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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Reference: Teacher education

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DEAKIN UNIVERSITY, GEELONG

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Wednesday, 8 June 2005

Members: Mr Hartsuyker *(Chair)*, Mr Sawford *(Deputy Chair)*, Mr Bartlett, Ms Bird, Ms Corcoran, Mr Fawcett, Mr Michael Ferguson, Mr Henry, Ms Livermore and Mrs Markus

Members in attendance: Mr Bartlett, Mr Fawcett, Mr Hartsuyker, Ms Livermore and Mr Sawford

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The scope, suitability, organisation, resourcing and delivery of teacher training courses in Australia’s public and private universities. To examine the preparedness of graduates to meet the current and future demands of teaching in Australia’s schools.

Specifically, the Inquiry should:

1. Examine and assess the criteria for selecting students for teacher training courses.
2. Examine the extent to which teacher training courses can attract high quality students, including students from diverse backgrounds and experiences.
3. Examine attrition rates from teaching courses and reasons for that attrition.
4. Examine and assess the criteria for selecting and rewarding education faculty members.
5. Examine the educational philosophy underpinning the teacher training courses (including the teaching methods used, course structure and materials, and methods for assessment and evaluation) and assess the extent to which it is informed by research.
6. Examine the interaction and relationships between teacher training courses and other university faculty disciplines.
7. Examine the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to:
    - (i) teach literacy and numeracy;
    - (ii) teach vocational education courses;
    - (iii) effectively manage classrooms;
    - (iv) successfully use information technology;
    - (v) deal with bullying and disruptive students and dysfunctional families;
    - (vi) deal with children with special needs and/or disabilities;
    - (vii) achieve accreditation; and
    - (viii) deal with senior staff, fellow teachers, school boards, education authorities, parents, community groups and other related government departments.
8. Examine the role and input of schools and their staff to the preparation of trainee teachers.
9. Investigate the appropriateness of the current split between primary and secondary education training.
10. Examine the construction, delivery and resourcing of ongoing professional learning for teachers already in the workforce.
11. Examine the adequacy of the funding of teacher training courses by university administrations.

The Inquiry should make reference to current research, to developments and practices from other countries as well as to the practices of other professions in preparing and training people to enter their profession.

WITNESSES

BIGUM, Professor Chris, Head, School of Scientific and Development Studies, Faculty of Education, Deakin University 15

BRABHAM, Ms Wendy Joy, Director, Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University 15

BREWER, Miss Jane Elizabeth, Student, Deakin University 31

BURGESS, Mrs Gillian, Faculty Registrar, Faculty of Education, Deakin University 15

CAMPBELL, Dr Coral, Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Deakin University 15

CONNELL, Dr Helen, Director, Connell Skilbeck International Education Research and Consultancy 1

COUCH, Mrs Geraldine, Student, Deakin University 31

CREW, Miss Emma Jane, Student, Deakin University 31

GRUNDY, Professor Shirley, Dean, Faculty of Education, Deakin University 15

HARRIS, Dr Catherine, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Deakin University 15

KAVANAGH, Dr Michael, Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Deakin University 15

KNIGHT, Mr Guy Stuart, Student, Deakin University 31

KOVACS, Ms Sarah Lauren, Student, Deakin University 31

MARNOCK, Miss Claire, Student, Deakin University 31

MARSHALL, Mr Alan, Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Deakin University 15

MATTHEWS, Mr Russell, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Deakin University 15

McCANN, Ms Alexandra Penelope, Student, Deakin University 31

MOUSLEY, Associate Professor Judy, Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning, Faculty of Education, Deakin University 15

NUSKE, Miss Rachael Ann, Student, Deakin University 31

PAYNE, Miss Laura Jean-Marie, Student, Deakin University 31

REID, Ms Patricia, School Experience Coordinator, Faculty of Education, Deakin University 15

SKILBECK, Professor Malcolm, Director, Connell Skilbeck International Education Research and Consultancy 1

TEMMERMAN, Professor Nita, Head, School of Social and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Education, Deakin University 15

WALSH, Ms Julia, Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Deakin University 15

WHITE, Dr Simone, Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Deakin University 15

Committee met at 10.45 am

CONNELL, Dr Helen, Director, Connell Skilbeck International Education Research and Consultancy

SKILBECK, Professor Malcolm, Director, Connell Skilbeck International Education Research and Consultancy

CHAIR (Mr Hartsuyker)—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training inquiry into teacher education. I welcome the first witnesses. If there are no corrections or amendments you would like to make to your submission, I invite you to make an opening address.

Dr Connell—We welcome the opportunity to meet with the committee to discuss our submission. Connell Skilbeck International Education Research and Consultancy is an independent company of which Malcolm Skilbeck and I are principals. On occasion we invite other people to work with us on specific activities. Between us, Malcolm and I have substantial national and international experience in education research and consultancy for governments and intergovernmental bodies. Brief outlines of our curriculum vitae are provided in the submission.

Over the past three years we have carried out research and prepared three reports on the Australian teaching profession. First, in 2002-03, for the Australian government, we authored the *Australian country background report* for the OECD multicountry study on attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers. This study was based on existing national and international sources. Our second study, in 2003, was for the chair and secretariat of the Commonwealth Review of Teaching and Teacher Education with special reference to science, maths and technology. We drafted the final report. This was based on data generated from the review and from our participation in a number of the review’s activities and from other existing sources.

The third recent study we have undertaken on the Australian teaching profession was in 2003-04, when we undertook a research project for the Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership Taskforce, TQELT, of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, MCEETYA. This study focused on the changing nature of society and related issues for the teaching work force, and we focused on teachers in their first 10 years in the profession. The final report draws on four stages of data-gathering. The first of these was a literature review, which was undertaken by Diane Mayer, who at that time was at the University of Queensland. The second was the teacher questionnaire survey undertaken for us by Stewart Bonser. The third was field visits which Malcolm and I undertook to four states: Queensland, Western Australia, New South Wales and Tasmania, during which we visited and interviewed teachers, school leaders, central and regional education authorities and teacher education institutions in both metropolitan and regional areas. The fourth data source that we drew on was a review of professional training in four professions of relevance to teaching—so we were trying there to contextualise teaching.

Our final report of that study was completed in September 2004 and will shortly be placed on the MCEETYA web site. The *Australian country background report* is currently on the Australian government web site. The Commonwealth Review of Teaching and Teacher

Education has of course been published. Malcolm will now briefly outline key findings from these studies which are of relevance to the work of this committee. I would like to table the overview of the most recent study, the MCEETYA study. Thank you.

Prof. Skilbeck—What Helen has just given you is a summary of the most recent report, the MCEETYA report, which elaborates on some of the points in our submission if you wish to follow those up from the text. This work has been quite extensive in Australia over the past four years but was preceded by many years of work internationally, when we were based in the OECD in Paris and before that in the United Kingdom and before that again in Australia. But our focus throughout all of this work has been on the quality of teachers and teaching. That is our primary concern. Whatever you have recorded about the scale of the problem, the number of teachers, demand and supply—all of which is relevant and important, of course—the key thing is teacher effectiveness in schools.

Our interest is in the education work of the universities in particular, including this one, Deakin University, which you will be hearing more about later today. Our interest is really in the capacity of the institutions responsible for selecting, educating and training teachers and continuing the education of teachers to produce an effective, high-quality teaching force for Australian schools. The education faculties do many other things apart from that, but that is not our concern; we want to focus on high-quality teachers for Australia’s schools.

Our conclusion is that there is a great deal of outstanding work going on and that the quality of the Australian teaching profession is reasonably high by international comparisons. The evidence for that is shown primarily in the work of the OECD that Helen referred to—the first of the studies that we contributed to when back in Australia, the *Australian country background report* on the teaching profession, looking at what we are doing structurally and organisationally, supply and demand data and so on. Against the international profile, Australia performs reasonably well.

The second major source of comparison is the international studies of student performance, because the effectiveness of the teaching has to be judged according to student learning outcomes. Australia does reasonably well both in PISA, the Program for International Student Assessment, which is now orchestrated by the OECD, and in TIMSS, the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. But if you look at the most recent TIMSS findings you will notice that we are not performing quite as well as we should be—there has been some slippage. I imagine the committee have access to those findings; they are available. The Australian Council for Educational Research is the key agent in producing Australian data for those studies, both PISA and TIMSS.

There are two major problems in the fields of maths and science and the areas that PISA covers. First of all, we have a very big tail. We have far too many low-performing students in Australia, which means that teachers and teaching are not sufficiently directed at raising the quality and the standard of learning of the tail. We have outstanding students. We have outstanding performers. We have good average performance—Australia is distinguished by fair average quality, as our wheat used to be—but we do not do enough to bring up that tail.

Second, if you look more precisely at some of the data, particularly in mathematics, for example—and it is only an example—you will find that it is an uneven performance. There are certain areas where Australia does well and others where it does not do well, and that pinpoints particular qualities or approaches by teachers and perhaps in the curriculum in schools. So, although we are reasonably well placed, there are issues, and of course we know that there are particular groups in our society who are very poorly served—I use those words advisedly—by our schools and therefore by our teachers, because their learning needs are not being adequately met.

I want to draw attention to specific weaknesses that we are working on at present and will continue to work on. For example, we have been invited by the University of Tasmania and the Department of Education in Tasmania to undertake some innovative and, we hope, creative and successful work in developing or redeveloping the teacher education programs in the state. That is about to start, so we will be challenged ourselves to try to put some meat on the bones that we have been focusing on in recent years. But there are particular areas where we think attention is needed. The first is selection of teachers. We do not think that the present criteria which are primarily academic performance are sufficient—they are necessary but not sufficient. We would like to see more attention to personal attributes of predicted successful teaching. That is a controversial point. There are many people in teacher education who reject that approach. We have considered their arguments and we reject their arguments. We think the attributes of a potentially good teacher should be a prime consideration in selecting people for the profession, and academic performance is one but by no means the only one. There are personal qualities, there are social skills and there are communications skills which we think good selection procedures would help us identify. It is time consuming, it is difficult, it is complex but it can be done.

Secondly, we think that the university, while it should remain primarily responsible, should be entering into much stronger, more equitable partnerships with schools, with the teaching profession and with employers of teachers. As a result of the adoption of the university base for teacher education, from the old days of the teachers colleges, employers have largely lost a controlling interest in teacher selection and education, which is not good. We would like to see a much stronger partnership model. In our most recent research we were rather struck, in fact we were appalled, at the evidence amongst practising teachers recently in the profession—at least within the last 10 years—who rejected out of hand the educational theory component of their studies to become teachers. It was a shocking finding and it was uniform and consistent across the country. There were some exceptions, and I think one could pinpoint some programs which are quite effective and doing well. But it is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs that the teaching profession should reject the intellectual, theoretical research, conceptual underpinnings of their craft as provided by their university studies. That is a major issue and we intend to focus on that in the work that we are doing in Tasmania.

Thirdly, when teachers enter the profession, from either a four-year BEd degree or a postgraduate diploma following a three- or four-year degree or a master’s degree, in Australia at present we have a lot of plans and programs for induction—every state that you go to will present you with a big model of all their induction arrangements in the schools. The reality is that it is very uneven in practice. Helen referred to the studies that we have been doing of other professions—for example, nursing. It appears to us that nursing has a much stronger, better and more systematic approach to inducting people into the profession than teaching does. That is because they believe that the initial training to become a nurse—now a four-year degree program at a university—is insufficient as preparation and that a strong, learning based induction program is needed. So trainee nurses and nurses recently in the profession have the support of a named mentor and a continuing nurse educator. We think that would be a very good model for teaching.

Although there has been a great deal of development of continuing professional learning—and for a number of years there has been a major Commonwealth program for people who have been 10 years or more in the profession—we do not think that the rigour, the comprehensiveness and the depth of continuing study in the first five years after graduation is adequate. Every state and every school will tell you about professional learning days and so on. We think a much more systematic and rigorous continuing training regime is needed not only to sustain and strengthen the quality, particularly at the point where people are experiencing greatest difficulty, but also to ensure that we reduce attrition rates, which are apparent both in training and in the first few years in the profession.

I have two final points; I know time is limited. Firstly, there are a quarter of a million teachers in Australia teaching in 10,000 schools. Paradoxically, there is not really a career of teaching. Teaching has a very flat profile as a profession. By annual increments you are raised in salary terms for anything up to about 13 years, according to state or territory, and there you sit unless you move into administration or sometimes into universities or you become head of a department—in a big secondary school that is largely these days an administrative job. There is not really a sense of a continuing advancing career as a classroom teacher. That is partly because we do not have performance reviews and we do not recognise and reward quality of performance in teaching. That is a very contentious industrial issue; we know that.

