C O R R E C T E D V E R S I O N

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into pre-service teacher training courses

Melbourne – 24 May 2004

Members

Ms H. E. Buckingham	Mr N. Kotsiras
Ms A. L. Eckstein	Ms J. R. Munt
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Research Officers: Dr N. Fischer and Dr G. Berman

Witness

Mr C. Thomson, executive officer, teacher quality and educational leadership taskforce, Ministerial Council on Education. Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.

The CHAIR — I declare open hearing of the Education and Training Committee. The Education and Training Committee is an all-party joint investigative committee of the Parliament of Victoria. It is hearing evidence today in relation to the inquiry into the suitability of current pre-service teaching training courses in Victoria. I wish to advise all present at this hearing that all evidence taken by the committee, including submissions, is subject to parliamentary privilege and is granted immunity from judicial review pursuant to the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act.

Mr KOTSIRAS — In other words, you can say what you want and you will not get sued.

The CHAIR — You can have nothing done against you really! We welcome Mr Christopher Thomson, secretary of the Ministerial Council on Education. Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) teacher quality and educational leadership taskforce. We have now had quite a few hearings and have been ascertaining a range of viewpoints. We have been working with VIT, which is running a similar inquiry albeit for its registration purposes as opposed to forward planning, and we very much look forward to hearing what MCEETYA is doing on the topic to add to our deliberations when we finally report. Perhaps you would like to give us an overview of what the MCEETYA taskforce is doing, how it is conducting it and how it relates to our terms of reference. I will then open up the meeting to questions.

Mr THOMSON — As an introduction can I say that I am attending this inquiry as an employee of the Department of Education and Training in Victoria, but in particular in my capacity as the manager and executive officer of the ministerial council, the MCEETYA, taskforce on teacher quality and educational leadership. However, to say I represent the taskforce would not be entirely accurate as the members of the taskforce represent 12 jurisdictions, and they would hold varying views on most matters. So it would be very difficult for me to suggest that I was representing them. I will attempt to outline the interest that the taskforce has in teacher education, as well as indicate some areas that have caused taskforce members some concern and work that we have under way to investigate and report on findings related to those areas of concern.

As some brief background, MCEETYA has requested the taskforce to provide advice, among other things, on teacher quality and teacher supply and demand, and in response to that request the taskforce has several projects under way that are investigating matters in those areas. I appreciate that this inquiry is focusing on Victoria, but I point out that due to the mutual recognition agreement teachers who have obtained a teaching qualification in other states or territories and who move to Victoria and seek to teach here have to be registered in Victoria if they have been registered in any other state or territory. So the VIT has no choice — if they have obtained registration in any other state or territory, they have to be registered here. That also applies to teachers from New Zealand under the trans-Tasman mutual recognition arrangement. It is therefore fairly important to be aware of and consider the national scene, and that is the role that the MCEETYA taskforce brings to this issue.

Additional background is that the taskforce has been operating for two years, and to this point we have developed a national framework for professional standards for teaching. That framework was endorsed by MCEETYA in July last year, and the taskforce is now undertaking follow-up work, some of which will directly impact upon teacher education and teacher educators.

If I could just outline some concerns that have been expressed by members of the taskforce around teacher education. Firstly, there is the HECS allocation. The number of HECS places allocated to states and territories is decided at the federal level. There is always a question about whether or not the overall HECS allocation is adequate. But in addition, within that overall allocation, the number of teaching places is not specified, so there is a further decision that gets made at a local level around how many HECS places will be allocated to teaching.

There are some concerns around that in terms of whether we can influence the commonwealth to get that allocation correct. Beyond that point, from that initial allocation of HECS places, universities are then responsible for deciding the number allocated to teaching, as well as the primary and secondary and subject area mix. Therefore university deans or faculties negotiate with one another around the number of places they will receive each year. The mix of places then offered in education, from reports we have, is based in the main on a range of factors including the history or the past practice, the faculty resources and staffing limitations, and the level of the course popularity.

Just anecdotally, in connection with one of the projects that I will mention, early indications are that very few universities consult outside with any of the education stakeholders around those decisions. Once they have done

that and they know the number of places, we then move to student selection. Each university decides the method for selecting students into teaching courses and it therefore can and does vary. Reportedly the criterion used for typical entry of post-secondary students is the academic score, and the process they use is via a tertiary admissions centre.

The university interest in attracting a broad range of students to include mature age, part-time, and career change candidates is also quite varied. Therefore some universities willingly try to attract a broad range, and include that as an important mix in the student population of candidates. Others are doing very little around strategies to attract the range of students. The structure and content of pre-service teacher courses is determined largely by each university faculty. Some employers we know provide advice on course content and structure; however, the degree to which this is heeded or implemented is questionable; and while some employer scrutiny occurs through accreditation procedures, particularly through the VIT, the method of scrutiny varies and is generally not viewed as being. overly detailed or rigorous. Additional to that is the quality of the lecturing staff. The method for assuring the quality of lecturing staff and instruction is not transparent. Anecdotal reports suggest that in many universities the quality assurance of staff and instruction is at best lenient. This is compounded by the recent trend for universities to utilise large numbers of sessional and short-term lecturing staff.

When we come to talking around the assessment of the students, the final judgment regarding their suitability to teach is largely a university decision. Some universities include reports from the school in which the graduate was placed for their practicum. However that varies between universities, and it is difficult to establish how an unsatisfactory school report is treated. Anecdotal reports from university staff indicate that the visits to the placement school by university staff are often missed or are brief, and therefore they are inadequate for assessing teacher ability. The anecdotal reports also suggest that school placement is viewed as a very important and perhaps most valuable part of the course; it is under real pressure and is not operating in an optimum way. Because of those concerns the task force has three projects currently under way. Two of those projects are scheduled to present reports to ASOC for its meeting on 25 June, so they are almost completed. I have seen drafts of those two reports. The first is the national alignment of graduate level standards, and this follows on from the standards framework I mentioned earlier that the task force presented to MCEETYA and was endorsed last year.

The follow-up work to that is aimed at achieving a national alignment of requirements for both registration and employment of graduate standards, so the work will undertake to have teacher registration and employer bodies around Australia look at the standards framework and align their requirements to that framework and therefore align them with one another. I should point out that that alignment will focus on qualifications; it does not focus on factors such as character checks or police checks.

The second project is titled 'Mapping pre-service teacher education courses across Australia'. That is undertaking to look at the processes and criteria universities use to select students, the content and structure of their courses and how their courses are accredited. At the same time it will provide information around other things such as one of the points I raised earlier, which was how they decide the number of student places that will be offered and the mixture of those places.

The third and final report, which I think will be of interest to this inquiry, is titled 'The changes in society and the implecations for the teaching work force', and that is a fairly in-depth look at how new generations of teachers — those in the first 10 years of teaching — view career and employment. It is hoped that that will provide a basis for advice regarding attracting and retaining quality teachers. That is one of the intended outcomes. However, I should point out that the findings of that investigation will require some interpretation, as Victorian schools and teachers were not included in that project, but due to the largely general nature of that research project it should be highly relevant. I would add that the states that were included in that project were Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia. I will finish at that point in terms of my presentation and answer the questions.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. You obviously have been busy. I will open up for questions. Who would like to start off?

Mr KOTSIRAS — The task force, all the reviews that you are doing now, they will go back as recommendations?

Mr THOMSON — They will. A report will go back. Each of those projects will produce a research report, and the task force will add to that report recommendations about how to implement a particular strategy a recommendation for further work.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Let us suppose it is agreed upon, it is not binding on the states, is it, to accept the recommendations?

Mr THOMSON — That is a difficult one. Because it will go forward to AESOC, where it is going to be something that will be binding on a state or an employing jurisdiction, I would assume that AESOC will refer it on to MCEETYA for a decision, so at that point it is actually the ministers who are agreeing to the decision, to the recommendations. So I would then assume that to a degree it is binding if a minister agrees with it.

Mr KOTSIRAS — The reason I am saying it is because we have got difficulties here with the universities to ensure consistency in Victoria. We are now trying to get all the states in terms of teacher training to have some consistency and some standards. That is why I asked whether it is binding on the states. What happens if one states does not agree upon the recommendations?

Mr THOMSON — Then I think what you are suggesting would be the case. That state would not be compelled to act at all on implementation, so that would be a difficulty.

The CHAIR — Just on that point before we open up more generally, the reports that will be tabled at MCEETYA,

presumably this year there are still reports?

Mr THOMSON — Yes.

The CHAIR — Presumably — I am not asking for that black and white.

Mr THOMSON — I do not think the MCEETYA secretariat has yet defined when the next MCEETYA meeting will be. Normally it would be in July, because they brought one —

The CHAIR — What is the time frame for the third report?

Mr THOMSON — Early September.

The CHAIR — Early September, so 2005 perhaps — late 2004 or 2005 MCEETYA?

Mr THOMSON — Late 2004 would be correct, to MCEETYA.

The CHAIR — Depending on how acceptable it is to those stakeholders?

Mr THOMSON — Yes.

The CHAIR — I do not think these reports are normally publicly available. Is that an issue that MCEETYA decides?

Mr THOMSON — In fact it is a decision that could be taken by the chair of the taskforce to share that report. If a request went from this inquiry to the taskforce chair that would be a decision that the task force chair could in fact make.

The CHAIR — Who is the chair?

Mr THOMSON — Grant Hehir, the secretary, yes.

The CHAIR — Okay.

Ms MUNT — I was interested in that you were saying that the quality of lecturing staff is not transparent, and that sessional staff and short-term staff are used. I was wondering if that is that widespread or is it confined to certain institutions or universities?

Mr THOMSON — I could not specifically answer that in depth. I am sorry.. I do not know how widely spread. We would be hoping that one of the projects we have under way, which is mapping practice, would shed some light on that, but it might be something that in fact requires some follow-up work.

Ms ECKSTEIN — In relation to the student assessment processes, which again are down to the universities, we have also heard that some universities are not visiting students a great deal in their practicum experience. Should that be controlled more tightly by a group like the VEET or the employing authority in some way?

Mr THOMSON — Ideally, yes, it should. I think in some way it should be controlled. I do not have a lot of trouble with allowing universities some control in that area. I think what the universities say is that having the students for a practicum is quite a burden on the school, and so they find it difficult to place students, so more and more they have to place them at schools further away from the university than they would like. That then adds to their burden in terms of getting to the visits and all of those sorts of things. I think they would say it is a staffing and therefore a budgetary issue, so it really is something that could be solved if the commonwealth were involved in the mix.

Ms ECKSTEIN — So, 'Give us more money, and therefore we will send our lecturers out to visit the students more'?

Mr THOMSON — Yes. And we could pay the supervising teacher a bit more, therefore schools might be more willing to have students.

Ms ECKSTEIN — What if we did not pay either the supervising teacher or the lecturer, apart from travel or insurance or those sorts of issues — that is, that we considered it a professional responsibility, and that maybe we made a grant to the school that they could use in whatever way?

Mr THOMSON — That might solve the school component of it, but I do not know how that would influence the university component in terms of a university lecturer travelling.

Ms ECKSTEIN — If you paid for the travel and you paid for insurance so that if they were involved in an accident or something they would be covered, but you would not actually pay them their time, that that was considered part of their professional responsibility in teaching those students?

Mr THOMSON — Then if they were already being paid for their time at the university, that would be fine. I have had experience in lecturing in two universities in teacher education, and that is not the way it worked. You were paid for the hours that you travelled, and they would decide on how many students you were visiting, do a calculation, and if it took you longer to get there that was at your cost. So there is a difficulty in the formula that they use.

Ms ECKSTEIN — I remember visiting the students regardless of whether I got paid or not.

The CHAIR — I have a couple of questions to start off. In Victoria we have VIT, and there is a lot happening in terms of teacher qualifications and education. Hopefully as a result of this inquiry there will be a lot more, and as a result of yours, MCEETYA, there will be a lot more. What is happening around the states? Is there any move? Are the states doing substantial work as a state — —

Mr THOMSON — The majority of them are actually following the lead from Victoria through the work of the VIT. So many of them are now moving to establishing something like a teacher registration body as opposed to having their department of education registering teachers. As I understand it, they are also following the type of model that the VIT has. New South Wales is fairly close to having something similar to VIT, although they say they will not register teachers; they will certify them. So there is a slightly different way, but that is what they are doing. The majority of them are also looking at the model the VIT has in place in terms of working with universities to accredit courses. So they are trying to take control of the quality of the graduate through accrediting the course.

The CHAIR — Are there any universities around Australia doing great things? Do you travel much?

Mr THOMSON — I do not, but that last project that I have mentioned will report in September. It is doing field visits to a number of universities that have been identified as doing unique things — that is, the

University of Queensland and the University of Newcastle. They will provide us with a case study of what is seen as cutting-edge practices in teacher education.

The CHAIR — So who heads that task force up, that assignment group up?

Mr THOMSON — The research project?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr THOMSON — That is Professor Malcolm Skilbeck and Dr Helen Connell.

The CHAIR — You have probably talked to them about what is happening then in those universities. They would be a good resource, would they, to have a chat about the problem?

Mr THOMSON — Yes, they are.

The CHAIR — Excellent. What about the issue of four-year qualification? There seems to be a number here in Victoria who are having often four-year or sometimes two-year Dip. Eds. In four-year bachelor of education courses is there a trend nationally? Is there an issue there? Do you look at that, whether it is — —

Mr THOMSON — Probably what is most common is the four-year course or a one-year Dip. Ed. on top of three years — someone who already has a degree. There are moves towards longer courses and shorter courses, but the one that everyone seems to be geared to is the four-year course.

Mr KOTSIRAS — On that, do you have a preference for a four-year course or a three-plus-one course? Which one brings out better teachers?

Mr THOMSON — I would be speculating, if that is permitted. I like the notion of a four-year course. Despite the difficulties that the universities have with the practicum in terms of placing students and all of that, they all seem to subscribe to the notion of getting students into placement as quickly as possible, so they actually quite like that four-year course. My experience in lecturing was that if you get students into schools, they bring that real experience back to the university, so it really does gel the whole course together for the student, the university and the school, and it seems to me that they move very quickly to a fairly cooperative partnership.

