

Mitch determined to match fund's investment in success

SAMANTHA HUTCHINSON

As a kid, Mitch Heritage dreamt of ditching school in regional Queensland to play professional football. More than a decade on, the University of NSW alumnus is the first indigenous student to make CBA's prestigious graduate program and now has his sights set on becoming the first indigenous head of a big four bank.

"A lot of my mates didn't go to uni — they're still at home and working full-time," he told *The Weekend Australian*.

He attributes his success in beating 7000 applicants for one of the country's toughest job programs to the Australian Indigenous Education Fund, a not-for-profit program providing financial assistance to Aboriginal students to get through high school, university and beyond.

Mr Heritage completed a traineeship in high school at a local branch of the CBA and this set his heart on banking. An AIEF schol-



arship in Year 12 turned his dream into reality, with funds covering tuition costs to study commerce at UNSW and board at the uni's residential dorms.

The program, backed by among others BHP Billiton, CBA, HSBC and *The Australian*, has helped 311 students complete high school and 19 graduate university, and is guiding 524 others through high school and university.

Yet the reluctance of the federal government to fully commit to the program is jeopardising the number of students it can take on.

"Investment from the Australian government in recent years has significantly lagged the private sector, so we've asked the Australian government to recommit to our work," AIEF chief executive Andrew Penfold said.

The group is now seeking gov-

ernment funding of \$40 million over four years, in an innovative model that draws funding only when students are proven to have graduated. The "one in, one out" model has the support of business, which has contributed more than \$73 million compared with government funding in the same timeframe of \$42m.

Mr Penfold argues that corporate support is contingent on government keeping its side of the bargain for a charity set up in 2008 to be funded by public and private groups in equal amounts. "If the government takes its foot off the pedal, the private sector won't necessarily pick it up," he said. "These businesses expect the government to lead and not follow."

There were signs that business would step up if government steps first. "If someone says they can match your dollar then that's great, and it would definitely make us think about (increasing our commitment)," said CBA chief executive Ian Narev.

EDITORIAL P23



Mitch Heritage, left, with Commonwealth Bank CEO Ian Narev in Sydney yesterday

HOLLIE ADAMS