



Australian Government

Department of Education, Science and Training

**Review of the ATAS Bulk-Funding
Arrangements to Higher Education
Institutions and Boarding Schools,
funded under the Indigenous Education
Direct Assistance Programme**

**FINAL REPORT
October 2003**

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1991, the Australian Government endorsed the establishment of Aboriginal Education Direct Assistance (AEDA), now known as Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA), for the Australian Government's support of direct education assistance to Indigenous students. IEDA is a cash-limited scheme. Funding is made available under the annual Appropriation Act. The overall programme allocation does not increase in response to increasing Indigenous student enrolments or demand.

IEDA supports the implementation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) and the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS) is specifically targeted at achieving equitable and appropriate educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

ATAS is one component of IEDA, and the bulk-funding arrangements to tertiary institutions and some boarding schools is a funding delivery mechanism. DEST provides annual funding to institutions to deliver ATAS tutorial assistance on behalf of the Australian Government.

IEDA was reviewed in 2000 and one of the recommendations of that review was that bulk-funded contractual arrangements with tertiary providers and boarding schools continue but that a review be undertaken.

Drawing on the recommendations of the 2000 IEDA review, the draft Terms of Reference were framed to develop an enhanced reporting framework and to examine current funding levels and funding formulae of ATAS Bulk-Funding Arrangements to higher education institutions and boarding schools. The Terms of Reference also seek to ascertain ways the bulk-funding contracts would be best administered and to identify examples of best practice.

In 1995, ATAS bulk-funding arrangements were introduced for most universities and some boarding schools. This was in response to the Department's identification of a low take-up rate of ATAS for this cohort of students and the desire of several universities to have more control over the engagement of tutors and assessment of students' need for supplementary tutorial assistance.

The scheme aims to help Indigenous students achieve educational outcomes equal to those of other Australians. Under the bulk-funding arrangements, the contracted institution administers and delivers individual or small group tuition on the Department's behalf. In 2002/03, bulk-funding contracts were in place with 8 boarding schools and 36 tertiary institutions. The funded organisations are listed at [Attachment A](#).

Education institutions receive advanced payments from DEST National Office for tutorial assistance for eligible Indigenous students. The amount advanced is based on the institution's estimates of the number of Indigenous students enrolled with the institution. Institutions receiving bulk-funded ATAS funding are required to account for the funds received by providing financial and performance reports to DEST.

Findings

The Review concluded the current performance reporting framework is largely output-focussed, but information is provided on the pass/fail grades of each student who receives tutoring. Information is also provided on the number of students who discontinue or defer their studies, but not the reason for discontinuation or deferral. Generally, no information is provided on the longer term impact of tutoring beyond the final examination result for the subject which the student received tutoring in. The Review sees merit in pursuing on-line reporting to facilitate a streamlined approach to collating data from a core performance reporting framework.

The Review concluded that institutions which deliver education into remote locations face additional costs and diverse circumstances which may make it more difficult to achieve educational outcomes. The Review considered that the current funding formulas may not be the most equitable way of distributing funding to students studying via distance education from remote locations. The current funding formulae are very transparent and have worked fairly well for the past eight years. But, consideration should be given to moving the funded institutions to a funding system linked to performance targets. This would allow sufficient flexibility for those institutions operating in remote locations, while not disadvantaging other institutions. It would allow the funding approach to be tailored to the institution's circumstances, referred to in Recommendation 7.

In the main, institutions do not provide their end of year financial acquittals in a timely way and under or overspends are common. The Review considered that this is partly as a result of the per capita formula used to allocate funding and the difficulty in pre-determining what the need for assistance will be. Because institutions find it difficult to provide their end of year, externally produced audit reports and financial acquittals by the deadline, their next year's funding which cannot be released until the previous year's funding is acquitted, is often delayed. This causes delays in accessing the ATAS tutoring at the beginning of the first semester. The Review proposes that funding agreements be revised and the mandatory requirement for all institutions to produce independent audit reports specifically for their ATAS funding be amended for several institutions, under certain circumstances.

The Review concluded it would be beneficial if ATAS was moved into a legislative and administrative environment, similar to that of the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme to enable planning and funding to be done over more than a single calendar year basis. This would help prevent any interruptions to funding during end of academic year breaks.

From examining the end of semester and end of year performance reports provided by institutions, it appears that students who receive ATAS tutoring do improve their achievement levels for the subjects they are tutored in. However, it is not possible to determine whether the funds are targeting or reaching those students most in need. The bulk-funding arrangements recognise that a student's educational institution is best placed to determine, monitor and respond to a student's educational needs. It is also not possible to determine if the ATAS tutoring is making a longer term difference by increasing the number of students who actually complete Award level courses.

Several institutions appear to be implementing ATAS very well. Examples of institutions' information and promotional materials were examined and it seems that overall, institutions are promoting the availability of the Scheme at key stages of the academic year. Some Institutions employ ATAS coordinators who contribute substantially to the success of the Scheme. Some States have State-wide ATAS coordinators' meetings to share experiences and solve issues. There were some attempts to collaborate on the development of databases and support materials. At least one institution employs permanent ATAS tutors in response to the numbers of Indigenous students enrolling in particular courses.

ATAS Bulk-funding arrangements are currently managed by DEST National Office. Due to the importance of creating linkages between programmes and different education sectors and the Department's *Open for Business* framework, the Review concluded that mechanisms be established to involve DEST State Offices more in the Bulk-funding arrangements to tertiary institutions and boarding schools. Immediately, there are opportunities for involvement in liaison and monitoring. The National Programme Manager should consider further devolution of administration of the ATAS bulk-funding arrangements from 1 January 2005, once revised contracts, performance reporting and funding arrangements are implemented.

Recommendations

Performance Framework

1. The administration and delivery of ATAS Bulk-Funding arrangements needs to further improve its focus on improving educational outcomes, especially in priority subjects and courses.
2. Performance indicators (selected from a suite of indicators for the programme) and annual targets need to be developed, and agreed to between each bulk-funded Institution and DEST. The target-setting process should be tailored on an individual provider basis to encourage incremental continuous improvement. This should be done in conjunction with the funding contract negotiations.
3. The performance reporting system and indicators should:
 - be clearly linked to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP);
 - provide both a basis for programme evaluation and individual evaluation of funded organisation's progress in achieving improved educational outcomes;
 - be simple and concise (to encourage its use);
 - complement existing major reporting frameworks (especially IESIP) to the greatest extent possible;
 - utilise existing organisational and state /territory assessment and reporting methodologies, wherever appropriate;
 - consider external influences that impact on the achievement of outcomes;
 - be developed in consultation with stakeholders, and
 - consider staffing and workload implications.
4. National consistency in reporting and data collection be required.
5. The end of year performance report and financial acquittal date should be moved to a more practical date of 28 February of each year to reduce non-compliance.
6. Bulk funded institutions, in line with the IEDA Online Project, be encouraged to make funding submissions and produce their reports online by 2005.
7. Funding contracts be revised, applying a risk management approach to the current mandatory requirement that all funded institutions submit a separate annual external audit report. This may no longer be essential for institutions that are audited by the Australian, State, or Territory Auditor General for the entire duration of the funding agreement and when the ATAS funding is included in the income and expenditure that is subject to audit by an Auditor General.

