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Department of Finance and Deregulation

Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs)



July 2009

Performance Audit of The Sporting Chance Program

Office of Evaluation and Audit
(Indigenous Programs)

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COVER IMAGE

Tingari Dreaming at Walukurtitje

2001

Linda Syddick Napaltjarri (c. 1937 -)

Acrylic on Canvas

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Contents

ABBREVIATIONS	ii
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS	1
Executive Summary	2
Recommendations	5
BACKGROUND	7
1. Overview	8
AUDIT FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS	11
2. Policy Context	12
3. Program Overview	16
4. Program Objective and Performance Measurement Framework	22
5. Program Performance	33
6. Program Management	46
APPENDIX	61
Appendix A – Sporting Chance Program – School-Based Sports Academies	62

Abbreviations

AFL	Australian Football League
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
IEP	Indigenous Education Program
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NIELNS	National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy
NRG	National Reference Group
OEA	Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs)
SRA	Supplementary Recurrent Assistance



Summary and Recommendations

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The Sporting Chance Program

1. The Sporting Chance Program, administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), aims to use sport as a vehicle to increase the level of engagement of Indigenous students in school and to improve their educational outcomes. The program was announced in the 2006–07 Budget with funding of \$19.6 million over four years through to 2009–10. The program has two elements: school-based sports academies (\$13.5 million) and education engagement strategies (\$4.3 million).
2. At the time of the audit fieldwork, the program had funded the establishment of 24 school-based sports academies for Indigenous secondary students who are at risk of not completing their schooling. The objective of the academies is to improve educational outcomes of participants by developing and implementing educational programs in partnership with schools. When announced the program was expected to provide support for 1700 students in 20 academies by the end of 2009. By semester one 2008, 24 academies were being funded and were reaching 1807 students.¹
3. Since December 2008, the Australian Government has announced an additional \$20 million in funding over 2009–12 for the development of additional school-based sports academies. It is expected that this additional funding will extend the reach of these academies to around 4,400 students.²

Audit objective

4. The objective of the performance audit was to assess the performance of academies funded under the Sporting Chance Program and DEEWR's management of the program. The audit did not assess the performance of the program's education engagement strategies component as this did not commence until 2008.

¹ This figure represents student participation in the first semester of 2008; the most up to date figures available at the date of audit fieldwork.

² Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *\$10 million to expand the Sporting Chance Program*, media release 12 May 2009, viewed 20 May 2009.

Executive Summary

Key Findings

Program objectives and performance measurement framework

5. There are opportunities to revise the program's objective to better reflect the outcomes which the Sporting Chance Program can reasonably be expected to achieve and to facilitate effective measurement of program performance. The program's performance measurement framework could be improved by revising the current suite of performance indicators and developing new indicators so that they are relevant and adequately measure progress towards achieving program objectives. This should be supported by baseline data and performance targets to facilitate the assessment of future performance and quantify the desired level of improvement.

Program performance

6. Academies aim to encourage positive educational outcomes for students through a mix of approaches to program delivery, including participation in sporting activities, intensive mentoring, in-class teaching and separating and elevating students from their peers using an 'exclusive academy' model. Schools praised the program for its positive focus, rather than a remedial approach focusing on students' disadvantage and for the nature of the support that it provides for these students, which often schools and their families may not be able to provide.
7. The audit concluded that most of academies' efforts are directed toward achieving intermediate and readiness to learn outcomes – that is, helping students to come to school and improving their behaviour and engagement in the classroom. Owing to the limited performance data available, OEA was unable to comment on the extent to which academies have improved students' enrolment, attendance, retention and engagement. However, there is consistent anecdotal evidence from schools that the program has a positive impact on the educational experiences of Indigenous students.

Program management

8. DEEWR has achieved positive results in mobilising the program and has exceeded targets for the rollout of new academies. Academies demonstrated a high level of regard for the support provided by DEEWR.
9. Current management arrangements are focused on program mobilisation and characterised by intensive administration of individual funding agreements. These arrangements may not be sustainable given the small size of the program management team, the recent commencement of the program's education engagement strategies component and the recent expansion of the academies element of the program.

Executive Summary

10. There are also a range of areas where the program's business processes could be improved and streamlined, including the implementation of an appropriate grant management framework and grant management system. DEEWR will also need to revisit key program risks, including third party funding arrangements, improve monitoring and evaluation arrangements and take a more active role in forming strategic partnerships.

Recommendations

11. OEA made six recommendations relating to the management and implementation of the Sporting Chance Program.

Summary of agency response

12. DEEWR welcomes this report. It is a valuable resource for informing program management and for planning the future direction of the Sporting Chance Program. It will inform DEEWR's efforts to continuously improve program management and through this, the outcomes of the program, to ensure they are aligned with key issues identified in the recommendations and within the body of the report. OEA has acknowledged in the report that DEEWR has achieved positive results, exceeding targets and developing strong and supportive relationships with providers.

Executive Summary

Recommendations

Recommendation No. 1

OEA recommends that DEEWR review the appropriateness of the program's objective, as described in the program guidelines, to ensure:

- it aligns with the Government's original intention for the program, where this remains appropriate, and
- it clearly articulates what outcomes the program can reasonably be expected to achieve.

Recommendation No. 2

OEA recommends that DEEWR review the program's performance measurement framework. In particular, DEEWR should:

- revise key performance indicators
- establish baseline data and data sources for indicators
- establish targets to quantify the desired level of improvement, and
- develop evaluation approaches to assess the longer-term impacts of the program.

Recommendation No. 3

OEA recommends that DEEWR investigate the reasons for the low level of female participation in the Sporting Chance Program, including developing an understanding of Indigenous female students' needs and motivations and whether these can be met within the framework of the Sporting Chance Program through specific strategies or through separate programs.

Recommendation No. 4

OEA recommends that DEEWR revisit its assessment of the Sporting Chance Program's risks, including the risks associated with third-party funding arrangements, and ensure that all key program risks have been identified and assigned appropriate risk ratings and risk mitigation or monitoring strategies. DEEWR should review whether the use of the term 'unacceptable' within the program's risk methodology has impeded the appropriate classification and management of risks.

Recommendation No. 5

OEA recommends that DEEWR integrate the Sporting Chance Program into an appropriate departmental grant management framework and streamline business processes to support the effective and efficient implementation and ongoing management of the Sporting Chance Program. Opportunities to implement local level monitoring should be considered, particularly now that the program has grown.

Executive Summary

Recommendation No. 6

OEA recommends that DEEWR improve coordination and strategic partnerships between the Sporting Chance Program's management and other areas of the Department, with academy funding partners, including state and territory governments, and with other Australian Government bodies in order to improve program effectiveness and avoid duplication of effort.



Background

Background

1. Overview

Introduction

- 1.1 The Sporting Chance Program was announced in the 2006–07 Budget.³ The program received total funding of \$19.6 million over four years, through to 2009–10. It sits within the overarching Indigenous Education Program (IEP) and is currently administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).⁴
- 1.2 The objective of the program is to use sport as a vehicle to increase the level of engagement of Indigenous students in school and to improve their educational outcomes. It has two elements: school-based sports academies and education engagement strategies.
- 1.3 The main element, representing \$13.5 million in program funds, has funded the establishment of 24 school-based sports academies for Indigenous secondary students who are at risk of not completing their schooling. The objective of academies is to improve educational outcomes of participants by developing and implementing educational programs in partnership with schools. When announced the program was expected to provide support for 1700 students in 20 academies by the end of 2009. By 2008, 24 academies were being funded and were reaching 1807 students.⁵
- 1.4 The second and smaller element of the program, education engagement strategies, representing \$4.3 million in program funds, only commenced in 2008. It is supporting five projects in rural and remote regions of the Northern Territory, South Australia, Western Australia and New South Wales to develop and deliver, in collaboration with local schools and Indigenous communities, sport and recreation-based strategies that will encourage the educational engagement of approximately 5000 Indigenous primary and secondary school students.
- 1.5 Program funds are appropriated through Section 11 of the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000*. This is a special appropriation which funds DEEWR's suite of programs under the IEP. At the time of the audit, the appropriation covered the 2005–08 school year quadrennium.

³ Australian Government, *Budget Measures 2006–07*, Budget Paper No 2, Canberra, p. 202.

⁴ Prior to the creation of DEEWR in December 2007, the program was administered by the former Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

⁵ This figure represents student participation in the first semester of 2008; the most up to date figures available at the date of audit fieldwork.

Background

Audit objective

- 1.6 The objectives of the performance audit were to:
 - assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the DEEWR's management of the Sporting Chance Program and
 - assess the effectiveness of school-based sports academies' efforts to improve educational outcomes for participants.
- 1.7 The audit focused on the main element of the Sporting Chance Program, the school-based sports academies, because funding of the education engagement strategies element had only commenced in 2008.
- 1.8 The purpose of the performance audit was to form a view about the overall effectiveness of the sports academies element of the Sporting Chance Program, and to make recommendations about how program management and service delivery arrangements may be improved early in the program's life.

Audit scope and focus

- 1.9 The audit considered DEEWR's management of the program, in particular implementation and ongoing management of the program, including the program's performance measurement framework.
- 1.10 It also looked at the operation of the school-based sporting academies and their performance to date.

Methodology


- 1.11 The audit was undertaken in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards and used a variety of audit techniques to address the audit objectives, including:
 - structured discussions with key program staff within DEEWR's national office
 - an examination of internal and external program documentation and guidance material
 - an examination of key processes, systems and data relating to the implementation and management of the program, including testing of the files associated with ten grants
 - site visits to three academies to observe and hold discussions with academy staff and staff of eight associated schools (including representatives of state and territory education departments), members of academy advisory committees and students
 - attendance at the 2008 Sporting Chance Providers' Workshop organised by DEEWR
 - a telephone survey of a sample of academies and their associated schools. Six academies were invited to participate in the survey. Responses were received from four academies and their associated schools.

Background

- 1.12 The audit was undertaken by WalterTurnbull in conjunction with staff of OEA. The audit fieldwork was conducted over the period August to November 2008.

Acknowledgements

- 1.13 OEA gratefully acknowledges the support and assistance provided by DEEWR officers in Canberra, as well as the time and effort of academy staff, schools, state and territory education department representatives and other community members consulted during the conduct of the audit.



Audit Findings
and Conclusions

Audit Findings and Conclusions

2. Policy Context

This chapter provides some context and background regarding the delivery of Indigenous education assistance.

Indigenous education policy

- 2.1 While school education is principally the responsibility of state and territory governments⁶ and non-government education providers, the Australian Government provides supplementary funding to both government and non-government education providers to support their mainstream funding sources and to achieve specific education outcomes.
- 2.2 Up until recently, the Indigenous Education Program (IEP) was the Australian Government's major Indigenous education initiative, which aimed to deliver strategic interventions that would accelerate improvements in Indigenous student learning outcomes. Funding for this suite of programs was appropriated on a quadrennial basis through the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000*. For the period 2005–08, a total of approximately \$1.16 billion was committed to IEP programs and initiatives which targeted areas of greatest need, including regional and remote Australia where there are significant gaps in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and toward programs and projects that had demonstrated effectiveness in the past.⁷
- 2.3 Of the number of programs under the IEP, Supplementary Recurrent Assistance (SRA) was by far the biggest with funding of approximately \$507 million over the quadrennium. SRA provided supplementary per capita funding to education systems and independent preschool, schools and vocational education and training providers to focus their effort on the priority areas for Indigenous education of literacy, numeracy, educational outcomes, employment, professional learning, involvement and culturally inclusive curricula. The Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) was the second largest program element, with funding of \$214 million for the quadrennium. This program provided a range of additional tuition assistance for Indigenous students from primary school through to tertiary study. The IEP also contained a number of smaller programs, some of which were introduced subsequent to the beginning of the 2005–08 quadrennium. The Sporting Chance Program is one such program.

