



**REVIEW OF THE PILOT PROJECT**

***PROMOTING INTERFAITH AND INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING IN  
SCHOOL SETTINGS***

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# Executive summary

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This mid-term review of the pilot program: *Promoting Interfaith and Intercultural Understanding in School Settings* (IIU) was carried out in the second year of the pilot which was conducted by Erebus International for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. The review is attentive to:

- the significance of the pilot within the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Action Plan (NAP) to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security within Australia;
- the historical, political and social contexts within which NAP was developed;
- the place of the Pilot with respect to other pilots within NAP;
- the two quite different geographical locations decided upon by Government for the implementation of the pilot; and
- the positioning of IIU within the core business and life of schools.

The review concludes that the pilot has been successful in its own right, and in terms of the learning it has generated for the future. It documents significant shifts in people's understandings and attitudes in the area of IIU and in the capacities of their schools. Key factors in the success of the pilot were:

- embedding IIU within the curriculum and life of the school;
- funding both resource focussed professional learning and interschool cooperation;
- adopting a place based approach for the implementation of IIU; and
- promoting a safe place approach for people's engagement across different cultures and religions .

Recommendations are presented for the continued implementation of IIU. These recommendations are seen as being relevant to the implementation of NAP as a whole. The recommendations concern:

- the positioning of IIU within a whole-of-government approach to NAP;
- criteria for selection of schools for the project;
- the leadership density and moral purpose required for the effective and sustained implementation of the project;
- the difference between learning about religions (as a social construct) and learning as a member of a particular religion; and
- the provision of structured, strategic professional development based upon the learnings, implications and recommendations from the pilot.

# 1. Introduction

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This document reports the findings of a review of the pilot program: *Promoting Interfaith and Intercultural Understanding in School Settings* (IIU) conducted by Erebus International on behalf of DEEWR. This program is a key element of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Action Plan (NAP) to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security within Australia.

The review was carried out by the Flagship for Creative and Authentic Leadership and the Institute for Advancing Community Engagement of Australian Catholic University. It took place some fourteen months after the commencement of the pilot. In any educational initiative, this would be considered quite early to expect to see clear outcomes, but for one dealing with complex issues of faith and culture, this is perhaps even more the case. As one student respondent said: *What we are trying to do takes time.*

The review provides a background to the IIU pilot, situating it within broader Australian Government policy. It outlines the objectives of the IIU project itself, and reports on the attainment of these in terms of specific project deliverables, organisational issues, contribution to the broader NAP agenda, impact on pilot schools and communities, lessons which can be drawn from the pilot, and recommendations for future policy and practice – including the proposal of conceptual frameworks which help to explain the dynamics of projects such as this.

## 2. Background

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One of the consequences of 9/11 was that Islam was increasingly being identified by many in the west as synonymous with terrorism. This perception was further entrenched for Australian citizens by the Bali bombing in 2002 in which 88 Australians lost their lives. This feeling of threat from the “other” came to a head in the Cronulla riots of 2005, prompting the Australian government to make a response which would restore social cohesion. A part of this response is the National Action Plan, of which IIU forms a key component.

One of the student respondents made an observation in a focus group discussion that captures succinctly, yet poignantly, the challenge being faced by the National Action Plan:

*Back home in Egypt, our families experienced persecution, so their experience of other religions is very different from ours. Here in Australia it is hard for us, because at a young age we have to work out, and form our own view. Our parents have harder views than us. I understand why, but we have to form a new view for ourselves, by ourselves, and give people acceptance.*

The NAP has been developed within the context of a nation of 20.3 million residents from 230 countries more than 100 religious faiths. In the midst of this diversity, the place of Islam was an explicit priority of the pilots, and as this report will show, this stance proved problematic, and was moderated very early in the IIU pilot.

The NAP adopts a whole-of-government and integrated approach to building community resilience and encouraging participation in the wider community through the following four focus areas:

- Education – “equipping students of all ages and backgrounds with the skills, democratic values and principles for effective participation in a culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse society”;
- Employment – “active and gainful workforce participation builds self-esteem, promotes understanding and acceptance of cultural and religious differences”;
- Integrating communities – to address “the isolation, alienation and marginalisation of some young Australians in our society... through a strategy of positive engagement and liaison, between governments, communities and individuals”; and
- Enhancing national security – through “the effective implementation of the education and employment initiatives and the successful involvement and inclusion of communities and individuals into mainstream community activities”.

The education area of NAP aims to strengthen social cohesion in this diverse context through focusing upon the following:

- Targeted education initiatives to build better understanding and acceptance of Australia's cultural and religious diversity (Outcome 9);
- Strengthening mutual trust within communities and between communities and governments through ongoing dialogue (Outcome 6); and
- Further opportunities for young Australians from different cultural and religious backgrounds to enhance their leadership skills and participation in mainstream Australia (Outcome 5).

This review will report the outcomes of IIU against these more generic NAP outcomes. In addition, it was anticipated that there would be interaction across the four NAP pilots. The extent and impact of this interaction will also be reported.

### 3. The Interfaith and Intercultural Understanding (IIU) Pilot

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IIU is a pilot program designed to address NAP principles and outcomes through a place-based approach to education in the Lakemba and Macquarie Fields communities. The objectives of IIU are to:

- Examine issues concerning interfaith and intercultural cooperation in two NSW locations: Lakemba and Macquarie Fields;
- Promote civics and citizenship education and values education especially in relation to mutual understanding, tolerance and social cohesion between Muslim and non-Muslim students;
- Identify current good practices being implemented by participating schools;
- Assist schools and teachers to work more effectively on interfaith and intercultural issues; and
- Reduce potential isolation and alienation felt by some students.

The IIU methodology makes use of situational analysis as a basis for shaping interschool cooperation, resource development and support for the professional development of teachers. It has a number of defining characteristics. It is making a direct response to the needs of target groups by making use of high level support and organisation to support grass roots initiatives. It takes a view of schools as embedded in their local communities (place-based). It adopts a whole-of-government approach, and it makes provision for capturing emergent lessons through the use of external evaluation within a clear and explicit framework – that is, this review.

The IIU commenced in June 2007 and is due for overall completion in June 2009. Activities planned to take place for the various stages of the pilot program are as follows:

Stage 1: Interschool Cooperation

Stage 2: Resource Development

Stage 3: Support for Professional Development of Teachers

At its broadest level, the aim of the program is to create a model of “what works” for sustaining interfaith and intercultural cooperation which could be replicated and disseminated to the broader education community. This report contributes to the achievement of this aim.



## 4. Review methodology

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### Review requirements

The requirements of the project as stipulated by DEEWR are summarised in the Table 1 below:

**TABLE 1: Requirements of the IIU review**

Pilot element	Major evaluation requirement	Criteria
Situational Analysis	Appropriateness	Appropriate to social context in given timeframe
		Objectives and designed outcomes match school and community needs
Interschool Cooperation		Objectives and designed outcomes match government policy and priorities
		Policy and implementation along with three other pilots in place based approach were appropriate
Resources	Effectiveness	Achievement of objectives
		Factors contributing and hindering: directed to objectives, style of implementation
Professional development		Contribution of whole of Government approach. Areas for improvement
		Opportunities for school-university partnership? How?
	Efficiency	Examine efficiency and make recommendations

### Data gathering approaches

There were five major approaches to addressing the data gathering requirements of the review: document/website analysis, focus group interview, survey, observation and individual interview. Because of the need to complete data gathering before the end of the school term, a team of eight researchers, including the two senior researchers was used for data gathering. This team was larger than initially projected, so additional care was taken in cross validation of the data, to preserve inter observer reliability.

The review methodology was given ethics clearance by Australian Catholic University.

Other than the project documentation, the major data sources were those people involved in delivering the project, participating as clients, engaging in related programs or observing as informed community members. Table 2 reports data sources, data gathering approaches and response rates.

