

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2005-2006 SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 1

Output Group: 1.2 – Assistance for Individuals including those with special needs

DEST Question No. E536_06

Senator Evans provided in writing.

Question:

Has the Department reported to OIPC or the Secretaries Group on the progress of the trial?
List the dates of reporting. Attach any reports.

Answer:

Murdi Paaki COAG Trial Reporting

The Department of Education, Science, and Training (DEST) has provided verbal reports on progress to the Secretaries Group since the inception of the Murdi Paaki Council of Australian Government (COAG) trial. The Department also provides annual public reports on the progress of the trial through the Department's Annual Report, and its National Report to Parliament. Relevant extracts from the Department's 2003-04 Annual Report (pages 43 and 44) and 2004-05 Annual Report (pages 43 to 45) and the National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training 2003 (pages 111 and 112) are attached for information.

- establish mechanisms to encourage better coordination of ATAS activities and the exchange of information about best practice.

The recommendations from the review will be considered during 2004 for implementation in 2005.

Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies

The independent review of the Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECBs) was completed in June 2003.

The review found that IECBs have provided important forums for consultation on education and training within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia since the 1970s. The report of review made 15 recommendations to improve the effective of the consultative bodies including that the state, territory and Australian governments value and recognise the significant contribution that IECBs have made to building Indigenous community participation in education decision-making. The review also recommended that state government appointments to IECBs be transparent and that those appointed should have the expertise and ability to analyse government education policies.

The review highlighted positive areas of IECB practices including the 10-year partnership agreement, *Yalca: A Partnership in Education and Training for the New Millennium (2001)* between the Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and the Victorian State Government which outlines strategies to ensure that Koories are in the forefront of the policy and decision making in relation to Koorie education. The agreement also aims to increase the participation and outcomes rates of Koorie students; to respect and support culturally relevant learning environments; increase the number of Koorie people employed in the education and training sectors and recognise the central role of local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups. The review concluded that the Victorian IECB enjoys a high profile and its consultative mechanisms are extensive.

The review commented positively about the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and its consultative mechanisms with the State. The review reported that the NSW consultative group is an independent body with a set of *Rules of Association* which are transparent and provide the basis determining both the state and local AECGs' practices.

The Group had experienced membership on many state Department of Education steering committees and it also has a partnership agreement with the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, which is set out in *Securing a Collaborative Partnership into the Future*. This partnership agreement recognises the NSW AECG as the State's peak advisory body on Indigenous education.

6.5 Other Australian Government funded initiatives

6.5.1 Council of Australian Governments Whole of Government Indigenous Initiative

In April 2002 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to trial working together with Indigenous communities in up to ten selected regions in Australia to provide more flexible programmes and services based on priorities agreed with communities.

The aim of these trials is to improve the way governments interact with each other and with communities to deliver more effective responses to the needs of Indigenous Australians. The lessons learnt from these cooperative approaches will be able to be applied more broadly. The trials are underpinned by a concept being called 'Shared Responsibility'. Shared responsibility in this context means that all partners to the trial recognise that responsibility for the condition and wellbeing of Indigenous communities is shared between communities, families, individuals and governments.

The day to day accountability for progress in each trial site has been given to nominated 'lead agencies'. Lead agencies are responsible for taking community initiatives forward and for developing productive relationships with Indigenous people and other agencies. The lead agencies are DEST and the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET).

The Murdi Paaki region includes the major communities of Bourke, Brewarrina, Broken Hill, Cobar, Collarenebri, Coonamble, Dareton, Enngonia, Goodooga, Gulargambone, Ivanhoe, Lightning Ridge, Menindee, Walgett, Weilmoringle and Wilcannia. In the 2001 ABS Census, 7,542 Indigenous people resided in the region. At least 14 % of the population in the region are Indigenous Australians.

In Murdi Paaki, DEST and NSW DET are working with 16 Community Working Parties as the primary Indigenous governance structures across the region. On 22 August 2003, DEST, NSW DET and the Murdi Paaki Regional Council signed a Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA), which is an agreement setting out the key issues and priorities, identifies agreed outcomes and benchmarks to measure progress, and describes each party's responsibilities for making things work. Key regional priorities under this agreement fall into four broad categories on:

- improving educational attainment and school retention;
- improving the health and well-being of children and young people;
- helping families to raise healthy children; and
- strengthening community and regional governance structures.