Funding Level and Funding Formulae

8. An ATAS Bulk-funding working party be established to oversee revisions to the ATAS Bulk-funding guidelines. The guidelines need to reflect the purpose and objectives of the programme more clearly.
9. A new funding allocation mechanism should be applied to ATAS Bulk-funding Arrangements from 1 January 2005, taking into consideration factors including:
 - o issues of remote versus non-remote location and delivery;
 - o the outcomes focused programme aim;
 - o the 15 per cent administration allocation and whether it should continue; and
 - o moving funding to a project-based funding system with specific targets and performance reporting requirements.
10. Consideration should be given to moving ATAS bulk-funding arrangements into the same legislative framework as that of the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme to enable planning and implementation to be carried out over more than a one-year period and in a coordinated manner.

Most Appropriate DEST Office for the Programme to Administered from

11. The ATAS Bulk-funding working party include representatives from the State and Territory offices of DEST and that mechanisms be created to facilitate greater involvement of State and Territory Offices in the delivery of these Bulk-funding arrangements.
12. The National Office Programme Manager consider devolving ATAS Bulk-funding arrangements to DEST State and Territory offices from 1 January 2005 when any revised funding and performance reporting arrangements are in place.

Identifying Best Practice

13. DEST establishes mechanisms to encourage better coordination of ATAS activities and exchange of information, similar to the NSW and Queensland State-based ATAS Coordinators committees.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Government is committed to ensuring that there is improved participation of Indigenous Australians in higher education, and clearly supports increased access to higher education through the various programmes and initiatives. It is evident that improvements in participation are highly reliant on improving the quality of participation in and learning outcomes from early childhood, primary, secondary, vocational education and training and higher education.

Educational outcomes are critical to the future of Indigenous Australians and higher education is crucial to ensuring that Indigenous people have access to improved employment. Higher education is of increasing importance and can impact directly on people's capacity to participate fully in economic, social and cultural aspects of life.

The ATAS bulk-funding arrangements under IEDA were established in 1995 with an overall objective of assisting Indigenous Australians enrolled in tertiary institutions to achieve educational outcomes equal to those of other Australians through supplementary tutorial assistance. The scheme enables students to access individual or small group (max 4 students) tutorial assistance to achieve better educational outcomes.

During 1989 the Australian Government introduced the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP)*, which was endorsed by all States and Territories, to come into effect from 1 January 1990. Three years after the inception of the AEP, the Australian Government undertook a review of the policy's effectiveness over its first triennium. The Review reported in 1995, making 44 recommendations for ways in which the Australian, State and Territory Governments could improve the effectiveness of the AEP and thus further improve Indigenous people's experience of education.

The National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (1996-2002) built on the recommendation of the 1995 National AEP Review and recommended reforms in the implementation, evaluation and arrangements relating to the twenty-one national goals of the AEP. The evaluation of initiatives undertaken in all sectors was given high priority; a six-year period of emphasis on inputs into Indigenous education came under scrutiny, and the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) joined the Australian Government in a national effort to focus on educational outcomes instead of inputs.

During 1999, the Australian Government indicated that, in the past, there had been a necessary emphasis on access and participation, but an insufficient focus on achieving educational outcomes. The Australian Government also indicated that it regards the continuance of significant educational inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school students as unacceptable.

The fundamental long-term goals for Indigenous education set out in the AEP remain relevant in higher education today, however, it is evident that the programmes established to support these goals require reviewing to ascertain their effectiveness and appropriateness today.

The Terms of Reference for the Review of ATAS Bulk-Funding Arrangements under IEDA were endorsed by the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Brendan Nelson, MP in June 2002. The Review commenced in December 2002, concluding in June 2003. The Indigenous and Transitions Group, Department of Education Science and Training conducted the Review using consultations with stakeholders of ATAS Bulk-Funding Arrangements for higher education institutions and some boarding schools (a list of funded

organisation is at Attachment A). Written submissions were also received from a wide range of interested parties.

The terms of reference for the Review were to develop a performance reporting framework, to examine funding levels and formulae in the context that the tutoring is of a supplementary nature and is not used as a substitute for what the funded organisation should already be doing. The Review was also required to identify best practice examples of ways to promote ATAS and to ascertain if ATAS bulk-funding arrangements to universities and boarding schools should continue to be delivered from National Office or devolved to DEST Indigenous Education Units.

This Report therefore outlines the background to the programme, the methodology for the Review, its terms of reference and reports on each of the terms of reference, separately. The Review makes 13 recommendations to improve the administration and performance reporting system.

3. METHODOLOGY

The review of Bulk-Funding Arrangements to Higher Education Institutions and Boarding Schools was undertaken by DEST staff from the Policy Review Team of the Indigenous and Transitions Group. The review was structured to allow stakeholders of the ATAS Bulk-funding arrangements to contribute their ideas and views.

The Review gathered information using a questionnaire for initial data collection and a critical conversation process that included teleconferencing, examining the programme guidelines, desk audits of administration files and participation in National Indigenous Higher Education Network meetings. A case study was also carried out at one funded institution and interviews conducted with students and university staff. It is acknowledged that one case study would not normally be sufficient, but it should be remembered that this Review was not intended to be an examination of the effectiveness of ATAS delivery by the institutions. From an analysis of individual institutions' performance reports, it is already evident that ATAS delivery in the tertiary sector is making a positive impact on subject pass levels.

Following the data collection from the questionnaire responses, issues and questions were identified and informed the development of a Discussion Paper which was distributed to all funded institutions and to DEST staff in National, State and Territory offices.

Written comments and suggestions on the issues presented in the Discussion Paper were invited. The Discussion Paper sought ideas for the development of a performance framework, and options for future funding levels and funding formulae. The responses to the Discussion Paper helped gain a better appreciation of external influences impacting on and contributing to the outcomes of the scheme. The responses also helped highlight examples of best practice.

Contributions provided by the Institutions in receipt of ATAS Bulk-funding through the questionnaire and submissions to the Discussion Paper were central to the Review.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The following terms of reference were approved for the review:

- a) develop a performance framework to move reporting from an outputs focus to an outcomes focus, having strong links to the Indigenous Education Strategic

Initiatives Programme (IESIP) reporting framework and having regard to external influences which may impact on or contribute to ATAS outcomes;

- b) examine funding levels and funding formulae allocations, bearing in mind the Australian Government's commitment as a method of *supplementation* rather than a *substitution* of an education provider's responsibilities;
- c) ascertain whether the National Office of DETYA is best placed to deliver bulk-funded ATAS or whether the administration of contracts should be devolved to DETYA Indigenous Education Units; and
- d) identify examples of best practice which can be used to promote bulk-funded ATAS.

