



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Official Committee Hansard

## SENATE

EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS, SMALL BUSINESS  
AND EDUCATION REFERENCES COMMITTEE

**Reference: Education of gifted and talented children**

FRIDAY, 11 MAY 2001

BOX HILL

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**SENATE**  
**EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS, SMALL BUSINESS**  
**AND EDUCATION REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

**Friday, 11 May 2001**

**Members:** Senator Collins (*Chair*), Senator Tierney (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Brandis, Carr, Crossin and Stott Despoja

**Participating members:** Senators Abetz, Allison, Boswell, Brown, Buckland, Calvert, George Campbell, Chapman, Coonan, Crane, Crowley, Eggleston, Faulkner, Ferguson, Ferris, Gibbs, Gibson, Harradine, Hutchins, Knowles, Lightfoot, Mackay, Mason, McGauran, O'Brien, Payne and Watson

**Senators in attendance:** Senators Allison, Brandis, Jacinta Collins and Tierney

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on the education of gifted and talented children with particular reference to:

- (a) a review of developments in the education of gifted and talented children since the 1988 report of the Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children;
- (b) consideration of whether current policies and programs for gifted and talented children are suitable and sufficient to meet their special educational needs, including, but not limited to:
  - (i) the means of identifying gifted and talented children,
  - (ii) whether access to gifted and talented programs is provided equitably, and
  - (iii) investigation of the links between attainment and socio-economic distribution; and
- (c) consideration of what the proper role of the Commonwealth should be in supporting the education of gifted and talented children.

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**Committee met at 8.50 a.m.**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this public hearing of the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee. On 12 October last year the Senate asked this committee to inquire into the education of gifted and talented children. The committee is reviewing progress in this area since the 1988 report of the Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children. Before we start taking evidence today I wish to state for the record that all witnesses appearing before the committee are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to their evidence. Parliamentary privilege refers to special rights and immunities attached to the parliament, or its members and others, necessary for the discharge of the parliamentary functions, without obstruction or fear of prosecution. Any act by any person which disadvantages a witness on account of evidence given before the Senate or any of its committees is a breach of privilege. I welcome all observers to this public hearing.

**BOURTON, Ms Pamela Alma, Coordinator, Yarra Plenty Gifted Support Group****COLLINS, Ms Rhonda, Coordinator, Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups****LINOSSIER, Mrs Michelle, Vice-President, Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children****MORRISON, Ms Karin, President, Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children**

**CHAIR**—I welcome also our first witnesses from the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children and the Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups. The committee has before it submissions Nos. 36, 54 and 58. Are there any changes or corrections to those submissions that anybody would wish to make? No. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, although we will consider any request to go into private session. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement, perhaps to each of the submissions, and we will move on from there.

**Ms Morrison**—On behalf of the committee of the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children I welcome the opportunity to present evidence to this inquiry this morning. The Victorian association is a voluntary organisation of professional people, parents and students who work together in the best interests of gifted children. The education of gifted children always creates strong emotions, either for or against. Rarely is one impartial about these issues and I am sure you are finding that in the process of this hearing.

In this brief opening statement I would like to raise the following issues: identification; possible misunderstandings of issues to do with education of the gifted; possible effects on the gifted child denied special attention; teacher training needs and resources. There are several problems associated with the identification of gifted children. There is no stereotypical gifted child and, as with all children, no two gifted children are exactly alike. And a gifted child does not have to be gifted at everything. It is important for methods of identification to consider not just high performance levels which are more obvious but also the potential for high

performance. This is much more difficult to discern, as high ability may be masked by a child's desire to conform or by behavioural issues.

Problems in identification include: teachers' lack of knowledge in giftedness and in general methods of identification in particular, although professional development in this area has made substantial inroads into this; the limited number of educational psychologists with a knowledge of giftedness and available to perform assessments and to support teachers and parents; and lack of knowledge about giftedness in relation to specific sectors of the population and, therefore, difficulties with identification of, for example, young gifted children, Koori children, children from non-English-speaking families, children with disabilities, children from low socio-economic areas and underachieving gifted children.

In the area of possible misunderstandings of issues to do with educating the gifted, a common misconception is, 'Gifted children are so lucky already. Why should they receive anything extra?' When talking about providing for gifted children, we are not asking for anything extra, but rather that gifted children, like all children, be entitled to receive an education that recognises their current understandings, skills and potentials, and builds on these. What about the possible effects on the gifted child denied special attention—things like academic underachievement or social and emotional maladjustment?

When looking at the social, emotional and educational implications of giftedness, an awareness of some of the characteristics is important. For example, when you are looking at a young child—perhaps a five- or six-year-old—who is really interested in science, whose favourite TV show is *Quantum* and who reads nonfiction books avidly, imagine this child talking with other five- and six-year-olds. Because she is interested in abstract concepts and understands them, it is logical that she will seek out others who have similar interests and knowledge. There is nothing wrong with her. She simply chooses like-minded peers rather than chronological peers. Perhaps we should be questioning what socialisation really is. How many of us mix with people who are within 12 months of our own birthdays?

Another misunderstanding is that there is no need to identify gifted children until the late years of primary school or early into the high school years, if at all. However, early identification is important in the child's development, if it means there will be a response to this information. We do not hesitate in saying that the sooner we identify a child with delayed development, the sooner we can intervene to ensure that programming can be developed to meet the needs of this child. This applies equally to a child showing advanced development. The needs may not be so apparent but, nonetheless, a lack of response to a gifted child's needs can lead to problems. A child denied the understanding and attention required for him or her to develop his or her potential is at risk of developing a behaviour problem, of experiencing various levels of frustration, underachievement and lack of motivation, and of dropping out of school.

Teacher training is an area of particular concern. Lack of knowledge is one of the main stumbling blocks in providing for gifted children, yet teachers can still complete a teacher training course without the opportunity to attend even one session on gifted education. There is an urgent need for including courses in gifted education in pre-service teacher training courses. The introduction of even an introductory course covering the nature of giftedness, identification

and providing for gifted students would have a marked impact on teachers' perception of gifted children and equip them with some knowledge and skills to work with these children.

I do not believe that the present provision of resources for the gifted in schools is adequate to provide for gifted students in all schools with an equal chance to achieve their personal best. Although I think the Victorian government's policy on gifted education, together with the Gifted Education Professional Development Program, have had a considerable and positive impact on the education of gifted students, many gifted students throughout the state are underachieving and spending an enormous amount of time in classes being taught information and processes that they already know. While this is happening, it is almost impossible for these students to improve their levels of achievement and to fulfil their potential.

I am deeply concerned about the limited number of personnel in the gifted students section in the Department of Education, Employment and Training, and how the new DEET enhancement project will affect this section. At present the staffing in the section consists of one full-time person who also has responsibility for gender and cross-curricula, one other full-time person who is currently on 12 weeks sick leave, and two part-time people, for the whole state of Victoria. It also concerns me that in the circular 123, *2001 DEET enhancement*, distributed to all school principals and council presidents, there are broad policy streams listing LOTE, multicultural education, ESL, Koori education and gender equity. The word 'gifted' does not even appear.

Some recommendations are that the Commonwealth mandates that all pre-service teacher training courses contain at least one unit that addresses the education of gifted students; that the Commonwealth provide funding for a national professional development strategy to provide teachers with the skills needed to identify gifted students from diverse backgrounds and of different age groups, including early childhood, and to develop and implement learning plans for gifted students; the employment of additional educational psychologists; a national publicity strategy for valuing and promoting intellectual excellence in the ways that sporting and creative expression are valued and promoted; that state and territory education systems support and further develop the education of gifted students; national research projects on the education of gifted students and that the Commonwealth coordinate the development of national guidelines for student acceleration, including early entry to school.

In conclusion, I would like to say that it is not such a gift to be gifted in a society where, unless you are a sportsperson or a pop star, it sometimes seems that it is a national occupation to cut down the tall poppies. Gifted children and their parents often have a difficult time. Gifted children are as entitled as any other children to have their needs met. In order to fulfil their potential, gifted children need to have educational programming that does not attempt to reteach them what they already know but builds on their existing knowledge, challenges and motivates them, and provides flexibility and structure so that, at least for some of the time, they can work and play with like-minded peers and be exposed to material of an abstract and complex nature. Most of all they need to be valued and accepted as children—not just IQ numbers but whole complete children—with interests and needs, individual personalities, strengths and weaknesses. Thank you.

**Ms Bourton**—Further to the Yarra Plenty Gifted Support Group's submission, I have given you a copy of the results of the reading section in the AIM test administered to my son. This test

was a grade 5 AIM test and was given to him in second term when he was in grade 2 as an off-level academic pre-test in accordance with the philosophy of Miraca Gross. As you can see, he was capable of reading and interpreting a range of texts containing some unfamiliar ideas and information, explaining how texts are made for particular purposes and audiences and distinguishing between facts and opinions presented in a text. These results are what you would expect for an average grade 5 student.

At the end of the year he was given this. It is a literacy activity given to the whole prep 1-2 class after the end of the year excursion. It says things like, 'What Australian bird cannot fly? Draw it. Draw a reptile you have seen in a park.' This is not appropriate provision for a student with these tested abilities. This AIM test is a standardised state-wide test based on the curriculum my son would receive for the next three years. Because the grade teacher did not believe that grade 2 children could do grade 5 work, she discounted the results of the test. The attitude is that this is not possible so therefore it does not exist. No amount of evidence would change her attitude. Teachers do the same thing with the results of IQ tests. One teacher told a parent, 'He can't have an IQ of 135 because my IQ is 125. He can't have a higher IQ than me because he is only five.' This is only understandable if you substitute the word 'talent' for 'intelligence'.

I would now like to refer to the excerpt from the case study I have given you today about Fred the student. It clearly demonstrates a common attitude of teachers. I quote:

He wrote me a letter saying that he was bored with the work we were doing, and outlined areas he was interested in. I thought how dare this seven-year-old challenge my authority. I thought Fred was a child who had become too big for his boots. Fred's mother suggested that I attend the Gifted Education Network meeting at a neighbouring cluster group. This session was conducted by Rhonda Collins. I had many questions for Rhonda and debated many issues with her. I came away from the meeting with a greater understanding of gifted students. I wasn't quite convinced about adapting my classroom strategies for this one child. I trialled a variety of suggestions made by Rhonda and, surprise, surprise, they worked. Suddenly Fred was happy at school and willing to attend. My job was also much easier because I wasn't having to constantly battle with Fred over every work task.

The important thing to understand about this meeting was that it was a very small group and Rhonda was, therefore, able to run it as a counselling session for the individual teachers. She was also aware that the gifted issue was an attitudinal issue and applied tactics that allowed the teachers to change their point of view if they wanted to.

I now refer to statement 6 on page 7 of the Victorian Affiliated Network submission. The problem of providing provision for gifted children cannot be completely solved by providing pre- and/or post-service training for teachers. As well as expecting quality instruction for our gifted children, it should also be provided for the teachers. In my experience, students in these courses are allowed to decide for themselves which definition of 'gifted' and model of provision they like the best. There is little critical analysis of the theories. You have a copy of the Bright Futures facilitators manual. This sort of training produces the grid, which you also have a copy of. It is a double page. This is a teaching aid combining multiple intelligences and Bloom's Taxonomy. The teachers can classify their students and pick the box for them to work out of.

During my postgraduate studies in gifted education I have heard it said in the course of a discussion with a lecturer that young children who have been assessed as gifted should not be accelerated as they may not grow up to be gifted. The criteria used to decide if the individual was still gifted was whether or not he was in a gifted job. Towards the end of the course one of

the pre-service teachers made the statement that all parents say their children are gifted. This was an ingrained attitude and no amount of university instruction changed her beliefs.

One of the prescribed texts in a number of university gifted subjects is that by Barbara Clarke. In it she states:

It is my belief that, if given the opportunity to develop optimally, most children could perform at the level we now call gifted and it would be probably more natural that they do.

These ideas are totally damaging to the special needs of gifted children.