⁶ In 2006 about 87% of Indigenous students were enrolled in government schools: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2008, *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training*, 2006, DEEWR, Canberra, p. 37.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

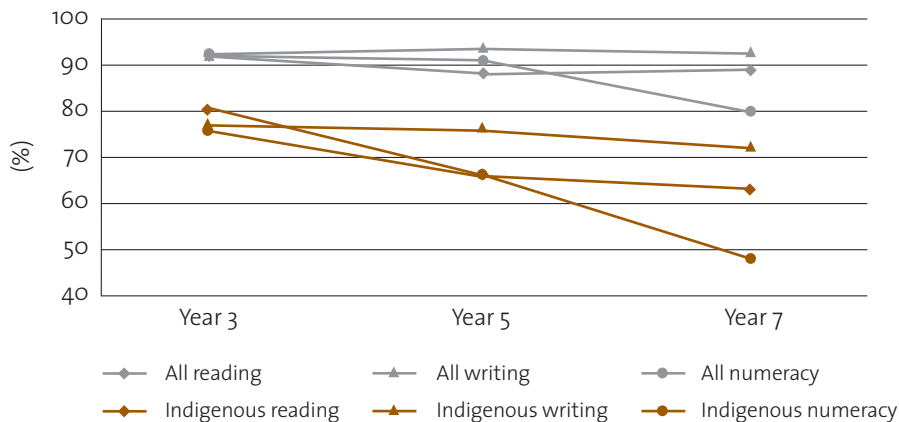
Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 2.4 The *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000* sets the legal framework for delivery of program funding and is based upon the key objectives of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, endorsed by the Australian, State and Territory Governments in 1990. This Policy sought to achieve equity in educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians by articulating 21 long-term, national goals under the following major headings:
- Involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in educational decision-making
 - Equality of access to education services
 - Equity of educational participation
 - Equitable and appropriate educational outcomes
 - Indigenous education outcomes and new policy objectives.

Education outcomes of Indigenous students

- 2.5 The recent *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2006*, found that the achievement of Indigenous students on the key measures for literacy and numeracy were well below that for all students at every year level.

Figure 2.1: Percentage of all students and Indigenous students meeting the reading, writing and numeracy benchmarks, by year level, Australia, 2006



Source: MCEETYA – National Report on Schooling in Australia, 2006

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 2.6 The 2008 *National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy* results released in December 2008, suggest that the real level of disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students may be even greater. In the Northern Territory, Indigenous students in Year 7 are one-quarter to one-third as likely as non-Indigenous students to be achieving at or above national minimum standards in literacy and half as likely to be achieving at or above national minimum standard in numeracy. Results also varied between locations. Students living in very remote areas have the lowest mean scores and proportion of students estimated to be working at or above the national minimum standards.⁸
- 2.7 The *National Report to Parliament* notes that ‘it is generally recognised that there is a direct link between improved educational outcomes and regular attendance (at school) and it remains an area where the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes are often stark.’⁹
- 2.8 In 2006, the median attendance rate for Indigenous students in government secondary schools was 79 per cent, compared to the non-Indigenous median which was close to 90 per cent.¹⁰ While there has been improvements in apparent retention rates of Indigenous secondary school students, large gaps still remain between grade progressions and apparent retention rates particularly through years 11 and 12.¹¹

⁸ Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2008, *National Report: Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy 2008*, Canberra: MCEETYA, p. 153.

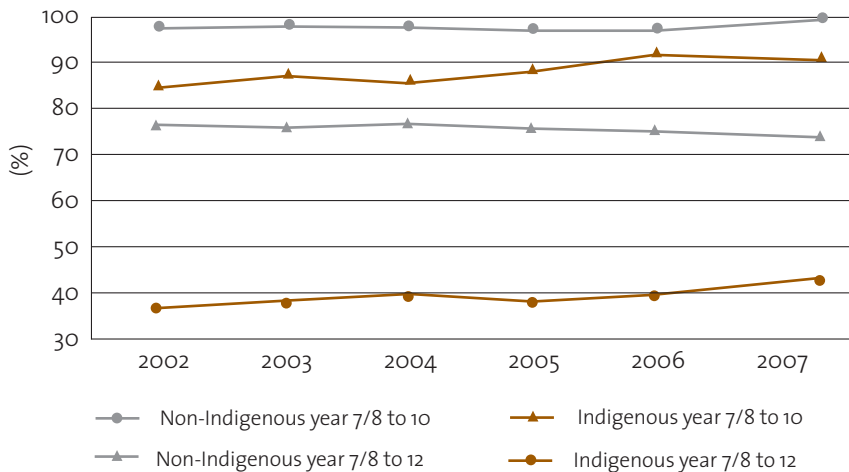
⁹ DEEWR 2008, *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2006*, Canberra: DEEWR, p. xxi.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 49.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Figure 2.2: Apparent national retention rates – full-time students



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics – Schools, 2007; p41.

- 2.9 Over the past year the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) has agreed to specific targets to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in a number of areas. The commitments in relation to educational attainment and employment outcomes are:
- to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous children within a decade
 - to halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020
 - to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.
- 2.10 The Australian Government and state and territory governments have been introducing a range of new programs and funding commitments to meet these targets. These changes will impact upon the suite of programs funded under IEP. Many will not be funded past 2008–09.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

3. Program Overview

This chapter provides some context and background regarding the delivery of the Sporting Chance Program.

Background

- 3.1 The Sporting Chance Program was introduced in the 2006–07 Australian Government Budget, with funding of \$19.6 million over four years to establish 20 sporting academies for Indigenous students, operating in partnership with schools.¹²
- 3.2 The Government announced at the time that it was supporting the expansion of successful models of sporting academies that had been helping young Indigenous people to engage positively in sport and succeed in education and later life, citing the Clontarf Foundation's football academy approach in Western Australia as an example of such a model. An outline of the operation of the Clontarf Foundation's academies is at paragraph 3.6.
- 3.3 The Government indicated that the academies would engage both girls and boys in a range of sports and activities that would help build their confidence and skills and assist them to achieve better education outcomes. They would also develop strategies to engage or re-engage young Indigenous people in school, build self-esteem and life skills and help inspire these young people and their communities.
- 3.4 The academies were to be implemented in partnership with national and state sporting bodies that have strong affiliations with schools, and in collaboration with state and territory governments. Corporate and philanthropic organisations were also to be encouraged to partner in these arrangements. The Government expected that by 2009, 20 academies would be operating across every state and territory and covering 1700 students.¹³
- 3.5 Expectations of the program and academies' operations are outlined in the program's guidelines and funding agreements. The guidelines state that 'there is no single model for the operation of an academy and the Australian Government will not prescribe the design of academies'.¹⁴ It is apparent that the intention of the program was for academies to develop a local program to meet the needs of students in association with participating schools.

¹² Australian Government, Budget Paper No.2, Budget Measures 2006–07, Canberra, p. 202.

¹³ The Hon. Julie Bishop MP, Strengthening Indigenous Communities – A sporting chance for Indigenous youth, media release, 9 May 2006 BUD 12/06.

¹⁴ DEEWR, Customer Guidelines for Sporting Chance Programme: School-based Sports Academies, 2006–07 – 2009–10. Canberra.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Clontarf Foundation Football Academies

- 3.6 The Clontarf Foundation has been operating football academies for Indigenous males aged between 13 and 18 years since 2000, when its first academy was established at the Clontarf Aboriginal College in Perth, Western Australia. Since then it has established a further 13 academies in Western Australia and the Northern Territory.
- 3.7 The Australian Government has contributed funding for the operation of the Clontarf Foundation's academies since 2001–02. The Western Australian office of the then Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), and subsequently DEEWR, funded six initial academies through other Indigenous Education Program funds (including the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program, the Vocational Guidance for Aboriginals Scheme program and most recently the Indigenous Education Project – Non-Capital funding) up until December 2008. A further eight Clontarf Foundation academies were established under the Sporting Chance program between 2007 and 2008.
- 3.8 The Clontarf Foundation's football academy model operates in association with selected schools and colleges, and uses Aboriginal boys' interest in Australian Rules Football and capacity to demonstrate success in this sport as a means of attracting and retaining them in school. Academy staff act as mentors for the students, supporting them to stay at school and counselling them in discipline, behaviour, health, anger management and life skills. The schools remain responsible for the students' education. The academies also help graduates to find full-time employment once they leave school.¹⁵
- 3.9 The Clontarf Foundation reports success in its approach in the areas of attendance, retention and behaviour at school, as well as employment outcomes. In 2004, their academies had between 80 and 100 Indigenous students participating in each academy, with average school attendance rates of 78 per cent, average retention rates at school of 82 per cent and 83 per cent of graduates from the program achieving full time work.¹⁶

¹⁵ DEEWR, *Customer Guidelines for Sporting Chance Programme: School-based Sports Academies, 2006–07 – 2009–10*. Canberra.

¹⁶ The Hon. Julie Bishop MP, *Strengthening Indigenous Communities – A sporting chance for Indigenous youth*, media release, 9 May 2006 BUD 12/06.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

New program funding

- 3.10 In December 2008, the Australian Government announced \$10 million in additional funding for the Sporting Chance Program, under Closing the Gap commitments, for the Clontarf Foundation to extend the operation of six existing Western Australian academies beyond 31 December 2008 and to establish an additional nine academies in Western Australia and the Northern Territory by 2010–11.¹⁷
- 3.11 In the 2009–10 Budget, the Government announced a further \$10 million in funding over four years to further expand the Sporting Chance Program. This funding is intended to establish new academies with a focus on improving the participation and engagement of girls in schooling and funding for the Former Origin Greats to establish academies with a focus on rugby league in Queensland and New South Wales. This additional funding is expected to extend the Sporting Chance Program's reach to around 4,400 students, a 47 per cent increase in participants.¹⁸

Program objective

- 3.12 The Sporting Chance Program's objective 'is to encourage positive educational outcomes for Indigenous students (boys and girls) through sport and recreation'¹⁹ The program guidelines set out a range of possible educational outcomes:
- increased attendance and retention through to completion of Year 12 or its vocational equivalent
 - strengthened engagement with school and improved attitudes to schooling
 - improved general competencies such as teamwork, communication and planning
 - improved achievement across key learning areas
 - improved access to post-compulsory schooling options
 - greater parental and community involvement with the school and students' schooling.
- 3.13 The development of sporting skills and participation in sport are subsidiary outcomes.²⁰

¹⁷ Prime Minister of Australia, \$10m to Expand Clontarf Academies, media release 9 December 2008.

¹⁸ Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, \$10 million to expand the Sporting Chance Program, media release 12 May 2009, viewed 20 May 2009.

¹⁹ DEEWR, Customer Guidelines for Sporting Chance Programme: School-based Sports Academies, 2006–07–2009–10, Canberra, p.1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.1.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 3.14 The guidelines set a broad benchmark for such improvements, noting that a 'general overall goal to work towards would be to lift attendance, completion and achievement rates to levels comparable with non-Indigenous students'.²¹
- 3.15 The guidelines provide a broad outline of DEEWR's expectations of academies operations:
- the annual operating costs associated with an academy would be in the order of \$390 000, of which the Australian Government would in general contribute approximately one third; the balance must be secured from other sources
 - generally, there would be between 50–100 students participating in an academy
 - the program should target Indigenous secondary school students, both male and female, and particularly those deemed 'at risk'²²
 - each academy must operate in partnership with a school, entering into a formal arrangement outlining the scope and activities of the academy and having the approval of the relevant school or education authority
 - each academy should establish an Academy Advisory Committee, involving the school leader(s), local Indigenous community members, funding contributors and other relevant parties, and which provides guidance on the academy's operation and at a minimum discuss, comment on and note the academy's plans and reports prior to submission to DEEWR.
- 3.16 The program's funding agreements commit academies to deliver an academy on the basis of the details provided in their proposals, including the number of students participating, as well as to a range of reporting and accountability requirements.

