



Australian Government

Department of Families,
Community Services
and Indigenous Affairs

Questions and Answers

What are the Cape York trials?

The Cape York Institute approached the Australian Government in December 2005 with a proposal to develop and pilot a new approach to welfare in collaboration with four Cape York Communities. The Australian Government agreed to support the initial research and design work and provided funding of \$3 million to the Institute in the 2006-07 Budget. The outcome of that work was provided to the Australian Government in June 2007 in a report *From Hand Out to Hand Up*. The Australian Government has now considered the recommendations and decided to support a trial phase. The trials will run for four years commencing in early 2008.

Where will the trials take place?

Subject to the support of the communities, the trials will take place in Hope Vale, Coen, Mossman Gorge and Aurukun. These communities have worked closely with the Cape York Institute over the last year and provided valuable input into the project. The Communities will continue to work closely with the Institute in the development of implementation plans.

What has the Australian Government committed to?

The Australian Government has committed to support a four-year trial of a new approach to welfare in the four Cape York communities. A major feature of the reforms is the introduction of a set of obligations attached to welfare payments. These obligations will require parents to send their children to school and protect them from harm and neglect. There will also be obligations on tenants to care for the house they occupy and to comply with tenancy requirements. There will also be the possibility of welfare sanctions in cases where people are convicted of domestic violence, drugs or alcohol offences.

What will the Australian Government fund?

The Australian Government's commitment includes significant funding for a range of complementary initiatives to support the trials and assist people to meet their reciprocal obligations. These include: case management services; specialist services such as drug and alcohol rehabilitation or parenting education; a roll out of "MULTILIT", a proven accelerated literacy catch-up program; a new education savings program designed to increase parental involvement in their children's education.

There will be reforms to Indigenous employment services and programs to enhance incentives to take up real jobs, education or training, improve work readiness and Indigenous people's capacity to find work both within and outside their communities. There will also be funds provided to convert existing CDEP positions into 40 Australian Government jobs in service delivery; and investments in infrastructure and support for business and home improvements. There will also be funding for income management programs including an expansion of the successful Family Income Management service.

In addition, funding will be provided separately to support additional housing for home ownership in the pilot communities, subject to the Queensland Government amending its land tenure legislation to enable this.

Improving the lives of Australians

Will people lose their welfare payments?

No, the Australian Government has agreed that the Family Responsibilities Commission will be able to direct how welfare payments are made to individuals in the trial communities. This does not change their entitlements. If a parent repeatedly fails to meet one of the agreed obligations, the Commission may decide that a proportion of their welfare payments will be compulsorily managed. That proportion will then be allocated by the Commission to meet essential expenses such as rent and food.

What is the Family Responsibilities Commission?

Subject to agreement from the Queensland Government, the Family Responsibilities Commission will be a statutory body comprising representatives from each community. These members may be drawn from a pool of qualified Justices of the Peace and experienced or active Community Justice Group members. The Commission will be chaired by a retired Magistrate or senior legal officer. It will have a key role in strengthening local Indigenous authority and rebuilding functional social norms. The Australian Government will amend its Social Security law to enable the Commission to make determinations in relation to welfare payments of individuals in the trial communities.

What role will the Queensland Government play?

The Queensland Premier has put his Government's support behind the Cape York trials and the establishment of the Family Responsibilities Commission. The Australian and Queensland Governments will be working closely together to progress this initiative and related support services. The Queensland Government has jurisdiction over matters which will form part of the welfare reform obligations and it is proposed that the Family Responsibilities Commission will be established as a statutory body of the Queensland Government.

What is MULTILIT?

MULTILIT was developed by Macquarie University Special Education Centre for low-progress readers in Year 2 and above (about seven years upwards) who are reading at a level considerably below (typically two or more years) that expected for their age. It is generally delivered in small groups by a qualified instructor or tutor, with three to four weeks' specific MULTILIT training. MULTILIT has been demonstrated to work in multiple settings, and delivered substantial improvements in reading ability in the trials undertaken in Coen in 2005-06.

How do the Student Education Trusts work?

Student Education Trusts (SET) enable low income parents to support their children's education and development needs from 'birth to graduation' and help ensure every child is set for life. Through responsible income management, parents make regular contributions to their child's SET which they use to meet education-related expenses. SETs build parental responsibility by setting expectations of parents and schools to increase parents' commitment to their children's education. A SET provides access to quality education products and financial advice on education, in addition to being a money management mechanism.