The first project to be agreed through the regional SRA was to establish administrative support positions for each Community Working Party (CWVP). The occupants of these positions will pursue traineeships through NSW TAFE and will help to achieve the fourth regional priority, above.

It is anticipated that in 2004, each CWVP will also develop a SRA in conjunction with DEST and DET, based on local priorities.

Find out more by logging onto the Indigenous Communities Coordination website at <http://www.icc.gov.au>

6.5.2 The Partnership Outreach Education Model (POEM) initiative

Twenty one Partnership Outreach Education Model (POEM) projects were contracted by DEST in 2002 to assist young people (aged 13 – 19) who had become disconnected from school and possibly their families. A number of projects took time to build partnerships and trial delivery approaches during 2002 while 2003 provided the first full year of operation.

POEM projects provide a supportive community based learning environment for participants where the focus is on helping them gain the accredited education (academic) and training (vocational) outcomes and to develop the life and employability skills necessary to help them participate as fully as possible in learning, work and community life once they leave POEMs.

All POEM projects assist Indigenous young people as part of their client mix, however a number have an exclusive or very strong focus on Indigenous young people. Projects operate in over 30 towns and cities across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australia. While all projects engage the target groups in a supportive education environment, the approaches taken differ significantly.

In 2003 POEM projects reported against two strands of activity. Strand 1 which provided a full time education and training option in supportive community learning environments and Strand 2 which provided part time or intermittent activities for young people who maintained some connection with mainstream school or were totally disconnected but not ready for a full time programme.

Participation by Indigenous young people in the POEM initiative increased in 2003. During 2003, 246 Indigenous young people engaged in POEM Strand 1. Of these:

- 81.7% were totally disconnected from school prior to attending POEMs, 14.6% were chronic truants and 3.7% were at risk regular school attendees;
- 21% were homeless or at risk of homelessness, 13% were involved with the juvenile justice system and 13% had substance abuse issues; and
- 66 (26.8%) continued POEMs into 2004, 56 (22.8%) exited POEMs to a mainstream education option, 39 (15.9%) gained work, a New Apprenticeship or exited to the CDEP programme and 5 (2%) engaged with another programme. While the remainder had less positive exit destinations due to transience and other factors, the majority of young people exiting POEMs do so having achieved a range of accredited education and training outcomes and other personal benefits which they carry with them.

Another 411 Indigenous young people attended a range of POEM Strand 2 activities. During 2003 Indigenous young people made up 34.5% of all the young people attending these activities including accredited short courses, regular part time assistance with education, life skills and employability skills.

DEST contracted Miles Morgan Australia Pty Ltd to work closely with providers during 2002 and 2003 to independently evaluate the POEM pilot. The three parts to the report are available on the Department's web site. 'Evaluation of the POEM pilot', 'A Community Partnerships

DEST ANNUAL REPORT 2003-04

During 2003-04, as part of the 2005-2008 quadrennium funding arrangements, the department started developing an Indigenous education performance reporting and monitoring framework and an accountability and evaluation strategy, covering both the *Indigenous Education Direct Assistance* programme and the *Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme*. The framework is proposed to come into effect in 2005.

The department is clearly focused on improving mainstream service provision for Indigenous students and better focusing Indigenous specific resources to the most disadvantaged Indigenous students.

Whole of government approaches

The department contributed to the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) whole of government strategy on Indigenous issues. The aim of the whole of government approach is to deliver more effective responses to the needs of Indigenous people, including in the area of education, through improved coordination and delivery of services. The department has taken the leadership role in implementing this approach in the Murdi Paaki region in the north western part of New South Wales. During 2003-04 the department worked with Indigenous communities and Australian Government and state agencies to improve outcomes for Indigenous people in the region.

Achievements include:

- a Shared Responsibility Agreement signed on 22 August 2003 between DEST, the New South Wales Department of Education, and the Murdi Paaki Regional Council;
- sixteen Community Working Parties designated as the primary community body for consultation and negotiation with governments under the Shared Responsibility Agreement;
- the Community Working Party Governance workshop (8-10 March 2004). The Workshop built on the regional Shared Responsibility Agreement and provided participants with the opportunity to develop more effective networks and share understandings of the Council of Australian Government's trial;
- Murdi Paaki Trial Coordination structures established and functional with Australian Government, state and community representation;
- sixteen Secretariat positions established to support the Community Working Parties in each of the communities in Murdi Paaki involved in the trial (funding with assistance from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services); and
- six Community Working Parties appointed consultants to help develop Community Plans to assist communities to identify their priorities, and negotiate with governments, to form Local Shared Responsibility Agreements (funding provided through the Department of Family and Community Services).

