

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students

Melbourne — 25 July 2011

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Dr G. Byrne, Chair,
Dr G. Alsop, Committee member, and
Dr S. Lea-Wood, Committee member, CHIP Foundation.

The CHAIR — On behalf of the committee I welcome you today to the public hearings of the Education and Training Committee's inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students. I point out that all the evidence being taken today has the protection of parliamentary privilege, just as we are protected by parliamentary privilege, but any comments that you make outside of these four walls does not have the same protection. Hansard, as you can see, is recording all the proceedings today. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to have a look at. You may correct any typographical errors or things that you may not have said.

We have received your submission earlier, so we have gone through that and have a number of questions we want to ask you. I invite you to start by making a small opening statement.

Dr BYRNE — Firstly, on behalf of the CHIP Foundation I really want to commend the Parliament, through this committee here, for expressing its interest in the education of gifted and talented children. As was noted in an earlier Senate Select Committee report, they are perhaps Australia's most disadvantaged students.

Briefly, the CHIP Foundation is the oldest independent Victorian advisory service specialising in the needs of intellectually able children and their families. The CHIP Foundation was established to encourage the development and education of children of high intellectual potential and to support their needs and those of their parents and teachers. The acronym 'CHIP' was coined by our founder, Professor Brian Start, who was then professor of education at Melbourne University, because he was concerned that there was a belief by many people holding influential positions in schools that giftedness was a middle-class phenomenon. The term 'gifted' he believed — and we would still agree today — is somewhat pejorative. Our interest is unashamedly with the intellectually gifted, not talented sportspeople, artists, musicians or ballet dancers, although we would add that high intellectual potential is found in many of these talented people.

In almost 25 years of working with CHIP — children of high intellectual potential — and their families we have worked with in excess of 2500 families. Many of these were from traditionally underserved populations — those who were geographically remote, those disadvantaged socioeconomically and those who struggled to reverse underachievement in their families. In the last week I have received emails from schools as far afield as Wodonga and Bendigo seeking information about what we could offer.

The CHIP Foundation has never received government funding. Without government funding, and offering heavily subsidised services, our costs outstripped our capital, and charging less than market prices — much less in many cases — to ensure open access meant that we largely relied on donations. Ultimately our services needed to change, and they did so quite dramatically about five years ago.

Today we operate a web presence only. The information contained on the website is extensive, and it is extensive compared to state, national and in many cases international websites. With a view to becoming self-funding we have produced some CHIP e-books or e-guides, and they will be available shortly at a very reduced cost for interested parties to buy. I would like to extend to the committee an offer of particularly our assessment e-book, which I ask to be treated as commercial in confidence. I am happy to forward a copy of that to the committee's executive officer, Kerryn Riseley, in the next week.

Members of our board work on a voluntary basis. We take emails and calls from parents and schools. Ninety-five per cent of our inquiries are handled on a voluntary fee-free service; some may attract a fee for service. In terms of definitions, 'high intellectual potential' is defined by us as the top 5 per cent. That is in keeping with the international standards. That is broadly 1 child in 20. That 1 child in 20 in a classroom is likely to experience classroom learning differently from others. Whilst many of these children are A+ students, talented musicians, artists and athletes, many too are underachieving and unrecognised for the intellectual potential they possess. It is this potential which we seek to have recognised and developed. I thank the committee for providing us with the opportunity to do so.

The CHAIR — We might go straight to the crux of your foundation's name, if you like, and the terminology that you use — that is, 'high intellectual potential'. Do you feel that is better received by students? I know you have alluded to that in your submission, saying you think it is a term better used by students, educators and the community. Why do you think that is the case as opposed to using the traditional 'gifted and talented' terminology?

Dr BYRNE — I will defer to Glen Alsop after my comment on this, but I think the situation is that when that name went out there 25 years ago it was certainly quite novel and unknown. The term ‘gifted’, as I alluded to earlier, is pejorative. There is a sense there that you have something that you do not deserve, that you are well catered for in a way that other students are not. Certainly Brian Start’s interest was to say, ‘High intellectual potential can be anywhere’. In those 25 years we have had schools ring us and say, ‘We are in the western suburbs. We do not have any gifted children here’. Glen, would you like to comment on that?