But when we asked teachers in their first 10 years whether they thought their salary advancement should be related to the quality of their performance as teachers, a majority said yes. I know perfectly well what the position of the Australian unions is on that subject and I respect it, but we also have to recognise what the teachers on the ground are saying. Equally they say they are uneasy and unsure about how that quality of performance should be judged. The paradox is that every day in the classroom they are judging the performance of their students, so of course quality of performance can be judged as long as it is fairly, adequately and professionally done. So we think that to advance the quality and the standard of the teaching profession we need to get the sense of career planning and career development from the first stage of training right through their career and we need to tie that strongly to performance review, recognition and reward. Those are some of our concerns and interests.

Helen has reminded me that I should also say that people should be recognised for doing advanced qualifications. They are not recognised in salary terms in Australia. They are in the United States, for example—not that it is a paragon, but that is one feature of the US system which we could learn from.

CHAIR—Thank you. We have had evidence that basically has said that effective integration of practicum with theory is essential for a good outcome. Your research is indicating that there is a rejection of educational theory by these beginning teachers. What is the reason for that? Where is that going wrong?

Prof. Skilbeck—We would like to see a bit more systematic study. I have to be careful in saying where it is going wrong because I have not been to every university department and spent days there reviewing every program. We have visited 12 universities, which is about a third, and we have discussed this with them. I think there are several things. First of all, there is a certain lack of coherence. With the introduction of the unit system and the credit based system into Australian universities many years ago, right across universities not only in education faculties but in all faculties we have semester-long courses. Each course is almost self-contained. It is assessed. The students then move on to the next thing.

Many years ago when I was working in a university in the United Kingdom, I strongly advocated such an approach and was responsible for developing it across the university. But it has weaknesses. One of the big weaknesses is that each of these things is almost independent of the others. You get linkage of course and so on. If you are studying languages you would certainly get linkages, as with mathematics and science. But in education you tend to get a lot of specialists presenting their specialist bit. They say: in this term, this semester, this course we will do this, this and this. It is a big challenge to students to integrate and interrelate those elements. Also, it is an invitation to specialists to parade their specialism, and in academic life that is a great temptation. It is tied to your research, to your advanced degree students, to the conferences you go on and so on. We think that that is a problem. We think that the actual structure of the program needs to be, as it were, overridden with a coherent, integrated approach.

There are only three things, I think, that students in their initial year or years of training need in terms of educational theory, and I say this as someone who has written and taught and worked in this area for many years in different settings. Firstly, there is the purpose of schooling: why have we got schools in Australia today and what values are schools advancing and should be advancing? What is the school and why have we got schools? What are these kids doing locked up hour after hour, day after day? That is one theme. Secondly, what works in planning lessons and managing learning in today’s schools? What works? How do you plan a lesson? How do you manage learning in the school as it is with all its rough edges and complexities and difficulties? Thirdly, how do you record and evaluate learning and teaching? Personally I think—in spite of the fact that I have taught in many other areas—that those are the three key things. Hold those together constantly before the beginning teacher, and all the other things—the icing on the cake, as it were—should come later. When people have had experience in schools they come back to the university, if they do advanced degrees, and they can go in any direction they like.

The other reason I would give in answer your question as to why they reject it is that there is not an effective partnership between schools and universities. It is still the university as the organiser and provider. Prospective teachers go out from institutions on teaching practice—practicum and so on—and we would like to see a number of experimental programs in Australia, big projects, with schools being the centres of teacher education. Instead of the students being based in the university they would be based in the school. They would still be doing a university qualification—it would be a partnership—but it would be the school which became the equivalent of a teaching hospital. There are schools and people in schools that we have personally met who could do this. It is a bit of an effort. There is going to be a lot of shaking up required, but if that shift of orientation took place then the academics would go into the schools to teach their educational theory—not in rooms like this—out there in the western suburbs of Sydney or out in Port Adelaide. They would be actually based in the place where academics are experiencing daily that life. So those are the answers I give to your question, but I would like to do a bit more work to verify those views.

Mr SAWFORD—Helen, I have read lots of your material over the years. Malcolm, I remember you speaking in Adelaide at a primary principals conference many years ago. You made eminently good sense then and you make eminently good sense now. I have a couple of questions about your comments this morning. This rejection of educational theory: why is that happening? You mentioned that there are some teacher education courses that are doing well. Is it too much to ask whether you could give us a clue where they are? I do not want to know the others that are not doing well but would you tell us some of those teacher education courses that are doing well and perhaps expand a little on why there is a rejection of educational theory?

Prof. Skilbeck—It is a difficult subject to be confident about. I think it is something that requires a bit more probing and a bit more intensive work on the ground and I would like to do that. It is not confined to education, by the way. In looking at some other professions—law, for example—we have found evidence from reviews and inquiries over the past decade on law teaching which indicates that there is a strong rejection amongst students of jurisprudence, which is the philosophical foundation of the law. So it is something to do with the intellectual climate as well.

Nursing is problematic in that it has been very difficult to persuade nurses that the study of certain basic sciences is very important. To get that sort of shift and to turn the teaching of, say, science and biology towards the practice of a nurse in a hospital or a clinic is a real challenge to the academic mind. The academic mind is tuned into the intellectual foundations of the subject. The nurse in the hospital or clinic and the teacher in the school are tuned into the practical use of knowledge in a constantly changing and often rather complex situation which does not lend itself to quick, easy, systematic scientific interpretation. So there is a genuine intellectual issue.

There is an issue in the culture. All students who are doing practice or profession based programs are faced with the same challenge that teachers are faced with. So, in looking at the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of educational theory, I think it is very important to look at the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of theoretical knowledge in other professional fields as well. I am not aware of any such study, although the work that Don Anderson has done over many years at the Australian National University on the professions gives some leads, if you like. A bit more work along those lines would be very good. In other words, what I am saying is that there is a context for this. It is not just what is happening or not happening in education faculties.

I genuinely believe that students would feel and experience the relevance of the theoretical knowledge more if the teaching was actually placed in the school situation. I do think the physical environment makes a difference. The cultural environment of the school is a very important setting for this sort of approach. But I also think there is a lot of sloppy teaching and a lot of rather shallow intellectualising going on in some of the education faculties. There are some exceptions. Naming names is invidious, of course. We can only give a couple of examples, but there would be others. We were very struck by one of the programs at the University of Wollongong.

Dr Connell—Yes, that is outlined in our MCEETYA study.

Prof. Skilbeck—We would be very happy to provide a few examples from our study, which draws examples from only four states. The knowledge building communities program at the University of Wollongong is a small part of their program, but it is a very strongly school based one. There is a very interesting and innovative approach at the University of Central Queensland. It is quite controversial, perhaps, but it was, when we saw it a couple of years ago, a very interesting approach. The University of Sydney has some interesting knowledge linked programs at the masters level but they are still part of initial training.

Dr Connell—Yes. These are discussed in our MCEETYA report. We tabled the outline of that. If you like, I can send you the details by email of the particular studies that we had. I can follow this up if you like.

Prof. Skilbeck—We think that, if you come to Tasmania in about a year’s time, you will see a revolutionary change.

Mr SAWFORD—Can I finish off with one other thing about that trilogy of questions we should be asking. A lot of the submissions that we have been given are almost unfathomable. There seems to be a lack of logic. You have come across and given us a trilogy. You have talked about the purposes of the school and the rationale. You have said what works, which is really about content, methodology and probably relationships, and then you have asked the next question, which is: how do you record an assessment or evaluation? That just seems to be such a logical picture. In all of the submissions that I have read from universities I have never seen a succinct breakdown of what they ought to be doing. You just did it in a few seconds. If you can do it—and you have been around academia for a long time, Malcolm—why can’t they? I think students actually respond to ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions. They can understand all of that. But we have teaching practice now being called ‘practicum’. What a pompous name that is. Teacher education is now not teacher training or something else. There seems to be a lot of language change, but nothing else has changed—it is all the same. Why is this?

Prof. Skilbeck—I have been in and out of academic life. That is one reason I take a somewhat different view. I have spent only half of my career in academic life and some of that has been in administrative jobs, so I have seen it from both sides. One of the explanations is the growth of the research industry—promotion and advancement. In order to advance in an academic career you have to publish. You have to do research, go to conferences and be part of international consortia. That is all very attractive and glamorous—I speak from personal experience—but it takes you away. The least fashionable, the least attractive part of the education faculty’s work is teaching undergraduate students to become teachers. But that is the bread and butter. That should be the basis of it. We really have to get academics in education faculties tuned into the idea that their primary purpose is to develop good teachers and to sustain quality in teaching in schools.

There are a lot of distractions. Every university in Australia is encouraged to bring in international students or to put up bases in the Middle East, South Africa or Europe—preferably in Paris or Florence. All of that is very attractive to the academic mind, and you get promotion for it. You get career advancement. But how much career advancement is there for being an outstanding teacher of student teachers? Very little, I can assure you. So it is a cultural phenomenon within the university environment. The reason for the huge submissions, by the way, is partly the accreditation process for courses. The state boards, the registration bodies in Queensland and Victoria and so on, demand a huge amount. So you get dozens and dozens of pages of detailed answers to questions from the registration authorities. If you simply put in my three points, you would not get registered. They would not seem to address all the concerns. By the way, I have simplified the situation somewhat.

Mr SAWFORD—Of course.

Prof. Skilbeck—So I think there are a number of factors like that. One of the recommendations we made in the report to MCEETYA, which is yet to be published, was that a few universities should get together in a consortium and try to break the mould. We have mentioned a couple that might perhaps be interested in doing this, with encouragement. It has happened in the United States. A number of universities have got together and said, ‘Let’s try and break the mould of teacher education.’ A few institutions here could be encouraged to do that, and they need to be encouraged in a number of ways. There are practical issues here.

Mr SAWFORD—That is not a bad name for the inquiry: breaking the mould.

Mr FAWCETT—I have a comment leading to a question about students rejecting the theoretical basis and also the lack of career advancement for teachers. I know that historically many teachers have trained as mathematicians, scientists and language specialists and then have gone and done a one-year teaching qualification. They are considered to be very good teachers because they know their topic and they know a bit about teaching. They do the job very well. There seem to be an increasing number of people, though, who have that one year expanded to three or four years, yet there is not a lot more classroom contact time. We seem to have taken what was able to be delivered in a very effective way in a year and expanded it to three years. Is that part of the reason that many people are being hit with things that are not all that relevant to what they need to go out into a classroom and teach and, therefore, they start to reject some of the more in-depth theory?

If that is the case, is there an argument to take somebody who is going to be a teacher and actually shorten the course to get them out into the classroom more quickly? Then, after a period of four years, 10 years or whatever, those who wish to develop and get more into the management of education could come back and do further training in education. The theory then becomes more applicable to their development of curriculum et cetera from a management perspective. Has that been looked at at all?

Prof. Skilbeck—By the way, I think the theory is relevant to everybody, but it has to be the right theory at the right time. At present you are getting the wrong theory at the wrong time. That is why people are rejecting it. Take a particular example: if you have a class of 25 somewhat unruly children, and there are plenty of those around, and the teacher is having a lot of difficulty, it is very important to understand why children are unruly, what is going on and the dynamics of their behaviour. Teachers, particularly younger teachers, ask, ‘Is it their individual psychology, the interaction in the group or the way I am relating to them?’ There are theoretical bases to understanding what is going on.

Of course, in the meanwhile you have the 25 children in front of you and you have to do something. The immediate task is management and order. Teachers and school principals say that you have to have an orderly, calm environment, and you have to have the practical ability to create that. You can do that in all kinds of ways, including some very authoritarian ways, and over time it is better to understand how to manage children on the basis of a good knowledge of the dynamics of group behaviour. That will come later. That partly answers your question. I think all teachers would benefit from that.

Secondly, I think all teachers should know a lot more about what learning is—what actually happens when somebody learns something that they did not know previously, how effective that learning is and what difference it is going to make over time and in different settings. That is learning theory, although not according to large American textbooks. Teachers need to have a really searching understanding of learning in the school. Learning theory is an abstract concept and it applies in any sphere of life, but what about learning in the school environment? There is a theoretical base for that which teachers would benefit from at a certain time.

As for your point about length of time, I must say I wondered, when we were reaching these conclusions, discussing them and travelling around the country, why it is that all teachers are going to universities for three or four years when 100 or 150 years ago primary school teachers had six weeks of training. It has gone from six weeks to four years over 150 years in the European system. The old idea was that you were trained as a nursemaid to look after young children and so on. We often wonder what is happening—why is it four years and should that be reduced? I think that is an open question. It would be very hard to reduce it because of comparability. With all the other professions it is three, four, five or six years in university. If we cannot make a breakthrough there, and I think it would be very hard, let us at least make sure that those four years are used to maximum advantage and we get really good, high-quality, satisfied teachers who want to teach and can teach well. Let us focus, in other words, on quality and not worry too much about length. Structurally, to change the length now would be, quite honestly, impossible, but we can change the quality.

