

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into indigenous education funding arrangements

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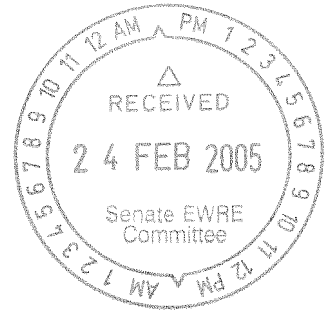
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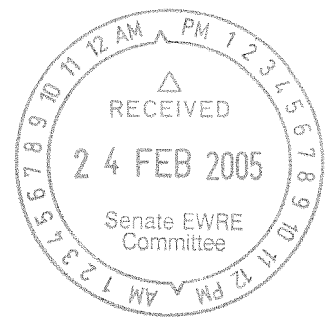


**AEU Northern Territory
SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE EMPLOYMENT,
WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION
REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

**Inquiry into the implications of funding policy changes contained in
2004 Amendments to the Indigenous Education (Targeted
Assistance) Act 2000**

FEBRUARY 2005

INTRODUCTION



1. The Northern Territory Branch of the Australian Education Union has prepared this submission for the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee Inquiry into the implications of funding policy changes contained in 2004 Amendments to the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000.
2. The Australian Education Union Northern Territory (AEU-NT) appreciates the opportunity to table this submission on the inquiry in to Indigenous Education Funding Arrangements. The AEU-NT represents approximately 2,000 members working in Government early childhood education centres, schools and TAFE colleges in the Northern Territory
3. In 2001 there were 12,383 Indigenous students attending Northern Territory schools. In 2003 this figure had risen to 13,208 Indigenous students, out of a total of 41,408 - this is the highest proportion of Indigenous enrolment in any jurisdiction in Australia, being 40.5% of the all students.
4. Since 1990 the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA) programs has been administered through three elements - the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) scheme, the Vocational Education Guidance for Aboriginals Scheme (VEGAS) and the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS), which included access to individual tuition, bulk tuition conducted under agreement through the NT Department of Employment Education and Training, Catholic Education Office and other system provider, and funding for Homework Centres. In 2001
5. According to the National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training (DEST, 2002) there were:
 - i) 192 ASSPA Committees, with a total expenditure of \$3,438,300
 - ii) 718 Individual and Small group Approved Students accessing ATAS
 - iii) 110 institutions conducting ATAS in-school tuition; and
 - iv) 68 ATAS funded homework centres
6. The projected growth of the Indigenous school aged population of the Northern Territory using ABS figures from 2004, suggests that the projected need for student support in the three categories above for individual and group tuition and homework centres will be greater than for the past 10 years. The figures quoted above in points 3 and 5, do not take into account the current under enrolment of Indigenous school aged students in the NT, estimated by the recent Review of Secondary Education (2003, *Ramsay et al, New Territory: Future Directions for Secondary Education in the NT*) at 3,500. Other reports and comparisons of ABS Community Basic Profiles by age indicate that this figure could currently be as high as 6,000 Indigenous students.

Implications of the New IESIP and National Strategic Initiatives

1. The implications of the Government's proposed changes to funding arrangements for targeted assistance in Indigenous Education as contained in the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment Bill, 2004 are that significant numbers of a high proportion of the NT school population, their parents and schools will not be eligible for assistance. The continued growth of Indigenous students in the VET sector who are currently eligible for ATAS support in the NT exceeds the proposed 8% increase in overall IEDA funding to be allocated across the States and Territories.

7. SRA funding overall will increase by \$86.3 m or 20.2% in the 2005 -2008 quadrennium. SRA increases based on enrolment projections over the quadrennium. Urban Indigenous enrolments in NT schools are growing at > 4% per annum and while the increases indicated as "new" money in the Government announcements in 2004, can be attributed primarily to the projected national growth in Indigenous enrolments.