The report has been written in the context of the Terms of Reference.

5. PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

Background

ATAS aims to achieve equitable and appropriate educational outcomes for Indigenous students, a long term goal of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP).

Under ATAS Bulk-funding arrangements, institutions have a funding contract with the Australian Government, through DEST. The current funding contract and its performance reporting framework is mostly output focussed. It does include details of the examination results for the subjects that students receive ATAS tutoring for. However, institutions do not usually report in any detail on the impact of the scheme on student progress, over a longer period of time.

The major obligations of contracted institutions under the ATAS Bulk-funding arrangements are to deliver individual and/or small group tuition and ancillary services to their eligible enrolled Indigenous students, including part time and distance education students, in the most cost efficient manner. This includes:

- . determining student eligibility for ATAS;
- . recruiting suitably qualified and acceptable tutors;
- . matching students and tutors and contracting or employing tutors;
- . arranging appropriate tuition for eligible students;
- . making appropriate payments to tutors and students;
- . monitoring work programmes and progress reports;
- . accessing the tuition provided;
- . maintaining appropriate administration, student and tutor files records;
- . providing performance reports and acquittals; and
- . informing students and tutors that their personal information may be passed to DEST for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating the Scheme.

In delivering ATAS to students, contracted Institutions are obligated under their contracts to adhere to the programme guidelines for ATAS Bulk-funding arrangements.

ATAS tutors employed by a contracted institution are required under the ATAS programme guidelines to provide the institution with the following:

- Work Programme which is developed according to the needs identified in the educational assessment, and in consultation with the students. The student must endorse the Work Programme which must be approved by the coordinator of the bulk-funding arrangements at the contracted Institution; and
- Student Progress Report for each student at the end of the tuition period. The purpose of the Student Progress Report is to indicate if the expected tuition outcomes have been realised. That is, the report should indicate if the desired student performance objectives have been met.

A Tuition Assessment Report is also completed under the contract arrangements. This is completed towards the end of the tuition period and completed by the student and the student's course lecturer/tutor (not the ATAS tutor). The purpose of the Tuition Assessment Report is to provide feedback about the effectiveness of the tuition. Comments from different perspectives help ensure the assessment is a fair indication of the services provided by the tutor.

The current guidelines require Institutions to report twice per year. The following end of year performance and financial information is required to be lodged with DEST by 31 January:

Current Performance Report

A table containing:

- student's name;
- the gender of the student;
- the name of the tutors;
- whether the tutor attended a cultural awareness course;
- the type of tuition the student received (group or individual);
- the subject and level the student received tuition for;
- the total hours the student was tutored;
- the period of tuition (including total number of weeks);
- the rate of pay; and
- the total salary.

A general statement of student academic outcomes:

- attributable to tuition provided, and
- any implications of unmet demand, and
- numbers of students assisted by ATAS, who passed, failed, withdrew and deferred;
- an evaluation of tutor performance and availability;
- an evaluation of the DEST/contractor relationship (visits, monitoring, assistance etc);
- comments on ATAS Guidelines as they affect service delivery (difficulties, suggestions etc) and any problems experienced;
- comments on the relationship between contractor and clients (both tutors and students);
- a statement of actual Indigenous enrolments at the beginning and at the end of each semester (include all Indigenous students regardless of whether or not they have accessed ATAS);
- a summary of students accessing ATAS by gender and year;
- a copy of the Assets Register for all assets purchased using ATAS fund; and
- an independently audited financial statement.

Other Australian Government programmes similar to the ATAS Bulk-Funding arrangements were examined to make some comparison to other outcome focussed programmes. The Indigenous Support Fund Programme was studied, on the basis that it is an outcome focussed programme and funding is contingent on meeting those outcomes.

Indigenous Support Fund Programme

The Indigenous Support Fund (ISF) Programme was considered as part of this review and operates in the following way:

The Australian Government base operating grants to higher education institutions include allocations from ISF to meet the special needs of Indigenous students and to advance the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP). The total money allocated for ISF is indexed annually by the higher education Cost Adjustment Factor. This set funding is allocated on a formula basis to participating higher education institutions.

The ISF formula was amended in 1998, after long and extensive consultation with the sector. The formula aims to reward institutions for successful education outcomes and is based on:

- student participation (measured in Equivalent Full Time Student Units) – 50%;
- student progress (weighted by student load) – 35%; and
- number of award courses completed – 15%.

There is a guarantee that funding for any institution in any year will not vary by more than 15 per cent of its allocation in the previous year to ensure certainty and stability of funding. DEST administers the ISF, while it does not control the way in which individual Institutions spend the money, allocations are regulated by the *Higher Education Funding Act 1988* (HEFA). Total allocations are calculated and when complete the entitlements are approved by the Minister for Education, Science and Training.

Recently, new reporting on expenditure has been established for ISF. Institutions are required to submit a report outlining:

- Income – amounts provided to the Institution under ISF and other funding, with a description of the major sources of other funding in order to identify the total costs expended to achieve Institutional outcomes;
- Expenditure – amounts expended on Operatives costs, including salaries for Indigenous support services, special projects, including details of the project, Institution overheads and other expenses with a description of the major uses.

ISF has a streamlined approach to reporting, and funding is contingent on meeting set targets against performance indicators. ATAS Bulk-Funding Arrangements could adopt similar arrangements to that of ISF to achieve streamlined and outcomes-focussed reporting.

Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP)

The Review also examined the current Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP) Indigenous Education Agreements (IEAs), to determine its contract provisions to terminate or reduce funding if agreed outcomes are not met. The IEAs have clauses in relation to monitoring (clause 11), reporting (clause 12), recovery of funding (clause 17) and termination and reduction (clause 18). These clauses explicitly state conditions on which, funding will be allocated and/or recovered if requirements are not met.

Key Findings

The current performance reporting requirements for ATAS bulk-funded institutions are satisfactory. The current system satisfies accountability requirements to DEST. Institutions generally understand the reporting system and it is not administratively onerous.

However, the administration and delivery of ATAS Bulk-funding arrangements needs to move further to an outcomes focus. A revised performance framework for ATAS bulk-funded institutions should be implemented and performance reports provided to DEST should be indicative of the impact of tutorial assistance on students' educational outcomes.

The information reported on by the institutions and subsequently collected by the Department should be:

- better streamlined;
- have links to the IESIP performance framework, where appropriate; and
- reported online.

It is against the aim of achieving equitable and appropriate educational outcomes that any revised performance monitoring and reporting framework needs to be based. Many submissions from bulk funded institutions called for a revised framework to include measurable changes in student performance that could be linked to the impact of ATAS. A set of performance indicators and annual targets could be developed and agreed to between each bulk-funded institution and the Australian Government. It is imperative that there is national consistency in reporting and data collection. The target-setting process should be tailored on an individual provider basis to encourage analysis of outcomes over a long-term period.

