

Teachers

Professional development of teachers

- 9.1 At the 4th Biennial Conference of the Australian National Centre Against Bullying in 2010, training of teachers was one of the ten steps recommended to increase cyber-safety and reduce bullying across the community.¹
- 9.2 The *Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study* showed that:
- ... the majority of staff (67%) felt other teachers at their school needed more training to enhance their skills to deal with a range of issues related to covert bullying, such as dealing with incidents or addressing covert (including cyber bullying) within the curriculum... Of great concern, of those young people who were cyber bullied and informed an adult, 45% of them reported that things either stayed the same or got worse. This reflects the need expressed by school staff for further training in how to deal with bullying, in particular cyber bullying ²
- 9.3 Many schools already have comprehensive cyber-safety programs and policies in place. These should include external presentations from cyber-safety and childhood development experts to allow teachers to ask about

1 Mental Health Council of Australia, *Submission 52*, p. 6. See also <http://www.ncab.org.au/ConferenceInfo/>, *Navigating the Maze: cybersafety and wellbeing solutions for schools* conference.

2 Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Submission 62*, p. 15 citing Cross *et al*, 2009, the *Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study*, Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University.

their own learning environment. Lessons learnt by such means can then be translated into individual teaching practices.³

- 9.4 As part of registrations in South Australia, teachers are required to complete training in Responding to Abuse and Neglect Education and Care, including cyber-safety elements, and this must be updated every three years.⁴
- 9.5 While all teachers are not necessarily experts in the subject, provided that they relate well to their students, they can play important roles in conveying messages about cyber-safety. Specific training is required to teach this material, particularly at secondary level. To do this effectively funding and resources are required, especially for continuing professional development.⁵
- 9.6 To reduce the impact of bullying, it is important to help victims find ways to develop positive connections with peers and a trusted adult. The NSW Government noted that there was evidence that teachers can help promote positive relationships by:
- establishing networks of buddies;
 - establishing circles of support;
 - creating peer mentors; and
 - finding ways to highlight the child's talent for others to see.⁶
- 9.7 The Australian Council of Educational Research referred to a study that noted the professional development of teachers needed to address attitudes and perceptions as well as development of technological skills.
- 9.8 The two issues emerging 'consistently' from literature and research are:
- a lack of teacher confidence, and
 - the need for professional development of teachers in information and communication technology (ICT).
- 9.9 This Council argued that these matters need to be addressed if schools are to be supported to implement online safety instruction and assist students to develop appropriate online behaviours. Professional development focused on teachers' perceptions about the use of ICT in the curriculum
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3 Ms Candice Jansz, *Submission 44*, p. 5.

4 Mr Greg Cox, Department of Education and Children's Services, SA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, p. CS69.

5 Australian Secondary Principal's Association, *Submission 33*, p. 3.

6 NSW Government, *Submission 94*, p. 26.

has to be addressed, as do technological skills coaching needs at the school level.

- 9.10 Confident teachers familiar with the uses and concerns about the use of ICT will be better able to assist students to develop effective online safety strategies.⁷ The Australian Council for Educational Research commented that, the 'professional development of teachers needs to address attitudes and perceptions as well as technological skill development'.⁸
- 9.11 Reference has already been made to the fact that curriculums are already overloaded, and to the difficulty of including additional items. To deliver an over-burdened curriculum, collegiality and collaboration are important for teachers. Lack of time and resources can have impacts on their behaviour to students, and such things as performance pay and additional requirements imposed from outside can also have their effects.⁹

Pre-service teacher education

- 9.12 Many participants in the Inquiry drew attention to the importance of the education of teachers before they begin their service.
- 9.13 It appears that the greatest concern for newly graduating teachers is their ability to deal with parents/carers. Another key concern is that they feel that they do not get enough support about behaviour management, either during their education or in their first few years as teachers.¹⁰
- 9.14 Experienced teachers are being replaced by more recent graduates already operating in the online environment and who are, for the most part, savvy and skilled. A 2010 survey of pre-service teachers on their understanding of bullying and cyber-bullying revealed that two-thirds of the participants felt 'confident and competent' to deal with these issues because they understand the online environment.¹¹

7 Australian Council of Educational Research, *Submission 20*, pp. 7-8.

8 Australian Council of Education Research, *Submission 20*, p. 7, citing Pierce R and Ball L, 2009, 'Perceptions that may affect teacher's intentions to use technology in secondary mathematics classes' *Educational Studies in Mathematics* 71(3): 299-317.

