

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 16 July 2007

Members

Mr N. Elasmar
Mr B. Finn
Mr P. R. Hall
Dr A. Harkness

Mr S. Herbert
Mr G. Howard
Mr N. Kotsiras

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford
Research Officer: Ms J. Hope
Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Ms J. Holt, general manager, curriculum projects, and
Ms G. England, senior project manager, curriculum projects, Curriculum Corporation.

The CHAIR — Welcome to this meeting of the Education and Training Committee, which is the first of our meetings where we are going to hear submissions in regard to our inquiry into professional development. Joan and Gabrielle from Curriculum Corporation, thanks for coming along to speak with us today. As you would be aware, with this inquiry Hansard is recording what is said, which will be made public later on in the piece. All evidence that is presented is covered by parliamentary privilege in regard to what is said in here, which of course does not apply to anything that is said out of here. Having said that, we welcome the information you are going to share with us in regard to your role in professional development.

Ms HOLT — Thank you. My name is Joan Holt. I am a general manager at Curriculum Corporation. Curriculum Corporation is very pleased to have had the opportunity to provide a response to this inquiry. We recognise the importance placed on education and training by the Victorian government. We are going to structure our presentation around the questions which were asked specifically of Curriculum Corporation and which form the basis for our formal submission to the inquiry. I am going to talk a little about the organisation, about our work and about the first of the questions that you directed to Curriculum Corporation, which was about the role of CC in ongoing professional learning of Victorian teachers. Gabrielle will address the other questions asked of Curriculum Corporation.

First of all I will give the committee a little bit of information about our organisation. Curriculum Corporation is an independent, not-for-profit, self-funding organisation. We were established to assist education systems in the improvement of student learning outcomes. We are owned by all ministers of education and we report to a board which comprises the directors-general of the departments of education or their equivalents — their representatives — as well as the Catholic and independent sectors, the New Zealand Ministry of Education and peak national teacher and parent bodies. The objects of our company include managing projects that have been referred to us by MCEETYA; facilitating collaborative curriculum activities endorsed by the board and in consultation with state and territory agencies and authorities; encouraging more effective use of resources by eliminating duplication, particularly in the area of curriculum development and information services, particularly library services; acting as a vehicle for the Australian government to provide support for agreed national initiatives and programs endorsed by state ministers; and establishing close working links with national bodies established by MCEETYA. In a sense they are the marching orders of our company.

A little bit about our work: Curriculum Corporation is asked by ministers to manage all sorts of key national initiatives that require the management of national collaboration, so collaboration between states and between the states and the commonwealth. Examples of this kind of work include the 2008 national assessment program for literacy and numeracy tests for years 3, 5, 7 and 9, which are currently under way; the Le@rning Federation online content initiative, in its third phase; and the statements of learning, which are now complete, which develop nationally consistent curricula in maths, science, civics and citizenship, and ICT. That is the kind of nationally collaborative work that we are often asked to undertake by ministers.

The company develops curriculum and assessment services and resources. Some of these involve direct provision of professional learning in a range of forms. Some involve the development of resources which often have professional learning associated with them. At present we are managing three major teacher professional learning projects for the Australian government which are being played out in every state and territory. These three projects were won at public tender. They are the Success for Boys project, stage 2; the Values Education Good Practice Schools project, stage 2; and the Australian Schools Innovation in Science, Technology and Mathematics project. Each of these projects is about developing innovation of practice in those areas, which absolutely intrinsically involves professional learning, either in the play out of the innovation or direct, formal professional learning.

These projects at the moment represent about 3500 schools. Around one-third of Australian schools receive managed grant funding to undertake these innovative projects in schools and to implement teacher professional learning activity in those designated areas. Through these projects we link to thousands of schools across Australia and they contribute to our understanding of education at the coalface and in particular to professional learning through those particular projects. In this presentation we will focus on the successes and barriers in teacher professional learning as they play out in national projects within state environments. In particular we will focus on the successes and barriers identified in school and cluster-based professional learning and successes and barriers related to professional learning associated with resource development.

For the committee's information we have also provided a copy of our annual review, which gives more information about the organisation and the kind of work that has been undertaken over the last year, so I will just leave that for you.

In relation to the first question directed to Curriculum Corporation about the role of Curriculum Corporation in the ongoing professional learning of Victorian teachers, I will just say a few words about that. A large part of our work involves developing curriculum and assessment resources to support teaching and learning in new curriculum areas. They might be new areas that have been identified as either gaps in performance through testing programs or gaps that are identified because we are in the 21st century and things need to happen differently to how they have happened in the past. So for example some of these new areas include civics and citizenship education; using ICT in key content areas; formative assessment, which has been identified as a gap in teacher understanding; and the studies of Asia. They are all examples of new curriculum areas.

Curriculum materials themselves can support teacher professional learning. They can do this in two ways. They can either do that by being exemplary resources which provide an example to the teacher of what something looks like in practice, or secondly they can do it by providing the actual professional learning resource to the teacher in the form of a tool, a module which teachers or regional officers can then use in the appropriate setting, whether it is regional, professional learning or cluster-based professional learning. So there are two kinds of resources supporting teacher professional learning in quite different ways. However, either type of material can very easily languish on a principal's shelves without some kind of face-to-face interaction with the profession. It is our view that without the teacher professional learning any curriculum or assessment change initiative will struggle. Materials are great tools. They are very important, but they are not usually sufficient in themselves.

Another key lever for change is working with stakeholders. As a national organisation we do that on a grand scale. We would generally work with five key stakeholder groups. They would include the jurisdictions — so the states, including the Catholic and the independent sector; principals, usually through professional associations; teachers, usually through professional associations; parents and the community, sometimes including industry; and the tertiary sector. So those five would be basic stakeholder groups for any change initiatives. With the resource or cluster-based innovation projects stakeholders can be engaged in a number of ways — steering or advising on the project, trialling, focus groups, feedback on drafts in the case of resource projects or briefing sessions where the aims and intentions of the innovation are shared. The importance of this is that it ensures the project is relevant to the stakeholder group, buy-in from stakeholder groups, dissemination of information about the project out to the stakeholder groups, understanding of and alignment with the aims of the project, and accountability for public expenditure.

During the rollout and implementation stages stakeholders can be involved in a range of ways — uptake of the resource, bedding down of the innovative professional learning project, content knowledge of the new area, pedagogical content — how you actually teach the new area — and further briefings and sharing of learning that has come out of the professional learning innovation project. One strategy we have seen in relation to all of our work in working in new areas and have found to be very effective is having a dedicated state-based officer to support a new initiative.

Examples of this approach include the studies of Asia, and we have one in every state; civics education, which was the case in the past; the reading assistance vouchers, which is currently the case; the learning federation, which is currently the case; and MindMatters, which again is currently the case. Where funding through the central agency is not available to support or pay for the salaries of those state-based officers it is sometimes the case that the states will allocate responsibility for that national project into the role of one of their own officers. Again that is effective provided they are not too stressed in terms of where that fits in terms of their overall workload.

In Victoria the state-based officers would work with the nine regions, the four Catholic dioceses, the independent sector and the stakeholder groups mentioned earlier. They in turn would usually establish a state-based reference group. They would also contribute to national workshops and reference groups — so planning at a national level, feeding in the state interests and understanding what the national project is about. They would undertake central or national Train the Trainer programs, which in turn they would roll out to key people in their own state. They would plan and negotiate the strategy for the state with the state reference group; provide face-to-face seminars, conferences and other forms of professional learning; short-list school or cluster-based projects, if there is a selection process to be undergone; support projects in the innovative clusters; train champions in the new areas — that is the case with the studies of Asia projects, for example. They would write content for the web, newsletters

and so on. They would also consult and evaluate at the state level to provide feedback on whether they think the project has been effective or is going effectively. Their key value is that they understand the local climate. They understand the networks, they understand the priorities of the state and they understand the curriculum of the state, and they can work on the ground at the local level using all the levers for change available to them to make it really work appropriately for the setting in Victoria. We find that they are one of the most effective means of supporting a new initiative, be it a national or a state one.

I am going to hand over to my colleague Gabrielle to talk about websites.

Ms ENGLAND — My name is Gabrielle England, and I am the senior project manager at Curriculum Corporation in curriculum projects. I have worked extensively in teacher professional learning for a very substantial part of my career.

Firstly I would like to just talk about the role of using ICT with particular websites as a method of providing professional learning for teachers. As a curriculum development agency we are regularly asked to provide online content and professional learning through a web-based community for teachers. To do this we usually have a central website, which acts as a hub for the learning community for the particular project or initiative. This is a focus of all activity and is supported through a project officer or officers who are constantly responsible for modifying, updating and working through the production process. We are moving most of our websites to a content management system, which means that the project officer is responsible for the site and is able to input to it on a daily basis so that the content can be updated fairly quickly rather than going through a lengthy production process. With websites, particularly ones that are information driven, a lot of our judgement about their effectiveness is about the volume of traffic on them and the peaks and flows of traffic activity, which we can monitor very closely.

We have had some experience with working with online forums, blogs, discussion groups and other methods of facilitated-teacher discussion and find that these work particularly well when the focus of those online discussions is very specific, when they are located in the project activity that is happening and when they are well supported by a managing agency which is able to provide some sort of moderation and maintain and steer the flow of content so it is actually quite focused. But unless they have clear structure around them, the teachers often do not use them.

With this area, of course, what we are aware of is that we are at the cusp of a new stage in the ICTs with the Web2.0 technologies developing and that this means that the co-construction of knowledge is being democratised and changing. So there are a lot of challenges for teachers using their social networking tools in a way that is productive for their own learning but also for the learning of their students. We know that this current generation of teachers are not digital natives and so for them to use technologies to improve their own professional learning — their focus: student activities and outcomes — it is quite a challenge. This presents a fairly significant question for governments responding to this challenge of distributed knowledge construction and the quality assurance that is necessary when we move into these new forms of collaborative online communities.

In our response we were asked to also speak about the opportunities for cross-sectoral links between industry, training institutions and education facilities and schools in the delivery of professional learning; and a number of our projects work closely with the tertiary sector and we have talked about those things in the written submission.

We find that working with universities can be extremely valuable, and it is very important in any project to determine the best place and focus for the university contribution, particularly in the areas of research expertise and educational expertise.

In cluster-based and school-based projects the universities can provide valuable support in the conceptualisation of the innovation, understanding of methodology, of action research and in the evaluation phase.

To maximise the effectiveness and alignment with project intention and facilitate the ongoing relationships between universities and schools, we do, however, feel that some sort of coordinator working in the managing agency has an important role to provide the relationship between the two parties. We also feel that there is a distinct difference between the educational and expert research input from our tertiary colleagues and the role of somebody who works as a cluster-based innovator or who has a role of managing the project initiative to ensure that it actually is seen through to its fruition and the learning is embedded in teachers' daily practice. Those need to be mapped out very carefully to ensure that they work in sync and support the teacher learning.

We were asked to also comment on challenges in teacher professional learning, and this is a particularly significant issue for government because of the extensive investment that is required to maintain the up-to-date pedagogy and understanding within the teaching profession. Improvement in student learning outcomes, sustainability of initiatives, and take-up by the profession are therefore of key interest in any project.

We mentioned in our tabled responses the number of barriers that mean teacher professional learning often does not reach the extent that is hoped for. But it is our view that whole school approaches that allow time for embedding practice and new knowledge and that build on a cycle of classroom trialling and reflection have the greatest chance of success.

In our project management we therefore work with clients to develop a model that is customised for each project, but that always has at its heart, embedding the initiative to maximise take-up and implementation of schools to improve teacher pedagogy and therefore student learning outcomes.

We were asked to speak about case studies and best practice, and we have chosen one of the projects that I manage within my portfolio called the Success for Boys project, and we have tabled here for the committee copies of the resource modules and a CD-ROM that is also backed up by an online website that is hosted out of our organisation.

This project is an innovative project and it was developed in response to government's concern about significant data about the poor outcomes of certain groups of boys within the community. This research data has been collected over a period of years and has come to the point where it is of concern in the public domain and it has acted as the moral imperative for government to take some action.

The Success for Boys project is a culmination of some years of research, and in the project 1600 schools across Australia working in clusters receive grant funding to implement the teacher professional learning package, which is tabled here on my left.

The project has as its core, strong research-based initiative, strong content, strong pedagogy which helps teachers unpack their understanding about what works for boys and what they can do to improve the teaching in the classroom and within their whole school community to enable all boys to flourish to their best outcomes in their own schooling. There had been a number of earlier initiatives prior to this, one of which was called the Boys Education Lighthouse Initiative, and the findings from those projects form the basis of the thinking that underpinned this project.

We have 1600 schools in the program, and one of the indicators that this project is successful is that all but about five of those schools will complete the project, which is a pretty phenomenal rate of success. We get daily feedback both within Australia and internationally about the quality of the research material, but most importantly the stories from the teachers themselves about how they have changed their practice and what they have learnt in their schools are telling us already that this has been a great success.

We note in Victoria that the innovation and excellence coordinators are often involved in the project, and it seems to us that those people have played a crucial role in Victorian schools in supporting local principals in their applications for funds, encouraging the take-up of initiatives, having the capacity to lead and steer the cluster through the project and finally then managing the accountability and reporting phase.

