Report of the consultation on future directions for public education and training

November 2005

“One size doesn’t fit all”
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(School principals’ meeting; Regional staff meeting; Federation of Parents and Citizens’ Association of NSW)
FOREWORD

Andrew Cappie-Wood  
Director-General  
NSW Dept of Education and Training  
L2, 35 Bridge Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Andrew

It is with great pleasure we present to you the Report on The Futures Project initiated by you in May 2004.

The community consultation generated by the document Excellence and Innovation has been extraordinarily widespread. By close of consultation some 28,000 people had been involved in meetings and some 2,700 submissions had been received. The analysis has identified common themes and these have been validated by independent analysis through the University of New South Wales.

This Report details the wide and sometimes confronting opinion held by various individuals and groups. It draws out specific directions and sets an agenda for the future. The academic companion pieces add a dimension that provides independent and wider perspectives on particular issues.

We would like to put on record our deep appreciation to the senior project officer, Ms Hetty Cislowski as well as the project officers Annie Hollander, Kathy Ryan, Catherine Burrows and Neville Warner. We also had a group of officers who have provided wonderful contributions through part time or short term employment during the course of the project. In particular: Eric Jamieson, Jim Harkin, Andrew Dowling, Bronwyn McLean, John Bentley, Jack Baseley, Lorraine Franklin, Mary O'Sullivan, Sandra Jones, Diane Wasson, Anne Topple, Sue Herron, Pam Peelgrane and Alan Pratt. Our clerical support has also provided invaluable service; Michael Manno, Jeanne Poisson, Michelle Ho, Joanna Manno and Helen Ling.

The experience of being able to analyse and reflect in developing this report has been a most unusual and exciting process. Thank you for the opportunity to work on this important task.

Yours sincerely

Alan Laughlin  
Deputy Director-General  
April 2005

Lindsay Wasson  
Regional Director Western Sydney (Futures)  
June 2005
The purpose of the consultation process was to engage the community of New South Wales in discussion about the priorities and principles that should guide planning by the Department of Education and Training (DET) for the next 5 to 10 years.

There was a remarkable response, a clear indication of the value that people in the education and training community, as well as in the broader community, place on public education and training. Altogether, more than 28,500 people participated in the consultation process. More than 1300 meetings were held around the state of NSW in schools, TAFE colleges and community venues involving students, staff, parents, industry and community members. The information from those meetings was recorded by the group facilitators and forwarded to the Futures team. In addition, 1342 written submissions were received from individuals and 66 submissions were received from representative organisations, via post, fax or email.

As described in Appendix 1 (Consultation Process), all the responses received were entered into an electronic database, collated by questions. All the responses to each question were read by at least two people with experience and expertise in the relevant area of education and training, initially working independently from one another, then comparing notes and aggregating ideas to form the major themes.

In preparing the report, the Futures team was aware that it would be difficult to do justice to the great volume of material that had been received. It was not possible to report on every issue raised nor to include every suggestion made: to do so would have generated a report too long to be read. Accordingly a series of decisions was taken that would influence the structure and presentation of the final report:

- The findings would be reported in a small number of fairly substantial chapters that represented the main areas of interest in education and training –
  - students’ learning across the K-12 continuum
  - the provision of leadership for quality education
  - the nature of the system which should be supporting schools
  - future directions and strategies for TAFE NSW.

- The material in each chapter would include brief summaries of the major themes related to that area and a set of Key findings arising from analysis of how those themes might impact positively on the future of NSW public education and training.

- Themes highlighted in each chapter would reflect the main issues that were most frequently reported by respondents, as well as less frequently mentioned issues that were clearly controversial. Each section would include a brief summary and direct quotes from the different viewpoints where this was appropriate.

- As many quotes as possible would be incorporated into the report to convey to readers a sense of the feelings and genuine concerns of respondents. The inclusion of quotes would also highlight the themes that were identified and, as far as possible, would reflect a range of stakeholders’ views.

Readers will find some of the quoted statements confronting. Many quoted statements will be arguable. They are not intended to offend or denigrate any staff or supporters of public schools and TAFE, nor do they represent absolute truths. They are a mix of perceptions, criticisms, observations, ideas and proposals. They are intended to convey the depth of feeling of the respondents, as well as the perspectives of a broad range of people interested in the future of public education and training.

Some respondents offered solutions to the problems they perceived. These were evaluated in the light of other responses and the knowledge and research available to the writing team. Many of the ideas and solutions have been incorporated in the Key findings in Chapter 6.

The Key findings reflect the views of respondents and the researchers who contributed.
At the end of each chapter there are one or more short Companion Papers by well-known academics who have an interest in public education and training in NSW. Their papers provide a brief overview of research which is relevant to the issues under discussion and their perspective on the issues outlined in the consultation document. The papers were commissioned as part of the Futures Project to provide an independent expert view on the issues raised for consultation. The views presented are those of the authors, not necessarily the views of the Department of Education and Training.

In addition, an independent text analysis was conducted on the data by an external organisation attached to the University of NSW, Educational Assessment Australia. This process was commissioned to supply an independent analysis which would provide verification of issues found by the experts and to identify any differences in the views of stakeholders. Sixteen sub-reports were produced, one for each of the discussion papers contained in the consultation document, Excellence and Innovation. The methodology for the text analysis is included in the report. There is a high degree of correlation between the themes identified by education experts within DET and the themes identified by the electronic analysis. The text analysis report contains quantitative information that would not be possible to generate from a qualitative analysis alone.
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Chapter 1

NSW – Leading Australia’s Learning
CHAPTER 1
NSW – LEADING AUSTRALIA’S LEARNING

The foundation of every state is the education of its youth.
Diogenes Laertius (3rd Century AD)

Education is the key to the State's growth, the intellectual capital of its people, the future quality of life of its citizens, the engagement of people in productive and personally satisfying endeavour and the international competitiveness of the State and of Australia as a whole. There is also an abiding recognition that NSW public education has helped shape the democracy of Australia, the values of its citizens and the spirit of the nation.

For these reasons, successive state governments have made ever increasing investments in education and training.

For the same reasons, the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) recognises the need for public education and training to be responsive to the expectations and challenges of a dynamic social and economic environment, to make the changes and build the capacity required to keep the state system and the State ahead of the game.

THE FUTURES PROJECT

To ensure education and training in this State confronts the systemic and professional challenges of best possible educational delivery in the 21st century, and in a spirit of genuine consultation with the community and stakeholders, DET has committed to a robust, comprehensive and open process of feedback, reflection and direction setting.

The Futures project, the product of that commitment, is a unique process in education in Australia for the scale and scope of its reach, and for the honesty and transparency of its process.

The Futures project is based on a determination and a need for NSW public education and training to be leading Australia’s learning. With one third of the nation’s public education students in NSW government schools and around 9% of the population of NSW aged 15 to 64 enrolled in TAFE at any one time, the future of education and training in this State is truly the future of education and training for the nation.

The Futures project was established in 2004 by the Director-General with the ultimate aim being to improve student outcomes but also to answer some fundamental questions:

• Do the students, parents, industry and wider community get the quality services and outcomes they are seeking?
• Can we improve our education system and, if so, how?

The Process

The first step in the project was to establish a dialogue with DET’s community as to the priorities, principles and potential strategies that could guide the organisation over the next 5 to 10 years. The assumption was that DET’s customers, the community of NSW, and its employees are well qualified to judge the organisation’s current performance and help inform its future direction.

Preliminary discussions with key stakeholder groups occurred and from the feedback received, a discussion paper, Excellence and Innovation was produced in September 2004, which formed the basis of much wider consultations.
The project has consulted a very broad sample of the education and training community. Over two and a half thousand written submissions were received and analysed both internally by education experts and externally by independent text analysis undertaken by the University of New South Wales. Teachers, parents and students from schools and TAFE Institutes across the State have shared their thoughts in response to wide-ranging questions. Industry representatives, school and TAFE administrative staff, preschool providers, senior executive staff members in regions, Institutes and State Office, interested spectators and all major stakeholder groups have contributed their views. In all, over 28,500 people provided opinion on DET's current position and future direction. (A detailed outline of the project's methodology is provided at Appendix 1.)

**Key Findings**

Two significant messages became apparent:

- There is pride in the many achievements of the public education and training system
- From this pride, there is a deep desire for DET to improve its operations.

By far the majority of respondents felt that DET should become more flexible, more adaptive and responsive, and more innovative to better meet present and future challenges. There was a palpable eagerness for change in order to ensure improvement. There was a passionate desire for DET to build on its considerable successes and be the preferred education provider through the early decades of the 21st century and beyond. There was strong acknowledgement that for this to occur, change was essential.

**Rationale for Change**

This State is serious about educating its children, young people and adults. After health, education and training represents the largest proportion of State government spending, consuming almost a quarter of the NSW State budget. As the body that administers public schools and TAFE, DET has a total organisation budget of $9.6 billion in 2004/05.

It is both timely and appropriate that the public education and training system in NSW be prepared to undertake a wholesale, public examination of its strengths and weaknesses and to seek fresh ways to strengthen its abundant capacity to be the leading education system in Australia.

**The Current System**

DET is a huge organisation, the largest in Australia and one of the biggest education providers in the world.

- DET enrols two out of every three school students in NSW.
- Some 745,508 (FTE) students attended 2,244 government schools across the State in 2004.
- In 2004, approximately 200,600 of these students (27%) identified as having a language background other than English; approximately 35,200 (5%) identified as Indigenous; and over 35,000 (5%) had a confirmed disability and received additional support.
- In 2004, DET employed approximately 89,000 full time equivalent staff, 96% of whom work in schools and TAFE colleges.
- In 2004, TAFE NSW provided training to over 9% of the State population aged between 15 and 64 across 10 TAFE Institutes, covering 137 campuses.

DET’s 2,244 schools and 137 TAFE campuses are clearly producing some very impressive results. DET’s size also provides opportunities for economies of scale and, compared with every other state and territory in Australia, NSW is by far the lowest costing education bureaucracy in the country (NSW spends on average $373 per student on administration costs while Queensland is the next lowest at $434 per student). In addition, NSW's total expenditure per student is $10,139 per student in 2002/03, well above the Australian average of $9,605 per student for the same year.

DET’s size and demand for efficiencies sometimes leads to a one-size-fits-all approach to educational provision. There is a belief that DET’s size results in an administratively driven organisation that imposes decisions, and solutions, from the top down. According to one Sydney high school principal, the existing
culture obstructs any sensible, rapid response to local needs. While the ‘tri-level reform’ agenda currently being implemented across the Office of Schools and regions is attempting to address this issue on both a cultural and operational level, there remain structural, policy and procedural obstacles to the full realisation of a system which better supports local solutions to local needs and expectations.

IMPERATIVES FOR CHANGE

The International Context

NSW education does not see itself in isolation from educational developments in other parts of Australia and the world. Indeed there is broad acceptance that the performance of public education and training in this State must be measured not only against nationally agreed standards but also by our performance against our international peers.

By many measures our performance is excellent. With the most rigorous and comprehensive state-wide external testing regime in the country, students are tested in Years 3, 5, 7 and 8 for literacy and numeracy. In addition, students sit examinations for the School Certificate in Year 10 and the HSC in Year 12. These tests point to impressive learning outcomes achieved by the students of this State:

- NSW is first or second in a number of Years 3 and 5 national reading and writing benchmarks1.
- NSW 15-year-old students rank amongst the best in the world in literacy, according to the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). In the 2003 PISA study of 41 countries around the world, students in NSW, as a group, performed better in reading literacy than students in countries such as Sweden, Netherlands, Hong Kong, Norway, Japan, France, United States, Germany and Italy. Only students in Finland did better than NSW in reading literacy and Finland was the only country to do better than NSW across all four areas tested: mathematical literacy, reading literacy, scientific literacy, and problem solving. In reading literacy, no state or territory in Australia significantly outperformed NSW students. Two-thirds of the NSW students tested were selected at random from NSW public schools.
- The 2002/03 Trends in Mathematical and Science Study (TIMSS) conducted in 46 countries also show NSW students performing extremely well in science. Only Singaporean students performed significantly better than NSW students in science in Year 8 and only Singapore and Chinese Taipei performed significantly better than NSW in science in Year 4. NSW students also performed well in maths, with students from only five countries performing significantly better than Year 8 students.

Results such as these are reason for celebration but not for complacency. In an endeavour to not only maintain but to improve on this position, DET must open itself to close scrutiny in all aspects of its operations. NSW needs to continually raise the bar as our international counterparts continually raise theirs. The truism that maintaining the status quo in a world of continuous change and progress has the effect of going backwards relative to others, is never more pertinent than in the context of education.

The Changing Environment

Public education and training in NSW, as in other states and territories, operates in a complex two-tier environment. Through its funding and reporting arrangements with the states, the Commonwealth government is increasingly impacting on the nature of education provision across the nation. This national agenda intensifies the resourcing and policy complexity of the environment in which the State system operates.

Rapid and continuous change is the defining circumstance for these times. Its pace, impact and global reach pose great challenges for the relevance and appropriateness of organisational structures, curriculum and services delivery, and the quality of teaching and learning.

At the same time, public education and training now operates in a highly competitive marketplace where choice is readily enabled through Commonwealth funding policies and the greater command, by individual families, of the discretionary wealth that can be applied to that choice.

This is a society in which education and training is seen by many as a commodity, a positional good, and a mechanism for social and economic leverage. It is also subject to inevitable, desirable, and welcome
demands by parents, carers, industry and the broader community for greater participation in decision-making and in the process of learning itself. A system which takes account of these demands along with greater community scrutiny of educational delivery, is a system which is better able to satisfy community expectations of highest quality and responsiveness to customer needs.

A Learning Organisation

The organisation that listens, learns continuously and acts on that learning is a healthy organisation. It is even healthier if it continuously adapts to changing contexts and builds its capacity to achieve better outcomes for students.

The Futures consultation is a clear demonstration of a learning organisation in intent and in practice. We have learnt from respondents that there is room for improvement in many areas. For example, the transition points into and through learning are identified as major areas for action. Like all systems and despite the considerable efforts of government, the system, principals and teachers, we have to continue to work on achieving the seamless, continuum of learning for students as they progress through school, TAFE and/or university.

The principle of lifelong learning is yet to be fully achieved. The imperative to address these issues creatively and to make them a reality drives the commitment to review our work through the Futures process.

Education and the Economy

In the State which constitutes the largest and most powerful driver of the national economy and which is the hub of Australia’s Asia-Pacific and world economic engagement, the link between a robust and vital public education and training system and economic strength, is a crucial consideration for our State Government.

On an individual level, the relationship between education and income is almost linear. The OECD states that the more skilled the worker, the wealthier they will be (2003: 13). On a broader level, greater labour mobility, lower unemployment and greater job satisfaction are also directly attributable to education. For societies, more education leads to better health, lower crime, increased social engagement and greater gross domestic product.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of developing the human and intellectual capital of a nation. A recent Canadian study has shown that if you measure actual skills rather than educational qualifications, human capital becomes a strong predictor of economic growth. (Economist 2004) Using the Adult Literacy Survey, a team of researchers at the University of Ottawa has … identified a clear and significant association between investments in human capital … and a country’s subsequent growth and labour productivity. Specifically, a rise of 1% in literacy scores relative to the international average is associated with an eventual 2.5% relative rise in labour productivity and a 1.5% rise in GDP per head. (Economist, 2004)

The link between learning performance and economic performance establishes an undeniable rationale for the types of changes and progressive improvements to the system that will continue to deliver growth in learning performance for all students whether in school, TAFE or both.

Skilling in a Changing Society

In the world of work, Australia is experiencing change at a rate and level of complexity quite different from that experienced in the past due to such factors as:

- increasing impacts from globalisation
- new and emerging industries
- new ways of doing business
- new business skills needs
- new and emerging technologies,
- demographic shifts, such as the ageing population and the growing wealth divide.
Globalisation is forcing new ways of organising ... work. Enterprises are increasingly integrating their systems, particularly in aligning training strategy with overall business strategy to improve their bottom line. (ANTA, 2004: 3)

In this context, skills shortages are a critical issue, and the decline in traditional skills is affecting many sectors in the economy, particularly the resourcing sector. A recent Commonwealth study into the New Apprenticeships scheme has found that while growth in the scheme has been impressive, traditional trades’ share of commencements has fallen from 25% in 1996 to around 13% in 2003 (DEST, 2004: 4). This decline in traditional skills is affecting many sectors in the economy, particularly the resourcing sector. Resources projects worth billions of dollars are now in jeopardy because of an acute skilled labour shortage (BRW, 2005).

The causes of the situation are complex. It has been said that parents are discouraging their children from entering the trades and that many people now believe that only a university education will provide the right foundation for successful careers and futures. There is also a view that industry may not have played a sufficiently active role in employing apprentices. The issue is, however, not so much identifying the causes as finding the ways they should be addressed.

During the course of the Futures project, the State Government launched its TradeStart@TAFENSW initiative which is designed to address a number of the issues around apprenticeships. However, industry, Government and TAFE will need to continue to work together to develop a range of strategies which will address the issue of skills shortages.

To provide skilled workers for Australia’s traditional, new and emerging industries, TAFE NSW will need a highly responsive and flexible approach. This will enable TAFE to maintain its viability while satisfying stakeholder requirements. If TAFE is to continue training students with industry standard facilities, equipment and resources, significant decisions about priorities, investment and renewal will need to be made. TAFE will need to enhance its industry partnerships. It will also need to build its capacity to earn commercial revenue and balance its priorities to meet the diverse needs of individuals, industry and communities.

**The Futures Project Consultation Results**

The consultation’s dominant message is that NSW education and training is a great system that can do better. To do this it must adopt a more flexible, student centred and responsive approach to the resourcing and management of schools and TAFE and of the system as a whole.

The DET operates in a highly competitive education market-place which is offering myriad services against which DET’s centralised services are not always competing effectively. Much potential has been shown in the steps taken to bring services closer to the locus of learning through the establishment of regions. However, further evolution of this model was suggested through the consultation in the desire for more localised support and greater discretion over resources to meet local needs.

The consultation’s responses can be clustered into four main themes:

- enhanced learning for students
- strengthening educational leadership
- building a more responsive and innovative system, and
- maintaining TAFE’s position as the leader in vocational education.

These four themes are detailed in chapters two to five below.

**CONCLUSION**

There are many things that the public education and training system of NSW currently does very well. The dedicated support staff, teachers, leaders and managers in DET’s employ are making this happen in a large and complex organisation.
DET's falling market share in schools suggests, however, that it is not meeting the requirements of parents who choose to send their children to other schools. DET must meet the needs of an increasingly competitive education market-place if it is to be the choice for a growing majority of parents and students in this State.

The challenge for a large and inclusive education and training system is that it must raise expectations and improve the learning performance of its students across all cohorts and groups. It must also narrow the gap between its top performers and its lower performers. The National Center on Education and the Economy in Washington, defines a successful education system as one in which the top tenth of the students compare favourably to the top tenth in any nation in the world, and the bottom tenth is very close to the top tenth (Tucker and Codding, 2000). The future of NSW public education and training should be measured in these terms for the benefits such performance will bring to individuals as well as to the society as a whole.

Raising expectations, improving learning outcomes and narrowing the performance gap are difficult but attainable goals. This consultation has recorded the voices of a community striving for more from their public education system. This community appreciates the importance of a quality education and DET's crucial role in providing it. At a broad level, the NSW community wants a well supported, accountable organisation which gets things done quickly and effectively at a local level as well as responds to its changing environment and innovates to meet future needs. NSW public education and training has a proud history of adaptation and innovation and must continue its tradition of improving its performance for the benefit of NSW and the individual children and young people and adults of this great State.

References


Notes

1 Note on national literacy and numeracy benchmarks: 2001 is the latest national data that is published. 2002 and 2003 data will be published shortly as will all Year 7 data for 2001, 2002 and 2003
Chapter 2

Improving Teaching and Learning
CHAPTER 2
IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING

“I want my teacher to be like batman and teach me how to fly ...”
(Student quoted in the response from the NSW Commission for Children and Young People).

The core factor contributing to quality student outcomes is the classroom teacher. The teacher’s understanding of the child’s unique needs and personality and their capacity to personalise a learning program are critical. The quality of the teacher depends on training, their mentoring and supervision, their own personality and love of children and most importantly their own continuous professional development.

This chapter will focus on the special needs of children at various stages of their development and learning paths. In analysing opinion about the child’s needs it will draw lessons for the teaching process and the roles the Department of Education and Training can play in facilitating a successful education for all. Essentially, this chapter is about the child and the teaching and learning process.

The chapter will include sections on issues raised in responses addressing:

- Good Teaching
- Early Childhood Years
- Primary School Years
- Middle Years
- Secondary School Years
- Students 15 to 19 Years Old
- Information Communication Technology (ICT).

Issues related to teaching and learning in TAFE are discussed in Chapter 5.

Each section of this chapter will conclude with Key findings and some ideas for consideration. These could be the basis of future decisions and programs.

This first section will focus on professional learning as the foundation for improving teaching and learning in classrooms. There was a major emphasis in all the consultation material on professional learning based on collegial support, mentoring, current knowledge of curriculum, further formal study and good teaching practice.
Great teachers are very special people. Many individuals and groups of students, teachers, parents and community members praised the work of good teachers. They described the critical relationship between the teacher and the student-learner as one which shapes attitudes about particular subjects, engagement with learning and staying on at school. Teacher-student relationships were described as vital for the ultimate success of students, particularly young people and students in second chance education. Respondents stressed that quality professional learning helps teachers develop and maintain strong and flexible teaching skills. This facilitates successful learning for groups of students with diverse needs, talents and abilities, all of whom need guidance, support and encouragement.

**GOOD TEACHING**

Great teachers are very special people. Many individuals and groups of students, teachers, parents and community members praised the work of good teachers. They described the critical relationship between the teacher and the student-learner as one which shapes attitudes about particular subjects, engagement with learning and staying on at school. Teacher-student relationships were described as vital for the ultimate success of students, particularly young people and students in second chance education. Respondents stressed that quality professional learning helps teachers develop and maintain strong and flexible teaching skills. This facilitates successful learning for groups of students with diverse needs, talents and abilities, all of whom need guidance, support and encouragement.

**GREAT TEACHERS MAKE LEARNING GREAT**

Quality teaching and learning was seen as the core business of schools and TAFE. Responses from teachers, schools, parents, students and the community constantly emphasised the importance of a quality teacher:

The re-orientation of the DET to ensure that teaching and learning is at the core of all its operations is critical. (NSW Teachers Federation)

Dinham and Bhindi (2005) support this in their reference to An Exceptional Schooling Outcomes Project (AESOP) based on 38 schools in NSW:

The key finding emerging from AESOP is the enacted belief that the core purpose of school is teaching and learning … Schools where ‘outstanding’ outcomes were being achieved were relentless in their quest for enhanced student achievement. (Dinham and Bhindi, 2005: 171)

One student expressed similar ideas in a more personal way:

A great teacher is someone who will talk through the maths exercise with you, and stop if you have any troubles, to go through each point step by step. A great teacher is one who doesn’t make you feel stupid and useless but helps you to understand every concept of the task, even if it requires giving up lunchtime. A great teacher will get straight into the work as soon as the bell goes, and will stop for casual conversation if there’s time left at the end of the period and everyone is confident of completing the exercise independently. A great teacher will never laugh at your understanding of the concept but will help provide a clearer vision of it, and a great teacher will always have time to answer your questions. (School student)

Another respondent stressed the personal and interpersonal skills of a great teacher:

Great teachers seem to exhibit abundant patience, kindness and commitment. Above all else, they are able to enthuse others and make a significant impact on the achievement of students. (Personal submission)
Respondents are clear that it is in the classroom that great teachers can both ‘bridge the gap’ and ‘lift the bar’ for their students.

Current, evidence-based research also supports the fundamental importance of the classroom in improving learning. Rowe (2003) is quoted or referred to in many group and individual responses including those from the Primary Principals Association, the Secondary Principals Council and the NSW Teachers Federation. Rowe argues that variance in students’ achievements due to the effects of class and teacher exceeded 40% in several countries while differences between schools, including socio-economic factors, accounted for much smaller variance ranging between 0-9% (Rowe, 2003: 18). There is, he says, more variation within schools than between schools. (Wilms, 2000; in Rowe, 2003: 20) specifies that pressure and support for change needs to be directed at particular teachers within schools, not simply at entire schools.

Rowe says:

Teachers can and do make a difference and that consistent high quality teaching, supported by strategic professional development can and does deliver dramatic improvements in student learning. (Rowe, 2003: 27)

He argues that structural interventions such as single-sex schooling, types of schools and even class size have, per se, small or negligible effects on learning and that what has to change is what happens behind the classroom door with a total commitment of all staff to new ways of working (ibid: 26).

**GREAT TEACHERS ARE LIFELONG LEARNERS**

There was strong support for student learning needs to be met by teachers who are themselves lifelong learners. Ladwig and Gore, in their companion paper to this consultation said:

In a general sense, quality teaching is something that requires continual reflection and renewal. (Ladwig and Gore, 2005: 122)

Parent and student representatives from one school saw the link between professional learning and classroom performance when they described great teachers as those who:

- Have been both professionally and personally supported
- Are up to date with and implement effective teaching strategies that cater for equity for all students
- Understand the needs of all students that they educate
- Support each other at faculty and executive levels
- Create a supportive, safe environment for all students to achieve their best results. (School SRC/P&C meeting)

Another view was:

Great teachers love learning and are able to impart this love of learning to their students. (School staff member)

One school staff pointed out that teachers complement and compete with a range of technologically driven choices, information and

Great teachers are those who can turn around difficult classes. (Parent)

The reality to be faced squarely is that adults cannot be developed unless they want to. (Catholic Education Commission)

They maintain their professional standards by actively engaging in professional development, are enthusiastic, creative and adopt a life-long learning approach for themselves. (TAFE staff meeting)

Teachers need to be committed to life-long learning not only for their students but also for themselves. (DET staff member)

They display a real passion for their profession, are life-long learners even when the learning is a challenge, want the best for students and parents and are prepared to put the effort in to achieve that best. (School staff member)
entertainment. Modern young people expect their learning to be entertaining, fast moving, interactive and rich in variety. If teachers are not up to date in their methodology, students will lose interest:

Schooling is no longer the main source of learning and developing knowledge and skills for many adolescents. Their multi-media saturated world is much more cutting edge than teachers. (School staff meeting)

Responses refer to disengagement and alienation as the price of poor teaching and emphasise that this is not an option for the future. Confident and competent teachers, themselves lifelong learners understand that how one teaches is inseparable from what one teaches, from what and how one assesses and from how one learns. (DET, 2004: 4)

A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

There were divergent opinions on responsibility for professional learning and the provision of time for it. Some responses stressed the importance of the teacher taking control of professional learning:

Teachers must become autonomous learners – willing to embrace change. (School staff meeting)

The ability to work alone and focus on issues of student learning. (School staff meeting)

Membership of professional associations was seen as valuable because of:

Access to professional learning that meets the needs of highly experienced teachers, particularly of senior courses such as those conducted regularly in the metropolitan area by professional associations. (School community meeting)

In their Companion Paper, Letts et al said that professional learning in rural and remote areas:

… requires an initiative on the part of the school and teacher to fully utilise such development opportunities and for the DET to acknowledge the difficulties faced. Information and communications technologies are proving useful …

Due to the nature of the place, school personnel often establish their own professional links, employing creative ways to operationalise and maintain these … Networking … teachers within and across rural townships engenders productive partnerships for professional development …

New teachers gain their professional support eclectically. (Letts et al, 2005: 238 - 239)

It was recognised that the learning styles of teachers vary as do the locations where teachers live and work. There needs to be flexibility in offerings to reflect this.
A number of respondents saw incentives such as Postgraduate Education Loan Scheme (PELS) support as encouragement for teachers to complete postgraduate studies. There was a feeling that:

*If teachers felt their time and professional learning was valued they would do more.* (Regional teachers meeting)

Many respondents stressed the need for time to embed curriculum changes and to share professional dialogue. There were different views on how this time should be provided. Some said that time provided for professional learning based on funded release presents children with discontinuous learning provision. They pointed out the paradox of frequently taking teachers out of classrooms to improve their classroom performance and argued for provision of professional learning while maintaining stability and continuity in classrooms:

*Training should be either conducted on-site or outside of school hours. Teachers could be paid for hours in the evening or on Saturday. Their professionalism would be recognised, (and) their students would continue to be taught… I believe most teachers, given the chance, would sign up for this win-win opportunity.* (School principal)

*Payment for professional learning conducted on weekends should be made directly to teachers involved. This would solve a number of problems: shortage of casual relief; teachers increased reluctance to attend courses during school time (and) reduce demands on teachers by not having to prepare and mark lessons which they do not deliver.* (Personal submission)

Others saw the responsibility as being more with the DET as the employer to develop courses, fund relief and travel for teachers and deliver programs in school time:

*Professional development courses should be in school hours.* (School staff meeting)

*Need a pool of casuals or district relief to allow staff to engage in Professional Learning.* (School staff meeting)

*Quality professional learning opportunities in school time need to be available to all staff to move towards best practice.* (School staff meeting)

Shared responsibility was advocated very often. Time for sharing, collegial discussion, mentoring and induction was usually seen as desirable in school time and with the necessary resources devolved to the school:

*Time at school for collegial networking and mentoring.*

*Sufficient funds to support professional learning plans.* (School staff/P&C meeting)

*It is essential that professional learning funds are based in schools. In the past, regional or central based funds meant that professional learning was like the Titanic – looks good but really impractical when under pressure.* (School community meeting)
There was some support for an additional school development day (either in term 4 or as agreed with the local community) to be devoted to school determined issues related to learning. Other respondents argued that:

Schools should choose their own pupil-free days to ensure the involvement of Departmental consultants. (School community meeting)

Many teacher respondents wanted professional learning programs to be more sustained rather than one-off days. They saw the DET having a role to develop and deliver courses and on-line programs of professional learning to meet teachers’ needs.

WHAT TEACHERS WANT IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Respondents clearly indicated that the classroom teacher and the school should be the primary focus of professional learning. In this they saw their school and collegial networks as more important to them than centrally developed programs:

Develop a culture of reflection, discussions of classroom practice, learning new strategies to support the learning needs of students. (School staff meeting)

In their Companion Paper, Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis wrote about:

… ‘the educational development of schools as knowledge building institutions’ where teacher professional knowledge is recognised, affirmed, challenged and debated under conditions of mutuality and trust that permit both teachers and the schools themselves to grow and flourish in times remarkable for the pace and nature of social and material change. (Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis, 2005: 177)

Many respondents saw assessment of learning outcomes and developing skills in ICT as key needs in their professional learning. This will be explored further in the section of this chapter on Information Communication Technology (ICT).

For primary teachers, respondents wanted professional learning to help them uncrowd the curriculum. This would better meet the needs of individual students and:

Teach students how to learn, not what to learn. (School community meeting)

They want to learn to develop and deliver flexible, connected units of work to better meet individual needs and relate to local communities. Given the higher levels of operational literacy required in an information rich society, a focus on literacy was preferred.

In the middle years respondents want strategies to counter disengagement of some students, especially boys. There was support for professional learning to improve student literacy and provide more variety and excitement in learning.
Secondary teachers wanted an emphasis on meeting the needs of non-academic students and help with delivering, assessing and reporting the outcomes of the syllabuses for stages 5 and 6.

Many respondents commented on the critical role of school administration and support staff (SASS) and Aboriginal Education Aides (AEAs) in schools and the importance of provision for their professional learning by both the DET and schools. Primary and Secondary Principals groups stressed the importance of providing for SASS and AEAs in the professional learning budgets provided to schools. There was also support for accredited learning and skill development programs linked to salary and career advancement for SASS. Specific suggestions for training included skills in customer service, ICT, and dealing with challenging parents and students. Respondents also stressed the importance of teachers’ aides working with students with disabilities to be appropriately trained and accredited.

THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF THE DET

The DET’s role in the professional learning of teaching and non-teaching staff was seen as critical and strategic, developing a policy framework and supporting schools to make local decisions on implementation.

In their submission, the Secondary Principals Council said:

Great teachers are best developed and supported in a school culture which is focused on quality teaching and student learning. The DET at all levels needs to build a strong culture of teacher development and leadership in curriculum, assessment and pedagogy focused on ensuring relevant, challenging and effective classroom practice. (Secondary Principals Council)

Referring to rural and remote NSW, Letts et al said in their Companion Paper:

… a ‘one size fits all’ approach is inadequate for addressing the educational issues of rural and remote New South Wales. (Letts et al, 2005: 237)

Their response argues that for many teachers, attendance at externally offered professional development activities is hampered by distance, time and even safety. There is and will be a reliance on ICT and creative ways of operating and maintaining professional links for learning and renewal.

This was also an issue for others:

More interaction between schools sharing resources and sharing ideas. (Regional students meeting)

Networking and being professionally generous is essential to support all teachers to be great teachers. (School staff meeting)

Respondents asked for DET support for mentoring and inter-agency partnerships as well as support to establish and maintain websites including learning circles on specific issues such as improving literacy in K - 2 or dealing with disengaged students in stage 4.

All admin staff need office and ICT skills as a minimum. Continue with the TAFE certificate and offer salary incentives. (School principal)

Recognition, respect, remuneration, job security, training and development, (for SASS). (School staff meeting)

Schools need a clear mandate from the highest authority possible to legitimise the local use of time and resources for the continual improvement of teaching. (Ladwig and Gore 2005: 122)

… strong inter- and intra- Departmental partnerships to support learning (Personal submission)
Action research projects also require support. In his Companion Paper, Fullan advocates:

… lateral capacity building, where the state invests in and facilitates focussed networks that learn from each other, as they implement priorities in the context of state policies. (Fullan, 2005: 233)

There was strong support for the DET and pre-service training organisations such as the universities to coordinate to ensure that teachers are suitably and effectively prepared for teaching. One response said pre-service training should:

Place more emphasis on teaching university students how to teach. (School staff meeting)

There was also support for DET to partner universities in higher degree courses for teachers.

Several suggested appointing targeted graduates above establishment to some schools as a way of capturing talented young teachers who would otherwise accept employment in non-government schools.

A number of respondents saw induction into the profession and support for beginning teachers as a critical issue in professional learning. Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis go further and stress that the newcomer is:

… a genuine resource – perhaps a source of new ideas encountered in a teacher-education course, or, at the very least, a new set of eyes through which current ways of working can be re-evaluated. (Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis, 2005: 179)

Internship, reduced teaching loads, and mentoring programs were all advocated as were incentives to attract the best beginning teachers available.

A few responses referred to the establishment of the NSW Institute of Teachers (IOT). The comments were generally positive:

The IOT is a great first step. Embedding professional practice with early alignment to a portfolio of professional learning at the outset of a teacher’s career is critical to development and career path. (School principal)

There was support for the Department’s School Leadership Capability Framework and the discussion paper, Quality Teaching in NSW Public Schools (NSW DET, 2003). These documents were seen as part of a broad policy framework and even as a direct scaffold on which school leaders could build local initiatives.

Provision of time and funding to schools were seen by most respondents as the key responsibilities of the DET. Funding for more consultants, reduced teaching loads (especially for beginning teachers), buying expert time from other schools, mentors, pools of casuals and teacher exchanges were consistently requested.

Pre-school, primary, secondary and TAFE teachers have discrete as well as common needs related to improving their teaching.
Professional learning is therefore an issue arising in other sections of this chapter as well as other chapters in this report.

Teacher Professional Learning is one of the key components of improved student learning outcomes. This is an individual as well as a system responsibility. It needs to be available in a variety of forms with flexible modes of delivery in order to meet the many and varied needs of staff and schools and TAFE colleges. Every staff member should be supported through individual professional development plans which are developed collaboratively with their manager and within the local context. By participating actively in professional development, teachers model their commitment to lifelong learning to their students.
References


EARLY CHILDHOOD YEARS

INTRODUCTION

There is substantial evidence that giving children the best start to life and nurturing them over the early childhood years will have long-term benefits for their future life and learning. In NSW, early childhood years are defined as from birth to eight years of age. For this reason, the issues related to early childhood education include the years prior to school and generally the first three years of school (Kindergarten to Year 2).

There is increasing evidence that the early years of life are a critical period in which the foundations for competence and coping skills that affect long-term learning, behaviour and health are established. The research demonstrates that development from the prenatal period to age six is rapid and dramatic and shapes long-term outcomes (Mustard and McCain, 1999).

Early childhood is a complex area with a range of risk and protective factors combining to influence children’s development. Children’s learning, development, health and wellbeing depend on their circumstances as individuals, as members of their families and communities and within society as a whole. (DET Early Childhood Unit)

Education is a continuum, beginning at birth, and the first eight years of a child’s life are the most important in determining the child’s development. … Children inadequately cared for in their preschool years enter schooling at an educational and personal disadvantage. (P&C Association of NSW)

There is also a range of research that indicates that single “one-off” strategies to support children at a particular stage are unlikely to be sufficient to make a difference to the future of children who may be at risk. The research shows that ongoing support for these children is required throughout their early years. (Mitchell et al, 2001)

In NSW early childhood educational settings are managed by government, community-based organisations and the private sector. The NSW Government responsibility is through two departments – the Department of Education and Training (DET) and the Department of Community Services (DoCS). There are 100 preschools managed by the DET. There are around 800 preschool services licensed by the DoCS. In addition there are over 1800 long day care services. The majority of long day care centres are managed by the private sector although a significant percentage is run by local government or community-based non-profit organisations.

While there is a range of early childhood education and care services across NSW, there are still many children unable to access one of these services. Many of these children come from areas that are socially disadvantaged.

ACCESS TO PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

There was general agreement by respondents on the benefits of children attending preschool or some form of childcare prior to entering school.

There is strong evidence that early childhood services, including preschools, can have a major beneficial impact on young people’s lives and give real meaning to the long espoused social aim of children attaining their full potential in life. (Vinson, 2002: 78)

The recommendations contained in the AEU National Preschool Education Inquiry Report, 2004 are supported. In particular:

All children should have access to fully funded government preschools so that they are better prepared to start school. (Parents)
• the provision of high quality and accessible preschool education in the year before commencing school [which] is free for all children … and is acknowledged as a universal right; and

• [that] the Commonwealth reintroduce dedicated funding for preschool education and that Commonwealth and state and territory movements jointly provide the full costs of preschool education. (NSW Teachers Federation)

The claims by respondents are supported by a large number of overseas studies such as the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program evaluation, conducted in the USA.

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program was conducted over 24 years. It showed that children who attended the program had less remedial schooling, achieved higher levels of schooling, and were more likely to attend university. As young adults, they earned more, were older when their first child was born and were less welfare dependent. It also showed that for every $1 invested in services to help families with young children, between $4 and $7 was saved on child protection, health education and justice systems (Schweinhart 2003).

Another recent study by the University of London and the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff showed that children who attended three years or more of preschool were more ready for school and were 10 to 12 months ahead of children who did not attend any prior to school program or care.

A substantial number of respondents commented on the need for greater access to preschool education or some form of childcare for all children in the years prior to school. The cost and lack of available preschools were cited as the reasons many children do not attend.

Making preschool affordable would encourage more parents to use it, also some parents are driven to send their children to school, when clearly they are not ready, because of financial strains. (School staff member)

Funded ‘preschool’ in the year before they attend formal education is imperative!! … ‘Everyone’ says they recognise the importance of Early Years - but money given to state funded preschools is very poor. ‘Put your money where your belief is!!’ (School staff member)

Children should not be institutionalised at 0-5 years. Students need to be with their parents in learning situations. This should be encouraged more through incentives to keep parents home with their kids. (P&C meeting)

A relatively small number of respondents stated that preschool or childcare are not the only way to support children and families in the years prior to school. The cost and lack of available preschools were cited as the reasons many children do not attend.

The provision of free / affordable preschool education would ensure that families would receive professional support in their parenting, be involved in a community of care, contribute to and be involved in their child's education. Early learning difficulties would be identified allowing for early intervention. (Preschool Provider)

We shove our children in institutions from 10 months old or earlier and go out to work at some obscure venue to pay someone else to look after our children build them houses, feed, clothe, entertain, train them. (Personal submission)

It is our contention that attendance at preschool does not necessarily enhance children’s entry into school. It is a further symbol of the breakdown of the family unit that preschools are being required to attend this preparation, a role that rightly belongs to the home. (School staff meeting)
Many respondents said that preschool education should be compulsory for at least the year before entry to school. Other respondents qualified this statement by suggesting that it should be compulsory in disadvantaged areas only.

The particular needs of families in rural and remote areas and the difficulty of accessing a preschool or childcare facility were raised in several submissions. Some respondents suggested that children in particularly isolated areas should have access to Distance Education preschool.

Preschool age children from isolated areas should be eligible for enrolment at the Distance Education preschool if there is no other preschool in the area, even if they will not be continuing with DE but attending a small isolated rural school with no preschool facility. (Isolated Children’s Parents Association)

Address the issue of access to a prior to school education, especially in remote and rural areas of New South Wales, through the sponsorship of a needs-based transport-to-school scheme for children enrolled at the Department’s 100 preschools and 50 Early Intervention Support Classes. (Primary Principals Association)

A number of solutions to the difficulties of access were suggested. Suggestions included:

- increasing the number of government preschools
- providing additional funding to current community based preschools so that fees could be reduced.

Deliver on the relevant sections of the Vinson Inquiry … by establishing further Departmental preschools in communities where many children could be given an opportunity to access a quality prior to school education. (Primary Principals Association)

We don’t need more preschools, but affordable education with current established & recognised community based centres. Providing financial support for early intervention centres to extend hours & capacity of clients as to ensure all children with disabilities have full access to mainstream schooling (if applicable). (Preschool provider)

There was strong support by respondents to ensure that Aboriginal students have access to preschool education.

More culturally appropriate preschools especially for Aboriginal families - Aboriginal run preschools which have minimal or no fee attached. (School staff meeting)

The particular needs of Indigenous children in accessing preschool education were canvassed in 2004 in The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education – Freeing the Spirit: Dreaming an Equal Future. As noted in the Report, Aboriginal children are poorly represented in preschools. In 2003, 348 Aboriginal children attended a government-funded preschool. This is approximately 10% of the 3784 children enrolled.
Quality of Service

While recognising the importance of access to a prior to school service, many respondents noted the importance of the quality of service. Some respondents stated that not all prior to school facilities provide quality programs that support children’s development. Many respondents said that to achieve quality, qualified early childhood teachers must work in prior to school facilities.

We need to place value on good, quality preschool education that teaches children how to be prepared for the classroom experience, builds early skills and gives them confidence to learn. (Parent)

A number of studies have found that children who have attended a quality childcare facility (as opposed to a poor quality centre) are more ready to start school, and have better language, pre-numeracy and pre-literacy skills. Children from poor quality care were found to have more behavioural problems (Vandell and Woolfe, 2000). Many see the critical factor in the provision of child care programs to be quality.

Access for every child to have good quality preschool year for free in accredited preschools/childcare centre. (School staff meeting)

It is not a time for children to be babysat; it is time to nurture, encourage and allow children to explore and extend their development within their own level. (Parent)

Research evidence indicates that high quality childcare is the most effective in improving educational outcomes and providing children with a chance to start school on a more equal footing to children from more advantaged backgrounds. It has also been found that to be effective, childcare does not have to be all day or all year but it must be high quality and programs need to be goal-oriented.

Government Responsibility for Preschool Education

It was suggested by some respondents that responsibility for preschool education should be transferred from the Department of Community Services to the Department of Education and Training.

The view that preschool education is comparable to childcare is a serious flaw of the NSW system. Preschool education should be overseen by the Education Department and follow a curriculum which will prepare children for entry into kindergarten. The association with DOCs gives the appearance that it is viewed as a form of childcare for those who can afford to send their children. (Parent)

Preschools and child care centres across Australia should come under the jurisdiction of DET in each state and provide continuity for children and families between childcare, preschools and the first years of school. (Preschool provider)
TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

Research indicates that children who make a smooth transition and experience early school success are more likely to be socially competent and achieve better results in school (Alexander and Entwisle, 1996; Pianta, Rim-Kaufman and Cox, 1999; Luster and McAdoo, 1996; Shepard and Smith, 1998, cited in Dockett and Perry 2003).

A significant number of respondents stated that transition to school programs were very beneficial in supporting children’s successful entry to school. The term “transition to school programs” appears to have been used by respondents to describe the orientation programs that primary schools operate each year for children entering Kindergarten the following year.

The guiding principle for effective transition to school acknowledges the importance of ‘transition’ to school instead of ‘orientation’ to school. Transition is a process that involves all stakeholders and acknowledges that it is a continuum until at least the end of the first year of school. (Parents and Citizens’ Association)

While supportive of the current programs, there was strong support for a much more structured and extended program that involved children and their parents. Some respondents suggested that the program should be held at least one day a week over the last term of the school year. The particular needs of children with disabilities were mentioned by a number of respondents.

Government schools should provide an informative / practical orientation process for both children and parents. My son’s school only provided one half day for orientation, which I personally feel was inadequate. I would like to see more input to extend the orientation process, where follow up visits by families to discuss how parents can participate in their child’s education. (Personal submission)

A number of respondents identified the specific issues that they would like addressed for parents as part of a transition to school program. These included information on:

- the school structure
- how the curriculum ‘works’
- specific information on how to teach reading
- how to be an effective parent helper
- how to help their child with homework.

Parents need orientation as well as the children (and not just in head lice, mealtimes and uniform policy – although they are important!). … Parents need training in how children learn and how to do homework with their children in order to maximise learning and minimise frustration and yelling! (P&C member)

We have found for our daughter, that preschool helped with her readiness for school as well as participating in the school’s head-start program. We also believed that our approach with home coaching enabled our daughter’s transition to school and prepared for a happy one. (Parents)

It would be helpful to have a better orientation to the school setting for children with disabilities, e.g. one day a week for six weeks prior to full commencement. This would enhance confidence and help identify any physical access issues. (The Spastic Centre)

Effective programs make children and their parents feel comfortable, valued and successful in school and help avoid negative outcomes. (Department of Community Services)
Readiness and Starting Age

The issue of ‘readiness’ for school was raised throughout all the questions of paper 2, Early Childhood Years.

There is a great deal of research about school readiness, what it means and what it implies. Narrow definitions of readiness focus on individual children and their perceived readiness to integrate into a school environment. More progressive definitions of readiness focus on the context of the school, as well as child, family and community expectations. In this view readiness is not a characteristic of individual children, rather of communities and contexts (see Dockett and Perry, 2001a).

(UWS meeting)

Recognising that the main criterion used for school readiness is currently age, many respondents commented on the appropriateness of starting age:

Establish an enrolment age as at the 1st of February thus ensuring that all children are of a similar age when they start school. This in conjunction with preschool attendance prior to starting school would overcome most of the problems faced in the early years of school. (School staff member)

Generally, there was agreement that the current starting age allows for too great a gap in age on entry to school and that the starting age should be raised. Other issues raised include:

- most respondents said that children should be 5 when they start school
- there were various cut off dates suggested but all would raise the entry age
- a significant number of respondents said that there should be a national entry age
- some respondents suggested that:
  - the entry should be staged so that students can enter throughout the year as they turn 5
  - a transition year be introduced for students who are not ready to progress to Year 1
  - the entry age of boys should be greater than for girls.

Something must be done urgently about school starting age. There is a 24 month variable. My suggestion - kids start transition year when they turn 5. The teachers then make the decision as to whether they should progress to Yr1 the following year or remain in transition year. Most parents are not equipped to make this decision. (Personal submission)

Studies have found that children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to be less “ready” for school. Children who begin school significantly behind their peers may never be able to catch up (Stipek and Ryan, 1997).

Many researchers have considered what determines readiness for school. Some argue that children need some minimal level of social competence (Ladd, 1999); some say that children’s social and behavioural adjustment is as important as cognitive and academic preparedness (Raver and Zigler, 1997; Raver and Knitzer, 2002); some say that language development is most important (Carnegie...
Task Force, 1994); more specifically, some highlight the ability to communicate effectively, with both teachers and peers; and others point out that being well coordinated and physically healthy also helps children.

**Location of Preschools**

A significant number of respondents said that preschools and other childcare facilities including playgroups should be located within the grounds of public schools to support the transition of children to school. There is already a number of public schools that have non-government preschools located within the grounds of the school. Respondents stated that they see benefits for the children in terms of their transition to school.

*The establishment of preschools within the grounds of their departmental school would support a far smoother transition for school starters. Although communication between school & preschool is encouraged & the benefits appreciated not all preschools/schools have easy access.* (School community group)

Respondents stated that the physical location of preschool facilities on school grounds, where possible, should provide opportunities to better support children’s learning and transition from preschool to the first year of school.

*A free preschool should be available to everyone through the public school system. Perhaps it could be linked with the public school, so that every child regardless of their economic background is able to access preschool and attend just one or two days a week so when they attend kindergarten full time they are ready to start learning straight away instead of having to settle into a new environment.* (School P&C)

Another view was:

*A cost effective alternative to establishing purpose built preschool facilities might be to provide teachers who would teach within premises operated by health and welfare services. Disadvantaged preschool children would benefit from being in an environment which coordinates education with health and welfare services.* (DET staff member)

The Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development commented that there needs to be greater consultation with the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) and the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) around the location of future DET preschools. It was noted that some areas where the most recent DET preschools were established were already serviced by community-based childcare. The Institute stated that:

*In an environment of scarce resources, it is critical that there is an equitable distribution of quality early childhood services.* (Institute for Family Advocacy & Leadership Development)
PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Prevention and early intervention strategies are designed to promote the necessary conditions for a child's healthy development. Current thinking about intervention increasingly accepts the idea that early childhood experiences crucially determine health and wellbeing and the attainment of competencies in later life. It also recognises that investment in early years will lead to improved education, employment and even national productivity (Keating and Hertzman, 2000).

This was reflected in a significant number of responses with many requesting that health screening be conducted at any early age and in the years up to and on entry to school. Some people said that they would like to see the return of school nurses. Early intervention for children with disabilities was highlighted.

Plans for the provision of services to families of children with disability must place families at the centre of decision-making, taking into account the needs of the whole family and building harmony between the needs of the child and the needs of the family. (Institute for Family Advocacy & Leadership Development)

Review the role of the school nurse with the view to implementing a renewed and invigorated program based on increased efforts to diagnose and provide early intervention for those children from communities with high health needs as well as those children who present with characteristics or symptoms that may impede upon their success and happiness in the school setting. (NSW Primary Principals Association)

Consideration should be given to the reintroduction of a school/preschool medical service. This is particularly relevant in rural/remote areas where an itinerant medical service would improve general accessibility. (NSW Teachers Federation)

Role of Parents and the Community

The critical role of parents in providing for the needs of their children was central to many of the comments around early intervention. The education of parents of children aged birth to 5 years of age was acknowledged. Some respondents suggested that the Parents as Teachers program be extended. Some people felt that parents should be able to complete a TAFE course at low cost. Some people felt so strongly about the need for training that they suggested that childcare benefits should be withheld until parents completed training.

Families are living in diverse communities and this in turn means that their lives and backgrounds are different. For many parents living in disadvantaged communities, their own experiences of being a child, and attending school, are not happy ones. They have little or no knowledge of child development, parenting, the needs of children, and the skills they need to develop to have the best chance of success when they attend school. (School P&C)

One of the most hard-hitting comments about the vital role of parents came from a young person through the submission from the NSW Commission for Children and Young People who said:
Generally respondents felt that some parents and families do not access support available in their community as they are unaware of what is available. There were a number of suggestions about ways to improve communication and disseminate information. Suggestions included using television commercials, and distributing booklets through schools or other community agencies.

**In my local community I have experienced fantastic resources available for children 0-5. I believe the foundations are already in place. The problem that exists (I believe) is in educating parents to use these great facilities.** (Community member)

Some respondents stated that the community should share some responsibility for the important role in caring and educating children within the community. The Early Childhood Services Policy for NSW states:

> A community that has an appropriate mix of services can help break down isolation by sharing information and developing vital support networks, which can prevent problems and relieve pressures on parents and families. (Department of Community Services, 2000)

**Interagency Approach**

There was strong support for an interagency approach to early childhood services before school and within schools.

**The importance of pre-diagnosis of disabilities and transfer of information to kindergarten implies a much higher level of cooperation and information exchange between agencies – DADHC/DoCS/Health. Need to develop urgently protocols to facilitate the sharing of this information.** (Regional staff meeting)

Many respondents suggested that children need a range of support that should be coordinated within the community to ensure effective early intervention and identification of the possible indicators of learning difficulties. The submission from the Department of Community Services stated that:

**The NSW Department of Community Services supports initiatives that promote schools as community centres and which endeavour to incorporate children and families into the wider school community. This can assist in reducing social isolation particularly for families newly arrived to an area and promote the school as a vital element within the community.** (Department of Community Services)

The needs of children and families in rural and remote areas were highlighted by respondents. It was suggested that an interagency approach could be of great benefit to isolated rural communities.

**Families First has provided a visionary framework for integrating resources so that government and non-government service delivery is more effective. Education needs to collaborate more strongly with agencies including DoCS, Health, Disability and Early Childhood Services to promote community development locally.** (Community Member)
families to raise healthy children and help parents build their skills and confidence in parenting.

The **Schools as Community Centres** program is funded under the **Families First** strategy. It was established to reduce the impact of disadvantage for children entering school by providing integrated services for families in disadvantaged communities. Many respondents suggested that this program should be expanded.

The Federation supports a genuine, systematic interagency approach utilising the expertise of other professionals in the development of programs that will truly address all factors that are indicators of possible learning difficulties. Programs need to be delivered within an integrated framework. Additional resources should be allocated to improve access to support services for young children, such as counsellors, speech therapists, mental health experts, both via DET preschools and schools and other child development agencies. There is a particular need for this provision in rural/remote areas. *(NSW Teachers Federation)*

**Schools as Community Centres** are located in primary schools and are designed to meet the particular needs of the local families with young children. These current 39 centres are located in the most disadvantaged areas of the state. The program reflects research that acknowledges:

- the importance of the early years for children’s development
- the important role of parents as their child’s first teacher, and
- the importance of community in assisting to achieve positive outcomes for children.

Whole of Government initiatives are reflected in the increasing interagency approach with DET as the lead agency in a number of initiatives that target children “at risk” 0-5 years such as **Schools as Community Centres**. These initiatives need to provide a strong early literacy, numeracy and social competency focus for families involved. *(Disabilities Program Directorate)*

Phase one of an external evaluation of the **Schools as Community Centres** program was undertaken in Term 4, 2004. Initial findings indicate that the program has had a positive impact on a range of factors that affect educational outcomes, including positive transition to school, increased community capacity building, increased confidence and skills in parenting and positive connections between schools, families and students.

Many respondents suggested that community liaison officers should be employed to support schools to develop a coordinated approach to the delivery of services to families with young children.

It is these early years of schooling that will establish critical learning. It is also the time when behavioural and physical problems children are experiencing can be identified and more readily than in later years effectively dealt with. However additional resources need to be allocated to improve young children’s access to support services, such as counsellors, speech therapists, mental health experts and medical...
professionals. These are particularly needed in rural and remote areas. (School staff meeting)

In the response from the Department’s Early Childhood and Preschool to Year 2 Initiative Units, it was recommended that the Department develop linkages and strengthen the relationship with Children’s Services and other agencies. In particular it was suggested that schools should be supported to map community services in the local area in the same way as Schools as Community Centres and that this information should be shared with parents and community members.

Some respondents suggested that community liaison officers be appointed within regions to assist schools to develop linkages with Children’s Services and other agencies:

Strengthen community partnerships through the employment of more community liaison officers. (School staff meeting)

**EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING**

**Preschool Curriculum**

In NSW the preschool ‘curriculum’, *The practice of relationships*, was produced by the Department of Community Services. It provides a focus for preschool staff to discuss, plan and evaluate their work with children to support their learning and well-being. It does not prescribe specific academic outcomes.

The promotion of reading and general literacy and numeracy development with 0-5 year olds was a major theme throughout the responses. There were varying views about what learning children attending preschools should have that would better prepare them for school:

- some people said that the program should be skills based – focusing on the development of thinking skills, emotional learning skills, communication skills and physical skills
- some said that programs should link to the Kindergarten syllabus particularly in reading programs and be outcomes based and prepare children for achievement of Early Stage 1 (Kindergarten) outcomes
- some said that children should be allowed to play and only to be taught social skills and how to look after themselves in terms of belongings and being careful.

*I am a stay at home mum with six children and have observed the 0-5 variations that children experience. With five children at school I also have watched children’s responses to school. The most important 0-5 skills children can learn is to follow routine and instructions, sit down for key tasks, sit down for eating. Basic things in order to concentrate on task at hand. Too many parents don’t set a standard for “there’s a time and a place” and “no fidgeting” and not enough emphasis placed on good manners and respect for others. (Parent)*

*Early childhood education needs to ‘lift’ from a caring focus to an educational and developmental focus. A curriculum framework that specifies the important dispositions young children need to acquire would assist. (Personal submission)*

An integrated preschool curriculum aimed at preparing children for their first year at school should be developed. However, it should be recognised that the development of social skills in preschools is paramount. (School P&C)

Get back to the idea that PLAY IS A CHILD’S WORK! (Parent)

A clear distinction between the role of preschools and the role of schools needs to be established to avoid the pressures on preschool children from parents and society in general to learn to read, write etc before they go to school. Surely this is the role of the school setting. (School staff members)
Personalised Learning

Addressing the needs of the individual (personalised learning) was a significant theme throughout the responses for both prior to school and school aged children:

- catering for gifted and talented children before they are “switched off” schooling – need more appropriate progression and acceleration options
- more support is needed for students with learning difficulties and disabilities
- teachers need to cater for children’s different learning styles.

All children will be different we do not need to try to make them all the same as long as we support the strugglers and give opportunity to progress faster to the faster learners. (Parent)

There was recognition by respondents of the importance of school teachers being familiar with what is being taught in preschool so that children’s learning is continuous.

Class Sizes

A significant number of respondents commented on the need for small class sizes in the early years of school. Some respondents were pleased with the most recent reduction in class sizes in these years.

THANK YOU for smaller class sizes. (School staff member)

Smaller class sizes is a good start. 20 students K-2! And then beyond. (School staff member)

Many respondents suggested that class sizes should continue to be reduced to help teachers better address the needs of individual students. A significant number of submissions expressed respondents’ opinion simply by recording the statement Smaller class sizes. The Federation of Parents and Citizen’s Association stated:

Federation is pleased with the current initiative for smaller class sizes in the K-2 years but believe that class sizes in Kindergarten should not exceed 17. (Federation of Parents and Citizens’ Association)

Teachers

Teacher qualifications for teaching in preschools can be gained through a TAFE diploma course in Children’s Services or through university to gain a degree.

The importance of having qualified teachers in all prior to school settings was raised by a significant number of respondents.

Early childhood services and all K-2 classes in schools to be staffed by specialist early childhood university trained teachers (birth to 8 years) (Kindergarten Union)

The importance of providing better professional learning opportunities for early childhood teachers was raised by a number of respondents. The NSW Primary Principals Association made note of
the need to target professional development for teachers of Kindergarten to Year 2 and noted a number of experiences that should form such a program, including the value of play as a learning tool and using assessment to inform student learning outcomes. This was supported by many other respondents.

_Because infant teacher training no longer exists, infant teachers may not be aware of all the stages of early childhood development._ (Learning Difficulties Coalition of NSW)

Many people commented on the importance of recognition of early childhood training and expertise by schools. Some people suggested that all teachers of Kindergarten to Year 2 should have early childhood qualifications.

_Whilst Federation supports the concept of K-6 in regard to curriculum and school policy, Federation believes that teachers who teach K-2 should be trained in early childhood. Children in the early years need teachers that have an understanding of child development within the 0-8 years._ (Parents and Citizens’ Association)

Some respondents commented on the benefits of male teachers in the early childhood years.

_Initiate programs encouraging males to teach in the 0-5 year category; role model leadership may assist in deterring young male disengagement at a later stage._ (Personal submission)

### Kindergarten to Year 2 Curriculum

The curriculum for children in the first three years of school is largely defined in syllabuses produced by the NSW Board of Studies. Learning is defined in terms of outcomes to be achieved in six key learning areas (KLAs) by the end of Kindergarten and again by the end of Year 2.

The importance of preschool teachers and teachers in the early years of school understanding the learning that occurs across these years was raised by a number of respondents.

_Closer relationships with prior to school field can support the development of curriculum and reduce the gap between prior to school and school learning experiences, and support and enhance the development of very young children._ (Department of Community Services)

Many respondents stated that they feel that the curriculum is overcrowded and the number of outcomes to be achieved should be reduced. Specifically respondents expressed concern about the current focus on assessment. These are major issues being addressed in the section on the Primary School Years.

_The curriculum has become very ‘crowded’ in recent years, resulting in inadequate learning time for the basic skills areas of reading, writing and mathematics._ (School staff meeting)

_Less pressure on schools to teach ‘everything’ - a less busy curriculum and focus on the 3 ‘R’s’._ (School staff meeting)
Many responses called for a reduced focus on key learning areas (KLAs) and achievement of outcomes and a greater focus on literacy and numeracy achievement.

*Reduce the curriculum load in the early years and focus on the basics!* (Personal submission)

Some respondents felt that there was not enough learning in the Kindergarten year and that some children remained unchallenged.

*Bright children entering the school system are disadvantaged. The critical kindergarten year is ‘wasted’ as a ‘socialisation’ year. Kids that are already readers have to ‘dumb down’ to fit in.* (Personal submission)

*Less focus on learning through playing, more on learning core subject.* (Personal submission)

On the other hand, some respondents said that the curriculum in these early years of school should be “less formal” and focus primarily on the development of language, social skills and fine and gross motor skills. Some people said that there should be a greater focus on “play” as a valid learning experience.

*We felt that there should be less formal education expectations in Kindergarten. It is more appropriate to develop language, gross and fine motor skills and social skill informally. Children need to have the time to develop their early Talking and Listening skills in a fun and non-threatening environment.* (School staff meeting)

There was a call for the purpose of Kindergarten to be better defined and that the outcomes for Kindergarten children be reconsidered as a result.

In the submission from the NSW Commission for Children and Young People, children and young people spoke about the importance of literacy and numeracy learning in the early years of school. The children’s and young people’s comments included:

*You need the basics, like reading and writing … and numbers.*

*It’s so shocking to see people in our year who can’t read properly. Like they just slipped through the system. That shouldn’t be happening.*

*Reading needs to be targeted in primary school. As soon as you hit high school, you are expected to read.* (NSW Commission for Children and Young People)

Recognising the importance of early intervention, many respondents said that intervention support should be increased for children who are not achieving. There was strong support for a range of programs, including the Reading Recovery program which has shown to be successful in assisting children in Year 1 in need of additional support. Some respondents expressed concern that not all schools have access to all programs.

*If you are in a school that does not have Reading Recovery, or Early Learning Initiative or PSFP, you are considered privileged,*
well you are not. In actual fact you are disadvantaged. I am not seeing any inclusion of developmental play in the K-2 classrooms. (Parent)

Provide access to programs such as Reading Recovery for all students not just those students in high demand schools. Students with difficulties at schools where numbers are low can’t compete at present with students in high need areas. They are currently disadvantaged because they would gain support in higher need schools. (Personal submission)

A submission from the Department’s Early Literacy and Numeracy Advisory Group made the following recommendations about support in the early years of school. These comments reflect many of the comments made by other respondents.

That the DET:

- maintains funding to focussed equity programs in the K2 years, such as ELI.
- expands targeted funding to extend access to the Early Learning initiative (ELI) to all schools where there are concentrations of students from low socio-economic backgrounds.
- recognises and utilises the infrastructure, capacity, and expertise that resides within ELI in relation to K2 literacy, assessing, teaching and learning.
- uses this … expertise … to develop an assessment tool that not only informs teaching but also demonstrates growth in learning for educationally disadvantaged students at the class, school and system levels.
- coordinates the above in a strategic and planned way through one directorate with the key responsibility for the K2 years of schooling.
- ensures that any program designed to support K2 students and their teachers is developed in negotiation with, and endorsed by the above directorate. (NSW DET Early Literacy and Numeracy Advisory Group)

IN SUMMARY

The long-term benefits of a quality preschool education for society and for individual children have been well documented.

The current provision of 100 Department of Education and Training preschools attached to primary schools has been greatly welcomed by those communities. It is recognised that the Department is a comparatively minor provider of preschool education in this state and that the majority of children attend a range of other quality preschools. Respondents have said that the need for non-Departmental preschools to charge fees has clearly excluded a number of children from less advantaged backgrounds. In addition, parents have indicated that there are not sufficient preschools and that waiting lists for enrolment are often long.

To ensure that all children can access a quality prior to school education program is clearly a major issue for governments.
Given the research evidence and the strength of opinion of so many respondents, it is undeniable that this issue needs to be addressed. The needs of children are greatest in areas of disadvantage. It is time to put in place a range of strategies that can increase access for all children to a quality prior to school education experience.

For many years schools have recognised the need to assist children in their transition to school and have developed “transition” or “orientation” programs for this purpose. Many of these programs are very successful and are greatly appreciated by their communities.

It is clear from responses that people are seeking programs that:

- commence while the child is in a prior to school facility
- are coordinated across the prior to school and school settings
- are developed over an extended period of time, such as the term before or even the year before commencing school
- has a major component that “educates” the families about child development, school routines, structures and curriculum
- ensures that teachers are aware of particular needs of children prior to entry to school.

A number of respondents saw benefit in greater coordination in the provision of preschool services. Some respondents suggested that the Department of Education and Training should have responsibility for all preschools.

It would appear that there would be a number of benefits to greater coordination or one department having responsibility for children's learning from preschool to Year 12. These benefits may include:

- greater opportunity to address issues of transition to school
- easier identification of potential learning difficulties early and development of programs to address needs of children
- better development of a continuum of learning from preschool and into Kindergarten.

The success of the Schools as Communities Centres program is clear and some respondents who are familiar with the program suggested that it should be extended to additional schools. Many more people did not comment specifically on the program but identified the benefits for children and their families if the school became the focus of the community, and the centre for a range of local government and non-government services. The strength of support for this proposal was significant.

The expansion of the Schools as Community Centres program would be welcomed in areas of greatest disadvantage. However, many people appear to be supportive of the concept of an interagency approach in a greater number of schools. It was suggested by respondents that support would be needed by schools to establish effective links with agencies. Some respondents suggested that community liaison officers be established in regions for this purpose.

There were strongly held and divergent views about the focus of learning in both preschool and the first years of school. It was, however, clear that people think that the curriculum of preschool and school should be aligned so that there is a clear continuum of learning across these early childhood years. This may require a review of both the preschool curriculum developed by the Department of Community Services and the curriculum for the early years of school, particularly Kindergarten.

The issue of starting age was raised by a significant number of respondents as a concern in a child's readiness for school. The consultation did not specifically seek comments on the starting age for school but it is clearly an issue that people feel very strongly about. The people who did mention starting age felt that the current age span of Kindergarten children is too great and that the age of entry should be raised. There may be people who hold quite contrary views who did not make comment on this issue.

The starting age and enrolment guidelines have been reviewed over the years. In looking to the future, however, this issue may need to be reconsidered as part of an overall plan to ensure that every child is well prepared to start school.
References


Vinson, T. 2002. Inquiry into the provision of public education in NSW. Sponsored by NSW Teachers Federation and Federations of P&C Associations of NSW (First Report), 78
INTRODUCTION
Young children enter primary school with high expectations of their primary school experience. This is evident in what some preschool children said in consultation meetings held by the Commission for Children and Young People:

- I want my teacher to be like batman and teach me how to fly …
- Teachers will be cool.
- Big school will be fun. (Commission for Children and Young People)

For most children their primary schooling is a very positive experience.

From the responses to the consultation, it is evident that there are a number of reasons why primary education is successful. Primary schools are characterised by a secure, happy and nurturing environment. Most primary teachers teach one class of children and have responsibility for their well being and educational progress across all areas of learning.

- I think Primary schools offer far better opportunities for holistic education and child centred learning than Secondary Schools, due to the simple fact that the children have one dominant teacher during any single year. This is a strength that is lost as soon as children enter the siloed world of secondary education. (Community member)

- K-6 schools have proved very effective both academically and socially – don’t change. (School staff meeting)

Many respondents commented on some of the well established and successful programs and initiatives in primary schools that are focused on identifying the learning needs of children as early as possible and providing targeted learning experiences in literacy and numeracy.

Some parents indicated that they recognised that it is the quality of the teaching that really makes the difference:

- In general I have confidence in the primary education that my children have received over the years. The only exception being when my children have had a poor teacher. (Parent)

Primary schools have been and, in many cases, still are, the focus of community activity. They are places where teachers, parents and the community work together to ensure that children have a happy and successful start to their formal education.

- P&C Federation Policy views the first eight years of a child’s life as the most important in determining a child’s development. It is encouraging to see this view reflected in this document’s (Excellence and Innovation) identification of the primary years as important for laying a positive foundation for learning throughout life. (Parents and Citizens’ Association)

- The current K-6 structures have proven sound and are strongly supported in our communities as this provides a positive environment to promote the educational and social development of students. There is no need to tamper with this successful structure. (NSW Teachers Federation)

Despite this satisfaction with education in the primary school years, respondents noted a number of concerns and made suggestions for improvement. The major concern related to the curriculum with a significant number of respondents saying that it is ‘overcrowded’. Many of these respondents indicated that the ‘overcrowded’ curriculum is impacting negatively on the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms. Included in these concerns about the curriculum were issues relating to current assessment and reporting procedures.

