

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 11 February 2008

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Ms K. Fletcher, executive director, Australian Centre for Effective Partnerships.

The CHAIR — I am happy to declare open this meeting of the Education and Training Committee. I welcome Ms Kaye Fletcher to the table, as the first witness making a presentation to the committee today. As you would know, Kaye, this is an all-party committee of the Parliament of Victoria. At the moment we are hearing evidence in relation to our inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning. I need to advise you and all people presenting to this hearing that any evidence they provide in these hearings is subject to parliamentary privilege, so you are granted immunity from judicial review. All evidence is taken pursuant to the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act, which essentially means that what you say here is covered by parliamentary privilege, which would not be the case for anything you might say outside, but I presume you know that already.

Mr KOTSIRAS — So you are free to criticise the Labor government.

The CHAIR — Or the opposition!

Welcome, Kaye. We are pleased to hear you this afternoon in regard to anything you wish to share with us, and, of course, after your submission to us we might have a number of questions we might like to follow up with you.

Ms FLETCHER — Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak. My understanding is that the inquiry has been going on for some time, so if I choose to talk about things you have heard a lot about I will not be offended if you say, ‘That is enough, we have heard all of that before’.

I had intended to address mainly paragraphs b and e of the committee’s terms of reference, but in a conversation last week I was asked if I would also talk about the principles of learning and teaching program, known as PoLT, so I might start with that one, if that is okay. I have some extracts from that program. I have marked just one page, but I have brought three copies of the document, which might be helpful as I try to explain. We have been involved with the program principally with government schools in Victoria for a couple of years. This is the third year. I have also been asked to go and work with schools in Queensland on the same program, so that state has seen the value of this Victorian program. I have been working last year and have been booked up again this year to work with the independent schools in Queensland, and this year the Catholic schools in Victoria are taking up the program in huge numbers.

It has been a long-term program, which is what it was designed to be. It was designed to have the teachers really clear on what are the effective principles of teaching and learning and to assess their own practice and then also collect data about that, set goals and move towards improvement. Just in brief, the program involves teachers coming together and getting an agreed sense about what are the things that make teaching and learning work effectively for all students in this changing world. It is based on a lot of research and previous research with middle years et cetera, and then we tease out what this actually looks like in classrooms. So rather than teachers saying, ‘Oh yes, I do that’ or looking at statements that are related to their particular philosophy, it has to be going a bit deeper down to evidence of what they actually do with students.

Then the teachers actually go through a self-assessment process. After that they work with a colleague and they are asked to give evidence to back up what they say. So the colleague will ask, ‘You say you do such and such, tell me a little bit about how you work with students in that way’. I have marked these things on a page here, if you can see it, just to give you a very brief example. So on this page these would be the kinds of statements the teachers are looking at. For example:

The teacher supports students to engage with contemporary knowledge and practice.

The teachers might rank themselves against the comments numbered 1 to 5 — ranging from 1, which is that they focus exclusively on skills and knowledge and rarely look at contemporary issues and practices, which means basically that they continue to teach the same content each year, up to 5, which is that they consider contemporary and socially relevant issues and support students to explore around and those sorts of things. The teachers actually work through a process of deciding where they fit along that continuum and giving evidence of it. Then the teachers go to the students and ask them similar things. They give them statements and they match up the statements. The students might be saying:

We often link our learning to current events and issues such as those reported in the media.

So they collect the teacher data and the student data and the teachers have a look at how they are going. Sometimes it is a bit of a shock, as they think they are doing very well, and it is always something that causes a bit of thinking

and discussion. From that they set some goals, they realise the things they do well, and then they might decide to work on one or two things they can improve on. Individual teachers do that, as well as schools and then groups of schools. Then they can have a bit of a plan or strategy of improving the teaching in regard to those aspects. Twelve months down the track they collect the data again and see if there has been change.

The reason I say individual teachers are involved is that we know from research that when we compare schools the learning experience for students is often quite different. But within a school there are examples of much greater differences between teachers in the one school. So, along with schools setting themselves on a path to improving certain things, the power of this program is that individual teachers realise they need to focus on some things and improve skills in some areas, and they can focus on their own individual needs as well as keeping themselves linked with the schools and their plan for attack. So that is a little bit about PoLT.

Then, in thinking about those principles, which are outlined in the bold statements at the front of the PoLT document — things like that the learning environment is supportive and productive, it promotes independence/interdependence and self-motivation, it has assessment as part of it, et cetera — it occurs to me that those things relate just as strongly to teacher professional learning. So the things that are good for the students are also good for the teachers in their professional learning.

If it is recognised good practice for teachers and the way they approach the teaching of students, then those principles also apply when we design professional learning to improve teacher practice. Having that environment that acknowledges the teacher expertise — and I constantly see examples of very good teacher practice, and all of our schools can boast of good teaching — there are opportunities where teachers can be challenged to look more closely at what they do. So rather than continuing to teach in the same way for 5, 10, 15, 20 or more years, we need to have prompts that will, I suppose, challenge teachers in a respectful way to look at what they have been doing and see if it meets the needs of today. The program needs to have that built into it so that teachers are challenged but not made to feel defensive about their practice.

The other thing I have been involved in and have seen working really well is when teachers work on action research. There is another program that you might have already heard about, teacher professional leave, where teachers follow an inquiry and they want to know more about something and its effect on students, so they have some time to actually investigate and to do some action research about that. That is all very well, but the teachers need to be supported through that. They cannot just be given 20 days leave and told to go and find out more about the use of multimedia in understanding concepts in science or something. They need to have a framework around that so that they are trialling new things and gathering some data to show whether it does make a difference or not. That is another really powerful way of setting up professional learning — when they have got some say in leading the research themselves.

The other one is, I suppose, linked with the PoLT — that teachers are given opportunities to really reflect on their practice. That is built into the school program so that there are appointment times when you actually sit down and have a discussion about your work and how you are going according to your goals.

The other thing which is connected to what we are hearing of the education revolution and the funds for ICT in general in schools is that the sixth principle is related to the use of technologies that are being reflected in schools and the sorts of things that are done outside of school. Getting teachers skilled up in the use of this wonderful technology that is going into schools is an important element of it. There are many teachers currently working who have excellent skills, particularly in Victoria. I have noticed them being much stronger in terms of their ICT confidence compared to other states. I work around the country and there is a lot of expertise, but it is just a way of harnessing that strategically so that an increasing number of our teachers will be confident and competent in using the ICT that is coming into our schools, and all forms of technology.

The other thing I wanted to talk about a little was the cross-cultural links between industry, training institutions and schools. My organisation has involved bringing people in from outside the school sector to actually become involved in the professional learning programs and facilitation of workshops et cetera to give teachers some exposure to thinking outside of schools. Schools, wonderful institutions that they are, can be quite inward looking, and there are not the opportunities to meet and work with people from outside the sector. One of the principles about the good teaching of students is that we have links outside the school. It also needs to be that way with teachers to give them the chance to work with people from other areas. That has proven to be something that really

does make them think. It confronts them a bit more about the things they take for granted, and traditionally do, and just gives them another perspective.

The last one is that the professional learning should allow some real ownership for the teachers. I think that the notion of implementing a program and doing things to them does not work because they are quite creative at finding ways to let that all float past them and waiting for the next change. Some ways of getting the teachers to look at what they are hoping to gain around their learning and also getting some data about what motivates them to want to continue their professional learning and to improve their teaching practice I would be very interested in hearing about — that ownership of their own learning path, what they hope to gain and how they can contribute to their own learning rather than being the receptacles of learning that is delivered to them. That is what I had prepared to say.

The CHAIR — Thanks, Kaye.

Mr DIXON — Is PoLT equally applicable to primary and secondary? I was just looking at student feedback. Obviously that would be how primary and secondary students are able to interpret that information and make a judgement on it.

Ms FLETCHER — It is actually prep through to year 12. That is the way it was designed. Some teachers adapted one of the surveys for the younger students. They have got little smiley faces and frowning faces, they collect data on the young students, and sometimes it is an interview rather than them filling out a form. These surveys are now done online too, so the data is collected more quickly and they can very effectively get some graphs and tables together. The younger students are now involved with that. The data is a little bit more subjective. The student data has to be read with a lot of factors in mind.

The CHAIR — Can I just follow up on that? Either a school or teachers within a school might identify that this is a program they want to get involved in. What do they actually do to do the PoLT program? Do they meet with people from your team? What is the process?

Ms FLETCHER — The process in the past has been that they come together usually for two days, and it might be some representatives of schools all gathered together; or, as is the case this year with the Catholic schools, they close the school and the whole staff are involved with the program. There are those two ways. They spend time understanding what the principles are and what is good teaching, getting agreement on that and getting some examples of what would really happen in classes. Then we go through the auditing tools about how you collect data and how well we are going against those principles.

They will come along and they will learn about the program. If I were a teacher in the program I might go back to my school and then I will work with some nominated teachers, say in their first year. I will make time to sit with them for an hour and go through and ask, ‘How do you think you are going on this?’, ‘Why do you say that?’, ‘Why do you think you are 3 out of 5?’, ‘Why do you think you are fantastic at it?’, ‘What is your evidence?’, ‘What sorts of things do you do with your students?’ et cetera, and enter that as data. Then that particular teacher says, ‘I am thinking of year 9E for this, thinking about my practice. I would like you to survey the students in year 9E and then put that data together as well’. We would then have a discussion and ask, ‘How does this match up? How well are you going? What would you like to be better at? What do you think you need in terms of professional learning to improve your skills in this or the other?’.

The CHAIR — So most of the follow-up is done within the school and not as an external program?

Ms FLETCHER — Yes. It is done working with the schools so that they come up with goals. There are a lot of support materials, and a lot has been put online by the education department. The following year they might go through the process again. They might survey some of their teachers and some of their students and compare the data.

Mr DIXON — Who then makes the connection between all of these? The needs of the teachers are identified and they might need PD in a certain area. Who then says, ‘Here is some good PD that will meet that need’. How does that happen?

Ms FLETCHER — It varies. When it started off it was done with clusters of schools. They pooled their money and they got a plan in place for professional learning that matched, but the more that you step away from the

individual teacher with the data the less effective it is in terms of if you are aggregating a lot of data and then you say, 'There is a bit of a trend that we need this, but it only applies to some of the teachers within the group'. The teacher usually has a discussion with their principal about the allocation of the resourcing for professional learning, so they might nominate or say, 'I would really like to work on this, and I could go along to this program or someone could come in and talk to us' et cetera. It works best if it can be done in small teams, but individual teacher or whole school works as well.

Mr HERBERT — Thanks, Kaye. Just having a quick look through, I would have thought that a lot of the ways of teaching in here and the practices that you outline would have been pretty much core business in terms of the craft of teaching. I was particularly looking at the last survey and the sorts of activities. I would be surprised that any reasonably effective teacher would not be using that anyway. What it has got me thinking about is why is there a need for an outside group to come into a school, as opposed to the normal practice of a principal looking at his staffing mix and going through the normal practice of education, because it is a basic teaching kind of methodology we are talking here.