8. Supplementary Recurrent Assistance (SRA) alone will not be able to substitute for the major IEDA funding shortfall in NT schools. The AEU-NT believes that the proposed changes will seriously undermine the proven successful practices in remote, homeland centres, regional and urban school settings which have been predicated on a mix of IESIP and IEDA program funding. Increased funding through SRA targeting Literacy and Numeracy will be advantageous in many remote community schools in the NT if community participation in and employment generated within communities is maintained.

9. The success of the ESL-ILSS program in the last quadrennium has seen the employment of increased numbers of Indigenous education workers and specialists in early childhood. Indigenous educators who are speakers of the early childhood target groups' first language are crucial to the success of this program, not only in the remote areas of the NT, but in all regional and urban schools. The proposed funding shift from urban centres to rural and remote regions perpetuates the artificial - and in the case of the Northern Territory, unjustifiable assumption that urban communities are predominantly non-Indigenous. While there are still some suburban schools in Darwin where the proportion of Indigenous enrolment is lower than the overall average of 40.5% for 2003 (See DEET Annual Report 2003-4), the implications are that these students are not "real" Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, who speak one or more of the sixty five Indigenous languages in the NT.

10. The AEU-NT does not support the perpetuation of the divide between urban and remote Indigenous communities, particularly when it is articulated through a redefinition of remoteness, originating from Canberra. The impact of this redefinition has been to redirect funding from a remote region of Queensland (Cape York) to the Northern Territory. Not only will this inevitable cause the cessation of valuable programs in those Queensland community schools, it make no sense when families from both sides of the border, and in particular around the Gulf of Carpentaria, frequently move

between regional and remote schools for business, education and ceremonial reasons.

11. Outcomes of many projects which have succeeded using IESIP Strategic Results Project funding relied on the dedication of teachers and the maximum involvement of whole communities. Clusters of schools or combinations of educational providers in a region have shown proven success, only to have funding cease at the end of a "project". The findings of the DETYA Report, *What Works; Explorations in improving outcomes for Indigenous students* (2000 IESIP SRP National Coordination and Evaluation Team), showed that the greatest indicator of on going success is the maintenance of involvement of local Indigenous families in the setting of goals and decision making about the education provided. Funding is vital, and ongoing funding based on the numbers of students and their specific needs, is identified as follows;
"[It] should come as no surprise: the work was there to be done, and it costs money to do it. The IESIP SRPs achieved their intentions.... [these findings] illustrate the relative normality of the circumstances in which the projects operated." (p.163, DETYA, 2000)
12. The AEU-NT regards remote area funding for Indigenous education as a priority shared by Commonwealth and Territory Governments and that this priority should be met by a significant injection of funding to overcome disadvantage to meet the goals of the NATSIEP. The redefinition of remoteness for the quadrennium will not advance these goals, rather it will hinder progress made already.

Implications of the New ITAS Program

13. Prior to 2005 ATAS funding in the NT has provided for and recognised the importance of in school tuition and out of school hours support through homework centres and individual support. The continuation of both programs is vital to the maintenance of current levels of achievement from early childhood to post-compulsory schooling, VET in schools, prisoner education programs and Tertiary Indigenous students enrolled with Batchelor Institute and Charles Darwin University.
14. The Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) will replace ATAS with: the In-class tuition scheme, targeting those students not meeting the year 3, 5 and 7 literacy and numeracy benchmarks; A tuition scheme targeting year 10, 11 and 12 students; and bulk funding arrangements to tertiary institutions. For the NT where year 3, 5 and 7 Multilevel Assessment Program results show some schools with 100% Indigenous enrolment have made major improvement in achieving literacy and numeracy outcomes will be unable to access any ITAS funding if the new arrangements are applied. The AEU-NT believes that targeting tutorial assistance to students who have not met the benchmarks is not an effective way to allocate funds. Effectively this will mean punishing schools and students where effective programs are in place.
15. The funding methodology DEST has adopted for ITAS limits provision to those who have "failed", and the AEU-NT believes that this undermines the 21

Goals of the IESIP. For Indigenous students to be deemed undeserving of support for achieving benchmarks is a punitive and harmful policy, and will continue to leave students with limited prospects of achieving the equality of outcomes in the primary and secondary years of schooling.