There are a number of issues which need to be addressed to ensure that quality teaching and learning programs continue to be delivered in primary schools. Primary schools need to build on their successes and continue to meet the changing needs of their local communities.
THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM

The curriculum in the primary school is based around six key learning areas:

- English
- Mathematics
- Science and Technology
- Human Society and Its Environment (including Languages other than English)
- Creative Arts
- Personal Development, Health and Physical Education.

The majority of primary school teachers are ‘generalist’ teachers and have responsibility for teaching all areas. This requires teachers to design programs that meet requirements of each of the six key learning area syllabus documents.

While children progress in their Year level, learning is divided into three major stages, Stage one relates to Kindergarten to Year 2, although syllabuses identify Early Stage one outcomes for Kindergarten. Stage 2 relates to students in Years 3 and 4 and Stage 3 relates to students in Years 5 and 6. The six key learning area syllabuses prescribe the outcomes that students are to achieve as a result of learning at each stage.

Since the latest English K-6 syllabus was released in March 1998, up until a revised Mathematics K-6 syllabus was released in November 2002, primary teachers have received new syllabuses or updated sections for each of the key learning area syllabuses.

In recognition of the demand on primary teachers to come to terms with such a rapid change in six syllabuses, the Department of Education and Training commissioned Professor Ken Eltis in November 2002 to conduct an evaluation into how teachers were using the outcomes, particularly for assessing and reporting on student achievement.

In November 2003, Professor Eltis presented his Report, *Time to Teach Time to Learn* (Eltis 2003). Work has begun to fulfil the recommendations of the Report but they are yet to be implemented.

In responses to the consultation, teachers expressed concern at the perceived rate and continuity of significant curriculum change and their limited access to professional learning time to support their knowledge of the curriculum and to provide opportunities for collaborative planning with colleagues.

*The DET and the Board of Studies need to come up with a much more realistic time frame for the implementation of their curricula and the achievement of student outcomes.* (School staff meeting)

We spend more time changing than educating. (TAFE staff member)

Once a new curriculum is brought in, stick to it; give it a chance – come to understand. (School community meeting)
‘Overcrowded Curriculum’

A significant number of respondents, both parents and teachers, stated that the primary curriculum is ‘overcrowded’. There was a strong feeling expressed that this places unreasonable demands on teachers to program learning activities across the scope of the curriculum while providing opportunities for children to both enjoy their learning and explore topics ‘at depth’.

I would most definitely agree that the primary curriculum is far too crowded and at times too complex. I really do wonder how much of each topic sinks in to our children’s heads as the teacher may only have a limited amount of time to cover a topic and if your child is having trouble then usually the teacher does not have enough time to go over things individually because they have to move onto the next topic!! (Parent)

The primary curriculum is crowded and the biggest problem is always time. (School staff meeting)

Concern was expressed by some respondents that the overcrowded curriculum makes it difficult to meet students’ individual needs.

Our overcrowded curriculum has led to many students not acquiring pertinent literacy and numeracy skills …. Our curriculum needs to change dramatically in order to best meet what students need and deserve from their education in NSW. (School staff member)

Many respondents stressed the importance of quality teaching but suggested that the ‘overcrowding of the curriculum’ and an emphasis on formal assessment has a negative effect on the spontaneity of teaching and learning.

I would like to see more options for flexibility for primary school teachers in selecting quantity and depth of curriculum for their students … based on the needs of their students and in consultation with the school community. (TAFE staff member)

Another submission argued for:

More emphasis on engaging in an activity ‘just for fun’, rather than for an assessable outcome … encouraging a balanced lifestyle with direction on outlets of energy and methods of relieving stress. (Personal submission)

In addition to meeting the requirements of the six key learning area syllabuses, respondents stated that additional topics are being added that they are required to teach.

Primary schools cannot fix all the problems of society. Many issues forced into the curriculum are important but not more important than achieving mandatory literacy and numeracy outcomes. eg drug education, bike safety, surf education. (School staff meeting)

The tendency to address every societal need through another “perspective” or additional cross-curriculum area needs to be re-considered. Teachers need permission to focus on the core...
business of the curriculum and not be excessively overloaded with add-on policies and programs. (DET staff meeting)

While some teachers agreed that the curriculum is overcrowded they were reluctant to remove anything as it was all seen to be important.

Not all respondents agreed that the curriculum was crowded.

The primary curriculum is manageable, however there is a need for specialist facilities for art, science, music and cooking for optimum learning conditions. (School staff meeting)

Some respondents suggested that the curriculum ‘feels’ crowded due to the rapid pace of the release of new syllabuses and insufficient professional development.

Part of the reason that the Primary curriculum feels so crowded, I feel, is that teachers like myself have been inundated with syllabi and support documents over the past few years and we haven’t been given the time nor adequate professional development opportunities to come to terms with outcomes and teaching to them. (School staff member)

While a significant number of respondents expressed concern at the breadth of curriculum, a number of respondents suggested additional areas which should be added to the primary curriculum.

These suggestions included swimming, more physical education and creative arts, greater emphasis on environmental sustainability, greater focus on information technology, teaching of local Aboriginal languages and the teaching of at least one language other than English.

Some teachers saw many of their teaching responsibilities as being the responsibility of families and the community. Some respondents suggested that classroom time would be better spent on activities more formally linked to the literacy and numeracy skills development of their students.

We need to raise the awareness of the community of the shared responsibility of our future generations. This involves agencies working together to provide support and programs which will collectively lead to a more cohesive community. If society were really aware of everything we are expected to achieve, they may have a more realistic expectation of what is achievable and what is already being achieved. The school community is not solely responsible for solving all society’s ills and dysfunctions. (School staff meeting)

### Suggested Solutions

Several respondents stated that they do not have sufficient time to teach all that is required and to meet the needs of all students.

Many respondents noted that assessing and reporting on outcomes has contributed to the workload of teachers. The specific issues and suggested solutions identified by respondents are addressed below in the section, Assessment and Reporting.
In addition to solutions relating to assessing and reporting, a range of solutions was suggested by respondents to help ‘uncrowd’ the curriculum.

Examples of solutions include:

- providing teachers with professional learning opportunities focused on curriculum implementation across the key learning areas
- providing support for teachers to design teaching and learning activities that make connections between the key learning areas
- concentrating on English and mathematics and removing some of the requirements of other key learning areas
- reducing class numbers
- having a ‘core’ national curriculum and providing flexibility for individual schools to implement curriculum to meet local needs.

A significant number of respondents suggested that teachers need assistance in designing units of work that will help students achieve the syllabus outcomes.

Teachers need to integrate learning so that they can teach a multitude of topics to children with the limited time that they have available. (Preschool provider)

There was strong recognition of the value for young children as well as for the workload of teachers in designing teaching and learning activities that cross the key learning areas. The Federation of Parents and Citizens’ Association stated that they support initiatives that:

... seek to ease the pressure on curriculum requirements such as integrated programs that cross KLAS and through discovery based learning activities that engage children in constructing their own knowledge. (Federation of P&Cs)

Examples of other responses include:

- We do need to have more integrated curriculum with overlapping outcomes of manageable proportions. (School staff meeting)
- Integrated programming is one way to address issues and the crowded curriculum. (School community meeting)

While there was a strong acceptance of literacy and numeracy as primary priorities some respondents suggested that the formal teaching of other ‘subjects’ including science and technology could be deferred to later primary years.

Concentrate far more strongly on the 3Rs. In NSW primary schools there seems to be an inordinate amount of time devoted to subjects other than English and Maths. I feel very strongly that in the earlier years (K-2) English and Maths should be increased and other subjects should be decreased. This would prevent the situation we have at the moment whereby children are getting a long way through primary school before it is noticed that they can’t read. (Parent)
A significant number of respondents suggested that the appointment of specialist teachers to primary schools would provide ‘expert’ curriculum knowledge and help reduce the workload of ‘generalist’ classroom teachers.

Specialist teachers were suggested in a number of key learning areas but in particular for the creative arts, science and technology and personal development, health and physical education.

Specialist teachers eg music / drama may ease teachers load of crowded curriculum. (Personal submission)

Similarly it was argued that additional support teachers or aides should be appointed to assist teachers with the learning needs of students with special needs.

A comparatively small number of respondents were opposed to any specialisation of learning in primary school.

Many respondents stated that with less students in each class the curriculum would be more manageable and assist teachers to meet the individual needs of students.

Further restrictions in class sizes is a necessary precondition if teachers are to take a more ‘Individualised’ approach to teaching and assessment. (NSW Teachers Federation)

Smaller class sizes are essential especially with the current policy of integration of special needs students. (Personal submission)

The class size reduction strategy was appreciated but many respondents requested that it be expanded to include the Years 3 to 6.

There was significant support for the implementation of a national curriculum including national standards, national testing and the adoption of a common starting age across the country. Some people felt that a ‘core’ national curriculum would allow individual schools more flexibility to implement a curriculum to meet local needs.

National standard set curriculum, national school starting age and national reporting to parents standardisation. (School community meeting)

Some respondents suggested that while some of these solutions may assist teachers with their workloads, the issues of curriculum including assessment and reporting are complex and also require management and consideration by individual schools.

The Catholic Education Commission response indicated support for the implementation of the Eltis recommendations as helping teachers with their workload but stated:

Reduction of primary school teacher workloads involves the school-based management of a complex set of curriculum, assessment and reporting issues as well as school based cultural imperatives. (Catholic Education Commission)
ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

Assessment and Reporting

Many teachers were concerned about increased workloads as a result of assessing and reporting against outcomes in syllabuses.

A number of respondents, including the NSW Teachers Federation and the Federation of Parents and Citizens’ Association see the implementation of the recommendations of the Eltis Report, *Time to Teach, Time to Learn* as providing solutions to difficulties expressed by teachers.

Outcomes-based student assessment, introduced without adequate support or guidance has dramatically increased the workload of teachers. This must be addressed through implementation of the recommendations of the Eltis Review, *Time to Teach, Time to Learn*, in full consultation with teachers. (NSW Teachers Federation)

Federation Policy supports Professor Ken Eltis’ recommendation of reducing the specification of the primary curriculum and preparing advice and support for teachers and schools to develop effective and manageable assessment and reporting practices. (Parents and Citizens’ Association)

One of the recommendations of the Eltis Report is a strategy to define mandatory outcomes in syllabuses, so that teachers are better able to design programs to address all the current outcomes in syllabuses. A significant number of respondents expressed support for this strategy.

The curriculum needs radical surgery. Outcomes need to be drastically reduced including those in Maths and English. It is impossible to adequately cover and assess all KLA’s. (School staff member)

The Board of Studies has commenced work on this strategy and distributed a draft discussion paper, titled *Defining Mandatory Outcomes in the K-6 Curriculum*, to schools for comment. There were mixed views expressed by respondents:

The CEC supports the approach taken to defining mandatory outcomes across the K-6 curriculum as outlined in the recent Board of Studies consultation paper. (Catholic Education Commission)

…. we need to ignore the recommendations of the Board of Studies discussion paper, ‘Defining Mandatory Outcomes in the K-6 Curriculum’; it is a regressive and limiting vision of the directions we need to take …. (Parent)

While respondents were supportive of reducing the number of mandatory outcomes, many recognised that a range of strategies is required to alleviate the workload issues of teachers or improve teaching and learning in primary classrooms.

Some respondents feel that assessment of outcomes is too time consuming and that they spend too much time assessing and not enough time teaching. To others, assessment of outcomes was not seen to be an issue as it was noted that it was a natural part of the teaching and learning process.
Many teachers and schools focus too much on assessment and reporting and not enough on learning. I see many schools teaching for assessment not for student learning. (School staff member)

What was of concern to a significant number of respondents was a lack of professional development for teachers to engage in valid and reliable assessment.

Some respondents feel that the Department is using assessment for ‘accountability’ purposes and is not concerned about the important role it plays in teaching and learning.

The need for accountability by continually testing has now taken on a ‘life of its own’ and to the detriment of teaching itself. We have become so obsessive about testing that there is little time for teachers to reflect on their teaching and learning processes. The little time they have left is usually taken up with completing ‘administrivia’. (School staff meeting)

Some respondents expressed concern that there appears to be too great a focus on the results of the statewide Basic Skills Testing Program.

Too much emphasis is being placed in Basic Skills Tests and Primary Writing Assessment and Computer Tests. These tests represent 0.5 of 1 % of the school year. (School staff meeting)

Basic skills testing should not be used as measure of a child’s development. It does not recognise that children have a variety of experiences and backgrounds and is not concerned with the individuality of the child. (School staff member)

There were a number of responses relating to the use of student portfolios as a means of assessment and for use in reporting to parents. Some teachers expressed concern about the workload involved in assembling portfolios. Some respondents stated that the effort of creating portfolios has detracted from teaching and learning and has added little value.

I think portfolios are time consuming and offer little added value to teaching. I have watched too many times – teachers become stressed, cutting back on everyday lessons to complete sheets for portfolios. (Personal submission)

Some teachers supported the use of portfolios.

Clearly 3 way conference in conjunction with portfolios is the best way to report to parents. (School staff member)

Portfolios were working well – what students could and could not do – but major negative impact from industrial action. (School staff meeting)

Most parents were appreciative of the use of portfolios as a method of reporting on their child’s achievement. Some parents recognised the work involved in these portfolios and suggested that teachers need support to be able to continue to use portfolios.

There needs to be an increase in the funding for professional development of assessment and reporting practices and principles and the link to classroom teaching. (Education Measurement & School Accountability Directorate)

Assessment needs to be integral to the teaching and learning process, not as an ‘add on’. (School community meeting)

The pig does not gain weight the more you weigh it. (School P&C meeting)

External tests, such as Basic Skills Test should not be the most important measure of children’s achievement. (School staff member)

Under no circumstances should portfolios of work be generated. (Parent)

Support for teachers to be able to prepare learning portfolios. (School community meeting)

Staff need to be given training and time to implement portfolios. It is the best way to demonstrate students improvement, it shows where students were and where they are now. It shows if learning is taking place. (School staff member)
As a parent I found these folders invaluable as a way of making sense of the teacher’s reporting and also a form of reflection for my child. She still looks back on her folders and gains a lot of self esteem from seeing how far she has come. A report card just can’t match up. (Parent)

Portfolios are an excellent form of ongoing assessment, although time must be allotted for teachers to compile this. (Parent)

Not all parents agreed that portfolios are useful:

I was never impressed with the portfolios as a method of reporting/assessment. I always saw them as a nice way of showing your child’s work and as ‘keep sake’ for the future. (Parent)

There was strong support by respondents for providing schools with examples of assessment and reporting templates, as recommended as part of the Eltis Report.

These templates are currently being developed with the aim of assisting schools with the assessment and reporting process while providing the option of adaptation to meet local requirements.

Some schools stated that they have reporting systems that were developed in consultation with their school communities and meet local need and do not require changing at this time.

Our school, after much consultation, has devised and implemented a reporting system that fully satisfies parents/carers, staff and students. WE DO NOT WANT TO CHANGE IT. Please do not impose a system on us that may not work and puts more pressure on the busy staff of a small school. (School staff meeting)

The importance of consultation with the school community in developing reporting systems was raised by a number of respondents.

Many respondents stressed the need for effective tracking of students’ assessment information across years, stages and at the various major transition points. Some schools are using computer-based tracking systems. These are not uniform and cannot necessarily be used to track students on entry to secondary school.

More tracking from primary to secondary so secondary teachers know what levels the kids are at. (School staff meeting)

Not all respondents agreed to electronic tracking of student achievement:

Student achievement from one school should not be available to another school on any computer system. (Parent)

Parental Expectation

Many parents said that they do not understand the curriculum, how their child is assessed and what is being reported.
Many parents stated that they do not understand the outcomes approach and requested information that they could understand about their child's progress. For some parents this was described as marks from tests and where their child ranks in comparison to other students.

As a parent I prefer a simple indication of marks and position in class and a face to face meeting with the teacher a couple of times a year … A simple indication that your child is passing the assessments set for them in class and some indication of where your child is placed in the class is all a parent really wants in my opinion. (Parent)

Other parents expressed quite a different view:

My son’s school (named) does an excellent job of regular outcomes-based reporting to parents … I am therefore astonished and concerned when I hear what happens at other public schools, where even infants school children are ranked as 1st, 2nd, etc. in their class and apparently their marks put on a bell curve. This means that even if every child in the class achieved the learning outcomes, only the top ones will be rewarded. (Parent)

Parents requested reports that were regular, clear, honest and in simple English:

Get rid of the jargon! If your doctor spoke to you in medical terms you’d leave his consulting room with only a doubtful understanding of what your diagnosis was. Schools are no different. (Parent)

The perspective of staff and students at one school was more optimistic, proposing that:

The outcome-based reporting is encouraging for children and is clearer for parents – allows for different learning rates and different maturity. Parents perhaps need to be educated to understand this form of reporting. Reporting should go to parents. (School community group)

The majority of respondents requested regular, timely, ‘jargon free’ discussions between the teacher, parents and student. Many respondents referred to this as “three way reporting”.

THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

The broad structure of primary schools has remained unchanged with children progressing through seven years of schooling, from Kindergarten to Year 6.

Respondents were generally satisfied with the structure of primary school. However, there were a number of comments made by respondents relating to:

- the entry age of school
- the length of the school day
- class structures
- the diversity of student needs
- staffing in primary schools

Reporting is too vague and uses too many ‘eduspeak’ words. Parents often don’t know where their child is at and therefore cannot give them the support they may need. Euphemisms like ‘emerging’ simply frustrate parents and certainly don’t help children to deal with a problem if it is there. I’m not an advocate of pitting young children against each other but I think parents have a right to know how their kids are doing in relation to the curriculum/benchmark/general expectation right from Grade 1. (Parent)

After 5 years at school I have very little idea what level my son is supposed to have reached. I know he is bright but for all I know he may be under achieving at the bottom of the class. I don’t think he is but no one will tell me for sure. (Parent)
• the importance of Years 5 and 6 as the middle years of schooling and
• the use of schools as community centres.

Some concern was expressed at the cost of maintaining numbers of very small schools.

_Small schools which are no longer viable are sapping huge financial and personnel resources for no good reason when they are located within a reasonable distance of a larger school._ (DET staff member)

**Starting Age**

There were many comments on the best age for children to start school.

There was a strong view that the starting age should be raised and a call for a national starting age to be introduced. Many people made suggestions of the ‘cut-off’ date and there was a suggestion that perhaps an additional transition class could be created so that children could enter at 5 years of age any time throughout the year.

The issue of starting age and school readiness was a major theme in response to the _Early Childhood Years_ paper.

**Length of School Day**

A relatively small number of respondents suggested changing the length of the school day or school year to ensure more time for formal learning.

_Conideration could be given to the extension of school hours and a slight change in services delivered to students._ (Parent)

**Class Structures**

Schools and their communities have some flexibility in the way classes are established although the number of children in the school determines how many classes can be formed. There are many primary schools which form composite classes of two or more year levels and small rural schools that can have a class with students in each year level.

There were divergent opinions as to the value and effectiveness of ‘streaming’ students into either ‘ability’ groups of single sex classes. Both sides offered arguments for their opinions.

The use of composite classes in primary schools was not seen as favourable by the majority of respondents who commented on their use.

_Composite classes appear to be a problematic concept. In my son’s school, composite classes are not structured according to students’ ability, at least not in infant years._ (Parent)

Some support was expressed for composite classes:
In interviews with the Commission for Children and Young People, children expressed divergent views on the use of composite classes:

- I still agree with composite classes or grades. (School staff member)

- I preferred composite classes – friendlier.

- Mixed ability classes depend on class size so teachers have time for everyone.

- Composite class are not good. If you are good at things you finish long before the younger kids and have to wait. It’s boring. (Commission for Children and Young People)

For some respondents, the concept of achievement in ‘stages’ is confusing when students still progress in year levels or grades. Some parents said that they would rather have achievement in year levels and not over ‘stages’ which relate to two years of schooling.

- After listening to parents who still have children in primary school, I was made aware of words like STAGES – GRADES. Grades I can understand. Stages I haven’t got any idea what is being discussed. I believe in some primary schools the curriculum is taught in ‘stages’, in ‘grades’ or ‘not in grades’. I feel a new parent not having previously been involved in understanding where their child is with education would not have any idea. This would push them further out the door because, for a lot of young parents, this would make them feel they are airing their ignorance. (Community member)

**Middle Years of Schooling**

Various submissions addressed the issue of the ‘middle years’ and the transition from primary to secondary schools. These issues are detailed in the Middle Years section of this report. Issues that were identified for the primary school included:

- the use of more specialist teachers in Years 5 and 6
- greater mobility for both teachers and students between primary and secondary schools, and
- increased training and development for teachers in effective teaching of younger adolescent learners.

Although there were divergent views on the benefits of the creation of a separate ‘middle school’, many respondents saw the issue as one of ensuring effective transition and the provision of continuity of learning rather than having an alternate middle years structure for students in Years 5 to 8. Some respondents identified that if middle schools were created, there would be additional transition points (between Year 4 and Year 5 and between Year 8 and Year 9) which may cause concern for students.

**School Communities**

Respondents spoke of the benefits of the co-location of representatives of other groups, such as the Departments of Health, Housing and Community Services as examples of government agencies with programs relevant to parents of school-age children.
This was also a significant issue in responses to the Early Childhood Years and is also referred to in the Community Partnerships section of Chapter 4.

**Staffing**

Some respondents felt that there should be an increased proportion of male teachers in primary schools particularly to provide role models for boys. Some people suggested reasons for the lack of male teachers are insufficient status and pay and concerns over child protection issues.

- At the moment males are not attracted to the job because of its relatively low status and remuneration; and the ease with which a male can become embroiled - child protection issues with no satisfactory way of defending himself against unfounded accusations. (School staff meeting)

- Male teaching staff are vital (not only to provide a balanced work force), but more importantly to provide positive role models for young boys who lack appropriate family models, or those without particularly single parent families mainly parented by mothers. (Personal submission)

Some respondents said that they thought that the staffing formula which determined staffing establishments in primary schools is inflexible. The major concern was that they felt that they compared less favourably with the staffing processes for high schools.

- There is a need for greater flexibility in staffing of schools. There is a need to at least determine the correct mix of staff for schools. Principals have no say in determining the needs of the school staffing in relation to school requirements. (Personal submission)

Many respondents also requested the appointment of additional staff to assist teachers in classrooms. In particular, respondents requested additional counsellor time in primary schools, support personnel to assist with technology, additional support teachers for students with learning difficulties and additional teachers’ aides in schools.

- Counsellors in the primary school at least twice a week. Specialised support for technology when it breaks down or operating certain programs. (School staff meeting)

- Safety net for students with special learning needs. More assistance with greater funding for STLA’s, counsellors, and learning support and health specialists. (P&C meeting)

- Employment of school counsellors/psychologists – 1 for every pp1/pp2/3 school. Counsellor and psychologist shared between PP4/PP5/PP6 schools. (DET staff meeting)

**Diversity of Student Needs**

A significant number of respondents identified issues that need to be addressed to ensure that needs of all students are addressed in primary school.
I would like to see children valued as individuals and their individual educational needs being assessed in the first instance and then education being provided at the appropriate pace and level of learning for each individual child. (Parent)

There was some general concern expressed about the range of needs of students within one class. This is clearly illustrated in the following quote:

Teachers are having to cope (still) with 30-31 students including children from non-English speaking backgrounds, language disorders, refugee backgrounds and so on. It is impossible to provide meaningful, relevant, well planned experiences to cater for all needs and maintain a safe, well managed classroom all day every day. (Personal submission)

The needs of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds were identified as needing particular attention. The importance of teachers understanding of the needs of these students was highlighted.

Introduction of cultural awareness/community education for city teachers transferred to rural/remote areas where the majority of children are of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander. This allows the Teacher to adapt to the diversity of the area. (Parent)

Several responses spoke of the impact of ‘children with challenging behaviours’ on classroom dynamics. Some respondents suggested that there should be ‘more discipline’. Others suggested that additional support in classrooms or different programs are needed.

Increased level of support for students with behavioural difficulties – more Support Teachers (1 per large school) and more funding for aides (spec). Alternate programs for students with Behaviour Problems e.g. Wilderness Experience. (School staff member)

It was suggested by some respondents that more professional development was needed for teachers and that additional support in the form of specialist staff, classes or units within the school.

The need for professional development for teachers of mainstream classes who have children with specific disabilities was raised throughout the consultation.

Teacher training to address needs of children in mainstream classes today eg aspergers etc. (School staff meeting)

There were a significant number of responses relating to the needs of children who have a language background other than English (LBOTE).

Each year many LBOTE children enter primary school after Kindergarten as newly arrived students from overseas and require immediate and ongoing ESL assistance in order to access the curriculum. For these and other children, a primary curriculum that systematically supports the development of English language and literacy throughout every key learning area in every year is the hallmark of a linguistically inclusive
Some respondents stated that there are insufficient numbers of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers available to cater for the increasing number of students with LBOTE, some of whom are refugees. The Ethnic Communities Council of NSW suggested that the needs of refugee children may require particular attention.

Students from migrant families may not require the same level of support as refugee students. Refugee students may have had experiences that are detrimental to their ability to learn. Their exposure to and understanding of education systems and processes, even in their home countries, may have been minimal at best. (Ethnic Communities Council of NSW)

The Inner and Eastern Sydney Migrant Interagency Group recommended:

*Increase in the provision of ESL support. There is an urgent need to appropriately train teachers and ESL counsellors to assist students at schools and TAFE Colleges to support refugee and new arrivals families to participate in the school community.* (Migrant Interagency Group)

A range of issues affecting children in rural and isolated areas was raised by a number of respondents. Many of these respondents felt that children in some rural and isolated areas lack the opportunities available to children in metropolitan areas.

*Our school is geographically isolated and it is strongly felt by all participants that the students miss out on education opportunities. Although the school strives to achieve to overcome the geographic isolation there are ways in which this area can be better addressed. The first area needing to be addressed is transport. The students miss out on attending planned excursions as there is no private or public transport available. In the past the school has applied to the state government for a school bus. This was not successful as the school had to pay for it out of general funds. This is not possible as we do not have sufficient funds to purchase a bus.* (School community meeting)

Some respondents felt that the needs of gifted and talented students are not adequately addressed by the current curriculum or school structures.

*There needs to be an avenue for the ‘gifted’ or the ‘advanced’ to progress at an accelerated rate but still retain links to their peers.* (DET staff member)

Wei have several bright children. They have consistently reported boredom and frustration with the slow pace of learning. (Parent)
HOME – SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Building Partnerships

Many respondents commented on the benefits for children if there are genuine partnerships between home and school. In the response from the Federation of Parents and Citizens’ Association, they stated that a positive relationship between children, parents and teachers:

... not only develops a sense of school community, but also allows parents to actively participate in their child’s learning and similarly allows children to be active participants in their own learning. (Federation of P&Cs)

A significant number of respondents emphasised the importance of frequent and effective communication between the school, class teacher and parents. These comments related particularly to keeping parents informed about their child's progress.

A number of parents indicated that they would like to have more opportunities to participate in school activities.

I would like greater parental/local community participation in local public schools - perhaps the more widespread practice of establishing mentoring programs with local persons/groups. (Personal submission)

Some submissions suggested that parents and community members who are able to assist teachers in the classroom could complete a course and be accredited in some formal sense. Another suggestion was that their time could be financially recognised through taxation incentives for the time devoted to school activities.

One way would be free or low cost courses that lead to a basic qualification that could then be credited toward a TAFE or Uni course. The area could be reading, math, science, art, counselling etc. This would help people out of work or not sure what areas to explore and as parents it would help their kids as the topics would be areas these kids are currently learning. (Parent).

Generally respondents felt that there needs to be clearer guidelines for parents and community members to work effectively in classrooms.

The issues of home and school partnerships are also addressed in the Community Partnerships section of Chapter 4.

Homework

Several submissions addressed the issue of homework, expressing concern at the purpose of homework and the effect that homework can have on families with limited shared recreational time.

I believe that children in K-3 should not have homework at all ... There is little down time for families during the week and if your child has an interest outside of school there is added difficulty in meeting the required outcomes. (Personal submission)
Some respondents expressed concern that not all children have home environments that support them to do homework.

*Homework makes children stressed and have less time to socialise with family and friends. Also homework takes time off (out of) your personal life i.e. so you can’t play sport or have fun which makes you unfit. That is why homework should be banned.* (Student meeting)

Homework and major assignments to be done at home using computers/other resources is very difficult and ‘unfair’ for students with no one at home to help them. (School staff meeting)

Students expressed their views quite clearly about homework. The following comments by children were made in meetings with the Commission for Children and Young People:

*Don’t learn from homework and repetition, just making mistakes over and over again.*

Don’t do my homework ‘cos there’s no one to help me.

(Commission for Children and Young People)

**IN SUMMARY**

While the structure of primary schools has remained relatively stable, the primary curriculum has undergone significant change.

Primary teachers have seen a great number of changes to their syllabuses since 1995. The demands on teachers to come to understand new requirements and to start using outcomes to guide their teaching, assessing and reporting in each area are reflected in the comments they have provided. Even the support material that they have received from the Department and the Board of Studies to assist them with the task of implementing new syllabuses has clearly appeared as an additional burden.

Primary teachers are seeking a time of stability in regard to syllabus implementation. They need time to become familiar with the requirements of each key learning area and to develop successful programs that will meet the needs of their students.

Given the pace of change in syllabuses and the time given to key learning areas, the various regular aspects of their week such as sport, scripture and assemblies, as well as those special activities such as school camp and performances, it is not surprising that teachers have insufficient time to meet the needs of all their students. This consultation indicated that in teachers’ efforts to meet all curriculum requirements, it is possible to lose the focus on delivering quality teaching and learning in classrooms.

Several teachers identified ‘additional subjects’ that they are required to address in their teaching such as road safety education and drug education. Some respondents noted that some of these ‘additional subjects’ can be identified as aspects of one of the key learning area syllabuses.

Some respondents suggested other possible reasons why the primary curriculum is so demanding:

- there has not been sufficient support through professional development activities to assist teachers to design programs that will help them with the scope of the curriculum
  
  Support to date has been focused on specific key learning areas and not on assisting teachers with the whole curriculum. Now that teachers have the six syllabuses, it is timely to provide targeted professional development that will assist teachers with strategies that will make the whole curriculum manageable.

- teachers and schools have not received any information to clarify requirements or guide them in making decisions about the scope of curriculum.

A significant number of respondents mentioned that the current curriculum demands do not allow teachers any flexibility to meet the particular needs of their community. In particular, teachers indicated that they feel that their students have no time for ‘in depth’ learning. In developing guidelines for curriculum implementation, consideration should be given to what flexibility there should be for communities to have a say in the priorities of curriculum. The teaching of surf education, for example, may be very relevant to a
community by the sea but irrelevant for communities in rural and remote areas of the state. Should primary schools that are feeder schools to a sports high school or a performing arts high school, for example, give greater priority to physical education or creative arts?

As a result of the recommendations of the Eltis Report, there are already a number of strategies that are being developed that should assist teachers with issues of workload. Some of these include:

- defining organisers of K-6 syllabuses to guide teachers to plan, program, assess and report to meet the needs of their students
- providing units of work that will help teachers to make connections between the key learning areas, and
- providing clear assessment and reporting guidelines and templates that schools can adapt to meet local needs.

As a possible solution to the crowded curriculum, respondents suggested that specialist teachers may be of assistance in particular learning areas. Not all respondents agreed that there should be specialisation in primary schools but this suggestion should be investigated for those communities that feel that specialist teachers will be valuable for particular learning areas.

Another suggestion to help teachers to meet the needs of all their students was to reduce class sizes. Many respondents suggested that the Class Size Reduction Program in the early years should be extended to the Years 3 to 6.

Parents and community members said that they are overwhelmed by the curriculum and that they have little understanding of the ‘outcomes approach’ to teaching and learning. As partners in the learning process, parents and carers need clear information about the primary curriculum. They need to be able to understand what their child is being taught, how they are progressing and how they might assist them in their learning.

The solutions to a crowded curriculum are not simple. The responses indicated that there are numerous views about what should or should not be part of the primary curriculum.

What is clear is that schools need stability in syllabus development. They need clarity about the requirements for implementing the scope of the curriculum. Within guidelines, they need flexibility to design quality teaching and learning programs to meet the needs of their students. They need support through targeted professional development to help teachers with the scope of the primary curriculum and they need a range of strategies that help them better manage the demands of curriculum.

Ultimately school communities need to be able to make decisions about curriculum that are in the best interests of their students. School leaders need to have flexibility to guide their school communities to make decisions about the implementation of the curriculum. With this flexibility school leaders can help teachers to manage the curriculum and remain focused on quality teaching.

Concern about tracking student progress at major transition points in their education remains a major issue. The transferability of information is vital if students’ learning is not to be significantly disrupted. Respondents identified the issue as being particularly important between primary and secondary school but also when students move school education areas, regions or even out of the state. The Eltis Report identified the need to conduct a survey of school computer-based tracking systems. As a result of this survey further consideration needs to be given to effective and efficient ways of tracking students within the system.

Primary schools want more time – time to develop quality teaching programs to help students achieve outcomes – time to allow students to focus on their learning – time to meet the individual needs of the diverse range of students in classrooms – time to meet professionally with colleagues and to engage in practical professional development opportunities – time to meet with parents and carers – time to enjoy the teaching and learning process.

Primary teachers and their communities continue to do an amazing job of meeting the multiple demands within a school day. They have always remained focused on the importance of the individual child’s welfare and academic progress. With the implementation of a range of strategies, the curriculum should be simplified and school communities be able to move forward with satisfaction that they are making a positive difference in the lives of primary aged students.
References

MIDDLE YEARS

INTRODUCTION
The term ‘middle years’ is used to describe young adolescents at the end of primary school and the beginning of secondary school (Year 5 to Year 8). These students, generally aged from 10 to 14 years, are experiencing the onset of puberty and have particular physical, emotional, educational and cultural needs that require special attention. The middle years of schooling should provide opportunities for young people to learn and grow in ways that acknowledge and respect this unique and special phase of their development. (Cumming, 1997)

Over the last 10 years there has been a number of major studies into the particular needs of this age group. Research reflects many of the views of respondents. Generally respondents identified five major areas that need to be addressed if we are to provide the best learning opportunities and future for young adolescents. These major areas are:

- a curriculum that is relevant and flexible, allowing students to make connections between learning areas
- quality teaching that is challenging and stimulating for students and keeps them engaged in learning
- effective programs that support students in their transition from primary to secondary school
- school organisational structures that allow for the flexible use of time and resources to meet student needs
- a supportive environment that is built on a commitment of respect and care for each student.

The transition to secondary school was identified by respondents as a significant time for middle years students. It is often an exciting time with many of these students looking forward to new challenges, new friends and new experiences and welcoming the changes that secondary school brings. Some, however, feel less secure than in the familiar and predictable environment of primary school and do not find the change to be a happy one.

Introduction to secondary school can be a confusing experience as students are faced with a number of different teachers with whom they are not familiar, bells indicating the end of lessons every 40 minutes or so and often a different room for every subject. Some students adjust to this more easily than others.

There is substantial evidence that if students do not have positive learning and personal experiences in the middle years they are at risk of becoming disinterested in school and learning in general (Barber, 1999). This can have long-term detrimental effects on their education and future prospects.

In response many schools have designed effective programs that help to address the needs of middle years students and in particular, assist them with their transition to secondary school. Integral to these programs is the transfer of information about individual student achievement.

While a number of effective programs have been established by individual schools and groups of schools, and some students assimilate the changes they experience, there is no focused longer-term systemic strategy to support schools to meet the needs of their middle years students.

Middle school years are difficult years for many reasons – changing and emotional years in students’ personal lives … where their ‘identity’ is often lost. (Personal submission)

THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF MIDDLE YEARS STUDENTS
The particular needs of middle years students are different from those of young children and older adolescents but like all developmental stages these students vary greatly in their learning styles, their ability to focus on particular tasks and their general levels of performance.
The nature of the student should be recognised and catered for to motivate students. Students at this stage are undergoing dramatic personal, physical and social change where they are trying out roles and values. They are developing a sense of personal identity, exploring questions of values, morals and ethics, finding a place and securing a level of status in their peer group, developing a balance between independence and adult figures, dealing with the impact of commercial issues, multiple expectations at home, school and with friends and developing commitments to people and causes. (School staff meeting)

Research has identified the particular needs of these students to include:

- feeling like they belong
- developing a sense of themselves
- having opportunities to act independently and cooperatively
- being recognised and valued
- feeling supported and challenged
- feeling secure (Cumming, 1997).

Some respondents suggested that, as a starting point in addressing the needs of middle years students, teachers need to develop a better understanding of the needs, interests and the developmental readiness of young adolescents.

Teachers need to be trained in what to expect from adolescents as they move from children to adults. (School staff meeting)

The importance of developing a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy in the primary years was raised by respondents. They noted the difficulty students face throughout their education if they enter Year 7 without this foundation. Some respondents suggested that more teachers are needed to support students with learning difficulties.

There is research that shows that by the time students are 14 years of age, their levels of literacy and numeracy are strong indicators of future success. Students with high levels of literacy and numeracy achievement are more likely to continue at school and go on to well paid jobs (Penman, 2004).

Provide better support for developing literacy and numeracy skills in primary school. Present levels of STL [support teacher learning] allocation are not adequate. (School staff meeting)

If the DET and the State Government accepts Penman’s (2004) findings …, it would be irresponsible of DET not to introduce many more STLD teachers into our primary schools and to adequately fund those schools in disadvantaged areas where literacy levels are poor and/or there are students from non-English speaking backgrounds. (School Teachers Federation meeting)

There are some middle years students who are more likely to experience learning difficulties. For example, findings reported in The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education Freeing the Spirit: Dreaming an Equal Future (NSW AECG and NSW DET, 2004) show that some Aboriginal students are entering Year 7 with a deficit of about 30 months in their reading ability. In Years 3 and 5, Aboriginal
students are roughly 19 months behind non-Aboriginal students in their literacy learning.

By Year 7, for many Aboriginal students that gap increases to somewhere between 30 and 36 months of learning. (NSW AECG and NSW DET, 2004: 112)

The particular needs of students who have English as a second language (ESL) were identified by a number of respondents as requiring specific support in the middle years. This group includes students who have a non-English speaking background (NESB) as well as students who have newly arrived in Australia. Some respondents expressed the view that these students have a greater need to be accepted by their peer group. It was also highlighted by respondents that there needs to be recognition of the prior learning of these students in their first language.

Address the NESB and new arrival students’ alienation from school and particularly in the middle years of school. They need to have a sense of belonging; engagement with the curriculum; practical orientation in their education … (Migrant Interagency Group)

The needs of students with disabilities were also raised as needing particular attention during the middle years.

The middle years are a time in which the strength of peer group pressure and the push for independence can weaken relationships between students with disability and their peers. The notion of ‘belonging’ becomes increasingly important to middle and high school students and without active support and an inclusive culture, students who are different in some way are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. (Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development)

Concern was expressed that there was not sufficient attention to the needs of gifted and talented students during the middle years. Respondents felt that unless the specific needs of these students are addressed they are at risk of disengaging from school and perhaps never achieving their potential. Some people were concerned about the lack of continuity in the curriculum between Years 6 and 7 causing some students to become bored.

Gifted students are not catered for when entering Year 7. They are expected to revise subject matter already covered in Years 4, 5 or 6. This leads to more gifted students being dumbed down and consequently switching off. (Parent)

Increased use of bridging programs between feeder primary and high schools. [Our school] ran a program aimed at gifted and talented last year, which was very well received by parents and students … (Parent)

A significant number of people commented on the needs of boys in the middle years. Many respondents suggested that boys were at greater risk of switching off. A number of solutions were offered including ensuring that the curriculum is more interesting for boys and making some same sex classes for some subjects.
A greater focus on boys’ education and appropriate teaching/learning strategies ... Wider curriculum choices – why should students be limited to core subjects such as science, geography when their interests lie in areas such as wood technology, graphic design, etc. (School staff meeting)

At this age boys often begin to assert themselves which means rebelling against females in authority such as teachers and mums … English texts should appeal to boys, Geography should include much more field work – this would require curriculum change. (Personal submission)

[Provide] opportunities for multi-age and or gender specific class or group learning, based upon current research on how boys and girls learn. (State office staff meeting)

**Engagement**

The issue of middle years students switching off or disengaging from their learning if their needs are not met was raised by a substantial number of respondents.

To keep students engaged in the middle years, we need to continue including hands-on activities that are challenging and engaging … (Personal submission)

With regard to primary schools in particular a lot of students become disengaged as they feel they are being treated like children when they are lumped in with the rest of the school. (Personal submission)

An indicator of disengagement can be when students have numerous unexplained absences from school. The following graph contains data collected from 200 government schools. It shows the attendance rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students between Kindergarten and Year 12. There is a significant decline in attendance from Year 6 through to about Year 9 when attendance patterns begin to improve. There is evidence that these patterns improve after Year 9 because some disengaged students have left school.

**Figure 1**

Attendance rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students from Kindergarten to Year 12

Source: NSW AECG and NSW DET, 2004. 25
Respondents identified the curriculum as one of a number of reasons for student disengagement. They stated that greater flexibility is needed so that teachers can better meet the needs of these students.

*Less crowded curriculum, relevance and appropriateness.* Involving students in selecting curriculum topics and then structure lessons from there. Achievable and understandable outcomes for students to know what they are working towards. (School staff meeting)

Other respondents felt that students disengage because the teaching is not always appropriate for middle years students.

*While a revitalised curriculum is mandatory, the teaching practices of middle school teachers need to be modified.* (School staff meeting)

A number of respondents felt that the structure of primary and secondary schools leads to students disengaging particularly at the transition point.

*From discussion with early school leavers, the reason most disengage from school during the middle years is primarily because students are required to fit into the learning environment rather than the learning environment being sympathetic to their needs, interests and learning styles of the individual. The general feeling of these young people is that they just “don’t fit in”.* (Community member)

While respondents were concerned about academic progress in the middle years, they were also concerned that if the students’ social adjustment and welfare needs were not met they are at risk of disengaging. Some respondents expressed concern that some students were not emotionally ready for the significant change that faced them in secondary school.

**CURRICULUM FOR MIDDLE YEARS STUDENTS**

Students in Years 5 and 6 experience a curriculum in six key learning areas. Their learning outcomes are described as being at Stage 3. Details of the primary curriculum are contained in the section Primary School Years.

Students in Years 7 and 8 experience a curriculum in eight key learning areas which contain a number of subjects. The learning outcomes are described as being at Stage 4. Details of the secondary curriculum are contained in the section Secondary School Years.

In an attempt to make the curriculum between Stages 3 and 4 more continuous the Board of Studies has revised the syllabuses for Years 7 to 10 taking into account the needs of middle years students.

Some respondents, including the NSW Secondary Principals Council, did not think that there was a close enough link between the syllabus for Years 5 and 6 and the syllabus for Years 7 and 8.

*Junior secondary [is] frequently characterised by repeats of material already covered in primary school or in other*
The Board of Studies mandates some time requirements for particular subjects. The Department sets additional mandatory course hours in its schools for Years 7 to 10 in English, mathematics and science, as well as requirements for elective hours, sport and special religious education.

A number of respondents suggested that schools could better meet the needs of Years 7 and 8 students with a secondary curriculum that has greater flexibility in time requirements as well as in subject choice.

Removal of some of the mandatory curriculum requirements to allow for local needs that fit the context of learners … (School staff member)

Flexible syllabuses that are tailored to a school’s socio-economic (etc) situation to encourage relevance to a student’s learning. (School staff meeting)

In summary, respondents felt that the areas requiring attention to better meet the curriculum needs of middle years students are:

- the ‘freeing up’ of the curriculum to provide a greater opportunity for elective study
- resolving curriculum overlap or repetition over Years 5 to 8
- improving learning programs with particular emphasis on the needs of boys.

**QUALITY TEACHING**

Other respondents felt that it was not necessarily the curriculum that was of concern but rather that the teaching practice of teachers of Years 5 to 8 was not meeting students’ expectations or needs.

A significant number of respondents identified that effective teaching is essential if there is to be any improvement in the education of students in the middle years. There was a view that teaching practices need to be more stimulating to students, emphasising skills development and knowledge more relevant to their everyday lives.

Many respondents felt that students disengage primarily because the teaching is not always appropriate for middle years students. Respondents identified that the teaching required for students in the middle years needs a different approach. A meeting of State office staff highlighted a range of research findings, including the following quote by J Barratt from an Australian report on middle schooling (Barratt, 1998):

> Many teachers have come to realise that neither a slightly more demanding version of the early years of primary school, nor a watered down rendering of post-compulsory requirements is appropriate for these students. (State office staff meeting)

Respondents commented particularly on the teaching of Years 7 and 8 students. There was a general feeling that the teaching was too content driven and instruction-based. They suggested that early
adolescent students needed greater stimulation and challenge if they are to be engaged in their learning.

**Employ a variety of teaching strategies that meet the variety of learning styles and needs of the students and attend to their interests.** (School staff meeting)

**Forget about the traditional subjects and concentrate on success. Life is about learning, not about whether you’re good at Maths or Science or Geography. Train teachers to teach these subjects in an integrated way with learning skills as the primary focus. Find out what the students are interested in. Give them assignments based on their interest. Access their level of effort, their passion. A love of learning comes from the passion and inspiration of a teacher. Those qualities are few and far between in schools.** (Parent)

There was strong support for middle school teaching practices which are more practical and relevant to students’ everyday lives. Some respondents also felt that if students had more input into what they were learning, they would be more engaged.

**To keep students engaged in the middle years, we need to continue … “hands-on” activities, that are challenging and engaging …** (Personal submission)

**Activities varied in lessons to motivate and encourage students to set benchmarks for individual improvement rather than see ranking in the cohort as the main gauge.** (School staff meeting)

In meetings held by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People, children and young people felt that learning needed to be fun:

**When lessons are fun it’s easier to learn.**

**Good teachers make learning interesting and fun.** (NSW Commission for Children and Young People)

There were varied opinions of what ‘fun learning’ was all about but the activities that the children identified as fun were all about making the learning relevant to them.

Several respondents identified the need to ensure that teaching is not just subject based but makes links between learning areas in a way that better reflects the way these students think and learn.

**We are at present examining our curriculums for middle school 2005, and trying to incorporate themes for a holistic approach – similar to primary – instead of separate KLAs. … One difficulty is the need to meet the curriculum demands from each KLA, including primary – as there is little flexibility in what must be taught at the time.** (School staff member)

**High schools need to cater to middle year students more holistically (as primary schools do) rather than as dealing with them as a teacher of one subject. High schools need to implement strategies so that the teacher can come to know each child as a whole.** (School staff meeting)

**Children need to be engaged, excited, challenged and TAUGHT in the middle years. It would be nice to see children encouraged for GOOD work as much as is done for the miscreants.** (Parent)

**Working in groups and teams so that students can develop confidence, interpersonal skills, team work, [and] group leadership is vital in the middle years.** (School parent meeting)

**The answer is always inspired teachers and good practice … our problem is an established culture in junior secondary that Years 7 and 8 are ‘a bludge’…** (DET staff member)

**Teachers in these years need to teach the student, not the content.** (School staff meeting)

**Children to have more say in what they are doing.** (Joint school and community meeting)

**Integrate learning at every opportunity.** (Personal submission)

**Teachers teaching the middle years require specialist training in how to meet the specific needs of pre-adolescent and adolescent students.** (School staff meeting)
**Professional learning**

Professional learning opportunities for teachers of middle years students were identified by respondents as essential if teachers are to adapt their teaching practice to meet the needs of these students.

Support for teachers implementing syllabi in a way that gives students ownership of their learning and helps them see relevance in the curriculum should be provided through ongoing professional development opportunities. Some flexibility of syllabi is needed... (Personal submission)

Low literacy and numeracy could be addressed by common training opportunities for existing and new teachers. Teachers should be given time to learn about the methods of their colleagues in primary or secondary schools. ... (School staff meeting).

Some respondents expressed support for the Department’s Quality Teaching in NSW Public Schools (NSW DET, 2003) framework. This framework was developed to provide a renewed focus on appropriate teaching particularly in the early years of secondary school. These respondents expressed strong support for the focus on collaborative planning and its value as a professional learning experience.

The ‘Quality Teaching’ model has many effective strategies to target engagement. A strong focus on the implementation of this model may provide some answer. (Personal submission)

**TRANSITION**

**Transition Programs**

The transition from Year 6 to Year 7 was identified as a major issue for students. Many parents, while recognising that some schools operated effective transition programs, called for more meaningful programs to ease students’ transition.

Primary and secondary schools need to be offered a framework for transition programs and additional funding to release teachers to implement it. (School staff meeting)

The jump between primary and high school no matter how much preparation is huge. Children progress from having one teacher solely responsible for them; that teacher has to make the effort regarding discipline, nurturing and genuine care, to having an abundance of teachers more than happy to see the last of them after a 40 minute period. They have been in a state of ‘consistent’ education and then thrown into one of inconsistency and unsettled organisation. (Personal submission)

Some respondents noted that many students found the adjustment to secondary school easy, particularly when systematic efforts had been made to assist students’ entry to secondary school before enrolment.

Schools already have many specific primary to secondary transition programs in place. Our College programs commence in February and often involve staff working outside usual school...
Some respondents described transition programs that are operating successfully in some primary and secondary schools. These programs include aspects of:

- Years 7 and 8 teachers adopting some primary teaching practices including introducing interactive and group learning
- having fewer teachers involved with each core class group
- team teaching across faculties
- establishing homerooms and transition support options.

The work of teachers in developing and maintaining such practices was acknowledged.

*The profile of middle years teachers needs to be raised. They are the unsung heroes of the profession, and good teachers in these years provide the foundation of a good education system.* (Parent)

Some respondents stated that they wanted transition practices applied more effectively and evenly across the state.

*... formalise transition programs and properly resource them! So far, NSW DET just expects everything to be done on a shoestring by the schools!* (School P&C meeting)

Some respondents suggested that future professional learning initiatives could be built on the best practice data gathered by the Department of Education and Training's 2000-3 Linkages program. This statewide program, supported by locally based consultants, was a focused strategy to improve transition practices among particular groups of schools, and gather information on exemplary existing transition programs.

*In 2002 the school participated in a very successful program called Linkages that helped to bridge the gap between high schools and primary schools. Targeted funding was available ... to participate in a range of orientation activities that supported Year 6 in their transition into high school. The funding has subsequently ceased and the successful program has been downgraded significantly.* (School staff meeting)

### Tracking student achievement

The need to track student achievement particularly across primary and secondary school was raised by a number of respondents. Concern was expressed that there is currently no standard way in which this occurs. It was felt that many students’ achievements remain unrecognised in Year 7 resulting in teachers reteaching the same knowledge and skills and students feeling unchallenged and unsupported.

*Some formal assessment or hand over to go from primary school to high school. This caters for individual children’s needs and formally recognises children at risk (ESL, Aboriginal, learning difficulties).* (School staff meeting)
Student records need to be able to travel with the student from school to school (including when a student moves) and should be in a standard format to indicate to the new school what level each student's abilities are at. (Personal submission)

**SCHOOL STRUCTURES**

Some respondents suggested that middle schools should be established so that there is a focus exclusively on these students. It was argued that this would allow teachers to specialise in the learning needs of middle years students.

Where the opportunity exists, middle schools should be established. (Joint school and community meeting)

Yes. Students come from many different primary schools and backgrounds. They are not jig-saw pieces who fit comfortably together in the one-size-fits-all system we currently have. (Parent)

The majority of respondents, however, were not in favour of establishing separate middle schools. Some of these respondents noted that middle schools would create additional transition points for students between Years 4 and 5 and between Years 8 and 9.

Separate middle schools are definitely not the way to go. They only create more exit points from the public education system. (Regional principals’ meeting)

Respondents who did not think that there should be separate middle schools, made a number of suggestions to assist these students using the current primary and secondary school structures.

. . . . Working in partnership between primary school teachers of years 5/6 and the high school teachers of years 7/8 on a rotation basis and utilising both school settings will not only provide staffing flexibility (to keep them motivated) but will enhance effective learning outcomes for students. . . . (School staff member)

It is important that class groups are taught by only a small number of teachers in the first two years of secondary schooling . . . taught by teachers who see themselves as teachers of students rather than teachers of specialist subjects. (State office staff member)

**SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS**

**Relationships**

While adolescents are beginning to become more independent of adults and could be distancing themselves from adult authority, research indicates the importance of these young people having a strong bond with supportive adults (Hargreaves et al, 1990).

Many respondents noted the importance of students’ social adjustment and welfare during the middle years. The need for allowing students more independence and giving them greater say over their learning was raised by a number of respondents.
Respondents also recognised the importance of the relationship among students and between student and teacher at this time.

[Teachers] need more specialist training in behaviour, living skills, music…(School staff member)

The important things [for middle school kids] are about relationships; how to get needs met without hurting others; how to work harmoniously with others to reach shared goals; how to resolve conflict effectively without violence; how to relate to people who may be different to you (other sex, other culture, with a disability). … RELATIONSHIPS are a focus for this group. (Community member)

The submission from the NSW Commission for Children and Young People stated that when children and young people were asked about teachers they were:

… unanimous in explaining that good teachers are those who know how to create and maintain quality relationships with students and how to maintain fair boundaries of acceptable behaviour without demeaning, bullying or being disrespectful. (NSW Commission for Children and Young People).

The children and young people described the relationship as follows:

Teachers should know how to talk to you, to communicate with you and get along with you just like friends.

Teachers who talk with you like an adult and connect are good.

I like my teacher ‘cause he listens to what you have to say and lets you explain.

Need to reach a balance between being nice to students and in control of the class. (NSW Commission for Children and Young People)

Respondents expressed the view that participation levels of parents and community members are essential as the middle years student progresses through the early secondary years. Many of the secondary schools that have well established middle years programs have included strategies that help develop better home/school communication and support.

A planned approach to include the community into all phases of the development and implementation of middle years initiatives has the potential to grow confidence in public education, enhance parent-teacher-student communication and draw on local expertise across a range of areas, for example, curriculum. (State office staff meeting)

**Specialisation in middle schooling**

In recognition of the particular needs of early adolescent learners respondents suggested that they would like to have greater flexibility in their staffing around the middle years. Some respondents suggested that with flexibility, staffing arrangements could be organised across Years 5 to 8.
The research and studies seem to suggest that there are specific learning needs for middle years students. As a teacher of years 4, 5 and 6 for over 20 years, I would like very much to extend my knowledge and skills by working with year 7 and 8 students, and associated staff. It seems to me that my wealth of experience, expertise and continuing enthusiasm could be a real asset in the quest for improved middle years learning and teaching. There must be many years 5-8 teachers who would feel the same way. (School staff meeting)

From my work with schools across the Riverina and South Coast areas of NSW it is evident that there are some schools which have overcome systems formulas, such as the staffing formula, in order to operate some type of middle years programs. This means that schools are providing programs based on their own situation which requires examining local needs. In most cases such ideas are not easily transferable into other locations but never the less these initiatives should be promoted within the department … (Personal submission)

Respondents were divided on the issue of whether or not there should be specialist middle years teachers. Some suggested that a number of teachers are particularly skilled at teaching in the middle years and that there would be value in recognising these skills and creating a category of middle school teachers.

Middle school is a speciality that requires training. However there is no career path for these teachers wishing to specialise. There needs to be a senior position at each campus for upward movement of these specialists. (School P&C meeting)

The NSW Primary Principals’ Association also expressed support for specialisation of teaching.

Specialist teaching is required … this could be provided as an option in the teacher training course, like early childhood. (NSW Primary Principals Association)

Other respondents felt that all teachers should be able to teach effectively and relate to students at all levels.

No, all teachers should be able to cope with any age group and learning styles. (Parent)

Having specialist middle years teachers would have more disadvantages than advantages. The idea suggests that a senior high school teacher is not able to change their teaching to suit junior school and vice versa. This is not the case. (Personal submission)

Some teachers were particularly concerned that specialisation is not in the best interests of the teaching profession.

[In relation to establishing middle schools] … on the whole, no. Most students progress to Year 7 with no problem. … Teachers do not want to specialise because it locks them into teaching a certain age group. (School staff member)

Already some universities are offering a specialised middle school teaching degree. (School staff meeting)

Specialist “middle school” teachers within a more flexible high school structure could be very beneficial. (School staff meeting)

If specialist middle school teachers were introduced, would it attract sufficient teachers? (School staff meeting)

We do not believe there is a need for special middle years teachers … (Joint school and community meeting)

… there was concern that teachers would be trapped in middle or senior years and unable to transfer. (School student meeting)

Differing employment conditions for primary and secondary teachers … all staff should operate under the same conditions. (Joint school and community meeting)
IN SUMMARY

The middle years of schooling has been the subject of extensive educational research over the last 10 years. The NSW Department of Education and Training has been raising awareness of the issues around the middle years of schooling for much of this time. Many schools have established targeted projects to enhance the learning for students in the middle years. These projects have involved aspects such as:

- transition programs across primary and secondary schools
- establishing home rooms for students in Year 7 for core subjects
- a focus on teacher/student relationships
- raising the confidence and motivation of students
- improving literacy levels
- addressing the fragmentation of the secondary curriculum
- providing targeted professional development.

The schools involved found many positive outcomes of these projects, including a reduction in truancy and suspension rates, improvement in teachers’ knowledge of the individual needs of students and better teacher/student relationships.

It is clear, however, that the Department needs to do more to ensure a coherent and coordinated strategy to assist schools in delivering the best possible learning and support throughout the middle years.

A major Departmental strategy around the middle years of schooling should support successful current practices and ensure the needs of middle years students in government schools are addressed. This was expressed as a recommendation in the Secondary Principals’ Council’s submission:

That DET adopts the middle years of schooling as an important priority. That DET develops and implements a coordinated approach to the middle years of schooling that encompasses all the elements that need to be addressed, including teaching and learning, curriculum, student welfare, professional learning, school organisation, parent partnerships and system wide needs and issues.

(NSW Secondary Principal’s Council)

While there were divergent views on the merits of establishing separate middle schools there was sufficient support by respondents to further investigate the value of such structures. For this reason a pilot program could be conducted in a number of supportive communities so that the benefits or otherwise can be properly evaluated.

Decisions about any such structural change should only be contemplated where communities are supportive.

The concerns of some teachers, particularly in secondary schools, to having specialisation in the middle years were clearly evident in responses. However there was far greater support for teachers to be able to focus on teaching in these years. Establishing a category for specialist middle school teachers has clear support however careful consideration would need to be given to the implications this would have on both primary and secondary teachers. Any changes to staffing allocations should have sufficient flexibility to ensure that teachers who choose to teach in the middle years are able to move after a time within their classification as either a primary or secondary school teacher.

While supporting the creation of specialist middle years teachers, respondents recognised a need to ensure that targeted professional learning opportunities are provided. This should help ensure that these teachers are well prepared to meet these students’ particular needs.

One particular aspect identified for professional learning by respondents was the need to support middle years teachers to deliver programs that cross more than one key learning area or subject.

Schools should be free to organise for the particular needs of the middle years without restricting the options for teachers to teach across Years 7 – 12. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)
There has been some resistance by teachers and parents to establishing electronic processes to track student achievement. Effective transition from primary to secondary school would benefit from secondary teachers having access to students' prior achievements. Without a common, effective electronic tracking system a student continuum of learning cannot be assured.

It is timely for the Department to better recognise and provide for the needs of young adolescents in the middle years of schooling.
References

Barber, M. 1999. *Taking the Tide at the Flood – Transforming the Middle Years of Schooling*. National Middle Years of Schooling Conference. Melbourne


Cumming, J. 1997 *Principles and Directions for the Middle Years of Schooling*. A position paper prepared in the context of outcomes from Forums conducted in each State and Territory during 1996-97 as part of the National Middle Schooling Project. Draft Report


SECONDARY SCHOOL YEARS

“... teach them how to learn and love learning.”

(Personal submission)

Responses to the Secondary Years section of Excellence and Innovation cover a wide range of issues across the full breadth of secondary schooling. In order to better understand these issues it is necessary to provide some background information and place the issues into the appropriate context.

INTRODUCTION

Secondary education in NSW is divided into three stages: Stage 4 (Years 7&8), Stage 5 (Years 9&10) and Stage 6 (Years 11&12). The NSW Board of Studies, (BOS) develops and endorses syllabuses in accordance with the curriculum requirements of the Education Act (1990). The BOS also administers the School Certificate (SC) and Higher School Certificate (HSC). The two credentials, the School Certificate at the end of Year 10 and the Higher School Certificate at the end of Year 12, are issued by the BOS to students from government and non-government schools.

Following a review in the late 1990s changes to the HSC were made to increase rigour and meet the needs of a greater range of students. K-10 syllabuses have also been revised and these new syllabuses are being progressively implemented to provide a continuum of learning throughout the junior secondary years.

Information provided by the BOS indicates that the numbers of students undertaking more demanding courses continues to increase as does the number of students undertaking Vocational Education subjects.

Between 2000 and 2003 the percentage of students in NSW staying to complete Year 12 has increased by approximately 3% to 70.5%. This figure remains below Victoria, Queensland and the national average. In NSW the percentages of students staying on to complete Year 12 varies according to socio-economic circumstances, ethnicity and location. Only 29% of Aboriginal students, 48% of students in Country Area Program (CAP) schools and 56% of students in Priority School Funding Program (PSFP) schools stayed on to complete Year 12 in 2003.

Figure 2

Views on the Higher School Certificate

Reports indicate that the HSC is increasingly seen as a pre-requisite for employment as well as university entrance. The retention of more non-academic students places pressure on schools to develop programs to better cater for their needs.
Submissions show there is strong support for a rigorous HSC for students with tertiary aspirations. However, many respondents questioned whether the HSC, or the way it is offered in some schools, provides adequately for all students, particularly those following a more vocational pathway:

While teachers value the rigour of the new senior courses, they are becoming increasingly disheartened at the number of students leaving before the completion of their HSC. (School staff meeting)

**Student Choice**

The dominant theme from responses is the need to focus on each student as an individual. This theme is also common to responses on the Middle Years and Students 15 to 19 Years Old.

Respondents emphasised, in particular, the need for students to have greater choice in the subjects they study, both in junior and senior secondary years and for schools to be structured to better support student needs.

There is no doubt that the rising generation think that they are going to be more in control and more determined to keep their options open than their parents ever were. Choice – like change – is an inherent part of their world view. (Hugh McKay, ‘Turning Point’ cited in DET State office staff meeting)

One student commented:

At the moment, there are students compromising their aspirations because a desired subject cannot fit onto their available lines. As a result students can become disinterested etc. in school and leave. (School student).

In addition to student choice and opportunity, other consistent themes identified by respondents to Secondary School Years included:

- curriculum organisation
- choice and flexibility
- the art and science of teaching
- meeting the diverse needs of students
- assessment and reporting
- reporting and communication.

**CURRICULUM ORGANISATION**

A number of respondents indicated satisfaction with current curriculum provision, valuing a good grounding in the basics followed by increasing choice and flexible delivery including TAFE and university options.

A number of respondents raised issues unique to either junior or senior secondary education. These issues have been grouped under Stages 4 and 5 and Stage 6 for ease of clarity.

**Junior years**

During the four years students spend in Years 7-10, government schools have mandatory requirements totalling over 700 hours (between 3 and 4 hours a week), for non-elective subjects additional to the indicative (but not mandatory) hours that apply for non-government schools. These cover an additional 100 hours in English, Mathematics and Science as well as requirements for sport and special religious education. (Memorandum to Principals 00/377 [S.294] Curriculum Requirements in Government Schools, August 2000).
Many respondents stated that for these years the curriculum is too prescriptive because of these requirements:

Government schools have less flexibility compared to non-Government schools when it comes to curriculum. The DET imposes additional hours of English, Mathematics and Science, leaving less time to conduct other learning activities that might be more relevant to students. (TAFE staff member) and:

… an overloaded curriculum in years 7 and 8 with little flexibility to respond to local needs and contexts, including the needs of adolescent students. Even in years 9 and 10, curriculum choice and flexibility is reduced by the time required for the mandated curriculum. Years 7 and 8 need to have flexibility in curriculum, especially outside of the core subjects of English, Mathematics and Science. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council).

Many felt that DET curriculum requirements leave insufficient time for elective courses. These are often regarded as having a lower status than core subjects in terms of fewer hours of teaching and non-inclusion in the current School Certificate examinations.

Many schools and communities would like to offer courses relevant to local issues, conditions and student needs but feel constrained by centrally determined, mandatory requirements:

Give the students the choice and especially more time … to do more elective subjects of their own choosing. (Personal submission) and:

There is very little room for students to negotiate any part of the overcrowded curriculum, especially in years 7-10. Students who simply do not fit mainstream schooling have nowhere else to go. (School staff meeting)

There was also a strong view that continuing to mandate hours of study at all is unnecessary and inconsistent with a modern outcomes approach and standards referenced curriculum:

It is likely that a curriculum that is outcomes based and standards referenced for assessment purposes would be more accessible if it were not constrained by the current mandatory Departmental time requirements. (State office staff meeting)

There was a strong argument for flexibility in Years 7 and 8 study of Language other than English (LOTE), especially in hard-to-staff schools, where many students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) are already fluent in two or more languages and have other curriculum needs and priorities.

Parents and students indicated that the current curriculum structure forced teachers to rush through work with little time for exploration or variety in activities. This, combined with lack of choice in 7-10, contributed to student boredom and disengagement.

The increasing rate of enrolment drift away from government secondary schools into private schools is indisputable. Some
respondents argued that this drift is partly due to the greater
curriculum freedom and flexibility available to private schools.

*Increasing numbers of non-government schools are*
*responding to the needs of students and their teachers by*
*focusing on middle year programs that promise academic*
*rigour, attention to welfare and flexible school organization.*
*(DET State office staff meeting)*

Respondents also felt that the mandatory inclusion of Australian
History and Geography, Civics and Citizenship in Stage 5 (Years 9
and 10) has further restricted elective choice. A suggested solution
was to let schools decide whether these could be taught in either
Stage 4 or Stage 5.

There was strong support for greater flexibility in the junior secondary
curriculum:

*Years 7 & 8 should have the flexibility to add electives to the*
*school structure to meet the diverse needs of students and*
*more closely engage them in subjects that they have an*
*interest in.* (School staff member) and:

*What we need is more flexibility to offer courses to students*
*that meet their needs rather than continually increases*
*‘mandated’ aspects of the curriculum.* (School community
meeting)

**Senior Years**

The senior school curriculum was seen by some as too focused on
university entrance and not meeting the needs of those students
planning to enter employment, TAFE or other pathways:

*Many students are not able to have their needs met by the HSC*
*focused, UAI driven senior curriculum.* (Parent) and:

*Re-vamp curriculum to have Yrs 10 & 11 as senior years and*
*then choice of leaving with HSC and then those that stay on for*
*Yr 12 study for UAI.* (School/TAFE community meeting)

While some respondents saw this tertiary focus as indicating a need
for curriculum revision, others saw it as indicating a need for
improved professional learning for teachers to develop teaching
approaches more suitable for the wider range of student abilities and
interests now in their classrooms.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses were strongly
supported with many respondents indicating the real value of VET
courses was greater than the recognition given to them.

Many respondents argued for the inclusion of all VET courses in the
University Admissions Index (UAI):

*The enhanced value of VET courses in gaining a UAI would*
*facilitate an improved perception of VET courses.* (School staff
meeting) and

*They should be given the same recognition as traditional*
*subject areas – employment areas are so diverse now that*

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Schools need to find more creative ways to answer the
most frequently asked question by adolescents, Why do I need
to learn this stuff? (DET State office meeting)

Australian History and
Geography reduces the elective
choice for students, especially
in year 10. (School staff
member)

Elective subjects should be
offered as early as possible.
(Parent)

The curriculum should be
changed to meet students’
needs and future choices.
(School student meeting)

Students should be allowed to
choose their subjects and the
difficulty of some of these
subjects … (Regional student
meeting)

Conflicts of interest in subject
line selection is everywhere in
schools. Flexibility is a must
when it comes to selecting
subject choices. (NSW Student
Representative Council)

How are we meeting student
needs when to complete the
later years of school is made so
difficult? (Parent)

All subjects should lead to a
UAI result. (Parent)
Some argued for the universities to reduce the number of units used in the UAI from 10 to 8 so that more choices could be made without loss of rigour while others argued that the UAI should be abolished altogether.

To remove the labels of ‘smart’ & ‘dumb’ we must value all achievement & stop the climb to the UAI heights as the only road to perceived success. (TAFE staff member)

**CHOICE AND FLEXIBILITY**

The dominant, recurrent theme from respondents was the need for more choice and flexibility in the secondary years to enable schools to provide a broader and deeper curriculum in tune with the needs and expectations of students and local communities.

The ‘one size fits all’ philosophy may have suited the 19th and 20th centuries’ demands but it does not suit 21st century demands for quality education. It is essential that schools have the opportunity to argue ‘local needs – local priorities’ on key issues and the system needs to respond accordingly … Other public education systems which have embraced some flexibility and creative thinking have not collapsed. (School staff meeting)

The above comments are further supported in relation to the needs of rural and remote NSW.

Each rural place is unique – the school, the community – each having specific needs and priorities. While it is necessary to a degree to generalise ‘rural’ for the purpose of policy and reform, the uniqueness of place needs to be acknowledged. The ‘one size fits all’ approach is inadequate and insufficient for addressing the educational issues in rural and remote NSW. (Charles Sturt University, 2005)

A number of respondents, however, opposed the use of ‘flexibility’ to rationalise or reduce resource provision to schools.