Ms MUNT — We have heard evidence from other stakeholders that they believe the three-year course with areas of specialisation is best and that the degree should not be broken down into primary and secondary, but that it should be a general course or perhaps a four-year course with early, middle and later years as the areas of specialisation. Do you have a view on that?

Mr THOMSON — I do not have a specific view on that proposal. I would be prepared to say there may be other people who have a better grasp of that than I have, but I would want to look at evidence that that model will produce a better outcome. One of the things I can say and represent the task force on is that what is always at the centre of the thinking of those on the task force is student outcomes. So if that proposition were being presented, they would always ask if there is evidence that the graduate teacher from that model is a better quality graduate rather than the model simply being an easier model to deliver teacher education. I do not have a specific answer; it seems reasonable, but I would want to test it against the outcomes.

Ms MUNT — Thank you.

The CHAIR — On curriculum, you said that one of the studies looks at courses, content et cetera, and I guess that would mean looking at how well those courses are aligned to the curriculum and the subjects taught in schools. How do you intend doing that if each state has different subject offerings, different subject mixing, different year levels and different courses? They do not even have consistent starting dates. How do you handle that nationally without a tighter national framework?

Mr THOMSON — As part of a project the task force is undertaking, which is to implement the national framework for professional standards, it is currently working with all teacher registration accreditation bodies as well as employers and asking, 'How do your requirements for registration or employment comply with this framework?'. Once we have that work completed, we should have the basis for a set of national guidelines that would go to all universities saying, 'This is what Victoria requires to register a teacher and this is anything

additional that Victoria requires to employ a teacher', and similarly for all the other states and territories around Australia. To give you a grasp of that framework, as I said, it has the designing and managing of student learning at the centre, but it has a set of career dimensions and it has a set of professional elements. The professional elements include professional knowledge, professional practice, professional values and professional relationships. Within that set of elements we would say to any university, 'If you are preparing a primary school teacher, you have to have as part of your course for Victoria something that relates to the professional knowledge for a primary teacher in Victoria, professional practice', and so on. When it moves to Queensland, the specific content might be slightly different, but it should still be paying attention to the professional knowledge, professional practice and so on.

The CHAIR — Having said that, does that mean that the current laissez-faire approach to subject specialisation and teacher qualifications to teach a special subject at various levels is a lot tighter? For instance, I understand that the guidelines to teach maths/science are that you need to have a major, which could even be year 12 physics, for instance, or you might have done statistics in second year. Does that mean you need to be looking at those issues and perhaps tightening them up a bit?

Mr THOMSON — Exactly.

The CHAIR — I do not mean to be contentious.

Mr THOMSON — No. We are at the point of providing that report with a set of recommendations stating that this is how this should occur, and the current draft recommendation is that all states and territories should implement those guidelines by the end of 2006. That would mean that if we were focusing just on Victoria, we would be saying to the VIT, 'You need to draft a set of guidelines that can be shared with all of your colleagues in other states and territories and provided to the universities in Victoria, giving them clear direction about what VIT requires to register a graduate teacher in terms of professional knowledge', to take one example.

The CHAIR — That is interesting to us, and hopefully we will see that report before this inquiry finishes. That is in the second one, is it?

Mr THOMSON — It is. So that report should go to the Australian Education Systems Officials Committee (AESOC) on the 25th of next month.

The CHAIR — Excellent. I have to keep noting that education has its own language. I was just thinking that 'professional dimensions and elements' is a new term that I have not heard before, but it is clear.

Mr PERTON — I have a25-page booklet of acronyms for you.

The CHAIR — My last question is to do with mature-age applicants. One of the issues we have heard is that mature-age applicants often bring a depth of experience and a vocational approach to studies and teaching that are valuable for an overall school, but it is often difficult for mature applicants because they have to give up a job and their income stream, and there are problems of availability et cetera. Are you looking at that in your encouragement of mature applicants into the teaching profession?

Mr THOMSON — We are probably at a similar point to yourselves in that respect. That is obviously very interesting, and there are some questions we have around it — for example, if we say that the gender mix in teaching is a difficulty, what impact is that issue having on it? As I said, the states and territories often run promotional campaigns to attract mature-age people to teach, but the universities do not necessarily then have anything in place to make that possible.

The CHAIR — After-hours courses?

Mr THOMSON — Very few are willing to have part-time courses. They will be on the books, but they are not something they really want to get involved in. It is those sorts of things that work against it. The point you have already made, which is probably a crucial one, is that mature-age people have financial commitments, family commitments and all of those things, so how do they afford to stop work, even if it is for a year, to get a teaching qualification? It is a significant financial burden on them. So that is also a factor. At the same time it will be something we will be looking at in both our report on the mapping of practices in teacher education courses, which will be completed by 25 June, and the other more major research project we have under way, the Connell–Skilbeck

project, which is due in early September. They should hopefully provide some information on that, but in fact it might be something we have to do follow-up research on.

The CHAIR — Let us say the jurisdictions, states and territories, endorse the new framework. What is the time frame to see the changes to course content?

Mr THOMSON — They have already endorsed the framework. What they now have to endorse is the implementation of the use of that framework to I guess redesign guidelines around graduate entry level standards. So that is the part we are at. The time line for that is that we hope to get those recommendations to AESOC in June, and I assume if they are approved they will move them on to the first available MCEETYA meeting. I am not sure if MCEETYA is meeting in July.

The CHAIR — Will that be in in two years?

Mr THOMSON — As I said in the draft recommendations, the implementation time frame we have is the end of 2006. That obviously has to be considered.

The CHAIR — That will not include the changes to courses and course content, that sort of thing?

Mr THOMSON — Yes.

Ms ECKSTEIN — Chris, it could not possibly. When we changed the LOTE teacher requirements in Victoria it took two years to negotiate the changes, and then it took another six years to allow the universities sufficient time to adjust to the new requirements.

Mr THOMSON — Sorry, that is a good point. I might have been misleading. For Victoria it is not a huge problem, but some states and territories have yet to go through legislation requirements, so by the end of 2006 the guidelines should be in place. The move for universities to get to that point, I think that time line is yet to be even considered. Sorry.

Ms ECKSTEIN — Because it can be a long process.

The CHAIR — In Victoria and other states increasingly there are the VCAL, students studying in TAFEs, adult community education settings et cetera. That trend seems to progress as we try to find the right niche for each student to keep them at school and give them a chance of progressing. You said before that the teacher institutes often do not consult stakeholders that well. How aware, in your experience, are they of this need to educate teachers in the diverse range of settings and styles?

Mr THOMSON — I think they are quite aware of it, but I think there will be some difficulties that they confront in terms of addressing it — for example, my experience in terms of one of the shortages we are having with teachers in particular subject areas recently mentioned is in the technology field. I know universities around Victoria and in fact nationally wound up courses in preparing teachers of technology some years ago. Because of the smallish numbers of demand it was quite an expensive course to run in terms of the facility, maintenance and all that. So there are those sorts of issues they have to address. I think they are aware of it, but I do not know that we are working on it cooperatively all that well.

The CHAIR — If there are no other questions, thank you, Mr Thomson. We have learnt a bit, and I am sure we will do a fair bit more reading and get more information from you and key participants in the task force. We wish you well and look forward to combining our efforts and discussions down the track. We will write to you and ask for some copies of those reports. Thank you.

Witness withdrew.

C O R R E C T E D V E R S I O N

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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Witnesses

Ms J. King, later years consultant; and

Mr E. Merambeliotis, VCAL consultant, southern metropolitan region, Department of Education and Training.

The CHAIR — Welcome to the hearing. Perhaps you could give a statement about what you have been doing as it relates to the inquiry, and if you want to make some points relating to our terms of reference that would be great. Then we will open up for discussion. For Hansard purposes can you state your name and position.

Ms KING — My name is Jennifer King, and I am a later years consultant in the southern metropolitan region of the schools part of the Department of Education and Training.

Mr MERAMBELIOTIS — I am Emanuel Merambeliotis. I am based at southern region but employed by the VQA. My main responsibility is to facilitate the rollout of the new Victorian certificate of applied learning across the region.

Ms KING — We have some written material. There is a signed copy and additional copies for members.

Mr PERTON — Have you had your submission vetted by the department?

Ms KING — No, I will explain when we move in that we are appearing here — —

Mr PERTON — I understand you are appearing as private individuals.

Ms KING — And our regional director is aware we are here.

The CHAIR — Can you outline your submission to the committee?

Ms KING — This is a very small slice of the things you will be looking at, but it was a slice that we feel sometimes is not given the full weight that it probably needs in terms of the end of schooling and where we have the biggest leakage before students complete. In terms of our presentation today, we have come as individuals with the approval of the regional director of southern metropolitan region, and she is aware of the materials we have put forward. Our reason for concentrating on these things — and there are many others, and I note you had some MCEETYA representations — while some of these are things touched on by the MCEETYA guidelines for teacher education, sometimes I think the MCEETYA ones do not fully embody everything that it is possible to do in Victoria at the moment in terms of the later years.

Through our work what we have been struck by is that we are in a region that has considerable numbers of younger, fairly recently graduated young teachers, particularly if you go — and this is a rough guide — from Springvale Road outwards. If you are on the inner part of the southern region, which goes from South Melbourne to Pakenham and down the peninsula, you get an older group of teachers in the main. When we go out into the areas where growth is very high, we have considerable numbers — in some schools well in excess of 50 per cent — of teachers who have been teaching for less than five years. These observations are very much anecdotal — we do not have data to support them — but they are observations of exposure to a fairly significant proportion of those teachers who have not been graduated for a long period of time. We felt some of the things that make it difficult to implement the programs — —

The CHAIR — Who is 'we'? Is it you and Emanuel?

Ms KING — Emanuel and me. We are very much only speaking for ourselves here.

As we have said, there appears to be either a lack of understanding of the breadth and the depth of the programs and philosophies underpinning those programs that are available in years 10 to 12 in Victoria, or perhaps it is that if there is an understanding of their existence there is some resistance to their implementation. I feel it is the former and not the latter.

Very often when speaking with people it is as if they have done a skimming in their training, but they have not actually looked, for instance — and Emanuel can talk about it more in a minute — at what comprises the Victorian certificate of applied learning, which is a very different way at coming at giving a senior certificate that has an equal status with VCE in terms of the Australian qualifications framework It has a very different structure, and the intention is that it will be delivered in a very different way than most Victorian certificate of education courses.

When it comes to the Australian qualifications framework it is our observation that very often recent graduates — and other teachers, might I say — are fairly unaware of the Australian qualifications framework. They may have

heard of the term, but if you talk to them about where TAFE fits, where school education fits and where higher education fits, it appears that they are not familiar with how that might look.

In Victoria, as you would be aware, there are three main certificates that are available to students — the VCE, the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning and Certificate II VET certificates and higher which are able to be done as part of a VCE or a VCAL and are able to be done independently. If you look at the Australian qualifications framework they are all equal. It is not dramatic to say that there would be very few recently graduated teachers who would have that understanding, and therefore that comes through in the advice that is given to students in terms of the choices that they make in a curriculum of a school, in terms of settings they may choose to study in, and in terms of that second point of the genuine valuing of each of those certificates and what they might stand for.

A key part of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning and to a different degree part of VET courses is those underpinnings of negotiated curriculum, the applied learning and competency-based assessment. Again, while teachers through their practicums are assessed by competency-based assessments, in fact it seems in discussions as if it is not just a foreign term but almost a foreign concept as a valid way of assessing a student's learning.

The recognition of all learnings and experiences within that is that while we have not been specific, we mean learnings in other settings, whether they are formal education such as adult and community education, neighbourhood houses or whether that is learnings that might have taken place in coaching a team of sport at the weekend or working in jobs with reasonably high levels of technology that the people in schools are unaware of and that no recognition is given to in terms of that young person's learning when you are assessing things such as their readiness to go on to VCE or to further studies.

The other thing that appears to be a gap — and we know we are not talking of all teacher training here; we have seen some wonderful examples of some assessment exercises from Monash University in terms of Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning and having it as an applied learning exercise — but there does not appear to be an emphasis on the integrated teaching of the multiple pathways that are available to young people today and the explicit valuing of generic skills that are called all sorts of things from key competencies to employability skills, or if you look at the essential learnings papers at the moment they refer to them as generic skills and have a combination of those and some additional skills. We are saying that some key things that have been documented within things such as the Kirby report and PENG and other documents that have for four years now been written as being essentials do not appear to be key elements of teacher training and are being carried through; or if they are key elements then there is a gap somewhere in being understood and being carried through as part of a teacher's work when they get into a secondary school.

Mr MERAMBELIOTIS — My experience over the last year and a half has been through working with and observing new teachers who have been given the responsibility of delivering a VCAL unit within the certificate. Much of my contact is through personal development, through networks, and they are struggling to come to grips with different assessments, adult learning principles, negotiation techniques et cetera, which are deliberately designed to re-engage or engage a broader range of students in 10, 11 and 12. Quite often they are very unclear about any broader provision that sits within or could exist within a year 10 or 11 framework. Many of the teachers are quite comfortable with the VCE, and many of the teachers come along to professional development or, as I think we have called it, PD looking for a set of rules or a neatly packaged unit that they can go away and deliver. So in VCAL it seems we are looking for flexibility, we are looking for some sort of adaptability and it does not seem to be coming through. They are looking for something ready-made that they can go away and deliver, and that does not exist.

The CHAIR — Thank you for your oversight. It is interesting for me to hear how things are going. I was very involved four years or so ago when VCAL was being implemented.

Ms MUNT — I would like to thank you for coming along today. It is interesting and illuminating for us to hear from people who are at the coalface of teaching and have first-hand experience. I have a few questions. The first is, I have to agree with you that a lot of the teaching profession probably does not look at all the range that is available to all the students. But I would like to ask you, is that confined to new teachers coming out or is that more a general thing?

