



Australian Government

**Department of Education,
Science and Training**

Review of Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies and Indigenous Support Units

FINAL REPORT

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Table of Contents

Preface.....	4
Glossary.....	5
1. Executive Summary	6
2. Introduction	12
3. Terms of Reference.....	13
4. Methodology.....	14
5. Historical Context	15
6. Literature Review of Policy Implementation	20
7. Structure, Activities and Consultation.....	24
8. Outcomes of the Review Consultations.....	30
9. Recommendations	39
10. Conclusion	40
11. Bibliography	42
Appendices	
Appendix A List of Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies and Indigenous Support Units	43
Appendix B List of Organisations Consulted	44

Preface

Professor Mary Ann Bin-Sallik and Ms Sonia Smallacombe from the Faculty of Indigenous Research and Education, Northern Territory University conducted the Review of the Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies and the Indigenous Support Units.

This consultancy was undertaken within a tight timeframe of nine weeks from 9 October to 12 December 2002. Consultations were undertaken in all major centres in all the States and Territories including Thursday Island as outlined in the Terms of Reference. The review procedure comprised face-to-face interviews; phone interviews; follow-up phone interviews and written reports, submissions and other documentation.

The review team acknowledges the support provided by DEST and ATSIC. This support was in the form of the provision of office space, the services of personnel, phone calls and detailed interviews.

Finally, we would like to express our appreciation and thanks to the Presidents, executive committees and staff of all the IECBs and ISUs, individuals and other stakeholders who gave their full cooperation, assistance, and patience often at very short notice.

Glossary

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ACTEC	Australian Capital Territory Education Committee
AEC	Australian Education Council
AECGs	Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups
AECs	Aboriginal Education Councils
AECSSU	Aboriginal Early Childhood Services Support Unit
AESIP	Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program
AETC	Aboriginal Education and Training Council
AEW	Aboriginal Education Workers
AJAC	Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
ASSPA	Aboriginal Student Support Parental Association
ATAS	Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme
ATSIAC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
ATSI ECSAG	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Sector Advisory Group Inc.
ATSIPTAC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Advisory Council
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEOs	Chief Executive Officers
DEST	Department of Education Science and Training
DOSAA	Department of State Aboriginal Affairs
IECB	Indigenous Education Consultative Body
IECBs	Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies
IECNT	Indigenous Education Council Northern Territory
IESIP	Indigenous Education Strategic Initiative Program
ISU	Indigenous Support Unit
ISUs	Indigenous Support Units
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAEC	National Aboriginal Education Committee
NAEP	National Aboriginal Education Policy
NIELNS	National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
QIECB	Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
SAAETAC	South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee
TAEA	Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Association
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TSIREC	Torres Strait Islanders' Regional Education Council Inc.
TSRA	Torres Strait Regional Authority
VAEAI	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
VEGAS	Vocational and Education Guidance for Aboriginal Students
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WA	Western Australia

1. Executive Summary

This is the first national review of Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECBs) and Indigenous Support Units (ISUs). IECBs and ISUs have provided important forums for consultation on education and training within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the country since the 1970s.

There are seven IECBs and three ISUs which are funded through the Commonwealth Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP). The organizations which currently receive Commonwealth funding are listed at [Appendix A](#). Their structure, operations and funding arrangement varies across States. The role of the three ISUs is to provide support services to independent community schools and early childhood education, though to some extent they do provide advice to relevant organizations and systems in their State. IECBs' primary role has traditionally been that of an advisory body across all education sectors, though in practice the primary focus is on schools. Table 1 summarises the 2003 IESIP funding allocations and committee membership and their appointment processes.

Table 1: Current structure of IECBs and ISUs

IECBs and ISUs	Funding Arrangements	Location of Secretariat	Committee Members	Appointment Process
Western Australia Aboriginal Education Training Council (AETC)	Commonwealth: \$364,702 (IESIP 2003 allocation) State: In-kind support: Executive Officer Administrative Assistant. Retainer for PT Chairperson	State Department of Education	13 Members Indigenous Community Reps x 7 CEO of Gov. Providers (non-Indigenous) x 6	Ministerial Appointments.
South Australia South Australian Education and Training Advisory Committee (SAAETAC)	Commonwealth: \$233,780 (IESIP 2003 allocation) State: In-kind support: Executive Officer 3 x Admin. Retainer for PT Chairperson	Department of State Aboriginal Affairs	15 Members (all Indigenous) Represent various education sectors from early childhood to tertiary	Ministerial Appointments.

IECBs and ISUs	Funding Arrangements	Location of Secretariat	Committee Members	Appointment Process
<p>Tasmania Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Association</p>	<p>Commonwealth: \$158,875 (IESIP 2003 allocation) State: approx \$64,799 (salaries for Executive Officer and Admin. Assistant Catholic Ed: \$10,000</p>	<p>Independent Office at former Aboriginal School, Risdon Cove</p>	<p>Members (Indigenous) North West state x 2 North x 2 South x 2 Cape Barren Is x 1 Flinders Is x 1 3 Executive members elected from members (President, Secretary and Treasurer)</p>	<p>Elected by TAEA membership</p>
<p>ACT ACT Indigenous Education Consultative Group</p>	<p>Commonwealth: \$88,882 (IESIP 2003 allocation) ACT Govt: In kind support for Admin. Officer, office space and support within ACT Indigenous Education Unit</p>	<p>Small office situated in ACT Indigenous Education Unit</p>	<p>17 Members (Indigenous) includes part-time Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson. Parent Reps x 12 Wreck Bay x 1 Catholic Ed. X 1 CIT x 1 Community Reps x 2</p>	<p>Ministerial Appointment</p>
<p>Victoria Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (VAEAI)</p>	<p>Commonwealth: \$231,924 (IESIP 2003 allocation) State: approx \$800,000</p>	<p>Independent Organisation</p>	<p>27 Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups and 13 Specialist Reps: (Indigenous) Early Childhood Primary Education Secondary Education Adult Community Ed VET Higher Ed Koorie Indep, Schools Catholic Ed Office Bearers: President Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary and Public Officer</p>	<p>Elected by VAEAI membership</p>

IECBs and ISUs	Funding Arrangements	Location of Secretariat	Committee Members	Appointment Process
<p>Queensland Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body (QIECB)</p>	<p>Commonwealth: \$409,362 (IESIP 2003 allocation) State: In kind support by providing an Executive Officer and Administrative Assistant. Part-time salary for the Chairperson.</p>	<p>State Department of Education</p>	<p>13 Members (Indigenous). Each member represents various education sectors and regions: The School Sector Crèche and Kinder. Assoc. Higher Ed VET Townsville (incl. Mainland TSI) Eastern side of Cape Western side of Cape Mt Isa South-West QLD</p>	<p>Ministerial Appointment</p>
<p>New South Wales New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.</p>	<p>Commonwealth: \$493,330 (IESIP 2003 allocation) State: Funds the CEO's position</p>	<p>Independent Organization</p>	<p>Representative from 18 Regional AECG Committees (Indigenous), although non-Indigenous people can have Associate Membership with non- voting rights. Executive Committee comprises (10): President Vice President Treasurer Secretary Regional AECG Reps x 6</p>	<p>Elected by NSW AECG members</p>

IECBs and ISUs	Funding Arrangements	Location of Secretariat	Committee Members	Appointment Process
Dhagun-Gur Indigenous Early Childhood Unit, Queensland (sponsored by Crèche and Kindergarten Association)	Commonwealth: \$262,477 (IESIP 2003 allocation) Funds the Co-ordinator's position, a Pre-School Consultant and 2 resource workers in the library	Located in Crèche and Kindergarten Association	Advisory Committee comprising staff and committee members of Pre-School Centres from around the State. Indigenous x 7 Non-Indigenous x 3	Nominated by Pre-School Centres
The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Sector Advisory Group Inc, (ATSIECSAG), NSW	Commonwealth: \$458,753 (IESIP 2003 allocation) Funds Secretariat Staff: Director, Admin Officer, 4 Field Officers and a trainee.	Independent Organization (Secretariat called Aboriginal Early Childhood Services Support Unit AECSSU)	11 Committee Members (Indigenous) Representatives from Aboriginal workers in mainstream services (rural) Aboriginal workers in mainstream services (urban) NSW Multi Functional Aboriginal Children's Services NSW AECG Inc. x 2 Other Aboriginal Early Childhood Services Director of AECSSU is ex-officio member	Elected at AGM
The Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Support Unit (WA)	Commonwealth: \$382,173 (IESIP 2003 allocation) Funds two Co-ordinators position based in Perth and Broome	Sponsored by Association of Independent Schools of WA	Under umbrella of Assoc, of Independent Schools of WA	N/A

In addition to the above annual allocations, the Support Units and IECBs also receive other programme funding for specific activities.