**TABLE 2: Data sources, data gathering approaches and responses**

Data source	Data gathering approach/Responses
Documentation/Website	Desk study of website, meeting minutes, reports.
Local community	Telephone interviews with community advisory group members: (4 completed: Police, DOCS, councils).
Parents	Three focus groups (2 Macquarie Fields and 1 Lakemba). 10 parents attended. Informal conversations with 5 parents at Punchbowl Iftar meal.
Teachers	Survey of teachers in each school: 33 responses Focus groups conducted with coordinating teachers in each cluster: 16 teachers
Students	Mixture of focus group (5 schools) and simple survey tool (all schools). Total of 89 students.
Cluster Leaders	Cluster Leader views obtained at cluster meeting
Resources Working Group (Did not function)	Interview with Erebus resource support worker Web site review
Program Advisory Committee	Survey sent to all members. (3 returned). Observation of PAC meeting.
Principals	All principals surveyed (13 returned). Four with follow up interviews.
Erebus	Extended interview with Erebus team.
Pilot program managers	Telephone interviews with all pilot program managers – Youth (DEEWR), Employment (DEEWR), Sport (ASC) and IIU (DEEWR) as well as DIAC NAP manager.

## Data analysis

Multiple approaches to data analysis were used.

### Document analysis

The website and records of various group meetings provided by Erebus were used as a data source. They were analysed with the criteria from Table 1 in mind.

### Surveys

Survey responses were aggregated by topic and respondent (principal, student, teacher, using frequency and mean measures. These gave an indication of the extent of impact which was illustrated using interview data where this was gathered.

### Interviews

Interview data was kept in the form of researcher notes. These were typed and gathered centrally for detailed analysis by respondent group (principal, community, pilot program manager, Erebus) and against criteria.

## Focus groups

Focus group data were recorded by researchers in the course of discussion using predetermined schedules and questions which emerged from either surveys or ongoing discussion in the group. Aggregated data were analysed by respondent group (students, cluster groups, parents) and criteria in Table 1.

## Observation

The review team gained opportunistic access to a Program Advisory Group meeting, Cluster group meetings involving representatives of each school, and one school's parent function (an Iftar meal). These provided additional data regarding the project.

## Reporting

Results in the report which follows are organised under the following headings:

- IIU deliverables;
- Impact on school and communities;
- Mapping against NAP outcomes;
- Organisational issues;
- Lessons from the pilot, including a consideration of appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency;
- Policy context of IIU; and
- Recommendations.

Key learnings and recommendations are presented throughout the report. The last section of the report presents recommendations concerned with the structure and continued implementation of the IIU Project.

## 5. Project deliverables

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The IIU brief called for deliverables in the areas of situational analysis, teacher resources, professional development and interschool cooperation.

### **Situational analysis**

Erebus' development of a situational analysis for each cluster was described by them in terms of three major activities. The first (and best documented) was to draw on published data for the Lakemba and Macquarie Fields Local Government Areas. The second was to develop an "on the ground" familiarity with the schools and their surrounds through driving around the areas escorted by the DET School Area Director. The third was to consider the situational analysis a "work in progress", being refined in cluster groups through the experience of the project. One of the key learnings to emerge from this was the extent of the difference between the two clusters.

Students generally reported that their teachers demonstrated a sense of what it was like to live in their community. Teachers, principals and members of the Program Advisory Committee (PAC) saw the project as responding to real needs in the schools and their communities, and as a valued contribution to their schools, although there was a view expressed by some that the choice of these two particular clusters attributed blame for lack of social cohesion to particular groups, and oversimplified the issue as a cultural/religious one. This is a perception that has faded across the life of the program to date.

In a formal sense, the situational analysis is documented and updated for each cluster meeting. The reviewers noted that this documentation relies almost exclusively on statistical and demographic data about the local government area, and does not document the deeper insight into the realities of schools that was very much in evidence in the way in which Erebus and the cluster schools were operating within the pilot. However, this has not impacted adversely on the other elements of the pilot because teachers interviewed for the review expressed a strong sense of understanding of their students and the communities in which they lived. In a sense they were continually applying their sense of the situation as it had come to be understood by them as individuals, and by their school communities through experience.

Erebus respondents described their role in the project as "leading from the shadows", which allowed schools to respond to their own locally developed sense of situation in each of their particular projects. This would seem to have been more powerful in the day to day operations of school projects than the formal document.

## Key learnings

*Differences found within the pilot showed the importance of giving attention to the extent and nature of differences in contexts, not only between the Lakemba and Macquarie Field clusters, but at the level of individual schools.*

*The situational analyses provided a knowledge base for shaping the pilot in ways which were appropriate to particular contexts.*

## Implications

*To maximise the appropriateness of programs for particular contexts and communities, the situational analyses need to occur at cluster and school levels. The cluster or LGA level analysis can provide the base analysis, with schools then being asked to analyse and document (perhaps with assistance) their own situation in a way that is useful to them. A collated school level analysis could highlight both the similarities and the differences among schools commented upon by participants, and would provide a useful collective record for the cluster.*

## Resources

Each school was asked to develop resources appropriate to its own project. Early in the pilot Erebus identified the fact that schools were facing difficulties in working on resources. Aside from juggling competing priorities, schools expressed the view that they did not have the skills to develop resources to a standard that could be published to their partner schools. The initial plan was that this dimension of the pilot would have been supported by a Resource Advisory Group, however this was set aside in favour of a project officer whose role was to work directly with schools in the development of resources. The provision of technical support in this way, and the stimulus to action provided by his regular visits was a successful response to the challenges of resource development.

One of the approaches used in the pilot for the sharing of resources and documentation was a specially designed website. Due to technical difficulties posed by the architecture of the DET network, this site had not been able to be made fully accessible until shortly before this review began. At the time of writing it was steadily being populated, although there was a suggestion that one or two schools were initially resistant to sharing on line. Again, the management of the program by Erebus is overcoming this reluctance.

Table 3 below summarises the nature of the individual school projects and the types of resource developed and recorded on the website at this time. This record will become more complete as the web site evolves.

The table reflects a diverse range of school based projects, some of which have specific resource development dimensions. Projects and related resources are also at different stages of development, reflecting different starting points, different projects, different contextual factors, different staff and different communities.

Significantly perhaps, resources or their development did not figure strongly in any of the participant group responses in the review. Of particular interest here are the views of teachers who seemed to see the resource element of the pilot as unexceptionable – neither a major challenge, nor a source of great satisfaction.

**TABLE 3: Project and resource summary**

Project Name	Description	Target Groups	Mainstream Curriculum – KLA's	Extra Curricula	Stage of development (materials, resources, programs)	PD Activities – Focus and Scope
St Mark's Coptic – HEART Project (Humanity, Equity, Acceptance, Respect, Tolerance)	To enhance school pastoral care program by providing more opportunities for students to experience other faiths and cultures	Whole School			Joint activity with Guise PS - Making of 'friendship bands'	A survey was developed for staff and students to provide a starting point Staff Development workshop with handouts re project provided to staff Pastoral care program being enhanced to reflect project
Good Samaritan College	Mapping of opportunities across KLAs to determine where interfaith and intercultural learning can be enhanced	Year 7 and 8	English HSIE Catholic Studies		Cultural day activity – celebration through food  Use of DVD 'The Australian Eye' and 'Respecting Beliefs'  <i>Sense of the Sacred</i> curriculum	
Guise Public School	Improving knowledge of faiths and cultures of students at the school and improving understanding and tolerance with a particular focus on indigenous students and their culture	Whole School			Joint activity with St Mark's Coptic College - Making of 'friendship bands'  Organic cultural day with Mt Annan Botanic Gardens  Pen Pals initiative with Iqra Grammar	
Casula Public School	To identify current student beliefs and issues re different cultural groups within the school community by linking in with existing schools programs		HSIE Creative Arts		Performances for Wakikerie Dance Festival  Use of Bounce Back resources Culture awareness program	Staff working on management plan to identify ways that teachers can be provided more time to reflect on professional learning related to faiths and cultures
Lurnea High School	Creating units of work for Intensive English Centre students	All Intensive Learning	Society and Culture	Excursions Cultural Infusion Day	Day to celebrate cultural diversity – key note	