Ms FLETCHER — I do not think it is — —

Mr HERBERT — And perhaps basically going again on that, is there a difference between this and what is taught in teachers college, or are your main client groups older teachers who need a refresher kind of course?

Ms FLETCHER — We have had the whole range — if I start with the last part first — in terms of the participants in the program. Quite new, inexperienced teachers, but, as is the workforce, a lot of older, more experienced teachers. I think the important thing is that it is translating those principles into practice. I am sure that they are teaching similar things in the teaching institutions, but there are all sorts of factors to do with class management, the stress level and the workloads, and teachers can sometimes fall into practices that are easiest for the teacher rather than best for the student.

So this acts as a reminder to them about these good teaching practices. To what extent do you translate those into your work with students? Also teachers cross such a range of subjects. There has been a lot in the media about teachers teaching in areas where they are not prepared; that they do not have the qualifications. If they are teaching a subject about which they are not confident, they are more likely to revert to traditional teaching methods where they teach all the same thing. Imagine there is some average student there and they are not adapting their program to meet the needs of individual students. They go to the easy class management styles of teaching rather than the more powerful ones.

The other thing is that the standards of teaching often differ from one class to another in terms of the students and the challenges for the teachers. So it is not important for an outside person to come in and teach teachers about this. No, not all. It is a very skill-based program, so it is just giving them that space and time to explain what is involved in the collection of data. The data collection for classroom teachers is quite recent. They have had data collected about them. This is data that they are involved in themselves, so that approach is new to them — just working through with them so they will fill this out honestly and openly so they understand that they have some power over choosing what it is they want to improve on and move forward. Otherwise it is an appraisal by someone else, and they will all be 5s. So it is not outside expertise; it is just explaining the program at the beginning, and then it is over to the school to continue with it for the years to come.

The CHAIR — So, Kaye, are there other education programs that you are involved in as well as PoLT?

Ms FLETCHER — That I have been involved in?

The CHAIR — Yes. What are some examples of those?

Ms FLETCHER — The one that I mentioned before about assisting teachers with action research about their work. I have done work on digital portfolios, which is collecting evidence of student learning digitally so that students can share that with other audiences. I have been involved with teachers as researchers as a general thing as well, so that they are actually collecting evidence about what makes a difference in schools on the ground.

The CHAIR — As the name of your group about effective partnerships suggests and as you have discussed, you bring in people from outside the educational field to work with teachers on these issues. So what are the sorts of skills bases that you believe can be shared between teachers? You have mentioned some, of course.

Ms FLETCHER — One example in a couple of programs is project management skills. So bringing in someone who has worked in the corporate sector and actually helping to skill up the teachers in terms of project management. Because they often have a particular project or get a grant or are trying something new, and they start with good intentions, but there is no sense of it carrying on in a strategic way that can be documented and measured. That is one example.

The other is ICT. Someone who has been working with us has previous experience in the Commonwealth Bank in terms of information management. So that is someone from totally outside education, but that is an opportunity for them to work together and learn about the sorts of connections that are possible with some of the practices outside of schools.

Mr DIXON — Have you got any general comments on the effectiveness of online learning for teachers to produce better outcomes, or are they better motivated because they are running at their own speed and using their own time? Any general thoughts on that?

Ms FLETCHER — It is quite a tricky one, because what has tended to happen is that so much has been put online. I know with the PoLT program many of the resources are online, but teachers have expressed that they find it quite overwhelming. It is finding the time to navigate around a whole host of resources. They want a few pointers on making it easier for them rather than spending all of that time. Having access to them online is important, but there still needs to be a kind of a balance and having some direction around it rather than it being totally self-directed learning.

Mr DIXON — But say there is a fairly narrow bit of online PD that they are doing. Once they have established this is what they want to do and start working through it, is that effective in itself?

Ms FLETCHER — I think it is for the people whose learning style suits that, and that would be a section of the teaching workforce — those who would be motivated and work in an individual way. We have done some surveys on learning styles with our participants in many programs, and it is amazingly skewed towards people who are more interdependent and like to work as teams or as groups as part of the recruitment of teachers in general, I think. So that individual online approach would work well with some.

Mr KOTSIRAS — One of the major problems for schools, especially schools in the country, is time. How do you overcome this barrier when it comes to partnership-forming work or partnerships between schools?

Ms FLETCHER — I have been involved in a few programs that have brought outside people into schools. As long as it is seen as core business — if it is going to be something that is around the periphery; the things that Steve, was saying before — yes, this is just good practice. But if we bring someone in, and it is not an add-on — it is shown to be incorporated into the program and can fit within the timetable — the biggest barrier apart from time is the actual rigidity of the timetable itself. So many things are done in a routine way in schools. It is like a revolution to actually move the time line. The person in charge of the timetable is all powerful. I think if it is about effective learning. Then there is time to do it. It is just a matter of working in partnership with the teacher rather than finding a space to bring someone else in and give them time with the students. I think the time issue would relate to teachers all over the place. Actually in the regional areas there are often quite strong links outside the school and with the community. It is sometimes easier for it to happen there — not the range and variety, but the motivation to work with the community is often stronger.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Kaye.

Ms FLETCHER — Thank you.

Witness withdrew.

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Mr T. Condon, board member, Victorian Principals Association.

The CHAIR — I welcome Terry Condon, representing the Victorian Principals Association, to this hearing of the Education and Training Committee. As you would be aware, we are hearing about professional learning for teachers. I want to advise you that all the information you share with the committee now is subject to parliamentary privilege and is granted immunity from judicial review pursuant to the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act — for the things you share with us in here, so you can be fairly free in what you say. We will obviously have some questions for you at the end of your submission, but we are pleased to hear your view, through the Victorian Principals Association.

Mr CONDON — Last week I thought about how I would do this, so I accessed the terms of reference. I have put some dot points under each area. Is that what you want me to refer to?

The CHAIR — That sounds fine, and then we can ask questions.

Mr CONDON — Feel free to ask as you go. Over the weekend I was talking with a couple of colleagues about where professional learning has gone in the education system. I can remember that during the Kennett years when I first became a principal there was quite a deal of worthwhile professional learning. But after that first couple of years it slackened off, and it has not been until Darrell Fraser took over as the deputy secretary that we have seen a real change in behaviour as far as professional learning in schools goes. He has had a significant impact on how professional learning is viewed across the system in a very positive way.

I can see, as far as leadership and my staff, there has been a whole new direction in professional learning. What I have outlined here will give you an indication of what is happening. I do hope it continues — it must continue. I remember a few years ago somebody telling me that a former secondary maths-science teacher, for obvious reasons — mainly monetary — did an accounting degree and ended up working with the National Bank of Australia. He is now fairly high up and his salary is about four times what he was getting. He said that one of the things that stood out was the commitment by the NBA towards professional learning — something like 9 per cent of its profits or budget was allocated to professional learning — and that it has a great impact, from what he could see, on worker or employee outcomes. I think we need to think about that with our system. At that stage he reckoned that it was less than 3 per cent; I have not seen the latest figures, so I am not sure. The old saying ‘If you pay peanuts you get monkeys’ is true. We need to think about how we look after our workforce, and with the rapidly changing world where knowledge growth is down to the stage where it is doubling every 10 years or something like that, we need to have our educational workforce properly briefed and prepared to meet the challenges of a changing world.

Looking at paragraph a, ‘the relationship between ongoing professional learning for teachers and teaching expertise’, I believe it is inseparable. There is a definite correlation between student achievement and effective teachers who regularly update and enhance their skills and knowledge. In recent times lots of research has come out which has shown that engaging teachers in high-level quality professional learning is the most successful way to improve their effectiveness or performance in the classroom. We need to provide educators with relevant professional learning that focuses on learning for understanding and developing students so they can apply their knowledge and skills beyond the classroom to new and different situations. By that I mean that we need to teach our kids to become independent learners, lifelong learners, and be able to finance themselves. I still take some classes because I want to keep in touch with kids. I take the bright futures group, which is for gifted students in my school, a couple of hours a week. I try to push them beyond normal limits and get them to think on different levels. I can say to them, ‘Just Google it, and anything you want to know in this world is instant. If you have got good broadband width on your computer access you can find answers immediately’. These kids just naturally do it and I think they are going to be lifelong learners. That is the sort of thing we need to encourage throughout our system.

Paragraph b refers to ‘which factors will support high-quality professional learning for teachers, including learning methods and environments?’. Firstly, we would need a government that recognised the fact that the greatest investment it can make in the future is via its children.

I remember listening to Barry McGaw a number of years ago at a conference. He spoke about Korea and presented a paper — I still have it at home somewhere; I had an electronic copy sent to me — saying that the Korean government realised that you should invest highly in quality education and that the greater the investment, the greater the return in economic performance. I think that is recognised throughout the world now. Victoria, if you look at the data — I was looking at it through the VPA; we were looking at what the latest trends were — is I think the lowest-funded state system in Australia, which is a bit of a worry. I think we have some really good people and

we are heading in the right direction, but we need to look at our educational spending. If you compare Australia to the other OECD countries, we are not in the top 50 per cent on educational spending. I think that is short-sightedness, because we need to think about the future. As I said, if you invest in students' educational growth, you invest in your country.

I will go through the rest of the points there. We need to have carefully planned teacher professional learning focusing on sound educational research and worldwide best practice re student achievement. I know that Darrell Fraser is very big on that. I have accessed a number of those programs as I have been a principal for — what is it? — 14 years now at four different schools, and the last few years have been extraordinary in my professional growth, because I naturally look at overseas trends and I naturally look at research. I probably attribute a lot of that to Darrell.

I was a member of the high-performing principals program. I opened a brand-new school at Roxburgh Park and the people in town suggested that I apply for this program and do some research on how new schools are set up in Victoria and how we can improve it. My brief was to go and look at new schools interstate and how they were set up, which brought out some interesting trends within itself. I really got caught up in visiting schools in Queensland especially, Tasmania and Western Australia, and with the pedagogy of what was happening in these schools. Reflecting back now, it had a huge impact on the way I established my school and the way I could contribute something back to the system. It has kept me in contact with fellow educators and other systems, and I can see that we need to learn. We talk about going to America, England, Finland and so forth. When I went to a conference in Chicago in 2006 an American educator said to me, 'What the hell are you doing here learning about education? We are one of the lowest-performing countries in the OECD. I've been to Australia and you do some amazing things there, but you don't seem to share across the system. You stay in your own state areas'. He said that there are some fantastic things happening in all different states, but we do not go out and investigate to see best practice. Mainly under the national curriculum that may happen, but going to the different states gave me an insight that there are greater things happening in other states that we should be sharing and comparing and appreciating.

It probably goes to point 3, the third bullet point, that we need to provide opportunities for educators to visit exemplary schools and personally witness best practice. Darrell, via Richard Elmore, says that the success of professional learning is often related to how close it is to the classroom. In one-off programs you go and do something because you think, 'This might interest me; I will have a day off and go and do this', and it has very little impact on the school. Whereas if a group of people do a program or go to see something that will change their teaching and learning practices, and the group is committed, they come back and work with the rest of the staff and it will have a far greater impact on the performance of the school.