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee and the New South Wales State Aboriginal Advisory Committee were the first IECBs to be established in 1976. The South Australian Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee and the Northern Territory Education Consultative Group were

formed in 1978. The Northern Territory committee was disbanded in 1999. The Tasmanian Aboriginal Consultative Group was formed in 1979 and in 1980 Western Australia decided to form Regional Consultative Groups, rather than having one central consultative group. However, in 1983 a State Consultative Group coordinated these regional groups. The Consultative Group in the Australian Capital Territory was also established in 1983.¹

Three of the seven existing IECBs are independent incorporated bodies while the rest are attached to State and Territory government departments. The NSW ISU is incorporated whilst the ISUs of WA and QLD are located within, and attached to, other independent associations.

This Review was undertaken to examine ways the IECBs and ISUs could provide more effective advice to the Commonwealth and more usefully facilitate consultation on key national education priorities. The structure and management arrangements for each organization were analysed to determine strengths and weaknesses. The Review also examined funding arrangements, funding sources for each organization and cost effectiveness. More detailed information on each organization has been provided separately to the Department of Education, Science and Training and this could form the focus of individual discussions with the Chairs of the IECBs and ISUs.

The Review met with representatives of the IECBs and ISUs and other stakeholders in all States and Territories. In addition, telephone interviews were used to obtain information from key people who were unavailable at the time of the face-to-meetings. During these interviews people were invited to submit any written comments for consideration. Information received included copies of policies, reports, information about the organization and submissions presented to other forums. Organizations consulted are listed at [Appendix B](#).

The review team found there is an overwhelming view that IECBs and ISUs are important because of their contributions to Indigenous education. However, the current arrangements and structures do not adequately address the major education policy issues in the States and Territories, and there is potential for the Commonwealth to receive far more useful information than is currently provided in response to the funding agreements with the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training.

The Review found that the structure of the organizations varies between states and territories and the way that Board members are appointed also differs and in some instances is unclear. Some are appointed by a bureaucracy and others are elected. In some States the organizations form

¹ Watts, B *Aboriginal Futures: A Review of Research and Developments and Related Policies in the Education of Aborigines*, AGPS, 1982, Pp49-50.

part of the State system and in others they are a separate incorporated body. Further consideration to identify principles of good practice in organizational and governance issues would lead to improve operational effectiveness.

Although it was broadly acknowledged that these organizations were originally set up to facilitate consultation with their respective Indigenous communities and to provide advice to the Government on key education matters, it would appear that their functions and priorities have become less clear over the years. In some cases, organizations' activities are predominantly reactive and they find themselves mediating in disputes between parents and schools, rather than spending time on developing more strategic advice which could influence policy and practices. The coordinated development of a long term strategic plan is suggested to revitalize the IECBs and ISUs.

The current funding agreements between the Department of Education, Science and Training are broad in terms of the activities and reporting requirements and the outcomes from this Review could be used to inform refinements to future funding agreements. Information that is currently supplied is inputs and outputs focused, but there are opportunities to provide advice and outcomes focused information about the implementation of national education policies like the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and relevant consultations. The performance reporting requirements of funding agreements are an important mechanism for the IECBs and ISUs to provide advice to the Commonwealth and this information can be improved on and used more effectively by the Department of Education, Science and Training.

Commonwealth funding to the IECBs and ISUs varies and does not seem to be based on any specific funding methodology. The level of Commonwealth funding seems to be based on historical reasons which might reflect what was negotiated some 10 or 20 years ago. Some organizations also receive State Government funding, but it is more common for State Government assistance to be in the form of office and secretariat support and other in-kind assistance. In addition, many organizations have received financial assistance to undertake NIELNS projects. Generally the organizations fulfill a valuable consultation, advisory and support role, however, further work could be undertaken to review funding arrangements with a view to establishing an equitable and transparent funding allocation mechanism. Transparency of funding allocations is related to accountability to the community and committee members, in addition to the government funding agency.

Throughout the review consultations some good examples of consultative models were identified. These IECBs had good linkages with schools, Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness

committees, TAFE, higher education institutions and other education providers at regional level. Such State IECBs provide some funding to promote and encourage regional committees and participation. One IECB has a Rules of Association document which could be adapted by or used to focus the development of similar documents by other bodies.

The Review has recognized the considerable amount of volunteer contributions to the consultation and committee work and identified the potential for these organizations to benefit from future investments in capacity building including in the area of governance.

To some extent this review has examined the activities of the three Indigenous Support Units, which have a different but related focus on early childhood education. The ISUs report to DEST and to the IECBs in their relevant State on their targeted outcomes. People consulted were generally of the view that ISUs play a crucial role in supporting Aboriginal independent community schools and early childhood centres in improving their financial and human resource capacity. It is suggested that DEST does further work to examine the functions of the ISUs and to look at ways to better utilize them and to get more useful information from them, in conjunction with their performance reports.

The Review noted that the Commonwealth no longer funds an Indigenous Education Consultative Body in the Northern Territory, which was established in 1978 and disbanded in 1999. Further consideration of ways to facilitate consultation and the provision of education and training advice and ways to fill any gaps should be given by the Department of Education, Science and Training.

2. Introduction

This report provides an overview of the historical development of the Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies and Indigenous Support Units together with background information on key publications relevant to the contexts in which these organizations operate. The review examined the current role and structure of the organizations in the context of the reasons why they were originally established. It proposes 15 recommendations and discusses a range of options to reinvigorate the organizations and suggests ways to strengthen the IECBs and ISUs through the coordinated development of a strategic planning framework which could provide the focus for future activities aimed at improving educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

The different roles of IECBs and ISUs is acknowledged and the emphasis throughout this report has been on the IECBs, which were originally established to fulfill an advisory role to Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and to consult with Indigenous communities on

education matters from early childhood to higher education. The three ISUs fulfill a support role to other Indigenous education bodies and their main focus is on early childhood education.

The Commonwealth provides total funding of approximately \$3.1 million annually from the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme to the IECBS and ISUs.

3. Terms of Reference

The context for the conduct of the review is the desire to enhance the provision of Indigenous community involvement and the development of advice to the Commonwealth in relation to Indigenous education policy. Within this context, the review will identify and celebrate effective practices currently being implemented by IECBs and ISUs with a view to extending this success to other IECBs and ISUs.

The review was commissioned to examine ways in which:

- Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECBs) and Indigenous Support Units (ISUs) could be more effective in the provision of policy advice to the Commonwealth Government;
- IECBs and ISUs could facilitate more useful consultation with Indigenous communities on key educational issues;
- funding could be distributed in a more effective way across IECBs and ISUs; and
- the ISUs could make a greater contribution to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for Indigenous students.

The review was also commissioned to examine whether:

- where appropriate, the quality of the arrangements is compromised by joint funding with States and Territory governments and other entities;
- the Commonwealth gets 'value for money';
- the IECBs and ISUs could provide a more cost-effective service to the Commonwealth and;
- a reformed structure could deliver better outcomes.

In addition, the review was commissioned to examine how the consultative mechanisms could be best aligned with the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NEILNS).

4. Methodology

The review team held face-to-face meetings with six Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies and three Indigenous Support Units as well as other stakeholders in all states and territories. The timeframe was tight so phone interviews were conducted in instances where key people were not available to meet with the review team. The review team made it clear that written submissions were welcome but very few organizations responded to this offer. The written information that was provided was in the form of policies, reports and other relevant information that had been presented to other forums. Notes from the consultation meetings were also forwarded to the review team.