One of the beauties of this project is that it works on some structure — in that the schools are expected to implement at least two of the modules in the package — but then at the end of their professional learning they get an amount of funding in the vicinity of 20 to 25 per cent, and from that they develop their own local projects. So they go through the learning that is research-based, and then at the end they say, 'What does that mean in our school, with our particular cohort of boys, to improve their outcomes?'. And so at the end they then implement their own local process.

The other thing that we think is a very important component of this project is that it is supported by a small but very involved help desk — trained teachers who are on the end of the phone and who work through email contact with those schools, who know them very well and who are constantly problem solving and helping them to ensure that the projects are implemented.

So the conclusion of the comment about that particular project is that it works well because it is a collaborative project. Teachers are very much partners in the project. They are well supported because they are funded with some

time release and an opportunity to use the research of the project and they see it focused very much on the core of their own work.

That is the conclusion of our opening remarks. We thank you for the opportunity to submit both in the written and in the oral form, and obviously we are very willing to answer any questions or respond to any comments you would like to address to us.

The CHAIR — Thank you Joan and Gabrielle.

Mr FINN — Thank you ladies for a very comprehensive discussion indeed. I have only one question, and that is: having listened to what you have had to say, what changes need to be made to the curriculum or teachers or what areas generally need to be changed to prevent the situation where children can go through 13 years of formal education and come out being semi-literate?

Mr KOTSIRAS — You have got 1 minute!

Ms HOLT — One minute to answer a question like that! I am not in the state education system, so I need to preface what I am saying with that, but one thing that could help is something that I believe is starting to be introduced in some universities, which is training related to literacy education in pre-service teacher training, and making that compulsory. That is possibly something that works. I do not know. That is just starting to be introduced, I believe, at one of the universities and it will be interesting to see whether it does make a difference.

Mr FINN — Yes. Very much so.

Ms ENGLAND — One of the modules in the boys project is Literacy and Boys, and there is certainly always an opportunity for constantly sharpening people's focus about their understanding of literacy. I think we have mentioned quite a number of times in our presentation about the notion of whole-school approaches, and it involves working with teachers to understand that literacy implementation is a whole-school approach and that every teacher has a responsibility to understand the core principles of literacy and therefore use it in their curriculum.

The needs of students who are underperforming in literacy are very, very complex. There is no quick-fix, easy solution to their problems, because they are enmeshed in a whole range of issues that are societal, sociocultural et cetera, but that does not step away from the fact that teachers have to say, 'We have responsibilities for this, and we have to do our maximum to ensure that young people succeed'. But therefore we need to ensure that all teachers are very well trained and that their support for those young people who are struggling is maintained throughout their schools, because if there are literacy differentials when they enter schooling, they just get bigger. So we have to keep providing support and training for teachers the whole way through to enable those young people to survive.

Mr FINN — I am glad you mentioned the area of teacher responsibility, because I would be interested to know your view as to whether we have a situation about — —

The CHAIR — That is a supplementary question.

Mr FINN — I have another one. It is a supplementary question; we are in the upper house! Would it be possible that teachers might just see some students as being too hard so they pass them on to the next year even though they are not up to scratch in literacy and numeracy standards, and this continues on right through their education?

Ms HOLT — I was a teacher for many, many years, and I do not believe that is the case — that teachers would say, 'That is not my responsibility. I will cut them off'. I think people work extremely hard to do what they can, but that is not to say that they could not work more effectively if they had the teacher training to know what is the most effective way of teaching literacy.

The question about automatic progression is a complex one. I do not know whether your question is partly getting at that. There is the issue of self-esteem, and the effect that being kept back can have on a student is generally considered to be more detrimental than any gains that might be made in terms of literacy. Obviously I cannot give you all of the research in that area, but I can tell you that that is the general consensus in that area.

Ms ENGLAND — And for students with specific needs, schools will always work at individual learning plans to try to maximise their own learning opportunities. I think one of the things Boys' Education research talks about is allowing all students to succeed at the maximum of their own potential, so we recognise that within any cohort of students there are some students who will go on to be Rhodes scholars and other students for whom literacy will always be a struggle for a whole range of reasons. Schools have to be given the support to enable each student to maximise to their own best. That is a real challenge for teachers, because within any class they can have in their academic levels students who can stretch between five and seven years in their capacity and understanding. So it is a really big challenge for teachers.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Can you please advise what some of the obstacles are in regard to PD and how do you overcome those obstacles — whether it is internal schooling or whether it external? What are some of the major obstacles?

Ms ENGLAND — One thing that we referred to in our formal address is that society is moving at a faster and faster pace, and with the explosion of knowledge primarily facilitated by the information and communication revolution the range of things that schools have responsibility for is certainly broadening. Society is becoming more complex, so it is a challenge therefore for teachers to deliver the core curriculum of the authority which is responsible for them. So in Victoria it is the VCAA, which provides them with a core curriculum that they are required to deliver. But then for them to be on top of all the ranges and initiatives that are constantly changing and devolving, which requires them to keep their knowledge fresh and alive, it is a huge challenge, because they are trying to do their core work at the same time as constantly trying to broaden and strengthen their knowledge.

There is a real challenge because of the cost of teacher release. The evidence I think is quite clear that teacher professional learning is best located in their own classroom, through some process where they can take their learning, trial it, reflect on how it has gone and then go back and embed it into their daily practice. Government has a certain bucket of money that it can spend on teacher professional learning, and it develops its own way to do it. There are some schools that are very skilled at doing that and other schools for which it is a real challenge in itself. The obstacles can be quite diverse, depending on the particular schools you are looking at.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Have you found that PD is more effective when it is done within one school or when it is done amongst a number of schools, a cluster of schools?

Ms ENGLAND — I think you cannot generalise, because even within a school you can get diversity, but we are finding there is a model that seems to be preferred across the country. Certainly within Victoria there are four groups of schools working together. About five years ago we had a large development in what is called the Middle Years of Schooling movement coming out of research perhaps going back another 5 to 10 years. That looked at the students in the age group from, say, year 5 to year 9. What that research found was that there was a need to break down the divide between primary and secondary teachers; that each had a lot to be able share, learn and grow through working together. In most of our projects now the cluster models are encouraged with primary and secondary schools working together to both work within their own schools and also to share across each other. The reality is there is not hard-and-fast answer to any of this. It would be nice to have a simple solution and say, 'This is it: five things', and away you go. It does not work like that. We need to tailor programs depending on what is available.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How would you test at the end whether a PD program had been successful?

Ms ENGLAND — There is a large body of research done through the Ingvarson report, which tried to pinpoint the actual direct correlation between teacher professional learning and student learning outcomes. There is evidence that there is, but the direct correlation is not clear-cut. What it is is knowing that if teachers know their craft better, that is going to enable them to deliver that initiative more thoroughly in their classroom.

The CHAIR — Just in following up on that one, in regard to some of the programs that you have been involved in, you would do some of your own follow-up in terms of outcome?

Ms ENGLAND — All of our projects would be independently evaluated by a provider who is separate to ourselves. We provide data to them, and those evaluators would be appointed through public tender. So, for example, with the boys project the public tender was advertised a couple of weeks ago, and there would be providers all over the country putting in proposals about how to do it and the one with the most suitable methodology would be selected. It could be through quantitative surveys, it could be through qualitative case

studies, it could be a component of that. We have a report from every school in the project about what they have learnt and how they see the student learning outcomes and the teacher professional learning improving. Those would all be analysed, and we do a lot of that analysis ourselves.

Ms HOLT — There has not tended to be — although I suspect it is going to become more common — a pre and post testing of students in a fairly rigorous way to identify whether student learning outcomes change or not. With the reading assistance voucher program, which is about improving the literacy skills for students who failed to reach the year 3 benchmark or were formally exempted from it — these are students who are very much at risk and have been identified through the normative testing process as being at risk — before they undertake the one-to-one tuition, which this program gives them, they undertake a pre-test and then a post-test. That has been psychometrically set so that it is absolutely valid data that will come out of it. I suspect that will become more common, but it has not been common to date.

The CHAIR — Just so that I can understand how Curriculum Corporation has worked with the three projects you have talked about, generally your focus has been on producing the materials? Is that what happens? Then the materials are passed on to the target group, which may be a group of schools across the country and New Zealand, I presume. I am interested to get a sense of what personal linkages there are in helping to train either the teachers or, it sounds like, the trainer level people and then how much is then dependent upon the school. In terms of an innovation and excellence coordinator, is that a person within a school who then has to take the program and try to implement it at school level?

Ms ENGLAND — The models vary, but primarily we have done both. We have done just materials, and then money may be given through a different funding line to the state authorities and the independent and Catholic sectors to have people, but because in the writing materials there is a research base to it, often we would work with those people in a training capacity. In some of our projects they actually work with us directly, so they are part of our responsibility, and we would support them and work with them in their delivery of the teacher professional link. It is customised depending on a whole range of factors.

Ms HOLT — With each of those three projects that you referred to, the boys project was the exception in having materials. The other two the science, maths and technology one does not have materials; and the values one is having materials, but that is completely separate from the schools-based project.

Your question was about the linkages and how it cascades down?

The CHAIR — How it flows down from your work to implementation?

Ms HOLT — Generally the process in those grants-based innovations projects is one by which schools would submit an application or an expression of interest — and I will simplify this; that expression of interest or application would be assessed against some criteria as to whether or not that was meeting the aims of the project; they would put forward a project coordinator. That would be the person who is responsible for taking control of that project across all the schools in the cluster; they would be our point of contact with that project. In some cases there is a state officer, as we mentioned, and in some cases not. In some cases the relationship is just directly between us, as the managing agency, and the cluster of projects.

In general, though, even if there is not a state-based officer, there would be some form of state relationship, even a reference group, so that we were getting feedback on, and being sure that we were rolling out, a project that met with all the needs and proper processes and so on, at a minimum for filling and ticking all those boxes, at the state level, and preferably, though, at a much higher level of stakeholder satisfaction by linking to the curriculum, linking to the state priorities in science or maths. That is the kind of linkage that happens.

Ms ENGLAND — And those roles — we have to be very careful when it is public money, that there is an accountability trail that is very clear and explicit, that the reporting is quite stringent, and that every report that is presented on every project is read very carefully. It would be cross-checked with the initial proposal to make sure it is accurate, that funds are expended according to the guidelines of the project, the project intention has been met, and then if there are any concerns there would be questions immediately asked, ‘Can you explain why this happened?’ et cetera.

We follow that, and so there is that key person who has responsibility in the school. They usually need the time to do it. Time is a teacher’s biggest problem, so that when they are delivering their local curriculum, any additional

activity they are taking on means they need time to do the thinking, the planning and the organising. Those persons in Victoria are the 'I & E' (Innovation and Excellence) coordinator, in other schools the cluster coordinator — that is the person who does the reporting and who actually indicates, 'What are the measures of how we will be able to tell if this project has been successful?'

Ms HOLT — I will add one final thing to your question, and that is the role of the universities within those projects, as Gabrielle mentioned in her comments right at the beginning. In each of those projects in different ways the university sector is involved to make sure that the way the project is delivered at the school level has a strong research methodology in effect; an action research methodology, that they are not just doing something in a fairly unfocused or scatter gun kind of approach; that it has got a profound, rigorous and coherent basis for the project. The relationship also is between us and the university sector as well as the project coordinator and the state. It is quite a complex set of relationships to make them work well.

Mr HALL — Do teachers generally get enough professional development time to implement the programs?

Ms HOLT — Teachers are always grateful for time.

Mr HALL — Do they get enough, do you think, in schools now?

Ms ENGLAND — Again that is a difficult question to answer because to provide more time for teachers on a systemic basis is a huge commitment from government. But I think it is important that adequate time is provided so that teachers have actually got time to grapple with whatever the current initiatives are that they are managing, to really understand it, unpack it and then trial and practice it in their classrooms so that they are fully embedded before they move on to the next one.

One of the issues we have found is that schools tend to have too many things happening and if they do, that then becomes an obstacle. I guess the answer is, more time is always desirable if government is able to provide it, but why we know these projects that we have talked about have been very successful is because in applying for funding, part of your funding is time. Because we will have time for a project coordinator, only a small percentage is for teacher relief — the Australian government guidelines are usually only 10 per cent of the project funds is for teacher-time out of classroom. But schools are incredibly creative, they run things from 2.00 p.m. until 7.00 pm. in the evening and they work around ways of making sure that the time to do the learning is supported and the funds mean that they can actually buy time in some way or other.

Mr HALL — Do you have any problems in terms of delivering the PD that is required for the rotation of your programs?

Ms ENGLAND — Because these projects are voluntary and they are very highly sought, we could have run twice the number of schools in this project and in most of our projects we get maybe three-to-one applications for the ones we can fund — sometimes higher than that. If you get it, you know you are lucky. It is the carrot and the stick, though — you get the rewards because you have got the funds: you have got the support, you have got this opportunity, so that means that the actual hard work, teachers are then willing to take on board.

Mr HALL — In these projects are a lot of the PDs required on an individual school basis, or can you do a bit of cluster of schools?

Ms ENGLAND — Both, you can do it either way. We have a group of schools on Thursday Island doing the boys project now. Their needs are quite different to schools in Preston where they can easily cluster with each other, jump in the car, go down the road and meet with a group of schools, but on Thursday Island, basically, you are on your own. We work in different ways with those groups of schools.

The CHAIR — You have just opened up an area that is of interest, but a number of schools obviously do not get into these projects that you have suggested. How was a decision made as to who gets in and who does not? Is it on the basis of need, or is it on the basis of commitment and therefore are some school communities that could benefit from your programs really missing out and therefore their students are missing out?