We need to look at — and I know this is happening at the moment, but I am hearing that it has been scaled back a bit — remodelling and rebuilding schools to fit in with a new age. The old designs of schools are passing. When I visited some in New York I remember visiting the Millennium High School, and Prakesh Nair has had a fair bit of impact on designing schools in Australia, at places like Reece High School and the Broadmeadows project. I went and visited this school, which is actually in the middle of Wall Street, I think, on the 12th and 13th floors. A fairly new office building has just been gutted and turned into a school. There are no corridors as such, and all the windows are low so you can see right through. There are lots of open learning spaces and lots of ICT access. It is completely different to a school you would see anywhere in Australia. That needs to change. Once again, we think of kids as being lifelong learners. They should be able to investigate and have hands on in a really exciting, engaging learning environment.

Teacher learning needs to be ongoing. I say to my staff and I say to the kids, 'I am learning all the time'. I attend most of the professional learning that occurs at my school. I have a professional learning plan that reflects where our mode of operation is going. I have focused, I think, in the last few years on major curriculum developments around the world and innovative teaching and learning practices, and I have tried to model that for my staff. It has got to be ongoing.

One thing I find with the teacher training institutions is I would like to see them link into schools and bring some of their best teachers and best leaders back into their secondment for a term or half a year or something, just to work with the kids. I think it is a lot more practical. We have lots of student teachers working at our school. Being a new school and growing quickly, we like to try before we buy, so we have a lot of — from four universities in fact — trainee teachers working in the school. They always say that the far greatest learning as far as becoming a teacher occurs during the teaching rounds, so those sort of things need to be looked at.

I tend to find that some of the universities where their personnel, their people, have been there 20 or 30 years, I just think they need to be regenerated. They need to get some best practice from the system and incorporate it into their teacher training. Also, there is that idea of having action research projects going, which I will talk about later. I know Monash, Melbourne and VU are really starting it in Melbourne in a big way. They are actually forming partnerships with schools and doing investigative projects and having lots of research people working in schools and trying to find out what is best practice.

The last point there is about allowing flexibility within the system. Staff at our school get 4 hours of administration and planning time, but one of those hours is designated to professional learning. We know about Richard Elmore and what he says about the need to get teachers focusing on best practice. The most successful way to do that is have them go into classrooms where there are brilliant educators at work so they can watch them. We did that last year. This year we are taking it further, where these people negotiate with somebody they respect to come in on an area that is agreed to. It might be questioning skills, student behavioural management or a literacy block. That person is invited to come to the classroom, but the actual teacher teaches, and then this person gives feedback on their performance. People like Richard Elmore would say that is the most successful, most impressive form of professional learning that teachers can do.

The CHAIR — So these people coming in are other teachers from the school?

Mr CONDON — Yes, within our school, and I would say that it goes on to your identifying high-performing schools, and where there is best practice you actually get teams of teachers going in and seeing it in the workplace. Seeing it at the coalface rather than somebody giving you a theoretical lecture about what should occur has a far better impact on your teaching and staff.

The third point is national and international trends. As I said, I think Darrell has encouraged the system to be doing that. I know with the OECD report, which came out recently — and you have probably had access — they came out and did a study of what we are doing with our professional learning. Darrell had their report on a website where you could actually access it, and it was very flattering to what we were doing here in Victoria. It says it is best practice, and we need to adopt that around the world. International trends need to be continually looked at, not only visiting, but accessing via ICT, via websites. Anything you want to know about education — what is happening — if you just know the term you can Google it and it is there for you.

With that notion of lifelong learning there is a growing belief that effective schools are learning communities. We want programs for our parents. We run regular professional learning, and it is targeted to school goals and staff needs, so it is not only the kids learning — it is the teachers and the parents. We ask wider school community members to come in, too, and we are expanding that each year. That needs to be developed further. I will talk later about schools. You have got billions of dollars-worth of infrastructure there. I worked it out once. It is about 82 per cent of the time that a school is inoperative. If you think about schools, they are open from 9 to 4 — 7 hours out of 24, and 200 days a year. If it is only used in those times, then it is basically empty — not all schools. I think there is so much infrastructure that could be used by the wider community. Private companies could come in and use the facilities to provide professional learning to the wider community. I talk about professional — —

The CHAIR — Can I stop you for a second, Terry?

Mr CONDON — Yes.

The CHAIR — I might suggest we stop at this point so that other people can ask some questions. We can certainly look at the other points you have yet to cover, then maybe just towards the end of our time — because we are sort of working till 10 past 2 with you — then we will give you another chance. If there are some other things we have not picked up in the discussion, you might like to highlight them at the end. If that is all right with you —

Mr CONDON — Yes, fine.

Mr KOTSIRAS — What is the male to female staff ratio in primary schools in Victoria? Have you got any figure?

Mr CONDON — I think it is about 80 per cent female, 20 male. We need to look at that, too. I think that has got something to do with the pay. I was at a reunion with some of my teacher college friends, and over half of them were out in private industries — and quite a few of them are multimillionaires.

The CHAIR — So that was the question that was not a question. Now you can have the first question!

Mr KOTSIRAS — What is your view about the 100 hours that VIT has put down for teacher professional learning, and what impact would that have on primary schools?

Mr CONDON — Are you talking about through the VIT?

Mr KOTSIRAS — Yes.

Mr CONDON — That is minimalistic. I would suggest it is probably quadruple that in high-performing schools.

Mr KOTSIRAS — But how would you cope? How would schools cope with that in terms of allocation, in terms of resources, in terms of teachers going and doing it, in terms of the funding? Who pays for it?

Mr CONDON — Funding is an issue. In a lot of high-performing schools there are personnel in-house who can deliver it, and that is a bonus. Starting up a new school, one of my greatest benefits is being able to select your own staff. As far as my leadership team, there are some of the best teachers I have ever worked with. I know those people, they know the ingredients to educational success and they can work with the other staff, but that is not the case in all schools. We need to look at how we can get those people working in the lower-performing schools. But it is a cost, and most of it is done outside school hours, too.

The CHAIR — Just following on that point, you are saying that in a school like yours you would aim to have three or four times the amount of PD time as required by VIT. How does that then work in practice? How do you fit all of that professional learning time in for yourself?

Mr CONDON — We timetable professional learning each week. We have our staff working in professional learning teams. We have got a prep team, a grade 1 team, a grade 2 team, and there are four or five teachers in each team, and they are given a coach and a mentor. We look at the whole performance.

The CHAIR — So when would that happen? Does that happen after school hours?

Mr CONDON — That happens at the start of the year, and yes, the actual professional learning is outside school hours.

The CHAIR — So there would be one night a week they would meet together as a team and discuss their professional learning program that they run?

Mr CONDON — And also we have, according to our school strategic and implementation plan, targeted areas of improvement. There is professional learning. Where could we bring in outsiders or gurus from the department? We would really like to, but it would cost too much. We have those people coming in for targeted areas to work with our staff.

We also have people coming in and working with them during school time. As I said, professional learning is my leadership team going in and working with teachers in their classrooms and showing them the literacy block and how to implement it and the numeracy block, and how to do assessment for learning. So it is hands on in the workplace. That is highly valuable, and that is happening more across the system too. But you actually have to have those people, and only the bigger schools can really afford to give those teachers the time to do that. Smaller schools do not have that luxury.

The CHAIR — What percentage of your staff might get out of the school to do external professional learning each year? Would that be all of them?

Mr CONDON — All of them, yes.

The CHAIR — So they would do some external as well as a fair chunk of internal?

Mr CONDON — Yes. The northern metropolitan region runs a lot of programs in priority areas, too, at minimal cost. Sometimes you have to put in a casual replacement teacher and pay for the teacher to go. For example, we have got five of our staff off doing the THRASS, which is a spelling program which has been highly successful throughout Victoria. It has been an action researched by Melbourne or Monash University, I think it was, and they are doing the training for that. But we provide that money for the CRTs to come in, the replacement teachers, so they can do this course. It is a four-day course, and there is follow-up outside school hours.

All our staff do have access to professional learning, but we get away from that notion of them just saying, ‘Something on computers — I think I’ll go and do that’, and going off by themselves. It has to go through a professional learning committee and be approved and be seen as being valuable to the individual but also, more importantly, to the school and the direction we are taking.

Mr DIXON — Terry, you talked about the colleagues you went through college with and half of them having left. Do you think the provision of more professional development, even sabbatical leave, and the system taking it seriously would keep teachers in the profession longer? Is that something that helps them feel valued?

Mr CONDON — Yes. I think the sabbatical leave is still there. You can still do that. You can work four years and get 80 per cent pay and then have a fifth year off, but that is rarely accessed by people. I think it is a monetary thing. When you look at Finland and places like that you need to recognise that teachers are having a huge influence on our whole not social but economic and intellectual development, and I think we need to recognise that.

I have recently been offered money by the private system to go and be a principal and an assistant principal at, surprisingly, an Islamic college — for more money than I am getting now — but I would not do that. I am 53, and I will not be in the system for many more years. But I think we need to put up education as a career that is worthwhile, not just because you think you are doing a great turn for your country or your state, but we need to make sure that it offers reasonable rewards so we keep those people.

One of these fellows I was talking about loved teaching but felt that the money was poor and he wanted to do things, and now he has set up a financial advising empire throughout Victoria and he is going interstate. To see where he is today and where he started just makes you think there are a lot of other people like that we have lost from the system because they do not think we are appreciated. It is not only money, it is also system wide.

I know people who have been to Finland, and recently a friend of mine went to Finland and saw what they were doing there and how teachers are held in such high regard — one of the highest regarded groups in the community — and I think that makes people want to go into the system, but it is also because they do get paid more compared to us.

Mr HERBERT — Thanks, Terry. It is good to see the VPA working closely with AEU over the EB agreement. It is good to see you have similar views.

Mr CONDON — I was a member of the AEU. I do not have any problems with the AEU. I always encourage my staff to be a member of a union for legal reasons.

Mr HERBERT — That is good.

Mr CONDON — So there is no conflict there.

Mr HERBERT — I was a secondary counsellor at one point.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Why would you want to be a part of the AEU?

Mr HERBERT — I was just commenting on the EBA current strategy.

I have two questions, Terry. The first one revolves around the tensions within a community about how much teachers are in front of the classroom and how much they need professional development. I know that I and a lot of my colleagues here are often accosted by parents who say there are far too many pupil-free days in a year, and there must be a tension for any school between kids not being at school and parents having to make arrangements for them, and yet your preferred option of professional development being where they go out and observe other teachers. How do you get around that sort of conflict?

Mr CONDON — I think that complaint is more for the private system, because it has up to 25 — —

Mr HERBERT — No, it is not.