Mr BARTLETT—You mentioned earlier that on the PISA and TIMSS scales Australian results have a very long tail. I am wondering what that says about the quality of training and preparation for teaching literacy and numeracy. It would seem to indicate that the more capable students can generally learn despite poor or mediocre teaching, but it is the struggling students who require much better quality teaching of literacy and numeracy. What can we do to improve those skills in our teacher training? For instance, with teaching numeracy is it a matter of the quality of the people that we are getting in or the skills that are being taught in the education courses? With literacy, is it a result of the swinging pendulum and the fashion in phonics versus the whole-of-language approach? What do we need to do to improve the quality of pedagogy with our new teachers?

Prof. Skilbeck—Ken Rowe from the ACER is chairing the committee that is going to give you the answers to all those questions. Meanwhile, I gave you three themes. There is a fourth theme, which I think has a bearing on your question—that is, how to work with parents, carers and the community.

Mr SAWFORD—Relationships.

Prof. Skilbeck—Relationships. The literacy theme must not be the swings, say, between phonics and whole-word, -sentence, -paragraph or -text approaches. There is a long history to this. In the 18th century a number of charlatans made quite a good living in the German states by going around selling their schemes for literacy. So it is not new, and there are still a few around. We will always have schemes—

Mr SAWFORD—Come on: name them!

Prof. Skilbeck—We will always have schemes for improving literacy and numeracy. But the students that we were talking about are most often, apart from those with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia—let us put those on one side, because they can come from any category in society—from the non-functioning families, the non-functioning communities and the non-functioning cultural groups. They are the ones that experience difficulty with basic tools of learning. The answer is in one sense perfectly obvious, because they are not getting the foundations in their environment. There is an enormous sense of frustration, and one of the biggest frustrations that teachers express to us is working with parents and communities. Children come to school, they are sitting in the classroom and running around and jumping on the desks or whatever, and the parents and the family are out there somewhere. Even though we sometimes have social workers, liaison groups and so on, we do not have a very good system for relating the school to the family and the community.

If you have had children that have been to school, think of the messages that you get from schools—once a term or once a year you receive a report or something like that. It is a very artificial, unnatural kind of pattern. There is not an easy interaction. Teachers do not readily go to the family, and how could they? They work hard enough as it is. That is a very large part of the problem. If we do not get a pattern of relationship whereby the school, the community and the family are integrated then, no matter how hard we try with schemes of literacy and numeracy, there will still be those problems. After all, the foundations of literacy and numeracy are laid down in early childhood—from the age of nought onwards. Language development starts at birth. By the time they are five or six years of age children from many families, such as those represented here, have an enormous advantage over children who have not had that foundational experience. The tests indicate straightaway that there is a huge gap which schools have to try to overcome. So it is not just about literacy and numeracy; it is about literacy and numeracy in partnership, in context and in relationship, and getting the idea that the teachers and schools have to be more community oriented.

Mr BARTLETT—Did you say that the tail for Australian results is longer than for other countries?

Prof. Skilbeck—It is not necessarily longer. I do not know that I can answer that question out of hand, but it is long. We already have a good average performance, not a bad one, but we could raise it further by concentrating on the tail. Take, for example, the country that normally comes in at the top: Finland. They have a much narrower range of performance. We have a wide range. So let’s narrow the range a bit, not by going back, but by taking everybody forward.

Mr BARTLETT—How is that related to what you were just saying? Do they have better programs to connect the school with the home?

Prof. Skilbeck—I think it is resolute policy. The Scandinavian countries in particular have always had very strong, determined, affirmative and assertive national education policies. Finland, 15 years ago, like New Zealand, went through a tremendous economic crisis, and there was huge unemployment. With the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union a lot of the Finnish markets disappeared—they had had a very cosy relationship, of course, with the Soviet Union. They had to reverse that situation, as New Zealand had to, and they saw education as an integral part of the policy of reversing economic decline. That is another very big and general point we make in our report.

With due respect, we believe the Prime Minister and politicians generally should boldly affirm the fundamental value of education and teachers. Each year in France in September the minister for education gives a public address. Everyone comes back from their long summer holiday and the minister declares the school year open, as everyone comes back to school. They also have an expression in France. I have to be careful in saying this—it is not a political point at all; it is an ideological or cultural point—'The school of the republic.' The Americans have 'the common school'. The French have 'the school of the republic'—and the minister actually uses that expression. What is our Australian school 'the school of'?

Mr BARTLETT—I have one final question. In those countries, there is a greater focus on education but is there any different approach to the training of teachers for numeracy and literacy for those early years?

Prof. Skilbeck—I do not believe that is the key principle. The key difference is a sense of purpose. That is why I asked the question. The Scandinavian school is 'the school of democracy'. They have a very strong commitment to the school as the engine, the force, that drives forward the culture and the society. That carries everything forward. Quite seriously, it does not matter what way you teach numeracy or literacy. It depends on the individual circumstances, the individual teacher and the school. There are 50 different ways of doing it—as long as everybody is driving hard to get good results and has good reasons for it. Take science as an example. Australian research, which we report on in the RTTE—the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education—in science, maths and technology shows that more than half of the teachers teaching science in Australian secondary schools would rather not be doing it. What sort of basis is that for successful learning of science? Why are we getting so few students coming into science faculties in universities? Partly because there is more money going into business faculties or law, but partly because of the dismal way in which science and mathematics are taught in the middle and upper years of secondary school. It is taught by disenchanted, uninspired people who would rather be doing something else. The motivation, the commitment, the enthusiasm is not there. You can go round to schools in Geelong and you will see the same evidence. I do not think the method is the key thing; it is the sense of purpose and value.

Ms LIVERMORE—Professor, I was interested in the comment that you made in your submission at page 9. You raise the issue of the number of teacher education courses in Australia. Could you elaborate on that, perhaps, and also the—I am assuming—related role of the accreditation process in driving the outcomes of teacher education courses?

Prof. Skilbeck—I will not score any popularity points from people in the education faculties in saying this, but we do not really need an initial teacher education program in every university in Australia. Thinking in terms of quality, wouldn't you say, 'Let's identify the best and make them even better'? There will be some inconvenience; there will be some shake-up. But it has just happened almost by default; it is the way things are and the way things have been. If we could look at the numbers and ask questions about how many teachers we need to train and where we need them, we might be able to work out a map. I have not done this. It might be difficult.

I would go for encouraging a few universities to forget about teacher education and concentrate their resources for teacher education, which are scarce, on those that are going to do the best job. I do not see an argument for having it in every university. Not every university teaches medicine and not every university teaches vet science—most of them nowadays want to teach law. The reasons for these things are not to do with the quality of the activity; they are to do with getting the right number of students in on seats and with getting the money from the Commonwealth. The vice-chancellors will all argue for it because it brings in dollars. But the quality argument is not met.

Mr SAWFORD—I will follow up what Kerry was asking you regarding the low-performing students and the question of denial, being the person who initiated the literacy challenge in the Australian parliament, having had it rejected by my own party, having had it rejected by our own leadership and then having had to manufacture four or five colleagues to get together and get it pushed through by a junior minister, and now it is the language of every day. One of the things that happened at the very beginning of the inquiry was that the teachers union got stuck into us by saying that we were attacking teachers. Academia got stuck into us. They were saying, again, that we were reporting what was not happening but actually we were reporting what principals, teachers and parents were telling us.

The aspect of denial has been a consistent behaviour of academia. The issues that you are suggesting that we consider, and this will be another one, which seem eminently sensible to me—I do not know about my colleagues, because we have not talked about it—are going to get trashed by people defending the status quo. There is a huge denial and it seems to be in education more so than in other faculties. Why is that the case? We know that there are low-performing students in this country. Why do people deny that fact?

Prof. Skilbeck—The teaching profession is a pretty visible profession and it is very sensitive. Every state minister of education gets up in arms or is alarmed if there are bad media reports regarding teachers misbehaving or students misbehaving. It is a very sensitive issue at that level and I think it is reflected in the university faculties. But denial is not an intellectually defensible position, as we know. It is paradoxical that universities would be denying reality, when universities are supposed to be casting the light of truth and learning and study on the world—certainly as it could be and should be. Of course there are interests at stake and there are jobs at stake as well. I made the point that if you close down a few teacher training departments then people are going to have to move and get a job somewhere else. There are those kinds of interests at stake.

There may also be something in resistance to sharp-edged analysis. I have to say, as a lifelong student of education, that I am pretty unhappy about a lot of the prose that I read in the journals—including one journal that I am on the editorial board of and have completely failed to influence the editorial policy of. There is a lot of very woolly, loose, cosy and incomprehensible talk going on and a certain sense that that is the kind of language community that you are part of—that is your world. That goes back to my earlier point: getting down there with people who are going into classrooms and coping with the difficult problems and challenges there is not as sexy as going to an international conference where you have a lot of papers at this level. That is where you get the credit—going to those conferences.

Mr SAWFORD—The phrase you just used is a very powerful phrase—‘resistance to sharp-edged analysis’. It seems to me that in academia there are no philosophical underpinnings, particularly in terms of law and education. It seems to be all synthesis and no analysis. It seems to be all collaboration but no competition. It seems to be all intuition but no insight. In other words, the balances seem to be missing. Is that part of the reason that there is not a great deal of analysis in academia today?

Prof. Skilbeck—I am not sure about that.

Mr SAWFORD—You used the phrase ‘resistance to sharp-edge analysis’. I think it is a beautiful phrase.

Prof. Skilbeck—I did use the phrase and you were quite right to pick me up on it.

Mr SAWFORD—I think it is accurate.

Prof. Skilbeck—So do I.

Mr SAWFORD—I want you to tell me why there is resistance.

Prof. Skilbeck—Let us come back again to the teaching profession. One of the curious areas of resistance by teachers is educational research. I am a lifetime member of the National Foundation for Education and Research in England and Wales. I was invited to accept that honour by virtue of many years of association with educational research internationally, including in the United Kingdom. I have noticed that a huge amount of valuable research is being done by research organisations—including the ACER in Australia, of course, which is one of the world’s premier educational research bodies—which is policy focused, directed to policy makers, and is used and valued by policy makers.

These research organisations, including academic institutions, have struggled hard to focus the communication of research on teachers. The language of communication research, the form in which it is cast, has moved from purely research communities towards policy makers. It has not moved sufficiently towards practitioners in the classroom, although both the NFER and the ACER in Australia do issue quite short summary statements of the findings of their research. It is not quite the same thing. It is nice to have a one-page summary of a research study, but that is not putting it into the working context of the practitioner in the field. This is where some synthesis is important alongside analysis. The analyses of the findings of the research then have to be cast into the mould of action in schools. Take Tasmania, Queensland or WA. In Tasmania, the Essential Learnings program is a major, state-wide innovation. In Queensland and WA there are similar major state-wide innovations.

For teachers to use the analytical results of research and to find them useful, you would have to put them into the context of policy initiatives in those countries—as seen by the teachers, not as seen by the people working in the head offices. We do not have an industry and enterprise that does that. Academics do a lot of analytical work and they publish it in journals. A prospective teacher might be obliged to read an article in order to write an essay or complete a term paper. It will not have any relevance to or meaning for the work that that person is going to do in the classroom.

It is almost as though what we are lacking and what we need is people, again in the education faculties, whose job it is to take that and translate it, working with practitioners in the schools—a bit like what happens in the clinical environment in medical health sciences—into things that people can do in the classroom. I think, if we do that, teachers will not reject research. They are certainly rejecting it now. They do not read it. It is mediated through magazines, of course. I am not quite sure whether I have adequately addressed your question, but I have worked around it anyway.

CHAIR—Thank you for appearing before the committee today. We may contact you if we need further information.

Prof. Skilbeck—May we thank you for the opportunity. I wish you every success in this important work that you are doing.

CHAIR—It is moved that the document tabled by Professor Skilbeck and Dr Connell be received by the committee as an exhibit and authorised for publication.