Ms ENGLAND — Initially — again in the establishment of any framework of reference for a project — there will be very clear discussions with the project groups and the five stakeholder groups about how the selection

process will be established. There will be very clear guidelines for a process application. In the end it is a competitive process and it does mean that some schools may not get the funding. With this particular resource, the resource is available free of charge to any school in the world because it is on the web. We will provide a post copy and the CD-ROM to anybody who asks for it. The web site is up there with all the extra resources, and so forth.

You are able to access the thinking and the research. What you do not get necessarily is the funding. With the selection process, the other part of your question is about how we go about it — that is a very rigorous process, and we do a lot of our marking in an online environment. We have people who mark blind in that they do not know whose application it is. They read it, they respond to it, then there are state committees who look at the shortlists and make decisions, then that list will be put up to the funding agency for the schools to receive funds. It is very carefully done, to make sure that the criteria are met, that have been established.

Ms HOLT — I should perhaps mention that we do professional learning that is not related to the grants-based projects. I think I indicated that in my opening comments. Perhaps one example I could draw your attention to is the professional learning associated with The Le@rning Federation work. Originally that was to be left entirely to the states, but in this phase of The Le@rning Federation work there is now a teacher services group.

That has come about as a result of the collaborative oversight of the project and a request that some central support from Curriculum Corporation would be provided to help teachers, states and territories with the uptake of The Le@rning Federation content. So that is not grants-based, it is completely about how you work effectively with each state and territory with schools who are asking for the professional learning opportunities that are available.

Again, with many resources that we put out, as I said, we provide professional learning associated with either the development of those resources, while they are in the process of development, or during the rollout phase — again that may be with state-based offices or it may be just directly Curriculum Corporation providing the professional learning — it might be Train the Trainer. So is not always associated with a grants-based competitive situation.

The CHAIR — Time prevents us from going a lot further today, but thank you very much for your time. That has certainly been very valuable to us.

Ms HOLT — Thank you.

Ms ENGLAND — Thank you for the opportunity.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 16 July 2007

Members

Mr N. Elasmar
Mr B. Finn
Mr P. R. Hall
Dr A. Harkness

Mr S. Herbert
Mr G. Howard
Mr N. Kotsiras

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officer: Ms. J Hope

Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Mr P. Brown, executive officer, Country Education Project, and

Mr G. Milner, principal, Maffra Secondary College, and member, Country Education Project.

The CHAIR — We are pleased to also hear from Country Education Project (CEP) today as part of our inquiry. I will just clarify a few issues — you know we are recording everything that you share with us as evidence and we will provide that as a proof version to you later on so you can clarify the transcript. We will be using that for our purposes and it will be made public, too. You are accorded parliamentary privilege for comments that are made in here before the committee but not for comments that are made outside. Can I thank you both for coming along to give us your perspective on professional development in the country schools that you deal with. We are looking forward to hearing from you formally and then asking questions later.

Mr MILNER — My name is Glyn Milner. I am the principal of Maffra Secondary College. The first day of the term is great! Anyway, we are here.

Phil Brown is the chief executive officer — I think that is his title with the Country Education Project. We represent rural schools, obviously, identified on the basis that they must be more than 130 kilometres from Melbourne and more than 25 kilometres from a rural centre of 10 000 or more people. So we are really dealing with the true rurals and the remote schools. The issues pertaining to professional growth of teachers in our schools are quite different to what the issues would be in a metropolitan school or a larger rural centre. So our input or information to you today is really centred on that sort of background.

CEP is a unique organisation to the extent that it is cross-sector representative. It has Catholic, independent and government schools as part of its make-up. We have a charter to represent the needs of those schools making no distinction as to whether they are from the government or the Catholic system — which does make for some interesting discussions at some of our committee meeting sometimes.

CEP has had a focus for quite a long time on growth of the teachers in schools and the particular issues that come with that. We have had standing committees that have worked on different areas that pertain to your inquiry, in particular recruitment and retention of staff in rural schools, and the development of the skills of those teachers in those rural schools, which is obviously the focus here.

What we have presented in the document is a summary of the issues, as we see them, from a rural perspective. If I refer you to page 4, that summarises the main issues as we see them for rural schools. Some of those will obviously apply to any school — the issue of time, as was mentioned by the Curriculum Corporation, obviously applies whether it is a rural or a metropolitan school. The difference for a rural school is that time is not just the attendance time, it is the getting-there time, and that often gets overlooked, particularly when it is coming all the way to Melbourne. In the previous group I have a problem with the fact that some of their delivery is purely metropolitan-based, which is an issue in itself — but anyhow, you are not quoting me.

The issues there are pretty straightforward. Rural schools, as a summary point, have a lot of teachers who have been there for a long time. They have moved to a country area, bought a house, settled, perhaps raised a family and stayed there — that is fantastic. They contribute a lot of skills, a lot of history and a lot of knowledge.

Rural schools also have teachers at the other end of the spectrum who are there for very short snippets of time — maybe one year; two years is doing well in some cases. So you have two needs — one is to invigorate the staff who have been there for a long time, to keep them current; and the second is to skill up, on a continuous basis, new teachers coming into the schools.

Personally I do not have a problem with the new staff because I think it is healthy for the system if there is movement around, and one of the benefits for country schools is probably that they do get young enthusiastic people in on a regular basis. Some of them sometimes get married and stay there and become the long-term servants later on. But this brings with it an issue that the school is continuing looking at both ends of the spectrum because we do not actually have that many in the middle ground to deal with. They are the issues that we have addressed in these areas there. Do you want to pick up on that?

Mr BROWN — I guess one of the things that we wanted to share today is to not just focus on the issues but to look at some creative ways in which we might be able to address some of those issues. We have spent probably 12 or 18 months exploring a whole range of ideas and examples, and those four or five pages there are some of those in condensation, in relation to some of the ideas that have come up in a range of conversations we have had.

I guess before I start — one of the things I was thinking just sitting there before is I reckon the real challenge for us in terms of renewal and training teachers into the future is getting a grasp of the need to look at parents, teachers, the community and students working together and to acknowledge that we are all responsible for learning — not only delivering and participating in it but also getting it and being a part of it, and I think that is a shift that a lot of our staff need to come to grips with in our school system — that they are learners just as much as the kids in the classroom.

I just had the fantastic experience of going to Canada for two or three weeks, and to actually see the relationship that students and teachers have, based on a youth culture as opposed to a teacher-delivery culture, is quite mind-blowing — to actually come to grips with kids learning using iPods, mobile phones, MSN chat pages and all those sorts of things, which are just alien to a number of the teachers that we work with, let alone myself! So I think that is a real challenge for us in the education system — to actually see that the partners in it all have a responsibility to learn equally with one another, and I think that is a partnership that we can explore. Anyway, enough of that big picture stuff.

Some of the issues that we were really keen to explore with you today are around four key areas. One is new graduates, and the need to pick up on a number of issues that new graduates have. Quite often they are thrown into a school as the only teacher of their age not only in their school but in their community. Not only do they teach maths, which they are qualified with, but they also have to teach literacy at year 11 and also just happen to be the VCE coordinator. In their first job walking into a school environment which is totally new to them and having all those sorts of things put to them, and knowing that their first port of call is about 45 minutes away raises a whole range of issues for us as a system I think. So I think there are some really critical issues.

We also need to understand that new graduates coming out belong to this new generation — we affectionately call them ‘mobile youth’ — who will work with us for two years, as Glyn said, but then they will go overseas or work with whatever, and get into that tripartite type of cyclic approach to life. They are not committed to the job that we were, 20 or 30 years ago. I think they are some of the sorts of things that we need to tackle.

Some of the specific areas — I think we need to really start working with our teacher training organisations; and start working with them in terms of educating and training those teacher trainees around what it is like to teach in a rural and remote context. When we did some research two years ago only one university provided that information to their teacher trainees, which is a bit scary. The second thing is to actually give those young people the practical experience in a rural and remote context. None of the universities actually promote that.

Graduate support networks are an area that we have looked at in consultation with the Rural Health Alliance. Around 10 or 15 years ago when GPs were greatly needed in rural and remote communities, a support network for new graduates or new GPs was developed, and we have explored that notion as a possibility in the teaching profession.

Within groups or clusters of schools you could actually get young people working together and supporting each other in their new positions. There is only one such network that we are aware of at the present time that exists in this state, and that is in the Sandhurst Catholic diocese, which operates a support network for teachers in their first, second and third year out on a regular basis. What we are suggesting is that we actually start exploring a support mechanism for new graduates to get involved. It might be that first-year-outs get an extra 3 hours a week to do some professional learning, second-year-outs might get 2 hours and third-year-outs might get 1 hour extra, as part of that process to allow them to engage in that professional learning support that they really need as a new graduate within a school within which they find themselves quite isolated.

While we understand that in the current agreement first-year-out teachers do have access to that, our information is that they do not take it up or they are not supported to get it, or it does not actually extend out to a length of time that is relevant to them — it only goes for the first 12 months. We are saying that we think it needs to span out until about two or three years out for that support to happen.

Mentoring is critical. When we talk to new graduates, they tell us that having an older person or a more experienced person mentoring them is absolutely critical.

The other area is a real left-field scenario — and we have played with this over the last couple of years — and it is actually trying to tap into the youth culture and their mobility with new graduates and trying to keep them engaged in education in Victoria. We have put up this notion in brief, and you can read it in the papers, that if they spend

two years in a rural school and they decide that they want to go overseas and do some travel, we will do a link with a university where they can do postgraduate study for 12 months. If they come back to a rural school, we will refund their air fare or help them out with their HECS. It is about trying to work in partnership with them and work creatively with them to play around with their culture. We do not do that very often. We have got schools that actually say, 'If you're not going to spend three years here, we don't want to look at you'. It is a fairly retrograde approach to the way we support them. But I think there is a whole range of ways we can support them. We actually had a partnership with a university in London that was prepared to develop a project with us around a postgraduate course and place them in rural communities throughout Britain while they were doing their postgrad and spending their 12 months overseas. There is potential there that we can actually explore.

The second area is that whole area of teacher renewal. As Glyn said, the two cohorts that we struggle with are, firstly, the older population who are coming up to retirement age — in fact a majority of them have gone past retirement age — and the challenge of renewing them and enthusing them to stay within the profession; and secondly, that mobility group who spend two or three years there as a ladder step to the next process.

One of the things we would put on the table very clearly is that if we actually started playing around with the notion of clusters working together to employ staff as opposed to employing staff school by school, then we might get around that notion of professional isolation and promoting the notion of collegiality and sharing of stories. When you look back into the 1970s and 1980s when clusters were very strong in rural and remote communities, we had shared specialists, and we had delivery of LOTE by telematics, delivery of VCE across electronic means and a whole range of others. As we sit here today, that delivery is decreasing by those mechanisms, and yet the capacity of technology is increasing. That is a real concern for us as an organisation.

The other thing that I think clustering does is it actually sharpens us all. It actually gets a conversation happening, and it gets the conversation around what education is and what we are here for in terms of our young people. We would be very up-front about that notion of rethinking how we do clustering or how we support schools.

The teacher professional leave initiative we think has provided fantastic support. We were involved in its predecessor TRIP (teacher release to industry program) and took three teachers on in consecutive years to expose them to educational issues outside their own schools.

One of the suggestions we would make to you in terms of teacher professional leave is that we target perhaps 10 professional learning initiatives, targeting those schools that are located in a rural or remote location. Up front we tag 10 of those, and we allocate them to clusters or teams of people as opposed to individuals. We ask them in terms of their project brief to expand it so it has an implication for all rural and remote communities and not just their own. That is another idea that we are talking about.

Another one is a new idea that came up in the last week. We actually did some economic costings on this, and most clusters in this state could actually do it tomorrow if they wanted to — that is, to actually cash in the money they get for professional development in their individual schools, pool it in a cluster and engage a person to be a relieving or expert teacher who will then go into a school and release teachers to do professional development. I do not know whether people were around 10 or 15 years ago when the old district relievers were around, but it is extending that notion down into an ownership level where a cluster engages an extra person with the professional development money, but it actually uses the person to support the professional development as opposed to using the cash. That then raises the potential of ownership and the expertise that that teacher then brings.

The third area that we wanted to put on the table was that notion of ongoing professional learning — the one-day seminars, the conferences and all those sorts of notions. While they serve a purpose, I think there is a feeling around that they are a bit all over the place and that there are a fair few of them happening. People are finding it difficult to choose which one to go to and what is most relevant. What we are saying there is that we need to explore electronic provision mechanisms — which currently are not being used very much at all, if at all — and that notion of using web-based and more flexible approaches to delivering professional learning for staff, especially in rural and remote communities.

I had a phone call from a principal at Swifts Creek the other day who said that he spent 3½ hours getting to a 2-hour professional development activity and then had to turn around and spend 3½ hours getting home again, and he asked the question, 'To what point?'. There are those sorts of questions.

Be clear, though, that rural and remote staff get a lot of value out of the face-to-face and the conference-type facilities, even if it is only for peer group support, collegiate conversation et cetera. But they need to be relevant, the content needs to be challenging and the location needs to be appropriate.

The final area is around leadership training. I am not just talking about principals here, I am talking about education leaders. I think if you look at rural and remote communities right across this state, you will see there is a real challenge to employ leaders in our schools. There has been a significant shift away from people being willing to take on leadership positions, and I would think that probably close to 50 or 60 per cent of our schools have to readvertise principals jobs because the interest is not there or the applicants are not appropriate.