The consultation itinerary included:	
Western Australia	Kalgoorlie, Perth, *Broome
South Australia	Pt Augusta, Adelaide
Tasmania	Launceston, Hobart
Victoria	Melbourne
Queensland	Thursday Island, Cairns, Brisbane, *Ipswich
New South Wales	Tweed Heads, Sydney
ACT	Jervis Bay, Canberra
Northern Territory	Darwin

*Included in the ISU consultations

Due to the sensitivity and confidentiality involved in carrying out this review, individuals have not been identified, however, a list of Government Departments, organizations and groups are listed in the Appendix B.

A review of literature relevant to the IECBS and their activities, particularly in relation to education policy implementation was also carried out.

The timeframe for the consultation meetings was tight but every effort was made to involve as many stakeholders as possible within the time available:

- Western Australia and South Australia between 9 - 17 October and included Kalgoorlie, Perth, Pt Augusta and Adelaide.
- Tasmania and Victoria were held between 21–24 October and included Hobart, Launceston and Melbourne.

- Queensland were held between 27 October - 1 November and included Thursday Island, Brisbane and Tweed Heads.
- New South Wales and ACT were held between 7 -13 November and included Canberra, Jervis Bay, and Sydney.
- Consultations were also held with various people in Darwin, 4 - 5 November, an Indigenous Childcare Centre in Ipswich on 14 November and Independent Indigenous Schools in Broome, 9 - 11 December 2002.

The review team attempted to include a wide range of views. Therefore, consultations and interviews were held with as many stakeholders as possible within the restricted timeframe. The review team felt it was important to present both the positive and negative views in relating to the performance of IECBs and ISUs as well as DEST and the State and Territory Departments of Education. While there was an awareness of community sensitivities, the review team felt it was important to present information about Committee members of IECBs and ISUs as they hold positions that have legal responsibilities and community accountability. However, care was taken to present comments constructively.

5. Historical Context

For many years, Indigenous people had called for involvement in, and control of, their own education. In the 1970s, the espousal of policies of self-determination and self-management highlighted the need for the provision of effective education programs and for the participation in educational decision-making by Indigenous people. In particular, there were calls for the recognition of the validity of Indigenous cultures and the valuing of Aboriginality in education programs devised for Indigenous children as well as raising awareness of Indigenous cultures within the wider non-Indigenous community.²

The first national committee to advise the Federal Government on Indigenous education was the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), which was set up by the Schools Commission in 1974. This group wrote a number of reports and made recommendations on a wide range of educational issues. The successor to this group was the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC), which was established in 1977, which consisted of a full-time Chairperson

² Watts, B *Aboriginal Futures: A Review of Research and Developments and Related Policies in the Education of Aborigines*, AGPS, 1982, p4

and eighteen part-time members. Its role was to: a) advise the Commonwealth Department of Education and other authorities on the educational needs of the people; b) assist the Department of Aboriginal Affairs monitor programs; and c) develop programs and policies and undertake its own investigations.³

In 1975, the AECG to the Schools Commission expressed deep concern over the lack of involvement by Indigenous people in education programs. Subsequently, when the AECG met with the State Superintendents of Aboriginal Education it requested that consultative processes be set up in each state. As a consequence, in 1976 the Schools Commission wrote to the State departments suggesting projects that aimed at increasing the degree of involvement of Aboriginal people in education and offered financial support for the establishment of Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups at State level. As previously stated at the beginning of this report, by 1978, all mainland States and the Northern Territory had established AECGs. The Tasmanian AECG was formed in 1979 and in 1980 Western Australia decided to form Regional Consultative Groups instead of one central consultative group. In 1983 these regional groups were complemented and coordinated by a State AECG. The process for setting up these groups was through initiating conferences and steering committees for Indigenous people so that they could discuss and develop and propose procedures, and put forward suggestions about membership and nominations to these groups.⁴

At the same time, education departments had also appointed Superintendents of Education and set up special Aboriginal Education Units with professional staff in each State and the Northern Territory. The role of these senior officers was to: a) advise their department on Aboriginal education issues; b) assist in the development of new Indigenous educational initiatives; and c) maintain contact with Indigenous people and communities. They were also required to maintain contact not only with each other, but also with the AECG to the Schools Commission, which later became the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the newly formed State AECGs.⁵

IECBs and ISUs have provided important forums for consultation on education and training within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the country since the 1970s. When the IECBs were first established, they were seen as symbols of self-determination and self-management in the provision of independent advice on education issues to Governments at the State, Territory and national level.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. p49

⁵ Ibid. pp43-44

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee and the New South Wales State Aboriginal Advisory Committee were the first IECBs to be established in 1976. The South Australian Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee and the Northern Territory Education Consultative Group were formed in 1978. The Northern Territory committee was disbanded in 1999. The Tasmanian Aboriginal Consultative Group was formed in 1979 and in 1980 Western Australia decided to form Regional Consultative Groups, rather than having one central consultative group. However, in 1983 a State Consultative Group coordinated these regional groups. The Consultative Group in the Australian Capital Territory was also established in 1983.⁶ The organizations which currently receive Commonwealth funding are listed in Appendix A.

Three of the seven existing IECBs are independent incorporated bodies while the rest are attached to State and Territory government departments. The NSW ISU is incorporated whilst the ISUs of WA and QLD are located within, and attached to, other independent associations.

Concerns about the functions and responsibilities of the IECBs have been raised in previous Indigenous education reviews and reports and are still very much relevant today.

The 1995 *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (National Review), chaired by Mandawuy Yunupingu, found that though there was overall support for the IECBs there were major concerns about: a) appointment of IECB members by State and Territory governments rather than being elected by indigenous communities, and the potential this has to compromise their capacity to provide good independent advice; and b) that advice could also be compromised in the case of IECB groups that are not incorporated and have to rely on funds, in kind support and the goodwill of government departments. Other concerns include:

- IECB arrangements were not generally well understood by the relevant stakeholders, and therefore measures should be taken, and structures set up to ensure that the Indigenous constituents and relevant stakeholders were adequately informed and inducted;
- all Indigenous education sectors from early childhood through to Higher Education were not adequately represented on IECBs; and
- that ASSPA Committees should be given greater prominence in policy issues and that IECBs be more responsive to ASSPA Committees, and that IECBs include ASSPA Committee representation.

⁶ Watts, B *Aboriginal Futures: A Review of Research and Developments and Related Policies in the Education of Aborigines*, AGPS, 1982, pp49-50.

The National Review recommended that IECBs be reconstituted and recommendation 6 states that in consultation with existing State and Territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Groups and State and Territory governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Groups be constituted to ensure:

- office holders are elected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders;
- the roles and responsibilities of such reconstituted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups are specified and agreed upon and with a minimum responsibility to:
 - a) participate in the formulation and endorsement of strategies drawn up under the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy across all sectors;
 - b) monitor the implementation of these strategies and;
 - c) provide independent advice to governments on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education issues as appropriate;
 - d) such Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Groups to be established as incorporated bodies;
 - e) regional and local structures exist to ensure that local constituencies can provide input to, and receive feedback from, their representatives: and
 - f) structures exist to coordinate the activity of these bodies with other relevant bodies, including other relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies.⁷

The last point refers to the establishment of a national coordinating body. The National Review stated that the administrative arrangements for what was then called the Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program (AISIP) placed unnecessary administrative burden on IECBs because of the focus on reporting educational outcomes. The National Review Committee was of the opinion that the role of the IECBs was purely advisory and that it was more appropriate that IECBs be funded the same way as other advisory structures. Recommendation 7 of that report states:

That Commonwealth support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Groups is paid as a grant-in-aid, in line with arrangements for other like organizations.⁸

The National Review proposed that in order for IECBs to be more effective and independent advisory bodies, similar funding arrangements be forthcoming from State and Territory

⁷ *National Review of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, 1995, pp39-41

⁸ *ibid.*

Governments to enhance their strategic plans and maximize their efficiency and effectiveness. Recommendation 8 states:

That State and Territory support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Groups be paid directly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Groups where they are incorporated bodies.⁹

Many of the key recommendations of the National Review in relation to the funding of IECBs have not been implemented. What has happened is the Commonwealth, through DEST, has introduced more rigorous guidelines for IECBs and ISUs in relation to performance monitoring and reporting for its targeted assistance during the 2001-2002 period. The Commonwealth stipulates in its agreement with these bodies that it is required by law to ensure accountability for Indigenous Education Strategic Initiative Program (IESIP) funds, and recipients are required to account for expenditure of such funds. IESIP funds are provided to education providers for the purpose of advancing the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP), which is to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for Indigenous people. IECBs and ISUs must achieve performance targets and specific objectives as set out in the schedule of their agreements. During consultations a number of concerns relating to how well IECBs and ISUs meet their performance target and objectives emerged.