		Centre Students	Other KLA's Quality Teaching Model	Public Speaking Competition	speaker, food stalls  Values education conference with Thomas Reddall High  Harmony Day values forum	
Qibla College (Awareness - Strength)	Developing a series of activities for staff and students to explore faiths and cultures beyond the predominant Muslim faith of the College	Whole School	Staff development days	Guest speakers Public speaking		
Macarthur Adventist College (We are one)	Engaging with technology to make accessible to students of other schools understanding of the Adventist faith	Whole school		Using technology (webcam) to invite schools to view prayer sessions		
Banksia Road Public School	Building on existing projects/activities to promote interfaith and intercultural understanding across the school	Whole School	All KLAs		Development of Peace Garden Learning From One Another Program Student Leadership Forum	
Al Noori Muslim School	Identifying where the school can enhance intercultural and interfaith understanding within the curriculum, and to engage the wider school community such as parents to identify key areas of need	Whole school, including parents	PDHPE	Harmony Day activity	Talking and listening component of PDHPE program Harmony Day program and related activities DVD produced by Punchbowl BHS on engaging parents	Parent Helper Induction Program
Lakemba Public School	Seeking where interfaith and intercultural learning can be enhanced in the Connected Outcome Group programs	Whole school		Professional development days Excursions Guest speakers Cultural festivals Professional learning day Visits to places of worship	Extend the current Connected Outcomes Group program at the school	2 professional learning days Professional Learning day to engage the community in the project
Malek Fahd Islamic School	Develop a unit of work for Stage 5 History and Geography to promote an understanding of the	Stage 5	HSIE – Stage 5 History and Geography		Stage 5 History Syllabus – Islamic Empire, and Stage 5 Geography Syllabus –	Full day workshops at the school Visiting mosques Inservice of teachers at the school



	Muslim faith in other schools				Australian Geography Curriculum Corporation	
McCallum's Hill PS	To improve interfaith and intercultural understanding through professional learning of teachers via use of the Connected Outcomes Groups of the NSW primary syllabus.	Whole school	All KLAS	COGS program	COGS program Professional learning packages	
Punchbowl BHS	To build value and culture within the school community by developing interschool programs, pursuing professional development activities for staff, working with parents and building a community leadership focus	Whole school Community Parents		Interschool activities Professional development of staff Community leadership programs for students Working with parents	Various activities	Parent project
Australian International Academy	To develop significant links with schools to reduce feelings of isolation and insularity of its students	Whole school				
Punchbowl PS	To work with schools to allow PPS students to enhance their understanding of interfaith and intercultural understandings outside the local community, ie Cronulla and Newport	Whole school		Projects including pen pals Interschool activities Development of anti bullying and anti racism play groups Develop whole school scope and sequence for Bounce Back Program Guest speakers		
Holy Spirit Catholic College -				Career expo with cluster schools  Creation of manual 'how to coordinate an interfaith and intercultural career expo manual'		

One of the key messages from both teachers and principals was the fact that the funding for the project allowed the provision of time to teachers for engaging with the development of programs, resources and school involvement in inter-school and community visits and events.

Given the commencing difficulties faced by the pilot in the area of resources, it is probably too early to make valid comment on the success of the resource dimension of the project, other than to say that it is under way, and that the structures in place seem to be appropriate to the task. In going forward it may be useful to see the issue of resource development as a dimension of shared professional development – focussing not only on how to use each other’s resources, but on the skills that were necessary to bring them to a finished state. Alternatively, one might ask whether the time and energy to take a set of teaching materials from being useful to the developer to a publishable state might be better spent in other activities such as more focussed action research. This theme is taken up in the section on professional development below.

### **Key Learnings**

*Additional funding allowed teachers to devote time and attention to the development of resources.*

*Teachers needed additional professional support to engage in the production of resources that could be shared.*

*The sharing that occurred around the initial development of resources developed was a key variable in promoting teachers’ professional learning, but the additional time taken to bring them to publishable state was less productive professionally.*

### **Implications**

*For similar projects in the future priority should be given to shared learning across schools, based upon action research and reflective practice rather than to development of resources per se.*

## **Professional Development**

The design and delivery of formal professional development activities had been deliberately left in the hands of the individual schools and the clusters, and as a consequence practice varied widely, as can be seen from Table 3 above, which summarises PD activities identified by schools on the shared website to date. A notable exception to this devolved approach is the combined forum being planned for March 2009.

There was a particular issue in the Macquarie Fields School Cluster where the initial cluster leader left and the replacement did not appreciate immediately the cluster wide nature of the role, which included PD. Nothing happened at a cluster level during this period of misunderstanding. The disruption caused by change of personnel proved costly here, as in other dimensions of the pilot.

Attendance at PD offerings was voluntary. As there are no records of participation in the formal PD offerings at school and cluster level, it is impossible to comment on scope and reach of the activities. Teacher ratings of professional development varied from school to school and cluster to cluster, with Macquarie Fields rating lower as might be expected in the circumstances. When teachers were asked to comment on the best features of the IIU for them, a number mentioned the professional development activities, or, in a less formal way, their own learning about other faiths and cultures.

One of the strongest messages to come through participant responses was the extent to which engagement in this program has increased teacher understanding of issues related to interfaith and intercultural understanding, often as a direct result of the experience rather than formal PD. Classroom teachers reported having learnt from engagement with the initiative in their own school. Teachers indicated a growing understanding of various religious faiths. There has been a growing awareness of the impact of faith and culture on learning.

Those teachers who attended the regular cluster meetings commented that these were a significant form of professional development for them. They expressed a desire for both more shared learning of a formal nature within that grouping, and an extension of this opportunity to teachers from beyond the formal cluster group.

One form of such shared learning would be to focus on the critical (but almost incidental in this pilot) learnings that occur for teachers as they engage in what has been for many of them the new field of endeavour of interfaith and intercultural understanding. Support and facilitation of reflection or action research could enhance learning considerably. If schools shared their experiences in a structured way, it could further leverage project outcomes in ways which could be of more benefit than resource development.

### **Key learnings**

*Teacher learning which grew out of their experience of their project was a positive influence upon their understanding of, and commitment to the importance of faith and culture in learning.*

*Opportunities to share their experiences across schools were valued by teachers. This was particularly the case for those in the cluster group. The lack of such experiences for the majority of teachers in the project to date limited the potential for professional learning.*

### **Implications**

*The learning that takes place through the experience of local initiatives could be enhanced by structured and conceptually based professional development which also includes a focus on action research skills and the sharing of learnings across sites. A contracted agency could act as both a clearing house and a facilitator of such professional development. This might be done either directly by the organisation managing the pilot, or by facilitating the engagement of other professionals, such as academics in relevant fields, to work as critical friends.*

## Interschool cooperation

Schools interacted with one another in a range of ways. They included:

- Teachers and students making and hosting visits to other schools in the cluster;
- Teachers and students making and hosting visits to schools outside the cluster;
- Meeting at special events like Harmony Day, sports days (like the AFL event);
- Teachers meeting at cluster meetings;
- Teachers meeting at shared PD; and
- Sharing of resources on the website and by other means.

Teachers, principals and the Program Advisory Committee noted an increase in interschool activity as a consequence of the IIU – particularly in the Lakemba cluster, and attributed it not simply to the focus of the IIU pilot, but to the fact that they were given additional resources to allow visits of various kinds to take place. In the light of the current economic crisis it is likely that resourcing for excursions will become an even more significant factor in enabling projects like this.

Students highlighted their appreciation of the opportunity to meet students from other schools. As will be discussed later, the experience lessened the sense of isolation experienced by some student groups. One student noted that meeting students from other schools was a new experience, but that intercultural interaction was not a new thing, because ...