The Review concluded that implementation of an overarching evaluation strategy for the IEDA programme would also assist in the collection of qualitative data that can be analysed to draw out important lessons for improving the targeting of ATAS in the tertiary sector.

Improving Administration to Improve Delivery

In line with the attempt to streamline current reporting requirements, both the external audit reports and timeline for the end of year performance report (which includes the annual financial acquittal) were examined, as they both presented as issues that are time consuming and costly.

The current requirement for ATAS Bulk-funded institutions to provide independent audit reports for many funding programmes operated by DEST was examined. Some bulk-funded institutions called for random audits to be performed rather than requiring all institutions to undergo external audits.

Revised funding agreements should take into consideration a risk management approach to the current mandatory requirement that funded institutions submit a separate annual external audit report to acquit their ATAS funding. This requirement may no longer be essential for all institutions that are audited by the Australian, State, or Territory Auditor General for the entire duration of the funding contract and when the ATAS funding is included in the income and expenditure that is subject to audit by an Auditor General.

Consideration has been given to permitting the Chief Internal Auditors of the institutions to sign off on financial audits for ATAS funds rather than an external auditor. These arrangements have the potential to reduce the administrative costs to institutions and the Department, and reduce the time delays in receiving external audit reports. This has been identified by institutions as a problem because tutoring is delayed.

Funding contracts should be revised to ensure they include relevant terms and conditions to reduce and terminate funding agreements if agreed outcomes are not met.

The end of year performance report and financial acquittal are a major compliance tool. They enable Institutions to acquit their previous year's contract requirements and funding. Once the report and acquittal have been approved, the current year's ATAS contract and

funding can be initiated. It has been discovered that the current deadline of 31 January of each year for this report to be lodged is unrealistic. Responses to the discussion paper and questionnaire suggested the report submission date to be moved to March 31. Institutions asserted that they were under pressure in January for preparations for a new academic year, making the current ATAS reporting deadline problematic. The delays in reporting are due to a number of factors but in the main due to the timing of the end of year break and the start of a new academic year. Consequently staff are not readily available to gather information and complete the reports and the late lodgement of claims for payment by tutors. A more realistic date for submission would result in increased contract compliance.

If IEDA, the programme which ATAS is part of, were to be moved into the same legislative framework as that of the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme, more appropriate and flexible funding arrangements could be implemented. These would allow funding agreements and planning processes to be implemented over more than a one-year period. This would be the optimum long-term solution to overcome delays in the start up of ATAS tutoring at the commencement of each academic year.

DEST has adopted an Online Funding and Grants Management (OFGM) e-Business Model to guide ongoing improvement in the Department's business processes and the development of IT systems that support our funding management business. This includes our delivery of services and our relationships with clients and business partners.

The vision of the IEDA/IESIP Online project is to contribute to better programme outcomes and improved operational efficiency, risk management and service quality by way of business process reengineering and better use of on-line technology.

The transformation, where appropriate, of business rules and processes will not only improve current operations for the IEDA and IESIP programmes, but also provide a more sustainable and cost-effective platform for on-line service delivery. This includes the delivery of improved on-line capability to clients and DEST employees engaged in programme management and administration.

The project will provide opportunities for making improvements in operational efficiency (eg through reduced manual handling of applications, claims and reports).

The IEDA Online Team within DEST has developed business rules and technical specifications for the ATAS bulk-funding programme. These rules and specifications have been developed on the basis of the programme as it exists and operates today. The IEDA Online Team is confident of being able to support delivery of ATAS bulk-funding institutions' submissions and end of year performance reports online in the near future.

There are several different formats being used by individual institutions to collect and report information to DEST. The Review Team posed the question to all stakeholders that there may be some benefit in developing Nationally Standardised Student Progress Reports for ATAS. Theoretically, by making a standardised form available, the collection and extraction of information would be easier and less time consuming. Responses revealed mixed views on the effectiveness and benefit of such a proposal. The main concern in relation to the introduction of such a proposal is that consideration needs to be given to the diversity of students and students' needs, and location and cultural issues. Another opinion was that a standardised reporting framework may allow for greater understanding of the impact of ATAS on student outcomes. It is the view of the Review Team that this issue and the development of any other automated forms be considered further in line with the DEST Online Funding and Grants Management e-Business Model. However, a minimum data set and minimum national Student Progress Report could be developed for the purposes of reporting to DEST. Each Institution could then add to it as necessary to suit their individual circumstances.

External Influences on Programme Outcomes

In looking at the influences that may impact on and contribute to outcomes under the ATAS Bulk-funding arrangements many issues were reported and it is considered that many of them often defy the best programmes structure, policies and procedures. Sometimes it is a matter of recognising the diverse circumstances in which Indigenous people live and developing appropriate responses, which would need to balance flexibility with equity and accountability.

Some of the reported external influences include:

- Over-estimation of capability of first year students and student load requirements. Unfortunately for some students and usually those at risk, to obtain full ABSTUDY funding they are required to enrol in a three quarter load which is sometimes far too much in their first attempt at university. It is argued that if students were able to negotiate a more manageable study load and focus on those courses with ATAS assistance while still receiving the full ABSTUDY entitlement, the outcomes for the students would be more sustainable through to completion of their Degree Course.
- influences of a personal nature including family responsibilities, work and community commitments.
- obtaining suitably qualified tutors and doing so in the timeframe required. There is sometimes a huge delay in the tutor/student matching process because of the availability or lack there of, of tutors. This is particularly relevant for regional universities who do not have the population base to draw on to obtain suitably qualified or available tutors; and for distance education courses where it is difficult to find a tutor in a regional or remote location where the student lives;
- the large turnover of staff in the Institutions affects the consistency and efficiency of the administration of the programme; and
- delays in submitting the previous year's report which leads to delays in establishing contracts for the current year and subsequently delays in payments of funding.

With an emphasis on streamlining the administrative processes and a view to institutions gaining more flexibility in the programme, issues such as the possibility of including Enabling/Bridging Courses as approved courses under the Programme, allowing Post-Graduate students to be entitled to receive ATAS bulk-funded tuition and the prospect of introducing other mediums of tuition such as the Internet as allowable tuition, were also considered.

The underlying rationale for the ATAS is to facilitate improved educational achievements of Indigenous students. Evidence shows that many Indigenous students enter higher education institutions via Enabling/Bridging courses due to factors such as interrupted or incomplete previous education experiences and these courses provide a pathway to higher education.

Many institutions considered that the exclusion of such courses from ATAS is disadvantaging a large cohort of students. Questions which need to be clarified and require more definition include what constitutes an enabling/bridging course? What constitutes basic numeracy and literacy at the higher education level? Will these courses show improvements to outcomes and achievements under the AEP goals? It is considered that tertiary institutions receive funding from other sources which could be utilised for enabling or bridging courses and for literacy assistance. Because the funding available for ATAS in tertiary institutions is limited, it is considered that it should be targeted to achievement of specific outcomes such as improving Award Course completion rates. The Review concludes that the current guidelines do provide for some use of funds for enabling or bridging courses, where this is justified.