I now refer to statement 3 of the Victorian Affiliated Network submission on page 5 where it is talking about definitions. Definitions that describe differences are appropriate, such as the South Australian definition. The description of 'gifted' that we prefer, as stated in my submission, is by Michael Piechowski:

One of the basic characteristics of the gifted is their intensity and an expanded field of their subjective experience. The intensity, in particular, must be understood as a qualitatively distinct characteristic. It is not a matter of degree but of a different quality of experiencing: vivid, absorbing, penetrating, encompassing, complex, commanding—a way of being quiveringly alive.

Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Are there any further comments?

**Ms Collins**—Yes, I refer to the case LJ on page 3 of our submission. He was going to be here today but, due to the rescheduling, he was unable to come. I asked him what he would like to say to you and he said that he had not been able to read all of the *Hansard* transcripts because it was too awful. He was concerned about the speakers not getting to the point. He wanted to just define 'gifted' and get on with the learning. He liked the bit about colouring in North America. He thought that would be really good. In year 9 he was supposed to colour in the front page of his English book. He said funding would be handy but not really needed; just make sure the teachers are trained properly.

We thought that we might illustrate what Liam means about the gifted students just wanting to learn and the curriculum they are given. This is a gifted child aged four at kindergarten. This is the same gifted child aged nine, his first project in primary school. This is interesting because it is on Sri Lanka and we have Tamil Tigers mentioned in here. This is actually 1986. This is the same student in year 11 physics. This is a scheduled, prescribed work requirement. This particular one is labelled 1993. 'Good effort' it says and 'S'. You get an 'S' or an 'N'—satisfactory or not satisfactory. In case you think this is just one case that is not particularly important, we then have a different child aged three at kindergarten; same child at primary school aged nine; aged 11—sketches he did at home; year 11 physics. This is the same project three years later at a different school. This one is a graded assignment. This one has an A-plus. It fulfilled the work requirements for physics VCE Victoria. I said to this particular child, 'How come you've got an A-plus?' He said, 'Because it had little shiny bits on it.'

I refer to the document 'The specific learning difficulties program'. This was originally a program for gifted students and then a program for students with special needs. The title was

changed because it was too political, according to the principal. The tutor employed for the program came to me one day and said, 'He doesn't have a specific learning difficulty, does he?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'It's because he's gifted.' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'If they had done something in the first place he wouldn't have this problem, would he?' I said, 'No.' Then I thought, 'Ah, we've got one trained teacher. It must be because of all the journal articles I have been giving him.'

The Commonwealth government has known since 1988 that gifted students are not being educated and that there was a social dislike of giftedness. The Victorian government has known since the symposium group met in 1994 that the only way gifted education will happen is if we change social attitudes towards the gifted. To solve this problem, our parent groups have systematically targeted community groups and individuals in their in-service training programs. We have trained psychologists, doctors, community health centres, infant welfare sisters, the ADD Society, toy libraries, community houses, social workers, youth workers, school parent clubs and preschools—not just teachers in primary and secondary schools.

Four years ago we gave the document entitled 'Gifted education: the blueprint for success' to a staff member at La Trobe University, Bendigo. On page 4 it lists eight goals of the research centre for gifted education. We have completed, or started, seven of those items, including the Daedalus program which we are running free of charge for the second time this year. We asked La Trobe University to present a submission to you at this inquiry. We support that submission. Please understand that we will not be waiting to see if you support it or not. We are creating a special school at La Trobe University, Bendigo, to be a model of best practice in the education of gifted students. Our children need it now.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Ms Collins, because it was the last point you were just covering, what proportion of Victorian teachers, in rough terms or your best guess, would have some level of exposure to appropriate dealings with gifted, intelligent children?

**Ms Collins**—Overall, a very small proportion. If they get some training in their pre-service years, that would be unusual. In Bendigo, for instance, we now have 44 students undertaking the course in gifted education. That is both pre-service and postgraduate level.

**CHAIR**—In relation to the various associations and support groups, et cetera, how far have you reached in relation to teacher support?

**Ms Collins**—It is limited to who will invite us to come and speak to them. That has been difficult but, because we have isolated it as a social issue, we are going more broadly than just teachers and that has been extremely positive. We now have social workers identifying gifted children and being able to refer them to us so that we can actually help in the schools. We go out to schools as advocates and train in schools.

**Ms Morrison**—The interest is there in the teaching body. On Wednesday night this week the Victorian association held a parent and teacher information meeting on the importance of questioning as a strategy for working with gifted children. There were well over 120 people, mainly teachers, attending that. If there are things offered, teachers will come to them. I think there is just not enough available for teachers.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Ms Morrison, you brought up the issue of chronological age in the gifted and you said children like to seek like-minded other children.

**Ms Morrison**—Yes, that is right.

**Senator TIERNEY**—There has been an approach, such as vertical timetabling, used in some schools. Often it is only done with a particular subject or one or two subjects.

**Ms Morrison**—That is right, yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—On the argument of social development, if you put a year 4 child in a year 6 class completely, the feeling is that this will upset their social development. But you seem to be arguing that, in their seeking like-minded people of similar ability, that would not be a problem. Can you expand on that.

**Ms Morrison**—Certainly. Often gifted children are considered as not socially adept because they are not connecting with the children in their class who are of their chronological age. Often the reason they are not connecting is because they do not share common interests. They do not have that sort of connection where they can talk about things that they know and like. The children do not understand them when they go off on to abstract things. They are not making friends of their own age. Often they will say, ‘My best friends are much older than me,’ or ‘I get on better with adults than children,’ simply because they can connect.

I think people will always tell a story about when acceleration did not work—when it did not work when a younger child was put with older children—but you never hear about the many successes. Simply because they are successes, and the children go on with what they need to do and things are going well, it is accepted and forgotten and things go on. But the moment there is a problem, people are very quick to go back and say, ‘Well, you know, the child is two years younger; therefore it could not work.’ When you are in an environment where the teachers are supportive of acceleration, research shows that it is a very successful method of providing for gifted children.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You mentioned support from teachers.

**Ms Morrison**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—To support gifted children, hopefully teachers know something about gifted education. Could you just describe for us the state of preparation and in-service training of teachers in giftedness in Victoria. What is your view on what is happening in Victoria?

**Ms Morrison**—A few years ago a whole Bright Futures professional development program was introduced for teachers already in schools.

**Senator TIERNEY**—About what year did that come in? How far back are we talking?

**Ms Morrison**—About two years ago. It is fairly recent.

**Ms Bourton**—Five years.

**Ms Morrison**—Five years, is it, now? I beg your pardon. Time flies.

**Ms Bourton**—You actually have the facilitators manual there for the training for the Bright Futures.

**Ms Morrison**—It has already been several years since the program was introduced. The problem is that now, with the staffing cuts, there is concern about whether the program will continue. It is still only an introductory program and it still is not reaching all schools. This is a concern. There are still so many teachers and so many schools where there is not even one teacher who has had any exposure to training in gifted education and that is a concern.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Typically, in an area in a school district there is something called Bright Futures facilitators manual?

**Ms Morrison**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—In that area of maybe six high schools and maybe 20 primaries, how would that be applied? What would actually happen?

**Ms Morrison**—It would depend very much on the school and the principal.

**Senator TIERNEY**—It is not a district-wide in-service; it is school by school, is it?

**Ms Morrison**—It is very much school by school.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Okay. When that comes into the school what then happens to it?

**Ms Morrison**—It depends on the school's priorities, whether this is a charter priority, and how proactive that principal and school community will be about bringing this into the school.

**Senator TIERNEY**—It is optional?

**Ms Morrison**—Yes.

**Mrs Linossier**—Could I add something. You mentioned the area of primary schools and secondary. From my knowledge there are active networks in certain areas, certainly in Melbourne. I cannot speak for country areas. There are some networks where primary and secondary staff, principals and parents are working together. Sometimes they will do it via meetings after school—like education for parents and staff. Sometimes they will do it with practical programs. They will host those programs on a rotating basis. There are networks that exist, but it really depends. Some are more active than others.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I assume that is very patchy across the whole system.

**Mrs Linossier**—Yes, it is.

**Senator TIERNEY**—If we take a school that decides, ‘Yes, we want to do something about giftedness and we will implement this,’ what do they actually do? How long does the course run? Who actually would do it?

**Ms Morrison**—The training is run by people coming out from the Department of Education, Employment and Training. The Catholic Office of Education also have people trained in Bright Futures. Staff from Deakin University are also involved in the Bright Futures training. This is run with groups of teachers. There is usually one person from each school and they all come together in a district and go through the training of this program.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Then that teacher goes back—

**Ms Morrison**—Goes back to the school, works with teachers in the school and it develops from there.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Just describe how they work with the teachers in the school. They have come back after having been through this whizzbang course. They have the manual. Then what do they do? Do they hold sessions with all the teachers?

**Ms Morrison**—The idea is that they are actually to invite teachers from schools in neighbouring areas and work together to bring understanding and knowledge to teachers within the schools in the area.

**Senator TIERNEY**—In the hard reality of that, what percentage of teachers would be involved and how long would they spend dealing with this sort of document?

**Ms Morrison**—My experience is that initially the teachers are very enthusiastic—they have one or two meetings with the surrounding schools—but maintaining the momentum is difficult.

**Ms Collins**—The course is six workshops—as you can see when you read it, six workshops of one to two hours with a maximum of 12 hours. The teachers do it voluntarily. It is a train the trainer model. They learn the package. They take that document back to the schools, supposedly then to instruct and train the other staff of the school. If there are two staff from a particular school, we might be able to train the other staff. If there is only one staff who has done the Bright Futures training, it will not happen, because you need an impetus of two staff at a particular school. If the staff have decided, or the school has decided, that welfare or early literacy is the focus for the school, the training package will not proceed at the school.

**Senator TIERNEY**—It will not proceed if what happens?

**Ms Collins**—If the school has taken a focus for welfare or early literacy or LOTE, then that will be instead of gifted education at the school.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Why are these things mutually exclusive?

**Ms Collins**—They are. They should not be, though. There is no reason why they should be.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Is that Victorian government policy?

**Ms Collins**—No, that is school policy. It is time. You can only do one training program.

**Senator TIERNEY**—It relates to the in-service amount of time available.

**Ms Collins**—It also relates to attitude. LOTE is more important than gifted. Early literacy program is more important than gifted.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Is that how it stacks up around the state—that gifted and talented tends to be the lower priority?

**Ms Collins**—Absolutely.

**Ms Morrison**—But there are schools where that is not so.

**Senator TIERNEY**—In that school where it is not so and they say, ‘It’s a priority; we’re going to run this,’ if I have a gifted child in teacher X’s class, teacher X, I assume, can decide not to get involved in it; is that right?

**Ms Morrison**—That is right.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So bad luck for me if my teacher decides not to get involved in it.

**Ms Morrison**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—All right. I think I have a fairly accurate picture of the way the in-service program works.

**Mrs Linossier**—We have talked about Bright Futures, but I think that the universities are offering education for interested teachers and parents. Pam has mentioned her study. I have studied also. I think the interest is there and people will not just rely on the six trainer-trainee sessions; they will go further. Those people all go back to schools and then create interest with other staff members. I think that is certainly something that should not be—

**Senator TIERNEY**—Just describe to me how that works. I am a teacher in a school and my school has decided this is a low priority but I think it is a high priority and I want to get involved via the university in some way. How do I do that?

**Mrs Linossier**—I could enrol in a gifted education subject that is available at university, but I would be going back to my school. I would obviously have students in mind who are gifted and I am trying to offer them programs. I work with teachers, too, to select programs that are appropriate to the child’s needs and that challenge perhaps some of the structures that appear in schools that need to be challenged so that gifted children can have an education that provides for their needs.

**Ms Bourton**—Melbourne University's gifted courses did not take any new students in this year and there were only three finishing off the part-time course once John Geake left. It is not running. Most of the time he was running around fighting to get more students because they were going to stop the course running because there was not the money behind it. You cannot actually go to Melbourne University at the moment, this year, and do a gifted course.