Katu Kalpa, the report of the *Senate Inquiry into the effectiveness of education and training programs for Indigenous Australians* (2000) made reference to the use of performance indicators in DEST funding agreements and the fact that some Indigenous organizations were questioning this practice and were calling for the submission of qualitative as well as quantitative data for performance reports. There were also calls for transparency in funding arrangements and outcomes measures.

Both reports called for an Indigenous coordinating body to provide advice at the national level on Indigenous education.

The review team is concerned that issues that have been raised in previous reports have not been addressed and this does have some bearing on the educational outcomes for Indigenous peoples. While there have been some improvements, the significant gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational outcomes and other Australians remains.

⁹ *ibid.*

6. Literature Review of Policy Implementation

This section examines a number of Indigenous education reports and reviews in regards to policy implementation. At first glance of the various reports and reviews on Indigenous education policies, it seems there is still uncertainty among policy makers in addressing equity for Indigenous people in all the education sectors. The major debate on Indigenous education policy has been, and continues to be, the policy's focus on 'mainstream' education rather than the development of frameworks for self-determination and community controlled education. This debate is ongoing. What is at the core of Indigenous education policies is the model that these policies are based upon, which is the human capital model, 'where education is seen as an investment from which both the individual and community benefit'.¹⁰ In terms of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP), the education pay off is the increased employment outcomes. Education is also seen as a significant factor in the elimination of income inequality.

This model was also highlighted in the *Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce 1988* (the Hughes Report), which stated that education improved the employment prospects of Indigenous people. It found that Indigenous people with tertiary qualifications were employed at comparable rates to their non-Indigenous counterparts with similar qualifications.¹¹ The *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* report also mentions the fact that poor educational participation and achievement in turn limit the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to make real choices about their participation in the economy. It was stated that a diminished educational opportunity effectively denies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people access to the full range of resources, which could help them shape their lives and communities according to their own vision and aspirations.¹²

The human capital model (of education) results in policies and strategies that are aimed at eliminating education inequalities and barriers such as racial discrimination, economic disadvantage, social and cultural isolation. In other words, the focus of the NATSIEP is about changing mainstream to better accommodate the needs of Indigenous people. The *Katu Kalpa, the Senate Inquiry into the effectiveness of education and training programs for Indigenous Australians* (2000) report outlines the changes required in mainstream education such as the advocacy of culturally inclusive curricula, the teaching of Indigenous languages, the employment of Indigenous teachers and the introduction of Indigenous studies in schools. These changes require statistical comparisons with the non-Indigenous population as the benchmark for

¹⁰ Ibid. p38

¹¹ *Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce*, Canberra, 1988, p15

¹² *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, National Report*, Vol, 2, 1991, p 240

Indigenous people as well as a strong emphasis on facilitating Indigenous involvement in educational decision-making.¹³

The *Katu Kalpa* Review and the *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (1995) commonly known as the National Review, both point to the fact that education policy development and implementation involves a myriad of government agencies at the Federal, State and Territory level. Constitutional responsibility for education rests clearly with the State and Territory governments who provide funding for school and TAFE education. State and Territory governments are also responsible for policies and processes in the areas of school and teacher registration, teacher employment, student enrolment, curriculum content, course accreditation and student assessment.¹⁴ The Commonwealth's role in school education is the provision of supplementary funding, promoting national consistency and coherence in the provision of schooling across the nation and exercising its responsibility under the 1967 referendum (Commonwealth Government given special responsibilities in Indigenous affairs) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. The Commonwealth has a role in formulating educational policy at the national level, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, policy implementation requires the involvement of State and Territory governments.

Various literature points to another level of policy implementation at the national level. The Commonwealth is a member of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), which is responsible for coordinating education policy. As result of the findings of the National Review, MCEETYA developed the National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People 1996-2002. The intention of the strategy was to confirm and significantly advance the aims of NATISIEP by the year 2002.

MCEETYA's Discussion Paper *Achieving Educational Equality for Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, April 2000, outlines the issues discussed at its 10th meeting in Adelaide, 22-23 April 1999, and the outcomes of the Taskforce on Indigenous Education, which was established to undertake a range of tasks and report back to MCEETYA in 2000. At the Adelaide meeting, an agreement was made between the Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers to address areas of common concern and a commitment to improving Australian schooling within a framework for national collaboration.¹⁵

¹³ *Katu Kalpa: Report on the inquiry into the effectiveness of education and training programs for Indigenous Australians*, Australian Senate (2000) p39

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p20

¹⁵ Discussion Paper 'Achieving Educational Equality for Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples', *MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education*, 2000, p31

The MCEETYA Taskforce included a number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people involved in the education sectors who carried out consultations within their jurisdictions with some Indigenous communities. The MCEETYA Task Force also considered policy implementation strategies at the local level. For example, the Taskforce proposed a new partnership model that focused on developing stronger partnership frameworks between government, communities and education systems for identifying issues and enabling all participants to develop solutions. The Task Force also requested their educational jurisdictions to work within existing protocols and at the local level with educational institutions, parents and caregivers, Indigenous communities and the wider community to establish local strategies.¹⁶ The effectiveness of policy implementation has been of major concern to Indigenous communities. For example, there have been a number of concerns that major national reviews and Royal Commission recommendations have not been implemented and have sat on bookshelves gathering dust. One such example is the lack of implementation of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* reports.

At a meeting of the Ministerial Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in 1992 all State and Territory governments committed themselves to regular reporting on the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission. However, in a report prepared by the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission to evaluate the governments' implementation of the Royal Commission recommendations, it was found that while State and Territory Governments claim to have implemented the overwhelming bulk of Royal Commission recommendations, their monitoring reports were often poorly organized and missed the point of a recommendation. Further, it was evident in the reports that the government employees approach to the concept of what constitutes implementation was arbitrary and they made general assertions of compliance without any supporting evidence.¹⁷

The example outlined above provides an indication that there is some misunderstanding about what implementation of policies actually mean. The Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner made the point that implementation is outcomes. It means changing legislation, changing priorities, changing cultures and changing procedures. Implementation of policy requires an efficient coordinated system to guide, monitor and assist implementation activities.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *Indigenous Deaths in Custody 1989-1996* Prepared by the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission p89

¹⁸ Ibid.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody examined NATSIEP's focus on equity. The Report stated that the emphasis on 'equity' or 'equality' in current policy objectives implied that once the statistical indicators of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population reached the same as those of the Australian community, as measured through aggregate social indicators, the 'problem' will have been solved. The Report raised the issue about the "degree to which outcomes of statistical equity were consistent with the achievement of self-determination, self-management and empowerment. In other words, the *process* of achieving desired change, as well as the *outcomes* of programs, is important".¹⁹ Further, the apparent conflict in advocating a policy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and empowerment, and measuring its outcomes in terms of how much like other Australians Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have become, is often not recognized.

While most of this section has been devoted to policy implementation at the bureaucracy level, there is still the issue of involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in policy implementation at the local level. The Report of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* also made comments about this issue. The Report stated that the ability or desire of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents to become actively involved in decision-making processes of schools was not adequately addressed in the NAEP. The Report stated that a policy directed at providing more structures of consultation and decision making does not, of itself, change the relationships of power and inequality which have so far alienated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the education system. It stated that specific attention must be paid to this relationship, and to devising appropriate and sensitive mechanisms for transforming it²⁰.

