



Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment (Cape York Measures) Bill 2007

Coral Dow
Social Policy Section

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Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment (Cape York Measures) Bill 2007

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Portfolio: Education, Science and Training

Commencement: Royal Assent

Links: The [relevant links](#) to the Bill, Explanatory Memorandum and second reading speech can be accessed via BillsNet, which is at <http://www.aph.gov.au/bills/>. When Bills have been passed they can be found at ComLaw, which is at <http://www.comlaw.gov.au/>.

[Inquiry by the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee](#) (report to be presented on 10 September 2007).

Purpose

The Bill will appropriate additional funding under the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000* (the Act) to support the expansion of the Making Up for Lost Time in Literacy (MULTILIT) teaching methodology and the establishment of Student Education Trusts for Indigenous students in the communities of Coen, Hope Vale, Aurukun and Mossman Gorge in the Cape York region of Queensland.

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) has estimated that

the Amendment will provide approximately 800 Indigenous students in these Cape York communities with additional support. Families will also be able to put in place support mechanisms to ensure that they can meet the on-going expense of their child's education.¹

Background

This Indigenous education measure is part of a broader welfare reform trial in Cape York, announced in July 2007 by the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon. Mal Brough. The Minister committed \$48 million to fund welfare reform

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1. Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), [Submission to Inquiry into Indigenous Education \(Targeted Assistance\) Amendment \(Cape York Measures\) Bill 2007](#), p. 4.

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trials in Hope Vale, Aurukun, Mossman Gorge and Coen. The trials aim to ‘promote engagement in the real economy, reduce passive welfare and rebuild social norms, particularly as they affect the welfare of children’ and will begin at the start of the 2008 school year, subject to the support of the communities and the passage of legislation by the Queensland Government.²

The recommendations to achieve these aims were provided to the Australian and Queensland Governments by the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership (the Institute) in their report [From Hand Out to Hand Up: Design Recommendations](#) released in June 2007. Recommendations in the report covered four areas:

- Restoring social norms by attaching reciprocity to welfare payments
- Addressing the ‘welfare pedestal’ by changing the incentives so that people are encouraged to come off welfare (or not enter welfare) and join the real economy or undertake education or training opportunities
- Supporting individual engagement in the real economy through converting CDEP positions into real jobs, making communities more business-friendly, and introducing measures to support mobility for employment and education, and
- Moving from welfare housing to home ownership.³

The Institute believes the education measures funded by the Bill will have a decisive impact on educational problems and will support engagement in the real economy: ‘Clearly individuals will struggle to enter into the real economy unless they have mastered the basics. Mastering the basics is not happening in Cape York communities today’.⁴

Making Up for Lost Time in Literacy (MULTILIT)

MULTILIT is a remedial reading program developed by Professor Kevin Wheldall and Dr Robyn Beaman of the Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC). It is a program specifically designed for low-progress readers in Year 2 and above who are

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2. The Hon. Mal Brough, [Cape York welfare reform trials to begin in 2008](#), media release, 18 July 2007; see also Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, [Cape York Welfare Reform Trials](#) and [Questions and answers](#).
 3. Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, [From Hand Out to Hand Up: Design Recommendations](#), Cairns, May 2007. See also Cape York Institute, ‘Welfare reform,’ <http://www.cyi.org.au/welfarereform.aspx>.
 4. Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, [Submission to Inquiry into Indigenous Education \(Targeted Assistance\) Amendment \(Cape York Measures\) Bill 2007](#), p. 2.

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reading at a level considerably below (typically two or more years below) that expected for their age.⁵

The Institute estimates that up to 70 per cent of Indigenous primary school students in Cape York need immediate remedial literacy instruction. In some schools, as few as 21 per cent of Indigenous students achieve minimum accepted levels in national literacy benchmark tests for years 3, 5 and 7.

In 2006 MULTILIT was trialled in Coen State School. At the beginning of the trial students were on average 3¼ years behind expected benchmarks in reading accuracy and 3¾ years behind in reading comprehension. A tutorial centre was established at the school and two MULTILIT instructors flown in for six months at a time to deliver the program to two groups of 10 students in Years 4 to 7. After 17 to 18 weeks of instruction, students gained, on average, 21.4 months in reading accuracy, a 19-month increase in word recognition and a 10.7 month increase in reading comprehension, after only one year. They could also correctly read 75 per cent more words per minute.⁶

The Director of the Institute, Noel Pearson, believes that the ‘long-term strategic policies that aim to improve community life and reform the regular delivery of education by the state education departments will not help the students who are enrolled in Cape York Peninsula schools this year’.⁷ Some of these remedial strategies have been evaluated by the Institute as having merit but MULTILIT ‘stands out as an evidence-based, remedial program, able to be implemented on a large scale quickly and with a track record of results.’⁸

There are approximately 570 Indigenous students enrolled in schools in the four communities. It is anticipated that all will be involved in a MULTILIT intervention in some way over the four years. The funding in the Bill will assist in the establishment of a MULTILIT Tutorial Centre within the four communities; embed MULTILIT instructional practices across each school; provide for after-school community reading clubs; and

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5. Professor Wheldall is the Chairman, and Robyn Beaman is a Director, of MULTILIT Pty. Ltd. (<http://www.multilit.com.au/>), a research-based initiative of Macquarie University. Professor Wheldall is also a member of the Cape York Partnerships Advisory Board, <http://www.capeyorkpartnerships.com/team/advisorygroup/index.htm>
 6. Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, Submission to Inquiry into Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment (Cape York Measures) Bill 2007, [Attachment B, ‘Why Multilit?’](#), p. 2.
 7. Noel Pearson, ‘Behind the eight ball’, *The Australian*, 20 January 2007, p. 20.
 8. Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, Submission to Inquiry into Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment (Cape York Measures) Bill 2007, [Attachment B, ‘Why Mulilit?’](#), p. 4.