Flexibility must not be used to cut resources to schools. (School staff member)

Schools were often seen as bound by organisational and industrial constraints limiting their capacity to meet either student or professional needs:

Curriculum does need to be more flexible but schools are pretty inflexible places in terms of staff allocation, timetables, resourcing, hours of attendance and all the extras (like welfare/ sporting/literacy - numeracy) that have to be fitted together. (School staff member) and:

Have a more flexible staffing and organisational structure around engaging students rather than around award conditions. (Regional staff member)
Easing mandatory requirements for government schools was linked to strong support for greater curriculum flexibility to meet the needs of students and local communities:

School hours which dovetail with student employment. (Regional student meeting)

Greater flexibility in secondary schools including timetabling, staffing and working outside hours. (Regional DET staff meeting)

School timetable – greater flexibility / making the school available to community during holidays and ‘after’ hours. (School student meeting)

Other barriers include some staffing practices and aspects of secondary school culture and organisation little changed since the first half of the previous century. As one principal wrote:

What other industry with a budget of $9.7 billion, given the complexities and challenges of the task, would put up with appointments of key staff by a system of central casting? (School principal)

There was strong support for comprehensive 7-12 schools to remain viable and some argued for a return to zoning and the closure of selective schools. Responses were varied, even polarised on whether selective schools should continue to exist:

The fact that selective schools operate in NSW is providing a doorway for students to excel … (Personal submission)

Current selective and specialist schools bleed the comprehensive system … (School staff member)

There was also support for selective high schools, multi-campus colleges, single-sex schools and central schools.

We need a variety of secondary schools to provide the best opportunity for all students. We already have single sex schools, academic selective schools, specialist sports/performing arts schools, multi-campus colleges, community and central schools, schools for specific purposes and comprehensive schools. Maybe the establishment of some middle school years would be appropriate as we learn more about student development and needs. (School P&C meeting)

If a school is comprehensive, then by definition it needs to provide a range of curriculum offerings. The multi-campus colleges in the NSW system have gone a long way to addressing this issue. (School staff meeting)

Rather than argue for or against the type of school, many respondents focused on suggestions to make their school more outwardly focused and community involved including cooperative arrangements with other schools.
a place where you can receive a great HSC result but also a place where students can go on to a trade or other employment. (School staff member)

We need schools that are flexible, with strong relationships with tertiary institutions, employers and the community to ensure that every student is treated as an individual, nurtured and developed to their highest level. (Parent)

A number of respondents support schools working cooperatively to support students and to provide greater curriculum opportunity:

… students should commute between their own schools and those offering specialty subjects, and there should be online connection between specialty teachers in any one school, and specialty students in other nearby schools. (Personal submission)

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF TEACHING

Respondents from all school environments referred to the importance of the middle years of schooling and the need to take positive steps to counter potential student disengagement and alienation in stages 3 and 4 (Years 5 to 8). This issue is addressed in the Middle Years section of this chapter.

It was recognised that the transition from a holistic one-teacher based primary education to a more fragmented multi-teacher based secondary education is difficult, both for students and teachers.

To this end, primary and secondary school teachers need to become partners in a long-term process. There is a need to examine how primary school learning activities can influence secondary school decisions. (Regional staff meeting)

There was support for the DET to develop and implement a coordinated approach to the middle years of schooling that encompasses teaching and learning, curriculum, student welfare, professional learning, school organisation, family partnerships and system issues.

A strategic and coordinated approach to the initiation, implementation and incorporation of a middle years of schooling strategy is critical to ensuring success for students, teachers, schools and the system. (State office staff meeting)

Respondents wanted the secondary years to include more opportunities to explore topics of interest and to use more excursions, self-paced study modules and community participation in programs. There was a desire for more cross-faculty and inter-school cooperation using available technology as well as more on-line learning and learning external to the school. Initiatives such as Quality Teaching in NSW Public Schools were welcomed by parents, teachers and community. Many sought a school-based shift in emphasis from what is to be taught to how it can be better taught so that students learn how to learn and are engaged, challenged and extended in the context of their local school and community.

Develop integrated units of work that can be taught without the constraints of the individual disciplines that have tended to isolate learning into artificial ‘silos’. (DET staff member)

Teach students how to learn, not what to learn. (School community meeting)

Improvement in teaching style will lead to improved student outcomes and behaviour. (Regional student meeting)

Never expelled, always suspended. I deserved it but you don’t learn anything from it. I learned more from an internal suspension. (Former student quoted by NSW Commission for Children and Young People)
More emphasis on meeting the needs of non-academic students was requested. This was often seen as a quality of teaching issue rather than of school structures:

*Secondary schools are unfriendly places for the non-academic student. We need a paradigm shift in teaching to reach the majority of students to help them enjoy learning and become more effective citizens and job-seekers.* (TAFE Staff member)

**MEETING THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF STUDENTS**

**Behaviour**

Student behaviour was seen as a growing challenge for teachers.

Some respondents wanted poorly behaved students to be removed to special classes or schools.

*More specialist places for disruptive students so their behaviour can be modified.* (Personal submission)

Others saw the solution as quality professional learning focused on behaviour issues (including bullying) and improving student engagement in learning by allocating teacher time to suspended or disengaged students. Other respondents wanted to be better supported by their school and the Department:

*Often teachers do not feel adequately supported in their efforts to contain the poor behaviour of difficult students.* (TAFE student)

The response from UnitingCare Burnside argues strongly against suspension of students from school:

*The current procedure, where the parents are responsible with arranging for care/supervision of the young person whilst at home, creates animosity between the school who are trying to follow procedures, and the parents who have financial/work commitments. For young people who are experiencing chronic behavioural issues, the long-term suspension can add to the conflict at home (which often is the cause of the school behaviour in the first place).* (Uniting Care Burnside)

Other respondents took a different view, suggesting:

*Remove disruptive students – it should be easier to expel students. Constant suspensions just give them a holiday and ready them to come back and make more trouble.* (Personal submission)

**Individual Learning Needs**

Respondents argued for initiatives to support teachers in all school environments develop skills to identify and cater for individual learning needs.

*To achieve a match between the student’s personal needs, goals and aspirations, it is important to identify, plan and document a program based on the child’s individual needs and to involve all those concerned, including the child.* (The Spastic Centre)
This included assistance to help disadvantaged and special needs students as well as to extend or enrich the learning of gifted and talented students:

Of course, not all students show an aptitude for particular talents early in life. Provision must be flexible to enable late bloomers to be included in talented/gifted groups when the talent/gift becomes evident. (School P&C meeting)

Any possible path that could cater to these gifted students should be explored. Perhaps the students themselves should assess what would best suit their needs etc. (School student)

There was support for consultancy in regions, extension work, community and industry mentors and the sharing of successful teaching ideas:

[There should be] … sharing of programs in a state or national learning circle. While students are individuals there is an element of re-invention in every school. This can be rectified by networks and computers to gain access to the resources of the web. (School staff meeting)

The individual learning needs of Aboriginal students and students from non-English speaking backgrounds were raised particularly in connection with issues related to Students 15 to 19 Years Old and are addressed in that section of this chapter.

**Students with Language Backgrounds Other Than English**

A number of submissions was received to the effect that there was insufficient support for students of non-English speaking background. The NSW Teachers Federation was particularly concerned about this issue:

It is estimated that over 40,000 students in need are not receiving ESL support. Over the last 20 years, there has been a doubling of the student / teacher contact ratio. Additional ESL teaching positions must be provided to address this inequity. (NSW Teachers Federation)

Respondents wanted to see changes to the way in which the programs operate, to provide more support and remove barriers. They also mentioned the language demands of the school curriculum, particularly in the context of recent immigrant arrivals. One teacher from an Intensive English Centre said:

There are a lot of unmet needs. Our former students drop out of high school unable to cope with the language demands of the KLA… The type of students being taught in Intensive English Centres is changing… we are (now) seeing people especially from Africa who are illiterate in their first and second languages, who have had no schooling. (School staff member)
ASSessment AND REPORTING

Assessment and Examinations

A number of respondents challenged the validity of marks and scores:

At a time when we are faced with a rich (full) knowledge society, success, or ‘failure’ is being reduced to simple marks and scores. Teachers, as professionals understand the conflicts that such ideology and Government ‘imperative’ places on teacher professionalism. (School community meeting).

While other respondents wanted:

Less focus on external examinations and more focus on formative, improvement focused assessment. (School principal)

Respondents commenting on the School Certificate credential and examination argued for urgent change:

The School Certificate has little value any more – get rid of it. (School community meeting) and:

The School Certificate does not measure what has been taught … a disconnection between syllabus and test. (Regional principals’ meeting)

Many saw it as an anachronism as it survives only in NSW. They stated it fails to articulate what students can actually do.

Principals were quite specific in stating:

Its standards are not explicit, it is seen as content driven and does not adequately reflect or support the principles espoused in the DET’s ‘Quality Teaching’ discussion paper, and external testing of only four subject areas signals the relative value of subjects. (NSW Secondary Principals Council)

Alternatives in other states focus on stronger school-based assessment, rigorous assessment in all subjects and providing a rich variety of alternatives to multiple-choice/first draft tests.

The School Certificate exam is also seen as unnecessarily dominating teaching and learning in the second half of Year 10. Principals say its timing encourages time-wasting and student absenteeism during November and December. Making changes to the nature and timing of the School Certificate exam (making it later in the year) could partly address concerns raised about curriculum and student engagement but there was a stronger desire for the examination to be discontinued.

Get rid of the School Certificate. (School community meeting)

Respondents argued that many schools need further assistance with outcomes based assessment and negotiated, authentic assessment based on portfolios, project work, practical tasks and team-work.

In Years 11 and 12 there were concerns that assessment dominates the curriculum. Many felt the UAI dominates stage 6, influencing subject choices for Years 11 and 12 usually made half way through Year 10. This dominance is perceived as a barrier to a greater choice...
of VET courses, seen as relevant and challenging but below the status of traditional academic subjects despite having rigorous assessment procedures in place.

**Reporting and Communication**

Many respondents strongly supported enhanced communication between schools, parents and communities as part of the overall wish for schools to be more flexible and responsive to local issues and needs:

> The reality is that (school) structures do not allow teachers to be free to discuss issues or plan with parents. (School staff member)

The need for consistent, plain-language reporting of student progress was stressed, especially when dealing with outcomes. Portfolios of work to supplement reports were welcome. Many asked for greater use of SMS, email and telephone in two-way communication with parents and for the adoption of less teacher-centred, structured approaches to student-parent-teacher dialogue.

Parents wanted more engagement with schools especially when an issue had direct and practical impact on their children or there was a substantive policy matter where their ideas would be listened to and acted on:

> A number of parents commented on the means by which engagement could occur (web and email interaction, paper or telephone surveys) as well as the need for the right environment (childcare, weekend or evening meetings). (Report on parent consultation, Western Sydney)

**IN SUMMARY**

For both the junior and senior secondary years the consistent theme was the need to personalise learning making it more relevant to the individual and the community where the school is located.

Providing choices was seen as a key to personalised learning. Allowing students and their teachers to make more decisions about what they learn, how they learn and where they learn should build motivation, engagement and satisfaction in learning.

There was a desire for the Higher School Certificate to be more inclusive of different study patterns and more in tune with the range of academic and vocational pathways preferred by the increasing number of students unlikely to enter university from school. Examples include the incorporation of TAFE delivered Certificate courses and courses that address local training needs.

Respondents identified the need to:

- provide choice and flexibility to schools, teachers and students to maximize learning opportunities and outcomes
- relax the DET mandated hours constraining delivery of the junior secondary curriculum
- remove or make significant changes to the school certificate
- expand the scope of the HSC especially for students unlikely to enter university from school
- assist schools to better cater for the particular needs of young adolescents
- increase the engagement of parents and carers based on the provision of clear, concise and timely information.
STUDENTS 15 TO 19 YEARS OLD

A champion is needed to drive change. We need a strong mandate from the Centre to support and reward innovation and change.

(Youth Interagency Taskforce)

INTRODUCTION

In New South Wales, the school leaving age is 15 and most students stay at school until they complete the School Certificate at the end of Year 10. However, as the people who participated in this consultation process have told us, there is a group of young people who are leaving even earlier. While many students complete the Higher School Certificate successfully, approximately one out of every three students beginning secondary school in Year 7 do not continue onto Year 12. (Source: NSW DET Strategic Planning and Regulation)

Some of the students who leave school before the end of Year 12 go on to study at TAFE NSW, some take up employment and some do both. A small proportion study with private vocational education and training (VET) providers or with Adult and Community Education. Those who go to TAFE can be divided into two groups: people who undertake Certificate and Diploma courses, including Apprentices and Trainees, across a wide range of trade and para-professional areas, and those who undertake general studies through Access courses. Access courses include the TAFE equivalent of the School Certificate (CGVE – the Certificate in General and Vocational Education), the TAFE HSC equivalent course, the Tertiary Preparation Certificate (TPC), as well as the Higher School Certificate itself.

Many students have great success in the Access programs and find these rewarding:

Like the program (TAFE Access) because they treat you like adults, give choices about what is learned and how we learn it. (Student interviewed by NSW Commission for Children and Young People)

However, a study of attrition rates for these two groups of 15 to 19 year old TAFE students shows that the outcomes are quite different. In the table below, the attrition rate refers to the percentage of enrolments where students withdraw from every module of their course during the year.

**Figure 3: TAFE NSW: Attrition and Module Completion Rates 2003**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All courses</th>
<th>CGVE</th>
<th>TPC</th>
<th>HSC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attrition rate 15 - 19</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TAFE Statistics

It is apparent from these statistics that the attrition rates for students enrolled in Access courses is up to twice that for students enrolled in trade and other industry related courses. This is important because one of the traditional pathways for students who leave school early is to go to TAFE. In 2003, for instance, there were 135,000 enrolments of people aged 15 to 19 in TAFE NSW, of which almost 30,000 were in Access courses. There is a relatively small, but significant number of students (approximately 4,000-5,000 each year) who have left school early and yet have not been able to find success in the study of general education courses at TAFE.

For these people, together with those who leave school and take up neither work nor study, the consequences of not completing a formal education credential can be negative. This is supported by Wise et al, who state:
There is overwhelming evidence of the relationship between education, health and well-being among children, adolescents and adults. The important role of education as a mechanism for breaking the inter-generational cycle of poverty is well-established. … Achieving high education is always associated with greater wellbeing. (Wise et al, 2003: 10)

Many of these people face long periods out of work (Penman, 2004: 42; OECD, 1999; OECD, 2003: 91), meaning they are more likely to be poor. This is a cumulative situation.

… the deprivation of the poor is pervasive … their infants are more likely to die. Their children are more likely to fail in school … Their children are more likely to drop out of school. They are more likely to become mentally ill. They are more likely to lose their jobs and to drop out of the labour force … In other words, poverty diminishes the quality of a person's life in many obvious and in many not so obvious ways. (Vinson, 1999: 20)

In addition to the personal cost of this situation, there is an economic cost to New South Wales and therefore to Australia. Dusseldorp proposes a framework for costing early school leaving, given lower employment and lower productivity for early leavers:

To show the potential … gain from further education and training, suppose that the proportion of leavers who are unemployed or outside the workforce could fall from 34 per cent to 20 per cent. This would represent employment for an extra 11,000 young persons per annum who are now unemployed or not in the labour force. Allowing a modest average income of $17,500 per annum, a little more than the minimum wage, the extra schooling would generate about $190 million in extra incomes per annum. (Dusseldorp, 2002: 28 – 29)

Another means of costing early school leaving is found in the relationship between incarceration and early school leaving. It appears that people who were early school leavers may be statistically over-represented in detention facilities, though this relationship is a complex one. The same may be said of the relationship between disadvantage and youth crime:

Researchers do not yet fully understand the relationship between disadvantage and youth crime. The balance of evidence suggests that economic and social stress increase the risk of involvement in crime by increasing the motivation to offend. Weatherburn and Lind argue that the link between economic and social stress and crime is not always offender motivation but the increased incidence of poor parenting, neglect and abuse. (Wise et al, 2003: 13)

The cost of keeping a person in detention for one year, including legal fees, food, accommodation and guarding is $65,000. This is more than the annual salary of a school teacher. In addition, the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services reports that … the total cost of juvenile crime in Australia is stated to be $1.5 billion per year. (FACS, 2004)

A submission from the Youth Action and Policy Association expresses this equally strongly:

Failure to be in school long enough (early leaving) or often enough (truancy) to gain basic skills and knowledge has personal and social costs. Unemployment, poverty, homelessness and minor or gross criminal activity can often be linked to this basic failure. … Similarly the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research found that poor school performance to be a strong predictor of involvement in crime. (Youth Action and Policy Association)

Efforts are being made to address these issues. It should be acknowledged that a range of non-government and other organisations are working with disadvantaged young people using strategies designed to improve their life outcomes. The State Government has implemented the Better Futures Strategy, which … aims to increase the effectiveness of services for vulnerable young people aged between 9-18 years. (DoCS, 2002) However, we need to know why young people are leaving school early and what is to be done. The companion paper on this topic (Vickers, 2005) describes the reasons for early school leaving and outlines one successful strategy.
For the individual in particular, and for society in general, the consequences of a substantial number of students not participating successfully in education beyond the age of 15 are serious. Through the consultation process, we received a great many responses to the questions about 15 to 19 year old people, covering both the reasons for their leaving and providing us with strategies and priorities for change. Many of these were from students in schools and TAFE and an attempt has been made in this section to highlight their responses, while also ensuring the issues raised by other respondents are covered. Their responses provide important insights, a consideration of which will allow an understanding of how to address this key area of education provision.

Young People Aged 15 to 19 Years Old in the 21st Century

One group provided a description of issues facing people aged 15 to 19 that seemed to summarise many of the descriptions from other submissions:

... this age group is going through significant personal change and development. There is a need for the school and teachers to accommodate the diversity of the student needs both personal and learning. Peer pressure is enormous on individuals but often teachers don’t encourage and support students in making individual choice and decision.

When you are young you often lack confidence but as a teenager you can’t acknowledge that with peers and in the classroom. It is often too hard to get help from the teachers and you can be ridiculed. As a 15-19 year old you need to learn to push away fear and learn how to ask questions but you are not taught or encouraged to do this so you end up following the behaviour of others. There is a need to develop trust between teachers and students. Peer pressure and pressure from older students is usually significant and demotivating. (TAFE students and indigenous community members)

RELEVANCE OF CURRICULUM

Of all the factors which respondents said impacted on staying on at school, ‘relevance’ was the most commonly mentioned.

TAFE, parents and communities need to work together as the main reason for discontinuing studying in younger people, (other than cost), is relevance. An immediate and direct connection needs to be seen by students on how the subject learnt today will impact on their lives by increasing skills and/or knowledge. (TAFE student)

Respondents said they were looking for a curriculum which provided more choices for students, which was more flexible and provided real options, particularly for students who were at risk of leaving school early. People wanted to see curriculum with:

- more variety and choice
- learning which was purposeful and equipped students for their futures
- practical courses, including life skills
- greater vocational options.

A great many people commented on the need for increased vocational education and training (VET) options in secondary school. They wanted to see:

- ‘junior VET’: VET introduced earlier, for students in Years 9 and 10
- meaningful work experience and work placement
- VET given equal status in the community and by school teachers
• a greater proportion of VET being undertaken for the HSC and counting towards the UAI.

All 15 to 19 year old students regardless of the secondary school they attend should be able to access vocational education and training options. ... All schools should be encouraged to ensure that work experience programs are offered for students in years 10, 11 and 12. (TAFE staff meeting)

They also commented on the need for students and their parents to understand the purposes of the study they were undertaking. A number of people commented that students and their parents did not see how the current curriculum was equipping students for life after school, particularly in the case of students who were not bound for university.

The importance of meaningful work experience and work placement was generally shared, although industry was concerned about the maturity of younger students. A growing preference in industry for apprentices to have completed Year 12 arose during the consultations and subsequently strongly through the discussion about skills shortages. School students are becoming aware of this:

More jobs require us to have better qualifications through tertiary education and a higher level of school so we have to stay at school longer. (School student meeting)

Some respondents questioned the premise that all 15 to 19 year olds should be studying.

I know that economic indicators show the benefits of keeping kids at school/ other education/training as long as possible, but this is really not always appropriate. So long as they have a reasonable prospect of work, have received adequate career guidance, have adequate knowledge of their rights and responsibilities as workers, and know what future training options are available to them, leaving school for work at 15 may be a perfectly sensible (option). (Parent)

Others felt that it was unrealistic to expect all young people to be in work or study. This was particularly the case with the expectation that everyone should undertake the Higher School Certificate. The Prime Minister, John Howard, stated his belief that the path from Year 10 completion to an apprenticeship is still a valid one.

‘Thirty years ago, we started getting this foolish bind that everybody had to go to university,’ he said. ‘Everybody doesn’t have to go to university, and a lot of people will be a lot better off if they don’t go to university, and they recognise that at age 15 or 16 and go down the technical stream.’ '(quoted in Nick O’Malley, Sydney Morning Herald, 12/3/05)

Several respondents commented that vocational training should be offered to less gifted students, and to less academic students, although this view was not necessarily shared by industry. A number of respondents stated that young people should be allowed to make their own choices and bear the consequences of them. Other respondents felt that guest speakers from the community could speak to students at risk of leaving school from their personal experience, in
order to help them understand the consequences of leaving school early.

Some respondents felt that VET was not the solution to all the issues for this group of students.

While VET provision has been one response … this needs to be supplemented by evaluations and action in a range of areas including what schools expect of post-compulsory students, how students are ‘managed’, how they are taught and expected to learn as well as on the relevance and value to them of … the whole curriculum. (Curriculum K-12 Directorate)

**Higher School Certificate**

It was not the case that people wanted to change the current HSC in its entirety. The importance of having a strong, rigorous and academic HSC for students who intended to go on to university was made clear through a number of submissions. Instead, what people wanted to see was a broadening of the HSC to allow for a greater vocational component. People were divided on whether the vocational component should also be counted towards the UAI or whether this was unnecessary because the UAI is designed for university entrance.

To keep students in schools we need education that is relevant to their needs, is accessible and flexible. While academic courses must be maintained in senior schooling, better access to a wide range of VET courses is also required. (School principal)

A number of people commented that the current curriculum and HSC, including the UAI, were appropriate for those students who were going on to university study but not appropriate to the needs of those who were not and that young people shared this idea:

Many young people believe that the HSC is only worthwhile if they want to go to university. Young people want schools to be more flexible and provide for the diversity of interests and skills that they have … there is a need to develop more practical, job related subject choices for students whose career goals do not include further academic studies. (Youth Action and Policy Association)

Part of the call for a broader curriculum was for the HSC to include a much stronger vocational component.

There is a need to consider a wider range of credential options for students who choose to remain at school. Currently the … (HSC) is the only exit credential on the completion of Year 12. The HSC focuses on post-secondary university education. Limited university places and increasing numbers of students encouraged to stay at school to complete Year 12 highlight the need for change. To make schooling relevant for all students who stay on an alternative qualification such as a vocational education certificate may be required. (DET staff meeting)

One of the most common concerns raised was that the new HSC was too difficult for a number of students, particularly in Maths and English. Respondents said this led to students leaving school early

Teachers should organise inspirational days so the students can have an idea of how the decision of staying in school will affect their future. (School student meeting)

Do students want an HSC? Do they need an HSC? What is the purpose of the HSC? (Joint schools TAFE meeting)

Why are we doing the university entrance exams for university? (Joint schools TAFE meeting)

The Universities Admission Index or HSC mark is not the end of their education. University is not the only alternative. (TAFE Student meeting)

Now there’s nothing inferior about being a tradesman, quite the reverse. I think we developed for a generation a cultural prejudice against tradesmen in this country and I think it was a terrible mistake. (Prime Minister, John Howard, Radio Interview with Leon Byner, SAA, 20 August 2004)
and they questioned the purpose of the HSC for some students. A number of people commented on the removal of Maths in Practice from the HSC syllabus, stating that this had disadvantaged a number of students for whom these subjects had been more appropriate.

People also commented on the pressure on students caused by the HSC and said that it should not hold so dominant a position over the whole senior curriculum.

*Less pressure needs to be put on the HSC. Students need to know that it's not everything, you can do other things after school if you don't succeed. Teachers need to be less pressuring.* (School student meeting)

People also said that there should be closer links between what students studied in Year 11 and for the HSC, to increase the relevance of Year 11. It should be noted, however, that some respondents felt that there had been too much change to the HSC and School Certificate.

Although some respondents endorsed the Victorian approach, with a separate and alternative credential of equal status (VCAL), the views expressed were not consistent. Some respondents felt that this would create two classes of school graduates. The concept of a broader HSC with greater access to vocational study was much more strongly supported by the respondents.

### School Certificate

The comments made about the School Certificate echo the discussion of middle and secondary schooling, so they will not be dealt with in detail here. However, it should be noted that each year, about 8% of all 15 year olds in NSW leave the school system.

Opposing views were expressed, with some respondents suggesting the School Certificate be made more rigorous; others suggesting that it be abolished. Some respondents questioned the purpose of the School Certificate:

*The concept of an exit credential such as the current School Certificate is inconsistent with our commitment to life long learning. It is more appropriate to consider any marker in the students’ progression as transition points: achievement is recognised and celebrated, and plans for the next phase of learning … are developed.* (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

Respondents believed the period between the completion of the School Certificate and the end of the school year was not being used effectively and wanted changes to the organisation of the School Certificate. Some said it should held much later in the year; others that students should be allowed to leave school after the exams; and others that students should be allowed to commence Year 11 work as soon as the School Certificate was finished.

### Literacy, Numeracy and Generic Skills

One of the concerns raised by parents, industry, students and staff was that young people are leaving school without the basic skills they need to gain and keep a job, particularly in literacy and numeracy.
While one parent felt it was the role of industry to teach them these skills on the job, industry respondents felt that young people should have these skills before trying to gain employment.

_TAFE colleges at present provide the necessary literacy and numeracy courses to enable students to succeed in their chosen course. Similarly then, schools should encourage (be able to enforce) students to complete literacy courses as prerequisites for all stage 5 courses if they do not meet a minimum standard._ (School staff member)

Respondents also commented on the need for school students moving to TAFE to have a better understanding of the requirements of TAFE courses, particularly in terms of numeracy, as students were often surprised to find these courses more difficult than they had expected. TAFE students frequently commented that the courses at TAFE were more difficult than they had anticipated. Others, however, commented favourably on the support structures for students in TAFE (such as tutorial support).

A number of school students commented on the need to be taught study skills and suggested that this become a compulsory part of the school curriculum. TAFE staff also commented on the need to prepare school students for the adult learning environments they would encounter after school.

Some respondents commented that too narrow a vocational curriculum limited students’ options and said it was essential to engender a love of learning for its own sake. They said that students should leave school with transferable skills and knowledge:

_Education does not become more relevant by being job orientated, this is a very short term view, as most people will change jobs/work several times. They need the skills and knowledge that will allow them to change as the world environment changes._ (School staff member and parent)

This is very much in accordance with the current interest expressed by industry that students learn ‘generic’ skills such as working in teams, communication skills and problem solving skills:

_The need for students to have generic skills and employability skills in order to participate effectively and successfully in the world of work is now well-recognised._ (Board of Vocational Education and Training)

**TVET**

TVET is TAFE-delivered vocational education and training for school students. Under this initiative, school students undertake their vocational HSC studies at TAFE. TVET was seen by respondents as a highly successful initiative of the Department and an example of schools and TAFE working effectively together to meet the needs of students.

However, staff of schools and TAFE NSW commented on policy and structural issues which form barriers to expanding TVET. These included the funding formulae, which school staff felt ‘penalised’ them when students went to TAFE:

_Workplace literacy and workplace numeracy could be developed as VET courses in schools and would provide an alternative for students experiencing difficulties in English and maths._ (School staff member)

_Study: we need to be taught how to study, from early like year 9. It needs to be on (the) curriculum so teachers have to teach you to study properly, not just read through work. Maybe having a period set aside each cycle for revision._ (School student meeting)

_There must be no disadvantage to a school if it encourages students to attend TAFE TVET courses._ (NSW Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW)

_The opportunity to study TVET subjects in senior years is greatly appreciated. Students love TVET! It opens pathways to jobs and gives practical training._ (Joint TAFE and school student and staff meeting)
Need to change funding models for schools so that TVET is not competing with school funding. This provides major disincentive for schools to be involved in TVET at the moment. (TAFE staff meeting)

Respondents called for better collaboration between schools and TAFE:

More effective collaborative arrangements need to be established between the School and TAFE sectors, and between local TAFE Colleges and High Schools. (TAFE staff meeting)

Respondents also called for more flexibility, both in timetabling and other organisational issues. However, some respondents from schools told us of their unwillingness to disrupt school programs to allow school students to attend TAFE, because they were missing other parts of the curriculum which school teachers and principals felt were more essential. There was also the issue that TVET was not sufficiently valued:

TVET offerings need to be given more credibility at secondary school level and not treated as ‘second choice’ options. (Personal submission)

The time demands of work placement required by TVET were also seen by some respondents as an impediment to study. This should be compared with the responses to the TAFE sections of the consultation document, in which respondents emphasised the importance of meaningful work placement for students.

CAREER COUNSELLING

… career counselling is an enormously under-utilised tool. We should be asking students what sort of path they have laid out for themselves and then help them achieve this. (Community member)

A key issue for students aged 15 to 19 was the importance of high quality career counselling, also known as vocational guidance and career guidance in some circumstances:

In order to facilitate appropriate career path planning for 15 - 19 year olds, it is essential that more time, emphasis and resources be allocated to formal career path planning in schools. The curriculum should include mandatory careers lessons from year 7 and more opportunities for work experience. (School community group)

In general, respondents told us that they were not satisfied with the current standard of career guidance in schools:

… students emphasised their difficulties in obtaining good information about career paths, what jobs actually involve, the differences between University and TAFE education and the lack of coordination in higher education sector concerning objective career advice. (TAFE staff and students)

Respondents also expressed the concern that career guidance was focused only on university pathways and not on the full range of
options available to young people. This was said to be because trades and other vocational pathways were not always valued by career counsellors.

In TAFE, career counselling is available to enrolled students who seek such assistance. It is also available to prospective students. It appears that many respondents were unaware of this service. A number of people wanted to see TAFE and schools work much more closely together to ensure young people had all the information they needed.

There needs to be a closer relationship between TAFE & Schools, with the involvement of School Counsellors & Careers Advisors so that 15 to 19 year olds, and their parents are better informed about the opportunities to engage in vocational education and training. (TAFE staff meeting)

An issue of concern was that strategies proposed by students in one submission included activities that could be considered fundamental to the provision of career advice in any school. They wanted to see:

- Classes with career advisors.
- Tell them what’s available.
- Tell what subjects you need for certain courses.
- Encourage students to do well so they have more options.
- Career lessons during school.
- Careers day.
- Better training for career advisors.
- Days out in the real world. (School student meeting)

A number of other respondents suggested that career counselling be made compulsory and wanted to see a range of improvements to the system. People were also keen to see career advice begin much earlier, some from Years 9 or 10 and others from Year 7.

Linked to career counselling were a number of comments advocating mentoring as a successful means of helping young people to stay on at school. The companion paper (Vickers, 2005) describes one successful model of mentoring.

**IMPORTANCE OF GOOD TEACHING**

Respondents to this paper commented on the importance of good teaching for students of this age:

Learning needs to be interesting and varied. It needs to have a real purpose, evaluation of work and constructive criticism and feedback of work is vital. (School staff member)

Students said they wanted to be treated more as adults and as individuals. A number or respondents, particularly from Aboriginal communities, said that teachers need to have a better understanding of the external factors impacting on young people’s lives. Teaching is covered in detail at the beginning of this chapter and in Chapter 5, concerning TAFE. This issue of curriculum guarantee, raised by a number of respondents, is discussed in Chapter 3.
BEHAVIOUR ISSUES AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AT RISK

A number of respondents commented on student behaviour. Some commented that the perception of poor behaviour was in part due to a lack of understanding of students' personal circumstances. Others commented that poor behaviour occurred because teachers did not value students and did not treat them with respect or as adults. Others felt that parents needed to play a more active role in setting and maintaining behaviour standards for their children. A number of respondents expressed the view that school students with behaviour problems were being encouraged by some school teachers to leave school; and by some to enrol in TAFE, although this was not always the best option:

Difficult students should not be automatically referred to TAFE. There should not be an assumption that TAFE vocational education and training or an adult environment will solve their problems. The disengagement of students is often more than just a product of the education environment. (Industry group)

TAFE teachers, supported by the comments of some school teachers, also commented that TAFE is perceived by some people as the place to send students who are not behaving appropriately at school. Although staff from one Institute said they had implemented professional development for teachers specifically to support teachers in dealing with students with behaviour problems, TAFE staff and industry expressed the concern that TAFE does not have appropriate support services to manage this issue:

Behaviourally challenging students encouraged by schools to leave school and attend TAFE. TAFE … (has) no support services eg behavioural teams to deal with their behaviour and lack of learning skills. (TAFE staff and parents meeting)

Alternative provision is also being made for such students:

The ALESCO Learning Centre in Newcastle has become an alternative pathway for many students from low socio-economic backgrounds who have been excluded from the mainstream school system, and also a referral point for schools in the Hunter Region who are seeking an alternative form of education for their students at risk. (Board of Adult and Community Education)

Students’ learning to take responsibility for their own actions was also a theme expressed by a number of people. It was felt that if too ‘soft’ an approach was taken, students would not be prepared for the harsh realities of the modern world. Other respondents wanted students to have more input into their own learning:

Encouraging students to take increasing responsibility for what they learn through self-selection and development of one or more personally meaningful focus learning areas from the curriculum, for which they will be accountable. Significant student input into learning criteria, success indicators and choice of assessment methods to be encouraged. (Vocational Education in Schools Directorate)

Several respondents wanted to see restrictions placed on young people’s access to government benefits, with a link between...
attendance and receipt of benefits. Respondents were also concerned about young people gaining access to Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) funding instead of completing their education. Some respondents stated that there were some students who enrolled solely for the purpose of getting benefits and then ceased to attend or were uninterested, with a negative impact on those who wanted to learn. Some respondents also suggested that Centrelink take a more active role in pursuing this. Two school students, however, commented on the financial burden placed on families of students staying on in study.

As discussed in Vickers’ academic paper, mentoring is seen as a highly successful strategy for assisting students at risk of disengaging from study, including students with behaviour problems. Respondents wanted to see:

_Student support services in communities where there are high levels of poverty, which should include homework centres, mentoring, access to information and communication technology, and health and welfare services._ (Industry member)

A number of respondents wanted to see those mentoring programs which were already in place extended to a wider range of students and educational settings:

_We notice at our program that some early leavers drop out of school because they think no one is interested in them. We think a wide spread mentoring program in schools linking young people with the community is needed._ (Youthstart Coordinators)

**COOPERATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND TAFE**

Students, parents, industry and the community generally felt that they wanted to see strong and effective links between schools and TAFE. They also wanted to see the two organisations operating more as one organisation, with clear connections visible to the public.

_There needs to be some common knowledge and mutual respect developed between both systems because at the moment there is no common ground from what we see. They are two separate organisations without any commonality or continuity in curriculum._ (School student meeting)

The responses made it clear that there were areas where this was happening well and other areas where it was not:

_At the moment, schools and TAFEs are not able to work together as their timetables cannot be reconciled. Also, schools are penalised in terms of staffing for each student who elects to travel to a TAFE to study. This is a disincentive to schools advising students to take up TAFE courses._ (School P&C)

It should be noted, however, that a number of people commented on the different cultures of the school and TAFE, and some commented that TAFE seemed better able to cope with students at risk of discontinuing education and training than schools, although this was not a universally held view.
It is significant that TAFE is often more successful with many students who … seek to leave school early. While the establishment of senior colleges and vocational pathways diversifies the way in which schools cater for these students it is essential that TAFE, alongside and in partnership with secondary schools, have a capacity to provide for these students. (TAFE staff member)

While the NSW Teachers Federation and a number of other respondents were keen to see comprehensive schools maintained, other respondents stated that senior colleges, run as joint facilities by schools and TAFE (and, some suggested, other providers), or as adjacent facilities were an excellent model which should be extended:

Senior Colleges and TAFE should be integrated to enable students to access the widest possible learning options. (State office staff member)

One of the key issues here was ensuring that school students had a good understanding of what TAFE had to offer. They suggested:

- open days and visits to schools by representatives of TAFE and local industry and former students
- information packages available to students
- career guidance, as mentioned above, which canvassed the full range of options open to students after school and explained the career paths available
- more TVET courses and TAFE ‘taster’ courses
- more Summer Schools, though it was not made clear whether respondents were referring to the Premier, Bob Carr’s initiative or other models.

The importance of work placement in VET courses was emphasised. Respondents stated that it was essential for school students to have an opportunity to experience the world of work, especially where they had an interest in working in a particular industry. School-based traineeships were mentioned as a good strategy, though more commonly it was simply the opportunity to participate in meaningful work placement as part of their VET courses which was seen to be the answer.

As with TVET, funding policy was also raised as an issue by respondents:

… the funding of TAFE needs to be revised … [it] needs to be based on student demand/enrolments in respect of enrolments up to the age of 18 years. This will ensure that TAFE as a successful provider will be able to expand its provision beyond the constraints of existing budgets. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

In simple terms, schools are funded on the basis of demand: the more students in a school the greater the resources, including the number of teachers. Where a program like TVET occurs, with the students enrolled in a school but studying part-time at TAFE, the funding ‘travels’ with the student.
However, a student aged 15 to 19 who leaves school to enrol in TAFE is like any other TAFE student. TAFE has a funding allocation within which it must deliver its services. It does not get additional funding for 15 to 19 year old students who leave school to undertake the school certificate equivalent course (the CGVE) or the HSC. This means that TAFE must balance the needs of students aged 15 to 19 with the needs of all the other students wanting to enrol.

Finally, respondents wanted to see flexibility in movement between schools to meet student needs:

… my son was 4 years at one high school, and tested out a move to a senior secondary college … but preferred to return to his usual school – however he was refused return – schools that specialise will not be interested in students moving easily between schools, TAFE and universities unless it benefits the school (rather than the student). (Parent and TAFE staff member)

### MEETING THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF STUDENTS

#### Young Aboriginal People

A number of submissions were received from Aboriginal people, particularly through various consultative forums. It was clear that the issue of young people disengaging from study and work was of particular concern for Aboriginal communities. These submissions listed a series of strategies for assisting students aged 15 to 19 who were Aboriginal, although many of these strategies have equal relevance for all students in this age group. They included:

- better transition for students between primary and high school including K – 12 schools
- more Aboriginal staff, including principals
- employment flexibility in schools that allows more Aboriginal staff to be employed
- more culturally inclusive teaching and learning strategies
- the importance of involving Aboriginal communities in school decision-making, eg Yarn-up days
- a focus on practical skills
- smaller class sizes and individual attention
- more flexible time tabling and attendance patterns.

Aboriginal people also wanted to see a greater vocational component in secondary school, with access to TVET for every Aboriginal student, as well as better collaboration between schools and TAFE:

*Consistency between TAFE and Schools in how to retain Aboriginal students. TAFE and Schools should work together to retain Aboriginal students.* (Aboriginal community Forum)

They also wanted strategies designed to address disengagement to start earlier:

… Aboriginal kids are leaving at Yr 7, 8 and 9 before they get to 15 years. Often these children are doing very well at primary school model with senior campus emphasizing adult learning environment is far more attractive to older students. (Parent)

More ‘alternative’ routes, such as Bradfield College, to completing education (School P&C meeting)

If [an] Aboriginal community has high expectations of Koori kids doing well at school they do achieve higher results and better attendance patterns. (Aboriginal Corporation)

Many Indigenous students have suffered from illness such as glue ear, vision impairments and this has put back their learning. Need support from health for this and understanding from teachers. (Aboriginal Education Network meeting)

Yarn-up day: Real push to stay till Yr 12 Lismore City Hall. Beginning of year 1/2 day organised … AEA, Elders spoke about how it was for them when they went to school. Only 2 hours then told to go home, stay at school, get an education, kids listen to elders. No teachers for when the kids spoke about issues. Result has been only 1 Koori student has left (dropped out) this year. Now want every term. (Regional AECG)
school and drop out in first or second year of high school. Why
– changes from 1 main teacher to up to 6 or 7 teachers in first
year of high school. Lack of transition programs from Yr 6 to Yr
7, leaving home community as High school is often outside of
local community. (Regional AECG)

Respondents also suggested a range of strategies to provide
Aboriginal staff members, including mentors, to assist Aboriginal
students:

A suggestion is to have an Aboriginal Cultural Co-ordinator for
Schools who assist staff and develop ongoing programs to
assist teachers in understanding issues about indigenous
communities and people; teach literacy and language including
the local indigenous language; mentor AEAs and kids; teaching
Aboriginal Studies. (Indigenous community meeting)

Respondents wanted to see programs designed to improve school
teachers’ understanding of the specific needs of Aboriginal people.
Racism was also raised as an issue needing to be addressed.

The recent Aboriginal Education Review (NSW AECG and NSW DET,
2004) has made a number of recommendations concerning issues for
Aboriginal people in education and training. The Government is
currently considering its response to these recommendations.

Young People from Language Backgrounds
other than English

A number of submissions were received about the issues for students
of language backgrounds other than English. These submissions
canvased a range of issues across secondary schools and are
discussed in that section of the report. In essence they were
concerned about extending the provision of ESL; the demand on
Intensive English Centres; and the issues for recent immigrant arrivals
with very low levels of previous education.

Young People who are Gifted and Talented

One submission raised the issue of the needs of gifted and talented
students who are aged 15 to 19 and the success of selective schools
as a strategy:

… when the academic needs of academically gifted students
are not catered for such students are likely to drop out. They
become bored, demoralised and even depressed … In
selective high schools, where … [their] needs … are more
likely to be met, there is a very high retention rate. The retention
rate of academically gifted students in selective high schools,
then, becomes an extremely powerful indicator of the success
of these schools. (OC & Selective High School Placement Unit)

Young People with Disabilities

Respondents stated that more effective links between schools and
TAFE would lead to better outcomes for students with disabilities:
Increased organisational flexibility will be essential in order for TAFE and schools to better meet the diverse needs of students, particularly for those experiencing barriers to education. (TAFE TA Outreach Special Interest Group)

However, one TAFE staff member expressed concern that students with disabilities not be ‘pushed’ from schools to TAFE if that was not the best approach to meet their needs.

Respondents also wanted to see a curriculum that did not provide barriers for students with disabilities by being too rigorous, and wanted DET to:

- Fund more resources for Life Skills programs for the SC and HSC for students with significant disabilities and learning difficulties. (School principal)

One submission called for greater flexibility to accommodate the needs of young carers:

- Young carers and siblings of children with disability are more likely to leave the school system early due to the difficulties they face juggling their responsibilities at home with the demands placed on them from the school. A more flexible approach is required. (Carer Support)

Respondents called for professional development for teachers, some suggesting the use of experts as trainers. Some also wanted to see Special Education as a mandatory component of all pre-service education. These issues are taken up in Chapter 3.

Issues Specific to Students in Remote Rural NSW

As described in the section on secondary schooling, school completions for 15 to 19 year olds in remote rural New South Wales are markedly lower than for metropolitan school students. A key issue raised by respondents for the 15 to 19 age group in remote NSW was access to the same experiences that young people in the city have:

- Students in remote areas need access to opportunities given to city students eg live performances, lecturers etc. with assistance for travel and accommodation due to isolation. Country students particularly need to be exposed to many and varied experiences to broaden their horizons. (School staff member)

Respondents also wanted young people to have access to quality teaching:

- The greatest need of students in remote areas is to have suitably qualified teachers… These schools are frequently characterised by inadequately prepared staff, lack of specialist teachers, lack of experienced local DET support and school leaders with sufficient experience. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

Respondents wanted to see broader curriculum options and suggested that technologies might be used to provide this, as well as to combine small groups of students to make viable classes, so increasing the subject choices for students in remote locations

Expand teacher training: young people are particularly affected by teachers’ understanding and awareness of students’ barriers to learning; and provide more staff learning in Aboriginal and disabilities awareness. (TAFE staff meeting)

All schools need to be aware of the range of services available for students with a disability, with up-to-date knowledge of funding timeframes. (The Spastic Centre)

Rural inequity needs to be addressed, kids have to leave town to access education. (Regional staff meeting)

… more online learning; emailing with teachers/other students. (School and TAFE student meeting)

Innovative strategies for students in remote areas should be developed and system support provided. (Curriculum K-12 Directorate)
without requiring them to travel. The distance travelled to high school was raised as an issue particularly for younger secondary students.

Some respondents questioned the need for the HSC in rural communities:

*In country areas the benefits of staying for the HSC drop off sharply. Farms and properties need to be run, and university is a far away thing. In remote communities having people staying to the end of their HSC may be counterproductive, with not enough of that generation staying local to preserve the town.*

(School student)

Transport and accommodation were seen as key issues for students in remote locations and a number of people suggested that TAFE offer block programs for school students to allow them to access vocational courses. TAFE currently provides block programs for its students, particularly apprentices, known as ‘block release’. These comments about school students provide an interesting contrast to the comments about TAFE students, with some people saying the current block release programs are not always convenient for employers.

### APPRENTICESHIPS AND TRAINEESHIPS

#### Apprenticeships

As mentioned above, apprentices were described as a critical means of addressing the current skills shortages. Throughout the consultation, many respondents commented on the importance of apprenticeships and the need to review and improve the apprenticeship system. These comments are dealt with in detail in the TAFE section of this report, Chapter 5. States have been dealing with this issue for some time, with NSW introducing TradeStart@TAFENSW to make apprenticeships more attractive to employers and employees and, in Victoria, the Education Minister Lynne Kosky describing the positive impact of VCAL (Maslen, 2005).

In summary, people told us that the system should be more flexible, with different entry points depending on previous study and experience. They also wanted to see incentives for both employers and apprentices to make the scheme more attractive.

Recent comments on skills shortages indicate that some people are questioning whether all students should complete the HSC. Others, for example Heather Ridout of the Australian Industry Group, have indicated that industry is now looking for people with higher skills levels and greater maturity and the system should assist in this:

*If we’re going to give this bargain to kids to stay around in school to year 12, we have to offer them better options … and we haven’t done that.* (H. Ridout, interviewed on The 7.30 Report, 8/3/05)

One respondent commented on the difficulty experienced by young apprentices:

*… those who would like to apply for apprenticeships at the end of Year 10 … do not have enough knowledge of how to survive*
in the ‘real’ world and often fail. This lowers their self-esteem, so many end up on the dole. (Personal submission)

The same respondent wanted to see a better understanding of older students returning to school:

Some others return to school, and allowances need to be made for these over 18 yrs. (They can die for their country in a war, but not leave school without a note from a parent!) (Personal submission)

**Traineeships**

A number of respondents also commented on traineeships. Generally, these were seen to be a useful approach for engaging young people and providing for a successful transition from school to work, whether they were part-time school-based traineeships, traineeships conducted through TAFE or through other providers.

Respondents wanted to see the number of traineeships extended and wanted to see them better organised. Respondents also called for more flexible approaches to make it easier for school students to become trainees and to complete their traineeships:

Change structure of day so year 11/12 has 1/2 day blocks allowing more students to participate in TAFE and in school traineeships. The spread out over the week timetable currently in practice at most schools inhibits this flexibility. (School staff member)

Respondents suggested traineeships be available for younger students:

Vocational learning, including accredited vocational courses should be available for Year 9 and 10 students. Where appropriate, students should be supported to commence a part-time traineeship or apprenticeship in Year 10. (State Office staff member)

As with apprenticeships, wages were seen to be a barrier. Some respondents expressed concerns about traineeships where they did not include real training. Others were concerned about the demands on employers, teachers and students:

There are demands placed upon students and teachers in the organisation of VET Framework courses. These courses are 240 hours in duration over two years PLUS an additional 70 hours in Work Placement, making them in practice a 310 hour course. Students are required to miss two weeks of school to undertake these Work Placements which is often difficult. It has been suggested that Work Placement can be incorporated into the 240 hours of the course but little practical direction has been forthcoming. Teachers of VET Framework courses have far too much additional paperwork to complete which needs to be eliminated. (School staff member)

The same respondent also advocated that traineeships be included as part of the HSC:
In School Traineeships have been in operation for a number of years and suit some students. However, students do not receive credit on the HSC for the time spent in the workplace. Therefore, In School Traineeships should have a total of 4 units counted towards the HSC (ie 2 units from theory and 2 units from the workplace). (School staff member)

**COMMUNICATION**

Another issue mentioned was the need for both schools and TAFE to communicate with parents and carers (and in the case of TAFE, employers) about students’ progress. People wanted to know early if students were struggling or behaving inappropriately and did not want to wait until exam results or parent-and-teacher nights to find out that their children were experiencing difficulties.

*Parents could be kept updated with their child’s progress so that if their grades are falling, then the parents can assist with getting them back on track to working harder.* (School student)

As one student said, *How do my parents know I’m learning?* (School community meeting)

**FLEXIBILITY**

Many respondents wanted to see more flexible approaches in schools across a range of issues: this could best be summarised by the idea that ‘one size does not fit all’. School students commonly work, some for long hours, and school organisation needs to accommodate this:

*Better utilisation of school resources outside 9-3:30 to promote [flexibly] offered courses. Timetabling in schools that is designed to assist students into multiple pathways. Greater accountability for time tabling – schools who are actively discouraging multiple pathways and only focused on self interest. Funding/rostering of TAFE/School staff to work with each others time tabling/flexible.* (School staff meeting)

Respondents called for increased flexibility in timetabling and hours of operation; curriculum, to allow schools to meet the local and individual needs of students and their communities; and funding arrangements across schools and TAFE.

*I believe to keep more students in school and training; the curriculum needs to be more flexible, more versatile. There needs to be avenues for school leavers to take that would allow them, or inspire them to remain in school or perhaps pursue a TAFE course etc. At the moment, there are numerous possibilities for students; however people commonly find problems with fitting their desired subject into an available line.* (School student)

Some called for mandatory hours of curriculum to be abolished (addressed in the Secondary School section of this report). They wanted to see part-time study made available to school students and TAFE providing study opportunities for school students during school holidays.
In addition to senior colleges, mentioned above, respondents suggested that we accommodate:

- single sex schools
- extended hours eg for libraries and ICT facilities
- student access to university while completing the HSC
- student access to TAFE for a younger age (though not all agreed)
- multiple pathways, allowing students to complete a package of units which meets their needs, across school, TAFE, university and other providers.

Respondents also mentioned the need for curriculum flexibility to allow people to address local skill shortages and job growth opportunities in new areas.

Some respondents wanted to see more flexibility in movement and concurrent enrolments across the sectors:

*Allow students to move between school, work, TAFE or university to hold their interest and allow them to achieve their goals.* (Isolated Children’s Parents Association)

Finally, there were some respondents who said that it was of great importance that we teach young people that learning is lifelong and, if they make a choice they later regret, this can be remedied:

*There should be a greater awareness that we are never too old to learn; a premature choice to leave school early should not mean lost/limited future opportunities but a need to be more imaginative when exploring different pathways if choices are being considered later.* (School P&C meeting)

**IN SUMMARY**

The strong response to this part of the consultation leaves no doubt about the importance of this issue. The consultation has provided an opportunity through which ... *the independent student voice (can) be clearly heard by all parents, teachers and administrators* (Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW). Students and other respondents have told us they want a more relevant curriculum, with greater vocational content. They want more flexibility across all services with greater individualisation. They want to be treated with respect.

Respondents want schools and TAFE to work together to improve student outcomes and engagement in work and study. They are seeking better career counselling which covers the full range of opportunities beyond school and helps them make effective transitions. Finally, they are looking to the DET to work with other agencies to create initiatives which will assist all young people to achieve their goals and fulfil their potential.
References


Maslen, Geoff. 2005. Has Victoria already got the answer? CAMPUS REVIEW. 16/3/05


INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Huge benefits for engagement of learning with use of IT ... Future education should use IT in a seamless manner

(School principals’ meeting)

INTRODUCTION

The majority of respondents to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) section of Excellence and Innovation consultation saw technology as an integral component of teaching and learning as well as a methodology through which individuals can be empowered and take greater responsibility for their own learning. The term ‘connected learning’, while not specifically used by respondents, encompasses this view. "The kids are the real experts when it comes to ICT. Most adults (including teachers) can’t even program a VCR and we have to get their kids to show us how. It’s the same thing when it comes to learning how to use all the features of a mobile phone such as SMS TXT messages and sending digital photos. Kids grow up naturally with the technology and take to it like ducks to water." (School P&C)

The NSW Secondary Principals’ Council suggests that:

"The classroom of the future will be technology rich. To an increasing degree, communication and collaboration will be facilitated by technology. The creation of knowledge by students undertaking rich tasks will increasingly be facilitated and the results presented and distributed using technology." (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

A scenario presented in the joint submission by Cisco and Microsoft perhaps best describes the current ICT dilemma facing education and training.

"A typical teenager comes home from school. Some of the classes will have used computers, but many would not. Much of her work will have been book and paper based. She gets home and, within minutes, has logged onto her favourite instant messenger program, where she starts several conversations, some with her school friends talking about the events of the day or perhaps a homework chore, some in larger chat rooms with participants from all over Australia and the world. She uses the web for research to write an essay or part of a school project ... The next day she heads back to school, quite possibly to spend an entire day engaged in the business of learning without seeing, much less working with, a laptop or any other digital device." (Cisco and Microsoft)

The gap between ICT access and use at school, home and in business is considerable and was raised by a number of respondents during the consultation.

"Do we want schools to LEAD or MIRROR the HOME or the WORKPLACE?" (Parent)

This ‘gap’ has also been identified as a significant issue in the United Kingdom where Derek Twigg, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools, is recently reported as stating:

"Imaginative use of ICT will open up a new world of possibilities in education. Digital technology is already changing how we do business and live our lives, we need to embrace this revolution within the education sector." (Twigg 2005)

The NSW Government has, over the past decade, invested significantly in the development of ICT infrastructure in NSW government schools. To date, the Government has:

- purchased over 200,000 computers for schools
- connected every government school to the Internet
LEADERSHIP

A number of submissions consider leadership at all levels of the organisation critical in achieving ICT advancement in schools and TAFE.

The Cisco/Microsoft submission, for example, states:

_The process of ‘connected learning’ draws heavily on the capacity of both system and school/college leadership to define and explain the vision for teaching and learning and then to harness the available skills, resources and experience to achieve it._

Further supporting this view Dr John Schiller of the University of Newcastle writes:

_Without the support of school leaders, particularly the principal, the educational potential of ICT may not be realised. Principals need to assume a major responsibility for initiating and implementing school change through use of ICT and can facilitate complex decisions to integrate ICT into learning, teaching and school administration._ (Academic)

The critical role of leaders is discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 5 of this report.

TEACHING AND LEARNING WITH ICT

Professional Learning

A majority of respondents spoke of the continuing need for teacher professional development in the areas of both learning to use the technology and applying that knowledge in a balanced way in the teaching and learning process.

_Teacher’s skill levels in ICT need to increase through provision of adequate professional development funding. Teachers should be assisted and encouraged to integrate ICT into most areas of the curriculum._ (School P&C)
Teachers need the guide-on-the-side in the classroom with them until they are confident themselves with the new technology. (School community)

While one student commented:

Some teachers are so bad at technology. They don’t know enough – like about computers and DVDs. A lot of time is wasted. If teachers know about computers it’s good. If they don’t, there’s no-one to help them. It’s woeful. (Young person interviewed by Commission for Children and Young People)

There was widespread support for the enhanced provision of pre-service education for school teachers including:

Trainee teachers need to be encouraged to respond using different multimedia whilst in training. Essay writing isn’t a really big skill needed in a primary school, yet it is how the students are mainly assessed. If they were asked instead to create a website, make a PowerPoint presentation of a book or present findings on a spreadsheet then you would get the kinds of skill development needed for when you go teaching. (Parent)

There was also a call for professional learning opportunities for support and administrative staff in the use of ICTs to manage the assessment of student learning outcomes.

DET must provide support for ICT integration into schools and TAFEs through more than simply sending out support documents and manuals; staff need to be trained on-site, tailored to a school’s needs. (School staff)

Some respondents saw value in the ability to access quality professional learning opportunities on-line at school or college and from their home. Some expressed concern about required computer competencies and the time that would be needed to participate in programs.

Some respondents supported the provision of training and development opportunities for parents to act in partnership with schools through ICTs.

Offer parents training in ICT so that they can assist their children at home. (School community)

**Teaching and Learning**

Many respondents emphasised the need for quality teaching to stimulate learning and reinforced the need to see ICT as a ‘tool’ to support learning.

**ICT is a tool, it is not the big picture by itself. It must first be quality teaching.** (Regional ICT Committee)

Computers are purely a tool or resource to enhance effective teaching and learning. (School staff meeting)

Many respondents commented on the role of ICT in personalising learning and allowing students to engage in learning when, where and how they choose.
Personalised learning and modern Learning Management Systems will allow students to engage in learning experiences anywhere, anytime. (Centre for Learning Innovation)

ICT can therefore be used for one on one tailored tuition for each individual student rather than the necessity of a teacher teaching a whole class the same things (whether a student knows them or not) at the same pace (whether the student just needs a quick introduction or need to reflect in depth to understand). (School P&C)

In addition, many respondents strongly supported the ongoing integration of ICT across all learning areas.

ICT needs to be integrated effectively into all KLAs and not just used for word processing. (School staff meeting)

Consider use of ICT as a learning tool in all curriculum areas, rather than solely for computer studies. (Northcott Client Services)

A number of respondents commented on the need for schools to provide greater access to ICT services and facilities both in and outside normal school hours. Increased access to ICT was seen as essential in achieving individualised or personalised learning.

Schools’ ICT resources able to be accessed out of hours (internet cafe type of set up) – should we have different ‘sessions’ for schools. (School and TAFE staff meeting)

There was also a comment that the needs of school students and TAFE students were not the same. The NSW Secondary Principals’ Council, for example, stated:

We also need to recognise that schools and TAFEs are very different in their application of technology in learning. TAFE students access whole units of work online whereas school students need to plug in and play/explore a whole variety of multimedia applications. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

A number of TAFE staff stated that the needs of students were better met through ‘blended delivery’, the use of ICTs, including on-line delivery, together with a range of other teaching and learning modes. This was seen to be an effective means both of supporting students as they master the use of ICTs and of addressing the preferred learning styles of different students.

Blended delivery is a better alternative to totally ICT-based learning in the ideal learning environment. We need to be aware of the cost effectiveness of using ICT as an approach to teaching and learning. Often a person will learn more effectively if taken out of an ICT environment – rely more on their cognitive skills. (TAFE staff meeting)

Some respondents expressed concern that TAFE was being left behind by universities in its uses of technologies. They also described the community’s expectations with regard to the provision of ICTs in TAFE, specifically on-line resources, and described the significant investment needed to develop and maintain on-line resources.
Maintenance of online learning materials is a major issue. …
Huge expectation by students and communities that TAFE will have high quality online resources. (TAFE staff meeting)

Some respondents indicated that ICTs were not necessarily applicable to every situation. Given the importance of on-the-job delivery, it was felt that in some contexts distance learning delivery through ICTs would not allow students to gain all the skills and knowledge they needed.

For TAFE staff, another key issue was the extent to which ICTs were now being used in industry. This meant there was a need both for students to have industry standard equipment and facilities but also a need for staff to have professional development which ensured they were up to date with industry standards.

APPLICATION OF ICT

Use of Technology

A number of respondents suggested that the use of technology to enhance learning was well behind the level of technology used in the wider world. Charles Stuart University stated … use of technology and web based learning are [both] areas whose potential is still to be fully realised.

The use of technology to overcome the ‘tyranny of distance’ was also raised by respondents and, by some, was seen as critical in maintaining high standards of access and delivery to rural and remote students, their teachers and parents.

Respondents frequently stated that effective student and teacher use of ICT will facilitate access to a variety of on-line services that increase learning opportunity. Schools saw a high speed broadband link as essential in ensuring this effective use of on-line services.

A one size fits all approach does not deliver at school level. A school with a 2mb connection and 250 students has a much better system than a school with 1050 students and 2mb connection. (School principal)

Respondents spoke positively of the increased use being made of school websites as a communications medium with their parents and communities.

Make use of excellent sites already in existence e.g. ‘capnsw’ and school websites – there are so many good things happening already … (TAFE and school staff meeting)

The issue of email addresses for students and staff was of concern, with one school requesting a revision to the ISP web services contract, to take account of the limitations in resourcing available to support the system outlined in the contract.

Some respondents suggested a range of communications strategies that could be used to engage parents in their child’s learning, including SMS messaging, e-mail and web based communication.

Parents can access the school site and view the homework, marks, due tasks and events relevant to their student. Such

There needs to be recognition that ICT is NOT necessarily an effective resource for all applications. This is particularly the case with many apprenticeships/traineeships in automotive service and repair industry. A lot of training is delivered ‘on the job’ by employees and this needs to be recognised. (Industry member)

In most situations, ICT would be a wonderful way for parents and teachers to communicate. However, many country areas have telephone lines that are very old and unreliable, and exchanges that badly need upgrading to cope with modern demands. (Parent)

School newsletters should be available on-line via the school’s website. Student reports should be computerised and available online – password protected. Student grades should be available on-line at selected times of the year. (School staff meeting)

School websites need to have more than just generic departmental information i.e. local information/newsletter, objectives etc and an information exchange for parents to the school community should be encouraged and supported. (CLI Management Teams)
access keeps families with Internet access fully informed of progress and on activities and is of benefit to families. (Centre for Learning Innovation)

Some respondents raised the issue of computer access in the home. They felt that electronic communication was not appropriate as the sole means of communication with parents. Access to computers and the capacity of many families to afford on-line services were seen as issues that influence a school’s communications policy and the assumptions that underpin the extension of curriculum opportunities on-line. One principal stated:

*I think about 60% of families in my school don’t have the technology, so that’s 60% that miss out if you use it (only) for communication – an equity issue.* (School staff meeting)

A number of TAFE respondents identified the advantages of on-line learning, particularly in relation to distance and remote students access:

*Delivery of TAFE courses online has the ability to increase access for a range of students, who do not have the opportunity or ability to participate in face-to-face teaching.* (NSW TAFETA - Outreach Special Interest Group)

**Infrastructure**

Many submissions spoke of the frustration experienced by teachers, who were not technicians, in maintaining school networks with a number proposing strategies such as:

*(We need) Qualified or trained technician to team teach with untrained / unconfident teachers to improve and upskill staff.* (School staff meeting) and

*Take the ICT budgets away from the school, employ technical support officers who oversee a group of schools to visit and repair, install, in-service, etc …* (School staff member)

Respondents were also seeking training to give them the skills and knowledge to maintain their ICT systems or effective support through qualified personnel responsible for undertaking these tasks.

Many respondents expressed concern at the capacity of schools to ensure an equitable supply of up-to-date computers and peripherals.

*… if DET was fair dinkum about technology in schools then we would be supplied with computers and peripherals such as printers, scanners, digital cameras etc. And computers would be leased and replaced every 3 years … Site licenses are useless. We can’t afford them.* (Personal submission)

These comments were echoed in submissions from TAFE staff who were looking for better levels of support from IT areas and the provision of opportunities for teachers to enhance their skills, knowledge and ability.

*Students are our business and if the IT support service is unwilling to support the curriculum we will not be in business as far as IT is concerned.* (TAFE staff member)
The provision of laptop computers for teachers and students was encouraged by some writers. Some suggested the Government develop an incentive scheme to assist teachers and parents to purchase laptop computers for use at home.

A number of respondents identified difficulties with older school buildings, including the inflexibility and size of rooms, limited power supplies and problems with cabling.

If 21st century schooling is to engage young adolescents born after 1987 we need to tap into their cyber world and move from the industrial age chalkboard/whiteboard to a technology saturated learning environment where there is fast wireless internet access in all classrooms. (School staff meeting)

Support Systems
A number of respondents were enthusiastic about the use of ICT to support student administration.

However, criticisms were levelled at DET for the ineffective implementation of earlier ‘solutions’, including KIDMAP; and the need for an updating of the OASIS system. This was seen as a serious barrier to more effective student administration practices.

Cisco/Microsoft in their submission presented a more global view:

It’s proving to be difficult in jurisdictions around the world to respond to an uncomfortable combination of new teaching and learning demands, dramatic shifts in technology and a difficult set of organisational challenges including an ageing workforce, out-of-date administrative systems and funding constraints. (Cisco/Microsoft)

The same issue appeared in some submissions from TAFE staff and the NSW Teachers Federation who state that the implementation of systems such as CLAMS (Classroom Management System) have increased teachers’ workloads and need to be supported appropriately. A solution to this is proposed in the submission from the Sydney Institute ICT and Systems Committee, who wanted to see the integration of some existing systems and some other systems removed.

A number of TAFE staff also mentioned the EC system and called for increased flexibility or its elimination. However, this is generally described as a barrier to flexible teaching practices rather than an ICT issue.

System Standards
Some respondents felt that a number of barriers could be removed through the implementation of standards for common platforms and equipment which ensure that computers and computer systems are able to talk to one another.

These submissions also stated that the implementation of standards would provide both efficiencies and cost-saving to the Department. One of the underlying problems is outlined in a submission from the DET Information Technology Directorate - Technical Services Branch:
All workstations in schools and TAFE need to be connected to the DET wide area network with remote support provided to ensure the reliability of the DET wide area network and the school local area network … The introduction of a small number of standard operating environments will allow for greater efficiencies and cost savings to DET. (Centre for Learning Innovation)

We need to resist the notion that common operating systems and support systems can work effectively across both schools and TAFE. Schools have spent years and years building up their own specialized and individual networks. Being required to ditch these now and conform to prescribed regional specifications will only pull back schools which have made considerable progress on their own. (School staff meeting)

Lack of classroom technology standards also inhibits student mobility, content sharing and technical support. DET should enforce a single technology platform within classrooms. (Personal Submission)

Breakdown the traditional emphasis on teachers knowing everything and develop more of providing pointers to where learners can find information. (Catholic Education Office, Lismore)

The idea of fixed classes and streamed classes will become irrelevant. Each individual student will be streamed according to his needs e.g. one primary student may be doing high school maths, while another may be writing novels. Teachers will become more facilitators of student directed learning rather than teachers of pre-digested information. The socialisation role of schools will become more important as more technical knowledge is obtained from technology. (School P&C)

Question. How many finance systems does DET have? The answer might be - JDE, TIFS, 2200 + Oasis, 3000+ middle level manager Excel, Access and similar system. This is a total 5000+ finance systems. Similar comments on HR. Question: Is having 5000+ finance systems best practice. It is likely that this style of solution is very high cost. (Information Technology Directorate - Technical Services Branch)

The concept of a common operating system was not always endorsed by all respondents, either from schools or TAFE, or from the community. Respondents from both schools and TAFE described the separate progress that has been made in each sector and were concerned that any movement towards system standards did not set back the progress that has already been made. There was also a concern expressed that a one-size-fits-all approach would not take account of the needs and capacity of different schools.

Some respondents also raised the issue of open source as opposed to proprietary software. They wanted to see students exposed to a wider range of ICT products, rather than only a particular suite of products. While other respondents suggested using the purchasing power of DET to drive better deals on software and hardware. For example, a TAFE Institute ICT Service group suggested the DET should:

Conduct software audit in schools and TAFE Colleges to rationalise the use of software across the state and achieve economies of scale in pricing of the software. (South Western Sydney Institute ICT Services)

The vast majority of respondents expressed positive views when discussing the role of ICT in teaching and learning and, from the comments, it can be concluded that teachers, students and parents are wanting to be more engaged in technology based learning.

Huge benefits for engagement of learning with use of IT. … Future education should use IT in a seamless manner. (School staff meeting)

I would like to see a web site to assist parents in seeing where their child should be in a learning year. If the child is having difficulty in certain areas then the parent should be able to access on-line further lessons to make the child confident in this area. (Parent)

While providing support for ICT in teaching and learning respondents recognised the importance of quality teaching and the role of teachers in engaging students in learning.

ICT will not solve all educational problems for teachers and learners. The quality of the content is more important than the newness of the technology. The key ingredient is the calibre and availability of the learner/teacher interface that is supported by the technology. (TAFE staff meeting)
So what does all that mean for the way we conduct education and training? What have been the implications for the learning enterprise in New South Wales?

… the dramatically increasing need for personalising the learning experience for students such that we pay more than lip service to individual differences. This can only realistically be achieved if we are able to connect all the elements that surround a child’s learning experiences. (Cisco/Microsoft)

The full impact of ICT on school and TAFE teaching and learning practices, administration systems and communication is yet to be realised.

The need to focus on the learning needs of individuals is a key outcome from a number of papers in the Excellence and Innovation consultation. It is clear from responses that ICT is a means through which this personalisation of learning can be achieved.

However, in order to move towards a more personalised approach a number of issues have to be addressed, including the need for:

• vision and leadership in schools, TAFE and the system generally
• support for all staff to enable them to use ICT better and more strategically
• opportunities for students and teachers to advance personal skills and knowledge
• clear guidance for teachers on how best to incorporate ICT in daily teaching and learning
• access for all students and teachers to relevant and up-to-date technology
• appropriate systems to support the current and future function of DET.
Reference

COMPANION PAPER 1

The Future of Quality Teaching in NSW Government Schools

Associate Professor James G Ladwig, and
Professor Jennifer Gore, The University of Newcastle

When the NSW Department of Education and Training began developing its Quality Teaching initiative in late 2002, it was doing so in response to a growing interest among schools and teachers in furthering their work on improving the quality of the core business of schools. This emphasis on core business was made explicit and public in Vinson’s recommendation that the Department develop initiatives to assist teachers in their efforts to continually improve their professional practice. In order for teachers to teach well, they need a clear mandate to focus on improving their teaching and they need the resources to support their efforts. When looking toward the future of NSW government schools, a critical question is, ‘what is needed to help schools and teachers to consistently produce high quality teaching?’

