

Education

Background

- 4.1 The Western Australian Department of Education and Training has provided school based education (from pre-school to year 10) on Cocos (Keeling) Islands since the late 1970s and on Christmas Island since the early 1990s. A Service Delivery Arrangement between the Department of Transport and Regional Services and the WA Department of Education and Training establishes the provision of services. Schools in the Indian Ocean Territories are managed by the Kimberley District Education Office.¹
- 4.2 There is one campus on Christmas Island, the Christmas Island District High School, which caters for approximately 400 students. There are two campuses on Cocos (Keeling) Islands with a total enrolment of approximately 130 students. The Home Island campus provides primary education only, while the Cocos (Keeling) Islands District High School on West Island provides primary and secondary education to Year 10. English is the principal language used, except at the Home Island campus where education is bilingual in the early primary years.² Consequently, teachers on Cocos (Keeling) Islands are specialists in English as a second

1 Department of Transport and Regional Services, *Service Delivery Arrangements [SDA] Performance Reports 2001/2002*, Regional Office Perth, p. 15.

2 Commonwealth Grants Commission, 1999, *Report on Indian Ocean Territories*, Canprint, Canberra, p. 85.

language.³ School accommodation on Christmas Island has recently been upgraded, and appears to be adequate. Some work is needed on the school buildings on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. The Committee understands that tenders have been called for this work.

Secondary Education

4.3 Students usually undertake years 11 and 12 in Western Australia, with the Department of Transport and Regional Services providing travel costs for a return flight each semester and a means-tested isolated students living allowance.⁴ A four-year trial to provide some year 11 and 12 units on Christmas Island commenced at the start of the school year in 2002.⁵

4.4 The 2001-02 performance reports for the Service Delivery Arrangements identifies the attempt to reduce dependence on distance education through the availability of post compulsory education on Christmas Island as a 'key change' in the delivery of education services.⁶ The Department of Transport and Regional Services noted that:

If the year 11 & 12 trial is assessed as successful, it is envisaged that the majority of year 11 and 12 students and or their families will prefer the on-Island post compulsory option rather than the off-Island option. This will be further reinforced if the financial support for the off-Island option is eventually withdrawn.⁷

4.5 During meetings with community groups on Christmas Island, the Committee was informed of community concern that the allowances currently provided to all students completing years 11 and 12 in Western Australia will be phased out. Island residents stressed that they want to retain the option of sending their children to the mainland. They considered that some students may be disadvantaged if forced to remain on-Island to complete their secondary education.

3 Commonwealth Grants Commission, 1999, *Report on Indian Ocean Territories*, Canprint, Canberra, p. 85.

4 Commonwealth Grants Commission, 1999, *Report on Indian Ocean Territories*, Canprint, Canberra, p. 145.

5 Department of Transport and Regional Services, Submissions, p. 60. Year 11 studies commenced at the Christmas Island District High School in 2002 with 8 students enrolled. Year 12 studies commenced in 2003.

6 Department of Transport and Regional Services, *Service Delivery Arrangements [SDA] Performance Reports 2001/2002*, Regional Office Perth, p. 16.

7 Department of Transport and Regional Services, *Service Delivery Arrangements [SDA] Performance Reports 2001/2002*, Regional Office Perth, p. 16.

- 4.6 The Committee would be concerned if the allowances for students from Christmas Island intending to complete years 11 and 12 on the mainland were to be withdrawn. The Committee assumes that this will not occur during the trial, and expects that the trial will include a thorough assessment of whether the curriculum able to be offered on the Island will cater adequately for students of all abilities. The Committee, therefore, recommends the following:

Recommendation 3

- 4.7 **That the Federal Government continue to provide financial support for Christmas Island residents wishing to complete years 11 and 12 on the mainland.**

International Students - Christmas Island

- 4.8 Christmas Island community groups and residents noted that economic benefits could be realised from the provision of educational opportunities for foreign students. The Chinese Literary Association suggested that research into a role for Christmas Island in the Indonesian English Second Language (ESL) market be conducted. The Association further suggested that the newly-built units associated with the construction of the IRPC centre could be used as ESL student accommodation. However, currently the relevant Commonwealth legislation, the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (Cth), does not extend to the external territories.
- 4.9 The Service Delivery Arrangements performance reports for 2001-02 canvass the possibility that the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (Cth) be amended so that post compulsory education courses on Christmas Island could be offered to full fee paying students from South-East Asia.⁸ The Department of Transport and Regional Services noted that the Western Australian Minister for Education, Sport and Recreation and Indigenous Affairs had written to the Federal Government asking that the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (Cth) “be extended to the external territories in order to allow the school on Christmas Island to attract fee paying overseas students”.⁹ The Federal Minister for

8 Department of Transport and Regional Services Office, Perth, *Service Delivery Arrangements [SDA] Performance Reports 2001/2002*, p. 16.

9 Department of Transport and Regional Services, Submissions, p. 686.

Education, Science and Training, the Hon. Brendan Nelson MP, advised the WA Minister that the request would be “thoroughly considered”.¹⁰

- 4.10 The Committee believes that the proposal to offer educational services to overseas fee-paying students has potential, given the educational infrastructure on Christmas Island and the ethnic and language composition of the Island’s population. The Committee trusts that the Federal Government will be able to assist in the development of this initiative which, if successful, would assist the Island’s economy and broaden its narrow economic base. Accordingly, the Committee recommends the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (Cth) be extended to the Indian Ocean Territories.