[11.45 am]

BIGUM, Professor Chris, Head, School of Scientific and Development Studies, Faculty of Education, Deakin University

BRABHAM, Ms Wendy Joy, Director, Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University

BURGESS, Mrs Gillian, Faculty Registrar, Faculty of Education, Deakin University

CAMPBELL, Dr Coral, Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Deakin University

GRUNDY, Professor Shirley, Dean, Faculty of Education, Deakin University

HARRIS, Dr Catherine, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Deakin University

KAVANAGH, Dr Michael, Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Deakin University

MARSHALL, Mr Alan, Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Deakin University

MATTHEWS, Mr Russell, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Deakin University

MOUSLEY, Associate Professor Judy, Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning, Faculty of Education, Deakin University

REID, Ms Patricia, School Experience Coordinator, Faculty of Education, Deakin University

TEMMERMAN, Professor Nita, Head, School of Social and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Education, Deakin University

WALSH, Ms Julia, Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Deakin University

WHITE, Dr Simone, Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Deakin University

CHAIR—Welcome. Is there anything you wish to add to the capacity in which you are appearing?

Dr Harris—I am the primary education coordinator at the Warrnambool campus.

Dr White—I am the course coordinator for the Bachelor of Teaching (Primary and Secondary) at the Burwood campus.

Dr Campbell—I am the course coordinator for the Bachelor of Teaching Primary and Secondary at the Geelong campus.

Ms Walsh—I am the course coordinator for the Bachelor of Physical Education at the Burwood campus.

Dr Kavanagh—I am the coordinator of the Bachelor of Education (Primary) on the Burwood campus.

Mr Matthews—I am the coordinator of the primary teacher education program at the Geelong campus.

CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. As there are no corrections or amendments to your submission, I now invite you to make some opening remarks.

Prof. Grundy—The Faculty of Education at Deakin University feels privileged to be able to host the committee’s visit here today. We believe that this inquiry is a very important one for teacher education. It is one that we take very seriously, and I hope that the seriousness with which we view this inquiry is reflected in our submission. In it, we have tried to provide for you as much information as possible about how we work and the principles underlying the programs that we have.

Deakin University has a very long tradition in teacher education, both through Deakin itself and through its predecessor institution. We are one of the largest providers of teacher education in Victoria and, indeed, one of the larger faculties in Australia. We have a comprehensive range of programs. We will be able to say with confidence from next year that our programs cover all of lifelong learning because, as from next year, we will be developing an early childhood program as well. But, at the moment, we have programs that cover from the time a learner goes through the school gate right through lifelong learning.

Of course, school education and the preparation of teachers for school education is our particular focus, and we look at both primary and secondary programs. We are a comprehensive faculty offering a comprehensive range of programs. We place a great deal of emphasis upon diversity, both in preparing our teachers to teach in a diverse range of situations, and also in preparing them to engage with a diverse range of students. In doing that we place a great deal of emphasis upon both knowledge discipline preparation and upon pedagogical and educational preparation. In general, the majority of our initial teacher education programs are four-year programs in which students would do the equivalent of two years of preparation in their knowledge discipline and approximately two years of teacher education preparation as well. Those dual functions of discipline knowledge preparation and pedagogical and teacher education knowledge preparation are really important.

In terms of the teacher education knowledge, however, we place a lot of emphasis on our partnership with schools because we really believe that that is the direction to go. There was a time in the nineties when teacher education was suffering a downturn. In essence, faculties almost retreated from schools. There was a partnership arrangement where it was: we will do this bit and you do that bit. We have certainly come through that and are really seeing teacher education very strongly as a partnership with our profession. So we work closely with the departments of education and other employers as well as with schools and with the teachers who work closely with our students. That may or may not give you a flavour of what we are on about. Perhaps I will close there because I am sure you have some questions that you would like to direct towards us.

CHAIR—I will start with a very general question. What things do you think Deakin University does very well and what things would you like to do better?

Prof. Grundy—Deakin University has a number of core commitments. These are common across the whole university. We take these seriously in education. One is a commitment to rural and regional engagement. It is not only our program at Warrnambool that is located regionally; our programs here at Geelong are located regionally and rurally and indeed they engage with those communities. Our program at Warrnambool is being developed very much as a community based program.

With regard to our commitment to lifelong learning, a mode of delivery for one of our initial teacher education programs—the Bachelor of Teaching (Primary and Secondary)—is by distance education. So that is able to provide an entry into teaching, particularly for people in more remote locations and particularly picking up the career change people. A new program—our Graduate Diploma in Applied Learning—is also picking up on that career change aspect. So we have those commitments to lifelong learning.

We also have a commitment to access and equity. Deakin University is very proud of its Institute of Koorie Education. In a moment I will ask the director, Wendy Brabham, to talk briefly about the teacher education program for Koori students. That is a community based program offered through IKE. We are very proud of our relationship with the IKE, the Institute of Koorie Education, in fulfilling that core commitment to access and equity in relation to Indigenous students.

We take seriously the mission of the university to be progressive, in terms of always trying to be using cutting-edge work. We take research very seriously in this faculty and the application of research to our teaching to be innovative, relevant and responsive. Every semester students are asked to evaluate their learning. There is one question about the connection with their later careers which asks: was this unit relevant to my later career? It is a source of great pride to us that we always get the highest mark for that in the whole of the university and we take that as a measure of our relevance.

I guess we all think of innovation in terms of, for instance, technology and online teaching and learning. We are again very proud in this faculty of the way in which we are preparing teachers to operate as lifelong learners themselves utilising technology and also to utilise technology in their own teaching. I will ask Wendy to say something about the Institute of Koorie Education before I come back to what we would like to be doing better.

Ms Brabham—I am certainly honoured to make a presentation here today. Deakin University's commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education has been incredible over the last 19 years. We have a very strong relationship with the Faculty of Education because it was through the Faculty of Education that we were able to target disciplines from other faculties. We experimented with teacher training because at that time, in the eighties and early nineties, there was a strong emphasis on increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in teacher training. It was probably the first discipline that the Commonwealth supported us to get into.

Over the last 19 years Deakin has developed very strong links with Aboriginal communities, especially through the state AECG—Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. As we have transferred to other discipline areas we have had to go interstate, but back in 1987 we established a strong relationship with the Northern Territory government. So a lot of the graduate teachers that have been out there for the last 10 years or so, as well as those in Victoria, the Northern Territory, parts of New South Wales and Queensland, are Deakin graduates. I often go to national and state forums now and see Deakin graduates.

The reason it has worked at Deakin is really because of the partnerships that have been established and the dialogue that Aboriginal communities have had with academics and senior management within this university about the type of model that would suit our people. What Deakin did from the outset was actually look at training teachers in their communities. They were able to do that through the very efficient distance education model they had back in those days. From there, students were able to engage in higher education and universities through an intensive study block and not move from their land, their families or their communities.

Our students come down six times a year, three times each semester. They have their tutorials at this campus in Geelong. They work with a faculty education course team that engages with all of the faculties, unit chairs, course coordinators and sometimes heads of schools and the Dean. So there is a lot of interaction going on between the academics that are based at the institute and the faculty. When our students go back to their communities, they actually continue their studies and are supported by the Commonwealth government through DEST’s Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme. So we are also connecting back to the educational networks to support our students.

CHAIR—Do some of the students just study conventionally here on campus without doing that?

Ms Brabham—No, Deakin has specialised in the community based model. There are so many universities in Victoria that have Indigenous units and support on campus. Deakin has worked very closely to try to maintain the students and graduates out in the regions and the communities in order to build up an increasing number of Aboriginal teachers.

There is one more thing that I want to say. We do have a concern at Deakin. We are funded through Aboriginal support funding and we also get the EFTSU funding because we are a teaching centre. But one of the most important goals that is being pushed by the federal government—that is, educating non-Indigenous students, especially in teacher education training—is expected to be taken out of designated funding to support the quality delivery and increase the number of Aboriginal students in teacher education. That is an issue, and I think the federal government needs to look at it if it is going to make a commitment to all of the national Aboriginal education policy goals that it states for us to report on. The federal and state governments need to work together on that so that we can Aboriginalise the curriculum for all trainee teachers so that they can contribute to quality teaching of Indigenous students and the wider community.

The work that has been done at Deakin has been excellent and it is to be commended. The Institute of Koorie Education gets the accolades, but people do not see the work that goes on behind the scenes by the faculties.

CHAIR—Professor Grundy, would you like to address the second limb to the question—that is, what you would like to do better?

Prof. Grundy—Rather than saying, 'These are the things that we do not do well,' I will put a positive spin on it and talk about the main challenges that we have. I think the challenge is around catering for diversity; in particular, preparing our teachers to be able to deal adequately with the diversity of students in classrooms in a very diverse range of schools. There are three areas that are particular challenges for us. One of those is the area that Wendy Brabham has just identified—that is, the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and understanding in our own curriculum so that our mainstream teachers are adequately prepared to teach Indigenous students in their classes.

The other area is special education. You probably noticed the silences in our submission as well as our words. You have a term of reference relating to that area. Although we deal with special education and students with special learning needs across our curriculum, it is not something that we deal with strongly in preservice teacher education. The other challenge for us—and I might say that these are challenges for schools as well as for teacher education—is dealing with students with severe mental health and behavioural problems. We have a new unit coming on which deals with student wellbeing and we are addressing some of those issues in response to that need. But I do think that that is an area that is a great challenge for us. So I think the big challenges for us are around the area of diversity.

CHAIR—You mentioned that your courses were seen as relevant by students. We have had evidence that many beginning teachers are finding educational theory is not necessarily relevant to work in the classroom. From your surveys, would you say that your education theory units are proving to be relevant? Are students finding it relevant or as relevant as other subjects?

Prof. Grundy—In the feedback that we have received, they are reporting that it is relevant. I would like one of my colleagues to take up that question. Mr Alan Marshall might be able to make some comments about that.

Mr Marshall—I am a unit chair for our education study's major component in their fourth year of the program. This year is our first year of operation. We have developed a program that has given a lot of the responsibility of running the program over to the students in conjunction with the academic staff. They help devise the program on the experience they have had coming through the program, on the expectations that principals have of students coming out and on our expectations from the academic side—all those components are built into the program.

We have developed links with schools in the community. Half of our seminar programs—they are not lectures—are conducted in the schools outside of school hours. While Shirley was talking I was trying to calculate the number of teachers and principals who are utilising the program. Somewhere around 50 have interacted with 200 of our students. Those programs are seminar based. Teachers in the schools do presentations to the students about their practice in relation to the components we are looking at, and then breaking to smaller groups with practising teachers to follow through on the discussion in a more intimate way. We have developed a tremendous rapport, in one case with a secondary school, where primary teachers have come in from surrounding schools. The number of teachers who want to take part is increasing tremendously. There is a lot of interest from the schools surrounding that secondary college and they want to be part of the program.

One of the difficulties with this program is breaking the barriers, working and talking through things with schools, and seeing that they make a valuable contribution, on top of what they are already doing. We have done this without any funding. No extra support money has gone into the program but a contribution from the schools has been made on a voluntary basis outside of school hours. It is a really tremendous breakthrough in terms of the interrelations. For that to continue and develop, there needs to be negotiation with other schools. In the end there is going to be a division somewhere between people in education in terms of teachers in the schools needing enough time to be able to make a commitment to continue the relationship. That is one of the issues that will be built into that. It has certainly opened up a whole phase of contribution from a range of different people into the program. We have just done an evaluation of the unit, and the overwhelming sense from the students is that this is a very relevant program and their contribution to it has been outstanding.

Prof. Grundy—I would like to ask Judy Mousley, our Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning, to make some comments.

Prof. Mousley—In my position I see all of the assessment tasks that students do. One of the things I am very conscious of is the need to integrate staff research, their areas of strength and knowledge and their publications and other theories that can be applied to the practical components. The way to get students to attend to those is through assessed work. It is very typical in any of the units to have, say, a curriculum development exercise that is informed by research and then to have time in schools to implement that and reflect on it—get some feedback from supervising teachers, visiting staff and other people—and then to have a final assignment that gets them to apply the theory to the practice very closely and analyse what happened, what could have happened and what they have learnt from the exercise through applying a theoretical lens to the activity. I think that most of the assignments that the students do, including the ones that Alan was talking about that are very school based and seminar based, draw quite heavily on well-known theories.

Prof. Grundy—Dr Harris has a comment she wants to make.

Dr Harris—I want to provide an example. I have two points. The first point is that, in research on beginning teachers that I have undertaken in New South Wales with Paul Brock from the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, it was found that the first year out for teachers is innately about practical issues like classroom management, reporting and those kinds of things.

What you tend to find in the first five years is that the understanding of the nexus between theory and practice emerges. When you interview teachers five years in, they will say, ‘I now get it.’ They will understand that nexus more closely. It used to be that universities were seen as the theoretical strand and schools as the practical strand. If you take the new Victorian Essential Learning Standards—or the ‘Essential Learnings’, as they call it in the Barwon south-west region—and look at the notion of a very heavy theoretical curriculum change, you will see that it has a beautiful theory about lifelong learning and all that kind of thing running through it. We are working in partnership with the department of education and training, schools and students. So this is the kicker. It is actually the students who are working with teachers, and they are learning from each other about this brand new curriculum change. In terms of our being responsive, I think that is innately responsive. That is the point I wanted to make.