Ms KING — No, it is not confined to new teachers out, and I guess while there is a range of professional development and training taking place in the hope that the word will be spread across, our hopes lie in new people coming out and understanding that from day one.

Ms MUNT — The other thing I am interested in is would that necessarily have to be a part of teacher training courses, teacher education, or would it sit more comfortably with monitoring if a mentoring system was put in place for new teachers with more experienced teachers who know the pathways and know how the students can access them — is that something that could be covered under mentoring?

Ms KING — To answer the first bit, in a sense I think it has to be part of teacher training. Mentoring can address some of the finer details, but unless you understand, if you do teacher training in Victoria or you want to teach in Victoria, what being in years 10 to 12 can offer you in this state then I guess I would feel that that would perhaps hinder your being able to prepare classes in the broadest possible way and perhaps hinder the sorts of things you might offer when you go into a school so that if you are given a preference about what you might teach you would go for what you know about, which is probably what you did, which is VCE. This is not our saying and I cannot attribute it to who did say it, but it is a bit of preparing students for your future rather than their future unless you have a clear picture of the sorts of things that are not exceptions but are core, that are key things that can be delivered not as something different but just as offerings in Victoria with two major certificates and a range of variations that fall within them.

I am not suggesting you would come out and know that this bit counts for what in this particular course and where, but certainly understanding — just as I imagine all students would be both taught and understand — that you would need 16 units to complete a VCE and they have to be comprised of so many units and structured in particular ways, that you would find somebody who would understand that there are four strands of VCAL, not the fine detail about how you might go about it but that there are four strands, that you can do a VET certificate that stands alone or it can be part of your VCE or it can be part of your VCAL, so you need that level of knowledge so you have the picture of what is available for students in this state.

Ms MUNT — Do the careers counsellors note that information and are they getting it across to the other teachers and the students, or not?

Ms KING — I think career counsellors know that information but their work is not to inform all other teachers. I still keep coming back to the fact that it is an add-on to be informed of, in the same way as I do not think you could start teaching in Victoria now without understanding the middle years of schooling changes, not in their finest detail but it is really a new paradigm.

I guess I am saying that the later years is a new paradigm, and I think that very few of our teachers have been able to embrace that at the moment. Mentoring could add to that and ensure that people understood, even if they were working in a school where only VCE was offered, that there were other things available. Either we value it enough to make it important enough that you need to know it when you qualify as a teacher or we are still putting out a message that this is just a bit of detail on the edge and not core to what it is we are offering students in this state. We can link it back to the goals of 90 per cent of young people completing these certificates.

We have some dealings with independent and Catholic schools as well as government schools, so it is not only government schools, where often young people end up leaving education and training simply because enough people who were dealing with them — whether it was the welfare teacher, the year level coordinator or a range of other staff or the person that they get on well with in the physical education class — do not understand the full breadth of things that are available and the range of settings that are available.

Ms MUNT — I think there is a fair way to go because we had evidence a week or two ago that many TAFE teachers have a very bare minimum of teacher training themselves. So I think there is probably a long way to go in many sectors, until we get to somewhere approaching where we would like to be.

Ms ECKSTEIN — I would like to ask you a couple of questions in relation to how you would structure teacher training, given some of the things that you have said. Currently we train teachers either as primary or secondary teachers. There are some courses that train P–12 teachers. What is your view about the way to go? Should we do it differently?

Mr MERAMBELIOTIS — From my point of view, when a student teacher arrives at a school and you are their supervising teacher, time and again — particularly in the later years — the main focus is on, 'What are your methods?'. Let us say that it is business management and legal studies. Basically you then go with that and so, therefore, one of the problems I see is that again we are gearing student teacher training, its delivery, its assessment and their experience in schools to the VCE. Normally if they have undertaken the VCE their focus is the VCE and then they are placed within a VCE framework. One of the things that we were discussing and looking at was the possibility of as part of teacher training that you undertake your training in a variety of settings. You look at your training delivering something other than a VCE unit. That could be a vocational unit; it could be something looking at competencies or it could be a VCAL unit, even though it is not part of your methods per se. Again most teachers will face the possibility of exiting teacher training entering schools and undertaking or being given a significant part of their load in terms of units other than the VCE units.

Ms ECKSTEIN — What I am trying to get to is: should we look at a different model? Is it possible to train a P–12 teacher? Is that a realistic expectation? Should we retain the primary–secondary divide? Should we look at early, middle, later years? Do you have a view about those kinds of issues?

Ms KING — I think it should be possible to teach a P–12 because there are learnings from both ends of the spectrum that a teacher would then gain. I think to imagine you could do that in four years would be fairly unrealistic given how complex that is, and particularly if given, as I imagine you have other representation, that we would be recommending longer practicums for people.

Ms ECKSTEIN — We certainly have had evidence to that effect. So if you are going to give longer practicums it is feasible but you would certainly be looking at a longer training time.

Ms ECKSTEIN — That leads me to my next question, which is: how should we structure the course? We have had evidence from, I think, the secondary principals who have said, 'We would prefer people to know their subject areas really well, and therefore we prefer the degree plus Dip. Ed. model'. We have had other people — I have to say largely from a primary background — who say, 'Teachers need to know how to teach. Therefore, the four-year model and developing skills and knowing how kids learn and all of that sort of stuff is really important'. Are there other models, perhaps a degree plus two? Do you have any views about any of those sorts of things? How do we structure it? How do we do it?

Ms KING — A degree plus two sounds wonderful, but in terms of the cost factor and the length of time and a reasonable level of income, I guess it is not the desired one.. We have models of apprenticeship-style teaching for 12 months. Just as we are saying that school should be more than 40 weeks between 9.00 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. in terms of use of buildings, perhaps it is that someone who wants to go into a Dip. Ed. course does their first practicum at the end of the year before, because most universities finish at a least a month before schools' end.

Ms ECKSTEIN — So put them into schools at the start of the year, or at the end of the previous year.

Ms KING — Bring them in at the end of the previous year. Other sorts of models might include, as Emanuel said, some work done in adult and community education settings so that you are looking at the differences between teaching adults. You also have a whole different style of teaching that you are then exposed to. Not all by any means but in every region, rural or city, there are adult and community education centres teaching under-15s, 15 to 19s and then adults.

Ms ECKSTEIN — That is a very good idea.

Ms KING — Thank you.

Mr HALL — Thank you for your presentation. Across the southern region is it your experience that there is difficulty in attracting staff to teach VET and VCAL, or is it that such programs are dictated by the experience of people who are already on staff?

Mr MERAMBELIOTIS — Again, my experience has been through networks and people arriving to do PDs and certainly workshops and conferences, and there has been a reluctance by some for VCAL; they have not actually volunteered. With the way that the timetable has panned out and peoples' workloads it has been worked out that somewhere along the line somebody undertakes these VCAL units. I am not sure if I am answering your question. Not a lot of people have put their hand up and nominated to undertake a VCAL unit. Most schools fill out

a teacher's load and basically they fill out and block their VCE units and work down, and therefore anything else other than that becomes — dare I say — a filler, or becomes part of somebody's load, but not a lot of people have been designated and put their hands up and said, ' I will take the VCAL unit'.

Mr HALL — Why is that? Is it the perception of the VCAL?

Mr MERAMBELIOTIS — Perception, stigma, a lack of knowledge about what it is, which is all tied up in terms of what comes through.

Ms KING — And because we are only looking at the second full year. There was a trial year in 2002 and this is now the second year of the rollout of VCAL. It is new. There is a lot of work in preparation compared to teaching things you have been familiar with over a long period and therefore it is often a workload issue for people about putting their hand up even when they are interested.

In terms of VET I think it is different. To teach VET you have to have particular qualifications, and in the main it has not been a problem because people who have those qualifications are more than happy to do it. As you would know, it is not always taught in the school, but people go out to private RTOs and to TAFE in order to do it. So it is a bit different. I think we can say that with VCAL at the moment, time will show whether that is just a new thing or whether people will continue to be a bit wary of the VCAL.

Mr HALL — Am I right in making the general conclusion from your submission that what is needed to be included in the pre-service teacher training is more awareness of all of these particular offerings, not just in VCE in later years, but VCAL and VET, plus some practical experience? Is it perhaps a case of one of the practical placements actually being involved in one of those particular programs? Is that generally what you are saying?

Ms KING — We are probably saying a third thing — and maybe we have not made it as clear as we had hoped — that it needs a different mindset. It is not about coming to teach VET or VCAL, but to facilitate the learning via VCAL and VET and other things. It is about acknowledging that students have a range of experiences, and using those experiences within the curriculum to further their learning and to give them acknowledgment. A good example might be where we as schools still ask people to do work experience in years 10 or 11, when these kids are working 20 periods per week, as I said earlier, often on really up-to-date technology or in quite sophisticated roles. We then say to them, 'Now we want you to go out and do two weeks work experience, and you can only do it in this way and at this time'. So it is about drawing on what we know about young people's lives and incorporating that into the teaching and the learning. If you have a student working 20 hours a week, whether we think that is desirable or not is irrelevant. Sometimes it is essential, and sometimes it is their choice, but let us see what we can count towards their VCE English class or the VCAL or literacy class, or whatever it is they are actually doing. It is changing how we look at young people and where they learn, how they learn and when they learn; and not imagining that we should be assessing only what happens between 9.00 a.m. and 3.30 p.m.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Are there any universities offering this at the present moment?

Ms KING — We do not come here saying we have a comprehensive understanding. I have seen some good things done through Deakin and Monash universities. Monash has done some good work in terms of the key competencies.

Ms ECKSTEIN — Is that Monash Clayton?

Ms KING — As I understand it, it is Monash Clayton. It has also done practical work around VCAL. We have had calls from asking them, 'What are the questions I would need to ask a student to see if VCAL suited them?' That is fantastic, but as we understand it that is not something that you would find across the board.

The CHAIR — I will stick to VCAL as opposed to VET in Schools or traineeships and apprenticeships. While I take your point about the teacher training and needing to do more, it is quite a difficult task, is it not, to have an applied learning model against qualification, albeit very flexible, but one in which you have to maintain the integrity of that qualification. That is a very difficult thing for a new teacher to attain. VCAL is a flexible delivery model; it has flexible course outcomes, it has key requirements, but it also has a certificate at the very senior level, so you have to maintain a level of integrity of that certificate outside the exam structure. Do you think VCAL is for young teachers — that is, suitable to teachers straight out of teacher training — or is it something you should teach

for a few years and then expand into? It comes to the heart, in many ways, of how much in-depth knowledge you do at a teacher training centre. I do not have a viewpoint. I am just wondering if you have.

Mr MERAMBELIOTIS — Just from listening to your question, I was thinking that the VCE, as a certificate, does not sit within an exam structure. You can still issue a VCE certificate on an ungraded basis. They are the sorts of battles that certainly I have with schools, teachers et cetera — the VCE and the VCAL are certificates that are issued by the same authority. The exam component comes in for those that are university aspirants after the ENTER score is attained.

In terms of the second part of your question, I find some of the youngest teachers are flexible and adaptable. I do not think I can conclusively say I think their inexperience or their youth does not enable them to undertake a VCAL. All I know is that the reality is that you cannot come out of a tertiary institution and expect not to teach it — there is no guarantee that you will or you will not, so I suppose I am coming from the point of view, as it grows and as the years roll on, that there is a very high likelihood that you will be asked to undertake a VCAL unit, and therefore we should be preparing teachers for that.

The CHAIR — I guess it is a bit like using that oft-quoted comment: you cannot be a little bit pregnant. In this case you will either apply it to applied learning and how it fits into a qualification structure that must have integrity with it, or you just get a skim of what it is all about, which is not much good to you.

Ms KING — Some of our most sought–after degrees have a very high applied learning component, such as medicine, pharmacy, engineering — all of those do not seem to have their integrity questioned or altered by the fact — —

The CHAIR — I am saying that for a teacher to assess a student at VCE or with the VCAL applied learning model, you need to have some kind of level for how that assessment fits into the framework of the course and how it is a transferable qualification. That is harder, notwithstanding your point that it is a straight VCE mark.

Ms KING — We have tried to alert to that by saying that some of the learning that most young people do during a Dip. Ed or B. Ed course will be linked to their actual courses. Most people have got jobs when they are students; most of those jobs will have some elements of where they have had to train and be assessed to see whether they were competent or not. Therefore if links are made in that training, let us unpack what it was they did, compare it to the theory, and then apply it in some way. I do not make a distinction here; we have concentrated — because of our area — on the later years, but all the pedagogical emphasis in the middle years is certainly on their being a strong component of applied learning, so I think they are skills that are needed anyway. I guess it is a moot point about whether people are ready or not, when they leave teacher training to do that at the senior level.

The CHAIR — That is a good point in terms of the teacher training institutes. Does that imply that they do not do that very well in teacher training — that in general they do not have enough emphasis on that applied learning that fits within middle years, within VCAL and other vocational training?

Ms KING — That would appear to be the case, given that when you change the pedagogy and change the mix of applied learning, it appears that both those who are disengaged and those who are engaged learn in new and different ways when you give them that applied learning and when you make links to other parts of their lives.

The CHAIR — Do you have any examples of international best practice in terms of how teachers are prepared for a learning type of environment? Are there any standards out there that perhaps we should have a look at?

Ms KING — I have read them, but to quote them here, no. Is it feasible to provide some additional information to the committee later?

The CHAIR — Yes. If you could convey it to the committee's research officer, that would be great. Thank you very much for your contribution. The committee wishes you well.

Ms KING — Thank you. I know it is very much a small slice compared to the bigger things you are talking about.

The CHAIR — No, it is excellent. Maybe the committee will come out to your subregion again and chat to some of your schools out there. We did go to Monash Peninsula, which has a unit in applied learning as part of its teacher training, so we have seen a little bit about it out there. Thank you again.

Witnesses withdrew.

C O R R E C T E D V E R S I O N

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into pre-service teacher training courses

Melbourne – 24 May 2004

Members

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Witnesses

Associate Professor V. Prain, head of school;

Dr S. Tobias, course coordinator, bachelor of education, school of education, La Trobe University, Bendigo campus.

