

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 6 August 2007

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Dr L. Ingvarson, principal research fellow,

Ms K. Hoad, manager, Centre for Professional Learning, and

Ms M. Meiers, senior research fellow, Australian Council for Educational Research.

The CHAIR — I welcome everybody. This is the first of the hearings of the Education and Training Committee for our second inquiry this year, which is on effective strategies for teacher professional learning. It is good to get under way with a new topic and to welcome representatives of the Australian Council for Educational Research, Lawrence, Kerry-Anne and Marion. Can I go through a little bit of a formal procedure to start off with. The comments that you make are going to be taped so that we have a record of this meeting. That will come back to you for checking later on and then be added as part of the official records of our inquiry. You would know, or perhaps you do not, that parliamentary privilege is provided for things that are said to the inquiry. I do not know whether that is relevant to you or not, but that means you are covered under the Parliamentary Committees Act for things that are said in here, but that of course would not take place for things that are said outside this room. Essentially we are looking forward to hearing your comments as the first input into our inquiry on professional development. It is great to have ACER here. I do not know who is going to start.

Ms HOAD — Marion is going to start.

The CHAIR — We will go on from there and ask questions at the end of what you have to say.

Ms MEIERS — To begin with, we would like to thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to meet with you because there is a great deal to be said about this topic. ACER has a very strong interest in teacher professional learning. Through our Centre for Professional Learning that Kerry-Anne manages we offer a very wide range of professional learning to teachers at all levels of schooling, and largely through the teaching and leadership research program we conduct extensive research into teacher professional learning. We have documented that briefly in our written submission, but what we thought would be perhaps most useful is if, instead of just going over briefly everything that is in the submission because it is there and referenced, we would like to focus on one aspect, which is perhaps breaking some new ground. We have headed a section “Involving teachers in professional learning” in the second part of the paper. Lawrence is going to talk about some of the issues that are connected with that that we think you will find of interest. Over to you.

Dr INGVARSON — That is on page — —

Ms MEIERS — Unfortunately the pages are not numbered.

Dr INGVARSON — I am going to speak in probably very broad terms about professional learning, realising that it is a huge industry and, as you will be learning, quite a large investment is made into teacher professional learning. It probably runs into the hundreds of millions of dollars if you add up all the time as well as all the commonwealth money and all the state money from across all the employers. It is a big business.

I am going to make just a few major points and then you can argue with me about them. Weaknesses have been recognised in the way professional development for teachers is organised for many years. It is quite difficult to provide the kind of professional learning that really makes a difference, that changes people, that leads to changes in practice and changes in practice that really can be identifiably linked to student learning outcomes, because at the heart of it what you are interested in is how might the money that is put into professional learning pay off in terms of improved student outcomes.

What kind of professional learning leads to improved student learning outcomes? That is where Marion has summarised that kind of research very well — the depth of engagement that people need to be involved in if they are to change their beliefs and if they are to increase their skills.

Overheads shown.

Dr INGVARSON — The first main point I want to make about the weaknesses in the traditional PD system, which is on this slide, is that if you look around and you want to know how clearly does the profession identify what teachers should get better at you would be struggling to find that. It sounds awfully simple, but it is very important to have some clarity about what we expect teachers to get better at, because teaching is a job where, in the initial phases, when people come out of college or out of university, there is a lot more learning that has to take place. So the continual professional learning, as in any profession, is vital, but the systems for identifying what the teachers should get better at and then particularly the assistance for providing incentives for that professional learning are pretty weak.

The other key point here is that, unlike most professions, teachers do not have a very strong say in their own professional development system. Often the courses that are provided are decided by employers or universities. Teachers are not a very empowered group in their own professional learning. They are the main weaknesses — the lack of clarity about what teachers should get better at; poor incentives in financial terms or career terms for people who do show evidence of sustained and deep professional learning; and not a lot of involvement as a profession in running its own system compared with, say, doctors or accountants or engineers. Engineers Australia has a very strong system, the chartered engineers and accounting system. Accountants have got certified practising accountants with strong incentives to reach those high standards, that kind of certification.

The second slide is probably rather difficult to read. It is of a graph which compares several countries and which shows what happens to teachers' salaries over time. It shows England, Australia, the US, Japan and Korea. It is a widely recognised problem that in some countries like Australia teachers reach the top of their salary scale after about eight or nine years — but that's it. You could say that in effect there are incentives to show evidence of professional learning for about eight years, and then it levels off. If you want to have a career and progression, the incentives are to move out of teaching. High status does not attach particularly to teaching well.

Personally, I think salaries should reflect the fact that the most important thing to be doing in a school is teaching very well. The career structures do not say that. If you look at the research on pay systems and at some of the major research by people like Ed Lawler on strategic pay, the fundamental principle is that you need a strong alignment between the objectives of the organisation and the knowledge and skills that get the highest remuneration. That is not the way teaching is organised. On this graph you can see that in Korea teachers' salaries continue to go up and up and up — until they are nearly three times the starting salary. The top of the salary scale in Victoria is about 1.4 times the starting salary. It is an extremely weak salary structure, it is an extremely weak instrument for lifting, on a wide basis, the quality of teaching. There are very weak incentives; it is a very weak recognition system.

I am now going to talk about a standards-guided professional learning system, shown in the third box, which summarises these kinds of points. Among the main components of a standards-guided professional learning or development system the first one would be, as I said, teaching standards. Here is a set of teaching standards the Australian Science Teachers Association has developed. With 30-odd pages it is very in-depth stuff which sets out what a highly accomplished science teacher should know and be able to do.

Marion has been involved with the literacy educators and the maths teachers. What is evolving is that teachers are getting better at writing these standards which describe in some depth what they should get better at, and therefore perhaps what the career path system should be attached to. That is the first point in this system — 'standards that articulate what teachers should get better at and provide direction for professional development over the long term'.

As you look at the typical pattern of professional development courses in Victoria you will find hundreds of courses — half a day long, a day long, a week long — all over the place. They are not characterised by some kind of sequencing to support beginning teachers or teachers after teaching a few years — it is all the same. It is a blancmange — they all do the same thing — rather than the thinking being, 'What might a teacher need over time to steadily develop their practice towards these high standards?'. You find lots of providers — there are many providers out there selling their goods — but it is very much a scattergun approach. The profession itself does not impose some kind of progressive or sequential system for what teachers should know and be able to do. As I have said, teachers are not in control of the system.

The second point is that as part of this idea, we need career paths that value teaching and provide incentives for teachers to retain standards. As I pointed out to you about the career path, the top salary is only at 1.4, and then you move to managerial or administrative-type roles if you want to get more status and more pay.

The third point is that once you have the standards in place and once you have the incentives, you need to build a new kind of infrastructure for professional learning, where it is driven by standards. As I say, these standards for highly accomplished teachers are not something that will be arrived at in the first year or two; it takes probably 10 to 15 years to reach those standards. When the standards were launched a few years ago a very senior person in the education department said, 'We wouldn't dare set standards this high'. Teachers set very high standards when they are given the job of doing this. We need an infrastructure for professional learning which is guided by this kind of stuff, so that when a teacher looks at a course they are looking in terms of, 'How well can that course help me meet those standards?'.

The fourth point is that you need a very rigorous system for assessing performance, for assessing whether teachers have reached those standards.

The next diagram shows those components and how interlocking they are. You have the standards; you have the need for certification, some kind of system for certifying the people who have reached those standards; you have the professional learning system that needs to be organised to help people reach those standards; and then you need recognition from employers for people who have reached those standards. What you could say you are looking at here is a performance-based pay system or a performance-based professional learning system.

There is a lot of talk around about how teachers' pay should be linked more closely to their performance. The big problem with doing that, of course, is finding rigorous methods for assessing performance. You will be well aware of current initiatives from the federal government to move in a direction of performance pay. I think this is a much more sophisticated system for moving in that direction. It is a standards-based system — something like Western Australia has with its level 3 classroom teacher, for which there is another \$6000 or \$7000 on top of the existing salary scale for reaching high standards and going through a rigorous assessment of practice. They are the four components.