I think we need to start thinking about how we actually support potential education leaders, especially in a rural and remote context. I think taking that notion of employing staff at a cluster level and extending it to actually employing your leaders at a cluster level might be an interesting notion to play with. There you are talking about things like portfolios of leadership, shared leadership, collegiate support and all those sorts of things starting to happen. From an economic point of view, you free up finances to do other things, which is quite interesting. A school that we are currently working with is in an area with nine schools; all of them have a curriculum coordinator, and the student population is 1500 kids. The question is: can we handle that curriculum advice and curriculum development more efficiently if we look at a collegiate approach to that process? I think we can, but I think the thinking needs to be there and the support needs to be there as well.

In terms of education leadership within rural and remote communities, I think most of the experiences we have had have been that people who take those positions on do not necessarily understand, are not equipped for or are not aware of the additional responsibilities that they as leaders have within that community. It is not just being an education leader, it is also about being on the board of the local hospital and playing centre half-forward at the local football club. It is about all those sorts of other things. When we start talking about our training programs at a leadership level in education, we do not spend a lot of time talking about that leadership outside the education realm.

While we are involved with the current government in the current leadership initiatives for state government schools, we are now finding that it would be much more valuable if we could expand that program into a whole-of-community, an educational or a much broader process for those people to develop their own skills. That is it in a nutshell. One really creative suggestion around that might be that there are a number of community leadership projects happening right throughout Victoria, and we could support principals and education leaders to participate in those leadership forums as opposed to the reverse. They are just some ideas floating around. In finishing, we would invite you to jump in the car and travel to Swifts Creek, or wherever you want to go, and just meet with staff and talk about those sorts of things.

The CHAIR — We are aware of that invitation and we are hoping we might be able to take it up later in the year.

Mr HALL — Thank you Glyn and Phil for your contribution. First of all, Glyn, how much do you get funded as principal of the school in a global budget for staff PD?

Mr MILNER — I have heard that said a number of times. You do not actually get funded for anything. You get a global budget and out of the global budget you establish a PD fund. In my school budget, I set aside \$20 000 this year for teacher release and \$20 000 for PD. I have already spent the teacher release, because there is a whole range of issues within our neck of the woods — floods and fires and droughts and all sorts of exciting things — and the PD money is what basically goes for people such as the Curriculum Corporation, sending your staff to it and bringing people into local areas. Whatever that is as a percentage of my school budget — staff included it is about \$3 million — I am spending that much on PD, and that would be a roundabout figure I would spend every year. On top of that is funding that you get for other activities — the teacher professional leave that Phil mentioned before. My school was able to be part of that three years ago. That is the single most effective PD that I have ever had a staff member involved in for one reason, and one reason alone — they had the time. They could go off, they did research. I sent them all over Australia. I sent them to Western Australia to Queensland to South Australia to get those new ideas, to invigorate. They then came back and, because of the money that they had for the release time, they could spend the time developing a program. We now have an absolutely brilliant year 9 program. Kids turn up. They are never away. It is a pain in the backside, but anyhow.

The satisfaction levels were up at 90 per cent plus, and all the indicators of this attachment to the school. That only came about because those four staff were able to be given the time to get out of the school and do the research, come back and develop the program and start it. Too much PD money is where the staff go off, they have a great chat, they might get a good idea and somebody might come back and use it, or they go off and come back and say that the morning tea was really nice, and that was it. It is a balancing act for a principal between the fact that you do need to give your staff the opportunity to do it. There is that collegiate contact that they need to have. There is that release valve that they need to have, and I do not begrudge the \$20 000 I spend on that, but in terms of returns for those dollars, that is one of those ongoing questions.

I have a whole program where my staff, when they come back, have to deliver to the other staff about what they have done — the train-the-trainer idea. The end result is questionable. The point was made earlier that there are a lot of demands on teachers in schools. This year if a school has not focused on the introduction of VELs and an introduction of the new reporting process and the development of new programs on that, they have missed the boat. That should have been the no. 1 priority and everything else should have been secondary, but we have probably had 20 or 30 other initiatives that have been thrown at us over the last six months. I should be careful who's on which side of politics in front of me.

Mr HALL — I appreciate that answer. How does that relate to the new requirements by the institute of teaching that will require teachers to undertake, what, 100 hours of PD every five years?

Mr MILNER — Is VIT here yet? It is a waste of time — seriously. I mean, anybody can sign off and say that the staff have done that PD. It is a piece of bureaucracy that will get ticked off. I am sorry, but as a principal who has been doing this for longer than I want to remember, it is just another thing, and yet we will tick it. The only effective PD is where the teachers want to do it and they have the time to be able to come back and make use of it and have other support. That is where the network or cluster approach is what needs to happen. So much PD requires more than one person to make it achievable. The individual PD really comes down to the subject association conferences which are very valuable and very invigorating for the individual. Most other PD needs a group of staff to be able to drive whatever the change would be. The VIT is mandating however many hours. It will be interesting to see the actual written requirements, but to be honest I do not think it is going to change much at all.

Mr HALL — Who is going to tick the box for casual relief teachers in country Victoria?

Mr BROWN — Where are they, Peter?

Mr HALL — That is the problem already, isn't it — the shortage of CRTs, and the requirement to also have 100 hours of PD. I see that as an issue. I have raised that in the Parliament. Do you see that as an issue?

Mr MILNER — Absolutely. CRTs are so few and far between as it is. The ones that are willing to do it, for whatever reason that they are willing to do it, will want the \$216 a day. They do not want to be spending their time and not getting that money to go off and do PD to meet the requirements. Once again, I would like to see the details of what is expected to be achieved in that. Again, I would ask why; what is it going to achieve?

Mr HALL — I gather you would not be contributing to the cost of PD for CRTs? You have got enough with your own staff already.

Mr MILNER — I would have to have a pretty strong argument put to me, and I would have to have a pretty strong argument to put to the members of my school community to use the school money to support somebody who may actually end up supporting a different school or a different system, even though I said we talk to the others.

Mr BROWN — Peter, can I shift the conversation, because I reckon that is really fascinating and you hit some really hard nails on the head. I reckon if you actually moved the conversation from you talking to me about one school or to Glyn about one school, to actually talking to a community around supporting good quality learning in this community, the conversation might be totally different. If you sat Glyn around a table with seven other principals in the Maffra community, for example, and the conversation is had about actually supporting the professional learning of our staff, the conversation would be totally different to me just speaking to Glyn at Maffra Secondary College, and I think from our experience —

Mr HALL — What is preventing that network approach now?

Mr MILNER — It is not, depending on where it is. Something that was said before was that the cluster educator is not based at one school. The cluster educator is employed by one school simply because they get the money and they work for a group of schools, and that was something that somebody said before, which seemed to be a misunderstanding. But my cluster I believe works quite effectively because we do work as a team. We have introduced the Boys in Schools program that we spoke about. We have actually funded that and we have worked with primary schools in that. POLT is the professional principles of learning and teaching that we are staffing. All the schools in our cluster work through that, and it works, but it has taken an enormous amount of time and energy to get those two things happening. If we tried to do it individually, it just would not have happened. But there are other networks that have even a stronger working relationship than what my cluster does — sorry, the cluster that I am part of does.

The CHAIR — So what is the recipe for a successful cluster?

Mr BROWN — I think the answer is simple. In the 1970s and 1980s when all those innovative projects were starting to happen around post-compulsory, around shared special and around LOTE, and all those sorts of programs, the money was allocated to a community and not an individual school. All the commonwealth money went to a conglomerate of schools which then had to resolve how that money or resources were actually supported. Currently what we have is all those resources coming down through an individual school. Then it is up to that individual school to choose whether there are clusters and, secondly, whether they contribute some of those finances to that cluster to help them do it.

I think it would be really interesting from a rural and remote perspective to start rethinking. Okay, you can have your core funding within your budget, but it might be that we actually phase it in over a period of time so that with all the commonwealth money that is targeted around literacy or geographic isolation, or whatever, we are going to ask you to work as a cluster now and we are going to fund you as a cluster, because I think the value that I saw happening in the 1970s and 1980s around clustering was not the money; it was the conversation that the money generated. I can remember sitting in meetings till 12.30 in the morning arguing over \$5.50, and it was about the debate, but the outcome was fantastic, and the money almost became irrelevant.

But the mindset I think subtly has changed and the thinking has followed that subtle change — that is, that the money now goes to Glyn as a principal in one school. If we said to Glyn, ‘We are going to take off your literacy money and targeted commonwealth money; you can still have access to it, but you have got to converse with nine others around that money’, I think the conversation would be incredibly rich. If you actually then translated that into a professional learning process, that would be an interesting concept as well. That was where that cluster relief-type teacher expertise started to float around. If we actually pooled all our professional learning money around the nine schools — if we want to use Maffra as an example — there would be quite a resource sitting on the table to have a conversation about.

The CHAIR — So why are there not a large number of schools that you are representing agreeing with that view or taking on that decision to cluster?

Mr MILNER — Because education is based on a market economy. The more kids that I have got in my school, the more funds I get; therefore, the safer, the stronger, the more resilient, the more creative my school can be.

The CHAIR — So you see yourself competing against other schools?

Mr MILNER — Fair dinkum. Show me a school that does not.

The CHAIR — I would have thought in regional or rural Victoria that is less likely to be the case.

Mr MILNER — It might be less likely. I have worked in Melbourne for a long time. I have now been principal at two country schools. One of them did not have any competitors because it was too far away. Now I am in competition with the local schools, whether they are Catholic or state. It is just a fact of life. The more bums on seats I have, the more resources I have to do all the things I want to do with my kids. In rural Victoria the numbers of kids are shrinking, therefore it is more cutthroat. Anybody who tells you it is not an issue, I am sorry but they are fibbing.

Mr ELASMAR — I note you said there are a number of teachers who are close to retirement. Have we got enough qualified teachers to replace them when they retire?

Mr MILNER — There are two parts to that question. Are there enough teachers? The answer is probably yes, in terms of they have the qualifications. Are they up to scratch? I think not. I have just filled a position that I only found out about with a couple of days notice at the end of last term. I had five applicants. Out of those five applicants, I have appointed one, and that was the only one that I could seriously consider. The others, while they had the piece of paper saying they were qualified, really did not have the background, did not have the knowledge, did not have the understanding to be able to take on a role. When I have people ring me and say, ‘Yes, I would like to apply for a position’, I always say, ‘Do you know where Maffra is?’. ‘Where is it?’ they ask; they have not bothered to check whether it is a metropolitan or a country school. One gentleman lived in Elsternwick. He said, ‘The Princes Highway. I am right on the Princes Highway, I can drive.’. It is a 3 hour drive there and a 3 hour drive back, but he reckoned he could drive. That is the difference. This is really frustrating for principal’s associations. We keep getting told there are a number of applicants. The recruitment online process, which is the employment system for the government system, will show that yes, people are being referred to jobs, but whether they actually apply is highly questionable, and whether they have the background to be able to apply is also highly questionable.

I would say there are two parts to the answer. The numbers would show that yes, there are enough people — there may be shortages in certain areas — but the quality of the applicants is very questionable.

Mr BROWN — I would think that that is a fair comment for any classification above leading teacher in rural and remote schools. I think there is a real challenge. At AP level, at principal level, at the old head teacher in small schools level, it is a pretty common story.

Mr MILNER — At a principal level, the system will show you that there are probably four or five applicants, at least, for every position, but, boy, probably a lot of those four or five are not really up to the level yet. They have not met the standards.

Mr FINN — Given the problem that you have just described, how much does that compromise the standard of education that country kids get?

Mr MILNER — How much does it compromise it? Gee whiz, how do I answer that one? I would argue that kids in most country schools are getting a fantastic education. I have 58 teachers; I have 58 professionals. There is varying ability within those 58 professionals. The kids still get taught. The biggest disadvantage for kids in country areas is the access to resources compared to kids in larger rural centres or in metropolitan Melbourne — the exposure to ideas. I have got teachers at my school who could get a job anywhere; they are fantastic. I think that would apply to any school. I imagine the quality of the applicants in some metropolitan schools is also pretty questionable. I do not know that the kids are being compromised in terms of the quality of the teaching. They are sometimes compromised in terms of the breadth of curriculum that they can access. They are sometimes compromised in terms of the breadth of the experience that the teachers have.

Your committee is now looking at the breadth of exposure to new experiences and new ideas, which is also a questionable area. Is the education compromised? I do not think the teachers as such are compromising the kids’ education. In many respects they are probably being advantaged, because the relationship that Phil spoke about before is very different. The people who succeed in country areas are ones who know that yes, I will see the kids selling me the litre of milk down at the supermarket — if you have a supermarket in your town — that night. They know that if you do go to the footy — if they are silly enough still to play football — they will have one of them on them at centre half-back or whatever it might be. They are the ones who succeed. The relationships are fantastic, and the results you can get out of the kids is so much better. I never experienced that in 15 years of teaching in Melbourne.

Mr HALL — Do you have any views, Phil and Glyn, about the content of PD and what is required? Is it curriculum content or is it teaching method content that is required most in PD? Is it an inspirational type concept to re-motivate people, or is it a combination of all of those?

Mr MILNER — It is all of those. All of them come in varying quality. One thing you touched on before is that there is an enormous industry of professional development for teachers. Like any industry, some of it is good, some of it is pretty average, and some of it is downright appalling.