16. In 2003 three Indigenous students in the NT completed year 12 studies in their home community, graduating from Kalkaringi Community Education Centre. On 20 February 2005, the Principal of Kalkaringi CEC spoke out in the media, claiming \$100,000 in IEDA assistance was unavailable for the students and parents and the effect was devastating. The provision of secondary education, and in particular Senior Secondary is available in only six of the remote community schools in the NT. This means that the "needs based " priority placed on funding tutorial assistance for Indigenous students in remote localities at this level, will be less effective and a misguided redistribution of funding needed by all students.
17. AEU-NT findings through surveys of Indigenous support staff in government schools in 2004 that the in school tuition is linked to improved literacy and numeracy outcomes for 5 to 13 year old students in a wide variety of settings. More than 100 schools in remote localities in the NT do not provide post primary education; they are not funded or staffed to deliver Secondary programs from year 7 to 12. The tutors who have been engaged prior to 2005, will again be unemployed; and as a high proportion of these tutors in remote communities are local employees, from the same family groups as the students, the effects are felt not only in the schools but in loss of family income.
18. The drop out rate of students in remote areas has been poorly researched in the Territory. The relationship between availability of local tutorial assistants, based on anecdotal evidence, and the Northern Territory Open Education Centre staff who provide distance education for year 8 to 12, suggests that retention of students is greatly improved by access to tutorial assistance. The rate of disengagement will accelerate for the very students who have managed to remain in, or return to secondary studies in remote communities without Secondary provision on site with the reduction in access.
19. Vocational Education for Indigenous students in the NT has expanded slowly in the past 5 years. Reflecting a national trend however, the rate of Indigenous participation in VET is occurring at more that twice the rate of non-Indigenous students. The AEU-NT believes that DEST should be making increased bulk-funding tutorial assistance to RTO's in the NT to encourage uptake of students and retention beyond Certificate I and II level courses.
20. The Prison Education programs at both Alice Springs and Darwin Correctional Centres rely heavily on tutors funded under ATAS. Prisoners are being denied access to any tutors at this time due to the ITAS provisions not being in place at the time of writing.

Implications of the Whole of School Intervention Strategy

The Parent School Partnership Initiative (PSPI)

21. The Australian Government's approach to Indigenous education as outlined in the discussion paper "Indigenous Education: Achievement through Choice and Opportunity - Indigenous-specific funding for the 2005-2008 quadrennium" (DEST 2004) is driven by the following principles:

- * Re-directing resources to programs which demonstrably improve outcomes;
- * Provide greater weighting of resources towards Indigenous students of greatest disadvantage - those in remote areas; and
- * Improve mainstream service provision for Indigenous students, particularly those in metropolitan areas." (p.2)

The AEU is concerned about the focus on the first two principles, and the lack of negotiation with the Territory Government about how they intend to meet the possible funding shortfalls due to the redistribution of funding. This top down approach by the Australian Government creates difficulties for the continuation of funding in Darwin, the only part of the NT deemed "metropolitan", in terms of the legislation.