The fifth one, at the bottom, is a definition of certification. I suppose what we are advocating is that part of what you might consider and might look at is: is there a need for some kind of system for certification — or accreditation, or whatever you like to call it — whereby the profession endorses whether somebody has reached those high standards, and a certification that employers might see as a credible indication that teachers have met very high standards? The idea behind professional certification there is that it is available to all members of the profession, based on an assessment of performance, not completing university credits and courses and things like that, although they might help people reach the standards. It is portable; it belongs to the person; it is a voluntary system.

The sixth slide in a very crude way sets out some of the main characteristics of an emerging career structure. Certain major career steps are defined by teaching standards, but reaching those standards leads to quite major salary hikes. With teachers moving from registration through to being accomplished teachers and to being highly accomplished, or whatever you might call it, over time, you might be looking at a basis for paying teachers substantially more, but only in return for evidence that they have reached high standards.

Over the page I indicated some examples. There is an example of a set of standards with headings; you can see four domains there. We need not go into the details of that, but that is an example of what you might find in a set of standards like these standards for science teachers. These are just the main headings. The next box looks at the extent of the assessment of the teachers who have reached those standards.

Here is an example. I will just go through the portfolio entries for primary teachers. What we are talking about here are ways in which a teacher may show they have met the standards. On the first one a primary teacher might be asked to, 'Provide evidence of a unit of work, with student writing samples, in which you have developed student's writing ability over time'. What we are looking at now are examples of ways in which teachers may show evidence of their performance and evidence that they have reached these high standards. The first one there, for a primary teacher, is based on writing. The second one is, 'Develop an interdisciplinary theme and provide work samples that show how you engage students in work over time that deepens their understanding of an important idea in science'.

The first one was about literacy — writing; the second one is about science. The third one reads, 'Provide a videotape and commentary illustrating how you create a climate that supports students' ability to understand perspectives other than their own'. That would be part of the SOSE kind of curriculum, I suppose. The fourth one was, 'Provide evidence through a videotape, written commentary and student work samples' — over time — 'of how you have helped build students' mathematical understanding'.

The point of those is to show how those four would cover key areas in the curriculum. You are asking teachers to show evidence. This kind of work is geared to encouraging or involving teachers. When they present these portfolio entries it engages them in the best kind of professional learning that we know of.

In the paper by Marion you have characteristics of effective PD. If you want to engage all teachers in good professional learning, you need these kinds of exercises that make teachers actively involved in analysing their own current practices — not sitting on seats at some kind of lecture theatre, not passive learners. Teachers need to be

actively engaged in analysing their own current practice in relation to standards if you are to get the characteristics of effective professional learning.

I am going to finish off by making an important distinction. Clearly, we are not talking here about all professional development. A lot of professional learning for teachers is determined by changes introduced by employing authorities. If the education department in Victoria brings in a new system for assessing or reporting on students' progress, it should fund that professional learning and make sure that the opportunities for professional learning are as good as possible. If it is employer-driven and it is policy-driven, employers should pay for that.

But that kind of professional learning is not enough. What is needed on top of that is a system, we are suggesting here, where the profession plays a leading role in defining, through standards, what it expects people to get better at. When you look in detail at some of these standards — say, standards for primary teachers teaching literacy — that is where you will find summaries of the best of current research.

How do you get teachers close to and engaged in keeping up with research? Standards define. That is the point of standards — to make a bridge between the research and convert and translate that research into what teachers need to know about recent developments in teaching literacy, or learning of literacy. That is the role of standards. Employer-driven PD does not necessarily do that. Through the certification — so this is the last distinction here — we need a distinction here between the system. It is like a distinction between certification, which is what a profession might give a person who has reached high professional standards; and recognition, which is what an employer might give to the person who has got that certification.

This is quite common in other professions. An employer who is employing an accountant may say, 'If you go and get that CPA — that is fine. I will take that as an indication of you having developed that knowledge, those skills, that standard, and that will be recompensed in terms of whatever enterprise bargaining agreements we have'. There is a separation here of the system for identifying highly-accomplished teachers and the recognition system — the pay system — for rewarding evidence of that professional learning.

They are just the bare bones of a system that I think we sadly lack; a system that would make much more sense in terms of performance pay, where the performance pay is not based purely on some standardised tests — a statewide test of student achievement, which are highly invalid — but based on evidence that teachers are providing improved conditions for student learning over time. It is based on the assumption that there are a lot for teachers to get better at, but we need to be clearer about what that is and get better about reporting, as I said, people who do reach those standards. I hope that makes sense.

The CHAIR — Did any of you want to add anything?

Ms HOAD — No. We are quite happy to take questions.

Mr ELASMAR — I understand that salary makes a big difference to the quality of teachers, but at the same time professional teachers chose their own schools. Are there any schools that have more professional teachers than other schools because of the lack of aptitude of the students or their attitude towards the teacher do not attract quality teachers?

Dr INGVARSON — You are asking me whether we have some schools where we do not have quality teachers.

Mr ELASMAR — Yes, some teachers prefer to teach at different schools to others.

Ms HOAD — Correct me if I am not clarifying this properly but I think Nazih is saying that teachers will prefer to go to particular schools. Often some schools attract the quality teachers and other schools are left with teachers whose qualities, perhaps, are not commensurate with those teachers. I think the question is whether there is something we can do to even that out.

Dr INGVARSON — I agree that that is a major problem. We do not know much about the extent to which differences in student outcomes are a result of the inequitable distribution of quality teachers across the schools.

Mr ELASMAR — It is a hard question.

Dr INGVARSON — You are touching on an extremely major issue, which is: how do we ensure an equitable distribution of our best teachers across schools? The pay system, the reward system, is poorly geared to ensuring an equitable system of distribution. As you well know, what teachers tend to do in the absence of a decent career structure is gravitate towards more comfortable schools where perhaps students are easier to teach. That is the sense of having a career and progress rather than a career structure based on perhaps recognition that the toughest kids — —

Ms HOAD — Need the best teachers.

Dr INGVARSON — Need the best teachers.

Ms MEIERS — We do know from a number of the evaluation studies we have done that if you put effort into a sustained professional learning program for teachers in a school facing a lot of difficulties, that significant differences happen. We have done a couple of major evaluations of initiatives.

For example, there is one in Western Australia where a specialist is placed in a school. The school is identified as being high-need, and that specialist teacher has significant additional training and works in the school for two years shoulder-to-shoulder with colleagues. That is showing a very significant impact on those schools, so I think we have some evidence for how we can make a difference to schools where things are tough by providing rich professional learning opportunities.

Ms HOAD — This is very important because you are quite right; we know that the most significant influence on student outcomes is the quality of the teacher. If a process like the Getting it Right professional development program in Western Australia were put into poor schools where the quality of teachers is not so good, you should see an increase in student outcomes.

Dr INGVARSON — That is a very big issue.

Ms HOAD — It is a huge issue.

Dr INGVARSON — You might identify these good teachers but then you have got to find formal roles for them to play in schools where their expertise is available to other teachers, not lock them away.

Mr HALL — First of all, thank you for your presentation. I interpreted your presentation to mean that the first step in terms of improving teacher quality is to identify the standards that we expect of the teachers; the second step then is to demonstrate that the teacher has met those particular standards; and then part of the critical third step is the certification that those standards have been met. Then I presume, within that certification process, if there are identified deficiencies in those standards, that is where the role of professional development comes in and that identifies for the teacher in which areas they should be engaging in professional development. I think that was a broad summary of my interpretation of what you said. My first question is: who should provide that certification?

Dr INGVARSON — That is a big question. We have not got a body, we need a body that would bring together employers, the teaching associations like the science teachers, maths teachers and the unions — I think they have a role to play here — employment authorities, teacher associations, and other interested parties, and create a body that has the responsibility for doing this.

The VIT has a role that is regulatory; it is a statutory regulatory body. We are not talking here about a compulsory system, I am talking about a voluntary system. You do not have to go and get certified as a CPA, you do not have to go and get a chartered engineer, you do not have to become a specialist, these are voluntary systems. The VIT has just set in place a re-registration arrangement which is, if you like, ensuring that basic standards are maintained. I am talking here about a system that would provide strong incentives, through recognition, to reach those high standards.

There is a body that has been set up nationally that you will know about called Teaching Australia. Many of us had high hopes that that would provide a national professional body for teachers that would provide the sort of certification that we are talking about. That body seems to be reluctant to move into the assessment of teachers' performance against standards and provide certification. We lack, at the moment, a body to carry out this certification function.

