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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Reference: Teacher education

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Friday, 10 February 2006

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, Ms Bird, Mr Michael Ferguson, Mr Hartsuyker, Mrs Markus 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

Committee met at 10.49 am

HALLIDAY, Ms Susan Maria, Chairperson, Victorian Institute of Teaching

IUS, Mr Andrew Paul, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Institute of Teaching

NEWTON, Ms Ruth Allison, Manager, Accreditation, Victorian Institute of Teaching

CHAIR (Mr Hartsuyker)—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training into teacher education. The inquiry has examined a broad range of issues which impact on how well we are preparing teachers for their complex, demanding and critical role in educating our children. It has generated considerable interest across Australia. To date we have received well over 160 submissions and we continue to receive more.

We now have almost completed our schedule of public hearings, having visited Victoria, Queensland, the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia. We have also held several previous hearings in the ACT. I welcome representatives from the Victorian Institute of Teaching. I remind you that public hearings are recorded by Hansard and that a record is made available to the public through the parliament's web site.

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. I invite you to make some introductory remarks.

Ms Halliday—It is opportune for us to appear before you today because we feel we do have some significant input into the inquiry. The Victorian Institute of Teaching is the independent statutory authority, the regulatory body that regulates and promotes the profession in Victoria. It is a historic entity, in that it covers the independent Catholic and state sectors. We are, in fact, the largest profession in Victoria. We have over 100,000 teachers in Victoria that are registered with our authority. I am the inaugural chair. The legislation was passed in 2001. We started our business in mid-2002 and did our registration of teachers as of January 2003.

We have a range of responsibilities under our legislation, the Victorian Institute of Teaching Act 2001. When you expand on what 'regulation promote' means, it also means to deal with the disciplinary issues of deregistration ensuring that all those entering the profession or re-entering the profession are fit and proper which, of course, extends to criminal record checks and a range of other things. We also have a range of responsibilities around accreditation of all the courses for teacher education in Victoria.

Our board comprises 20 people. They come with a range of expertise. They do not necessarily sit with representative hats on from the various sectors, or stakeholders; they come as independent experts and entities within the education profession. Many of them are practising teachers and some are principals. I and my colleagues are all originally teachers as well, although we have moved into various other spheres of life and done other things. So we come

together as a body that is highly representative of the community and the education sector with a lot of expertise.

The accreditation committee and other committees are drawn originally from, or had some membership in, that council that governs the institute's work and administers the legislation. The accreditation committee is the largest committee. Ruth and Andrew are very involved with that committee. We also have a chair who is a member of the council. That committee has representation from every university in Victoria—from teachers, from principals and from parents groups—working on what is required in teacher education courses in the 21st century. We have been actively involved in helping institutes to upgrade their educational areas and their courses for teachers. We have also been well guided by the Victorian inquiry into pre-service teacher education and a range of other pieces of research over recent times. I will leave it there.

Mr Ius—It might be useful just to give a bit more of an overview of the operations of the accreditation committee and put that into brief context. In Victoria, prior to the establishment of the institute, the Department of Education and Training had a Standards Council which provided advice to the department about the appropriateness of pre-service teacher education programs, essentially for the purposes of employment within the government sector. With the establishment of the institute the function of accrediting pre-service teacher education programs for the registration of teachers was enacted, and so we have, as Susan has mentioned, an accreditation committee specifically for the purposes of doing that work. To date that work has been undertaken under the aegis of some guidelines which were previously the guidelines of the former Standards Council.

But not long after its establishment the institute put in place its own what we call future teachers project with a view to moving the whole accreditation process which, under those guidelines, is still very much oriented towards the inputs side of things, looking at the quality and the diversity of the inputs that are brought to bear on the development of these courses. Our intention, specifically now with the recommendations of the Victorian parliamentary inquiry, is not to lose the focus but to build on that focus with much more attention to outcomes orientation. In that respect we have already developed, and are about to consult widely on, a set or of standards for graduate teachers. We have used the standards framework that we have developed for the full registration of teachers as the framework we intend to move forward with to put in place some outcomes or expectations and we will look at monitoring and working with universities to start building up a benchmarking capacity.

It is important to understand that much of that work happens behind the scenes. We focus on courses, not on the institution, so we look at every course separately. Our focus very much is to look at the courses against the guidelines. That is done by panels, from the accreditation committee, who interrogate the information that is provided by the universities. They may well go and visit, discuss and raise issues with the universities and, where there are concerns or issues, attempt to resolve those and ensure particular concerns are addressed before any formal recommendation is put forward for those courses to be approved.

Once every five years it is expected that those courses would come up for review. So a dialogue and a discussion take place. But that discussion, as we move forward, will be much more oriented around outcomes. I might just leave it at those sorts of general comments and see if there are particular questions that you might want to raise or pursue.

CHAIR—I am sure members of the committee will have a range of questions. I might lead off. You mentioned the shift from an inputs based approach to an outputs based approach. How, in practice, do you implement your outputs based approach to the accreditation?

Mr SAWFORD—Maybe it is the same sort of context because in education people use terms and they have different definitions for us. Perhaps you could just give us your view on what you mean by outcomes based?

Mr Ius—I suppose by outcomes, I mean an expectation of the skills, knowledge and capacities that you would expect a teacher leaving a program to have. Unless you articulate that then it is hard to say what are your outcomes or the output measures you are trying to work with. That is why, from our point of view, the establishment of those standards is the critical element in the process.

We now have an articulation of what we expect to be the knowledge, skills and attributes of graduates who exit pre-service teacher education programs. With that in place we can then go back and start to assess with universities how those are or are not being achieved. One of the important elements that we will be putting in place to do that is establishing a benchmarking survey.