The National Review also outlined concerns at the limited power of regional and local Indigenous communities, whose role was often purely advisory. The National Review called for greater direct control over funding and strengthened decision-making role for Indigenous people was required to achieve self-determination in education. The National Review also stated it was important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were able to determine their educational needs and delivery options, thus exercising real choices in education, rather than choosing from options constructed for them. The strategies for involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision-making processes included the formation of a new national independent body that would

¹⁹ *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, National Report, Vol, 2, 1991, p243*

²⁰ *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, National Report, Vol, 4, 1991, p451*

be a signatory to NATSIEP to oversee education for Indigenous Australians and the restructuring of IECBs to ensure access for local communities to IECB representatives.²¹

The literature review indicates that policy implementation is still 'top down' with some input at the local level. The National Review stated there were concerns expressed by Indigenous people that the NATSIEP was vague about implementation and evaluation. The review team also found similar concerns raised by the National Review in that there is a noticeable absence in current literature of 'how to get things done' and if there is a commitment to community controlled education, what is actually involved in developing and implementing it? The review team agrees with the National Review that policies are, in general not designed to explain how strategies will be implemented and that change requires an efficient coordinated system at the local level to guide, monitor and assist implementation activities.²²

7. Structure, Activities and Consultation

IECBs and ISUs enter into agreements with DEST either through umbrella bodies or State and Territory governments or if they are incorporated bodies, they enter into tripartite agreements with the State and Commonwealth governments. The Commonwealth Government provides funding in return for initiatives aimed at achieving performance targets. For ISUs the targets relate to English literacy and numeracy, professional development and training and national conferences. For IECBs the performance targets relate to operational issues including developing strategic plans, meeting with DEST and providing advice on NIELNS; consultations with the Indigenous communities; and attendance at IESIP monitoring meetings. The following discussion provides an overview of some aspects of the committee structure and role of IECBs and ISUs. It is meant to illustrate some of the pertinent differences among the organizations.

The Aboriginal Education and Training Councils (AETC) of Western Australia

The Aboriginal Education and Training Council (AETC) of Western Australia comprises 13 members, six of whom are CEOs of major education providers from the Department of Education, Association of Independent Schools, Department of Training, Department of Indigenous Affairs, Catholic Education Office and the higher education sector. The other seven members are Indigenous community members. Members are appointed by State Minister for Education for a three year period. The membership process involves calling for expressions of interest in the state's major newspaper. The criteria on which community members are selected is unclear. Improvements could be made to make this selection process transparent. AETC's secretariat is

²¹ *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (1995)* pp36-41

²² *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (1995)* p26

located in the State Department of Education and comprises an Executive Officer and an Administrative Assistant. The Chairperson is employed on a part-time basis. AETC meets every two months and employs consultants who facilitate various consultation meetings as needed.

AETC has initiated some good policies and programs. One such program is called tracking the whereabouts of Aboriginal School Age Children as part of Achieving Attendance (Key Element 1 of the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy). All Indigenous students are formally 'tracked' through a central system so that when students move from school to school the tracking program identifies these students and forwards their academic progress to their new school. This system has proven to be invaluable especially for the remote areas of Western Australia.

The South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee (SAAETAC)

The South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee (SAAETAC) is the only IECB to be located in a State Department of Aboriginal Affairs, which provides in-kind support in the form of an Executive Officer, retainer for a part-time Chairperson and three administrative staff. All Committee members are Indigenous and they represent all education sectors. SAAETAC's consultative mechanism includes six meetings per year and these are held at various locations around the State. One of the days is for informal consultation with education providers such as ASSPA Committees, AEWs, and school Principals. The meetings in the regions were designed to provide the opportunity for local communities to attend and observe the Committee at work. However, there were some criticisms that local community people were not always aware of the meetings, as they were not advertised widely. There was a general view that there is not other consultative mechanism besides these meetings. For example, there is little, if any, formalized sharing of information between SAAETAC and other education groups like the Pitjanjatjara Education Committee or ASSPA Committees.

The focus of SAAETAC's activities currently appear to be schooling and TAFE. It considers that it does not have sufficient resources to adequately cover all education sectors.

Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Association (TAEA)

The Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Association (TAEA) comprises eight elected committee members, who in turn elect the three members of Executive Committee. All the Committee members are elected representatives from various parts of the State including the North West (2 members); North (2 members); South (2 members) and Cape Barren Island and Flinders Island (2 members respectively).

In terms of membership, any person can apply to become a member of TAEA as long as they pay their membership fees and satisfy TAEA's Aboriginality criteria.

TAEA claims they do not have sufficient funding to allow them to undertake extensive consultations around the state and therefore have to rely on their elected representatives to communicate with the Aboriginal community. TAEA believes these representatives are well known in the community and as they often attend community events they are able to inform and consult their respective communities on issues relating to Indigenous education issues. Further, there has been an increase in the number of ASSPA Committees in the State and TAEA believes this increase is largely due to them raising awareness of education issues in the Indigenous community.

TAEA has undertaken an important project involving NIELNS. Under this project, five community liaison officers were appointed to raise awareness and encourage parents to become involved in numeracy and literacy programs.

Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (VAECG)

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (VAECG) is a state-wide Koorie community organization consisting of eight state regions. Each region has a number of Local Aboriginal Education Groups (LAECG). There are currently 27 LAECGs in the State. VAEAI is the representative body responsible for providing the secretariat for all the LAECG advisory programs and policy issues at the local, state and national levels. VAEAI's Committee of Management is the policy unit of the organization and is also responsible for developing and implementing all programs on Indigenous education in the state. The committee of management comprises representatives of the 27 LAECGs and specialist representatives from early childhood, primary education, secondary education, adult community education, vocational education and training, higher education, Koorie Independent Schools, Catholic Education and the VAEAI office bearers. It also comprises a president, vice president, treasurer, secretary and public officer.

The LAECGs and specialist representatives elect the office bearers, while the specialist representatives are elected at the VAEAI Annual General Meeting. The specialist representatives have responsibility to provide a comprehensive overview of their nominated areas to the VAEAI Committee of Management. The office bearers are voluntary and there is a preference for the Chairperson's position to remain voluntary.

The VAEAI Secretariat is the working arm of the organization and it works mainly to the direction of the Committee of Management. The Secretariat also provides support to the LAECGs,

monitors policy and program development and liaises with governments and other education providers.

VAEAI receives most of its funding from the Victorian State Government. Since the 1990s, VAEAI has negotiated partnership agreements with the State Government for the development of strategies to address the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. The 10-year partnership is set out in the publication *Yalca: A Partnership in Education and Training for the New Millennium (2001)*. The objectives of the partnership agreement are to ensure that Koories are in the forefront of the policy and decision making in relation to Koorie education; recognize the central role of LAECGs; involve Koories people in decision making; increase the participation and outcome rates of Koorie students; respect and support culturally relevant learning environments; and increase the number of Koorie people employed in the education and training sectors.

Another partnership agreement is set out in the publication *Wurreker*, which is a joint initiative between VAEAI and the Department of Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment. This partnership ensures the delivery of training and support services to the Victorian Koorie community with links to desirable employment and other community outcomes. Again, there are a number of regional committees that are chaired by the LAECGs. Their role is to identify training needs and develop Regional Training Plans. These regional plans inform VAEAI's Statewide Training Plan, which advises the Victorian government of the overall needs of the Koorie community.

VAEAI has attempted to coordinate meetings among the higher education Indigenous staff. In 2001 it hosted two higher education forums to discuss the Higher Education Review. Perhaps the only major criticism is about the higher education sector, where VAEAI might have a role in the seeming lack of pathways between VET and higher education.

Generally VAEAI has a high profile in the State and its consultative mechanisms are quite extensive. VAEAI was also involved in negotiating the KODE (Koorie Open Door Education) schools in four locations in the State. These schools are usually attached to other schools although they have their own Principals and staff. They cater for K-12 Koorie students. Therefore, VAEAI has been able to work with the State Government on a number of new initiatives.

It is noted that VAEAI receives most of its funding from the State Government and that accordingly its priorities are to the State Government. However, it has supported the

establishment of a national consultative mechanism or framework through which IECBs could work on national priorities.