**Ms Collins**—And the other point is that the end result of in-service training, if you are using Barbara Clarke and various other documents including 'Bright Futures', is that you may end up with a teacher who says, 'Yes, I'm gifted trained. I've done the 12 hours and I've done a course and here we are, we're doing the grid.'

**Senator TIERNEY**—If someone went to do John Geake's course, how long would they spend? What sort of course is that?

**Ms Morrison**—It is postgraduate.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Diploma, is it?

**Ms Morrison**—You can either do a postgraduate diploma or you can go on to a master's or a doctorate.

**Senator TIERNEY**—A postgrad diploma would be what, equivalent to one year full-time work?

**Ms Morrison**—Full time, but it is usually done part time for teachers coming in after school hours.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Yes.

**Ms Morrison**—I think the quality of courses available at the postgraduate level at universities is excellent. It is just that the numbers are so small and that is a concern.

**Senator TIERNEY**—With the pre-service training, those who are doing an education degree, what is happening there in the universities in Victoria?

**Ms Morrison**—It is not unusual for teachers to go right through a teacher training course and not have even a 40-minute session on giftedness.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Why do you think that is? Why do teacher educators—who you would think would be interested in the education of all children, including the gifted—ignore it? When I was trained as a teacher they ignored it, too. The word 'gifted' never passed anyone's lips 30 years ago.

**Ms Morrison**—I know. For me also.

**Senator TIERNEY**—It does not seem to have changed very much.

**Ms Morrison**—No, it has not.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Why is that?

**Ms Collins**—It is a social attitude. Teachers only reflect the wider social attitude. The education system is what society is all about, what we value in society. Those institutions only reflect what the wider community is thinking.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So even experts in education are saying, ‘Well, these kids are pretty together, pretty talented. They can look after themselves. Let’s try and help the ones who have learning difficulties.’

**Ms Collins**—That is very much the case.

**Senator BRANDIS**—I just wanted to pursue that very point. Ms Collins, you said it is a social attitude, but it is sounding to me as if it is more than that, as if it is an institutional attitude.

**Ms Collins**—It is a systematic fault all the way through. It is a system fault.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Where does that come from? Does it come from ignorance or does it come from insufficient resourcing? Does it come from an actual almost ideological concern by some education professionals that special provision for gifted and talented children is elitist?

**Ms Collins**—It covers all of those aspects. If you refer back to Dr Moss in Tasmania, she finally I think became exasperated and said, ‘Gifted children have learning needs like everybody else.’ Senator Tierney at least pointed out that, no, they do not have learning needs the same as everybody else.

**Senator BRANDIS**—I remember Dr Moss’s evidence, but that is really the sort of institutional attitude that concerns me. How prevalent is that in your experience in Victoria?

**Ms Collins**—Rampant, absolutely rampant.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Elaborate, please. Where do we find it? I do not want you to name names but are there particular university education faculties that you can identify as being worse than others?

**Ms Collins**—It is not isolated to any particular education faculty but isolated to individuals within faculties. La Trobe University, Bendigo, we have specifically targeted—and I use that very nicely; they are very nice people. We have in-service trained the staff at the university to the point where they understand the issues of gifted and are responding to that with in-service training both at pre-teacher levels and postgraduate levels.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So you are training the lecturers, are you?

**Ms Collins**—We are training the educators.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Are you inviting this committee to conclude that one of the problems in this area of policy is the existence of an institutional attitude in some places in the education sector which deliberately devalues the importance of gifted education because it is seen to be elitist?

**Ms Collins**—That is right.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Can I just stay with the attitude of the staff of universities. In other states they have said things like, ‘Believers in inclusive education and therefore, within the classroom, the teacher should provide for individual differences and teach in an individual way all children across the spectrum: people with intellectual disabilities would have special treatment in an inclusive classroom and so would the gifted.’ Presumably so would the ones in between. How realistic do you think that is in terms of what happens in the average classroom?

**Ms Collins**—I think that is absolutely absurd because you get such a wide range. Say, for instance, you might have an integration student in your class, you might have ethnic groups in your class, non-English-speaking groups in your class and then you will have a gifted one. If you take into consideration that the gifted is an extraordinary exception to the norm, statistically different from the norm, you are then placing that child in a normal setting with a normal teacher, with normal curriculum. It cannot work. It simply cannot work. If you have an intellectually disabled child in that setting, you have a teacher’s aide, you have an individual program legislated.

**Senator BRANDIS**—But it is worse than that, isn’t it? It is not just a functional problem of the classroom not working. Isn’t it also the case that if you subject the gifted child to that teaching environment you are discriminating against him or her by not giving them an environment that educates to that child’s needs?

**Ms Collins**—That is right. That is why we have this illustration of exactly the education that gifted children receive.

**Senator BRANDIS**—I understand the point. I just want to get it on the record, you see.

**Ms Collins**—That is right, yes.

**Senator BRANDIS**—I am a lawyer.

**Senator TIERNEY**—One of the ways in which you are suggesting you fix this is that governments mandate that teacher education institutions actually teach for the gifted.

**Ms Collins**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Putting aside the point that they do not seem to understand very much about doing it, so I wonder how they would do it, how realistic is that, given that we do not control the curriculum in the universities? Is that realistic?

**Ms Collins**—Mandating it covers two areas: it means the Commonwealth has taken an official stand—‘This is what you will do.’ We had a meeting with Mary Delahunty and she told us personally, ‘We can’t tell teachers what to do.’ If the employer cannot tell them what to do, who can? If the Commonwealth takes a stand, hypothetically, and says, ‘You will do this,’ it then gives us something concrete to go to the schools with as parents and say, ‘They said you have to do it.’

**Senator TIERNEY**—I am sure we would like to do that but the problem is we actually do not—

**Ms Collins**—We will tell them what to do.

**Senator TIERNEY**—We do not have the power to do that. We do not have a head of power that says we can mandate what a university teaches. We do not have that.

**Ms Collins**—No, but you can mandate, as in our suggestions. You can change the wording of particular documents that already exist to include ‘and gifted’. If you look carefully at other legislation that already exists and change the wording, that will hopefully give us the power we need as parents to go back to the schools and tell them.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I think you might be confusing what state governments can do and what federal can do, but neither can do this with the university. Finally, wouldn’t it be more realistic, given that the state government is an employer of teachers and has more power in this area, to perhaps pursue the in-service course a little more vigorously? You have described for me the inadequacies of how Bright Futures is implemented. Don’t you think perhaps that is what should be worked on in terms of being a bit more serious about the in-service priority and spread of in-service training for existing teachers?

**Ms Collins**—If you are then going to say it is a state matter to in-service train the teachers, I think that is a problem. At this particular point, if they are going to get Bright Futures, I would prefer them not to have it. I think that the Bright Futures training manual is causing problems because of what they are teaching the teachers. If they are teaching them that you do multiple intelligences, Bloom’s Taxonomy and six thinking hats, I would prefer the government to not teach them that.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Still doing Bloom’s Taxonomy, are they?

**Ms Collins**—That is right. I used Bloom’s Taxonomy with my severely intellectually disabled children back in 1973, as teacher in a special school. If I can use it for intellectually disabled children, it is not gifted, but we have the grid. It is being presented to the parents as the solution to the gifted education issue. I would prefer the governments not teach teachers this stuff.

**Ms Morrison**—Could I just make a comment here. I disagree with some of the things that Rhonda has been saying there. While I do not agree with everything in this training package, there are many strings to this package. Some of the sections on identification are very valuable. I believe it is a starting point and we have to start somewhere. At least it has exposed many teachers to the idea of giftedness. Sure, it is not perfect and we have a long way to go, but at

least it was a step in the right direction. We have to build on that. I agree with what you are saying about, 'Let's push for in-servicing more of teachers.' That is very important, but that is only one part of the approach that we should be taking. We need to come from many different directions to heighten the awareness altogether about this area.

**Senator TIERNEY**—But surely we have a group of teachers out there who have had no pre-service training in this—probably virtually no in-service training. I want to explore finally the possibility of doing something about this through targeted Commonwealth funding to gifted in-service, so that the money then controls the direction of what happens.

**Ms Collins**—That would be very nice if the Commonwealth government actually looked at some package for in-service training both pre-service and post-service, but it would have to be perhaps written by Professor Miraca Gross.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Yes, whom I have met. We are going to the University of New South Wales as part of the hearings. Thank you very much.

**Senator ALLISON**—Could you expand a bit on what you mentioned earlier about the staff cuts to delivering the Bright Futures program. Can you map those? How many did we used to have? What do we have now? What is the optimum?

**Ms Collins**—We are not quite sure because these changes to the structure happened on 1 May and we had a great deal of trouble finding out what was happening. We have been told that the gifted section is no longer in existence. It was a particular unit. Those staff have now been spread across a new restructure called 'early, middle and late years'. The person who was originally head of the department, the manager of that particular section in curriculum, is no longer working in the central office; he has gone off to the eastern region, so that there is a new person who is heading up that particular section.

**Senator TIERNEY**—When did that happen?

**Ms Collins**—On 1 May.

**Senator TIERNEY**—This year?

**Ms Collins**—Yes. On 1 May the gifted section in the head office was disbanded.

**Senator TIERNEY**—How many people used to work there?

**Ms Morrison**—Between three and six. There is now one person full time who also has the responsibility, as I said before, of cross-curricula and gender, another person full time who is now on 12 weeks sick leave, and two other people sharing a position. That is it.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Was that accompanied by a policy change or did they just restructure?

**Ms Collins**—They just restructured.

**Ms Morrison**—It is called ‘enhancement’.

**Ms Collins**—Yes, it is called ‘enhancement’. Please note the correct terminology for the disbandment of the gifted section in the state of Victoria. It has been enhanced, yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—It sounds like something out of *1984*, doesn’t it!

**Senator ALLISON**—What is the optimum size of a department in your view?

**Ms Collins**—The optimum size is not the point. It should be a specific unit that parents can access. As a parent of a gifted child, I now have to decide, firstly, that it is a curriculum issue. I probably would not bother. I would ring up with a problem about a school, so it is under ‘Curriculum’. Then I would have to decide whether they are early, middle or late years to find a particular relevant person. If it was a psychological issue or some other issue or problem with staff or bullying that is associated with giftedness, sorry, I do not know who to speak to.

**Senator ALLISON**—But we are talking here about this group being able to answer questions to parents but also being able to do the training, presumably.

**Ms Collins**—That is right.

**Senator ALLISON**—There must be some simple calculations that tell you that if you want to get to 25 per cent of the teaching population you need—

**Ms Collins**—You need more than four staff.

**Senator ALLISON**—a unit of six people to work over three years to do it. What is the optimum size of a department which undertakes training in this field?

**Ms Collins**—If you wanted to make gifted education actually happen, given that it is not happening now, and you want to go from not happening to happening, you are going to have to employ a hell of a lot more staff than about 20. They need to be in regional offices. They need to be out on the ground. There need to be accessible training programs at regional offices, not in central downtown Melbourne. What are we going to do in the bush?

**Ms Morrison**—The people in the central office do not actually have to do the training; it does not have to be huge numbers in the central office. The universities have people that are very well equipped to do the training. There are other people that can be accessed, but we need more people with training within the office, who can make sure and follow through that these things are happening, and provide the links.

**Ms Bourton**—There is a problem also sometimes that schools will not let anyone who is not a DEET employee actually in to do in-service training. I have come across a number that would not let someone who was not a DEET employee in. No matter how much experience they have, they could not go in and train the teachers.

**CHAIR**—A DEET consultant?

**Ms Bourton**—Yes.

**Ms Morrison**—Individual schools will decide who comes into the school.

**CHAIR**—Yes, but if DEET has an arrangement with an academic as a consultant, are you suggesting the schools would still not let that consultant into a school?

**Ms Morrison**—That is right.

**Ms Bourton**—Yes. I can think of one at the moment that would not.

**Senator ALLISON**—That raises an interesting point about your own group. You, Ms Collins, are a teacher, I think you said.