Dr ALSOP — Brian’s particular interest in this term was to get away from the notion of ‘gifted’, which was pejorative, but also it did not say what we were dealing with, whereas ‘high intellectual potential’ is exactly what we are dealing with. It is the measurable attribute. You cannot predict creativity; you cannot predict even some sporting abilities. You can only say, ‘Someone is looking okay and looking as though they have something’, but intellectual potential is measurable. They are imperfect in terms of measuring but IQ tests are one of the best instruments we have. They have a long history, so from the point of view of identification it is very precise. It is high, it is intelligence and it is a potential — the reason being that potential needs to be developed, it is not there, whereas giftedness implies that it is there. No-one ever said when Ian Thorpe jumped in the pool, ‘This is a gifted swimmer’; they said, ‘By God, that kid has potential’. We do not do that with intelligence; we sort of say, ‘They’re gifted’.

In terms of your point about whether students or teachers relate to it better, I cannot say much about students because in my case I tend not to discuss that in front of children as such, but certainly teachers will say, ‘Yes, that sounds very sensible and we like that’, and then they will go back to using the term ‘gifted’. It is a very hard mindset to change and to move from one term to another. The South Australians for a time did toy with the idea of using another term. They came up with the acronym SHIP, which was students of high intellectual potential. The group I work with in northern Queensland has also toyed with that acronym. It seems to be embedded. They will say, ‘Yes, what a good idea’, but the next word is ‘gifted’.

Dr LEA-WOOD — I would really like to add to that. I am on the board of the CHIP Foundation but I am also the manager of the CHIP Centre in Geelong. We work with children individually but also do a lot of work in schools. Many of the schools have accepted the term ‘CHIP’, and some even talk about running CHIP programs. The children are quite comfortable with the word ‘CHIP’, so it is something that is quite well established and well accepted in the Barwon south-west region.

The CHAIR — In terms of the two tests you use to assess giftedness, why have you chosen those particular tests as opposed to the other things out there? What would you say are the advantages they offer over the other tests that are in the marketplace at the moment?

Dr BYRNE — The CHIP Foundation has been always interested in assessment, and it is one of the services that people seek us out for. Glen and I are both psychologists and the main bulk of the work we do is certainly assessments. When parents — and let us talk about parents — approach a psychologist saying, ‘My school has suggested my child needs an assessment’, what the school is suggesting is a cognitive assessment. They are seeking an IQ test, and there are only two acceptable psychologically administered IQ tests: the Wechsler scales and the Stanford-Binet scales. By default, then, that is what we utilise — either of the scales. We use the two and take a lot of care in determining which is the better instrument for the child in front of us. Both are accepted worldwide. In Victoria the Stanford-Binet is nowhere near as well known.

There are other good instruments out there but they are not instruments that must be administered by psychologists. You have brief intelligence tests, such as the KBIT, which I know Sandra uses. These are screening tools. The Raven’s is one that was very widely used in schools, and I have used it. I have been in charge of those programs. It is a great screener because it is a non-verbal instrument. It is pattern recognition, but that is one element of an IQ measure. It is not the full element at all, and there can be 30 to 50 points difference between something that can be group administered and an individual administration. This is now being clouded of course by people going online and doing an IQ test online or watching Eddie McGuire or whoever on TV and then they say when they come to see me, ‘That IQ is quite different from what my child got’. Where did they get it? On the internet. We have a real cloudiness in assessment. In terms of our position, we are looking at that benchmark — top 5 per cent and top 3 per cent are the two figures — on a recognised individually administered IQ assessment.

The CHAIR — In terms of some of the testing for achievement that is currently being used in schools, you mentioned in your submission that it is potentially leaving out or missing some of the children from non-English-speaking backgrounds and from different disadvantaged groups. How do you think we can do identification in those types of groups?