²¹ Ibid, p. 5.

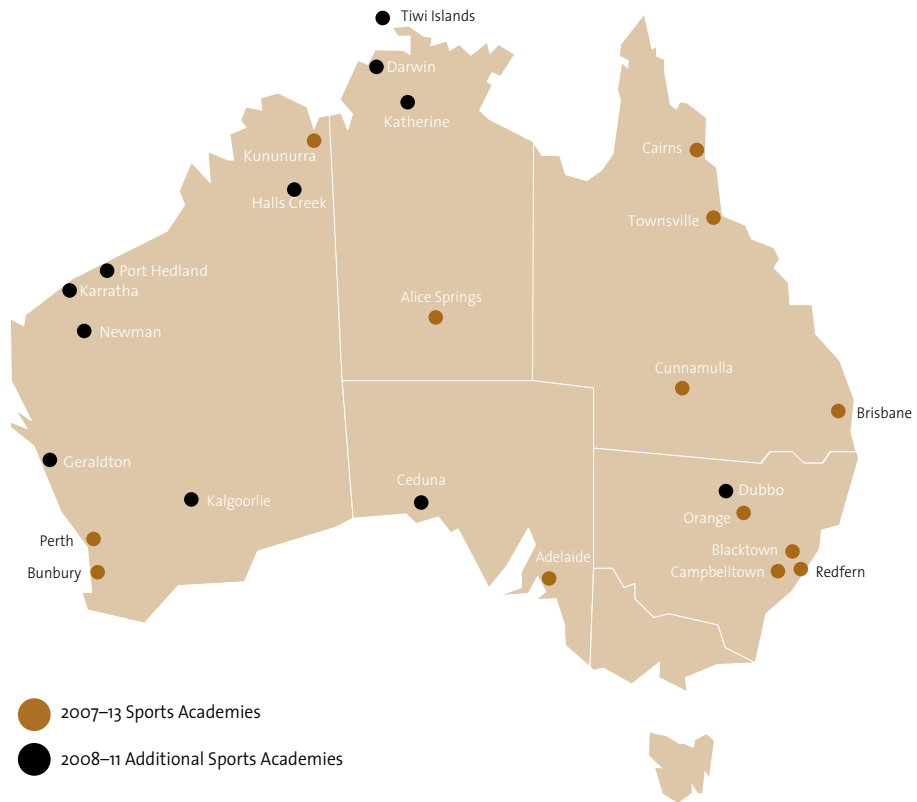
²² Ibid. The program guidelines define at risk to include: low attendance rates, literacy and numeracy skills below their peers or national benchmarks; increased likelihood of dropping out of school and increased risk of non-completion to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent; and social and/or behavioural concerns.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Program delivery arrangements

3.17 At the time of the audit fieldwork, the Sporting Chance Program was providing grants to 13 providers to operate 24 academies across Australia. Figure 3.1 illustrates the regions in which the academies are located. A detailed list of the academies, providers and their locations can be found at Appendix A.

Figure 3.1: Locations of Sporting Chance academies as at December 2008



Source: DEEWR

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 3.18 Most academies receiving grants under the Sporting Chance Program remain in an early stage of development and continue to refine strategies to address opportunities and challenges they experience over time. Thirteen academies were first funded in 2007 and the following 11 since 2008. Role Models WA, the Swan Districts Football Club, and the Clontarf Foundation were operating programs similar to current school-based sports academies prior to receiving Sporting Chance Program funding.
- 3.19 The Sporting Chance Program has led to the development of a range of different approaches to program delivery across locations. It is providing grants to education providers and private organisations to operate academies in urban and regional locations, in association with a single school, a group of schools within a local area or across a region. The academies are establishing individual programs to meet local circumstances and challenges in association with schools, other funding partners and communities.
- 3.20 The academies seek to address some of the socio-economic and educational disadvantage faced by Indigenous students. Each academy is dealing with students with a range of needs and facing different hurdles in relation to education, such as students who have difficulty engaging with and attending school or middle year secondary students who are at risk of not completing Year 12 or its vocational equivalent. Differences in needs can also arise between boys and girls, urban and regional Indigenous populations, students from remote locations and those from town camps.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

4. Program Objective and Performance Measurement Framework

This chapter discusses the program's objective and its performance measurement framework. Particular elements of performance monitoring that are examined include:

- performance indicators
- baseline data and performance targets and
- evaluation activities.

Program objective

4.1 The Sporting Chance Program was announced in the 2006–07 Budget with the following intention:²³

- establish 20 sporting academies for Indigenous secondary school students
- operate in partnership with schools
- use sport programs to engage Indigenous teenagers to improve their education and life prospects, including health and employment outcomes
- develop strategies to engage or re-engage young Indigenous people in school, build self-esteem and life skills and help inspire them and their communities
- be implemented in partnership with national sporting bodies, corporate and philanthropic organisations, and in collaboration with State and Territory Governments.

4.2 However, according to the program's guidelines, which were subsequently developed, the program's objective is directed towards achieving educational outcomes.

“The objective... of the Program is to encourage positive educational outcomes for Indigenous students (boys and girls) through sport and recreation. Such outcomes may include:

- *Increased attendance and retention through to completion of Year 12 or its vocational equivalent;*
- *Strengthened engagement with school and improved attitudes to schooling;*
- *Improved general competencies such as teamwork, communication and planning;*
- *Improved achievement across key learning areas;*
- *Improved access to post-compulsory schooling options; and*
- *Greater parental and community involvement with the school and student's schooling.*

The development of sporting skills and participation in sport are subsidiary outcomes.”

²³ Australian Government 2006, Budget Paper No.2, Budget Measures 2006–07, Canberra, p202; and The Hon. Julie Bishop MP (Minister for Education, Science and Training), Strengthening Indigenous Communities – A sporting chance for Indigenous youth, media release, 9 May 2006 BUD 12/06.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 4.3 The Australian National Audit Office suggests that:
*“Grant programs should operate under clearly defined and documented operational objectives. The operational objectives should be clearly linked to the outcomes set by government... The more specific the objectives, the easier it is to develop selection criteria, limit wasted applications and develop an appropriate performance framework”.*²⁴
- 4.4 The Sporting Chance Program’s objective should be aligned with the Government’s original intention for the program, where this remains appropriate. The current objective does not address the Government’s intention to improve Indigenous students’ life prospects, including health and employment outcomes and operate academies in partnership with schools. Where these intentions are no longer considered appropriate, DEEWR should seek to clarify the Government’s objective for the program and if necessary, formalise a new program objective in consultation with Government.
- 4.5 The program’s objective of ‘encouraging positive educational outcomes’ is also very broad and non-specific for a small program operated largely by organisations outside the education system. The objective does not make it clear how the program intends to ‘encourage’ positive educational outcomes and the specific improvements sought by any kind of encouragement.
- 4.6 The program would benefit from a more specific objective which lends itself to ready measurement and the development of targeted strategies and activities. The program’s objective should clearly articulate the specific impacts or outcomes which can reasonably be attributed to academies’ efforts, rather than making a general statement about encouraging educational outcomes supported by a range of diverse examples of possible longer-term outcomes. This approach should help DEEWR to set meaningful and measurable performance indicators, baselines and performance targets, and assist to focus reporting requirements and monitoring arrangements.

²⁴ Australian National Audit Office, Administration of Grants, Better Practice Guide; May 2002, Canberra, p.9.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 4.7 For example, the description of academies in the 'Overview' section of the program's guidelines appears to be a closer reflection of how the program operates. While it doesn't fully address the Government's original intention for the program, the description makes a clear statement about specific outcomes the program aims to achieve and the strategies to be delivered.

"school-based sports academies that are intended to engage Indigenous students (boys and girls) in secondary education and encourage positive educational outcomes including increased attendance and retention through to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent. This will be achieved by the academies through:²⁵

- *delivery of sports-related education Programs in a flexible learning environment;*
- *promotion of pride and excellence in the school(s);*
- *support for students' development of general competencies and life skills;*
- *provision of an encouraging environment to nurture students' self-esteem and self-confidence; and*
- *improved access to post-compulsory schooling options."*

Measuring program performance

- 4.8 Discussions with DEEWR staff indicated difficulties in establishing performance measures for the program and the collation of performance information to provide a useful picture of how the program and academies are performing.
- 4.9 DEEWR collects and collates the following de-identified performance information from academies through half yearly reporting requirements:
- the number of students participating in the program
 - school attendance rates for students participating in the academy programs
 - school retention rates from one semester to the next
 - a qualitative assessment of student's academic progress.
- 4.10 DEEWR also seeks to capture qualitative information about the successes and challenges faced by academies. Academies rely on schools to provide data on student attendance and retention and to provide a qualitative assessment regarding students' educational performance.
- 4.11 Although DEEWR demonstrated a good understanding of successes and challenges faced by each academy, it is not clear how this information may be used to measure and communicate project performance or the performance of the program as a whole. Most academies have not captured baseline data, and program guidelines and funding agreements do not set specific performance indicators or targets against which performance and outcomes can be measured.

²⁵ DEEWR, *Customer Guidelines for Sporting Chance Programme: School-based Sports Academies, 2006–07 – 2009–10*, Canberra, p.3.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 4.12 There are also questions about the validity and reliability of some data currently being collected by DEEWR. For example, it is unclear how qualitative assessments of academic progress is used to assess program performance and whether any changes in student's academic progress can be directly attributed to academies' efforts. In addition, the mobility of many Indigenous students presents problems for measuring the performance of an academy. The discontinuity of Indigenous students and the complex reasons for non-attendance at school is an issue which all schools raised. The de-identified nature of student data, meant that where a student moved between schools and academies, their re-engagement could not be identified.
- 4.13 At the time of the audit fieldwork, performance information had been collated and maintained internally by DEEWR and had not been reported externally.

Education-related performance indicators

- 4.14 In terms of educational outcomes and impacts, it would appear that academies are primarily supporting Indigenous students to achieve intermediate and readiness to learn outcomes, as defined in the *Final Report of the National Evaluation of DEST's National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (NIELNS).²⁶ Such outcomes include improved self-esteem, behaviour, interest in school and attendance.
- 4.15 The NIELNS report grouped education-related strategies and outcomes into the following classifications:
- *Intermediate outcomes* – necessary achievements, including social and behavioural outcomes, which are pre-requisites to achievement of readiness to learn or literacy and numeracy.
 - *Readiness to learn outcomes* – those conditions that have to be achieved so that a child is at school and is able to concentrate on and participate in learning.
- 4.16 For example, the report classifies increased interest in school and in material being presented as an intermediate outcome, while improved attendance, retention and capacity to learn as readiness to learn outcomes.

²⁶ DEST, 2003, *Final Report of the National Evaluation of National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*, report prepared by Hugh Watson Consulting, Canberra.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 4.17 The most recent *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training* notes that 'it is generally recognised that there is a direct link between improved educational outcomes and regular attendances'.²⁷ It would therefore seem reasonable to assess the program's impact on attendance, retention and completion of school to focus attention on specific, measurable and achievable changes that may be attributed to academies' efforts. The schools already provide this data to academies.
- 4.18 The program does not currently have any behavioural or engagement-related indicators, which could provide a measure of academies' contribution to intermediate outcomes. Schools and academies express a consistent view that the program is making a significant contribution to the behaviour and participation in school of students. In some cases, however, academies monitor suspension and expulsion rates for other funding partners. It is possible that this could be a useful measure of behaviour for some students.
- 4.19 Other impacts such as improved self-esteem and participation in class may be more difficult to measure. It is possible that these impacts are better measured through individual case studies.