The CHAIR — Welcome. Could you please provide your names and titles for Hansard before we start? I think you are the third or fourth education faculty we have spoken to. We have visited one, and if we get out to Bendigo we would like to drop in and have a talk to teachers and see what you are doing there. If you would like perhaps to talk about what you do and how it relates to the terms of reference, then we will open up for some questions.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — I am Vaughan Prain, I am the head of school at the school of education at La robe University's Bendigo campus. We certainly enjoyed the chance to talk to you at the council chambers at Bendigo. We do not want to return to some of the issues that we talked about there — that is, the unmet demand. As with that presentation we are very keen to offer a regional and rural perspective, which we think is really important in this question of teacher preparation. I did include in the preamble a statement about what we think a good pre-service course entails, but we do not really want to talk about that today, unless there are questions you want to ask. In terms of our presentation we want to focus on three of the terms of reference of the inquiry, the first one being the variation in pre-service teacher training courses in terms of contact and practicum. The second is issues relating to attracting people from other professions, which is the fourth term of reference. And the third is the challenge of supporting increased entry of mature-age persons for the professions, which is the fifth. So we are hoping to look at those in our 15 minutes. We have got 15 minutes, is that right?

The CHAIR — Excellent. A bit longer, I think. Quite a bit longer; you have until 3 o'clock.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — Over 200 primary and secondary students graduate from the school of education each year, and most are employed in regional Victoria. We got an early insight into Professor Malcolm Skilbeck's findings in relation to his task force looking at teachers in their first 10 years of teaching. No real surprises. The thing that they found hardest in their first 10 years was managing students.

To put it in the teacher vernacular, the teachers will tell you more and more they are dealing with the mad, the bad and the sad in increasing numbers, and that these people pose serious challenges for their new teacher. The other point he said, which was no surprise either, was that when teachers were asked the most useless thing that they have experienced they said it was their teacher education. I raised that because when we look at results of recent Graduate Careers Council Australia surveys of satisfaction levels of graduates we find that our courses, primary and secondary, are regularly rated very highly and that our students, our graduates, do not think their course met that kind of description, and often praise the relevance and quality of their programs.

What we want to talk about today is first how we provide diverse school experiences. We see the practicum and professional experience as being at the heart of teacher education and teacher preparation. We think it is teacher preparation, not training, but you have probably heard that kind of point before about nomenclature. Steve is going to say a little bit then about the diverse school experiences that our students receive as part of teacher preparation.

Dr TOBIAS — My name is Steve Tobias. I am the course coordinator for the bachelor of education primary course As Vaughan said, there are about 600 students at Bendigo in that course. It is a big course on any scale, and it takes up a lot of our energy and time. In fact it is probably the hub of the Bendigo education operation. I can also talk about the Dip.Ed. program, the secondary program that links in with that. Just to give you a little bit of a background of the bachelor of education course, it has just been accredited in the last 12 months by the VIT; in fact it was one of the first to be accredited there. The course was developed and designed in a way to try and capture and enthral, I guess, our students and keeping them in teaching and giving them a broad view. We hope to — and we fought and won a battle with the VIT — to maintain a P-9 focus in the course, so people coming through that course are coming out with a prep to year 9, so we actually can cover the middle years of secondary schooling as well.

This sort of flexibility, I just wanted to point this out, is one of the key issues, we believe, in good teacher education. There are lots of our students who are now doing a lot of background discipline-based studies in areas that are not typically areas that you would find in a primary school, such as mathematics, in calculus and in science, and in physics and chemistry. In visual arts there are in-depth studies into ceramics and fine art. There are health studies and studies in any number of different areas, including IT. So we actually are offering these students a broad, diverse sort of background in studies other than just teacher education or primary teaching. We are trying to push the boundaries right out. One of the key things that we think we are doing quite innovatively in Bendigo is built on the fact that since about 1926 or so we have been operating as a teacher education institution. We have extremely strong links with our schools. This is fundamentally, I believe, along with our ability to be flexible and

broadminded and really coping with any sort of issue, and that is the sort of country way. As it arises we have to adapt and change. This strong link with schools has served us really well because it is not difficult for us to actually call on a school, ring a principal at the drop of a hat and talk to them about some new idea or something that we would like to try with schools, with our students. In effect we are looking at broad-based practicum experiences for students.

Teaching is a profession. Students respond vigorously to any experiences that they can gain in schools. They would like to get out there and get their hands dirty and get a bit of chalk dust under the fingernails, because that is where the real world is to pre-service teachers. We can talk about the research, but unless the research is grounded in real and meaningful experiences it does not seem to have any sort of basis. So what we have tried, and have been very successful doing in Bendigo, is to develop a variety or a host of different experiences in schools. We have pointed this out here on the front page of that document that was just handed around by Vaughan.

Some of the experiences are short-term experiences. In first year we actually have them out in schools; within three weeks of them starting university they are in schools. This is unusual. A lot of institutions hold off practicum experience till much later on, but we are out in the schools so that the kids can actually see what schools are about. They can also make some decisions about whether they really are cut out to be a teacher as well, so they are right in it. We are expecting them to be professional and to adopt the demeanour of a teacher from a very early start.

These experiences are followed up with more intensive programs and with formal programs like practicum — two, three or four-week experiences in their second and third years. What we are also doing increasingly is building on our collaboration with schools and offering students alternative programs — not two or three-week blocks where they get a snapshot of a school but one or two days a week working in schools over a whole semester. One of our goals there is to build on these strong collaborative links we have with teachers in a tripartite arrangement where the student teacher is gaining something from the experience, the classroom teacher is also gaining something from the experience in the form of professional development, and the lecturer coming out to visit and work with these people is gaining on-the-ground experience that they can then take back to lecture theatres at the university.

This collaborative approach is a very strong method, and it moves away from the old approach to do with teacher training. Rather than adopting that old approach, we are looking at teacher education in the form of collaborative interaction with classroom teachers. Behind this thinking is the concept of teaching with understanding rather than teaching just to remember what the curriculum outcomes are. We are looking for an understanding behind these things in the syllabus. We believe that one of the best ways to gain that understanding is through first-hand experience with classroom teachers and with real children in real classroom settings and schools, along with the support of the university, which then links that classroom experience or practicum experience back to the theoretical approach we have at the university within our lectures and tutorial programs.

The approach we have adopted is student focused in that we are focused on our learners and not so much on the curriculum. We are focusing on the learners and where they are at. We are trying to change their thinking about how we teach and about how we need to learn, and we believe that to do that we need to offer these sorts of experiences. Our aim in the long run is that they will go out into schools and replicate this sort of model with their children. Rather than the teacher being the focus or the central person in the classroom, the learner is the central element. So in a way what we are doing at La Trobe University in Bendigo is focusing on exactly the same model that we would like these people to take into the classroom and to teach for understanding. We have developed these very strong relationships with local Bendigo schools. We now have a hub operating out of Mildura in a similar sort of arrangement with our course. Our course operates in Mildura in first year and fourth year, and during the second and the third years of the course the Mildura students come to Bendigo before returning, if they wish, to Mildura in fourth year.

We would dearly love to develop other hubs like that in other country areas. The communities respond to them extremely favourably, and like any contact with a tertiary institution or teacher-education school, it enhances teachers' knowledge and the way they do things, and hopefully it improves the lot of children in those towns. Currently I am working on a particular arrangement in Echuca with the Echuca schools, and that is very big. It is encompassing all the schools within the state system and the Catholic system in Echuca. We see these sorts of interactions with local schools as being extremely important for our students, and fortunately the schools see them as being very important for them as well.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — I would like to say a little bit about recruitment and mature-age applicants. I am sure in the course of this inquiry you have heard lots of advice about factors affecting that. We now have more research evidence that is relevant to this. Professor Johanna Wyn, the director of the youth studies centre at the University of Melbourne, has noted in her research that the average Australian will have had at least five different forms of employment by the age of 30. If you have kids aged between 20 and 35, you would recognise this pattern.

Clearly Australian teachers are just one of a group within this larger pattern of employment trends, which relates to the uncertainty and the volatility of labour markets; the capacity for many of our young teachers to be recruited by agencies to any country they like overseas, particularly in the northern hemisphere; and considerable volatility in terms of how they view their working lives. As Johanna Wyn said, even before they leave school, kids see their career as a project — a portfolio. They do not imagine they are going to be heading off to do 40 years at something, and they are not willing to persist in anything they consider to be underpaid or dissatisfying. So in that context we have considerable volatility and challenges.

As a consequence we see this means that university education faculties need to provide a very broad range of initial and bridging programs with very flexible and diverse delivery modes to address these work force realities — in other words, there is not going to be a magic-bullet fix to the chronic absence of people wanting to be maths or science teachers. We will in the future have patterns where teachers work for a while in the service, leave and then return. We just have to develop much more fluent, flexible and nuanced ways of dealing with the provision rather than thinking that a few measures will suffice.

I would now like to say a little bit about what this means in terms of Bendigo and Dip. Ed. and Grad. Dip. Tech. Ed. courses, which we know a bit about. We would have about 150 to 100 students graduating with a Dip. Ed. each year, and of those, 90 per cent are already mature age. We do not have a problem with attracting mature-age students into the profession. The median age of the students we are dealing with every year would be about 28, and we have people in their 30s and their 40s. There is no problem with attracting mature-aged people into the service. They are in fact the people who get the scores which enable them to get in. If you are just a past graduate and you are trying to get into a Dip. Ed. course, your odds are not very good unless you have done further study. So the median age of our students is 28 and many are in their 30s. When we look at where they have come from, 75 per cent have come from the region; maybe they have gone down to Melbourne and studied, but after some metro study they are returning to the region which they see as their home, and of these students — say we are dealing with 100 — 80 would be seeking work immediately. Not all students, even though they have a Dip. Ed., immediately seek work. They have any number of opportunities and offers here and overseas. Of those 80, 65 would be committed to seeking and gaining employment in the region.

We certainly have some knowledge about what kind of effect our course has. There is also research evidence that once students train in a rural or regional centre and have the opportunity to have regional practicums, then the odds of their at least starting in the region — we are not saying that anything confers a guarantee that will lead to longevity in the region — and the odds of their seeing a regional teaching post as viable and attractive are raised. Of the 100 or so students, 25 are not regional students and come from a metro context, often because they could not get into a metro university because of the cut-off scores, as you can imagine. On the basis of their experience of doing a regional Dip. Ed., quite a few graduates then see the advantages and possibilities of starting their teaching in a rural or regional context. So we feel there is considerable evidence of the value of having a strong regional teacher preparation program.

Mr HALL — Do you have a male and female breakdown of mature age students?

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — We would have; I do not have it on me. I take English Method and it is notorious for not getting males. I have about 38 people doing English Method and there would be 5 males. So there would be some sense in which there are striking patterns in some subjects, but not generally.

Mr HALL — I am just interested — and may be you do not have that information today — about mature age students in particular, whether there is any pattern in the male and female attraction?

Dr TOBIAS — In the primary B. Ed course in the 120 first years there would have been about 30-odd mature age people. You would say three quarters of those would be female for sure.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — If people are coming in at 28, you are rarely dealing with someone who has deferred working; you are usually dealing with someone who has started something and then changed.

Mr HALL — Sorry, I have interrupted your flow.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — In the Grad. Dip. Tech. Ed., we have 50 students currently on the books with about 10 graduating each year. In general they take up this course because of dissatisfaction with their current work. It may involve shift work and they see it at odds with family responsibilities. We have student teachers placed in a range of settings rather than traditional school settings and they may have had contact with a student teacher through some industry placement, and it is these kinds of personal contacts that may establish for them an alternative possibility. They perceive then that there are better opportunities and job satisfaction in teaching. A Grad. Dip. Tech. Ed. is highly sought after, and often they work before they have graduated and are not about to leave their communities but see it as an alternative pathway within a regional or rural context.

What all this adds up to is that we welcome the government's paper *Teacher Supply and Demand for Government Schools*. We think it is a shrewd and correct assessment of some of the immediate problems — the immediate problems being financial support for people with relevant professional backgrounds to undertake accelerated teacher programs. We understand the need for bridging courses, for fast-tracking people to deal with emerging and chronic shortfalls in staffing in some areas. We appreciate that we think it is in the right direction for some students to receive financial support to undertake travel and accommodation costs in remote areas. Fast-tracking of individuals is a good idea in terms of understaffed places.

But we see, I suppose, all these initiatives — I do not know if you have heard these before — as timely responses to immediate staffing needs, but perhaps not in the broader light a fully considered approach to work force planning. Really work force planning in terms of these regional schools will become an increasing challenge because of the mobility of teaching populations. There is no way that we can lock in loyalty, that if people are paid to do something for a couple of years that that will lock in loyalty for 20. We now deal with volatile labour markets which means there will be a considerable sense of flux in these matters. Therefore, not that it is good or bad, but we need some structural ways of addressing these sorts of issues. We would see that there is a strong role for regional providers to at least be offering some leadership in terms of short courses and other sorts of programs that are going to address an ongoing set of issues for the government, rather than thinking that it is an accident where we have not had enough maths teachers for 20 years and we will continue to have problems staffing schools that are on the fringes of the state.

I have hopefully put a case for why rather than thinking it is a beam-interesting-things-out-from-the-metro view, which has its advocates and there may be a place for some preparation involving those kinds of things, that equally it should be a strong approach to supporting and strengthening regional providers so that we can be part of addressing an ongoing issue.

The CHAIR — Thank you. I will open the hearing up to questions.

Mr SCHEFFER — Vaughn, when you opened you made a remark about how the biggest problem that exit teachers have is student management and you rather colourfully described them as the bad, the sad and the mad.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — That is how teachers describe it.

Mr SCHEFFER — I understand that. Then you went on to talk about a range of innovations, and the principal thrust of that was the close connectiveness between the institution, the schools and the various towns. Can you unpack a bit the nuts and bolts of what it is that makes the difference in the teaching practicums that enable the student teachers to come to grips with managing students in classrooms?

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — I would not want to make a sweeping statement that our practicum experience has solved that one. It is ongoing.