Prof. Temmerman—Following on from what both Judy Mousley and Catherine Harris said—and coming back to your question, Luke, about relevance—I think we have lots of examples within the faculty of partnerships that are established with schools. One of the things that we do in nearly all of our courses is ensure that our students get out into schools very early on so that when we are talking about school based experiences, they are not only the professional school practicum experiences but also experiences that are built in and integrated into a number of our different units. So students have the opportunity to observe teachers, to work across the school, to go into libraries, to talk with principals and deputy principals, and to do all sorts of things which are not necessarily the more formal practicum that we usually associate with practical experience.

Mr SAWFORD—Should every university have a teacher education faculty?

Prof. Grundy—I do not necessarily believe so. I believe that the provision of teachers is such a great demand for society that there needs to be a great number of providers just to be able to do that, but the courses that universities provide need to be in keeping with their own missions and their own histories. So I do not think it necessarily follows that, just because you are a university, you therefore should have an education faculty. I think that education faculties need to be very strong. They need to be able to attract high-calibre academics, practitioners and professionals to come and work in them; therefore, they need the support of their universities and the commitment of their universities. So I think it is very important that universities decide what their mission is, what their areas of expertise are, what their history is, what it is they are good at and then make the decisions about that. That is very broad. I think that is about all I can say.

Mr SAWFORD—What is the balance between research skills and teaching skills in your education faculty?

Prof. Temmerman—Are you talking in relation to the staff?

Mr SAWFORD—Yes. Of your staff, who comes from a strong teaching background and who comes from a research background? There is sometimes this question: do researchers make good teachers or do they make lousy teachers? Do teachers make good researchers or do they make lousy researchers? Do you need both? Researchers and teachers have different areas of expertise. Do you need to find another group of people to blend the two together? I want to know how the faculty here works.

Prof. Temmerman—Every single one of our staff members would be involved in research or scholarship of some sort. We consider that highly important. We have a category called ‘active researcher’, which relates to publications and other sorts of criteria. We would have about 65 per cent of our academic staff currently on that active researcher list. But all are involved in some sort of research, whether it is action research scholarship or projects that they are doing with schools.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you think that is the right balance? Does anyone else have a view on that?

Dr Harris—Those 65 per cent would also be very active teachers so I do not know that the dichotomy of researcher and teacher is as black and white as that. Most people here would be trained teachers and would have taught in, particularly, government primary and secondary schools and early childhood schools, and would be active researchers. It is not a dichotomy; it is very much a nexus. It is not an either/or.

Prof. Mousley—That is a really important nexus to maintain and promote. Keeping your knowledge up to date about teaching is not a matter of just going into schools. It is reading what is happening elsewhere in the world and carrying out your own research into areas of your own interest and expertise so that you can contribute that new knowledge to teaching programs. It is absolutely vital that teachers in tertiary institutions are also researchers and that researchers are involved in the act of teaching through their writing, their contact with students and their contact with colleagues. It is impossible to separate out teaching and research in a good teaching program.

Mr Marshall—I agree with all the comments. It is really important, though, to realise that no matter whether a person is a researcher or a teacher on the staff there are avenues to tap into the teaching fraternity to bring their expertise onboard to assist with the current relevance of the teaching. That notion should push aside the whole notion of research. The two do fit together as Catherine said. It is a matter of being able to draw on the right expertise at the right time to be able to bring relevance and show the relevance to the students about what is actually happening. Our task is to help the students make links between the two, to see the benefits of one against the other and to see more than one working together to make the overall end product much richer for our students out in the schools.

Mr SAWFORD—I have one more question and then I will shut up. There is a mission statement on page 6 of 37 of your submission. It seems that when you go out and talk to young beginning teachers they often say that the theory does not fit. Some of them even still say that after five years. Some of the things they get put under pressure on are, for example, when a parent asks them, ‘What is the purpose of school?’ It is a basic question and they cannot answer it. They feel so inadequate. When a parent says, ‘Why is the content of the curriculum organised in this way?’ they cannot answer that either. They are asked another question, ‘Why don’t you work with other teachers in a cooperative way?’ These are basic questions that are asked of teachers and many teachers are inadequate in answering them.

I looked through the mission statement and it is a bit like a jigsaw puzzle. I can see that there is a set of beliefs there, but it is not clearly identified. I can see that you are talking about active learning, curriculum and content, but you have to dig to find it. It is not clearly stated. In fact it is quite vague, obtuse and oblique in my view. There are ‘why’ questions that I think should be answered quite simply and they are about beliefs, rationale, thinking and underpinning philosophy and there ought to be questions about relationships with other staff, with senior staff. They should be much more simply stated.

We had a lot of submissions from universities in Victoria. With the exception of one, perhaps two—and I am a former teacher and school principal—I found them vague and absolutely obtuse. It was there but you had to dig for it; it was not clearly stated. One of the universities came out and stated it very clearly so you knew what the why question was, the how question, the when question, the with whom, the for whom, the measure of, the assessment of and the evaluation of. There was an analytical framework to the teacher education program. Do you think that analytical framework is here at Deakin?

Prof. Grundy—I think you have identified something that has also been identified within the university, interestingly as part of our faculty review last year. One of the recommendations of that review was that we develop a clear statement of our place, our distinctiveness. I am not sure that that statement is going to do all that you are—

Mr SAWFORD—I am not being critical of what you have written. I am saying that a lot of beginning teachers make this point about the theory not fitting the practice. A lot of the research—we had submissions yesterday from ACER—is saying exactly the same thing. These are highly qualified and very well-respected researchers, so it is not just anecdotal, it is based on research.

Prof. Grundy—What I was going to say was that we are engaged in consultative processes in the faculty to develop such a clear statement. We find it is actually more challenging than it appears. I am not sure that there can be simple answers provided to teachers into the future so that they can take the right answer out of their kitbag whenever a parent asks them, ‘Why teach music?’

Mr SAWFORD—I am not suggesting that. I am saying that teachers like to feel comfortable. You are a teacher. They need to be able to put an exposition forward to rationalise what they are doing. If they cannot do that with normal questions that they would deal with in everyday schooling, I think it says something about the way in which we prepare teachers. Maybe there is something wrong with the way schools are organised.

Prof. Temmerman—If you asked lawyers, accountants, doctors, any profession, they would all say that they were really well prepared to be a beginning doctor, a beginning teacher or whatever. But their learning does not stop there. It is about continuous learning. It is about partnerships again. It is about ensuring that universities and the initial degrees connect with what goes on afterwards. So it is a continuous process and our job in terms of pre-service is to make sure that we actually do graduate very good, well-equipped beginning teachers. But that is what we are doing. We are not preparing them for every question that they are going to come across and so on.

Mr SAWFORD—I am not asking that. It is a pretty basic question: what are the purposes of schooling? That is the fundamental question. If you go out teaching and you cannot address that question, I think it says something about what you study. That is a fundamental question.

Dr Harris—I do not have students who cannot answer that question so I am quite shocked to hear you say that.

Mr SAWFORD—Okay.

Mr BARTLETT—I am interested in your selection processes for those who enter your courses. Some of the universities we have spoken to have processes not based just on the entrance scores, as yours is, or the grade average for the postgraduate course. They have an application process at least, in some cases also backed up with an interview process. I am wondering why it is that you think that an ENTER based process is better. Is it just a matter of convenience? How do you eliminate those who might have a good ENTER score but not have the attributes to make a good teacher? Do you think there is a disadvantage in not allowing in students who have all the attributes to be a good teacher but do not have a high ENTER score? What processes do you have in place to monitor and to perhaps weed out those partway through the course who you do not think would make good teachers? Do you have any post-teaching follow-up to see what is happening to your graduates in terms of their effectiveness in the classroom, the attrition rates and so on?

Prof. Grundy—I will work backwards through those and then ask some other people to respond. First of all, in terms of what we do as they go through, we certainly have very rigorous, academic progress monitoring. When we say ‘academic progress’, that means all aspects of the course.

Mr BARTLETT—Including practicums?

Prof. Grundy—Absolutely. In fact at Deakin we would have one of the strongest rules that I have ever seen in relation to practicum in that, as soon as you fail one practicum, you have to show cause why you should continue in the course. That is a very strong provision, but I will ask others—perhaps Trish as our school experience coordinator—to comment on that. I will ask Russell Matthews to make a comment in a moment about selection, and others may also want to comment. Of course only a proportion of our students are coming straight from school. We have non-VCE entrants.

Mr BARTLETT—What percentage would that be, roughly?

Prof. Grundy—That would be about 50 per cent. So it is a substantial number. We do rely on a lot of information in relation to that. As a basic selection criterion, the university requires us to apply a fundamental test about evidence of ability to succeed in the course.

Mr BARTLETT—How do you evaluate that though?

Prof. Grundy—We need to make sure that we apply objective measures—and one of those is the ENTER score—but for other students coming via other means we have to make judgments about other evidence that they put to us. In order to be equitable, we are committed to making evidence based decisions for selection. I would like Russell Matthews to make some comments about that. I wonder whether our registrar, Gillian Burgess, would also be able to add some points.

Mr Matthews—When we select school leavers, the first thing we do is to make sure that the criteria that we use are equally applied, that there is equity in the system. Therefore the one thing that all applicants have in common is their performance at VCE or their ENTER score. That is used first and foremost for school leavers. That is about 50 per cent of our intake in any given year, particularly last year I think. There are two other things that accompany that. First of all there has to be a basic competence in English. They have to have a score of about 25 and they have to have done two units of mathematics at year 11. That is to account for the literacy and numeracy concerns in society at large.

The other group is made of people who have come from a variety of areas. There will be people who want to transfer into teaching who have discovered that law is not the meaning of life, or something like that. For those people, if I have a subquota, the grade point average—in other words their performance at university—then becomes the distinguishing criterion as to whether I would make them an offer. Remember that we are making an offer based on the prediction that these people are going to succeed. If somebody is applying from another faculty or another institution who has failed everything, clearly they will not get an offer, even though their ENTER score from a preceding year may be way up.

So we have people transferring in in that area. We have people who have gained a level IV certificate at TAFE to whom we accord certain credit. There are all sorts of other things that people have done in their lives which are very important—they might be qualified in first aid, sports coaching, swimming, music or a multitude of different things. We ask the people in the non-school leaver category to submit a personal information form with documentation to accompany their application.

So there is a vast array of information that is taken into account in the selection process but there has to be equity. A number of years ago interviews were put in place, and it was proposed that all applicants shall have completed an interview. There were problems. First of all a number of schools refused to undertake the interview—this was practising teachers making recommendations about prospective entrants into teacher education—because it was additional to their workload and they were not being given due reward for it. Then a number of schools chose to do it but, because judgment is subjective, there was no consistency across the outcomes of those interviews, and it was abandoned because there was a lack of equity. That gives you a little profile of some of the processes that were involved in selection.

Prof. Grundy—I wonder whether Mrs Burgess could give you a bit of an outline about the way in which we look at our selection rules, revise them and constantly monitor them.

Mrs Burgess—All of our selection criteria have to go through the university’s committee system. We decide on our criteria and then they have to be approved within the university regulations for admission selection. We have separate rules for each course and we have rules for year 12 entrants and also for non year 12 entrants. Those are roughly the same as Russell has outlined. As regards the issue of interviews, it would be interesting for you to understand the logistics of such a process. The Bachelor of Education (Primary) is one of the courses in Victoria which has the highest number of first preferences. We have over 1,000 year 12 applicants at the Burwood campus and another 1,000 non year 12 applicants—that is, over 2,000 for just one course. There are another 1,000 applicants at Geelong and probably 500 at Warrnambool. That is just the BEd (Primary). On top of that we have the secondary courses and graduate entry courses, and there are probably 500 in each of those courses. So the logistics of interviewing that number of applicants is extremely difficult within the short time frame of selection, which occurs in January.

Mr BARTLETT—Are you satisfied that academic results are a good enough indicator of quality teachers?

Prof. Grundy—That only gets them through the gateway, because we have a great belief in learning and the ability of students to learn. Our commitment is that teaching is not something that you are just born with but a competence and a practice that can be learnt and improved. So students coming in have four years to learn that. I had indicated before that Trish Reid, our school experience coordinator, might want to say something, and then I glossed over her—my apologies.