Several institutions raised the issue that post-graduate students should not be excluded from ATAS bulk-funding. The current programme guidelines do not exclude post-graduate students from ATAS but they do state that applications from post-graduate students should only be approved in exceptional circumstances. Given the ATAS Bulk-funding arrangements are aimed at assisting those students in most need and the funding limitations of the Scheme, it is considered that the open inclusion of post graduate students in the programme may disadvantage those in most need (students trying to complete their first Award Course). It is also considered that generally post-graduate students should have acquired the necessary foundation skills to continue study without supplementary assistance. Some institutions, however, believe there is a lot of unmet demand in the post-graduate study area. The Review concludes that the current programme guidelines allow sufficient flexibility to address the granting of access to post-graduate students.

Given the rapid and radical reshape of the teaching and learning environment by the combined impacts of new information technology and communication, most Institutions are in agreement that the introduction of internet tuition would be beneficial to students.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the ATAS Bulk-Funded Higher Education Institutions and Boarding Schools be required to negotiate performance indicators for improved educational outcomes. Each Institution will be required to submit a Performance Report twice annually showing their outcomes against the performance indicators.

Responses to the Discussion Paper suggested outcomes to be reported include:

- progression rates of students receiving and not receiving ATAS support;
- participation rates of students in ATAS program (ie percentage of Total Indigenous Enrolments);
- student demographic details (eg normal entry/alternative entry, prior formal education levels, ABSTUDY or other, living situations, course of study);
- retention/success rates of ATAS and non-ATAS students;
- exit surveys of graduates and non-graduates who received ATAS;
- student and Tutor progress reports;
- a concise Individual Study Program/Contract (including where required an Initial Intervention Assessment to establish academic skill level) with well defined personal performance indicators. Concise Evaluation and Reporting on Cultural Awareness Training of Tutors; and
- quantitative monitoring of students outcomes per discipline of study.

It is proposed that most performance indicators be common for ATAS Bulk-Funded Institutions. However, the diverse circumstance of each Institution may require some unique performance indicators, along with some different definitions and data collection methods.

Negotiations between Institutions and DEST could take place and this process would need to take into account:

- the Programme's objectives to achieve equitable and appropriate outcomes for Indigenous education and training;
- Indigenous community's and student's own aspirations for education and training;
- the circumstance of individual Institutions; and
- the Institutions' aspirations for Indigenous education and training.

Any performance or evaluation framework for the ATAS Bulk-funding arrangements should be based on the following principles:

- be clearly linked to the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy*;
- provide both a basis for programme evaluation;
- be a simple and concise (to encourage its use);
- complement existing major reporting frameworks (especially IESIP) to the greatest extent possible;
- utilise existing institution and state / territory assessment and reporting methodologies wherever possible;
- be developed with consideration to external influences that impact on the outcomes;
- be developed in consultation with stakeholders, and
- consider staffing and workload implications.

It is recommended that Bulk-Funded Institutions, in line with the IEDA Online Project make funding submissions and produce their reports online. With the onset of new performance framework and indicators it is recommended that indicators are developed and negotiated with individual Institutions during 2004 with a view to having the new reporting arrangements online by 2005. Further thought should be given to trialing the Performance Framework data collection during 2004.

It is recommended that the current funding agreements be revised. They should include clauses in relation to meeting outcomes, monitoring, reporting, recovery of funding and termination and reduction.

Revised funding agreements should also take into consideration a risk management approach to the current mandatory requirement that funded institutions submit a separate annual external audit report to acquit their ATAS funding. This requirement may no longer be essential for institutions that are audited by the Australian, State, or Territory Auditor General for the entire duration of the funding contract and when the ATAS funding is included in the income and expenditure that is subject to audit by an Auditor General. This would allow some institutions to provide an audit report signed off by their chief executive officer, chief financial officer or chief internal auditor.

In relation to the end of year performance report and financial acquittal due date which is currently required to be lodged by the Bulk-Funded Institutions by 31 January of each year, the Review Team recommends that this date be moved to a more practical date of 28 February of each year. This recommendation is based on evidence that it is difficult for Institutions to comply with the current deadline and non-compliance technically places them in breach of funding agreement terms and conditions.

6. FUNDING LEVEL AND FUNDING FORMULAE

Background

The Australian Government's commitment as a method of *supplementation* rather than a *substitution* of an education provider's responsibilities was taken into account while considering the appropriateness of funding and funding formulae.

The ATAS bulk-funding arrangements provide **supplementary assistance** for Institutions to assist them to provide enrolled Indigenous students with tutorial support on a needs basis.

The nature of the programme does not necessarily allow for every enrolled Indigenous student to receive this assistance. Indigenous students (or the student's lecturer) who are enrolled at an ATAS bulk-funded Institution apply to the Indigenous Education Centre of the Institution for tutorial assistance. Institutions process applications by firstly conducting

assessments of each student and tutorial need. The level of tuition required is assessed in consultation with the lecturer/tutor. Tutors and students are then matched and tuition commences.

DEST does not set pay rates for tutors engaged by contracted Institutions. Tutors should be paid according to the individual Institution's pay scales and Workplace Agreement in recognition of their skills and qualifications.

The existing formulae in place for the ATAS bulk-funding programme are as follows:

Funding bases for Higher Education Students

Annual funding for higher education students is based on the Institution's Indigenous Equivalent Full Time Student Unit (EFTSU) numbers for the previous year of study. This figure is published by the DEST Higher Education Group each year.

The formula for calculation of an Institution's annual funding for higher education students is based on the following estimated usage:

- a 50% take up rate (ie half the students will require tutoring);
- 70% of these will require individual tuition;
- 30% will be tutored in small groups (less than four);
- three hours tutoring per week per student or group taking up tuition per academic year of 34 weeks;
- a limit of 15% of the total programme allocation to be applied to administration costs.

Funding bases for Vocational Education and Training (VET) students

Annual funding for VET students enrolled at Higher Education Institutions is based on VET Actual Student Contact Hours (ASCH) in the previous year of study divided by 540 (equivalent full time hours).

The formula for calculation of an Institution's annual funding for vocation education and training students is based on the following estimated usage:

- a 20% take up rate;
- of these 30% will require individual tuition;
- 70% will require small group tuition (less than 4 students);
- two hours tutoring per week per student or group taking up tuition per academic year of 34 weeks;
- a limit of 15% of the total programme allocation to be applied to administration costs.