Dr ALSOP — The non-verbal tests are probably the strongest. The two that Gail mentioned, SB5 and WISC-IV, are the two that are administered by psychologists. Up until the early 1990s the Raven's progressive matrices test was regarded, particularly in research — and that was throughout the world; in America and in Europe and England — as one of the strongest of what they call g-loaded tests, because it has a strong identifier of non-verbal reasoning and abstract and conceptual thought. This became a very good way of establishing a general ability as much as anything. The Raven's is still around. It is not necessarily well liked by some companies that no longer have it, because it is a commercial product. It was handled by ACER for a while. Now they have lost it, so they are now trying to devise their own non-verbal test.

It has become available as a more open administration, so schools and teachers can be trained to use it — I train north Queensland teachers to use it — as an identifier and as a screener. It does not have the precision of the SB5 or the WISC, of an individually administered test, because part of administering a test is also observing the child. How they actually interact with you is very important to get the scores. Part of the psychologist's job is to interpret how the child is behaving as you are going through the test. Raven's in particular has been traditionally one of the strongest and best ways of screening for abilities. It is not the only thing to use but it is certainly a part.

The CHAIR — This might be a little difficult to answer, seeing as it is not a one-size-fits-all approach to testing as far as you are concerned, but do you think all Victorian students should be tested for giftedness? If so, at what age level should they be tested?

Dr BYRNE — I am in the business of testing, but why test if you are not going to do anything with it? That is my basic argument on anything. I have been in schools and I have done orientation day programs where I have tested the students, and that has always been the philosophy: what are you going to do with the data you collect? Are you going to identify those children who are going to struggle in school? The Raven's, as a broad screener, does that. If you have a handful of children getting the first, second and third percentile, you check their eyes because it is a visual pattern-matching situation, but also the chances are they have very poor abstract reasoning, which means — and we know this because of the worldwide research — they are going to struggle with maths.

If you put it with a battery of testing — that is an awful word — and if you put it with something to tap the more linguistic side, as many schools do, you can find a high Raven's and a low linguistic. This is a child who may have a language disorder. Then you have picked it up; you have achieved something in doing your testing. However, to do the testing and then not do something with it — and teachers are already overloaded — is taking time out of the curriculum. Really, if it is going to sit there in a bank, apart from research boffins who is it going to interest? It really is about doing something with it.

The CHAIR — Let us say that we are going to do something and help these kids and support these kids. At what age do you think we should be testing these kids?

Dr BYRNE — It comes back to the test instruments. For instance, in the Raven's there is what we call a baby version, a coloured one, which goes up to about grade 3. I would say, and I think this is true both of the foundation and of Glen's and my work privately, that the bulk of the people we see would be 8, 9 or 10.

Dr ALSOP — Younger; I would say 6 or 8.

Dr LEA-WOOD — I do cohort testing in schools, and we generally start at grade 3.

Dr BYRNE — I would be suggesting that somewhere around there is the potential.

Dr LEA-WOOD — As Gail was saying, it really depends on the school and what it is going to do with the testing. Sometimes they have had me test a whole cohort, a year 4 cohort or year 5 cohort. I have gone back a couple of months later and followed up and the school has really done nothing with it. It is just a feelgood thing, that they have identified students. Then the trick, of course, is deciding what you actually do with these students. I hark back 15 or 16 years or so to the Bright Futures policy where schools were actively encouraged

to identify gifted children. There was a really great rush for about five years and a lot of schools did identify students and they continue to do that and they are still doing some good things, but then some other schools decided it was all too hard so it was not done.

Dr ALSOP — I think one of the problems is that teachers do not necessarily know what to do with the results because the teacher training does not teach about tests; even now they do not teach about tests. Again I will go back to the northern Queensland group that I am working with. We are not testing; we do not advocate testing across the board at the school. What we are doing is putting in a pro forma of characteristics, behaviours and profiles for key teachers to go into the other classrooms and say, 'Have you got children that you would like to put into the pool for assessment?'. They start from prep and they do use the coloured matrices, which is not as strong as the progressive matrices but they still use it, and they get a reading of the 95th percentile and above, but it is not a rigorous test.