In 2004 we trialled a survey instrument which we developed in consultation or with the assistance of the Australian Council for Educational Research to look at establishing a questionnaire and a capacity to elicit information from graduates and their employers as to what they thought and how well their programs prepared them for their early years of teaching.

The testing of that instrument provided us with some confidence on its validity. So as we move forward we will be refining that instrument alongside our graduate standards and using that as a benchmarking tool. That process has already happened in Victoria under the aegis of the former Standards Council but their survey instrument was identified as being too blurry around the edges of what was the responsibility of the university versus what was the responsibility of the employer.

So we have built on that in constructing a new instrument, which will be a critical tool in being able to allow us to look course by course at what is happening with teacher education and then also to try to provide some advice back to universities on benchmarking so that we can show them how their course stands up against other courses that they offer or how their course stands up against other comparable courses that other institutions are offering in Victoria.

CHAIR—Setting aside the survey side of it for a moment, in assessing the outcomes you, as an organisation, will still very much be depending on the universities basically to assess the competency of the students, or would you be proposing to put in external processes over and above what the university does?

Mr Ius—We would still largely be relying on the universities assessments of the qualifications and competency of their students. However, you will see that one of the recommendations in the Victorian inquiry is to put a lot more emphasis on providing classroom teachers with the capacity to be involved in assessing the students, particularly through the school experience and the practicum arrangements. That is something we are attending to in the

revision of our guidelines to ensure that there is a stronger say by the profession around those sorts of issues so that there is not simply a recommendation type process but hopefully a more direct capacity for them to give assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of the students as they are seeing them, particularly in the final element of their practicum.

Ms Halliday—It might be worth while for you to understand what Victoria has initiated with respect to a different type of system to what has been known previously with respect to registration. A teacher who exits a university with a qualification only receives provisional registration. They enter a school and they need to demonstrate a range of criteria that meet the standards over a significant period. For some that might be six to eight months—for others it might be 18 months—before they then qualify as a fully registered teacher in Victoria. We have established through a pilot and ongoing program a mentor system that takes those teachers through that process. I note that one-third of those mature-age students who are coming through in Victoria and who have a range of other worldly experiences choose to enter teaching in their thirties or forties.

On top of what we have with the exit point at the university, we now have provisional registration prior to full registration. It is fair to say that there are people who, within that period, either determine that teaching is not right for them, which is a good decision to make at that time, or that they do need some extra support for a range of reasons to get through that provisional to full registration, and there are those that fly through. It is a very timely and appropriate determination about how people should enter and continue to grow as new entrants to the profession. It has been particularly good for us and the profession, we believe, to better groom those people for that future career.

CHAIR—And that comes from the mentor teachers?

Ms Halliday—It is a formal process. They have to demonstrate that they are meeting the standards, they have to be signed off by the principal of the school and they have to provide evidence of that to the institute to achieve their full registration.

Mr BARTLETT—Are there any practical implications of full registration such as salary differences, job security, or any of those sorts of things?

Ms Halliday—No.

Mr Ius—Those are issues that the employers handle. For us it is simply a status issue in terms of provisional registration verses full registration. Some employers correlate or link in their performance assessment processes with our processes and then spring off that for their own assessment processes and say, 'Yes, okay, that entitles you then, as a consequence, to career progression.' Employers do use our system. So it is not only separated; it is integrated. But the purpose from our point of view is essentially to make the judgment that, yes, this is a teacher that has demonstrated that they meet the basic standards of competency for someone who is just entering the profession.

CHAIR—Just on my knowledge of what you are achieving as opposed to a range of other accreditation bodies around the country, it would appear that you are significantly better resourced than a range of other accreditation bodies, particularly in the smaller states. I am

interested in your thoughts. This is a bit of a states rights question on a national accreditation organisation. Perhaps that could be your organisation that provides fee for service to the smaller states rather than reinventing the wheel right around the country. I am just interested in your thoughts on that.

Ms Halliday—I was hoping you were going to stop at, 'You are better'; anyway it just extended on.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Chair, could I just tack onto your question. What is your relationship with NIQTSL? I think it is now known as Teaching Australia.

Ms Halliday—You might just start with AFTRAA.

Mr Ius—I think it is important. We simply want to highlight the fact that a national framework for professional standards for teaching has now been agreed by the ministers of education. Not only is there that standard; the ministers have said that they expect that standards framework to be used to align standards by the end of 2006.

CHAIR—But we still have a range of bodies that are out there.

Mr Ius—That is right.

CHAIR—Some are resourced better than others.

Mr Ius—Some are possibly resourced better than others. All of those bodies are now working collaboratively to try to get that alignment happening. It is happening under the aegis of what has become known as AFTRAA, the Australasian Forum of Teacher Registration and Accreditation Authorities. So that is a bringing together of all the state based statutory authorities that now exist in Australia and New Zealand because of the fact that we have the trans-Tasman mutual recognition arrangements to address as well.

In that context there is work under way to try to build, if you like, a unified rail system for teacher education across Australia. That work is progressing. They are all working to develop standards, where they do not have them already, that are consistent and aligned with that national framework. Indeed, we have now taken that one step further. A number of the states that already have in place some teacher accreditation arrangements are actively sitting down and working to establish what are the differences, similarities and complementaries that can be seen across the different elements of the programs and arrangements with a view to springboarding off the alignment of standards to try to build consistency of practice across Australia.