What’s needed

A shared understanding of what quality teaching can contribute: It is important to speak of quality teaching in both the general sense and in relation to the NSW Quality Teaching initiative that is already in place. Whatever the specific contents of any programmatic initiative to improve the quality of teaching, if that initiative is based on a sound, comprehensive research base, there are some clear benefits that will come from increased levels of quality teaching.

In general terms, of the things that schools can influence, the quality of the teaching provided is known to be the most important factor in how students perform (Mortimore, 1993). While there are ongoing and justifiable debates about the relative size of this influence and about how it inter-relates with the broader social context of schooling, there is no question that in functioning school systems such as those in most of Australia, the quality of teaching is the most decisive factor in what students achieve in school.

More specifically, quality teaching can contribute in the following ways:
- For schools, establishing a systematic program to support quality teaching declares a clear priority to focus school plans and teacher energies on core business.
- For teachers, a systemic focus on quality teaching reinforces the important recognition that all teachers have the capacity to deliver high quality teaching.
- For students, high quality teaching provides improved educational outcomes. This includes students from social backgrounds normally associated with educational disadvantage.
- For both teachers and students, high quality teaching provides more satisfying classrooms.

A shared vision of what Quality Teaching is: There are several reasons why a shared vision of Quality Teaching matters. First, such a vision places an emphasis on what teachers actually do with students and provides a framework for them to make judgements about the quality of their interactions in terms of the learning that is promoted (Darling-Hammond and Youngs, 2002; Rowan, 1996). While this may seem an obvious point, it provides a level of specificity beyond most professional standards frameworks for teaching (which tend to focus on general, broader components of professional practice than what happens in classrooms).
Second, having a shared vision of teaching means that teachers have a common, professional language for discussing, analysing, and debating their core business (Louis, et al, 1995). Having a shared vision of teaching does not necessarily mean that all teachers agree with that vision, nor should we ever expect full agreement in a lively profession; but, it does mean teachers have a shared language with which to articulate their disparate views about teaching and with which to both enliven and deepen their professional conversations in the interest of student learning.

Third, having a shared vision of teaching provides a means by which teachers can make their work explicit to students and parents. It is reasonable to expect that teachers will develop a specialised language for talk with each other about their work – but if that language is not widely shared among teachers, it is more difficult to communicate effectively with students and parents (who do not necessarily share the professional understanding of teaching expected of teachers themselves). The fact that Quality Teaching was designed to work in all year levels, and across all KLAS, is a strength in this regard. No doubt, teachers have even more specialised understandings of their work based on the area of expertise. Parents and students, however, communicate with all teachers, across all professional lines. Having a professional language representing a shared vision of teaching will facilitate teachers’ efforts to assist parents and students in understanding why things are taught as they are (Louis, et al, 1996).

The importance of a shared language about teaching has been demonstrated many times in research, for all of the reasons noted above. Selecting only parts of the current Quality Teaching framework or re-working specific elements or dimensions of the model might satisfy the desire of some people to align Quality Teaching with their own professional preferences, but it does so at the expense of the benefits that come from a shared vision and language. The Quality Teaching framework offers considerable scope for professional judgement and individual style to shape its translation into specific school, classroom, and community contexts. We recommend engagement with what it does offer, reiterating its basis in solid research about how best to improve student outcomes (see Ladwig and King, 2003).

A mandate for schools to dedicate resources and time to the improvement of teaching:
Schools face demands from a plethora of legitimate sources. In the midst of these demands, schools need a clear mandate from the highest authority possible to legitimate the local use of time and resources for the continual improvement of teaching. Teaching is a highly complex and dynamic practice. It isn’t something that is learned once and done well forevermore. In a general sense, quality teaching is something that requires continual reflection and renewal. School leaders need to exercise the authority and refine the necessary skills with which to drive such productive use of school resources in relation to pedagogy. Without a clear central mandate, that recognises teaching as the core business of schools and quality teaching as the means to strengthen that core, school energies are to easily diverted and fragmented among a host of other concerns that have relatively little impact on student learning (Newmann and Associates, 1996; Newmann, King and Rigdon, 1997; Newmann, King and Youngs, 2000).

In a more specific sense, the NSW Quality Teaching model has been designed to advance current teaching practices and set very high standards for teachers in NSW public schools. At the same time, schools now have the responsibility to set their own professional learning agendas. The Quality Teaching model provides a direct scaffold on which school leaders can build their local initiatives. It is readily possible, and has been the experience of many newly decentralised systems, for schools to exercise a mandate to focus on improving teaching by adopting all of the latest educational fads, or by responding to the latest headline. The NSW Quality Teaching model outlines enduring characteristics of teaching, built on the knowledge generated by respected
traditions of educational research that can support longer term strategic planning for teachers professional learning that can yield lasting improvements in pedagogy and student outcomes.

A reasonable, consistent and manageable set of systemic demands and supports: For schools to be able to manage a mandate to focus on Quality Teaching, the system needs to manage more strategically and parsimoniously the competing demands placed on, and supports provided to, schools in the interest of improving pedagogy. These competing demands and supports include many legitimate and necessary functions of the school system. However, the centrality of quality teaching as the core business of schools needs to be continually reiterated. Maintaining this clear focus includes minimising the number and impact of passing government interests and fashionable reform trends brought to bear on schools, as well as providing practical support to schools in the form of highly trained, skilled personnel who can guide schools in their programs to improve pedagogy (Newmann et al, 2001).

A coordinated curriculum – assessment – pedagogy system: One of the most difficult sources of competing interests faced by schools is the complicated nexus of required curricula and assessments in NSW. A simple observation is that some of the existing mechanisms for student assessment and some parts of state syllabi are not internally consistent with each other, or with what is known about how to best help students learn well (King, Youngs, Ladwig, 2003). While substantial work has been directed toward bringing syllabi into a more coherent alignment, those efforts will always be open to competing interests since the Board of Studies in NSW must represent all sectors of schooling (which by definition have differing clientele). Bringing the assessment system into closer alignment has been at the heart of the Secondary Principals’ current concerns for reviewing the School Certificate. Initiatives from new national assessment mechanisms similarly may not be obviously consistent with the demands of NSW syllabi. Thus, teachers in NSW government schools are faced with many tensions, if not direct contradictions, from the various systems designed to support teaching and learning itself (even before we consider all those that are not about teaching and learning directly) (Hatten, 2001).

Teachers need a reasonably consistent set of professional instruments with which to work. When it comes to improving students’ learning, that set includes curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. Since the current NSW Quality Teaching model builds from the same body of research that has guided some of the recent shifts in the HSC and its accompanying syllabi, there is substantial consistency from which further efforts can move forward.

Schools need instructional leaders: Teaching is fundamentally about applying high level principles and deep professional knowledge in concrete, everyday situations with real people in diverse contexts. High quality teaching requires the exercise of extensive expertise. For such expertise to be exercised in schools, there need to be strong professional communities bound by a strong sense of collective responsibility for improving student learning. Such school capacities depend on active, highly competent, and confident instructional leaders working everyday in schools with teachers to refine teaching (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood and Prestine, 2002). At the base of such instructional leadership must lie the firm belief that all teachers are capable of delivering high quality lessons and assessment tasks. In sites where only certain teachers are seen as highly capable, the instructional leader feels no mandate to work closely with all staff. In the same way that Quality Teaching is premised on the capacity of all students to learn, so too is Quality Teaching premised on the capacity of all teachers to teach well.

A reasonable pace of change: The rapid pace of change in education over the past few decades has come at a price. In systems around the world, teachers and school leaders have experienced change fatigue. One of the strengths of the NSW Quality Teaching model is that it acknowledges and
builds on what many high quality teachers are already doing. Pursuing improvements in teaching, seeking quality teaching, does not require wholesale change, but does ask teachers to carefully reflect on their current practices and refine what they are doing. It is readily possible to begin engaging in the processes of quality teaching by taking small steps: redesigning one lesson, refining one assessment task, teaching differently for one day. For this to happen, however, the overall pace of change schools and teachers face needs careful management, steering, and a clear ordering of priorities.

**Time for developing, enacting and analysing pedagogical experiences and outcomes:** Teachers would be the first to recognise that much of what they have experienced in the name of teacher professional development has had little impact on their teaching practice. This means that many teachers have not experienced truly effective professional learning and, because of its differences from much common practice, they may not recognise certain activities as professional development at all. Unfortunately, solid research findings about effective teacher professional learning are as rare as teachers’ experience of it. However, recent research has begun to tease out some essential characteristics of professional learning that does positively impact on teaching (Borko, 2004; King and Newmann, 2000; King, 2002).

While external knowledge and fresh stimuli are sometimes very useful, professional learning is not just what is delivered by those from outside of a particular school. One of the best ways to improve teachers’ professional learning is for teachers themselves to reflect on records of what they are doing. Records of practice, such as student work samples, assessment tasks and programs, are powerful tools for the analysis of professional practice. Some of the most effective professional learning involves teachers working in groups, intensively, to interrogate and refine their teaching work. Practices such as these are not complicated, but they are all too rare in the daily work of teachers. They do require a shared language, a defensible set of quality criteria about teaching, (such as are provided by the *Quality Teaching* model), and time. Each of the needs identified above will assist in freeing up and making the time needed for deep professional learning about *Quality Teaching*; but there needs to be a much broader recognition of the need for time to be dedicated to professional learning and deeper understanding of effective ways to use that time. As a specific instance, in addressing the increasingly urgent challenges of recruiting and retaining good teachers for NSW public schools, there are no better tools than those which assist teachers to do their main work well.

**How can the system further support these needs?**

The NSW Department of Education and Training has made a bold and critical commitment to quality teaching as a long-term strategic priority and has put substantial resources and structures behind that commitment. Professional learning funds are now in schools, with quality teaching as one of the named priority areas around which schools are advised to direct their own professional learning needs. This represents an important opportunity for schools to solidify their priorities. Regional support is available to schools to assist in their pedagogical improvement efforts, through personnel dedicated to quality teaching, but also through the host of regional structures and programs designed to support schools. Keeping quality teaching as a main priority at the regional level will be critical in supporting school improvement of pedagogy (Leithwood, 1995; Floden, et al, 1988). As noted above, principals are central in guiding priorities and practices at the school level. Just as the system needs to support principals in operating as instructional leaders, principals can make decisions to both free and require teachers to focus on the quality of teaching.
The Department has also developed accessible materials designed to enable schools to work fairly independently in engaging with quality teaching. These materials not only lay out the NSW Quality Teaching model and provide teachers with tools which can be used for the analysis of classroom practice and assessment practice, but also provide guidelines for how the materials can be used. Schools that have not yet engaged, or engaged deeply, with the available resources should find the tools useful. The resources provide schools and teachers with practical ways of moving toward higher quality pedagogy. The Quality Teaching website and Teaching and Learning Exchange are also important resources provided by the NSW DET to assist in this agenda. The NSW DET has in place many programs that can support, and have in the past supported, pedagogical reform. These include the Priority Action Schools Program, the Priority Schools Funding Program, and the good use that has been made of the Australian Government Quality Teacher Program.

Quality teaching, in both the general and specific sense, depends on the commitments, planning, and professional judgements of teachers and school leaders. Quality teaching requires deep understanding and hard work. Given the complexity of teaching, there can be no simple recipes or clever tricks that will deliver improved outcomes for all students in all year levels and in all subject areas. Teachers’ enormous capacities for producing good teaching must underpin serious efforts to improve pedagogy.

What is in place in the NSW system is a good balance of both central and local supports. Current school reform research suggests that the most effective system is one in which central authorities establish standards, provide clear models and expectations, and accountability mechanisms, but leaves the specific issues of implementation to the professional judgement of those who know the local setting best, namely school leaders and teachers (Leithwood and Duke, 1999; Leithwood and Earl, 2000). In a sense, the current NSW system will provide a test of that thesis, if it continues to provide central leadership that matches the de-centralised and localised financial and structural arrangements implemented from the beginning of 2004.

**Steps for the Future**

The current work on quality teaching in which NSW teachers and schools are engaged will undoubtedly lead to further and new developments in relation to pedagogy. In the first instance, The University of Newcastle and the Department of Education and Training are currently conducting a longitudinal study of the implications of the quality teaching initiative for student outcomes and teachers’ professional learning. The findings of that study will assuredly lead to modification of the Quality Teaching model and to recommendations about how best to support teacher professional learning.

In addition, however, there is a range of questions related to quality teaching that need substantial attention and more research. In general, there is a need to bring to lasting fruition Vinson’s recommendation for the development of a clearinghouse of curricular and instructional material developed by teachers, as they work with the Quality Teaching model. Pedagogy can not live apart from what is being taught, and quality teaching can only be made real in the synthesis of instruction, curriculum and assessment. The material developed by teachers in the coming years will represent enormous effort and professional generosity on the part of a generation of teachers that ought not be lost as the teaching force evolves.

Further, three specific areas in need of attention are, 1) working through the implications of quality teaching for specific KLASs and stages of schooling, 2) understanding the degree to which, and manner in which, quality teaching meets the needs of special educators and their students, and 3)
developing a deeper understanding of how quality teaching works for Indigenous students across
the full range of contexts in which they study. Each of these specific areas has solid grounding on
which to work toward a more coherent systemic understanding of quality teaching for students in all
NSW government schools; but at the moment they are relatively independent from each other. The
opportunity now exists to clarify where commonality can exist for all teachers in understanding
the core of their profession in NSW; and, in so doing, clarify what needs to be unique across the various
contexts and classroom of NSW.

The future of quality teaching in NSW government schools is bright. As a system, NSW
government schools are well positioned to improve on what they already achieve and to carry that
work much further, well into the future. If the core business of schools and teachers truly is
maintained as the core business at all levels of the NSW government school system, advertisements
about the quality of teaching in the public schools of NSW will not be needed. It will be general
knowledge that NSW government schools ‘teach your children well.’

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Staying on at school in New South Wales: sustaining quality, increasing retention, and providing transition support

Dr Margaret Vickers University of Western Sydney

In 1999, the Ministers of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) committed Australian schools to ensuring that ‘all students have access to the high quality education necessary to enable the completion of school education to year 12 or its vocational equivalent …’ (Adelaide Declaration, 3.6). The declaration goes on to say that students’ experiences in school should provide a sound basis for future employment and for participation in further education and training. It places a strong value on the quality of secondary schooling. Retention matters but it is not end in itself. Indeed, students are unlikely to stay on if their experience of school is unsatisfactory.

Currently, one in four young Australians leave school without completing Year 12, and the children of the poor and poorly educated are clearly over-represented among this population. Of the 65 thousand students who entered year 7 in NSW secondary schools in 1997, approximately 20 thousand did not appear in year 12 classes six years later. Yet early leaving is not always ‘bad’. One of the most common reasons teenagers give for early leaving is the desire for a job. If the job they gain leads to a contract of training (particularly an apprenticeship), parents and schools can rightly claim this as a successful outcome. Unfortunately many early leavers do not achieve such positive outcomes. Compared with those who do complete Year 12, early leavers are generally less successful in gaining secure employment. In May 2001, among 15 to 24-year-olds who left school in the previous year without having completed Year 12, approximately 17.7 per cent were unemployed and not in training. The rate for Year 12 completers was 4.7 per cent (ABS, 2001). Young people who leave school before Year 12 tend to face significant hardships. Changes in the Australian economy place them at greater risk of low income, unemployment and dependency on government welfare.

Since 2000, public education systems across Australia have made concerted efforts to improve high school completion rates. Victoria has introduced a new senior certificate, and substantial revisions of Year 12 certificates are under way in Western Australia, Tasmania and South Australia. Queensland has made participation in school, TAFE, or a structured combination of work and training mandatory to age 16, while South Australia simply raised the leaving age to 16 years. Numerous examples of mentoring programs and local support networks have emerged in all systems. These aim to provide a safety net for students who are not well supported by their families; they focus not on what schools can do alone, but rather, on what governments and community agencies can achieve if they work with schools, employers and young people themselves to achieve higher levels of participation in post-compulsory education and training.

The first section of this paper outlines current research on student disengagement, and provides examples of programs and policies aimed at encouraging school completion. The second section considers what might be done to track early leavers and what kinds of transition support might be offered to them.
1. Increasing student engagement and improving high school completion rates

Numerous Australian research studies have sought to determine whether particular groups of young people might leave school before finishing Year 12, and if so, why. The first lesson from this strand of research is that young people who do leave early are often thinking about leaving during Year 9 or even earlier. More often than not, students who say they will leave early do exactly that. In 1995, approximately 13,600 year 9 students across Australia were surveyed as part of the 1995 Year 9 Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY-95). Among other things, they were asked, ‘When do you plan to leave school?’ Over 1000 students - approximately seven percent of the sample - replied ‘At the end of year 10’. When these students were re-contacted two years later, half of those who said they would leave at the end of year 10 had actually done so (Marks and Fleming, 1999). These researchers included a wide range of background variables and academic achievement measures in their models. After taking account of all these, they concluded that students who stated that they would not be at school in Year 12 were seven times more likely to leave before completing school than were students with higher aspirations (Marks, Fleming, Long and McMillan, 2000). An earlier NSW study of student aspirations produced similar findings Ainley and Sheret (1992).

Both the large-scale national longitudinal studies as well as local and state-based studies suggests that young people are making up their minds about when to leave early in their high school careers (Marks and Fleming, 1999; Lamb, Dwyer & Wynn, 2000; Marks, Fleming, Long and McMillan, 2000). International research provides similar findings. Several studies conducted in Canada and the USA also suggest that disengagement from school begins at an early age for many students (Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Audas & Wilms, 2001).

Students stated intentions indicate fairly accurately which students are at risk; they also suggest that efforts to prevent early leaving need to begin in the junior years. When asked why they are thinking about leaving school, two themes consistently emerge from their answers: essentially, their motives for leaving are either dominated by the desire for work, or by a lack of interest in (or a dislike) of school. Some students cite both reasons: there is also a great deal of variation in the specific balance of student motives, depending on whether the student is an under-age leaver, leaves at the end of Year 10, during Year 11, or later. Motives also vary depending on where students come from (urban leavers tend to differ from early leavers in remote and rural areas). Gender plays a role in the balance of motives, for the work motive tends to have a greater pull on boys than on girls. Indigenous students, homeless students, and the very poor have a somewhat different balance of motives, yet across all groups, similar themes recur again and again.

The ABS survey on education and training experience in Australia reported that students most often cited work-related reasons for leaving school before completing year 12 (ABS, 1997), see Table 2. About 46.0 per cent of early leavers gave work and income-related reasons for quitting school. Most reported a desire to get a job or apprenticeship (42.5 per cent), while over 3 per cent reported that remaining at school would not necessarily help improve their chances of getting a job. This latter finding suggests that there are some young people who leave school because they do not believe that staying on would help them to get a job. This view exists even though the early leavers may be concerned about their employment prospects. Similar findings have been reported by Lamb, Dwyer & Wyn (2000), using longitudinal survey data, and by Ainley and Sheret (1992), Pitman and Herschel (2002), Teese (2002), Smyth et al. (2000) and Craven et al. (2003).
Table 1: Main reason for leaving school before completing Year 12 (a), 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason(b)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work-related reasons</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little difference to job prospects</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got (or wanted) a job or apprenticeship</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooling-related reasons(c)</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not do well or failed subjects</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not like school or teachers</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost interest or motivation</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal, family or other reasons(d)</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own ill-health, injury or disability</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) 15-24 year olds only.
(b) Respondents nominated one reason only.
(c) Includes people who gave other schooling-related reasons.
(d) Includes people who gave other personal or family reasons.

Source: Education and Training Experience, Australia, 1997 (ABS Cat. no. 6278.0).

The second most common reason students give for early leaving is directly related to their experiences of school. About 15 percent of all leavers in the ABS study stated this explicitly, saying that they left school because they did not like school or did not like teachers (see Table 2). If those who leave school because they are failing or do not do well are added to those who simply don’t like school and those who claim to have lost interest or motivation, it appears that approximately one in three of all early leavers do not find school a happy or satisfying place to be. According to these findings, young people will not stay at school if they are having a miserable time, are failing academically, or are in trouble with teachers. These students will leave school even if they are not able to find work or do not have other education and training opportunities to go to (Fine, 1991; King, 1999; Spierings, 1999).

Some students leave school because of curriculum and program issues. Some drop out because school does not offer the course they want to do, and because the courses that are offered are not relevant or of interest to them. Lamb, Dwyer and Wynn (2000) found that up to 15 per cent of early leavers report that their main reason for leaving school was to do training or study not available at their school. A recent survey of 1125 Year 9 and 10 students in Queensland secondary schools found that a lack of curriculum choice in the lower secondary school leads some students to lose heart, believing that high school will not offer them the job training they want in order to prepare them for work (Pitman and Herschel, 2002). Taken together, approximately one-third of all early leavers say the main reason they left school was because they did not like it, they were not doing well, or that they had lost interest or motivation to continue (ABS, 2000). If the first major motive for early leaving is the desire to work, then the second major factor is the desire to get away from school.
The third major set of reasons for not continuing in school relate to family and personal related factors. Table 2 suggests that approximately 16 percent of early leavers tend to give ‘other’ reasons for leaving school. This should not be dismissed as a ‘miscellaneous’ group, for buried within it we find young people who are among the most disadvantaged in our society. So extreme are their disadvantages that many of them are homeless, some become habitual truants, some become juvenile offenders, and many leave the school system before reaching the legal leaving age.

Numerous official inquiries have been conducted by high-level bodies including Parliamentary Committees, and State and Commonwealth departments into the causes and consequences of youth homelessness and juvenile crime (Beresford, 1993). These inquiries overwhelmingly have found that homeless students and juvenile offenders came from families that are very poor, or families where domestic violence is not uncommon. In some cases these young people have been victims of sexual abuse. Early leaving occurs most frequently where there is poverty, transience and ill-health. Where a family is poor and affected by illness or mental health problems, older siblings often carry out parental roles. Erratic school enrolment patterns, high mobility between schools, and broken attendance means that a good deal of school time is lost. A downward spiral in academic achievement follows and this in turn leads to low academic self-esteem and disengagement from school (Beresford, 1993; Fine, 1991). Some young people are homeless but still attempt to stay on at school. Others may be wards of the state, or orphaned refugee minors. Some young women fall pregnant and become mothers while they are still school students. While this group might represent a relatively small proportion of the overall student population, the probability that they will not make it to year 12 is much higher than for other students in less disadvantaged categories.

Differences across groups

While similar themes recur, the reasons young people give for leaving school early vary across different groups of students. There is a great deal of variation in the specific balance of student motives, depending on whether the student is an under-age leaver, leaves at the end of Year 10, during Year 11, or later. Motives also vary depending on where students come from (urban leavers tend to differ from early leavers in remote and rural areas). Gender plays a role in the balance of motives, for the work motive tends to have a greater pull on boys than on girls. Indigenous students, homeless students, and the very poor have a somewhat different balance of motives.

Among the poor, for example, ‘school’ tends to be the dominant reason for early leaving. Work undertaken for the evaluation of the impact of Youth Allowance (YA) found that when students on YA were asked why they left school before Year 12, they most frequently focused on negative aspects of school. Many emphasised course-related concerns (Lamb & Johnson, 2000). The frequency with which school related issues were raised was much higher among those on YA than for the general population of early leavers (Lamb & Johnson, 2000). This finding is consistent with previous analyses of LSAY data based on the Y95 cohort in 1998. Using these data Lamb (2000) showed that among early school leavers who received government income support after leaving school, negative experiences of school — a lack of achievement and advice from teachers suggesting they should leave — were more influential in their decision to drop out of school before completing Year 12 than those reasons were among early school leavers who were not on Youth Allowance (Lamb, 2000).

It is possible to summarize the major reasons young people give for leaving school early under three main headings: work-related aspirations, low interest in school, and unmet survival needs. These reasons for leaving school are represented schematically in the model presented in Figure 1 (from Lamb et al, 2004). This model connects these reasons for leaving to the factors that lie behind them: employment-related factors, school-related factors, and family and personal factors.
Although the main drivers of early leaving are presented as separate in this model, they are likely to be interrelated. When a teenager aspires to leave school to get a job or earn an income, this tests the relevance of the high school curriculum. A curriculum that focuses largely on academic subjects designed mainly to prepare some students for University entry is likely to be seen by other students (especially those with direct workplace aspirations) as boring, irrelevant, and difficult. Despite the interactions between the two different motives for leaving, it is important to recognize that these can also operate separately: students who leave early for work are not always low achievers, and not all low achievers decide to give up school for a job.

**Figure 1: A conceptual model of the reasons young people give for leaving school early**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment-related factors</th>
<th>School-related factors</th>
<th>Family and Personal factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Economic Strategies -</td>
<td>Engagement falls because of</td>
<td>Homelessness, pregnancy, mental health problems, ill health of parents, absenteeism, mobility and instability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Early entry to work</td>
<td>• Focus on academic program and University entrance goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• On the job training</td>
<td>• Offer of limited subject choices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Advancement via experience</td>
<td>• Risk of failure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Diagram showing employment-related factors, school-related factors, and family and personal factors.]

The tertiary-entrance focus of the senior secondary curriculum raises complex issues that have been debated endlessly over the past 30 years. Comprehensive public high schools aim to offer all students who come to them a ‘fair go’ at completing a full secondary education. These schools offer a ‘fair’ chance, but never an ‘equal’ chance, since nothing can erase the advantages of having well-educated parents when it comes to feeling fully ‘at home’ with the academic curriculum of the high school. It is not surprising that students from the poorest families mostly say they are leaving school for ‘course-related reasons’. Some states, for example Queensland and Victoria, attempt to respond
to the difficulties poorer students encounter by offering year 11 and 12 academic subjects such as English and Social Science and Mathematics at two levels: at a ‘difficult’ level for those who are seeking tertiary admission, and at a ‘more accessible’ level for students who are seeking to gain a year 12 qualification but are not aiming to enter a University. In NSW, this approach has not been strongly supported (Vickers & Lamb, 2002; McGaw, 1997).

While the structure and content of the senior curriculum continues to cause concern, some states have now broadened their focus and are reviewing their programs for the middle years. In 2002, Pitman and Herschel studied a large sample of Queensland students in years 8 and 9 in public, Catholic and private secondary schools, using both surveys and semi-structured interviews. One conclusion of their investigation was that many young students were unaware that the senior curriculum included accredited-vocational-studies (VET). Interviews with these students suggested that they would remain on in school if they could study ‘something relevant’. The absence of VET from the junior curriculum led many of them to believe that school was only about academic study, and that it would never meet their needs in terms of preparation for the workforce (Pitman and Herschel, 2002). Queensland is now considering offering ‘taster’ VET in year 9, and allowing students to accumulate credits toward a VET certificate from the beginning of year 10. Some other states (South Australia and Western Australia particularly) are considering similar reforms.

As noted, a wide range of factors influence early leaving, and there is no single approach that will work with all students. Some of the best school-based initiatives involve an integrated approach, providing support and guidance while also addressing students’ welfare and personal needs. In targeting those at-risk of dropping out, many of these programs address such issues as histories of failure, low self-esteem, and lack of family support. Youth mentoring, case management, and continuity of staffing are key features of some of the more successful youth support programs. Plan-it-Youth is a well-known youth mentoring program in NSW, operating in public high schools across the state.

Plan-it-Youth provides mentoring support for students who are potential early leavers. It creates a supportive relationship between young people and their adult mentors, aiming to re-engage young people with school and helping them re-evaluate their options in terms of their educational and employment futures. Currently, Plan-it-Youth operates in six School Education Areas (SEAs) across NSW. Coordinators, employed by NSW-DET, work with several schools in each of these SEAs, identifying students who might benefit from mentoring and who wish to join the program. They link them with mentors, and support the mentors at all stages. Students are mentored one-on-one every week by volunteer mentors who have completed an accredited training program delivered by a local TAFE institute.

While there are many youth mentoring programs, there are relatively few rigorous, well-controlled evaluations assessing their effectiveness. A number of carefully-constructed US studies of mentoring programs have been conducted in recent years (see for example, Evans, 1992; McPartland & Nettles, 1991; and Cave & Quint, 1990). These studies found that young people who participated in strongly implemented mentoring programs were less likely to drop out, had better school attendance records, and better grades. One study found that participants had higher educational aspirations than similar student who had not been mentored, and another followed mentored students into the workplace, and found that they did better in terms of positive employer reports and early promotion than students who had not been mentored.

A follow-up study of 315 students who participated in NSW Plan-it-Youth during 2003 found that 88 percent of them had positive destinations in April 2004. 70 percent were still in school, 7 percent
had gained an apprenticeship, and 11 percent were either in full-time work or TAFE or some combination of TAFE and work. Although this was not a controlled experimental study, these results represent a better set of outcomes than might be expected, given the profiles of the students who enter Plan-it-Youth.

2. Supporting further learning and managing effective transitions

This section explores what is increasingly a blurred boundary between school and work. Some early leavers may have had the good fortune to find a stable job or enter an apprenticeship: they will not be seen again in the school corridors. Others will be gone but will be back again when their hoped-for career ‘goes bung’. To respond to such students, some South Australian schools, mostly around Adelaide, have been converted into re-entry high schools. These invite any student who has been out of school for six months or more to return on a part-time basis. It is expected that most students entering these schools will be working part-time, so the timetables are flexible and there are many night classes. There are no uniforms and the environment is an ‘adult’ one, but at the same time, these schools offer support and guidance and help students deal with welfare problems and income support needs. Across Australia, there are many situations where an approach like this may be desirable, but few high schools have the institutional flexibility to support students who are seeking flexible combinations of education and work.

An important initiative designed to respond to the blurring of the boundaries between school and work was the Full Service Schools Program (FSS). This national program was established by the Commonwealth government in the latter half of the 1990s following the introduction of the Youth Allowance scheme. It funded initiatives in every State and Territory, aiming to encourage young people to remain in school until the end of Year 12, or to return to school if their initial transition to work had not been successful. Unfortunately the Commonwealth discontinued this program, but an evaluation done at the time (DETYA, 2001) found that:

- a whole-school approach was more successful than situations where projects relied on individuals or small groups of teachers or staff;
- successful collaboration with community agencies for delivery of health and other social services depended on well-grounded agreements between all partners; and
- appropriate identification of students at risk of early leaving and their individual needs was fundamental to the targeting of services.

The Commonwealth Government spent over $20 million establishing the FSS program but did not set it up on a permanent basis. Although FSS funding was discontinued, several initiatives emerged soon after. In effect, some of the successful FSS programs survived and were transformed into locally-supported initiatives. While these continue to fulfill critically important functions, helping many young people through risky and complex periods of their lives, their survival depends on continual grant writing in order to achieve the necessary funds. One example of such an initiative is the Macarthur Youth Commitment (MYC), which grew out of the Campbelltown FSS. Initially, MYC was supported by a seed grant from the Dusseldorp Skills Forum,. It is currently funded through a three-year grant from the NSW Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTARs).

**Macarthur Youth Commitment** keeps track of young people who need support. It sustains effective collaborations and partnerships with a network of community agencies, including Centrelink, the Police, employer organizations, and local high schools. It employs transition brokers who work with schools, employers, families and welfare support groups. Through the MYC case-management system, many students who are on the edge of dropping out of school are coaxed into staying, many who leave for TAFE are mentored as they enter this less custodial environment, some return from employment to re-enter high school, while others make an effective transition into work.
One of the core concepts driving programs such as MYC is that the most vulnerable young people in our society need continued mentoring and support as they negotiate the blurred boundary between school and work. Their transitions need to be ‘managed’ and this is best done by coordinating the efforts of several community agencies. It cannot be done by schools alone.

In the ACT, the case management system known as STAIRS provides in-school support and links to outside agencies for approximately 200 at-risk youth. In certain targeted high schools in NSW, the Department of Education and Training provides case management for students through the Gateways program. In South Australia, school-based mentors and Department of Human Services staff work together to provide case management services for at-risk students. Queensland has adopted an all-of-Government approach which means that 100 Youth Support Coordinators, employed by the Department of Families, are being located in high schools to carry out case management and transition broker functions. In this context, high schools serving disadvantaged communities tend to function as community hubs (Spierings, 2001).

In Victoria, transition planning systems are known as Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs). In theory, MIPs is implemented in every public secondary school in Victoria, but it is implemented more intensively in communities where needs are high. Another Victorian initiative is the development of local area partnerships that aim to increase the level of coordination across different government agencies. These are known as Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) and they operate at a local or regional level, as bodies answerable to the Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission. Through the LLENs, local high schools, TAFEs, Adult Education Centres, as well as local branches of both State and Commonwealth agencies work together to help young people. The LLENs may also elicit participation from local employers in providing training and job opportunities for youth (Curtain, 2002).

**Case management, career education, and transition support**

Evidence regarding the effectiveness of case management transition support programs is mounting, yet it is also clear that they can be costly. Policy makers therefore need define as clearly as possible who should carry out these programs, how their roles should be defined, and which groups of students should be targeted to receive them.

Since the success of these programs derives from the provision of comprehensive and personalised services to small groups or classes of students, it is a challenge to provide such interventions on a system-wide basis. Continuity is essential to program success, so it preferable that intensive systems of case management be focused on that small set of schools with the highest concentrations of difficult cases.

The MCEETYA inquiry into early leaving (Lamb et al, 2004) found some variation in the relationships between case managers and transition brokers across Australia. In South Australia, for example, case managers seem to form the core of the system. School-based case managers aim to make sure that the services a student needs are accessible, coordinated and monitored. Case managers may refer a student to resources and staff within the high school, or to welfare or medical resources outside of the school, as needed. The fact that in SA, schools are embedded in the Department of Education and Children’s Services may mean that cross-agency links are easier to achieve in this context. In other states, the case manager and transition broker roles are distinct, so that transition brokers work outside of schools to support early leavers who are trying to find a start in the workplace, or to help them re-enter the education and training system. At the same time, these transition brokers must work in close liaison with in-school case managers or student mentors. In cities as large and complex as Sydney where liaison between government and community
agencies is not always strong, the combination of and in-school mentor and an out-of-school transition broker would seem appropriate (see Boxes, MYC and Plan it Youth).

It is not clear how supportive career educators are in relation to young people who disengage from school at an early age. Findings from the classic study by Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963) have been supported by subsequent research (eg, Audas and Willms, 2001). This line of research suggests that, in general, students who are low achievers feel less satisfied with the career education system than high achievers. It is not clear that these findings apply in the Australian setting, but it is important to ascertain to what extent career educators focus on advising high-flyers on their University options, and to what extent they provide effective guidance for those who are more vulnerable to early leaving and unsatisfactory transitions.

Conclusions

Three imperatives emerge from the literature and case studies reviewed in this paper. First, it is important that transition workers, teachers, and parents do all they can to reduce student disengagement, but this work needs to begin no later than the junior secondary years. If the problem in not addressed until year 10 or 11, many students will either have left already or be so disengaged that it will be too late to turn them around. Second, the most vulnerable young people in our society need continued support as they negotiate the blurred boundary between school and work. Their transitions need to be ‘managed’ and this is best done by coordinating the efforts of several community agencies. It cannot be done by schools alone. And third, youth mentoring programs appear to have powerful positive effects on students who are at risk of early leaving. It seems that mentoring can often re-engage young people with school or orient them towards productive combinations of work and further education.

References


Marks, G. & N. Fleming (1999), Early School Leaving in Australia, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne


Chapter 3

Leadership Makes a Difference
CHAPTER 3
LEADERSHIP MAKES A DIFFERENCE

I’ve seen a bad principal destroy a good school in less than a year. I’ve seen a great principal turn a bad school around in a couple of weeks. It’s frightening that so much can depend on one individual, but it needn’t be that way.

(John Marsden: A matter of principal Sydney Morning Herald 05/03/2005)

While there may be no single factor that makes a ‘good school’, most people would agree that the one that appears to make the most difference is leadership.

Principals play a vital role in schools and hence their leadership and management of the school is a key to the student and school outcomes. (Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW)

Principals of public schools across the state of NSW are passionate about and loyal to public education. A high level of commitment and pride was evidenced in many written responses and at meetings held across NSW:

For many of the students I have taught, public education remains the key to their pathway to life and work. The opportunity provided by their public school was significant in creating the belief that they could achieve in modern Australia. They recognise that the school did more than prepare them academically, it gave them citizenship and social skills. (School principal)

The major issues about leadership to emerge from the consultation were:

• the strong desire of principals to provide expert educational leadership in schools and the factors which they and others perceived to assist or impede them in doing this
• the current lack of alignment between the principal’s level of authority and level of accountability and the pressing need to address this for public education to maintain the confidence of the community
• the need to recognise and develop leadership capability at all levels in schools and throughout the Department of Education and Training in order to support quality teaching and learning and meet future needs.
THE PRINCIPAL AS EXPERT EDUCATIONAL LEADER

INTRODUCTION

The Department’s expectation of school leadership is spelt out in the policy document *Leading and Managing the School*. Clearly, responsibility for the delivery of quality education day in, day out, whatever the context of the school and the level of available staff and other resources requires highly capable leadership.

Many submissions emphasised the critical role of the principal in leading and managing change for continuous improvement.

> At a school level it is the principal who determines the effectiveness of any change. They determine the allocation of resources (human or material), the morale of the staff and shape the culture of the school. They determine the climate for interactions between and amongst students, staff and parents and they may actively encourage or passively resist any initiative as they choose. (Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW)

Considerable research, including the recent Australian studies reported by Bhindi and Dinham and Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis in their papers included with this report, identifies the capabilities demonstrated by excellent leaders and the important role they play in establishing the conditions and maintaining the climate in which teachers and students can soar. Dinham and Bhindi (2005) wrote that:

> Principals in schools where ‘outstanding’ outcomes were being achieved were relentless in their quest for enhanced student achievement. They do not become distracted and ‘bogged down’ by the administrative/managerial demands of the Principalship, finding ways to concentrate their energies on educational leadership. They constantly remind students, staff and the community that the core purpose of the school is teaching and learning. (Dinham and Bhindi, 2005: 171)

LEADERSHIP

The Scope of Leadership

The scope of leadership was recognised in many submissions.

> Principals occupy a unique place in the education system. They link the broader system and society with the effective ongoing delivery of quality learning for students. It is they who, more than any others, mediate between any call for change and what actually happens in response to that call in the classroom. It is principals who must lead the processes of improvement and innovation and who are primarily accountable for the outcomes of these processes. (Secondary Principals’ Council)

Future and current school leaders need to be able to manage change, have knowledge of curriculum and outcomes-based education and know what is best for their school. Leaders need to have effective interpersonal skills to deal with students, teachers and parents and the community. They need to know how to manage a school site. They need to know how to access the information they need and be willing to ask for assistance when needed. (Regional staff member)
At numerous school and community consultation meetings, parents stated that principals had a powerful influence on the degree of their confidence and trust in their schools as well as the quality of school/community relationships.

Parents also perceived the principal as the most important influence in establishing an inclusive culture and a welcoming environment. In multicultural communities, the principal’s role in liaising with parents and the community was seen as very significant. In many cases, it was complemented by specialists such as community liaison officers and representatives of particular language and ethnic groups.

Why Be a Principal?

Many submissions recognised the increasing complexity of the principal’s role, with more accountability and interference and less control and support and provided examples to support their perceptions. Examples included the administration associated with Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) issues, school finances, complex personnel and community issues, dealing with communications, bureaucratic red tape, drawn-out processes for dealing with inefficient teachers, dealing with individual and community welfare issues, changes in curriculum, assessment and reporting requirements and bureaucratic and political intervention.

Some respondents felt that the cumulative impact of these issues had escalated to such a degree that the positions of principal and other executive were no longer perceived as attractive career options.

Many responses proposed the establishment of a bursar or similar high level administrative position as the solution to support the principal in managing many of these issues. This proposal is not new and has been advocated by principals’ groups for some time. Under the present staffing formula arrangements, principals have little flexibility to create such positions.

A number of respondents perceived that principals in non-government schools had higher levels of administrative support than those in government schools and that this could result in a loss of good school leaders from the government system. The small differential in pay between a teacher on the top of the scale and an executive was seen by many to be insufficient incentive to take on the additional tasks and responsibilities of a promotions position.

To make the job more attractive, a significant number of submissions simply called for increases in pay for school executives. Some argued that principals’ salaries needed to be comparable with salaries of leaders in the corporate sector with:

... remuneration packages similar to private enterprise or equivalent trade-offs such as car, laptops etc. Streamline the job so the principal is not torn between student/staff/education and administration. (School staff meeting)

Pay alone was not the only message. Adequate support, leadership training, trust and recognition from senior Departmental officers, the community and media were seen to be very important and needing to be addressed.
Invest time and money in leaders. Encourage people to move through the executive ladder, learning skills and gaining experience at each level … (School community meeting)

If educational leaders are to respond to the challenges and opportunities open to them, the 'system' needs to offer support, encouragement, constructive and timely feedback and trust. (Dinham and Bhindi, 2005: 172)

There were many submissions which promoted the value of professional learning opportunities such as sabbaticals, study visits, scholarships and support for higher degree studies not only for their intrinsic value but also as incentives for difficult-to-staff areas and as rewards for high performance and ways of attracting aspiring executives.

**Strengthening Educational Leadership**

Principals desired to be educational leaders, first and foremost. Many submissions referred to the primacy of the educational leadership role and the core business of teaching and learning. They perceived a high level of educational expertise to be essential for an effective principal. Many of the submissions about recruitment and selection of school leaders emphasised the need for credibility, experience and higher degree qualifications in educational leadership.

Permeating many consultation responses was the distinction between educational leadership and the overall management of the school. The tone of responses was that principals wanted very much to be seen as the educational leaders of their schools but were obstructed by the mass of administrative tasks.

Understand that properties and financial management deter leaders from applying for principals’ positions. It is not that they lack training in these areas. They are deterred by the fact that they will not have educational leadership as their sole focus. (SEA staff meeting)

Principals and executives stated that a lack of high level clerical and administration support was the major obstacle standing between them and the full expression of their educational leadership. Apart from the creation of a bursar-type position, other solutions proposed included creation of an administrative manager position at principal or executive level and employment of non-teacher professionals, though not all agreed.

In the main, these suggested roles were to support the principal with administration, not to take over the entire responsibility. There was a very strong view that whatever solutions were to be found, the top leadership position in a school should always be filled by a teacher.

There were many suggestions for strengthening principals’ educational leadership capability other than the establishment of administrative support positions.

Respondents advocated the need for a comprehensive and strategic leadership strategy with many components, implemented at all levels – school, School Education Area (SEA), region and state. It was noted that many of the suggested strategies were already being implemented to some degree by the Department.
Suggested strategies included improved selection processes, mandatory higher degree qualifications for principals, incentives for teachers to undertake further study, provision of coaching and mentoring opportunities, increased professional development opportunities, establishment of a Leadership Centre to promote research and best practice, induction programs at the right time, setting clear performance standards, linking accountability to standards and regular performance monitoring.

CHOOSING LEADERS

Selection of School Leaders

A very strong theme was the need for a major overhaul of the current merit selection process. The criticisms levelled against it came from both staff and community members and related mainly to the inadequacies of an interview process to gauge performance.

Many submissions called for some form of on-the-job observation or assessment as a more authentic way of assessing suitability and competence. There was a fairly widespread belief that under the current arrangements persons with skilled interview techniques and a good CV could be, and were being, selected for promotions positions without the skills or knowledge required to perform the role effectively.

The current promotion process involving CV’s and interviews advantages personnel who have outstanding written and oral abilities but may, in fact, not be either experienced or exemplary practitioners. (School staff meeting)

Some submissions called for a return to the former inspection process. A few submissions also called for a return to the List system which was essentially a seniority system or wait-order list of applicants determined as being eligible for promotion through the inspection process.

It was not always clear in submissions whether it was the LList (seniority) system or the inspection process, or both, that were regarded favourably. Taking into account the context of comments, the main message seemed to be that on-the-job assessment was the element that was favoured.

A small number of submissions suggested some form of peer assessment be incorporated in the selection process.

Other criticisms of merit selection related to inconsistencies in the application of the process itself including obtaining information from referees, the low level of training or interviewing skills of some panel members and the potential for panels to be ‘stacked’ with compliant panel members.

Many submissions recognised the important influence of leadership on school culture and school/community relations and criticised the current practice of filling large numbers of leadership positions by transfer on the grounds that it did not meet the needs of particular schools and communities.

All promotions positions should be by merit. Seniority gets in the way of excellence. Transfer system gets in the way of...
Many respondents raised the need to consider more significant incentives for attracting principals to hard-to-staff schools. These included increasing the quantum of existing incentives such as allowances, housing and motor vehicles, and adding some new ones such as sabbaticals, study opportunities, status and recognition, childcare subsidies and changes in superannuation arrangements.

**Personal Attributes of Leaders**

Many respondents also raised the issue of personal attributes desired of leaders and the extent to which these could be recognised and incorporated into the selection process or in development programs for principals and executive.

The desirable attributes included values, ways of thinking, and a broad experience of life. Specific characteristics mentioned included strong commitment to public education, independence, resilience, moral and emotional intelligence, lateral thinking, ethics, enthusiasm and ability to lead change.

_Different leaders have different strengths. We should not produce a series of robot principals doing the same things the same way. One of the strengths of our system is the diversity in leaders. This produces innovative ideas and ways to approach education._ (School staff meeting)

Risk-taking was identified as a valuable characteristic.

_Innovative schools and communities require the space and trust to take calculated risks and to experiment with new approaches and systems._ (Vocational Education in Schools Directorate)

_Dinham and Bhindi refer to this as “informed risk-taking”._

_Even when things are going well, they are prepared to experiment and to support those proposing taking initiatives. They risk time, money and failure, and empower others to do the same. They don’t say “yes” to every request but do use “yes” to empower and recognise others._ (Dinham and Bhindi, 2005: 169)

School staff and parent groups emphasised the need for principals to have high level interpersonal and communication skills – “people-skills” - the ability to get the best out of staff and students. In recognition of the importance of these skills, many submissions called for principals to have formal training:

_Managers and leaders should complete a program where they are taught communication skills … and should be involved in working with teachers and students in their classrooms._ (School staff meeting)

_The great majority of respondents endorsed the necessity for leaders to hold teaching qualifications and experience. Some stated that this should be gained from within the state system, others saw benefit in_
widening the eligibility criteria so as to have a larger pool from which to recruit.

Opening up the process to those outside the system, particularly with attractive salaries, should attract the best people. (Secondary principals’ meeting)

Qualifications for Leaders
Submissions suggested a strategy for raising the level of skills, knowledge and professionalism of leaders would be to mandate a postgraduate qualification in education as a criterion for promotion. It was recognised that this would need to be phased in over time and provision of support to undertake further postgraduate study would act as an incentive for leadership positions.

A number of respondents referred to the potential for leaders to be accredited at the Professional Leadership level within the Institute of Teachers.

While respondents suggested increased educational qualifications would enhance leadership, they commented that presently there was little support for or recognition of leaders and aspiring leaders undertaking postgraduate study. Some respondents compared this situation to other professions where postgraduate study was seen to be encouraged and rewarded.

Standards and Accreditation
Throughout submissions and consultations principals, executive and others expressed a keen desire to have a clearly articulated set of standards for leadership against which performance could be measured and which would also underpin development programs.

This was regarded as an important element in strengthening principals’ educational leadership and professional status. Some respondents referred to the possibility of building on the level of professional leadership in the standards developed by the Institute of Teachers and requiring principals and aspiring principals to become accredited at that higher level.

Many other submissions, including those from the representative principals’ organisations, referred to the Leadership Capability Framework as a preferred source of standards to underpin both leadership development programs and accreditation processes. The Framework describes domains of leadership and is currently used in Departmental development programs for principals.

PROVISION OF QUALITY EDUCATION
Many respondents to the consultation process perceived the provision of quality education to be a shared responsibility between individual schools, the community, the Department and Government. The role of the Department was seen to be that of providing support and the Government’s role to be the provision of funds.

The issue of funding for public education was raised frequently in individual submissions and meetings. Comparisons of funding levels were drawn between NSW government and non-government schools.

…. recent changes which allow recruitment from outside the DET including interstate have been an outstanding move forward … on this issue and need to be applauded. (DET staff member)

Agree with the idea of completing a recognised qualification before being appointed. (School principals’ meeting)

Greater emphasis and recognition of formal academic training. (Regional principals’ meeting)

The Department needs to establish a financial incentive program to attract the best leaders and to encourage further tertiary education. Higher qualifications to be acknowledged through salary package. (School staff meeting)

The future status and quality of the profession is dependent upon clearly articulated standards of leadership and a code of ethics. (Primary Principals’ Association)

The DET at all levels needs a framework of qualities and capabilities required of effective leaders. (Secondary Principals’ Council)

The use of the Leadership Capability Framework as a basis for guiding continued professional development of aspiring leaders should be encouraged. (DET staff member)

We should think not of a three way partnership, involving students, teachers and parents, but rather a four way partnership with the government a vital and committed participant in the education process. (School staff meeting)
and between Australia and other OECD countries. There was a strong perception from many respondents that public schools in NSW were under-funded.

Many respondents also linked level of funding to the declining market share of public schools. It was felt that some of the reasons for parents leaving or not choosing public education included perceptions of schools being run-down, not having adequate facilities, not having enough resources and generally not being able to meet the high expectations of ‘aspirational’ parents.

For some respondents the issues of funding and flexibility were juxtaposed:

… to ensure all schools are quality schools we must very clearly reject the agenda of devolution of responsibility – only government-funded intervention and resource distribution can break the cycles of poverty and educational disadvantage. No devolution! (Personal submission)

While many respondents stated that public education required better funding, most also felt that there were other important factors that contributed to quality education. The many factors that were seen to contribute to quality teaching and learning education are explored in other chapters of this report. Of these factors, the leadership of principals and others is regarded by many to be critical.

IN SUMMARY

Respondents recognised the key role played by highly capable leaders in establishing and leading a learning culture in their schools. This concept has been described in the papers by Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis as “learning-centred leadership” and by Fullan as leaders working “to improve the bottom line of student learning”:

Two things stand out in our work. One is that we need to re-define quality leaders as those who work to improve the bottom line of student learning, while at the same time develop leadership of those around them. The other key finding is that leadership is best learned “in context”. Put another way, changing the culture of the system and learning as you go must be built into the day-to-day learning of leaders. Qualifications frameworks are valuable, but they represent only about 30% of the solution. The remainder of the solution must be built into the culture of the school and district. (Fullan, 2005: 233)

The development of school leadership and the recruitment of future leaders were identifiable challenges to be met in order to strengthen the foundations for the future of public education in NSW. The development of a leadership strategy will be central to delivering leadership of the highest standards across the Department and in lifting the performance and professional status of principals in schools. This will need to encompass a framework based on clearly articulated standards for leadership with an associated accreditation component; the provision of mechanisms to acknowledge, support and develop leaders; a review of the qualifications required for leadership; and an improved process for the selection of school leaders.

The determination of agreed leadership performance standards is fundamental to ensuring school leaders have a clear framework against which their performance is measured. The Leadership Capability Framework developed by the Department in collaboration with Secondary Principals Council and the Primary Principals Association provides a basis for developing such standards. Expert practitioners need to be identified using the leadership performance standards and acknowledged through a range of mechanisms designed to provide greater autonomy and to ensure their expertise is shared more broadly across the system. Principals requiring support may also be identified against the standards and programs put in place to ensure development and improved performance.
The increasing complexity of the principal’s role and identified issues impacting on the principal’s capacity to deliver quality education also need to be carefully considered in designing school leadership provision for the future. Support in meeting management responsibilities is essential to ensure principals are able to devote themselves more fully to educational leadership while providing high order school management.

The importance of leadership in shaping school performance was recognised in relation to the appointment of principals. The requirement for higher degrees and accreditation should be considered as a means to raise the level of skills, knowledge and professionalism of school leaders. Along a similar line, respondents identified the process for the selection of school leaders as being inadequate and requiring a workplace component in order to achieve a more authentic way of assessing suitability and competence.
WHAT SHOULD BE THE LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY OF PRINCIPALS?

INTRODUCTION

The major issue to emerge in the responses on school leadership was the mismatch between level of authority and degree of accountability. In the words of principals and others:

One of the most frustrating issues for principals is to be on the one hand totally accountable for everything related to his or her school while on the other hand not being given the responsibility or control over what is the most vital element – staffing. (School staff member)

... feeling that as principal I am held accountable for the actions of others while having less autonomy to use the tools of the trade more flexibly. (Personal submission)

A leader with no authority is merely a puppet and will never be able to perform or achieve the best outcomes that are achievable. (School P&C meeting)

I he need for a greater degree of local decision-making permeated responses to many of the consultation papers and is taken up in other places in this report. It is a seminal issue for the future of public education and training and clearly an issue on which the NSW Teachers Federation position indicates little room for change:

The statewide staffing system and its centerpiece, a system of transfers, is the essential element in ensuring the appointment of teachers in every school across the state and therefore a curriculum guarantee for all students. (NSW Teachers Federation)

The contrasting view:

Leaders need flexibility to meet the needs of their local school communities and should have greater responsibility for making decisions about staffing needs, hiring staff and determining how resources are allocated to programs within the school. (School staff member)

LOCAL DECISION-MAKING

Increased Flexibility and Autonomy

Parents, teachers and principals, whilst representing a continuum of views, clearly indicated a desire for more flexibility and autonomy within an overall statewide accountability framework. Many people in schools and their communities believed that there could be significant devolution of decision-making to principals. The NSW Teachers Federation, however, strongly opposed this view.

In respect of leadership in particular, this issue was outlined by the Secondary Principals Council and echoed by many principals’ groups and individuals:

... we need leaders who, whilst operating in a system framework have the freedom and support to engage their school community in local initiatives responsive to local needs ... we need leaders at all levels who can promote a thriving and dynamic school that is highly regarded by the local community. We can not accept the philosophy that public education means one size fits all. We need leaders who can inspire creative solutions to address inequality of outcomes, increase...
engagement of disaffected youth and the acceptance of inclusive practices in schooling. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

Parents and community members frequently expressed surprise that principals had so little control over their resources:

In a business you would not expect a manager to have all the responsibility for his staff outputs and achievements yet not allow them a say in who the staff should be. (Parent)

Local Decision-Making for Staffing

Permeating the responses about leadership was the issue of increasing local decision-making for staffing. Respondents called on the Department to give principals more flexibility and discretion over staffing.

Principals and parents supported increased flexibility and local decision-making within statewide frameworks and with safeguards for hard-to-staff schools.

While a degree of flexibility within specified guidelines is welcomed, it should be noted that where excessive flexibility is provided in the use of staffing allocation or other school resources invariably there are sectors in the overall management or provision that become neglected. (Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW)

The PPA has a draft position ... a preference for some level of ability for principals to select a percentage of their own staff. (Primary Principals’ Association)

The opposite, however, was argued by the NSW Teachers Federation submission which claimed, in respect of the whole teaching service, that:

… the transfer system has the capacity to meet genuine school needs by closely matching the qualifications, skills and expertise of teachers with the vacant position. (NSW Teachers Federation)

The NSW Teachers Federation maintained that a statewide staffing system, with a transfer system as its centrepiece, was essential to provide a “curriculum guarantee” for all students. A “curriculum guarantee” was described as “the right of every student to be taught by a qualified teacher”. It was not made clear how increased flexibility would compromise the guarantee.

In other submissions, additional reasons given to maintain the centralised staffing system were that:

- there was the potential for principals to abuse their autonomy (eg by showing favouritism or by hiring the cheapest staff, not quality staff)
- that principals already had enough flexibility
- that principals lacked the time or skills to manage this function
- the transfer rights of teachers should be preserved.

Responses relating to flexibility and local decision-making for staffing extended to the removal of inefficient teachers. While respondents
emphasised fairness and due process, there was a widespread view that the existing procedures for dealing with inefficient staff were too time-consuming, drawn out and impacted negatively on morale:

There are two separate issues here. Principals have indicated they want the right to determine the mix of staff but they do not wish to hire staff locally. In determining the mix, principals want to respond to the curriculum, welfare and administrative needs of particular school contexts. (School principal)

In relation to hard-to-staff schools, respondents emphasised that such schools have very particular needs, often requiring teachers with special attributes and they are not all the same.

This point was made strongly by respondents and also by Letts et al in their Companion Paper attached to this report:

The diversity of rural and remote settings makes it necessary to examine leadership in a variety of ways. For the rural/remote school, leadership issues are site specific and are related significantly to factors of distance, location, space and place – overlayed by local community issues. Leadership in this setting is broadly conceived – the appointed positions of Principal and school executive, but also including teachers as leaders. (Letts et al, 2005: 237-238)

Several submissions also described the negative impacts of the transfer system on education in the areas in which transferees have become concentrated over time. Added to the frustration of having limited opportunity for merit selection, the lack of mobility and turnover is perceived to have negative impacts in some schools.

**Revitalising Public Education**

Many principals see their lack of flexibility and decision-making authority as a major contributing factor to loss of market share. This view was strongly put by many respondents.

If we are to succeed in revitalising public education in NSW we will only succeed if we have greater capacity to manage staffing processes at the school and regional level. The current system is rigid, outdated and crushes innovation and creativity. Schools and regions must have greater capacity to identify their staffing needs, identify specific criteria for a percentage of positions and select the most appropriate person based on merit. (DET staff member)

The greatest impediment to change and getting onto the front foot in drawing students back to public education, is our antiquated, regressive adherence to employment and work practices which adhere to the principle of 'one size fits all'. A vigorous school must have the capacity to select and 'unselect' staff to best meet the needs of its students; an education system which champions self direction in a world of change must show it has the confidence in its leaders to be real leaders, with a degree of autonomy to make local, community-driven decisions on behalf of their particular community's children. (Regional staff meeting)
ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability of Leaders for Quality Education

In discussing the accountability of principals, responses covered two separate but related domains:

- the personal performance domain which is essentially a private matter between the principal and the school education director
- the school performance domain (school accountability) which is a matter of public interest and draws on the collective performance of staff and students.

The two domains are intertwined in complex ways – personal appraisal of principals by their supervisors takes account of achievements of the whole school and the degree to which the principal has been able to influence the many factors that impact on student learning and achievement.

For all schools to become quality schools, every school principal must be willing to change the school culture if necessary. There must be a regular review of school targets, and principals and school leaders must be held accountable for meeting these targets. (Parent)

Both aspects of accountability were addressed in the responses to the consultation process.

Personal Accountability of Leaders

Many respondents supported the value of using an agreed set of standards for accountability purposes and provided suggestions as to how performance could be monitored, and how often this should occur.

Put in place an appropriate 360 degree appraisal system to find good leaders and the low achievers. (TAFE staff member)

Many respondents also suggested that the Capability Framework provided an excellent basis for discussions between directors and principals and could be incorporated in the existing Teacher Assessment and Review Schedule (TARS) and Principals’ Assessment and Review Schedule (PARS).

Regular (annual) monitoring and fixed term renewable contracts of 3, 5 and 10 years were suggested as ways of ensuring rigorous accountability and keeping the quality of educational leadership at the highest level.

The issue of principals’ accountability was frequently linked to the issue of principals’ authority and degree of control over resources. Many individual respondents and meetings were highly critical that the broad sphere of principals’ accountability was not being matched by the limited span of authority in decision-making about school staffing.

This raises the issue of the alignment of accountability and authority.
Aligning Accountability and Local Decision-Making

Principals advocated the alignment of accountability with local decision-making to ensure openness and transparency and address probity issues. Many respondents made reference to the current accountability requirements being supplemented by additional types of audit and monitoring by supervisors, though some felt the current requirements were adequate.

Respondents also drew attention to the fact that principals in some schools have already participated in successful trials and programs which provided them with the opportunity to make decisions locally about the best mix and selection of staff for their schools.

Frequent reference was made to the Priority Action Schools Program (PASP), in which school communities determined the best use of the resources they were allocated while meeting system accountability requirements. The evaluation of this program was very positive.

Accountability for Provision of Quality Education

Many respondents affirmed the view that public schools are providing quality education and that a poor public image was the problem, not the actual quality of education. Nonetheless, many still believed that rigorous accountability systems needed to be in place to assure parents and the community of the quality of their schools.

Many mechanisms were suggested for school accountability including more rigorous monitoring of student performance on tests, appraisal of teachers and principals, a return to inspections, target setting, formal reviews of progress and many of the elements already included in the current school accountability framework:

- Self reflection and evaluation of practices within the school; seeking feedback from staff, students and community on aspects of school performance. (School staff meeting)
- Limited, significant achievable targets linked to specific whole school/stage project focused on improvement in classroom practice and student outcomes. (Regional principals’ meeting)
- Reviews of performance and setting of targets; whole school systems of positive reinforcement of quality practice; involving students in reviews of quality; ongoing evaluations; monitor and assess. (School staff meeting)
- Each school develops a set of criteria/expectations for their school in consultation with the school community. (Joint school/community meeting)
- Systemic consistency and commitment to implementing quality schools concept for at least 3 years. (Regional staff meeting)
- All members of the school community should have a deep knowledge of what constitutes a quality school. (Regional staff meeting)

The recently introduced accountability arrangements for principals provide a platform from which the system can build. (School staff member)

The Priority Action Schools Program is testament to schools utilising resources to better meet needs of the school and the community while also meeting accountability requirements. (SEA principals’ meeting)

Local solutions for local problems. PAS has proven it works. (Regional principals’ conference)

All schools are quality schools – need a PR campaign, respect from community … (Joint school and community meeting)

Put in place strong accountability mechanisms and provide appropriate support. (Regional staff meeting)

Bring back Inspections. (Parent)

… principals should be on contract. (Personal submission)

… regular testing of students and teachers to prove they are meeting requirements. (Personal submission)

Provide guidelines for quality schools. (Regional staff meeting)

Performance criteria with consequences, not moving a problem; bringing in new blood, closer supervision and improvement programs; basic skills testing in all years to track progress and allocate resources to areas of need. (Regional staff meeting)

Data driven and focused on outcomes … Annual report and finance report. (Regional principals’ meeting)
IN SUMMARY

The prevailing view amongst respondents was the need for more flexibility and autonomy within an overall statewide accountability framework.

... we need leaders who, whilst operating in a system framework have the freedom and support to engage their school community in local initiatives responsive to local needs ... (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

Indeed, a shift to greater local authority was seen as the key to a revitalisation of public education in NSW.

In relation to the contentious area of staffing, the development of a system that affords schools a range of options from the local selection of staff through to an appointment via a central staffing operation which maintains responsibility for recruitment, staff transfers and other appointments, would better meet the full range of needs.

Respondents made it clear that increased flexibility and autonomy for schools must be accompanied by increased accountability. This should include the domains of principal performance and school performance, the two being inextricably linked. Principal respondents indicated a readiness to embrace a more rigorous accountability process, provided they had greater autonomy in the design of the education provision and use of resources at the local level. Determining the most effective use of the school’s inputs in order to achieve quality outcomes is essential. In addition to providing greater autonomy at the local level, a range of proposals should be considered to ensure more rigorous accountability for principals, including regular monitoring, performance appraisal and fixed term renewable contracts.

A better level of information about the school’s operations and performance needs to be available to ensure schools adequately account to their communities. Further, accountability processes for schools should incorporate an assessment based on the meeting of performance-based targets, and include an enhanced process for appraisal of teachers and principals, a system of cyclical reviews, and the opportunity for school accreditation.

The result will be a closer alignment of local decision-making and accountability that will encourage an open and transparent education provision designed to meet local needs, operating within a state framework with clear guidelines and expectations.
DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP CAPABILITY AT ALL LEVELS

INTRODUCTION

In addressing the issues of leadership many respondents drew attention to the role of the leadership team including executive staff, school administrative and support staff (SASS) and other non-executive staff undertaking leadership functions in the school. This is a concept well developed in the literature on leadership and is referred to in the Companion Paper by Dinham and Bhindi (2005) attached to this report.

It’s not about a leader, it’s about a leadership team. (Personal submission)

(There) needs to be recognition from the Department that “leaders” are at all levels of the organisation and emphasis should be placed on supporting current leaders as well as those aspiring to become leaders. (DET Young Professionals Network Group)

Many submissions recognised the important and satisfying role of principals in developing and supporting executive and aspiring leaders in their schools.

Leadership is sitting within the walls of schools. My current school has many! The fun for me is opening the door for them and letting in a little light. We cannot assume that only a few will aspire. (School principal)

Submissions also recognised the important contribution of non-teachers to school leadership, that of administrative and support staff, parents, community members and students.

It should be recognised that school leaders are not restricted to persons employed by the Department of Education and Training. (Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW)

DEVELOPING LEADERS

Developing a Leadership Team

One of the core functions of leadership is that of providing opportunities for staff to ‘practise leadership’ prior to applying for and gaining promotions positions.

Recruitment of leaders needs to be undertaken over a period of time. Aspiring leaders need to be able to undertake sequenced in-service courses and workshops, with between meeting activities to be undertaken at their school … Capacity building needs to be undertaken – many people are unsure of their skills, under-estimate their potential. (Regional staff member)

Move away from the concept of “leaders”. Instead, ask what should be the leadership and management roles, contributions and capabilities of people at different levels … This implies a greater emphasis on collective as well as individual approaches to leadership development. (Personal submission)

Principals foster the leadership of others. They identify talent and coach and support these people, sometimes at the risk of being accused of favouritism. They realise that if change and improvement are to take root in the school culture, they need to build and distribute leadership capacity throughout the school
and to trust people. Sharing of responsibility also assists in leadership succession. (Dinham and Bhindi, 2005: 171)

The Significant Role of School Administrative and Support staff

Throughout the responses to the leadership paper there was a significant emphasis on the role of SASS in supporting leadership and allowing leaders to focus on teaching and learning. The role of SASS in directly supporting quality education was strongly endorsed.

The contribution of the school’s ancillary staff to the successful operation of our school is enormous … and with the principal form the “engine room” of our organisation. (School staff meeting)

Despite this, there were also many comments that SASS were poorly recognised, undervalued, lacked adequate training and facilities and were often excluded from decisions that impacted on their work.

Let them know they are valued and integral members of the school; acknowledge the range of their workload and particular skills. Include them in relevant in-services. Let them share their expertise and knowledge in in-service and committee situations. Utilise their knowledge of family situations to help teachers deal with students and relevant issues. (School staff meeting)

Respondents frequently drew attention to the evolving nature of the SASS role and the impacts of educational program changes on workload and skills required:

The current structure and allocation of administrative and support staff does not meet the present and future needs of schools and the changing nature of work. In particular, the status, role, skills and salary of the most senior officer need to be reviewed to provide the required level of support for principals and schools. (Secondary Principals’ Council)

The allocation of SASS, the selection criteria for appointments, remuneration and career paths were all seen to be out of step with what schools needed. Building an effective leadership team was seen to require more flexibility in the nature and level of SASS. A solution proposed by the Secondary Principals’ Council was to have:

… a model of employment and advancement complemented by the flexibility to determine at school level, the mix of staff required to reflect existing and future school needs. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

Leadership from Non-School-Based Positions

Understandably, the school as an entity was the focus of most responses about leadership. The model presented by Fullan, 2005 for creating an effective school recognises the need for collaborative effort between schools, regions and state office. Such collaboration was seen by respondents to the consultation to require shared vision, trust and respect.

The community will be confident (in public schools) if the system’s leaders can and do speak confidently about the excellent work done in public schools. (School principal)
Submissions from school staff emphasised the need for staff in regional and state offices who undertook direct support or supervisory roles with schools to be qualified and experienced educators. A number of respondents suggested that short-term secondments and opportunities to move in and out of non-school-based positions without penalty would enhance the relationships between schools and regional/state offices.

This need for regional and state office leaders to be closely connected to schools was also supported by submissions from people in state and regional offices.

**Time for Leading**

Submissions from both primary and secondary groups identified the need for more executive release time for members of the leadership team, particularly assistant principals in primary schools who have no allocated executive release.

Greater flexibility in the utilisation of staffing resources within a school could allow principals to allocate more time for specific tasks and roles.

> Encourage leadership density in schools by providing more staffing flexibility in schools for principals to provide release to those teachers undertaking leadership roles. (DET staff member)

Primary principals’ groups and a number of school and individual submissions advocated for parity between executive positions in primary schools with executive positions in secondary schools. This is not a new issue and has become a national campaign of primary principals’ associations. The degree of emotion expressed by some respondents in the consultation indicates this is a highly sensitive issue for primary executive in NSW.

> Give APs in primary parity with secondary head teachers. Give us time off our classes. I work 50-60 hours a week, every week and I have one extra hour off class to do the mountain of administration, professional development preparation, etc that is part of my AP role … What a joke. (School staff member)

Some submissions, including that from the Primary Principals’ Association, stated that all positions of principal should be full-time release. The problem was clearly stated by many:

> It is very difficult for a teaching principal to perform both jobs to the best of their ability if they are full time classroom teachers as well as full time office managers. They need to be either one or the other. (School staff member)

This issue refers specifically to principals’ positions in small schools classified as P5 and P6 which have enrolments less than 160 students. While one implication of the abolition of such positions could be the creation of a new group of non-teaching positions for such schools, a number of submissions from both metropolitan and country areas suggested alternatively that small schools should be amalgamated with larger schools to provide better administrative and curriculum support.
Professional Learning Linked to a Capability Framework

Both the secondary and primary principals groups addressed this issue in detail, urging for higher levels of funding for professional development and a more integrated approach to development and accountability.