DEST ANNUAL REPORT 2003-04

The department is playing a key role in the reforms to the administration of Indigenous affairs. These reforms were announced on 15 April 2004 by the Prime Minister and Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. The reforms will introduce a whole of government approach to the provision of programmes and services to Indigenous Australians and will be informed by the learnings from the Indigenous COAG trials under way throughout Australia.

The reforms provide an opportunity for the department to extend its existing networks with Indigenous communities and other Australian Government and state agencies, and to improve outcomes for Indigenous people.

Reviews and evaluations

Several Indigenous education programme reviews have been completed, including:

- Review of the Indigenous Independent Vocational Education and Training (VET) Providers;
- Review of Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies and Indigenous Support Units;
- Review of *Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme* Bulk Funding Arrangements to Higher Education and Boarding Schools;
- Phase 2 Review of the *Indigenous Education Direct Assistance* programme; and
- Evaluation of the *National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*.

The findings of the reviews informed the significant changes proposed to the *Indigenous Education Direct Assistance* programmes' settings and directions for the 2005-2008 quadrennium, to achieve greater impact on student learning outcomes.

Outcomes of the reviews underpin the significant restructuring of the *Indigenous Education Direct Assistance* programme, proposed for implementation from January 2005, with focus and effort to be heavily weighted towards remote regions. The *Indigenous Education Direct Assistance* programme will be brought under the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000* for 2005-2008, to provide programme funds for the quadrennium and align the programme with the calendar year rather than the financial year.

An evaluation of the impact made on Indigenous participation in education by the ABSTUDY policy changes, introduced in January 2000, is being conducted and is due to be finalised by November 2004. The review is examining a broad range of factors that could have impacted on ABSTUDY recipients in addition to the ABSTUDY policy changes, including labour market conditions, and developments in the higher education and VET sectors. A round of consultations with Indigenous stakeholders and providers, based on a discussion paper, will form part of the review process.

DEST ANNUAL REPORT 2004-05

As shown in Figure 3.11, there was little reduction of the gap in Year 12 apparent retention rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students over the period.

Table 3.6 shows that between 2003 and 2004 the number of full time Indigenous students enrolled in school education, including preschool students, increased by 4559 (or 3.4 per cent). This included a sharp increase in secondary enrolments (up 5.0 per cent).

Information on tertiary students receiving ABSTUDY is included under Outcome 2, Strategic Priority 9.

Table 3.6: Indigenous students—Performance information for Output Group 1.2

	2002 Actual	2003 Actual	2004 Actual
Indigenous school students	121 638	125 882	130 447
Indigenous pre-school students	8 731	9 051	9 055
School students in receipt of ABSTUDY	28 414	29 677	34 156 ^a

Source: Department of Education, Science and Training.

^a Not all Indigenous school students are eligible for ABSTUDY. The ABSTUDY beneficiary numbers for 2004 are extracted from Centrelink data using BRIO software. BRIO software reports those beneficiaries who received an ABSTUDY payment in 2004. Previously (2002 and 2003 actual numbers) were extracted from Centrelink data using SuperStar software. SuperStar only reported beneficiaries paid and entitled to be paid in the calendar year.

Whole of government approaches

The department continued its involvement in the COAG whole of government Indigenous trials. The aim of the whole of government approach is to deliver more effective responses to the needs of Indigenous people including in the area of education, through improved coordination and delivery of services.

The department has a leadership role in implementing this approach in the Murdi Paaki region in north western New South Wales. During 2004-05 the department continued to work closely with its lead partners, Indigenous communities and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, as well as other Australian Government and state agencies, to improve outcomes for Indigenous people in the region.

Achievements include the signing of new local and regional Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs), which added substantially to the momentum being built in the region. The SRAs include provision of distance education up to Year 10 to support the continued engagement of local secondary students in England; previously students had to travel long distances to access high school.