Mr CONDON — It is only three days. If you discount the first day of school, which is a pupil-free day, we only get three other professional learning and curriculum days a year. I know that because my wife is in the Catholic system, and I know that at the schools my kids went to the amount of days that they had for pupil-free days was incredible — nothing like the state system.

Mr HERBERT — Can I just say to you that is not actually the case in many schools, but that is the case in terms of the award, basically. That is not the argument. There is no doubt that particularly in secondaries there are a large number of days, and I am simply commenting on the balance between how you get your teachers out of the school — out of the classroom — to do professional development but at the same time work out that tension between having to have teachers in front of the class. How do you work out that balance — that is what I am after — as a principal?

Mr CONDON — As I said before, as part of their administration and planning time they are entitled to 2½ hours a week. We give our staff 4 hours, but there is an expectation that 1 hour of that — at least 1 hour, and it is sometimes more — should be used to visit other classrooms to observe or have other people come in and work with them.

Out of school hours we run a couple of sessions a week, normally. One is sort of compulsory, and one is elective — it might be ICT — on an as- needs basis. A computer leading teacher might say, ‘At 4 o’clock today there’s a session on how to use Outlook effectively’, and she would have a group of people come down. But we have in our school implementation plan a focus on literacy and numeracy, and especially with so many new teachers coming in we need to get them in line with our school culture, so we do have targeted professional learning for those people. They are matched with buddies and mentors who work with them consistently to get them working in the same direction as we have been heading.

The CHAIR — Do you hold to just the four days of professional development each year or are you able to find some other days?

Mr CONDON — Three, because the first day is a setting-out day; no, just three. Some of us do it outside school hours. Five of us went to David Langford quality education, which was during the first-term break. That was four days during the holidays, and there are plenty of people putting their hands up to do that, so that does occur too, and at weekends.

Mr HERBERT — My second question follows on from that. It would seem to me that good teachers will put in extra time and they will go during the school holidays, and that is as it has been, as it will be and as it is, but that negates the problem. It is the ones who really need to do it who need to be putting in that extra effort.

I guess it comes to the second question. Given that I think we would all accept that the core business of schools is learning and that the core business of learning is the effectiveness of the teacher, it follows that it must be the core business of an administration of a principal to ensure that all their teachers are in fact effective educators and that if they are not, actions such as professional development are put in place to do it.

Is that part of a principal’s performance evaluation with school council? Is it a major role? It obviously is with you, but you are in a very high-performing kind of environment. Is that a sort of priority across the state for principals in negotiations with school councils or in their performance evaluation?

Mr CONDON — System wide we have an expectation — and it started with the previous government and has continued on with this government — with more of an emphasis on performance and development culture. You link your professional learning plans to the needs of individual teachers.

Mr HERBERT — Not the needs of your students? Students are ultimately your clients, presumably?

Mr CONDON — Yes. You look at the educational direction of the school, you look at assessment for learning — what the data is telling you, being evidence-informed — and then plan your teacher professional learning linked to that. But the teachers have to do a performance development plan of where they want to go educationally throughout the year, and that incorporates professional learning, so that is built in. They are assessed

on that. I think the system still protects the incompetent teacher far too much — that is my personal opinion — and if you are talking about caring for the future of Australia, we need to make sure we get the best possible teachers in our schools. It is very hard to get rid of the incompetent ones. I do not have any, because I have had the luxury of selecting all my own staff and doing it very carefully. But it is very hard to move those people who will not access professional learning and say, ‘Look, I don’t need it. I know everything’. That happens, I know; my colleagues talk about that regularly. Those types of people need to be held more accountable, for sure.

The CHAIR — I have a question. I notice in regard to point 4 you talk about the opportunity for high-performing schools assisting schools that have lower performance. Have you seen that happen? How can that be further followed up?

Mr CONDON — Wayne Craig, the northern region regional director encourages it — one of my mentees — was doing his masters degree in leadership. It was a program sponsored by the department; I think they paid half of the masters course. David Hopkins was like the public servant head of English education, and he spoke to this group of young leaders who were doing this masters course, and I was invited, being a mentor, to listen to him. Somebody asked him, ‘What was the most successful undertaking you achieved in the UK?’, and he said, ‘Building up the lower performing schools’. He maintained the best way to do it was to link these lower achieving schools with high performing schools to cross-pollinate each other — mainly the lower performing school, but also the lower performing teachers going to the higher performing school to see what was actually done. They had never been exposed to this before. He said all the data showed that it had a huge impact on the lower performing school, and on the other hand the higher performing school did not drop at all either. So Wayne Craig started to do that a bit in the north. There are some schools that had been paired up. I have not been exposed to the results of the effect, but he has actually employed David Hopkins to come out and work in the northern region, and I think there is going to be more of that happening.

It is in the poorer suburbs, because most of our secondary colleges that are struggling are in the poorer suburbs, with in many cases 50 per cent of their clientele going outside the suburb to go to other state schools, private or Catholic. That is a real issue too, because my uncle, Geoff Maslen, who used to be education editor for the *Age*, says that is the same in Sydney. He said he can see in the next 20 years — the next generation — they will be closing all the secondary colleges in the poorer suburbs and building them in the affluent suburbs, because that is where the kids will always go, where they gravitate towards.

Mr ELASMAR — What specific outcomes would you like to see from the committee inquiry?

Mr CONDON — From this inquiry I think, no. 1, a real commitment to maintaining the current level of professional learning and hopefully increasing not just the money but it has to be value-adding professional learning, so it has to be carefully planned. As I said before, we need to put more money into this. I think this government — I am not being political here — is to be commended for what they have done in recent years. They have actually recognised that the only way you are going to make a difference with the teaching performance is high-quality professional learning, and they have started to put some money into it, but I think it needs to be increased. I was reading something the other day that said 50 per cent of our principal class members are going to retire in the next five years. That is going to leave a huge vacuum, and if we do not have the succession planning and the professional learning to prepare our next level of leaders, the system is going to struggle.

Mr DIXON — Is enough being done in terms of the regulation and accrediting of PD providers? The VIT is working in that direction. Is there a long way to go? Are there still shonky dealers out there? Do we need to do more there?

Mr CONDON — We probably do need to do more. There are still some shonky ones around, but the grapevine news travels very quickly in the system, so they are soon black-banned and there is no work available for them. But it would be good to have them accredited in some way and have some sort of ranking of what they actually deliver, because that would have a real, positive effect across the system in selecting appropriate personnel to deliver PD.

Mr DIXON — Do you see a key role for VIT or it does it not really matter who does it?

Mr CONDON — I am not a great fan of the VIT. I just think it is a level of bureaucracy that we could do without. I would rather see it with real experts steering it, not just elected delegates who know very little. I think it is a white elephant, and that is the belief of the AEU, the VPA and all my colleagues. I have heard so many curse it

every day. The notion was not bad, but I think it should be a nationwide one, and it should focus on best practice professional learning and improving educational outcomes.

The CHAIR — Putting your hat on as the principals association representative, are there special needs for school leaders — principals — with regard to professional development that are not being met; or what are the differences in terms of the professional development needs that school leaders might have as opposed to the teachers?

Mr CONDON — Yes, I do believe there are special needs. I talk about people moving out of the system in leadership in the next few years. That is a major worry. I have mentored a few younger principals, and there are some dynamic people coming into the system, but they are very good on technical administration things, but I think the emotional intelligence, leading difficult people and managing difficult situations, is the area that we need to put more focus on in our professional learning, because they invariably bring people down and cause some major chasms in school communities. That is an area that I think we need to look at — building up emotional intelligence, making the right decision, the considered decision, relationship development, dealing with difficult people but also managing people effectively. That is the area that I think they struggle in.

The CHAIR — Is there some professional training available to principals and school leaders in those areas at the moment?

Mr CONDON — There is, but not really across the system enough. There is some good stuff available via industry, but as I said, it is cost prohibitive. It is just too expensive.

Mr HERBERT — I thought the government funded a body specifically for that purpose?

Mr CONDON — I cannot think of one recently. There have been some and some leadership programs incorporate small pieces of it, but I think it needs to have a larger emphasis system wide. You get a lot of young people who are highly skilled, with their ICT, their vision and that sort of thing, but taking people with them is another issue. You need that EQ development.

The CHAIR — Anything else you want to share with us?

Mr CONDON — I think I have spoken enough.

The CHAIR — We have covered all the territory.

Mr CONDON — You can read that. There are points there that I have made, but my mouth is very dry.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your time, Terry.

Mr CONDON — Thank you, and good luck. I do hope some real good comes out of this.

Witness withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 11 February 2008

Members

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Mr N. Elasmarr	Mr G. Howard
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Witnesses

Ms C. Hickey, education officer, and

Ms J. O'Shannessy, Victorian Independent Education Union

The CHAIR — Cathy and Jane, you are representatives of the Victorian Independent Education Union. Thank you for agreeing to come to speak to the Education and Training Committee with regard to our teacher professional learning inquiry. You would be aware that we are an all-party investigatory committee of the Parliament. I want to let you know that the evidence you share with us today is subject to parliamentary privilege and is granted immunity from judicial review pursuant to the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act, so feel free to share as broadly as you wish to. That applies in here but not to things that would be said outside. We are certainly pleased to hear any submission you wish to share with us, and then we would like to have the opportunity to ask questions of you.

Ms HICKEY — Thanks very much. We are very pleased to be here to contribute to your inquiry, and towards the end we would not mind knowing what is going to happen at the end of the inquiry and so forth —

The CHAIR — We would like to know that, too!

Ms HICKEY — All right. I think you have our submission there, hopefully. We presented a submission last year, and we are very pleased to speak to that. Jane, who is a practitioner at a school, Santa Maria College, has a lot of experience in terms of English coordinator, curriculum coordinator and PD coordinator, so she is going to add generally, but I was going to give a brief overview of some of the key issues, I suppose, because I know you will have read the report and we do not want to labour some of that.

I really just wanted to highlight some of the key findings of our policy position, and no doubt we are not the only people to talk to about the importance of PD. I think our view is that it really is a cornerstone of innovation and cannot be underestimated. Essentially professional development is an area that from our point of view has been underresourced for many years. I think as we move forward and look at places like Finland and so forth in terms of our professional development one of the distinguishing areas to look at is the professional development and specialisation of teachers there and the development of diagnostic skills. It is an area that we believe needs a lot of focus; it is not just simplistically on things like literacy and numeracy but it is the higher order assessment and pedagogical skills.

I think particularly here in Victoria there has been really inadequate resourcing for the implementation of curriculum and assessment, and the latest, VELS, in some ways is a very innovative but radical approach to curriculum because of its three interweaving strands. We are not just looking at discipline. Particularly if you are in secondary, but I think even in primary, it has created huge workload implications in the redoing of that curriculum, if you are going to do it properly. A large proportion of PD budgets, which themselves are quite small, have really been spent on the workload.