In that context, therefore, it is interesting to identify what the potential for teaching in Australia might be. At the end of the day, the fact that a registration authority or any authority can exercise influence over the teacher education programs is the key question. How will that be achieved? Our capacity is a very strong capacity because of the fact that, ultimately, if the courses are not approved by us, the graduates for those courses cannot enter the profession. That is a very strong, direct influence that we can have in drawing the attention of universities to what we say are the expectations and requirements. I am yet to identify what capacity a national body

might be able to have. Unless it has a lever as strong as that or comparable to that, I am not sure whether it will have any significant capacity to do something with the universities.

The next question from my point of view is one of scale and capacity to achieve consistency. In Victoria I think we have eight universities providing over 30 courses that have to be looked at and reviewed periodically. Those courses do not remain stagnant, even though we have an expectation that over five years they would be reviewed. By the time we get to review a course over five years we have probably already seen it two or three years ahead of that because they are making changes to it. It is a dynamic process. New knowledge and new information are always being brought to bear in these courses and that is always coming up. So there is a significant issue of workload and how that is going to be addressed and how that can be attended to in a consistent manner across the nation. I believe that, if we can construct a national framework, it is possible for the jurisdictions to work within a national framework to achieve some higher degree of national consistency and alignment without necessarily having to place all that work in a national entity.

CHAIR—I have a range of questions but I will ask just one and then defer to other committee members. In the Victorian report there was a recommendation for a substantial increase in practicum.

Mr Ius—Yes.

CHAIR—I noted that the evidence we received from ACER, who has provided you with a deal of research, indicated that more practicum is not necessarily going to achieve a better outcome and that the best graduates are those who have a very strong subject knowledge who have received an adequate amount of practical experience which is related to the theory of pedagogy and the classroom experience. I am interested in your thoughts on the implementation of that recommendation in view of what ACER has said with regard to levels of practicum?

Mr Ius—I think the government response to that recommendation was along the lines that it would pursue it in the context of a national approach. In other words, whilst that might be a recommendation we would prefer to see in Victoria, understanding the implications of it in relation to resourcing, demands for universities and the need to build a national framework and try to be consistent within a national framework, the government's response to that recommendation was to be pursued in that national context. So I imagine that Victoria would be carrying forward that recommendation through both the AFTRAA and MCEETYA network to understand what capacity there might be to build an increased practicum within university programs. The response and the implementation will be framed in that context.

Mr SAWFORD—I have about three sets of questions. If I stick to one this time hopefully I will get a chance later to get back to the other two sets. I found the report *Step up, step in, step out: report of the inquiry into the suitability of pre—service teacher training in Victoria* extremely useful. I am sure other committee members have too. To put it into some sort of context, this House of Representatives committee is the first House of Representatives group to have a look at teacher education. We are all very conscious and aware that over the last 20 years there have been numerous reports in teacher education throughout Australia, which is acknowledged also in this report, but none of them really seem to have nailed anything in particular. There are lots of things but nothing seems to have moved. I think this report

acknowledges the same thing. I wish to ask some questions on the executive summary of the report. Under the heading 'Context for the Inquiry' it is stated:

It is widely recognised that the role of the teacher is probably more complex than it has ever been, requiring an unprecedented range of skills and knowledge.

Is that the problem?

Ms Halliday—I do not think it is a problem. I just think it is an assessment of the reality of the 21st century. In relation to that I think one of the most pertinent and important things we put forward to that committee, and we would choose to do so to you, is that the way we are now operating with respect to the input and accreditation of courses—it is the profession, the people who have the most current and expansive knowledge about what is needed now by the classroom teacher—is feeding back into the process. It is the first time that that has ever happened in a formal and structured way. That is a reality.

I think we have some of the answers, given the model that we now have to feed back into the changes that need to be made to best prepare those young or mature-age students, by utilising the knowledge that exists in the profession. Some of that is achieved in practicum, but with respect to identifying what those courses definitely need to have, certainly teachers and principals are the best people to ask.

Mr SAWFORD—A lot of experienced teachers and principals, as well as young graduate teachers, will tell you that there is too much in the curriculum. Too many of our teachers are being expected to carry out parts of the curriculum for which they are not trained and for which they do not have skills.

Ms Halliday—I suppose you could make a teaching course five or six years long. If that is the case, something has to give.

Mr SAWFORD—That is what I am trying to get at. Is there too much in there and is that part of the problem? Maybe it needs to be a balance between a generalist sort of approach and a specialist approach? Maybe we have downgraded the specialist approach a little too much?

Mr Ius—I think the body of knowledge about teaching has grown and is growing now at quite a considerable rate. Therefore an expectation that you can put all of that into a pre-service program is probably unrealistic unless you are prepared significantly to expand and resource pre-service teacher education programs. Specialism might be a way to go but, at the end of the day, it still brings you to the point that the profession has to recognise, and is recognising, that continuous education is going to be necessary.

It is a constantly evolving field and, therefore, there is an expectation that teachers will have to continually build and develop their knowledge base and skills base as teachers. What probably needs to happen more is an articulation of what those skills and knowledge are so that teachers who need to plan a career path can find a way through that and be guided in that. The profession possibly has not been as good at articulating some of that as it could be.

Mr SAWFORD—The second paragraph talks about the need for 'a balanced mix of professional and pedagogical skills and subject knowledge ... communication skills, relationship skills' and so on. Is that the problem? In other words, the balance is not there?

Ms Halliday—What we know is that some of those young people come out and move into a classroom. What is the most confronting thing for them is having to deal with parents; having to do all the administrative work, the extent of which nobody ever told them about; and having to be involved in a range of other activities in a school. We find that one of the things that is most confronting for a lot of young people when we talk to them is that set of requirements, which is very much about employment. How you prepare people for that is a good question.