**Ms Collins**—Parent.

**Senator ALLISON**—And a teacher?

**Ms Collins**—I am due to start a teaching position, yes, but I am a parent.

**Senator ALLISON**—But you put yourself in a position of training teachers. Where do you get the expertise from, apart from being parents? I do not mean this to be a nasty question to you, but the whole business of teaching teachers is an academic issue. I can see the difficulties you would have in persuading university departments that they should listen to you, given that you are parents.

**Ms Collins**—No, it was very easy. At La Trobe University, Bendigo, it was very easy for us to access the staff and train them.

**Senator ALLISON**—Can you comment on the appropriateness of your group being in that position?

**Ms Collins**—Of teaching other people in the community?

**Senator ALLISON**—Teachers specifically.

**Ms Collins**—Yes, teachers specifically. My training is originally in special education. I then completed a graduate diploma in special education and human services (gifted education). I am on my master's by research in the field and I am just upgrading to a PhD. We have several other parents within our group that have completed the graduate diploma course, specifically so that they are trained. In addition to that, we have brought down people like Miraca Gross, run conferences in Bendigo and in-service trained hundreds of our parents and teachers in the region. We have direct access to experts. We have also attended conferences for the last umpteen dozen years, so that we have now personal contact with people like Michael Piechowski. We have their home addresses and we liaise with these people. Our training is in both professional formal qualifications at university levels and ongoing training of ourselves,

where we go to the library and read journal articles. We take the parents through the courses of how to find the literature in the library.

**Senator ALLISON**—I am sorry, that was not quite my question. I am sure you go to great lengths to be informed on this subject. My question was about what I perceive to be a problem in academic circles of the appropriateness of a group like yours, which is an advocacy group, conducting training.

**Ms Collins**—We have to because nobody else is doing it.

**Senator ALLISON**—If this committee were to make a recommendation that the Commonwealth provide funds for gifted and talented children's training, and the whole scope, would you like to suggest a figure that ought to be considered?

**Ms Collins**—I draw your attention to a submission which is before you from La Trobe University, Bendigo. We asked them to put in a submission. We specifically want centres of excellence set up at universities. The university itself has put an initial cost figure of something like \$400,000 to start up these centres, particularly in rural universities, because we cannot access information from major cities. I think that that is a university figure and I think we can do it for much less. It is important that the Commonwealth looks at that proposal because it targets specific problems and will be a solution. It is not the end solution but it starts to get something done.

**Senator ALLISON**—Just to pursue that point a bit, the \$400,000 presumably is centres of excellence for teachers to come in and go through the training process.

**Ms Collins**—At regional centres, yes.

**Senator ALLISON**—But there are other costs associated with the release of those teachers for PD. There are costs associated with, presumably, smaller groups. When you have 30 kids in a class and one of them is gifted and talented and two-thirds of the rest have language or learning difficulties, then the teacher is probably not going to be able to spend more than half an hour with that gifted child in a day. You would imagine that it would be ideal to have other measures in place to allow one to one or small groups to take place. Would you agree with that?

**Ms Bourton**—I would like to say something. I have a school in Melbourne I am doing a case study with, the one I mentioned before. They are doing really great things for gifted kids. They have a few that have had radical acceleration and they have had no extra funding at all. There has been a change of attitude and restructuring within the school but there has been no extra funding and they are working for gifted kids. They are in the process of using Raven's testing to test all of the kids who they think could be gifted.

**Senator ALLISON**—What school is this?

**Ms Bourton**—Lalor Primary School.

**Ms Morrison**—Senator Allison, when we are talking about a figure it is very difficult, really, to state that at the moment but could we get back to you with that information?

**Senator ALLISON**—Certainly.

**Ms Morrison**—Thank you very much.

**Ms Collins**—Any amount of money thrown at this problem will not necessarily change attitudes, and changing attitudes does not require money; it requires willpower.

**Ms Morrison**—However, funding, very thoughtfully planned and allocated, can make a difference and I think that is important to note.

**CHAIR**—Ms Morrison, perhaps when you give us your thoughts about the issue of funding, you could also indicate the nature of the allocation you think is most appropriate.

**Ms Morrison**—I will certainly do that.

**CHAIR**—That concludes this session. Thank you very much for your appearance.

[9.47 a.m.]

**KRONBORG, Mrs Leonie, Lecturer in Education (gifted education), Faculty of Education, Monash University, and President, Australian Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented**

**MURPHY, Dr Betty (Private capacity)**

**O'BOYLE, Professor Michael, Director, Morgan Centre, School of Behavioural Science, University of Melbourne**

**CHAIR**—I call the committee to order. I welcome Professor Michael O'Boyle, Dr Betty Murphy and Mrs Leonie Kronborg. The committee has before it submissions 98, 62 and 64 from each of you. Are there any changes that you need to make to those written submissions at this stage? No? Fine. We also prefer all evidence to be given in public. If there is a need to move into private session, we can consider that, but I will take it that all comments are on the public record at this stage. I invite you to make opening statements, and I am happy to commence with Professor O'Boyle.

**Prof. O'Boyle**—In keeping with the idea of brevity, I wish to make just a short introductory statement to reserve time for discussion and questions, which I think will probably produce supplements to the submissions, as opposed to rehashing of ground we have already been over. In general, we at the Morgan Centre believe that most of the important substantive issues regarding education for gifted and talented students have already been brought to the attention of previous Commonwealth commissions and inquiries, and have been published in their 1988 report in particular. However, as academic specialists in the field, we would like to point out a significant change and a growing sense of urgency and community awareness over these issues that have emerged, in my opinion with growing enthusiasm and momentum, over the last several years.

Although still at the grassroots level, some innovative groups have begun to implement the types of programs recommended in that earlier report, but without serious government funding these fledgling programs will continue to exist only in small pockets of the Australian community, and will remain reliant upon the capacity, goodwill, and passion of well-meaning private sponsors. We at the Morgan Centre believe that the time has come for the Commonwealth of Australia to take the lead in actively supporting the recommendations of past inquiries by funding existing and yet to be established services that would provide equitably for the needs of Australia's gifted and talented children. Such support would allow the gifted and talented to gain personally, and the whole country to benefit from their enhanced contribution to Australian life.

In this regard, the Morgan Centre at the University of Melbourne submits to the committee the following recommendation: that in order to provide effective support for the diverse needs of gifted and talented students, the Commonwealth government establish a national funding authority to coordinate the financial support of programs designed to promote the educational development of gifted and talented children. We further recommend that Commonwealth funds should be directed to the following specific-purpose programs: (1) professional development courses for school personnel in designing and delivering educational programs for gifted and

talented students; (2) extracurricular extension programs for gifted and talented students; and (3) funding specialised research directed to better understanding the development of high-ability students and the most effective strategies providing for their education—perhaps from what I have heard earlier today, a very important component. We further recommend that the funds administered by such a national funding authority be distributed through a national competitive tendering scheme, the details of which could be worked out if the sentiment is received positively.

I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity for the Morgan Centre and the University of Melbourne to appear, and I wish you success in your inquiry.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. We will move to the other two witnesses and then come back to questions beyond that. Dr Murphy.

**Dr Murphy**—My involvement in the field of education of the gifted has been as a psychologist only—I have never taught gifted children—both in a research capacity and as a clinician. In my work, I have interviewed, assessed and counselled a large number of gifted children. For the last two or three years I have been working wholly as a clinical psychologist, but the bulk of my submission is fairly specific, and concerns a longitudinal research study which I carried out as an evaluation of the acceleration program for gifted secondary schoolchildren at University High School in Melbourne.

This program has been running since 1981, through three changes of state government, despite the fact that one of those governments was ideologically opposed to special provision for gifted children, and the program has been replicated in many state secondary schools in Victoria. I would like to emphasise the point that I stopped collecting data in 1993, so any comments I make today will have no relation to the acceleration program at University High as it is today.

There are three brief points I want to emphasise as to my findings. Firstly, the program could be said to be highly successful and so popular with parents that every year siblings of previous students in the program apply to be selected. Secondly, very strong bonds were forged between the children in each annual cohort, a wonderful group feeling which did away with feelings of competitiveness, and also did away with the urge to get high marks for the sake of getting high marks, and, along with this family feeling, there was a remarkable personality change in the students, from rather repressed, conscientious, good little children, to independent, creative and mature adolescents—the sort of children who, when they get to university, become leaders.

From my statistical analysis, it was clear that this personality change was due to the effect of the program, not to the effect of maturation or high intelligence, or the type of school the program was embedded in. After I had found this in my findings, I discovered that a similar effect had been found in a smaller study in America by a psychologist called Cornell. Thirdly, it was clear from my results—and this is quite important—that maths is the best and the easiest subject to accelerate, and that accelerating in all subjects is probably not best practice, although it is difficult to see how else the program could be administered.

The last point I would just like to touch on is a comparison between acceleration programs such as the ones in Victorian state secondary schools and vertical timetabling. Vertical

timetabling has come in and out of fashion over the years. At the moment, it is being recommended again. For instance, it was highly recommended by Dr Geake in his submission. On the surface, vertical timetabling would seem to smack less of elitism than an acceleration program, but there are a number of criticisms I could make. However, since I did not deal with this topic in my submission, I will not take up the inquiry time now. I just wanted to say that it is a question to be faced.

Finally, it must be said that no program can be viewed in isolation since so much depends on the type of school, the social climate of the school, and the calibre and the attitude of the teachers. Thanks for the opportunity to speak to this inquiry.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Mrs Kronborg.

**Mrs Kronborg**—I am responsible for gifted education at Monash University. I have had experience with gifted kids as a parent, as an educator, as a teacher of children and as a consultant over 20-odd years. I believe there is a huge misunderstanding about the concept of giftedness and talent development, and you will find there is no one universal concept or definition, which leads to huge problems within the field. I think people still believe that gifted and talented education is about elitism, when in fact I actually see it as a social equity/justice, social justice/equity issue.

Every time someone encounters a gifted child or works with a gifted child they discover something new about giftedness, because gifted children actually do vary enormously, although there are common characteristics of giftedness. We have developed a lot or we are providing educationally for gifted and talented children now much better than we were in the early nineties. I think the release of the educational policy in 1995 made a huge difference in Victoria. There was the introduction of the Bright Futures policy, which meant that schools did become aware that there was a need to provide for gifted and talented students.

I do believe the staff within the gifted education section at the department of education, under the limited staffing that they did have, have done an enormous amount in changing people's attitudes, but it is very hard to evaluate what has happened. Gifted and talented education is on a continuum. There are some schools in this state which are providing superbly for gifted and talented kids in their schools, but they are mainly independent schools, and then there is the other end where you will have schools in which the belief is that there are no children in that school who are gifted and talented.

I believe that gifted potential within all individuals needs to be nurtured in order for it to realise. That means that we need to provide for it educationally, the family needs to be able to support it, and the child needs to recognise their own needs as well. Tertiary education needs to do a lot more to provide for gifted students. In 1996 I first established the certificate of gifted education at Monash University, which then became the postgraduate certificate of gifted education. We started off with 20-odd students. It has dipped at different times but this year in a summer school I had 49 postgraduate students. I have 30 in a first semester subject. The students want the courses, but sometimes the universities are not necessarily supportive in recognising that there is a need to provide those subjects. For next year, at this point in time, my subjects are going to be cut back to one subject supposedly offered in gifted education, as opposed to two this year.

Because there are changes in attitudes, providing for gifted and talented children is a situation where you are constantly educating the people that you are working with; whether you are at a tertiary level, a school level, a parenting level, it just goes on. It is a constant process of education for everyone you deal with.