Recommendation 4

- 4.11 **That the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (Cth) be amended to include the Indian Ocean Territories.**

Vocational Education and Training

- 4.12 In 2001, the Department of Transport and Regional Services and the Western Australian Department of Training entered into a three-year Service Delivery Arrangement “to maximise employment related training opportunities for apprentices and trainees of the Commonwealth-contracted Indian Ocean Group Training Association (IOGTA)”.¹¹ Services provided by the WA Department of Training include monitoring, support and advice.¹² The Shire of Christmas Island noted that additional funding provided by the Federal Government for vocational education and training “has improved the services provided on Island”.¹³
- 4.13 However, some witnesses expressed concerns. On Christmas Island these concerns related to training in health and other professions, and tourism. On Cocos (Keeling) Islands, the concerns related to the absence of any apprentices in the basic trades. Mr Gordon Thomson, General Secretary of

10 Department of Transport and Regional Services, Submissions, p. 686.

11 Department of Transport and Regional Services, *Service Delivery Arrangements [SDA] Performance Reports 2001/2002*, Regional Office Perth, p. 79.

12 Department of Transport and Regional Services, *Service Delivery Arrangements [SDA] Performance Reports 2001/2002*, Regional Office Perth, p. 79.

13 Shire of Christmas Island, Submissions, p. 330.

the Union of Christmas Island Workers, suggested that the Federal Government's expenditure on health could be reduced if it were "to put some money into the training of medical staff, nurses in particular".¹⁴ Mr Thomson cited a case where a family's financial situation had prevented a student from completing her health care studies on the mainland.¹⁵

4.14 The Department of Transport and Regional Services pointed out that Indian Ocean Territories' residents:

are eligible to apply for funding from the Commonwealth under WA Government grants programs, including for scholarships provided by the WA Department of Health.¹⁶

The Department noted that two teacher assistants at the Christmas Island District High School were undertaking on-Island training as teachers.¹⁷ It is expected they will graduate as teachers at the end of 2004.¹⁸

4.15 Ms Foo Gee of the Austasia Business Council claimed that there was "no proper training" available to Christmas Island residents interested in the tourism industry.¹⁹ She suggested that funding be made available for the training of Island residents in tourism. Ms Foo also noted the high costs to employers of sending employees to the mainland for specialised training.²⁰ The Department of Transport and Regional Services pointed out that the Indian Ocean Group Training Association offers hospitality courses for Indian Ocean Territories' residents and that additional training assistance had been given to the tourism industry on Christmas Island. The Department noted that it had recently, in conjunction with National Jet Systems, "provided travel agencies on Christmas Island with airfare assistance to assist with sending a trainee to the mainland for travel agent training".²¹

4.16 Limited employment opportunities on Cocos (Keeling) Islands appear to be responsible for a lack of apprenticeships. The Shire, for example, does not employ any apprentices, although this situation may change with the devolution of service provision to the shire.²² Mr Signa Knight, Chairman,

14 Mr Gordon Thomson, Transcript, 11 March 2003, pp. 45-46.

15 Mr Gordon Thomson, Transcript, 11 March 2003, p. 50.

16 Department of Transport and Regional Services, Submissions, p. 652.

17 Department of Transport and Regional Services, Submissions, p. 652.

18 Department of Transport and Regional Services, Submissions, p. 652.

19 Ms Gee Foo, Transcript, 11 March 2003, p. 28.

20 Ms Gee Foo, Transcript, 11 March 2003, p. 28.

21 Department of Transport and Regional Services, Submissions, p. 652.

22 Mr Robert Jarvis, Transcript, 13 March 2003, p. 118.

Cocos Islands Co-operative Society Ltd, speaking through an interpreter, pointed out that:

We also want to go back to training of school kids who have just left school. In the old days there used to be a lot more money in the bucket, but nowadays there is very little and we never see any proper training services being provided like we had in the old days when we had five or six apprentices or various kids doing various projects or jobs. At the moment, that is very quiet. We need to see more apprenticeships for our kids, or a training program for that matter.²³

4.17 The Department of Transport and Regional Services noted that it had contracted the Indian Ocean Group Training Association to provide group training and adult education services for the territories. Under the contract:

- IOGTA is paid at northern WA-equivalent rates for adult education courses it delivers, and higher rates for the training of its trainees and apprentices; and
- IOGTA is required to consult with a wide range of community representatives in developing its training plans and priorities to ensure that the services provided are meeting the community and business needs of the Territories.²⁴

4.18 Mr Alan O'Grady, Financial Controller, Cocos Islands Co-operative Society Ltd, stated:

I would just like to reiterate also my concern, as the manager of the cooperative, about employment opportunities. There are no new carpenters, electricians, plumbers—just basic tradespeople—coming through the community from either island. Robyn Jenkins, I believe, is going to hold a meeting in the near future to see what we can do about this, but, as the older population retires, it will be somewhat difficult to imagine just how these very basic services are going to be run if there is nobody on the island to do them.²⁵

The Committee shares Mr O'Grady's concern and believes it is vital to encourage students from the territories studying in Western Australia to return to take up jobs on their home islands.

23 Mr Signa Knight, Transcript, 13 March 2003, p. 105.

24 Department of Transport and Regional Services, Submissions, p. 648.

25 Mr Alan O'Grady, Transcript, 13 March 2003, p. 106.