There were many suggestions for enhancing principals’ professional development. Many of the specific strategies mentioned were to expand programs already being run by the Department for leaders and aspiring leaders such as Induction Programs (run at the right time), the Targeted Principals’ Preparation Program (TPPP) and the support provided for principals by Principal Support Officers (PSOs). Each of these programs was highly regarded. The range of strategies suggested are evidenced in the following submission:

- Online competency modules, with local coaches and some blended learning, to support development of management skills e.g. financial management, OH&S, child protection, critical incident management etc;
- Action learning groups, incorporating deep questioning and reflection processes;
- Online reference library of articles, audio and video tapes;
- Online sessions with international expert educators;
- Train all principals to develop executive as professional learning teams;
- Train all executive to develop faculties/stage groups as professional learning teams;
- Conduct holiday courses and pay teachers who meet attainment requirements. (Personal submission)

A number of respondents, particularly the Secondary Principals’ Council, endorsed the School Leadership Capability Framework, as a good basis for coordinating development opportunities and for providing a basis for discussion of performance between principals and their supervisors.

Apart from the expressed need for greater funding at school and regional level, many submissions also suggested that executive should take greater responsibility for their own learning, with varying degrees of subsidisation by the Department such as provision of time, payment of fees and allowances. Suggestions included providing high quality development programs in school vacations for teachers and executive seeking accreditation for leadership.

Leadership Centre

The concept of a DET School Leadership Centre or similar venture was highly favoured by principals and others as a joint activity of the Department and principals’ groups and as a way of coordinating and integrating professional development.

Continue the TPPP – there should be more positions in this. (Regional Primary Principals’ Association)

Provide encouragement and support for the building of executive teams within schools – funds to release whole executive teams, relevant courses, series of seminars, team-focused action planning and Area consultants. (Regional middle management meeting)

In recognition of the critical importance of quality school leadership, existing and aspiring leaders need increased support and access to quality professional development as part of a comprehensive leadership strategy. (NSW Teachers Federation)

School Leadership Capability Framework – the most comprehensive foundation for DET school leadership development initiatives and programs. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

Principals need to take responsibility for their own learning. (School principals’ meeting)

As a matter of urgency DET establish a DET School Leadership Centre to coordinate and support the development of principals, school executive and aspiring school leaders across the state. (Secondary Principals’ Council)
A Leadership Centre must be central to professional learning and practice...The current size of our system, the current fragmentation of good programs from all over Australia is perpetuating a confused sense of direction. Too many practices and, needless to say many good people, have fallen by the wayside. (School principal)

The Primary Principals’ Association recognised the work that was being done collaboratively between the DET and stakeholders through the Leadership Alliance and encouraged the continuation of initiatives that involved the principals’ groups in designing and delivering leadership training.

**Recognising Levels of Performance**

Performance pay was a controversial issue. Some respondents endorsed the concept as being the norm in contemporary society and therefore necessary to keep the best leaders within the system.

"As in all areas of life the motivation will be remuneration. To prevent loss of our best leaders and teachers they must be paid in accordance to their skill level. Otherwise they will seek employment outside of the public school system." (School staff meeting)

Others rejected it outright, on the basis that it was too difficult to measure. This was at odds with the many submissions that endorsed the development of clear performance standards being used as part of an accountability framework for principals.

A large number of submissions avoided the issue of performance measurement and differential pay, instead endorsing a range of non-salary rewards for excellent performance. These included being able to be paid at the next level without having to take promotion to a bigger school, being valued by senior officers, variations in superannuation structures, variations in working conditions, access to leadership development and further study and opportunities to contribute to the learning of others.

Many respondents emphasised the need for clarification of expectations and standards, adequate development programs and support for leaders who were having difficulties, fairness and opportunities to acquire skills and confidence.

"More in-service and reduced workload would improve over-stressed and under-achieving principals." (Parent)

"Earlier and more targeted intervention..." (Secondary Principals’ Council)

In addition, respondents believed there should be more streamlined procedures for removal of inefficient leaders from schools as quickly as possible. Some respondents proposed that contracts and tenured appointments would simplify the issues of dealing with poor performance.
Mentoring and Support for Learning On-the-Job

Mentoring was frequently mentioned as an effective leadership development strategy as well as an effective means of providing ongoing support to principals, especially those in their first year of appointment. Mentoring was highly valued because it represented a personalised approach to leadership development:

A change in culture is needed. The current culture does not encourage leaders to seek help when they need it. Leaders should be supported not berated for “trying and failing” ... resilience varies over time. A strong leader at one time can become a struggling leader at another time, due to a range of factors. (School staff meeting)

Several forms of on-the-job learning were proposed as ways of supporting new principals and increasing their effectiveness. One model was the introduction of internships for principals in which newly appointed principals would undertake studies in leadership whilst under the guidance of a more experienced colleague on site.

Just as new teachers have teaching practice, new principals also require principal practice with a principal mentor. (Regional staff member)

A related model was the concept of a probationary year for principals in which confirmation of appointment would be dependent on agreed performance criteria being met. Such a model could be difficult to implement where relocation was involved.

Networks

Networks and collaborative partnerships between leaders were also suggested as significant development and support strategies with transformative power if implemented well.

... one of the most powerful recent strategies is lateral capacity building, where the state invests in and facilitates focused networks that learn from each other, as they implement priorities in the context of state policies. (Fullan, 2005: 233)

Many submissions also drew attention to the value of using the expertise of senior leaders, both in the system and retired.

The school's older teachers are a great strength … I have seen some remarkably clever changes made by the “old dogs”. (Parent)

Succession Planning

Many respondents remarked on the current age profile of principals and executive and identified the need for action to be taken immediately to prevent the so-called “crisis of leadership”.

We have age averages for Principals and Deputy Principals that are almost the same, creating an issue where we will have massive numbers of vacancies over a period of about 5 years. To ensure that we are able to build our succession planning, we need to start with recruitment of teachers and include career planning within training and development. If we are
successful in developing succession planning, the bulk of the leaders in schools could come from within the DET especially considering the numbers of staff currently employed. Keeping long term staff will be problematic in future years as staff will not be locked in by superannuation to the same extent as the current leaders in schools. In order to keep these staff, incentives will need to be available, including increased salary and better conditions. (School staff member)

A range of strategies was identified as having potential to meet future leadership needs. These included: recognising the leadership role of all staff; identifying potential principals early and providing opportunities to practise skills and access training and development opportunities; creating a leadership culture within all schools; implementing incentives for leadership positions and incentives for effective principals to stay on beyond anticipated retirement.

Succession planning was seen as both a system responsibility and the responsibility of leadership in schools.

Identification of potential must become much more sophisticated. Any large organisation will require process systems for the task but also, there will always be an element of “illogical identification” based on deep knowledge of the organisation and its particular change phase of the moment. (DET staff member)

A number of respondents emphasised the value of talent-spotting of young teachers, even if this appeared to be outside normal processes.

**Opportunities for Renewal**

Maintaining enthusiasm and capacity for innovation was identified as a significant issue for maintaining quality in leadership. Experience in different schools, with new contexts and with different executive was identified as a simple, low cost but effective development strategy.

Fixed tenure appointments, contracts and other variations to employment conditions were also proposed in respect of both development and performance monitoring.

A number of submissions suggested staffing arrangements that enabled leaders to rotate through positions within a district or more options for short-term appointments in nearby schools:

More flexible staffing/transfer arrangements must be implemented to allow experienced teachers and principals to be more refreshed/challenged. The school education director should be able to appoint a targeted leader to a specific short term position in a nearby school … currently the models of short term appointments are restricted. (Regional principals’ meeting)

Other suggestions were that there should be a range of development options such as sabbaticals, exchanges, study tours and scholarships for higher degree studies to provide opportunities for principals’ leadership to be refreshed and re-invigorated. The positive benefits were clearly articulated:
Sabbaticals built into the system to allow continued growth and learning about other systems. (School staff meeting)

**Rural and Remote Areas**

The challenge for leadership development in rural and remote areas was raised by many respondents. Access to professional learning was the major issue. Solutions proposed included support for networks and more on-line learning opportunities.

Many respondents were concerned that unless more attractive incentives schemes were implemented, schools in those areas would continue to attract relatively few and inexperienced applicants. Higher remuneration as an incentive (ie differential pay) was identified as a strategy that works in most other contexts and should be applied to education.

**Implications for Quality Education**

The consultation responses highlighted the relationship between quality schools and quality leadership. Given adequate funding and appropriate resources, the role of leadership was seen to be the creation of a culture that supported teachers to create success in their classrooms.

*Quality schools have succeeding students ... Quality schools have teachers who teach, not just deliver lessons. These teachers make a quality school by being effective with children.* (Personal submission)

Much has been written in the educational literature about school culture. The paper by Groundswater-Smith and Kemmis (2005) included in this report reinforces what many school leaders know intuitively: they are in the business of creating knowledge-building cultures.

*... what was most needed to achieve significant and sustainable educational change in schools was learning centred leadership – leadership that aimed directly to contribute to students’ learning and to the professional learning of staff. Time and again, teachers drew our attention to events and activities that made change possible precisely because leaders had opened up conversational space, among and between teachers and students ... In many PASP schools, principals and members of school executives opened opportunities for discussion and debate not only by introducing new and interesting provocations to the staff (which they frequently did), but also by creating space for others to share ideas, explore their consequences and evaluate their outcomes openly and collaboratively.* (Groundswater-Smith and Kemmis, 2005: 178-179)

**Issues for Leadership in the Future**

Very few submissions projected a distinctly future-oriented view of leadership. Of those that did, the areas that were identified as needing to be explored for their impacts on the future role of leaders included:

- understanding the impact of technology on pedagogy
- creating new kinds of learning environments for the knowledge society

The development of networks, the use of technology and web-based learning … Maintaining professional networks - in person, via phone or via the Internet … are important from a personal or professional point of view in a rural setting. (Letts et al, 2005: 239)

Offer a higher rate of salary for this and make sure that a support network exists in these areas. (School staff meeting)

For all schools to become quality schools, every school principal must be willing to change the school culture if necessary. (Parent)

Develop a culture of reflection, discussions of classroom practice, learning new strategies to support the learning needs of students. (School principal)

Give teachers time to discuss, reflect and plan new classroom strategies. (School staff meeting)

Training for leadership begins the day a teacher graduates and begins teaching. Leading learners are important for our classrooms, for action-learning projects; some will go on to be leaders of teams, and some, eventually, principals. (School principal)

Leadership roles are always changing. They were significantly different 15 years ago and indeed, will be 15 years hence. (DET staff member)
achieving personal mastery and leading the integrated use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in teaching, learning and administration

• managing the flow-on within their schools from the current leadership succession issues

• responding to trends in market share

• developing stronger community partnerships

• extending education to other sources of knowledge outside the school.

In the shift from an industrial society to a knowledge-based society, effective, visionary and innovative leadership will be vital as new processes, ideas, systems and networks are explored and developed. (State Office staff meeting)

IN SUMMARY

The importance of broad-based leadership which embraced executive and non-executive teaching staff, school administrative and support staff, regional and state office support staff, along with parents, community members and students was strongly communicated by respondents. An inclusive approach to leadership and decision-making was considered both desirable and necessary to achieving quality education in schools.

Respondents focused on the need to enhance and promote leadership in schools and throughout the Department. Many ideas were suggested in this regard. The articulation of a leadership strategy was seen as a means for providing a coordinated approach to leadership development across the system. Consideration should be given to the creation of a Leadership Centre to provide professional learning opportunities at all levels using a range of media and strategies. Flexibility was considered to be a key to such a provision.

There were many other suggestions for promoting leadership. The interchange of staff between schools, regions and state offices, for example, was seen as a way to enhance relationships at the three levels and provide an opportunity to more readily share expertise. Accredited development programs for teachers and school administrative and support staff were seen as further methods to enhance overall leadership capacity.

In relation to principals, the development of a tertiary accredited statewide mentoring program was considered to be an effective means for using the expertise of current leaders and retired principals. Mentoring, in combination with a probationary year and internship, would provide stronger support to newly appointed principals. At the other end of the spectrum, opportunities for long-serving leaders to be reinvigorated should be created.

A significant aspect of the leadership strategy should be to ensure succession planning. Identification of future school leaders and individual development plans should be a priority to make certain prospective leaders are supported and provided with opportunities to practise leadership.

The challenges confronting contemporary leaders have become apparent throughout the consultation process. Impacting on school leadership is the increased role complexity of and expectations on school leaders; the responsibilities for middle management in driving quality education; the changing demands and reshaping of roles for administrative and support staff; and the importance of partnerships with the local community, other agencies and industry. Central to this is the role to be played by students in designing their own education provision in a rapidly changing world. The development of a strategy which will provide outstanding leadership in order to deliver quality education in the future has never been so critical.

1 The Department’s age distribution data (as at 1 March 2005) indicates that, while the largest age group for principals, executives and classroom teachers is 50 – 54 years, principals and executives are particularly concentrated in this age group. The age distribution pattern for classroom teachers is more even, with 43 per cent between the ages of 25 and 44, compared with 30 per cent of executive and 12 per cent of principals. These figures indicate that effective, long-term succession planning should include the identification of classroom teachers, as well as executive staff, for the development of their leadership potential.
COMPANION PAPER 3

TRENDS AND IMPERATIVES IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Steve Dinham and Narottam Bhindi
Australian Centre for Educational Leadership
University of Wollongong

The Dynamic and Challenging Context of School Leadership

The job of the principal and other school leaders has become more demanding, stressful and complex. Whitaker (2003) argues that the contextual changes and shifting roles of principals have contributed to problems of selection, recruitment, and retention of quality candidates (see also Norton, 2002; Goodwin, et. al., 2003).

Elements of the contemporary educational leadership context include:

1. The aging population of principals and other educational leaders and leadership succession.
2. Attracting and preparing the next generation of educational leaders.
3. New accountabilities and responsibilities.
4. New technology.
5. Public and stakeholder demands and criticism.
6. Competition within and between educational systems.
7. Balancing managerial and leadership responsibilities.
8. Initiating and coping with change.
9. Fostering and distributing leadership across the school and system.
10. Developing and maintaining a positive school culture centred on teaching and learning.
11. Facilitating staff professional learning.
13. The need for ‘moral’, ‘authentic’ leadership.

Best Practice In Leadership: Findings From AESOP

A recent research project carried out in NSW, AESOP (An Exceptional Schooling Outcomes Project) revealed how educational leaders are coping with and utilising the contemporary educational context. AESOP took place in 2001-2004 at public secondary and central schools in NSW where ‘outstanding’ educational outcomes had been identified in years 7-10. Sites were selected using a variety of data including performance in standardised tests, public examinations, various value added measures and nominations from various stakeholders.

Sites were of two types: subject departments responsible for teaching certain subjects and teams responsible for cross-school programs in Years 7-10. Fifty sites across NSW from 38 schools were studied.

For further details on AESOP, see AESOP (references); Dinham (2004).
Analysis of data revealed common attributes and practices of principals (and other leaders) of these schools, central to which is a school-wide focus on students and their learning.

1. External Awareness and Engagement

Principals of schools where outstanding sites were identified exhibited a keen awareness of the wider environment and a positive attitude towards engaging with it. They place a high priority on good communications and relationships with external stakeholders.

Rather than seeing change as a threat, principals are open to opportunities. Even with mandated change, principals look for how they can adapt what they are doing to meet new requirements and consider ways their school might benefit from such change.

Rather than being inward looking, they seek out, foster, and utilise external networks and resources to assist with change. These can be at the local through to the international level. They are entrepreneurial in obtaining financial and in-kind support from the system, government, community and the corporate sector and utilise such support to realise their vision for the school.

These leaders have positive attitudes that are contagious. They realise negativity can be self-handicapping and attempt to drive it out. Their positive approach motivates others and acts as a form of organisational energy to keep the school moving and improving.

Finally, these principals are prepared to seek outside assistance when they cannot solve problems. They are not afraid to ‘put their hand up’ for help and don’t see this as failure or inadequacy.

2. A Bias Towards Innovation and Action

These schools have strong executive structures with clearly understood responsibilities. Principals use these structures effectively.

They use the discretion available to them and push against administrative and systemic constraints when necessary. They tend to be ahead of the system and act as ‘ground breakers’. They have credibility with system officials and receive support or approval for new approaches. Some appear to operate on the principle that ‘it is easier to gain forgiveness than permission’. They encourage and support staff to leave their ‘comfort zones’ and creatively use resources at their disposal to support innovation.

They are informed risk takers. Even when things are going well, they are prepared to experiment and support those proposing initiatives. They risk time, money and failure, and empower others to do the same. They don’t say ‘yes’ to every request, but do use ‘yes’ to empower and recognise others (less effective principals were observed in other studies to use ‘no’ as a means of controlling staff).

Principal and staff were found to have a major influence on the development and application of policy. Some leaders and staff characterise this as ‘zero tolerance’, but this is more a case of having clear guidelines, effective communication and consistent application, with everyone knowing where he or she ‘stands’. The simple, standard things are done well. This is not to imply rigidity, with principals prepared to exercise discretion and compassion when needed. Students know what to do and who to seek help from when problems arise and often this understanding begins in primary ‘feeder’ schools with visits from key secondary staff and orientation visits to the secondary school playing an important role in easing the Years 6-7 transition.

3. Personal Qualities and Relationships

Principals have high-level interpersonal skills and are generally liked, respected and trusted. They use peoples’ names when ‘out and about’ in the school and show interest in what others are doing.
Students, staff and community members speak positively of principals who are ‘open’, ‘honest’, ‘fair’, ‘friendly’ and ‘approachable’. They value the fact the principal listens to and respects them.

They exhibit the characteristics they expect of others such as honesty, fairness, compassion, commitment, reliability, hard work, trustworthiness and professionalism. They provide a ‘good example’ and tend to have a social justice agenda, believing in education for social good and the importance of putting students first. They are good communicators and listeners and provide prompt feedback and recognition to staff. They are seen to work for the school rather than themselves and model ‘do as I do’, rather than ‘do as I say’.

These principals possess intelligence and imagination. They are good judges of individuals, astute, and are able to balance ‘big picture’ issues with finer detail. They have good recall of a multitude of issues, facts and problems and can pick up the threads of previous interactions. They deal with many issues concurrently and know when to consult and when to be decisive. They understand school ‘politics’ and have the courage to make unpopular decisions.

4. Vision, Expectations and a Culture of Success

These principals don’t attempt to ‘build Rome in a day’. They have a long-term agenda and work towards this. They set achievable goals rather than short-term targets.

The norm for principals was 6-7 years in their current school, and when they had not been Principal for this time had often served in the same school as a deputy principal or head teacher, helping them to ‘know the territory’. An implication is that ‘quick fixes’ or ‘flurries of change’ (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004) are unlikely to be successful. It takes time to alter patterns of thought, behaviour and practice and to achieve effective, lasting change. Some schools had been in decline prior to the appointment of the principal, suffering falling reputation, students, staff and resources. With time and effort things have ‘turned around’ such these schools are now ‘full’.

Principals possess the ability to see the ‘big picture’ and communicate this to staff. They have high and clear expectations of others (and themselves) and do not easily accept ‘second best’.

They treat staff professionally, expecting a high standard of professionalism in return. Principals place a high priority on the school environment. Graffiti and mess are not tolerated. Staffrooms, classrooms, playgrounds and other spaces are clean and pleasant, with resources diverted for furniture and fittings. Principals realise the importance of school pride, identification with the school and its reputation in the community. Students and staff respond positively to this.

Principals take every opportunity to recognise student and staff achievement and to ‘talk up the school’. They utilise a variety of media including assemblies, newsletters, announcements, awards, letters, personal approaches, classroom visits, and the local press. They create a school climate of high expectations and success and find ways for every student and teacher to receive recognition. Such recognition is seen as authentic and eventually makes an impact with an upward cycle set in motion.

Principals are frequently given credit by staff, students and community members yet usually deflect this. Generosity and lack of professional jealousy is another aspect of leadership that positively influences the climate and culture of the school.

5. Teacher Learning, Responsibility and Trust

Principals place a high value on teacher learning and act as role models, learning from others. They support staff professional development and bring ‘experts’ into the school to provide assistance.

There is an expectation that those taking up these opportunities in-service others to maximise outcomes. Staff development days and meetings are used to provide teachers with skills, knowledge and confidence to try different teaching approaches.

Principals foster the leadership of others. They identify ‘talent’ and ‘coach’ and support these people, sometimes at the risk of being accused of favouritism. They realise that if change and improvement
are to ‘take root’ in the school culture, they need to build and distribute leadership capacity throughout the school and to trust people. Sharing of responsibility also assists in leadership succession.

6. Student Support, Common Purpose and Collaboration

Principals often identify and utilise a central focus, e.g., ICT, assessment, literacy, pedagogy, student welfare. Programs to support and develop such areas bring members of the school together, leading to better understanding, commitment and outcomes.

These leaders are pragmatic. They know it is impossible to gain unanimous support and involvement. Rather than attempting to ‘move’ all staff, they concentrate on those who are committed and provide them with support. These ‘pockets’ of staff may be within faculties or across the school. Principals facilitate bringing like-minded staff together. There is a danger, in that some staff may be ‘left behind’ or be resentful and obstructive. As part of their risk taking approach, Principals believe that the ‘contagion effects’ of committed staff and demonstrated success will bring some - but probably not all - negative or reluctant people ‘on-side’.

Whether the focus of the visit was on a curriculum area and/or a program, it was found that student support in all its guises was central to the outstanding outcomes achieved. Student support is seen as broader than ‘welfare’ and ‘discipline’. It is every teacher’s responsibility and has an academic focus of ‘getting students back into learning’, rather than being about ‘warm fuzzies’, or ‘enhancing self-concept’, to use the words of a number of teachers interviewed. Student support and academic achievement are seen as mutually reinforcing, not mutually exclusive. The belief is that students cannot learn until their needs have been met and improved student behaviour creates an environment where learning can occur.

Principals and other leaders facilitate the centrality of student welfare through supporting welfare teams and ensuring a common approach and commitment. Students understand and support welfare policies and procedures and see student welfare as something done for them rather than to them. Clear communication, good understanding and consistent application lie at the heart of the success of school welfare programs and procedures. Again, the standard things are done well.

7. Focus on Students, Learning and Teaching

The key finding emerging from AESOP is the enacted belief that the core purpose of the school is teaching and learning. Principals and staff recognise that every effort must be made to provide an environment where each student can experience success and academic, personal and social growth. Even in schools identified for success in cross-school programs there was a focus on equipping the individual student to succeed academically.

Principals of schools where ‘outstanding’ outcomes were being achieved were relentless in their quest for enhanced student achievement. They do not become distracted and ‘bogged down’ by the administrative/managerial demands of the principalship, finding ways to concentrate their energies on educational leadership. They constantly remind students, staff and the community that the core purpose of the school is teaching and learning.

Their external awareness and engagement, their bias towards innovation, their personal qualities, their vision and expectations and the climate of success that results from this, their emphasis on teacher learning, their trust of staff, and their focus on student support, common purpose and collaboration, are all geared to the facilitation of student achievement.

It is acknowledged that principals are not solely responsible for the outstanding educational outcomes observed, but their leadership has been found in the AESOP study to be crucial in producing the environment where these outcomes can occur.
IMPERATIVES FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

There are key imperatives for leadership arising from the current educational context. Some of these are:

- the challenge of greater autonomy
- attracting sufficient quantity and quality to educational leadership
- preparation prior to appointment
- developing and applying suitable selection and appointment processes
- inducting educational leaders
- facilitating and providing professional growth and career development
- retention and rejuvenation of educational leaders.

1. The Challenge of Greater Autonomy

A key aspect arising from AESOP was principals’ exercise of autonomy. Educational leaders are faced with the situation where they have greater autonomy over matters such as staffing, budgeting, school organization, innovation and decision making, yet are more accountable in various ways. Successful leaders identified in AESOP dealt with this contradictory context and had ‘taken charge’, rather than being defensive and reactive.

If they are to be effective in the contemporary context, leaders need to be prepared – in both senses of the word – for the exercise of greater autonomy and control over the teaching and learning environment. As AESOP demonstrated, some of the best leaders ‘mine’ change, taken advantage of resources and support open to them, and are change makers, fully using the discretion and powers available to them.

There is another aspect to autonomy, in that leaders need to be prepared to give autonomy to others through shared responsibility and distributed leadership, again, something successful leaders were found to do effectively in AESOP.

If educational leaders are to respond to the challenges and opportunities open to them, the ‘system’ needs to offer support, encouragement, constructive and timely feedback and trust.

2. Attracting quality and quantity to educational leadership

There is a need to widen the pool of potential educational leaders, and to deepen the pool through attracting quality people.

The Australian teaching service is bifurcated, with a bulge in the beginning years under 30, a bulge in the later range of teachers over 45, and a shortage in the middle years (due to lower levels of recruitment and resignation during the 1990s) from where most educational leaders will come over the next decade (Preston, 2001, 2002).

Leadership succession looms as a major issue for educational systems in the developed world. Inevitably, a younger, less experienced cohort of educational leaders will be required (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003: 107-108).

As the older ‘bulge’ retires, opportunities for teachers to step into leadership positions will increase but due to the shortage of teachers in the middle years and the aging teaching service generally, some could face problems when they are placed in positions where they may lack (or be perceived to lack) the experience and skills to work with more experienced staff. Less experienced leaders need encouragement, preparation and support to take on such roles. Shortages will occur unless steps are taken to ensure the pipeline of leaders is sufficient. A precursor of a talented pool of leaders is attracting quality teachers and retaining them, vital but outside this discussion. A further factor
contributing to the leadership shortage is the growing feminisation of the profession. Women are underrepresented in leadership and less mobile than their male counterparts. Support will be needed to assist women (and men) to take up leadership positions across NSW.

Widening the pool of potential leaders to non-DET applicants and giving schools greater autonomy over hiring has potential to provide both sufficient quantity and quality school leaders in the future.

Concern however centres on the attractiveness of leadership. Referring to the shortage of qualified applicants for the principalship, Lashway (2002: 1) observes:

*Many individuals who possess the necessary credentials see the principal’s job as impossible - a stressful, thankless endeavour that doesn’t pay nearly enough to compensate for the frustration.*

Allowing educational leaders to exercise leadership through rationalising the role is needed, as is a more general reconceptualisation of teachers’ work (Dinham & Scott, 1998). In other states and systems facilities managers, bursars, ICT specialists, high level ancillary staff and accountants take some of leaders’ administrative loads. While Principals still have overall responsibility, they can be freed from some day to day matters to concentrate more on leadership.

‘Talent spotting’ has a role to play in widening and deepening the leadership pool. A study of head teachers in NSW public and non-government schools found that one third had not considered promotion until ‘tapped on the shoulder’ and encouraged by more senior colleagues (Dinham, Brennan, et. al., 2000). This process needs to systematised rather than ad hoc if the pool of educational leaders is to be sufficient.

### 3. Preparation prior to appointment

With establishment of the NSW Institute of Teachers, the professional leadership level of accreditation provides a guide to the attributes and competencies needed for leadership and recognition that a candidate has met the standards. Over time, it should be an expectation that accreditation at the professional leadership level is a prerequisite for promotion, and that reaccreditation is required for continued appointment in a leadership position.

There is potential for consortia of educational employers, professional associations, universities and others to provide tailor made, flexible educational leadership programs that articulate into formal qualifications and accreditation with the Institute of Teachers.

Head teachers in the study mentioned previously (Dinham, Brennan, et. al., 2000) were critical of ‘one size fits all’ leadership programs as their needs were so diverse. Many educational leaders do not have a clear view of what a role encompasses until they have taken it on. Potential leaders should visit, observe and work with those in the position to which they aspire. Linking aspiring educational leaders through mentoring and on-site visits is a valuable form of preparation in enhancing a ‘real world view’ of the position concerned and in providing necessary skills and knowledge to take on promotion. Mentors can also assist aspirants to gain a clearer view of their strengths and weaknesses, informing their preparation for promotion and on-going professional learning. The Head Teachers who participated in the AESOP visits described these as the ‘best PD ever’.

Leadership preparation programs must reflect the dynamic, contextual realities and provide preparation and strategies for dealing with complex issues and problems. Programs must be informed by contemporary research on school leadership and experiences and best practices of local and international Centres of Educational Leadership. Exemplary principals and other executive should play key roles in such programs and be released and recognised for their involvement.

The recently established National Institute for Quality Teaching and Educational Leadership has potential to facilitate national cross-sectoral approaches to educational leadership (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 2003: 167).

In any leadership program, geographic and professional isolation needs to be addressed. Isolated, less experienced and aspiring leaders need to have greater access to more experienced colleagues.
4. Developing and applying suitable selection and appointment processes

Promotion procedures reliant on written responses to criteria, referees’ reports and interview need to be augmented by more dynamic forms of assessment. Because context is so important, the aspirant’s present situation and that of the position applied for should be considered. In other systems and professions, assessment centres operate where aspiring leaders receive coaching and participate in simulated leadership activities and assessments, receiving constructive feedback.

Promotion procedures need to be built around the attributes identified by AESOP and other studies. For example, personal qualities have been shown to be of great importance. How best might these be assessed for any candidate and for any position? Once again, accreditation at the professional leadership level of the NSW Institute of Teachers would be one indicator of leadership suitability.

5. Inducting educational leaders

Formal induction programs for educational leaders are essential to assist leaders to quickly adapt to their new role and to support them in their first years. In the past, the timing of formal programs has been problematic as principals and other leaders often receive their appointments throughout the year in a domino effect – a vacancy appears and is filled, creating another vacancy, and so forth.

Induction is different from information giving and administration and includes both ‘management’ and ‘leadership’ aspects. More experienced colleagues – including those recently retired and others released for the purpose – are needed to act as coaches, consultants, role models and critical friends in the induction process. Timely support and feedback must be available. A ‘sink or swim’ approach can lead to drowning.

6. Facilitating and providing professional growth and career development

Educational leaders are discouraged from undertaking further study that would benefit them and the profession. Fees, the pressure of time, and lack of financial recognition all militate against involvement in formal study. Time is as important as money to busy educators. Leaders and potential leaders would benefit from ‘time out’ to complete leadership courses.

As noted, such programs could and should be designed, conducted and accredited by a consortium of credible providers comprising DET, other systems, universities, other providers, and professional associations.

There is a need for greater coherence between the DET’s education policies and initiatives and school leadership development programs. It is essential that these programs integrate the leadership implications of initiatives such as Professional Teaching Standards, Professional Learning, and Quality Teaching. The DET also needs to review its other key school leadership policies and bring them in line with the emerging realities.

7. Retention and Rejuvenation of Educational Leaders

Retention of educational leaders will be enhanced through mentoring and other initiatives mentioned previously. ‘Time out’ through sabbaticals can enable leaders to recharge their batteries, visit other schools and systems and complete formal qualifications. It is expecting much of leaders to fit their professional development in and around their school commitments.

In school education, leadership tends to take teachers progressively away from the classroom and to be a ‘one way street’. In other educational organisations leadership positions are taken on for a fixed period, with the option of reappointment. This enables leaders to make a concentrated contribution for a known period of time before stepping aside. This need not apply to all leaders and all positions, but would provide flexibility and enable leaders to bring their experience back to the classroom and to step away from formal leadership without ‘loss of face’.
With the general aging of populations in the developed world and emerging workforce shortages, there is pressure to delay retirement when only a few years ago retirement ages were falling. If educational leaders are needed until their mid-60s, retention and rejuvenation assume greater significance.

Note
Many of the imperatives and suggestions above are being addressed in various ways. However, the looming turnover in leadership and the current and emerging realities make these even more pressing if public education in NSW is to retain its dynamism and relevance.

References


COMPANION PAPER 4

Knowledge Building Schools – Educational Development for All

Susan Groundwater-Smith & Stephen Kemmis

INTRODUCTION

When our friend Rozzie was a literacy educator in a Victorian prison, she used to wear a T-shirt emblazoned with the words “How come they made up all the rules before I got here?” Her students thought the slogan very apt. The prison rules were archaic, and the reasons for many of them were long-forgotten, but they endured. So do the rules by which much of social life is structured, from turn-taking in civil conversation to lining up to go into the primary classroom, from the use of standard English in formal settings to the use of the normal curve as a guide to how many As and Es should be given in competitive assessment. And the same is true in education: many ‘rules’ endure though the reasons for them have not. Even the multi-teacher, multi-classroom school as a social technology was a response to historically-specific needs and opportunities of schooling in Britain in the 1860s and 1870s (Hamilton, 1989), evolving “architecturally and organisationally – to accommodate contemporaneous assumptions about the control and efficiency of schooling” (p.10).

The ‘rules’ by which we live our lives – in schools and in the wider community – were made “before we got here”. Even the ‘rules’ by which those ‘rules’ are challenged already exist. Thus, for example, the ‘rules’ of authoritarian teachers are long-established, as are the ‘rules’ that underpin the challenging behaviours of students who rebel against and resist classroom ‘rules’ they regard as illegitimate. Remaking education means remaking such ‘rules’ – on both sides. We recognise that remaking the ‘rules’ by which schooling is done and administered is not an undertaking for any one group alone, be it composed of teachers, administrators, policy makers or interested members of the wider community. It is a task that must engage key partners in the educational process in a grand cooperative effort of making change. The task, therefore, should be inclusive, engaging and enabling. We argue that remaking the rules of current schooling and training, and educational administration, is itself a project of education – education for development. In order to give body to our argument we shall illuminate it in terms of some of our recent work on professional development initiatives in schools that have really ‘worked’ – notably some of the initiatives described in our report Knowing Makes the Difference: Learnings from the NSW Priority Action Schools Program (Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis, 2004). In our meta-evaluation of the work of the PASP, we identified a number of strategies used by schools in communities with deep needs to make substantial changes to the ways they worked within the single year for which we observed the Program. In many PASP schools, students, teachers, school communities, principals – and the Department – changed ‘the rules’. They found ways of doing things differently in the interests of the learning outcomes of their students and the professional learning1 of teachers. Schools and the state PASP team together bent existing rules, reframed them, re-ordered their priorities. They worked within the system to show that schools and senior Departmental staff, by working together, could deploy resources differently and change habitual and existing practices of teaching and of learning in many NSW schools, based on the principle of identifying local solutions to local needs.

One of the reasons so many of the PASP schools did so well in making change was that they had some additional resources, to be sure, but more particularly they did well because they had permission, encouragement and support to explore how they might do things differently, to try new ideas in practice, to learn from carefully-observed experience, to reflect, and to change direction in the light of

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1 We prefer the term ‘professional learning’ to ‘professional development’ since the latter sometimes seems like something done to teachers rather than with them.
what they learned. The schools saw themselves as *agents* of change, not as *objects* of change (objects, that is, of someone else’s ideas about what they could or should be). Moreover, they were not *individuals* acting alone, or just in their own schools. They were regarded a *partners* in the change process – partners with the Department (through the State PASP Team), with other schools in the Program (through various Forums at which schools reported on their work), and with the communities they served.

From the beginning, PASP was structured as ‘a *knowledge-building program*’, and it insisted that the participating schools should be ‘*knowledge-building schools*’. It assumed, first, that the schools were committed to building the knowledge and capacities of their students through education and improving learning outcomes for students, and, second, that they were committed to building their own corporate or collective knowledge of and capacities to respond educatively to the educational and social needs of students in communities with deep needs, their families, and their communities.

Thus, offered this opportunity to comment on ‘professional development that works’ on the basis of our learnings as the meta-evaluators of PASP, we begin with the strongest of advocacies for the notion of ‘the knowledge-building school’.

**KNOWLEDGE BUILDING SCHOOLS: THE WAY TO THE FUTURE**

There is an ongoing lament that “the times they are a-changing” but schools remain the same. As Slavin (2002) argued “At the dawn of the 21st century, education is finally being dragged kicking and screaming into the 20th century” (p. 16). In this invitational paper we shall certainly challenge a number of Slavin’s precepts, but it is hard to disagree with him on this point. It is our intention, here, to put the case for the *educational development of schools as knowledge building institutions* where teacher professional knowledge is recognised, affirmed, challenged and debated under conditions of mutuality and trust that permit both teachers and the schools themselves to grow and flourish in times remarkable for the pace and nature of social and material change. Under such conditions, teachers and their students are no longer seen merely as the ‘bearers of structures’, as ‘authoritarian dupes’ or ‘structural dopes’ (Hutchinson, 1996, p. 99) but as beings with agency and expertise.

While there can be no question that basic human behaviours and needs are unchanging and enduring, it cannot be doubted that the conditions in which people live out their lives, particularly in the developed world, are altering at an hitherto unimaginable rate. Frances Cairncross, senior editor of the *Economist* has mapped the trajectory of three major technological changes over the past two hundred years (Cairncross, 2002). She argues that the nineteenth century saw major changes in the transport of goods; the twentieth century in the transport of people; and the newly arrived twenty-first century in the movement of information and ideas. Western economies are rapidly transforming into knowledge economies where more and more people are engaged in the production, utilisation and analysis of ideas and services rather than the creation of something tangible and concrete.

As a consequence, knowledge creation is now a matter for significant contestation and debate as the “Knowledge Society” (Stehr, 1994) emerges and develops. Knowledge has assumed the leading role in social and economic change. Gibbons *et al.* (1994) developed our understanding that knowledge creation is not exclusively a matter for scientists and academics working in institutions but may be socially produced and distributed in the form of what they called “Mode 2 Knowledge”. Such knowledge production is concerned with the identification and solution of practical problems in the lived professional lives of practitioners and organizations untrammelled by the boundaries of single disciplines with their conventions and orthodoxies. Problem generation and problem solving are contextualised within professional practice in the face of “variously jostling publics” (Nowotny, Scott & Gibbons, 2003, p. 192).

Education, as a field of practice, is concerned with professional knowledge production of the kind that can inform and enrich the lives and learning of those who participate in it. Hargreaves (1999) first drew our attention to the notion of the knowledge creating school, arguing that schools have within them significant professional knowledge, much of which is tacit and unexamined. He has since developed his argument (Hargreaves, 2003), making the case for mobilising and developing the intellectual and social capital held by practitioners in any one site; and drawing upon organisational
capital in the form of networks and external links in order to inform and improve at both local and regional levels. Importantly, he believes that moving beyond incremental innovation (swimming with the tide) to radical innovation (swimming against the tide) cannot be achieved by central direction, but requires the school itself to be a learning organization.

Of course, Hargreaves’ ideas have not been developed in isolation. He in turn has drawn upon the work of such influential writers in the fields of business and commerce as Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995) who have argued for four conditions for the knowledge creating organization. They can be summarised thus:

- **socialisation** – sharing information and transforming it into personal knowledge through apprenticeship and mentoring;
- **illumination** – casting a light on tacit knowledge and thus making it explicit;
- **actualisation** – learning by doing and experimenting; and,
- **communication** – increasing the communicative space by networking.

Education, itself, has long been concerned with how professional knowledge is created, negotiated, and utilised. As Elliott (2004) observed:

Many academic researchers … have expressed concern about the fact that teachers rarely use the findings of research on education to inform their practice. We tended to argue that in order to engage teachers with research it was necessary to engage them in a form of research that addressed and sought to ameliorate the practical problems they experienced in their particular contexts of action (p. 266, emphases in original).

Knowledge building schools do just that. They are places where innovation and change is seen as an opportunity for learning for all who participate in them both directly and indirectly: teachers, students, parents, professional associations, education departments and related organizations. Knowledge building schools see themselves as authentically accountable. That is, they acknowledge their ethical and social responsibilities not only in fiscal terms and in relation to previously stated outcomes, but also in relation to what actually took place. Knowledge building schools are intelligent schools whose attributes recognise corporate knowledge as well as individual knowledge (MacGilchrist, Myers and Reed, 2004). Knowledge building schools are where professional learning is the right and responsibility of all; where activist professionalism and trust are keywords (Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002)

What then are the conditions that will enable the knowledge building school to flourish in a sustained and sustainable manner and take education into a future that is complex and uncertain?

**CONDITIONS SUPPORTING KNOWLEDGE BUILDING SCHOOLS:**

Schools that take seriously the notion that they can and should create professional knowledge for themselves and for others cannot be simply summoned out of the ether. They require explicit internal and external conditions that will support their development. We shall discuss these conditions in terms of: (1) leadership and the development of communicative space; (2) ethical regard including mutuality, respect and commitment; and, (3) the development of networks and partnerships.

**(1) Leadership and the development of the communicative space**

While others have researched and written extensively on issues surrounding school leadership it is our wish to emphasise particular features of leadership that contribute to the evolution of the kind of communicative space that permits sound professional knowledge building (Niemi and Kemmis, 1999; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005). Too often, the leadership literature has treated as separate and distinctive the notions of ‘leading from the front’ and ‘distributed leadership’. We learned from our studies of PASP schools that there was indeed a time and place for ‘hero’ leaders willing to take risks and create conditions that encourage the kind of experimentation so necessary for knowledge building. On the other hand, it was equally critical that opportunities for leadership were shared within a school community so ideas could be generated, tested and evaluated in a safe and professionally nurturing environment. Citing Stoll, Fink and Earl (2002), we argued that:
The formation of professional learning teams at the schools (for example) ensured that teachers’ and students’ academic and social outcomes could best be fostered by an organisational structure that recognised that, given leadership opportunities, people will behave ethically and with integrity (Groundwater-Smith & Kemmis, 2004, p. 149).

The experience of many PASP schools convinced us that what was most needed to achieve significant and sustainable educational change in schools was learning centred leadership – leadership that aimed directly to contribute to students’ learning and to the professional learning of staff. Time and again, teachers drew our attention to events and activities that made change possible precisely because leaders had opened up conversational space, among and between teachers and students, to allow previously settled ways of thinking and doing things to be ‘bracketed’, problematised, explored and unsettled – in talk and in action. Indeed, projecting from the exploration of ideas in talk to exploratory action (in action inquiry documenting change in practice in schools and classrooms) was one of the principal ways teachers and schools sowed possibilities and harvested learnings from their developing practice. Through learning centred leadership, early career teachers led by introducing new ideas into the school community and were honoured for doing so, and experienced classroom practitioners led by sharing their ideas, by mentoring and by demonstrating their practical wisdom in practice. In many PASP schools, principals and members of school executives opened opportunities for discussion and debate not only by introducing new and interesting provocations to the staff (which they frequently did), but also by creating space for others to share ideas, explore their consequences and evaluate their outcomes openly and collaboratively. Such enactments of learning centred leadership require genuine confidence and trust among those who participate in them. They require, as we have already emphasised, ethical regard, mutuality, respect and professional commitment.

(2) Ethical regard, mutuality, respect and commitment

There is a distinction to be made between ethics and rules. Relationships among staff and between staff and their students are governed, in part, by sets of rules that recognise and enact legislation, administrative procedures and the requirements of policy. Thus, for example, a teacher may not harass a new and beginning teacher on the basis of his or her race, religion or sexual preference. Behaving ethically, however, goes beyond meeting such requirements, important as they may be. Behaving ethically involves matters of moral deliberation. For example, in situations where new and beginning teachers are held in low esteem in a school simply because they are inexperienced and uncertain about particular aspects of professional practice, it is unlikely that they will feel comfortable or confident to make a contribution to debates about the school’s operation or its relationships with its students. In such situations, ways of talking and working that explicitly recognise and enact the moral value of respect for persons not only help to overcome timidity or professional anxiety, they also treat the newcomer as a genuine resource – perhaps a source of new ideas encountered in a teacher education course, or, at the very least, a new set of eyes through which current ways of working can be re-evaluated. Mutuality and respect are essential virtues for the kinds of debates that contribute to knowledge building, and the practice of mutuality and respect is essential to collective knowledge-building and critical and self-critical efforts to make changes in established ways of doing things.

Pring (2004) makes a distinction between moral virtues such as courage, kindness, generosity of spirit, honesty and a concern for justice, on the one hand, and, on the other intellectual virtues comprised of a concern to seek out the truth (as it is understood), openness to criticism, and an interest in clear communication based upon evidence (p. 145). Developing the conditions for knowledge building schools requires embedding both moral and intellectual virtues in the very fibre of the school, as central to its culture – which means, as central to its day-to-day practices of communication, work and social organisation (including the exercise of power). The practice of such moral and intellectual virtues, central to the culture of knowledge-building schools, should not only characterise relationships between teachers, but also to relationships with adults in the community beyond the school, and – of course, and most importantly – to relationships between students and teachers. Indeed, as Nel Noddings (2003) shows in her description of teaching as a caring practice, the virtue of care is central to the relationship between teachers and students, and, like the necessity for open and respectful communication between teachers and students, it is central to creating the conditions under which students best learn, grow and flourish.
While *learning centred leadership* and *practising moral and intellectual virtues* of ethical regard, mutuality, respect and commitment are in one sense ‘internal’ matters of school culture, our PASP experience shows that schools as knowledge-building communities also look outwards.

(3) Networks and partnerships

Just as someone new coming into a school can assist in making the familiar strange, so too there are benefits in opening up the knowledge and experience within a school to other schools and to other agencies. Knowledge building organizations increase their communicative space by actively engaging in networking – both in terms of knowledge networks (resources of research literatures, for example) and in terms of inter-personal and inter-agency networks (links to people and agencies that make others’ ideas and experiences available to a school). However, connecting to a multiplicity of voices beyond the school does not mean engaging with an incoherent babble of voices. The PASP experience shows us that networking as a means of developing knowledge building schools needs to be purposeful. For example, one group of nearby primary schools in PASP – known as SAIL (School Action in Liverpool) – established itself as a collective to meet on a regular basis with an academic partner to share and discuss issues and challenges they faced – many of which were shared as consequences of social conditions of disadvantage common across their district. In this case, schools’ and teachers’ familiarity with each other’s contexts assisted and encouraged them in their discussions. As we said in our report:

The portfolio reports of the schools suggest that these kinds of schools (who networked) greatly benefited from the outside advice and input that became available to them. The schools appeared not to be self conscious (let alone nervous) about opening their work and ideas to outsiders and in general to be more willing to try out new ideas and practices, and to explore and document the new ideas and practices systematically through action inquiry (Groundwater-Smith & Kemmis, 2004, p. 118).

A very different network of unalike schools has been established by the Centre for Practitioner Research at the University of Sydney. Now in its sixth year, *The Coalition of Knowledge Building Schools* originally comprised six schools, and has now grown to ten. The schools are widely dispersed across metropolitan Sydney, covering the government and non-government sectors, primary and secondary, wealthy and economically disadvantaged, with an agreement to share ideas for methods of practitioner inquiry particularly in relation to consulting students about their experiences of school as a source of ideas about how education in the schools might be improved (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2003). Such is the commitment of its members that the Coalition has continued to grow and thrive with no external sponsorship or funding.

In each of these cases, teacher professional learning has been extended and developed not only through knowledge building within the school, but also through developmental and educative processes which go beyond each participating school. The *Coalition* is an educative community that continues to extend and broaden participants’ professional lenses. As in school clusters like the SAIL group in PASP, the *Coalition* has increased the quantum of teacher professional knowledge available to each participating school through the experience of teachers in other schools, and also through the contributions of an academic partner.

One of the important features of the PASP was that each school should have the opportunity to work with an academic partner whose role was described in this way:

Firstly they will be key resources helping schools to document their work and learn from it through their action inquiries. Second they are likely to offer ideas about the kinds of innovations being tried. They are thus likely to be partners in the schools’ work of innovation and inquiry rather than simply ‘outside’ or ‘objective experts’ in methodology or the substantive areas in which the innovations are occurring (*PASP Guiding Principles for the Evaluation of Priority Action Plans*, 25th November, 2002, quoted in Groundwater-Smith & Kemmis, 2004, p. 27).

Partnerships between schools and universities are not new. For example the national *Innovative Links between Schools and Universities Program* (Yeatman & Sachs, 1995) involved staff from fourteen Australian Universities connecting up with (more or less local) ‘roundtables’ or clusters of schools in almost every State and Territory. In the view of the evaluators of the Program, while much was achieved by participating schools, often the initiative tended to rest with university participants. Our
experience with PASP, with the *Coalition of Knowledge-Building Schools*, and with the Australian National Schools Network (NSN), is that these kinds of school-university partnerships have significantly matured over the years, with schools now having a much greater sense of control and agency *vis-à-vis* their university academic partners than in earlier times.

If networks and partnerships are important to the development of the knowledge building school, then it is essential that the ‘match’ between the various participants in a judicious one. In SAIL the relationships between the university and school partners were based on the shared challenge of meeting the needs of children in difficult and challenging circumstances. In the *Coalition of Knowledge Building* Schools, it was the determination to find valid and worthwhile ways to capture young people’s perceptions of their school experiences. In each case, the role of the academic partner has been one in which there is parity of esteem between that partner and the network. Our research into the establishment, building and maintenance of relationships between academic partners and schools in the PASP convinces us that merely throwing schools together, or assigning schools academic mentors without careful negotiation, is unlikely to produce a knowledge-building ethos. On the contrary, our evidence suggests that the most successful partnerships in PASP were built on shared and agreed commitments to transparency, clarity of expectations, complementarity of contributions, mutual respect, democratic participation and a willingness to renegotiate the terms of the partnership in the light of changes needs, circumstances and opportunities (For a detailed description of key features of successful partnerships in PASP, see Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis, 2004, pp.110 - 119).

We now turn to a particular feature of knowledge building schools that we believe is more frequently notable for its absence than its presence – the practice of consulting students. We discuss this more broadly in terms of responsiveness, both in the sense that schools can be more responsive than is usual to the voices of students and in the sense that education systems can be more responsive than is usual to the voices of schools and teachers.

**CREATING A RESPONSIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR AND WITHIN KNOWLEDGE BUILDING SCHOOLS**

So where on earth does one start in such a complex field? While there are many starting points we are going to select just one. That is, the notion that in order to begin to engage in mindful, carefully designed, and morally defensible teacher professional learning within a knowledge building school there is no better place to start than with the students themselves. How curious it is that consulting students is often an afterthought rather than the beginning point.

Schools exist to educate their students, but it is a curious thing that as the “consequential stakeholders” of the many decisions about the organisation of schools, curriculum and assessment practices and the like, they are rarely consulted about what happens in their classrooms, in the playground and more generally in the ways in which the purposes of schooling are discussed. As Crane (2001) indicated in her portrayal of the ‘Students as Researchers’ project at Sharnbrook Upper School and Community College in UK:

Not only can the students come to school to learn; but they can and indeed must be an integral part of the school’s own learning. Schools cannot learn how to become better places for learning without asking the students (p.54).

Just as it essential for the development of the knowledge building school to consult with its students, treating them as partners in learning and knowledge about the conditions for good learning to occur, so too is it vital that the system itself consults its constituency – its member schools and the communities that they serve.

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2 As we were writing this paper the Sydney Morning Herald (5th/6th February) indicated that it wanted to hear from students on “The School that I’d Like”. In its background piece the Education Editor suggested that there was little or no consultation with students in schools, an observation that unfortunately has some validity.

3 This is a phrase that has long been used by the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration to describe students in schools.
Of course in writing this paper we are mindful that not all schools are the same. Going into a school is not the same as visiting a fast food outlet where the product and the means of production are standardised and controlled. As PASP recognised, local problems require local solutions. The program was based upon an understanding that social geography plays a significant part in deciding upon how schools will operate. It is to this issue that we now turn.

RECOGNISING SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY

PASP schools and teachers were given a kind of ‘permission’ to become knowledge-building schools in order to find ‘local solutions’ to their local problems. To implement and evaluate these ‘solutions’, they were given some additional funding much of which was utilised for additional staff, frequently specialist staff (for example, specialist literacy and numeracy teachers including primary teachers to assist literacy learning for junior secondary students with literacy problems, school-community liaison staff with social work training, , ICT specialists, and others). They also had powerful support from the NSW Department of Education and Training and the State PASP Team who were advocates for the schools within the Department, and ‘brokers’ to a variety of kinds of expertise to support the schools in the implementation of new initiatives.

These, then, were not typical NSW schools – if there is such a thing as a ‘typical’ NSW school. They were schools confronting challenging circumstances. And most produced measurable positive outcomes in increased student learning outcomes and teacher professional learning outcomes in the single year in which we observed the Program. These are substantial achievements, and they were produced in a timescale and quantum far greater than we meta-evaluators expected. Our experience evaluating educational innovations in schools – particularly disadvantaged schools – had led us to expect that improving educational outcomes for students would be slow and the improvements small. One reason the improvements were larger than might have been expected is that a number of schools targeted their interventions towards students with the poorest educational attainments, producing improvements for this group and thus improving average attainments on measures like the Basic Skills Tests. Another reason, more important in our view, was that the Program focussed on teachers’ professional learning outcomes and on improving professional practice. PASP schools were also ‘atypical’ in the sense that they had more principals in their first appointment to a principalship, more members of school executives in their first appointment to such positions, and more teachers in the first year and first five years of teaching. Moreover, Departmental staffing practices which give additional ‘transfer points’ to teachers serving in ‘difficult to staff’ schools tend to maintain their profile of relative inexperience (though some schools in the Program had markedly bimodal staff distributions with many teachers in their first years of teaching, and many close to retirement).

In short, PASP schools may be regarded as atypical for three reasons: (a) they were given substantial additional resources and support, (b) they frequently chose their own developmental strategies that focussed on professional learning and the improvement of specific aspects of professional practice that were regarded as yielding ‘local solutions to local problems’, and (c) they were characterised by relative inexperience among teaching and executive staff.

Having declared that these three things may make PASP schools ‘atypical’, however, there seems little reason to believe that the mechanisms that actually produced improved educational outcomes for students and professional skills and morale among staff are not generalisable beyond PASP schools. To be sure, there may also have been a sense of crisis which galvanised collective action in some PASP schools, but most simply had a shared sense of needing to respond collectively to challenging circumstances. Many schools in less challenging circumstances share the latter view – that times are changing and schools, teachers and educational practices need to change in relation to new and emerging social, cultural, economic, technological and material conditions. Staff in PASP schools used this shared sense of a ‘call to action’ to work together to find, implement and evaluate responses to these challenges, but they are not alone. Other schools, like those participating in various Australian National Schools Network initiatives and the Coalition of Knowledge Building Schools, similarly take the view that changing circumstances require collective responses. PASP schools were required by the Program to conduct action inquiry as part of the implementation process, documenting and
interrogating their experience and the effects of their efforts; these activities are equally characteristic of the professional practice of many other schools.

Social geography is not just an important concern for schools like those in the PASP, working in communities with deep needs. Every school has its own social geography, and every school must respond to the social, cultural, economic, technological, historical and material circumstances and conditions of its students, their families and the wider communities from which they come – and to which schools, in the end, return them after each young person’s journey through their school years. The challenging conditions PASP schools confronted may have attuned teachers more closely to those circumstances and conditions, but those conditions alone did not dictate the nature of their professional learning. Indeed, as the case of the Coalition of Knowledge Building Schools shows, schools in very different circumstances make their own collaborative learning journeys as they respond to changing circumstances and conditions within and around them. Every school can and must respond to changing practices and structures in the social, cultural, economic, technological, historical and material dimensions that frame its work in relation to those dimensions in its community and the wider society.

Social geography is an important reason for schools to become knowledge building organisations – to understand the local in relation to the general or the global. Social geography is always educationally substantial – by attending to social geography, teachers and schools like those in the PASP and the Coalition of Knowledge Building Schools have guided their knowledge building deliberately to learn how best to respond to the needs, circumstances and opportunities of their particular students and their families, and of their local communities. Many, perhaps most, of the PASP schools also learned – that their local efforts at knowledge building, through their action inquiry documentation and evaluation work, yielded insights not only into what worked and did not ‘work’ but how things worked.

It turns out that this has become a controversial question in some parts of the world – and increasingly in Australia. In health and in education in Britain and the United states, policy makers are increasingly interested in ‘what works’ in order to direct what health professionals and teachers do – in response, they say, to a crisis (an alleged crisis, that is) in public confidence about the quality of health care or the quality of education. In those places especially, though the trends are here in Australia too, they are turning to notion of ‘evidence-based practice’ to demand that health and educational interventions are justified by research. We turn now to consider what this means as part of our conclusion about the effectiveness of knowledge-building schools.

CONCLUSION – KNOWLEDGE BUILDING SCHOOLS: HOW DO WE KNOW THEY WORK?

In this contribution to the NSW Department of Education’s consultation document Excellence and Innovation we have asserted the strength and value of supporting schools as knowledge building organizations. We have developed our arguments both from the literature in the field, our own scholarship and the experience of conducting the meta-evaluation of the Priority Schools Action Program. Clearly, supporting schools to work in the ways which we have advocated under the conditions that we have deemed to be essential, schools need not only resources, especially time and flexibility, but also authentic accountability structures through which they can demonstrate that their learning makes a difference in the educational interests of their students.

The call for ‘evidence-based practice’ is a call by governments, policy makers and administrators for justifications that professionals are using available resources to best effect. It is also a call for teachers and other professionals to justify their practice on the grounds that it is supported by the best available research evidence. What counts as the best evidence is not an open question in the minds of many advocates of ‘evidence-based practice’, however – many advocates of evidence-based practice have a very particular view of the kind of evidence that might be regarded as compelling. Early in this paper, we cited Slavin (2002) and indicated that we would be returning to his work. He is one of a number of researchers in the United States arguing for the reinstatement of the randomised control trial as ‘the gold standard’ of scientific ‘proof’, and thus as the most appropriate way to evaluate changes in education.

We part from Slavin on evidence-based practice on the question of whether the randomised controlled trial is the source of the most reliable and valid evidence about practice. To be blunt, we
regard this as a mere assertion, based on a particular view of science, social science and educational science. It is undermined by the substantial and educationally-significant findings of a vast body of educational research that does not employ experimental (or even correlational) methods – for example, educational anthropology, much educational sociology, history or even economic research. Slavin’s position imagines that all the problems to be solved are ones of discovering what ‘interventions’ work best, in general (and not in this particular case), where what works best is measured in terms of student outcomes on common measures. It imagines that the evidence that guides good practice is to be found exclusively in books or literatures or research reports, and not in the experience and critically-examined reflection of practitioners themselves. It imagines that evidence travels across time and space, in the form of propositions, rather than in the observations of thoughtful people about what goes on in their own lives.

In different ways and to different degrees in different places, the research efforts of many teachers in many PASP schools, often helped and supported by academic partners, embraced all of the kinds of insights that experimental research does not yield. PASP teacher-researchers gathered evidence about different participants’ perspectives on their practice – for example, by responding to the student voice, by collecting the views of parents and others, and frequently by collecting and occasionally responding with surprise to each other’s views. They located their schools in place and in history, and studied how the situations of their schools came to be as they were, and how their efforts changed things for different people – and the reports they produced at the end of the first year of the program vividly showed what they changed, why, how, and with what effect. They studied the discourses they employed in understanding their work, and the possibilities of new discourses – like the discourses of ‘productive pedagogy’ and ‘quality teaching’. They explored the extent to which some school and classroom practices may have played a role in maintaining or challenging tendencies towards the reproduction of social inequalities – for example, by responding to cultural difference and improving the engagement of students in classroom work. In short, many teachers and schools collected powerful, relevant and compelling evidence about the nature and consequences of their efforts at improving education in their schools without employing – or ever needing – a single randomised controlled experiment. They used evidence, explored their work critically, considered alternative explanations, recognised practical exigencies, and worked in and through the drama that is the fluidity and dynamism of practice responding to real students in real schools in real communities.

Effectively, the PASP schools, like hundreds of schools before and since, around NSW and around the world, decided to become knowledge building organisations and they did so by gathering and reflecting critically on evidence, and by using the evidence available to inform their reasoning about what to do next. They regarded all evidence as partial and frail, as giving only a part of what we can never have and science can never give – a complete picture of the work of a school as a unified reality. They reasoned with and from evidence, they did not regard evidence as a kind of ‘proof’ that what they were doing were the best and only thing to be done.

Hundreds of journal articles, books and conference papers demonstrate the power of teacher research and practitioner knowledge, and, increasingly, the simple utility of understanding schools as knowledge-building organisations. Indeed, if we are to find the notion of evidence based practice truly useful, we would say that knowledge building schools use evidence forensically, that is to gather information from many sources and through many different means to more fully comprehend and understand what is taking place. The result is educational development for all – teachers, students and the school and its community.

REFERENCES:


Chapter 4

A More Responsive System
CHAPTER 4
A MORE RESPONSIVE SYSTEM

Public education has serviced NSW and the Australian nation very well indeed for over 150 years but it is now time for some radical changes and for some serious rethinking.

(School staff meeting)

The role of the NSW Department of Education and Training is to deliver high quality education and training, from early childhood education through to post-compulsory education and training. The Department meets the learning needs of children, young people and adults, and addresses training needs in industry. In providing its services, the Department is required to manage the resources made available to it by Government, meet Government priorities and operate within legislative expectations.

Society has widening expectations of education. The changing needs of parents, the impact of the rapid expansion of technology on the learning process and competition, particularly through the expansion of the non-government school systems, are all contributing to reshaping the educational landscape. Public education cannot rely on current systems to support teaching and learning but must continually reassess and adapt.

It is self evident that innovative schools, able to evolve and adapt to local and contemporary needs and pressures, are in the public interest. However there are significant questions in the public’s mind, and indeed among many of our principals, teachers and academics, about the Department’s capacity to support positive change in schools.
ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

The culture of any organisation sums up the relationships between the people who work in or are clients of the organisation, the way they think and pride themselves on what the organisation does and how it operates, its value systems and directions. Culture also contributes to employee work satisfaction, morale and commitment to corporate goals.

DEVELOPING A POSITIVE CULTURE

‘Them and Us’
Respondents expressed major concerns about the culture of the Department which is seen by many as overly bureaucratic, authoritarian and lacking connection to the field.

Management needs to talk and listen to staff. Management needs to communicate better with staff.
(School staff meeting)

... DET culture is ‘them and us’. ‘Them’ – head office bureaucracy ... those not involved in face to face dealings with students. [Administrators should] spend some time in classrooms. This together with some flexible and innovative thinking may help create a more united Department. (Personal submission)

The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW argues that: the DET needs to evolve from a highly centralised, mechanistic bureaucracy towards becoming a learning community. The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW has adopted the Senge (1990) model of a learning community as being an organisation where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.

For my entire teaching career it has been them and us and has no relationship to schools as the DET is administered by rules, formulas and faceless clerks. (School principal)

The Department needs to ensure, from the top down that the organisation’s culture is focused on their core business of providing quality education for kids ... (SEA community)

There were many comments about the system being rule bound and administered by people out of touch. The issue of ‘connection’ between schools and people in authority was frequently raised, with teachers reporting that they felt many decision-makers did not know enough about schools and how they operate.

The feeling and volume of such comments indicate a major need to address this perception. The sheer size of the system has also been seen by many as an inhibitor to innovation.

Bureaucracy supporting schools is the rhetoric but in reality the DET bureaucracy is driving schools. (Regional principals’ meeting)

It is the size of the system, combined with a top down bureaucratic management model which inhibits risk taking and responsiveness. Principals argue that such a system cannot sufficiently address and provide creative solutions to localised problems. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

Some schools commented on the reasons why the Department has, in their eyes, become distanced and authoritarian in its processes. Some have seen this as a product of the industrial disputation that frequently occurs with the NSW Teachers Federation whom they see equally carries the responsibility for inflexible approaches.
NSW DET and the NSW Teachers Federation are two monolithic entities that have for many decades obstructed any serious reform to NSW public education. Both have in past decades provided a valuable service in maintaining a statewide system with a commitment to equity but both are dinosaurs in the current market oriented educational context. Jointly they obstruct any sensible, rapid response to local needs, through mind-boggling bureaucratic paralysis in the case of DET and a lemming like ideological blindness in the case of the NSW TF. (School principal)

Riordan, in describing new models of schooling in NSW public education, states:

If a culture of innovation and local responsiveness is to further develop … then the successful local changes … should be closely studied with a view to identifying and removing unnecessary obstacles to further innovation. (Riordan, 2005: 247-248)

Schools expressed a common view that decisions are made that do not involve them but impact significantly on their operations. They feel that things are done to them and they do not know what to expect.

Right hand must know what left hand is doing eg volume of unannounced documentation. (Regional principals’ meeting)

Many respondents expressed the desire to have a greater professional say in the direction of their school to better meet local community needs.

The Department’s Policies

This view of a ‘top down’ management style was reinforced by comments in relation to the Department’s policies. Many respondents objected strongly to both the volume and content of policy statements. Principals reported frequent, lengthy and excessively detailed paper-based policy that gave little room for schools’ discretion.

Many principals spoke of the need for a ‘policy framework’ that gave schools an opportunity to meet system requirements but allowed them to adapt to local circumstances. Requests for a more measured approach to policy change linked to more effective use of modern technology to communicate changes were frequent.

The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW stated:

By developing a clearly stated set of expectations for schools, similar to those proposed in the implementation of the ‘Time to Teach, Time to Learn Review for Assessment and Reporting to Parents’, the DET could provide a framework for action that encourages freedom to act within limits.

The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW also noted that core entitlements should not be threatened by any such framework and cited the School Student Enrolment Policy as being one where variation could disadvantage some children.
A Coherent Vision

Many comments referred to the need for a coherent vision and statement of purpose for public education, backed by the commitment of both Government and the Department. There was a clear view that decisions were often ‘issues’ driven without apparent consistency. Some suggest there is a need to develop a common mission statement, through consultation, with agreed and shared goals.

A view expressed by many respondents is that the Commonwealth Government is making it deliberately hard for Public Schools to get funds (Principals’ meeting). Respondents called for a government commitment both morally and financially to public education. (Personal submission)

Underlying many comments was a mistrust of the system and a feeling by many staff members that they, as well as public education, were not valued. Many respondents sought public affirmation:

A culture in which politicians and senior managers openly champion public education is desperately needed. (School staff member)

From the responses, it is clear that many would support a more responsive and nimble bureaucracy, well connected to and respected by schools and communities; and a system of schools that can adapt and change to meet local needs.

Supporting Local Decision-Making

The theme of giving schools a capacity to shape themselves while operating within statewide requirements was frequently mentioned and appears as a fundamental issue for public education in the future.

It is clear that respondents believe that the operating systems within the Department are top down and excessively bureaucratic. They stated that the current operating environment works against innovation and evolution. They wanted to see greater flexibility and local decision-making. Respondents also said that if schools are given responsibility for more local decision-making then accountability systems and resources would need to be put in place to ensure effective management based on educational needs.

Fullan made the following comment:

… intelligent accountability involves balancing state-wide requirements with school and district-wide self-appraisal. There needs to be some degree of devolution to allow necessary flexibility at the local level which should operate within and be connected to state priorities. A one size fits orientation does not work … (Fullan, 2005: 232)

The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW echoes this view:

All teachers and all students are not the same, all boys and all girls are not the same, and so generalisations about the nature of schools, staff and students need to be tempered by the realisation that one size does not fit all. However, it is important to have a standardised set of minimum expectations. (Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW)
Local decision-making is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 and later in this chapter.

**Getting Connected**

Respondents stated that state office personnel were often remote and unaware of the special needs of schools and some suggested ways in which this might be improved:

*Head office needs to stay in contact with teachers in schools - perhaps regional school reps could be selected by peers for a limited term so head office have continuous input from different teachers in different schools.* (School community group)

The Department’s communications systems were frequently questioned. While a communications review is proceeding, there is a strong feeling that new technologies should be used more effectively and that schools should not be overwhelmed with information.

*We receive endless emails, the same information by fax and sometimes again by mail. There needs to be a central site that ensures all information sent and requested … is relevant to the education of students …* (School principal)

Respondents also expressed concern that the Department is a “politicised bureaucracy” and this has impacted on education planning and delivery:

*As education has become increasingly politicised over the years, government departments have become focussed on addressing perceived concerns quickly, and on managing community expectations. Thus the focus shifts from long term planning to short term solutions to perceived problems.* (State office staff member)

The issues of broad inclusion in decision making and the building of professional networks were frequently mentioned with respondents wanting a balance between autonomy and systemic responsibility. Networks that ensure regular dialogue between TAFE and schools, between primary and secondary schools and between parents and teachers were strongly valued by respondents.

**IN SUMMARY**

There was little doubt that many respondents were critical of the current culture of the Department of Education and Training. In essence there was a strong desire to allow schools to grow and shape themselves to better meet local needs. A top down system does not give people the capacity to grow nor does it allow principals to build local confidence to the degree that they could.

A recently published monograph by the OECD, *What Makes School Systems Perform*, found that in high performing systems there was *typically a division between a central state that defines broad objectives and monitors outcomes, and local governance and control over school processes* (OECD, 2004b:16). Many respondents expressed the desire to meet local needs in the context of a statewide framework of curriculum, defined responsibilities and clear accountabilities.

One response emphasised the importance of government support:
... particularly in terms of adequate funding of projects developed at the school or district level to promote transformational change. We should think not of a three way partnership, involving students, teachers and parents, but rather a four way partnership with the government [as] a vital and committed participant in the education process. (School staff meeting)

In the context of creating large scale, sustainable reform to build a more responsive public education system, Fullan (2005) has proposed renewal of the tri-level relationship between school, district and state. Fullan's model includes:

- schools reaching out to community and each other, forming learning communities
- districts with strong leaders able to drive reform and build lateral capacity between schools and with external partners
- a degree of devolution to allow flexibility at the local level, operating within and connected to state priorities.

This model places a mutual responsibility on players at each level to be more engaged with, and more able to influence, the other two levels. This model promotes networking within and between levels and is the antithesis of ‘us and them’.

In the NSW context, Fullan suggests the following combination:

*Some devolution of authority to local schools with respect to operational issues ... within a framework of state priorities...supported and monitored by districts and regions ... schools need to learn from each other ... Thus devolution does not mean school isolation. State and regional strategies, and commitments of local schools must include working with other schools to learn how to maximize improvement.* (Fullan, 2005: 234)

*Progress will be made ... when all three levels realise that they need each other, and begin to experience the benefits of interacting in new ways. ... The idea is to break with the status quo, create new momentum and then build on it ... capacity begets capacity. More can be accomplished with less effort because collective effort and ingenuity gets stronger. For the first time in the history of educational reform, we have an opportunity and possibility of changing the entire system for the better.* (Fullan, 2005: 235)

Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis (2005), who evaluated the highly successful Priority Action Schools Program (PASP), support productive networking and have seen it in action to bring about improved student outcomes and improved organisational culture.