These teachers are encouraging their colleagues to use characteristics of the children to become familiar with those to establish a pool and then those teachers themselves, once they have been trained, do the testing, go back to the teachers and say these are the findings we have. What about the behaviours you were looking at, what about the characteristics? It is one of these subjective ways of doing it, but what we have found is that it is bringing more teachers who are interested into the mix of saying, 'Look, this is interesting. Yes, I will put this child forward.'. Does it miss children? I am sure it does. Does it bring others in who probably should not have been there? Yes, it does. But all along it is giving teachers the experience of interpreting their data, because I think that is one of the key problems. Gail can look at a test and say, 'Yes, this and this', and Sandra can do the same, and I can do the same, but these teachers do not; they do not know quite what they are looking at.

Dr LEA-WOOD — It is not part of the teacher training.

Dr ALSOP — This is where this is, I suppose, almost subjective. I put in quite a lot of written material for the teachers to work with their colleagues to establish the pool.

Ms TIERNEY — I wanted to just talk about the negative aspect: the myths. I understand your organisation does a lot of work in breaking down myths in this area. How do you do this? And what do you think the role of government should be in addressing negative attitudes to the children we are talking about?

Dr ALSOP — That is a hard one. Part of the social milieu is that we say wonderful things about the entertaining abilities, like — shall I say? — bike riders, as happened this morning, and the swimmers. We are even talking about dancers and so on. It is hard for a government to offer leadership in something like intelligence except if you are talking through your schools. The schools say 'We support excellence'. Yes, but how do you do it? If in schools you are only producing curriculum standards that meet the average, then there is a degree of cynicism about it. You look at data like NAPLAN and so and so and say, 'Look, these children are achieving above the benchmarks, isn't that good? But there is some cynicism out there when at the same time we get the publicity that the workforce is illiterate and innumerate.

It is a very hard thing for government. I am really not sure how the government can change this around, and certainly within the term, because the messaging out there is so negative, and the messaging about schools can be so negative, particularly state schools because of the way they teach, I think. It goes back to grouping. If you want to teach something you are very familiar with, you can teach it, you can modify it to teach it to the upper end and you can modify it to teach it to the lower functioning, but do you want to teach it to the same groups at the same time? And that is what our teachers are being asked to do. It is no wonder that it is hard for them to do this. There is this difficulty with this notion of excellence and producing and dealing with our highest students.

I would not like to see competitions because in my experience of these kids they just love to learn. Just let them. 'Don't have me go out there and perform. I like to master algebra, and I love analogies and I like doing crosswords and I like learning about things. Don't ask me to go out and compete.'. This is the great dilemma. How do you as a government show, apart from the statistics, that these kids are producing good outcomes? We do not know. It is a social — —

Dr BYRNE — As well, if the client group you are looking at is disappearing into the cohort, if it has never been identified, if it has never had even an hour in a Dip. Ed., where trainee teachers are being taught — when I did my Dip. Ed. I had seven hours of teaching hearing-impaired children and one on teaching high-ability children. The current Dip. Ed. situation — the most popular course for a Dip. Ed. being the Monash one — does

not even have that. Depending on your combination of subjects, you may be offered an elective. One of eight electives is on high ability. So you are asking to actively break down a myth that people do not even know they have got because they have never been forced to look at the issue of the child.

I have a situation at the moment with a young child I am working with. They have entered prep and they are sitting reading the *Hobbit* under the desk in their prep classroom next to the letter chart. What they have to do when their teacher says ‘Now it is your turn, Johnny’ is Johnny has to put aside the *Hobbit* and say, ‘Mr A is for apple. Mr B is for banana’. Johnny is not feeling good about being Johnny, Johnny is not feeling good about showing his abilities, and his parents are not terribly happy, but this is the situation. These myths are ingrained, and in many things it is an educational process that says it is okay to be — and this is the problem with the term ‘gifted’ — gifted learning disabled. How does a teacher who has no training at all get their head around a child with a 140 IQ who cannot read in a classroom?

Dr LEA-WOOD — And that is the crux of the matter. Teachers and pre-service teachers just do not know how to cope with high-ability students in their classes. A very small portion of their courses are in special education, and of that perhaps a very, very tiny part is gifted education. We really need leadership from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, right back from preschool teachers, in teaching teachers to teach things.