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provide support to transition-to-school programs in terms of pre-reading and language development in feeder pre-schools.⁹

Student Education Trusts (SETs)

SETs are voluntary education trusts that enable low-income parents and guardians or extended family members to save for their child's ongoing education costs. These costs can include school fees, uniforms, textbooks and excursion fees, as well as home-based expenses such as reading books, a computer and other learning aids. SETs have been designed by the Institute, but they are similar to other educational-savings funds, such as the Australian Scholarships Group, that are used throughout Australia.

The Institute will work with those families who wish to establish a SET to create and manage a trust account. Family members are then able to make regular contributions to their child's SET which can only be used to meet a child's education-related expenses. Families with SETs will also have access to education products and financial advice on education, in addition to money-management assistance.

A trial of SETs was conducted in Coen in 2005 with the result that there are currently 102 SETs for Coen children, which equates to approximately 90% of children under the age of 18 in the community, with up to two donors contributing an average of \$30–40 per child per fortnight.¹⁰

The Institute envisages that parents will come to the Institute for advice and assistance with establishing a SET for their child. Consultants will help the donors work out their fortnightly contribution, ensure all forms are completed and submitted, answer questions, and talk donors through the process and benefits of establishing a SET for their child.

The trust guidelines would stipulate that funds be used for legitimate education purposes only. Parents are provided with regular financial statements showing the current balance and recent transactions. All costs associated with the trusts, such as monthly fees, auditing and administration costs, would be borne by the program.¹¹

9. Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, [Submission to Inquiry into Indigenous Education \(Targeted Assistance\) Amendment \(Cape York Measures\) Bill 2007](#), p. 2.

10. Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), [Submission to Inquiry into Indigenous Education \(Targeted Assistance\) Amendment \(Cape York Measures\) Bill 2007](#), p. 7.

11. Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, [Submission to Inquiry into Indigenous Education \(Targeted Assistance\) Amendment \(Cape York Measures\) Bill 2007](#), p. 3.

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Financial implications

The Bill will appropriate an additional \$2 million over the 2008–09 year under section 14A of the Act.

The Government has also approved additional funding of \$8.1 million for these measures beyond 2008, which will be appropriated when the Act is amended for the provision of the 2009–12 quadrennium funding.¹²

Main provisions

Schedule 1 amends Item 4 in section 14A of the Act to reflect the increased appropriation.

Conclusion

The measures funded in the Bill meet the Government's stated priorities for Indigenous education of improving outcomes and school retention through shifting 'the resourcing to where it is most needed' and targeting the resources 'into things that we know actually work'.¹³ The Bill implements broader Indigenous Affairs policy which is focussed on 'helping Indigenous families and individuals to become self-sufficient' through strategies to encourage shared responsibility, harnessing the mainstream and engaging in the real economy.¹⁴

Noel Pearson and the Institute have stressed the need for a quick and efficient response to what they describe as an 'emergency: that a large proportion, perhaps a majority, of indigenous children attending primary school in Cape York Peninsula are destined to be excluded from mainstream society because they will be illiterate or semi-literate.'¹⁵ The Government is responding to the need for intervention, but unlike the emergency response in the Northern Territory this is a more measured response based on the evidence from

12. *Explanatory Memorandum*, p. 1.

13. The Hon. Dr Brendan Nelson, '[Second reading speech: Indigenous Education \(Targeted Assistance\) Amendment Bill 2005](#)', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 2 June 2005, p. 32; see also Department of Education, Science and Training, 'Indigenous Education and Training 2005-2008', http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous_education/policy_issues_reviews/indigenous_education_and_training_2005_2008.htm, in particular 'Priorities for 2005-2008', accessed on 7 September 2007.

14. Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination, [Indigenous Affairs Arrangements](#), August 2006, p. 49.

15. Noel Pearson, *op. cit.*

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trials, community consultations and partnerships. The SETs measure stresses working with families and encouraging them to plan and contribute to their children's schooling and development needs, rather than the imposition of an Income Management Regime and the quarantining of welfare payments which will be the experience of parents in the Northern Territory under the emergency intervention legislation.¹⁶

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16. See: Peter Yeend and Coral Dow, '[Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment \(Welfare Payment Reform\) Bill 2007](#)', *Bills Digest*, no. 27, 2007–08, Parliamentary Library 13 August 2007 and, also See: Kirsty Magarey et al., '[Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bill 2007](#)', *Bills Digest*, no. 28, 2007–08, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 13 August 2007.

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