Mr Ius—Our understanding is that it is necessary to have a strong induction program. The teaching profession is probably one of the few professions that is mostly in the human services area. The expectation is that someone comes out of a pre-service program, a preparation program, and will go straight into teaching year 12, for example. It is often argued that you would not expect a first-year architect or engineer to go and build or design the Sydney Harbour Bridge, for example, but that is almost the equivalent expectation of teaching and of other professions as well, such as policing, where you go straight into the front line.

The notion of being employment ready to do that is a very difficult concept to come to grips with. Therefore, we believe you have to have a program of induction into the profession that allows people to come in with the necessary skills and capacities but then to be supported to build that. That is an interaction between the employment context and the professional context.

Mr SAWFORD—But the point I was trying to get at was balance or lack of it.

Mr Ius—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—I think the report has correctly identified that there is a lack of balance. I will finish on this and move on to the second set of questions and then give other people a chance. If I said to you, 'If you describe teacher education in Victoria, would you say it was biased towards an analytical approach or a synthesis approach'?

Mr Ius—Would you elaborate on what you mean by those two things?

Mr SAWFORD—I will go on a bit further. When you analyse the accreditation of those courses would you say that it favours implicit teaching or explicit teaching?

Ms Halliday—I would say that, with 30 different courses, it very much depends on the course and the context of that course—whether it is one year, whether it is four years, whether it is metropolitan or whether it is regional. I think that is why it is such a difficult question to answer.

Mr SAWFORD—Let me push down a little further. Do you think what happens in teacher education is more focused on presentation or is it more focused on organisation?

Mr Ius—I think it is difficult for us to answer because we are sitting back looking at the program arrangements and how those program arrangements are put in place. On balance, what we are perceiving as an emerging trend is that universities are trying to put more emphasis onto

the practical experience and build on the realities of teaching. To do that they need strong partnerships with schools.

Mr SAWFORD—I will keep going. When you look at teacher education courses, do you think that they favour continuous assessment over multiple choice answers and examinations?

Mr Ius—My understanding is that they are probably using a range of assessment strategies that they would use throughout their courses, depending on the particular program being followed.

Mr SAWFORD—They do not favour one or the other?

Mr Ius—I am not aware that there would be any particular favouring of one or the other.

Mr SAWFORD—In relation to approaches in teacher education, do you think competition is valued and encouraged or is it discouraged and collaboration is the way in which people go?

Ms Halliday—Competition between whom?

Mr SAWFORD—Just the concept of competition. Competition is not when people who have a high ability are competing against people with a low ability; that is not competition. Competition is when people of equal ability compete against each other.

Mr Ius—My perception—and I do not have any evidence for this—is that teacher education programs would stress the collaborative nature of teaching because just like parenting, when there are multiple adults involved in the development of a child, you need strong collaboration to achieve the best outcome. Therefore, if your notion is about whether they are trying to understand how teachers should compete with each other versus how they should collaborate with each other, my sense is that universities would lean more towards the notion of collaboration, because at the end of the day successful student outcomes are about a team effort, not just an individual teacher's efforts.

Mr SAWFORD—I think that is correct. On literacy and numeracy, if you examine teacher education do you think there is a great bias towards verbal skills and against visual and spatial skills?

Mr Ius—I do not have any evidence I could answer that question on. I do not have any evidence I could base a reasoned answer on. All I could say in relation to that is there has been a strong emphasis, at least in Victoria, because of the work that has been done on the research around literacy and numeracy, on taking that research and building it into the programs around pre-service teacher education.

Mr SAWFORD—This is my last question on this. Hopefully I will get a chance to come back to the *Step up, step in, step out* report. Do you think the research that is tackled at universities in Australia, particularly in teacher education, is biased towards qualitative research in small samples and that there are very few examples of quantitative research?

Mr Ius—Certainly the major systemic programs of research that I am aware of in Victoria have been significant research projects that have involved quantitative analysis as well as qualitative analysis. When you look at the early years research program around numeracy and literacy and when you look at the middle years research programs, you see that they involve both quantitative and qualitative research. The conclusions that were drawn from that research were then looked at and brought into the university sector. Because of the time—as we have now moved on—you probably do not see that any more, but it does happen and it does take place.

Mr SAWFORD—My last comment goes back to the original question about balance. You are giving us the very distinct impression that there is a very mixed message about the balance that is involved in teacher education. Again, when you go through the criticisms of teacher education that are identified in this report, I think it probably reinforces that. I will come back to that set of questions later.

Mrs MARKUS—I have a couple of questions. The first is reflecting on your comments earlier with regard to the national framework and comments that have already been made that you seem to be more resourced. With a national framework—and, obviously, some work is already being done—what would you see as the challenges for the states in resources, looking at what you all have, for that to be able to work? What would be some of the challenges? What is not there at present and what would need to be there? I do not want to focus just on what is not there, but what would be required for it to work effectively?

Mr Ius—I think the challenges are probably different for each jurisdiction. Victoria is not a large state. In relative terms it does not take us very long to get from one part of Melbourne to the other side of Victoria. So the issues and challenges for us are different from the challenges, for example, for somewhere like the Northern Territory, Western Australia or even Queensland, where you have across the state a diverse range of universities offering programs. Our processes and arrangements in Victoria involve a high level of interaction between us and the universities. We become involved and we are invited to become involved almost when courses are being developed or being thought of, so we have a high level of interaction with our universities around the development of their programs. Therefore, we have a capacity to influence early on what happens in those programs. That is a significant element of how we can achieve some outcomes. The capacity for others to have that direct input may well not be as significant in other jurisdictions, where you have the distances factor or no capacity to get that involved. I think challenges are going to be different for each jurisdiction.