Mr HALL — What about the form the PD takes? I notice, Glyn, in one of your other answers you were talking about the success of giving some extended leave for teachers to travel and participate and get experiences elsewhere. What is the value of the one-dayers compared with that extended leave? What would your thoughts be if there was a general sabbatical PD leave — going back to university or a particular program for a term every five years or something like that?

Mr MILNER — In the right circumstances, for the right person, for the right need, that would be great. I know we have said that sometimes the one-dayers are questionable — and sometimes they are — but the one-dayers can still be very effective. One of your criteria was about inspiration. The one-dayer can be really good in terms of being able to reinvigorate and inspire a teacher. A five-day program might start out inspiring but just be downright boring by the third day. It is a mix and it depends on the scenario. If you are introducing a new program, one day is probably not going to get you anywhere. You need to find out about it, you need to see what the implications are, you need to find out, from other schools that have already trialled it, what is involved and how to do it. That takes more than one day. It is then the planning. How is it going to work at Maffra Secondary College or Robinvale, or wherever it might be? That is what you have to look at.

The CHAIR — Can I just finish by asking whether you have seen any success in online professional development programs? Is there a bit of a take-up of opportunity to do something successfully with online stuff.

Mr BROWN — I have not seen huge success rates. I have seen some attempts to deliver some professional learning online. I think if you actually start talking about online, it is another tool that you add to the process. Some of the retraining processes that we have in place from our universities to pick up local teachers, to retrain people to become teachers, are trying to do some online stuff, but it is getting a really interesting mix. Especially in the school education sector, we are nowhere near realising the full potential that that can provide.

We have a bunch of 100 grade 5 and grade 6 kids playing with online learning to extend their learning in rural and remote communities. They understand the concept and participate in the concept a hell of a lot better than we do as adults. I think there is a whole range of skills bases that we have to build up to actually utilise the online potential that is available. Because of that, people steer away from it.

Mr MILNER — It is too easy to say it does not work. The telematics approach that Phil referred to before is not happening anywhere across the state. I used to be in charge of a school that was part of a cluster, and we had a number of subjects that were delivered telematically, but over time it was just drifting back because the technology was not reliable. Now the department decides— and I do not know how it works, whether it is X amount of X units, and that is it. That is what is distributed across the state. If you stop delivering a subject you lose that facility. You might lose it because you do not have enough kids to run that subject for that year, and it goes somewhere else. Then you have to fight to get it back.

The same applies with teacher professional development. There is a place for teachers to be able to sit in their schools and learn online or learn telematically via videoconferencing. The thing with teachers is that the single strongest skill — the stock skill — is talking. They need that opportunity to be able to talk — for instance, I have not shut up.

Mr BROWN — Geoff, I think there are two issues. One is the deliverers who provide online learning for adults have a lot of work to do, because I think it is very mono or very narrow in terms of how they deliver it. Secondly, the skill base, especially in our rural and remote communities, to actually embrace that as a learning tool has to be lifted. I would even argue that back in the telematics stage of the big delays and all those sorts of things happening across lines, the skill base and the knowledge base and the passion level at that time was much greater than what I see now. I think we have to re-engage that enthusiasm both for the kids' sake but also for professional teachers as well. I think both are missing.

Mr HALL — Phil, I liked your idea about countering the under-25 travel issue by turning it into a learning experience.

Mr BROWN — We liked it too!

Mr HALL — Did you have any takers for that?

Mr BROWN — No. The response we got from the bureaucracy was, ‘We do not want to be seen to be promoting teachers to go overseas’.

Mr MILNER — But schools do it.

Mr HALL — Schools do it?

Mr MILNER — I have currently got one working in Dubai for 12 months. She came to me. She had an opportunity and I supported her to do it. I have another person who is actually working — —

The CHAIR — So in terms of your support, is it that you have given her a year’s leave?

Mr MILNER — Yes.

The CHAIR — But there is no financial support associated with it?

Mr MILNER — No, absolutely.

The CHAIR — But you have provided her with a year’s leave.

Mr MILNER — But I will get two teachers back who have experienced something absolutely and totally different and will bring that set of skills back, and because I have given them a year off after — probably — about two years in one case and three years in another, they have had that chance to go and experience something else and they will come back and I might get another three years out of them.

Mr BROWN — We have just got a young guy of 23 years who said to his principal, ‘I want time off — 12 months leave’. He has been there for two years. He is a fantastic young guy who heads up their VCAL program, their VCE program and a whole range of stuff. He was prepared to resign if the principal did not give him leave without pay because he knew if he came back he would pick up a job. He was speaking at one of the forums we held just a month ago. We said to him, ‘If we flick \$1000 to you, would you put a one-page proposal to us about what you are going to look at while you are away?’. He came back the very next morning and said, ‘I want to investigate disengaged young people in Britain’. We said, ‘There’s the \$1000, run with it. We will talk to your principal’. He has now got leave without pay and he has the \$1000 to go, and he will come back and present at whatever conferences we want him to, to talk about engagement of young people. And there is a fair chance that he will go back into a rural community and continue his teaching career.

One of the concerns I had with the review a couple of years ago of how we keep young people in rural communities is that I reckon the title was wrong. How we celebrate youth involvement in rural communities is what we should be talking about, and the conversation is exactly the same here. It is not about keeping teachers in rural and remote communities, it is about helping them enjoy it while they are there. We know at some point they are going to go, that is a reality unless they get married to a multimillion-dollar wheat farmer, but let us give them an experience they can then remember and then at some point they will say, ‘Jeez, I enjoyed that; I am going to go back and teach in those communities’.

Mr HALL — Are teachers in country Victoria generally keen about taking on PD, or is there a reluctance to or a frustration about it?

Mr MILNER — I was the principal at Corryong before I was the principal at Maffra and I think there was more enthusiasm to do it there because the isolation meant there was more benefit from travelling to do it, even though it was 6½ hours to get to Melbourne — Maffra is 3 hours from Melbourne. There is still a degree of enthusiasm, but not much. I have some staff who — and this contradicts what I said about the VIT before — are keen on mandating that they get out of the school and do some PD, mainly to be exposed to other ideas, and to talk to other colleagues.

From my background I think people are still pretty keen to do it. It is just that some of the stuff is, as I said, pretty questionable. Once you go off and do a couple of activities, you find that you come back and — wow! — this person has never taught in your school and they are telling you how to do it. The credibility of the presenters is a big issue, as is the quality of what they are presenting, and the ideas. Sometimes staff come back and say, ‘We did all that 20 years ago’. That is a problem if they are still doing the same thing. You would not go to a doctor who is still doing the same thing as 20 years ago.

Mr BROWN — Peter, my quick response is that I do not think you can actually take professional learning separately to a whole range of other things, and what you are finding is that you have to treat it as a package. You have got to look at teacher training in terms of rural and remote. You have got to look at how we recruit and employ and then in an ongoing sense employ staff in rural and remote. We have got to be creative about those sorts of things. We have got to talk about professional development and professional renewal of teachers, and we have got to rethink how we actually provide a coordinated incentive and support mechanism for people who work in rural and remote. If we actually treat one in isolation from the other, then it is going to be a hard task.

Mr MILNER — You have schools that are going for performance and development accreditation, and I do not know whether this group dealt with that. I went for it mainly because I wanted to emphasise to the staff that personal growth and professional growth and continued growth was important. I think that is what is most critical about getting the plaque up on the wall. I think some of my colleagues have missed the point about it. They see it as another tick they have got to get, and therefore they are not getting it. Doing the process is one thing. Whether or not you get it really does not matter. If you do the process and it produces that result — if you want to do the PD and see the value of it — then it is worth it.

The CHAIR — Thank you Glyn and Phil for coming along. It has been very interesting.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 16 July 2007

Members

Mr N. Elasmar
Mr B. Finn
Mr P. R. Hall
Dr A. Harkness

Mr S. Herbert
Mr G. Howard
Mr N. Kotsiras

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford
Research Officer: Ms J. Hope
Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witness

Professor A. Gough, Australian Council of Deans of Education.

The CHAIR — The Chair welcomes Professor Annette Gough, head of education from RMIT University. Thank you for coming along today, Annette, to speak on this, the first of our hearing days in regard to professional development in the teaching area. Before we start can I point out to you that we are recording what is said as evidence. We will provide you with a proof version of the transcript for checking. It will be used for our reference and made public at a later time. You also might be aware that what is said in the committee hearing is covered by parliamentary privilege, if that is needed, but that would not be the case outside. Thank you, Annette, for coming along. We are looking forward to the contribution you make on behalf of the deans of education.

Prof. GOUGH — Thank you very much for the invitation. A number of member faculties have put in submissions to the inquiry. I know we certainly did and Monash did, and I am sure others have as well. We have got a keen interest in the topic, as you can imagine. We see the universities having a very significant role in the ongoing professional learning of teachers. We prepare them for teaching, but then we hope that we have prepared them as lifelong learners that will continue to engage in their own learning, recognising that they need input as the years go by and that we can provide credentials for them and short courses as they go on a lifelong journey of teaching.

The professional learning needs of teachers have changed considerably over the years. There is no longer the preparation and then you are credentialled. The education system is changing so fast that there is a need for ongoing professional development and we see that universities have a significant role to play in that in bringing together theory and practice and showing how changes in theory can be applied in practice for teachers and helping bring the two together.

Also the delivery models of professional development have changed over the years, too, as we have engaged in research projects not only within universities but also with external bodies evaluating the effectiveness of professional development programs. There is pretty solid recognition now that there is little benefit to be gained from the one-off or the one-day-type of professional development, which is the pattern of the past. The most effective forms of professional learning actually happen when it is ongoing and inquiry-based, with the teachers involved in projects in the schools — with a group of them rather than a single individual engaged in professional development. There have been some good examples of projects in Victoria in the last 10 years, with the Middle Years research and development project, and the Science in Schools research project and so on, where a whole school staff was engaged in a research project with some time release to work together in a practical way to engage in inquiry. I think we have seen some very effective results as a result of those sorts of projects.

Those sorts of activities also are enhanced by university involvement by providing teachers with training in research methodology, because the amount of research that a teacher now has to do as part of their everyday practice has changed hugely. Now they are hit with data sets all the time as part of school review projects. How to work with data is something that you did not need in the past, whereas now it has become part of the everyday, and not all teachers have had that experience during their training, so universities can help as critical friends in a lot of projects or by providing courses for teachers on how to handle data.

I was delighted to see that gender was one of your terms of reference, because, as you are probably very well aware, teaching is increasingly a feminised workforce. The proportion of female teachers has always been greater than males in primary school, but it is becoming even more so, and in secondary we have recently crossed over the 50 per cent line of women in high schools as well. That has all sorts of implications for the delivery of professional learning to teachers. A lot of women choose teaching as a profession because of the down-the-track benefits of school holidays and so on, but that means that they are not necessarily available for after-school activities or during school holidays to undertake professional learning. If we are going to get women involved in ongoing professional learning, then perhaps we need to look at issues such as child care for them and the timing of the professional learning activities or moving to the model — as I was mentioning earlier — of having the professional learning happening within a school context so it is actually happening in the school day with the collaboration of other members of staff and with time release within the school program. The on-site types of professional learning are often the best forms for them.

Online learning is also a dimension. Most people have got computers at home — in fact Victorian teachers led the way with having laptop computers. I think we have had the rollout of laptop computers for about eight years. The access to online learning is a real option, and that can happen after hours, which is another way of engaging in professional learning to supplement what is happening in a school context.

In terms of things that have worked well in the past and perhaps might be worth revisiting, nine years ago we had the launch of the professional learning framework, an agreement between the Victorian Council of Deans of Education and the department of education and the Catholic Education Office and the independent schools. That set up accredited professional development, where teachers who do a program of a minimum of 20 hours contact could then do an assessment task that would then get them credit towards a credential. We had a framework of a graduate certificate and a graduate diploma of professional development. That seems to have disappeared over the last few years, but it certainly is something that might be worth revisiting, particularly when you look at the VIT and its introduction of 100 hours of professional development requirement for re-registration of teachers. I have said that 100 hours is quite a minimum requirement — it is only 20 hours a year — which is not very much when you look at the rate of change in schools, but that is something that might be worth looking at.

The other is TRIP — the teacher release to industry program. Teachers used to be able to go out and spend 12 months in industry. If we are looking at building the partnerships between the community and schools, then the TRIP program was a really good way to do that, but I think the last year of that was 2003. It is something that might be worth looking at again. The teachers received a credential through a partner university. They were getting a graduate certificate, so there was that credential built into it.

That is probably an opening statement for you.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Can I just ask as a follow-up, you said that there is 100 hours of PD?

Prof. GOUGH — Yes.

Mr KOTSIRAS — What is desirable? How many hours should you spend on PD?

Prof. GOUGH — Twenty hours is really — half a week in a year; I would have thought 40 hours.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Forty hours; a week?

Prof. GOUGH — Forty hours; one week out of 52 in terms of professional development.

Mr KOTSIRAS — What would determine a good PD program? Who could determine whether something is worth going to, and how do you work out whether the teacher has achieved something as a result of attending a program?

Prof. GOUGH — I think the VIT has a role in determining what is quality professional development. In terms of outcomes, if it is accredited, then there should be some sort of graded certification — going from a certificate of participation, which is what is usually handed out, to actually getting some credit for it, so there is an actually an assessment task that goes with it. It might be producing a report, if you are following a managerial model, but if it is a school-based team thing, then you could actually see a change in the school. There would be an action plan that could then be evaluated that would come out of that experience.