The finalisation of Community Action Plans is a critical part of the process of working with communities and a priority for the trial. Through the plans, the community clarifies and expresses its priorities and how government can help it achieve them. Community Working Parties have endorsed Community Action Plans in Wentworth, Bourke, Collarenebri, Enngonia, Goodooga, Ivanhoe, Wellmoringie, Brewarrina, Gulargambone and Walgett.

DEST ANNUAL REPORT 2004-05

CASE STUDY: Strengthening Partnerships – COAG Whole of Government Indigenous Trial

The department continues to work closely with the NSW government and the Indigenous communities of the Murdi Paaki region to provide programmes and services in a more flexible and coordinated way.

We continue to uphold the key principle of the trials, which is to base initiatives on priorities identified and agreed upon within the Indigenous communities. This is a significant shift for governments and provides many challenges, both at policy and at programme levels.

Much of the earlier work of the trial was centred on establishing trust, strengthening relationships and building the capacity of all involved. We are now in a position to build on these solid foundations.

Communities have been supported to engage consultants to develop community action plans which clarify and express their priorities. The plans will inform the development of future Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs).

Some of the things provided through the SRAs negotiated to date include:

- the continued support of the voluntary Community Working Party (CWP) through the continued employment of the working parties, administrative trainees and the provision of computer hardware and software
- an agreement to trial air cooling in the region through the installation of evaporative air cooling units in community-owned Indigenous housing
- a local agreement to establish an Aboriginal Women's Homemaker Programme, which will allow the Ngemba women of Brewarrina to contribute to the overall wellbeing of the Brewarrina community
- a local agreement with Enngonia to support the continued engagement in education of local secondary students by providing distance education up to Year 10, where previously students have had to travel long distances to go to high school.

After the success of the first Community Working Party Governance workshop in March 2004, two more were held. These provided an opportunity for CWPs to build on the excellent work done at the first workshop and to begin to share good practice and learn from each other's experiences over the past year.

The trial has attracted high profile attention. Senator Aden Ridgeway, former Democrats Senator for NSW, noted in an article in the *Koori Mail* on 12 January 2005, "Murdi Paaki has led the way in negotiating better service delivery and community involvement in all aspects of life in the region..."

We need to make sure we are learning as we go along. The first phase of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the Murdi Paaki trial has been implemented. The framework will evaluate the effectiveness of community governance structures and identify factors that may either improve or hinder the development of effective partnerships.

DEST ANNUAL REPORT 2004-05



*Attendees at an ICC
Information day in Cairns.*

*From left: standing
- Cecilia O'Brien [Torres
Strait], Rose Iles and
Jacqui McDonald [Mc
Isa], Anne Bruyeres
[Townsville], Rick Hodges
[Cairns], Karen Weigel
[Brisbane], Joslyn Foster
[Cairns]. Seated: Nicole
Wallace [Cairns], Christine
Kennedy [Townsville],
Trudy Sunderland
[Rockhampton], David
Binjuda, Suzann Krall and
Shannon Bowe [Cairns]*

During 2004-05, the department worked closely with Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) and the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC). ICCs provide the opportunity to better integrate education and training initiatives with employment, health, family, community and regional infrastructure programmes. To assist in providing effective whole of government services, departmental staff were physically co-located in 15 of 22 regional ICC offices. Cooperative working arrangements were established with the remaining regional ICC offices and the department continues to work towards physical co location with all regional ICC offices.

The department continued to contribute to the work of the Indigenous Education, Employment, Training and Youth Taskforce of MCEETYA. In May 2005 MCEETYA agreed that improving outcomes for Indigenous students is its top priority issue for the 2005-2008 quadrennium.

Strategic Priority 3: Enhanced quality of teaching and learning in a safe and supportive environment

The acquisition of high quality foundation skills and learning outcomes is dependent on a school system that:

- has highly skilled and motivated teaching professionals who have access to ongoing professional learning opportunities
- provides quality learning outcomes for students from all groups within the Australian community, including those with disabilities, and those from low socioeconomic, rural and remote and non-English speaking backgrounds
- provides a curriculum relevant to Australia's future needs, including science, technology and languages other than English
- takes advantage of the latest technology to provide access to, and to enrich, the learning experience
- provides a safe and supportive learning environment, including one that is free of bullying, harassment and drugs.