CONSULTATION PROCESS

The *Futures Project* was designed to create a genuinely open and accessible process which would allow the people of New South Wales to have a say in the future of education and training in this state. The process was conducted to facilitate the broadest possible engagement of internal and external stakeholders.

The overall objective of the consultation was to identify the directions and principles that would ensure that public education and training is coordinated, driven by a clear set of priorities and sound principles and is dynamic, responsive, innovative and future-oriented.

Early in 2004, the Director-General of Education and Training announced the establishment of a small group led by Deputy Director-General Dr Alan Laughlin to consult on and develop principles and priorities to guide public education and training over the next five to ten years.

**Phases in the consultation process**

The project was conducted in three phases.

In the first phase, the project team met with a broad range of stakeholder groups, in 25 meetings, to determine the themes and questions to be explored. The stakeholder groups included:

- parents
- students from schools and TAFE
- union representatives
- members of professional associations, including Primary and Secondary Principals and TAFE Managers
- representatives of the Parents and Citizens’ Association
- academics and key individuals in education and training.

A booklet was drafted and sent to a number of critical friends who had a high profile in public education and training. Sections were also piloted with various stakeholder groups. Feedback from both sources was used to create the final version of the consultation booklet, *Excellence and Innovation*.

In the second phase, 350,000 copies of the booklet were distributed across New South Wales. A broad-based advertising campaign was undertaken to ensure people were aware of the process. A copy of the booklet was provided for every member of DET staff and there were sufficient copies for individual respondents, group respondents and respondents attending meetings. A copy was also placed on the web, together with information sheets and copies of key sections from the booklet in community languages. There was also a facility for additional translations to be developed on demand.

Support documents, including a proforma for meetings, were also prepared and distributed. Because of the extent of engagement in the process, the Director-General responded to requests and extended the closing date from the end of December to the end of February.

Institute, regional and state office directors took a leadership role in convening meetings, as did school principals, directors in the TAFE Curriculum Centres and TAFE College Directors. Executive from the P&C at regional and local level and officers of government and non-government agencies also facilitated meetings and submissions.

Members of the project team were assigned to geographic regions to provide assistance to school, education area and TAFE Institute staff who were coordinating, facilitating and recording meetings. Project team members also attended a number of meetings. A 1300 number was created which allowed community members and staff to request booklets and seek additional information about the project. Hundreds of calls were received on this number.

Meetings were held in schools and TAFE colleges across the state. There were also a number of responses received from representative organisations, other government agencies and businesses. Consultants (Paul Porteous and Macaw Consulting) and the Office and Children and Young People convened independent
meetings with community and staff members and young people. Students participated at school and college level as well as in state representative groups. A formal Industry representative forum was convened by the Director-General.

Altogether, 2711 responses were received as shown in the following table.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal submissions</td>
<td>1342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submissions from Organisations, Agencies, Businesses</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses from Meetings</td>
<td>1303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total responses received</td>
<td>2711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of people participating in the consultation process</td>
<td>28,519</td>
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In the third phase, each response was logged and entered into a database by question. Where this information was provided, personal data about the respondents, for example name, address and respondent type (such as school staff member, TAFE student, and parent) were also entered. Once sufficient responses were received, a process of analysis was commenced. Members of the project team were assigned to each paper and two people independently read through all the responses to each paper, developing a list of themes raised by the respondents. Under each theme a list of comments and strategies suggested by the respondents was developed. Sections of the report were developed around these themes, taking account of as many comments and strategies as possible and using as many quotations as possible. Additional information from research and from the media was used where appropriate. Given the scale of the responses, it was not possible to use every comment nor to quote from every respondent.

It is important to note that this consultation process was not set up as ‘research’. There was no control over who participated in the process: it was designed to try to ensure that anyone who wished to do so would be able to, so respondents were self-selected. Responses were received by email, fax and using the tear-out sheet provided in the middle of the booklet. Some people holding meetings used the meeting proforma and others chose not to. Some people wrote letters and some people came to visit the project team.

Respondents also chose a range of different response types. Responses varied from a single line answer to formal submissions and even articles. Some individuals and groups answered only one question. Some answered every question. Some people provided a more general response which was not specifically related to any individual question. Some people, particularly those responding by email, answered a series of questions over time. Given the nature of the consultation, it was not considered appropriate or valid to weight the responses in any way.

**Independent text analysis**

To enhance the validity of the overall process, a team of researchers from Educational Assessment Australia, an organisation attached to the University of New South Wales, was commissioned to undertake a qualitative text analysis of the process. The system was tested in a pilot run using data received to 31 December for one of the papers in the consultation document. At the conclusion of the consultation period, the text analysis process was applied to the whole data set.

The external text analysis used Nvivo software Version 2.0.161 (QST Pty Ltd). The first step in their procedure was to analyse the data for the most commonly occurring themes in each question. This was undertaken to provide validation of themes developed by the educational experts who read the submissions. The second step was to identify any differences and/or similarities in responses between metropolitan and regional respondents, and between respondents of different stakeholder groups. The third step was to examine the data by key words derived from the responses.

**Commissioned research papers**

A number of prominent academic researchers were commissioned to write papers on subject areas canvassed through the Excellence and Innovation booklet. These papers provided a brief overview of relevant themes emerging from contemporary research of relevance to NSW as well as insights from the
researchers. The views of the authors do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Education and Training.

Finally, all the information gained through these processes was used to develop the Key findings which appear in Chapter 6. These findings provide the Department of Education and Training with an overview of the main points raised by the participants in the consultation process.