Mr KOTSIRAS — What would be some of the obstacles that would stop teachers from participating in PD?

Prof. GOUGH — Time — a lot of teachers feel that their workloads have increased hugely in recent times, particularly because of the administration requirements — family commitments outside of school hours or the cost of the activity.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Do you think that teachers should be looking at perhaps doing some PD time during the term holidays?

Prof. GOUGH — The federal government is heading down that way with the summer schools that tenders are out for at the moment. I know that we have a meeting forthcoming for those. I think they are looking at having 10-day programs.

Mr KOTSIRAS — A lot of the independent schools are having their teachers doing it during the school holidays.

Prof. GOUGH — Yes.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Do you see anything wrong with that or any disadvantage to teachers attending PD programs while on school holidays?

Prof. GOUGH — The main problem with the school holidays is with women teachers who have family commitments. Then you have the cost of the child care or arrangements for the children while you are engaging in professional development. That is probably the biggest obstacle in the holiday time. Then there is the question of who pays. That is another one.

The CHAIR — Can I just follow up on the issue of online learning and professional development that you touched on. Have you seen examples of that working effectively and what needs to be done to make it work more effectively? In terms of what we have already heard, there seems to be limited uptake and questions about its value at this stage.

Prof. GOUGH — The Department of Education has certainly done some interesting online learning activities. Back in the years of the science initiative, the Science in Schools strategy, it produced some very good resource materials in primary science for teachers to help them upgrade their knowledge in the science area that they could then use. My background is science education, so my example is going to come from that area. They were really very useful in helping teachers put together curriculum units for their own students, and they received very positive feedback. Most of the department programs are now going to an online model. The principles of learning and teaching — POLT — that has been rolled out for the last couple of years, there is an online version of that for school staff that cannot necessarily get to the PD training sessions that are run, or it is a backup to the face-to-face.

I think teachers are engaging more and more. Sometimes they see it as a huge imposition. For example, there was a mandatory reporting PD that was mandated for them to do. They were given a very short time line to do that, but they all had to do it. I think you have to be realistic in your time lines for doing it. The uptake of computer-based learning in Victoria has been very good compared with other places, because of the provision of notebook computers to teachers.

The CHAIR — Are you aware of some good examples of best practice in terms of professional development happening in other states or other places around the world that you think we should be aware of as a committee and that we can gain more information about?

Prof. GOUGH — There have been some interesting developments in the UK around science literacy, the public understanding of science, science for the 21st century and so on. There is work coming out of Kings College in London — and Jonathan Osborne's work — that is certainly worth looking at. But in lots of ways I think we are keeping up if we not ahead of where other people are going in Australia. We do not always have to have a colonial cringe. Our education is very highly regarded by the rest of the world. We have done some good projects. The Science in Schools research project was one that really did make a difference in its early days. It got the amount of funding reduced over the three years of the project by not having as much teacher-release time, and that time for teachers to reflect and get involved in projects is an important criterion for getting effective learning. If you just impose a change on top of what they are expected to do on an everyday basis without providing the time to actually think about it, it leads to very little uptake of an innovation or even resistance to the innovation.

Mr HALL — Are the universities generally involved to some degree in the delivery of professional development for teachers beyond their basic teacher training?

Prof. GOUGH — It varies considerably between the universities. Prior to being at RMIT I was at Deakin, and we had a very extensive professional development program that ran through the summer holidays and through the winter breaks. We ran Saturday programs and all sorts of things for teachers. RMIT does not have as much of a history of providing professional development for teachers. They seemed to drop out of it a few years ago. We are trying to get it up and running again. It does vary considerably between the universities.

Mr HALL — Do you market and develop those programs yourselves, or do the universities do it themselves, or are they commissioned by VIT or particular schools?

Prof. GOUGH — It varies. At the moment we have contracts with the department of education to deliver Leaders in the Making and the POLT professional development programs. The ones at Deakin were developed and delivered by staff as part of a credentialing program for teachers. We had programs on developing effective

classrooms, on using computers in classrooms, on boys issues — boys and literacy, those sorts of topics. They were developed by staff and then marketed in a semi-commercial way.

Mr HALL — Do the universities have an area of expertise in professional development? Is it in teaching practice or curriculum content or those tools you spoke about before like handling data et cetera?

Prof. GOUGH — It is across the whole lot, because that is what we prepare teachers for, and then we are researching ourselves in those topics. You will find across the university staff people who are involved in VCE exam panels. They have curriculum expertise, they have been on accreditation panels for the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, so you have got subject expertise as well as the pedagogical expertise — strategies for learning and teaching — and the research, because we have all got to research as well as teach nowadays.

Most faculties of education have got the basis for delivering a wide range of professional development. Whether the staff have got the time to develop the programs and to deliver them is another matter, because we are under pressure to do research during the breaks when we are not teaching as well.

Mr HALL — One of the comments that you made was that a one-day professional development program was just about a thing of the past. It was not as effective as it should be.

Prof. GOUGH — It is not so much a thing of the past as its effectiveness being certainly under question.

Mr HALL — So what do you see as the ideal structure for professional development?

Prof. GOUGH — The most effective professional development that I have seen has been in things like the Sustainable Schools program or the Science in Schools program where the whole school is involved or the majority of staff in the school are involved so you have broad ownership. You have got the teachers working collaboratively together on something that they are interested in. They have agreed that they want to make a difference so they have actually got an action plan with some outcomes in mind, and they work together on that.

That is where we have seen the biggest change happen. Schools actually progress through all five modules of the Sustainable Schools program to get their five stars and to be given their certificate as a sustainable school. That is a fair amount of commitment. They go through four professional development modules as a staff and then have an external person come in. They have to show what they have set out to achieve and that they have actually achieved it. It is externally monitored.

Mr HALL — Do you see any merit in an extended period of professional development — say every five years a teacher coming back and doing a term or something like that? Is there a refresher course in content and art in teaching?

Prof. GOUGH — I think it would be a great idea, because the curriculum is changing so fast nowadays. In Victoria every five years we have had a change of curriculum. We have gone from the CSF in 1995 to the CSF2 in 2000 to VEL5 in 2005. Every five years you have got a fairly major change. In fact when I was at Deakin, before the department introduced its refresher program for teachers, we had started one as a weekend program, recognising that for teachers that are coming off seven years of family leave there could have been two curriculum changes in those seven years, so there was a lot to be made up. Assessment and reporting guidelines are all changing. We were running a program that was attracting 30 teachers each time we offered it, with people recognising that they do need a skills upgrade as well as a knowledge refresher when they are coming off a break. It is probably not quite so necessary for those who have not had a break in their teaching service.

It takes a lot to take things on board. When you look at the current blueprint, with its seven flagship strategies, it is a huge amount for teachers to get their heads around. They are having changes in what they are supposed to teach; they are having changes in how they have got to assess the students and how they have got to report to the parents, as well as having the whole pedagogical change thing happening with the Principles of Learning and Teaching. It has basically been a revolution in the last two to three years for teachers. It is a period of very rapid change, so having that time out to actually reskill and rebuild your knowledge would be a wonderful idea.

Mr HALL — I presume universities have run PD programs on a fee-for-service basis generally?

Prof. GOUGH — We have to now nowadays. We are only 42 per cent funded by the federal government nowadays.

Mr HALL — Do you have any view or knowledge about whether teachers are prepared to pay for their own PD or whether it is paid by the department or at the school level?

Prof. GOUGH — Teachers are usually willing to pay up to a certain amount. I think educators tend to expect everything an awful lot cheaper than a lot of other professions are willing to pay, but they certainly do pay. They pay their own way when they go to the subject association conferences. They will pay for their own education, as long as the fees are seen as reasonable.

The CHAIR — Can I ask for your views on how you would best determine the priorities for what professional development should be offered — if you were the state government, for example?

Prof. GOUGH — That is a hard one. We know that the state government has priorities around wanting at least 90 per cent of students to stay at school to year 12, so I think strategies for keeping students engaged — and that does not have to be an academic, a VCE, pathway. VCAL has been a wonderful introduction. There is also the Youth Guarantee. Youth can now take that promise to TAFEs as well and start their own credentialing through an apprenticeship or a pre-apprenticeship program. That is a great idea.

I think we almost need to work more on the parents in that space — but also the teachers — to recognise the value of the non-academic pathways. There is still too much valorising or valuing of just that academic pathway, instead of saying that it is just as good, if not better in some instances, for students to be engaged in the alternative pathways. We do not need everybody to have a university degree.

On OECD-type statistics we are doing okay on the percentage of our school leavers who are going to university, whereas our workforce shortage is actually in the skilled workforce area. We really have to get more of that into the schools. That then feeds back into needing to reskill or upskill teachers in dealing with other ways of teaching and knowing that match that.

The CHAIR — Thank you for sharing your views, Annette, and those of the deans.

Prof. GOUGH — Thank you. Good luck with your inquiry. Teachers feel very much under the microscope at the moment with the succession of inquiries that have happened both federally and at the state level. But it is good to see professional learning being focused on, because it is an area where we need more recognition of what teachers can do and do do. Thank you.

Witness withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 16 July 2007

Members

Mr N. Elasmar
Mr B. Finn
Mr P. R. Hall
Dr A. Harkness

Mr S. Herbert
Mr G. Howard
Mr N. Kotsiras

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford
Research Officer: Ms J. Hope
Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Ms S. Halliday, chairperson,

Mr A. Ius, chief executive officer, and

Mr G. Emmett, group manager — standards and professional learning, Victorian Institute of Teaching.

The CHAIR — Welcome to the three of you, and thanks you for coming along. It is obviously pretty important for us to hear your views in regard to our inquiry on professional development.

In terms of the formalities, we are taping the contribution you make and a draft report will come back to you just so you can clarify it and be satisfied that it is correct. Then we can make it public after that time. You will also be aware that this being a formal committee hearing and the evidence you provide is covered by parliamentary privilege, which is not the case with things you say outside the hearing of course. I do not know whether that is relevant to you or not, but it is the case that you can feel confident about the information you share with us.

Again, a welcome to you. It is good to see you again. I do not know whether Geoff came to the stakeholder briefing we had, but I know the other two of you were here, which was good.

Ms HALLIDAY— I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present our submission. It was probably unlikely that we were not going to come and present, because it is obviously of particular interest to us, the area you are talking about. I suppose that from where we are sitting it is a significant part of the charter of the institute's legislative framework — the strategies for professional learning. From where we sit, five years down the track — mindful that I have been on board for five years and both Andrew and Geoff were around in other capacities but involving themselves in the evolution of the institute — it is something that for quite a period of time we have been getting our heads around and working towards.

That said, we have also been doing it in quite a structured way. As you are aware, we have a range of legislative responsibilities, but certainly with respect to regulating the teaching profession both on quality and the effectiveness of educating Victoria's students, we have got a situation where we have some very key and specific requirements around professional learning and the development and ongoing development of teachers. Throughout the materials that have been provided — we have made some specific references to them, but I will draw your attention to some aspects — we find that it is key to our responsibilities to develop, establish and maintain standards of professional practice for entry into the teaching profession and indeed for the continuing membership of the profession. That often means it is at a re-entry point for teachers who may have been out for a while, and we actively work in that area as well as at that early entry point.

We also have the key responsibility of developing and maintaining a professional learning framework to support and promote the continuing education of members of the teaching profession. We put quite some work into developing not only those standards but also a model that will allow the ongoing development of teachers. That is something that they themselves can monitor, and we have an ability to reflect upon that and ensure that that is taking place.

We have developed a professional learning framework based on the standards that we have developed, which apply to the 100 000-plus teachers whom we now have registered on the books — about 102 000 on a good day — and they include the standards of professional practice for entry. As I said and as you will be aware, beginning teachers come in under the auspices of provisional employment and need to be deemed competent against the standards before they can be signed off to be fully registered, which is a new process and certainly one that we are having more and more positive experience with, given our mentoring programs.

I suppose the other thing that is key for us and worth spending some time on with you is actually unpacking what professional learning means. As a council we have spent a lot of time unpacking that and going around in a few circles and coming back, but we have done quite some work in defining it from our perspective. Andrew and Geoff are going to elaborate on that. The models we present to you have undergone extensive consultation with the profession itself and certainly with our council and are things that we have been actively involved in.

Professional and ongoing learning is not new, but what is key is understanding the range of environments and the most positive environments in which it can take place and understanding how best to measure and monitor it. I suppose what is also important is engaging those in the profession themselves to understand why it is very important to them. The outcome focus that we seek to promote has been integral to the work we have been doing.

On that note and that summary, I would encourage you to ask any questions you have of us. We are going to continue on for another 10 or 12 minutes.

The CHAIR — We will come back to you with questions.

Mr IUS — I suppose the first point that we would like to make is by reference to the title of your review — that is, teacher professional learning. We began the whole conversation about this issue by first of all trying to understand what is teacher professional learning. Our point of view, after considerable conversation, discussion and consultation, as Susan has said, is that we have adopted a view of teacher professional learning as being more an outcomes issue or an outputs issue than an inputs issue.