Ms Reid—I will just briefly talk about what happens through a student's course, because I think one of the questions you asked was: how do we know whether somebody is going to be a good teacher or not? I suppose one of the first ways we learn is that in the first year of a four-year course, students do a lot of activities—and I cannot remember the terminology exactly—in a round of very intensive group work. So through that kind of process you get an idea about whether people are able to develop relationships with other people and work collaboratively. As part of their first year, students also go out and do some observation work in schools with teachers—generally in a primary classroom, although this year we are encouraging students to go out more widely in the community and look at some of the other places where lifelong learning takes place.

In second year, students do their first practicum in second term, so it is very early on in the course. They are in schools in their first year, and in their second year they are doing a practicum. As part of that process, they have to work with a teacher in a classroom. As part of our four-year undergraduate degree, all students—primary and secondary—go into a primary school. That way they get to work intensively with one teacher, in one classroom and with one group of students. From the reports that come back from that placement and from the next placement, we get an idea about whether a student is really suitable—whatever that means—and is able to go on learning about being a teacher or needs further development of their skills.

As Shirley said, we have a policy of fail one practicum and you have to demonstrate to the academic progress committee why you should not be excluded from the course. A lot of students are able to explain to the committee some of the things they deal with all the time when they are at university, including relationships, family problems and the intensity of the work that students do—I know I dealt with them myself, and I am a teacher—and demonstrate why things did not go so well. They are generally allowed to come back into the course, but they have to go through the hurdle of demonstrating to the committee what they have learned about the placement and what happened on the placement. I should add that it is never left up to a teacher in a school to fail a student on their own. An academic staff member goes into the school and works with the teacher to determine whether that student should continue or not. Following a failed placement, students are always followed up by either people in my office or by academic staff members.

Students are in schools very early on in the course, and we are able to identify very early some of the skills teachers need to develop relationships. Things have been added to our school experience reports in the last couple of years that talk about developing relationships and working collaboratively with other people. Some of the additional skills are different from even when I was teaching—which was a while ago. I have gone from being a secondary teacher working in my own classroom to now having to work collaboratively with other people. That has become much more the emphasis of our reports, and teachers are much more willing to report on it.

Ms LIVERMORE—I want to stay on the topic of pracs. We have heard from other courses that they have enormous difficulties in finding prac places. Do you share those difficulties? If so, why? If not, why? Could you elaborate on how you work with schools to make them understand what your students need—your expectations of the placement schools and what your students need out of the practicum experience—and what your students are taking into it as well?

Ms Reid—I manage the school experience office that operates on the Burwood, Geelong and Warrnambool campuses. Some of our difficulties in relation to placement are shared by every university in Australia. I know that because I am in a national association of people who are responsible for practicum placements, not just in education but generally. It is particularly bad in Victoria, and particularly bad in secondary in Victoria. Part of the reason is that the demographic of the staff in secondary schools in particular, but also in primary schools, is changing. There are a number of teachers who are in the first three years of their employment, and there is a very large group of people who are of average age but going towards the twilight of their careers—I have probably offended everybody in the room! The issue is that they have taken on a lot of additional responsibilities in schools or they are tired. In secondary in particular, a lot of them are teaching outside their method areas—outside their direct area of expertise.

There is a whole range of reasons why we are having difficulty with placements in secondary schools, and I am sure I am not going to be able to tell you anything additional to what you have already heard. It is about the polarisation of the work force. I believe it is also about the people who are responsible for coordinating student teachers in schools. It is generally given to somebody who is perhaps not a senior member of staff and it is given to somebody as an additional responsibility. They do not get any time allowance for it, they do not get any recognition for it and they are not necessarily appointed because the school has a commitment to school experience. It could well be that the school does not have a commitment to school experience because it does not have the facilities to place any student teachers in the school. That is one of the other issues that we have: where students are placed when they come to the school. The feedback that I am getting from schools is that they will take maybe five student teachers a term—that is in secondary and in primary. There are exceptions to the rule, but on average it is about five.

I think the other part of your question was about our relationships with schools and how they know what is expected of the students. In primary, we work with a particular group of schools that we have worked with for a very long time. We send them out a very long handbook that is written in plain English. I wrote it. We also send out a memo that is also written in plain English. If people do not want to read the book, they can read the memo. The other thing I found when I came to Deakin was that the people in the schools really needed somebody whom they could contact instantly and who could give them quite good answers to questions. That is why Deakin is committed to employing teachers in the school experience offices. We can provide teachers with the kind of information that they need. The relationship that we have with schools is because of the relationship that has been built up by the academic staff who visit and because of the accessibility of the office.

Mr Marshall—I wonder if I could add a comment there. One of my roles is to go out and visit some of the students who are underperforming in schools. In that discussion with the practicum organisers in the schools, it has become clear to me that in Victoria there is another demand on teachers out there for mentoring first-year out teachers now. This has impacted on their ability to take on trainee teachers. The extra demands that have been placed on them mean that they are less willing to take on trainee teachers because they have the commitment to that mentoring. That is one of the issues that I think is really important.

Another issue is a personal viewpoint that I have. I think there is a sense in teaching that professionalism is still to come to full fruition in terms of maintaining the development of the profession and in terms of making a commitment to being involved in the development of student teachers. I do not have any figures or anything like that to support that, but I firmly believe that the teaching game needs to lift its profile in terms of what it means to be a professional. That might mean some sort of link into the ongoing registration of teachers so that there is some commitment to the development of new teachers. That is something I would like you to look at because I think that is a critical part of the whole process of being a teacher.

Prof. Bigum—I will add a couple of extra points to the issue around school experience. While the practicum is important and a historically significant part of teacher training, it should also be stated that a number of courses and units within the offerings we have are very much school based. Our students are in schools for a whole range of other purposes. The other component that needs to be added to that is that there is quite a significant amount of volunteer work that students do in schools that the faculty also encourages and negotiates on their behalf. To represent the experience of students purely in terms of the practicum is to get a fairly distorted picture of what actually goes on.

Ms Brabham—If I could add one more point to that, the practicum is a real issue for Indigenous students. We have to spend a lot of time building up the partnerships with the different schools in which we place students, not only in this state but in other states as well. The area of professional development needs to be looked at if schools are very serious about not only supporting Aboriginal educators or Aboriginal education workers but also trying to develop new strategies to support Indigenous students, especially in their learning and development stages as a teacher. If we can get over that hurdle, we will maintain more Indigenous teachers out in schools. It is because there is not a cultural shift in the attitude that says that it is okay to be a Koorie Educator or an AEW. The difference is being a teacher and how the school community accepts that.

Mr FAWCETT—My question relates to practicums and the difficulties in getting people to do them. Obviously, the practicum is important. Supervised learning in any profession is a very important part of applying your theory—you have highlighted that you have got one fail, show cause, so it is obviously an important part of qualifying. In many other industries, if you are going to have that assessment and that supervisory role they require a demonstrated level of competence, experience and performance before they will let you fulfil that role but in return they will pay you more to do that. Would it make a difference—you are all sitting here as qualified teachers—if the education departments around the country started looking at paying teachers for performance, competence and the kind of supervisory level of ‘yes, I’ve got a tick in a box, so I can supervise and assess’? Would that encourage more teachers to (a) seek career progression and (b) take on student teachers?

Prof. Grundy—Many of us who have been in teacher education for quite a long time have wanted to see what I think Alan Marshall was picking up on, which is a professional commitment to the ongoing renewal of the profession through mentoring and the transition of new teachers. There can be a debate about whether you do it through some form of performance pay or some form of professional recognition. It has been advocated for a long time, and we would want to see this as something that teachers and schools take seriously. It should be recognised as a function of a school and teachers in a school as well as being able to do this work. For that recognition to happen, obviously, there needs to be some form of recognition of enhanced professional standing. How that enhanced professional standing is recognised is a matter for debate but the idea that this should be an integral part of being a teacher or, for some teachers, an integral part of what a school would do, is quite acceptable.

Mr FAWCETT—If somebody says that it is one of the responsibilities of a teacher to mentor new people that is fine, but as a student teacher you might find that the person who is mentoring you is a lousy performer and your experience is dreadful. You are seeing a bad role model and the kids are behaving terribly because they are a lousy teacher. They might not happen to like you, so you are assessed badly. It is a very negative experience. Would you see a nexus between setting a benchmark to say that people should be eligible to supervise and assess students, and performance criteria set that are recognised and compensated appropriately?

Prof. Grundy—We would love to have some capacity to choose who supervises our students, but sometimes we are very limited in having control over that.

Mr Matthews—I have been in the profession a long time. There was once a system where the department of education in Victoria identified teachers who were deemed to be appropriate to supervise students. It was a measure of professional recognition that those people were competent. They were identified by the principal of the school, and we received the names of those people. There was a very clear expectation that each of those people would take responsibility for supervising students, and they were paid accordingly. There was a margin put onto their salary to take students. In the course of history that evaporated.

Mr Marshall—I am not sure that just payment is sufficient, because payment does not create time, and one of the big issues in schools is time. For teachers to be able to do the mentoring appropriately requires time, and money just does not make time. I think time allowance is a really critical issue in schools.

Mr SAWFORD—Is there a third one called status?

Mr Matthews—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—That is going back to what Russell was saying.

Mr Marshall—Status would be one of those as well. That would not by itself be a complaint, but it would be another factor.

Mr SAWFORD—I know. I am saying that. It is a third one. There is time, status and remuneration. Is there another?

Dr Kavanagh—I think there is another, and that is recognition at the local level of your competencies, your experience and what you can contribute to the school and to its placement within the educational context of the community. I had the experience some years ago as principal in which there were no allowances but we did feel that there were a number of staff who really needed to be given some credit and some roles in teacher training for the school. It was La Trobe University at the time. We found that when we placed those people in positions and gave them time—there was no remuneration but we gave them status in that role—it worked extremely well, and it was still operating when I left the school some eight years later. So I like the idea personally and I have had experience of people working very well when they have designated roles. It would be a great advantage to us in teacher education.

Mr FAWCETT—I have a second question for you about curriculum development. You have talked about the fact that you have a linkage between your researchers, your current staff in schools and the students which is fantastic in getting eyes outside this institution. From a broader perspective, though, it is still very insular because you are only talking to educators. There are two other key stakeholder groups in the whole education process, and those are parents and employers or employer groups et cetera. What involvement, if any, do you as a group who are developing new teachers have with these other stakeholders in terms of what you are teaching—the philosophies and the underlying outlook that you are trying to inculcate in new teachers?

CHAIR—We will need a concise answer to this one because we are running a bit late.

Prof. Grundy—We have a formal mechanism for getting that outsider stakeholder input into our teacher education courses—although I do not think we do it as well with parents, but certainly we do that with the profession—and that is through our advisory boards. Every course has an advisory board. In fact, while we were out there we were just discussing how we would augment our initial teacher education advisory board meeting that will take place in September, because we have our bachelor of physical education degree—I am gesturing behind me because Julia Walsh is the coordinator of that degree—and we are looking at quite a substantial renewal and change in that degree. We will be developing some proposals that we will then take to our advisory board in September. We will augment that board with other specific stakeholders around physical education, health and wellbeing and we will get their input into that. That is one mechanism. We have a number of other formal and informal mechanisms—practicum committees and community committees—where we get that advice into our courses.

CHAIR—Professor, you might like to provide advice on those other mechanisms in writing to the committee. That would be appreciated. Thank you for appearing before the committee today. The secretariat will provide you with a proof copy of your evidence and a copy of the transcript of the evidence will appear on the web site. We really appreciate you taking the time to join us in what is a very important inquiry.

[12.58 p.m.]

BREWER, Miss Jane Elizabeth, Student, Deakin University

COUCH, Mrs Geraldine, Student, Deakin University

CREW, Miss Emma Jane, Student, Deakin University

KNIGHT, Mr Guy Stuart, Student, Deakin University

KOVACS, Ms Sarah Lauren, Student, Deakin University

McCANN, Ms Alexandra Penelope, Student, Deakin University

MARNOCK, Miss Claire, Student, Deakin University

NUSKE, Miss Rachael Ann, Student, Deakin University

PAYNE, Miss Laura Jean-Marie, Student, Deakin University

CHAIR—Welcome to the inquiry on teacher education and thank you for being a part of the student forum. We really appreciate the time you have taken out of your busy day to come and join us. I think it is really important that, as a committee, we get to hear from the students receiving teacher education: what they like about it, what they do not like about it, what the education faculties are doing well and what they could improve on. Rod is a teacher of longstanding in a past career, as is Kerry. They are very keen and passionate about education, as no doubt you are as students.

As a part of the formalities, I must tell you that the proceedings of this student forum are a formal part of the public hearing. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. I would like to throw the forum open with a simple question: what do you like about the course that you are in and what do you think could be done better?