Ms Halliday—Some of that is about culture and developing relationships with the universities and their understanding that we are not a threat. A lot of groundwork went in with the first institute. Operating the way we do across the country with advanced legislation, we made it very clear that we wanted to be inclusive and that we wanted the profession and the universities to work together. A lot of groundwork was put in there by the secretariat and the council to establish the right culture from the outset. Resources cannot buy that.

Mrs MARKUS—You are also talking about the approach being significant?

Ms Halliday—Absolutely.

Mr Ius—The other challenge is language—that is, getting behind the language and the terminology. One experience that we are discovering working with our other interstate colleagues is that, when we start comparing what we mean by the things we are saying, at the end of the day we start to realise that we are starting to say the same things.

Ms Halliday—We are just using different words.

Mr Ius—We might be expressing them differently because of the dynamics of the context we are in. In one state you talk about things in a slightly different set of terms than you do in another state, but when you start to explore that you discover that, basically, it is about the same sorts of issues and the same sorts of things. We discovered from a quick pulling together of the guidelines we have in Victoria with those in Queensland and those that are being developed in New South Wales that there is more that is the same than there is that is different.

Mrs MARKUS—I want to focus briefly on recommendation 7 in the report, where you mention attributes and the balance between academic ranking and aptitudes. You mentioned attributes earlier on when you were talking about standards. You have some suggestions there, but how would you see the balance between attributes and academic knowledge, skills and so on? Where would you put that? Do you think it needs to be equally balanced? What are you already doing in that area?

Ms Halliday—I think we have to start by saying there are some ground rules that we have mandated around language skill and the number of years of a course. There are now some givens that are unmovable. After that you can start to look at a balance, and that has caused some contention where people may not have the language skill that we deem they need. For a range of reasons, we encourage people to increase their skill base.

Ms BIRD—Could you clarify whether that is their entry to training or to the profession?

Mr Ius—I think this recommendation is about entry to training. In Victoria currently the majority of selection into the undergraduate programs essentially is done on ENTER scores, whereas entry into postgraduate courses is largely done on anything other than an ENTER score. The recommendation acknowledges that there needs to be in the current balance, which is heavily oriented towards using just academic results, an infusion of other attribute measures. We have started exploring that. We have commissioned some work on what has been developed for other professions and the capacity to bring such a system into play. One major challenge of such a system is the numbers that you are dealing with. We have about 4,000 graduating students every year out of Victorian universities. The application pool is far greater than that. Teaching is still one of the high-demand areas in Victoria and there are far more people applying for teaching than there are places available. The capacity for universities to sift and sort and to spend a considerable amount of time on it in a very tight time frame is very low. We are starting to explore what other mass type programs that have been able to develop attribute assessments that might be relevant to teaching.

Mr SAWFORD—Can I add a bit to that, because I think that question Louise asked is a very good one. The report acknowledges—as you, Andrew, have just said—that teaching is attracting a higher quality of student right around Australia. There is an increasing trend to mature age people coming in to teaching.

Mr Ius—Yes, mature age students are coming to it, particularly in the secondary courses.

Mr SAWFORD—But there is also some disquiet about that, because a lot of the intake is metropolitan, middle class and female. We are not getting men and we are not getting people from regional and provincial Australia into teacher education. Do some of those attributes need to be considered as well?

Mr Ius—I do not know that you can put an age attribute into a course requirement.

Mr SAWFORD—The age does not worry me but the applicants being metropolitan, middle class and exclusively female does worry me. It does not seem to be a problem.

Ms Halliday—It is not exclusively female.

Mr SAWFORD—It is getting that way.

Ms Halliday—If you look at the campaign that AFTRAA institutes ran around last year for World Teachers Day, you will see that we looked at the entry of people into the profession and celebrated the diverse nature of that. We had many men from different vocations—that is, from builders and architects to people who had been in the law.

Mr SAWFORD—I understand all that, but they are still a small percentage. We have looked at the numbers; they are still a small percentage. Rather than the gender thing, the more important thing for me is that we are not getting people from provincial and regional Australia, we are not getting people from Indigenous groups and we are not getting people from disadvantaged areas. There is a huge fall down in those areas. I think that has tilted the balance of what happens in teaching towards a very narrow end. What I am asking is: do you think it is important that teachers be deliberately recruited from disadvantaged backgrounds—that is, from Indigenous backgrounds and from regional and provincial Australia? That is really all I am asking.

Mr Ius—I think it is important.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you think we should do something about it?

Mr Ius—I think it is important for the teaching profession, because of where it sits in society, to reflect the diversity of society. It is important that we see across the profession the range of people that are in the society at large. That means we need to see within the profession people from Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal backgrounds and new arrivals. A whole diversity of people should be within the profession. I think there is a recognition that we need to start to broaden some of that. In Victoria, for example, the government has instituted a rural teacher retraining program to try and assist people. It has also instituted a graduate recruitment program to try and bring into the profession other people who might have alternative pathways and start to address that question of a broader balance across the profession.

Ms Halliday—We do see quite a significant influx of diversity with respect to religion and race in Victoria. It is fair to say that we have an enormous interaction with like bodies overseas because of the trade in teachers both ways. From an international perspective we are actively

involved in ensuring that the people we allow to teach are appropriate to teach in Australia, even if it is for a short period. I think there is quite an element of diversity that may be going unnoticed with respect to religion and race.

Mr Ius—In that context it is important to note that entry into the profession is not only from pre-service programs.

Mr SAWFORD—I understand that.

Mr Ius—We register about 8,000 teachers a year in Victoria. Only about 4,000 come out of pre-service teacher education programs; the others come in through skilled migration programs, interstate transfer arrangements and people returning to the profession. The diversity of entry into the profession needs to be looked at at a different level from the diversity of those coming out of pre-service teacher education programs.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—You ran and reported on stage 1 of a project called the Future Teachers Project.

