses.

The Australian Government has clearly articulated its commitment to a strong social inclusion agenda through my appointment as the first ever Minister for Social Inclusion.

I am pleased to be invited to convey this message to the Conference and wish participants every success.