Many people and organisations talk about professional learning, but they have simply replaced words that used to be there before, such as professional development, and now they just talk about professional learning. From our point of view it is much more than just processes, content and resources: it really is about outcomes. From that positioning, as Susan said, we have developed a sense of what teacher professional learning is that is standards referenced and standards based. That is the model that we have articulated in the material that we have included in our submission and in what we are pointing out to you today. In our view, professional learning — that is, a better understanding and a better knowledge about what a teacher does in relation to their practice — derives from a critical analysis of their practice with reference to the standards, from a critical understanding by asking the question, ‘What are the professional development activities that I should be undertaking that will improve my practice’, and also hopefully from having an opportunity to engage in those considerations in a collegiate context.

Out of that we believe more effective professional learning will take place. Our first point, I suppose, is to give some consideration to what we actually mean by professional learning and not fall into the jargonistic trap of just renaming things for the sake of trying to keep modern or be in line with the latest fad or whatever.

The second issue that we would like to put to you is that our notion of professional learning is very much focused on the individual, because as a regulator for the profession, that is where we have the relationship. We are on about the individual teacher. Others may have definitions or notions of professional learning that are driven by organisational context and organisational learning, and that is equally valid. We are not saying that that is not valid, but the perspective that we come to it from is the perspective of the individual and their professional responsibilities as a member of the teaching profession, and not necessarily their responsibility as a member of an organisation. It is, however, equally valid that there be expectations and requirements of people as a member of an organisation, and I mean by that schools and not other bodies, but it is equally valid for other bodies. They are the two points that we would put to preface the consideration that we have given to this issue and the work that we have done in this area.

We would just like to highlight a couple of pieces of that work that are relevant. First and foremost is the standards of professional practice that have now been developed in Victoria. I know you are familiar with them, so I will not go into details about them, but roughly those standards, and that framework that we have developed in particular for those standards, are now being applied by the institute across three key areas of our work. We have a set of standards for entering the profession, and those are the requirements that we have now articulated as our graduate teacher standards, which are the requirements we have for the accreditation of pre-service teacher education programs. The second set of standards are the standards where we recognise teachers for full registration, having gone through a period of provisional registration. The third is a set of standards that we put in place for guiding teachers on the renewal of their registration by getting them to ask themselves, ‘What are the professional development activities that will contribute to my growth and therefore my capacity to renew my registration?’. In each of those three areas we have been active or are about to become quite active.

Around the area of moving from provisional to full registration, I think it is fair to say that we are the only jurisdiction in Australia to run a fully coordinated cross-sectoral support program for people moving into beginning teaching roles and moving to being fully registered. That program has received both international and Australian recognition as a unique and successful program, and that has been backed up by year-on-year work that ACER has done in evaluating that program. That program again demonstrates the principles that we have articulated around our understanding of professional development, because it asks teachers to engage in reflection of their professional practice with their colleagues and make some judgements about how they have moved to improve their practice. There have now been something like 6500 mentors trained in that area over the last few years, and over 8500 — almost 9000 — beginning teachers have gone through that induction and mentoring training program.

The results, as I said, have been quite significant and quite consistently high in terms of the degree of satisfaction with the program and the belief by teachers that it is actually helping to improve their practice, particularly as beginning teachers. However, we would point out that there is one point of stress within that program, and that is that currently it relies heavily on the mentoring element, and that mentoring element in schools at times is not being

properly or adequately supported. That, I think, comes down to a resourcing issue that some schools and some sectors possibly have around how to best support the professional learning and development of people as they move into this important profession.

The next major area into which we are probably going to put quite a lot of effort over the coming years is the area of ongoing professional learning. You would be aware of the fact that we have recently announced our requirements for renewal of registration, and in them there is a requirement that teachers declare that they have undertaken a certain quantity and scope of professional development. In conducting our consultations on professional development activities and this policy, there were two very strong messages that came through from the 14 000 or so teachers who responded to our consultation program in 2006.

The messages were firstly that there was a concern for access to professional development and secondly there was a concern for quality of professional development. As you are aware, teachers are very time-poor people, and consequently their capacity to spend a lot of time trawling through the vast array of professional development activities that are out there is very limited, and so they get very frustrated and confused about what is out there, where they can get it and what is going on. Where they see what is out there they also have a concern, again being time poor, to ensure they make best use of what is available, and therefore their concern is for the quality. 'How do I know this is going to be good or helpful et cetera?'

Our position for supporting and addressing those two significant issues through our renewal policy is to put in place what we are currently calling as a working title 'professional development online', which is a web-enabled search facility which will enable teachers to identify what professional development activities are available. But not just what is available but also what is cross-referenced by way of professional standards of practice so they can start to make quick judgements about, 'Is this professional development targeted towards better assessment practices so I can better understand how to assess students, or is it more towards how I do better classroom management et cetera?'. So it is referenced to the standards and it will also be referenced to such issues as location, cost, availability et cetera.

We are investing about half a million dollars into the development of that online search facility as a means of starting to address the issue of access. We propose to address its quality elements by starting to build in some feedback loops from teachers on those professional development activities that they have been participating in which are on our website, and to start giving some feedback to teachers about what other teachers have seen as the relevance and effectiveness and contribution of those programs. Again this will probably be an Australian first in terms of its development, and we expect that we will have that facility online from early next year. We currently have ACER as the contractor working with us in the development of that online PD search facility.

The other significant element of work that has been highlighted for us working in this area is that we think there is now a significant group of people who have remained — not untapped — but whose needs have not currently been addressed adequately in the whole system, either by the sectoral authorities or by groups of professional bodies or indeed by the system overall, and I am talking here about the over 10 000 teachers who we estimate, and the department estimates, to be casual relief or emergency teachers. We should not underestimate the significance of this body of people to the teaching profession. Indeed schools would not be able to operate without these people, yet what we are uncovering is that currently their professional development requirements and their needs are not being addressed adequately within the profession or indeed by sectoral authorities.

We would urge you to consider looking at these groups of people and looking at what could be done, or what should be done, either by employers or by ourselves or by other groups in terms of attending to the development of these significant people within the profession. We have been trying to do some things. Currently as we discover a need we run a number of professional development programs across the state, and we are starting to get quite high subscription rates to those programs. Our capacity to meet that need is somewhat limited within our current jurisdictional authority and also our resourcing base, but we are starting to see that this is potentially a very significant area, and just like everyone else these people have a need to stay abreast of what the changing issues are in education, what the current learnings are and what the latest developments are in education, because it is our view, and I suspect it is their view as well, that they are not just there as childminders, they are there to do the job on the day of educating the students. From our point of view we would encourage you to look at that group of people as an area of issue within this whole field of your review.

I have probably gone on a bit longer than I should have, so I will stop at this point, and the three of us will be more than happy to take any questions that you may have.

The CHAIR — Okay. Thanks, Andrew.

Mr FINN — A very simple question. It may not be such a simple answer, but a simple question nonetheless. What degree of professional development or extra learning would be necessary to prevent a child going through 13 years of formal education and at the end of it being semi-literate?

Ms HALLIDAY — It depends on why the child is semi-literate — —

Mr FINN — That is a good question as well.

Ms HALLIDAY — If the child is semi-literate because the child has dyslexia or a learning disability or a language issue because English is not the mother tongue — there are a range of different circumstances that need to be identified and met by the practising teachers throughout.

Mr FINN — But I am just suggesting that at some time during that 13 years there may have been at least one teacher who said, ‘Hey, we have got a problem here. I think we should address it’.

Ms HALLIDAY — You would like to hope so.

Mr IUS — And therein I think lies the fundamental rub that, whilst it may be the one individual teacher who can recognise the issue and maybe have a capacity to respond to the issue, at the end of the day it is not just one teacher’s responsibility to address that particular issue; it is the whole school’s responsibility. Therefore I think you have to answer the question by looking not just at the question of the professional development necessary for the teacher but at the organisational learning or the organisational structures in place to address that issue.

Mr EMMETT — In addition you will notice that the renewal requirement that the institute has put in place now is for teachers to complete 100 hours of professional development. The 100 hours of professional development is not just any professional development but is focused on the standards. One of the key standards is knowledge of the content, and one of the key elements of the content for a primary teacher is literacy and numeracy. All of a sudden there is a more structured approach to professional development and professional learning as a result of the Institute policy.

Mr FINN — Do you have confidence that these extra hours will prevent children from going through 13 years of education and coming out unable to put a sentence together or unable to count to 10 — almost?

Ms HALLIDAY — I think it is fair to say that for some people they are not extra hours. There are teachers who automatically put that 100 hours in without a blink; it is not a problem for them.

Mr FINN — So is that a no?

Ms HALLIDAY — No. There are others who need to be encouraged to grow the contemporary nature of their discipline, and there are others who for a range of reasons need to engage more. But the 100 hours is a minimum benchmark. I think we have a far better chance with that, mindful that there is more pressure on people to do it, than we have had in the past. There are lots of reasons why people do not get involved in professional development, but I think it is fair to say that what we have done is a way to move forward. Nobody can ever guarantee that you are going to have a child who for whatever reason disengages — bad home life — —

Mr FINN — But I am talking about somebody who is actually at university who can barely put a sentence together. How does somebody get to university and, as I said, be practically semi-literate?

Mr IUS — I think there are two particular strategies that are about to be put in place as a result of both federal and state agreements that will start to address that issue going forward. I am not sure if you are aware, but the recent decision of the Council of Australian Governments is that from 2009 it expects that literacy and numeracy standards will be used in the course accreditation arrangements that we have in approving pre-service teacher education programs, and together with our interstate colleagues we are currently developing a set of literacy and numeracy standards for beginning teachers as to what we expect them to be able to know and do as part of their requirements for graduating from these courses. So that is one significant effort.

The other significant effort is that COAG has also agreed for the requirement for leadership development in schools to be focused on this issue as well, and it is requiring that some programs be put in place to develop the leadership capability to analyse, interpret and devise appropriate school-based strategies for addressing literacy and numeracy needs. I think with the effort that a number of groups are putting on this issue in different ways, you would expect and hope that that situation would not be the situation going forward.

Mr FINN — Absolutely.

Ms HALLIDAY — I have to say there is another focus that we have had in particular, and that is in the responsibility to accredit the degrees that teachers come via. We have put quite some pressure on those who create, redesign and rethink that material and the content of those degrees to be constantly focusing on literacy and numeracy skills. For those degrees to move beyond and to be given the tick by the institute has required some of those institutions to go back and rethink and do some work on the content of some of their degrees for a range of reasons, whether it be that it is less articulate in IT than it needs to be or the standard of past graduates has not been as it should have been with respect to their ability on entry. That is another thing that is factored in that is clearly having some impact, and it is a key component in ensuring you get the right people at the entry point into the university qualifications to actually train, and certainly we have been progressing that by pushing the envelope in that area as well.

Mr FINN — So are you suggesting that some of these children have missed out because their teachers have missed out?

Ms HALLIDAY — I am suggesting that there are some teachers who in the past have not had the breadth and depth of experience that they might need to deal with kids who struggle. It is always on the agenda to grow people's ability and depth to actually identify those kids and work with them because they have special needs and they do need assistance.

Mr HALL — First of all before I rush away I want to say that you have acknowledged that there is an issue here with the casual relief teachers, because that is an unresolved issue, and Andrew, I am sure that as a committee we will turn our minds to that, but I do not have any suggestions for you right at the moment. It is an issue that as a committee we need to explore as we go through this inquiry. The question I want to ask is: in respect to your comment, Andrew, that professional learning needs to be outcome driven rather than input driven, how do you measure the outcome of professional learning?

Mr IUS — Again it is a very difficult issue to address, but my view would be that it is best addressed in the context in which it is expected to happen. Like many things in education, the context is very critical, so the capacity and ability to assess the professional learning for any individual teacher is probably best measured or assessed in the context in which they are working. Okay? So we can provide some guidance around that in terms of a set of standards that you can use to reference where the areas of professional development effort should be placed. A teacher might make the judgement 'I probably need to build up my knowledge in a particular area' or 'I probably need to explore a bit better how to assess students or how to respond to the particular needs of particular groups of students'.

So you can use the standards framework that we have developed to guide you as to where the areas of professional development might be, but then, having undertaken professional development activities, the best way to assess what you have been able to do is by way of looking at what the application of that learning has been. I believe that is best done in the workplace context, because at the end of the day that is where the rubber hits the road. That is where the practice of the individual and the effect of the practice of the individual can best be seen.

Mr HALL — I understand what you are saying. At the end of the day who is going to kick off on the 100 hours of PD?

Mr IUS — From our point of view we are asking the teacher to self-assess in the first instance — that they have done this professional development — against the standards framework that we have articulated, and we will follow up on that with a degree of auditing to check, on the programs they think they have undertaken, firstly that they have undertaken them, and secondly, that we see them as being referenced to the standards. But at the end of the day what we are putting in place is more a new professional culture for teachers to gain the understanding that is now a part of this profession's culture — that you engage in continuous professional development rather than a

standardised, past-the-bar-type approach. What we do is very similar what many other regulatory authorities do, and that is create the professional culture.

Mr HALL — Just finally, does VIT have a view as to who should pay for professional learning?

Mr IUS — I suppose our view would be — —

Ms HALLIDAY — It is not us.

Mr IUS — As to where the impact happens, if it is professional learning being undertaken that maximises contribution to organisational development and organisational outcomes, then possibly it is something that the organisation needs to invest in and encourage and support. That is part of best practice for most organisations these days. However, if it is being pursued more substantially for the individual development, then you might ask the question of whether that should be borne by the individual. The obvious issue is that those two things cross, because teachers' professional development is often being done both for organisational benefit but also for their own personal benefit. At that point in time I think it becomes a matter for negotiation between the individual and the employer as to where they think the relative benefits are and therefore where the relative cost sharing might be.