Literacy and numeracy indicators

- 4.20 DEEWR presently collects qualitative information relating to students' educational performance as part of its regular performance measurement. However, OEA does not recommend setting a literacy and numeracy objective nor collation of such data for the program as part of short-term monitoring arrangements. Schools remain primarily accountable for literacy and numeracy outcomes of students and the benchmark testing of students over longer-timeframes, such as through the NAPLAN results, should provide more meaningful and reliable measures of students' progress than qualitative assessments over a six-month period.²⁸
- 4.21 It may also be difficult in the absence of reliable baseline data and the evaluation of academy programs to establish a direct causal link between the efforts of academies and students' long-term literacy and numeracy outcomes, compared to intermediate and readiness to learn outcomes.
- 4.22 This should not preclude academies and schools from setting educational targets for individual students and measuring as a partnership their own medium to longer-term impacts and progress with regard to each student.

²⁷ DEEWR 2008, *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training*, 2006, DEEWR: Canberra, p. xxi

²⁸ The NIELNS report notes that literacy and numeracy outcomes are 'usually assessed levels of literacy and numeracy and course completion or grade progressions'.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Other indicators of program performance

- 4.23 DEEWR collects data for the following input and output measures:
- Numbers of students assisted – while the intensive nature of the support provided to students under the program may mean that the program should not be judged on the basis of student numbers, it might provide a useful benchmark for comparing academies.
 - Australian Government grant funding per academy and per student – while each academy is operating in different circumstances addressing students with a range of needs, maintaining data on the utilisation of funding can facilitate an assessment of program costs or financial performance.
- 4.24 There are other important aspects of the program which are not currently measured that could provide insight into the program and the progress of individual academies, including:
- many academies claim to be achieving outcomes in terms of transitioning students between school, further education and work
 - the quality of an academy's partnership with the school – i.e. school support for the academy
 - academies' success in securing additional funding or support for their projects and developing partnerships with other levels of government and private sponsors
 - community and parental support for the program as well as flow-on effects such as increased Indigenous or parental involvement in the academy or interest around schools.
- 4.25 Much of this information is already provided as part of regular academy performance reporting for the program, but has not been formally identified as key measures of program performance. By formally identifying a few key performance measures for the program, DEEWR will be able to better streamline and focus performance reporting and clarify how academies' performance will be measured.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Setting performance indicators

- 4.26 There would be benefit in revising the program's current suite of performance indicators to ensure indicators relate to the program's objective and can be efficiently and usefully measured, both for external reporting purposes and program management purposes, including risk management and policy development.²⁹ The performance indicators should probably include some key input, output and outcome measures³⁰ and where appropriate articulate into broader performance frameworks in the area of Indigenous disadvantage, in order to facilitate meaningful and efficient assessments of performance.
- 4.27 In reviewing and developing performance indicators, DEEWR should be mindful that the program's funding model, which requires academies to secure funding from third parties, imposes an additional reporting burden on grant recipients. Academies are often required to report separately and at different times for each funding provider.
- 4.28 In a number of cases academies are applying other IEP funds to the operation of their academies. In most cases these funds are paid directly to them by other areas within DEEWR or flow through state or territory governments and have separate performance reporting requirements to the Sporting Chance Program. In developing appropriate performance indicators DEEWR should consider the performance reporting requirements and indicators for other funding partners, including other DEEWR or Australian Government funding, and where possible work together with other funding partners to reduce any administrative burden.
- 4.29 It is also important that the key performance indicators for the program are clearly identified in program guidelines and funding agreements so that it is clear how program and academy performance will be measured.

Setting baselines and performance targets

- 4.30 In order for performance indicators and the data collected to be useful, it will be necessary for academies and DEEWR to set baselines and specific, measurable and achievable targets against which academies' performance can be measured.
- 4.31 DEEWR advised that it had attempted to collect baseline data on attendance and retention for academy participants prior to the program. Since many participants had transferred from primary school to high school prior to joining the academies, this data was held with various primary schools. DEEWR advised it had proved too difficult to obtain this data, and that the first semester data for participants is being used as a baseline. The audit concluded that this was a reasonable approach

²⁹ Australian National Audit Office, Administration of Grants, Better Practice Guide, May 2002, Canberra, p27. The ANAO notes that it is desirable to have commonality for internal and external purposes to avoid duplication of effort.

³⁰ Ibid, p27.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

for new students. However, since many students participating in academy programs were not in their first year of secondary school academies should be required to provide baseline data for those students.

- 4.32 To date the program's targets have focused on outputs, including the number of academies rolled out and the number of students engaged by academies. DEEWR should consider setting attendance and retention targets for individual academies to work towards. Targets are typically expressed as a numerical change in a particular indicator; for example, a percentage increase in attendance rates for academy students. Setting targets highlights the importance of particular outcomes, and focuses effort on achieving and measuring those outcomes rather than simply maintaining a high level of general activity or 'busyness'. Given the multiple external factors affecting attendance, retention and behaviour, these targets should be challenging, but realistic.
- 4.33 It is important that targets are set following discussions with academies and schools, rather than being set in isolation using arbitrary benchmarks such as national statistics. There are significant variations in enrolment, attendance and apparent retention rates for Indigenous students across age groups, gender, states and territories and geolocations. These differences are often obscured in aggregate national and state or territory statistics. Any targets set may need to reflect the level of local disadvantage and any particular challenges faced by an academy and the schools it supports. For example, it would not be effective to criticise an academy that had increased attendance rates, but had not met an attendance target based on national mainstream attendance rates.
- 4.34 DEEWR needs to consider what will be the most useful and meaningful measures of results for academies. For example, it may be more appropriate for academies to compare their progress against the school cohort or regional statistics, rather than national statistics. It may also be necessary to provide data by sex, age groups and grade levels in order to make meaningful comparisons against other data collections.
- 4.35 Academies indicated that they were interested in feedback on performance and on lessons learned. Until key program performance indicators are explicitly identified in funding agreements and academies have provided appropriate baseline data and set targets to work towards it will be difficult to assess their performance in any meaningful way and to provide useful feedback.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Planning evaluation activities

- 4.36 The Sporting Chance Program does not currently have formal evaluation plans in place. As part of the program's performance measurement framework, DEEWR should commence designing evaluation activities to assess academy and program performance over the medium to long-term.
- 4.37 The NIELNS evaluation³¹ identified some of the issues surrounding the nature of small programs in Indigenous education and the difficulties with measuring and reporting on their outcomes and impacts. This evaluation could provide useful background for DEEWR in developing evaluation activities for the Sporting Chance Program.

Conclusion

- 4.38 The Sporting Chance Program's objective of encouraging positive educational outcomes for Indigenous students does not sufficiently address the Australian Government's original intention for the program and is very broad for a small program like Sporting Chance. The objective does not reflect the Government's intention to improve Indigenous students' life prospects including health and employment outcomes and does not make clear what it means to 'encourage' educational outcomes.
- 4.39 Refining the program's objective to better reflect the Government's intended objective for the program, and to clearly articulate program operations and the outcomes the program can reasonably be expected to achieve, would facilitate improved program performance measurement. Where the Government's intentions are no longer considered appropriate, DEEWR should seek to clarify the Government's objective for the program and if necessary, formalise a new program objective in consultation with Government.
- 4.40 The audit also found that the program does not currently have an effective performance measurement framework in place to determine whether the academies, and program as a whole, are meeting the program's objective. There are opportunities for DEEWR to improve the current suite of performance indicators so that they are relevant to the program's objective and are sufficient to assess program performance.
- 4.41 The program's performance measurement framework encompassed little baseline data by which to monitor future performance and no targets have been set for academies against which their performance can be measured. There is also currently no evaluation strategy in place to assess program management, performance and impacts, and to inform continuous improvement.

³¹ DEST, 2003, Final Report of the National Evaluation of National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, report prepared by Hugh Watson Consulting, Canberra.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Recommendation No. 1

- 4.42 OEA recommends that DEEWR review the appropriateness of the program's objective, as described in the program guidelines, to ensure:
- it aligns with the Government's original intention for the program, where this remains appropriate, and
 - it clearly articulates what outcomes the program can reasonably be expected to achieve.

DEEWR response

- 4.43 Agreed.
- DEEWR has reviewed and amended its Guidelines and reporting requirements as they relate to outcomes as part of the continuous improvement to program management. A review of the appropriateness of the program's objective is now appropriate given the implementation phase for a majority of the projects is nearing completion. This process will be initiated as part of ongoing program management monitoring.
- Paragraph 4.4: OEA state that 'The current objective does not address the Government's objective to improve Indigenous student's life prospects...' DEEWR considers that the Government's intention is being met by using sport to better engage children in their schooling to increase retention and Year 12 attainment. A direct consequence of this engagement through sport is likely to be better employment and health outcomes which will improve their life prospects.

OEA response

- 4.44 OEA recognises that there may be a likelihood that the Sporting Chance Program could lead to improved life prospects, including better employment and health outcomes but it is difficult to determine the contribution of the Sporting Chance Program to achieving these long-term outcomes. The program's objective, strategies and performance measures in place at the time of the audit were directed towards achieving and measuring educational outcomes rather than employment and health outcomes.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Recommendation No. 2

4.45 OEA recommends that DEEWR review the program's performance measurement framework. In particular, DEEWR should:

- revise key performance indicators
- establish baseline data and data sources for indicators
- establish targets to quantify the desired level of improvement, and
- develop evaluation approaches to assess the longer-term impacts of the program.

DEEWR response

4.46 Agreed.

DEEWR has, as part of continuous improvement, revised key performance indicators and the data sources for the Sporting Chance Program, and will continue to do so as the program progresses.

Establishment of baseline data has presented challenges because of the nature of the cohort and the indirect relationship between DEEWR and schools – the formal relationship is between the providers and the schools. However, DEEWR recognises the value of baseline data and will continue to endeavour to establish a process through which they can be consistently and accurately obtained. The success of this process will be dependent on agreement by schools to participate.

DEEWR will, in consultation with schools and following the collection of cohort data in semester 1, 2009 establish targets to better quantify the desired level of improvement.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

5. Program Performance

This chapter discusses the performance of school-based sports academies and their efforts to improve educational outcomes.

Assessing performance

- 5.1 The audit examined the performance information collected by DEEWR and held interviews with a sample of schools and academies (see paragraph 1.11) to assess the extent to which school-based sports academies contributed to the program's objective and met DEEWR's service delivery expectations (outlined in paragraphs 3.12 and 3.15).
- 5.2 Of the possible educational outcomes identified in the program's objective, the audit concluded that it was possible to make some assessment of the extent to which academies:
 - met student enrolment targets (both male and female)
 - improved attendance and retention rates, and
 - improved students' engagement in the classroom and overall behaviour.
- 5.3 The remaining educational outcomes listed in the program objective, covering improved general competencies and achievement across key learning areas were determined to be beyond the scope of available evidence. The program's performance measurement framework does not include the collection of performance information relating to these educational outcomes.
- 5.4 The audit also considered the extent to which academies built links with schools and analysed the key drivers of good performance and the risks that might prevent academies from meeting their goals.

How academies work

- 5.5 The audit observed that academies' efforts to improve attendance, retention and engagement can be characterised by three key attributes: the use of sport as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself; promoting and delivering the program as something exclusive rather than remedial in nature; and the extensive use of individual and group mentoring.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Sport as a means

- 5.6 Academies use sport as a hook to engage students, rather than as an activity in its own right. According to academy providers this approach has many advantages. Organised sport provides a useful framework for instilling and reinforcing appropriate behaviours and discipline for the students. Academies are often able to secure additional funding and in-kind support from different professional sporting codes, such as the support of local coaches to develop and deliver components of academy programs and to connect students to local sporting events or sporting networks.
- 5.7 Providers indicated that sport also helped to facilitate team building, improved school spirit and improved engagement with the local community or communities further a field through participation in sporting events. While many academies offer a range of sports for their students, some focus on one sport, such as Australian Rules Football or basketball.