The New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

The New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group has a similar consultative structure to that of Victoria. It is also an independent body. It has different levels of membership: full membership, associate membership (non-Indigenous members), junior membership and life membership. AECG membership is open to all Indigenous people. Associate members do not have any voting rights. The local AECGs, as well as the regional AECGs, abide by the same rules as set out in the NSW AECG Inc. *Rules of the Association*. The rules are very clear and they set out the responsibility and obligations of the office bearers and could provide a good model for other IECBs. It has membership on a number of Department of Education steering committees including the otitis media program, teacher education and the Board of Studies. It also sits on the IESIP Monitoring Committees. Local AECGs have some advisory involvement in school programs.

The partnership agreement between the NSW AECG Inc. and the NSW Department of Education and Training is set out in a document called, *Securing a Collaborative Partnership into the Future*. This document recognizes the NSW AECG Inc as the peak advisory body on Aboriginal education and that their officers and members will work collaboratively to promote the educational achievements of Aboriginal students and that all students in NSW schools will receive education on Indigenous Australia. In addition, the NSW AECG is involved in the VET National Strategy and has established agreements with the University of New South Wales, University of Western Sydney, Sydney University and University of Technology Sydney, where the AECG has representation on the Higher Education Advisory Boards.

The NSW AECG has a strong commitment to training for its members. State meetings provide the opportunity to provide training in the regions and Department of Education and Training provide training on education issues to do with the Board of Studies, Reading Recovery (K-Years 1 and 2). There is also a community/training package on the National Aboriginal Education Policy. Training has also been provided to treasurers on the GST. Training of teachers is provided in consultation with the AECG. A main area of training involves IESIP funding as AECG members at the regional and local levels are often on IESIP Monitoring Committees and therefore, they must have good knowledge of this area.

Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body (QIECB)

The Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body (QIECB) comprises 13 Indigenous members (including the Chairperson), representing various education sectors and regions including:

- schools
- the Creche and Kindergarten Association
- higher education
- training
- Townsville
- Torres Strait Islands
- Eastern side of the Cape
- Western side of the Cape
- Mt Isa
- South-west Queensland

The QIECB secretariat is located in the Queensland department of education. Membership to the QIECB is based on Ministerial appointments. The appointment process has involved calling for 'Expressions of Interest' in the major daily newspapers. The Chairperson of the Queensland Government Indigenous Advisory Board, the Queensland Education Minister's Office, and the Chairperson of QIECB are involved in the selection process. A major requirement for appointment to the QIECB is that members have established networks. It is the intention of the QIECB to represent all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the mainland and in the Torres Strait.

The focus of QIECB's activities is on the provision of policy and strategic advice, rather than involvement in operational matters. Recently research reports include: Factors supporting/inhibiting 12 years of schooling; Pre-school experience; Teacher education; Standard Australian English and Indigenous languages; Cultural awareness and reporting; Community capacity building; and Independent Kindergarten. The research appears to benefit the State, but could have broader relevance to policy makers and education practitioners in other States. The research papers have been provided to both the Commonwealth and State Ministers for education. Further research is planned and the Queensland department of education has had a role in monitoring role in relation to research.

At the State level there is a cooperative relationship between QIECB and DEST and regular meetings occur. DEST has also used the IECB as a facilitator on a regular basis.

Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Support Unit (WA)

One of three Indigenous Support Units funded by the Commonwealth is the Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Support Unit which was established in 1990 to address the collective concerns of the Aboriginal/Indigenous Schools. It is sponsored by the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia. The ISU represents some 15 Indigenous independent community schools located across the State often in remote and rural locations with governing bodies comprising Indigenous elders and family members of the respective communities. The ISU has two coordinators, one in Perth and the other in Broome. The ISU provides a diverse range of services to community schools with the aim of overcoming diseconomies of scale and meeting the professional needs of the schools that arise because of their physical, professional and social isolation.

The Broome ISU Coordinator provides a range of services to the Kimberley and Pilbara community schools, working with school principals and school governing bodies including advising on educational, corporate, human resource, administration and industrial relations matters; referrals to other sources of advice and resources; acting as conduit between schools, funding bodies and government agencies; coordinating the delivery of the scaffolding program in the community schools; assisting community schools to develop policies on education and corporate/administrative matters; representing community schools' interests at policy forums; providing professional development and training for parents and community members; providing a desktop publishing service to community schools; facilitating the provision of information to community schools and enhancing the profile of the community schools.

The ISU's main focus is the tracking of students under the Achieving Attendance, Key Element 1 of the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS) and the Scaffolding Literacy Intervention Project operating in 14 Aboriginal community schools in Western Australia and introduced to the Kimberley Community Schools in 2001-02.

8. Outcomes of the Review Consultations

The IECBs and ISUs are often required to be represented on every Indigenous education-related committee, and required to provide advice or comment on a range of issues, which are often outside the scope and expertise of the organization and in some cases the individual. Like other Indigenous organizations, some committee members, and staff of IECBs and ISUs do not have clear understandings of the roles, responsibilities and the legal obligations required of them. They often work in isolation and therefore are not able to measure their own progress or lack of

progress constructively. Equally important and in many instances, their host or funding bodies do not always ensure that personnel within these units have access to adequate staff development facilities.

At the same time however, the staff and committee members of IECBs and ISUs were found to be hard working dedicated people who are committed to improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous people. They are also extremely frustrated because they are being continuously designated to deal with administrative and bureaucratic matters such as resolving disputes between parents, students and teachers. They have asserted that these are time consuming activities that get them so bogged down that they are unable to get on with dealing with policy issues. Consequently many members of IECBs and ISUs felt they were not contributing to major policy formulation and decision-making in Indigenous education.

The review team found that the IECBs and ISUs clearly reflected the enormous amount of voluntary work undertaken by Indigenous people to provide better outcomes in education for their people. This is the kind of information that is never publicized or acknowledged. The review team found there is an overwhelming view that IECBs and ISUs are important. However, the current structures do not adequately address the major education policy issues in the States and Territories, nor is there significant information flowing to the Commonwealth Government other than via the DEST Agreements. Consequently, there is a need to reform the current structures to enable these bodies to operate more efficiently and more effectively.

In most States and Territories regional areas had little, if any knowledge of IECBs and their activities. Similarly, there was confusion about the role of ISUs and their activities. Generally, committee members were unclear about their roles and responsibilities. The review team found that the orientation and capacity building of committee members was clearly lacking.

In situations where IECB Committee members are appointed by State and Territory governments, the review team found there was a lack of transparency in regards to the criteria for appointment. In some cases, there was a strong view that Committee members did not always have expertise within the education field or possess appropriate education qualifications, nor are they able to represent regional and sector interests.

The membership issue was further complicated by the Government's use of the term 'community person'. The review team was advised that there seems to be an emphasis by Governments for community representation that draws a distinction between Indigenous people who possess qualifications, work in senior positions within the public service and other agencies and

Indigenous people without any formal qualifications. This distinction by governments has served to marginalize those Indigenous people with qualifications and skills on the basis they are not 'community people'. The review team was informed that there is a need to 'educate' Government agencies that Indigenous people belong to, and come from a community (or communities) irrespective of their qualifications and positions in mainstream organizations.

It appears that the lack of funding hampers the IECBs to undertake consultations in the regions. It also hampers the infrastructure of IECBs to deal with the administrative issues that arise out of the consultations. The difficulty in terms of funding is the fact that a number of IECBs are not guided by rules and regulations or a set agenda of priorities, which should be outlined in their strategic plans. It is understandable that IECBs are pulled in all directions to deal with every problem in relation to Indigenous education such as resolving parent/school conflicts, dealing with requests for a school bus or facilitating cross-cultural training sessions for teachers. It is very difficult to cost the type of work that IECBs undertake, particularly when most of the work is voluntary.

Some of the major concerns that were raised with the review team in terms of the current situation of IECBs and ISU are:

- IECBs and ISUs tend to lack direction and focus because they are involved in a broad range of education activities and programs;
- IECBs and ISUs are reactive, rather than proactive;
- IECB and ISU Committee members and staff are often frustrated with the restraints placed on them, particularly at the State and Territory Government level;
- State and Territory Governments are in general benefiting from IECBs and ISUs in that they are getting advice from the Indigenous community at little cost to them;
- overall, IECBs and ISU are not scrutinizing Government education policies;
- there is not enough attention paid to the educational outcomes of Indigenous students;
- IECB and ISU Committees and staff members are in need of training in regards to their roles and responsibilities;
- DEST Agreements are too broad and do not reflect educational issues at state level; and
- DEST Agreements are not aligned to the MCEETYA eight priority areas.