9 Ms Catherine Davis, Federal Women's Officer, Australian Education Union, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS15.

10 *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS20: Ms Kate Lyttle, Secretary, Australian Parents' Council; Ms Catherine Davis, Federal Women's Officer, Australian Education Union.

11 Dr Barbara Spears: Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of South Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 11 June 2010, p. CS38 (and see Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Submission 62*, p. 24, for some results of this survey.) Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, p. CS17.

- 9.15 The Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance noted, however, that the role that pre-service teacher education can play in a 'whole-of-school' approach to cyber-safety is often omitted. The Alliance also referred to another study which showed that pre-service teachers were reflecting advice and strategies which young people do not use and to which they do listen. When asked what advice they would give to students who were being bullied, 96 percent of pre-service teachers said that it would be to seek help, to tell a teacher or a parent/carer.¹²
- 9.16 Throughout the Committee's inquiry, a need was seen for teacher training in Australia to include cyber-safety units as part of pre-service teacher education. Units of this kind should include a component addressing awareness and skills for preventing and managing bullying.¹³
- 9.17 In January 2011, the Australian Communications and Media Authority rolled out its Pre-Service Teacher Training program. This is built on its successful face-to-face Professional Development for Educators workshops. It will equip final year student teachers with the skills, knowledge and classroom resources to help their students stay safe online. This pioneering program consists of a lecture and a tutorial, and 18 universities have confirmed bookings to the end of June 2011.¹⁴
- 9.18 The demand for speakers from the Authority, however, exceeds its capacity to deliver:
- There are other programs available but these can be very costly (prohibitively so) and the content may or may not be as good as anybody can purport to be an expert in the field and there is no regulatory body.¹⁵

12 Australian University Cyberbullying Research Alliance: *Submission 62*, pp. 24- 25; Dr Barbara Spears, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 February 2011, pp. CS14-15.

13 Dr Helen McGrath, School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS33; Alannah and Madeline Foundation, *Submission 22*, p. 5.

14 Australian Communications and Media Authority: *Submission 80*, p. 2; Ms Andree Wright, Acting General Manager, Digital Economy Division, *Transcript of Evidence*, 3 March 2011, p. CS3. See Dr Helen McGrath, Psychologist, Australian Psychological Society, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 December 2010, p. CS61, for the success of its programs for teachers.

15 Parents Victoria Inc, *Submission 143*, p. 3.

Recommendation 16

That the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations and the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy work together to ensure that sufficient funding is available to ensure the Australian Communications and Media Authority can provide the necessary training for professional development of Australian teachers.

Recommendation 17

That the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations and the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy encourage all Australian universities providing teacher training courses to ensure that cyber-safety material is incorporated in the core units in their curriculums.

Cyber-bullying of teachers

- 9.19 Cyber-bullying of teachers by students was an issue for several participants in this Inquiry. The anonymity of some online sites allows staff or schools to be the target of inappropriate content.¹⁶ There is an increase in the number of teachers being bullied by students and this can affect their lives, careers and performances because of its public nature.¹⁷
- 9.20 The Australian Teachers Union highlighted the personal and professional attacks on teachers by students using Facebook and Myspace such as the Rate My Teachers sites.¹⁸ The Union is contacted 'regularly' by members who are attacked personally and professionally via websites such as RateMyTeachers and Facebook. Further, the Union has received allegations of students filming classes on mobile phones and uploading videos with disparaging comments onto YouTube.¹⁹

16 NSW Secondary Principals Council, *Submission 32*, p. 3; Mr Mark Anghel, Assistant Secretary, Legal Services, Welfare, Queensland Teachers Union, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, pp. CS2, 8.

