

Department of Education, Science and Training

Supplementary Submission to the

**House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Affairs – Inquiry into Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities**

The term 'capacity building' has a multitude of meanings. Fundamental to discussions on community capacity building is the need to:

- o focus on individual and family strengths and abilities;
- o develop effective Indigenous institutions of governance, reflective of, and accountable to, their community's needs and values; and
- o foster and build Indigenous leadership capabilities.

That said capacity building cannot just be about Indigenous communities and individuals. Capacity building needs to be viewed in a holistic context. Government and other key agencies and organisations also have a role to play in terms of changing the way we do business with Indigenous communities and building the capacity of our staff to respond to and connect with the issues identified as important by Indigenous Australians.

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) is mobilising its efforts to engage fully in the capacity building agenda. This supplementary submission allows us the opportunity to reflect on the Inquiry to date and outline in further detail some key developments and areas of activity that DEST is contributing to Indigenous capacity building since our previous submission in August 2002 and subsequent appearances before the Committee. This submission will cover the following topics:

- o Role of education and training in building the capacity of Indigenous individuals and families;
- o Accelerating educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians:
 - o Establishing mainstream priorities;
 - o Reaffirming the importance of literacy and numeracy skills; and
 - o Focusing on what works;
- o Commitment to a Whole of Government Approach;
- o Role of governance in capacity building;
- o Indigenous leadership and capacity building; and
- o Up-skilling DEST's Indigenous Education Network.

Role of Education and Training in Building the Capacity of Indigenous Individuals and Families

Capacity building at the individual and family level aims ultimately to ensure that people have the capacity in terms of education, health, confidence and access to decision making processes, to make informed decisions about issues which affect them.

Encouraging the involvement of Indigenous parents and community members in education matters and educational decision-making is integral to the programmes and services that DEST delivers to Indigenous Australians. *The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy* (NAEP) introduced in 1990 by all Australian governments through the Australian Education Council and reaffirmed by MCEETYA in 1999, remains the overarching national policy framework for Indigenous learning in Australia. Our goals are defined by the NAEP and remain:

1. Involvement of Indigenous peoples in educational decision-making.

2. Equality of access to educational services.
3. Equality of educational participation.
4. Equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

Education and training is the means by which Indigenous Australians are able to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to actively participate in today's complex and changing environment and develop long term sustainability. DEST is committed to providing opportunities for individuals to acquire the skills needed for work and a social life, to build a foundation for lifelong learning in formal and informal settings, to develop problem solving and critical thinking skills and develop the flexibility to adapt with change. Hand in hand with this commitment is the need for education and training institutions to embed themselves in communities in new ways, to work with families, individuals and groups, to balance the benefits for society and individuals from education.

Accelerating Educational Outcomes for Indigenous Australians

Building on the goals of the NAEP, the Australian Government's overarching priority for Indigenous education and training is to accelerate the achievement of educational equality. The shift to national standards and to reporting on educational outcomes has exposed Indigenous education and training issues at their source and revealed barriers that need to be overcome to achieve educational equality for Indigenous Australians.

Whilst the *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training* for 2001 and 2002 showed improvements, serious gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes remain in literacy, numeracy, student attendance, retention into senior secondary education, Year 12 certificates and some completion rates in VET and higher education.

Establishing Mainstream Priorities

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that Indigenous students are a mainstream priority for States and Territories. Reporting requirements for Australian Government mainstream funding for schools require a commitment to *the National Goals* and performance measures for all students. To ensure that outcomes of Indigenous students can be measured and compared with mainstream outcomes, the Commonwealth and States and Territories are cooperating in developing definitions and putting reporting mechanisms in place.

As part of continuing to improve the outcomes for Indigenous Australians, in 2001, the Commonwealth entered into agreements with all school education providers, both government and non-government. Those agreements contain performance targets, which are aimed at significantly and measurably improving the educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians. The effect of these agreements is that there will now be greater transparency and accountability attached to the Commonwealth.

Reaffirming the Importance of Literacy and Numeracy Skills

The importance of basic literacy and numeracy skills cannot be overemphasised. These proficiencies provide the foundations upon which all further educational performance is based and are an integral part of general life skills and capacity building.

There were many new approaches introduced in 2002 to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for Indigenous students. Some key strategies included:

- literacy scaffolding;
- professional development courses for teachers outlining culturally appropriate literacy and numeracy learning methodologies;

- the creation of Indigenous specific literacy and numeracy resources, such as a CD-ROM, 'Eli the Dragonfly';
- the expansion of literacy and numeracy learning media, such as utilising Indigenous cultural web-sites to promote the development and application of these skills; and
- the development of literacy and numeracy curriculum incorporating community languages.