In principle, if it is a professional body, it should be national. Professional standards do not vary from system to system, or school to school, so it would not make sense to have one for the Catholic system, one from the independent system, one for the state system; but that is the way New South Wales is going.

New South Wales has set up a teacher certification system for independent schools under the New South Wales Institute of Teachers, which is the VIT equivalent in New South Wales. It has developed standards, but it has given the job of assessing teacher performance against the standards to the separate school systems, which makes no sense to me whatsoever. It is the most stupid thing that anyone could have done, to give to the employers and to have separate professional standards with separate meanings of certification across different systems — we need one system.

Mr HALL — Do you think there is a role for VIT to set standards themselves, or do you think they are best conducted by the subject bodies?

Dr INGVARSON — VIT could run such a system, but it needs to be understood, we are talking here about a voluntary system, but there would or should be powerful incentives for people to reach those high standards. You cannot tell employers what to pay people, that is what I am getting at, but you can try to convince employers that, ‘If you provide recognition to teachers for reaching these standards, you are going to provide a very powerful incentive for people — all teachers — to develop professionally’. I go back to my original point, the incentives for teachers to develop professionally are very weak and very poor.

Mr HALL — I just want to ask one further question about the voluntary, as opposed to the mandatory, nature of professional development. Although you are saying that this system should apply voluntarily, the fact of the matter is that there is a mandatory system of PD, as per the requirement VIT now places for 100 hours over five years for re-registration, as you said, therefore teachers would not want to be wasting their time and they may as well be doing something constructive during that period of time. There is a component of the mandatory nature of professional development in there at the moment.

Dr INGVARSON — Yes, but it is 100 hours of sitting on your bum.

Mr HALL — You are saying that without correction, 100 hours is probably going to be wasted.

Dr INGVARSON — There is no direction — much — to it. The VIT does not have standards as yet; like highly accomplished teaching standards. It has very general standards, very generic; they do not go into what a science teacher needs to know; or what does a maths teacher need; what does a teacher of early childhood writing need to know? It does not have that specificity.

As I said, the stipulation is only in terms of attendance or sitting there, and 100 hours over five years is 20 hours a year. This is pathetic.

Ms HOAD — And only 50 per cent of that needs to be, or is described to be, researched-based knowledge acquired outside of the school. The other 50 per cent can be for a variety of activities that are termed professional development, such as, running a meeting, mentoring a colleague — so there is also a range of activities in that 100 hours.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Teachers are time poor. The first year, the first thing our teachers want to do, is to survive in the class room.

Ms HOAD — That is right.

Mr KOTSIRAS — The last thing they want to do is leave the classroom to take part in PD, whether it is targeted or whether it is a waste of time. How do you overcome the fact that teachers are required more and more, to do more things in schools, which does not allow them more time to develop as a teacher? Have you any ideas of what schools should be looking at, to allow teachers to take part in programs?

Dr INGVARSON — I think you are absolutely right about the first few years of teaching being time poor. In other research we have been doing for the VIT we have been looking at its program for professionally registered teachers. The early years of teaching, as you probably know, are very high pressure. After about 7 to 10 years though, people reach a certain level where the research suggests they can take two paths.

One is into a kind of state of plateauing off; another one is to kick on into new kinds of professional development, experimentation, innovation and a lot of enthusiasm. We are talking here about something that hopefully provides that incentive to kick on, that sense of 'I have made it' recognition, but incentives to reach higher standards.

By that time, I think the pressure of time is not so great, and I think it is something that teachers do have the time to start now stepping back, reflecting very carefully on their practice, getting feedback from others about their practice, engaging in these things which mean that they have a chance to really seriously reassess, move on and evaluate their practice.

That is what the research says: if teachers are to change their practice, they need to be deeply engaged in looking at what their students are learning, in relation to the standards for what students should be learning, but they are deeply engaged in analysing their own practice in relation to standards.

We are talking about not doing a system of PD that is about course attendance; it is in the workplace, engaging in activities, often with other teachers, or with your students, that give you a lot of feedback about the effectiveness of your practice. It is about getting good data on your students' achievements; where is my student's achievement in relation to where it should be? This sort of facing up to the reality of your own teaching and getting good feedback is vital to professional learning.

Mr KOTSIRAS — The 20 hours per year that we have, I think is quite enough, but then again as I said, teachers are time poor. If teachers have not got the time or if they think it is a one-day PD which they have to attend and they gain nothing from it, then they will just turn up at the start, sign up and then go somewhere else for the whole day, and turn up to school the next day, as has happened in the past.

Ms HOAD — Yes.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Being a former teacher, I have seen that happen. How do you encourage teachers to take PD seriously if at the end of 10 or 12 years their pay stands still and there is no further increase? What incentive is there for the teacher to take part in high-quality programs to improve?

Dr INGVARSON — That is exactly what I am saying. With this performance pay issue that has been boiling around the place, you have got two ways to go here. One coming from the present, which is very much a one-off, bonus pay kind of scheme. Or there is the type of scheme I am talking about here, which is tied to a few major career steps. This certification might be only twice or something in the whole career, but it is a major step, and it needs a major salary step.

I would not baulk at, say, a salary system where teachers can finish up at twice the starting salary. The starting salary in Victoria is about \$45 000, roughly. Teachers, I think, should be getting to \$90 000. I would not baulk at that at all, but you need perhaps two steps on that path where the big salary hikes are dependent on evidence of reaching high standards. One may be after 7 to 10 years and another one may be after 15. After 15 years you need to be someone who really makes a difference to other teachers, so you spread that expertise. You find ways of freeing up the expertise, not locking teachers away in their own classrooms.

The best kind of PD often happens in the ordinary routine of the workplace, where teachers are open about the practice, they are accountable to each other, they are focused on student learning outcomes, they develop systems for assessing the quality of their work. That is the best kind of PD, but the incentives need to be powerful. I am saying to you I would not baulk at, say, a salary hike that has \$20 000 attached to it and then another \$20 000.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Yes, you did say that before. I was just going to ask: is there any other way apart from paying the extra money?

Dr INGVARSON — This is the question.

Mr KOTSIRAS — I am saying, if there is no political will, is there something else that you can provide teachers to encourage them?

Dr INGVARSON — The public is willing, I think, to start to pay for teacher quality, but for the public to put this kind of investment into teaching, the profession itself has got to show that it can evaluate its own practice — that is the equation. If the public is to put more value on teaching, the profession must show that it can

come to the party and provide guarantees about people who have reached high standards — and then you have got career paths attached to that. That is vital.

The CHAIR — I am a bit aware of the time, but I just wanted to ask a question and get some commentary from you with regard to the types of professional development that you think are the most important and most effective forms of professional development. Obviously there is a whole range of reasons why you might do professional development. Sometimes it is to do with gaining better understanding of the content of materials you might be teaching, sometimes it is method and learning and assessment-type issues. I am interested, in terms of what you have been talking about, in what are the most effective forms of professional development.

Ms MEIERS — Perhaps I could speak briefly to that. In the submission we have identified, from our research, the features shared in common by the most effective professional learning programs that we encountered. There were things like opportunities for teachers to focus on what the students learn, so it is directly connected to their ongoing work. Interestingly, when teachers get together and look at actual samples of students' work and talk about it, that is a very rich setting for significant professional learning.

Time is important — professional learning that extends over time, not the one-shot activity but sustained learning that involves them perhaps working with a cluster of other teachers, working in a mentoring relationship. There is a paper that we have referenced here where we drew on a number of evaluations and teased out what those key features were. There is a fair consensus in the professional literature about what does make effective professional learning. That is something that we know and can build on.

Dr INGVARSON — That is summarised very nicely by Marion in the paper.

The CHAIR — That is good. There is obviously some more detail we want to go into, but that has given us a good general understanding of some of the issues that you are able to put to us. Thank you for your time.

Ms MEIERS — We are very pleased to know you that you are conducting this inquiry.

Ms HOAD — Yes, it is excellent.

Witnesses withdrew.