*Every time you walk into this school you are a part of intercultural stuff, because we're not all just one culture, but we hang around together.*

This raised the issue of the way in which the clusters were formed. They represented two discrete geographic zones in Sydney, each of which had been involved in some way in recent times in a form of social unrest. Principals, teachers and students all expressed a desire for groupings of schools which were more diverse.

The following quotations capture the sense of the argument for greater diversity:

**A principal:** *I wonder, because the schools in the project have similar outlooks and similar issues, are we "preaching to the converted"?*

**A Lakemba teacher:** *Only including high NESB schools indicates that the problem is with them.*

**Community Advisory Group member :** *I don't think the problem is in Macquarie Fields. I think the problem is as much in the north shore and the beach side towns.*

Some attempts to bring the two clusters together proved difficult because of a perception of “distance”. However, during the life of this project, various schools in the clusters established links with Moriah College (Jewish), Riverview College (Catholic), The Forest High and Cronulla and Kurnell Public Schools (Government)– links which were possible to pursue as a consequence of the additional resources provided by IIU, and which were clearly not blocked by a sense of distance. The perceived value of these links overcame issues of inconvenience.

Cluster meetings have already been mentioned as a form of professional development. Erebus’ skilled facilitation of meetings at the different schools in the clusters has resulted in a sense of welcome across sectors, and a sense of ease among many cluster group members. This proved to be one of the key ingredients of the success of the project, as cluster group members now report feeling comfortable in contacting each other outside the sphere of the meetings. They have expressed appreciation of the open dialogue. In one cluster there were some early sensitivities, which were reported as having been well handled by Erebus. This is not to say that there was absolute comfort and unanimity. One Community Advisory Group member reminded the reviewers that “*It’s a two way street, not just a one way street*”, and a small number of teachers (from across the sectors) made similar observations about the degree and direction of influence and engagement. There is clearly still work to be done.

There was evidence of interschool cooperation taking place, but not uniformly. The funds for IIU have made otherwise too expensive inter-visitation and attendance at joint activities possible. All stakeholder groups see value in this cooperation, and some have pursued it in distant parts of Sydney, well beyond their own cluster. It would seem that there might be benefits in constructing clusters as communities of interest by group application rather than as ad hoc geographic groupings by individual application. The process of negotiating such communities (similar to that used for Boys Education Lighthouse Schools) would have the additional benefit of opening up communication channels and creating shared agendas even before the project is formally endorsed.

### **Key learnings**

*The stimulus and financial support of IIU clearly increased the amount of interschool cooperation.*

*Interschool cooperation, and hence the capacity of IIU to impact, extended beyond the schools in the two clusters.*

*Interschool collaboration was valued by participants, particularly where there were shared interests and opportunities for learning. In some instances the collaboration gave rise to this form of learning, and in others it was further enhanced by it.*

*Interschool collaboration contributed to the development of friendship and trust among participants. These were important in teachers and students becoming open to interfaith and intercultural learning.*

## **Implications**

*Interschool collaboration would be enhanced by making provision in the formation of clusters for “coalitions of interest” ie schools which propose to work together on common objectives, regardless of geographical location. Such interschool collaboration will be essential for the development of trust and relationships.*

## 6. Impact on pilot schools and communities

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The impact of the IIU project on pilot schools and communities will be considered in terms of student learning outcomes, impact on teaching and learning, teacher capacity building and community participation in broader Australian Society.

### Student learning outcomes

Student outcomes are an explicit focus of the pilot, and one with which schools are engaged. However, this evaluation is taking place approximately 14 months after the commencement of the IIU projects in the various schools in the two clusters. This is probably too soon to see the effects of some of the interventions when start up and development processes are factored into the processes.

Erebus has invited schools to make use of a tool for tracking student outcomes on the website. It includes a very useful rubric and some tools in draft form for describing teachers, students, parents/community and whole school along a continuum from non-interest to early recognition to awareness, then sensitivity and competency. The measures gained by these tools will yield useful pre- and post intervention data if they are taken up by schools as Erebus has been suggesting. At this stage a small number of schools have begun to use the tools, and others have expressed an intention to do so, but data are not yet available.

This having been said, data from surveys and interviews reflect a sense that there has been an impact. A number of principal respondents named the impact on students explicitly. Students reported a growing understanding of the issues, and that they are learning respect, acceptance, teamwork, celebration of difference, anti-racism and anti-bullying. One primary student at a public school put it this way:

*When you study religion you realise that faith can be important for people.*

A teacher described the experience in these terms:

*This project, for the participating students, has provided them with soul enriching experiences – a concentration of human value enriched activities has left a lasting impression .... on these students.*

Participation in IIU was seen as breaking down barriers. A secondary student at a faith based school, in reflecting on the question of identity, spoke of “being Australian” as a unifying factor. Students, teachers and principals of non-public schools spoke of a decreased sense of isolation which came

from meeting other students. This was particularly, but not exclusively the case for Islamic schools. They felt less subject to stereotyping – observing a change in the attitudes of non-Muslim students whom they saw, in the safe environment of inter-school functions, as moving beyond a view of Muslims as terrorists. Comments like this one from a student were common:

*It's good to discover that they don't look at us as different – like we're terrorists or something.*

Student engagement was commonly seen as a benefit of the program, and teachers expressed a hope that there would be a flow-on effect to parents. This will be discussed later in the report.

### **Key learning**

*There are early signs that the approaches used by IIU schools have impacted positively on students' sense of self, and on their interfaith and intercultural understanding.*

### **Implications**

*That pilot schools be very strongly encouraged to make use of the Erebus online tools as a means of providing measures of impact on students at the conclusion of the project.*

## **Teaching and learning**

Schools made use of a wide range of vehicles to carry forward the IIU agenda. These can be broken into mainstream curriculum, and extra curricula activities and special events.

### **Mainstream curriculum**

As is reflected in Table 3, the most common curriculum vehicles for IIU were Human Society and its Environment, Studies of Religion, English, Science and Technology and Creative and Performing Arts. One school utilised its Careers market. As well, pastoral care programs such as anti-racism and anti-bullying were utilised. Sport became a focus for one of the major cross school initiatives. This embeddedness in core business was identified by principals and teachers as a major factor in successful implementation of IIU in their schools, and was identified by several as one of the best features of the initiative.

In one instance, focussing on interfaith cooperation rather than “religion” *per se*, led one faith based school to build formal treatment of other religions into its curriculum at an earlier stage than had hitherto been the norm. Not only was the project embedded in the curriculum, it was starting to shape it.

One of the most consistent responses from principals was that in some ways, IIU was not new, because the agenda was already a part of their existing sense of purpose – linking particularly to the



values and citizenship domains. They saw IIU as an opportunity to give concentrated and well-resourced attention to the agenda.

## Extra curricula

Some extra curricula activities took place within individual schools, while others were examples of inter-school cooperation. The list below reflects those activities identified by principals in the course of their interviews:

- Islamic school hosting World Youth Day pilgrims
- Harmony Day
- International Day
- Excursions (linked to curriculum) to religious sites
- Careers market
- Youth Leadership Forums
- Reciprocal school visits
- Community garden
- Iftar meal
- Art and calligraphy program for fathers
- Walk to school day
- Carnival of cultures

It would be fair to say that students, while indicating overall satisfaction with their engagement with IIU, were more likely to identify these extra-curricular activities – particularly excursions – as the best aspects of their experience of IIU.

The experience of IIU pilot schools with treating interfaith and intercultural issues as part of the curriculum may have something to offer to the current National Curriculum Debate in this country, as it seeks to give expression to what makes us Australian.

### Key learnings

*IIU projects worked well when embedded in the curriculum, and in turn shaped the curriculum.*

*Alignment with the explicit purposes of the school assisted in the success of the IIU projects.*

## Teacher capacity building

Teacher capacity building activities have already been discussed under the heading of professional development. This section will focus more on the attitudinal dimension of teacher engagement with IIU.