Strategies such as these were combined with the maintenance and expansion of programmes and methodologies developed during and before 2001, and the continued utilisation of AIEWs and support teachers for one-on-one and intensive work.

The 2001 (preliminary) results were the best to date for Indigenous students on five out of six national benchmarks for reading, writing and numeracy for Years 3 and 5. In 2001, 72% of Indigenous students reached the Year 3 reading benchmark and 66.9% of Indigenous students reached the Year 5 Reading Benchmark.

The final report on the Evaluation of the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS) is close to being finalised. Major findings included:

- 75% of initiatives, representing 75% of NIELNS funding, either achieved their targets or significantly improved their outcomes;
- 88% of providers indicated that NIELNS had a moderate to major impact on student literacy and numeracy outcomes; and
- success factors identified through the evaluation included:
 - the provision of buses for improving attendance;
 - training and employment strategies for teachers result in better skilled teaching staff;
 - literacy scaffolding techniques improve literacy outcomes;
 - the presence of Indigenous people in the classroom encourages Indigenous student attendance; and
 - preschooling provides a strong foundation for learning.

Focusing on 'What Works'

The Australian Government recognises that resources need to be directed to programs that demonstrably achieve improvements in educational outcomes. The *What Works* project that was undertaken during 2000-2001 by a consortium of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) and the National Curriculum Services (NCS) has been a valuable resource in Indigenous education and training policy development and service delivery.

Under the *What Works* project, two reports were published and distributed: an Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme Strategic Results Project Report for teachers titled *What has worked (and will work again)* and a complete report on *What Works* called *What Works? Explorations in Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Students*. The project also involved the development of a professional development package entitled *What Works – the Work Program* comprising a CD-ROM, guidebook and workbook.

Since then, two further *What Works* projects have commenced due to an overwhelming demand within the education community for its products. The projects consist of a website, a series of professional development activities, and three Success Zones of intensive support.

The *What Works* website, which provides access to the package and a teacher discussion forum, currently showcases over 40 examples of schools or communities addressing

Indigenous education. As part of *The Works Program* contract, 15 specific case studies are online, and a further 5 are planned for 2004. The case studies reflect community and school responses to the issues of improving Indigenous outcomes in education.

Under the *What Works* workshop project, the *What Works* professional development package is being 'rolled out' across Australia, often in tangent with the *Dare to Lead – Taking It On* forums. The professional development package comprises a CD-ROM, guidebook and workbook. A further \$500,000 from the Australian Government Quality Teacher Program has been granted to allow the extension of workshops during 2004. 50 activities are planned, and over 20 new facilitators have been trained to cope with delivery and logistics.

Three 'success zones' have been identified. The first two are located across the Dubbo, Moree and Bourke districts of north-western New South Wales, and are part of the Murdi Paaki Council of Australian Governments (COAG) region; the third is the Logan-Baude desert area of Southern Queensland.

This project is exceeding original estimates, both in terms of reach and results. In January 2004, the project managers trained an additional 20 people from across Australia to be facilitators to deliver the teacher professional workshops, in response to need and location of those seeking support.

DEST recognises that one-size does not fit all and therefore the main efforts throughout the remaining timeframe of the *What Works* project will be transferring a framework of well-grounded materials in best practice, to the local needs of communities and schools. Teachers and community members can thereby reflect upon where they are and be provided with a tool for progressing their goals for Indigenous students.

Commitment to a Whole of Government Approach

The level of educational disadvantage which many Indigenous people face is unacceptable and needs to be addressed in a holistic way. One way DEST is addressing this is through the COAG Whole of Government Indigenous trials which recognises the interconnectedness of all aspects of life and the need for strong capacity building.

The Harvard Project referred to by the Committee indicates that community capacity building in Indigenous communities must be preceded by fundamental changes in the relationship between governments and Indigenous peoples. The COAG Whole of Government trials provides both government and Indigenous communities with the opportunity to forge new relationships based on partnerships and shared responsibilities.

DEST is the lead agency for the COAG Whole of Government initiative in the Murdi Paaki region of NSW. A Regional Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) was signed on 22 August 2003 between DEST, representing the Australian Government, the NSW State Government and the ASTIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council. The Agreement incorporates the regional priorities identified by the community and also establishes the responsibilities of all parties. Regional priorities fall into four broad categories:

- o Improving the health and well being of children and young people;
- o Improving educational attainment and school retention;
- o Helping families to raise healthy children; and
- o Strengthening community and regional governance structures.

Role of Governance in Capacity Building

Eade and Williams define capacity building as “strengthening people’s capacity to determine their own values and priorities, and to organise themselves to act on these.”¹ Fundamentally, governance which has been described as the ‘art of steering societies and organisations’ is about who has influence, who decides, how decisions are made and how decision-makers are held accountable. “Strengthening community and regional governance structures” is a key priority of the Murdi Paaki SRA.