Mr SCHEFFER — Not solved, but you suggested that you have had some achievement in that.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — There certainly are benefits in putting professional practice at the heart of preparation so that you then experience more. One of the ways — Steve probably has lots of ideas on this — in which management of student issues is solved is when you move from just seeing yourself as marshalling or controlling and that you are building long-term relationships with individual learners where students have lots of opportunities to have a broad range of professional relationships. Even in the first six weeks of Dip. Ed. unlike

other courses, our students are going round observing practice schools and getting some sense of the at first overwhelming range of professional challenges. I would not want to be saying that in 18 weeks we do wonders for the Dip. Ed., but the sense of professional orientation is strengthened by more experience in that preparation time.

Mr SCHEFFER — You did tantalise me a bit into thinking that maybe you might have a bit of a secret weapon in there that was a bit more effective than anything else we have heard.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — Our colleagues down at Bundoora run well-subscribed courses dealing with stress and all sorts of things that teachers deal with in terms of some of the metropolitan context they are working in. A major challenge for teachers is the conditions for setting up of classroom management that will enable their idealistic views about helping the next generation. I am sorry, that was a long answer.

Mr PERTON — If I could follow that up, the parliamentary Public Accounts and Estimates Committee made a finding that stress claims among teachers under the workers compensation system went up 40 per cent last year, and it continues to trend. As you are aware, today there is some debate about violence in schools and very high levels of police attendance at schools. What is the effectiveness of these programs in teacher training for dealing with stress. I just had to leave the room for a moment, but I think you used the term 'mad and the bad'.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — The teacher vernacular: mad, bad and sad.

Mr PERTON — I have heard it before. You hear these courses are there, but on every statistic the system is going into reverse.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — This may seem unfair, but it is not strictly a preparation question; it is probably a kind of lifelong learning and in-course kind of issue — that is, it is more a kind of professional development issue for teachers. Certainly they need to understand the rudimentary aspects of managing time and students and all that, which preparation courses can achieve, but these kinds of issues are ones that I think are more down the track rather than preparation issues. Probably it would be a good investment by the government and teacher education providers to offer expert advice in this in an in-service context rather than thinking that you can immunise or prepare people when they have never even put in a year of being a teacher.

Ms MUNT — I have so many questions I do not know where to start, but I will start with a follow-up to Johan. You are talking about the exit student teachers who have come from your particular courses. How are you finding out what they think and what their feedback is? Do you have a formal process for following them up or keeping in touch or asking them for their feedback or how they are getting on?

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — Because they are often placed in the schools where we subsequently have student teachers we have plenty of opportunities to have that kind of professional linkage within them. What I was referring to before were the graduate council career advice surveys which are part of quality assurance of all tertiary courses. I was just referring to the fact that the satisfaction levels of our graduates have generally been higher than in other courses, which suggests that there are some positive advantages. Many of them do go into the region, and we have plenty of opportunities to visit them through our ongoing practicum support programs, so it partly anecdotal and partly survey.

Ms MUNT — That goes on to my next question. Looking at this list of diverse school experiences, there lots of practicum involved in that. There are probably about 10 or 15 dot points on methods of getting the student teachers out into the school. We have heard that there are lots of practical problems in following up, supervision, mentoring and all of that. How do you manage to pack so much into your course and have it work?

Dr TOBIAS — We meet the requirements of 80 days of practicum within the first three years of the course. We follow up and we visit. We have a committed staff. Part of the philosophy if you like of the institution is that we deal directly with schools, so if we have students in schools every one of them will be visited while they are on practicum.

Mr PERTON — Are you unique in that?

Mr SCHEFFER — Sounds unusual.

Dr TOBIAS — It is unusual, and often there will be large distances involved.

Ms MUNT — Is that because your staff agree or want to do it, or is it within their professional responsibility?

Dr TOBIAS — That is right, It is a part of our job. We see that as an important part of our job. We would each pick up, say, a dozen students scattered all over central Victoria — sometimes in Melbourne, often we are getting more and more students from Melbourne coming to Bendigo and they like to return to Melbourne schools. But even our country students like to come to Melbourne to get broader experiences that we cannot offer in central Victoria. We have had students go all over the place.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — There is a lot of pressure on us to reduce that amount of support and feedback because of, as you can imagine from all of the submissions you have had, the huge amount of perceived roles, duties, responsibilities, initiatives that teacher education schools practicum are meant to generate. Because we are just so dependent on having good working relationships with the schools we have had — at least so far — a good record of putting in extra work to sustain those relationships. We do not just leave our students unvisited, and we avoid the kinds of things that can create less than satisfactory relations with the school.

Dr TOBIAS — I was going to add that the staff see the real advantages in that commitment in that they can get first-hand experiences in the schools themselves. Often we have not been in schools as teachers for a long time and this is an ideal way of interacting so we can feel a part of the school, which is very important for a teacher educator, as you can imagine.

Ms MUNT — You do recommend we do some practicum requirements for GBTE from 82 to 60 days?

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — Apparently, but we will not be able to. But again for that particular group the practicum does pose a range of considerable financial hardships and constraints, and that is just from our experience of responding to that. It is probably more an issue with VIT and licensing groups as to the regulations that that particular recommendation is addressed to. Extended practicum would be great. Opportunities for people who have industry experiences outside school means that they often need quite a lot of understanding of how schools work, how learners learn, the diversity of schools and the altered universe that schools are these days. In an ideal world it would be good for people from those professional backgrounds to have more time, but it does pose a lot of logistic and financial constraints.

Ms MUNT — One final question: what would be your preferred course structure? There has been discussion today about whether there should be primary and secondary courses for P to 12 as part of a four-year course. What would your view be?

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — It is hard for us. I have a personal preference.

Ms MUNT — You can tell us your personal preference!

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — However, there is diversity among the staff. Many of the staff felt strongly that the scale of P to 9 was appropriate and manageable for our group. Our group is only a relatively small group of teacher educators. I think we have 22 permanent and others part time. If you had a larger group then it might be feasible to consider a more consolidated broader approach, so part of it is how you think about it related to the scale that you can imagine succeeding in.

Mr HALL — At Bendigo do you have a certain number of places reserved for mature age students?

Dr TOBIAS — In the bachelor of education we sit it on about 25 to 30 per cent. There is a very good reason for that. About 1995 is when we first implemented that structure. We found that the mature-age people coming into the course have a fantastic influence on the young ones.

Mr HALL — Are those funded places?

Dr TOBIAS — Yes.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — Not secondary, because as I said initially 90 per cent of our students are not straight through from their past degree — very few.

Mr HALL — Have you had any difficulty in filling those places?

Dr TOBIAS — Not at all. We had 1100 fully qualified applicants for the course this year. We could take only 120, and of those 30-odd were mature-age people, so we stuck to our guns even though we had 1100 applicants.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — Admittedly we had the capacity to offer 75 places to ex-schools, so you can see why that puts pressure on ENTER scores.

Dr TOBIAS — Enormously so..

Mr HALL — I mentioned the male to female ratios. It is an interesting conundrum, is it not? How do you attract the 30-year-old young male who has all the skills and background, technology skills et cetera, who is earning $75 000 a year now? How do you ever get those people back into teaching, and do you?

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — Well, you have answered your question. Again, teaching has to be about the satisfaction of the rewards of working with young people rather than having a purely monetary focus. It is never going to win a kind of a competition where the only criteria is the financial reward. It has to be perceived as rewarding and an opportunity to serve others, and people have to either take that on or not.

Mr HALL — Some of those young men are locked in, aren't they? And even though they would like to, they cannot afford to go back and drop in salary for a year at least.

The CHAIR — No, and it poses problems for tech and other people joining the profession that unless there is some attempt to differentiate salary scales. all of those things will operate as a blocker to tapping into that pool of expertise that could be useful for addressing staff shortages.

Mr HALL — Whereas I would have thought females may find it a bit more attractive, given that teaching is a rather flexible career — part time, full time, you can have whatever you like.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — Exactly.

The CHAIR — It is not just the salary; it is also the opportunity to do the course. If you were a 30-year-old male and had a house repayment you would need an income to keep that up for a year. Do you offer after-hours courses? How flexible are you in terms of your delivery? Do you offer after-5.00 p.m. courses in terms of academic study and that sort of thing, and how does that fit?

Dr TOBIAS — We have the whole gamut of offerings — weekends, holidays, summer programs — —

The CHAIR — So it should be feasible for a 30-year-old bloke to do the courses and fit the practicum into leave arrangements and to keep his job and still do the course? Is that correct?

Dr TOBIAS — That is a difficult one. We have students on the course with a family of four, and who hold down a full-time job and do a course as well.

The CHAIR — So you are flexible enough in structure to do that?

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — We are certainly working as hard as we can to be responsive. There is a lot of pressure on us to be responsive to — —

The CHAIR — Is that the case with most teacher training institutions? I have my own view on that question.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — The two words are often put together. I think they are because there is so much pressure on us to meet targets and also to generate income in various other sources through fee paying. So this encourages us and forces us to offer a considerable degree of flexibility about how we deal with short courses and basic structural issues.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Can you say a bit more about your recommendation 1.

Mr PERTON — Long and elaborate — can we slip it into the earlier report?

The CHAIR — Go on.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — If we are really looking at a longer-term structural response, you would probably have to go beyond what I see as necessary and valuable attempts to attract students.

Mr KOTSIRAS — In your recommendation you state — —

The CHAIR — It does not say, 'state'. You must say — —

Mr KOTSIRAS — Do you mean the state government to provide the funding?

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — Some support, yes.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Financial support?

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — Yes.

The CHAIR — I have two last questions. What stakeholder and student feedback do you undertake in terms of schools, student teachers and trainee teacher mentors after the course has finished? Do you have formal methods of undertaking that feedback?

Dr TOBIAS — There are no formal methods other than what Vaughan outlined with the Australia-wide surveys.

The CHAIR — I am talking about your student teachers a year down the track.

Dr TOBIAS — We enjoy a really strong relationship with local schools and because we have interaction with the schools we tend to follow up and see them, and they drop in. It is a lot less formal than you might expect, but it gives us good feedback about how we are going.

The CHAIR — What about drop-out rates? Do you find that you lose a few students after the early practicums? If they have a harrowing practicum, do you they drop out of the course? Do you have any statistics on that?

Dr TOBIAS — We would lose less than 5 per cent consistently — —

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — It would be about the same in secondary. That has probably dropped compared to the past. As you can imagine, the pressure on those places means that the quality and the commitment may be stronger and people have a more resolved view that they are interested in being a secondary teacher perhaps than in the past where the rates might have been slightly higher, but they have reduced because of the people doing the courses and their commitment to them.

The CHAIR — I was interested in your mad, bad and sad categorisation of experiences. Personally I do not think that schools are any harder; they are certainly a damn sight better than the school I went to when I was young. I was wondering whether it is a lot tougher now with kids and whether that transforms into student teachers dropping out after their practicum — but it does not, so that was all I was after.

Assoc. Prof. PRAIN — There is some evidence of increased adolescent problems of adjustment in society generally producing disruptive behaviour.

The CHAIR — Just picking up what Peter said, do you counsel student teachers? Are there courses in counselling and that sort of thing? Has that now been integrated into the curriculum?

Dr TOBIAS — There is a strong special education and welfare section in our course.

The CHAIR — Excellent. We thank you very much. It has been quite illuminating. A number of us look forward to coming out and having an in-depth look at what you are doing. So we will arrange it if we can. The committee thanks the La Trobe University school of education at Bendigo for contributing.

Witnesses withdrew.

C O R R E C T E D V E R S I O N

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into pre-service teacher training courses

Melbourne – 24 May 2004

Members

Ms H. E. Buckingham	Mr N. Kotsiras
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Witness

Ms H. Le Roy, chief executive officer, Education Foundation.

The CHAIR — The Education and Training Committee welcomes to the hearing Ms Heather Le Roy, chief executive officer of the Education Foundation. Traditionally we ask witnesses to say something about their organisation and comment on the terms of reference, and then we open up for questions, if that suits.

Ms Le ROY — I have prepared written material here that I will draw from and then, as you say, I will answer any questions. I would like to apologise for the fact that my colleague, Ros Black, is not with me. She became quite sick not long ago. So we have combined the address and we have pulled it together at the last minute. Hopefully it makes sense, because we were going to do it together.

It is great to have the opportunity to address the committee. The foundation does not profess to be an expert on teacher training. When we first spoke to Mr Kotsiras we declined the offer to speak because we were not sure there was anything that we could add relating specifically to your terms of reference, but after talking to Mr Kotsiras we were very encouraged to come before you to talk broadly about what we know about the world of public education here in Victoria, how it is for teachers, students, parents, carers and the community. This broad perspective should, we hope, provide you with useful insights into what new teachers need to be equipped to deal with.

New teachers need to be the spearhead to major, ongoing reinvention of public education. At the moment the community's aims and expectations of public education are moving faster than the schools' ability to adapt. It is up to the next generation of teachers to be more responsive to change.

Schools no longer fit the world around them. As a result we have too many bored kids. They play truant from school or leave school at year 10 or earlier; too many are excluded from school, unable to behave in an acceptable way in that environment.

It is not just a problem for students. Too many teachers leave teaching early in their career and never return. Too many teachers suffer from low morale, too many graduates find teaching in school unattractive and too many trainee teachers quit before they become qualified teachers. So schools have to change to meet the needs of kids and teachers.

The next generation of teachers have to be able to envisage this change and enact it. They have to be drivers of change, and training institutions need to be telling teachers that their role is to be bold innovators and deliverers of real, relevant learning. It is in the hands of our new teachers that our future lies.

I will start by telling you about the foundation and our areas of interest and activities. Where these overlap with the inquiry's terms of reference are quite specific. They relate, I think, to the third point specifically. Our focus is dealing with teacher–facilitated, not teacher–directed learning, particularly in the middle years, and school–community partnerships as a key teacher orientation and a practice that needs to be moved from the periphery to the centre of education.