Miss Nuske—We really like the practicum side of it. We have been given a lot of opportunities to go into different schools. I think we here at Geelong will have gone into six or seven different schools by the time we are done—about 90 days of teaching experience in the classroom. It is levelled too. I have done a prep, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 and I am just about to do a special school round. So we have had a lot of exposure to children and a lot of time in classrooms.

CHAIR—How long will you be spending in the special school?

Miss Nuske—My next round will be for three weeks. I am looking forward to it. It is very good.

Miss Payne—I am doing a bachelor of physical education. Our course has been fantastic with how much exposure we have had to different sports. I know that in the past courses have been run without the exposure to as many sports as we have had. It has been fantastic. Also, again, the teaching rounds aspect has been really good—getting out there into those schools, starting with observation and then gradually progressing into teaching. I am actually doing the St Michael’s internship. I have spent a whole year in a school doing teaching rounds throughout the school, doing camps like horse riding camps, coaching and all different types of things. That has been fantastic in our course.

Miss Brewer—The curriculum studies component of the degree I am doing—I am also doing a bachelor of PE but I think some people doing other courses might agree as well—in both biology, which is my second method, and PE, gives you a context of how to go into a classroom and teach and what exactly you will be tackling. There is a really practical side to the discipline studies. So rather than just being told, ‘These are the facts you are going to be teaching,’ we are told, ‘This is how you are actually going to have to teach it.’ It also ties in really well with the practicum, which I found really good and useful.

CHAIR—What could be done better?

Miss Marnock—I think that the thing that really needs to be done better is that we need a lot more experience in schools. We only get 10 half-days of observation in our first year. I do not think that really gears us up for it very well. There were a lot of people who dropped out a bit later than I thought they would have because they did not have that much observation of schools. When they got into their first really big round they said, ‘Hang on a minute. This is not what I want to do.’ I think we need a little bit more practicum than what we have.

Mrs Couch—I am of the same sort of feeling. You have to undertake additional time, which we actually all have done since rounds. We will go back and usually commit at least two hours a week in a class just doing literacy or numeracy. I am doing bike ed at the moment; you go on your camps. I know there is a certain requirement with regard to how much the government pays for teachers to have a student teacher. I think it is terrific the way we are sometimes sent into schools to work in groups—to work with perhaps literacy or our science component. That is great. But I think we have had to undertake our own extra time to give ourselves the needed practicum.

We will go back and the teachers will give us opportunities within that hour or two to actually teach. I do not think there is enough time teaching in a school. Particularly compared to quite a few years ago, teachers would spend maybe in the last semester nine 10 or however many weeks it was. It was a lot more than what we are having now. Unless you are given the opportunity, and the school too, to do what you can do you might be limited. It all depends on where you are too. You might be at a school that does have specialists in art, music and PE, and they got off to those specialist classes. That is your time you are given to plan. But then you might go into a school where you do everything. So it all depends where you are as to how much opportunity you are given and how much free rein and how much support. But I must admit that at each school we have been to we have been given a tremendous amount of support by the staff. So that is fantastic.

Ms McCann—I do agree that perhaps we need more practicum experience but I also think it is about balance between practicum experience and making sure we get that theoretical background. During my first two years at university, I thought ‘What’s going on? This isn’t relevant to me.’ It really was a struggle for me to get through. But now in fourth year—I am doing primary education—I am realising that that theoretical background is extremely important. So I think maybe, particularly in the first couple of years, we need to get much more of a balance between the theory and the practicum and make sure the two are linked.

Assignments and so on could relate more to the practicum, with the theory in it—so asking how this theory could be applied to the classroom area. Also, providing more practicum experience could become a policy. We need to make sure there is the opportunity for students to not so much get out of it but be exposed to a whole school—so we might look at doing a practicum with a school as opposed to with just one teacher, in case there are personality clashes or problems with one person in particular. If you are locked into being with someone that you do not necessarily get along with, the likelihood of dropping out of the course is fairly high, when maybe that is just one bad experience.

CHAIR—Who found standing out the front for the first time a difficult experience? Was it difficult or easy?

Mr Knight—I just want to go back to the last question about what could be done better. To get more males into teaching we need to be focused a bit more on the minority and on the changing nature of being with children as a male. We need to focus on that within the course and there needs to be something that covers it. At the moment, I am in third-year primary teaching and no-one has spoken to us. Obviously, you know what you should not do, but you see the female teachers cuddling children when they have fallen over and you have to step back. You obviously need that nurturing within the primary school, but I think that could be focused on more and would help more men get into teaching, just so there is that professional standard.

Mr SAWFORD—It is interesting that you raise that. One of the first lessons I got on the first day that I was a teacher was for the principal to take the four newcomers—I was one—into the office. There were a number of rules set down. The first rule was: you will never be with a child on your own. At the time it did not actually mean a big deal, but during that week a young teacher shot himself in another school after being falsely accused. It was a front-page story. It turned out that it was a false allegation, but it stuck in my head. I did that with all my teachers and all my staff. I think there has been an overreaction. It does not matter whether it is a female teacher, either. You should never be with a child on your own—it is another person’s child. With what happens in a classroom when someone falls over, I think there has been an overreaction and that needs to balance out a bit. It has always been a problem; it is not a new thing. I do not think it is actually handled that well in the current climate. I think it is handled very badly.

Ms LIVERMORE—How does the feedback work when you are on your prac? How do you find out how you have gone and how is it used as a learning experience? Is it done effectively?

Miss Marnock—I have received a couple of extremely bad reports from teachers who thought they would use the report like they would use it for a primary school student. They listed every mistake I made as a practising teacher. This report is something that I want to put in my CV to get myself a really good job. Sometimes they can be really quite 'teacherish' about it, I guess. They tend to forget sometimes that you are a professional as well. You are learning to be a teacher; you are not a student in the same sense as their students. It is hard to be taken seriously sometimes.

Ms LIVERMORE—How does what you do on the prac get tied back into what happens at university? Do you talk with your lecturers about what you learned or ask questions about what you saw?

Miss Marnock—After each practicum in our education studies major we will usually have a debriefing in which a lot of extremely funny stories are told. I am just speaking about the primary education course, but occasionally we get some assignments that relate to our practicum. But they could be related to any education situation. I think it is a bit different with secondary education.

Miss Payne—In secondary education we get an evaluation at the end of most classes. I have had positive experiences, where the teacher has come to me and sat down and said, 'This is what we need to work on.' For the next class you will usually work on what you did wrong in the last class. There is always positive and negative feedback, and the criticism is constructive. On top of that, we have a lot of assignments that are tied in to how we have gone on our teaching rounds, so that we can become reflective teachers and can evaluate ourselves. That is tied into our assignments.

Miss Brewer—It has not been like that for me in all of my practicums. I think there needs to be a lot more support and guidance or training for teachers who are having student teachers. There is a lot of disagreement on what happens on practicums. Very rarely has it happened on my rounds that someone has said, 'Let us go through it.' Maybe one teacher has done that with me, so there is a big discrepancy. I think it depends very much on who your teacher is. How your rounds are depends on whether you have a supportive teacher who acts as a mentor.

The other issue with the internships is that you have those mentors and you have a whole school, virtually. It seems that Laura has had access to a lot of different mentors across the whole school. Perhaps it would be fine if we were to increase practicums, but you might just spend a lot of time with someone who does not want to have you as their student teacher. That is no good; that is absolutely useless. That is the sort of situation we were talking about earlier in which people might drop out.

Miss Nuske—We have lecturers come down to the school and see us while we are doing our placement. They meet with us and our supervising teacher. That is very supportive and really good.

Miss Crew—I have not had positive experiences on my teaching rounds. I have had one positive experience.

CHAIR—How many rounds have you done?

Miss Crew—I have done four. On my last rounds, my teacher was not aware I was coming that day. He told me to sit at a desk and wait until recess because he did not know what to do with me. He was unwilling to give me classes. He said, ‘I know what I am doing. You will not know what you are doing with this class. You will not understand what they have to do.’ So I was just left to my own devices. Even if I did take classes, he was really not prepared to talk to me about them afterwards. He told me straight down the line: ‘I did not want a student teacher. I have had too many student teachers. I am sick of student teachers. They are never any good.’ At the end of the rounds he said, ‘You were not too bad. You were a good one. I am happy to have you back next time.’ But it is not good. It is not confidence building to be treated like that.

Mr FAWCETT—Obviously there are two areas of feedback. It strikes me that the useful one is the nitpicking detail: teachers treating you as a student and saying, ‘These are the things I observed,’ but for feedback to the university and to your future employer what you are really looking for is a statement of overall performance and potential, saying that, at the end of the day, you are a student teacher. What if something like that were brought in—say, you got a nitpicking one back to you and to your tutor but you also got an overall statement of your performance and potential?

Miss Marnock—I cannot actually use any of these reports in my portfolio now, which is really annoying. I want to have a fabulous report to put in there and they have all got ‘satisfactory’ on them instead of ‘highly satisfactory’, because of the teachers I have had. It is good in one way, because I can learn from what they have given me, and I do not want to say to them: ‘I want to use this as something I can take into an interview.’ They want to give me some feedback. So that would be a good idea.

Ms McCann—There is absolutely no standardisation. What might be highly satisfactory to one teacher is not satisfactory to another. There is absolutely no way of actually judging it. It rest totally on one person’s opinion. Yes, they might be a leading teacher, they might be a fantastic teacher, but you might do something that they do not like whereas another teacher might really like that and think it is great.

Mr FAWCETT—Is there any assessment criteria provided to them?

Ms McCann—Yes, but I have had experiences where it just depends on how they interpret it. There is not a day where they can go and learn.

Miss Marnock—There is not a document that comes with the whole lot.

Ms McCann—There is. There is a criteria document.

Miss Marnock—I know, but there is not something that says how to interpret it or anything like that.

Ms McCann—No.

Miss Marnock—There are a couple of sheets of paper—and half the time they do not read them.

Ms McCann—Yes. That is the other thing: it depends on whether they really look at it. There is no real information, no basis. That is the way it comes across to me.

Mrs Couch—In one round with one of the teachers, we did not hit it off as personalities but there was probably a respect for each other. But I found the criticism that he gave me was more in terms of putting things in place into my lessons. He felt, at the end of the time, that I had made the improvements that he had suggested. Even though we had not got along as such, there was still a good working relationship. He still gave me a very good report based on overcoming some hurdles within our working relationship. And a third teacher who was also in the classroom observed the way he spoke to me doing a lesson. He would interrupt a lesson and ask me to clarify. I was shot down a few times in front of the kids. We have been encouraged, when we are on rounds, to really just go with the flow because you must ensure that you work well with people. It was only this third teacher who said to him one day, ‘I really don’t think I like the way you spoke to Geraldine during that lesson.’ It was really from there that he was made aware of how things had gone. So the improvements were put into practice, but my reports were good as a result of having to work with him, and the negative things were not put in. He might have put a comment like: ‘You have really improved because of how I have assisted you. You have taken on board things that I have said.’

Miss Brewer—I wanted to add to what I was saying before about the type of practicum that we experience. I think it is important for us to have a broad range of experiences. I have found, in my practicum, that I have had three schools that have all been very similar in their demographic. I have been very lucky because I have had only to travel a maximum of 20 minutes by car to get to any practicum. But I have found that I have not had a huge range of experiences—say, with private education or Catholic schools or anything like that. So I think that could impact on how I am prepared for teaching. I feel now that I am really prepared to teach in a government, middle-class, Caucasian school. But also I have not had a huge range of experience with respect to relationships, mentoring and all those sorts of things that other people have experienced.

Mr BARTLETT—How well do those of you who are doing primary teaching think you have been prepared for the mechanics of teaching numeracy and literacy? For numeracy, how many of you were good at maths or confident with maths? If you were not, has your preparation enabled you to teach it well anyway, regardless of your own disinclination towards maths? And, with your training for literacy, has the focus there been on phonics, on whole of language, or a balance of both? Do you think the balance has been good?

Miss Marnock—Personally, I think our literacy and numeracy training has been fantastic, due to the quality of the tutors that we have had. Especially with our literacy we have been exposed to a really wide range of different ways of teaching and we have been able to pick from that what we think is the best way of doing it. We have not really had extremely biased tutors who have just wanted to do it in one particular way. We have looked at phonics and we have looked at the ins and outs of it. We have looked at the ins and outs of other ways of doing it—I cannot think of them now, but—

Mr BARTLETT—So how will you teach literacy then? Let me ask you this: will your approach be largely phonics based or whole-of-language based?

Miss Marnock—Probably whole of language, I think.

Mr BARTLETT—Why is that?

Miss Marnock—I am not sure, actually.