As you are probably aware, the A to E reporting really created a lot of problems for us in Victoria, because in many ways it was contrary in fact to the whole philosophy of VELS. The grappling with the pedagogical thrust of VELS — when you actually talk to principals and teachers, people are still just grappling on the surface with it. That was, unfortunately, distorted by that A to E reporting in the implementation — so the real value.

We wanted to talk a little bit about that because it highlights the problem of not having a professional development arm to innovation. What we have got is websites with exemplars on them, but you cannot just say, 'Here is an example. Do that'. When you have got an innovative curriculum, that is when you actually need a very innovative professional development program to go beside it, and that program has never been developed. What you have got is resource materials on a website. I think, if anything, we would like the committee to have a look at those kinds of complexities of that in its deliberations, because we have got 11 areas to be implemented in 2008. We thought we had it hard with English and maths! If you are in a primary school, you are trying to grapple with something that people still conceptually do not understand.

Leadership training is the other area. There is a huge expectation on principals and other leaders. You will be well aware of all the leadership competency work that has been done at the national level and at the state level. Again, that budget in the Catholic primary schools is being divided up in terms of the principals and so forth. That is another key finding — that leadership is a key area that we need to focus on in terms of innovation in education if we are going to go anywhere.

The other thing that our submission does is give a bit of an outline of where we see effective PD needing to be focused — I am sure everybody is saying that — in terms of enhancing opportunities for access. As to HECS — people are still undertaking study for which there is no support, there is no study days. We have in most of our

awards a diploma conferral or a degree conferral, and you have exam days — most courses do not have exams any more. People undertake that study without any assistance from the employer.

Our submission also talks about flexibility. I think when you looking at effective PD, the aim is flexibility and that people have an access to different modes of PD and that you have got opportunities for people to work together in teams and in clusters. That actually requires specific funding. Because you are going to work across schools, you have to bring people together, and that costs money in terms of release and so forth, not to mention travel. If your are in regional or rural Victoria you have a lot of travel issues and so forth that are not really adequately addressed.

I think our submission talks a bit about credentialing of PD. It is an area where we have lagged behind for years. Universities will not grant any credit to professional development activities unless they are able to see some kind of assignment. Essentially, almost none of the PD that is undertaken by people generally in schools has any credit transfer for into masters courses and so forth. That is still a big hurdle that we have got. I think that the VIT has those kinds of things on its agenda but that is fairly slow in developing.

I will stop there in terms of general comments. Jane might talk a little bit about some of the specifics of challenges in professional learning.

Ms O'SHANNESY — I would just like to thank you as well for the opportunity to speak. I hope I can give you a view of the things that I would like to talk about in relation to my experience teaching in Catholic schools.

Just to concur with Cathy, I think probably one of the biggest challenges teachers have faced in the last couple of years has been the implementation of VELS. Part of the reason for that difficulty was that we were not given time. Much of the work that had been done in previous years when we had to implement CSF or the VCE, there seemed to be time given, and plenty of trialling was done before implementation stages occurred.

I think that teachers generally felt much more comfortable with those programs because of that. They also felt that they were in partnership with the kind of curriculum development that was occurring. A lot of teachers really felt that VELS was imposed on them and it was imposed over a very short period of time. In Catholic schools we were actually assessing and reporting before we had implemented VELS. That created a tension that I think I can safely say is going on today.

The thing that we always echo, and I talk about schools that I think have become a lot more collaborative as places of learning, is that when I first started teaching I think teachers were pretty isolated. You would go to classrooms, you would come back. The principal would say, 'We're doing this', and then off you would go and do it. I think the most effective form of professional learning is when it can be shared and when it can be understood. As all teachers are not all learning at the same time, we need to bring most people along with us when we are implementing change. I think time and money has to be put into that. VELS is probably the one area that I think still sticks for a lot of teachers, both at primary and secondary school levels, in terms of staff taking ownership of the philosophy behind it and its direction and where it is heading in terms of education.

There are two other areas I would like to speak about, because I have had a lot of experience with these two areas. One is mentoring. When the Victorian Institute of Teaching began — it was implemented in 2001, I think — one of the programs that the standards and professional learning branch had was this idea of mentoring, which is a wonderful opportunity for experienced teachers to work collaboratively and in partnership with first-year-out teachers. Certainly as time has gone on and we see the profession changing, the sorts of teachers attracted to the profession, the sorts of mature-age students taking up teaching and also the ageing of the profession itself, the mentoring process is a wonderful form of professional development and learning, both for the mentoree and the mentor. One of the concerns teachers have had in their day-to-day business of picking up on those sorts of possibilities has been time.

If I just gave you a little run-down of what I teach, for example: besides being an English coordinator, I teach year 12 English literature, year 11 English and year 8 English, so most of my weekends are spent correcting. Of course with the number of meetings that we love to have at schools, it takes a lot of time. Taking on mentoring was a really big decision for me. I would say it was one of the most worthwhile ones I have had in the last couple of years — working with a teacher in their first year out — learning, watching, working with her, learning from her experiences. But I often felt that I had short-changed her in what I was able to offer because of the time factor. I

think if we want to maintain the professional standards and develop the professional standards we have, we have got to take on these things seriously. That means, I think, funding and time.

The other area that I suppose is an area of concern in schools is student teachers. I know universities are very concerned about the stretching of their budgets so that often when student teachers are coming into schools for their practicum, they actually have no connection with the universities or with their methods lecturers. They are solely relying on the teachers who are supporting them in their practicum. That can often lead to some real difficulties.

I know that teachers in schools really want to take on student teachers, but their first comment is that it is too much work, it is too hard. They have a student teacher for five weeks, and often the first comment will be, 'They are not like I used to be. They don't do the things, or they won't do what I used to do', so people find it a lot of work. As valuable as it is — and I have certainly found it to be valuable as a professional development and learning process — I think if we value the profession and the learning environment as much as I do, and I hope we all do, we need to look at the best ways to support teachers in school doing the best jobs they can.

I do not think I have really got much more to say. I think those are the areas we need to mention.

The CHAIR — Thank you for sharing that with us.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Are there any links between the Catholic school system, the independent school system and the public school system in terms of sharing ideas and professional development, professional learning? Do you work together at all? For example, is Santa Maria College working with Thornbury high or St John's school in the region?

Ms O'SHANNESY — No. It depends on the kind of professional development that is on offer. For example, the subject association offers PD — there will be people from all over the state of Victoria. In terms of that kind of partnership, you might find it from Catholic school to Catholic school, especially if they are all order linked. But independent schools are very much isolated — even within the independent structure, they are quite isolated.

We do not do cross-sectoral work generally speaking. Most of the large group PD that we do, say at Santa Maria College, is very much to do with building the kind of vision and community that the school wants to create and which is focused on the Good Samaritan principle, so we would work very much on our own unless we invited our sister school in Belgrave. As for other kinds, there might be the very rare occasion where, for example last year with the implementation of the new year 12 English course, we invited like schools around because we had a speaker around after school and it was a way of cutting costs — but that is very rare.

Mr KOTSIRAS — You do not think it is a good idea to do this?

Ms O'SHANNESY — I do, but it is just that it is a difficult management issue too. I think it is a great idea but it has not happened up to now.

Ms HICKEY — You probably have had some submissions on the AGQTP which delivers funding to the three sectors. It has commonwealth priorities but we manage to wed the two: state priorities and commonwealth priorities — and there is some limited sharing of that program. It is about \$2.8 million in Catholic schools and proportionately less for any independent sector, and proportionately greater in the department.

There is a lot of sharing at the coordination level of that. Originally we tried to have joint activities, and there are still a few of those, but that has actually given us a great opportunity to share, I think. I am involved on that state committee for the union. I think all of the three sectors work really well on that program but it is one kind of fairly small program. At the school level it does not deliver a lot but it does allow for a lot of sharing when they are within those particular programs, but some of them are commonwealth priority areas and some of them are broader; in terms of maths or whatever.

That is one opportunity but because it is particularly funded it has allowed for that sharing, but generally PD is devolved to the school and the school will essentially buy in somebody. I suppose our concern is more and more particularly with VELs, people have been doing the work, they are not necessarily doing professional learning per se, they are actually just trying to rewrite their curriculum. That has been an unfortunate development over the last

few years when you really need a rich input and working with universities and so forth, about some of the deeper issues, but people are really just using the time to do the work.

Mr HERBERT — Cathy, does the Australian Catholic University, which basically would be a large-component of teacher education, provide a lot of professional development offerings or do they just do undergraduate stuff? Is it a key corner post in proficient Melbourne Catholic schools?

Ms HICKEY — Particular academics probably are, there are some people who specialise in certain things and schools might hire them, so to speak, to present. For example, we always use one particular academic there, for legal conferences, because he is about the only academic working in education at all. I think schools by and large, form a kind of relationship with one person who might be looking at classroom management, but generally speaking, no. It is really the specialist academic.

Mr HERBERT — They do not offer a fee-for-service or a component?

Ms O'SHANNESY — No.

Mr HERBERT — I was thinking when you were talking, Jane, in answer to Nick's question, that we have got a lot of expertise tied up in universities around the state in terms of professional activities for undergraduates, and I just wondered what component of that total mass of expertise actually goes into schools as professional development after the initial teacher training?

Ms HICKEY — I think they are too stretched to do that. If you actually look at it, you can get them to come and speak, or something, at a conference but there has been a lot of shared consensus, if you like, about how great it would be if academics could work in the school when they are particularly visiting, as one of the issues. But in reality they cannot even visit people on practicums.

On the ground, we had all these wonderful ideas about them working with staff when you have got student teachers there and so forth, and how great that would be in reflecting on that, but it is just not a reality under the current resourcing. People who tend to work with us, speakers, essentially at conferences and things, which is not really what you are talking about, is a pretty limited form of professional learning. There is a wealth of experience but we cannot get at it.

Mr DIXON — Is there an issue out there with the quality of the professional development providers and, if there is, whose job is it to accredit them, do you think?

Ms HICKEY — Jane might be able to talk about VIT. In terms of the people that you have to get, classroom management is a very big focus, and certainly for beginning teachers. So you tend to find that there are about three people whom you will get, and everybody uses them and so the same people are used; consultants that are in that area are used. By and large it is a bit like the filter down. Somebody will go and you might have, if you are in a primary school at one of your staff meetings, some feedback from somebody who went to a conference. It is a pretty much a trickle-down effect.

It is very rare that schools will actually get someone to come in and work. One end of the independent sector does a lot of really good PD. Some of the schools will have fantastic PD programs. They have even got PD coordinators; they will actually do up the PD plan where teachers have got their priority areas, the school's priority, and they will often have some of the key people come in and work with them. But by and large the other half of the independent sector are probably, maybe, not really tackling the issue at all; it is pretty rare.

Mr DIXON — I am talking more about the actual providers, the people who come in, or the people that the teachers go out to. Is quality an issue there?

Ms O'SHANNESY — The Victorian Institute of Teaching, of which I am on the council — —

Mr DIXON — That is where I have seen you.