The CHAIR — If I can, I have to keep things moving because we have got 15 minutes to cover a whole lot of other questions.

Ms TIERNEY — We touched on identification a little earlier, and I think, Sandra, you were saying that in Geelong it was in grade 3. I got a sense that that might be an optimum time for identification.

Dr LEA-WOODS — Yes. Purely for a group assessment, a cohort assessment, but individual assessments are younger than that. If a school has identified or feels that they have identified a child who is bright, they will opt for a psychometric assessment to give accurate information. But if they want to have a screening test for a whole cohort, then they will do something like the Raven’s.

Ms TIERNEY — Okay. So what can we do in terms of identification pre-primary school?

Dr BYRNE — I think it returns to Glen’s comments about checklists. Glen and I have been asked to go out to kindergartens, for instance, and talk to kindergarten teachers, because if we think that pre-service teacher training is poor, there is nothing in the very early years training, and after those sessions, as we have gone through those checklists, we have these people contacting us saying, ‘I have got this child who is doing X or Y’.

Testing very young children on either a group measure or psychometrically has its challenges and its inaccuracies, but taking a checklist approach does two things: it normalises — these children are normal; they are just not average — and says that you are going to get these children into a program, be it a kinder, prep or grade 1; and it says, ‘Okay, there are some signs here. Maybe you watch them, and this is what you do about it’.

Dr ALSOP — I would also grade this. I would use the Raven’s coloured matrices because I would want some objective criteria.

Mr ELASMAR — Talking about a lack of options at primary school, your submission, Dr Byrne and Dr Alsop, noted that too little is offered at primary school level. What problems and strategies do you think are needed in primary schools?

Dr ALSOP — I am a great believer in homogeneous ability grouping. It is an organisational approach; it is not a program. It is hard to say, ‘Look, this program suits these sorts of children’. The nature of this simplistically is high intelligence. If you put a group of highly intelligent children together and you can teach them algebra in year 5, why not do it?

It is a matter of an organisational change, a little like they are doing in secondary schools, where you are grouping like minds with like minds. The secondary schools have established the SEAL programs that narrow the range, then you can say, ‘I will teach these children what they can learn’. Is it oversimplistic? No. If they can learn algebra, teach them algebra. If they can learn to express their views in very good English and you can teach them a more advanced form of language and they can rewrite Shakespeare in a common language, let

them do that. A program as such is not what I am looking for. I am looking for grouping and teaching to what you can learn.

Dr BYRNE — Other options that have been tried are vertical timetabling, for instance, which allows maths to be taught at the same time at every year level in the school. Timetablers go grey at the thought of that because that means you have to have enough maths teachers to be teaching every class at the same time. What that does in a culture that allows flexibility — and that is what I would stress to parents: flexibility in school — is that the child who is in a base of grade 3 and who needs grade 1 maths gets grade 1 maths, not just grade 3 with a bit of grade 1; and the child who needs grade 5 maths, regardless of the base that they are in, can move. So vertical timetabling or partial vertical timetabling in English and maths has been tried successfully, but it has staffing ramifications.

In some respects it is the flexibility that it is okay to move in a classroom, whereas a pull-out program can have a stigma attached that you are leaving the classroom, unless the school has established that children leave the classroom for chess, philosophy, support — every instinct: the bell goes and we move. It is a school-wide change, not just a program.

The CHAIR — Peter, could you address the teacher support?

Mr CRISP — Yes, which was building up from the Queensland model, Dr Alsop. What sort of information support do teachers need to cater for gifted students? We have touched on that earlier, but if you could just round it up in a quick package for us.

Dr ALSOP — They need to know more about their behavioural characteristics. These kids are not always — —

Dr BYRNE — Pleasant?

Mr CRISP — Agreed from the motherhood gallery.

Dr ALSOP — They are challenging, they can be devious, they are manipulative and they are controlling. They use their intelligence to do all that. They are absolutely charming, whenever we agree on what we want to do.

The behavioural characteristics and how they present, warts and all, are absolutely vital, because it is a challenge for the parents and they cannot understand what is happening, and it is a challenge for the teachers because they think they are doing their best. Just what those characteristics are, I could entertain you on for a while, but they certainly have been documented very carefully and very effectively.