An exclusive program

- 5.9 The academies seek to separate and elevate the students in order to promote positive change within their lives through improved self-esteem and confidence. Academies are required, through funding agreements, to make academy participation or membership an exclusive arrangement by requiring students to commit to certain behaviours in relation to attendance at school and respect for self and others and by rewarding appropriate behaviours and achievements.

Mentoring

- 5.9 The audit concluded that the most important aspect of the program for many students is the mentoring role played by academy staff and the relationships they develop with other students. Although the academies seek to reward good behaviour and school attendance, they also recognise the many challenges faced by most of these students in seeking to engage or stay engaged with school.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 5.10 The program relies heavily on the individual and often intensive mentoring or case-management of students to help them deal with their individual challenges and to connect with the academy in order to stay engaged with school. Some academy staff use the time away on academy excursions to help to connect with troubled students to encourage them to return to school, many help to ensure students can actually get to school by transporting them between home, school and academy events, and often, in association with the pastoral care staff of the school, they will seek to link students with other programs and services to address their specific needs.

Student enrolment targets

- 5.11 The following is an analysis of the available data for eleven of the thirteen academies which have been operating since 2007 (two have been excluded from the analysis because their data is not comparable) ³².

Table 5.1: Actual versus anticipated student numbers

Student numbers	2007	2008	Grant funding per student 2007	Grant funding per student 2008
Proposed	864	1250	\$1770	\$1546
Actual at June 2008	813	961*	\$1881	\$2011
Actual/ anticipated	94%	77%	106%	130%

*figures for the first semester of 2008 were the latest available at the date of audit fieldwork.

Source: DEEWR

- 5.12 Academies have not been able to engage the numbers of students proposed in their initial project applications. These estimates were generally prepared prior to the development of academy programs and appear to have been too ambitious.

³² Both academies operate very different service delivery models to the other eleven. One has struggled to provide data for all its participants and the other has experienced difficulty attracting participants to the level they initially proposed.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 5.13 The 11 academies analysed had proposed a 45 per cent increase in student numbers from 2007 to 2008 in their grant applications. In 2007, their first year of operation, they engaged 94 per cent of proposed student numbers. By June 2008 (the latest figures available at the time of the audit) they had only managed to engage 77 per cent of their anticipated student numbers. However, this did represent an increase of 18 per cent between years.
- 5.14 The level of student participation can have an impact on the average level of grant funding per participant. While the average level of grant funding per student in 2008 is seven per cent higher than in 2007, the actual level of grant funding per participant is 30 per cent higher than that proposed in applications because of lower actual student numbers. DEEWR advised that it monitors student targets and costs and had regular interaction with academies where there were concerns about performance, and in some cases had made adjustments to funding where there were significant variances between the numbers of students academies had proposed in applications and the numbers actually participating.

Low female participation rates

- 5.15 The level of involvement of girls in the academies has not been as successful as the program's original target of 50 per cent of participants. In 2008, girls represented approximately 30 per cent of total academy participants (it is important to note that the eight Clontarf Foundation academies only deliver their program to Indigenous boys).
- 5.16 Academies and schools have indicated that it is a challenge to engage and retain girls in academy programs and some have found it necessary to change academy activities regularly to maintain their interest. The academies were interested in opportunities to share information about strategies that may work for girls.
- 5.17 The issues relating to the involvement of girls in academies are likely to be complex. For example, the one girls-only academy, Role Models WA Clontarf Girls Academy, indicated that the lack of purpose-built boarding accommodation for girls from remote areas attending the school has led to a high turnover of girls at the school and consequently in their program.
- 5.18 The retention of girls in the program requires investigation. Research should be conducted into the needs of Indigenous female students and their motivations. It may be that specific strategies need to be developed for females, either within the framework of the Sporting Chance Program or through alternative programs.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Attendance

- 5.19 Most academies and schools consulted indicated that they were seeing an immediate improvement in attendance rates for students participating in the program. However, the audit found it difficult to quantify improvements in attendance resulting from the Sporting Chance Program other than anecdotally for a number of reasons.
- 5.20 Presently, there is little baseline data and no attendance benchmarks for academy participants or school cohorts against which to measure change. A lack of baseline data makes it difficult to track improvements in academy participants' attendance and retention over time. National data on attendance rates shows marked variations between states and territories, between urban and remote locations and between education systems.³³ The data from academies also displays variations which makes the usefulness of aggregation on a program basis questionable.
- 5.21 Students face a range of barriers to attendance which even the intensive mentoring practices typical of academies cannot necessarily mitigate. These include parental attitudes to schooling, remoteness and access, involvement in the justice system, health, housing, poverty and racism.³⁴ Accordingly, poor attendance rates may not necessarily be attributed to poor performance by an academy.
- 5.22 Schools run a range of other programs that could influence attendance, and so it may be difficult to separate the contribution made by Sporting Chance to improved attendance rates.
- 5.23 Most academies remain in an early stage of development and continue to refine strategies to address opportunities and challenges they experience over time. It may be too early to quantify the extent of the causal link between Sporting Chance and improved attendance and retention.

Strategies to improve attendance

- 5.24 The audit noted that academies employed a range of strategies to improve attendance rates.
- 5.25 *Exclusivity* – as noted in paragraph 5.8, academies seek to separate and elevate students from their peers. This strength-based approach contrasts with more traditional deficit-based approaches such as remedial classes or behavioural contracts that focus on punishment, which could act as a disincentive to going to school. Academies and schools consistently commented that this approach encouraged students to come to school so that they could take advantage of the opportunities offered to academy participants.

³³ DEEWR, 2008, National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2006, DEEWR: Canberra, p. 36.

³⁴ DEST, 2003, Final Report of the National Evaluation of National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, report prepared by Hugh Watson Consulting, Canberra, pp. 14–15.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 5.26 *Incentives* – academies offer students a range of incentives to encourage attendance, including membership of the academy itself. Examples of rewards include participation in a range of desirable learning opportunities, an academy uniform which students can wear to school (usually the only uniform apart from the approved school uniform that may be worn at school), being able to access an academy room with games and other facilities during breaks in the school day, and attending camps or trips to locations that students may not otherwise have the opportunity to visit.
- 5.27 The Clontarf Foundation indicated that it may use such excursions as a means for forging relationships with students and reengaging them in school. In many academies, students' failure to meet attendance expectations will often mean that students are not able to participate in particular excursions or, in extreme cases, may be suspended from the academy program.
- 5.28 *Mentors* – the audit observed that some academy staff went to extraordinary lengths to ensure students met their attendance obligations. Staff reported working significant additional hours to collect students from their homes, sometimes in more remote communities or townships, to bring them to school and to return them safely in the afternoon. Mentors discussed barriers to attendance with students and actively sought to develop strategies to mitigate these, including meeting with parents in their homes and linking students with other support services.

Overall attendance rates

- 5.29 The average school attendance rate for students participating in the 11 academies has remained relatively consistent at around 79 per cent across 2007 and the first semester of 2008. This is comparable with the rates reported nationally in the *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training 2006*. The Report found that in 2006 Indigenous attendance rates in government secondary schools ranged from 64 to 89 per cent with a median rate of 79 per cent. The Catholic system had a median rate of 89 per cent.
- 5.30 The audit found it difficult to draw any conclusions regarding academies' impacts on school attendance rates for the reasons outlined above, and in particular, because attendance rates vary greatly across locations within Australia and appropriate targets have not been set for the program.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 5.31 Average retention rates for students participating in the 11 academies between semesters one and two in 2007 were 72 per cent, and had improved between semester two in 2007 to semester one in 2008 to 82 per cent. There is not a readily comparable national statistic for retention rates, as the national statistics calculate retention on the basis of enrolments across Australia and in relation to grade progressions and retention across the secondary years. It is apparent that the rates generally decline over the years of secondary school and vary between states and territories, and between genders.³⁵

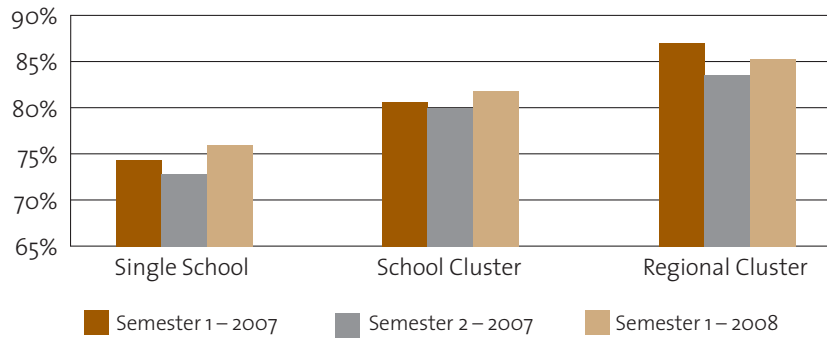
Attendance rates by academy model

- 5.32 In 2007 DEEWR categorised academies according to common themes in the delivery of academy programs: academies which operate within a single school, across a cluster of schools in an area, or across a group of schools within a region. Half of the academies operate within a single school and one third operate across a cluster of schools in an area.
- 5.33 Based on the data collected by DEEWR, there appear to be differences in outcomes across these models. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 suggest that the school and regional cluster models are outperforming the single school academies in levels of attendance and retention. There is an opportunity for DEEWR to investigate the reasons behind this difference in outcomes, which may provide useful information in relation to the challenges faced by particular academies.

³⁵ DEEWR, 2008, National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2006, DEEWR: Canberra, pp.43–47.

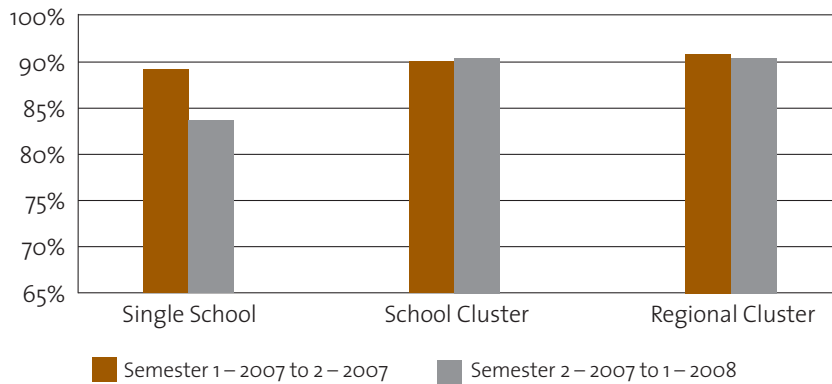
Audit Findings and Conclusions

Figure 5.1: School attendance rates for academy participants



Source: Attendance and retention data collected by DEEWR

Figure 5.2: School retention across semesters for academy participants



Source: Attendance and retention data collected by DEEWR

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Engagement and behaviour

5.34 Most academies and schools consulted indicated that they were seeing an immediate improvement in the behaviour of the children participating in the program, associated with improved self-confidence, participation in class and pride in their sport and culture. Some cited lower incidence of suspensions amongst certain students. Others cited cases of dramatic improvements in students' confidence, progressing from extreme shyness to public speaking in the course of a school year.

Strategies to improve engagement and behaviour

5.35 Academies adopt a range of strategies to seek to improve students' engagement and behaviour at school.

5.36 *Formal agreements* – in most cases students must sign an agreement to abide by a particular set of rules in order to participate in the academy. These rules usually cover expectations regarding attendance at school and appropriate behaviour.

5.37 *Using sport as a framework for teaching discipline* – sport appears to be providing a useful framework through which appropriate discipline and behaviour can be reinforced to students. Academies provided examples of how sport was able to serve as a development tool building confidence, motivation and self-discipline. Some academies use sport as a means of addressing poor behaviour, for example by withholding permission for students to attend particular sporting events. One academy visited during the audit used a tribunal system, similar to those used by the major sporting codes, to address issues of serious misbehaviour. The academy reported that academy membership and the continued support of their mentors and peers was so important to students that they often volunteered to accept harsher punishments than academy staff or the school might have handed down themselves.