Ms O'SHANNESY — Yes. We are actually in the process of devising a website where we will get as many of the good quality PD providers on a website and that will hopefully encourage people to use that service and then through word-of-mouth we will find out. But budgets really have a lot to do with it. I think part of the problem for schools is that getting a provider out also means paying for lunch for the staff and there are other

offshoots of that, and it becomes a very expensive day when, if you have an opportunity, to take a day to do PD. It is wonderful if we can spend time doing it on one thing, but usually, for example, at Santa Maria we are introducing about four different programs so a day will be split. We might get someone in for an hour or so, but then I might speak about something or we will have experts from outside that do not cost very much. It is much bigger than, I suppose, making a decision about who is out there.

The CHAIR — How do you balance it all up in terms of the time you have got as a teacher? What are the issues that you would advise us about in terms of developing that focus and getting the balance right?

Ms O'SHANNESSEY — I think one of Cathy's first comments was very important — that is, that professional development is very much the vein of school life in that we are not necessarily a young profession. We as a profession are not as young as we were when I started teaching. We are further away from the kinds of formal studies that we did that often enabled us to be excited, to have ideas and to find out what was going on. That kind of renewal needs to happen more and more, I think, than it did even 20 years ago, and it needs to be an integral part of our teaching and our learning. As teachers we always know that the best teachers are the best learners as well. The more we do of that, the more we see it as an important part of our educational processes and give it the time and money it requires, the better we will be as a profession.

Ms HICKEY — Can I add there that there have been some programs like the middle years program in the department schools and so forth that have created a bit of excitement with staff, and it is a mixture of the opportunity to learn about things but also as a group do something innovative and come back and talk about it, look at how it has worked and do other things. What I understand of that program in the department is that it has worked really well, but whether it is sustainable — —

Bits and piece of it get picked up in our sector. That is the problem with our sector, I suppose; the resourcing always defeats the goodwill of it in terms of really running with a big program like that, but that kind of thing actually is very valuable. That really is a government, if you like, department deciding that we are really going to focus on a particular thing, like the middle years and having a structure that actually supports that. All of the research that came out of that was really valuable for all schools and teachers, and I think that is an important way to go because it gives people space to really work on something in terms of action research or something. In other words you are getting good quality, expert information, then you are applying it practically and then coming back and things like that.

We certainly recommend that there is more of that because it sustains people and energises them, rather than at the workplace where you just can become overwhelmed. You might have somebody come in, but the result of that is that you have got to spend the next seven weekends rewriting all of your curriculum, and you still have not really grappled with what you were supposed to be doing; you are just kind of rewriting it the way you are told to write it.

Ms O'SHANNESSEY — Certainly a number of Catholic schools that I am aware of — I do not know so much about the independent sector but I would assume so — have taken up this idea of professional learning teams and module development. For a lot of teachers and a lot of schools that really came out of the fact that you get to the end of a term and you think, 'All we have done is really have bread-and-butter meetings' where we are just moving from one point to the next without long-term development. A lot of schools looked at, for example, taking an area — perhaps the strategic plan of the school — or last year we ran some workshops on the implementation of the new VCE. So we can actually bring people out but also feed on the kind of experience that people have and the skills they have, plus give a platform for teachers to speak about the in-servicing they have had because often it gets lost if there is not an opportunity for them to talk about it and share what they have learnt. Professional learning teams, I know, have become very popular as a way of harnessing teacher skill and learning.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your input.

Ms HICKEY — Thank you. We wish you well in your endeavours.

Mr HERBERT — You wanted to know the process from here.

Ms HICKEY — Yes.

The CHAIR — We are due, we believe, to present the report later this year — November — so we are going through a number of months of consultation. We are doing two inquiries at the same time so we jumping a

bit from one to the other. The other one is on geographical distances in terms of students going on to tertiary education, so we will be using the latter part of this year — September, October — to really focus on the issues for this report and looking to pull all of the research together then and release the report at some stage early next year.

Mr HERBERT — The report is tabled in Parliament, and the government has six months to respond to the recommendations, and say yes, it accepts them, or no, it does not, essentially.

The CHAIR — We hand the report on to the government, and then it depends on us as individuals and other people to follow up with the government to some extent.

Ms HICKEY — I might take the opportunity to send the committee some information that it can look at if it likes. The two unions run a consortium. You might know a professional development organisation called the Teacher Learning Network. As part of the material I could send you the programs, which are really interesting, and some of the other feedback from professional journals just so you can look at the flavour of that because there are often a lot of reports in them. We will send that through to you.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 11 February 2008

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Mr N. Elasmar

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Witnesses

Mr C. Smith, president, and

Ms S. Bennett, vice-president, Science Teachers Association of Victoria

The CHAIR — Welcome, Soula and Cameron, as Science Teachers Association of Victoria representatives. You are our last witnesses for today. Thank you for your time and for coming along speak to the Education and Training Committee's teacher professional learning inquiry. Before we start I want to let you know that we are looking for you to make a brief presentation to us and then we will probably want to follow up with a number of questions so we can have a form of discussion. Can I let you know that the information you provide to the committee in this forum is subject to parliamentary privilege. I trust you understand what that means. It would mean that it cannot be taken up in the courts pursuant to the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act, which, of course, would not be the case for things that you would say outside. Thank you for coming along and spending some time with us. We look forward to what you have to share with us.

Mr SMITH — Thank you very much. I will introduce myself — Cameron Smith, as you know. I am a primary schoolteacher — grades 5 and 6 this year at Thomas Chirnside Primary School in Werribee. I am the new president of the Science Teachers Association of Victoria. For the purpose of today I will just call it STAV, as there are lots of syllables in there. I have just been recently appointed to that role, so it is a new and exciting thing for me.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Is this the first time that a primary schoolteacher is president?

Mr SMITH — I am not sure about that actually. I would have to check up on that; I am not sure. The primaries are taking over — slowly, slowly!

Ms BENNETT — The secondaries are there to make sure there is a balanced view, so let us not worry about that.

Mr SMITH — Speaking of secondary, Soula does work at Northcote High School.

Ms BENNETT — I will introduce myself.

Mr SMITH — You do that.

Ms BENNETT — Soula Bennett — currently I am the head of middle years at Northcote High School. I have been a STAV member I think for at least the past 8 or 10 years, from memory. My background is chemistry, physics and geology majors. I have taught year 7 to year 12, participated in the many conferences that Cameron will speak about. We also host an ICT conference at our school, which is a new initiative. This is in its eighth year, but it was a new initiative when it first began. That is just one of many examples that Cameron will allude to, to show you that we are abreast of the different changes that are occurring all the time. We do try to come up with strategies to equip the science teachers with what is required. So it is an exciting time for us, and having representation from both sectors I think is a very good thing.

Mr SMITH — Thanks, Soula. Let me just first start off by saying that professional learning, or professional development, is a really vital element of STAV. We host annual conferences, VCE conferences — the biology one was held today out at La Trobe. We also run chemistry, physics, environmental science and psychology conferences, and we are in strong collaboration with the VCAA and the chemistry association and maths association of Victoria and the like in running those.

I will give you a brief overview of some of the other conferences that we host: the Beginning Science Teachers Conference, which equips new science teachers with strategies and skills to ensure a smooth transition in their first few years. We have a primary teachers conference. The idea of that is to share ideas and resources for generalist teachers, who are sometimes lacking in the confidence of teaching science, so that is helpful for them. The ICT conference, which Soula alluded to, for years 5 to 12, provides teachers with worthwhile strategies in the use of ICT, or information communication technology, as a tool in the science classroom.

Then we have our science coordinators conference, which is a valuable weekend where ideas and resources are shared amongst the convenors of science in our schools. We also have STAVCON, which is our major conference held towards to end of the year, in November. That is a two-day conference, bringing together science teachers from primary and secondary sectors. There is also LABCON, which is a two-day conference focusing on the issues of laboratory technicians.

In all of these examples STAV addresses the specific needs of all science teachers with a broad offering of conferences and by fostering an environment where dialogue and networking, both formal and informal, can occur

between delegates, members of the wider scientific community, such as practising scientists and academics, as well as representatives from the commercial sector.

Firstly, I will touch on the relationship between ongoing professional learning for teachers and teaching expertise. The whole professional learning scene is more complicated and the stakes are higher because the Victorian Institute of Teaching, or VIT, is mandating that a certain number of hours of professional learning will be required for teachers to obtain renewal of registration. So much of the above feeds into this. Both tertiary institutions and commercial providers see an assured market for professional learning. As an organisation, professional learning income is now significant and important for us. This should not bias judgements about the real worth of conferences, nor about participants evaluation of them, but it is something to be borne in mind.

STAV members and science teachers generally now give very positive evaluations of our STAV conferences. One very important feature of our conferences is that they provide an opportunity for informal professional learning — the networking, the exchange of ideas, the starting of collaboration; that comes about when people from the same profession get together. It happens during and at the end of a conference workshop as participants interact, or over lunch or morning tea, or even at the end of a conference or in social situations. Although workshops and lectures get positive responses, many participants say that it is the informal networking that is most valuable, and it is that that is entirely absent when you have a professional learning model in a school, for example.

I will touch on some factors that will support high-quality professional learning for teachers, including learning methods and environments, for the development of professional learning in the pedagogy relevant to professional development of teachers. Science must become more accessible to all students, where meaningful connections can be made outside the classroom. This cannot happen with one-off events or visits. A culture must be established within schools that fosters and encourages dialogue beyond the classroom. Teachers find it frustrating when professional learning presenters extol the virtues of PoLT, which is the Principles of Learning and Teaching, yet their professional learning session remains instructional, with the lecturer out the front and the students taking notes. People who are already committed are listening attentively, but a large percentage of the audience wonder why they gave up their time to read a PowerPoint presentation. Interactive, engaging and enjoyable professional learning sessions are necessary to inspire teachers to take a positive approach to their learning and then take that learning and implement it in their classroom.

Presenters who provide reading material and then open the floor for discussion or ask groups to report their opinions and get feedback with an expert scaffolding them towards an understanding will always generate greater understanding and a change in teaching practices. Often as adults we forget that when it comes to learning, the majority of us are no different to our younger counterparts. We will put up with having to listen to someone drone away at us about teaching pedagogy, but for us truly to engage and retain and impart new knowledge to others, we enjoy activities that provide interaction with our colleagues or those closest to us.

Nowadays in primary schools children are encouraged to work within their favoured learning styles — for example, the multiple intelligences; hopefully you have heard of that — yet teachers often do not get this choice when they do professional learning, as it is easier to coordinate in large groups, often. Professional learning should inspire wonderment and awe. Presenters should provide engaging activities that allow their participants to discover new concepts or challenge preconceptions and allow for the fact that we are professionals and have the ability to discuss, share, investigate and explore how a new concept or recent scientific understanding can be taught or explained to the students that they teach. If a teacher is not inspired to wonderment or passion by the topic, how can we expect them to inspire the children they teach?