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Ms J. Petch, acting general manager, teacher and school capacity building,

Ms C. Beesey, acting group manager, student programs division, and

Mrs R. Dodds, acting assistant general manager, leadership and teacher development, Office for Government School Education, Department of Education and Early Childhood.

The CHAIR — Next we are going to hear from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Welcome to this hearing of the Education and Training Committee in regard to effective strategies for teacher professional development. Just before we hear from you I should point out, as you would have noted, that we are taping everything that is said so that we can have that as a record. We will pass a copy of that record back to you for any clarification you may need to make, and then it becomes part of our hearings material. Things that you say in the inquiry in this room are covered by parliamentary privilege, if that is required. It is covered by the Parliamentary Committees Act. That is something that is there so that you are able to speak freely. Parliamentary privilege of course does not apply outside here.

Thank you for coming along. Obviously this being our first hearing on this issue we are interested in getting a general feel for the issues that relate to professional learning. Before you begin, could you introduce yourselves.

Ms PETCH — Thank you very much. We welcome the opportunity to present to the committee. On my right is Raylene Dodds, who is the acting assistant general manager of leadership and teacher development in the Office for Government School Education. On my left is Cathy Beesey, who is the acting group manager for student learning programs in the Office for Government School Education. I think we are all in an acting role. My name is Judy Petch, and I am the acting general manager for teacher and school capacity building division in the Office for Government School Education.

Developing workforce capacity is a strategic priority for the department. The impact of some of the recent work by the department has been recognised by the OECD. Victoria has been selected by the OECD to be one of three sites to have an intensive case study based around innovative professional learning and leadership. That will be happening during August this year. It is an acknowledgement that is quite significant in terms of the work that has been undertaken over the last couple years, to have that recognition by the OECD.

In setting a context for what we intend to present today it is important that we start, probably, in November 2003 when the *Blueprint for Government Schools* was launched, and that was specifically to improve the performance of government schools and to ensure that all students gained access to a quality education. A comprehensive range of strategies, which I will certainly expand on during the course of this presentation, were deliberately built to develop the skills of the education workforce and to improve teacher quality. The blueprint actually placed teacher quality at the centre of those strategies. Those strategies have included student learning initiatives around curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting, building leadership capacity, teacher professional learning and other workforce and school improvement initiatives.

The strategies implemented supported the department's approach and that of other educational jurisdictions because the department continually scans what is happening around the world — and the research base — which confirmed that teachers have a significant impact on student learning and are probably one of the key determinants of the variations in student achievement in any schools.

The department requires that all teachers and leaders engage in annual reviews of their performance and they are required and encouraged to identify professional learning needs and goals that are aligned to a school's strategic priorities, and indeed to the department's priorities and government targets. Teachers are expected to keep abreast of the expanding knowledge base, which is consistently illustrated in changes in curriculum, in assessment, in reporting and having an impact on teacher practice. Performance expectations are matched by a recognition by the department that teachers' growth and development needs to be invested in over time, so global budgets within schools provide funds for professional learning, but other professional learning initiatives are subsidised by the department so that teachers are able to engage in a wide range of professional learning opportunities.

It is probably important to note that the department is very clear about its definition of professional learning. One of the things that was produced was a publication that was provided to all schools — to every principal in a government school in Victoria. Within this publication the department defines professional learning as an intentional and purposeful process that is designed to bring about positive change and improvement. It is a deliberate process, and it is guided by a clear purpose and goals. The department developed and constructed an evidence-based model of highly effective professional learning. It was constructed based on a very critical scanning of the literature of the research and of models that had been developed around the world. That evidence base was synthesised so that a model was put up.

It is probably important in terms of the definition of professional learning to say that there were a number of factors that the department identified and built into the model. Essentially, highly effective professional learning is described as that which is focused on student outcomes; is embedded in future practice; is informed by the best available research and effective adult learning; is collaborative, involving reflection and feedback; is evidence-based and data driven to guide improvement and measure impact; is ongoing, supported and integrated into the culture of all levels of the system; and is an individual and collective responsibility and not optional.

The preferred models of professional learning that are supported by the research base, and certainly reflected in department initiatives, include mentoring, coaching, shadowing, train-the-trainer models, inquiry action research, classroom observation and feedback, individually-guided activities and team-based approaches. These models are supported across educational jurisdictions. If we were to look at professional learning models in other countries, they would replicate some of those models that are embedded in department initiatives. These professional learning principles have certainly informed the design and delivery of professional learning initiatives in government schools.

There is an extensive array, but I would briefly like to outline some of them. Teacher professional leave is an initiative where teachers are able to get up to 10 weeks paid leave, and to date 2000 teachers have participated. This initiative has provided time for teachers to inquire into, study and work with other teachers around challenges of teacher practice and certainly within the context of a school's priorities. Another initiative is the Learning to Lead Effective Schools initiative, which is actually a suite of 20 leadership programs that are identified and targeted at different stages of growth for teachers and leaders and at different stages in their careers. Induction and mentoring of beginning teachers is done in conjunction with the VIT. This program targets support for beginning teachers, as well as a teacher mentor support program to the government, Catholic and independent sectors.

Refresher courses for teachers returning to government schools provide teachers who are returning to school after an absence of three or more years or who have been trained overseas or interstate with an understanding of the current government school setting. The type of support and training they get is around current curriculum, assessment and reporting initiatives to ensure that there is a smooth transition back into the school setting, and with some ongoing support. The array of student learning initiatives that have been developed over the last three or four years in particular to support the professional learning of teachers and leaders includes online resources; self-assessment tools; self-paced professional learning programs, including discipline, specific resources, forums and workshops — where teachers gather together with expert facilitators to examine those student learning resources. The resources and tools have supported, and continue to support, the implementation of Victorian essential learning standards, curriculum planning, teacher practice and assessment and reporting.

One of the main strategies has been the principles of learning and teaching. I think we have got a folder that demonstrates the depth of the resources that are available within that strategy. It is designed to support a consistent approach to teaching practice across the system, and it enables teachers to review their practice. It has also proved to be a significant strategy in that, based on a survey of their staff, principals are able to identify professional learning needs within their staff to target that professional learning to individuals, teams and across the school.

The department also has significant cross-sectorial links with industry, training institutes, universities and schools — for example, the Australian Government Quality Teacher program, where the Australian government funds each of the sectors and those three sectors meet together and share, discuss and report on progress over the course of any one year. The department has a number of professional learning programs that it has funded through that program. Master in School Leadership is another initiative where we have been targeting our potential leaders. We are up to our fourth cohort. It has been a very successful collaboration with Monash and Melbourne universities.

We have ICT professional learning programs, one of which is called Creating New Learning Leaders, which is done in partnership with Microsoft. E-potential and ICT capabilities resources have been developed by Victoria in conjunction with South Australia and the Northern Territory. There is an online toolkit which assists teachers and leaders to plan and set professional learning goals around the integration of ICT into their curriculum. Again that type of resource enables principals to survey the capabilities and capacity of their staff at any point in time, identify gaps and then target the professional learning at an individual team or school level.

A significant resource was developed earlier in the year called the Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders. That was a very successful collaboration with the University of Melbourne, and that resource has been

provided to every principal in Victoria to work with their leadership teams. It identifies the capabilities required of school leaders in government schools, and it provides a continuum so that any leader is able to determine what stage of growth they are at and then is able to target their professional learning accordingly.

We also have had successful collaborations with Melbourne and Monash universities in the development of English, maths and science continuums, which are being used by teachers in schools throughout Victoria to enable them to understand how a child progresses in those particular disciplines and then to be able to both determine their own professional development needs and also the teacher practice that matches that particular stage of growth.

We have also had a successful collaboration with Harvard University in terms of WIDE World online pedagogy. The department has funded a number of teacher teams across the state to be enrolled in those Harvard online programs, which specifically focus on classroom practice and gaining a greater understanding of their work by both working online with a cohort around the world and also being able to develop that in their practice.

There are other strategies that the department has used to support professional learning within and across schools: literacy improvement teams — which is essentially coaching in the classroom, where you have a literacy specialist who is working side-by-side with individual teachers. At this stage 159 schools are involved and 67 literacy specialists, 22 of whom are funded by the regions.