5.38 *Building a sense of connection* – academies seek to improve students' connections with school by enabling them to demonstrate success through sport and link that to success at school, or just by being a part of something positive, healthy and which they enjoy and which is associated with school. Academies also claim that they are improving students' connections within school by helping them to build connections with their peers and to feel a sense of belonging. Academies provided examples of how improvements in students' confidence, behaviour and success in sporting events were also helping to improve their connections and reputations within local communities.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 5.39 *Intensive mentoring* – a common theme across many academies is the important role played by key academy staff as mentors or role models for the students. In some cases the level of support is very intensive and better characterised as individual case management. Academy staff, many of whom are respected athletes, former athletes or local community representatives, are providing focused one-on-one support for students, which can involve being a friend and role model; collecting them from home and transporting them to academy training, school and sports events and returning them home; and linking them into programs and services or opportunities to which they may not otherwise have had access. The audit concluded that this mentor relationship is an important element of the program.
- 5.40 *Providing other learning opportunities and assisting transitions* – although academies have a sport focus, they also provide a range of other learning opportunities for students, which can contribute to better behaviour and improved engagement with school. Such opportunities include cultural, leadership and vocational training, tutoring support, education and career planning and work experience opportunities. Others are looking at making connections with students in their last year of primary school in order to assist with their transition to secondary school, as well as supporting students to make a successful transition between secondary school and further training or employment.
- 5.41 *Building links with parents* – It is apparent that the academies could play an important role over the longer-term in building relationships with parents and increasing their involvement around students' participation at school. Academy staff indicated that they were gaining the trust of parents over time and many were seeing increased involvement and interest from parents around their children's sporting events and academy achievements. It is plausible that parents who are engaged with schools are more likely to encourage attendance and retention where they can see positive impacts for their children from school and where they are comfortable engaging with the school.

Links with schools

- 5.42 In order to deliver the program, academies must have close relationships and regular contact with the associated schools. In many cases academies have developed formal agreements with the schools regarding responsibilities and how they will work together.
- 5.43 Depending upon their own governance arrangements, many academies have established academy advisory committees which play a key role in development of the program. These committees will have a range of school and community representatives, often including representatives of the state or territory education authorities.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 5.44 Schools surveyed during the audit indicated their strong support for the academies and the program generally. It was seen as providing substantial additional support for students, but one that did not impose a management burden on the school. In general, the school principals were very supportive of the program and indicated that it was vital that the academies were considered an integral part of the school and given all possible support by the school. Many academies have secured time during school hours to work with students and some have been able to establish academy rooms within the school that students are able to use before school and during breaks in the school day. Others operate largely off the school grounds and out-of-school hours.
- 5.45 In most cases academy staff work closely with schools' pastoral care staff and programs, providing individual support for students who are experiencing difficulties in staying engaged with school and may develop individual plans for students often in association with the students.

Key success factors

- 5.46 The audit identified a number of factors that are important to the success of the program:
- Employing and retaining the right staff – students appear to respond equally well to Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. The critical attributes underpinning successful mentoring relationships were strong mentoring skills, a strong personal commitment to meeting individual students' best interests and an ability to collaborate with schools and the local community.
 - Successful integration and relationships with the school, including a key contact officer at the school.
 - Well connected organisations or key staff who can leverage other funding and support to deliver their programs.
 - Adequate facilities, including rooms, sports facilities or transport, in order to deliver the program.
 - The use of multiple strategies and incentives to retain students, including non-sport activities designed to build confidence, self-esteem and strong relationships. Multiple strategies serve to mitigate the risk that a student's diverse or unique needs will not be met by a single approach.
 - Effective links with programs and other services that can support students. Academies that recognise they are one aspect of schools' multi-faceted solutions to helping students were more motivated to secure additional development resources and maximise students' chances of success.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Key challenges

- 5.47 A number of common challenges for academies were also identified:
- Securing funding – including attracting funding or in-kind support from third parties, but also the security of ongoing Australian Government funding for the program and other Indigenous Education Programs.
 - Relationships with the school – in some schools there appeared to be a tension between the need to integrate the academy into the school and allocate sufficient time and teachers' concerns over gaining adequate access to students in order to meet formal curriculum requirements.
 - Transport costs – academies commented on the difficulty of covering transport costs associated with assisting Indigenous students to get to and from school, to sporting events and on trips away within their budgets. Transport was considered a critical component of meeting Indigenous students' needs.
 - Professional development – many academies cite identifying and funding professional development opportunities for academy staff as a key challenge affecting the quality of support provided to students and academy staff retention rates.
 - Reporting – this was a burden for some academies where they report to three or more funding providers at different times. Not all academies and schools find it practical or meaningful to report on the academic progress of students over a six month period. Schools indicated that meaningful measures, such as benchmark testing of student progress, were usually undertaken over a longer timeframe.

Conclusion

- 5.48 While it is likely that the Sporting Chance Program is improving the educational experiences of Indigenous students, OEA was unable to comment on the extent to which the program objective has been met owing to the lack of an effective performance measurement framework to facilitate measurement of program outcomes. The audit had to rely largely on anecdotal evidence from academies and schools as to the program's impact on students.
- 5.49 There is considerable support and goodwill for the program and academies' potential to improve Indigenous students' retention and outcomes in school, particularly within participating schools but also within their wider communities. This is demonstrated by the funding or in-kind contributions in many locations from private organisations and state or territory governments.
- 5.50 The audit found that most of the academies' efforts are directed toward improving Indigenous students' confidence, self-esteem and connections with school in order to improve their attendance, retention, and behaviour and engagement in the classroom.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 5.51 Most academies have established effective links with the schools that they are associated with and the schools are very supportive of academies' efforts. Academies and schools identified a number of common success factors and risks for the program, which could help focus academy and DEEWR's management efforts.
- 5.52 While many academies have not met the number of students proposed in their original funding applications, it appears that those projections may not have been realistic. Many academies remain in an early stage of development, refining their strategies to attract and retain students.
- 5.53 The low level of involvement of girls in the program requires further analysis and the development of appropriate strategies to ensure that their needs are also being met.

Recommendation No. 3

- 5.54 OEA recommends that DEEWR investigate the reasons for the low level of female participation in the Sporting Chance Program, including developing an understanding of Indigenous female students' needs and motivations and whether these can be met within the framework of the Sporting Chance Program through specific strategies or through separate programs.

DEEWR response

- 5.55 Agreed.
DEEWR has been aware of the gender imbalance of participants in the program and will address this through expenditure of funding allocated through the 2009–10 Budget to establish new projects focused on girls.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

6. Program Management

This chapter discusses DEEWR's management of the program, focussing on risk management, grants management, and building internal and external strategic partnerships.

Overview and achievements

- 6.1 The program operates in isolation from other programs within the IEP³⁶ and is managed centrally from Canberra. No part of the program has been devolved to regional offices of DEEWR.
- 6.2 At its commencement in 2006–07 the Sporting Chance Program was administered within the Indigenous Education Group of DEST. Since August 2008 it has been administered within the Indigenous Group, Employment and Strategic Policy Division of DEEWR. The number of staff administering the program has grown from an initial two personnel to the current level of five personnel.
- 6.3 DEEWR's efforts to date have primarily focussed on program mobilisation, involving the conduct of three funding rounds, the associated negotiation of funding agreements and the provision of individual support for projects in their establishment phase, particularly in relation to meeting their reporting requirements. They have also organised two annual workshops for academies to network and share messages about opportunities and challenges.
- 6.4 The program was initiated by conducting an expression of interest round in 2006, which sought to gauge the level of interest and capacity around Australia to deliver the program. On the basis of the feedback from this exercise, DEST proceeded to seek applications for two funding rounds, the first an open round in 2006, and the second, targeting rural and remote locations that had not been covered by the first round, in 2007.³⁷
- 6.5 During that time DEEWR has successfully negotiated with 13 providers to deliver 24 academies in New South Wales, Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia. The distribution of funding is broadly in line with original expectations, covering those states and territories with the highest number of Indigenous students and weighted for remoteness. Thirteen academies have been operating for nearly two years, with another 11 commencing operations in 2008.

³⁶ This includes the funding of six other Clontarf Foundation academies that were managed under other IEP funds by DEEWR's Western Australian office until December 2008.

³⁷ Three funding decisions were made outside funding rounds. Provision had been made in the program guidelines for such decisions.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 6.6 The audit noted that DEEWR achieved these results:
- while working in relative isolation from other areas of the IEP
 - in the absence of an appropriate departmental grant management framework
 - without full access to the Department's Indigenous education program funding and performance management system, INDIGO, and
 - with limited funds for travel to monitor and support implementation.
- 6.7 Given the small number of staff administering the program, the ambitious nature of the rollout targets and the short time-frame for mobilisation, DEEWR has achieved positive results.
- 6.8 The audit noted that, while efforts have been made to streamline aspects of the program's administration, the program's current management arrangements are characterised by intensive administration of individual funding agreements. There have also been areas of inefficiency in grant administration process that have added to the burden placed on the program area. At the time of the audit fieldwork these arrangements were not considered sustainable, with the recent commencement of the program's education engagement strategies component and particularly now that the program has grown.³⁸

Reviewing program risks

- 6.9 DEEWR undertook risk assessments in 2007 and 2008 in accordance with departmental risk management policies. DEEWR uses the RISKMAN system to collate risks, with further guidance provided in the Department's *Risk Management Manual*.³⁹
- 6.10 The audit reviewed DEEWR's risk assessments to identify potential gaps in the analysis and to assess the adequacy of risk ratings and responses. The audit identified a number of issues with the Sporting Chance Program's current risk management arrangements:
- DEEWR did not actively use the risk assessments as a tool to manage risk. While program staff displayed an awareness of the key program risks and advised that they did monitor them, these risks or monitoring actions were not necessarily reflected in the risk assessments.
 - the assessments did not identify the risks of not having adequate strategic planning or performance measurement frameworks and processes.
 - based on analysis of the program and discussions with the program area, the audit concluded that the impacts of a number of risks are understated.

³⁸ Program funding has almost doubled since the audit fieldwork was completed.

³⁹ DEST March 2006, Risk Management Manual.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 6.11 Under the risk methodology applied to the program, high impact risks that cannot be reduced by controls are classified as 'unacceptable'. OEA was concerned that the use of the term 'unacceptable' may have lead program staff to understate risks in order for them to be classified within an acceptable level.
- 6.12 In order to obtain a sense of the actual risks associated with the program, the audit analysed the risks associated with a failure to achieve or demonstrate achievement of the program outcomes and objective. This analysis identified a number of risks which should potentially be rated higher in the program's risk assessment and which may warrant specific management action or monitoring:
- *Program design* – to date, DEEWR has viewed the program as a pilot. DEEWR recognises that further work is required to refine the program's design and delivery mechanisms, including analysis of which models or strategies are most effective for delivering the program.
 - *Assessment processes* – the program has been in operation for a relatively short period. Since the program is in its infancy, the capacity of many grant recipients to deliver the program and secure sufficient funding is still being tested.
 - *Service delivery framework and processes* – the program is centrally managed by DEEWR National Office and largely reliant on decentralised delivery of the program by third parties. There is very limited scope to physically monitor projects and provide direct interaction with academies. In addition, funding has not been made available for physical monitoring or formal evaluation. If the program was to grow the current framework would not be sustainable.
 - *Strategic planning framework and processes* – there is no documented strategic plan for the program. To date DEEWR's focus has been on program mobilisation and grant management. A more strategic approach to planning is required that considers the medium to long-term goals of the program, the strategies and activities required to achieve program objectives, the indicators of success, and input from key stakeholders. A three year strategic plan would assist in focussing management effort and planning on key opportunities and risks.
 - *Performance measurement framework and processes* – DEEWR staff noted that they found it difficult to define and measure the program's core objective. The distributed nature of the program and the diverse circumstances of students pose a significant barrier to setting baselines and collecting and analysing meaningful performance information.
 - *Program resourcing* – the program relies on the ability of the academies to attract up to two-thirds of their funding (or in-kind support) from other sources and failure to do so would represent a major risk to the program's success.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- *Achievement of objectives* – while the program area’s intensive grant management processes may mitigate some risks associated with the delivery of the program, the program relies on third parties to deliver the academies. The academies as a whole are relatively new, and some are facing a range of challenges, particularly in the areas of implementation, funding support and continuity of staff.