Contact teachers in schools reported shifting of teacher attitudes, not only about particular religions and cultures, but about whether such issues have a place in the discourse of their schools. Teachers in faith-based schools were more comfortable with the notion of the treatment of issues relating to faith, but often this had been from a single faith perspective, and from a perspective of handing on a particular religious tradition. They had to come to terms with ways of teaching *about* other religions, which calls for a different approach. A few teachers in some of the government schools were reported as being somewhat reluctant to engage in any way with religion, seeing it as being inappropriate in a secular system. Their dilemma is really similar to that of their faith-based school colleagues – the dilemma of exploring how one can teach *about* a religion without being seen to promote it. It seems that over time, teachers have found ways through this challenge. It could be worthwhile elsewhere to seek to document this learning so that it can be shared beyond the pilot. The legitimisation of discussion about matters of religion is a significant step along the road to unleashing teacher capacities in this area.

### Key learning

*In order to engage teachers in the IIU agenda, it is important to be clear about the distinction between teaching about religion as a social construct and promoting particular religions.*

## Community participation and inclusion in broader Australian society

The tensions and anxieties which gave rise to the NAP are still very much alive in local communities. One Community Advisory Group member expressed this view very clearly:

*We can all sing Kumbaya until the cows come home, but racism still exists at a very high level in Australian society.*

This means that engaging with interfaith and intercultural agendas can be risky, and a number of participants were very aware of this as they embarked on the IIU pilot. Drawing on knowledge of their stakeholders, some schools even avoided publicity in the wider community, and kept communication to parents to a minimum, for fear of provoking hostility. The IIU pilot managed to navigate these difficulties with success. As one principal wrote:

*Interfaith and intercultural communities have the potential for disaster, however the dialogue made possible through this program has certainly reduced this potential.*

Having said this, though, while teachers were generally quite satisfied with impact on the community, significant numbers of principals, and Community Advisory Group members signalled that they would have liked to see higher levels of community engagement, and greater impact on the community. How realistic this aspiration might be in the short term is doubtful.

In one cluster meeting, a view was expressed by Islamic members that initially they had viewed the IIU pilot as yet another example of marginalising Muslims by implying that they bore responsibility for the kinds of intercultural violence which had erupted in places like Cronulla during 2007. They indicated that the way in which the program had been implemented helped to dispel this view. A small number of non-Islamic participants had expressed a concern that the program might not be sufficiently reciprocal. In other words, they had been concerned that the intention was for non-Muslims to learn about Islamic culture, without the reverse also taking place. The kinds of activities that have taken place would seem to have dispelled both of these sets of fears to some extent.

The reviewers were also acutely aware, as became clear in the situational analysis of the cluster and through discussion with community members and other project participants, that while culture and religion were significant factors at play in these areas, so too was low socio economic status. This may be every bit as significant as faith and culture in shaping people's behaviours and attitudes.

Teachers and principals reported that IIU gave their schools a more outward facing stance, and that engagement with other schools was building a sense of inclusion and capability. When discussing impact on the community, it should not be forgotten that students are community members in their own right, and changing their attitudes and understandings is changing those of a significant section of the community.

Looking further afield, at this early stage of the pilot program, reports indicated that the main point of impact on the wider community has been through parents. In some cases, like Punchbowl Boys High School and Banksia Public School, this had been by direct engagement with parents in the community garden, or in the *Yalla Badin* art project respectively. One mother spoke enthusiastically about the way in which the garden had brought a diverse parent group together. In other instances, teachers identified the indirect effect of the program through the students on the parents as a factor.

Impacting on parents may not be the kind of widespread impact hoped for in long term for this program, but it has potential to be most significant. The existence of entrenched attitudes among parents of many cultures and faiths was drawn to the attention of the review team by students, teachers and parents themselves. The Egyptian student's comments about her parents' attitudes in section 2 of this report threw this into harsh relief. Changing attitudes like this will not be accomplished in one year or two, but may take a generation in some cases. Thus, impact in the school becomes impact in the community over time.

Formal links to a number of other community agencies have been maintained through the Community Advisory Group. Participants have expressed a deal of satisfaction with the communication that has taken place at meetings, but have indicated that their sense of engagement is limited to these meetings and that they would like to see a greater effort at communicating with the community more widely. Some of the complexities of this have been previously discussed.

Schools have a unique capacity to contribute to participation and inclusion because they provide what one student described as “*a safe place to talk*”. This then allowed a process of engagement to take place, within which knowledge and attitudes can change. One Community Advisory Group member described it this way:

*It's quite positive because first someone meets someone who's just like them.  
It changes their perspective and their misunderstanding of other cultures.*

Creating this safe place for engagement may be one of the lasting legacies of the IIU pilot.

### **Key learnings**

*IIU demonstrated a capacity to impact on parents, who in turn acted to strengthen and leverage some of the school based projects.*

*Projects mounted within schools had a limited capacity to impact beyond students, staff and parents in the comparatively short term of the IIU. However, the primary purpose of schools is to work with students who are (and will be) members of their communities, so changes in students are in fact changes in their communities. A long term view is necessary.*

*Matters of interfaith and intercultural understanding are seen as needing to be treated with sensitivity within communities.*

*Schools provide a safe place within which issues related to faith and culture can be addressed.*

### **Implications**

*A balanced approach to social cohesion which does not appear to single out some members of the community for special attention will be less likely to create initial suspicion about programs like IIU.*

*Projects whose goal is to impact on the wider community in the short term would need to be designed with a clear focus in that wider community, and preferably in partnership with community agencies.*

## 7. Mapping against NAP outcomes

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Sections 5 and 6 above report the elements of IIU which relate to the outcomes. These can be summarised as follows.

- Targeted education initiatives to build better understanding and acceptance of Australia’s cultural and religious diversity (Outcome 9);
  - Two geographic clusters where cultural and religious diversity had been identified as an issue were selected for the sites prior to the public tender process. The early identification of these clusters as “problems” has been overcome to a great degree.
  - Each of the 16 schools from government and faith based sectors had developed a project in this area, engaging directly with the student population, developing resources and engaging in ongoing professional development. Each school had progressed in their own journeys in the area of interfaith and intercultural understanding.
  - Participants report high levels of student engagement and satisfaction, and, early indications are that the programs are having a positive indication for students. Better data on student outcomes will emerge from the web-based tools which schools are now beginning to take up.
- Strengthening mutual trust within communities and between communities and governments through ongoing dialogue (Outcome 6);
  - The major impact of IIU to date has been on the students and teachers of the schools concerned. Significant impact has been in the area of people’s attitudes with the attitude changes stemming from engagement with “others” and the gaining of new knowledge.
  - Impact on the community at large has been limited to students as members of those communities, and in some cases, to their parents.
  - The facilitation of communication between schools within and beyond the cluster has created safe spaces within which engagement and ongoing dialogue can take place.
- Further opportunities for young Australians from different cultural and religious backgrounds to enhance their leadership skills and participation in mainstream Australia (Outcome 5).
  - Youth leaders from different schools benefitted from participation in a youth leadership forum.

- A number of initiatives have brought schools together in ways which allow students to engage in naturalistic environments with one another (eg sports days, careers markets) and to take on informal leadership roles (e.g. older students working with younger ones)
- Islamic students reported a lessening sense of being seen as outsiders.
- Project schools have begun to develop links in other parts of Sydney, and across sectoral divides.

The review team made contact with the project manager for IIU and those from other NAP pilots in the areas of employment, youth mentoring and sport. It appears that the various pilots developed independently, with contracts negotiated for each separately. Structures for interaction among the pilots were put in place in a post hoc fashion. Among the formal structures is the quarterly meeting of the pilot projects.