Performance and development culture accreditation is another initiative that the department has rolled out in order to build the internal capacity of every government school in Victoria. The elements of that accreditation involve providing evidence of a comprehensive professional learning strategy within your school, having customised individual professional learning plans for every member of staff, having an induction program for all beginning teachers within that school and providing evidence that all teachers use multiple sources of feedback on their practice in order to improve that practice.

We also have innovation and excellence cluster coordinators — about 257 across the state — who are recognised for their expertise in teacher pedagogy. They work with groups of schools across the state, where they focus on aspects of teacher practice and agree on the priorities for those particular areas.

The Leading Schools Fund has created centres of excellence around the state and has brought together groups of schools who now support other schools in looking at innovative ways of improving teacher practice, and we also continue to invite international educators into Victoria who move around the state. We hold forums for teachers and for leaders so that they are exposed to the most current thinking around teacher practice and school improvement.

The department recognises that there are challenges in the delivery of professional learning and continues to evaluate the impact that professional learning initiatives have and to refine approaches over time. The external evaluations to date confirm that there has been substantial participation across the state and that participant feedback suggests that there have been changes in the knowledge base of teachers as well as changes in practice.

Rural and regional isolation is being addressed through statewide initiatives, a comprehensive resource base online, videoconferencing, mandatory practices such as the mentoring of beginning teachers and the mentoring of beginning principals, as well as regional professional learning initiatives. The department recognises that changes in teacher practice take time but continues to maintain a focus on developing the knowledge base and skills of teachers through sustained learning.

There are future initiatives that the department believes will further assist the education workforce to increase its knowledge base. The Ultrinet is an electronic knowledge management system which will be deployed in order to connect every Victorian government school within Victoria and to make transparent teacher practice and resources that are developed in any school in any part of Victoria.

At the statewide Big Day Out for all principals in Victoria a classroom instructional model was put on the table and received overwhelming endorsement from the principals in the room — that they would support the development of a classroom instructional model in order to develop a common language and understanding of effective teacher practice. That is now under construction and that will evolve into a developmental learning continuum for quality teaching so that teachers are able to locate themselves on a continuum to determine what their current practices are and where they can actually target their professional learning to improve that practice.

The department's priority is to develop workforce capacity and to improve the performance of government schools. In order to do that it will continue to refine and improve the professional learning that is provided to teachers and leaders in the Victorian government system.

The CHAIR — Thank you. You have covered a lot of ground there. Now we will go to questions. Who wants to start?

Mr KOTSIRAS — Can I just ask — with the teacher leave, you said that there was a minimum of 4 weeks to a maximum of 10 weeks. How often can a teacher get 10 weeks leave? Is it up to the school or the department?

Ms PETCH — When teachers put in their application for teacher professional leave they can only gain one block, so 10 weeks is given to one teacher.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How many years? When can I apply again for the leave?

Ms PETCH — I think that the idea is to try and be as equitable as possible — we would like the greatest number of teachers to be involved in the initiative. If I as a teacher received 10 weeks leave in 2008, then I would not expect to gain it again.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How many teachers would get that a year?

Ms PETCH — I think at this stage we have had about 2000 — I would have to take that on notice to get the exact numbers — but it might be one individual in the school or a team of teachers that actually makes application for that school.

Mr KOTSIRAS — During your presentation you went through a number of programs. How do you assess the success of those programs? Is there anything in place to say 'That has worked; that hasn't'?

Ms PETCH — Indeed any initiative that is developed in the department has a robust evaluation framework built into it. In the majority of instances those evaluations are done by external providers, so that every leadership program, for instance the 20 leadership programs, have both an internal evaluation component done by the provider who delivers the program and then we have an external evaluation that looks at the 20 leadership programs in total. Certainly, Cathy, you might talk about student learning initiatives.

Ms BEESEY — All these programs are opt-in. With our Student Learning Professional Learning program we have had over 60 per cent of schools who have opted in to participate over 2005–06 and into 2007. As part of their opting in we always collect evaluations that identify what have been the strengths of the program and what have been the strengths of the resource, and we encourage participants to think about what they will do when they go back into their own school.

Mr KOTSIRAS — One more. As I said earlier, I think teachers are time poor. Do you think teachers should be encouraged to take more PD days during their term holidays rather than during school time? Should more teachers be taking PD?

Ms PETCH — Are you asking for a personal perspective?

Mr KOTSIRAS — Yes.

Ms PETCH — Or the department's position?

Mr KOTSIRAS — Oh, no, your expert perspective.

Ms PETCH — The global budget of the school certainly provides funds for teachers. One of the reasons that the department has invested so heavily in leadership is that we need leaders who can actually create the conditions within their school and the structures that enable teachers to have the time to meet together and to work on their practice. We would take it from the point of view that an effective leader in a school is able to use the time, the structures and the processes within that school to create the opportunities for teachers to work together, to observe one another and to work in teams.

Mr KOTSIRAS — That is a very good public service response.

Ms PETCH — Thank you.

Mr KOTSIRAS — But it does not answer my question.

Mr HALL — First of all, thanks for the presentation. It was appreciated, Judy. You said that global budgets provide funds for professional learning; is there a targeted amount within the global budget specifically for professional learning?

Ms PETCH — I would have to take part of that on notice. Prior to the introduction of the SRP there was a budget line in the global budget. That no longer applies, because the funding follows the student, so it is now a nominal amount that is provided for each teacher. I would have to take that on notice to find that amount.

Mr HALL — All right. Are there any expectations from the department as to how much a school should be spending on professional learning?

Ms PETCH — I think the department has tried to broaden schools' understanding of what professional learning is. Certainly in all publications it is stated quite explicitly that it is not just about going out of the school to undertake a program, but that the most effective professional learning actually happens within the school context, with teachers working together on aspects of their practice within their own school, working with other teachers, being observed and inquiring into their own practice. There are obviously times when the knowledge base is not there and they may require external expertise to be brought in or they may need to go out of the school, but the department has been very consistent in its broad view of professional learning being not simply about discrete programs.

Mr HALL — In terms of the annual reviews that teachers undertake, you said that they identify areas where there is perhaps a need for professional development. Is there any mandatory requirement or is there a situation in which a teacher would be required to do particular programs as a result of that annual review process?

Ms PETCH — I think that would be possible, because effectively the school leader has to take responsibility to ensure that all teachers meet the standards when they are reviewed in any one year. That review process may well be where a principal would specifically recommend that teachers undertake particular professional learning.

Mr HALL — It might be pressure more related to VIT in terms of its mandatory requirements. My last question, which I think is going to be the hardest one for us as a committee to tackle, is about measuring the learning outcomes from professional development. As you rightly said in answer to Nick's questions before, you can evaluate particular PD programs, but you are evaluating at the level of the recipient rather than ultimately the level of the kids at the end of the line. Can you give us any advice or provide any work that the department is doing in trying to measure learning outcomes as a result of particular programs?

Ms PETCH — I think you are right; I think it is the \$64 million question. Certainly the department, in framing the expectations of providers who undertake the evaluations, is continually looking for measures with those programs to see whether in fact they can find indicators that might assist us with that final stage of professional learning. I think that the research base supports the premise that there is a lag between teachers actually gaining knowledge and changing practice and students changing their performance. Certainly the initiatives that are being rolled out now, particularly those with a level of support provided within the classroom — for instance, around the literacy coaches — and those that have a particular focus on working in the classroom and a direct impact in that classroom are probably where we will get our answers from, rather than from some of the leadership programs, for instance.

Mr HERBERT — Each school has so many professional development days — is that right? How many is that? Do they do three or five days a year? How many professional development days do schools have?

Ms BEESEY — Four.

Mr HERBERT — Four; okay. That is a fair commitment from government, I guess, and the department.

Mr KOTSIRAS — It is pretty slack, if you ask me. It is appalling.

Mr HERBERT — Do you monitor what goes on on those days, and do you have an evaluation across the state of what sorts of things are occurring during those professional development days?

Ms PETCH — The principal of every school takes responsibility for the professional learning. Certainly that would be reflected in their performance reviews with their senior education officers and the regional directors within their regions. There would be evidence of that in their annual implementation plans, their strategic priorities and the documentation that they would provide to the region in terms of their accountabilities. Certainly it might not be as fine grained, but that would be evidenced in the conversations that the principals have with their designated officers over the course of the year. The assumption underpinning the principal performance process is that they will be very rich conversations about the improvement strategies and milestones over the course of one year.