Dr BYRNE — It is the elements of myth busting that you were talking about, Gayle. There is this myth that they are all compliant, pleasant children, or conversely that they all look like little Albert Einsteins. When they do not fit that myth — and we see that all the time; certainly anybody who is working with them does — they are not identified. They are identified as something else. That part of the teacher training needs people who have expertise to deliver it and not deliver a rose-coloured picture of what these children are that is so far from the truth that teachers fail to identify the children.

These children can be prickly, they can be difficult, they can be all the things that we can reel off, but they can also be A-plus-plus students who are compliant, convergent thinkers. They are not highly creative — or they may be highly creative; we are trying again to homogenise a group that may only share high IQ or high intellectual potential and not anything else. It is like putting 13 of them in the room and wondering what they share in common. It will not necessarily be apparent, so the training must be realistic.

Ms MILLER — How are gifted indigenous students best identified and supported, and are you aware of any jurisdictions that have successful programs in place for identifying and supporting gifted indigenous children?

Dr ALSOP — Far North Queensland has really tried to explore that, because the school I am based in has 25 per cent indigenous people.

Dr BYRNE — New South Wales employed Graham Chaffey, and I might be inaccurate in some of the facts but as part of his doctoral studies Graham modified the Raven's in creating a test that he felt was appropriate for

large populations in schools in New South Wales. The success of that lies with the New South Wales government, so I do not know.

Dr ALSOP — The Queensland people have tried to approach him, and they said that somehow it is not happening any more. They are caught. I have actually administered the Raven's to some Aboriginal children and Torres Strait Islander children. They are still playing with that. The Chaffey principle was definitely Raven's-based, but he also taught to the test. There is a test theory, Feuerstein theory, that you teach to the test; so you deliver the test, then you teach to it, then you do it again. They were using quite a lot of that.

Dr LEA-WOOD — Ravens SMP were used in the Northern Territory. It is now used to identify ESL students.

The CHAIR — On the technology area, how can technology be used to provide more effective programs for kids and students?

Dr BYRNE — I think technology is a dual-edged sword. Often it is used by the children to do anything except improve their lot in life and to avoid homework. I would see that the technology is something that we could utilise, particularly with teacher training. I would think that is the way to get to the teachers in Wodonga, but it is not something that Glen and I can troop up there on a voluntary basis and deliver a workshop on. But we could do a webinar or something else for those people. I know that the ministry program, *As the Crow Flies*, for instance, utilised some of that technology for students.

I think sometimes what is driving that is the technology, not the program behind it. It is about making some networks. I know, technology-wise, there have been some mentoring endeavours that over the years DEET in various guises has used. There may be some research as to their success in the mentoring. We have to be careful. If you put children online, you need to make sure they are safe, but I think for teacher training and professional development, pre-service and post-service, the technology is there to be used.

Dr ALSOP — I also counsel, and over the last three years I counselled up to 20 young people who use computer games as an escape because the real world is too difficult for them, and they become addicted. It is very much a two-edged sword. It is a very saddening situation. One boy stayed in a darkened room for nine months playing computer games because it provided the one retreat. It was always, 'I feel safe. I'm relaxed. I don't have to deal with the emotional difficulties of the real world'. Some do have difficulties dealing with the real world. It is not a huge number, but it is there.

The CHAIR — Gayle, do you want to pick up on the early access to tertiary education?

Ms TIERNEY — Sorry, I got absolutely immersed in that. Your submission recommends that early entry into tertiary education should be developed as a pathway for children of high intellectual potential. How should we determine whether early entry into university is appropriate for a particular child, and what are the potential disadvantages of early entry to university — for example, where there have been suggestions that a younger teenager may not have the social and emotional maturity to cope with tertiary education?