Mr Ius—Yes.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Were you interviewing or surveying students while they were in service or after they had completed their studies?

Mr Ius—No. In that program we surveyed teachers who had been teaching for at least one year and their employers, their principals.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—You have explained how they gave some feedback on how well prepared they felt, but did they identify any weaknesses in the courses that they had completed once they had been chucked into that deep end of the pool?

Mr Ius—That survey was designed not so much to elicit what they thought they were not being well prepared in or where their weaknesses were but to test the validity of an instrument that we were using or intended to use. Previous work that we are aware of that has been done in Victoria has identified some areas of weaknesses where students felt that they had not been well prepared, which tended to correlate with the principals' perceptions of those weaknesses. Those areas tended to be such things as dealing and interacting with parents.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Behaviour?

Mr Ius—Classroom management I think was identified in one of those reports as a bit of an issue.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Don't you use the term 'behaviour management'?

Mr Ius—It is used differently. It depends. There were some areas that were identified as areas for improvement in terms of what universities needed to focus on. The interesting thing that also came out of that work, however, is that the students tended to be harsher on their own assessment than their principals were. Their principals saw them as being generally or overall

quite well prepared, with some areas that needed improvement. But the students were far harsher on their assessments of themselves. It was quite an interesting result.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—This is possibly outside your purview, but you must in your role have some insight into whether or not some universities after graduation provide support to students. Have you seen any evidence of that and of where that has been a valuable exercise—that is, of when a university really has finished its obligations but still provides some sort of support?

Mr Ius—I am not directly aware of that. Universities do offer a range of postgraduate study programs and courses et cetera to continuously engage with teachers, but I am not aware of a structured program where they have intentionally, with an alumni type approach, tried to follow up with their graduates.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Do you think there would be some value in that if it were pursued to some degree? You have talked about the greater need for somebody, whether it is the institution or the employer, to take some responsibility for some induction and mentoring in, shall we say, that first year.

Ms Halliday—Most of that happens and we have a lot of feedback from the provisional registration process, because every new entrant has to go through that process. They need a mentor and they need to be signed off, and somebody takes responsibility for supporting that person and signing them off.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Is it happening in the school itself?

Ms Halliday—Yes, it is in the school. We are also looking at how we manage it for that significant percentage who work as CRTs, casual relief teachers, so they do not get left behind. That part of the profession in itself has a different nature, and it is quite substantial. The system relies on all three sectors. Our induction program as the provisional registration picks up an awful lot of what you are talking about. We are finding that it is a very successful, albeit reasonably new, standardised activity and that it is one on which we get a lot of feedback.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—I think I misunderstood that.

Ms Newton—I think it is worthwhile mentioning too that in that project the provisional teachers get to meet together as a group for at least two days, as do the mentors, and the principals also have some input via half-day seminars. So it is not just people operating independently in their own schools through that process; there is also a lot of cross-networking and support through those mechanisms.

Ms Halliday—All those mentors go through a training program that we run, so they are all trained in exactly the same way. They all get the same understanding of what their responsibility is as somebody partaking in that provisional process with a new entrant.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Are you aware of this happening anywhere else?

Ms Halliday—We know our model has been looked at.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Speaking for myself, I would like to see some more information on how you do that. Do you have something that you could share with us?

Mr Ius—We could certainly provide you with the relevant background and information on that program.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—That could really inform one of our recommendations.

Mr Ius—I am not aware that it is happening in a structured, state wide, coordinated program. It is certainly happening in other states, and different schools have different practices, so you cannot say that it is not happening. I think the thing that possibly distinguishes the arrangements in Victoria is that all three sectors have sat down and agreed to work with us to implement a coordinated state wide mentoring and induction program. Each sector will resource it slightly differently and will do slightly different things, because they have some other priorities et cetera within their sector, but we have established over the past few years a common basis on which to work.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—But you do registration plus, don't you? You are doing registration plus some form of quality assurance?

Ms Halliday—Yes. Can I just say that there is an onus culturally, and it is very new, on the sectors. What they are now doing is looking beyond their own school fence or even indeed their own sector and understanding that when they sign somebody off they sign them off to work back in the state sector or in the Catholic sector or they might go through a range and come back to them.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—And interstate?

Ms Halliday—Absolutely, and they really have to do so hand on heart. That is why we do have some who do not get signed off in a short period of time—maybe not in 18 months and maybe not all. This is a very honest way in that very early stage of managing people's potential or maybe of managing somebody who has made a mistake, and it is proving positive on a whole lot of fronts.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—My last question is around the workforce. Again, it may be outside your purview but it is of great interest to me. Of your 4,000 graduates per year who are coming out of their courses and then are wanting to enter the workforce, how many are succeeding in obtaining employment not in their chosen career but in their chosen specialisation? I would not ask you for a percentage.

Mr Ius—We honestly cannot answer that.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—You cannot gave me a feel for it?

Mr Ius—No, I really cannot give you a feel for it because we do not ask those sorts of questions and our registration is not a classification registration. We simply say, 'You are a registered teacher.' What they teach and where they teach then becomes an issue between the employer and the teacher themselves to negotiate.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Sure.

Mr Ius—We have some understanding of the numbers of teachers who are coming out with different skills backgrounds, because we survey each year the numbers of students going in, the numbers of students graduating and what they are graduating with, so we have a sense of the supply side of what has been happening. But once they come out and they go into teaching in a school, we have no follow-up mechanism that we are able to use at this stage to assess what areas they are teaching in.