My recommendations are that the Commonwealth should encourage professional development for teachers in the area of gifted and talented education by providing scholarships for teachers who wish to do postgraduate studies specialising in the education of gifted and talented children in their own time; provide specific research funding for Australian studies into gifted education and talent development; provide funding for individual assessments for disadvantaged families with gifted students experiencing learning disabilities, underachieving gifted students, and gifted students with impairments, so that they can access services which can help them; provide small, innovatory grants for preschools and schools to develop a whole of school approach to gifted and talented education; and to establish an advisory body to monitor developments in gifted and talented education, and to make recommendations to the minister.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Professional development seems to be a very common theme in terms of what the Commonwealth could do in this area, and potentially an area where the Commonwealth can impact on state level school priorities. I am curious about the professional development that currently occurs, such as postgraduate studies, and what those students go on to do currently. Are you able to give us any information about that?

**Mrs Kronborg**—I must admit that most of my students who come in are working with some gifted children in their schools already. Those within the independent schools often are working in special education positions, or are responsible for teaching and learning within the schools, but are providing support to all teachers about the awareness of differentiation of curriculum and awareness of individual needs. Giftedness seems to be accepted the most under the guise of providing for individual differences. Within the state schools I have had principals come and do the courses; therefore they can effect change from the leadership position. A classroom teacher, if they are the only classroom teacher in their school who is doing the gifted course, find it the most difficult to get some of the support to bring about changes more than beyond the classroom. I advise all the teachers that it is a long-term process, because they can only start with the group of gifted children within their class and move on from there, and they have to have fairly strong personalities.

**CHAIR**—Those doing postgraduate training tend to apply that training in a support or special education or administrative role.

**Mrs Kronborg**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Do you think that is appropriate?

**Mrs Kronborg**—Some are doing direct teaching as well with gifted education. It is most appropriate.

**CHAIR**—By withdrawal.

**Mrs Kronborg**—I believe in flexible provisions. I do not think you can make a definite recommendation that ‘This school should have’. I think schools are all at different stages in their own development and that where an acceleration program may suit one school, another secondary school may decide that vertical curriculum is the best way to go and, within vertical curriculum, provide for individual differences by also having acceleration classes for groups of children who are advanced in their learning in particular subject areas. They may also be providing group lunchtime sessions. They may also be providing after-school activities. They may be providing Saturday programs. It really varies enormously, depending on the qualities of the staff within the schools, the knowledge of the teachers within the schools and their experience with gifted kids in the past.

From one school I have two students at the moment. Their head has been a past president of the Victorian Gifted Education Association and has done the training in gifted ed. There are two classroom teachers in that school who have postgraduate studies in gifted ed and the consultant who is working on changing teaching and learning within the school has master’s studies in gifted education. You can imagine the momentum that four staff within a school can have, or the effect that they can have on the rest of the staff within the school. They are working at whole school change. But other teachers are just batting their heads against a brick wall in trying to get other teachers to acknowledge the needs of gifted kids in their schools.

**CHAIR**—Can I take it from your comments, though, that in a policy sense you believe that gifted intelligent education resides within the special needs area as an identified special need for individual students?

**Mrs Kronborg**—I think that seems to be one of the most acceptable ways to go. What you are trying to do is bring about mainstream change as well, so that people coming into special education have a mind-set of providing for individual differences. My background is that I started off working with children with learning disabilities and different areas of disability. Working with some of those children, what I recognised was that they also had gifted potential, but it may not have been in verbal talent. What we are trying to do is to recognise the differences of all children. I think knowledge makes the difference with all teachers.

But also giftedness varies by degree. If you are talking about children with IQs above 140, the ways of providing for those kids are not the same ways of providing for children of average IQ. I believe you have to consider intellect, you have to consider the high IQ children. You also can consider multiple intelligences and come down the talent development pathway. You have to be open in your thinking about how to provide for all these children.

**CHAIR**—You may have heard from the earlier session the limited prioritisation that will occur in this particular field. In the absence, for instance, of a special target program from the Commonwealth level, as soon as you are in the special needs area this committee has heard time and time again that the needs of the physically or intellectually disabled end up overriding the needs of gifted, intelligent children.

**Mrs Kronborg**—I could say that even within an education faculty in a university that could take place. It varies amongst the systems. The independent schools have a very good special ed support system. The Catholic education system are doing a lot to provide for their disadvantaged, disabled students; therefore they recognise the needs of gifted education students. I must

admit, my least number of students from any sector comes from the department of education, yet I recognise that the department of education probably needs more highly qualified teachers in the field of gifted education than any other field. I do think that we need to address that situation. I think part of the difficulty has been that the department of education has tried to provide its own professional development with its funding when, in fact, if it had had more substantial training of more teachers within its schools, I believe it could have had a much greater effect on changing whole school approaches to gifted education.

I think professional development within the department of education should back up substantial education at a university level as an ongoing process. I find teachers who come into the courses may have some sympathy towards the needs of gifted and talented education, but it is not until they get into their reading and develop further knowledge that they realise how little they actually know. It really takes a 39-hour course, with another 100 hours probably put into reading and writing papers, before they have some—what I call—reasonable knowledge in the area. Then they need to go on to another 39 hours to develop further knowledge. Also, I honestly believe that teachers who become informed in gifted education improve their teaching strategies and their knowledge of ways of providing for all children.

**CHAIR**—I think that has been obvious. Professor O’Boyle, the question I wanted to raise with you specifically comes from your earlier comments. and you might add to that now because Mrs Kronborg has referred to it as well. The postgraduate studies seem under threat. We heard earlier that Melbourne University is not offering subjects this year. I wonder to what extent that relates to another inquiry this committee is conducting on the higher education system as a whole and I would ask you all—perhaps starting with Professor O’Boyle—if you could comment on that issue.

**Prof. O’Boyle**—May I, in turn, follow up something which is linked quite closely with Leonie’s comment, which has to do with educating the teachers who will do the teaching of the gifted. One of the things that I have experienced in the relatively short time I have been in Australia is that there is a grassroots need for research findings in the area of gifted and talented individuals about the origins, the mechanism, the means by which they might develop. Teachers and parents are wanting to learn about that literature and become aware of that literature because it does inform their practice. It informs their intervention, development and interaction with their children.

It seems to me that as soon as people are made aware that there is a growing literature out there about the special needs of these gifted and talented children, it becomes a much more accepting sort of premise. I think the premise in the past had to do with, ‘It’s all right to handle the learning disabled’s individual differences, but if we just let the gifted be they’ll turn out just fine anyway. We don’t have to put resources behind them.’ The research literature now indicates that that is simply not the case. If you engage in denying the neglect of gifted and talented individuals, what occurs is a variety of things that can have very significant detriment to their own personal development and to that of those who are around them. For example, if they become overly bored, they begin to act out and then no-one learns and that is not very useful; they become very bored; they are accelerating along certain lines and have no other option, in terms of their own kind of development, but to seek out some of these special opportunities provided on a hit-or-miss basis.

I think there is a growing awareness that the literature out there will inform the individuals who are doing the teaching and inform the parents that there are special needs and those special needs will be readily accepted and met without any kind of concern about elitism, in my own opinion, simply because they are treated as another group that needs a special opportunity or learning environment to continue. That is the growing sense that I get from the situation here in Australia, which is that maybe once upon a time the tall poppy idea was a reasonable thing to pursue, but I do not think people are willing to take a chance with that right now. They are much more concerned about active measures to promote the opportunity for development of another special needs group in a very true sense.

With regard to the university situation, because my appointment is actually in the school of psychology, I do not have direct access or information necessarily to what the goings-on of teacher training and the gifted unit per se are. I interacted with John Geake before he left for Oxford, but that was pretty much the extent of my involvement in the gifted education training component, so I am not really able to speak with great authority on that.

**CHAIR**—Mrs Kronborg, perhaps you can give us your views on why you think these subjects are under pressure at the moment.

**Mrs Kronborg**—One is the change in Commonwealth funding for next year. There is a concern. We have just introduced a master of education by research. There is a concern, because of cutting back in HECS, that we will not have the students to continue in the courses that we have been offering in the past and the emphasis seems to be on research related subjects. We also have a new dean in our faculty who came in last year and who is trying to gain an awareness of what has been happening in the faculty and what needs to happen in the faculty. I am having a discussion with her next Wednesday in relation to this particular inquiry and some of my own concerns about rationalisation of subjects within the faculty.

I do think Commonwealth funding is having a huge impact on universities, with how universities structure their education courses. How do students pay to come in to do the courses they are actually doing? It was stressed this year that I could have full fee paying students come in and do my summer school but, as I said to our registrar, ‘You won’t get teachers, on their salaries, coming in and paying \$2,325 HECS for a subject, because generally most of them can’t afford it.’

Part of it is the change of federal funding in education and the direction of moving into research more, although there is an absolute need to develop research. My concern in gifted education is that you will not get a lot of teachers going on with researching gifted education unless you have had a background of education, so that you actually have a background of knowledge to go on at a doctoral level, or at a master of educational research level. It is not like a field of mathematics or science—brain studies research; okay, you can follow that direction in psychology. There are different ways of going into it, but as far as education of the gifted, you have to have a background of knowledge to be able to do research in that field. Unless we maintain courses at a postgraduate level in gifted education we are not going to get the research students, either, in education.

**CHAIR**—In terms of what research is available, my understanding is that a lot of the research is done in that special needs type of focus. However, I query the extent to which the out-

come of that research is directed at other special needs, rather than gifted children. My question is: what level of research is there, where the outcome of it is not being utilised in the gifted field but is being targeted more directly at the intellectual disability type of area?

**Mrs Kronborg**—Within Australia the research within gifted education is incredibly limited. Betty Murphy has done some of our most significant research with the students at University High School, as part of her doctorate, but we just have not had the funding to encourage research into gifted education. Sure, people will do research in special education. We have our *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education*, which I think first began in 1995, so that was when we first started really publishing research in gifted education in Australia. There were huge amounts of research in gifted education in the US, England and Canada, compared to Australia. We are lagging behind. Educationally, we have some outstanding programs in existence, but we do not have the research funds to write them up.

**CHAIR**—Yes, that is part of the point, but going back another step there has been the targeting on research into literacy, for example.

**Mrs Kronborg**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Some of the literacy research is using a variety of subjects, including groups of gifted children.

**Mrs Kronborg**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Are we seeing in the literature the results of that research in relation to those subject groups as well, or are they only being used for measurement purposes against those with other literacy problems?

**Mrs Kronborg**—I should imagine that is limited because most people do not identify who are the gifted. We just do not seem to have the identification process to come up with a cohort of gifted subjects to compare against average subjects, or children with limited ability. The United States are strong on testing. We are not, in Australia. Our assessment measures are different to that. To empirically identify a group of gifted children, generally you give IQ testing. Australians have generally been against giving intellectual assessment. Would you agree?

**Dr Murphy**—Yes. Most schools refuse to have wholesale intelligence testing through their school, which, to my mind, is quite right. I have a horrible memory of going into a staffroom in a state high school and seeing a list of IQs up on the board, which is not the right attitude. There is an incredible dearth of research in gifted education, probably in the whole of Australia. This has a bad effect, in that people who are in the gifted movement, if you like to call it that, tend to make romantic statements that are not data based and not backed up by research evidence. This has a bad effect, a deleterious effect, on teachers hearing it. They say, ‘Oh, that’s nonsense,’ whereas if you are able to present research evidence they take a lot more notice.

As far as professional development is concerned, I always contact the schools concerning every child I assess and counsel, and I have found that the attitude of the schools has been absolutely supportive. Most of the teachers want to do something. Most of them are at their wit’s

end to know what to do with these gifted children, because often there are behaviour problems. They just do not have the knowledge, and that is where the dearth is. There is no training for the teachers. They have no knowledge about what to do with a gifted child.

**Senator ALLISON**—Most of my questions were answered as we went along. One thing we have not discussed with you this morning is undergraduate courses and the degree to which there is at least some smattering of inclusion of gifted children training. Perhaps Professor O’Boyle or Mrs Kronborg could comment on that?

**Mrs Kronborg**—I would say we have two or three hours in our undergraduate course at the moment.

**Senator ALLISON**—Every primary and secondary undergraduate teacher would receive two or three hours at least as a minimum?