Sport seems to have been the major success in terms of inter-pilot cooperation. One explanation for this may be that sport is seen as common ground, or neutral territory. In fact, some students commented on how they valued interacting with students from other schools about “ordinary things” – that is matters of concern to all young people, and not necessarily related to religion. The review team also interviewed DIAC’s manager of NAP who emphasised the effectiveness of IIU and its natural linking with the pilot program in sport. However, investigation revealed a more significant factor in explaining why the interaction between these two pilots was more significant and more responsive than for the others: continuity of project managers. These are the only two pilots within which Government level project management has not changed significantly since inception. This has allowed for the development of both an in-depth understanding of the manager’s own project, and a productive, ongoing relationship with their opposite number. This type of relationship, and the resultant positive interaction between projects was not possible where there had been a number of people in project manager roles. Once again, the issue of continuity of staffing for sustainability surfaces as a significant factor.

### **Key learnings**

*Continuity of staffing at Government level was essential for collaboration among projects.*

*Inter-project cooperation was hampered by the fact that the issue of collaboration was introduced only after the individual projects were under way.*

### **Implication**

*Pilots that are intended to have common agenda should be designed collaboratively, with a clear shared framework for participation and consistency among contracts.*

## 8. Organisational issues

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Erebus was commissioned to manage the IIU project on behalf of DEEWR. Respondent groups were asked to comment on the way in which Erebus had carried out this role and in particular on the way in which communication had been managed within the pilot. There is a general consensus that they have done this well.

Principals and contact teachers are the major points of contact at each school. Both of these groups, as well as the Program Advisory Committee, rated the role of Erebus highly, frequently identifying the role played by Erebus as one of the major facilitating factors in projects, and a major contributor to effectiveness. In particular principals identified a balanced approach to the administrative requirements based on a sound understanding of the reality of schools. They did not feel that they were overburdened. Erebus staff were seen as being responsive and flexible, and had an engaging and personable approach to schools. Principals appreciated both the fact that regular meetings were held, and the skilled facilitation of these meetings. Cluster group members also reported a high degree of satisfaction with meetings. Principals saw Erebus' non-directive approach as empowering them to shape the project to their own school situations. The Erebus project manager was described in glowing terms by almost every principal. Schools reported no problems with issues like the administration of funding.

The major vehicle for project wide communication noted by principals was the cluster meeting. These were very highly appreciated by both principals and cluster group members as a means of staying in touch with other schools. The degree of cross school communication outside these meetings varied from school to school. Erebus maintained ongoing communication with project schools using email and telephone, and the website is beginning to emerge as a useful tool for sharing. Once again, the role, efficiency and personal style of the Erebus project managers were rated very positively.

Some principals and cluster group members indicated that there had been occasions on which earlier communication would have been appreciated regarding project developments, but in general communication was seen as clear and timely by schools.

There was a different perspective on communication among members of the Community Advisory Group who were interviewed. Their priority was on communication with the wider community, and they consistently expressed a desire for more communication with groups beyond the school about developments in the project. This aligns with the view (discussed above under the heading of *Community Participation and Inclusion*) that the impact of IIU beyond the schools at this stage has been limited. As well, some schools reported a deliberate option to limit communication with the community due to perceived sensitivities. Some CAG members did express a preference for more communication between meetings. A simple newsletter was suggested by some respondents for communication beyond the schools.

## 9. Lessons from the pilot

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The review of the IIU pilot provided key insights regarding factors contributing to and constraining its success in achieving the NAP outcomes, as well as addressing the criteria of appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency.

### Contributing to its success

#### School based leadership for IIU

This factor includes the formal commitment by school principals and other senior staff in the public endorsement and carriage of IIU within the school. Participative commitment by school principals as well as other senior staff contributed substantively to the degree of ownership of IIU within the school. Teachers who had the carriage of IIU in schools where there was no public commitment by the principal commented upon the negative impact on students and teachers of the lack of leadership at particular events. Principals' support of and engagement with IIU were essential to school ownership of IIU. The principal "needed to be the driver".

The extent and style of leadership supporting IIU were identified in several ways. This leadership was found in keen and committed staff who were the "right person" for IIU. The dual leadership roles of being cluster leader as well as having the carriage for IIU in one's own school gave that school a wider base to draw upon in the planning and implementation of IIU. A leader's personal style such as the Lakemba Cluster Leader's approach inspired others within the school as well as the cluster to bring creativity and new energy to their own work with IIU. Such leadership and inspiration for IIU were also found in those schools where there were keen and committed staff implementing IIU. The energy and enthusiasm of early career teachers were valued by other IIU team members. Leadership for IIU was related to finding the right people for overseeing and implementing IIU in the school. Of note is that participation in this review of IIU led to the beginning of ownership and participation by the principal of one of the schools.

Principals and executives who formally endorsed IIU or who were involved publicly in its carriage expressed a moral purpose and vision for the school and the community which gave priority to the dignity of all people and the integral role of social cohesion and inclusion in Australia. The expression of this vision of hope and sense of moral purpose led staff and the wider school community to appreciate the fact that education had an essential role in values education while still giving priority to the other learning outcomes demanded by NSW Board of Studies, governments and the public. In such instances IIU is integral to the vision and ethos of the schools.



## Embedding within school life, curriculum and calendar

IUU needed to be integral to the life and work of the school. This was achieved through embedding IUU in:

- school life such as in pastoral care or anti-bullying programs;
- formal curriculum such as in history, art, literature and studies of religion;
- activities such as interschool and school-community events featured in the school calendar.

The survey of resource activities (see Resources above) showed that of the 16 schools chosen 7 had linked IUU resources to mainstream curricula, 9 had related them to extra-curricula activities and 1 school had based them within a total school pastoral care program. The visits to schools highlighted that in primary schools IUU was embedded within their holistic approach to the curriculum whereas for secondary schools IUU needed to find a formal place within the secondary school curricula.

Schools appreciated assistance they received regarding appropriate curriculum areas and resources for embedding IUU into the curriculum. One teacher commented upon the need for more resources particularly regarding Aboriginal culture.

The police representative on the Community Advisory Group emphasised the essential role of embedding IUU in the school and also in the community:

*There is a need to integrate inter-faith and inter-cultural understanding into the school curriculum. It has to be a regular agenda item during PD days for teachers. Teachers should bring back and introduce activities in the classroom and also plan activities for community involvement. The approach, however, should be coordinated among the various groups involved, the curriculum should be designed to accommodate the program and be built into classroom activities and more information should flow through to the community to create awareness about the program.*

For other NAP pilot programs – Sport provided a common focus for all groups in embedding IUU into the school life. The sports activities provided arenas in which people engaged across schools and faith and cultural identities. People were engaged in these arenas with a focus on their sporting abilities more than their cultural identities. There was engagement across different backgrounds in the safe place of the sporting arena.

## From place-based to safe place learning

The choice of the two cluster areas Lakemba and Macquarie Fields expressed a place based approach for IUU. The two areas provided different social contexts within which schools were

addressing IIU. The expression of interest by a school and its selection for the IIU project gave a legitimacy to its work in the area of IIU and social cohesion. The cluster approach provided safe places within which schools could engage with each other beyond educational, cultural, religious and social differences. Relationships of trust were developed which led to increased engagement by teachers, schools, students, and communities.

The Lakemba cluster schools looked beyond their own context for engaging in IIU across a wider range of schools and religious traditions. The Macquarie Fields cluster schools, which came from a more diverse social context than the Lakemba cluster, gave priority to engaging with the other schools in their own cluster.

The engagement beyond schools' own walls showed the high value people gave to having safe places for implementing IIU and advancing social cohesion. Schools varied in how they pursued such engagement. Sometimes it began by bringing the community and other schools into a school's own spaces such as the involvement of parents in arts programs with subsequent movement into safe places outside their own school. Other times the engagement occurred through initiatives across schools, religious traditions and social contexts. These differences across schools reflect differences both in their contexts and the stages schools and their communities are at in developing social cohesion as reflected in the following comments.