Ms Kovacs—I had an experience in my first year of uni with numeracy. It was really good to see this one teacher I had. He was really focused on making the lessons interesting for children. I have been really inspired by that, and that is the way I want to teach it. He was actually from Warrnambool and he was a really good teacher. He inspired us to make our lessons interesting. It was good.

Mrs Couch—I think we have had a tremendous education regarding literacy here. We have also had a variety of tutors. They each have their own ways that they have shared amongst us, and we have taken their strengths with us. I do not feel so well prepared, myself, with numeracy. I am not quite sure whether the way we have been taught has been as good as it could have been. We have had science in the last year. We went into schools and it was brilliant. I just wished our maths had operated in a similar process to that. Regarding teaching maths, I have sought out other teachers—one in Warrnambool; not the same one. I have gone and watched people who I have heard have been very good at teaching maths, in order to get ideas from them. I do not feel I have been prepared adequately. Therefore there is extra work that I feel I have to take on to ensure I can teach maths well, because I want to.

Mr SAWFORD—What was the attribute of the teacher who could teach maths well, in your view?

Ms Kovacs—He was really focused on getting kids interested in actual maths, first of all—doing a lot of hands-on activities and that sort of thing, instead of just writing numbers and sums on the board and that type of thing.

Mr SAWFORD—So what did he actually do?

Ms Kovacs—One thing we had to do was a tessellation project. We had to make up our own tessellation. We had to make it as artistic as we could, first of all, colourful and all those types of thing. He said that kids will find that that will be their focus and at the same time they may not realise they are doing maths.

Mrs Couch—In the maths that I went to in Warrnambool, the teacher made fractions and decimals absolutely wonderful to learn. I used the same technique in a class I had last year with a class that predominantly worked from the Nelson maths book with very little introduction—there was very little hands-on maths work at all. The class used a clothesline with little cards over it. I had all these cards labelled with decimals such as 0.1—and 0.01 for the kids who were a little switched on. Each kid had time to peg a little card on to show where it was in relation to zero and one, so each child was challenged. It was an open-ended class, and it challenged every child. There was not a child in that class who was not challenged by a simple task. You could see the really bright kids' minds were ticking over: 'Where's that going to go?' But I also found in the end that some of them were saying, 'When are we going to do the book?' They had been regimented to work from this book and to speed through those questions as quickly as they could to get to the end to get the sticker. But they were not getting down and manipulating things, and I did not see a real relevance to life itself, whereas what we were doing with the other guy in Warrnambool was just brilliant.

Mr SAWFORD—The two teachers used teaching aids but they did not use concrete materials? Is that what you are saying?

Mrs Couch—Yes. There were no concrete aids. One boy could not understand it. So we were making things for him. We were playing fraction wall chart games. The children had so much fun switching on—they did not realise that two quarters made a half. This boy was making some inroads, which was so exciting. But we might as well have been asking him about something from year 12 maths when we asked him to add a half plus a quarter on paper, because he did not understand it.

Mr SAWFORD—At the beginning of your introductory comments, you said that in your first year you had 10 half-day observation visits.

Miss Marnock—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—One of the things that happened when people like Kerry and I went to a school on our first half-day observation visit was that we are put in front of the class. On the first visit we were out in front of the class teaching a little five-minute or maybe 10-minute lesson. It was called ‘sink or swim’. When I look back at that, maybe it was a bit too dramatic. But do you think you are mollycoddled a bit in the first year?

Miss Marnock—Absolutely. At the school I was visiting, I walked in there for half a day. I got bandied around the school. No-one really wanted me because I was only there for half a day. I was supposed to be only observing. The school did not have to bother organising any lesson plans with me, and I just sat in the corner feeling useless.

Mr SAWFORD—What sorts of things do you think you could have done on that first day?

Miss Marnock—I tried to go into the school earlier to ask: ‘Which teacher am I going to be with? Can I meet up with them and discuss some stuff I can do? Can I bring anything? What subjects are they doing? Great, they are doing dinosaurs. What can I bring in?’ It was that sort of thing. I was not received very well there.

Ms McCann—Your enthusiasm was squashed.

Miss Marnock—Yes. They could have received me a bit better. They could have given me their timetable so that I could have seen what they would have been doing at that time. I could have brought in things to help out with that, but I did not know what I could have done.

Mr SAWFORD—What could you have done? What could you have offered? What would you have felt confident about doing? Could you have got up and read a little story to the children?

Miss Marnock—Definitely. I was always asking the teachers whether I could do that but they said, ‘No, we’ll do it.’

Ms McCann—I had a completely different experience. I arrived at my first teaching round and I decided that I was not going to sit back and observe. My teacher was fine with that. I told her that I had worked with kids. I had done a lot of stuff with kids before I came to university. I said, ‘I’m more than happy to do extra. I would like to do extra because I do not think I am going to get anything out of observing.’ She said: ‘That’s fine. What can you do?’ So I worked with small groups, I worked with individuals and I read short stories. I got into it a little more like our second teaching round, which is working with small groups and doing short whole-class activities—that sort of thing.

Miss Marnock—I really wanted to do all that, and I was not allowed to.

Ms McCann—Again, it really depends on the same thing that we were talking about before. Because the schools do not have any basis, it is potluck whether you get out of it what you really want and what you can put in.

Miss Nuske—In relation to the 10-day practicum round, the girls here are saying that they want rounds to be linked to the theoretical side. I think the theoretical side for the first half of first year was very much focused on getting to know children—the sorts of backgrounds children are coming from, the children who will present in our classroom and the differences amongst children. The first 10-day observation round is really important in establishing that.

I have not got any younger brothers or sisters, so I was out of touch with what kids were doing. I found that 10-day observation round very valuable in sorting out what kids are interested in now, how they talk to each other and how they interact in groups—the differences among kids and how other kids respond to that. I did not recall any of that from primary school. I went to a country school, and I could not tell you what other kids were doing or how other social circles interacted.

I think a lot of the first 10-day round was initiative too. It seemed to me that the teachers were not sure of what you were comfortable doing. Mr Sawford, you said that you were thrown in on your first day in the classroom to sink or swim. That obviously does not happen anymore, because schools want to cushion you a little bit and make sure that you stay in teaching, which is what you want to do.

I think the opportunities were there to find things to go and do. I remember on my first day seeing a little boy trying to do a maths activity and he had those dinosaur counters. Rather than focusing on what he was supposed to be doing, he was sitting there moving the dinosaurs around and roaring at them. I went over to him and said, ‘What can you do with these dinosaurs?’ I used my own initiative. I did not go to the teacher and go, ‘Can I go and work with him?’ I think that 10-day round turns into what you want it to be. I had a really valuable experience with a lot of children.

Ms McCann—It depends on the school you are with, again, and the teacher as to whether they are going to let you do that.

Miss Brewer—I think there are two things that are really important: the first thing is our experience. Those first lot of rounds, that 10 half-days of observation, were an absolute waste of time for me because I had already had a lot of experience with children. For those who had not, it was extremely important for exactly the reasons that have been said. If you had not had that experience recently or whatever, you need to have that to understand the first lot of theory that you are getting from uni. The other thing, again with regard to what Ally was saying, is that it has a lot to do with initiative and whether you go, ‘I haven’t had a lot of experience; I want to get a lot more experience.’ I think that, if the teachers we were placed with understood that we had varying degrees of experience, some of us would actually be quite happy to take a bigger role, and if they were actually equipped with the capability to give us that extra experience then our experience would have been a lot more valuable. If a teacher had said to me, ‘She says that she has had a lot of experience with kids, so she might like to work with groups and that sort of thing’, then I had the initiative for that. But if they are expecting you to be an inexperienced—

Miss Marnock—Yes, if they are not sure about things.

Miss Brewer—first year and you are there for a half-day a week observation round, then they might not give you those opportunities. Again, I think that the teachers you are getting in practicum need to be better prepared for our situation. Also for secondary teachers in our first semester of second year, we had the exact same rounds again at primary school—again, that was totally useless.

Mr SAWFORD—When you went on that first half-day practicum, how many of you went to that school?

Miss Brewer—I was the only one from Deakin in Burwood.

Ms McCann—That varies.

Miss Brewer—Again, it makes a big difference what school you are at.

Mr SAWFORD—Did the principal say anything to you? Were there any formal introductions?

Miss Brewer—I do not think I was introduced to the principal. I think I have been introduced to the principal at maybe one of the four schools that I have been to. Again, it is very school dependent.

Mr SAWFORD—It is all over the shop.

Miss Brewer—Yes, it is all over the shop, really.

Mrs Couch—Unlike Rachael who did not have any experience really going into a school or admitting to that, I have four kids, I have been a parent helper at a school and I have been an integration aid for 18 months. Yet I found our rounds, which are a bit structured and a bit different—we do a five-day block and then five days that we negotiate after that—and going into the classroom one of the most valuable experiences I could have had, even though I had had that experience. It was a different opportunity with a different teacher where I could learn things I had not experienced, like the way she went about maths activities. I wrote and wrote and wrote as she went on and she played all these games to get this group going—a group who were the lowest group in maths. Because of the experience I had had as an aid, I found I was just drawn to the kids who had special needs. As a result, she then gave me the responsibility to work with a particular group.

I found there was more when it got to sport. I was asked if I played basketball and could umpire, and when I said yes I then umpired a game of basketball for the kids. It just seemed to depend on how things started. She could see within me that I could do something and without asking—my place within the class was really to observe—she gave me these things to do. It all depends on your teacher, but she just judged from me that I could do these things.

Mr SAWFORD—In your first year it was five days?

Mrs Couch—A five-day block and then five negotiated days.

Mr SAWFORD—Was that because you are mature age?

Mrs Couch—No, that is just our set rounds here.

Miss Nuske—We did five and then another five. I am mature age.

Mr SAWFORD—We’re mature age.

Miss Nuske—I am 21.

Ms Payne—I want to add to what Janey was saying. As a secondary teacher, I did not feel there was any point putting us into 10 weeks of half-days in a primary school and the next round again in a primary school. We only have three rounds in a secondary school so that is nearly half and half. I would rather we were thrown straight into a secondary college and do the 10 weeks of half-days observing our methods. There is no point to it. As a secondary teacher, I feel that our course was lacking as it seemed to be more primary oriented than secondary and I did not like that.

Miss Brewer—I thought it was important, especially if you have not had a lot of experience with children, to have that basis in a primary school, so it was quite useful; however, I found that the two lots of rounds were very frustrating. In the second semester of our second year of teaching—halfway through our course—we had our first lot of rounds in the secondary school we were going to teach at. It was just observation, so it was very frustrating.

Mr Knight—The course, the practicum and everything are all good. It is all relevant for us to realise that the children we are going to teach eventually are individuals. Everyone here is saying, ‘It was good,’ ‘It was bad,’ and ‘It was indifferent,’ but we need to realise that when we are going to teach lessons—and this is what we are taught—we cannot teach the same lesson to the same children. Children are not going to respond in exactly the same way. Some people hated the practicum. It depends on what you want to get out of it. Also, the economics of it are that in the first set of rounds the teacher takes you voluntarily. They are saying, ‘I’ll take you,’ and in the second round they are getting paid to take you. You have got to make the most of it as a personal experience and look at it as an overview. Even if it is rubbish, it is still useful because you cannot become a teacher unless you can see the differences in children and in teachers. Everybody is different. We are going to meet these people when we are out in the real world and even if you are not learning how to teach children you are learning how to deal with other teachers and how to work as a team. The practicum is good. You will look back on it and realise that at the end of day.

Ms McCann—Diversity was brought up before and teaching for a diverse range of students in classes. I am from the country, so I am focused on that. In education departments in universities I have seen a lot of country students leave. I am doing country rounds this year. I think that the country side of things has not been represented all that well. I think that a lot of country students at university have dropped out because they cannot afford to live where they need to go to university. They have to pay for rent, food and all the rest of it as well as going to university. I know that getting teachers to the country is a huge issue at the moment and, in terms of diversity and representing that side of our schools, we need to have teachers from the country. I will go back to the country and teach because I am from the country and that has always been my aim. There needs to be something in place to make university a little more accessible to that group of students. I am lucky in that my parents pay for me to go to university. I know a lot of people who had the opportunity, the marks, the intelligence and the motivation to do it but, financially, they are being held back. I just wanted to say that.

CHAIR—Gentlemen and ladies, thank you again for joining us. We really appreciate the feedback we have got. We have been hearing from a range of educational experts and institutions but it is good to hear from the students who are receiving the training because you are what it is all about. It is how effectively we are giving you the tools that you are going to need to go out into the work force and teach in schools. So thank you again. We really appreciate your time.

Committee adjourned at 1.40 pm