17 Mr Mark Anghel, Assistant Secretary, Legal Services, Welfare, Queensland Teachers Union, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, p. CS1.

18 Australian Education Union, *Submission 11*, p. 9.

19 Australian Education Union, *Submission 11*, p. 9; Ms Diane Butland, Executive Member, Federation of Parents' and Citizen's Associations of NSW, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS5.

- 9.21 The NSW Secondary Principals Council and the NSW Teachers Federation noted similar conduct:

Cyber-harassment of staff should also be recognised when considering the importance of stakeholders working together. The anonymity of some sites does allow staff or schools to be the targets of inappropriate content. Tracing of the source of the postings would be helpful in preventing these postings in the first place.²⁰

Teachers work well with School Liaison police who reinforce to students the message of Cyberbullying. But investigating cyber-bullying is difficult even for the police.²¹

- 9.22 The Queensland Teachers Union believe that the number of false and defamatory statements made online by students about teachers is increasing. It is 'quite common' for teachers to be accused falsely of being paedophiles and, in one case, a teacher's private address was included on a site. Students have also placed some false profiles of teachers on 'dating' sites.²²
- 9.23 If offenders can be traced, the Queensland Department of Education and Training allows behaviour management policies at schools to be used and this can range from suspension to expulsion from school.²³
- 9.24 The Union noted that it had 'very little success' in having material removed from the RateMyTeachers site. While it advises its members about inappropriate material on such sites, because of the complexity and cost of taking legal action, it has never proceeded against anyone for defamatory remarks.²⁴
- 9.25 There continue to be ethical and legal issues about the presence online of educators and the blurring of the teacher/student relationship. Teachers are still unclear about the legal requirements and implications of cyber-safety.²⁵ Some teachers are ignorant about the need for appropriate

20 NSW Secondary Principals Council, *Submission 32*, p. 3.

21 NSW Teachers Federation, *Submission 73*, p. 4

22 Queensland Teachers Union: *Submission 21*, p. 1; Mr Mark Anghel, Queensland Teachers Union, Assistant Secretary, Legal Services, Welfare, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, p. CS2.

23 Mr Mark Anghel, Queensland Teachers Union, Assistant Secretary, Legal Services, Welfare, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, pp. CS2, 5.

24 Mr Mark Anghel, Queensland Teachers Union, Assistant Secretary, Legal Services, Welfare, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, pp. CS3, 5, 6.

25 Queensland Catholic Education Commission: *Submission 67*, p. 5.

relationships with their students and do not understand the possible implications, for example, of sending a student a text message.²⁶

- 9.26 There is a view that there is limited redress for teachers, and students in some cases, because Internet service providers (ISPs) are unwilling or unable to remove material in a timely manner. Unless posted messages are defamatory within the existing law, or contravene communications regulations, the perpetrators can continue to operate and inflict significant harm by damaging the reputation of individual teachers and school communities.²⁷ Mr Michael Wilkinson from the Queensland Catholic Education Commission stated:

Increasingly profiles of teachers were being uploaded by students with all sorts of very negative and close to defamatory comments, but never crossing the line so that legal action could be taken. Through the student protection person in Toowoomba Catholic Education, we pursued that at some length to see if we could have the site taken down. It was taken down, and then it was up 48 hours later.²⁸

- 9.27 The Systems Administrators' Guild of Australia noted that there is anecdotal evidence that academics are being bullied by their students. While they are comparatively easy to block, via emails, as social networking sites are not yet much used for teaching.²⁹
- 9.28 The Tasmanian Department of Education provides guidance to schools where teachers are aggrieved by material that might be put on RateMyTeachers by, for example, contacting the person responsible for posting it or the site itself.³⁰
- 9.29 Netbox Blue suggested a central legal counsel be established to provide advice to schools therefore providing access to the best advice and consistency across schools.³¹

26 Australian Education Union, *Submission 11*, p. 9; Mr Michael Wilkinson, Executive Secretary, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, p. CS29; Mr Mark Anghel, Assistant Secretary, Legal Services, Welfare, Queensland Teachers Union, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, p. CS4.