I would like to draw briefly on the Australian and OECD research to background these topics of interest and perhaps close with a few examples from our work to illustrate what we know is needed for new teachers today.

What is the Education Foundation? We are an independent, not–for–profit organisation supporting young people by funding and facilitating innovation in the public education system.

We are a public benevolent institution that allows trusts, individuals and companies to receive a tax deductible donation for gifts to government education, which makes us unique. We are politically unaligned. We raise about $1.2 million a year, mostly from the community. Our belief is that kids can do anything with a great education. Our vision is that the public education system inspires every young person to achieve their best. Our mission is to work with public schools and the community to give young people the opportunity to unlock their potential.

Our objectives are to stimulate new thinking about and commitment to public education, and to strengthen and support creative learning opportunities for young people at P–12 public schools, particularly those experiencing social, educational or economic hardship.

Our 15 years gives us experience in supporting bottom-up innovation that enables teachers to think outside the square, use and build on expertise in the school and the local community, drive their own vision of innovation, and keep ownership of their own vision and innovative practice.

We aim to combine three activities in equal measure: action on the ground; research; and being part of a dialogue around policy reform.

All of this leads us to the understanding that the teaching profession needs to see itself as a conduit between the students in government schools and the wider world. There is a strong and well-known literature on the importance of quality teaching on student learning and success in school. There is even a stronger literature on the impact of socioeconomic status and social capital on student achievement and life chances.

While traditional debates about schooling focus on the importance of class size and quality of instruction a growing body of thought suggests that there are even more powerful factors in how people learn. OECD data confirms that the strongest indicator for success is whether a student either begins or leaves school in a disadvantaged position relative to the other students. For us it is a very topical finding. OECD research describes Australia as a high-quality, low-equity nation. Together with the US, the UK and New Zealand we perform well above the OECD in reading, maths and scientific literacy, but we also have one of the widest gaps of any OECD nation between our lowest and highest-achieving students.

Academic achievement is related to students' socioeconomic status (SES) in all countries. Australia has one of the widest gaps of any nation between students from low-SES and high-SES backgrounds. It is one of the widest gaps between schools with lots of high-SES students and schools with a big intake of low-SES students. I am sure you know all of this.

These gaps have widened significantly over the past three decades. Low-SES students are twice as likely as those from high-SES areas to do poorly in literacy and numeracy. They are more likely to truant and have negative attitudes. They are more likely to leave school early, less likely to take up further study and more likely to struggle with the transition from school to work.

There is also a growing concentration of educational failure in certain regions. In Victoria the highest rates of early school leaving are now found in low socioeconomic metro and rural areas. This geographic concentration of academic failure mirrors a wider geographic concentration of social disadvantage. Tony Vinson's recent study of disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales found that disadvantage strongly concentrated in certain areas, and this has changed little over the past five years. Areas disadvantaged in 1999 — —

The CHAIR — I would say 20 probably.

Ms Le ROY — Absolutely. It remains so today. So there are two vital messages from this research, and I think it is important to the way teachers see their roles. Social capital can do a great deal to combat the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage. Schools can operate in a way which changes how learning happens and builds social capital both within the school and its local community.

These messages are strongly supported by a paper we have recently commissioned from a UK think tank, Demos. The paper will be launched shortly as part of our national Case for Change research project.

Our work shows that teachers can be more than the deliverers of a traditional curriculum. Instead they can be instrumental in making the school the learning centre of the community, a driver of local solutions for local problems, a builder of social capital and community capacity and an incubator of youth leadership in their own community. When, in the words of David Hargreaves, we make schools permeable to the community, weaken the boundaries between schools and the outside world and break down the walls of the school to involve the community in young people's learning, real change results.

This change includes greater resilience, self-esteem and life skill development for young people; richer learning; greater participation in schooling; higher retention levels and better post-school pathways; greater capacity for young people to participate in and contribute to their community; reduced isolation for schools and new community resources, capital and human, that support innovation and capability in the school; and better community connectedness and capacity.

None of this will happen by itself. There is a certain approach or orientation for effective teaching which goes beyond quality instruction alone.

What might this look like? How can teacher training institutions prepare and orient new teachers for the new learning environment? We suggest that four elements need to be added to a teacher's job description, and that these things are not added on to the role of educator and bringer of knowledge, but that these things are central to teaching today.

The first is the concept of using the community as the classroom. Schools can no longer expect children to learn in a vacuum, cut off from the world in which their knowledge is actually put to use. Schools cannot meet the expectations of the modern world unless they tear down the walls and use the rich learning opportunities that surround them. Our new urban school is an example of this approach. Established in the heart of the city on the corner of Collins and Elizabeth streets, The City Centre invites government school groups to come in for a week of active learning around a certain theme, such as finance, architecture, fashion, law or football. The students spend time exploring the city, its people, its commerce and its less celebrated side — the homeless and destitute. It is apophysis learning, and evidence suggests that it is the key to education in the 21st century. The City Centre builds partnerships with business to offer young people the sort of inspiring experiences that can change their lives, with fabulous speakers — from reformed gamblers to high-profile CEOs — and unique experiences, such as observing a board meeting or spending the day with stockbrokers or construction workers.

After a year of evaluation, one of the most frequent comments from students shows how greatly middle-year students value independent learning in small teams outside the classroom. Students told us, 'I liked the way the teachers have trusted us and given us a chance to show that we are responsible by letting us go out and research our projects. We were independent and we had to learn how to do things for ourselves'.

A majority of teachers believe that The City Centre has benefited students by, firstly, offering rich-task real-life learning and boosting connectedness to school and teachers; and secondly, enabling them to develop more supported relationships with other young people. A majority of teachers also believe that City Centre's real-life learning approach will influence their normal teaching practice and enable them to use more innovative teaching strategies.

The second important orientation for modern teachers is to see your students and relate to your students as leaders. One of our programs called 'Are you Mad? Are you Making a Difference?' explores this theme. It embodies a vision of what can be achieved when students give back to their communities and strive to make a difference about real problems. It focuses on student engagement, organisation and decision making. For teachers, it models a new approach for effective teaching and quality learning. One of the main challenges of moving to a values-based student-led education environment is the perception of the teachers themselves about what teaching and learning is. For students to develop as leaders, they have to be related to that as such. You cannot expect leadership determination, perseverance, communication and decision-making skills to be developed powerfully in a teacher-driven environment.

At Myrrhee Primary School in north-east Victoria grade 6 students were concerned with the number of plastic bags choking up their environment and eventually the whole country's oceans and waterways. A traditional approach may have been to run a community awareness campaign through stating shocking statistics in posters and essays and appealing to others to take action. Myrrhee kids took a more active and structured approach. Their survey of local shoppers and stores found that 40 000 plastic bags were consumed each week in the district. They researched viable alternatives and located a King Island company that produced low-cost calico bags. With advice from entrepreneurs Dick Smith and Big Kev, they negotiated with local business, generated publicity and directly influenced 57 per cent of local families, who now use alternatives to plastic bags when shopping.

The third orientation is to maximise partnerships to bring together the skills, resources and experience of individuals and groups in the community. Partnerships bring new ideas and new resources to engage in curriculum. One example of this is the Powercor Australia School and Community Fund. It is a three-year environmental education program linking Powercor with three rural school communities in Central Highlands–Wimmera. Sustained partnerships in rural communities provide lasting benefits for the young people involved, and our evaluation tells us that within the Powercor program teachers agreed or strongly agreed, without exception, that since the project began, students had a more positive attitude to learning and school and better self-esteem, confidence and motivation.

Teachers also need to be ready to build a link with business, because young people need to be opportunity ready and enterprising. Today's school students will enter a work force in which more and more jobs will be in small

business, more jobs will be part time or casual, and changes of jobs and periods of unemployment will be common. Self-employment will grow as more companies contract out work rather than take on permanent employees. Skills shortages in certain industries will mean that business will be trying to find ways to link with schools to create a work force of the future. Teachers have to be ready for these approaches.

The fourth orientation is to play an active role in supporting volunteering and mentoring in schools for student, school and community outcomes. Of course secondary schools in particular could benefit from a more strategic approach to non-parent volunteer programs in and out of the classroom. Last week we ran Back to School Day. It is a national campaign that brings former students back to public schools as role models for today's young people. Some 400 schools, 1000 former students and about 60 000 kids were directly affected. Last year 95 per cent of students who responded to a survey said that good role models made them think about their own possibilities and potential, and 86 per cent said they were more positive about what they can do after leaving school. These are the sorts of resources that teachers need to feel they can and should perhaps be working towards by moving into links with the community.

The school volunteer program is another way to illustrate this point. It is currently a Victorian pilot program funded by DET which helps schools recruit and train senior community volunteers. One of the pilot schools, Moreland Secondary College, has its first-ever team of 12 volunteers to assist with curriculum delivery, and we are very excited about that. You probably know Moreland; it is in a low SES area, and it is struggling on a number of fronts. We hope that the school will benefit in immeasurable ways from the volunteer initiative.

Our hope is to roll the pilot out statewide and offer support to schools that wish to utilise volunteers. There is evidence to show that supervising and managing a volunteer force can help develop teachers and is a key new avenue to explore for senior teachers who want a different kind of leadership role in the school. So it is actually about teacher leadership and development too.

What is at risk if we do not widen our definitions of quality teaching? It is not an attractive scenario. We will continue to have too many young people who will continue to find school irrelevant to their lives and their interests, and who are disengaged from learning and wonder what the point of school is. We will continue to have too many schools isolated from the community around them and disconnected from its needs, like moated fortresses that lower the drawbridge at the start of the day and again at its end but operate in between as though the outside world did not exist. We will continue to have too many kids leaving their communities, particularly in rural areas, because they do not see any reason to stay. We will continue to have too many communities struggling to keep themselves viable and searching for their future leaders who will not be there.

In summary, the foundation can see a future for public schools in which the curriculum is all about rich task learning, much of it outside the classroom, and in which many of the resources that underpin this active learning agenda is contributed to by individuals and companies. Teachers will be trained to see the benefits of school community partnerships not as an add-on to their role as educators but as central to their responsibilities. They will be trained to relate to their students as leaders and to allow facilitated student-led learning to happen in a variety of settings. They will be prepared to and allowed to restructure the traditional timetable to allow flexibility, and they will have more time allocated to building and creating relationships with important community stakeholders. This empowerment of individual teacher initiative and increased creativity in the curriculum should both retain teachers in the profession and retain kids in school.

The CHAIR — That was a good presentation and very thoughtful. I will open up to questions.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Have all the projects that the foundation has undertaken or is undertaking, especially the ones which are very successful, been passed on to VIT or to the tertiary institutions, or are you doing them in isolation?

Ms Le ROY — No, we are sort of on a continuum in that area because we are 15 years old this year, but for the first 10 years, like most philanthropy, we started up funding, so we gave grants to teachers to start a good idea. Like most pilots and a lot of philanthropy, as soon as the money runs out the good idea is over. So we have a problem with sustainability. It is unusual for a small organisation like us to then take on the risk and the responsibility of actually setting up the permanent interventions that can make change happen over time. The City Centre is a perfect example of that. It is something we will raise funds for year on year; it is there as a permanent resource to all government schools. 'ruMAD' is a generic program; 'Back to school day' is generic. We are only at

the first stage of those. Over the last year or two we have been approaching government to work with us because the last thing we want to do is work in isolation, and that is happening very well now.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Do you work with institutions, with the universities?

Ms Le ROY — We work with the universities. Where we have funding, which is more and more these days, we independently evaluate our programs with universities. We have had teacher trainees for both The City Centre and ruMAD and we hope to continue to do that because they are both examples of non-classroom teaching, and the Victoria University trainees came in last year to experience a different kind of program.

It is mainly through evaluation. 'The case for change' is a research project that we are just about to launch and draws heavily on new innovative thought within universities here and overseas, and think tanks like Demos, so we have commissioned individuals and universities to do, hopefully, paradigm shifting work and to create dialogue, because part of what we can do as an independent organisation is take the best of the thinking and put it out there for the community to discuss because we are independent and unaligned.

Ms MUNT — I think it is very brave of you to come on your own when you were going to be a duo, and then you are on a solo journey. Thank you for coming and putting it together so well. I read through the background and I am interested in the Lighthouse Schools project. Which schools are the Lighthouse Schools, and exactly what goes on there, what sort of programs are there, and how is it working?

Ms Le ROY — We are at publication stage. It was a three-year project funded by the William Buckland Foundation. Middle years reform was the focus, and schools applied for funding over three years, in total about $75 000 each.

Ms MUNT — That is lot of money.

Ms Le ROY — It is. It is one of the biggest projects of William Buckland, certainly the biggest of the Education Foundation. Some are rural, some are metro, probably most importantly two were city classrooms. So we took the learnings from Buckley Park and Malvern Central and established The City Centre on the back. We hope that we have used the funding well to build a body of knowledge and then turn it into a permanent facility. That is the ideal. The City Centre is like the second stage of the William Buckland Lighthouse funding which finished last year.

Ms MUNT — So the Lighthouse Schools are connected to The City Centre; it is the same program?

Ms Le ROY — William Buckland is not funding The City Centre, but of the five years funded for the middle years reform project within the Lighthouse program, two did city school programs and of those we focused on The City Centre, so we took the knowledge from the Lighthouse Schools.

Ms MUNT — What do you actually do in the Lighthouse Schools and which schools are they?

Ms Le ROY — There was Rushworth, Malvern Central, Buckley Park — I cannot remember the others, but they all had different middle years reform programs.

Ms MUNT — Have those middle years reform programs worked well? Have they hit the mark?

Ms Le ROY — Buckley Park and Malvern Central have permanently established city based programs. I do not know about Rushworth, but I think so. It had a much tougher task, being a small rural community with a few very specific issues to tackle. I do not know the answer to that. We are waiting for the publication to come out. I cannot remember the other two schools.

Ms MUNT — I have had a fair bit of contact with my local schools — for instance, Mentone Girls Secondary College, which is doing The City Centre work program, and it is working very well for them, so congratulations.

Ms Le ROY — Great, that is fabulous.