Professional learning that assists teachers in linking real life activities to theory would make our job as teachers much easier. Professional learning sessions that involve computer-based learning modules incorporating self-testing are very effective. I have also experienced sessions where pre-reading is sent out to all participants, so that once you arrive you can participate in a hands-on, interactive experience. You are then provided with time to collaborate with fellow colleagues and develop a program or plan for implementing the new change or new concept into the school's program.

Being provided with opportunities to observe outstanding practice remains the biggest influence on my own personal and professional growth as a teacher. Reading about it lets you talk the talk. To walk the walk I believe you need to have a safe environment in which to practise and take risks, be willing to fall down occasionally, but be open to exploring new paths; and once you achieve mastery, be willing to revisit or explore new paths with

younger teachers. Sometimes it is our job to teach them where to tread and what direction to take, but often it is just to see if there is a different direction previously unexplored, a new path worth exploring that we perhaps did not notice with old eyes.

On national and international trends regarding ongoing professional learning of teachers and reporting on innovative initiatives, the extensive professional learning run by many subject associations in Victoria is not the norm across all of Australia. While subject associations in other states all run some professional learning in some states — for example, New South Wales — it is more common for professional learning to be organised through the department. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's previous incarnations have at times tried to put on professional learning offerings to compete with those from subject associations, but generally without a positive response from teachers.

We are facing a bit of a dilemma and there will continue to be a shortage of students studying the physical sciences like chemistry and physics and going on to become engineers. This is a concern that STAV has acknowledged and it is not something we can work on alone. There need to be relationships and partnerships between the department, industry, tertiary institutions et cetera, where meaningful strategies can be developed — for example, in Singapore and Korea governments have put on some initiatives that are supported by STAV, and they are getting higher numbers of students participating in those subjects.

On determining how best practice in ongoing professional learning for teachers can be delivered into schools and learning communities, there is a push from within the department to have professional learning run within schools, sometimes entirely by school staff and sometimes by people brought in. There is some good thinking at the basis of this, such as professional learning being more tailored to schools' needs. Continuity in ongoing professional learning run by the same staff is an important factor. These reasons, however, are often forgotten and locally run professional learning becomes an end in itself.

Two sets of comments are often heard from science teachers: firstly, a lack of expertise from those leading local professional learning; and secondly, professional learning which is general in nature — for example, just focusing on the middle school or focusing on multiple learning style — can be a little bit general and not quite specific enough.

There is a push from some tertiary areas for all professional learning to be of an extended nature — that is, a series of sessions run over a term, a semester or even a year, rather than having a single workshop or a conference. Again, there is research evidence for the greater effectiveness of well-designed and well-conducted extended professional learning compared to a one-off event. This, however, does not mean that workshops and conferences are of no value. An example of a very effective professional learning format is the recent science summer school taking place over 10 days. Ideally this should be made available to all science teachers. We are confident that STAV conferences, together with the various publications on offer via STAV Publishing, will continue to provide science teachers with the necessary skills, strategies and resources required in order to provide their students with the quality education mandated by the department.

In regard to the examination of potential for greater cross-sectional links between industry, training institutions and schools in the delivery of ongoing professional learning, tertiary institutes would like to expand their roles as professional learning providers — it brings in money. They will claim that professional learning is research based, which is not necessarily the case, and have or will offer professional learning programs that offer pathways to formal certification. Teachers report a distinction between undertaking courses for the sake of getting a certificate and courses or workshops that are actually useful to them in their work in the classroom.

The whole professional learning scene is more complicated and higher stakes are on offer because of the VIT's mandate that a certain number of hours of professional learning will be required, otherwise you will not be able to re-register. As a result of this both tertiary institutes and commercial providers see only a short market for professional learning. The lack of planned updating of knowledge, keeping abreast of this field, for science teachers is inadequate and regarded with incredulity by those working in science areas in industry and at tertiary level. Other professions take it for granted that continual registration requires updating of skills and knowledge. The VIT's plans are a small step in the right direction, but in terms of science it is inadequate in terms of maintaining professional knowledge and not focused on science knowledge. A vast range of activities will satisfy registration renewal. The new VIT requirements where teacher registration is dependent on the type and amount of professional learning only reinforces the need for continuation of the quality professional learning that STAV provides.

STAV welcomes the interest and collaboration with tertiary institutions, teacher training, peer mentoring programs, chemistry/physics/biology outreach programs and working with the VCAA and other organisations, such as the Tall Poppy campaign that we work with at STAV, and we will continue to explore the benefits of such partnerships in the future.

In regard to examining gender issues in the delivery of ongoing professional learning for teachers, STAV supports equal opportunity across the board. We encourage positive role modelling in schools, where there is, as much as possible, equal gender representation. For example, it is great to see a female student who is doing chemistry having a female teacher who teaches chemistry as well, just to know that it can be done and is something to aim for.

Mr HERBERT — They have 80 per cent chance in primary school to see that.

Mr SMITH — It is the other way around — you are exactly right. With primary school teaching, I know there is a severe lack of male teachers in primary schools. That is one of the reasons I do it: to give young boys a positive role model as well.

In conclusion, we have a new and enthusiastic team on our STAV council this year, with representatives from primary, secondary, tertiary and the wider scientific community, to tackle the issues facing both science teachers and the declining number of students continuing to study the enabling sciences. We look forward to continuing to provide science teachers across Victoria with the strategies and resources necessary to equip their students with the skills required for the 21st century. Thank you for listening.

The CHAIR — Thanks, Cameron. Let us move to some questions.

Mr DIXON — Soula, you are at primary school. Is it a role that STAV has had to take on to upskill teachers that do not have a science background to actually teach science? Do you find yourself doing that?

Ms BENNETT — I think it is not something that STAV can do on its own, but STAV does take that role on board. The government previously has come up with initiatives like Science in Schools, so SIS became SIT — I do not know what the rest of the acronym stands for, but it relates to technology in schools and that is what it evolved into.

We were part of that, and that equipped not only secondary schools but primary schools with resources, in other words money; time was allocated; and then for teachers who could or needed to do some further training STAV would come up with partnerships with tertiary institutions. It is not something you can work on on your own, but it is something that we are aware of. In particular, the students are fortunate at Northcote because we have a strong representation of teachers who can teach the physical sciences. It is not just the stereotypical male or female teaching biology and so forth. It is an issue. STAV has tried to tackle it with different conferences on offer and also with the partnerships that they have developed with the tertiary institutions.

Last year we were fortunate to pilot a program with the Tall Poppy campaign. It is an initiative that began in New South Wales and South Australia where elite scientists are awarded. This is the second year running where elite scientists have been awarded. These scientists go into the schools. Last year was a pilot program. I worked very closely with the Tall Poppy campaign manager. We worked with three schools. We had cross-age workshops. The teachers had dialogue with these scientists from different areas. They came into the school, but it was not a one-off thing. I am going around the border, but STAV does look at providing resources, whether it is partnerships with the various institutions and industry or it is working in dialogue with government representatives, which I feel is very important — they are not working on their own.

Mr HERBERT — On the issue of wonderment and passion — Soula, I will perhaps direct it to you, because primary schools have their own different things — what strikes me is that there are some fantastic science teachers out there, but increasingly you seem to see young kids laden down in secondary school with massive science texts that they go through. Their bags are absolutely chock-a-block.

This is an age where you can simply turn the station on Foxtel or get onto the internet and have fantastic, creative, rich sources of scientific material streaming down at you. I am just trying to get a handle on how those two facts mesh in terms of what is happening in schools, and what we need to do to make sure that we have a huge amount of wonderment and passion in our secondary schools in particular?

Ms BENNETT — Secondary schools have another challenge that primary schools probably do not have. When we take on board the students as they come from primary school to secondary, they go through adolescence. We know that the most important things around them are probably their peers and their social network. Taking on board what you said is relevant. Students do need to have some material that reinforces knowledge. Whether they get it from Foxtel or other providers is one thing, but it is a responsibility of each school to come up with a program where students can go home and continue understanding the concepts.

It is about changing culture within the school. It is not only about textbooks, it is about pedagogy; it is the way we teach science. Having one-off visits, as Cameron said, is not enough. I know there has been a huge transformation at Northcote. I was privileged enough to be the SIS coordinator and then lead the science staff for five years. In that time we sat down and looked at what was it — how could we get our kids to connect? What did they want? Apart from surveying the kids, you look at making that connection beyond the classroom, and so the kids must feel confident with the program that you are offering them. The kids also need to see that there are pathways for them. The ones that go on to tertiary education, the ones that go on to other pathways, you need to come up with a program that will enable every student to pursue science as far as they want to.

Textbooks are one thing, curriculum development within the school is another thing, but there is also changing the culture where you invite the parents into the school to participate in the dialogue. One thing that I tried last year was called 'Bringing Science to the Community' where we invited scientists to come along. Parents, students and other members of the community were invited to come along. Ian Frazer — I am not sure if you aware of Professor Ian Frazer, the person who came up with the vaccine for cervical cancer; Australian of the Year 2005, I think it was — came out to Victoria. I found out, and I said, 'Look, on your way to the airport, stop off at Northcote for an hour, have a chat to the parents and the kids'. For the parents, just seeing this dialogue was amazing. What we are about, and I think the direction that we want to take in STAV is not only looking at the way the curriculum is delivered — and we cannot mandate things; each school does what they choose to do — it is actually changing the culture that is in place within the schools, making science accessible to all. Whether they want to go on and get an apprenticeship or become doctors of chemistry or neuroscientists, you have to have something in place. Kids have to be confident with the programs and so do the parents.

Mr SMITH — Can I add to that a little bit? From my experience, my school has had the introduction of SMART Boards, interactive whiteboards. That has been a major factor in lots of primary age kids just being more engaged in whatever they are learning. You can get stories or maths on the SMART Boards — they are great. That is something where we can explore the use of technology. These SMART Boards are starting to pop up everywhere. There is going to be one in each of our classrooms by the end of this term. I think that is something that is going to become more popular. There is just a higher level of engagement with the kids. If we are getting that in the earlier days through science — you can watch a DVD and pause it and you can write on it — it is just great. We are finding that the use of that sort of thing is engaging kids more. Shifting that a little bit more into high school could be something worth looking at.

Ms BENNETT — We do that too, but it is not just using ICT for the sake of using ICT. I think you need to look at the broader issue. The biggest problem that I think is facing us as an association and also us as a nation is the fact that we do not have enough students going on to become engineers. This is a huge issue, especially since most of the issues that we are facing now will be solved with science. If we do not have scientists out there, then we cannot solve them. As an association we need to make it a voice for all science teachers. We need to consolidate our partnerships and make sure that, whatever programs, if it is best practice in one school, why can't it be across the board? It should not just be in government schools but also in the independent schools — sharing of resources, having dialogue.

I am not sure I am allowed to say this, but I am going to say it.

The CHAIR — You are under parliamentary privilege. You can say what you want.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Anything you like.

Ms BENNETT — Collegiality was an issue under the Kennett government, which now seems to have —

Mr KOTSIRAS — That is wrong.

Ms BENNETT — It was the wrong thing to say?