27 Mr Michael Wilkinson, Executive Secretary, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, pp. CS29, 30; Queensland Catholic Education Commission: *Submission 67*, p. 2.

28 Mr Michael Wilkinson, Executive Secretary, Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, p. CS30.

29 Ms Donna Ashelford, Board Member, National Management Committee, System Administrators' Guild of Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, p. CS69.

30 Mr Trevor Hill, Department of Education, Tasmania, *Transcript of Evidence*, 20 April 2011, pp. CS6-7.

31 Netbox Blue, *Submission 17*, p. 6.

- 9.30 To combat cyber-bullying of teachers and support them, a 'reputation management' position has been established in the Queensland Department of Education and Training. The occupant has good contacts with State police and the Australian Federal Police, as well as with Facebook. The Department noted that relationships with Facebook and Google means that inappropriate material can be removed 'fairly quickly'.³²

Recommendation 18

That the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth establish a position similar to Queensland's 'reputation management' position to provide nationally consistent advice to teachers who are being cyber-bullied by students about the role and processes of the Australian Communications and Media Authority, law enforcement agencies and Internet service providers in facilitating the removal of inappropriate material.

- 9.31 The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia called for a 'readily available, simple and easy to understand explanation of the changing online environment for parents and schools to access'.³³ The Association further commented that,

Pre-service and in-service teachers be given additional support and training on online safety, responsible use of technology and online security and privacy. Many teachers would benefit from greater support and advice to recognise and manage incidents of cyber harm ... A greater suite of resources that can be used within the curriculum to teach students about the social and emotional consequences of Cyberbullying and inappropriate behaviours that are regularly reviewed.³⁴

32 Mr Michael O'Leary, Executive Director, Information and Technologies Branch, Web and Digital Delivery, Department of Education and Training (Qld), *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 March 2011, p. CS82.

33 Association of Independent Schools of South Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 4.

34 Association of Independent Schools of South Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 14.

Mandatory reporting

9.32 Mandatory reporting is required in some situations:

Currently in South Australia, mandatory reporting requirements exist for teachers and others in relation to suspected physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect. This could be extended to include online maltreatment or abuse, though this would require extensive consultation and negotiation with states. Any variation to the mandatory reporting laws would need to be supported by adequate funded training of teachers to recognise and report incidents of cyber-harm.³⁵

9.33 The NSW Teachers Federation called for clarification in relation to the decision as to whether or not law enforcement agencies should be contacted:

[The] Federation does nonetheless strongly support clarification of the role and responsibilities of school staff ... The Coroner in the Wildman case also called for revision of “policies so as to provide practical and clear guidance to senior staff as to the circumstances in which police should be called to deal with “...³⁶

9.34 Dr Helen McGrath added that if a system of mandatory reporting is introduced it may ‘do more harm than good’, as ‘you will not even know if the child has a mental health disorder and you do not know if it comes from bullying.’³⁷

Training accreditation

9.35 The Australian Council of Educational Research referred to a study that differentiated between barriers to use of the online environment. It suggested that the lack of teacher competence and confidence, resistance to change and ‘negative attitudes’ were ‘major barriers’ that could be attributed to teachers. Lack of time, lack of effective training and lack of accessibility and technical support could be attributed to schools.³⁸

35 Association of Independent Schools of South Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 16.

36 NSW Teachers Federation, *Submission 73*, p. 3.

37 Dr Helen McGrath, School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 June 2010, p. CS32.

38 Australian Council of Educational Research, *Submission 20*, p. 7.

- 9.36 Teacher accreditation was also discussed by the Australian Psychological Society:

Teachers should be provided with regular training and support about how to appropriately understand and respond to cyber risks. This includes the capacity to build in cyber-safety as part of the broader curriculum, encouraging pro-social behaviours as part of general classroom management techniques and more specifically being able to respond to inappropriate internet use.³⁹

- 9.37 Such a program would be more effective if it could be provided online, and if it was open to both teachers and students.

Recommendation 19

That the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth and the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy investigate funding a national, online training program for teachers and students that addresses bullying and cyber-bullying, and is validated by national accreditation.