*For isolated communities it is important for people to come to them. Get the world in and the community can then look outwards.*

*Students from Iraq and Iran do not mix with each other. Parents do not want them to mix even in the school.*

*This takes time to develop.*

*It does not happen overnight.*

Teachers were conscious of differences in students regarding how they engage with and move beyond differences:

*in primary school it is "you and us";*

*for teenagers it is territorial;*

*you are "not accepted until you get into the high school."*

Essential to this engagement in safe places are reflection, trust and relationships. In safe spaces, stories were shared - especially people's experiences as refugees. This sharing of stories was appreciated by students, teachers and parents. It gave them the opportunity to reflect upon and understand each other's "journey". People were deeply affected by the stories and these gave them a "real sense of why students behaved as they did". This sharing and mutual understanding was seen as contributing in one school to "sincerity, politeness and genuine good nature". Students also

mentioned that they learnt that “everyone’s different and we should respect that” and “when you study religions you realise that faith can be important for people”.

The principle of students’ changing and learning as a basis for communities changing was emphasised by teachers and students. However, one group of parents commented:

*In this community there is no integration unless it’s forced on them by schools. People in the community are unsure of different things and the parents are intimidated and uncertain and they are the ones that need to be educated for it to flow through to the children.*

The relevance of the learning to people and their contexts is central to both place based and safe place learning. While the learning needed to deepen people’s understanding of cultures and religious traditions, it needed to be framed in ways which are relevant to the everyday lives of young people and the worlds in which they live. Students listed activities with high levels of student participation amongst the “most important things they had learnt” and would like to see in IIU. These high levels of participation and relevance show how the programs and activities need to be “more exciting and involve wider community participation”.

## External Resourcing

Schools found the professional and financial support from the Australian Government, through DEEWR and Erebus integral to the success of IIU. Being selected for IIU meant engagement across schools through cluster meetings. The financial resourcing made engagement of a school, including teachers, students, and parents, in new safe places beyond their own school possible.

Parents at an Islamic school stated that one of the best things is that the financial resourcing has allowed the schools to pay for someone to come in and educate the children in areas other than literacy and numeracy, which is the focus of most other supplementary funding.

Erebus facilitated, affirmed and celebrated this wider engagement and the resultant new learnings that have occurred within and across schools. The celebration of such learnings has occurred in individual schools, within clusters and across the pilot.

Erebus provided technical support for the development of resources and the accessibility of these resources online. This technical support was also a catalyst for sharing of ideas across schools and the whole project during the development of the resources.

## Constraining factors

### Reluctance

The legitimacy given to IIU through the selection of a school for the project was not accepted universally. Reflecting their personal histories and world views, some teachers and parents were reluctant to see religion (or other religions) as a focus of discussion in their schools. In places where principals did not provide strong leadership and endorsement of the program, this was particularly the case.

A number of people in the schools and communities showed an initial reluctance to be part of IIU because of the way it had been placed within the national priorities of security and anti-terrorism. Erebus was effective in moving people's attention to the essential value of interfaith and intercultural understanding.

Teacher reluctance to adopt IIU occurred when a school's approach consisted of IIU being an "add-on" to the core life and work of the school. Teachers were seeking ways in which IIU could be hooked onto or embedded into what was core to the school.

Passive resistance resulted from people not being well informed about IIU. Keeping part-time staff informed was a challenge for the people responsible for the carriage of the project in the school. The delay of online access to information about and resources for the project was also an issue in keeping people informed. People were also seeking appropriate acknowledgement of the time (and resources) needed for the implementation of the project

Reluctance to be involved in IIU could also reflect people's sense that they need professional assistance if they are to contribute effectively in this area. The survey of resources (see above) showed that 6 schools had focussed their resources upon professional development – 4 schools with a focus on teacher professional development and 2 schools with a focus on parent professional development. These results are one indication that professional development needs to move beyond being the responsibility of the individual schools and clusters to a strategic and substantive approach which is the joint responsibility of the contracted agent(s), the clusters and the schools.

Some reluctance was related to how IIU was embedded within the school curriculum. This was the case where participants could not see a clear distinction between a study of religions as a subject in its own right, studying religion as part of a community's or nation's cultural identity and diversity, and educating people to be religiously literate within a religious tradition.

## Issues of leadership stability and succession

Issues of reluctance to implement IIU were heightened when there were a number of changes of personnel with leadership roles in IIU within the clusters and schools. One parent commented “the school has seen a lot of change, with principals and teachers.”

People committed to implementing IIU acknowledged their concern when key people were transferred from the cluster or from the school. This raises the question as to who is then ready to assume leadership for IIU and how well prepared are they for the role whether that be as cluster leader or school leader. The sustainability of IIU requires a critical number of people with capacity to have leadership roles in the project both at school and cluster levels.

## Contextual differences

The approaches to IIU needed to be shaped to meet the needs of particular schools, communities and contexts. The principal and parents at one school emphasised the interacting effect of socio-economic factors, student mobility and students’ experiences. There were significant transition issues for primary school children who were recent arrivals from countries such as Iraq. Some of these children expressed their preference to return to Iraq rather than stay in Australia. Addressing questions of people’s cultural identity and community cultural diversity was a low priority in contexts where many children had difficult home lives. They needed to be motivated to come to school, and needed the space “to form their own opinions on all things especially racial and interracial issues”. In such contexts inter-school visits, after school activities and wider community involvement were seen as ways forward.

A whole of government approach is integral to addressing some of these contextual differences. For example, housing commission policies contribute at times to the constant changing of the student population, with this lack of stability requiring students to be repeatedly forming new friendships.

The differences in school and community contexts required prudence and caution on the part of the people responsible for the carriage of IIU. While schools valued their involvement in IIU there was a need to identify the most appropriate way to progress the program with their unique student body and within their unique communities. This was especially the case when such an agenda was not a priority for them, and even at times in strong contrast to their previous experiences of differences in faiths and cultures.

The differences in school and community contexts required attention by each school. Hence the situational analysis developed for the project as a whole was effectively to be supplemented by the detailed local knowledge each school had of its community.

## **Key learnings**

*Leaders legitimated the pursuit of social cohesion and engagement in interfaith and intercultural dialogue through their enunciating a clear vision and strong moral purpose for these goals.*

*The learning journeys of individuals, schools, clusters and communities consisted of transitions from initial ignorance and, at times, suspicion through awareness, to a new understanding and appreciation of religious and cultural identities, the importance of people's personal histories, and the religious and cultural diversity of communities.*

*Engagement was both an integral process in, and an essential outcome of, the pilot. Engagement of people and communities was integral to the learning journeys as well as an important outcome of the sense of empowerment or agency they gained with their newly developed understandings and appreciations.*

*This engagement was facilitated through the creation of opportunities for individuals and groups to engage with one another in safe spaces often beyond their immediate socio-economic and cultural contexts.*

*Reflection and celebration were integral to teacher and student ownership of new understandings and insights.*

*People's hope and confidence in achieving the goals of socially cohesive schools and communities were based upon:*

- *fostering social cohesion by developing understanding, transformative engagement and trust;*
- *working together to develop mutually beneficial agendas;*
- *legitimizing the project and its approach with the focus upon learning about religion through embedding them in the core business of the school – in the curriculum and in the calendar;*
- *a willingness to explore new curriculum options, teaching learning strategies, and forms of engagement across schools and communities;*
- *teaching/learning strategies which involve community and/or faith based leaders; and*
- *valuing community culture, knowledge and skills.*

## **Review Criteria**

The reviewers have remained aware, throughout their work, that IIU is a pilot, and that pilots are, by their very nature, opportunities for learning what works. The lessons outlined above detail what has

been learned from both the successes and the challenges of the IIU pilot. Another way to look at this is to address the three criteria required in the review brief: appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency. This section treats each of these criteria in turn by way of summarising the major findings of the review which have already been provided in detail above.

## Appropriateness

There is evidence of the IIU pilot as having evolved as an appropriate and timely contribution to the promotion of social cohesion in the Australian schools and communities in which it has operated. The Program Advisory Committee members (an expert outside body) viewed the program as appropriate. This appropriateness is also evidenced by the general sense among students that their teachers had a good sense of the realities of life in their communities. The on-the-ground success of IIU has drawn on both the formal, wide-scale situational analysis, and the local school's own sense of its needs, because it was this sense that ultimately gave rise to local projects. Assisting schools to choose their own focuses was a most appropriate way to proceed in this instance, reflecting a respect for local communities and their capacities.