**Mrs Kronborg**—Not everyone. Some would; some would not. It would depend.

**Senator ALLISON**—How is that determined?

**Mrs Kronborg**—Someone is teaching a course down at Frankston. They ring me and say, ‘We need some input on gifted education. Would you be prepared to come down and do a lecture for two or three hours?’

**Senator ALLISON**—If you are busy that day, it does not happen?

**Mrs Kronborg**—Or if I have too much on. I say, ‘No, I can’t do it,’ or else I can recommend some of my students who can give input to the courses. But universities are driven by people who encourage their own field of knowledge, and gifted education cuts across the different areas, whether it is literacy, numeracy, whatever. It is difficult for some people to work out how gifted education fits into the education courses. We are trying to introduce a special education unit in the undergraduate course at the moment, although I am not doing that. I work with two colleagues who focus on special education full time. I am part time at the university. I have been reduced to 0.25 in the last two years and I am working on my doctorate, so I have been doing an enormous amount in my own time because of my belief in the needs of gifted and talented children.

**Senator ALLISON**—It was not your choice to reduce your number of hours?

**Mrs Kronborg**—No.

**Prof. O’Boyle**—I think oftentimes when there are courses available that would touch on giftedness they are usually embedded in some larger framework, like the psychology of exceptionality, which encompasses a whole variety of different domains, so you only get a small smattering or a little piece of the picture relative to what is going on in gifted and talented. They are buried in courses like the study of psychology of exceptionality or the psychology of individual differences, which encapsulates so many different types of groups that it does not get the kind of focused attention that it probably deserves in the context of the research that is out there with regard to the specific needs of gifted and talented children.

**Mrs Kronborg**—Historically we have not provided for gifted and talented kids; therefore within our universities we do not have a history of departments. Our medical department has been going for decades, building on the knowledge and the expertise before them. We have not established that yet in Australia in our universities. Tasmania does not have a course in gifted education at all. The Northern Territory at the moment does not have a consultant in the Department of Education representing gifted and talented. We really need to go back and start introducing, at the university level, courses in gifted education that are going to stay and not be wiped out because they decide there is a cutback in funding. It is not because of lack of numbers or lack of desire from students.

**Prof. O'Boyle**—There is a certain kind of reluctance on the universities' part to stand behind gifted education as a separate unit because they in many respects, just like the people at large, are not aware of the fact that there is the opportunity for extensive, hard-core research in the area that would inform educational intervention in practice. It is a tough sell. For example, I am in the faculty of medicine, and it is a very difficult thing. Luckily, I do brain imaging of math geniuses, so it fits in nicely. But the whole idea of bringing in a more psychosocial developmental perspective on the knowledge base that we have about gifted children and so forth is a tough sell in a lot of universities because there is not a lot of federal funding available specifically for that kind of work.

You get into a kind of cycle or circular situation: we need the research to inform the practice, but we cannot get the research because the funding is not available, so in turn we do not have the knowledge to inform the practice, and it goes around and around. The cycle needs to be broken, in my opinion, and this is a perfect opportunity by virtue, as we suggested, of a sort of national competitive tendering scheme to put some money into a research base that would generate an element of credibility in the university community which would then allow a lot of things to open up, from courses to teacher training, to extension courses or extracurricular opportunity for extremely bright kids—who, by the way, might then attend the University of Melbourne. Those kinds of things would fall out somewhat naturally, I think, once that sort of sell could be made.

**Senator ALLISON**—Dr Murphy, I want to ask you about your research. You indicated that the program at University High was successful in a range of ways and that those students matured and tended to become leaders at university. Can you characterise those students and where they end up? Do they go into academia by and large? What happens to them?

**Dr Murphy**—This is always a difficult question. There has not been a formal follow-up study, partly because of lack of finance. Not only with this program, but with overseas programs also, the children vary in what they do. Almost all of them go to university. Some of the most successful of the children from University High have big jobs, but a lot of them are big jobs in industry, in computers in particular. In fact, one child who did extremely well worked with a computer firm in his vacation, and the computer firm said, 'You're just what we want. Don't bother with your university degree. We don't care about a university degree.' He is now at the head of a big firm.

It is rather distressing to me that the very brightest have mostly ended up in industry, but that is where they go. They vary. A lot of the girls go into motherhood and family work and some of them end up as teachers. There is a varied result. The people who designed the program were

very disappointed because they expected them all to get incredible marks at HSC. They expected them all to become leaders in the community. Well, some of them have not. Most of them are in good jobs, but people vary, and whether you develop your intellectual potential depends on so many personality factors—for instance, persistence and motivation, and what you want to do. It does not mean that every very bright child is going to become a great man or a great woman in the future.

**Senator ALLISON**—I am interested, Mrs Kronborg, in the fact that private schools have shown an interest in your postgraduate certificate course. I can imagine why students are attracted to those schools. I imagine there is some encouragement at the school for teachers to do your courses, but are they given financial assistance to do so, in your experience? Is it just attitude or is it that teachers in that sector are given extra funding to do this? And what does it cost? What would it cost for a teacher from the state sector to do your course?

**Mrs Kronborg**—To do a subject, I think it is something like \$660 for the HECS, to pay the HECS up front. I am not exactly sure.

**Senator ALLISON**—Yours is one subject?

**Mrs Kronborg**—To do the postgraduate certificate you would do two subjects, but then you also have to pay your university fees to attend. Most of them do convert and go onto their master of education or special education. Then they can do another subject in what I have built in—psychology of the gifted child—where I have brought Professor Barbara Kerr across from Arizona State University to co-teach that with me in the last three years. Then there are reading subjects and there are research subjects, so they can do a whole master of education, studying in gifted education. There used to be eight subjects to the master's and now there are six. Each subject would have a HECS fee of \$600-odd on it, plus university fees.

You also have to consider that there is not necessarily an incentive to go on and do the master's. You do not get an increase in your salary because you have worked, gone to lectures for three hours a week for 13 weeks in one semester, plus put in all the extra time. For people who are teaching full time and with families, that is a huge commitment, so the teachers have to be hugely committed. Therefore, they need to feel that the schools value the effort they are putting into the university and then actually use their expertise in their schools. The independent schools have realised that these days it is a very good marketing exercise to provide for gifted and talented children within their schools, and to do it very well, because you are talking about excellence; you are talking about probably better results for the schools at the end.

**CHAIR**—Mrs Kronborg, are you referring to elite independent schools or is it something across the independent sector?

**Mrs Kronborg**—Across the independent sector. My concern is that giftedness should not be related to finance. I have parents who are doing my master's course who have home-schooled their children, pulled their children out of some independent schools. One parent in particular who has put her child in the local primary school at the moment is quite distressed because that local primary school is not providing for that particular child. We know that child is around 150. The teachers cannot seem to recognise the abilities of that child, because so often we do believe that gifted kids must be the dominant, extroverted, highly intelligent child who performs across

all fields. Gifted kids are not like that. Gifted kids are often highly sensitive. Most of them are introverted. The expectations that teachers have are often based on myths, rather than based on the research, as Michael talked about before. Therefore, the schools support knowledge. Independent schools have to these days, for the fees that are charged, attempt to provide quality education, and they recognise that the teachers are coming back with better knowledge about how to provide for all kids. Differentiation of curriculum is not hard. It is just that teachers need to know how to do it.

**Senator ALLISON**—You touched earlier on equity issues and you mentioned gifted potential and your concern that the potential was not being realised where perhaps the family is not well educated, where the school might have lower expectations. Lalor Primary School was mentioned earlier as being a school that had a good program. What is your assessment across the socioeconomic spectrum of how well schools—let us confine it to government schools—are doing in this respect? Is it all the primary schools in Brighton and those places that do better, or does it not matter?

**Mrs Kronborg**—It is still incredibly idiosyncratic. I would say Essex Heights Primary School and Glendal Primary School are two schools in Victoria that have been working over a period of time to develop knowledge amongst the staff. The parents know that the teachers are working on value gifted and talented education, and that is where the parents are sending their kids, if they are in those particular areas where those schools are. It depends on an individual often in a state school who has a passion for gifted kids. Often their own kids are gifted, so they decide to come in and do some further study to increase their knowledge on how to provide for their own child, as well as learn to provide for other children in their school. As they start to gain knowledge they realise how much more they could be doing. I have had teachers saying to me, ‘I wish I had known this when my kids were younger.’

**Senator ALLISON**—How many kids are we talking about? Is it two in every classroom or is it more than that?

**Mrs Kronborg**—If you are talking about, based on intellectual, supposedly three per cent of the population. If you are talking about talent, you are opening it up to 20 to 25 per cent. There are some kids who are musically talented who do not have a high IQ but they need to have appropriate education for their musical aptitude. The broader you go with your concept of giftedness and talent provision, there are two paradigms—everyone is gifted. I would also say everyone should have the opportunity to be all they can be, but that means you have to have the educational environment, the family environment and the personal strengths to overcome all the adversity you are going to deal with to be able to manifest your giftedness in the long term.

**Senator ALLISON**—Dr Murphy, did you want to add to that? You were emphatic there.

**Dr Murphy**—I was really just agreeing with Leonie that it depends almost entirely on an individual teacher, usually the principal, or someone who happens to be very interested in the field and maybe they have a personal interest too. You do find that schools that are doing a good job tend to be more in the eastern suburbs because in the western suburbs they do not seem to have as many gifted children. I know genetically there is probably as big a percentage in the disadvantaged classes as in the middle class, but whether that potential is realised depends so much on the home and whether the home is a verbal home. Therefore you do not see so many

children in a disadvantaged school who seem to need that. You might find the one odd child who is going to overcome all hardships and that is part of their motivation, but apart from that you see these very bright children of middle-class intellectual families in the eastern suburbs.

**Mrs Kronborg**—But we also need to do so much more for primary aged gifted and talented students. I think the department of education has done very well since 1995—

**Dr Murphy**—So do I.

**Mrs Kronborg**—in developing select entry acceleration programs here. There are about 20 now. They have also tried to get professional development going across the state. That has been a huge exercise to try to deal with. You also need to consider our select entry high school—MacRobertson Girls High School—and Melbourne High. Those two schools have the best academic results of just about any schools in Victoria, against the independent schools as well.

**Dr Murphy**—That is true.

**Mrs Kronborg**—I do think the select entry high schools are outstanding and we need more of them. There are different ways of providing for gifted and talented children and you need the whole range of provisions.

**CHAIR**—Dr Murphy, the committee is next visiting Box Hill High School. I wanted to ask, given your submission, whether it is based on the UHS model.

**Dr Murphy**—Yes, all the acceleration programs in the state secondary schools replicated the UHS model.

**CHAIR**—Is there anything else that you would like to focus our attention on when we visit Box Hill, about the model generally? Or, Mrs Kronborg, anything else you think is relevant to the committee?

**Mrs Kronborg**—I would say Box Hill High School's program has been going exceptionally well because their principal has been incredibly supportive of it. I have also had two students come in and do subjects within their masters of gifted education. They have had whole school teacher training on professional development from the department of education as well. You need the professional development happening at all levels, and the right attitude.

**CHAIR**—As opposed to a select school such as Melbourne High or MacRobertson, how does it operate between your mainstream student and your select stream in the UHS model?

**Mrs Kronborg**—I think Box Hill High may raise with you some of their concerns about that aspect within their particular school. I think it would vary depending on the schools that you go to. I do think having a whole school climate, such as Melbourne High and MacRobertson, which has no resentment, no hostility and where they are all like-minded individuals together with a range of abilities means that they can all move on. It is the same as getting into a university class and all competing against each other but feeling as though you are all being provided for.

I do think there are some concerns from parents of kids who are not in the acceleration programs—their kids are on the border—‘Should my child be in that program?’ In fact Box Hill tries to deal with that particular issue; and again, the communication between the schools and the student body that is not involved in the acceleration program, the reaction from those students and their parents as well.