The primary Indigenous governance structure in the Murdi Paaki region is the Community Working Parties (CWP). Each CWP comprises a broad cross section of the local Indigenous community it represents. The ATSIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council, in conjunction with ATSIIS, is currently facilitating ‘refresher’ elections for each of the CWPs, with a view to giving communities the opportunity to ensure that working parties are as representative as possible.

In accord with the SRA, sixteen support positions have been established to provide secretariat/administrative support to each CWP. Their aim is to assist each CWP to improve their operations, the flow of communication and to support local governance operations.

A Governance Workshop for the CWP representatives is currently being planned for 8-10 March 2004 in Cobar. The key objectives for the workshop are to:

- Develop a shared understanding of the trials among key people in the participating communities and strengthen networks;
- Assist to build the skills of community leaders to participate in ‘practical’ governance and develop leadership skills;
- Bed down the evaluation elements of the trial in Murdi Paaki; and
- Look at how to progress the local Shared Responsibility Agreements.

How effective governing institutions and processes are is dependent on the capacities of the human resources from which they draw. In the same way that individual Indigenous Australians need access to support and services to develop their own capabilities, so too do existing and emerging Indigenous governing institutions.

Indigenous Leadership and Capacity Building

A significant investment in Indigenous leadership is crucial to capacity building in Indigenous communities. This needs to include an enhancement of the capabilities of existing Indigenous leaders and the development of new leaders.

The Australian Government (through DEST) has committed \$2.5 million over five years to work in partnership with the Queensland State Government and Griffith University to establish the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership. The Queensland Government has agreed to match that funding.

The Institute will have a regional and national role in providing opportunities for Indigenous people to develop leadership skills and foster innovative policy debate. The Institute will focus on four mutually supportive areas of activity:

- a ‘Think Tank’ (to formulate and pursue a reform agenda);
- a research programme;
- a leadership programme; and
- a course work programme.

¹ Eade, D. and Williams, S. 1995, *The Oxfam handbook of development and relief*, vol. 1, p. 9, Oxfam, Oxford.

The Think Tank will include Cape York Indigenous Leaders drawn from the regional and community organisations of the Cape York region, together with leading public and private sector thinkers. The function of the Think Tank is to inform and encourage innovative policy and program delivery designed to meet the needs and aspirations of Cape York Regional Indigenous communities.

Key objectives of the Research Programme are to:

- o assist in turning new ideas and strategies into innovative public policy reform;
- o support and evaluate practical initiatives through empirical action research; and
- o integrate the activities of the Institute into broader public policy debate.

The main aim of the Leadership Programme is to build the skills of current and future Indigenous leaders, and to ensure that they have the skills needed to serve their communities. The initial client base will focus on Cape York but through exchanges with other leadership centres, such as the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre, the Institute will attract a wider base of Indigenous leaders, while at the same time exposing future Cape York leaders to a national perspective.

Up-skilling DEST's Indigenous Education Network

DEST also recognises the importance of building the capacity of our staff to respond to the needs and priorities of Indigenous communities, particularly within the context of the new whole of government agenda.

The "*Training for the Indigenous Education Network*" (TIEN) strategy has been developed in response to the review of DEST's Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA) programs and its principle focus is to develop the capabilities of staff who deliver the DEST IEDA programmes.

The TIEN strategy provides two face to face training sessions and a final assessment interview over an eight month period. All staff are required to complete all aspects of the TIEN, but seeking accreditation is optional. The key focus of TIEN is to deliver three Units of Competency which are based around change management, risk management and developing and maintaining networks. The strategy requires participants to apply their learning through a work based project based on their real work. Project methodology is also covered in the TIEN face to face sessions and allows for assessment for an additional three Project Units of Competency for those who choose an accreditation pathway. The remaining nine Units of Competency required to complete a Certificate IV in Government are assessed through a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process.

Comprehensive resources have been developed for TIEN and include a Reference Guide, which covers all the classroom learning /theory and a Workbook and Evidence Kit for recording all TIEN activities and collecting evidence for RPL. The TIEN resources have been extensively contextualised to the work of the DEST Indigenous Education Staff. A Reference Group comprising representatives from each State and the NT participated in a workshop to provide CIT Solutions (the contracted Registered Training Organisation) with: expert advice drawn from their comprehensive work experience on real work scenarios and case studies which relate to the three Unit topics; and advice on material development and delivery appropriate to the learning styles and culture of DEST Indigenous Education staff.

In addition to developing and confirming the capability of staff in preparation for future changes of the IEDA programmes, TIEN provides staff with: options for accredited pathways including the attainment of a Certificate IV in Government; consistency of delivery across the States; linkages to the DEST Performance Management System; support for staff to achieve maximum success; and flexibility for future training needs.