Ms BIRD—Can I just clarify something that Michael said. You are talking about generic teacher registration. You do not differentiate between primary school, high school or subject areas?

Ms Halliday—We do you have to be mindful that we have the responsibility under the act to have a public register. At this point in time what goes on that register is very clear—that is, the person's name; their registration number; whether it is full or provisional registration; and depending on the circumstances, some conditions depending on what may have happened with discipline issues and maybe even deregistration, as stated. There is some requirement for us over a period of time to look at some identification of the people's academic records. Process as it is, we have got stage one up and running and we are starting to think about how we do that over a period of time. How do you collect the academic records of the 70,000 that were there before we got there? That is a good question, because the department does not have them, nor do the teachers. We do collect that information, obviously, as of day one of all the new people that we have registered, so there is some information that we maintain. We are mindful that over a period of time there is the requirement for us to do more with respect to that public register.

Ms BIRD—I find how you can inform yourself on standards and things, with no differentiation between those things, a bit baffling, because the structures of primary and secondary education courses in universities are so different.

Mr Ius—If you get the opportunity to see our standards framework, you will see that the differentiation happens at what we call the indicator level. A standards framework is fairly generic in the domains that it will specify and then the subsequent subdomains that it will describe within either practice, knowledge or engagement. But, when you start to look at the descriptors of how you unpack that, what you look for and how you provide the evidence to meet that will start to be different. That is where the differences start to emerge. Across the profession, because the profession is so diverse in the knowledge and skills required of teachers, unless you are prepared to go down the model of the American investment in a multistranded, multifaceted standards framework that digs down quite deeply into different levels, the investment in such a standards arrangement is quite significant.

Ms BIRD—So you leave it to the employers to say that people must be secondary trained to teach in the high school system and so forth?

Mr Ius—Yes.

Ms BIRD—You just provide registration?

Mr Ius—Yes. We validate that people have the relevant qualifications and that they are suitable, fit, proper and all of that sort of stuff.

Mr SAWFORD—Can I just go back to something that Michael touched on in his second last question and an issue that Sharon took up. I am not getting my head around this. When we had teachers colleges, education departments played incredibly powerful roles in teacher education. The move to universities has almost pushed the education departments across the states out of the question in many ways, and the relationships between universities and schools have been varied but in many cases are very strong. Is the Institute of Teaching—and I am not saying this in a rude way, because I am actually very attracted to the way in which this is being done—in some ways almost a de facto? Is there recognition in departments around the country, and in Victoria in particular, that there needs to be a third partner? You are the third partner. Is that part of the rationale as to why the institute was set up in the first place?

Mr Ius—In part, yes. There was a recognition that departments essentially have two hats at times. They have the hat of an employer, because they are sectoral employers—that is, they run a state education system—and they also are state wide policy departments that have responsibility for cross-sectoral issues, for broader issues. In an effort to be more transparent and in an effort to try to find a way in which to engage the profession more—

Mr SAWFORD—That addresses my question—

Mr Ius—That is why organisations like us are created.

Mr SAWFORD—but it does not address what Sharon is saying.

Mr Ius—Sorry?

Mr SAWFORD—How can 20 people do that?

Mr Ius—Well, we do not it through those 20 people. We do it, as I said, through the mechanisms of involvement lower down the line. For example, our accreditation committee has 20 other people. They are practising teachers, people involved in schools, who give up their time to meet with us, to meet with Ruth and to meet with the people from the universities, who then look at the courses, go in the universities, discuss what is going on and interrogate what is said on the paper versus what is going on using their own experiences. That group of people is the group that we work with and it is ultimately from there that the recommendations come forward. Our council sets the policy and sets the framework around which this operates, but the rubber hits the road through the practical involvement of the teachers who gave up their time to be involved in our arrangements.

Mr SAWFORD—It is interesting. I do not know what Sharon is thinking now. I am convinced about the first part, which Michael was asking about, but I am totally unconvinced about the point that Sharon was making. I do not see how you can do that.

Ms Newton—The other part of that too is that this same committee is managing the process. They are revising their guidelines, using the input from, for example, the Victorian parliamentary inquiry into teacher education, to the point where they are going out and consulting with the

profession. There will be consultation sessions held throughout metropolitan and regional areas, where teachers and teacher educators will have an invited opportunity but also an open opportunity to come and input into that.

Mr SAWFORD—One of the chair's first questions was, 'Are you resourced appropriately?' I think you sort of agreed, but in some ways I am getting the very strong feeling that the Victorian Department of Education and Training has opted out of its responsibilities and palmed them off onto you.

Mr Ius—No, I do not—

Ms Halliday—It is a question you put to me.

Mr SAWFORD—You do not think so? You do not agree?

Mr Ius—No. I do not agree that it is a department opting out of its responsibilities. I think what you see happening is governments seeking to be more transparent and putting in place more clear arrangements about their responsibilities and how they exercise those.

Mr SAWFORD—Not being as accountable and putting the responsibility onto someone else, getting it away from government?

Mr Ius—Well, government works with us.

Ms Halliday—There is another take on this. The reality is that when the education department sits there and dictates to a university what should and should not be in its course, and what it looks like, that is exactly what is happening. It is the department doing that, with some people for whom teaching has never been a reality. What you now have happening is that the people who know it, understand it and live it—that is, the pracademics—go in and work with the people who are the academics, and they draw together the necessary criteria for a qualification in the 21st century. It is a very different approach, but it is about the people with the real knowledge being the feed. A department can never do that. I do not care whether it is the Victorian one or anybody else's. They cannot do that because they are not the ones with—

Mr SAWFORD—With more than 20 people?

Ms Halliday—Well, it is more than 20 people. The committee sits 20, but then it draws on expertise from a whole range people in the sector.