*The PASP experience shows us that networking as a means of developing knowledge building schools needs to be purposeful ... one group of nearby primary schools ... established itself as a collective to meet on a regular basis with an academic partner to share and discuss issues and challenges they faced – many of which were shared as consequences of social conditions of disadvantage common across their district. In this case, schools’ and teachers’ familiarity with each other’s contexts assisted and encouraged them in their discussions.* (Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis, 2005: 180)
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS ENHANCING LEARNING

The most accurate predictors of student achievement in school are ... the extent to which a student’s family is able to 1) create a home environment which encourages learning; 2) communicate high yet reasonable expectations for their child’s achievement and future career; and 3) become involved in the child’s education at the school and in the community.

(National PTA, 2000; in Charter Friends National Network, 2000.)

Student outcomes are critically dependant on parental and family factors. Value systems, social growth and maturity, resilience, self esteem and sound judgement are driven substantially by family experiences. Stronger partnerships between the school, its teachers and the parent self-evidently make a positive contribution to student learning. As society changes, its expectations of schools change. In their effort to promote effective partnerships with parents and carers, schools are faced with a new and evolving social reality.

Since the quality of parenting is such an important factor in a child’s success at school, there are questions about how schools can best work with parents in contributing to their children’s education. Children from families that find it difficult to provide a stable and caring environment are most at risk:

Outcomes for students are clearly maximised when there is a genuine partnership between school and home. They are additionally enhanced when students see that the goals of school and home are closely aligned when it comes to the learning and well being of students. (Secondary Principals’ Council)

The quality of parenting in the early years of a child’s development needs a special focus. The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW described parents as the first teachers of their children and asserted that the needs of individual students can only be addressed by participation and empowerment of parents and students and by the active partnership of informed parents, teachers and students.

Parents have been clear that although they want to be involved at school many see available time to engage in school-based activities as a major problem. Many believe their capacity for sustained engagement, including through the traditional P&C organisation, is limited. They have as a result raised issues about effective school/parent communication and expectations.

As a parent, I want to be consulted, informed and valued but I do not want to come home from work and be another teacher for my own children and I do not want to have unrealistic expectations placed on me. (Parent)

Many parents have expressed the view that unambiguous and regular communication about their child’s progress is their critical concern. They are also anxious about the tendency for schools to use education jargon.

Please ensure the use of jargon is decreased! The culture/mindset of DET shorthand speak and acronyms are a
substantial barrier to parents; jargon excludes casual interest and requires effort to overcome. Even if parents can translate the code, they can find it difficult to understand the implications and consequences of particular schoolie speak. Schools and staff need to learn how to communicate in an effective manner; this also means actually listening to parents’ concerns before telling them how DET does things. (P&C meeting).

Many parents sought a more comprehensive use of modern communication technologies and strategies. This includes the creation of school websites, group email systems, email capacity between teachers and parents, focused information nights (for example literacy strategies for parents), and plain language invitations, newsletters, reports and presentations. While many schools have embraced some or all of these, it is clear from comments that schools and their communities would benefit from reassessing their communications strategies.

Although some countries and other systems have structures such as school boards, there was no strong view expressed that parental roles in school governance should change significantly nor that a new form of organisation for community involvement in NSW public schools was necessary.

To support parental involvement the NSW Primary Principals’ Association suggested a statement of principles reflecting best practice, exemplary ideas and guiding notions.

There was a strong view that any framework supporting and contributing to the development of partnerships between parents and schools should be basic and flexible, giving individual schools the opportunity to implement systems that suited local needs within overarching requirements.

The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW believes there is a need for a state-wide policy framework to ensure consistency of inclusion of parents, carers and the community in decision making. Such a framework must be flexible to the needs of individual schools.

The Catholic Education Commission in reflecting on its own circumstances supports this view by stating a state-wide policy to achieve consistency should be in the form of general guidelines and communities should be given the responsibility for deciding the manner in which they wish to be involved in decision making.

Some parents have expressed the view that schools need to be clear about their expectations of parents. A clarification of mutual obligations, possibly even contracts between parents and the school, is required. The NSW Secondary Principals’ Council felt that this was a particular issue for some children who came from challenged backgrounds where some parents expected schools to be able to do “all things for all people.”

In the Companion Paper on rural education, Letts et al said:

Overcoming issues of low attendance, poor retention rates and below average student outcomes requires the community to play an active and decision-making role in rural and remote schools. For example, Indigenous students’ attitude towards schooling and perceptions of their current and future prospects have
improved where Indigenous parents, carers and the community have been involved in the school. (HREOC, 2000; cited in Letts et al, 2005: 240)

Some respondents wanted much greater local input into value statements and school procedures, rather than the adoption of systemic positions. They felt this would give a greater sense of commitment and a sense of ownership by the school community. Some respondents suggested that parent surveys and evaluations could contribute to a review of schools’ partnership processes in consultation with their communities.

The role of the P&C was frequently mentioned:

P&Cs should exist in all schools and this should be the place that provides a forum for parents and citizens of the local school communities to discuss issues relating to the school and advise the principal in any matters relating to the school. (Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW)

One respondent, however, stated parent participation is a domain of the middle classes (Regional staff meeting).

Respondents felt that one of the less recognised community assets is the volunteer and/or mentor. With Australia’s ageing population there is a growing capacity to increase volunteer engagement in schools. Volunteers or mentors could work as tutors, specialists in particular curriculum areas based on their career experiences, coaches and advisors. Respondents recommended incentives that could assist volunteers including tax breaks or some similar form of recognition.

There is a view expressed by respondents that learning as a partnership should involve a range of community assets. In addition to parents, these included local industries, facilities and organisations, with all schools needing a culture of extending themselves out to such groups.

Industry needs to provide places for work placement for students and nurture and develop local population … Industries need to work with schools and support cooperative ventures such as VET subjects and work placement. (School staff member)

There is little doubt that many respondents were excited to develop the concept of the school as a community hub. Some described the school as the cement that binds the community. Some positively described school parenting classes, joint school community projects, ‘adopt a school’ projects by community groups and/or significant community members and school mentoring programs.

The role of the school in rural communities is particularly important.

The significance of the relationship between the rural school and the community cannot be underestimated … Partnership between the school and community would ideally ensure the future success of rural education and rural student outcomes. Rural and remote education entails schooling from the bush in addition to the more commonly understood schooling for the bush. Rural schools are often positive focal places in rural communities where a spirit of action and empowerment, learning and togetherness is espoused and enacted. (Letts et al, 2005: 240)
Partnerships with other government agencies were seen as particularly important. Early diagnosis of disabilities and timely intervention strategies were highly valued. Respondents praised Families First, Better Futures, Macarthur Team Work Project in Schools, Schools as Community Centres and similar programs and sought their expansion.

The NSW Department of Community Services supports initiatives:

- ... that promote schools as community centres and which endeavour to incorporate children and families into the wider school community. This can assist in reducing social isolation particularly for families newly arrived to an area and promote the school as a vital element within any community.

The capacity of preschools, sited within a school, and with across agency involvement would assist in early intervention activities and parenting support, particularly in needy communities. The Schools as Community Centres program funded through Families First provides a good model of this concept.

Early intervention is common sense. It aims to nip a problem in the bud to strengthen families and communities. (Fiona Stanley, SMH, 15 March 2005). This issue is highlighted in Chapter Two, in the Early Childhood Years section.

Respondents emphasised the important role of the principal in ascertaining community views and opinions. The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW believes that:

- ... further professional development of the understanding, attitude and knowledge needed by school principals in how a P&C Association works, its constitution, rules and structures as well as their role in relation to P&C associations is urgently needed.

Dinham and Bhindi in their companion paper to this report stated:

- Principals of schools where outstanding sites were identified exhibited a keen awareness of the wider environment and a positive attitude towards engaging with it. They place a high priority on good communications and relationships with external stakeholders. (Dinham and Bhindi, 2005: 169)

The Priority Action Schools Program is a recent good example of the involvement of parents in school-based decision-making. This program gave substantial funding to schools and required community involvement in planning. This capacity to shape educational provision in partnership empowered schools and communities and fostered genuine engagement.

IN SUMMARY

Riordan suggests that schools of the future should become social and educational centres of communities and builders of social capital of the local communities they serve.

In this future, communities will regard their schools as community centres and valuable community resources. In order to achieve this goal it is likely that there will need to be a further shift in resources and authority from State offices and toward school regions and to schools themselves in order that they may better be able to respond to and work with their communities. (Riordan, 2005: 243)
The concept of a full service school, adequately resourced with across agency personnel based in the school, would help build the school as the logical centre of the community and also build an effective partnership with parents for a more efficient delivery of service.

Respondents who wrote about building better partnerships between schools and communities generally focused on acting in the best interests of students. The idea of students as partners, rather than students as clients, is gaining currency with interest groups and in academic circles.

Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis (2005) support the engagement of students as partners in both their own learning and as participants in a learning community.

... in order to begin to engage in ... teacher professional learning within a knowledge-building school there is no better place to start than with the students themselves. How curious it is that consulting students is often an afterthought rather than the beginning point ... they are rarely consulted about what happens in their classrooms, in the playground and more generally in the ways in which the purposes of schooling are discussed ... it is essential for the development of the knowledge building school to consult with its students, treating them as partners in learning and knowledge about the conditions for good learning to occur ... (Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis, 2005: 181)

Community involvement and partnerships across a range of community and government agencies continue to offer great opportunities to enhance the life opportunities of children. It is clear that building conditions to promote and enhance this involvement needs to be a continuing component of our schools and system in the future. At the same time, the Department's processes need to adapt to school communities' changing capacities and expectations.

The final word on this topic should come from the Federation of P&Cs' Association of NSW which stated:

Parent and student participation in genuine decision making can only occur when partnerships are recognised as complementary activities to the 'real work of schools', rather than as a set of competing interests. The existing power structures of schools mean that education is done to students rather than with students, where curriculum is not negotiated and where authenticity and connectedness to the community is an afterthought. The work of the Priority Action Schools Programme has had a great success in modifying school culture towards an empowerment based model. A similar model could be employed to address systemic change issues.
MEETING LOCAL NEEDS

If we are going to compete on a level playing field with non-government schools we need, I believe, the capacity to be far more responsive and flexible in matching teachers and their skills to the specific needs of each school and its individual programs.

(School staff member)

HOW SCHOOLS ARE STAFFED

What is happening in other places

In other Australian states and territories, there has been a general shift towards local selection of teachers based on merit. For example, the Western Australian public education system is phasing in local selection of classroom teachers, with up to 50% of positions to be filled in this way by the end of 2006. Victorian and Tasmanian public education systems undertake the most merit-based selection.

Non-government school systems choose their own staff, some within an overarching framework:

Any staffing formula is a blunt instrument which promotes conformity rather than local equity. Schools are not equal or homogenous. The alternative used in non-government systems is to use guidelines as an indicator which allows the principal to see staff as a resource. This permits the school to manage staff levels relative to operating costs. Class sizes then become a local rather than a central decision. This has worked quite satisfactorily in Catholic diocesan schools for many years, though some schools remain difficult to staff fully. (Catholic Education Commission)

The report Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers (OECD, 2004a) draws on the results of a major study of teacher policy conducted over 2002-2004 in collaboration with 25 countries, including Australia. Concerns raised by participating representatives included whether students in disadvantaged areas have the quality teachers they need.

The report also states that systems which focus on selecting the best suited candidate for each position, such as exist in Canada, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, will often recruit from a wide range of sources, including varying age groups and from other careers. While such systems may also experience difficulties such as attracting enough teachers in subject shortfall areas of mathematics, science and ICT, the report also poses solutions. These include the following:

- Because local managers play such a critical role in personnel management, and tailoring school programmes to meet local needs, such countries also need to place comparatively greater emphasis on the selection and training of principals and other school leaders.

- … schools in disadvantaged or unpopular locations need to be provided with significantly more resources to enable them to compete for quality teachers …

- … there needs to be much more differentiation in salaries and working conditions in order to attract the types of teachers that are in short supply. Uniform salaries and conditions are likely to result in an over-supply of some types of teachers, and shortages of others. (OECD, 2004a: 10)

How NSW Public Schools are Staffed

The staffing of NSW public schools takes place on a centralised, system wide basis. The filling of classroom teacher, executive and principal vacancies is in accordance with a Staffing Agreement between the Department and the NSW Teachers Federation. The number and type of teachers allocated to a school, including executives, classroom teachers and specialist staff, are in accordance with centrally determined, enrolment-based formulae. The appointment of teachers is supported by a computerised staffing system which holds encoded details of vacant positions and available applicants and matches applicants to vacancies.
Recent changes to the Teaching Service Act 1980 provide for appointment on merit to senior positions from applicants outside the NSW Teaching Service. This Act also provides for annual performance reviews for principals.

A new Staffing Agreement came into force for three years from term two 2005. It maintains all current provisions for priority transfers for all teaching staff and service transfers for classroom teachers and includes 300 classroom teacher positions each year being advertised for filling through merit selection.

The new Agreement provides a balance between providing principals with more flexibility in choosing their staff, with procedures that ensure all schools throughout NSW are staffed with quality teachers. The agreement provides:

- capacity for a principal to choose for a selection panel to be provided with up to five applicants from the employment list. This enables schools to select the employment applicant who best meets their needs. The principal also continues to have the capacity to request the School Staffing Unit to make the appointment from the employment list.
- schools in all regions with opportunities to select teachers through the Permanent Employment Program (PEP).
- improved processes, including strengthened staffing codes and an expression of interest process for the selection of teachers under the executive mobility and merit selection from within current principals scheme. The executive mobility process now includes the capacity for selection panels to not recommend any applicant for appointment. These processes ensure that the teacher selected under these schemes meets the specific needs of the school.

The documentation to accompany the Staffing Agreement notes that as a result of amendments to the Teaching Service Act 1980, both current NSW DET employees and persons not currently employed by the DET may apply for vacant positions which are to be filled by merit selection following advertisement.

Since 1992, the Department has implemented an Incentives Scheme to assist with staffing isolated rural schools. Incentives include priority for transfer following the minimum service requirement; additional training and development days; rental subsidies; and enhanced leave provisions. An annual retention benefit of $5,000 gross is paid to teachers in 40 of the most isolated schools who remain beyond the minimum service requirement. Also, a range of locality allowances is available for teachers in identified schools. The option to apply for a priority transfer after a minimum period of service has been a popular aspect of the Incentives Scheme, with about 150 priority transfers effected each year.

**Local solutions**

Responses indicated that, by and large, school communities were keen for greater flexibility in the staffing and resourcing of schools and wanted opportunities for schools to choose their own staff. There was a strongly held view that the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to school staff allocation needs to be abandoned if NSW public schools are to meet local needs.

*Principals should be in a position to employ the people most suited to their school - as in the private school system. To continue to consider the entire workforce of teachers to be equally skilled and suited to any school type is nonsense. Teachers would then have greater encouragement to continue to update their skills.* (Parent)

*We have to balance the FAIRNESS of a statewide transfer system with the opportunity for schools to select locally teachers that match their skills needs. This balance may DIFFER according to the staffing problems of the school. (e.g. Ballina may be happy with 90% local and 10% system staffing, while Brewarrina may need 10% local and 90% system, with...* (School staff meeting)

*Schools need same flexibility TAFE has to employ its own staff - need to be able to determine staffing portfolio/mix based on local needs: need to build team strengths.* (Joint schools TAFE meeting)
HEAPS of INCENTIVES). There are needs here that don’t match. Kids needs/teachers needs/school & system needs. (School staff member)

At the same time, some respondents, generally teachers, wanted no change to the current system. A number of respondents cited an article from the Teachers Federation journal *Education* (22 November 2004), entitled Futures Project – Developing a submission:

The NSW Government is responsible for staffing the statewide public education system. His responsibility should not be abrogated by devolution. The statewide transfer system has the capacity to meet genuine school needs by closely matching the qualifications, skills and expertise of teachers with the vacant position. The statewide staffing system and its centrepiece, a system of transfers, is the essential element in ensuring the appointment of teachers in every school across the state and therefore a curriculum guarantee for all students. (School meeting group)

Those who wanted no change to the system were particularly concerned with the issue of hard-to-staff schools, which is discussed below. It was clear that respondents were not aware that advertised positions have generally been those which could not be filled through internal transfer mechanisms, and most of these are in hard-to-staff locations. Other reasons given for maintaining the current system included:

- concern about the role of principals in selecting staff (see Chapter 3)
- the wish to preserve the transfer rights of teachers.

In their Companion Paper, Letts et al stated that location and context define the culture and needs of schools:

The ‘situated’ aspect of this concept signals that place matters, and that far from being a unitary site for education, place and context create different dynamics that call for differentiated approaches and responses – from the school level to the system level. (Letts et al, 2005: 237)

Some respondents wanted to increase schools’ control over staff selection and appointment while operating within a statewide framework. The NSW Secondary Principals’ Council made the following recommendation:

That DET negotiate with the NSWTF staffing arrangements, within a centralised state-wide staffing model and in consultation with the SPC, that enable the local selection of a proportion of the school’s staffing entitlement in both teaching and support roles. (Secondary Principals Council)

The Federation of P&C’s Association of NSW supported a degree of flexibility but cautioned against “excessive” flexibility. It also expressed frustration at having little say in who gets appointed to a school:

... there continues to be considerable disquiet about staffing processes, where locally determined selection of staff is rarely allowed, and community input is disenfranchised. (Federation of P&C’s Association of NSW)
A large number of respondents proposed different resource allocation models to enable a greatly increased capacity for schools to meet the needs of their students and said this should be a priority.

Some respondents expressed a view that schools should have total control over staff selection and saw this as critical to meeting local needs. Some made comparisons with the way the Department allocates staff to schools and methods used by other systems.

Some respondents advocated the capacity to vary their staff allocation by accessing the monetary equivalent and using it to pay for different types of staff.

Other respondents expressed a wish for a school to be provided with a total salaries budget as determined by the staffing formula, and for principals, in consultation with the school community, to determine the composition of staff, to meet the needs of the students at the school.

Many respondents made a distinct link between the capacity for schools to choose their own staff and the benefits of this. Benefits mentioned included improved student outcomes and achievement of synergies, made possible by strong team work.

Principals should be able to choose their staff on ‘merit’. They should have the right to choose suitable people who will enhance the culture of the school and fit in as part of the existing team. Sending people who are unsuitable, to schools who do not want them, is detrimental to both students and staff. A good school culture is a hard fought reward and the Principal of the school should have the right to protect that culture. (School staff meeting)

Schools need the ultimate say in who teaches at their schools. A principal knows the local area and the local people and giving them the ability to recruit allows the Principal to build an effective team. All appointments should be made on merit. (Personal submission)

Many respondents expressed a tension between accountability for student outcomes and the inability to select staff to best meet student needs.

One of the most frustrating issues for principals is to be on the one hand totally accountable for everything related to his or her school while on the other hand not being given the responsibility or control over what is THE most vital element – staffing. As I look … to the Victorian system, the comparison is stark. (School staff member)

The issue of the alignment of increased responsibility and increased accountability is discussed in Chapter 3 on Leadership.

Meeting the Needs of Hard-to-Staff Schools

In Britain, teachers in inner London schools are paid 20% more than other teachers. Principals in inner London schools are also paid significantly more than other principals (Labour, 2005).
Some respondents suggested specific proportions of staff be selected locally, while expressing a view that the centralised staffing system assists hard-to-staff schools.

We need to also guarantee that hard to staff schools will still have quality teachers for their students. Perhaps this is best achieved by allowing 90% of schools to locally select staff and maintain central or regional appointments for the other 10%. Alternatively, we could allow all schools to appoint up to 90% of positions, some using incentive payments and maintain a pool of positions for central placement. We must move beyond the rigidity and low degree of ownership and incentive that exists in our current procedures. While we can expect the usual level of doom saying and intimidation from the union, we must not be defeated by this. (State office staff member)

In spite of the statewide transfer system and a range of incentives, demographic data indicate that teacher turnover in western NSW (ie Western NSW and New England Regions), in terms of total transfers and transfers out of the region, is higher than anywhere else in the State, followed by South Western Sydney Region. The mean age of both classroom teachers and executives in South Western Sydney Region is the lowest of the ten regions, with classroom teachers and executives in Western NSW Region being the second lowest.

This supports the respondents’ view that consideration should be given to extending the concept of incentives and initiatives to attract and retain teachers particularly in difficult to staff locations.

Some respondents favoured an expansion of available incentives to attract and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools. These included additional salary, laptops, cheap housing loans, access to child care and other forms of family support, smaller class sizes and additional time off.

Some respondents focused on incentives related to training and career development, such as support for additional study, career path management through training plans and promotional opportunities, and training for relevant skills development including behaviour management and upskilling to keep up with the demands of teaching today.

Accelerated progression through the incremental scale; additional increments for difficult to staff locations; additional employer super contributions; salary packaging for a range of items [related to] disadvantaged areas. (Staff office staff member)

Other ideas included improved induction for beginning teachers into both hard-to-staff schools and the system as a whole, followed by mentoring and professional support through effective networking.

Some said that local selection, coupled with monetary or other incentives such as transfer after a specified period, tax breaks, smaller class sizes and better resourcing of disadvantaged schools would be powerful in attracting and retaining the best staff.

Many respondents saw additional resourcing in a wide range of forms as the best way to attract and retain teachers in schools in disadvantaged areas.
More financial incentives; … more support staff …; increased funding …; reduced teacher load …; increased professional development. (School staff meeting)

A large number of responses suggested improved recruitment strategies to target schools in hard-to-staff locations. Suggestions included:

- expanding pathways into teaching so that recruitment would take place from a larger pool
- ‘growing your own’ teachers, that is encouraging local young people (especially Aboriginal people) into teaching
- reintroducing bonded scholarships
- staffing schools on an area basis and providing opportunities for rotation
- strengthening partnerships between schools and communities
- allowing schools to choose their own teachers, including the permanent appointment of casual teachers.

Other respondents commented on the issue of retaining good casuals in their schools:

> We all have outstanding casuals that we would like to keep / have at our school but under this system there is NO WAY we can get them. (School staff meeting)

More effective recruitment of new graduates was seen as a key strategy:

> We need to target pre-graduate students and offer them employment … up to 12 months before graduation. … We cannot continue to see the brain drain go to the private schools. (School staff member)

Others suggested that positive promotion of hard-to-staff schools should be used to break down any misconceptions about working in particular areas as a solution to attracting and retaining experienced teachers.

> Maybe we need a really intensified marketing of the innovative programs and results being achieved in the south western and western suburbs coupled with some incentives to get more experienced teachers to come out here. (School staff member)

A number of respondents suggested that effective teachers would be attracted to schools which were traditionally difficult to staff if they were set up as models of innovation, quality teaching and quality leadership.

Some staff favoured provision of distance education in place of keeping open very small, isolated schools which use a high level of staffing resources compared with the number of students enrolled.

> A far superior level of education could be provided to the students of these schools through a combination of satellite technology, distance education and tutor support … Part of the existing facility could be maintained as a learning centre, supported by one full time teacher, as a tutor/ facilitator. The learning centre could be equipped with the latest technology

Merit based employment of staff in disadvantaged schools. (School staff meeting)

Perhaps some sort of sandwich course [for graduates to undertake teacher training] with lots of on-the-job training could be arranged. (Parent)

… priority dates need to be scrapped and jobs need to be given on merit selection. … Having recently graduated and been through all this I feel very strongly that the way teachers are employed and supported needs a big overhaul. (School staff member)

Offer new and innovative ideas to teaching in these schools. Project based learning and opportunities to involve the community in education. This will attract quality teachers. (Parent)

Supporting disadvantaged schools to become ‘lighthouse’ schools through targeted pilots such as middle schooling, as specialist locations for collaborative programs with universities, which would ensure enhanced skill development and therefore greater marketability of teachers when they wish to leave the school. (State office staff member)
Some NSW universities frame their pre-service teacher education in terms of preparing teachers to teach in particular locations. Charles Sturt University is revising core teacher education subjects to foreground issues related to the importance of place, learning to “read” place, multi-age pedagogies, and providing place-based experiences (Letts et al, 2005: 238) related to rural and remote locations. In so doing, university staff have examined from the teacher’s point of view living in rural and remote locations and its impact on teacher retention.

Social inclusion and involvement - the way the individual teacher contributes to, and manages living in, a rural and remote community, and their adjustments to their highly visual public role (the ‘fishbowl’ syndrome) - directly influences overall satisfaction, professionalism and retention. (Letts et al, 2005: 240)

Schools Reshaping and Reorganising to Meet Local Needs

The reform initiatives of six high performing education systems have been examined by the OECD (OECD, 2004b). A common feature of these high performing education systems is:

> There has been an overall move towards decentralisation, but this has not meant the central state disengaging from an interest in educational outcomes. (OECD, 2004b: 16)

Features of the reforms include:

- Canada: increased parental involvement
- France: consolidation of initial teacher training with a stronger practical orientation
- Netherlands: government decision-making on basic framework for education, while schools manage personnel policy and finances
- Sweden: increase in local authorities’ ability to allocate resources as they see fit
- England: establishment of specialist schools. By allowing secondary schools to take on special characteristics and encouraging links with outside bodies including companies and community organisations, the aim is to strengthen these schools as organisations and allow them to thrive as places of learning
- Finland: improving cooperation between schools and the world of work and establishing standards in pre-service and in-service teacher training.

In his Companion Paper, Riordan provides an historical insight into the development of comprehensive schools in NSW. He argues that:

> … standard provision was ‘invented’ at a time when community opinion was in favour of assimilation of difference and that variation of school types and educational programs within the public system might now better reflect the … diversity of the population [multicultural, gifted and talented students, students with special needs] … (Riordan, 2005: 4)

Riordan outlines the range of relatively recent successful alternative models of schooling in NSW, including collegiate groups and their links with TAFE NSW and universities. He also attributes part of their success to wide ranging community involvement, including local industry. He sees these alternative models of schooling as:

> … the beginnings of a move from public education as comprehensive schools to public education as a comprehensive system of schools. Recent successes in public schooling both in NSW and elsewhere have been evident where schools have responded to the specific educational needs of increasingly diverse learners and communities. (ibid: 7)
Reshaping schools

Some respondents wanted to see schools reshaped, for example by establishing campuses with a junior school, a middle school and a senior school, and having improved transition between primary and high school.

*A structure of campuses for: preschool to Year 4; Year 5 to Year 8; Year 9 – Year 12 would allow for the segregation of students at significant stages of their development and provision of more age specific student welfare programs.* (State office staff member)

A number of NSW public schools have been established outside the traditional models of Kindergarten - Year 6 primary schools; Year 7 - Year 12 high schools; or Kindergarten to Year 12 central schools catering for smaller numbers of students in non-coastal rural locations. These include:

- six community schools catering for students from Kindergarten – Year 12, using a range of different models
- eleven multi-campus colleges consisting of a number of junior campuses (Years 7-10) and usually one senior campus (Years 11 - 12) working together as a single entity across a number of sites.

In addition, some multi-campus colleges are co-located with TAFE NSW and university campuses. Many respondents saw great potential for achieving greater synergy through schools and TAFE, working together in productive partnerships:

*A collaborative and cooperative culture … between schools and TAFE to underpin the effective use of resources … staff members teaching across TAFE and schools … [shared] resources … schools and TAFE reviewing schedules to ensure optimum access for students undertaking studies in both environments.* (State office staff meeting)

The NSW Teachers Federation expressed their support for retaining comprehensive high schools. Their submission quotes the Vinson Report as follows:

*In considering structural arrangements for public secondary education, in general, Year 7-12 high schools … should be considered the norm, and any departure from this form, such as selective and specialist schools and multi-campus colleges, should be based on cogent and explicit justification of the values and evidence supporting the change.*

Flexible Work Practices

Some respondents favoured renewed and flexible work practices, such as extensions to the school day and more flexible timetabling, as well as an expansion in the modes of delivery, such as distance education and summer schools, as ways of increasing access to education for all students and better meeting their learning needs.

The Teachers Award provides for some flexibility in high school organisation. Provisions include the capacity to vary school hours for the purpose of delivery of vocational education and training to students in Years 11 and 12; teaching outside normal school hours...
for Years 7 to 10; and provision of alternative work organisation with the concurrence of the majority of staff. However, the restrictive nature of the Teachers’ Award and its impact on schools’ and TAFE’s capacity to deliver flexible and responsive services was noted by a number of respondents:

The current teachers’ award restricts organisational flexibility – there is a need to ensure that any industrial agreements are appropriate to the organisation’s goals and are flexible enough to enable achievement of those goals. (TAFE staff meeting)

Some respondents suggested solutions with implications beyond the school and saw the advantages of a strong public education system within which schools could operate in partnership. They said that principals of different schools should work together for the good of the students.

Other respondents wanted to see a whole of government approach to issues, particularly in remote locations, where schools could work with, for example, Centrelink, NSW Health and TAFE NSW to support students better within and beyond the school.

Some respondents foresaw major changes in the future for both teachers and schools:

Teachers, in the knowledge society, will need to tolerate higher levels of ambiguity, complexity and potential conflict. They also need to cope with information overload and constantly changing skill requirements. (Industry meeting)

Flexibility - will schools be as they are? Will schools cease and learning become home centred (using computers) and social skills weekly? (School staff member)

The Review of Aboriginal Education made a number of recommendations concerned with reshaping and reorganising schools, with the goal of better meeting student needs. Recommendation 16 of the Review of Aboriginal Education 2003-2004 states:

That targeted schools … (for example, those with 60% of Aboriginal students) may, through consultation and agreement with their communities, and through support by DET in negotiating new industrial instruments to protect the working conditions of employees, be classified as Community Schools … (NSW AECG and NSW DET, 2004)

Features of these community schools would include:

- capacity to reconfigure their resources in more flexible ways than is currently possible
- determination of their own operating times (for example extended school days and different operating hours)
- interagency involvement and support.

Recommendation 17 of the Review of Aboriginal Education 2003-2004 states:

That a number of innovative secondary education programs be developed … that provide greater flexibility in the use of resources and staffing structures in specific schools to better meet Aboriginal student needs and aspirations … (NSW AECG and NSW DET, 2004)
IN SUMMARY

Respondents had divergent views on how much decision-making should take place at the local school and community level, particularly with respect to staffing resources. Many respondents, including teachers, principals and parents, said that schools and their communities must have at least some say about which teachers are appointed.

Within statewide frameworks, and having regard to the special needs of hard-to-staff schools, the selection of staff for their capacity to deliver quality student outcomes in a challenging environment, within a locally driven school culture, would maximise schools' capacity to support students and value staff.

It is clear from submissions that there is a recognised need for a more responsive service provision than currently exists in our schools. There is a capacity for the Department to build on its successes of more joined up services, for example the co-location of schools and TAFE to achieve a smooth transition between school and post-school options.

Many submissions reflect this need and point to a readiness to explore some other models. While there is no plan for far-reaching changes to the current models of primary and secondary schooling, the Department needs to provide those school communities which see a need for a variation in current structures with support to try something different, such as the piloting of middle schools or greater flexibility in school hours. Such variations, carefully monitored for their effectiveness, in consultation with school communities, could provide a rich base for furthering productive change to meet the diverse needs of students and their communities.
PREPARING TEACHERS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THEIR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITIES

It is imperative that the elements and stages of teacher competencies ... refer to knowledge and skills related to teaching all students in the typical class. Today, the typical class includes Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students, students with special education needs, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, students with challenging behaviours and students with challenges in literacy. (Family Advocacy)

Meeting the widely differing needs, aspirations and learning styles of students in NSW public schools has implications for teacher education and qualification requirements, teacher induction and ongoing training and development, school organisation and allocation of resources, including teachers.

Academic qualification requirements for teaching in NSW public schools include prescribed mandatory levels of university study in a particular subject area or areas. They have been developed in consultation with the NSW Teachers Federation, principals’ groups, the Department’s curriculum consultants and teachers’ professional associations. These groups have traditionally seen a correlation between the capacity to teach to a high standard and academic teaching qualifications.

The NSW Secondary Principals’ Council, in relation to pre-service teacher education, stated in its submission:

In order for teachers to meet the needs of 21st century learners, thorough preservice preparation is needed coupled with continuous learning throughout their teaching careers. The preparation must include our culture of valuing diversity. An extensive knowledge of diverse needs of learners is essential, as are the techniques to respond to and meet these needs.

The preparation must include extensive time in several school settings.

Many respondents echoed this view. They said that teacher education needs to include more professional experience or practicum, to take place in a range of schools including non-coastal rural, schools for specific purposes, and schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Longer periods of practical experience, such as one-term-long internships, were also favoured.

Respondents also stated that pre-service teacher education should provide practical experience teaching students with different learning needs and styles, including gifted and talented students, classes which integrate students with special learning needs, Aboriginal students and multi-age classes.

... training should include modules that introduce all teachers to the profile of students with special needs ... address indigenous education, gifted and talented, behaviour modification, enterprise education, VET, career education and life-long learning. (State office staff meeting)

... more practical training, less theory ... university in small blocks ... in classroom more. (School staff meeting)
A large number of respondents also said that pre-service teacher education should equip students to meet the challenges of the real life situations they are likely to encounter in the classroom. They wanted better training in behaviour management and in identifying and teaching students with mental health issues such as depression and attention deficit disorder.

Some respondents advocated targeting people from diverse backgrounds and providing them with scholarships to undertake teacher training.

Many respondents wrote about the changing nature of teaching and the need to prepare current and future teachers for the knowledge society of the future. A common theme in these responses was the need for teachers to be able to access technology and training in its use to enhance student learning. A large number of respondents also wanted the role of teachers to encompass teaching students how to be successful lifelong learners and how to gain research skills. They also wanted teachers to support students to manage their own learning.

Teachers need to become facilitators of knowledge acquisition for students and to teach them the skills to critically evaluate information and to develop the skills to apply their knowledge to new situations and to use it to solve problems. Students need to be aware that knowledge is ever changing and we are all becoming lifelong learners. (School staff member)

Respondents stated that teachers needed to be capable of preparing students for a society and an economy in which they will be expected to be self-directed learners, able and motivated to learning over a life time.

Teaching in a knowledge society is far removed from passing on a body of knowledge … encourage students to inquire, reflect, create and test ideas. (State office staff meeting)

Many respondents advocated strengthening and making more productive the partnerships between the Department and universities to ensure that teacher education is relevant to NSW public schools and well connected to school needs.

As the largest employer of teacher education graduates in NSW the Department needs to exert more pressure on universities to ensure that both the theoretical and practical experiences in preservice teacher education: prepare graduates for the realities of classroom teaching; are focused around best practice models being espoused by the system; reflect changes occurring in teaching both locally and globally; and give graduates the skills and flexibility to move into a more performance driven and accountable profession. (State office staff meeting)

Teacher education programs in NSW universities differ widely. They may take the form of an integrated program of content and teacher education, or they may consist of a one to two year program of teacher education completed following a suitable undergraduate degree. The length and nature of in-school professional experience also varies. Some programs include a term-long internship, under
which the teacher education student teaches without a supervising teacher being present at all times.

Teacher education programs in NSW universities generally prepare a teacher to become either a primary or a secondary teacher by including either a primary or secondary teaching ‘method’. In 2004, Charles Sturt University (Albury-Wodonga Campus) commenced offering the Bachelor of Education (K-12 Middle Schooling) under which teachers will qualify to teach in both primary and secondary schools.

The University of Western Sydney has put forward a proposal for a teacher education program for students studying to become secondary teachers of mathematics, science, technological and applied studies and English/English as a Second Language, through a professional partnership with the Department in South Western Sydney. The aim of this program would be to develop teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools. A selected group of teacher education students would train under the program.

The program would be co-delivered in a small number of schools using school-based and academic expertise. It would include professional development available for the student teachers and also for early service teachers, mentoring teachers and experienced teachers. Through this partnership, these schools would have the potential to become innovative teaching and learning centres with the capacity to attract and retain quality teachers and students.

Some respondents suggested that to increase the connectivity between teacher education programs and school needs, universities should ensure that their teacher education programs are designed to enable graduate teachers to meet the professional teaching standards in the Institute of Teachers’ framework.

The professional teaching standards developed by the Institute of Teachers provide a means of measuring relevant competencies beyond formal academic qualifications. The professional teaching standards include the ability to form positive relationships with students and community members, knowledge of subject content and how to teach that content to students. These standards therefore complement more flexible pathways into teaching, for example recognition of prior learning, as they provide a credible way to describe and acknowledge quality teaching.

DEALING WITH INEFFECTIVE TEACHERS

Public education is massively damaged by the very small number of ineffective teachers we have in schools. They generate massive parental complaints and great angst for principals and executive. The current … process is both cumbersome and finicky in detail, allowing the ineffective staff to seek support of the Teachers Federation over process, often trivial, and thus further damaging the school and public education. (School principal)

Current Procedures

The Department’s procedures for managing teachers experiencing difficulties with their teaching performance have been developed in
consultation with the Teachers Federation. The procedures involve a ten week support program to assist the teacher to improve their performance. This period can be extended if the teacher takes sick leave or applies for workers compensation.

The procedures involve regular meetings between the executive or principal managing the process and the teacher experiencing difficulties, and extensive documentation. During the meetings, the teacher may request the presence of a support person, who is often a representative of the Teachers Federation.

At the end of the ten week program, if the teacher's performance has shown some but not enough improvement, they may participate in a further six week program. If the teacher has shown no improvement, following an independent review of the process, the Department may commence disciplinary action, which may result in dismissal, and the teacher may be removed from the school. The further management of the teacher is generally time consuming and resource intensive, due to possible lengthy appeals and action in the Industrial Relations Commission.

A Preventative Approach and Early Intervention

A large number of respondents suggested a preventative approach to dealing with ineffective teachers, through assisting them to develop into effective teachers in the first place. They stated that teachers need increased support to undertake ongoing training, especially in the effective use of technology. They also suggested increasing retention of young teachers through mentor support in the early years and reduced teaching loads for beginning teachers.

Many respondents favoured early recognition of and intervention for ineffective teachers. Some said that better support early in a teacher's career could prevent a teacher from becoming ineffective. Ideas included school-based mentoring and training in how to be an effective teacher. The OECD report (OECD, 2004a) advocates induction as the first step in the career-long professional development continuum.

Others favoured testing of candidates' suitability to teach before they commenced training, and universities taking more responsibility for identifying teacher education students unlikely to succeed as teachers.

Others suggested that the centrally imposed staffing model, with its limited accountability for a teacher's effectiveness, was contributing to the issue of ineffective teachers:

> The problem is simply that those who make the initial decision [of selection for employment] are in no way accountable for the consequences of their decision. The problem is simply transferred to the school which receives the appointed teacher. (NSW Secondary Principals' Council)

It was also suggested that teachers should be provided with career counselling at particular stages of their career to assist them to change careers if this is what they want.

Respondents made a link between the system responses made by the Department, in the form of complex procedures for dealing with
ineffective teachers, and how such a response would not be needed if ineffective teachers were not selected for employment in the first place:

*Ineffective teachers need to be identified and removed from the system – they are discouraging to teachers that try hard to be good teachers and lower the professional profile of teachers.* (School staff member)

Other suggestions for enhancing teacher effectiveness included paid professional development outside school time to reduce disruption to student learning; paid study leave; succession planning in light of an ageing workforce; collaborative development; and more teamwork and sharing of resources in schools for greater efficiency.

**RECOGNISING AND REWARDING QUALITY TEACHING**

*Teachers should be awarded by the students. If the teachers knew the students appreciate them it would be a big enough reward.* (SEA student meeting)

Under current practices, outstanding achievements by teachers and schools may be acknowledged by a range of awards, for which recipients are nominated or self nominate. These include TAFE Quality Awards, the Minister's and Australian College of Educators’ Quality Teaching Awards, The Director-General's School Achievement Award and a range of Premier's Scholarships for Teachers. These awards are prestigious and high profile. Submissions provided a rich source of ideas on a greatly expanded system for rewarding, recognising and supporting effective teachers.

Excellent teachers are also greatly appreciated by parents who are sufficiently involved as school community members to observe their work.

*Effective teachers stand out like a lighthouse. They are respected by students, their peers and parents. They need to be given an opportunity to have their say in curriculum development, rather than being told by bureaucrats … how they should be teaching and what they should be teaching. Effective teachers need to be given … higher pay levels.*

*Teaching is probably the most important job within a civilised society. We should be rewarding great teachers, they are assisting families create our future.* (School P & C meeting)

Teachers and school community members wanted the public education system, including governments, to provide them with recognition and appropriate rewards. In addition, respondents wanted to ensure that ineffective teachers are dealt with promptly via simple procedures so that students’ learning is not disrupted and valuable staff time is not wasted.

A large number of respondents expressed the view that rewards for good teachers are intrinsic to the role of teaching and tangible on a daily basis.

*teachers are motivated by intrinsic rewards, particularly by the joy of effective interaction with their students. They need the*
support of their peers and the trust of their supervisors: they can find fulfillment through working in a collaborative environment, not one that pits them one against another.

(Industry member)

A large number of teachers expressed the need to feel valued and supported by the Department, their colleagues and the community. Suggestions included letters of thanks from their principal, staff awards and positive media stories.

Good, effective teachers do not need monetary rewards. They need to feel valued. They derive a huge level of satisfaction from the successes of their students. They need to feel appreciated. This does not have to be Big Deal. It could simply be a GENUINE comment of thanks from someone representing the Department. Too often, good teachers become disillusioned because they feel like a cog in the whole process. They do not need a mass produced statement of thanks from the Director General. This is meaningless and promotes cynicism … Teachers are human - they just like some positive acknowledgment of what they’ve done … I’ve worked for nearly 30 years with the NSW DET - I’ve never had any letter of thanks.

(School staff member)

Some teachers stated that appropriate rewards might also include the opportunity for permanent employment for effective casual teachers and opportunities for promotion.

Many respondents wanted monetary rewards such as performance pay or acceleration on the incremental salary scale.

As a school principal … the single factor which we must never dilute or underestimate, is the quality of the teacher. What incentive is there, apart from personal satisfaction, for teachers to continuously strive to improve their pedagogy and student results? I am quite fed up with my best teachers only receiving the same pay as those who put in a minimal effort only.

(School principal)

School and TAFE teachers’ salaries and conditions are determined by industrial awards and agreements. Currently, there is little scope for the recognition of individual performance.

A number of possible payment-based rewards for individual teachers were suggested:

- knowledge/skills based salaries schedules
- additional payment for extra school activities
- additional payment for additional responsibilities
- additional payment for relevant postgraduate study
- salary increases for achieving higher levels of Institute of Teachers certification
- school based performance award bonuses, and
- accelerated progression along incremental scales based on performance.

Some respondents suggested opportunities to work in industry, increased pay attached to ‘mentor status’ in return for assisting other teachers to become more effective; and a means of providing...
There should be opportunity to encourage effective teachers to remain as teachers by providing a parallel development path and pay rates to those that go into management positions. (TAFE staff member)

Paid study leave, particularly for overseas research, could be considered as a reward for effective teachers. (State office staff meeting)

genuine rewards, equivalent to promotion, for effective teachers willing to remain in the classroom.

The NSW Secondary Principals’ Council stated its opposition to differential salaries based on student outcomes. However, it favoured specific rewards for good performance, in return for the highly performing teacher passing on skills:

The SPC believes that recognition and reward which involves teaching load and/or salary should be linked with additional roles and responsibilities, for example mentoring other teachers, mentoring students, classroom and school improvement in learning and more. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

IN SUMMARY

The OECD report (OECD, 1994a) states that the most important factor influencing student achievement and which can be addressed by policy-makers is teacher quality. While research shows a positive correlation between student performance measured by standardised tests and teacher qualifications, experience, academic ability and subject matter knowledge, this correlation is not as high as might be expected. Studies agree that there are important aspects of teacher quality that are not captured by measurable indicators and which can be vital to student learning. These include:

- the ability to convey ideas in clear and convincing ways
- ability to create effective learning environments for different types of students
- ability to foster productive teacher-student relationships
- enthusiasm and creativity and
- ability to work effectively with colleagues and parents (OECD, 2004a: 3).

These qualities, which are reflected in the Institute of Teachers professional teaching standards framework, may be developed in a range of ways, including various work and life experiences, and by becoming a focus in teacher education programs.

According to research conducted by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People, involving approximately 120 people aged from four to 19, young people’s unanimous view is:

the ability to establish and maintain quality relationships with kids [is a] characteristic of ‘good teachers’ and … a critical quality lacking in … ‘bad teachers’.

The Commission recommends that:

preservice teacher training should include developmental experiences for trainees in developing and refining this critical competency. (NSW Commission for Children and Young People)

The research indicates that the most effective ways of ensuring that teachers are providing excellent teaching and learning experiences for students revolve around a holistic approach to teacher development. The building and maintenance of appropriate knowledge and skills for effective teaching and meeting school needs must commence at the pre-service stage, and continue throughout the teacher’s career.

The OECD sums this up as follows:

Key ingredients in a teacher quality agenda could include more attention to the criteria for selection both into initial teacher education and teaching employment, on-going evaluation throughout the teaching career to identify areas for improvement, recognising and rewarding effective teaching, and ensuring that teachers have the resources and support they need to meet high expectations. … teachers are highly motivated by the intrinsic benefits of teaching – working with children and young people, helping them to develop, and making a contribution to society … system structures and school workplaces need to ensure that teachers are able to focus on these tasks. (OECD, 2004a: 10)
Regardless of the pathway by which knowledge and skills required for quality teaching are gained, they need to be built upon in a positive school environment which provides appropriate induction and mentor support to beginning teachers.

This is supported in the OECD report (OECD, 2004a). It recommends that major policy priorities should include forging stronger connections between teachers’ initial education, selection and professional development. The report also supports the introduction of more flexible employment options, opening up possibilities for external recruitment and more school-based decision-making.

A review of teacher qualification requirements is timely. The following statement in the submission from a Departmental officer suggests that current, restrictive academic requirements for teaching with the Department may be detrimental to getting the best people to teach in our schools:

*We need to critically consider our current qualification frameworks to determine whether they really meet the needs of contemporary schooling and indeed whether they restrict access to teaching for people with qualifications, skills and life experiences required to bring about some of the shifts required to enhance provision of public education and training.* (State office staff member)
ENVIRONMENTS FOR LEARNING

I like it when they have lots of grass so you can run around.

(Commission for Children and Young People)

INTRODUCTION

The provision of high quality, modern school infrastructure is one of the most contentious issues facing Government. The cost of improving or building new capital infrastructure is huge. The Government has spent large amounts of money, for example $517m in the last ten years, on 64 new or replacement schools and $1.75bn on maintaining schools and TAFE buildings. However, many said this was not enough.

There is great variability in the quality of the 2247 buildings owned by the Department. The new schools on the Department’s register are extremely well designed and built and greatly valued by teachers, students and their communities. However, there are still criticisms relating to maintenance, the use of demountable accommodation and buildings that do not meet health and safety standards and educational needs.

THE PHYSICAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND ITS MAINTENANCE

Many respondents stated that the design of facilities strongly influenced the quality of the learning environment:

… students still continue to achieve, the teachers still care but it could be so much better if the physical environment was up to standard. (School staff member)

All students and staff within the public education system are entitled to learn and work in an attractive, properly functioning and well resourced and maintained learning environment. Quality teaching and learning occurs when supported by quality resources. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council).

Respondents said that the design of modern facilities met expectations, and were acknowledged as being of high standard. Respondents also commented that many older permanent buildings were very suitable, roomy and well insulated learning spaces. While expensive to maintain, the Department’s efforts to refurbish those facilities of historic and heritage value were applauded.

However, many respondents stated that there was a wide range in the standard of facilities and infrastructure across the public education system:

[Our school] was built in 1912 for 600 students and it now needs to cater for 1200 students … students need to cross from one side of the school grounds to the other to reach the toilets. (School P&C meeting)

Many public schools present with shabby buildings, badly cleaned and poorly maintained. Public school ambience is further hindered by ugly asphalted playgrounds with cracks
and trip hazards and haphazard landscaping. (NSW Primary Principals’ Association)

Some respondents called on the Department to have a long-term, stable capital works program:

NSW school communities are given few assurances about funding for improving schools, other than through the erratic joint funding program. … NSW schools … need assurance, well in advance, about funding for improving their amenity and infrastructure. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

Respondents called for economies in capital works costs and more creative uses of existing facilities to extend the value of each dollar spent:

If our buildings are of a standard that would be acceptable to community groups then there is potential for use of school facilities outside of school hours and some scope for partial cost recovery. (Personal submission).

Respondents also suggested that community partnerships should be extended and enriched. These partnerships, it was reported, could involve sharing available facilities and the cost of construction of new buildings with other education providers, industry, business and community groups:

There needs to be a concerted effort to share facilities. This would increase usage of scarce resources. Schools could house adult education programs, public libraries, computer training facilities and public meeting rooms … (NSW Primary Principals’ Association)

Create community hubs in conjunction with local Councils and other human services providers in local developments on a ‘shared cost’ basis. (State office staff meeting)

Other, less tangible dimensions – for example, the positive ambience of a classroom, the feeling of a welcoming, open school climate, or a college culture of industriousness and standards – were also mentioned by some respondents as important aspects of learning environments:

The school environment should be pleasant for children. They should look forward to being there, not just learning there. (School P&C meeting)

QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Improving Physical Appearance and Maintenance

Respondents noted the importance of how a school or college was presented:

The physical presentation of a school is critical in attracting enrolments and maintaining school morale and image in the wider community … A well maintained school has an impact on...
the attitude of the community towards that school. (School staff meeting)

The physical state of a school is one effective predictor of school achievement. (Vinson, cited in NSW Teachers Federation submission)

The majority of respondents highlighted great differences in the quality of facilities across the State, and problems in keeping pace with maintenance demands:

Public schools need to look good – many are not attractive to the students, staff or community. As we are constantly being reminded, we operate in a competitive market, and many public schools are hamstrung by public perception based solely on the appearance of the school, rather than the excellent work going on inside. (School principal)

Clean up the mess and back log attached to the old Properties department. Stop ‘band-aiding’ and undertake real maintenance and school improvement to sites [to] meet OHS standards. (School staff meeting)

Respondents also highlighted concerns that maintenance and cleanliness standards were deteriorating; and the need for new strategies to stretch available funds:

… Much of our building stock is outdated, poorly designed and does not meet the needs of a modern forward looking education system. Nor does it meet the aspirations of increasingly affluent and ambitious parents … There needs to be a ‘taking stock’ of this situation, legislation amended to facilitate a rational approach and process of engaging with school communities, outsourcing to private industry the redevelopment of the buildings/facilities for communities of schools, and a promotional campaign outlining new opportunities … (DET staff member)

The ongoing need to maintain an increasing stock of facilities was viewed by respondents as an expensive, although necessary, responsibility. Respondents suggested the mothballing of some facilities, with minimum associated maintenance; and securing sponsorship from private sources, but keeping the philosophy “public ownership for the public good”.

Respondents also saw need to shorten contract lead times in tendering for all maintenance (and minor capital works) by introducing more local responsibility and control:

[we should] provide schools with monetary flexibility to build and maintain specialist rooms, equipment, heating and cooling that is relevant to their school community and location. (School staff meeting)

It would be advantageous for rural schools to use local contractors to undertake all maintenance jobs – it would improve response time, cost effectiveness, [take advantage of] local knowledge and history and be more competitive. (School staff meeting)
Specific differences among respondents included attitudes to the Department's Privately Financed Project (PFP), and debate on the advantages and disadvantages of ‘outside’ groups’ after hours access to school and college facilities:

*The Privately Financed Project (PFP) is an innovative approach and it is important to explore the options.* (State office staff)

*In order to ensure equity throughout the state funding must be centrally administered and not delivered through PFP.* (School staff meeting)

Respondents also mentioned the need for principals to have greater discretion in the management of schools’ infrastructure and the allocation of resources:

*Schools [should] have more control over maintenance contractors … negotiating directly with individual contractors rather than waiting weeks to go through the pro group …* (School community meeting)

### Better Utilisation of Sites and Facilities

Some respondents saw duplication of particular buildings and services across schools and TAFE colleges as wasteful. This raised the important question of joint use, and practices to encourage staff working across secondary schools and TAFE:

*Break down the differentiation between high school and TAFE provision i.e., TAFE by night, school by day. Timetable for ‘day school’ and ‘night IAE’ usage in the same buildings with a cohort of school teachers and a cohort of TAFE teachers using the same buildings [and] allow teachers to move freely between school and TAFE facilities.* (State office staff meeting)

Calls were also made for more creative uses of facilities - better utilisation of co-located sites, of libraries, halls, gymnasiums, and of other learning spaces - as well as for cleverer approaches to use of buildings out of hours:

*The infrastructure must not be seen as having a limited use as a school, a IAE, or even a university. The site has multiple uses. An education facility is only one of these uses.* (State office staff member)

*Allow more community use of [excess] sites i.e. establish preschools on site – very successful for [our] school which allows for a smooth transition from preschool to school …* (School community meeting)

To achieve efficiencies and to promote the concept of community-focused education, respondents suggested that there should be more ready usage by other educational, government, community and industry groups of schools and colleges:

*IAE managed businesses, which utilise students, teachers and industry partners… Business tenants should be indicative of the local business activity with established IAE links e.g., motor vehicle maintenance, business/ professional services, website management/ design, personal services, restaurants, cafes.* (Bankstown City Council meeting)
Other respondents highlighted a need to provide greater access for students to non-government sites:

TAFE could lease buildings from developers and other organisations which would minimise maintenance and refurbishment costs. (TAFE staff member)

Respondents stated that facilities which were no longer needed should be disposed of as soon as possible. They suggested alternatives to selling, including leasing, shared use, or philanthropic gestures such as donating to local community organisations. It was also suggested that such properties should be used for other public purposes and not sold to the private sector.

\section*{Design effectiveness of major capital works}

Some respondents commented favourably on the design and standards of many newer schools and colleges. It was noted that such standards were what was expected for the education of all of our young people, as well as boosting community confidence in public education:

Public schools need to have learning environments comparable to the better private schools. Learning environments must provide equal access to technology, culture and expertise regardless of the geographic, demographic or economic circumstances of the students. (School staff member)

A number of respondents outlined their views on the best learning environments:

[for a sustainable future we need] …safe and challenging environments that promote learning i.e. students learn more when the physical environment is supporting their learning. … bright and colourful where the students have ownership of the visual stimuli. … an innovative environment, reflecting yet leading society. (School staff meeting)

Future schools will have to be prepared for a future which is technology based. Future schools will be places for students to come to so they can be looked after as they facilitate their own learning … Rooms with work stations will prevail … students will have access to ‘lessons’ on a 24 hours/7days a week basis from anywhere in the world. (Parent)

My favoured learning environment for learning in the secondary schools at least is the college set up where 2 or more year 7-10 schools send their students on to a senior campus for 11-12. While I know not all teachers favour it, there is no doubt in the mind of most parents that it is MUCH BETTER FOR STUDENTS. I hope that DEECD understands that students are the whole raison d’être. (UnitingCare Burnside)

They stated that the best design capitalised on flexible learning spaces, exploited opportunities for outdoor learning, and was environmentally sensitive:

Outdoor areas need to be well-maintained and attractive … suitably resourced to support classroom curriculum eg. environmental areas, sport areas … (School community meeting)
Environments that can be reassigned or resized to meet the current needs of the school population. Moveable wall partitioning, mobile wet area modules. (Parent)

Design enhancements to promote sustainability (natural solar heating and cooling as alternatives to air conditioning, refurbishing of old rather than building of new) were also commented upon:

Schools to be environmentally sustainable – tanks for water, grey water recycling, solar panels, etc. This would encourage student understanding of environmental issues and also provide a healthy and sustainable school environment. (School P&C meeting)

Other respondents saw a need for broader flexibility in building code standards:

[There is] need for greater flexibility in statewide building code for schools … [lack of flexibility] has limited the benefits that have flowed from the school/TAFE [sharing of facilities]. (Joint school TAFE meeting)

[We have] been involved in the production of the current facilities standards for new schools. These standards provide generally safe and comfortable surroundings for students and teachers, but are largely based on current learning and teaching practices, or business-as-usual. Some flexibility has been built into these standards, but the probability is that this flexibility will prove to be inadequate … (Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW)

… in many primary schools … cabling and electric wiring that constitutes trip hazards [and] inadequate furniture … (NSW Primary Principals’ Association)

Building design should use passive solar principles to be more energy efficient and provide role models for sustainable living. Australia has an admirable knowledge resource base in these areas which must be utilised. We cannot afford to continue developing schools (or other buildings) which do not acknowledge our environmental conditions. (Kidsafe)

… [it is] particularly important for young (K-6) students who need to feel safe and secure … to have a high degree of ownership of their grounds and facilities. (P&C meeting)

IN SUMMARY

There is clear recognition that access to quality learning facilities is a vital factor in boosting the learning outcomes of students, in raising community perceptions about the standards of school or college, and in lifting the morale of staff. In short, an attractive, well designed and constructed physical environment for learning will directly support better student outcomes and community confidence in our public education system.

Over recent decades, successive governments and the Department of Education and Training have faced, and responded to, marked pressures in developing and maintaining school and college infrastructure. Some major successes - against a background of demographic, economic and curriculum change - are evident in building design, in some maintenance and refurbishment projects and in particular strategies to access other major sources of funds.

The consultation process drew out four common major areas:

- redressing, as a longer term program, the disparities in the physical conditions, security, and occupational health and safety standards across schools and colleges
- better managing existing assets, including more efficient utilisation of underused facilities and disposal of surplus sites and more effective ways to conduct maintenance programs
- expanding the design options for major works, particularly to provide variations in codes to adapt to local situations and circumstances, and to promote sustainability
- broadening the pool of funds available to move forward major capital works construction timelines, including, for example, accessing sponsorship, levies on property developers and shared enterprises.

Finally, respondents raised the importance of sustainability of our learning environments for the future use of our school and TAFE students.
References


COMPANION PAPER 5
BUILDING A MORE RESPONSIVE SYSTEM OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Michael Fullan
University of Toronto

March 2005

Prepared for the Department of Education and Training, New South Wales

The Problem

Our current work in educational change focuses on how to create large scale, sustainable reform. The goal is to “raise the bar and close the gap” of student learning for the vast majority of students. Using tightly focused strategies called “informal prescription”, we have seen success, for example in England, as literacy and numeracy reached 75% on the average for 11 year olds (Fullan, 2005). This is a remarkable achievement, but the new standard must be 90% or more.

In getting systems to change there are several inherent dilemmas when it comes to strategy. These include:

- Top down vs. Bottom up
- Accountability vs. Capacity
- Flexibility vs. Fidelity
- Exclusive vs. Inclusive
- Short term urgency vs. long term sustainability

The truth is that neither horn of a dilemma represents a viable solution for large scale, sustainable reform. We know that top-down strategies do not beget ownership; but bottom-up strategies produce small scale, non-sustainable change (a thousand flowers do not bloom, or some bloom but only for a season, and they are not perennial).

Systems heavy on accountability get narrow conformity at best and only for a short while. Investing in capacity building (strategies that attempt to increase the collective efficacy of a group to learn new skills and gain knowledge) does not seem to be realized on a large scale. Emphasizing accountability undermines ownership; promoting capacity building only works when capacities actually increase which does not occur and/or persist on a large scale.

When good practices get developed and identified, the dilemma is whether to emphasize their faithful implementation or to encourage flexibility, which if taken too far squeezes the essence out of the new ideas.

Strategies that are inclusive try to involve everyone, but fall short, while exclusive strategies (such as working with pilot programs) do not produce ownership.

Perhaps the most prominent dilemma concerns whether short-term urgency for results undermines the capacity for establishing the conditions for longer-term results; or whether a longing for the long run undermines short-term results and credibility in the eyes of the public.
These dilemmas are just that—dilemmas. And they call for both/and vs other/or thinking and strategies. To move us forward I recommend the “tri-level solution” along with some strategic guidelines. The end result is that we need to promote “system thinkers in action”, which leads to the realization that the only way to transform the system is to enlarge our sphere of experience. What this means will become clear as we identify the ideas and strategies in the next section.

The Tri-Level Solution

Figure one depicts the three levels. In essence we need changes within each of the “tris”—the school/community, the district, and the state; and especially across the “tris”.

Figure 1: Tri-Level Reform

The first level school-community requires establishing permeable professional learning communities at the school level. If we take Newmann et al (2000) as the starting point, we find that effective schools (even under the most difficult circumstances) develop a certain collective capacity of the full staff to make a difference in student achievement. The internal to the school capacity includes:

- Knowledge, skills and dispositions of teachers,
- Professional community,
- Program coherence,
- Resources,
- School leadership (Newmann et al 2000).

The research shows quite clearly that schools with collective capacity (i.e. strong professional learning communities) do achieve greater success because they focus continually on improving teaching and learning as it affects student achievement.

Two other factors stand out. First, schools that develop their collective efficacy also reach out to engage the community. It is as if they are confident enough to take the risk to consider the community as part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

The second finding, and this is a transition to the mid-level of our tri-level model—is that schools with high capacity are in the minority. Put another way, schools with high capacity did not get that way because the system (district and/or state) was “causing” capacity development in schools on a wide basis.

It is for this reason that we have begun to work with districts. The goal is to “raise the bar and close the gap” of student achievement in the district as a whole. In our work with various districts in different countries, we recently identified 10 lessons concerning district-wide reform. School districts, which evince district-wide success in improving coherence in the majority of schools, have the following capacities:
1. Internal leaders with a clear, driving conceptualization,
2. Collective moral purpose that extends to everyone,
3. The right bus (structure and roles at district and school levels),
4. Leadership and capacity building for those on the bus,
5. Lateral capacity building,
6. Deep learning for adults as well as children,
7. Productive conflict where differences are aired,
8. Demanding cultures,
9. External partners,
10. Growing financial investment over time (see Fullan, Bertani & Quinn, 2004).

In short, districts must become a driving force, for district-wide reform, and they do this by having a strong moral and conceptual basis for the strategies they pursue, such as the 10 just listed.

In the same way that schools will not establish or sustain learning communities if the district is not working on this agenda, districts cannot establish or sustain district-wide reform if the state is not actively pursuing this agenda.

In a recent article, Michael Barber and I outlined 8 principles that the state must embrace if it is to promote large-scale sustainable reform. These are:
1. Moral purpose,
2. Get the basics right,
3. Communicate/reshape the big picture,
4. Intelligent accountability,
5. Incentivize collaboration and lateral capacity building,
6. The long lever of leadership,
7. Design every policy to build capacity too,
8. Grow the financial investment (Barber & Fullan, 2005).

Most states have not been able to incorporate both accountability and capacity building; nor have they been able to develop new two-way relationships with the field. In addition to standards of accountability and corresponding data on student achievement, states must redefine their relationship with the field, so that new ideas are constantly being generated, and that new motivation and commitment develop. This is difficult, but the bottom line for large scale, sustainable reform is widespread engagement.

In terms of the 8 principles, the state must foster continuous attention to moral purpose—“raising the bar and closing the gap” for all learners in the state. Second, getting the basics right—literacy and numeracy—must be non-negotiable. Third, the agenda (vision, strategies etc.) must have a core focus, and be easily communicated. More than that, this bigger picture needs to be the subject of discussion and debate so that it can be reshaped and refined as it evolves in practice.

Fourth, intelligent accountability involves balancing state-wide requirements with school and district-wide self-appraisal. There needs to be some degree of devolution to allow necessary flexibility at the local level which should operate within and be connected to state priorities. A one size fits orientation does not work, nor does “letting a thousand flowers bloom” approach - a point to which I return in the conclusion. The goal is transparent accountability, which is not onerous but targeted to improvement with local schools and districts building their own capacity through self-evaluation and related action plans.
Fifth, one of the most powerful recent strategies is lateral capacity building, where the state invests in and facilitates focused networks that learn from each other, as they implement priorities in the context of state policies. England for example, has established a Primary Strategy Learning Network, in which 1500 networks of around 6 primary schools each, learn from each other with respect to improving literacy and numeracy. The second English example is the new School Improvement Partner (SIP) program where all schools in the country will have a trained and supported SIP, the vast majority of whom are current or recently retired principals.

The long lever of leadership consists of policies and practices that provide a pool and pipeline of school leaders. Two things stand out in our work. One is that we need to redefine quality leaders as those that work to improve the bottom line of student learning, while at the same time develop leadership of those around them. The other key finding is that leadership is best learned “in context”. Put another way, changing the culture of the system and learning as you go must be built into the day-to-day learning of leaders. Qualifications’ frameworks are valuable, but they represent only about 30% of the solution. The remainder of the solution must be built into the culture of the school and district.

Principle seven - design policy to include capacity building is a reminder that most states pass new policies without attending to the capacities required for them to be successful.

Finally, growing the financial investment represents another dilemma. Problems do not get solved by throwing money at them, yet new capacities require new resources. The general idea is to invest new money up front in the first year or two, and then to have, so to speak, next year’s success, be the following year’s additional money. The investment does grow, but only if success accompanies it. A word of caution - improved student learning does not increase in a linear fashion. It goes through step changes - moving up for a few years, and then plateauing requiring deeper strategies to enhance the next step change. (see Fullan, 2005)

Conclusion
We are currently engaged in a tri-level learning network involving five states (England, New South Wales, Ontario, South Australia and Washington State). In these cases, the tri-level model is being pursued. Since large scale, sustainable reform is complex and dilemma-ridden there are no solutions in advance. We do, however, know how to approach tri-level development. Figure two represents the overall lens. It means that not only must all three levels develop, but they must develop in concert. It means also that people at any one level, must not only be more engaged in the dynamics at their own level, but must interact with and have greater understanding of the other two levels. This applies to all three levels. It amounts to greater rapport with and empathy across levels - not false harmony but critical engagement.

Figure 2: Enlarging Your World

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The ideas in the previous section contain the elements of a strategy that enables the system to better manage inherent dilemmas including:

- How to balance system requirements, standards and accountability with opportunity for flexibility at the local level,
- How systems at the central and district level need to operate to best support schools to achieve high standards,
- How schools and systems work together to achieve higher learning,
- How to foster leadership that facilitates system thinking in action, and improves the culture of the system as a whole across the three levels.

In summary, the solution to large scale, sustainable reform requires a new relationship between the state and local schools and districts. This relationship requires mutual engagement and mutual influence. There will always be elements of tension between state policy and local needs, especially in relation to how to go about making improvements.

To be more specific to the New South Wales situation, one can think of systems in terms of how they need to operate in a simultaneous loose-tight manner. If systems are too loose, it would be necessary to tighten up for greater focus. By contrast, if a system is too centralized it would be necessary to redress the tight-loose balance. This paper is not a direct analysis of NSW, but I believe that it is accurate to say that the system is too centralized in relation to the criteria that are contained in this paper. It will be up to NSW to decide on the particular implications of this line of analysis, but the gist of the needed new direction can be outlined. The combination needed is as follows:

1. Some devolution of authority to local schools with respect to operational issues, concerning, for example, aspects of staffing and budget. At the same time devolution means greater flexibility in designing strategies for reaching goals (again one size does not fit all), although as I say in point three such strategies must be based on clusters of schools working locally and regionally, not on individual schools working in isolation.

2. Such devolution would work within a framework of state priorities. The tightness or accountability function would be achieved through building up transparent self-appraisal school plans which would be based on state policy priorities, and would be supported and monitored by district and regions.

3. Within this same approach it has become clear that schools need to learn from each other - what we call lateral capacity building. Thus devolution does not mean school isolation. State and regional strategies, and commitments of local schools must include working with other schools to learn how to maximize improvement. Two things are accomplished with this strategy both of which counter the isolating tendencies of devolution: one is that as schools learn from each other best practices are identified and retained representing convergence in the system toward evidence-based practices; the other is that the more that people interact the more that there is a we-we versus we-they commitment. Greater shared commitment to improving the system is generated.

In brief, focus is retained through the emphasis on state frameworks and policies and through monitoring of results, and flexibility is increased with respect to the means of how local contexts and processes can be best positioned to move the particular localities forward. Lateral capacity
building is also a “coherence-maker” as people learn from each other and consolidate around best practices and newly developed shared commitments. What NSW needs and would get from such an approach is greater rapport between localities and the center (a greater we-we versus us-them identity), and greater shared commitments laterally as schools and clusters of schools interact with a focus on improvement.

The purpose of my comments in this paper is to suggest new directions as clearly as possible realizing that it is the NSW system that would need to work out and decide on the particulars. My suggestions are broadly congruent with the recent conclusions of OECD (2004) in its analysis of the characteristics of the five highest performing countries in the PISA study (Canada, Finland, Japan, Korea, and Sweden), although I caution that the devil is in the details and must be contextualized to fit the needs NSW as it is in 2005.

Progress will be made in any system when all three levels realize that they need each other, and begin to experience the benefits of interacting in new ways. Using the principles I have outlined above can result in initial success in relatively short order within a two-year period. The idea is to break with the status quo, create new momentum and then build on it. The only caution is that success is not linear. It typically involves step changes where one plateau is achieved, requiring new and deeper strategies to move to the next step change. The good news is that capacity begets capacity. More can be accomplished with less effort because collective effort and ingenuity gets stronger. For the first time in the history of educational reform, we have an opportunity and possibility of changing the entire system for the better.
References


COMPANION PAPER 6

Different Places, Familiar Spaces:
Rural and Remote Education as Situated Practice

Will Letts, Matti Novak, Kristina Gottschall, Bill Green and Bob Meyenn

Faculty of Education
Charles Sturt University

Education in rural and remote Australia is essential because the skills and knowledges for entire communities depend on its success. The future of rural education in New South Wales requires genuine and productive partnerships between the NSW Department of Education & Training, universities, TAFEs, rural schools, and rural communities. An emphasis on the ‘rural’ aspects of ‘rural education’ needs to be kept in focus by those concerned with rural education, in that place matters - all policies and practices are located within social, cultural, spatial and historical landscapes. Each rural place is unique – the school, the community - each having specific needs and priorities. While it is necessary to a degree to generalise ‘rural’ for the purposes of policy and reform, the uniqueness of place also needs to be acknowledged. As such, a ‘one size fits all’ approach is inadequate for addressing the educational issues of rural and remote New South Wales.