Mr HERBERT — I am not asking for evidence. Sorry, Judy. You have just run through a fair array of professional development programs that are run by the education department, and presumably they are administered out of here and operate through the regions. What I am asking is, if we assume that the four days for every teacher in every school is a fair whack or a major part of the professional development that occurs in the system, do you have feedback on what has happened there and how that relates to all the other programs you are doing, or are they done in isolation? Are the programs you have gone through today done in isolation from what is actually happening in most of the schools during most of their professional development?

Ms PETCH — No. In the first instance some of those professional learning programs that are rolled out actually have to relate to the strategic priority of a school. What professional learning is undertaken is written into a teacher's performance plan or a school leader's performance plan. The professional learning is actually undertaken both as part of the program but also within their own school, so there is accountability through the program to ensure that they are not carrying another load of baggage, that the professional learning is actually taking place within the context of their own school and that they are working on a problem in practice. That is in the first instance. In the second instance, the department does not have a comprehensive map of every school in the state and what they do on those four professional development days. The responsibility for that lies with the principal, and it would reflect the needs of that school in the context of its priorities and the department's priorities.

Mr HERBERT — The reason I ask is that I would have thought that what happens across the state would be monitored, if for no other reason than to give us a good idea of where schools see the priorities being in professional development. I think that is the direction, and I am happy for you to comment on that. Presumably, if schools are the determining bodies and if they are doing professional development in a certain area, even a rough evaluation of that by talking to regions et cetera would show that a large proportion of schools are doing it in curriculum design, VELs or whatever, and that would be an indication centrally for where prioritisation should go.

Ms PETCH — I think that information is fed through — certainly fed through the department. That comes through the principal providing that information through to their designated officer. I think that is put on the table at the regions. The regions certainly provide that information to the department.

Mr HERBERT — The only other question is: in terms of 60 per cent of schools that take up the PD package, do we monitor those to see that the poorer performing schools are in fact the ones taking up the PD, that that 60 per cent is not made up of the same schools or the high-achieving schools? Do we have some sort of mechanism in place to double-check that in fact the voluntary nature of it means it is going where it is needed, as opposed to schools — —

Ms PETCH — We have databases — for instance, with the blueprint initiatives, we can say what initiatives any one school in Victoria has actually taken on board. We target particular programs for particular disadvantaged areas. So, for instance, with the literacy coaches, the index that was established was around the SFOs, so that those schools that had the greatest need, those students that were performing below expectations, they were the ones that we targeted. So we certainly target, we believe, the right schools. The regions have priority schools, they identify schools, they monitor that progress, they have extensive data.

Mr HERBERT — Do the schools get a phone call from the region, saying, 'Hey, look, you're down in these areas. There are these packages. We suggest you take that up' — that is what would happen?

Ms PETCH — Certainly.

Mr KOTSIRAS — I reckon that is a good job for the new parliamentary secretary to undertake, to earn his money.

The CHAIR — If I can just take up the point about professional development time, my memory of my teaching days is that a good part of it was taken up with assessment and reporting. There were certainly plenty of changes in the latter part of my teaching days and my feedback is that it is still happening, that a lot of teacher professional development time is taken up with programs, especially in the assessment area, that are developed from other areas of the department of education. I am wondering whether when you look at teaching and professional development there is a concern there and whether there is an opportunity across the department to balance directives that are presented to schools, so that we are not skewing what is teacher time so that it is taken up in addressing one area of education, rather than others. I am looking for some commentary on how you work through the system to ensure a balance in professional development.

Ms PETCH — The department would like to think that we do not take up the time of teachers on things that are not important. Certainly the initiatives around assessment and reporting are aimed to actually improve the quality of what is happening in the classrooms. So I think that because schools and teachers are at different stages of growth and development sometimes it may well appear to be overwhelmed. The department would like to think that the resources that are provided enable the principals to make strategic decisions about what expectations they have of teachers at any point in time. A lot of leaders will buffer, to enable teachers to concentrate on particular things at a particular time, rather than being overwhelmed by everything at once.

The CHAIR — The other thing I was just going to ask about is what you talked about, the substantial participation in professional development. Again, there are all sorts of issues about what is professional development and so on. Is it again back to the principals to determine those issues so that when they look at their staff they are satisfied that they are all being challenged to undertake suitable professional development, or how do we assess that further up the system?

Ms PETCH — Certainly the principals, in being responsible for the performance and development of all their teachers, will make some judgements in terms of the gaps within their own schools about the areas that they will focus on. But at a cluster level, at a network level, at a regional level and certainly at the department level we use a whole range of different communication channels to ensure that people are aware of the opportunities that are available. They are then fed through, certainly to the principals, so that they have the best possible information to be able to make decisions about where they should focus attention. Principals, schools and teachers are often invited. So the region might actually target particular schools or principals with particular opportunities because they believe that they would benefit from them in terms of their school improvement.

The CHAIR — Thank you. You have given us a lot to think about again.

Ms PETCH — We would like to leave you with a lot, too.

The CHAIR — I was also going to ask whether there is some material.

Ms PETCH — We have a whole set of the sources, that are all available publicly.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 6 August 2007

Members

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Mr B. Finn
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Witnesses

Mr J. Firth, chief executive officer; and

Ms H. Wildash, general manager, curriculum, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority,

The CHAIR — Welcome to the representatives from the VCAA to the first day of the Education and Training Committee's inquiry into effective strategies for professional teacher learning. As you would be aware, we are taping the material that you share with us. A transcript of that recording will be forwarded back to you for you to have a look at and then we will be adding it to our formal inquiry material. I also advise that the material you share with us is covered by parliamentary privilege as it is shared in this room, so you can be aware of that. Of course that does not apply outside the room.

I would like to invite you now to make a statement to us, and we will of course follow up with some questions. I will get you to formally introduce yourselves for the benefit of the transcript as well as for our general benefit.

Mr FIRTH — Thanks very much, Mr Chair. My name is John Firth. I am the chief executive officer of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, and I have with me Ms Helen Wildash, who is the general manager, curriculum. We will make a relatively brief opening statement and then we are happy to take any questions.

To start off, just to clarify the VCAA's role in relation to teacher professional learning and the terms of reference of this inquiry, as you know the VCAA is a statutory authority. It is perhaps not always the case, but in our case our title makes it very clear what our job is, which is to work in curriculum and assessment for Victorian schools.

Under the act, or our part of the Education and Training Reform Act, we have responsibility for professional development, essentially in relation to our key purposes — that is, to the curriculum and assessment programs that we run — so that we do not have a generic responsibility for workforce development and for developing teachers more generally as teachers. That is really the responsibility of the employing authorities and teachers themselves. Our professional development remit runs to assisting teachers and schools to understand the curriculum and assessment arrangements that we put in place and to assist them with their implementation. What that means in practice is, as you would be aware, at the senior years it is essentially the Victoria Certificate of Education and in the last four to five years the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning as well, and various VET programs that can contribute to both the VCE and the VCAL. For the P-10 years, it is the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, which is the set of standards that we developed and within which schools develop their curriculum, and also the statewide testing program, the AIM, which we administer for years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

We are a cross-sectoral authority so we cover all Victorian schools. What that means is that we work closely with the employing authorities in the sectors with the Department of Education, with the Catholic Education commission and the offices in Victoria and with the Association of Independent Schools Victoria, when we are developing new policies and programs and when we are assisting schools to understand and implement them.

I guess there are a couple of phases where teacher professional learning comes in and there are a range of levels of opportunities that we provide. When we are developing new programs or reviewing existing VCE subjects, for example, we put together initially expert working parties which generally have a majority of teachers, so for expert teachers or teachers who have particular interest and expertise, there is an opportunity to be involved in the policy and program development. That is obviously going to be a minority of people, but for those who undertake it, it is a major professional development activity to be involved in a working party providing advice to the board. Then when drafts are developed, we conduct consultations and discussions, both online and face to face around the state, and then when finally they are approved, we then have to develop an implementation strategy, and that is most particularly in conjunction with the employing authorities, so that schools are equipped to understand the nature of the program and to meet any commitments they might have under them. That applies at each of the different levels.