Mr KOTSIRAS — You are one-sided! You are biased! Continue; it is all right.

Ms BENNETT — I must say that, if it was not for the Kennett government, Northcote High School would not have become a science and technology centre.

Mr KOTSIRAS — He saved it. It was running down. I lived in the area. It was going downhill. He saved the school!

Ms BENNETT — No, we saved the school.

Mr HERBERT — When did you move into your electorate?

Mr KOTSIRAS (to Mr Herbert) — Way before you did.

The CHAIR — We will leave that. Mr Kotsiras has a question.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Most primary school teachers dislike teaching maths or science. How do you overcome that? How do you ensure that they take part in PD to up-skill themselves, to feel more confident in teaching science and teaching mathematics?

Mr SMITH — It generally depends on the nature of the school — where you are working. My school runs professional learning teams every Wednesday night. It is part of our program every week. We are getting weekly professional development. We are encouraged, but there is no real strict guidelines as to how much PD or professional learning you do out of school — like going to a STAV conference. It generally depends on motivation of teachers. But you find that in 99 per cent of the cases, when a teacher has gone to a session and gone in with a positive outlook, their needs will become less and less. So basically, with the upskilling of maths and science, I think there is a role there with universities. Maybe just some of the instruction may be at universities.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Is there a place for secondary school teachers to come into primary school?

Mr SMITH — Absolutely, yes.

Mr KOTSIRAS — And does it happen?

Mr SMITH — It has happened. You are probably aware of the clusters — we call it the WITs cluster — what is it called?

Ms BENNETT — It is clusters. Each region where there is a collective of, say, three or four, maybe five, schools from primary, secondary and other special schools, they link together and they share resources. They come up with common goals, but they still have, in essence, the culture within the school. So there is a sharing of resources that occurs.

Mr SMITH — However, that is being dumped this year.

Ms BENNETT — It has ended.

Mr SMITH — For whatever reason.

Ms BENNETT — Last year was the end of it.

Mr SMITH — I think teachers love doing that. I went and visited Werribee Secondary College and spent half a day in there just seeing the different styles of teaching. I think you will find that from that strategy alone of just observing another teacher and just being in another classroom you get ideas all over the place.

Mr KOTSIRAS — What is the break-up at your STAV conference between primary and secondary school teachers?

Mr SMITH — Sorry?

Mr KOTSIRAS — What is the break-up, in terms of how many primary school teachers turn up to your conference, compared to the secondary school teachers?

Mr SMITH — In percentage numbers?

Mr KOTSIRAS — Yes. Is it half-and-half, or is it 60–40?

Mr SMITH — No, it would be 80 per cent secondary, 20 per cent — we have got our own primary school teachers conference as well.

Ms BENNETT — There is a special primary STAV, and then the ICT — I just met with some of the people, and this is a little brochure. I think I invited you, Steve.

Mr HERBERT — Good, yes.

Ms BENNETT — And you did not come to the ‘Meet and greet the top cheese’.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Typical! He was overseas at the time.

Ms BENNETT — It was one of the best endings to our conference. It was the first time we had come up with that. I might invite you again this year. But as Cameron said, we have got our primary school teachers conference; the beginning teachers conference, and they are primary and secondary; and there is the ICT conference, which is primary and secondary. But you also mentioned the summer school, which was an initiative that has just begun. That is a wonderful thing where teachers can get together.

The CHAIR — Is this the federally funded program?

Ms BENNETT — Yes.

Mr HERBERT — It is good, that one.

Ms BENNETT — This was a wonderful initiative. But I think you are right that there needs to be a lot more close collaboration between the primary and the secondary sectors where expertise is shared. We learn a lot from the primary teachers in the way that things are organised and the framework of modules and so forth, and we can share our specific expertise, so it is a two-way street. But the way that education is organised and also the working conditions — the constraints that we work under — make it quite difficult, because the only time that we can really do that is maybe outside the classroom.

Mr KOTSIRAS — So time is an issue?

Ms BENNETT — Time is a big issue. I know that we are currently negotiating conditions and so forth, but it is something that needs to be addressed because we are not getting people coming into teaching — especially in the science and maths areas — because they can go into other fields and get better conditions in terms of contact hours as well as their pay. Teaching is a vocation. I always wanted to teach, so for me it is my passion. Some people may need a little bit of assistance along the way, and it may not be their passion to start off with, but they might develop. But we have got to encourage, and I think it has got to come from the government. We have got to say that we value it and we should not pooh-pooh it and say that we are all bludgers and we are all indoctrinating the kids. But it is our fault, too. We have got to work together to come up with a way to show that it is a fantastic profession and it is very important, and we do need to have experts who are passionate about their area teaching our kids.

The CHAIR — As you mentioned the summer school, can I just follow up on that? The summer school program has pretty much been a one-off, has it, that a small number of selected teachers across the country went to?

Ms BENNETT — Yes.

The CHAIR — Where was the summer school for science?

Ms BENNETT — Adelaide. There were some in New South Wales as well. It depends on what? For science in particular I know it was in Adelaide.

The CHAIR — Yes, that is what I meant. The summer one was in Adelaide.

Ms BENNETT — Yes, but it was a select few.

The CHAIR — There was an English one or something in Sydney?

Ms BENNETT — Yes.

The CHAIR — Yes, that is right, and the one that you attended was in Adelaide?

Ms BENNETT — I am not sure. We will need to maybe enter into dialogue. And there is another issue there — access. We want as many teachers to access those programs as possible. We are also part of the Australian science teachers network, and there is that big conference called CONASTA, and that happens every July, so there is communication with our interstate colleagues and so forth. But I think as an association, if you looked at the other states you would see we are actually doing a pretty good job with the type of professional learning programs that we do.

The CHAIR — Just following up on that, too, in terms of getting science teachers to go to STAVCON, for example — as an ex-STAV member who attended STAVCONs in the past — do you still get the same number of teachers attending STAVCON, or what is the trend?

Ms BENNETT — It is actually quite a big one. I think we had 900 going, which, if you think about the number of science teachers within the state, may or may not be that big, but it is still quite big.

The CHAIR — I was interested in the trend, because the challenge is that there are a whole lot of other areas of PD that schools are wanting to be involved in, as you are well aware. Is that taking away from the subject-area curriculum professional development time?

Ms BENNETT — It is, because there is only a finite amount of resources within the school. The professional development budget goes a certain way, and sometimes teachers have to pay their own way to go to those conferences. And it is not just about releasing the teacher; you need to also pay for CRTs — the replacement teachers who come in — so that is about \$250.

The CHAIR — Yes, that is right. That is why I was interested to know what the trend has been, as to whether you have still been able to keep a similar proportion of staff going on to STAVCONs.

Mr SMITH — Yes, I would say they are as popular as ever, but I would not know the exact numbers on it.

Ms BENNETT — People do decide they may not go to all of our conferences, and they will cherry pick. They will say, 'I've only got X amount of dollars and I can only leave the school at this time, so that's when I'm going to go'.

The CHAIR — Yes. The school is going to only allow so many at any one time.

Ms BENNETT — It is an issue, and if you have any influence, maybe we can get our professional development budgets increased.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Steve can!

The CHAIR — There are a number of issues there, and it is a matter of seeing how the balance is going.

Mr HERBERT — Sorry I did not make the conference, but I will try and get out to Northcote high, because it sounds like you are doing some fantastic things there, if that is okay. One of the things that I was kind of interested in is that the government is spending a bit of money — and you were talking about getting people into the sciences — and there is a scholarship program ramping up to get university graduates, I think in their last year, to go into teacher training. It is about \$8000 a head, I think, and then for those who do their teacher training it is \$8000 for the first year. I think there are two scholarships. It struck me that that is a fantastic opportunity to get 50, 100 or whatever it might be bright young things into teaching. Does your organisation work with those scholarship

recipients? You could probably do an awful lot in terms of preparing the next generation through. Do you do any programs with those in particular?

Mr SMITH — Not that I am aware of, sorry.

Ms BENNETT — Not that I am aware of, either, but that is a very good point. I think at the moment it is basically left to the individual schools, and I know that at our school last year the principal had interviewed someone who was a scholarship recipient. But it is also very positive that the federal government is looking at waiving part of the HECS as well, and I think that is also a good thing.

Mr HERBERT — Do you think that combining those two, the HECS and the scholarships, there is an opportunity to try to have more ongoing professional development as they go through with your organisation and with others to really skill them up into science leaders of the future? Do you think there is a good opportunity there?

Mr SMITH — Absolutely, yes, it would be worthwhile. I would say that obviously having something to aim for is what every human being enjoys. I am not really sure whether science teachers in general feel valued or not, but certainly those sorts of programs enable that to happen.

Mr HERBERT — Yes, because if they have gone for a scholarship and they are going into teaching, you would think it would certainly be worth putting in a fair bit of investment?

Ms BENNETT — One other quick thing about mentoring, with recent graduates and experienced teachers; it is basically up to each school to come up with the resources to fund this, and I think if the government was looking at an initiative, they could encourage recent graduate science students to work with experienced science teachers. I have been teaching for over 17 years. I remember when I first started there was nothing formal in place and I worked a little bit closely with other teachers, but it was a sink or swim. I know that two of my colleagues who were also first-year-outs, resigned in that first year. It is quite difficult and you feel alone.

One positive initiative would be time, and in terms of money the schools will need to release teachers so that they can shadow each other. We do it informally in our school but I think it would be a very positive step if you could have mentors and work in closely together. Perhaps a younger chemistry teacher or a physics teacher working with me, and so forth. I think that would be a wonderful thing for the students and for me, but also for the other teacher. That would probably keep the recent graduates in teaching.

Mr SMITH — Can I add to that just a little? With my university experience I felt that I did not quite have as many hours in a classroom as I would have liked. You do your six weeks in fourth year and a few weeks here and there in the other years, but I felt that was not enough. With what I said before and what Soula was just saying, it is about just being there with another teacher, looking up to them and taking little notes here and there. There are some other universities, I think Melbourne uni has a very comprehensive teaching practice when you are at university, but some of the others do not quite have one. Maybe that is something you could look into.

Ms BENNETT — Melbourne University is taking on an initiative where these graduates or teachers that are undertaking a bachelor of teaching, two-year course will be in the classrooms for long periods of time and working with teachers, so that is a positive initiative. There is a lot out there. There is also the science communication that Melbourne University does. There is inter-science peer mentoring which is a partnership program with Latrobe and Melbourne, and Monash university is now going to come on board. That only works with government schools, but these are postgraduate and undergraduate students that volunteer 10 weeks of their time to come into the classroom and work with years 7 to 10 students.

All of these initiatives are important and as a subject association, we will need to take these on board. We are new leaders, we have come on board, I think at a time that is an exciting time. We are open to a lot of suggestions, but I think that we do have our finger on the pulse with what is out there and what is required. We will enjoy taking the challenge and continuing to work in partnership with the different organisations that we need to in order to further this.

The CHAIR — Thank you for your contributions today.

Committee adjourned.