Funding bases for Boarding School students

Formula is based on the school's Indigenous enrolments of both day and boarding students for the previous year. The funding formula is based on the following estimated usage:

- one tutor for each five students;
- two hours tutoring per week for each group of five students;
- tutoring to be available for 34 weeks per year; and
- either an additional 15 per cent of programme allocation or an additional \$1,000.00, whichever is greater, for other administrative costs including the conduct of an annual audit of the ATAS funds and contract.

Enrolment numbers are checked against School Census figures and the allocation adjusted accordingly. Contracted schools must ensure that commitments do not exceed the adjusted allocation. This means that the allocation should be managed on a term by term or quarterly basis, to ensure that expenditure does not exceed revised allocations should enrolments fall significantly.

It must be recognised that the percentages have been used to equitably allocate the available funding nationally. They are not intended to reflect the actual usage by an individual Institution.

Exceptional circumstances are taken into account. Where an Institution can demonstrate the use of actual EFTSU figures for the previous year of study will cause severe financial hardship, DEST may approve or amend a contract based on the current year of study EFTSU where there is a substantial difference. Other factors such as previous year's expenditure patterns may also be taken into consideration.

Costs to be met from the programme component of the allocation include:

- payments to tutors,
- Superannuation Guarantee Charge payments on behalf of tutors,
- PAYG tax instalment payments on behalf of tutors,
- approved travel and accommodation costs for students and tutors to attend ATAS tuition sessions*,
- reimbursement of essential student materials and equipment costs for approved ATAS tuition (\$50 materials and equipment allowance), and
- payments to tutors for attending any cultural awareness training (up to two hours).

*Travel costs - tutors may be provided with some assistance to meet the cost of transport where they are required to travel more than 20 kilometres each way to attend a tutorial session in a non-metropolitan area. The maximum transport allowance is the equivalent to the DEST vehicle allowance of 55 cents per kilometre for that component of the journey in excess of 40 kilometres only. Accommodation costs - where it is necessary to stay away from his/her usual place of residence overnight in order to undertake a tutorial session in a non-metropolitan area, the actual cost of this accommodation including an evening meal and breakfast may be reimbursed. The maximum rate payable is equivalent of the lowest appropriate rate of travel and meal allowance provided to DEST officers. This allowance is only available in exceptional circumstances, such as there being no appropriately qualified tutor closer to the student. The exceptional circumstances must be documented. This provision is not available to tutors who are attending residential schools or field trips. Claims against this allowance must be supported by receipts of actual expenditure.

The ATAS Bulk-Funding Guidelines state that administrative staff or expenses are not to be paid from programme funding. Claims for administration costs are limited to 15 per cent of the programme allocation and include for example, administrative staff salaries and on costs, postage, telephone stationery, computer facilities and up to \$1,000.00 for annual audit.

Contract payments are made in advance, normally in two instalments per year, each of one half of the annual allocation. Unexpended or uncommitted funds may be deducted from the following instalment as an alternative to DEST exercising its right to recovery of funds. The payment schedule may be varied in certain circumstances and payments made quarterly rather than half-yearly. Any unexpended funds remaining at the end of the year (including expenditure made by the Institution which has been declared unapproved expenditure by DEST) may be approved by DEST to be rolled over into the next year and deducted from the new allocation.

Funding bases and payments

Calculation for Higher Education students

Programme Allocation

Individual Tuition:

$\frac{\text{Student Numbers}}{2} \times 70\% \times \$34.00 \times 34 \text{ weeks} \times 3 \text{ hours}$

Group Tuition:

$\frac{\text{Student Numbers}}{2} \times 30\% \times \$40.00 \times 34 \text{ weeks} \times 3 \text{ hours} / 4$

= Total programme allocation.

Administrative Allocation = 15% of total programme allocation.

Total for year = Programme Allocation + Administration Allocation

Note: The amounts of \$34.00 and \$40.00 have been used to equitably allocate the available funding nationally. They are not intended to reflect actual amounts paid by an individual Institution.

Calculation for VET students

Programme Allocation

Individual Tuition:

$\frac{\text{Student Numbers}}{5} \times 30\% \times \$27.00 \times 34 \text{ weeks} \times 2 \text{ hours}$

Group Tuition:

$\frac{\text{Student Numbers}}{5} \times 70\% \times \$31.00 \times 34 \text{ weeks} \times 2 \text{ hours} / 4$

= Total programme allocation.

Administrative Allocation = 15% of total programme allocation.

Total for year = Programme Allocation + Administration Allocation

Note: The amounts of \$27.00 and \$31.00 have been used to equitably allocate the available funding nationally. They are not intended to reflect actual amounts paid by an individual Institution.

Calculation for Boarding School students

Programme Allocation

$\text{Student Numbers} / 5 \times 2 \text{ hours} \times 34 \text{ weeks} \times \32.00 per hour

Administrative Allocation = 15% of total programme allocation

Total for year = Programme Allocation + Administrative Allocation

Note: An hourly rate of \$32.00 has been used to equitably allocate the available funding nationally. They are not intended to reflect actual amounts paid by an individual Institution.

Key Findings

ATAS bulk-funded institutions are part of a society which is demanding greater accountability from all its organisations including the Australian Government. Internally, institutions have needed to develop more transparent and accountable systems of resource allocation and stronger mechanisms for accountability as management responsibilities are delegated within the Institution. Externally, institution accountability has been determined by things such as the devolution of greater financial control by the Australian Government and the standardisation of State and Australian Government financial accountability requirements. This, along with the changing academic environment and the growing commercial and competitive aspects of higher education has reinforced the imperatives for institutions to manage their resources efficiently and effectively.

It is also evident that the funding formula doesn't adequately take into consideration the additional costs of delivering tutorial assistance to students in remote locations.

As stated earlier, 15 per cent of the total programme allocation is available for to administer the ATAS Bulk-Funding programme each year. Overwhelming, the Institutions expressed concerns that the 15 per cent administration fee is greatly insufficient to effectively and efficiently administer the Programme. Most of the bulk-funded Institutions have a full-time ATAS Bulk-Funding Coordinator who is employed by the Institution to administer the programme. The ATAS Bulk-Funding Coordinators in each Institution are responsible for a variety of duties including such things as assisting in the matching of students to tutors, development of forms for ATAS use, maintaining files and databases of students and tutors and making payments to tutors and assistance in the preparation of reports in accordance with the requirements of DEST funding agreements.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that given each institution employs a full-time ATAS Coordinator to carry out the duties associated with ATAS, that 15 per cent of the total programme allocation for administration is insufficient to effectively and efficiently perform these duties. However, it is acknowledge that ATAS is a supplementary funding programme.

There have been concerns raised by the institutions about the basic foundations of the current funding formula for example the perceived assumption by DEST that 70 per cent of the student population (in the case of higher education institutions) require individual tuition and 30 per cent require group tuition. Some institutions comment that this is clearly an incorrect assumption and the funding formulae are flawed. It should be noted at this point that it appears as though some institutions are misinterpreting the intention of the formula and the guidelines.