**Dr Murphy**—I found at University High School there was very little hostility from the other parents. This was mainly because the children were selected the year before and so they came into the school as a group, whereas in some of the private schools where they have a special program the children come into school and then they are selected. Then you have the business of, ‘She was chosen and I wasn’t.’ Of course the parents of the children who were not chosen hate it. If they come already in a group, there is a little bit of friction at the beginning, but then it disappears because the children do art, music and sport—sport is a great leveller—with the mainstream children, and they are dispersed at the VCE level. I think there is very little feeling of elitism in a school because the children forget about it. It depends so much on the teachers and the way the teachers handle it. If the teachers do not regard them as little geniuses, then nobody else will and they will not feel resentful.

**Mrs Kronborg**—Arrogance is not a characteristic of gifted kids. Gifted kids, when they are with other gifted kids, can be incredibly humble. It is when they are not provided for appropriately that the negative aspects of giftedness come through.

**Prof. O’Boyle**—At Trafalgar, which is a sort of outer school, they have done a terrific job with regard to this gifted and talented emphasis or recognition of exceptionality. What I found in my visits there was that any mind-set of elitism was eliminated by a top down phenomenon. That is, if the people at the top, the administrator and the principal, do not share that kind of thing, it never seems to filter down into the student body per se or even to their parents because there is a recognition that difference does not mean deficit; it only means different. If that is substantiated from the top down a lot of this stuff gets circumvented further on down the line.

Furthermore, I would like to say that, with regard to research on talented and gifted, it is not an elitist enterprise in the following way. What we would be doing is studying individuals who do these things the best. By virtue of understanding how the best do them, we can then revamp profiles of intervention or a curriculum to utilise those same techniques to have everyone optimise their potential. If you want to learn to play golf, whose swing are you going to emulate—Tiger Woods’s or mine? It would be Tiger Woods. I may not be able to make you a PGA champion but, by virtue of studying his golf swing, I could certainly influence your ability to perform to optimise your potential as a golfer, whatever that might be.

I think that is the sort of diffusing of elitism that you can do in the context of this situation. It is to emphasise that difference does not mean deficit; it only means different. By studying individuals who happen to be very good in some domain, you open it up to the entire ability spectrum to optimise the intervention techniques that will put everybody in a position to realise their potential.

**Mrs Kronborg**—It also does not mean that because you are gifted you are better than anybody else.

**Senator TIERNEY**—We are about halfway through this inquiry and what we are finding broadly—with some bright exceptions in faculties of education—is a complete lack of interest in this area. Could you, Professor, perhaps give us your view on why, broadly, university faculties of education have virtually no interest in the gifted and talented, as reflected in the structure of their courses and programs?

**Prof. O’Boyle**—I spoke to this slightly earlier. It has to do with the fact that universities are very research oriented. The federal funding and research grant really is the fuel that drives the engine, for example.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I was a teacher educator for 20 years. There are areas where there is a lot of hands-on involvement and training of teachers but not in this area. If we could just speak to that.

**Prof. O’Boyle**—Yes. I think what happens is that the university does not show as much interest in this area because the research that would come about by virtue of studying such individuals is a very hard sell to make in the context of a university system that is driven by external research funding and research funds. As I mentioned to the committee earlier, if there was the opportunity for a special amount of money to be tendered in a national scheme that would promote research in the area of gifted and talented, not only in its development but also its origins—where does it come from; whence does it spring? Once that research base gets ensconced into the system the university recognises, ‘This is real bona fide discipline; an area that has science behind it, research guiding practice.’ As soon as that connection is established, the university will sit up and take note of the fact that this is just another discipline able to produce experimental and research findings just like everyone else is. Suddenly from that point forward, the universities would say, ‘It makes sense for you to start talking about special intervention techniques that are based on this research informing practice.’

**Senator TIERNEY**—Let us move from the research side to the reality in the classroom where there are gifted and talented children. I would have thought it behoves people who are preparing teachers to prepare them, regardless of the inadequacy of research and education. There is a lot of inadequate research and education but that does not stop us moving forward from the position that we now have established. In terms of the preparation of teachers, what is taught in the teacher ed curriculum? There seems to be an incredible lack of interest in this. Some universities will give three hours on it. If you miss that day then, bang, you have missed it. That is what I am trying to understand. Even if the research is inadequate there are ways of identifying gifted and talented, there are established techniques, there are centres like GERRIC at the University of New South Wales which go out and train teachers. They are pre-service teachers. What don’t the others do it? That is the question.

**Mrs Kronborg**—Maybe because many of us grew up in an era of streaming in schools. Maybe the environmental background of a lot of educators is that they were not in the A stream.

**Dr Murphy**—That is a very good point.

**Mrs Kronborg**—Many of our most talented teachers are women teachers who are now in their 40s and 50s who chose teaching because teaching and nursing tended to be the most encouraged fields to go into and that was acceptable for women. So we actually have some

outstanding women teachers still around in their 40s and 50s. If you look at the English departments of different schools, there are some amazing women teaching there. Part of it could be the negative experience that educators have had with so-called nerds in their schools when they were younger; some of it is that they did not ever think about giftedness.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Let me take you on to some of the things that have been said in other faculties of ed that have appeared before us. They seem to take a view of what they would call inclusive education and that each child should be developed to their own potential within a mainstream type class. The theory sounds fine but what people keep telling us is, ‘That is not the reality; that is not what happens out there.’ If you have those mainstream classes the gifted ones are particularly not catered for. Some view it as ‘They can look after themselves.’

**Mrs Kronborg**—If you have got 25 to 30 in your class and you are trying to provide for the range of abilities of those children and you have one child who is intellectually disabled, another child who is visually impaired, two or three with specific learning disabilities or difficulties, you are going to try to get those kids up to the average. Teachers are human and they only have so much energy. They do the best they can with the knowledge they have.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I understand that. In that situation what you are saying is that the needs of the gifted and talented are ignored.

**Mrs Kronborg**—Often because teachers just do not have the time and energy to provide for it. If you have three or four gifted kids in your class then you may do it, but most people have this myth that those kids will get by anyway. They do not realise the kids may be shut off for 80 per cent of the time while they are sitting in your classroom, or they are reading a book that is under the desk. They actually do not come alive until 10 o’clock at night, if you ask the families who live with them—when they go home and have got into their own reading and doing some of their own individual activities at home. Just because kids conform in the classroom does not mean they are being provided for appropriately educationally.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Given that there is a very patchy and inadequate approach in pre-service training, what should we do in the in-service area for a more comprehensive approach to preparation of teachers once they have started in this area of gifted and talented?

**Mrs Kronborg**—There should be ongoing in-service in gifted and talented education state-wide in all schools.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What is your view of the structure of what they currently do? If I can just sum it up in a nutshell for Victoria—and it is in other areas—there would be in-service courses, and then someone goes away, does this course, comes back, they are the only one in the school who has done it, and then they are to disseminate that in some way. How do you view that as an effective educational approach?

**Mrs Kronborg**—I think two staff should go off to the in-service, and then they come back and in-service the rest of the staff. Anyone who goes to an in-service should come back and report on it or do an in-service with their own staff.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You don't think a lot would be lost in the translation? If you have a professional trainer and he has one teacher from the school and that teacher then goes back, you do not think that is a very inadequate model?

**Mrs Kronborg**—I think it is inadequate. There absolutely has to be postgraduate education for teachers of gifted kids. I do not necessarily believe there should be just gifted programs. We need a mind-set of programming for giftedness. You may have a child in a primary school in your classroom for some subjects, but maybe with a group of other children at other times. There may be subject organisation. There may be timetabling organisation. It could be that everybody has maths at the same time so that you could actually have ability groups in maths.

We need flexible provisions for gifted and talented children. Just because you have five gifted children in your class at one level, it does not mean you are going to give them the same program. They are still going to have huge individual differences. Just because they have similar IQ scores, it does not mean they have similar learning styles. It is all about knowledge, understanding what is giftedness, or what is the gifted potential, in what areas do the children have that gifted potential, how we nurture it from an effective perspective, and then, cognitively, how do we provide for it.

**Senator TIERNEY**—The question then is: if the teachers are not prepared, in pre-service, to do any of that, and in-service they are not prepared to do it, how on earth does it happen?

**Mrs Kronborg**—I find many of our teachers are parents of gifted kids themselves, and they are desperate, so they come and do a master's course to find out how to provide for their own child.

**Senator TIERNEY**—How many do that? What percentage out of the total teaching force do that?

**Mrs Kronborg**—It is minuscule.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Exactly.

**Mrs Kronborg**—We have to do it on a much larger scale Australia-wide.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for appearing today.

[10.55 a.m.]

**ALSOP, Dr Glenison, Honorary Consultant and Counsellor, Children of High Intellectual Potential Foundation Ltd**

**BYRNE, Mrs Gail Robyne, Chairman, Children of High Intellectual Potential Foundation Ltd**

**CHAIR**—I now welcome representatives of the CHIP Foundation. The committee has before it submission 41. Are there any changes or corrections you need to make to that submission?

**Mrs Byrne**—No, there are not.

**CHAIR**—The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public but we will consider any request for all or part of evidence to be given confidentially. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement and we will move to questions beyond that.

**Mrs Byrne**—Thank you. To maximise question time, I would like to make just a few brief comments, if I could. The CHIP Foundation is the oldest independent Victorian advisory service specialising in the need of what we call CHIP, children of high intellectual potential. This is our preferred term rather than gifted and talented children. The CHIP Foundation was established to meet the very specific needs of identifying, educating and parenting these special children. We have over 10 years experience in working with CHIP families. We have worked with in excess of 1,500 CHIP families. We provide specialist counselling, support and educational services and—we have heard here today of the dearth of research—we do in fact foster research on the development of CHIP. I will leave my comments there, if I may.

**CHAIR**—Perhaps you could elaborate a bit further on how you foster research.

**Mrs Byrne**—We have within our ranks not only families of CHIP; we also have a group of researchers who approach us, knowing our particular interest resides in CHIP children. We have, therefore, an extensive database of information about such children and the needs of parenting such children, of educational experiences of such children. We have established over the years an ethics committee to deal with such requests and have very strict protocols in place. As well as that, many of our researchers in fact came to us as parents of CHIP, seeking assistance, and have gone on, as Leonie has mentioned, to conduct further studies. Glen, would you like to add anything here?

**Dr Alsop**—I will forgo a statement if you would like to just continue questions. The database is comprised of the test files and a parent background questionnaire, so we have a lot of data in those individual files. Currently the file number stands at 2,000. The ethics committee has been registered under NHMRC guidelines. It is very carefully controlled. I have worked in research in the disadvantaged areas. I have a study out at Dandenong, in Greater Dandenong, associated with the Visy Cares Centre for adolescents. We have had several approaches from researchers from various places, but one of the big problems with this database is that it is not on data. It is not in an accessible form whereby you can get it out of a computer. It is all in these files. The research and an enormous amount of information is there on both the children and their families.

**CHAIR**—What is the project you are working on at Visy Cares?

**Dr Alsop**—In 1999 I was funded by the Pratt Foundation and I went to five different high schools to identify a group of year 10 students who were, in the view of their teachers, bright but at risk. We had 13. I tested them. They were all underachieving. They were potentially drop-out students, so we brought them in. Every second week they came into the Visy Cares Centre. We did a number of activities with them throughout the year. The funding was fairly narrow, so during year 11 I just kept in touch with them by phone or by letter. This year they are in year 12. I have eight of them still with us, and we are trying to get them through their VCE as successfully as possible. It is fairly qualitative, and I am acquiring an enormous amount of information about disadvantaged high ability children.

**CHAIR**—This is where you are referring in your submission to disadvantaged socioeconomically and reversing underachievement?

**Dr Alsop**—That is one of the aspects, yes. The other aspect is the number of requests we have. The foundation has a very small fund set aside to support families who seek both counselling and assessment. We are fee paying, so families who have financial difficulties cannot access the sorts of services we have. We have a service whereby they apply to us and the foundation will offset some of the fee payment but, even then, an assessment costs \$350. If we offset by half, it is still a fair amount of money for a disadvantaged family to find.