To support those activities we see our responsibilities as developing the policies and documents themselves. Depending on the need, we will develop support materials and resources which should be available in hard copy and/or online and, when it comes to particular VCE reviews which are, I guess, the most concrete examples, when we review something and change it after a four or five-year period, we generally run an implementation program for the schools in the year before its implementation to ensure that schools are ready to teach the new subject and understand the assessment requirements.

Just to give a couple of recent examples of the scale and scope of that and how we do it, we reviewed chemistry a year or two ago and made some reasonably substantial changes, so last year we conducted a series of briefings for chemistry teachers and prospective chemistry teachers around the state. We did those in 14 locations — six metropolitan and eight regional. We conducted that in association with the Chemistry Education Association,

and most of our work with VCE subjects is done in partnership with an appropriate professional body, sharing expertise. They have access to members and they have access to networks that we do not necessarily have. Those chemistry briefings, for example, were attended by 541 participants around the state who came from the full range of providers — 178 government schools, 78 independent schools, 65 Catholic schools, 4 adult providers and 3 other providers.

That is a model of what we typically do when we are revising VCE subjects, and we have done similar things with the revised English study this year and last year. There was a similar exercise with VCAL when VCAL was developed initially by the VQA. Since we took over the responsibility for it, we have run briefings, especially for new schools when they come on, and then while they are conducting the VCAL we provide a range of quality assurance exercises, which involve teacher moderation meetings, which we support. We appointed 20 or so expert teachers around the state to convene those. They are released a number of days a year to work for us so there is a particular professional development opportunity for those people who are the expert reviewers, but we also provide two meetings — one at the beginning of the year and one towards the end — for all VCAL teachers to ensure that their work is being moderated. Now, understand that there is a dual purpose there in a sense. The primary purpose is our responsibility for the quality assurance of the assessments. It has a flow-on effect. It is for general professional development. It is not run for professional development purposes per se, but it has a knock-on effect.

I guess our other major impact on teacher professional learning is through participation in the assessment programs. We are gearing up towards the VCE assessment time of the year. We employ 3500 assessors, most of whom are practising teachers, for the written component of VCE assessment. A big majority of them are practising teachers. Again, the purpose of that is to get experts involved in the assessment program, but there is training provided at the start, and most people who participate in VCE assessment regard it as high-level professional development. Many people would say it is the best thing you can do in terms of PD. Similarly, coming up at the beginning of term 4 we have the performance exams in both LOTE — languages other than English — and performing arts. We have 700 assessors for oral LOTE and 300 for performing arts. Again, there are major opportunities for those teachers to participate.

In terms of the ongoing support for something like the implementation of Victorian Essential Learning Standards — it is a bit of a contrast, in a sense — that is a program that schools are two-thirds of the way through. We provide lots of materials. We have had working parties to help us produce expert materials, but the rollout of support for that has largely been the responsibility of the employing authorities. We work in a train-the-trainer model, to a certain extent, with the people who work in the department in its innovation and excellence clusters and with regional curriculum consultants. They are responsible for directly supporting the schools. The same is true in the Catholic Education Office, which is committed to supporting its schools to help. We do not have the resources and it is not especially our remit to go around and support directly the 40 000 government school teachers and the other 20 000 or whatever it is. It is a huge number. We have a supportive and collaborative role with the sector authorities when it comes to that form of supporting the profession.

There are various other forms of technical support and training that we provide as well in terms of interpreting the data, which I will not go into great detail on. We will coordinate with Michael to provide links for the committee for the various websites.

There are about 130 different offerings at the VCE level, if you count all the different languages, the VET programs and so on. Each of those has a dedicated page on our website with lists of resources, activities and so on. From time to time we target particular priority areas. I will give one or two examples, and this flows over into the question you asked about challenges. What we need to be doing in particular, of course, is keeping curriculum up to date. We have an ageing workforce. With the introduction of technology, for example, we have spent a lot of time over the last 10 years introducing more advanced technology into the maths curriculum at all levels, but particularly at the senior level, with the introduction of computer algebra systems. In that case we have collaborated with the providers of the software to run professional development programs for teachers so that they are equipped to actually use this new technology.

On a smaller scale we have done the same thing with accounting. We introduced accounting software into the VCE accounting study design. We did it progressively over a five-year to six-year period. We worked with the key subject association — the Victorian Commercial Teachers Association — and with the software providers. If you are going to teach accounting at a senior level, it makes no sense at all not to use accounting software, because that is what any student will discover when they go into the workforce and if they go on to any further study, whether it

be at TAFE or at university level. Many of our accounting teachers gained their accounting qualifications — like I did when I did my accounting study — rather a long time ago, but certainly well before there was widespread application of computing. The same thing would apply in the sciences, with the application of biotechnology and the synchrotron, which we introduced into physics as an option. Again, we have run professional development programs for that. We collaborate with the sector authorities and the specialist providers.

We do a lot of work with not just professional associations but with some of the major community education providers — Scienceworks, the museum and the art gallery. We have a terrific relationship with both the Melbourne Museum and the National Gallery of Victoria. We collaborate and produce material for teachers as part of the VCE excellence programs every year, for example. Each of those has a major suite of workshops for teachers of those VCE subjects hanging off their exhibitions, so the teachers can not only take their students to look at exhibitions at the museum, at the art gallery or at ACMI, but there are also professional development programs that we run in association with those organisations.

We are very much into partnerships and very much focused on making sure that schools and teachers have the capacity to successfully implement the curriculum and assessment programs that we run as opposed to having a more generic responsibility to upskill teachers. We do not see that as our role, but we do see it as our role to enhance the capacity of schools to successfully implement the programs that we are developing. I guess that sits as an overview of our role and gives you a bit of a snapshot of the sorts of things that we do in this area of teacher professional learning.

Mr HALL — Thanks, John, for that overview. Can I ask, to start with, who actually pays to access the professional learning programs that you deliver? Do you provide them free of charge?

Mr FIRTH — Some are free of charge and some have relatively nominal charges. For the VCE ones that we run in conjunction with, say, the Victorian Association of Teachers of English, there is a small charge — \$20, \$30 or something like that — to attend, largely to cover the exigencies of tea, coffee or whatever, but basically we subsidise those. We provide a payment to the association to run those programs, and we produce most of the material that is given out at those, but sometimes there is a relatively small charge.

Mr HALL — That is generally the case?

Mr FIRTH — It is generally the case for VCE.

Mr HALL — For VCAL programs and things like that?

Mr FIRTH — If it is a compulsory requirement to attend, such as the VCAL moderation days, if you like, there is no charge. They are fully funded by us. If it is a voluntary program, in a sense, then there might be a nominal charge, but we bear most of the cost of those.

Mr HALL — With curriculum changes like you mentioned in chemistry, would those programs be provided free of charge to schools?

Mr FIRTH — We provide all the material, we provide the study designs free, and we provide support material on the website and sometimes in CD-ROMs and those sorts of things. For those programs we ran with the Chemistry Education Association, again there would have been a nominal charge. It would have been nothing like full cost, but \$20, \$30 or something along those lines.

Mr HALL — Do you have an in-house team at the authority to develop some of those programs, or do you largely contract them out, as you said, to professional organisations, subject organisations et cetera?

Mr FIRTH — We do not have a full-time professional development team or anything like it. In Helen's area in particular we have curriculum managers with expertise — people who are in charge of developing the programs. Helen might like to talk about how they work with the professional development activities.

Ms WILDASH — The curriculum managers, as their name suggests, manage large chunks of curriculum content, if you like. One curriculum manager might be responsible for two, three, four or five VCE studies as well as a VELS domain, so there is a lot of work that they do. In fact they are managing the development of the review of those areas of the curriculum. Then when it comes to implementation support with professional learning, they may in fact construct an outline and, through a tender process, contract a professional association to do something

that is particularly tailored to supporting teachers to understand changes to a chemistry curriculum, an English curriculum or whatever it happens to be. We do not have a whole lot of staff inside, but we try to manage our resources and the timing of all our review cycles so that they are sensible and manageable for teachers and also manageable for us in terms of what we do.

Mr HALL — That curriculum-based PD that you actually take responsibility for, do you get that out to a lot of the rural and regional centres, and, if so, how do you do that?