- 6.13 These issues were rated as posing significant⁴⁰ risks to the program and warranting specific risk mitigation strategies. DEEWR should revisit the risk assessment for the program and ensure that risk mitigation strategies are developed for the above areas.
- 6.14 A number of these issues are explored in more detail elsewhere in this report. The risks associated with program resourcing was considered a key risk for the program and is discussed below.

Program risks – third party funding

- 6.15 The program guidelines provide a benchmark for the expected operating costs of an academy and indicate that the Australian Government’s contribution will be generally one third of an academy’s annual operating costs.
- 6.16 DEEWR has indicated that the funding contributions vary depending upon the individual circumstances of academies. Academies must secure the balance of funding from other sources, such as state and territory governments, schools, education authorities, sporting bodies, business and community organisations. Contributions may be in the form of funding or in-kind contributions, such as the provision of facilities, staff (or volunteers) and equipment.
- 6.17 The audit has identified that the potential failure of academies to attract and retain the balance of the two thirds contributions poses a significant risk to the success of the program and its sustainability. Another significant risk to the program is the extent to which some academies rely on IEP funding to make up the two thirds funding. In these academies, the funds flow either from DEEWR or through state or territory governments, with the result that DEEWR is directly or indirectly funding most of an academy’s operations, rather than one third. DEEWR does not appear to have a process to identify cases where other Australian Government funds were being applied to the operation of academies.
- 6.18 The risk associated with the program’s funding arrangements was identified in DEEWR’s program risk assessments as a moderate risk to the program. DEEWR required funding applicants to provide details of their project partners and the associated proposed contributions, along with evidence from partners of their intended support.

⁴⁰ This is not specifically defined in the Risk Management Manual, but requires a specific risk action plan.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

6.19 Funding agreements require grant recipients to secure other funding and in-kind contributions as outlined in their funding application and to document these other contributions in reports provided to DEEWR, as required under the program guidelines and funding agreements.

6.20 However, the audit found:

- the assessment of the consequence of the failure to secure adequate third party contributions potentially understates the impact on the program. DEEWR have rated the impact to range from minor to moderate.
- the assessment of the controls as highly effective overstates the effectiveness of the controls identified. While funding agreements require grant recipients to report on other funding sources, this is not being done consistently across recipients and explanations for variances between proposed and actual partner contributions are not provided. The Australian Government has limitations over its authority to require other funding sources to be reported and reviewed.

6.21 The audit concluded that this risk should be given a higher risk rating and warrants a specific risk management action plan because:

- academies' acquisition of two thirds contributions from third parties is a requirement of the program and in most cases will be critical for academies to achieve their objectives. Failure to obtain and maintain such contributions could have a substantial impact on the overall program, and may actually lead to the failure to deliver the program's intended outcomes.
- the risks of not securing adequate funding or support would have significant potential impacts for the program's target group, because the program relies heavily on mentoring and building the trust of Indigenous students who are at risk of or who have already disengaged from education.
- it is difficult to implement highly effective controls in this regard because DEEWR has limited ability to control the actions or intentions of third parties and because there is a general informality around arrangements that exist between academies and partners.

6.22 Another difficulty for DEEWR in determining the success or otherwise of the funding model and academies success in securing adequate support is that the reporting of other contributions is not consistent across academies. There are cases where the academies are so successful at securing other financial contributions, that they do not report in-kind contributions such as physical facilities at the school, the use of buses or the in-kind support of volunteers. In other cases, academies largely rely on in-kind contributions or IEP funds to operate their academies. This is an area where analysis over time could indicate whether particular models and locations are more successful than others, or perhaps where particular academies need further support to raise funds. It may also have implications for the appropriate level of benchmark costs for operating an academy.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 6.23 While it may be difficult to implement highly effective controls over third party funding contributions, it is important that they are actively monitored and where possible any risks mitigated. The risk should be rated higher due to the potential impacts and limitations on the ability to effectively control the risk and to ensure that additional controls and monitoring takes place.

Academy perceptions of DEEWR's management

- 6.24 Most academies were happy with the support they received from DEEWR and saw the program staff as responsive and helpful. They appreciated the continuity of staff within the program area and saw the annual workshops as an important networking opportunity to share lessons learned and discuss strategies and challenges. Most indicated that it had been helpful for program staff to visit their academy operation and in many cases felt that it would be useful to have more regular visits from DEEWR.
- 6.25 While some academies were dissatisfied with the amount of reporting required, most felt that new reporting *pro forma* introduced in 2008 had simplified the reporting process. Some experienced difficulty obtaining data from schools in relation to academic progress. Others indicated that the qualitative data was providing a better representation of their outcomes.
- 6.26 Some expressed concern over the uncertainty of ongoing funding for the program, as well as uncertainty of funding under other programs within the IEP, which some were relying on to operate their academies.
- 6.27 Many academies indicated that they would like feedback from DEEWR as to their progress, and greater opportunities for sharing lessons learned and developing links between academies. They also wanted better access to information on how to navigate the range of Australian Government and state or territory programs which they could usefully link their students with to address hurdles that they may be facing or to increase opportunities to achieve successful life outcomes.
- 6.28 Many were interested in the opportunities presented by the integration of DEEWR, to link students into appropriate vocational education, training, and further education or employment opportunities after leaving school, as well as the support necessary for them to successfully make this transition.

Improving grant management business processes

- 6.29 The business processes for the management and administration of the Sporting Chance Program have been evolving. In the two years since the program was established, business processes have been characterised by an intensive grant management approach which is unlikely to be sustainable. The audit found that the program's business processes have suffered from a number of inefficiencies, which are discussed below.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Access to an appropriate management framework

- 6.30 It is unclear why the program was not managed via an existing grant management framework within the former DEST or DEEWR. Despite program funding being provided under the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000*, DEEWR developed new business processes to manage the program, separate to the processes in place for the main body of IEP programs.
- 6.31 These processes have evolved over time as DEEWR has sought to improve upon or streamline processes in response to feedback from grant recipients or as difficulties or shortcomings in existing processes became apparent. They are not formally documented.
- 6.32 DEEWR is a large provider of grants and it would be considered better practice to have an established agreed documented framework with associated guidance and templates for the development, implementation and management of grant programs which individual areas within DEEWR could follow as a standard and adopt and revise as appropriate.

Conduct of additional funding round

- 6.33 DEEWR conducted a further funding application process for all 24 academies late in 2008 because initial funding agreements (even those commencing in 2008) were only negotiated through to the end of the 2008 calendar year.
- 6.34 Although the program received funding for four years from 2006–07, at the time of audit fieldwork the special appropriation through which the program's funding flows (the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000*) only appropriated funding through to 2008–09. This created restrictions which were not able to be resolved within either DEST or DEEWR.
- 6.35 The conduct of a new funding round resulted in significant efforts being expended by DEEWR as well as the academies. DEEWR should consider whether the limitations posed by the special appropriation are too restrictive for the Sporting Chance Program and consider whether a more appropriate funding mechanism exists.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Grant management system support

- 6.36 The program's grant management is not supported by adequate information technology systems. The program's grant management is largely manual, with limited use of INDIGO (DEEWR's grant management system for the IEP), which has primarily been used to process grant payments. It was unclear at the time of the audit fieldwork why the program had not been fully integrated into an appropriate grant management system.
- 6.37 The lack of information technology system support has led to a range of inefficiencies, which have also contributed to the intensity of the grant management process, including:
- manual records being maintained in official files
 - records copied into TRIM, which does not meet the needs of a grant management system
 - creation of Excel based spreadsheets to capture performance data;
 - individual program staff creating and maintaining other files and systems to track and manage grants and
 - overly complicated and cumbersome grant contracts being issued for the first grant funding round.
- 6.38 It is apparent that major efficiencies could be achieved through the adoption of an appropriate grant management system to support the program's business processes.

Streamlining of business processes

- 6.39 In the absence of local level monitoring mechanisms and an appropriate grant management framework, DEEWR has adopted a very intensive form of grant management.
- 6.40 In 2007, the first year of academy operations, DEEWR sought extensive detail from funding recipients in relation to their establishment and delivery of academy programs. Many grant recipients appeared to struggle with reporting requirements and in response DEEWR moved towards a more risk-based reporting framework in 2008, introducing new reporting *pro forma* which reduced the level of detail sought and also reduced the amount of reporting required. As a consequence, in 2008 academies' reporting appeared to be more timely and there was less follow-up by contract managers.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- 6.41 There are a number of areas where the program's business processes could be further streamlined. The current process requires the production of an annual plan, which is largely a repetition of the grant recipient's application; the submission of progress reports mid year; the provision of an annual report at the end of the calendar year, as well as a final report for the end of the grant period; and the provision of an audit report. Grant payment milestones have recently been increased from three to five per annum and academies are required to submit invoices before payments are released.
- 6.42 The size of the grants per academy overall, and the risks associated with them, is relatively small compared to the frequency and level of reporting imposed. The removal of the annual plan (provided sufficient detail was contained in the grant application regarding program delivery); the reduction of the number of payment milestones and reports to twice a year; the removal of the need for an invoice from the academies prior to payment; the streamlining of the mid year reporting details to focus on key performance measures and areas of risk are all worthwhile and beneficial changes that should be considered. The audit acknowledges that these changes would need to be supported by the implementation of an appropriate grant management system.

Implementing some local level monitoring mechanism

- 6.43 DEEWR may also need to consider introducing some local level monitoring mechanisms for the program, to support program delivery and performance monitoring, particularly as the program has now grown.
- 6.44 Academies stressed that the continuity of program staff in DEEWR's national office had been a real strength of the program and was particularly helpful to them in their establishment phase. However, most academies consulted were interested in additional support from DEEWR (see paragraphs 6.24 and 6.27). At the time of the audit fieldwork, program responsibilities had not been devolved to regional DEEWR staff and a few of the academies consulted during the audit appeared confused as to whether they should be receiving support from local DEEWR staff, such as those staff located in Indigenous Coordination Centres.
- 6.45 In considering how such mechanisms could be implemented, DEEWR should investigate the effectiveness of monitoring arrangements that were in place for the Clontarf Foundation's academies administered by DEEWR's Western Australian office, to the end of 2008, and explore successful monitoring arrangements for other similar programs.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Improving coordination and building strategic partnerships

Within DEEWR

- 6.46 At the time of the audit fieldwork the program largely operated in isolation from other DEEWR programs.
- Management is entirely centralised, with no program presence in DEEWR's regional network.
 - Even though the program is a part of the IEP, there is no mention of the program in the IEP's evaluation and audit strategy, and there has been mixed success integrating it with the INDIGO grant management system.
 - It is not clear why the original Clontarf Foundation academies in Western Australia continued to be managed by the Western Australian office of DEEWR under separate arrangements to the Sporting Chance Program, including different monitoring and performance reporting requirements.⁴¹
- 6.47 The audit concluded that there was considerable scope to improve program efficiency and effectiveness through more effective coordination within DEEWR, specifically through actively brokering relationships between the managers of similar or complementary programs within DEEWR to ensure that there is no duplication of effort, and to identify opportunities to create links and share lessons learned.
- DEEWR should rationalise the management of the Sporting Chance Program and the other six Clontarf Foundation academies that were being managed by the Western Australian office of DEEWR, adopting the best practice aspects of both program management arrangements. For example, the funding agreement for the six Western Australian academies set specific performance indicators, baselines and targets, which the audit has recommended that Sporting Chance Program should do.
 - There is potential for links to be developed and lessons shared between the Sporting Chance Program and other programs within DEEWR such as: other education programs which seek to improve outcomes for Indigenous students like the What Works program; the range of youth programs which target disadvantaged youth, including Indigenous students, such as Mentor Marketplace and Youth Linx; and programs which seek to assist young people to access training or employment such as the Indigenous Youth Mobility Program.