Early concerns about the schools seeming to have been selected because their communities were a source of social problems have, by and large, been put to rest.

## Effectiveness

Sections 5 and 6 of this report provide a catalogue of the effects of the IIU project in its own right, and Section 7 focuses on the extent to which it has contributed to the wider NAP outcomes. These create an overall picture of a project which has been effective. Indicators of this effectiveness are captured in brief below.

The situation analysis process has helped to shape local initiatives. All schools have initiatives under way, with resources in different stages of development. There is evidence of impact on the understanding and attitudes of teachers, students, and to a lesser extent, parents. Discourse about issues of faith and culture has been legitimated in schools as safe places. Schools have engaged in interaction within and beyond the cluster, with those teachers most directly involved in the cluster now feeling comfortable in one another's schools. Where there has been continuity of staffing, different projects within the NAP have shown that interaction among projects can be successful.

It is too early to have quantifiable data about student outcomes at this stage. The experience of professional development has varied across schools and between clusters.

## Efficiency

The IIU project management by Erebus has elicited strong satisfaction from participating schools in terms of the balanced approach to administration, the flexibility of approach and their facilitative

skills. Erebus has acted as a clearing house through personal communication, meeting structures and the web-site. Their change of approach to the resource development element of the project by providing skilled support for the task rather than an additional committee was an efficient way to deal with schools' expressed difficulties.

As a pilot, the IIU project has had a comparatively modest budget, but it has been money well spent in terms of the lessons that have been learned as a consequence. The budget has explicitly addressed not only resource development, professional development and overall project administration, but the critical dimensions of teacher release (which is sometimes explicitly excluded from such initiatives) and funding for excursions. Grants have been prudently and efficiently managed, and good governance has been ensured through the cluster, Program Advisory Committee, Community Advisory Group and inter-departmental committee.

Changing personnel both within schools, and within partner NAP projects, has proved to be a challenge to efficiency, with gaps in personnel, a loss of "corporate knowledge" and hence loss of momentum, as new relationships are built. The program managers in each of the NAP pilots have been essential to the efficient and effective operation of their projects.

Sustainability is a critical issue in the discussion of the efficiency of any pilot. There is no doubt that the additional resources, which convert into time for teachers and opportunities for students, have been a critical element in the success of the pilot. Respondent opinions were divided as to whether the initiatives would or could continue once funding ceases. On balance the reviewers would suggest that funding at the level of the pilot is a key factor in capturing the attention and energy of schools and allowing early implementation. On its own, though, this does not guarantee sustainability. Four other key factors are leadership engagement, breadth of ownership within the school, continuity of staffing (at both school and government levels) and the degree to which the agenda can be "mainstreamed". As long as interfaith and intercultural issues remain exotic extras, they will not be sustainable.



# 10. Policy context

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While IIU has been piloted as part of the Government's National Action Plan it also relates directly to the federal government's social inclusion agenda and MCEETYA's *National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. IIU addresses the following three NAP outcomes:

- Building better understanding and acceptance of Australia's cultural and religious diversity (Outcome 9)
- Strengthening mutual trust within communities and between communities and governments (Outcome 6)
- Providing opportunities for young Australians from different cultural and religious backgrounds to enhance their leadership skills and participation in mainstream Australia (Outcome 5).

The Australian Social Inclusion Board has been given as its first priority jobless families and children at greatest risk of disadvantage, taking a locational approach as necessary. IIU provides important strategies for addressing social exclusion related at least in part to people's attitudes to religious and cultural differences. The IIU outcomes for children, schools and communities include enhancing people's knowledge, informing their attitudes and increasing their community participation and social connectedness. IIU strategies emphasise engagement in safe places thus modelling social inclusion in ways which also challenge people's attitudes and discriminatory practices. IIU is an important vehicle for addressing issues of:

- *wide exclusion* by particular groups in the community based upon a single dimension such as discrimination;
- *deep exclusion* of people based on multiple or overlapping dimensions; and
- *concentrated exclusion* experienced with a concentration of problems in a particular geographic area.

(See the recent report *Social Inclusion: Origins, concepts and key themes* prepared by the Australian Institute of Family Studies for the Social Inclusion Unit, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.)

IIU is well positioned to address the MCEETYA draft *National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. These goals include developing students as active, informed and responsible global and local citizens with:

- moral and ethical integrity;
- an appreciation of Australia's culture and history;
- an ability to relate and communicate across cultures; and
- a desire and capacity to work for the common good.

In presenting these goals, governments are committed to "schooling (which) contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural, social and religious diversity". Such a goal is

based, in part, upon governments achieving new levels of engagement with parents, communities, businesses and, most importantly, students. These goals situate national security as a consequence of inclusive education promoting social cohesion, rather than as an end in itself.

One of the challenges for government is how to turn policy directions in areas like social cohesion and social inclusion into practical strategies for implementation. The IIU project goes some significant distance towards showing how this can be achieved. The approach can be characterised by the following features:

- It is making a direct response to the needs of target groups
- It is making use of high level support and organisation to support grass roots initiatives;
- It takes a view of schools as embedded in their local communities (place-based);
- It has implemented a whole-of-government approach;
- It has made provision for capturing emergent lessons through the use of external evaluation within a clear and explicit framework.

# 11. Recommendations

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Project specific key learnings and implications have been embodied within the report. This section provides broader recommendations which apply to the IIU project as a whole. A number of these have implications for the broader NAP:

1. That in order to capitalise on the momentum of the pilot, the IIU be extended as a pilot beyond NSW as a further phase which addresses the National Action Plan, the Government's social inclusion agenda, and MCEETYA *National Goals for Young Australians*;
2. That a whole of government approach be taken to the next phase, beginning from a consideration of how different branches might share the lessons from their pilots, and cooperate on common projects by planning, implementing and reviewing collaboratively. This could benefit from an allocation of overall coordination responsibility to one officer, or a small management group;
3. That in each school and government agency more than one person share primary responsibility for the project, to allow a leadership density that will both provide ongoing mutual support, and a capacity to cope with unavoidable changes of personnel. That as far as is possible, schools and government agencies strive to maintain continuity of staffing allocated to the pilots;
4. That selection in the subsequent phase be based on criteria which allow for some groupings which may go beyond geographical locations, to allow for the formation of coalitions among interested schools and community agencies;
5. That criteria for inclusion of schools in the project be based on factors which would include as essential the commitment of leaders and other senior staff, a whole school approach to professional development and action learning, and evidence of engagement and participation between schools and community;
6. That schools from this pilot should be involved in some way in the next phase of the project to allow incorporation of findings from their experience as a means of enhancing sustainability in their own schools, and those in the next phase;
7. That structured, strategic professional development be provided across the total pilot, making use of external expertise such as university faculty. This should be based on the lessons from the pilot. It should address areas such as:
  - leadership with moral purpose;
  - shared leadership for sustainability;
  - strategies for embedding IIU within school life and curriculum;
  - core knowledge about major religions;
  - the difference between learning about religions (as a cultural construct) and learning as a member of a particular religion;

- action research processes and tools;
- knowledge and skills required for the facilitation in “safe places” of engagement between different cultures and religions;
- processes of attitudinal change involved in people’s and communities’ transitions from ignorance through awareness to new understandings and appreciations of people’s cultural and religious identities;
- understanding the importance of story and journey in understanding people’s and communities’ cultural and religious identities; and
- Quality assurance framework and measurement indicators of the achievement of a project.

## 12. References

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Hayes, A., Gray, M. & Edwards, B. (2008) *Social Inclusion: Origins, concepts and key themes*. Paper prepared by the Australian Institute of Family Studies for the Social Inclusion Unit, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

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