The funding formula in place which highlights the 70% / 30% ratio is merely an allocation method for distribution of available funds under this programme. This ratio does not and therefore should not restrict the individual Institutions to specially spend their funds in this way. It must also be emphasised that the ATAS bulk-funding programme is a budget limited scheme and the funding formulae is purely a means for equitably allocating funds among institutions under the budget limitations.

Likewise, the funding formula's reference to an amount of money allocated per tutor per hour is merely a basis for a formula and not a prescribed amount in which Institutions should be paying their ATAS tutor. The guidelines clearly state that DEST does not set pay rates for tutors. This issue needs to be considered by individual Institutions in the context of each of their Enterprise Bargaining Agreements and specific job description for ATAS tutors to officially recognise the difference between them and mainstream tutors.

There was a strong view from institutions that the allowable tutorial hours per student per week are not equitable or flexible enough to meet the needs of all Indigenous students

requiring tuition. Issues such as tuition not being available during summer sessions, covering the tuition of students who have been absent from study due to personal illness, family issues or to attend significant cultural events and consequently need to catch up on studies needs consideration when prescribing hours permitted for tuition. It has been firmly recommended by the majority of bulk-funded institutions that hours permitted for each student per week should be determined by and is at the discretion the each individual Institution or at the very least, the guidelines need to be more innovative and flexible so as not to disadvantage any student.

The guidelines also state that tutorial hours cannot be saved up and used during block release. During block release is sometimes the only time in which off campus students from remote areas will have access to tuition. It is considered unreasonable to insist that students in these circumstances should be confined by the same regulations as students studying on campus.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the ATAS Bulk-Funding Implementation Working Party be established to revise the ATAS bulk-funding guidelines with a view to revising them to specifically address any ambiguity created by the inclusion of the funding formula. The guidelines need to reflect the purpose and objectives of the programme more clearly.

Issues such as the flexibility and generic nature of the guidelines need to be considered in order to acknowledge the diverse circumstances of Indigenous students, especially students from remote areas.

The funding level and formulae issues need further comprehensive consideration and need to be in line with work currently being considered within the Indigenous Group regarding future funding formulae and the next quadrennium funding arrangements for IESIP. It is therefore recommended that for 2004 the funding formulae and level not change but that the Programme's funding levels and formulae be revised, commencing from 2005, so that it is consistent with approaches used for the next quadrennium for IESIP funding. Future funding allocations need to take in account factors such as:

- issues of remote versus non remote location;
- the outcomes-focussed aim of the programme;
- the 15 per cent administration allocation and whether this should continue as a separate component of funding;
- efficiencies that could be achieved by converting the bulk-funding funding arrangements to a full project-based arrangement (rather than a per capita funding driven approach) that was dependent on negotiating of targets and setting performance indicators.

7. MOST APPROPRIATE DEST OFFICE FOR THE PROGRAMME TO BE ADMINISTERED FROM

Background

ATAS bulk-funding arrangements are currently managed by National Office. One DEST staff member is committed to the programme on a full-time basis. Duties include:

- the formulation of the funding contract, approved by the Legal and Business Assurance Branch of DEST and agreed to by the bulk-funded institution;
- collating and analysing performance reports, acquittals and payments; and
- arranging monitoring of the bulk funded institutions.

Key Findings

The questionnaire responses indicated there was a strong desire for more face-to-face contact with DEST. The current contact with DEST was reported to be very helpful, always on hand and very professional. The DEST ATAS Bulk-Funding Contact Officer was seen to have the capacity to answer questions relating to funding, policy and reporting and was able to clarify issues relating to the guidelines.

There is a widespread view that any increase to the face-to-face contact between the DEST ATAS Bulk-Funding Contact Officer and the institution, would provide DEST with beneficial information about the administration and operations of higher education institutions. It would also be useful for the institutions to discuss the administration of the programme. Institutions, in their written submissions have also consistently indicated that feedback from DEST about the issues raised in their end of year reports would be valuable.

While there is a little resistance by some Institutions and some State/Territory Offices for the programme to be devolved to DEST State and Territory Offices, there was support for increasing State and Territory Offices involvement in the programme.

There is some belief that given the significant differences that exist across states and territories and within regional areas that State and Territory Offices are the best mechanism to provide advice and to negotiate specific changes to guidelines that reflect the needs of local students.

Devolution of some of the duties of administering the programme would also allow for State and Territory networks to be established to share and promote information on best practices.

However, there was some concern that devolving the entire programme administration to the State and Territory Offices could lead to too much variance in implementation.

While there is not an overall consensus regarding where in DEST this programme is best administered from, the Review Team concludes that there is strong desire among stakeholders, that DEST State and Territory Office staff should be more actively involved.

Recommendations

It is recommended that National Office take steps to facilitate the involvement of DEST State and Territory Office staff in the administration of the ATAS Bulk-Funding Arrangements. Further work is required to identify the appropriate structures and suitable operational guidelines within each State and Territory Office. It is envisaged that State and Territory Office staff would take on a monitoring and liaison role with the ATAS Bulk-Funded Institutions. It is recommended that DEST National Office continue to make payments and initiate the funding agreement negotiation process at this stage. It is proposed that new funding arrangements, including the possibility of transferring the programme into the same legislative framework as that of the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiative Programme be considered. This would allow ATAS delivery by institutions to be planned and implemented over more than a one-year period. It would be more efficient to further devolve the administration of ATAS bulk funding arrangements, once any changes to the funding and performance reporting arrangements are settled.

It is recommended that the ATAS Bulk-Funding Working Party consider the above recommendations and make arrangements for these to occur with a view to the commencement of implementing these recommendations from January 2005.

8. IDENTIFYING BEST PRACTICES

Background / Key Findings

Several examples of best practice within individual institutions have been highlighted to the throughout this Review. Some of these examples include:

- Abergowrie College in Queensland reported that they submitted an overview of successful programmes at the College to the Australia's Best Schools in 2002 competition which was run by *The Australian* newspaper. In their submission to the competition, Abergowrie College included acknowledgement to both IESIP and ATAS funding sources which helped contribute to the success of their Indigenous graduates and the achievement of high retention rates. The College received an award through this submission and included in Category One for Sustained Dramatic Improvement. The awards were made by a panel of distinguished Australian educators.
(Abergowrie College, Queensland)
- Griffith University, Queensland has developed of a more user friendly, simplistic version of their ATAS Tutor guidelines into pamphlet form for ease of understanding and use by tutor. Please see attached a copy of this pamphlet at Attachment B.

A further example from Griffith University was that they have a policy on ensuring all students become independent learners. This involved a more critical assessment of student learning needs from 2nd year and above.

Griffith University also invites Elders and students to speak at the Cultural Awareness Program to give the tutors their first hand experiences / knowledge of cultural issues.
(Griffith University, Queensland)

- A database, based on Microsoft Access has been developed by Tranby College, NSW, incorporating all possible reporting information required including reporting, monitoring and expenditure in line with the ATAS Bulk-Funding guidelines. Tutors' payments and monitoring reports are linked into the report table of the database enabling immediate access to the expenditure and check against payments to keep a running accurate balance of monies.