Ms HALLIDAY — It is fair to say that much of the 100 hours actually can be informal learning through self-education, books, utilising what is on the internet around research papers and things like that. So the informal component of the 100 hours does not have to be in a structured environment where somebody has paid for a facilitator.

Mr HALL — So are there criteria, Susan, that you have published, in respect to what will constitute 100 hours?

Ms HALLIDAY — Certainly there is information around the two, the formal and the informal — and I use those words to try and classify the self, as opposed to joining a group and doing something or at a university. But, yes, we have been working on language trying to explain that to teachers. Geoff has actually been doing all the finer tuning around that.

Mr EMMETT — It has basically been focused around the standards. That is the key point. So there is a set of standards and they are statements of what teachers have agreed they ought to know and be able to do. We will identify that they are strong or weak in any of those areas. That is where they need to build on. That is the framework which we have built.

The question you asked about outcomes driven was a very important one, because if you look at the success of our beginning teachers program, the reason why it is successful is that the support program is located directly with the teacher's work. Our support program is not something added on, but it says: okay, we want to locate the support program in your classroom. So we place a mentor with them, someone who is more experienced, and they look at issues of substance about how kids are learning. They actually follow a couple of kids through, and say, 'Well, how well did you go?'. That is one of the tasks they have to undertake. I think that is an example of that sort of classroom-focused, outcomes-focused professional development that makes sense.

The CHAIR — I noticed you were talking about accrediting PD programs that are on offer. Are you planning to do some of that or how do we go about a process of accrediting that as well as teacher training?

Mr IUS — Our first effort in putting together the online PD search is a fairly soft accreditation process. It is not actually going to be a formal accreditation process. The cost implications of such a regime are pretty significant, given the breadth and scope and numbers of professional development programs that are out there. What we are asking people who wish to be listed on this professional development database, which we believe will be a quite significant tool that most teachers will be interested in, is to actually first of all tell us, so we can put it on the website, what their professional development programs are geared towards in terms of addressing the standards framework. If they cannot do that, then it will not go on the website and it will not be available, therefore, for teachers to see and identify and find. So I suppose that is the first soft form, if you like, of accreditation that we are putting in place. The feedback loop I suppose will be another element to that accreditation program, in that if the feedback is pretty negative — in fact, very negative — then obviously it is not a quality program that we would continue to support on our professional development website.

From those experiences that we will gain in doing that work we will then be able to assess the capacity to which we can move to more hard-edge or hard-line accreditation arrangements, but at this stage we do not plan on having such a strong formal accrediting process, as we do, for example, with our work around pre-service teacher education programs.

The CHAIR — Does the teacher feedback go online?

Ms HALLIDAY — Well, we have a range of issues. By being an accrediting agency, first of all — if you set yourself up — you have got to look at the people who might deem that their trade has been restricted by you knocking them off. So from an institute's perspective and council discussion we pulled back with respect to an approach that was lateral and flexible in the first instance and put the onus on the individual PD provider to actually evidence that they were fit and proper to be aligned with the standards.

The teacher feedback, again, we have to be very careful with that, and the aim is not to have it public, no. It will go to an internal mechanism which will scrutinise the course. Because, again, if you make it public, then you have the legal issues of the PD provider saying 'It's defamatory' or 'It's that'. So we have to be very mindful of the way in which we receive information back. Teachers sometimes are not always the most subtle of people, so we have to be very careful about how we manage. We appreciate — and this is in train; we have not started this yet — that they are going to be in a position and will really want to share the information with their colleagues. We have ingrained a mechanism, haven't we, Geoff, as part of the process where, if you get feedback, there will be an assessment of certain courses. Sometimes it might be that the practitioner gets a 'Please explain because your course does not appear to be meeting' and if they cannot, then we move them off.

Mr EMMETT — That will be the first approach, saying, 'Look 300 teachers who went to this course thought it was rubbish, so — —

Ms HALLIDAY — Please explain.

Mr KOTSIRAS — My understanding is that teachers are time poor. One hundred hours over five years — 20 hours per year, 50 of those internal, 50 that could be external — is that enough hours? That is the first question. Have you done any cost analysis, if the school is paying for those 100 hours over five years, of the cost that will come to the school?

Ms HALLIDAY — Can I start with the first one, about whether it is enough. I cannot start to tell you how long it took for us to get to an agreement on the 100 hours. New South Wales determined had 100 hours for its entry-level teachers. We started off with 150. We have an in-principle position whereby the 100 is our starting point, and we, through assessment, may progress to an increased level, because many people are insulted that you would only ever ask for them to do 100 in five years. Then we have got people who are affronted, and then there are those in the middle who had not thought about — never added it up. So we did have some cultural issues to manage in that process. The 100 was an agreement at this point in time that council was comfortable with, given a whole lot of input and consultation.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Is there agreement amongst the councillors?

Ms HALLIDAY — After extensive consultation with the community. There were many in the teaching community who were more than happy for the 150. There were many who wanted less than 100. There were others who did not believe we could tell them to do anything. So the 100 was the agreed starting point, with an in-principle understanding that we will review it and see where else we can go in the future to evolve the involvement. So I cannot even start to explain how complex an issue it was, getting to there, particularly given that New South Wales had set 100 hours, prior to us, for its entry level, rather than its continuous and ongoing, evolving teaching fraternity. Having said that, I will then hand over to Andrew for the rest.

Mr IUS — We do not believe that the benchmark that we have set would create a significant cost impost for schools. It substantially reflects what schools would more or less already be doing with teachers, for the overwhelming majority. From our point of view — and I think to reinforce what Susan was saying — at the end of the day in the agreement and the consensus reached by the institute council in setting that policy the overriding consideration was to set a realistic benchmark to establish a new professional culture. Having now established that culture, in a few years time it might be opportune to see how that culture is being applied and where you might try and look at setting a new benchmark. But the important thing was to move from setting a professional expectation

to setting a professional culture and a professional requirement. That is a big transition to make for 102 000 registered teachers. So the point of choosing the 100 hours was really to settle on an appropriate benchmark, given that you have got to have something that is relevant to teachers working full time in schools and something that is equally relevant to people who are casual relief teachers that we have already spoken about.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Andrew, what is your view on teachers taking part in PDs during the term holidays? As I said, there is not enough time for teachers to go away to undertake PD. Have you thought about having some of these programs during the term holidays? What is your view?

Mr IUS — From our point of view, a number of the programs that we undertake for professional development for casual relief teachers in fact we do undertake during the school holidays, because if we undertook them during the school term they could not attend, because they are likely to be working or they are losing an opportunity for a day's pay. So we do understand and we do run our programs during school term holidays for particular groups of people, where it is appropriate to do that.

My understanding also is that generally teachers are engaged in professional development activities during school term breaks, for a range of reasons — negotiated, preference, whatever — so it is happening. My understanding also, having once been a teacher, is that the terms of my employment were that those term holidays were actually not holidays but times when I was not required to be at the workplace, and as a consequence I could be requested to engage in professional development activities during that time.

Mr KOTSIRAS — So those programs also would be on the online search that you are about to set up?

MR IUS — Yes, of course they will be. We do not prerequisite only certain types of programs to be on it. The only prerequisite we will have for that online development database is that they be able to demonstrate how their program references to the eight standards in our standards framework. That will be the key criterion. All the other factors, as to when they are on, where they are on, how much it will cost, what can be done there — that is all means for just searching. So if you wanted to find all the programs within 10 kilometres of Horsham, you might be able to do that, but not that it is a prerequisite for it being on or off the database.

The CHAIR — Can I just follow up, for interest, with regard to refresher professional learning courses — you are doing them yourselves, are you?

Mr IUS — We offer some, yes.

The CHAIR — How long do those programs take?

Mr EMMETT — Usually we offer three days of professional development every year which people can participate. There is a different focus on each of the days. One, for example, deals with curriculum matters and new curriculum issues such as the VCAA and VELs and so on. Another deals with classroom management issues and organisational issues, and the third deals with just a range of new policies that have been brought on board.

Ms HALLIDAY — That said, we are not a PD provider per se. What we provide is party to the regulatory requirements that we have to meet within our legislation. So the PD that we provide and the support we provide is about us progressing what it is that the act requires us to do, and we do not envisage ourselves becoming a training institute.

The CHAIR — No, I understand that. So they are just some opportunities that you provide. In terms of refresher-type courses, do you still require for registration a certain number of hours of coursework or how does that work? For teachers who are returning to teaching, in terms of registration what is required of them?

Ms HALLIDAY — Teachers who are returning, depending on how long they have been out and what they have been doing, a lot will go back in on provisional, and that gives them an opportunity to almost go through the process again, depending on how much they had when they left, or to be signed off in a very short space of time within a school that they are working in. It depends on the individual.

There is also capacity to assess what they have been doing while they have not been teaching. They have may have been involved in education — there are a whole range of ways — but not actually in front of a class. There are opportunities to assess that and determine at what point they come back in. Some are straight back to provisional, some are assessed and do not need to be provisional.

Mr IUS — Currently there is no regulatory requirement for teachers re-entering the profession to have a certain number of hours of professional development or undertake professional development activities. The department as an employer, for example, has such a policy. It requires that people who have been out of teaching for more than I think five years undertake one of their Returning to Teaching programs that they have outsourced, but there is currently no regulatory requirement.

From time to time we may impose as a condition of registration for some people that professional development be undertaken in certain areas, but there currently is not any mandated regulatory requirement for teachers to undertake professional development as part of re-entry into the profession. The current requirement for re-entry into the profession is to be able to demonstrate recency of practice and competency in your practice.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Until 2012?

Mr IUS — That is for the renewal process. That is for teachers who are in the service, in the profession, not out of the profession, who wish to maintain their standing within the profession. They go through the renewal requirements. What I have been talking about is people who are outside the profession coming back into the profession.

Mr KOTSIRAS — So if someone wishes to come back in 2013, from outside the profession, would they have to satisfy the 100 hours?

Mr IUS — If they have been outside and not registered, no. By 'returning to the profession' I mean having lapsed in their registration or no longer being registered, then seeking to be registered. You cannot retrospectively apply something to someone who was never registered.

Ms HALLIDAY — But on entry of re-registration, those teachers may go back to provisional. There would be an extensive assessment of what they have been doing while they have not been teaching. It might be that they go into a school for a month and are signed up within that professional process really quickly because they are a skilled teacher with a bit of catching up to do in more recent curriculum. So every case is assessed on its individual merits.

The CHAIR — Just in terms of those 100 hours minimum, is it possible that of those 100 hours none of them might be in an external sort of program and they could all be in school or informal type activities that they have undertaken?

Mr IUS — The external element or the external nature of what we are articulating is not about the location of where the professional development is being undertaken, it is about the content. So what we are saying is that teachers should seek to expose themselves to at least 50 hours, for example, if it is 100 hours, of professional development that provides them with information, knowledge, experience and practice for new research and knowledge to that which they currently have. To do that you do not have to leave a school. That can happen by virtue of a professional development program happening within a school context or it can even happen in an online context. The issue for us is the content, not the location.

The CHAIR — So are teachers encouraged to log what they are doing on that score?

Ms HALLIDAY — Yes.

Mr IUS — We have devised and tested a form that we can provide teachers with to help them do that. Many teachers already do that. Many schools already do that by virtue of HR programs, HR software that they have in their schools that tracks what their expenditure has been and what individual teachers have been doing, and indeed issues a certificate at times for teachers to recognise the professional development activities that they have engaged in.

The CHAIR — I presume any teacher who is going to apply for promotion in the future is thinking of those sorts of things and so is keeping a log anyway?

Ms HALLIDAY — There are a lot of teachers who go through more formal appraisal mechanisms, and they utilise that information on an annual basis to present what it is that they have actually done and that they are a calibre employee.

Mr EMMETT — And some schools as a result of a policy being introduced have developed quite comprehensive ways of recording the information of what professional development was undertaken, where and what value it was to the teacher as an individual.

Ms HALLIDAY — So this program, as we put it, for some teachers is nothing new and nothing hard. It is just a part of what they have already been doing. But it is fair to say that for others, depending on their own views about the world and teaching, it is a bit of an affront.

The CHAIR — That is right.

Ms HALLIDAY — So when we talk about the cultural change and the benchmark being minimal, it in itself has addressed some attitudes and positioning that have been problematic, I suppose, for the profession at large, but for many others it is not an issue at all.

The CHAIR — No, that is right, and probably the majority are totally aware of all those things. But we all have seen examples of teachers who at the end have got their job and they slot into their day-to-day routine.

Ms HALLIDAY — And year 7 will do the same thing for the next 25 years.

Mr IUS — Just before we go, one last thing that we would like to draw to your attention to is that, together with our interstate colleagues, with the exception of New South Wales, we are embarking upon a professional development research project where we will be looking to survey a broad range of teachers in each of the jurisdictions and therefore aggregate to a national picture on their current professional development experiences and their perceptions of those professional development experiences.

This replicates a piece of work that was done over five years ago by the commonwealth, and we are looking to do it partly to better understand the professional development experiences of teachers so that it better informs the development of the professional development online database that we have been talking about, but also to try and present a better and deeper level of understanding around what the professional development experiences of teachers have been. That is about ready to go out. I think that will be going out in the next few weeks, so as we get that information in and have it collated, we would be happy to share the results of that research with you at the appropriate time.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Committee adjourned.