In general, the review team felt the Commonwealth is not getting 'value for money' because there is a lack of advice from the IECBs or ISUs going to the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training. The review team proposes the following three models that could facilitate advice

from IECBs and ISUs to the Commonwealth Government and help to develop a more coordinated approach to developing strategic directions.

The first is the establishment of a national body, similar to the old NAEC structure. All IECB Chairs as well as other representatives (to be defined) would be members of this body. It would be responsible for providing advice on the educational needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the appropriate methods and strategies for meeting those needs. This could involve monitoring existing policies and programs, developing new policies and programs, promoting and undertaking investigations, reviews and studies.

The second suggestion is to adapt a model of consultation similar to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – NGO consultations on Human Rights which are held twice yearly in Canberra, usually in February and August. The consultations are held over two days and during this period discussions are held with the Minister for approximately 1.5 – 2 hours.

The third option is the establishment of a national coordinated consultative framework to facilitate collaboration between the IECBs, the State and Territory governments and the Commonwealth. This framework could be based on the arrangements that some IECBs, such as VAEAI currently has with the Victorian Government. Obviously, further funding would be required for IECB Chairs to meet regularly.

IECBs and ISUs were founded on the basis of providing input to Government policies and programs as well as facilitating consultation with Indigenous people on key education issues. These foundation beliefs are still relevant today. However, there have been many changes in the political landscape since the 1970s and 1980s when these bodies were formed. The IECBs were seen as symbols of self-determination and self-management in the provision of independent advice on education issues to Governments at the State, Territory and National level. The level of independence and provision of advice has certainly changed over the years. All IECBs except for the ones in Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales are now part of the bureaucratic structures, and there is no longer an election process for committee members as they are Government appointments. This has led to the view that the appointed committee members have no mandate to make decisions on behalf of Indigenous people. At the same time, the review team would argue that while the election process is seen to be the most democratic means of appointment, this does not necessarily mean that those elected are necessarily representative of community views. Examples of such are evident in many Indigenous organizations including the ATSIC elections.

The issue of independent advice is also complex. The IECBs tend to have closer links with the State Government and in many cases have direct links with the State Minister for Education. The fact that IECB secretariats, with the exception of Tasmania, Victorian and New South Wales, are located in, and staffed by the State Government agencies results in closer links with the State Government even though they are funded largely by the Commonwealth. The fact that Tasmanian, New South Wales and Victoria are incorporated bodies does not necessarily mean they are independent from the influences of their respective State governments. They too, may be compromised by the fact that the State provides most of the funding to the Victorian IECB, the State Government in New South Wales provides the salary for the IECB CEO position, and Tasmania also deals directly with the State Government although due to its current position is highly dependent upon employees within DEST.

At the national level, the only advice provided by IECBs is through the DEST funding agreements, which focus on targeted outcomes. IECBs are required to report against three projects: a) their operations such as developing strategic plans, providing advice on the implementation of NIELNS and attending quarterly meetings with DEST; b) their consultations with the Indigenous community where they agree to convene and attend a specified number of meetings, forums and workshops; and c) their attendance at IESIP Monitoring meetings. Once advice is returned to DEST in Canberra, it remains in the contracts section. It was not clear to the review team whether there is a process for advancing the information from the IECBs to other sections of DEST, such as the policy area and how these reports inform DEST policy and advice.

In the current economic rationalist climate, there is an expectation that IECBs and ISUs be more effective professional adversarial bodies with committee members and staff having a strong understanding of all education issues at State, Territory and National levels. Certainly there is an assumed view that if educational outcomes are not improving, IECBs must take some responsibility. This was evident in the Northern Territory where the IECB was disbanded as result of the Collins Review, which found that educational outcomes in the Northern Territory were deteriorating from an already unacceptable low base, which was linked to a range of issues including long-term systemic failure to address this situation.²³

This section suggests ways to revitalize the IECBs and ISUs, specifically addressing:

- proposals on how Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECBs) and Indigenous Support Units (ISUs) could be more effective in the provision of policy advice to the Commonwealth Government;

²³ *Learning Lesson: An Independent Review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory (1999)* p1

- proposals for more useful consultation with Indigenous communities on key educational issues; and
- could a reformed structure deliver better outcomes?

The review team found there was overall support for improved coordination of IECB activities and directions, including through a national body and a number of suggestions were put forward as to how this could operate. There were a number of concerns regarding policy issues at State level that were not being addressed by a number of IECBs. Some of these issues include Abstudy changes, lack of funding in the VET/TAFE area for Indigenous students and a need to coordinate a national response to reviews on Indigenous education.

Independent Support Units

In relation to ISUs in Queensland, Western Australian and New South Wales, their reporting arrangements are via their DEST Agreements and through the State IECB, which has sector representatives (except in Western Australia) of independent schools and early childhood. The ISU's committee and staff feel they play a crucial role in supporting Aboriginal independent community schools and early childhood centres in improving their financial and human resource capacity and this requires some recognition at the State and Commonwealth level. A more suitable arrangement would be for ISUs to have a place on the IECB and on a national body if such a body was established. As stated above, ISUs do provide information on targeted outcomes as required under the DEST Agreement. However, as stated elsewhere in this report, these agreements do not capture what is happening at the local level.

Regional IECBs

Regional IECBs which are independent, but closely connected to schools, ASSPA Committees, TAFE, Higher Education institutions and other education providers within the region should be encouraged, similar to the regional IECBs in New South Wales and Victoria. The voluntary nature of the groups is dependent on the goodwill of local community members, however, there should be some support from the State IECB to assist these committees with their administrative costs such as petrol costs for traveling to meetings, postage, phone calls and some costs associated with venue hire for meetings.

Proposals for more effective distribution of funding across IECBs and ISUs

From what the review team can ascertain, the funding is loosely based according to the size of the state and territory in terms of its Indigenous population and the size of the IECB. From various reports it appears the lack of funding hampers the IECBs from undertaking consultations in the regions. It also means IECBs having insufficient infrastructure to deal with the administrative

issues that arise out of the consultations. The difficulty in terms of funding is the fact that many IECBs are not guided by rules and regulations or a set agenda of priorities which should be set out in their strategic plans. It is understandable that IECBs are pulled in all directions to deal with every problem in relation to Indigenous education such as resolving parent/school conflicts to dealing with requests for a school bus to facilitating cross-cultural training sessions for teachers. It is very difficult to cost the type of work that IECBs undertake, particularly when most of the work is in fact voluntary.

The review team feels that the issue of funding requires further discussion and review, particularly in regards to the proposal for a national body or coordination mechanism.

A funding formula could be based on the notion of equality of funding on a per capita basis. For example, states with the largest Indigenous population receive a bigger slice of funding etc. This funding formula would require IECBs to be more strategic in their focus as well as providing the opportunity for those states and territories to develop regional consultative mechanisms. It is also suggested that states and territories provide support in the form of funding so that IECBs can choose their own staff members. At the State level, funding could cover at least three to four staff members (an Executive Officer, a Research Officer, an Administrative Assistant and a Field Officer), as well as a full-time Chairperson which would be covered by DEST funding. State and Territory Government must contribute to the costs of IECBs as they are the immediate beneficiaries of the advice provided by these bodies.

Proposals on how ISUs could make a greater contribution to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for Indigenous students

ISUs could provide better outcomes for Indigenous students by developing strategic plans that set out goals and priorities and any relationships they have with the State and Federal Governments and the organizations they support (eg Early Childhood Centres and Indigenous Independent Schools).

The ISUs, in partnership with their umbrella organizations, could lobby for funding from their respective State governments. ISUs could also develop better pathways for Indigenous children moving from Pre-Schools to Kindergarten to Primary School. The Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Support Unit in Western Australia, for example could also provide information on student retention rates, completion rates and expectations of school leavers once they complete Year 10 at the independent Indigenous schools.