Tranby has also reported it will be embarking on an advertising campaign within Indigenous media supported by print promotion to obtain the services of Indigenous tutors and mentors across Australia and the Torres Strait to best meet the needs of their students. **(Tranby College, NSW).**

- The University of South Australia reported it has developed an ATAS Database which has become an excellent means of monitoring the student uptake of hours and the ATAS expenditure to date. The database was first established in 1985 and has since evolved into a complex database enabling the University to efficiently monitor the program in accordance with the specific details in the ATAS guidelines. The database uses the software application FileMaker Pro 6. **(University of South Australia).**
- Feedback / Evaluation Form has been developed by Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in order to monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of programme procedures and allows for constant internal review of the programme. **(Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, NT).**
- A State ATAS Coordinators Committee has been established in Queensland. The Committee meets quarterly to discuss issues to do with ATAS and provides ATAS Coordinators with a list of contacts they can call any time for assistance. This has

proved to be particularly useful for staff in smaller institutions. Similarly there is a NSW State ATAS Coordinators Network. This network has provided a valuable forum through which operational and administrative issues can be discussed. Regular meetings assist in maintaining communication and support between Universities and DEST National Office.

The above reflects only a small sample of the best practices identified by Institutions and through the completion of the questionnaires and submissions to the Discussion Paper for this Review. This is in no way exhaustive of the different best practices in place.

Recommendations

The Institutions listed above have given their permission for the Policy Review Team to report these best practices.

On the basis that there has been overwhelming support from the Institutions that a National ATAS Coordinators forum be established, it is recommended that DEST consider a mechanism for better coordination of ATAS activities similar to the NSW and Queensland State ATAS Coordinators Committees maintained through Institutions. This is believed to be a positive method for information sharing and identifying best practices. Consideration needs to be given to how if at all, any linkages can be made with the National Indigenous Higher Education Network which is currently established, is active and meets regularly.

9. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that an ATAS Bulk-Funding Working Party be established to develop of an implementation strategy for all recommendations contained in this report. It is suggested that the Working Party consists of staff members from Teams within the Indigenous Group and members of State/Territory Offices.

Performance Framework

1. The administration and delivery of ATAS Bulk-Funding arrangements needs to further improve its focus on improving educational outcomes, especially in priority subjects and courses.
2. Performance indicators (selected from a suite of indicators for the programme) and annual targets need to be developed, and agreed to between each bulk-funded Institution and DEST. The target-setting process should be tailored on an individual provider basis to encourage incremental continuous improvement. This should be done in conjunction with the funding contract negotiations.
3. The performance reporting system and indicators should:
 - be clearly linked to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP);
 - provide both a basis for programme evaluation and individual evaluation of funded organisation's progress in achieving improved educational outcomes;
 - be simple and concise (to encourage its use);
 - complement existing major reporting frameworks (especially IESIP) to the greatest extent possible;
 - utilise existing organisational and state /territory assessment and reporting methodologies, wherever appropriate;
 - consider external influences that impact on the achieve of outcomes;
 - be developed in consultation with stakeholders, and
 - consider staffing and workload implications.
4. National consistency in reporting and data collection be required.

5. The end of year performance report and financial acquittal date should be moved to a more practical date of 28 February of each year. This recommendation is based on evidence that it is difficult for Institutions to comply with the current deadline.
6. Bulk-funded institutions, in line with the IEDA Online Project, be encouraged to make funding submissions and produce their reports online by 2005.
7. Funding contracts be revised, applying a risk management approach to the current mandatory requirement that funded institutions submit a separate annual external audit report. This may no longer be essential for institutions that are audited by the Australian, State, or Territory Auditor General for the entire duration of the funding agreement and when the ATAS funding is included in the income and expenditure that is subject to audit by an Auditor General.

Funding Level and Funding Formulae

8. An ATAS Bulk-Funding Working Party be established to oversee the ATAS Bulk-Funding guidelines. The guidelines need to reflect the purpose and objectives of the programme more clearly.
9. A new funding allocation mechanism should be applied to ATAS Bulk Funding Arrangements from 1 January 2005, taking into consideration factors including:
 - o issues of remote versus non-remote location and delivery;
 - o the outcomes focused programme aim;
 - o the 15 per cent administration allocation and whether it should continue; and
 - o moving funding to a project-based funding system with specific targets and performance reporting requirements.
10. Consideration should be given to moving ATAS Bulk-funding arrangements into the same legislative framework as that of the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme to enable planning and implementation to be carried out over more than a one-year period.

Most Appropriate DEST Office for the Programme to Administered from

11. The ATAS Bulk Funding Working Party include representatives from the State and Territory offices of DEST and that mechanisms be created to facilitate greater involvement of State and Territory Offices in the delivery of these Bulk-Funding Arrangements.
12. The National Office Programme Manager consider devolving ATAS Bulk-Funding Arrangements to DEST State and Territory Offices from 1 January 2005 when any revised funding and performance reporting arrangements are in place.

Identifying Best Practice

13. DEST establishes mechanisms to encourage better coordination of ATAS activities and exchange of information, similar to the NSW and Queensland State-based ATAS Coordinators committees.

10. CONCLUSION

It is expected that this Review Report will be handed over to the Business Management Branch, Indigenous Group, DEST for the development of an implementation strategy to respond to the issues and recommendations raised.

Due to the funding agreement period for the ATAS Bulk-Funded Institutions being on a calendar year basis, for continuity, the implementation of any recommendation contained in this report would occur commencing from January 2004.

INSTITUTIONS FUNDED UNDER THE ATAS BULK-FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

New South Wales

Charles Sturt University
Macquarie University
Southern Cross University
University of New England
University of New South Wales
University of Newcastle
University of Sydney
University of Western Sydney
University of Technology, Sydney
University of Wollongong
Australian Catholic University
Tranby

Victoria

Deakin University
LaTrobe University
University of Technology Swinburne
University of Melbourne

Queensland

Central Queensland University
Griffith University
James Cook University
University of Technology, Queensland
University of Queensland
University of Southern Queensland
Sunshine Coast University

Western Australia

Edith Cowan University
Murdoch University
University of Notre Dame
University of Technology, Curtin
University of Western Australia
Curtin University of Technology

Northern Territory

Northern Territory University
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

South Australia

Flinders University
University of Adelaide
University of South Australia

Tasmania

University of Tasmania

Australian Capital Territory

Australian National University
University of Canberra

Boarding Schools and other

Shalom Christian College (Qld)
Kormilda College (NT)
St Teresa's College (NT)
Yirara College (NT)
St John's College (NT)
Columba Catholic College (Qld)
Tranby Aboriginal College
Institute of Aboriginal Development