While regional, rural and remote NSW is often homogenised as simply ‘out there’ by those who imagine it all to be the same, these areas are in fact quite diverse, and the importance of place and context warrant closer attention. Thus, we are framing this paper with the notion of situated practices in order to examine both the specificities of particular places as well as the more enduring trends in rural and remote education. We have been using situated practices as a guiding framework for research in The Rural (Teacher) Education Project, which has been investigating how best to understand the challenges and opportunities associated with country teaching and rural schooling.

The ‘situated’ aspect of this concept signals that place matters, and that far from being a unitary site for education, place and context create different dynamics that call for differentiated approaches and responses - from the school level to the system level. The notion of ‘practices’ captures the full range of actions, values, meanings and understandings that comprise the acts of teaching and learning in rural and remote NSW. In what follows we will examine issues related to two fundamental aspects of this model - situated leadership and situated pedagogies [See Diagram 1]. These organising categories allow us to take a broad sweep across a range of issues integral to rural and remote education, while focussing attention on two crucial components of the teaching/learning dynamic.

**Situated Leadership**

Viewing leadership as situated entails shifting from models that understand it as either positional or as an amalgam of qualities that confers on one the status of “a leader.” Instead, situating leadership necessitates viewing it as pedagogy, with a focus on assisting students to achieve high academic and social outcomes through productive pedagogies and productive assessment (Lingard, Hayes, Mills, & Christie, 2003).

**Quality leadership**

The diversity of rural and remote settings makes it necessary to examine leadership in a variety of ways. For the rural/remote school, leadership issues are site specific and are related significantly to factors of distance, location, space and place - overlayed by local community issues. Leadership in this setting is broadly conceived - the appointed positions of Principal and school executive, but also including teachers as leaders. Beyond a positional form of leadership, we can also conceptualise it as positioned (McConaghy, 1998) in order to acknowledge issues related to the politics of location.

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1 The Rural (Teacher) Education Project, or R(T)EP, is an ARC-funded Linkage project partnership between the NSW Department of Education & Training, the University of New England, and Charles Sturt University, which has been interested in promoting quality learning outcomes by examining teacher education, broadly conceived, for and in rural NSW.
It is in fact this locational aspect that forge the agenda for leadership priorities in a school. Rural schools can face instability resulting from ongoing staff turnover at all levels from Principal/executive to classroom teacher. For many school leaders issues relating to staffing predominate, becoming at times a source of frustration and anxiety. The needs of beginning teachers, combined with a young and inexperienced executive, can dominate a school leader’s consciousness. The rural Principal balances educational and visionary aspects of their role with, in many cases, the problematics emerging from issues of staffing of the school.

Associated with a lack of applicants for leadership positions in rural/remote schools is a corollary disadvantage of the incumbents having no prior experience in the particular role. Compounding this is the number of positions filled from within the same school, potentially making for limited experience. The positive side to this phenomenon, however, is that rural and remote schools offer avenues for teachers at an early stage of their careers to experience leadership roles. Such situations allow elements of youth, enthusiasm and entrepreneurship to emerge.

Leadership issues are also paramount in the arena of school/community dynamics. The Principal plays a potentially important role in the community. Their style and degree of connectivity is an inherent element in this relationship and for the success of the school (Lingard, Hayes, Mills & Christie, 2003).

The Department of Education & Training can engage in “positioned” responses to many of these leadership issues by endorsing more local decision-making, particularly around the recruitment, hiring, and professional development opportunities available to schools [and communities].

Professional learning communities

Related to issues of leadership in schools are issues connected to the emergence and sustainability of professional learning communities. Numerous factors underpin the nature of professional development for rural and remote schools. A range of professional development avenues should be utilised where appropriate and where possible - from preservice and in service, formal and informal, and in-school and out of school experiences.

Universities are increasingly acknowledging and engaging with issues related to preparing teachers to teach and lead in rural and remote locations. At Charles Sturt University, for example, we are revising core teacher education subjects to foreground issues related to the importance of place, learning to “read” place, multi-age pedagogies, and providing place-based experiences. Likewise, the Department’s successful Beyond the Line Program adds richness to the complex endeavours of preparing teachers for rural life and work by extending preservice teachers’ boundaries of expectation and experience of ‘the bush’ (McConaghy & Bloomfield, 2004).

Many schools successfully foreground the importance of induction of new teachers and the professional development of beginning teachers. The value and effectiveness of the Head Teacher Mentor role in this context is regarded as an important initiative that should continue.

In taking up their new role many beginning teachers move considerable distances from personal networks. The ramifications of this, both personally and professionally, play a significant role in teacher welfare, and as a result, student outcomes. In-school support processes are fundamental, but are often varied in the translation from policy into practice. The development of both informal and formal learning communities in the school allows a school to address critical local needs.

Attendance at externally offered professional development activities is hampered by concerns of distance, time and safety of travel (Vinson, 2002). A paucity of access to personnel and courses from the DET and other agencies requires initiative on the part of the school and teacher in order to fully utilise such development opportunities and for the DET to acknowledge the difficulties faced. Information and communications technologies are proving useful in overcoming some of these hurdles.
Due to the nature of the place, school personnel often establish their own professional links, employing creative ways to operationalise and maintain these. For staff members who intend to keep teaching in rural and remote schools, outside avenues are important if they are to experience professional development and renewal. Networking teachers within and across rural townships engenders productive partnerships for professional development and sense of community.

New teachers gain their professional support eclectically. Effective mentor teachers and supervisors are integral to professional growth, yet commonly they face a shortage of time in which to fulfil these roles. In addition to their mentor and supervisor, their fellow teachers can affect the new teacher with their knowledge and skills. These shared resources are critical to a successful sense of community within a school. The development of networks, the use of technology and web-based learning are all areas whose potential is still to be fully realised. Maintaining professional networks - in person, via phone, or via the Internet - between schools and towns is worthwhile as these collegial networks are important from a personal and professional point of view in a rural setting.

Situated Pedagogies

Drawing on McConaghy’s (2002) notion of situated pedagogies, as evolving out of but moving beyond authentic pedagogy and productive pedagogy, we want to foreground issues related to taking place seriously in rural and remote education. This model asserts that place matters, and grounds this assertion in an investigation of quality teaching and learning dynamics, quality leadership, quality school/community dynamics, and quality professional learning communities. Since we have already addressed leadership and professional learning communities, we will focus in what follows on quality teaching and learning and quality school/community dynamics.

Quality teaching and learning

We first must consider how we attract highly qualified teachers to rural and remote schools. This necessitates close ties with universities - both so that there is a degree of curricular coherence to address issues like multi-modal/distance teaching, proficient use of a range of ICTs, and how we also promote the bush as the “crucible” for the rest of the system. Many lengthy, successful teaching careers are forged in the bush, even if those teachers do not always remain teaching in rural and remote areas. Issues of teacher retention require that we think through quality of life [at work] issues in rural/remote communities. We must also address issues of renewal in the bush, so that long-serving rural teachers are afforded opportunities for professional renewal and rejuvenation - an issue detailed earlier in the situated leadership section.

Thinking through the lens of situated pedagogies raises issues related to pedagogical leadership as a key to quality teaching/learning dynamics. We must think deeply about responsive and situated pedagogies that are place-sensitive - moving them from being “just good teaching” to contextualised teaching that accounts for a recognition of difference. Rural and remote teaching invariably raises issues around Distance Education and the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs). These partial solutions can help to mediate the effects of distance, although they are unable to eliminate all of the challenges.

Quality teaching and learning also draws our attention to curricular issues that might include capitalising on a sense of place in rural schooling, and acknowledging the centrality of an authentic, connected curriculum - one that recognises people with/in places. Attention must be focused on providing place-based experiences for rural students. Examples of how this could play out in classrooms are being explored in the research project entitled Literacy and the Environment: A Situated Study of Multi-Mediated Literacy, Sustainability, Local Knowledges and Educational Change which explores teaching and learning opportunities within the Murray-Darling River basin.

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2 See Newmann, Marks & Gamoran (1996) and Newmann & Associates (1996)
3 See Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (2001) and Lingard, Mills & Hayes (2000)
4 This ARC-funded Linkage project between the Primary English Teachers Association [PETA], the University of South Australia and Charles Sturt University is undertaking research into strategies for developing environmental literacy and expressive communication within primary schools. It focuses on PETA’s Special Forever program, which is funded by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission.
To this end, when place matters, issues of quality teaching and learning need to not only consider issues such as authentic, connected curriculum and pedagogical leadership at a number of levels, but also quality school-community relationships.

School-community dynamics

The significance of the relationship between the rural school and the rural community cannot be underestimated. Integral to McConaghy’s (2002) ‘situated pedagogies’ model is the inclusion of parents and the wider community as fundamental to positive school/community relationships. McConaghy claims that in no other public schooling context is the community more fundamental than within the rural schooling context. Partnership between the school and community would ideally ensure the future success of rural education and of rural student outcomes. Rural and remote education entails schooling from the bush, in addition to the more commonly understood schooling for the bush. Rural schools are often positive focal places in rural communities where a spirit of action and empowerment, learning and togetherness is espoused and enacted.

The effect that the wider rural community culture(s) have on the school population – students, teachers, Principals, parents and guardians - is significant for schools and individuals, but most importantly for young rural people. Overcoming issues of low attendance, poor retention rates and below average student outcomes requires the community to play an active and decision-making role in rural and remote schools. For example, Indigenous students’ attitude towards schooling and perceptions of their current and future prospects have improved where Indigenous parents, carers and the community have been involved in the school (HREOC, 2000).

Community and family learning traditions play a significant part in the way in which individual students think about education, their place in the community, their place in the world, and thus their future. This in turn affects their learning capacities, development and aspirations. Similarly, the school affects the community via their ethos and actions. Ideally, the school and community work together to create and maintain levels of positivity, sense(s) of identity and self-worth, which play a significant part in shaping wellbeing, social capital and resilience (Vinson, 2004).

Furthermore, the effect that the community has in the personal/social lives of teachers and the ramifications this has for teachers’ professional experiences are highlighted in the rural and remote setting. Social inclusion and involvement - the way the individual teacher contributes to, and manages living in, a rural and remote community, and their adjustments to their highly visual public role (the ‘fishbowl’ syndrome) - directly influences overall satisfaction, professionalism and retention. The ‘fishbowl’ nature of many rural and remote towns requires the teacher to become more involved in the community. This often burdens the individual with community expectations of roles, conduct and propriety. At the same time, this ‘closeness’ fosters social activity and interaction, often placing value upon the individual and providing the teacher with a real sense of belonging and worth.

The space that the new teacher forges in the rural/remote place affects the quality of their teaching and learning practices. This has particular resonance for the teacher new to the town with no prior experience of rural/remote living. This is exacerbated further in that many new teachers to rural/remote schools are from the eastern cities and are often metro-centric in both training and philosophy. Preservice and induction programs could be enhanced if they took up and engaged more substantively with these important issues.

The situated nature of teaching and learning practices within schools and communities has particular resonance in the rural setting. School-community dynamics require both a broad and focused understanding in order to inform rural education policy and practice.

In Conclusion: Rural Schooling and Social Justice

This paper is based upon the assumption that all students deserve a quality education. Rural students should not be denied this simply because they are regarded as being “too different” or the place that they live in as “too difficult.” Nor should we think that there are no significant differences in rural places and spaces. Further, we know that quality teachers are pivotal to realising socially just
schooling (Lingard, Mills & Hayes, 2000). Opportunities and challenges abound for rural education in relation to issues of cultural diversity and social justice. Though often caricatured as lacking cultural and social difference, to varying degrees, rural and remote communities are quite diverse (HREOC, 2000). In light of this, schools, and the communities that they are embedded in, can engage with and foreground the importance of issues of difference. As Lingard, Hayes, Mills & Christie (2003) note,

Making hope practical in schools means mediating the pressures of the global within the specificities of the local for the purposes of academic and social learning for all. This requires opening up opportunities for all young people through schooling, but especially for those disadvantaged by poverty, marginalised by difference and surrounded by violence (p. 2)

- some of whom are undoubtedly rural and remote students. Identifying how recognition of difference can constitute situated and engaging curricular and pedagogical possibilities will not only strengthen our rural and remote schools, it will strengthen our rural and remote communities.

References

Vinson, T 2002, Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education in NSW, NSW Teachers Federation, Sydney.
Diagram 1: Situated Practices
In this paper I suggest that public schools in New South Wales in the future ought to increasingly become key social and educational centres of communities (OECD, n.d.). The “public” character of such schools would not just be evident in their funding source, governance structure and student enrolment policies but, critically, in the careful and deliberate way in which such schools identify and address the learning needs of their communities. In this future, schools would be functionally integrated with other education and service organisations such as early childhood education centres, post compulsory Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, and universities. In some communities this integration may extend to providing education related services, such as libraries and internet services, in collaboration with other state and local government bodies.

Another way of describing this future is to consider public schooling in terms of social capital. Social capital, in this context, refers to the knowledge, relationships and attitudes that contribute to the experience individuals have of being members of communities. The development of social capital is effectively the development of the goodwill and sense of belonging that defines a community. Public schools have always had the responsibility for building social capital. Public schools in the future should more consciously focus on building the social capital of the local communities that they serve. Conversely, such schools will need to draw on the tangible and intangible resources of local communities if they are to succeed. In this future, communities will regard their schools as community centres and valuable community resources.

In order to achieve this goal it is likely that there will need to be a further shift in resources and authority from State offices and toward school regions and to schools themselves in order that they may better be able to respond to and work with their communities. Schools and school regions will need to develop programs and offer services that are tailored to the specific context and needs of the communities that they serve. As there are a range of different communities in NSW with varying educational and social needs and varying levels of existing educational infrastructure, it is also likely that the forms of schools and the types of programs that they offer will deviate further from the standard school model that has been provided up until recent times.

It is important to point out though that the devolution and variation of school programs and types proposed in this paper are not ends in themselves. These should be regarded as possible means by which the community and public goals of the government school system are achieved. In this sense then this paper is not to be seen as a critique of centralised, bureaucratic government schooling, rather as presenting a case for public schools to embrace a particular “local community” character and culture. The paper starts with an interpretation of the history of public schooling in NSW which argues that the “public” purposes and not the shape and form of schools were originally intended to be the defining characteristics of public schools. Next, examples of the forms of school and program variation and community embeddedness being advocated are provided. These examples include projects and innovations involving schools in NSW as well as from other parts of Australia and overseas. From these examples and from recent literature on public schooling some specific features of these community embedded schools are outlined. Finally, some of the challenges for the State, for the Department of Education and Training and for schools and school regions that will need to be addressed in achieving further local embeddedness will be presented.

**Historical Background**

The centralized provision of public schooling is not a universal feature of public schooling. In the vast majority of western democracies, public schools derive much of their public character from their decentralised, district-based responsibilities, and their democratic governance structures. School
Districts are more directly accountable to their local communities and in countries such as Canada and the USA, they derive much of their income from local taxes. To illustrate the extent to which there is variation in the forms and structures of public schooling in western democratic countries, in 1997 in Ontario, Canada the provincial government introduced Bill 160 which, had it become law, would have created a public school system like that which exists in NSW where much of the decision making authority would have been centralised. Teachers went on strike for several weeks, supported by the community, arguing that the Bill was a direct attack on public education in that it was usurping power from the democratically elected local school boards (Valpy, 1997).

Following several “experiments” with local control, and with different state level education boards, policy makers in the mid 19th century opted for a centralised provision model of public schooling in NSW. William Wilkins, who was to become the State’s first Director-General of Education prepared an influential report which concluded that the specific conditions in mid 19th century NSW, meant that a centralised system was likely to be the most effective and efficient. Wilkins argued in particular that local communities were not fit for the task of running schools as most of the population, particular in rural NSW were illiterate (Barcan, 1965, 1980, 1988).

The path to the system of public education that exists today in NSW did not just have to be made through the issue of centralisation and local control. A much larger and more contentious matter had to be resolved.

Henry Parkes, who is more frequently acknowledged for his important role in Federation, arguably made a far greater contribution to the development of public schools as we know them today. In numerous speeches Parkes identified a range of reasons why the “state” should intervene in the provision of schooling and further, why it should require its citizens to attend. These purposes remain compelling and are almost exclusively “public”. They were public in that they were seen to be the pre-requisite for a civil and democratic society. They were intended to develop the “knowledge, values and loyalties that form the foundation of . . . liberal democracy” (Caldwell & Keating, 2004, p. 1).

While most agreed with these sentiments, the means by which they could be achieved was hotly debated for several decades. In this debate, Parkes’ approach up to the late 1870s was different to that of other 19th century opinion leaders in that he was in some sense anticipating the “third way” arguments of the current Blair Government in England—namely that the policy goals and not the means of achieving those goals are the most critical matters for the state. Parkes’ view, best captured in various speeches' in the mid 1870s, was that the internecine fighting among those proposing a single, state run system of schools, such as the Baptist minister and Sydney Morning Herald editor, Greenwood, and those of the Catholic Bishop of Sydney, Vaughan, who characterised public schools as “seed plots of immorality” missed the point that the fundamental interest of society was in ensuring that the aforementioned “public goals” were met, namely high levels of attendance, high levels of achievement— at the time these were conflated, as they sometimes now, as measures of literacy, and the contribution schools make to the development of a civil and just society. Parkes argued his pragmatic “third way” in reply to those who wanted an even tighter restriction on denominational schools by claiming that many of them were “as efficient as public schools” in achieving these “public goals”, that there was little to be gained and much to be lost if the “extremists” had their way (Morris, 1969).

Thankfully the bitter sectarian past has now long gone, and the 1880 Public Instruction Act was a clear settlement of the dispute in favour of a centralised, free, compulsory and secular system of public schooling. Unfortunately, what remains in some influential quarters in the education community in NSW is a tendency to still view variation and difference within and across school systems as inherently problematic. A number of people directly involved in public education seem opposed to or at least wary of differentiated provision of school services. Nearly all of these people are also beneficiaries of the mid-20th century form of public schooling, the period in which the form of public schooling become the most standardised under the Wyndham scheme, and see little reason why it should be changed. Others, while recognising the need for variation argue that it will be costly, inefficient and impractical.
From the early 1960s the comprehensive high school, based on a model developed in England in the 1950s and championed by the then Director General of Education, Sir Harold Wyndham, was with a small number of exceptions, the single model for the provision of public secondary schooling in the State. Comprehensive public schools had a number of advantages. First, they provided a curriculum that it was claimed could cater for a range of student interests and abilities within the one school. Second it appealed to the egalitarian values of the broader Australian community by bringing students with a range of abilities together in the one school. Third, from a systems point of view, the comprehensive school was efficient and economical to administer as it was a “one-size-fits-all” operation that could be resourced on the basis of clear formulae and staffed accordingly. Buildings and teachers could literally be moved anywhere within the State!

Despite its clear advantages, serious problems with the NSW model of standard provision of schools have emerged in the past 20 years. The first, and most fundamental problem with the comprehensive high school is that it requires that there is no alternative to it! While there has always been the alternative of non-government schools, within the public system, following its introduction in the 1960s there was virtually no alternative to the comprehensive high school. Wyndham’s resignation as Director-General of Education occurred because the government of the day allowed, after extensive lobbying, the survival of some of the academically selective schools which had preceded the Wyndham scheme.

The tendency for the more academically able students, students with particular sporting and cultural talents and interests to leave comprehensive high schools in favour of selective high schools, performing arts schools, sports high schools, technology enriched high schools and various other forms of specialised public schools has been evident since the introduction in the late 1980s of these schools. This coincided with the relaxation of zoning rules which had until then effectively forced children to attend their nearest public school. Also evident has been the drift of students away from the public system to the non-government system. The majority of these students have gone to low-fee non-government schools, set up to serve particular religious and ethno-cultural groups. This trend away from government schools in general and comprehensive public schools in particular has been widely described in the literature (e.g., Marginson, 1993; Reid, 1998: Vinson, 2002) and is often referred to as “residualisation”.

While, in theory, one way to solve the problem of residualisation might be to reduce the variation of schools within and across school systems, such a move would clearly not be well received by the community who by their actions have shown support for variation.

Another way of looking at this problem with standard provision is that it appears to not have addressed the educational needs of an increasingly pluralistic and diverse society. One might argue that standard provision was “invented” at a time when community opinion was in favour of assimilation of difference and that variation of school types and educational programs within the public system might now better reflect the multicultural diversity of the population. Cultural difference though is just one of many dimensions on which difference is evident among the school age population. Educators have become increasingly aware of the learning needs of gifted and talented students and of students with special needs. Issues of developmental readiness and awareness of various learning styles further serve to differentiate the student population and need to be addressed by educational programs (Masters, 2005). Finally, perhaps the most striking differences relate to geography. While visiting schools in western NSW recently I heard some teachers refer to “the sandstone curtain” to describe graphically the difference between the city and country and particularly the invisibility to policy makers and the DET of problems rural schools face. Children in rural and regional areas do not enjoy many of the educational benefits that children in the city can take for granted, such as inexpensive access to educational services and resources. Even within Sydney, socio-economic and cultural differences that impact directly on student learning needs, interest, readiness and support are evident between different suburbs.

Invariably, where the public school system has engaged proactively and constructively changing schools to address specific student and community needs, these efforts have been successful. In their

1 Sydney is surrounded by sandstone rock formations.
successes they have encouraged others to experiment and diversify. There are several excellent examples of this. In this section some of these innovations are described.

**Examples of Successful Innovation and Responsiveness**

Bradfield College is part of North Sydney TAFE. It caters for students who were “failing” in regular high schools. It provides a Yr 11 and 12 program based on adult education principles and has provided an education pathway for students, many of whom are, according to their teachers, academically very capable. Located within a few kilometres of Bradfield are two of the most academically successful schools in the State - North Sydney Boys High School and North Sydney Girls High School. Each of these schools has achieved remarkable success as measured in terms of the large numbers of students seeking enrolment and in the academic results that have been achieved. Government schools in the North Sydney precinct are a clear example of one form of successful adaptation to local needs and conditions.

Another example of successful innovation in response to particular local needs has been the establishment Northern Beaches Secondary College. Several northern beaches high schools were facing increased competition from non-government schools and a public selective high school at Manly. The northern beaches project has brought these comprehensive high schools and the local TAFE Institute into a collaboration designed to maximise the educational opportunities for young people on the peninsula. The Freshwater Education Centre, an integral part of the College, comprises three partners, the Freshwater Senior School Campus, the Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE and the University of Technology, Sydney. A unique aspect of the College, and there are several other similar colleges in NSW, is that each of five schools offers a senior curriculum. Students at these schools are still able to access specialist TAFE and school subjects from Freshwater. Enrolments at the Freshwater Senior campus have reached capacity within two years of its official opening. The quality of the facility, the culture of the campus and its focus on adult learning principles and other flexibilities suited to the needs and capacities of senior students as well as the breadth of curriculum offerings are, according to the senior staff of the school, the reasons why Freshwater was able to attract 260 new students in 2005. In February 2005, in recognition of its curriculum development and offerings across the five campuses, the Northern Beaches Secondary College received from the Federal Education Minister the Outstanding National Achievement Award for Excellence in School Improvement. Part of the success of this project has been the close involvement of the local community. Warringah Council, the Harbord Diggers Club, the Manly Warringah Rugby League Club and countless other organisations have become closely involved in the activities of the College. This is a clear example of the community embeddedness being advocated in this paper.

There are many other examples of success stories around NSW. There are small central schools working in Aboriginal Communities, such as at Goodooga that have remade themselves as integral parts of the local communities, providing educational services and support, including internet access to the whole community. There are extensive TAFE/School/university partnerships at Coffs Harbour, in Western Sydney and at Dubbo, with excellent new campuses and facilities. Other examples include specialised schools in Sydney and the major regional centres that cater to the communities needs for specialisation in performing arts, technology enriched education, academic specialisation and so forth.

Caldwell and Keating (2004) describe a large number of examples of variation and innovation within public school systems in Australia and overseas. In some of these cases, particularly in England and recently in Victoria, private providers have assumed responsibility for running under-performing public schools. Public-private partnerships of the sort advocated by Caldwell and Keating (2004) appear to have had some success. However, they are clearly not a necessary requirement for successful innovation as has been evidenced by the NSW experience of successes with the types of innovation described above.

What is evident from the NSW examples that I have studied and from Caldwell and Keating’s (2004) work is that new structures and arrangements comprising secondary schools, TAFE colleges, universities and other education providers are becoming increasingly common. Also clear is that many of the innovations are in the form of changes to curriculum and pedagogy rather than resources and infrastructure. This is particularly evident in local curriculum developments in vocational education and training, often in partnership with local employers and industry.
Another area of innovation has been in programs designed to better meet the needs of learners in the middle and senior years of schooling. This has seen teaching the “middle-years” slowly emerge as a specialisation among teachers. Teachers in this area teach across a wider range of subjects and focus on the pastoral and developmental needs of young teenagers. House groupings of students sustained over the first few years of high school, the explicit development of peer support networks, mentoring programs for younger students, timetabling which sees students based in “home” rooms for many of their classes are all examples of this type of curriculum and pedagogical innovation and responsiveness. The needs and of learners in the senior years of schooling have been recognised and addressed by some schools in the adoption of adult learning principles in classrooms and in modifications to school rules and requirements. Examples of this include the use of peer and negotiated learning, an emphasis on problem solving and the development of research skills, classes being timetabled outside of regular school hours and subsequently, the requirements for attendance being modified.

Less common, or perhaps less publicised, have been developments in primary schools that have seen the integration of early childhood services with regular K-6 schools. In some rural communities the primary school has become the focus for the delivery of community and educational services, with community health and welfare services working closely with schools. A number of formal, funded pilot projects are underway in primary schools in NSW. Some are funded by the Department of Community Services (DOCS) while others involve Federal agencies. This type of interagency collaboration is being increasingly researched and reported on in the literature and would seem to have particularly application in specific communities of NSW.

Public Schools as Community Resources

From each of these vignettes and descriptions of successful pedagogical and structural changes certain elements and issues emerge. While detailing all of these is beyond the scope of this paper, some of the issues need to be at least identified in order to outline what public schools as community resources in NSW might mean for schools, the DET and for government.

The focus in each case above has been on the specific learning and broader needs of local communities. The innovations that have been successful have addressed these needs. While in some cases this has involved radical changes, in other cases these have occurred within “standard” schools. The point being made in this paper is that the problem is not the comprehensive high school or standardised provision per se but rather in the “systems” capacity for adaptation of standard school structures and curriculum to local contexts. When the standard school form as a means of achieving the goals of public schooling becomes confused with public schooling, then serious problems emerge as “one” means of achieving the goals of public schooling can effectively act as a barrier to “other” means. The emphasis in public school administration at the State and regional level should be on local needs of communities and not on standardisation as an end in itself.

Another feature of these innovations is that they have required leadership of school and communities at the local level. The capacity for flexibility and freedom to innovate have been necessary pre-requisites to these changes. Importantly, the expertise that has been applied to these changes has been both within the local education community and the Department more broadly. The key feature of this leadership then, at least as it appears to me, is that it has been broadly distributed within the schools themselves, the Department, and in some cases, within the wider community. Distributed leadership then, emerges as a feature of successful innovation in NSW public schooling. Further, new research on sustainable leadership (Hargraves & Fink, 2005) suggests that not only is successful and sustainable leadership shared, it needs to be developed and supported at the system level. Succession planning, leadership development and educational leadership as community activism all represent rich challenges and opportunities for public schooling.

A third issue is that while it is the case that existing structures have allowed for these types of developments, people directly involved in them sometimes express frustration at the difficulties that they have faced in managing to negotiate the changes through the Department, the Teachers Federation and various stakeholder and interest groups. If a culture of innovation and local
responsiveness is to further develop in the public schools in NSW, then the successful local changes that have occurred to date should be closely studied with a view to identifying and removing unnecessary obstacles to further innovation. Considerable work should be done to develop policies that facilitate innovation and local responsiveness while at the same time address “real” accountability and quality concerns. Recent changes in areas such as staffing where principals will be able to select staff from a “pool of qualifying candidates” (Education Review, 2005, p.2) and where principalships will be open to applicants from other systems and States are a potentially positive step in focusing attention on local needs.

A critical issue in many of these changes has been the provision of resources. In its recent work on educational futures, the OECD has noted that, in order to support some of the changes being advocated in this paper, “significant investments would be made to update the quality of premises and equipment in general, to open school facilities to the community, and to ensure that the divides of affluence and social capital do not widen” (OECD, n.d.). Given the financial constraints that governments face, this is likely to be a key challenge for policy makers in encouraging further renewal and innovation within public schooling.

Perhaps the most obvious matter that will need to be addressed is that of the professional preparation and ongoing professional development of teachers. Teachers’ will need further expertise in working with children, parents, particular communities and with related professionals and paraprofessionals in this emerging role for public schools. Such expertise is widely acknowledged as a key element in the success or failure of attempts at innovation. Ongoing professional development throughout teachers’ careers is essential to develop the individual and organisational capacity and responsiveness. Attention will also need to be paid to the recruitment of teachers with particular attributes to particular communities.

Finally, the community character of the examples that I have given here is not evidenced solely through listening to parents and the particular needs that they articulate. This is what I would consider, in its extreme to be an example of “private” schooling where the parent and child are at the one-time recipients of the educational service and also to a large extent dictate the sort of service to be provided and by whom. While public schools need to work in close and mutually supportive partnerships with parents they can never be parent run schools effectively only accountable to the parent body. Broad public and community accountability and responsiveness are the defining characteristics of public schooling and will be needed if schools are to be valued and supported as community resources.

**Conclusion**

This paper is supportive of the trend that has emerged in recent years in NSW that has seen the beginnings of a move from public education as comprehensive schools to public education as a comprehensive system of schools. Recent successes in public schooling both in NSW and elsewhere have been evident where schools have responded to the specific educational needs of increasingly diverse learners and communities. This paper has advocated that these innovations and adaptations become a key characteristic of public schooling in NSW in the 21st century.

Some specific cases where alternative approaches to schooling appear warranted are in the areas of Aboriginal education, in communities with high levels of disadvantage and in communities with a high proportion of students from non-English speaking backgrounds. The DET’s recent review of Aboriginal education (DET, 2004) has recommended that specialist schools be establish to serve Aboriginal communities and that these schools be staffed by teachers specifically trained for that purpose. The public schools that will emerge if these recommendations are implemented will obviously be different to the “standard” model of school in a number of key elements but, I would argue, they will be fundamentally public in the purpose and character.

The challenge as I see it for the NSW Department of Education and Training and for the NSW Government is to review is practices and policies and to modify these in ways that further enable community embeddedness and responsiveness. The need for further flexibility in staffing and resourcing are likely to be key features of this important work as will leadership development and the professional development of teachers. Equally important and no less challenging will be the
development of formal structures and mechanisms for community engagement and involvement. These will need to guard against the narrow interests of some parents and lobbies and ensure broad community engagement.

These proposals are offered in the belief that the purposes of public education that were being developed and refined 150 years ago are still valid and important in the development of a just and civil society, in the development of a rich social capital. The future lies in a commitment to achieving these purposes in a post-assimilationist society, one that values diversity and recognises the educational demands such diversity makes upon the State. This goal should be embraced in a spirit of optimism and urgency.
References


¹ See for example Parkes’ Speech on the Education Question and his election speech of 3 December 1874. The speech that is most interesting though is the one made in 1875 in reply to Dibb’s motion against the 1866 Act.
Report of the consultation on future directions for public education and training: One size doesn’t fit all
Report of the consultation on future directions for public education and training: One size doesn’t fit all
CHAPTER 5
PROVIDING SKILLS AND OPPORTUNITY

THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Sustained Economic Performance

Ian Macfarlane, the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia, observed that:

More and more, development economists and economic historians are coming to the conclusion that, at the deepest level, a sound institutional framework is the crucial ingredient for sustained economic performance, and that it is far more important than distance, geography or the presence of resources. (Macfarlane, 2004)

Mr Macfarlane went on to identify the first two requirements of a sound institutional framework as the protection of property rights and constraints on the capacity of Government and other elites to exercise arbitrary power. He identified the third part of the institutional framework as:

Some degree of equal opportunity so that people can invest in human capital formation. In this area, by far the most important component is access to education and an economic structure where positions of importance and authority are open to all comers on the basis of merit. (ibid)

TAFE Institutes as major, well established, widely distributed and accessible vocational education and training institutions play a key role in the process of human capital formation and in providing equity of access to human capital formation in Australia.

The Business Council of Australia concluded in a recent major report:

The vocational education and training sector has a critical role to play in supporting the development and maintenance of skills, ingenuity and capabilities that are required by Australian enterprises. (BCA, 2004)

However, the BCA report also concluded that

Rapidly changing skill requirements, the need for heightened flexibility in how and when training is delivered, the intertwined nature of technical and generic skills are some of the factors pointing to the case for fundamental changes to the VET sector to align with the new skill paradigm in business. (ibid)

TAFE NSW

TAFE NSW is part of a national industry-led system of vocational education and training (VET). TAFE’s mission is to deliver products and services that improve the competitive advantage of industry in NSW and address the impact on people, organisations and communities of continuous technological, economic and social change. It provides the skills training needed by industry and the community and through this contributes substantially to NSW retaining its position as the healthiest economy in Australia. Because TAFE is a public provider, it has a commitment to meeting the needs of all NSW. TAFE plays a key role in the sustainability of rural and remote NSW: the more remote the area, the more essential TAFE delivery becomes.

1 Much of this introduction is quoted or adapted from work undertaken for TAFE NSW by Peter Noonan of the Centre for the Economics of Education and Training, Monash University.
TAFE NSW is resourced through a combination of state and Commonwealth funding, and through commercial activities. It is the largest VET provider in Australia and among the largest in the world, providing approximately 90% of the VET undertaken in NSW. Its training for young people equips them with the skills they need to gain and keep their first jobs. Its second chance education programs provide opportunities for people to gain skills they did not gain as young people. Its programs for mature workers allow them to re-skill and upgrade their skills so they can continue to contribute to the economy and to society.

**Responding to Changes in the Labour Market**

Over the last decade or more, the NSW TAFE course profile has changed in response to shifts in the labour market, with significant growth in areas such as information technology, hospitality, and community services to give people the general skills for employment and further learning. In recent years, these shifts have largely been achieved through a redirection of effort from areas of lower demand or low priority. Provision for equity groups has also increased.

At the same time, there has been a dramatic change in the structure of TAFE NSW. About 10 years ago, nearly 3000 head office staff administered 137 individual colleges which were the size of the average high school. Today, 10 NSW TAFE institutes, the size of regional universities, effectively manage their own affairs within the governance, planning and budgetary framework set by the State Government through the NSW TAFE Commission. The Commission itself has been absorbed within the Department of Education and Training, with a significant reduction in, and redeployment of, staff.

Over the last several years, TAFE NSW has been operating in an environment of increasing demand and increasing efficiency, at the same time as budgets have been reduced.

> TAFE funds were effectively frozen for years; and when growth funding came in 2001 – 03, it fell well short of the rise in student demand. (Horin, 2005)

This is mirrored across the VET sector. Commenting on the release of the Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) report, *Skills at Work*, the *Australian Financial Review* reported:

> While there has been a 100 per cent increase in the numbers in training, recurrent spending on the system by governments has lagged far behind … strip out spending by state governments, and the increase from the federal government has been even smaller: 19 per cent. At the same time, employers are squeezing the public purse. They are calling for better and better training of employees, but increasingly transferring this responsibility to the public coffers. (Priest, 2005)

In summary, since 1998, TAFE NSW has increased output, reduced costs, decreased reliance on government funding, transformed its modes of delivery, extended its range of programs, services and products, implemented major reforms in structure and governance and met all government budget and output targets with minimum industrial or public disputation.

**From Skills to Capability**

Over the past decade, much has been written about the need for Australia – along with other mature and even developing economies – to make the transition to a knowledge based economy. That debate has been undertaken in largely theoretical terms and overly focussed on pure research and innovation (Noonan, 2001).

The demands of a knowledge economy are now a practical reality in Australia. Skills shortages across the labour market are widespread, as discussed below. Shortages in specific areas have been driven by sustained high levels of economic and employment growth and, to some extent, are cyclical in nature. However, regardless of the economic cycle, ensuring that Australia has sufficient people with the technical skills and the broader capabilities to work in complex modern workplaces will underpin participation levels in the Australian labour market and determine future productivity growth in the Australian economy.

The magnitude and complexity of this task is greater now than at any point in recent Australian history. The workforce is ageing, and the gap between the number of people entering the workforce and those retiring is closing rapidly. The following graph from Access Economics highlights this trend.
Access Economics concludes that:

... the effects of employment growth, staff turnover and retirements will amount to 12½ million people over the next decade – or around 1¼ million people per year.

Not all of those 1¼ million people per year new to their occupations will require training, but many will, especially as Australia’s industry structure changes towards a more highly skilled future.

Given that total employment is 9½ million, it is estimated that the average industry or occupation needs to plan on 1-in-8 workers being new (or newly returned) to their occupation every year ...

(Access Economics, 2004: 20)

The Commonwealth Department of the Treasury has identified the need to raise labour force participation levels in Australia as one of Australia’s key economic challenges, with education and skills identified as the key to raising levels of participation in the labour market (Department of the Treasury, 2002; 2004).

Skills Shortages

During the course of the Futures project, the issue of skills shortages came increasingly to prominence. It reached a point where major companies were reportedly cancelling projects due to a lack of skilled workers. An example of this was the mining company Bronzewing, in Western Australia, which recently reported it was unable to reopen its gold mine because of skills shortages. Group Training Companies gave another example of the importance of vocational education and training to the Australian economy:

How critical the skills shortage crisis is becoming is rammed home by the fact that with Australia’s unemployment rate now at just 5.1% (the lowest since 1976), and is expected to drop even further this year ... Surely we should be doing everything in our power to produce a generation of home grown skills and not import them from far off lands?

Moreover, in recent times, the chief economist of the ANZ has warned that national skills shortages are already holding industry back even as the economy continues to grow. (GT Network, 2005: 2)

The Reserve Bank reportedly expressed a similar view:

The RBA has said that skills shortages are threatening to push up inflation and that the economy must be kept in check by higher interest rates. (Allen, 2005)
The Prime Minister, John Howard, was reported to have stated that the skills shortages were the product of a strong economy. However, a report in the Australian Financial Review cited a University of Western Sydney research paper as saying that … an increase in the use of contractors and labour hire firms, rather than in-house tradespeople has led to an erosion of their training. (Morris, 2005)

The following table demonstrates the comparative decline in apprenticeship enrolments in TAFE NSW during a period of increasing enrolments, while enrolments by trainees were variable.

**Figure 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrolments</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apprentices</td>
<td>47,268</td>
<td>46,454</td>
<td>44,829</td>
<td>46,783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainees</td>
<td>11,759</td>
<td>10,303</td>
<td>11,953</td>
<td>14,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Enrolments</td>
<td>401,881</td>
<td>447,739</td>
<td>469,301</td>
<td>480,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>460,908</td>
<td>504,496</td>
<td>526,083</td>
<td>541,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprentices as % of enrolments</td>
<td>10.26%</td>
<td>9.21%</td>
<td>8.52%</td>
<td>8.63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because it is employers who take on apprentices prior to their presenting to TAFE for training, this downturn reflects a decline in employment of apprentices by industry, an issue that governments and industry are beginning to look at very seriously. The TradeStart@TAFENSW initiative, announced by the State Government in March 2005, was designed to assist in addressing this issue.

While the Commonwealth’s New Apprenticeships Scheme has seen an overall growth in apprenticeship numbers, this growth has not been in traditional trades (DEST, 2004: 27 – 28) where some of the serious shortages are:

*The skills report, completed by the Department of Education, Science and Training … confirmed that the broadening of traditional apprenticeships … had caused a huge rise in formalised training in sectors like clerical work and sales but a decline in traditional trade apprenticeships. (Tingle, 2005)*

As the table above shows, apprentices only represent a small proportion of all TAFE’s students. As knowledge work becomes part of more and more occupations, the demand for second chance education can only be projected to increase, while the data from Access Economics show that training and particularly re-training will become ever more important. That students aged 40 to 49 are the fastest growing group in TAFE NSW provides strong evidence that this has already begun.

**A Sustainable TAFE NSW in a Sustainable NSW Economy**

To support the economy in NSW, TAFE will need to be able to respond to new and continuing demands on its capacity and capability. Partnerships with industry will become increasingly vital, particularly to allow students to access cutting edge industry facilities and equipment, if students are to have the skills industry needs. The BCA Report on the Vocational Education and Training System – Key Issues for Large Enterprises argues that:

*From the perspective of the business community it is important that the public VET sector is able to access the level of resources required to deliver high quality and relevant training, particularly in the area of entry level skills development. (BCA, 2004: 99)*

The report goes on to identify as major issues the fact that public VET providers have a relatively narrow funding base and that revenue growth has severely lagged behind student activity growth (despite growth in fee for service and ancillary trading revenue). The report raises a specific concern that public VET providers maintain cash balances by not covering the costs of capital depreciation, relying instead on specific purpose capital funding, with a consequence that facilities are not replaced until they are past their use by date (ibid). This analysis could be taken further to include investment in equipment and technology...
and, more generally, in product development, staff capability, market analysis, branding and business development.

The level of recurrent funding available to deliver government-funded programs will also determine levels of participation in TAFE and the quality of outcomes. However, nationally, total investment in VET from public and private sources is declining relative to the schools and higher education sectors. This decline will continue if current trends continue.

Clearly, a strong and sustainable TAFE NSW is essential to a healthy NSW economy and a resilient labour market. The response from the community, discussed below, demonstrates that they value TAFE NSW but are looking for a wide range of improvements. TAFE’s role will now be to meet the challenges their submissions represent while remaining sustainable and resilient itself.

**SUMMARY OF RESPONSES FROM THE CONSULTATION**

…the relationship between TAFE and industry is vastly improved but needs to go further. (Industry meeting)

The key message, especially from industry, was that TAFE is travelling along the right path but still has some way to go. It was clear from the responses that TAFE is seen to provide a valued service but, equally, there are many areas in which that service could be improved. In general, respondents said that TAFE needed to be more flexible, both in its dealings with industry and in meeting the needs of individual students, although some respondents were:

*Pleased by the flexibility and adaptability of current TAFE approaches locally – particularly tailored responses to a particular industry need.* (Industry meeting)

A key area of agreement was that TAFE has not been sufficiently successful in promoting its achievements and benefits to the community at large.

Responses about TAFE came from industry, students, community members, including parents, and staff of TAFE and schools. Given the differing concerns of these groups, it is not surprising that many of the views expressed about TAFE were widely divergent, for example:

- some see TAFE as a business while others strongly disagree
- some want more courses at more colleges; while others suggest that TAFE reduce the number of courses offered at each college and create areas of specialisation.

Others expressed views which described different aspects of the same needs. For example, many respondents wanted TAFE to improve its products and services, but in different ways:

- many in rural and regional areas, and from small and medium businesses, want more customised service at the local level
- large employers want a single point of contact for statewide coordinated service through a relationship or account manager.

In analysing the responses, the first overarching issue for TAFE which emerged was whether TAFE should be ‘everything to everyone’, or whether it should be selective in the products and services it provides.
If TAFE is to be ‘everything to everyone’, the need for increased resourcing for TAFE is clear: many respondents called for more funding for TAFE. Industry sought stability in TAFE through a clear Government commitment to TAFE.

There needs to be a government commitment to a publicly funded TAFE system. There is a need to sustain or improve funding for TAFE. (Industry meeting)

On the other hand, if TAFE is to become more selective in the products and services it provides, it will be important to ensure that all its customers are aware of this shift and accept the reasoning behind it.

A second overarching issue was who TAFE’s customers are, since a shift is apparent in TAFE’s customer focus. Traditionally, because TAFE is a public sector organisation, the Government has been both its primary customer and funding provider. That focus is shifting to industry, community and the individual citizen in New South Wales who, together with Government, hold the collective ownership of TAFE.

The Business Council of Australia has affirmed that … education and training is one of a handful of really significant drivers of individual business performance and growth across the economy as a whole (BCA, 2004: 5). TAFE NSW is a key part of the industry-led vocational education and training sector. At any one time, 9% of the population in NSW aged 15 to 64 is enrolled in training at TAFE NSW.

Respondents said that they want to be able to update skills through industry-relevant training that is accessible, consistent and delivered in a professional and effective manner. Comments and potential strategies were focused around six themes:

• supplying what the customer wants
• being there when you need us
• valuing people
• organisational culture
• sharing the benefits, sharing the costs
• a long-term commitment to TAFE.

Under these principles, major areas of comment were about:

• improved servicing of industry skill needs through a broadened and tailored product and service range; and
• a more accessible TAFE; improved teaching performance; and increased work experience opportunities.

In addition, students, parents and the community wanted:

• a highly accurate advisory service especially prior to enrolment and
• the ability to enrol in units or modules rather than a whole qualification, when that suited their needs.

Respondents commented on the people who work in TAFE. They wanted TAFE teachers to combine personal qualities, teaching skills and technical currency. They wanted staff to be supported by a flexible system. They wanted the organisation to identify and develop leaders with the skills, capability and behaviours needed to take TAFE into the future. And finally TAFE staff said they wanted to work in a
department which values TAFE and in an organisational culture which values innovation, creativity and sensible risk taking through a process of consultative decision-making.

SUPPLYING WHAT THE CUSTOMER WANTS

CONTACT POINTS FOR INDUSTRY

One of the most important messages about industry in NSW is that it is not homogeneous. The issues for industry in rural NSW are not the same as the issues for industries in regional or metropolitan areas. The issues for large national and multi-national enterprises are not the same as the issues for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Consequently, some respondents raised quite diverse issues while there were other issues which were common across the responses. The issues reported in this section were principally those of large enterprises. Issues for SMEs and rural and regional industries are discussed in the next section.

Industry reported that it does not know who to deal with in TAFE and that it often has to deal with TAFE people who are not from the industry area. This lack of statewide coordination makes it extremely difficult. (Industry meeting).

Respondents wanted TAFE to provide highly expert and informed single points of contact for industry; and relevant individualised products and expert training services to meet industry’s current and future needs.

*Formalise the brokerage between the particular company/industry organisation and TAFE; so industry knows what is on offer and so TAFE knows what is needed (eg location issues; technician level training as well as apprenticeships). Clear points of contact are needed eg Client Account Managers. The process should be systematised.* (Industry meeting)

Industry asked clearly and repeatedly for a coordinated statewide (or national) strategic approach for developing cohesive and consistent curriculum that addresses current, emerging and future skills gaps:

*Dealing with different TAFEs for the provision of services in regional settings or even statewide settings creates a lot of logistical and communication problems … and there is not a coordinated management approach to monitor and report on the effectiveness of training.* (Industry meeting)
Report of the consultation on future directions for public education and training: One size doesn’t fit all

TAFE needs to have a more systemic approach to client management. (Industry meeting)

Work with industry to plan 10-15 years ahead. (Joint Industry and Community meeting)

How does TAFE segregate its market clients to deal with the special needs of small, medium and large-scale enterprises? Coles has a particular philosophy about segmenting these markets and develop[ing] strategies to meet these individual requirements. (Industry meeting)

Clear strategies are needed to enable Curriculum Centres to improve links with major industry stakeholders, while also allowing Institutes to continue to maintain their links with local enterprises. Industry felt that there has been a decline in communication between TAFE NSW and industry stakeholders. (Industry meeting)

TAFE system needs to cater more for needs in local communities. (School Community meeting)

This was supported by TAFE staff:

*Difficulty is often experienced when TAFE liaises with industry as it is often complex and diverse and on occasion maybe in competition with ... [itself].* (TAFE staff meeting)

Industry repeatedly stated that it wanted a client manager or account manager who had industry expertise and a strong and clear understanding of local, state and national contexts. Industry also repeatedly called for a cooperative approach within TAFE (rather than the competitive intra- and inter-Institute approach).

Industry also wanted TAFE to operate on a longer-term planning and budgetary cycle to:

*... deploy the resources where future policy is being made.*
*Alocate TAFE resources to the industries that are growing and important and need to be sustained.* (Industry meeting)

This issue is discussed at the end of this chapter.

One large national enterprise suggested that TAFE consider segregating its market clients to deal with the special needs of small, medium and large-scale enterprises. This segmenting approach to the market would allow TAFE to develop strategies to meet the requirements of individual market segments.

Industry and TAFE staff called for TAFE to take a lead role in improving consultation between industry and enterprises: a number of respondents commented on the role of the Curriculum Centres in this regard. Some respondents suggested TAFE take on a more general brokerage role with local and statewide operations. This would involve TAFE in linking employers with innovative and relevant skill solutions at the local and statewide levels. Operating on the local level would ensure that the real needs of individual enterprises are being met and statewide coordination would ensure the cross fertilisation of skill requirements, products and services across the state:

*Strategic networks need to be fostered and developed at local/ regional levels to ensure the ‘real’ needs of enterprises are being met. State-wide management of such networks (via units like TAFE NSW Curriculum Centres) would ensure the cross fertilisation of skill requirements, products and services across the state.* (TAFE staff member)

**THE NEED FOR IMPROVED LOCAL COLLABORATION**

Many respondents wanted TAFE to listen to, collaborate and engage with industry (particularly with small and medium employers) and with the community (particularly in rural and regional areas), to ensure that TAFE products and services reflected local needs. The suggestions and advice received indicated that TAFE needs to increase its capacity to be more focused on workforce skill development to address the skill requirements of local and regional enterprises and communities.
Respondents called on TAFE to have regular, direct and effective engagement with industry and the community to ensure that TAFE products and services meet local needs.

They suggested many ways by which TAFE could improve its collaboration with industry and the community were suggested. One suggestion mentioned frequently was for TAFE to be more active on industry boards and associations. There were also many calls for improved partnerships between TAFE and industry, in particular with small and medium businesses.

Partnerships were seen as a vehicle for sharing industry-standard equipment and facilities and delivering workplace (on-the-job) training and work placement and employment opportunities, as well as:

• increasing effective consultation with industry
• linking to industry experts, guest speakers and mentors
• jointly evaluating products and services to identify currency and relevance.

Respondents also suggested that partnerships with industry would provide an effective means of developing regional strategic plans to identify and meet regional skill needs. This was not just seen as an opportunity to work with large enterprises but also with SMEs.

Industry wanted to have a leadership role in TAFE course content, local TAFE course offerings and timetabling of course offerings and the setting of standards for student and teacher performance, as well as having feedback opportunities in these areas. They also wanted to see improved reporting to employers from TAFE on individual student performance and outcomes.

One issue repeatedly raised was the need to work more effectively with SMEs, for example in tailoring courses to meet their needs. Respondents said that SMEs did not have a sufficient voice in the VET sector, particularly given the large number of people they employed across the state. An example of such an issue was the design and relevance of Training Packages:

*The people who provided input into the introduction of training packages were large firms; small firms are too busy earning a dollar! Training Packages are of limited relevance to most small employers. There needs to be a system in place where the views of small businesses can be listened to. Most small business people do not know how training packages work. The system must be made easier for them to know how they work.*

(TAFE staff meeting)

**ADVISORY AND ENROLMENT SERVICES**

There were many calls from community, parents, students and TAFE staff for improved advisory, counselling and support services to students, particularly prior to enrolling in a course, but also during and at the end of the course. One respondent referred to the Western Australian Department of Education and Training Report, *Deciding on a Better Future*, stating:

*Without relevant, easily comprehended and timely information, people are more likely to enrol in inappropriate courses and hence withdraw.*

(TAFE staff meeting)
Many believed that students make uninformed decisions about the courses they choose to enrol in. They said that as a result students are often unprepared for the study commitment required and have false expectations about the chosen qualification and occupation. They wanted clear, accurate, plain English information and advice from knowledgeable and expert TAFE or school career counsellors. This should be about course content; and training and career pathways for all students prior to enrolment. Some stated that school students did not always have access to appropriate and sufficient information about the full range of pathways and occupations. (This is discussed in the section on students aged 15 to 19 in Chapter 2.)

Accessing support also appeared to be hampered by a lack of awareness of services available:

... good pre-enrolment information and career counselling ... is critical to TAFE's success and to the cost effective use of its resources. (Parent and TAFE staff member)

Some respondents also felt that students were hampered in gaining appropriate information by the disinclination of some students with a disability to disclose their disability.

Respondents said that an important part of getting the right advice to students, and in providing the right post-HSC pathways, involved listening to students about what they needed from TAFE, respecting students as individuals and taking into account their life experiences and skills.

Parents, TAFE students and staff wanted to see more frequent, better and, in some submissions, compulsory information sessions at the school and in the community. Some respondents also wanted:

Employers to assist TAFE in the recruitment of TAFE students. (Industry response)

Respondents wanted TAFE to provide individualised advisory and counselling services for students, in particular before enrolment, to assist students to make informed study and career choices; and to ensure effective and efficient use of TAFE resources.

Require all students to participate in an orientation to TAFE. These are not section specific and work best with mixed groups as pre-enrolment exercise[s]. Topics [might] include the adult study environment, rights and responsibilities, expectations, support available and how to access it. (TAFE staff meeting)

They requested written and on-line material about:
- course offerings, durations and costs
- the skills required by and details about specific occupations and vocational pathways
- information about careers, for students leaving TAFE at the completion of their studies
- better information for school students about TAFE, including its support services.
They also wanted to see better consultation with current students through increased face to face discussions between students and teachers in the classroom; regular surveys to establish students’ opinions and follow-up actions on student suggestions; and exit surveys of students to investigate employment rates post-training. They also called for previous students to be consulted about future course content and structure.

They asked for TAFE to consult with students about provision:

... if the resources are available, TAFE can ‘customize’ a particular course to the students’ needs. For example, I am studying Certificate IV in … [IT] and for the Diploma course next year, the teachers are considering integrating CISCO Academy into the course. This was initiated by discussion between students and teachers. ... I think if our input is used to develop courses, it would better cater [for] our needs. (TAFE student and staff meeting)

Respondents suggested that TAFE staff make follow-up contact with those people who sought advice from TAFE about courses and careers. They suggested that: Course Information Centres be staffed with people who know the TAFE system, rather than casual employees; and TAFE should fund specific staff to undertake these roles, rather than allocating them to existing staff.

One respondent called for the expansion of the existing TAFE counsellors’ network and the establishment of a Vocational Counselling Service. Concerns were also expressed about the quality of information about careers available on-line.

Respondents also suggested that TAFE provide a service in each Institute that linked students with employment opportunities. Some respondents suggested this could involve TAFE investing in employment liaison officers to assist students with employment opportunities, while others thought it could be achieved through better links with existing services, such as job networks.

Finally, respondents suggested that smaller class sizes could be achieved through efficiencies resulting from better subject choices by students and the resulting increase in effective use of resources.

Application Processes

TAFE NSW has a statewide Application Processing System (APS) for high demand courses, which involves a written application and, for some courses, the presentation of a portfolio of work or an audition. Some respondents felt that the APS, together with the fee increase in 2004, had had a detrimental impact on enrolments. Others thought that the APS discriminated against people of non-English speaking backgrounds:

Courses are getting harder to access. The application process discriminates against NESB students. Students who undertake entry level training cannot progress due to the application process. Better pathway planning required for introductory courses into higher levels. (Multicultural Community Focus Group)

We need better mechanisms to gain feedback from students. One is systematic exit surveys. This includes tracking students post course completion and generating quality student destination information to use in marketing just as the universities do. (TAFE staff member)

Ensure that there are regular follow-ups for students who have previously accessed assistance and these follow-ups follow the student through the educational life of the student. (TAFE student meeting)

TAFE needs to take a greater involvement in being a labour intermediary. (Industry meeting)

TAFE needs to have links with job networks, for increased employability of students. Employment outcomes are paramount for students completing their training. Referral system for students into local industries. (TAFE student meeting)

TAFE introduced the new application procedure – fees were increased and half yearly payments were accepted. This backfired as many students did not return for 2nd semester. (TAFE Staff member)
A number of other respondents, however, thought that it should be extended:

*All enrolments should be under an application system, with interviews held. … Screen students to ensure they are enrolling in the correct course.* (TAFE student meeting)

Other respondents listed a variety of means of improving the appropriateness of student enrolments into courses, including pre-screening, selection tests and compulsory information sessions:

*…require each section to have an information session prior to applications closing or prior to actual enrolment. Make attendance at such a session worth twenty points in the application process or a required part of the enrolment process.* (TAFE staff meeting)

**INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PROGRAMS AND STUDENT DIVERSITY**

In TAFE NSW:

*The Act states that it should provide for educationally or vocationally disadvantaged groups such as women, Aborigines, persons of non English speaking background, persons with disabilities, and persons in rural areas. TAFE should provide courses and qualifications which are transportable and allow them to develop a career.* (NSW Teachers Federation)

Many respondents wanted increased support and respect for students. They called for more learning programs or training plans to be designed for individuals that clearly stated the modules and outcomes to be achieved and which identified and met individual training needs.

*By allowing and encouraging more choice and flexibility in methods of assessment and presentation of assessment tasks to take into account individual students’ learning styles, strengths and weaknesses.* (Industry meeting)

They wanted teachers to recognise and address the individual learning needs of students (for example, gifted and talented, non-English speaking background, hearing impaired, intellectually disabled, general education needs). They also commented on the need to work with students to ensure they had the skills to study in an adult learning environment:

*Structured learning is important for majority of young people who may not be equipped with skills for managing their own learning. Personal contact, interaction with teachers, rather than self paced learning, provides greater support.* (TAFE staff meeting)

They also wanted teachers to match the pace of delivery and to the capability level of the class and individual. This included the provision of individualised programs and flexible assessment modes for students with disabilities and students whose first language is not English. They called for the use of more teaching aids and learning
resources; and improved clarity and expression of lecture notes and assignment explanations. Both TAFE students and staff also wanted to see lecture notes available on-line.

Many respondents wanted increased availability and ease of access to tutoring and counselling of individual students during their studies, by teaching staff; by industry and Centrelink representatives. They also wanted to see increased mentoring, for example of younger student by employers, to help them gain access to the world of work; and of older students by younger students, to help them learn to manage new technology. Some referred to this as a buddy system, and thought it was particularly needed for students experiencing difficulties, those with special needs, and those in rural communities. One student commented on the need for this to be provided outside the student’s own family or even community:

> If your family is unemployed and all your community is struggling where do you get a mentor? Do you know mentors exist? (Personal submission)

Other respondents commented on the need for support and welfare services for TAFE students. There were also a number of respondents who called on TAFE to provide vocational and life skills courses for younger students, both as support programs in schools and in TAFE itself. (This is discussed in the section on people aged 15 – 19 in Chapter 2.)

Trial or ‘taster’ experiences in TAFE and visits to industry for students prior to enrolling in TAFE and early in their TAFE course were also suggested. These visits would help to give students realistic expectations of occupations and workplaces.

These suggestions came particularly from, but were not limited to, groups representing people with disabilities and indigenous community groups.

> TAFE should offer support/life skills/social skills programs in the schools to under 14 year olds to engage them in further education. Provide orientation and taster courses to introduce TAFE courses to Year 8 & 9 school students. School Counsellors are spread too thin and cannot properly support students with special needs. (Community and Interagency Group meeting)

Responses from Indigenous community groups stated that there were attributes of TAFE provision which were appreciated and suggested strategies for working more effectively with Aboriginal people:

> TAFE needs to work with the communities to help people to set goals. It is important to have special TAFE staff (eg Aboriginal Coordinators and Outreach) to come into the community and work with the people and motivate them. (Indigenous community meeting)
Aboriginal people also called on TAFE to work with industry to improve employment opportunities and outcomes for indigenous people and to allow adequate time for people to complete their studies but without compromising standards. They also wanted TAFE to provide learning which integrates theory and practice:

There needs to be an integration of theory and practical as many Aboriginal people are not good at ‘book learning’ – in many indigenous communities people don’t see any relevance in education and training. Grandparents and parents haven’t had employment and therefore there needs to be programs that will assist in changing community attitude. There is a need for good role models and learning must be positive and practical so young people are motivated. (Indigenous Community Group)

A number of respondents commented on the needs of students of non-English speaking background, especially younger students:

NESB students and their families are a vulnerable group that needs targeted programs and on-going assistance to help with educational outcomes. Often, NESB students are unable to receive support in the home, due to language and education barriers of parents and older siblings. Young refugee people in particular often require extra assistance with schooling and homework and their home is not always suitable for a quiet study environment. (Ethnic Communities Council)

Students with behaviour problems were seen to be an increasing problem for TAFE, as well as for schools, and a number of strategies were suggested:

Students with disruptive behaviours should be given support by opening up different learning options either by taking the student out of the environment and being placed in a special classroom to produce the class work required … Also by seeing the mature age students returning to TAFE given their own life experiences (ie the mature students’) the disruptive students may see there are options available for them to input their ideas now and not waste opportunities. (TAFE staff member)

Respondents suggested a three-strike or yellow card/red card approach, ensuring students’ poor behaviour had consequences and, following this, allowing them a fresh start. Other strategies suggested included teacher training in and resources for managing students with behaviour problems, as well as assigning teachers with expertise and a particular interest to work with specific groups of students. They also called for:

- cooperation with parents and with other agencies
- support from counsellors
- consistent guidelines on discipline
- specialist classes or classrooms
- providing programs like WOW (Work Opportunities for Women) for men.

It was also suggested that TAFE Institute planning and delivery be modified to cater increasingly for older students (older than early 20s) who have broader life experiences and different expectations of their training:

Enrolments of Aboriginal students are increasing and Aboriginal students are achieving and feeling success through the flexible hours and timetabling of TAFE. Students are treated with respect and maturity so feel they can achieve. Aboriginal students’ life experiences are counted and respected within this process. (Regional Aboriginal Education Consultative Group)

Sometimes it is difficult for Aboriginal people to apply themselves so it is important for programs to allow time while maintaining competency standards. (Indigenous Community Group)

The culture and structure of the organisation should better reflect the diversity of the community. (Multicultural Community Focus Group)

There are many reasons why students chose not to complete their training, … [including]
- Wrong career or course choice
- Workplace rosters and shift work
- Personality clashes with staff and other students
- Disruptive students in the class. (TAFE student and staff meeting)

Why do we need to keep children at school after 15 if they don’t want to be there? Perhaps the option of returning to TAFE etc. at a later date when they are more motivated may be more successful allowing committed students to work without disruption. (Personal submission)
Planning efforts at Institute level are being concentrated on persons less than 20 years of age yet the statistics in this paper confirm our own observations, that older students are statistically more significant. (TAFE staff meeting)

Traditionally TAFE has provided training for young people for their first job, often in trades and related occupations. Increasingly TAFE is catering for an older student population which is seeking training to upskill or retraining for a career change. The average age of a TAFE student in the period from 2000 to 2004 was 31. The importance of TAFE as a provider of second chance education was emphasised by a number of respondents, including the TAFE Teachers Association (TAFE TA):

TAFE through sections like Outreach plays a valuable role in the provision of opportunities for people who did not complete their secondary education and who may not otherwise pursue further education. (TAFE TA Outreach Special Interest Group)

BROADER RANGE OF PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

TAFE was called on to provide a broader product range that was more closely aligned to employment opportunities particularly in the local or regional area; and for current and relevant support materials and resources to meet customers’ needs:

TAFE … needs to develop a mechanism, that demonstrates that they listen and respond to consumer requests at student, community, industry and peak body levels. Strategies need to meet customer demands in order to remain competitive. (TAFE staff meeting)

There were some areas, however, where respondents felt that TAFE was offering a very flexible service:

Flexible Learning Centre at Hornsby is fantastic – as a full time worker, it allows me to participate when you want, in evening, can demonstrate competence by doing assessment, without having to be in classes. … Evening sessions are really catering to us. (TAFE student meeting)

Many people in rural and regional areas asked for an enhancement of local training provision to suit their local needs. Many of these respondents wanted more courses, at more times and at more colleges. Others, however, suggested that TAFE reduce offerings at colleges and move toward specialisations at identified sites or … develop properly resourced, strategically focussed centres of excellence and inform industry about where these were located (Industry meeting and TAFE and industry meeting).

There were calls from students, industry and staff of TAFE to update its courses and delivery to match changing industry needs and technologies; and for TAFE to use current, industry standard equipment, machinery and resources.

Many people wanted more short courses and the opportunity to enrol in modules (subjects or units), rather than long courses leading to a
Students may only want to do a part of the course e.g. selected modules only. Some students want modules from different courses and sections. (TAFE staff meeting)

TAFE should be able to either run shorter/compressed day courses ... or endorse[e] the shorter courses on offer by many community colleges and other training centres. (TAFE student)

Flexibility in teaching methods helps students. (TAFE student meeting)

‘Catch up’ facilities should also be made available to students who wish to enrol in a module part way through a term, i.e. the opportunity to receive training is still available however it is up to the student to be up-to-date with the rest of the class. (TAFE student)

qualification, as a way of addressing the need for rapid updating of specific skills in the workplace.

Allow module or unit based enrolments ... [to allow a student to] update and choose units or modules that would further enhance and upgrade existing qualifications. (Parent and TAFE student)

Short course or module enrolments were not universally supported, with some people continuing to support the national training system of training package courses and nationally transportable qualifications.

Respondents called for increased flexibility in teaching methods; increased on-line offerings and the integration of chat rooms into the learning environment; and blended learning opportunities. They asked for mobile and virtual campuses. They wanted more on-the-job training (or work experience) and the ability to move between courses to cater for changes of study or career goals.

They wanted a more flexible system that provided:

- more training hours (campuses being open for longer hours)
- more information about and ease of access to recognition of their existing skills and knowledge
- a ‘mix and match’ approach to timetabling.

They also wanted TAFE to cease turning away prospective students from high demand areas and cancelling classes after they had started.

A number of respondents called for expanded flexible delivery options:

TAFE needs to provide greater flexibility in learning, assessment and training pathways. TAFE is being presented with a complex range of problems in addressing the training requirements of traditional and new and emerging industries. Teaching staff need to embrace new methods in delivering training and strategies that engage industry as a partner in the training of its workforce. While there are examples where teachers have embraced new delivery arrangements this is more the exception than the rule. (Industry meeting)

There were, however, also calls for the provision of structured learning opportunities that would assist young students lacking established study habits. One person observed that traditional learning remained valuable and in many instances appropriate; and that it should not be ignored:

While new trends in VET Pedagogy embrace a wider suite of delivery models including flexi learning, [and] workplace learning the value of institutionalised learning must not be ignored – as in many instances it is the most appropriate model. (TAFE staff member)

There were a number of calls for allowing enrolments throughout the year, one suggesting the provision of facilities for students to catch up. TAFE currently permits enrolment throughout the year and is usually still accepting enrolments in November each year for a limited number of courses. The expansion of this process to all courses would address people’s needs.

Many respondents asked for support for students particularly:
• more childcare services, including in the evening to allow single working parents to attend TAFE courses
• transportation to rural and regional campuses and
• accommodation for students.

Issues around commercial delivery were also mentioned. Most respondents on this topic suggested ways of increasing commercial revenue and improving commercial delivery, while the NSW Teachers Federation stated it did not support any increase in commercialisation.

Students and industry commented on the timetabling of course offerings. Most wanted increased offerings at a range of times to suit the part-time worker and also to suit industry needing seasonal training or training at a specified time of day. Respondents also called for:

_The introduction of industry specific intensive training programmes - on campus - over weekends and holiday periods, which could potentially include workplace experience with industry partners on evening and night shift. This type of training will enhance the TAFE-Industry alliance, showcase partners and their respective facilities to a broader audience, and introduce industry participants to potential new employees._ (Bankstown City Council)

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TAFE AND SCHOOLS, UNIVERSITIES AND ACE**

**TAFE and Schools**

Many people (TAFE students and respondents from schools and community groups) called for closer links between TAFE and schools. Respondents wanted TAFE and schools to operate in mutually beneficial and supporting ways to ensure the best outcomes for students:

_We can improve educational outcomes by placing greater emphasis on planning, collaboration and combined professional development arrangements._ (TAFE staff meeting)

Suggested strategies to improve the links between TAFE and schools included the broadening of vocational education and training (VET) options in schools to include:

• ‘taster’ and transition programs, mentioned above
• the opportunity to complete secondary school through TAFE
• visits to school by TAFE careers advisers and
• targeted programs for special needs students (for example, basic skills for students with a disability).

Comments on the needs of 15 to 19 year olds (discussed in Chapter 2 of this report) emphasised the importance of stronger vocational pathways within the framework of a stronger HSC. These strategies are of benefit to schools by increasing their course offerings without the need for increasing their facilities or teacher expertise. However, they do not focus on the need to address reading, writing and maths difficulties for school students who subsequently come to TAFE and industry without sufficient basic skills.