Mr HALL — Heather, first of all thank you for your submission and well done on some of those very good programs you spoke about today. I read in the background that 70 per cent of your programs were directed towards disadvantaged schools and disadvantaged students.

Ms Le ROY — Yes.

Mr HALL — In your opinion do you think that teachers understand and are adequately trained to address issues of social disadvantage? I ask that because it has often been said to me that teachers are more than educators. They have to be parents at times; they have to be counsellors; they have to be friends; they have to be social workers. They have to understand all those things about children as well as trying to educate them. Do teachers come out well prepared to deal with social disadvantage?

Ms Le ROY — I agree with you completely, and that is the way I see the role of teachers. From a training point of view, they are probably trained to educate. Everything else that they are asked to do sort of comes up on them by stealth. It is not fair because it is not really reflecting the curriculum. They have to take on all those extra roles and do them well, and educate as well.

In low SES areas the kids are coming off a low base. So the teacher who is working in a school with a disadvantaged cohort, and I do not have the statistics to back it up, but probably more of their time is spent in those other roles than straight education. Also, the schools are not necessarily funded either to take on those roles well. There should be one global budget for education and one global budget for the rest of the jobs they do.

In low SES areas if there is a breakdown in the social fabric, everybody turns to the schools to find the solution. That is why schools are more and more in the news. What are our schools doing to fix these problems? It is just unfair, and ultimately that ends back on the teachers and school leaders.

Mr HALL — Do you see your volunteer program filling some of those gaps and providing some of that assistance for teachers?

Ms Le ROY — Yes, we do see that. What we would like to see is an organisation like the foundation providing a network of support, recruitment, training, retention, even doing things like police checks. So supporting the schools but the schools make the choice of where the volunteers are used, so it is still a localised decision-making process and about localised relationships. It could be mentoring at-risk kids; it could be literacy and numeracy support; it could be working in the office; it could be odd-jobbing in the schoolyard. There are real opportunities.

I also think that there are so many baby boomers who want to do more. In a way government schools have an obligation to be ready to accept that work force, because they will be banging at the doors, I believe, soon. As more and more active, well-educated baby boomers retire they will just want to do something.

Mr HALL — They have a lot of skills.

Ms Le ROY — A lot of skills and they will want to use them.

Ms MUNT — I found the names of the other two schools; they are Footscray City College and Sale College.

Ms Le ROY — Yes, thank you.

Mr SCHEFFER — I too enjoyed your presentation. I want to come back to The City Centre. I have been down to the one with Malvern Central. Is that the premises you are talking about, just on Bourke Street?

Ms Le ROY — That is right. We were in there for our pilot year and we have now moved. Malvern Central is in there now, and we also piloted the school of excellence there.

Mr SCHEFFER — But what I particularly wanted to ask — you said some training teachers came there. Could you talk a bit more, if you know, about how that worked? Did the Education Foundation negotiate with the university and make the positions available and if so, how is it planned and what did they do; or did the students come through the school that they were posted at, whether it is Malvern Central or one of the other ones we mentioned?

Ms Le ROY — They came straight from the Victoria University program, and Victoria University approached us to take two groups of three. I do not know a lot about it but I understand the university's philosophy is to explore new ways of training. For whatever reason I do not know why it has not happened again this year; I would have to explore it. I wanted to find that out before I came here today, so I am sorry I am not prepared for the answer.

Mr SCHEFFER — Are teachers regularly posted there or is the place effectively empty unless the schools are using it? What I am wondering is who is the trainee teachers' supervising teacher and how is the program worked out to be The City Centre based as distinct from school based?

Ms Le ROY — We took on the role of supervising. There was a structured program, and they then had to report back to their supervisors at VUT and we would have played a role in reporting back to the supervisors at VUT. Again, I tried to find a copy of that report before I came here today. Our staff have changed, but I can supply it if you like, because I thought that would be a very good example of new learning, new experiences, and I really wanted to see what those student teachers had thought about that placement, whether they thought it was worthwhile. Perhaps when I find that I could forward that to you. Would that be useful?

Mr SCHEFFER — Yes, absolutely.

Ms ECKSTEIN — I was also very interested in what you talked about and the paradigm shift in the way kids learn and teachers facilitate. In your experience in working with schools and obviously a range of schools, have you found beginning teachers in their first, second, third maybe even fourth year out are prepared adequately for this new paradigm shift; or is it something that is out of the blue, and they say, 'Hey, yes, this is great, let's take it on', but they have not actually been prepared for it? Should they be prepared more in their training?

Ms Le ROY — I think so. I suppose a lot of that sort of community orientation and ability to source new resources to effect a more even curriculum is about being allowed to use one's own initiative. I see the goodwill draining out of young teachers quite fast. The timetable is too tight; it does not allow them to explore anything.

Ms ECKSTEIN — Is that because the schools are constraining, or because they have not come with the skills that they need to do it, or both?

Ms Le ROY — I am not sure about the training, but I do think because — as I say I am not really an expert on that side. I think from what we know from talking to VUT last year that what they did with us is quite new and different. At a guess, I would say that it is probably still quite new. But even that initiative and enthusiasm gets ripped out of them, aside from the training, because they have to fit into a system and because they have to fit into a strict timetable that probably does not allow for anything except text book learning. I am really now talking about the worst possible scenario, but if there was a chance of allowing new teachers to do more exploration, giving them the time in a busy day to do that, you might find that they can then establish some more of these connections.

A lot of this sort of real-life learning, non-classroom learning, costs money, so one of the jobs of a teacher these days is good old fundraising to raise the extra dollars for the initiatives. Of course the ones who know how to use the philanthropic system come to us but they have to find the extra dollars so there is a whole range of other jobs, as Peter was talking about before, just to deliver in some ways what should be a vibrant curriculum.

The CHAIR — The City Centre is where kids in years 9 and 10 come in, do some lessons in the morning, go out and do their project or whatever it is, maybe come back in the afternoon for a lesson, or after lunch they come back for a lesson and then do some more, and that happens for the week in the city? Is that right?

Ms Le ROY — Thanks for the opportunity to explain.

The CHAIR — That is what my son did. I am just trying to see if it is the same thing.

Ms Le ROY — Yes. We customise it for the school. Not every school is ready for this, but our best practice model is an eight-week program, which is nearly a whole term of course. What we are trying to do is reform middle years. We start with the teachers back at school so the teachers work with the students to pick a subject — it could be one of the ones I mentioned like architectural law or a city-oriented theme. The work in school is around that theme and the week in the city is the high point. They then go back and do their research, and then they present, hopefully to the wider community.

Some schools from low socioeconomic status areas and the remote rural communities are just using it as a week of orientation in the city. We would cultivate a relationship with those teachers, get them in, give them a customised city orientation week — say, the top of the Rialto, up to Parliament House, the whole range of standard city experiences — but then we would hope that the next time they came back it would be part of a more innovative curriculum approach across the whole term.

The CHAIR — My son said it was fantastic, they did a report, and that was terrific at the time. It was good for him, he was interviewing people and that sort of thing, but that was it. Then back to school. You can understand the issue — trying to keep 50 000 kids in the middle years, roughly, 9 to 10. I do not know how many you accommodate, you might accommodate 20 000 a year tops I would have thought, so there is a resourcing issue. How do you broaden that in real terms? I know that we need a change of approach, a paradigm, but is there a step by step, is there a percentage? How do you broaden it to get some real changes as opposed to a useful experience?

Ms Le ROY — That is ultimately about working closely with government. That is the only way that it is going to happen. We see it as a bit of a spearhead and a bit of an example of how things can be done. We are working with the department and VCAA to look at how the years 9 and 10 curriculum can be reformed more broadly to reflect some of the learnings that we have happening within The City Centre so it is a bit of a catalysing of an idea and a testament to what is possible, in a way. But it is absolutely essential that we use innovation and excellence clusters as a way to get the message out and start to get some of those good teachers who use The City Centre to go out and advocate within their own clusters.

The CHAIR — Nick and I were talking about the Lighthouse — you use very creative wording for your projects, I must say. There is a whole heap of innovative programs out there and they all seem to happen in isolation.

Are you aware of any way that they are being pulled together so that you have a collective body of good teaching practices and experiences or programs that are firstly pulled together, and secondly fill-in teacher education programs, because it seems to me that if you are teaching teachers, whether it is any particular style of learning or how to be good teachers in the future, the best thing we can do is give them some concrete examples to take into the classrooms during their practicums.

Ms Le ROY — I agree.

The CHAIR — Is there any way that is happening through VUT or — —

Ms Le ROY — Not that I know of. I would love to see that kind of investment being made in building a body of knowledge in a useful way — —

The CHAIR — Best practice programs and integrated teacher training institutions.

Ms Le ROY — Yes, and then having it used in a bipartisan way, because one of the problems you face is human nature. You build a resource and not everyone uses it because they did not think of it. I have noticed before that that is why we get these groups of new ideas coming out, and in some cases it is about making the opportunity for people to work together. I do not know the answer to that. It is something that I would like to see happen.

The CHAIR — We might be able to help.

Ms Le ROY — We have a web site called 'Kids and Community' which is about school community partnerships. It is a passive resource. Getting the funds and then actively getting it to the right hands and keeping it current, exciting and relevant to whole audience, is the really tough thing for us. One of the things that would be great for that resource would be to say, 'Let's turn this into something that can be specifically used for teacher training'. That would give it a very focused use and that would be of enormous interest to us. That resource is just sitting there.

The CHAIR — We thank you and the Education Foundation very much and wish you well in your fundraising and then using those funds for innovative programs.

Witness withdrew.

C O R R E C T E D V E R S I O N

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into pre-service teacher training courses

Melbourne – 24 May 2004

Members

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Ms G. Atkinson, president; and

Ms Veronica Weisz, policy and research officer, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association.

The CHAIR — The committee welcomes the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association to the hearing on pre-service teacher training. It would be good if you could begin your presentation by formally introducing yourself, including your title. You might like to talk about the VAEA and how it relates to our terms of reference. We will then open up the meeting to questions.

Ms ATKINSON— I am Geraldine Atkinson and I am the president of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association.

Ms WEISZ — I am Veronica Weisz and I am the policy and research officer at VAEA.

Ms ATKINSON — Just briefly, we have given you some background on the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association which says that we are a community based and controlled organisation. We develop and provide ongoing processes so that all the KooriKoori community of Victoria is involved in decision making regarding education and training for our Koori students throughout the state. Our main principle is to ensure that our community is empowered in the decision-making process in relation to Aboriginal education.

We have a holistic view of the needs of our Koori students and we advocate that education is a birth to death experience. We believe that all sectors of the education system are important, beginning from early childhood services right through to post-compulsory education and training. We believe in supporting that cross-sectoral approach and we work closely with all the other areas of Aboriginal affairs which includes health, justice, housing, wellbeing and employment for the social wellbeing and economic development of Koori communities.

VAEA has an advocacy role for our community and we provide representation in relation to all education and training policy strategies and program development at local, state and national levels. We ensure that the provision of education and training is culturally relevant; it is really important to us that it resources cultural identity and that it also provides a supported learning environment for our community. We also support the provision of Aboriginal education to the wider community so that we ensure there is an increased awareness of Koori culture; so that is education about our communities and our aspirations.

We have had a long and strong working relationship with the Victorian Department of Education and Training. In 1990 we developed and formalised the partnership in education policy, which was the Koori education policy, and that provided the framework and strategies that address the national education policy goals.

With that partnership the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association has been recognised by the state government to be the primary source of advice on all matters relating to Koori education and training. That was in 1990; that was with then Premier, Joan Kirner, that we first developed that. That was then reiterated under the Kennett government. It also agreed, and we also worked towards that policy but developed other strategies.

Then in 2001 we recommitted to the principles education department's new policy framework called 'Yalca: A Partnership in Education and Training for the New Millennium' with the current Labor government. That is a bit about our background.

We have some recommendations. First of all, we believe in Aboriginal education that meets the needs of Koori students so they will be more effective learners. As I said before, that is about reinforcing Koori identity and culture at school. We believe that should happen, but it should also happen in line with our communities' and parents' aspirations.

We believe Aboriginal studies provide an understanding of and respect for our traditional and contemporary cultures to all students through the teaching of Aboriginal history, contemporary lifestyles and politics.

To our knowledge, we believe there is only one educational institution which provides compulsory Koori studies to pre-service teachers, and it is only to students undertaking primary education courses. Members of the committee might know of others and tell us about them.

Ms ECKSTEIN — Which institution is it?

Ms ATKINSON — Melbourne University.

Ms ECKSTEIN — And it is only in primary?

Ms ATKINSON — Yes.

Ms WEISZ — It is the only compulsory one.

Ms ATKINSON — Yes, it is the only compulsory program that we know of. There may be others that do it, but that may be an elective and not all students may take it.

Our population is young and it is growing; as you can see more than half of our people are less than 25 years old, with 28 per cent being between the ages of 0 and 9. So you can see what is happening there, and there will be more of our children in schools.

We think the following recommendations that we have listed in our submission might go towards improving the education of our kids, improving the education of our communities and perhaps enabling the wider community to gain a better understanding of us and our communities and our aspirations.

Our first recommendation is that all teacher training institutions develop core curriculum units in Koori-exclusive curriculum in order to prepare teachers to meet the needs of Koori students, as well as providing them with the skills to teach Aboriginal studies. We believe that teacher learning should focus on addressing the 21 goals of the national Aboriginal education policy. I do not have the complete list of the them with me. Is the committee aware of them?

Ms MUNT — Not all 21.

Ms ATKINSON — The relevant ones are listed in our submission, but we should have provided a list of all 21 goals.

Ms ECKSTEIN — You can send them to us.

Ms ATKINSON — As I have said, we have listed the relevant goals in relation to teacher learning. Some of the goals are:

11. To achieve the participation of all Aboriginal children in compulsory schooling.

...

14. To enable Aboriginal attainment of skills to the same standard as other Australian students throughout the compulsory schooling years.

...

15. To enable Aboriginal students to attain the successful completion of year 12 or equivalent at the same rates as for other Australian students.

...