Mr FIRTH — Yes. It is a priority for us, Peter, to make sure we can provide material statewide. In English and chemistry we ran at least eight regionally-based PDs in those areas. We generally go to Mildura, because it is just too far away for them to go somewhere else, even though it might be a small group. Generally at least two at each end of each country region is our general sort of template for that.

Of course we have moved increasingly to providing resources online, which are more accessible across the whole state. Following a round of those activities, for example, typically in the review of that with our partners we would identify any issues that have arisen, any frequently asked questions and any follow-up, and we would make those available on our website and publish them in the bulletin. We do not see it as a one-off. We see it as an ongoing exercise. We are frequently providing updated advice to schools on the basis of questions that we get, and that is statewide. We go to some lengths to make sure that we do go to the full extent of the state, and we would certainly provide, per capita, more support in country regions than we would in city regions.

Mr HALL — Do you do any tracking, John, as to which schools take up those offers — for instance, you said that with the chemistry review there were 500-odd schools or something?

Mr FIRTH — We do monitor. We have attendance lists for all of those and so on. It is not compulsory attendance. When principals sign up to be a VCE provider they sign an annual declaration to us that they will ensure that the teachers of any subjects that they offer have got access to the appropriate resources and support, so there is a general understanding that that is your responsibility as a VCE provider. Occasionally our curriculum managers will take calls from individual teachers who are feeling a bit overwhelmed or whatever. They perform a very supportive role in terms of linking people to others. Most of our curriculum managers develop their own very strong networks. I know that we often provide advice linking up inexperienced teachers with experienced teachers.

Increasingly there are some self-developing networks as well, using the web, which we monitor but are not responsible for, so we can point to people to resources. We do see that as a role on request — to plug people into support networks. We do not necessarily seek to go to schools and ask ‘What are you doing in relation to this’, but we will certainly be very responsive to any requests.

Mr KOTSIRAS — You said that one of the best PDs is when teachers are actually employed to mark scripts. Have you got a break-up of whether they come from the public school sector or the private school sector; is it the same teachers every year; and what PD do you provide to give teachers the opportunity to become script markers?

Mr FIRTH — I can get you the breakdown. We do monitor that list to ensure that we have a spread from across the three sectors. We are constantly using our publications — and the most obvious one is the VCE VCAL bulletin, which all year 11 and year 12 teachers read religiously — to call for expressions of interest, and we have just done it again recently. We do it regularly during the year. We also use what networks we can to encourage people to apply. If they do apply we take them through a training session and we make a final selection after the training session. It is generally a one-day training session, which is an example of the sort of things they are doing. New people in particular will look at some sample scripts and so on, and we will get a bit of an indication of their accuracy or otherwise in marking. We do not simply take everybody who applies, but if they show interest in being involved, we invite them to a training session, take them through and then confirm or otherwise their selection at the end of that.

I think the implication of your question is an interesting one, and we are pursuing internally whether we can do a little bit more by perhaps going out and running some model training sessions before people apply to encourage people to apply. That is a model that we are looking at. We are a bit constrained by resources of course, but I think it has something going for it in terms of broadening the base. We are always looking to broaden the base.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Many years ago I was a script marker. The first year I did it my confidence went through the roof in terms of my ability to teach the contents the following year. I imagine teachers would benefit so much from it, but only if they were provided with the opportunity to learn a bit more.

Mr FIRTH — Yes, absolutely. One of the things we are doing is to talk to the principals associations in each of these sectors as well, encouraging them to be encouraging of their staff because of that effect that you talked about. We also work with principals, reminding them of the value to their staff involved and getting them to be promoting. If you have got a school leadership group which is supporting this, it can also have an impact on the number of people who volunteer to do it.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Do you use the expertise of TAFEs and university staff?

Mr FIRTH — Yes, they are not exclusively teachers. There is a majority of teachers, but we also have some academics. We have some people who have recently retired. There is a range of people. As I said in my opening remarks, our priority of course is to get capable, competent people who can mark accurately. Most of them happen to be teachers, so the professional development, if you like, is a subsidiary effect of it rather than its main purpose — in other words, we do not restrict it to teachers. Other people with expertise can also apply and are also employed.

The CHAIR — I was going to ask you a question about programs like the VELs that has now come in. Presumably when programs like this come in there is a need for lots of workshopping in schools so that teachers understand the new program and so on, but I am also interested in getting a sense of the feedback you get from those workshops to see whether some of the things you do within a program like VELs or its predecessors is varied to take into account the feedback that you are getting from teachers.

Ms WILDASH — What we have been trying to do as an authority is to hook into both Catholic Education and the Department of Education programs that are around supporting VELs implementation, because a lot of the work we do is supportive, complementary, largely in the area of online resources and materials. If there is only one curriculum manager who has to work prep through to year 12, they would not carry the VCE and the VELs. There is a limit to the human input that can be there. What we are trying to do is to be strategic in getting information about how it is going. In relation to developing the VELs, a review of the CSF2 in terms of what teachers views about that were — what were the strengths, what were the weaknesses — influenced how VELs turned out, and we certainly have a different beast in terms of the essential learning standards.

I guess one of the things that has interrupted the implementation process is the big focus on assessment. It is probably a little bit soon from our point of view, but it was important to understand the imperatives that the department, the Catholic education sector and the independents were following through on in relation to the commonwealth reporting guidelines. There has been a bit of interesting work with teachers, who say: 'It is about assessment'. We are saying 'No, it is about the combination of the standards and how you shape your curriculum'. Fortunately the department has developed a Principles of Learning and Teaching program, which gives a complementary view of what they should do in terms of curriculum planning guidelines and looking at student work.

We are always looking for ways of getting more feedback. We run teacher reference groups and review groups. We have just had reference groups a couple of weeks ago asking us what materials we should be focusing our limited resources on now in terms of supporting teachers with the VELs implementation.

Mr FIRTH — We are also a partner in the department's evaluation itself, more broadly, of the Blueprint and how it is going. There is a major external evaluation being undertaken for the department. We are a party to that with them, and we will have access to that data as it comes through in terms of the evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the VELs as well as the other aspects of the blueprint. As Helen said, we also regularly commission reference groups and focus groups — representative groups of teachers — to get feedback about what is working and what is not, as well as encouraging people to respond to our website.

Ms WILDASH — In fact, one of the key strategic initiatives proposed for our board for the coming year or two is around that renewal process and how we get accurate data from teachers about the next curriculum iteration. But we do not talk about that too loudly because people get a bit panicky when they are halfway through the year.

The CHAIR — I can understand that.

Ms WILDASH — You have to start thinking about it early in order to be ready in four, five, six or eight years time, or whenever.

The CHAIR — You heard my question before, I think. You were here when I was asking about the time taken up during professional development or curriculum days at schools. I am interested to hear your comments in terms of VELs that you are trying to get the message across. Hopefully in the implementation we will see that it is about the teaching.

Ms WILDASH — And the trick there is that VELs is a continuum, and we are actually asking teachers in their assessment to say where along this developmental highway the student is. What the department is trying to do is to match that view.

The CHAIR — The feedback I am getting in regard to it is that people are seeing the assessment as the time-consuming component of it, and I am interested to know how you are able to support teachers in reducing the time taken in completing report forms and so on so that there can be more time for some of the other issues that teachers need to be directing their time to in terms of their actual teaching effectiveness.

Mr FIRTH — For example, there is a coordinated group convened by the department on which Helen and our assessment general manager are represented, together with the other sectors — the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools — looking at this whole question of assessment reporting from P–10. Reporting responsibilities are those of the sectors, and not us. Schools do not report to us — in other words, they report back to their sector authorities. We understand of course that they are using the standards as part of that, so we are integrally involved in those discussions and in providing input into the data and the review that the department is continuing to undertake as to what is working and what is not in relation to the reporting formats.

One of the things we can do is provide increasing support for online assessment resources and so on, which can do some of the thinking work, provide some high-quality resources for schools so that 1600 government schools and all the others do not have to individually invent this stuff themselves. There is an increasing demand for high-quality assessment materials, which we can provide and which will circumvent some of that work being done individually, school by school, around the state.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that outline of VCAA. It has been very helpful to us.

Mr FIRTH — Thank you very much.

Committee adjourned.