**CHAIR**—What does an assessment involve?

**Dr Alsop**—The assessment is IQ testing and the counselling is, ‘Come and see me.’

**CHAIR**—But that is it, is it—IQ testing?

**Dr Alsop**—Yes. We can do achievement testing. We can do curriculum based testing, but generally the schools can handle that. If schools had teachers who were well trained in test administration, then that aspect does not require a psychologist. That could be done within the school. We do try to keep our services very much on the IQ testing, simply because we try to encourage the other form of assessment. We can do all of it but, if schools can do it, it is at no cost for the client.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What proportion of gifted children do you think are underachieving?

**Mrs Byrne**—I am currently conducting private research in this area. My doctorate is in the underachievement of CHIP. The American literature as a starting point tells us that anywhere between 15 and 50, which is a fairly widespread cannon shot, underachieve as gifted children. My own research with 50 children ranging between IQ 125 and 200 is that approximately 38 per cent are underachieving in either one or two or both curriculum areas, being English and mathematics.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What do you think it is in the teaching/learning situation in schools that leads these children to underachieve?

**Dr Alsop**—The major patterning starts very early in education. It begins in perhaps prep 1, 2. The emphasis there is on basic skilling. These children characteristically learn faster and they love intellectual complexity. The bright little button wants to play mental mind games. If those conditions are not supplied for them, the tendency is for them not to acquire the learning behaviour that keeps them as a learner, and I think it is the erosion of learning behaviour at young ages that can be so damaging, and we even get it in the one to one assessment situation. It is a very supportive environment when one is testing, yet you cannot persuade the child to even take the risk of working with you in this. The erosion of learning behaviours has become marked throughout our testing experience.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Given that you take that child and you put them in mainstream classrooms—which tends to be what happens—what effect does that have educationally on the child?

**Dr Alsop**—They just become mainstream. Some become mainstream quietly; some become mainstream with a lot of devilment. One of the boys in the program I have at the beginning of his year 12 was expelled from the school he was in because he debagged one of the teachers. He still has that devilment. But, once he had moved schools, he realised what he had done, so he started back on again. But it is a matter of ‘dumbing down’, and some do it quietly, some do it in a bloody-minded way and some—I think a few—do become genuinely at risk or exposed to problems of perhaps depression, poor mental function, poor emotional function.

**Senator TIERNEY**—If we take these children out of mainstream classes, what do we put them into? What do you think is the ideal structure for learning for these children?

**Dr Alsop**—The selective settings I think have to be optimal, both learning and social settings, but exposure to the rest of the world is also very important. I do like the idea of an experimental school, simply because it gives parents the choice to put their children into that environment.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Can you just define what you mean by experimental school.

**Dr Alsop**—Perhaps a school where we had high ability children, primarily, so that we could trial curricula, we could look at developmental issues and social-emotional development, and also give parents a genuine choice about whether they do want their children in these settings or not. They are also safe havens. For children who are suffering or have problems, they are a controlled setting. I would love to have got my adolescent kids into a more controlled setting than to put them into the mainstream, because we could have had them in a secure setting where we could predict the curriculum delivery and control their behaviour.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Something like the selective high schools in New South Wales?

**Dr Alsop**—In a primary setting, yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Selective primary schools.

**Dr Alsop**—I do not think it should just be the one school. I do believe that the Uni High model, where they return for sport, for music, for other activities, is a wonderful model, and it could be in primary even.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What do they do at Uni High? I am not familiar with it.

**Dr Alsop**—Uni High has the selective program, the selective class, where they do their academic studies.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Within a normal school?

**Dr Alsop**—Yes, and where they do their academic study, but in music, sport, the other more extracurricular activities they are all as a group. They are not in their selective classes at all.

**Senator TIERNEY**—When streaming was the fashion, these children would have ended up in the A class usually, wouldn't they?

**Mrs Byrne**—Not always.

**Senator TIERNEY**—If they were underachieving at that stage they would not have.

**Mrs Byrne**—And again the process whereby children are selected into an ability stream is very much one that is achievement testing based. Achievement testing needs certain characteristics to exist. It needs children who are able to read to be achievement tested in the main. It will not pick up CHIP children, learning disabled children, often compliant girls, culturally different children. There are certain major groups of CHIP it will not pick up, so what you have are your high functioning, achieving, brighter children, who may or may not be CHIP, in you're A grade streams. It also depends how the higher ability is nurtured at home; in fact, whether it is nurtured at home. There are so many conditions.

We are aware of high schools which do offer graded mathematics, and our last panel was talking about areas where mathematics is, in fact, virtually timetabled vertically in a school so that presumably if you are grade 3 but you are functioning at grade 5 mathematics, you simply go across to the grade 5 classroom. Sounds great; does not always work when the little grade 3 comes across to the grade 5 classroom. It needs to be embedded in an attitude within the school that says, 'We accept such differences as quite acceptable, that you'll skip across to the big school to do X, but you'll come back for art to your home room.'

**Senator TIERNEY**—If we could turn to pre-service and in-service, you mention in your submission on page 11 that the Commonwealth government should mandate pre-service training. Of course, we actually do not have the power to do that.

**Mrs Byrne**—We live in an ideal world!

**Senator TIERNEY**—Well, we do not have any head of power to tell a university to teach anything, actually. How do we get around that? How do we make sure that the teachers are properly prepared to identify and then teach these children?

**Dr Alsop**—Mandate that all teachers should be trained, then the universities have to do it. All you need do is mandate that any specialist should be appropriately trained and the universities

will say, 'Thank you very much. We'll put the bums on the seats for you.' Regulate it. The universities have to follow you.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What about in-service? There are a whole lot of teachers out there that have never had—when I went through, no-one ever mentioned the word 'gifted' in the entire course and there are a whole lot out there now. What do we do with that group? I know there are programs. We have seen an example of one this morning but it does not seem to be adequate. What should we do with in-service training?

**Mrs Byrne**—There is very little tagged, in educational terms; there is little benefit to a teacher in taking on further training. When there was a need recognised for student welfare coordinators in schools, a compulsory training program was created by a number of the universities. It was tagged that, if a teacher went through such training, not only would they be given a POL—a position of leadership—and commensurate pay increase with it, but there would be certain rewards, perceptible rewards, in the staffroom, in the school environment and in recognition of their expertise. That is not there for any of the gifted in-service and PDs that are on offer. It is very ad hoc: 'Would you like to go?' 'Yes, we would,' or, 'No, we wouldn't.' Often teachers are not even released to go on such a PD; their positions are simply not backfilled in the school. If a teacher has an interest and leaves, they may well be aware that their classes are not being taken over by another teacher during this point of time.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Finally, this month the Victorian government has disbanded its unit on giftedness. Does your organisation have any comment on that? Have you made any representations on that?

**Dr Alsop**—We did not even know it.

**Mrs Byrne**—We were not aware of that.

**Senator TIERNEY**—We only found out this morning, too.

**Mrs Byrne**—We are pleased we are not far behind the committee. We are horrified by that, I might add. We have had, over the years, a great involvement with the gifted education unit at the ministry. We believe our work has been mutually beneficial. We have made numerous representations to the ministry. That leaves us, I believe, with a great, gaping hole in Victoria. It sends not a terribly positive message to the teachers you are trying to train, nor the parents of these children who are out in those schools.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What was that Orwellian term they used for the restructuring this morning? 'Enhancement', wasn't it? Yes, 'enhancement' is right. This was an 'enhancement'. You disband the unit and that is an enhancement.

**Mrs Byrne**—It is probably not my definition of an enhancement, I would have to say.

**Senator TIERNEY**—No, it would not be mine, either. Thank you very much.

**Senator ALLISON**—I wondered if you could expand on the point in your submission about CHIP—in your words—children being misdiagnosed as having attention deficit disorder and

attention deficit hyperactivity. What are the similarities? Is there any evidence that those students might be put on inappropriate pharmaceutical regimes?

**Dr Alsop**—Yes. For example, in one school in Geelong where there had been quite a lot of testing done, out of 30 students, 20 students were on Ritalin.

**Senator ALLISON**—Twenty students identified with high IQs?

**Dr Alsop**—No, of that group, five were identified as high IQ, but 20 were on Ritalin. Geelong has become one of the areas where there is a lot of access to drug therapy. There is a tendency for parents to look for reasons for children's behaviour. If that behaviour tends to include things like high mobility, demanding questions—a whole range of very active mental and physical behaviours—parents will try to look for a reason. I have had a number of parents say, 'It took me 10 doctors before I got the diagnosis—and who would give the child drug therapy.' We have tested children who are on drugs. Traditionally, it does dampen down their function. They have tested high; they have been high IQ children. By anecdotal report, we often have parents who bring in the sibling of an ADD child for testing—and that has also proven to be high.

**Mrs Byrne**—A point has been raised about the lack of teacher training but I would like to reiterate the lack of psychologist training in this area. Leonie mentioned two or three hours may well be given in an undergraduate course of teacher training. That is two or three more than is often given in a psychology undergraduate degree. This is an area where you will do a psych assessment unit and you will be taught how to give a WISC but you will not be taught how to necessarily analyse it with respect to high ability children. There are certain clusters of scoring on something such as the WISC that one looks for to say, 'Here is a CHIP child,' and I will correct that to, 'Here is a gifted child,' because the WISC is not always the most appropriate instrument for children.

It then takes a fairly attuned psychologist to say, 'This scatter of scores that I see resembles an ADD child.' It takes one attuned to CHIP to say, 'It also resembles the score I might see of a gifted child,' and to say, 'What do I see in the behaviour of the child before me?' I have taught children with ADD. I have also assessed children who have come to me on Ritalin, diagnosed with ADD, and the little child has sat there for some two hours of testing without moving. On medication or off medication, that is not an ADD child. What do the parents say? 'Oh, he spends an hour and half on the cello at home of a night.' An ADD child cannot sit in a chair for three minutes, let alone an hour and a half. Often as psychologists we do the assessment and the parents are in and out and rarely a question is asked of them. This is why the foundation and people who work in this field spend so much time talking to the parents. We tend to discount parents. Parents will tell you some of the behaviours that do not quite jell with an ADD diagnosis. You just have to listen and ask the right questions. I am seeing it in private practice, the foundation is seeing it and I am talking to other psychologists who are concerned with the general increase in ADD diagnoses. Often what we are seeing in a classroom are some classroom management issues that the teachers are finding difficult to deal with and are saying to the parents, 'I think your child has a problem. Go off and have them assessed.'

**Dr Alsop**—That also relates to parent management issues. As a parent counsellor I find myself increasingly addressing parents' difficulties managing their own children. Characteristically,

they will say, 'They do not listen. They don't attend to what I want them to do. They are challenging. They argue with me.' Of course a CHIP child argues. They love the argument. They do not care about the outcome; they just love the argument—'This is debate, this is a bit of power and a bit of control for me'— and they are very good at this. Parents do have these great difficulties and they go back to the parents who need support and advice. I think this was very much in the idea of the beginning of the foundation, to be a centre modelled on centres like Noah's Ark and the disability centres, where people come and talk to someone and they can have a cup of coffee and look through the resources. We had a building at one stage which we could not maintain and we had to sell it. That is what we established it for, but that facility is not there any more. We rely on fee for service so we cannot pay those costs. But for a while it was a very lively centre where parents could come and just talk.

**Senator ALLISON**—What happened to your funding? Where does most of your funding come from? Is it all fee for service?

**Mrs Byrne**—We receive no government funding at all.

**Senator ALLISON**—No, I realise that.

**Mrs Byrne**—And never have. Our funds have relied on donations. We do receive some donations, both from people who would prefer to remain anonymous and from acknowledged sources. Our funding is primarily fee for service. We do charge for assessments. With the donations we receive we subsidise those assessments for disadvantaged families who cannot afford them.

**Senator ALLISON**—Do you have tax deductibility status?

**Mrs Byrne**—Yes, we do.

**CHAIR**—Good. That concludes the questions. Thank you for appearing today. That concludes this morning's session. Thank you.

**Committee adjourned at 11.24 a.m.**