ISUs could also enter into agreements or MOUs with the governing committees and staff of early Childhood Centres and Aboriginal Independent Community Schools regarding the expectations of each other. This could include a number of visits, staff training seminars and governance training. Mutual agreements would set out clearly the relationship in terms of the expectations of both the education provider and the support service, which would ensure accountability.

The review team would also like to point out that this review is generic and perhaps ISUs may not have the same focus as IECBs. In that regard, it is suggested that a more focused assessment be undertaken of ISUs, especially in the area of Early Childhood by an expert who is more experienced in these matters.

Better arrangements where there is joint funding by State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments

The Secretariat of the IECBs that are located within Government Departments must also deal with issues of effectiveness because of this relationship. As pointed out in this report, the Executive Officer and support staff of the Secretariats are Departmental officers and are often called upon to undertake other duties. Consequently, the Secretariat does not have committed full-time staff. As stated elsewhere in this report, IECBs must have dedicated staff. It is therefore suggested an agreement between State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments be reached that covers issues such as that:

- State and Territory governments provide funding to IECBs so that they are able to appoint their own three to four staff members;
- all IECBs and ISUs have either a set constitution or a set of rules which guide and govern their functions;
- all appointments to IECBs and ISUs are transparent and that they are appointed on the basis of their expertise and ability to analyze government policies and legislation;
- details of Commonwealth funding and expenditure such as IESIP and funding to IECBs is made available to IECB Committee members and that these members also have input in to how this funding is distributed in the State and Territory;

Is the Commonwealth getting 'value for money'?

In general, the Commonwealth is not getting 'value for money' because there is no advice from the IECBs or ISUs at the Commonwealth level. However, as pointed out in this report, there are a number of reasons why this is occurring, one of the main reasons being that there is no formalized strategy in place for IECBs to meet directly with the Minister.

As stated in this report, the DEST Agreements require further discussion in terms of how they could facilitate better advice to DEST and once in DEST how this advice informs policy and advice to the Minister.

Alignment with the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS)

The review team found that ISUs are strongly involved in NIELNS and receive funds from DEST to undertake NIELNS projects.

All other IECBs have a monitoring role or an advisory role on NIELNS Steering Committees. The review team did not find sufficient evidence on IECBs' role in NIELNS and therefore, is not able to provide a more comprehensive analysis on the matter. However, comments were made by some IECBs that there are instances where education providers have protested about the participation of IECBs on NIELNS Steering Committees. This is perhaps an area that requires further discussion involving both State and Territory governments and education providers in terms of IECBs having a stronger role in NIELNS.

Examples of Best Practice

The review team found examples of good consultative model where local AECGs are independent but closely connected to schools, ASSPA Committees, TAFE and Higher Education institutions and other education providers within the region. Obviously, the voluntary nature of the groups is dependent on the goodwill of local community members. However, participation at the local and regional levels are encouraged through the support of the State IECBs who provide some funding to assist these committees with their administrative costs such as petrol costs for traveling to meetings, postage, phone calls and costs associated with venue hire for meetings.

Another example of good practice that the review team would recommend is the IECB that has *Rules of the Association*. The rules are very clear and set out the responsibility and obligations of the committee as well an explanation of each office bearer's position. The same rules apply to local and Regional AECGs.

9. Recommendations

1. A model that includes regional and local IECBs be encouraged, similar to the regional IECBs in New South Wales and Victoria. It is suggested they be independent but closely connected to Indigenous communities in schools, TAFE and Higher Education institutions and other education providers within the region.
2. DEST considers the way it advances information from IECBs to the Minister's Office and how these reports inform DEST policy and advice.
3. DEST considers establishing mechanisms to coordinate and guide the strategic directions of IECBs and ISUs and to facilitate better advice from IECBs to the Minister.
4. IECBs develop stronger collaboration and networks with relevant ISUs, where they exist in their respective States and Territories.
5. State, Territory and Commonwealth governments value and recognize the significant contribution that IECBs and ISUs have made to building Indigenous community participation in education decision-making.
6. That further consideration be given to establish a mechanism for obtaining advice and community input on education policy and practices in the Northern Territory.
7. The issue of funding for IECBs requires further discussion and review, so that IECBs understand the basis on which funding is allocated. It is suggested that a funding formula based on the notion of an equitable distribution methodology be developed.
8. The ISUs in partnership with their umbrella organizations actively seek funding from other relevant sources.
9. ISUs develop proposals for better pathways for Indigenous children moving from Pre-schools to Kindergarten to Primary School.
10. ISUs to enter into agreements or MOUs with the governing committees and staff of early childhood centres and Aboriginal Independent Community Schools regarding the expectations of each other.
11. That all State and Territory governments strongly consider committing funding to support IECB operations.
12. DEST disseminate a model set of rules of association to all IECBs.

13. That State Government appointments to IECBs be transparent and those appointed have the expertise and ability to analyze government education policies.
14. That further discussions be held between Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and education providers to determine a stronger role for IECBs in key government policy implementation.
15. That DEST consults with relevant Commonwealth Government agencies to raise awareness of IECBs and ISUs and to explore opportunities for improving access by IECBs and ISUs to their programmes that focus on improving Indigenous governance.

10. Conclusion

There has been significant progress in education of the past decade in terms of Indigenous participation in the education system and achievements by Indigenous students are often publicized in the media. In some respects the IECBs have been instrumental in these changes, however Indigenous people still lag behind the rest of the country as there are continuing concerns and failures in the education system. Therefore, it is crucial that Indigenous education remain in the forefront of policy debate in this country and IECBs must be prepared to meet the challenge of keeping the debate alive and making the education system accountable to Indigenous people. This review is part of the process of ensuring that the current structures are effective and able to progress Indigenous participation and outcomes in the education system.

IECBs have changed considerably since the 1970s and 1980s when they were first established. They were seen as symbols of self-determination and self-management. Their role was to provide independent advice on education issues to the State, Territory and Commonwealth governments, facilitate the involvement of Indigenous people in the education system as well as promote Indigenous culture and perspectives in the curriculum. It could be argued that IECBs and ISUs have facilitated this process as Indigenous Australians are much more involved in the education process since the 1970s – 1980s. However, educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians still lag behind the rest of Australia.

As stated elsewhere in this report, the political landscape has changed and IECBs and ISUs must demonstrate their accountability to the Indigenous community as well as accountability to governments in providing advice on Indigenous education issues. IECBs are much more bureaucratized than they were in the 1970s-1980s, and like most Indigenous organizations they are reliant on Government funding. What is missing today is the ability to be more strategic in getting messages to the Government that reflect the views and concerns of Indigenous people in

relation to education policy and practice. Educational outcomes for Indigenous students are critical and IECBs and ISUs have an important role in facilitating the involvement of Indigenous people in improving the current situation.

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Appendix A

Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies

Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc	New South Wales
Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEI)	Victoria
Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body (QIECB)	Queensland
South Australian Education and Training Advisory Committee	South Australia
Western Australia Aboriginal Education Training Council (AETC)	Western Australia
Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Association (TAEA)	Tasmania
ACT Indigenous Education Consultative Group	Australian Capital Territory

Indigenous Support Units

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Sector Advisory Group (ATSIECSAG) Incorporated	New South Wales
Dhagun-Gur Indigenous Early Childhood Unit sponsored by The Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland	Queensland
Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Support Unit (AICSSU)	Western Australia

Appendix B

List of Government Departments and Community Organizations consulted for this review.

- Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST)
- State Education Departments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Units.
- TAFE
- State Aboriginal Education, Employment and Training Councils
- ATSIC Chairpersons and Regional Councilors
- ATSIC Staff.
- Torres Strait Regional Authority
- Torres Strait Island High School
- Catholic Education, Tasmania
- Department of State Aboriginal Affairs, South Australia
- Indigenous Directors and Staff at: University of South Australia, University of Adelaide, Edith Cowan University, Curtin University, University of Tasmania, University of Melbourne, Monash University, RMIT, University of Ballarat.
- Aboriginal Education and Training Council of Western Australia
- Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.
- South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee (SAAETAC)
- Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Association
- New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
- Queensland
- Association of Independent Schools of WA and Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Support Unit (WA)