The Executive Officer
Education & Training Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE, VIC 3002.

Re: INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

SUBMISSION from HUMANIST SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC. (HSV)

HSV is a wholly voluntary, secular organization concerned with social questions of ethics and contemporary values. It fosters an ethical, reasoned and responsible approach to life; it supports human rights, democratic processes, and a just and inclusive governance. It seeks to alleviate suffering and to promote well-being and the circumstances where all individuals can attain their full potential. It engages in educational, counseling and charitable activities.

The views that follow have been formulated at specially convened group discussions to which all HSV members are invited. Further supportive information is obtained from print publications, the Internet, public lectures and from individuals with relevant expertise.

The HSV Submissions Committee is authorized to present the following views.

The Humanist life-stance emphasizes reasoned enquiry and dialogue, individual freedom with responsibility, the need for tolerance and co-operation, and the recognition that we are a dependent part of nature.
1. The effectiveness of current policies and programs

1.1. Identification of gifted and talented students

Just as all students should be given the opportunity to develop their full potential, so there should be appropriate provisions for the gifted and talented. There is a need to foster a wider range of talents than is available in conventional academic courses. We favour the broad conception of giftedness expressed by Tannenbaum:

*Giftedness in children is the potential for becoming a critically acclaimed performer or exemplary producer of ideas in spheres of activity which enhance the moral, physical, emotional, social, intellectual or aesthetic life of the community.* ¹

Such potential characteristics are not directly measurable. Tests for I.Q. should be used as a guide only. Altho in general we favour inclusive treatment, certain kinds of selection are acceptable; for example, selection of students by examination for entry into the VCA Music School. Within a class of an ordinary school, where the students know one another, it is possible for them to divide themselves by ability, without the selection being imposed.

1.2. Equity of access to quality educational choices

We believe strongly that gifted and talented students ideally would be accommodated in mainstream settings rather than in segregated areas. Such segregation is detrimental, for both the talented and the ordinary, to self-image and conception of society. A group selected for giftedness or talent is no more homogeneous than the mainstream, since there remain marked differences in learning style and variations in motivation and in temperamental suitability for particular programs.

1.3. Impact on learning, development and well-being

Schooling is instrumental in the shaping of individual and social identity. In the fostering of talents and gifts the students must not infer that those qualities are the paramount values of life. The overall development of the person involves relating to others with tolerance and sympathy, the sense of social responsibility, etc.

Gagné distinguishes giftedness from talent in terms of nature and nurture, respectively. The educational process transforms native abilities into fully developed skills. ² Students offered enrichment programs become engaged in the process, and their skill development is accelerated. But such acceleration should not take them right out of their peer group.

2. Scope, coverage and effectiveness of current policies and programs

With flexible teaching and appropriate additional resources and encouragement, the pursuit of excellence in the mainstream setting is consistent with satisfying the educational needs of all students.

We applaud the policies of the Education Department to recognize different modalities of learning within the curriculum and permitting flexibility to allow for different individual abilities within classrooms.

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3. Opportunities and strategies for enhancing support
   No comment.

4. Opportunities for collaboration across school sectors, etc.
   No comment.

This concludes the submission.

Stephen Stuart
President and Member of Submissions Committee

9 May 2011.