22. The AEU -NT is not arguing that there needs to be a greater focus of efforts on areas of greatest need. We have consistently put forward proposals for more resources to be targeted at areas where the greater need exists, eg the lack of secondary school provision in home communities in remote communities. The greatest educational disadvantage can exist in suburban areas of Darwin or Palmerston, as they can in Borroloola or Kintore. As the Commonwealth Grants Commission Indigenous Funding Inquiry found:

"Indigenous people in all regions have high needs relative to the non-Indigenous population. An important question is whether new methods of distribution should be applied to existing programs and funds. Any change in methods of distributing existing resources means that some regions would lose funding and others would gain. Large redistributions risk losing the benefits of investments made over long periods of time, including those in developing organisational capacity and people. The real costs of redistribution may be high." (Commonwealth Grants Commission 2001, Report on the Indigenous Funding Inquiry)

23. The proposed Parent School Partnerships Initiative (PSPI) has effectively put at risk the kind of investment over a long period of time referred to in the Report above. As recently as 2000, DETYA found in their review of IEDA funding that ASSPA program;

"has proven to be appropriate as a method of increasing the access of parents of Indigenous students to decision-making structures". (p.34)

24. The AEU-NT argues that the ASSPA committees can and do significantly improve student retention and attendance. The increased confidence of many Indigenous parents to develop proposals and new forms of governance through ASSPA committees has had a significant positive impact on education. The problems identified by our members are about the level of structural support

provided by the Department of Employment Education and Training, and the role of the DEST regional officers in ensuring that it ASSPA submissions for funding are indeed the result of a genuine partnership between the committee and the school.

25. The creation of the new PSPI involves a two-stage concept plan and submission process, which members have reported is already a far more onerous task than the ASSPA formulation. As 50% of the PSPI funding is to be targeted at remote areas, and in the NT over 100 schools are small schools including Homeland Centres, where a high proportion are staffed by a teaching principal and an AIEW or Indigenous assistant teacher. These staff have limited time to commit to engaging parents or even themselves completing the two-stage submission process. This is compounded by the prevalence of Indigenous language use among parents in most of these NT schools. The ASSPA committees were previously able to conduct meetings in vernacular, and for a bilingual speaker to assist with formulating their submissions. There has been limited support from DEST or DEET in the NT for promoting integration of ASSPA committees with mainstream school management structures and for providing the support, advice and training required for ASSPA committee members.
26. The accusation by the Federal Minister that funding for ASSPA committees has funded "bbqs and excursions" to the exclusion of programs which involve parents and broader communities in the delivery of "good outcomes for Aboriginal kids". The ASSPA guidelines have specifically included examples such as "bbqs and excursions" as appropriate ways, among others to encourage Indigenous parent to become involved with school based activities. Perhaps the funding for metropolitan or rural School Councils spent on wine and cheese or "observations of best practice" in other school communities are more to the Minister's taste, but the reality is that substantial pedagogical and professional input for Indigenous parents has also been the object of IEDA funds.
27. The total amount of funding over the 2005 -2008 quadrennium for PSPI will amount to a decrease of approximately \$4million per annum across Australia. Any decrease in the funding to support the engagement of Indigenous parents in educational decision-making will seriously disenfranchise the increasing numbers of young parents, especially in the NT, where the enrolment growth of Indigenous students entering formal schooling is the highest in the country.

There is acknowledgement of the need for reform of ASSPA, however the AEU-NT submits that in 2004 there were poor consultation processes and lack of time for parents and community members along with the school staff to determine how the changes would impact on existing programs. At the time of writing, scores of ASSPA funded nutrition programs in urban, regional and remote schools have not commenced for the 2005 school year, due to lack of funding. No PSPIs have been approved that the AEU-NT is aware of, even though some group school applications for the first round were submitted to DEST before the close of the 2004 school year.

Conclusion

28. The AEU-NT believes that the changes to IEDA funding arrangements have already resulted in a degree of irreparable harm to the educational communities across the Territory - all of which have between 5% and 100% Indigenous student populations. The fact that very few of the principals and Indigenous education employees have been provided with adequate briefings on the changes is evident as programs as information is only now being distributed by the DEET to outline a "rescue package" for tutorial assistance, with NT government funding. DEST employees are constrained by limitations imposed from Canberra on making further public announcements, and media speculation is taking the place of informed discussion based on clear indications of a timeline for the release of funding.