Dr ALSOP — It is a difficult one. I have examples, because I still hold the files of the foundation testing — I have over 2500 files — and I have had young people come back to me. Some have been very successful in transitioning as young students; some have not. The key seems to be their context in secondary education. Some secondary schools have been perfectly happy to have accelerated students and to address their learning needs. That is fine; accelerate them, hands off. For the rest of their secondary school lives these kids sat in the library or the computer room and watched all the other kids through the windows, so they did not develop the necessary connectedness that I think is important for young adolescents. Those students who missed the connectedness of a secondary school setting were the ones who were the most vulnerable in university settings, not necessarily with their academic work, but they eventually hit brick walls. Their grades fell off or they did not feel that they could choose their courses. They do have difficulties.

When I say 'early entry' I do not mean kids going in at 14, but certainly the MUPHAS program, where you can study some university programs in your school setting, and some early entry cases, say, if you are 16. We need to look subjectively at what their school has been, because we are not talking about thousands of kids; we are talking about individual children or students. If we can get a background of how they have experienced their

secondary education, then I think we can get a fix now. We know enough. I think I have enough now to be able to pick where things are going to fall off on that.

Dr BYRNE — I think the other issue underneath that are the parents who are quite distraught because there has perhaps been a grade advancement in where the child's birthday is. You have a very young child who has gone through with a much older cohort, and the attitude becomes, 'Send them on a gap year'. Well, not everybody has the money to do that. Many of the parents have struggled to educate their children just as children going through school. They do not have the wherewithal to send them overseas for an enriching year, so we have to have some process in place. As Glen said, we are not talking about a large number of children, so I think we can put the effort into those children. Often once they get into the universities they are perhaps in the most enriching educational environment they have ever been in, because it is not about how you look, how old you are or how good you are at sport; suddenly it is about what you know, how you learn and how you apply it. For many of them it is terribly enriching, but they have to get in.

I did some work with Open Learning Australia because a number of the students, I found, were using off-campus courses where it did not matter how old you were or what qualifications you had. I had secondary students doing first and second-year units through what is now Open Universities Australia as part of a course. I in fact presented a couple of gifted programs, but the number of teenagers actually completing university courses whilst in years 8 and 9 — and that was across Australia — was still a reasonably small group of kids. We can put the effort into interviewing these kids, working with them and cultivating them. There will be some children that it will not be recommended for, and there will be others that it will be recommended for. They are not a homogenous group.

Ms MILLER — Your submission states that gifted education options in Victoria are more limited than in other states in Australia. Which other jurisdictions, either nationally or internationally, should the committee examine when looking for best practice gifted education, and what elements of those other jurisdictions' programs make them best practice?

Dr BYRNE — I am going to defer to Glen. I would like to say that you have to compare apples with apples, though, and often the criteria when we talk of programs or best practice — the actual selection of children into those programs — is not apples with apples. Overseas tends to rely fairly heavily on individual IQ assessment, and it sets a benchmark for children into the program. For the Davidson Institute, for instance, you must be in the top 0.01 per cent to be in. There are not a lot of those children by statistical methods.

Ms MILLER — Why is Victoria less than any other state?

Dr BYRNE — I think historically we have been faced with a situation where we were worried about equality of outcomes. I am going back over a 20-year period of time. There were the PEAC programs in WA, there was the SHIP in South Australia — it became very unpalatable in Victoria to promote high-ability children. Programs that were in place were not recognised. We were going through a period of time when the SEAL programs were very close to being considered to be shut down. The review was put into place, and now that has been extended. We have had people in senior positions over the last two decades who have been quite influential and whose attitudes towards gifted individuals have not been positive, and that has coloured this state to the point where we lost Miraca Gross from here, headhunted to the University of New South Wales to set up GERRIC at the University of New South Wales. I think that is why Victoria is now lagging behind, because we have been through that period of time where it was not acceptable.

The CHAIR — On that note, I am sorry but we have come to the end of our time. I want to thank you very much both for your contribution here today, which has been very valuable for us, and also for the submission you have presented. If there is something that you feel has not been covered today or in your submission, I am happy for one very small contribution, otherwise we are going to have to finish up.

Dr BYRNE — I would like to thank you. I do think the secret is in teacher education, because that is where it does start. We can educate the parents, but the teachers are the first port of call for those parents, so I think teacher education is critical.

The CHAIR — That has been well and truly heard today. Thank you very much for your contribution and for coming in today.

Witnesses withdrew.