20. To enable Aboriginal students at all levels of education to have an appreciation of their history, cultures and identity.

...

21. To provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal traditional and contemporary cultures.

Our second recommendation is that all teachers are trained and educated in identifying and dealing with the racism. As we have said in the submission, racism can take many forms, including teacher expectations, exclusions and institutional racism. They all affect our kids. Combating racism requires commitment to shifting the school culture from the state level down. This shift will include a focus on the strength of our community and students, eliminating the deficit model of 'Aboriginal issues', and can be achieved through greater involvement of Aboriginal people within the school community.

Our third recommendation is that the state and the commonwealth provide resources — that is, above and beyond Koori supplementary funding — to higher education institutions to develop Koori-inclusive core curriculum units. This will allow Koori institutions to meet their core business of providing for the educational needs of their Koori students.

Our fourth recommendation is that ongoing professional development in Koori-inclusive curriculum be provided at the school level for all teachers.

In regard to the particular training needs and arrangements for mature-age entrants from other professions, we have said that currently there is a shortage of Koori people within all professions, so developing programs encouraging mature-age Koori professionals to move into teaching will only create a further shortage within other areas, which ultimately impacts on education as well as housing, wellbeing, justice, health, et cetera. It is it our view that the following recommendations will better serve the Koori community in increasing the numbers of Koori teachers and staff within the education system.

The fifth recommendation is the development of a targeted teacher training program, including postgraduate training, for Kooris aimed at increasing the number of Koori teachers and staff. This recommendation addresses the following goals of the national Aboriginal education policy: to increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as educational administrators, teachers, curriculum advisers, teachers' assistants, home-school liaison officers and other education workers, including community people engaged in the teaching of Aboriginal culture, history and contemporary society, and Aboriginal languages; and to increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as administrators, teachers, researchers and student services officers in technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.

The sixth recommendation is the development of Aboriginal employment strategies at the school and regional level to increase the number of Koori people employed within education.

Ms ECKSTEIN — I am very interested in what you have had to say. For many years I worked very closely on Aboriginal educational issues — that is, physically closely, not directly on these issues — because I was involved in migrant multicultural education and languages and those sorts of things. Does the VAEA keep any data on the number of Koori teachers in schools, Koori educators and those sorts of things?

Ms ATKINSON — We do not. We probably do have it, but we do not keep it. But the state department has it. The Koori education strategy unit will have that.

Ms ECKSTEIN — Is it your feeling that it has been increasing, or are we still at a stage where we do not have a lot of teachers of Koori background but we have some Aboriginal educators in schools? Also, how do you think we can move from that to getting more fully qualified teachers into our schools? They are important role models for the community.

Ms ATKINSON — They are. In actual fact if you go back and talk about the Koori educators, they were first employed in the early 1970s, about 1974-75, as role models for our kids. Since the 1970s I know we had a target that by 1990 we wanted to have 1000 Koori teachers in Victoria.

Ms ECKSTEIN — We did not quite get there, did we?

Ms ATKINSON — In actual fact we had more Aboriginal people trained as teachers than any other profession in this state. One of the things that has occurred is that it has been very difficult to get them employed within schools. This is going back over the years. Extremely difficult.

Ms MUNT — I am amazed.

Ms ATKINSON — We had a program. VAEA in partnership with the state government developed an intern teacher training program. They were employed by government. They were paid a teaching salary at that base level to complete their training, so we ended up with quite a few. I have not got the numbers, but it was 40 something teachers over a period of about six years. That program no longer exists.

Ms ECKSTEIN — So these were people who were — —

Ms ATKINSON — Koori educators.

Ms ECKSTEIN — And they upgraded their qualifications to become teachers, and there were about 40 of them.

Ms ATKINSON — Yes.

Ms ECKSTEIN — Did they subsequently get employed in schools?

Ms ATKINSON — There are several of them employed in schools.

Ms ECKSTEIN — What happened to the others.

Ms ATKINSON — I mentioned in the paper that we have a shortage of other professions. What happened is that a lot of those who were teacher trained were picked up to run our community organisations and all those sorts of things. That was because they had the qualifications and the skills to do that, so that is what happened there. But it was also extremely difficult. With the intern teacher program those who graduated were expected to be employed to go into teaching. Those who did their teaching under any other scheme or just by themselves found it more difficult to get employment.

Ms ECKSTEIN — And why was that?

Ms ATKINSON — Because they were not considered to be as good as other people; because of general racism — all those sorts of things.

Ms MUNT — I find that extraordinary.

Ms ECKSTEIN — And they had completed standard teaching qualifications?

Ms ATKINSON — Yes.

Ms ECKSTEIN — And they could not get into the system.

Ms ATKINSON — No, they were just considered to be inferior. So that is what happened. That is what I am saying. That is what happened over that period from whenever they started, from 1990 when we did that big drive — from the 1980s to 1990 — to get people employed.

Ms ECKSTEIN — Where are we at now? We have a handful of teachers, and they are mainly Koori educators?

Ms ATKINSON — No. I am not really sure of the figures, but we can get them for you. Out of that 40 we would probably have about 25 teaching.

Ms ECKSTEIN — And about how many Koori educators would there be around now?

Ms ATKINSON — There are 52 Koori educators, but that will decrease because of how they are paid. The Koori educators are paid from commonwealth funding, so we have an arrangement. I do not know whether you are aware of the new arrangements with the religious education strategic program, which has commonwealth funding, but it provides funding to the state on a per capita basis. The new arrangements for the quadrennium are going to be frozen at the 2004 level, from Sydney down the eastern seaboard — anywhere that is other than remote will be frozen, so capital cities and others.

Ms ECKSTEIN — So no more new — —

Ms ATKINSON — No more new money from the commonwealth. What will happen is what they have expected us to do, or they expect the states to do, is then pick up. So we will in actual fact decrease the number of Koori educators that we have in the state because the funding will decrease.

Ms ECKSTEIN — Getting back to the teacher training stuff, will that mean there is less capacity to do things like in-transition programs and things of that nature?

Ms ATKINSON — What is happening is that in those recommendations we are getting our Koori educators to provide that cultural training in those cultural programs within schools. That is why we are saying we need to have teachers who are able to do that.

Ms ECKSTEIN — Absolutely.

Ms MUNT — I am sitting here absolutely amazed, I have to tell you. It is quite a revelation to me. Thank you for coming in and speaking to us and educating us on exactly what is going on. There are a couple of things I absolutely have to agree with — that is, putting Koori history and Koori culture into the curriculum. When I was doing form 6 many years ago I refused to learn Australian history purely because it only went back 200 years. I was just appalled that Australian history did not cover the last 40 000 years, so I cannot agree more. Also in a previous life I worked for the federal department of education and allocated bursaries or scholarships to Aboriginal children to go to university. Do you know if they are in place, particular bursaries to help Koori students travel through university?

Ms ATKINSON — No, they probably do not exist, but they may need to again because of how the commonwealth has changed and said that because we live in Victoria we are no longer considered as remote and we have access to mainstream services, so specific Aboriginal service will be tapered down.

But what happened was that perhaps because of the Aboriginal studies assistance scheme and those sorts of things for tertiary students are both payments — —

There are not a lot of bursaries. Individual universities do have scholarships that will cover HECS fees that some Aboriginal students can access, but not all.

Ms MUNT — I am interested. You were talking about mature-age entrants into teaching. Are there particular entrance requirements for Kooris, or is it just the general mature-age entry that — —

Ms ATKINSON — It is just the general mature age.

Ms MUNT — Okay. Thank you very much. The other thing is that I also cannot agree with you more, that only having Melbourne University offering or making compulsory Koori studies is extraordinary.

Mr SCHEFFER — Thank you, Geraldine, for your presentation. I found it really interesting as well — and disturbing. Can you tell us a bit more, if you can, about that Melbourne University course? Is that in the teacher-training program?

Ms ATKINSON — Yes.

Mr SCHEFFER — Could you talk a bit more about it? What is involved in it?

Ms ATKINSON — At this stage I do not really know a lot about it. I know from the very beginning that I had an involvement but just a general knowledge of Aboriginal studies.

Mr SCHEFFER — I suppose what I am getting at is it looking at Aboriginal culture and history, or is it about particular things related to teaching Aboriginal kids?

Ms ATKINSON — No, it was not. It may be now but at the very beginning it was not. It was looking at Aboriginal history and at contemporary culture. It was traditional and contemporary culture that they did because I know they were involved in having speakers from the community going into it. There were aspects of teaching Koori students as well.

Mr SCHEFFER — Okay, thank you.

The CHAIR — Across Victoria is English the home language of all Aboriginal kids?

Ms ATKINSON — Not really. The home language of Aboriginal kids is Koori English. At home we speak a form of — —

The CHAIR — I only ask the question because — —

Ms ATKINSON — We do not have Aboriginal languages. There are no fully developed Aboriginal languages. But during colonisation and with missions in Victoria Aboriginal languages have been destroyed. There are no complete languages

Ms ECKSTEIN — Is Koori English different to standard English?

Ms ATKINSON — Yes, it is. What is spoken at home is not standard Australian English. There are actual words that people still use. There is a way we use English to express ourselves which is probably different than the way you use English. Aboriginal words that people still use and there is a way we use English to different from the way you use English.

The CHAIR — It is important in terms of teaching and teacher training.

Ms ATKINSON — I agree totally. I agree that teachers should be made aware that what children are bringing into the classroom is another language, which is Koori English, because if they are not respected and valued for what they bring into the classroom, they will not be able to participate. You will not get them participating because they will be too shamed to speak because they do not speak standard Australian English.

The CHAIR — Is this a factor in many courses, do you think? Do you think this very discussion happens in teacher training institutes?

Ms ATKINSON — We try. I spoke to Melbourne University students about that a few years ago. Whether they still do it, or whether they are still enlightened about that, I do not know.

The CHAIR — The point I was making there is that Victoria is quite different from other states in terms of its Koori population, its Aboriginal population and its educational needs, and we need to keep that in mind. Earlier we have spoken to bodies that talk about national teacher training, and this is an issue particularly in Victoria and in different states. You have a lot of recommendations here, and they are all very relevant, but teacher training courses are a bit like schools — they suffer from a crowded curriculum, or at least a perception of a crowded curriculum; I do not know how true it is. There is a lot here ranging from racism to approaches to teaching Koori kids and curriculum. If you could get one thing as compulsory in the teacher training course as a first step, what would it be it be?

Ms ATKINSON — It would be that teachers are made aware of and taught about Koori history, Koori culture, Koori values and also contemporary Koori issues as well so that they would have an appreciation of those things, because if they have an understanding of those things then you would hope they would develop some sort of empathy towards the Koori students they are going out to teach.

The CHAIR — Excellent. Other than that, in terms of school administrations, would you have the same comments for principals?

Ms ATKINSON — Most definitely, because school administration is where all the rules are made, and that is where whatever follows originates from. The *decision-makers are in the administration, and that is where the people are who come into contact with our parents. That is where it happens.

The CHAIR — Okay. And lastly for me, what are some schools here in Victoria that have a good understanding of the Koori culture and that relate to Koori kids well and are delivering outcomes? Which schools are they?

Ms ATKINSON — I would say there are probably a few throughout the state, and there are some that I am aware of because of the community that I come from. The principal at Shepparton High School expects outcomes and has high expectations of our Koori students, and that is what we have to have. We have to have teachers who have high expectations of our students — expectations that they are able to perform to the same standard as the other kids in the school. It may be that they need more supports — and we know that Koori students do need additional supports — but we want exactly the same outcomes, and that is what that principal wants. He tries to ensure that that happens with the additional supports. So that is one school. I am just trying to think of others.

Ms MUNT — Echuca Primary School? That looked very good to me.

Ms ATKINSON — Yes, it is very good. There are very strong Aboriginal community leaders in Echuca. And I think Heywood down in the Western District is another.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Northland Secondary College?

Ms ATKINSON — They do.

The CHAIR — No comment on the outcomes?

Ms ATKINSON — No, I would rather not. I would just rather not. Mooroopna Park Primary School.

Ms MUNT — We have been to Mooroopna.

Ms ATKINSON — The principal there is very, very good. We do have some really good principals who work in the schools, but we are still not getting the same outcomes.

The CHAIR — How important is the local Koori community in terms of working with schools to get those outcomes? I wonder whether partnerships are needed as much as good schools?

Ms ATKINSON — There have to be partnerships. We believe that we have to work in partnerships. We have to have local partnerships with schools to ensure that we improve the education of our Koori kids and so that we get better outcomes. We believe that we need to work with parents. It is the local parents who need to make the decisions.

We did not really outline our VAEA structure, but within our consultative body we have 30 communities throughout Victoria and we have local Aboriginal education consultative groups, and they then come together and form our main committee of management. So that is how we get out and work with our communities. We are able to develop programs by having a body that is out in communities, but we come together to develop policies, programs and strategies. So it is at that local level that VAEA works.

The CHAIR — I would have thought an important part of teacher training about Aboriginal culture and history was that teachers, when they go out to schools, actually know how to contact parents and Aboriginal communities and engage them if there is an issue with a student. I would have that is fairly important. No?

Ms ATKINSON — Well, yes.

The CHAIR — Not at the top of the list?

Ms ATKINSON — No. It does not happen a great deal. As I said, a lot of Aboriginal kids — we should have had the figures, and I am sorry about that — are in schools where there are perhaps only two or three of them, so they do not have the supports available in the larger schools where we have Koori educators or other support people working, so it is difficult for them. A lot of our kids are missing out on getting that support. We have some really good teachers, but I really think that the majority could be better trained.

The CHAIR — We might leave it at that point. It is not a bad point to finish off with. We thank you very much for your presentation. We wish VAEA well in the future, and if you could you pass on my best wishes to Lionel when you see him, I would appreciate that.

Ms ATKINSON — He was coming; he is an apology. He had something else to do.

The CHAIR — That is no problem. Thank you for coming.

Ms ATKINSON — Thank you very much for listening to us. If you can get a better deal for us with teacher training, we would appreciate it.

Committee adjourned.