⁴¹ The management of the Clontarf Foundation's pre-existing Western Australian academies was transferred to the Sporting Chance Program at the beginning of 2009, subsequent to completion of the audit.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- The program area should also seek to build formal links with DEEWR's evaluation managers so that it can receive advice about how to best develop a monitoring and evaluation strategy for the program.
 - As mentioned at paragraph 6.43, DEEWR should explore opportunities to use staff in DEEWR's regional network to undertake some local monitoring of Sporting Chance projects, reducing the burden on national office staff and providing academies with some local-level support.
- 6.48 The audit acknowledges that effective coordination may not be easy and that the scale of DEEWR's responsibilities since the December 2007 merger of DEST responsibilities with those of the Department of Workplace Relations could make effective internal coordination more difficult. However, the merger has also increased opportunities to link the Sporting Chance Program with a range of training and employment programs and an increased pool of program expertise.

With other funding partners

- 6.49 When the program was introduced, the Government indicated that the program would be implemented in partnership with national sporting bodies, corporate and philanthropic organisations, and in collaboration with State and Territory Governments.⁴² Overall, the audit concluded that this collaboration and coordination has not yet occurred.
- 6.50 To date, DEEWR has not taken an active role in working with state and territory governments, national sporting bodies or industry in the promotion of the program. Rather, this collaboration takes place largely at the academy level as they seek to source the balance of their funding, liaise with schools and develop activities for academy participants.
- 6.51 Academies have had mixed success in this area. Some academies have been particularly successful in brokering strategic partnership while others have faced real difficulties. The reasons for this success, or the occurrence of difficulties, do not appear to have been actively analysed or managed by DEEWR.
- 6.52 A major challenge for some academies was being able to identify and access the right people and organisations to seek support, as well as having to promote and educate people and organisations about what the program sought to achieve and compete for funding.

⁴² Australian Government, Budget Paper No2, Budget Measures 2006–07, p. 202.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

6.53 Academies indicated at the last providers' workshop that they would welcome assistance in promoting the program and seeking funding sources. There is an important strategic alliance and coordination role that both DEEWR and the National Reference Group (NRG) (see below) could play in relation to the program, including linking academies with complementary programs, sourcing professional development opportunities for academy staff and promoting the academy program to potential funding partners.

Across government

6.54 While Sporting Chance is a small program in the scheme of the IEP and other Australian Government programs, the sharing of information and establishment of links across Australian Government programs and agencies remains vital for its success and are key principles under COAG's *National Framework of Principles for Delivering Services to Indigenous Australians*.

6.55 DEEWR has attempted to coordinate its activities with those of other Australian Government bodies through the establishment of the NRG. The NRG is responsible for ongoing support and advice to DEEWR and other stakeholders through the department to support the implementation of Sporting Chance. The NRG meets twice a year and comprises representatives from:

- the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- the Australian Sports Commission
- the Department of Health and Ageing.

6.56 The NRG was intended, amongst other things, to provide an opportunity to share information on and promote the program and to identify opportunities to link and connect activities. Discussions with the program area indicated that the NRG has had a limited effect on effective coordination of Australian Government programs.

- While the Australian Sports Commission appears to have been quite active in the group, the other agencies are not as well represented. Increasingly, junior staff from agencies have been attending meetings and there appears to be little evidence of information sharing in relation to similar programs to avoid duplication or discussion of any opportunities to connect or learn from related activities.
- While there are a range of complementary programs across the Australian Government, some of which are identified on DEEWR's website, there is not yet a strategic approach to linking academies with these or other useful programs.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

- In particular, there would appear to be opportunities to learn from or leverage support from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs' initiatives, such as its partnership with the Australian Football League, and ensure that the many initiatives funded through this relationship complement but do not duplicate academy efforts in certain locations.
- 6.57 It would be useful for DEEWR to consider how this group's efforts can most effectively be targeted to assist the program, for example by ensuring that where possible agencies are working together to share information and create linkages in a systematic way. As it meets only twice a year, this should not be a burden on agencies.

Conclusion

- 6.58 The audit concluded that the program personnel had achieved excellent results in mobilising the Sporting Chance Program, and as a result DEEWR has been able to exceed its target for the rollout of new academies. Academies demonstrated a high level of regard for the support provided by DEEWR.
- 6.59 However, the program's current management arrangements are characterised by intensive grant management, which is not efficient and unlikely to be sustainable. In particular, OEA considers that DEEWR should streamline grant management business processes, revisit its assessment of key program risks and improve program linkages within DEEWR, with funding partners and across government.

Recommendation No. 4

- 6.60 OEA recommends that DEEWR revisit its assessment of the Sporting Chance Program's risks, including the risks associated with third-party funding arrangements, and ensure that all key program risks have been identified and assigned appropriate risk ratings and risk mitigation or monitoring strategies. DEEWR should review whether the use of the term 'unacceptable' within the program's risk methodology has impeded the appropriate classification and management of risks.

DEEWR response

- 6.61 Agreed.
DEEWR has recently completed a revision of its risk assessment framework. DEEWR intends to revise the Sporting Chance Program's risk assessment against this new framework taking into account the comments provided by OEA against this recommendation with the exception of those at paragraph 6.12.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

Recommendation No. 5

6.62 OEA recommends that DEEWR integrate the Sporting Chance Program into an appropriate departmental grant management framework and streamline business processes to support the effective and efficient implementation and ongoing management of the Sporting Chance Program. Opportunities to implement local level monitoring should be considered, particularly now that the program has grown.

DEEWR response

6.63 Agreed.

DEEWR has recently completed a review of its grant management framework. The Sporting Chance Program will integrate its management of projects into the new framework in order to streamline business processes to support the effective and efficient implementation of new projects in particular, but also to support ongoing management.

DEEWR has already commenced the process of implementing local level monitoring and management with one major project to be managed in a state office from July 2009.

Recommendation No. 6

6.64 OEA recommends that DEEWR improve coordination and strategic partnerships between the Sporting Chance Program's management and other areas of the Department, with academy funding partners, including state and territory governments, and with other Australian Government bodies in order to improve program effectiveness and avoid duplication of effort.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

DEEWR response

6.65 Agreed.

Improvement to program effectiveness and avoidance of duplication of effort is an important goal for DEEWR's programs and extends beyond the Sporting Chance Program. DEEWR is developing a comprehensive policy strategy to achieve the four key Closing the Gap targets relevant to this Portfolio. This will serve as the basis for negotiations with jurisdictions, education systems and other parties, and inform how programs are designed, implemented and managed. The Sporting Chance Program is being considered within this process. Further, the National Education Agreement and a range of National Partnerships will provide important mechanisms for improving program effectiveness and avoiding duplication of effort.

Paragraph 6.49: OEA interpreted the implementation intentions around collaboration and coordination between the program and other agencies, such as state and territory governments and other organisations, to be at the departmental level. The intention on implementation of partnerships within the program was in fact related to arrangements between providers and other agencies, predominantly around sourcing additional funding. This has occurred.

OEA response

6.66 The Government's announcement of the program states that:

'The initiative will be implemented nationally in partnership with national and state sporting bodies that have strong affiliations with schools, and in collaboration with state and territory governments. Corporate and philanthropic organisations will also be encouraged to partner in these arrangements.'⁴³

6.67 OEA is of the view that both DEEWR and providers are responsible for implementing this strategy. DEEWR has a management responsibility to identify and address program management challenges, including building strategic partnerships and promoting the program to facilitate the achievement of program objectives.

⁴³ The Hon. Julie Bishop MP (Minister for Education, Science and Training), Strengthening Indigenous Communities – A sporting chance for Indigenous youth, media release, 9 May 2006 BUD 12/06.



Appendix

Appendix

Appendix A: Sporting Chance Program – School-based Sports Academies

Table A.1: School-Based academies in New South Wales

Location/ Region	Academy Name	Provider	Grant start date	Student No's 2008	Model
Western Sydney: Blacktown region	Blacktown Australian Football League (AFL) Indigenous Academy	AFL (ACT/ NSW)	2007	58	School cluster
South West Sydney: Campbelltown region	Campbelltown AFL Indigenous Academy	AFL (ACT/ NSW)	2007	49	School cluster
Sydney: Redfern, Waterloo, La Perouse and Glebe	Walan Barramal	National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA)	2007	61	Single school
Western NSW: Bathurst, Kelso, Bourke, Brewarrina, Cowra, Condobolin and Orange.	Girri Girri Sports Academy for Indigenous Students	NSW Department of Education and Training	2007	118	Regional cluster
Dubbo	Gambirrang	NASCA	2008	75	School cluster

Source: DEEWR

Table A.2: School-based academies in Western Australia

Location/ Region	Academy Name	Provider	Grant start date	Student No's 2008	Model
Perth: Waterford	Clontarf Girls Academy	Role Models WA	2007	50	Single school
East Kimberley: Kununurra	East Kimberley Football Academy	Clontarf Foundation	2007	56	Single school
South West WA: Bunbury	South West Football Academy	Clontarf Foundation	2007	52	Single school
Kalgoorlie	Kalgoorlie Girls Academy	Role Models WA	2008	42	School cluster
Halls Creek	Halls Creek Football Academy	Clontarf Foundation	2008	53	Single school
Geraldton	Mid West Netball and Basketball Academy	Geraldton Streetworks Aboriginal Corporation	2008	73	School cluster
Newman	Kicking Goals Program	Swan District Football Club	2008	49	Single school
Port Hedland	Kicking Goals Program	Swan District Football Club	2008	101	Single school
Karratha and Roeburne	Karratha/ Roeburne Football Academy	Clontarf Foundation	2008	0*	School cluster

* The Karratha/Roeburne Football Academy was established in 2008, but did not commence operation until first term 2009.

Source: DEEWR

Appendix

Table A.3: School-based academies in the Northern Territory

Location/ Region	Academy Name	Provider	Grant start date	Student No's 2008	Model
Central NT: Alice Springs	Alice Springs Football Academy	Clontarf Foundation	2007	221	Single school
Darwin	Darwin Football Academy	Clontarf Foundation	2008	210	School cluster
Katherine	Katherine Football Academy	Clontarf Foundation	2008	91	Single school
Tiwi Islands	Tiwi Football Academy	Clontarf Foundation	2008	24	Single school

Source: DEEWR

Table A.4: School-based academies in Queensland

Location/ Region	Academy Name	Provider	Grant start date	Student No's 2008	Model
South West Brisbane: Runcorn and Woodridge	Leroy Loggins Basketball Academy	The Leroy Loggins Foundation	2007	92	School cluster
North QLD: Gordonvale	Djarragun Sports Academy	Djarragun College	2007	113	Single school
Far West QLD: Cunnamulla	Eagle Edge Academy of Sport	Eagle Edge Solutions	2007	36	School community
North QLD: Townsville, Ingham, Charters Towers	Sports Academy for Catholic Colleges	Catholic Education Office – Diocese of Townsville	2007	114	Regional cluster

Source: DEEWR

Table A.5: School-based academies in South Australia

Location/ Region	Academy Name	Provider	Grant start date	Student No's 2008	Model
Eastern Adelaide: Woodforde	Rostrevor Indigenous Sports Academy	Rostrevor College	2007	51	Single school
Ceduna, Port Lincoln and Woodville (Adelaide)	SA Aboriginal Sports Training Academy	SA Aboriginal Sports Training Academy (SA Dept. of Education & Children's Service)	2008	18	Regional cluster

Source: DEEWR