_Employers require students to possess basic skills, e.g. maths. Trades students must be able to do basic calculations._

**Transport to Campuses is a huge problem. TAFE needs to look at the problem and ways of assisting students to get to country campuses.** (TAFE student meeting)

**Equip our business units with people skilled at performing in a commercial environment, including resources to compete locally and internationally.** (TAFE staff member)

**Schools need to link to TAFE to ensure that students have achieved the skills necessary for success in TAFE courses.** (Parent and school staff, member)

**It is vital that there must be cooperation between schools, TAFE and universities and there needs to be easy transition for students between all three of the institutions.** (Personal submission)

**The Ourimbah Campus on the Central Coast is an excellent example that could be modelled in other areas. Cooperation in Schools and TAFE in the Hunter region is excellent.** (Community meeting)
Problems with literacy/numeracy need to be identified earlier. Opportunity for TAFE to be involved. Numeracy & literacy problems should be picked up in early childhood, not passed onto TAFE & employers. (Industry meeting)

Industry saw limited benefit in links between TAFE and schools. Industry respondents said that the content of the VET courses taught in schools should provide pre-vocational skills; while the content in TAFE courses constituted training for employment and was what industry was interested in. Industry wanted reading, writing and maths skills to reach an appropriate level in schools prior to the release of students into the TAFE system and trades courses. Others saw no benefit for TAFE in being in the same department as schools. The different ways schools and TAFE are funded were also seen as an impediment. This is also discussed in the section concerning students aged 15 to 19.

One respondent suggested the implementation of a model similar to the Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks:

Establish in each LGA [Local Government Area] an education and training planning mechanism to support complementary provision, improve communication and link educational planning to long term community and economic development and priorities - needs to include schools, TAFE, ACE [Adult and Community Education], job network providers, council economic development and Youth Officers etc. (Industry meeting)

**TAFE and Universities**

When considering links between TAFE and universities, respondents wanted more articulation for TAFE courses into university courses. More broadly, people wanted recognition in the community of the value of TAFE qualifications. They also wanted to see more flexibility, allowing students to undertake the programs which best met their needs, from whichever sector offered them.

Some respondents made comparisons between TAFE and universities. Most commonly this was in the context of providing a broad range of career development information to students aged 15 to 19 years old, and this is addressed in detail in Chapter 2.

Others raised the concern that there should be far more effective articulation between TAFE and universities, allowing TAFE graduates to have the qualifications they gained in TAFE more readily recognised by universities. They also requested improved training pathway planning to remove barriers to higher level qualifications.

However, one respondent commented on the difficulties of achieving better credit transfer:

Training packages need to have a better link with University subjects. Within the competencies there is a range of interpretation and a variation in the quality of the outcome. Underpinning skills and knowledge have been eliminated in the training packages. University unable to identify the competencies and knowledge of TAFE subjects. TAFE and Universities need to communicate to the community on the credit transfers available to students. (TAFE staff meeting)
TAFE and ACE

The Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector, through the Board of Adult and Community Education (BACE), commented on the difficulty they perceived TAFE would have in the future in continuing to meet the needs of students in general education programs, while increasing commercialisation and meeting industry and Commonwealth priorities to address skills shortages.

ACE saw a future where TAFE and ACE could work together in … rural and regional NSW, especially in small and remote communities, where TAFE will find it difficult to maintain a physical presence. (BACE)

The BACE submission commented on the sustainability of the ACE sector and saw an increased role for ACE provision in the areas of literacy, numeracy and language. The submission also suggested that Outreach be moved from TAFE to ACE:

As TAFE re-prioritises, turns its focus more and more to meeting the needs of industry and becomes increasingly dependent on industry for commercial revenue, the education and training system as a whole needs to respond by developing mechanisms for strengthening communities, creating new educational pathways and fostering social inclusion. ACE is an existing mechanism for supporting people looking for foundational and employability skills and pathways into vocational training and for providing general adult education programs for equity groups. (BACE)

A submission from the TAFE Teachers Association (TAFE TA) Outreach Special Interest Group (SIG), however, described the ongoing importance of Outreach to TAFE.

The BACE submission also emphasised its role in indigenous education in regional and rural New South Wales, with more than 6000 students enrolled in 2003.

APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM

During the course of the Futures project, the issue of national skills shortages came to the fore, as discussed in the introduction. A key aspect of this was apprenticeships. Reports, both in the media and from the Commonwealth Government, showed that while there had been an increase in apprenticeships overall, these had not been in the traditional trades areas, where the shortages were reported to be.

It should be noted that TAFE NSW does not ‘own’ the apprenticeship system nor employ the apprentices, although it does train many of the apprentices in NSW.

Respondents saw the need to make apprenticeships more attractive, particularly to young people. Respondents from industry said that the current ‘one size fits all’ apprenticeship system is not useful and some called for a reduction in the amount of time taken for an apprenticeship.

The challenge is to configure a flexible apprenticeship system that increases the engagement of industry (large, medium and small) in the training of apprentices:

"I … have never put on a trainee or apprentice. The reason has always been the expense and the loss of that person for tech. release, we train our own people to carry out the tasks that we require of them … If a person arrived at my door and said I have covered my technical training and am now ready to provide you with my services 38 hours each week I would snap them up at once." (Industry member)
This comment was echoed by a respondent from a traditional trade area:

There are massive shortages in the auto industry and the auto apprenticeships are seen to be very inflexible. The auto industry would like to see the four-year apprenticeship reduced to three years – the first year being deleted. (Industry meeting)

Many people commented on problems in the apprenticeship system, which was described as needing to provide benefits and incentives to all involved:

Learning experiences have to be structured and supported not only to the students’ needs but also to industries’, giving the best outcome for the student and all concerned, e.g. Ensuring that the Apprenticeship Board liaises with TAFE in monitoring employee/employer’s relationships and offering more apprenticeship places, increase the basic wage for apprentices and better incentives for employers in those industries where there is a shortage of skilled and qualified tradespeople. Market trades as an attractive career. (TAFE student)

There was a number of calls for the provision of incentives to employers to encourage them to take on apprentices (for example, tax incentives, or legislating a set ratio of apprentices to employees); and for the provision of incentives to young students to take up apprenticeships (for example, a review of the pay structure; and a guarantee of employment).

Some employers were concerned about the expense associated with taking on an apprentice (particularly if the student moved onto a different employer after the completion of the apprenticeship). Some in industry wanted legislated processes to prevent employees leaving employers for an identified period after their training. Some stated that the duration of the contract of training (indenture) was too long. The State Government initiative, TradeStart@TAFENSW, announced in March 2005, was designed to address a number of these issues.

Some people commented on the need for industry to be involved with TAFE in the selection process for apprentices to ensure applicants have sufficient ability to cope with the training. Currently, however, most apprentices are already employed before they come to TAFE for training.

There was a call for a review of the practice of offering both apprenticeships and traineeships in the same industry area. The concern was that since traineeships attracted lower wages than apprentices and resulted in lower skills levels, enterprises with short-term skills goals would be likely to engage trainees in preference to apprentices, to the potential detriment of skilling long-term. Concerns were also raised about the role of the Australian Technical Colleges.

Respondents, including parents and TAFE students, wanted the Government to improve the pay and conditions for apprentices and to redress real or perceived exploitation of trainees. Others wanted the pay of apprentices and trainees to be according to industry needs.

There were many calls for more pre-apprenticeship courses being offered and for increased practical ‘hands on’ training or work

There needs to be a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship in apprenticeships. Employers need to feel they benefit from taking on an apprentice. Perhaps better tax breaks, annual payments/incentives, assistance with wages. Also, apprentices should feel there is, at least, a short term guarantee of employment at the end of their training. (Personal submission)

Inadequate apprenticeship wages or allowances lead to apprentices dropping out of apprenticeships therefore from TAFE. (TAFE student meeting)

Reintroduce pre-apprenticeship courses – expand ‘get skilled or access’ type courses. We urgently need more future apprentices but growing numbers of employers want pre-skills because of the expense of taking on an apprentice. (School staff member)

Need more pre-apprenticeship courses so that students learn about the industry (TAFE student meeting)
placements and workshops that are relevant to the workplace; with many wanting to have compulsory work placements introduced.

Industry called for a flexible apprenticeship system:

- that recognised existing skills and knowledge from either vocational or educational experience (for example, completion of pre-apprenticeship courses prior to Year 10, Year 10 certificate or the HSC)
- in which students could start their training at different points in the course depending on their existing skills and knowledge.

Multiple entry points into an apprenticeship that permitted the recognition of existing skills and knowledge, gained for example through completing the HSC, would address a number of industry concerns.

Finally, industry commented that TAFE and industry must work together to ensure an apprentice gains all the skills they need:

Employers need to understand that TAFE provides the technical skills for apprentices but it cannot provide the depth of practice that the apprentice requires in practical skills required by the industry. Industry needs to do this. (Industry meeting)

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BEING THERE WHEN YOU NEED US

There were many respondents who stated that TAFE was not promoting its achievements and services sufficiently:

TAFE needs to market itself more vigorously, both locally and overseas. … People in the community need to understand what TAFE now is … TAFE can no longer rely on students dropping into the course information centre on the off chance that we have something. … Many people within TAFE, let alone in the wider community, are completely unaware of the range of courses, quality of facilities and flexible pathways which TAFE offers. (TAFE staff member)

This was borne out by the many comments and suggested strategies which reflected a lack of understanding of the products and services currently available from TAFE NSW. For example, many people called for on-the-job training or work placements in TAFE courses to give students a better idea of the workplace environment. Currently, all TAFE apprenticeship and traineeship courses and many other courses include compulsory on-the-job training (work experience modules or units). This ranges from 30% to 90% of courses, depending on the industry area. Other people called for summer school programs. TAFE has run Summer Schools for a number of...
years now and these have been expanded each year. These comments suggest a strong need for TAFE to promote itself more effectively so that the community knows what TAFE offers.

Overall, respondents wanted to see improved industry, community and school knowledge about the training, products and services available in TAFE. They called for TAFE to promote its willingness and capacity to meet new skilling needs, with delivery when and where it is needed. They also wanted TAFE to turn around the current view held by some people that the careers for which TAFE provides training are less valuable than other careers. (This is discussed in some detail in the section on students aged 15 to 19.)

Community, parents and TAFE staff wanted improvements in information about the links between course options and subsequent employment prospects so that students, parents and employers are able to make more informed training choices:

**How TAFE informs the community about itself and how it relates to the community needs to be addressed. TAFE needs to recognise that money [spent] on ‘relating’ to the community and assisting students to select the most appropriate course is well spent.** (TAFE staff meeting)

Specific suggestions for improved promotion included developing promotional brochures with local current offerings to supplement the TAFE Handbook, particularly when there have been changes to offerings since publication of the Handbook; and funding a program of informing the community throughout each year about TAFE and its courses using high quality promotional materials, faculty based information days at TAFE campuses and in schools and the community.

Other suggestions included:

- making the TAFE Handbook free and improving its organisation
- providing expanded advertisements in the printed press, including the local and ethnic press and providing television advertisements throughout the year
- providing clear, accurate TAFE course information and fee exemption advice to employment agencies
- providing a pre-recorded video on the TAFE internet with a chat room facility.

They also wanted to see TAFE’s achievements publicised, though one respondent pointed out that this was already being done through publications such as *TAFE Link*.

Respondents also called for:

- improvements in the accuracy of course profiles in Institutes
- consistent information across Institutes to reduce customer confusion
- clearer course naming, using well-known names of jobs rather than Training Package titles
- improved assistance to students in making informed choices about courses
increased employment outcomes and job placement services would also assist in the promotion of TAFE to potential clients.

They also asked for better processes for recognition of prior learning (HPL) and improved promotion of HPL, because it was seen as an important attractor of potential students both in the context of on-the-job and Institute-based training. One respondent, however, called for less HPL to ensure students learned new skills:

Reduce the amount of RPL allowed when training to get national qualifications so that students actually learn new skills and knowledge rather than just getting a piece of paper for skills and knowledge they already have. (Industry member)

The comments about TAFE promotion can be summarised by the idea that TAFE needs to become clever with their marketing – you may pay more but quality is better. (Industry and TAFE staff meeting)

VALUING PEOPLE

TEACHERS

The teacher makes or breaks what happens. (TAFE student meeting)

While a number of submissions made positive comments about TAFE teachers, many parents, students, industry and community respondents wanted them to improve their performance and competence.

Respondents identified a series of areas where they saw the need for improved teaching:

- improvements in knowledge of current workplace skills and requirements
- the use by teachers of correct written and spoken English
- improved teacher organisation, planning, preparation and classroom management
- improved empathy and emotional intelligence when dealing with students especially students of non-English speaking backgrounds and students with a disability.

They wanted to see consistent quality in teaching across TAFE and suggested annual reviews of teacher performance be undertaken. There were also many calls for teachers to be industry specialists as well as being accomplished teachers. Both skills sets were valued highly and equally by TAFE students.

Ensure teacher-knowledge is up to date and that they are able to use/teach about latest technology in the field of study and

TAFE needs to work more on RPL especially for mature aged students. (Industry meeting)

We need to put out material showing how we compare to private courses and how TAFE training is better and cheaper. (Industry meeting)

[There is a need for] teachers with expertise, care and commitment to student welfare. Many of the teachers at Bradfield College fit this mould. They go out of their way to help students, to build their self esteem and self confidence, to be sensitive to their needs and to be extremely professional. (School staff member)

Great teachers plan their module presentation, present a mutually agreed timetable to the class within two weeks of the start, and then stick to it. The last thing students need is chopping and changing during the time a module is being covered. (TAFE student)

The teacher is a facilitator. A good one has to provide different methods of learning. It is important for TAFE teachers to know about different learning styles. (TAFE student meeting)
have current industry knowledge/experience. (TAFE student meeting)

Many industry respondents and students suggested that teachers ‘return to industry’ regularly, or be employed by industry and be part-time teachers in TAFE. They called for:

… a compulsory Return to Industry program every 3 years for teachers to keep up with industry skills. (TAFE staff and parents meeting)

They called on TAFE to:

• continuously improve teacher performance through professional development, rewards and incentives
• increase support for all categories of teachers, but particularly for part-time casual teachers
• provide professional development for teachers.

A number of staff respondents commented on the negative impact of employing part-time, casual teachers:

Most teachers in TAFE are P/T and P/T teachers are not supported sufficiently. This affects the level of support they are able to give to students. (Multicultural Community Focus Group)

An effective performance management system, with sanctions and incentives, was seen to be an important tool for managing staff. Most respondents, however, emphasised the importance of effective recruitment. Improved recruitment procedures were seen as one means of improving teacher performance: respondents suggested that TAFE ensure that successful applicants have the appropriate mix of skills and knowledge before recruiting them rather than having to manage poor performance after employment. They stated that TAFE needed to select people with the right personal qualities and relevant industry skills and then provide them with appropriate pre- and in-service training, ongoing support and the right mix of resources.

Some respondents suggested that, where incentives, counselling, mentoring and other forms of assistance did not result in improved teacher performance, the employment of a poorly performing teacher should be terminated.

People who advocated incentives suggested the following ways of improving teacher performance:

• improved valuing and rewarding of quality teacher performance
• the sharing of successful class management
• ‘inspirational leadership techniques’
• salary packaging and allowances
• housing and spouse or partner employment in hard to staff areas.

A number of respondents wanted to see rewards in the form of incentives for their sections, in addition to or in place of personal rewards:

… TAFE teachers need to see a series of concrete advantages for their section to reward them for enrolments gained in commercial ventures. … greatly improved procedures need to
be set in place to support teachers in the realisation of TAFE Plus courses including market research, advertising, course development and resources. (TAFE staff member)

Some respondents suggested that teacher skills and knowledge be matched to model appropriate skills to students; and that industry representatives become involved in TAFE classes, for example as guest lecturers. Respondents also suggested that more flexible staffing arrangements be introduced including sharing staff between schools and TAFE, targeting mature age workers for recruitment and increasing the number of part-time permanent positions. Teacher exchange between schools, TAFE and universities was suggested.

One respondent suggested that TAFE teachers serve an apprenticeship, an idea also raised in the context of school teachers:

The rate of having ineffective teachers could potentially be reduced by having them serve a type of apprenticeship with entry via part-time teaching and the gradual building of teaching skills. In TAFE it does not alleviate all mismatches, but it helps people prepare themselves mentally and physically for meeting students in a learning context which is full of challenges. (TAFE staff member)

The value placed on administrative and support staff was clear from the many calls for increased administrative support for teachers to allow teachers to focus more directly on teaching and to enable innovation. Respondents said that the removal of administrative support from TAFE structures was making it increasingly difficult for education staff to focus on educational issues. They also said that the ‘tension’ between administrative and educational functions should be addressed.

The issue of succession planning was also raised. One response stated that it was Important to consider the issue of the ageing workforce in course planning and curriculum design (TAFE staff meeting).

Another response stated:

Succession Planning: Industry is not convinced that TAFE has the capacity to continue to maintain current levels of delivery. There was a perception that TAFE’s ageing workforce and lack of succession planning would diminish TAFE’s capacity to meet industries training requirements. (Industry meeting)

**LEADERS**

Most of the responses about leaders in TAFE were from TAFE staff. Respondents wanted to see early identification of possible future leaders, with systems put in place to develop their skills and capabilities. It was noted that leadership may be seen at all levels of the organisation.

Succession was seen as a critical issue and respondents called for a statewide comprehensive leadership development strategy. Some people wanted leaders to have closer links with industry; others wanted them to have an educational background. A number of respondents wanted leaders to have formal qualifications in management or leadership.
Leaders should complete a recognised qualification in leadership/management, such as a Graduate Certificate in Leadership in the Workplace or Certificate IV similar to the Certificate IV in Assessment in the Workplace. (TAFE staff meeting)

They also wanted leaders in TAFE to have skills in strategic development and business development and achieving cost savings. Change management was also described as a key skill area:

Great emphasis should be placed on change management and providing skill development in change management strategies. … There is a need to establish formal statewide and regional networking groups for future leaders to develop skills and exchange experiences. (TAFE staff meeting)

Some felt people management skills were most important; others financial skills. A holistic approach was suggested, as was the development of selection criteria reflecting VET leadership and management capabilities … informed by recent research. (TAFE Managers Association)

Some respondents proposed dual leadership pathways. One of these was to allow people access to leadership positions while remaining in the classroom: advanced skills teachers and master teachers were referred to. Another view was that the dual pathways should consist of administrative and educational leadership roles.

Again, the importance of administrative and support staff to respondents was clear. A number of submissions stated that Head Teacher positions had become overloaded with administrative duties, which took attention away from the educational and business aspects of the job, and that support staff and structures should be provided to assist in this.

Future managers will need to be provided with support structures geared to the core activity of educational delivery – teaching. Too often managers are servants to processes and ‘support’ units. (TAFE staff member)

As with teachers, recruitment was seen as a key issue. Some people wanted to see efforts made to increase the possible recruitment pool, in order to bring in new ideas, but others felt that leaders should be found from within, to bring a knowledge of the organisation to leadership positions.

Effective recruitment was again seen as the key to managing performance. Some respondents felt that the interview process was not sufficient in identifying leaders; some questioned the merit selection process, while others supported it. One submission referred to NSW Police as an agency where leadership competencies have been developed for recruitment purposes. It was also noted that good teachers and good leaders do not necessarily have the same skill sets.

Other strategies identified for building good performance, as well as addressing low performance, included:

- appropriate performance management, including retraining and upskilling programs
• mentoring and shadowing schemes, including targeted opportunities to act in leadership roles
• 360 degree review scheme.

More movement across the schools and TAFE sectors, both in terms of careers and secondments, was also suggested.

Rewards and recognition suggested for high performing staff included:
• return to industry programs, specialised training and sabbaticals
• formal recognition and award schemes for leadership positions
• performance-based remuneration.

Respondents also wanted to see good leaders rewarded with more challenges and trust.

There were respondents who emphasised the importance of the student, to the business of all members of the Department, including leaders:

Future and current leaders need to … accept … that the whole educational system … is ultimately there for the benefit of students, and not the other way around. (TAFE student)

Respondents also called for senior management to recognise, value and support the good leaders already in place. People wanted to see a culture that encouraged innovation and risk-taking. They also wanted leadership roles to be clarified in a way that gives appropriate authority, responsibility and accountability (TAFE Managers Association). They called for a culture that accommodated risk-taking, within boundaries, and understood mistakes being made:

Recruit leaders that are not conservative, that are innovative, exciting, effective communicators and have a strong management skill set. Improve the recruitment process by moving towards a performance based assessment rather than the superficial interviews that focus on conventional day to day processes. (TAFE staff member)

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

As with leaders, most of the respondents who commented on organisational culture with reference to TAFE were TAFE staff. It was clear from the responses that TAFE staff valued the TAFE culture they described and did not want to see it lost in the larger DET culture.

Respondents called for a vision for collaboration and future direction, which focused on the students and on education. They wanted to see an organisational culture which was transparent, fair, inclusive, trusting, flexible, supportive and collaborative.

I believe that the unique strengths of TAFE NSW are in danger of being lost through its integration with schools in the DET. (TAFE staff member)
To achieve this our leaders should demonstrate capabilities and behaviours that align to new organisational values. There needs to be more individual awareness of all of the organisational processes and this can be achieved through the implementation of a quality improvement approach across the organisation. There should be regular consultation and participation of all levels of management in decision making processes and not a hierarchical approach to involvement. Critical behaviours should be articulated and practised. Delegations and flatter management structures should be established which provide for local decision making. (TAFE Managers Association)

As in the responses to the leaders section, they wanted a culture which encouraged people by valuing innovation, creativity and risk-taking in a supportive environment. They also wanted consultative decision-making, with open and transparent communication across the organisation. They called for a culture of autonomous business units to enable flexibility and responsiveness … that TRUSTS officers to make decisions but holds them accountable. (TAFE staff meeting)

Barriers they identified included the size of the organisation, resourcing, the centralised culture of State Office, inflexible human resources practices, ‘political interference’, industrial award constraints and the adversarial industrial culture.

The current teachers award restricts organisational flexibility – there is a need to ensure that any industrial agreements are appropriate to the organisation’s goals and are flexible enough to enable achievement of those goals. (TAFE staff meeting)

They wanted State Office to offer a service and support approach which enabled good local decision-making and recognised local expertise. They wanted to see a continuation of devolved budgets and accountability for TAFE.

Restructuring was also described as a barrier to achieving the kind of organisational culture respondents wanted to see:

Remove the constant threat of restructure. It … only causes unrest and upheaval in the organisation. I’ve seen many restructures where valuable expertise and experience are lost by culling of staff, leaving the remaining staff over worked with increasing pressure. (TAFE staff member)

To enhance collaboration across the organisation, they called for systems, policies and work practices that recognise the benefits of collaboration, for example sharing both best practices and facilities. Examples given included team approaches between schools and TAFE in dealing with student behaviour problems; and in TVE programs, including appointing a full-time TAFE staff member in each school. (TVET, TAFE-delivered VET for school students, is discussed in the section on students 15 to 19 years old in Chapter 2.) Respondents from both schools and TAFE also wanted the organisation to create opportunities for sharing ideas and collaborating on common issues and mechanisms for people to contribute new ideas:

The DET should encourage and support initiatives for school and TAFE staff to understand each other’s work better. This
should include teacher exchanges, partnering, team teaching and other models so that the approaches to teaching of both parties are enriched. Some models of these arrangements already exist in the delivery of VET subjects and these should be expanded and supported. (Curriculum K-12 Directorate)

The issue of TAFE’s own culture within the context of the Department of Education and Training was frequently raised:

DET culture has colonised the TAFE culture, there is concern that the TAFE culture was healthier than the DET authoritarian, hierarchical, didactic management style … The department to look at qualities and skills for long term effective management where communication is open and unafraid. (TAFE staff and parent meeting)

People wanted to ensure that TAFE’s strengths, such as encouraging a team approach to problem solving, were maintained. A number of respondents described a ‘them and us’ culture between schools and TAFE and said that schools did not value TAFE’s contribution to education and training.

Industry respondents who commented on the combining of schools and TAFE into one department did not see this as having been beneficial, except to some extent in the area of VET in Schools. Industry also said that there was a challenge presented by the combination of schools and TAFE as a different philosophical approach was required. Some people both from TAFE and from industry felt that the two organisations had operated more successfully separately and some even called for them to be separated again, a divorce. Others felt that it was taking too long for TAFE and schools calling for to start working effectively together as one agency.

Respondents wanted to see recognition from State Office that TAFE and schools had separate businesses, with different goals and largely different clients and customers. While some described this as problematic, others thought there was a benefit to a large organisation which recognised that it had different operational arms and allowed and facilitated their different operations within an enabling culture:

We should ask if it’s necessary for one sort of culture across DET. TAFE and Schools are in very different customer bases and the way we behave and manage our businesses reflects this. We can have two distinct cultures but the same set of values predominately around providing quality learning outcomes for all students. (TAFE staff meeting)

Finally, some respondents stated:

Bridges need to be built to address cultural differences/barriers between schools and TAFE. (TAFE Staff meeting)
The Business Council of Australia (BCA) has previously described the importance of education and training to a company’s bottom line and to the economy of Australia. Training which meets the needs of industry and individuals will be critical for the current and future economic performance of Australia (BCA, 2004).

In 2004, prior to this consultation, a study was released that analysed the employer contribution to training, by acknowledging the value of employee time. It showed that the employer contribution is around 57% of the total national contribution (based on 1996 figures), with an employer contribution equivalent to $16b annually (NCVER, 2004). Industry respondents were prepared to pay for training but were not happy with funding cuts to TAFE – TAFE has been kneecapped (Industry meeting) – and wanted to see a long-term political commitment to TAFE.

In relation to students contributing to their education and training after school, one submission expressed concern about the lack of awareness of fee exemptions by some members of the community. Some people were opposed to students paying the TAFE fee and called for a removal of it. Others commented on the negative impact of the cost of training (including fees, text books, loss of potential income and the cost of travel). A number of respondents also said there should be no further increase in the fees beyond the 2004 increase.

Others expressed concern about the capacity of the working poor to pay fees:

TAFE should be affordable – fees should be within the reach of low-medium income earners. The people most disadvantaged with the current fee structure are those in low paying jobs who do not qualify for financial aid but who want to increase their earning capacity by improving their standard of education. (TAFE staff member)

Most responses about the TAFE fee were focused on changes to they way the fee structure operated, including:

- reducing the TAFE fee for low income earners
- the fee being means tested
- the fee being based on the number of units rather than the level of the qualification
- the fee structure being modified to reflect the level and duration of the course.

A number of respondents suggested alternative payment options including a HECS-type arrangement with deferment of payment until employment; or a year-by-year advancement system:

Students should pay using a HECS type Model. Australia is responsible along with Industry. Investment in training is for the...
whole country… A Federal Government incentive for taxation purposes should be introduced. At present there is no incentive to Employers. (Community meeting)

Others, however, insisted that HECS not be introduced for TAFE students.

Many respondents viewed the responsibility for education and training as belonging to the Government or industry. Some called for increased government financial support of students for their training through scholarships, exemptions or other incentives, particularly for students from low socio-economic groups, to ensure that people were not denied the benefits of education and training.

There was another view that the payment by students was acceptable because students receive some benefit from their studies and also because dedication to the course was felt to be proportional to the sacrifices needed to do the course. There was also the view that everyone who benefited from TAFE should have to contribute to it:

Industry’s the major influence in setting directions for the future for TAFE. As they are the major beneficiary of the TAFE system they need to, indeed have an obligation to, provide a major part of the financial support for TAFE. This may be in the form of a training levy or through the use of industry facilities. The community is also a major beneficiary; therefore the community through the government should contribute a major part of the TAFE budget as well. Individuals benefit from TAFE and therefore some fees are appropriate but they can be a deterrent to potential students. There is a need for scholarships and exemptions, especially for those students living in a low socio-economic position. (School staff meeting)

A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT TO TAFE

TAFE’s goal is to increase knowledge, skill and resilience among individuals and businesses to grow the economy and build the skills of the people of NSW and beyond. (Chair of the NSW TAFE Commission Board, addressing an industry forum during the consultation)

As discussed in the introduction, the issue of skills shortages was brought into strong focus during the time of this consultation, through the media. A number of respondents addressed this issue:

There is a massive shortage in the various aspects of the wool industry. Ten years ago there were 48,000 accredited wool classers nationally. Now there are only 25,000. This is a definite challenge for the future. (Industry meeting)
While some in industry have called for ‘guest workers’ to be brought into Australia (Colman and Korporaal, 2005), others in industry feel that it is essential that skills shortages be addressed by skilling the workforce in Australia, including reskilling mature age workers (The 7.30 Report, 8/3/05). Some respondents linked skills shortages to resourcing of VET and especially TAFE:

TAFE needs catch-up funding urgently to address skill shortage issues. Industry needs to contribute more to the cost of this skill shortage training … (Joint school, TAFE and community meeting)

Some respondents felt that industry should contribute more:

Often industry is a major benefactor from the VET system, with most initial and much ongoing training of their workforce provided by TAFE. There would appear to be some scope for contributions from industry in the same way that individuals now contribute through fee payment. (Industry group)

High levels of knowledge, skills and competencies derived from education, training and experience have been linked to economic prosperity, fuller employment, and social cohesion. Investment in knowledge, skills and competencies is increasingly recognised as being essential to individual, organisational and national security and success (OECD, 1998). For this reason, other respondents believed that industry’s role in generating income meant that Government should continue to fund training:

Given the role wealth generation industries play in the economic development of regional communities a commitment to funding for the delivery of training by the government is important. (Hunter Manufacturing Council)

In commenting on issues for TAFE, the Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW stated:

Industry … needs to contribute to the education process that is a benefit to both the individual and to the industry. It is essential that funding from industry and business reflects this commitment.

It is extremely important that TAFE is funded adequately and that any redistribution of funds by successive governments between the TAFE and school sector is never to the detriment of one or the other. (Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW)

Many respondents called on TAFE to continue to seek funding actively from a number of different sources. Other respondents called for TAFE to take on a more business-oriented approach, raising the idea that TAFE should gradually decrease its reliance on government funding and increase its profits through prioritisation. One industry group commented that the flexibility of the service provided should be related to the cost and funding source:

For commercial activity the delivery and content is flexible and is determined by what the customer wants. However for government funded activity it may not be reasonable for industry to expect the same level of flexibility and customisation. (Industry group)
A number of industry respondents wanted to see TAFE undertake longer term planning, as discussed above. It was suggested that a longer budgeting cycle would assist here. This is a model that has been adopted in the United Kingdom:

- The new planning and control regime is divided between Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) spending, which includes most departmental programme expenditure, and which is planned and controlled on a three year basis through the Spending Review process; and Annually Managed Expenditure (AME), which is reviewed twice yearly as part of the Budget and Pre-Budget Report process.

- Firm and fixed DEL plans are set for three years going forward, and are reviewed every two in biennial Spending Reviews. To enable spending programmes to be planned over the medium term and to avoid wasteful end of year spending, the new regime allows full end-year flexibility (EYF) - that is, departments can carry forward any unspent resources into future years. (HM Treasury, 2005. Original emphases)

A three-year budgeting cycle has also been adopted by the European Union and Sweden, while in New Zealand: During the strategic phase of the Budget cycle, Ministers collectively determine the Budget strategy objectives for the coming three years. (State Services Commission, 2002)

A strong viable TAFE NSW needs a clear, stable and ongoing commitment from the community, industry and Government to resource and support it, within a system which allows for appropriate contributions to be made:

Public education is only equal to the commitment of the politicians. There needs to be a long term policy that has the commitment of all political parties, that is costed and which has a long term commitment to funding. Such a policy commitment needs to be subject to regular, smaller reviews that ask ‘Can we do it better?’ but without a complete change of policy. (Industry meeting)
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TAFE NSW: Flexibility, Sustainability and Renewal

Peter Noonan and Gerald Burke
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CEET, Education, Building 6, Monash University, Victoria 3800 Australia
Tel (03) 9905 9157 Fax (03) 9905 9184
peter.noonan@education.monash.edu.au
gerald.burke@education.monash.edu.au
www.education.monash.edu.au/centres/ceet
Policy context

The current public debate about skills shortages is overdue as is public recognition that the skills and capability of the Australian workforce will be the key determinants of Australia’s continued economic and productivity growth. The current debate has also seen a shift away from limited science and research dominated approaches towards ideas embedded in the concept of the knowledge based economy - to a focus on the critical skills which underpin production processes, service provision, business processes and business relationships. These are the areas where many firms are focusing their efforts to boost productivity and competitiveness - through production processes, service provision, business processes and business relationships.

Increasing workforce participation and workforce capabilities are now the dominant economic challenges facing Australia and other mature advanced economies. The Australian population is ageing - there will be little growth in the years to 2020 in the numbers aged 55 or under and a rapid growth of those 56 and over (ABS 2003).

A range of strategies is required to boost workforce participation and workforce capability.

1. Increasing the supply of skilled labour through initial training for young people entering the workforce:
   - Too many young people still do not make a successful transition from school to further learning and to work. An indicator of this is the 14 per cent of 15-19 year olds in NSW who are in neither full-time education or work, a percentage little changed over the years as evidenced in the Dusseldorp Skills Forum report: How Young People are Faring (Long 2004).
   - There is unmet demand for places in TAFE.
   - A strong case has been mounted nationally for an expansion in traditional trades. NSW has about 31 per cent of traditional apprentices and of trainees in Australia compared with 33 per cent of population (NCVER 2004).

2. A much greater emphasis on retraining and upskilling the current workforce and the adult population more generally, particularly those disengaged from the workforce:
   - The decline in the labour force participation rate of males and the growing numbers on the Disability Support Pension highlights the importance of this (ABS 2005).
   - The role of education and training in lifting participation is evidenced by the strong relationship between education and training and labour force participation (ABS 2004, OECD 2004b). Particularly among older persons, those with more education and training have much higher rates of labour force participation and employment.
   - Rate of return studies show quite good benefits to investment in VET qualifications. For less advantaged groups the returns may also be good especially if the comparison is made not with those who complete year 12 but with earlier school leavers.
   - OECD data shows Australia to have high average levels of adult participation in education and training, but that participation is largely among those with good initial levels of education and training and many adults do not have literacy and numeracy levels sufficient for effective social participation (OECD 2000, 2004a).
   - OECD in its Employment Outlook for 2004 reviewed education and training for adults and found ‘evidence that training has indeed a positive impact on individual labour market performance….potential benefits from training are not limited to those individuals who have already adequate skills, high wages and good employment prospects. In particular, in the case of more mature and less educated workers, training plays an important role in enhancing employment security’ (OECD 2004b Ch 4).

3. Ensuring that new and existing workers have both the technical skills and broader capabilities required for today’s workforce and for effective participation in a modern and complex society.
   - Technical skills are no longer sufficient. Changing technology, the operation of international markets, the capacity to use and adapt business processes, relationships and networks, increased consumer awareness and protection, sustainable development, security and occupational heath and safety and intensifying the level for and changing the nature of skill requirements.
— The OECD has defined the contemporary skill requirements as know what, know how, know why and know who, and has emphasised the importance of formal and informal learning and blending codified and tacit knowledge.

4. Reforming career paths, workpractices and workplaces to that people can utilise their skills and capabilities in productive, engaging and rewarding employment to which they have an ongoing commitment.

— Supply side solutions are not sufficient. Many highly skilled people leave their trades and occupations and a number of occupations in areas of skills shortages.

Role of TAFE

The Vocational Education and Training sector in Australia and TAFE in particular, is central to these strategies. VET has responsibility for providing skills and knowledge to the significant majority of the Australian workforce, with over 1.7 million students undertaking some form of VET each year.

New South Wales TAFE is by far the largest VET provider in Australia and provides over 92 percent of VET courses in NSW in all areas of VET provision and in national and international markets. At present, there are over half a million enrolments in NSW TAFE Institutes.

One hundred and twenty-five thousand of these enrolments are due to the fact that NSW TAFE Institutes have increased student numbers by over 25 percent, while reducing cost per student by nearly 15 percent from 1998 to 2003.

However, the role of TAFE is not just a function of its size and coverage. As the public VET provider TAFE has an important and unique role to play in strategies to boost labour market participation and workforce skills and capability:

1. TAFE is a major arm of government educational, industry and social policy;
2. TAFE’s community service obligations are intrinsic to its role as a public provider;
3. TAFE has a broad geographic distribution and a capacity for statewide, national and international flexible delivery. In many communities—particularly those in rural, regional and outer metropolitan areas—TAFE is the only major post school education and training provider;
4. People with major literacy and numeracy needs require specialised and intensive support available in TAFE;
5. The growing numbers of people in casual and part-time employment (the highest proportions in the OECD) and the unemployed, who do not have access to formal and informal work based learning, need access to equipment, facilities and simulated work settings that only large providers such as TAFE can offer, particularly in areas of high technology;
6. More young people are also seeking access to TAFE either directly or through their schools through the broadening of upper secondary school curriculum to include VET subjects and policies to increase participation of young people in education and training beyond the minimum school leaving age;
7. TAFE is a major provider to Indigenous learners and Indigenous communities and enrolment rates have increased in TAFE in recent years;
8. TAFE is the major or sole provider of skills training for many industries and occupations, despite the opening up of the training market;
9. TAFE Institutes will increasingly play important roles as intermediary agencies helping to support local networks of employment, skills development and innovation;
10. The benefits from the equity initiatives in TAFE extend beyond direct employment and earnings benefits. There is increasing evidence of broader benefits more social interaction, reduced crime and improved health resulting from increased levels of education and training;
11. TAFE has a growing role in training international students including those who seek to become skilled migrants to Australia.

Flexibility and renewal of TAFE

TAFE Institutes must help enterprises to build the capabilities required to be productive and competitive and to harness the capabilities of all of their employees. They must help individuals to acquire the capabilities for productive and rewarding work, to manage their transitions through the labour market and in their life circumstances and to improve personal and social well-being. They must assist
communities to develop learning resources and to harness the substantial but latent knowledge and capability within firms, community organisations and individuals across NSW.

This will require:

- A further transformation of pedagogical practices in NSW TAFE Institutes;
- The development of a range of new products, services and programs in NSW TAFE Institutes;
- Partnerships with a range of public, private and community organisations and the development and management of an extensive range of networks and intermediary services;
- Investment in staff capability changes in the role of teachers and other staff and effective management of workforce aging and staff renewal in TAFE Institutes;
- Investment in infrastructure, in particular in information and communications technology and in new technology relevant to current industry needs;
- Greater understanding of the needs of different industry and community ‘segments’ through effective market research and client engagement, and a capacity to develop programs and services to meet identified need;
- Business development strategies to increase fee for service and privately funded revenue;
- An improved governance and business model encompassing management, funding and accountability.

The financial capacity of TAFE NSW to meet these needs is also crucial.

Costs and sustainability

TAFE Institutes will need increased resources to meet the costs of provision of additional places, facilities, especially for those who do not have access to workplace training and experience, and staff and staff development for new range of activities and industry and community partnerships.

Strategies for accessing increased public and private funds will be required.

In this context the recent changes in expenditure and student numbers across the education sectors need to be considered. Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview for Australia.

- VET—largely TAFE— provides for about a quarter of all student enrolment in the whole education system (though noting that most of the VET enrolments are part time);
- VET expenditures are only a little over 10 per cent of all education expenditures;
- The VET sector receives over 80 per cent of its funds from government (and NCVER data shows that it is a higher percentage in NSW);
- Enrolments in VET have increased substantially from 1997 to 2003 for very little additional real expenditure, and this resulted in a large reduction in expenditure per student¹;
- School expenditures have risen quite rapidly, and expenditure per school student has risen, especially in non-government schools; and
- Employer expenditure on training is as large as all expenditure on the formal VET system, and provides some training for very large numbers of workers.

¹ It can also be noted that hours of training per student have increased in recent years, meaning that expenditure per hour declined more than expenditure per student.
Table 1. Total expenditure on education and training by sector, Australia 2003 (approximate estimates)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total $ billion</th>
<th>Government funding %</th>
<th>Enrolments million</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government schools*</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-government schools</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total formal education</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Enterprises: direct spending on structured training | 5 | 12 | 5 |

Source: Based on data from DEST, MCEETYA and NCVER  
Note: * No estimate is included for private funds received by government schools

Table 2. Expenditure on education in constant prices*, Australia, percentage change 1997 to 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Students Per cent increase 1997 to 2003</th>
<th>Total public and private expenditure per student Per cent increase 1997 to 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-government schools</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities—total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities—Australian publicly supported students **</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on data from DEST, MCEETYA, NCVER and ABS  
Note: * Constant price estimates prepared with an index based mainly on the ABS Wage Cost Index.  
** Refers to Australian students supported by government funding (excluding international students and full-fee paying Australian students).

The increased provision of funds for TAFE by industry may flow from the development of an increasing range of partnerships. NSW TAFE has raised relatively low amounts of revenue from fee-for-service activities compared with Victoria and has relatively low proportion of international students. The exploration of industry levies used in some sectors of industry could be further explored but the experience of the early 1990s with the national Training Guarantee Levy was not successful, and yielded it seems very little funds for TAFE.

Tuition fees have recently been reviewed in TAFE in NSW. The fee levels have been increased while exemptions for persons in need have been retained. Relative to higher education fees remain low. The case for low fees and for exemptions is strong given the socio-economic background of many students in TAFE and the needs of industry. However, whatever the rate of fees, there is a case for the provision of income-contingent loans similar to HECS to enable the payment of fees by those who do not have access to funds. The matter may need further consideration in the light of the provision of FEE-HELP to a range of full-fee courses including those in the VET sector.
In recent years public funding by both Commonwealth and states of VET has been relatively static while the number of students has grown. The Commonwealth, in most years, has only adjusted its funding for price changes, and the price measure it used has not covered the full increase in wage and salary levels.

A strong case can be made for a new partnership agreement between the Commonwealth and the States for long term resourcing of VET to meet skills shortages and other future challenges flagged in this paper.

**Summing up**

The debates on skill shortages and the ageing of the population have markedly increased the attention given to VET and to TAFE. The new roles for VET include new products, pedagogy and partnerships with industry, all with implications for staff development. TAFE has particular responsibilities for equity including concern for those in casual employment, for those not in employment, for Indigenous peoples and regional communities. There is a need for increased private and public funding, with a strong case to be made for a long term funding agreement between the Commonwealth and the States that gives public recognition to the important and growing needs of the sector.

**References**

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Chapter 6

Key Findings
Report of the consultation on future directions for public education and training: One size doesn’t fit all
CHAPTER 6
KEY FINDINGS

The input by over 28,000 teachers, parents, students, leaders and the broader community of NSW has made compelling reading. There have been very strongly expressed views. The underlying feature of the consultation has been the pride so many in public education and training feel and their desire to ensure it grows and progresses. This compels us to take stock of our current situation and build for the future.

For schools, there is little doubt that public education is confronted with great challenges. The market share statistics and falling demography will inevitably mean change. The simple view that more funding will provide an answer may be partly true. This consultation has shown there is a deep seated concern that the DET and its schools need to change the way they operate. Schools need to be given the capacity to innovate and shape themselves, with their communities to better meet local needs.

This is not to say there is support for a scheme that lets “a thousand flowers bloom”. Quite the reverse: there is strong support for explicit and clear frameworks within which schools must operate, supported by strong accountability and monitoring procedures. Within these frameworks, schools should be given the capacity to grow and develop. This is certainly borne out by comparison with nearly all first world countries and states. In NSW, public education should not expect to prosper if we do not develop a more contemporary system.

The consultation demonstrated the value people place on TAFE NSW and the pride of its staff in their organisation. For TAFE, the issues of flexibility and accessibility were highlighted by students and industry. The demand for further improvements in the quality of teaching and in customer service was clear. What was also clear was the need for TAFE to be able to operate in a business framework which allows it to prioritise its products and services, in consultation with its customers. To be sustainable, TAFE must be able to meet the prioritised needs of its customers and be resourced to do so.

This chapter lists 21 Key findings.

The list of Key findings follows for consideration.
Good Teaching

Key findings
Quality student learning outcomes are dependent upon quality teachers who are themselves lifelong learners. Quality teachers need support from a whole of DET philosophy that values career-long professional learning for all staff.

School and TAFE teachers, support staff and managers, schools and colleges, regions, Institutes and State Office share the responsibility for career-long professional learning. Support for the continual improvement of teaching through reflection, professional dialogue, discussion of teaching practice and networking between schools and TAFE colleges needs to be provided.

Pre-service and in-service professional learning programs should be developed in collaboration with universities while for beginning teachers and teachers new to executive positions, there is a need to provide mentoring programs to ensure universal and targeted professional support for staff in new positions.

The conflict between the advantage to teachers of professional development during school hours and the ensuing disruption to student leaning needs to be resolved through flexible delivery models including online learning, on-site in-classroom programs and peer development programs. There is also a need for longer-term professional development programs including longitudinal action research and access to a wide range of courses and on-line services and learning materials.

Teachers need to determine their own professional development needs in consultation with their manager and within the context of their school or college and local community. Evidence of ongoing participation in recognised professional learning programs should be required of all aspirants for promotion.

Schools, TAFE colleges and the system must support teachers, support staff and managers as they continually develop their skills and knowledge.

Early Childhood Years

Key findings
All children should have access to a quality prior to school education for at least the year before school and we should work to achieve this aim. The needs of children are greatest in areas of high Aboriginal population and in areas of significant socio-economic disadvantage. The number of DET preschools should be increased particularly for these children.

The current transition to school or orientation programs are welcomed by school communities but need to be enhanced to better meet the individual needs of children and give them the best possible start to school. Transition to school programs should be coordinated across the prior to school and school settings and be offered over an extended period. These programs need to involve the children’s families and include specific information that will assist families to support children at school. The school, in working with the preschools and childcare centres, should be aware of, and have developed plans for, the individual learning and support needs of children prior to entry to school. This is particularly important for children with disabilities.

Greater coordination is required between prior to school centres and primary schools. There are potential benefits for children's transition to school if the preschool or childcare centre is located within the grounds of public schools.

There is too great a gap in the ages of children on entry to school, making it difficult for younger children to adjust and for teachers to meet the range of needs of children across these early years. There are a range of views about the best possible age for children to start school but generally the belief is that the starting age for school should be raised.

As the DET and the Department of Community Services currently have responsibility for preschool education, greater coordination is needed to better address children's learning needs in the years before school and prepare them for learning in school. There are divergent views about what children should learn prior to school and in the first years of school. There is, however, a need to better align the preschool curriculum and the curriculum for the early years of school so that learning is continuous.

There should be an interagency approach to children's services before school and within schools. The Schools as Community Centres interagency program has been greatly valued by those school communities that have been involved. Given the success of the program, there would be benefits for children and their families if the school is the focus of the community, and the centre for a range of local government and non-government services. Support should be provided for the further development of interagency programs within school communities with the greatest need.
Primary School Years

Key findings

Primary teachers are seeking greater stability in syllabus implementation. They need time to become familiar with the requirements of each key learning area and to develop successful programs that will meet the needs of their students.

Since the six key learning area syllabuses have been in primary schools, teachers have not received information to clarify curriculum requirements. In an attempt to meet all requirements of syllabuses many teachers have felt overwhelmed and the lack of flexibility has made it difficult to meet the particular needs of school communities.

The solutions to a “crowded” curriculum are not simple. There are divergent views about how to “un-crowd” the curriculum and about what should or should not be part of the primary curriculum. A range of solutions is required, including clarifying curriculum requirements for public schools and providing targeted professional development and support for the integration of key learning areas. Other suggested solutions include reducing class sizes from Year 3 to Year 6 and providing some specialist teachers in primary schools.

Within clear guidelines, schools need to be able to make decisions about the curriculum that are in the best interests of their students.

Many parents feel that they do not understand the curriculum, how their child is assessed and what is being reported. They want to be able to assist in the education of their child and want reports that are regular, clear, honest and in simple English. The issue of homework is of concern to some parents. Given the impact homework can have on family life, there needs to be greater flexibility within the Homework Policy for schools to better meet the needs of students and expectations of parents.

The implementation of the recommendations from the Eltis Report should assist teachers particularly with assessing and reporting requirements. There is a need to develop a way of tracking student achievement across the primary school years and at transition points in their education so that their learning is continuous.

There are divergent views about the use of composite classes in primary schools. Notwithstanding this matter and the urgent need to address the issue of the “crowded” curriculum, there is general satisfaction with the structure of primary schools and the education that children receive in these years.

Middle Years

Key findings

Many schools have established successful programs involving a range of strategies to meet the needs and enhance the learning of students in the middle years. Many of these programs, which include support for students’ transition between Year 6 and Year 7, have proved to be successful in supporting students in the middle years and helping to give them a good start to high school. They are greatly valued by their school communities.

There is a need, however, to develop a coherent and coordinated Departmental strategy around the middle years of schooling. A Departmental strategy should support successful current practices and ensure that all primary and secondary schools establish effective middle years programs.

There is currently no standard way of tracking student achievement particularly across the middle years of school. The achievements of some students entering Year 7 may not be recognised, resulting in reteaching and students feeling unchallenged and unsupported. There is support for a tracking system that can be used within and across government schools to support a continuum of learning although some people have concerns about how such a system may be used.

Effective teaching which involves students in more practical and relevant learning experiences is essential to ensure that students remain engaged in the middle years. Professional learning opportunities targeted at meeting the needs of middle years students need to be available for teachers of these years. These opportunities could include support for teachers to integrate learning across the key learning areas or subjects.

Research indicates that students in the middle years need a strong bond with supportive adults. Teachers’ relationships with students during these years are very important. Some teachers would like to focus their teaching in these years of schooling although there were others who are opposed to creating specialist middle years teachers. Greater flexibility in staffing arrangements across primary and secondary school would allow teachers the option to teach across Years 5 to 8.

There are divergent views on the merits of establishing separate middle schools. Generally, schools should be encouraged to implement innovative middle years strategies. In some supportive communities this could include piloting a middle years school structure.
Secondary School Years

Key findings

Secondary schools need to be more flexible in order to meet the needs of their students.

The junior secondary curriculum needs to be freed up to allow choice, greater relevance, and an opportunity for students to participate in vocational education as well as study courses of their own choosing. Suggested solutions include: reviewing the DET’s mandated additional hours of study for Years 7 to 10; developing a vocational studies elective option; and reviewing the nature and purpose of the School Certificate.

Students should be assisted to achieve their personal aspirations and goals through the provision of high quality resource materials supporting students understanding of knowledge management and learning how to learn. Resources for teachers should be developed that ensure the effectiveness of school-based assessment tasks using standards, outcomes and innovative assessment options that report to parents in plain language. Resources should also be developed for teachers which are based around integrated units of study.

The senior secondary curriculum is seen by some to be too focused on university entrance and not meeting the needs of those students wanting other pathways, such as TAFE or employment. Expanding the scope of the HSC, especially for students unlikely to enter university from school, is seen as essential.

While co-educational comprehensive secondary schools are well supported there is a need for greater flexibility to enable consideration, at the local level, of other school models to better meet local needs.

Parents need to be provided with the information that enables them to help their children make good choices about what they do in school and beyond school.

Students 15 to 19 Years Old

Key findings

Schools and TAFE must work together in a planned and strategic way to improve the outcomes for young people and their engagement in work and study. Areas of duplication between schools and TAFE should be reviewed, particularly in relation to the delivery of vocational education to school students, and the delivery of the CGVE (School Certificate equivalent) and the Higher School Certificate to students under the age of 18.

Education and training must be relevant to the needs of 15 to 19 year olds and be structured flexibly to provide easy and equitable access to both school and TAFE. There is a need to provide flexible pathways and enable students to exercise greater control over their own learning by selecting modules and units from a range of sources within a more flexible provision. Funding arrangements for 15-19 year old students attending TAFE to undertake School Certificate equivalent and the Higher School Certificate need to be reviewed.

The current structure and requirements of the Higher School Certificate do not accommodate the needs of a significant number of post compulsory age students. The curriculum must provide more flexible educational pathways that range from completely academic to largely vocational in the context of a single, rigorous Higher School Certificate.

Students need to be supported by professionals dedicated to improving opportunities for 15 to 19 year olds. There is a need for better career counselling for students which helps them plan their futures across the full range of opportunities beyond school and assists them to make effective transitions. Students should be supported in their planning to complete their studies or for their transition to work, recognising their participation in part-time and full-time work.

Partnerships involving combinations of schools, TAFE, other government agencies, industry and community organisations, should be used to assist young people to remain engaged in education and training and to develop the skills they need to gain and keep employment. The Department needs to work with other agencies to create initiatives which will assist all young people to achieve their goals and fulfil their potential.
Information Communication Technology (ICT)

Key findings

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is seen as a vital tool in the learning and teaching process. The Department must have a clearly defined plan for the future development and use of ICT in schools and TAFE which: integrates ICT into quality teaching and learning; provides for appropriate levels of support and resourcing; incorporates appropriate staff training; facilitates access to new and emerging technologies; and incorporates maintenance of ICT products and systems.

School and TAFE leaders have a critical role in promoting learning and teaching with ICT in schools and colleges. There is a need for a greater emphasis on professional learning to develop competent teachers and leaders who are confident in the use of ICT in quality learning and teaching. Professional learning opportunities are also important for support and administrative staff and there needs to be an enhanced provision in the area of ICT in pre-service teacher education.

The effective use of ICT has the potential to revolutionise the learning and teaching both inside and outside the classroom and school. The Department needs to implement systems that fully exploit the capabilities of ICT in the management of students’ learning and school and TAFE administrative systems.

The effective use of ICT greatly enhances the ability to personalise learning for each student in ways that have not been previously possible. There is a need to continually expand the range of e-learning materials to facilitate innovation and support personalised learning. ICT needs to be used to continually expand the choice and opportunity for school and TAFE students, particularly in remote areas of NSW.

In order for students and teachers to best use this tool, technology must be accessible and appropriate. Schools and TAFE need ICT infrastructure and systems that support student learning. There is a need to develop an anytime anywhere approach to the delivery of on-line learning materials for students, teachers, support staff and leaders.

The Principal as Expert Educational Leader

Key findings

Whatever the context of the school, responsibility for the delivery of quality education requires highly capable leadership. It is the principal who has the critical role in leading and managing change for continuous improvement and in establishing the learning culture of the school.

To ensure the continued development of expert leadership within the system, a comprehensive and multi-layered leadership strategy needs to be implemented at all levels of school, region and state. The attributes desired of leaders need to be recognised and incorporated in development programs for principals and executives.

The determination of agreed leadership performance standards was regarded as fundamental to ensuring school leaders have a clear framework against which their performance is measured. Performance standards used as part of an accountability framework for principals would provide a basis for recognition of levels of performance. Rigorous accountability needs to be in place across the system to assure parents and the community of the quality of their schools.

The level of skills, knowledge and professionalism of leaders needs to be encouraged and recognised through increased levels of autonomy, access to further study and professional visits and assigned roles in mentoring.

Leadership should be enhanced by requiring principals to achieve higher educational qualifications and accreditation. This was considered an effective means for raising the level of skills, knowledge and professionalism of school leaders.

There needs to be a major overhaul of the current system of appointment of school leaders, including a process which includes workplace observation as a more authentic way of assessing suitability and competence.

The principal’s role has become increasingly complex with more accountability and less control and support. Effective systems for administrative support need to be developed to ensure the principal’s primary focus is on educational leadership while providing high order school management.
What Should be the Legitimate Authority of Principals?

Key findings

There is a distinct mismatch between the level of authority and the degree of accountability required of principals. Given that principals are held accountable for school operations and performance, there is a corresponding need to give principals greater control over school resources. While a greater degree of local decision-making is a critical issue for the future of public education and training, it is important that increased flexibility and local decision-making occurs within statewide frameworks.

While not a universally held view, there was a strong sense that central to the need for a greater degree of local decision-making is for principals to have more flexibility and discretion over staffing. Capacity to design a staff profile that best meets the local needs of the school, more input into the selection of staff and changes to the current processes for dealing with inefficient staff are considered essential.

The need for increased flexibility and local decision-making extended to the design of the school's education provision and use of resources at the local level. Determining the most effective use of the school's inputs in order to achieve quality outcomes was considered by many to be essential.

An accountability framework is required to effectively monitor any increase in flexibility and responsibility entrusted to principals. This needs to be rigorous in terms of the principal's leadership and management of the school. It also needs to be inextricably linked to school level accountability in which mechanisms are in place to more effectively monitor the operations and performance of schools. This needs to be accompanied by the provision of a better level of information being publicly available so as to assure parents and the community of the quality of their schools.

Developing Leadership Capability at all Levels

Key findings

The role of leadership in developing a culture that supports teachers to create success in their classrooms reflects the strong relationship between quality leadership and quality schools. The principal must play a key role in developing an inclusive, team approach to leadership and decision-making at all levels within a school. The leadership team needs to be developed in order to undertake the leadership functions in the school.

A leadership strategy is considered to be fundamental to ensure a coordinated approach to leadership, with provision for a range of activities delivered in flexible ways. A Leadership Centre was suggested by respondents as a key element for the implementation of such a strategy. The importance of continued funding for professional learning and a more integrated approach to development and accountability were stated as being central to improving leadership capacity.

There is a need for a range of leadership activities for staff at all levels. The significant role played by school administrative and support staff and the need to provide further development was widely recognised by respondents.

At the executive level, it was acknowledged that while staff must take responsibility for their own learning, innovative strategies need to be implemented to encourage broader participation in leadership development activities. A leadership capability framework is essential for guiding the development of staff and for recognising levels of performance.

In relation to principals, suggestions focused on strategies to support newly appointed principals, to use the expertise of experienced and retired principals and to reinvigorate long-serving principals. Mentoring was a consistent theme.

The relationship between schools, regions and state offices was raised in relation to leadership. A more collaborative effort between schools, regions and state office would enhance leadership in schools and make better use of expertise.

Succession planning was considered to be an important responsibility at school, regional and state levels. Identification of future school leaders and individual development plans should be a priority to make certain prospective leaders are supported and provided with opportunities to practise leadership.
Organisational Culture

Key findings

The central finding to emerge regarding organisational culture was the need for schools to have the capacity to shape themselves within a state-wide policy framework supported by a clear vision and statement of purpose for public education.

There is a desire for schools to be able to grow and develop themselves so that they can more adequately meet local needs. The current centralised system and the industrial regulations governing working conditions do not provide the autonomy or flexibility necessary to allow decision-making at the local level in relation to a range of key school operations.

A policy framework that gives schools an opportunity to meet system requirements while allowing them to adapt to local circumstances is needed. This will require a review, in partnership with stakeholders, of the philosophies, policies and practices of the DET to build a statewide framework within which local decision-making takes place with clear responsibilities and accountabilities.

Policy should be driven by a coherent vision and statement of purpose for public education, with agreed and shared goals, backed by the commitment of both the Government and the Department. The promotion of a strong direction for public education and advocacy for public schools and staff in general, was an underlying theme.

To ensure delivery of these important fundamentals to public education, more efficient and effective connections need to be made between schools and the regional and state staff who support them. State office and regional staff need to be regularly seen and connected to the experiences and practices of schools to ensure they are knowledgeable about them. There is a need for more inclusive decision-making processes and the building of professional networks to ensure an appropriate balance between autonomy and systemic responsibility and to develop a sense of inclusion and trust among all staff.

The system would benefit from improved communications systems which better provide for the needs of schools, parents and the system through the use of new technology and in a timely and balanced way.

Community Partnerships Enhancing Learning

Key findings

There is evidence that when parents and community work effectively together with schools, students’ learning is enhanced. Parents want to be involved in their children’s education but many find it difficult to find the time to engage in school activities.

Parents want unambiguous and regular communication about their child’s progress with minimal educational jargon. Many parents are seeking a more comprehensive use of modern communication technologies and strategies but also recognise that there needs to be a variety of forms of communication to ensure that no family is excluded. While many schools have excellent communications systems, others need to evaluate their systems and partnership-building practices.

Parents and students want a greater say in school decision-making and to have opportunities to provide feedback on their schools. There is a need for an overarching statewide policy framework to be developed that ensures that staff, parents, students and community are included in school decision-making. This framework must allow flexibility for schools to implement systems that meet local needs.

There is support by many people for schools to become the ‘hub’ of their communities and to build on the opportunities provided within the community to advance student learning. Schools need to make better use of their local community assets such as using community volunteers to work as mentors and coaches in schools and seek engagement of local business and industry in the development of relevant education programs.

There are benefits for students and their families when Government and community agencies work in partnership with schools, building the concept of full service schools. These partnerships have already proved to be successful particularly for the early childhood years in low socio-economic areas, providing early intervention activities and parenting support. Co-locating community agencies and support services, where possible, in school premises would support these partnerships for the benefit of students and their families.
Meeting Local Needs

Key findings

The ‘one size fits all’ approach to school staffing needs to be abandoned and replaced by a system that better meets the needs of individual schools and their communities. The new system requires a redesign of DET procedures and communications to recognise the professionalism of principals and staff and their capacity for decision-making.

Schools need to have greater control over the staffing profile of their school as well as the selection and employment of staff. The design of a new staffing system must ensure school needs are met by enabling the appointment of staff with the required qualifications, skills and expertise best suited to the local situation. It needs to support and encourage staff through the provision of opportunities to operate in a range of schools as desired. It requires the development of new school resource allocation processes which provide flexibility in staffing structures, including the determination of a staffing profile tailored to school needs.

The high turnover of school staff in some areas such as western NSW and south western Sydney must be addressed through a new and innovative scheme that will ensure experienced teachers and leaders are attracted to and retained in hard to staff schools. The scheme should enable greater flexibility in the recruitment of staff, provide a range of incentives, including financial and career development opportunities; and promote the positives of teaching in hard-to-staff schools. Schools in such areas should be set up as models of innovation, quality teaching and quality leadership.

Schools need to be responsive and flexible and able to configure and allocate available resources to best meet their needs. Schools and their communities need to be able to determine the profile of public education which best meets community needs including the types of schools, the relationship between and among schools and TAFE, the hours of operation and the role of other government and community agencies. This will involve more flexible work practices which allow variations to school organisation and operations. Such arrangements will support and encourage partnerships between schools and with TAFE to enhance curriculum provision and to reduce disjunctions at current transition points. A whole of government approach in which schools are working closely with other agencies such as Centrelink, NSW Health, Department of Community Services and TAFE NSW, often at the one site, is needed.

Developing, Supporting and Rewarding Quality Teachers

Key findings

Pre-service teacher education programs need to reflect the current role of teachers in schools including managing student learning for groups and for individuals. The preparation must include an understanding of the values of public education; the development of an extensive knowledge of the diverse needs of learners and techniques to meet these needs; and an understanding of the changing role of teachers within the knowledge society of the future.

Teacher education needs to include more professional experience, through both practicum and internships, to take place in a range of schools. This will provide practical experience in teaching students with different learning needs and styles, from a range of backgrounds and in a variety of settings. It should equip graduate teachers to better meet the challenges of real life situations in schools.

There need to be stronger links between the Department and universities to ensure that teacher education is relevant and well connected to public schools. Current teacher qualification requirements need to be reconsidered to determine whether they meet the needs of contemporary schooling. Teacher education should be designed to enable graduate teachers to meet the professional teaching standards in the Institute of Teachers’ framework.

There is a need to ensure quality teachers are valued and supported by the Department and their school. A range of formal and informal strategies to achieve this is essential. Strategies needing consideration include appropriate incentives and rewards, acknowledgment by the Department and by their community, an opportunity to perform higher duties with allowances, and higher education sponsorship and targeted transfers.

Ineffective teachers need to be identified quickly and mechanisms put in place to provide support. An emphasis on developing teachers earlier in their careers through school-based mentoring and training is necessary to improve the standard of practice. In cases where teachers continue to experience difficulties, procedures for dealing with such situations need to be simplified to ensure student learning is not disrupted.
Environments for Learning

Key findings

The physical presentation of a school is critical in attracting enrolments and maintaining school morale and image in the wider community. Schools and their communities need greater discretion in the management of school infrastructure, including maintenance and minor capital works.

While the design of modern facilities meets expectations and is acknowledged as being of high standard there was concern that much of the building stock is outdated and does not meet current and future needs. There is a need for the planned, progressive upgrading of facilities.

The Department’s efforts to refurbish facilities of historic and heritage value and the quality of recently constructed facilities were applauded, but present infrastructure modelling standards lack flexibility. There is a need for the development of alternative, flexible building code standards to enable adaptation to local circumstances. Sustainability options in facility design and construction should be promoted.

Joint use of facilities, to avoid duplication between schools and TAFE, is advocated along with greater use of facilities for community focused education and out of hours use.

Economies in capital works costs, more creative use of existing facilities and more effective ways to conduct maintenance programs are needed to extend the value of each dollar spent. Effective asset management which includes procedures to better rationalise under-utilised and excess facilities is required to balance available funds against demand.

Exploration of alternative strategies for funding and accelerating school building, refurbishment and maintenance programs is also needed.

TAFE Teachers

Key findings

TAFE teachers who combine high quality teaching with high level knowledge of and skills in their industry area are strongly valued. Industry currency is equally valued. Students now and into the future must gain the knowledge and skills they need for their target industry. A succession strategy is needed to ensure that TAFE has the staff necessary to achieve this.

Teachers should have the skills and flexibility to respond to the individual needs of students within diverse groups, using diverse teaching modes, including workplace delivery. Ongoing teacher training and systematised return to industry processes are needed to support this. New teachers should have the industry currency and appropriate qualifications to ensure TAFE’s ongoing capability now and into the future.

Gaining qualitative feedback from students, for example through focus groups, was said to be a key method of gathering information to improve students’ learning experiences and outcomes.

The importance of Head Teachers in establishing the quality culture of their sections and in the management and educational leadership of their staff was emphasised in the consultation. Managers need a range of skills including interpersonal, communication and business skills. Effective leadership is critical for the ongoing business of TAFE.
TAFE Services to Industry

Key findings
One of the most important messages about industry in NSW is that it is not homogeneous. The issues for industry in rural NSW are not the same as the issues for industries in regional or metropolitan areas. The issues for large national and multi-national enterprises are not the same as the issues for small and medium enterprises. Partnerships between TAFE and industry were seen as a key strategy in ensuring TAFE delivers what industry needs and in providing students with access to cutting edge industry facilities and practices.

Industry at all levels wants more efficient and effective ways of communicating with TAFE. They want a single point of contact for each industry staffed by people with industry knowledge and expertise, to provide information about TAFE products and services for each industry area.

Creating account managers for major clients was a strategy proposed by industry for improving customer service. The needs of small and medium enterprises and of industry in rural and regional NSW should be taken into account, in terms of both communication and products and services. Strengthening TAFE’s use of industry feedback is important in strategically improving the quality of products and services. It is important to include small and medium enterprises in this process. Industry and TAFE staff want TAFE to actively seek feedback from industry on its performance by implementing a broad range of measures to evaluate TAFE’s services, in a context of continuous improvement.

Addressing Skills Shortages

Key findings
Skills shortages are a critical issue for NSW and Australia. Apprenticeships are a key strategy for addressing skills shortages and engaging people in work and training. Apprenticeships need to be more attractive, both to young people and to employers.

Industry said that the current ‘one size fits all’ apprenticeship system is not useful and some industries called for a reduction in the amount of time taken for an apprenticeship. The challenge is to configure a flexible apprenticeship system that increases the engagement of industry (large, medium and small) in the training of apprentices. Many people believe a more flexible apprenticeship system is needed and are not aware of recent developments in this area.

Industry and the community want to see flexible entry points which recognise prior learning and industry experience; flexible delivery patterns which meet the needs of industry and apprentices; and more mature age apprenticeships. They also wanted to see the promotion of apprenticeships to the community as pathways to careers.
TAFE Services for Students

**Key findings**

People want more targeted information about TAFE courses and modules and related employment pathways. There is a need to ensure students are provided with the support they need to assist them to enrol in the programs and patterns of studies, including individual modules or groups of modules, that best meet their chosen pathways and accommodate the other pressures on their lives.

There is a need to review and enhance career guidance, vocational training and TAFE NSW pre-enrolment information and counselling to improve current career services across schools and TAFE.

Better information for school students about TAFE is particularly important. Enrolling in the wrong course was described as distressing and discouraging for the individual and wasteful for all concerned. It was felt that the efficiencies derived from a more effective system would offset the cost.

The use of destination surveys to gain feedback about work opportunities and career pathways is a key element of providing improved information for students.

Promoting the Value of TAFE

**Key findings**

By their responses, people showed that they had limited knowledge of TAFE’s services, products and achievements. TAFE staff feel that if industry and the community had a greater knowledge of TAFE’s products and services, they would be better able to make use of them.

Closer links with industry and the community would allow TAFE to create stronger and more productive partnerships, as well as providing the means for better information exchange. These links provide opportunities for students to find mentors and to gain work experience in current operating environments. They also provide opportunities for staff to maintain industry currency and for industry to inform TAFE about its needs and for TAFE to show industry the products and services it can provide.

Effective use of evaluation and customer satisfaction measures is needed for systematic and strategic quality improvement.
A Robust and Sustainable TAFE

Key findings

A strong viable TAFE NSW needs a clear, stable and ongoing commitment from the community, industry and government to resource and support it.

There were differing views about how TAFE’s services should be costed and who should pay. The different users – students, government and industry – were all called on to contribute. Increasing demands on TAFE’s resources, such as increased flexibility and cutting edge industry equipment, are clear. TAFE also continues to have the most generous fee exemption policy in Australia and this is strongly supported. TAFE will need to operate increasingly as a business to remain viable and will need to work more closely with its customers to prioritise its products and services.

Industry in particular wanted TAFE to operate more as a business. They called for TAFE to develop a three year operational budget framework for TAFE. They also wanted TAFE to undertake longer-term planning and suggested a longer budgeting cycle would support this.

Customers want TAFE to be more flexible in meeting the needs of both industry and individual students. Students need to be able to build and upgrade their skills through industry-relevant training that is easily accessible and consistent in quality. Customers want TAFE to provide a broader product range that is more closely aligned to employment opportunities, particularly in the local or regional area, with current and relevant support materials. Partnerships with industry, community agencies and other educational providers can improve services while increasing efficiencies.
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>
</table>

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.