Mr SAWFORD—I do not want to delay this.

Ms Halliday—If you want to suggest we are resourced with a lot more money to do that better, that is fine!

Mr BARTLETT—Recommendation 3.4 of the *Step up, step in, step out* report is that your institute encourage universities to maximise the flexibility in their provision of teacher education. How are you doing that, and how successfully are you doing it?

Mr Ius—It should not be interpreted in that recommendation that there is no flexibility currently. That is the first point that would have to be made. But there are a range of programs already that the universities provide that are offered in different modes, be they distance education or short courses or whatever, so there is some flexibility building in there already. However, we are working together, for example, with the department, to look at putting in place new programs that allow people to come in from different career paths, so the graduate recruitment program in Victoria is a different model—it is a highly intensive instruction model with considerable experience based in schools. They actually work and train at the same time, or work and complete their education at the same time.

So it is by working with the employers and the universities to find ways in which we can restructure program arrangements, and within the regulatory framework that we are establishing, that we achieve that sort of arrangement—also by working with different people who may choose to come into the field. For example, Open Universities Australia are looking at putting in place some diverse models involving some of the current arrangements that universities have, and they have started some dialogue with us around that arrangement. It is by working with the universities and others who are interested in supporting different arrangements—

Mr BARTLETT—Are you finding the universities reasonably responsive to this?

Mr Ius—They will be generally more responsive where there is resourcing available.

Mr BARTLETT—In other words: not very.

Ms Newton—One of the difficulties with flexibility is that the only time you can do practicum is during school times.

Mr BARTLETT—Presumably, this is a bigger problem for professionals, tradespeople, mature age entrants, rather than for post-school entrants?

Mr Ius—What is a particular difficulty?

Mr BARTLETT—The inflexibility of training.

Mr Ius—Yes. You would no doubt be aware that increasingly people are combining work and study. That is a reality of what is happening, so therefore universities are having to respond to that situation and arrangement.

Mr BARTLETT—Do you think we are getting enough qualified tradespeople to teach VET courses in schools, for instance?

Mr Ius—The short answer to that is no. That is why there are particular initiatives in place to try to increase the proportion of people with those qualifications, background and experiences and bring them into the profession. So in Victoria there are four programs specifically targeted at bringing people in from the sciences and the technology areas into the profession.

Mr BARTLETT—But with limited success to date?

Mr Ius—They have not been running that long, so I do not know whether you can judge the success. But they are relatively small programs, in the sense that they are not mass programs.

Mr BARTLETT—Is it the flexibility or inflexibility in training or other factors that are standing in the way of the recruitment levels required?

Mr Ius—At the end of the day, the current model of how we choose to prepare teachers—through a university based program with a strong practicum element required—dictates certain things. I do not know how far you can push the flexibility line when you have got those sorts of arrangements in place. Unless you move to an entirely apprenticeship type base or something like that. I am not sure how far you can move the flexibility line when you have certain requirements about the depth of knowledge and experience that you expect of people.

For example, we have specialist area guidelines that say what we expect as the level of knowledge and background of people, and we interrogate their academic transcripts to make sure that that is there. So if we are saying that you expect people to have second and third year studies in particular areas or in particular disciplines, how do you get that in such a short, tightened time frame?

Mr BARTLETT—Ultimately, it is issues of salary and career progression and prospects and those sorts of things that really determine the supply of people coming in from other professions, isn't it?

Mr Ius—Indeed. For example, there is a need for more maths and science teachers, certainly in Victoria—and I think that is replicated across Australia—but the anecdotal evidence we see from universities is that they are having difficulty attracting them to the maths and sciences at the university level. So if they are having difficulty in attracting them there, and we are the second level in the supply chain, we have to try and attract them across from there into teaching. So the issues of what you do at a broader level to make teaching more attractive have to be addressed.

Mr BARTLETT—What about the quality of people coming into academia, into teacher training?

Ms Halliday—You would have to see it as something that has improved if you look at it over the last two decades. Not only are we seeing that the enter scores are higher, but there are also some factors around when you enter teaching. It is one of the very few areas of employment that starts off at a high salary and has permanency. There are not many options for graduates exiting with that—in fact, very few. So that actually has a level of attraction that may be currently underestimated.

Mr BARTLETT—It starts off at a moderately high level, but it goes nowhere after that.

Ms Halliday—It is the second highest exit salary of all of the professions, so it is high. And when kids want to pay off their HECS—

Mr BARTLETT—But after three, five or ten years, the relativities are somewhat different. My question, though, is about attracting people into academia to teach education courses.

Mr Ius—I think academia faces probably an even more significant challenge than even the teaching profession in regenerating the people in there. They have a significantly higher age profile than what we have in the teaching profession. That is another reason why we see universities seeking to engage in stronger partnerships and involvement with schools, because they are trying to draw across that experience and bring that knowledge and information in to start to address the issues that they are looking at ahead in terms of the exiting of people within their profession.

I would also like to highlight that, whilst we are commenting on a number of challenges that pre-service teacher education programs are facing, our evidence from the work that we have done—just from looking at the numbers that we get every year from those that are coming in and those that are going out—suggest that they are doing a reasonably good job. The apparent retention rates that we see for our courses in Victoria are well over 80 per cent to 85 per cent—90 per cent in some cases—so they are actually doing a reasonably good job in bringing people in, holding them and bringing them through their programs.

We did do a little bit of an exercise to see what that apparent retention rate looked like compared to other professions, and it seemed to stack up pretty well from what we could see across the other ranges of professions. There are significant challenges, but I suppose we do not want to give a perception that it is all doom and gloom. There is some significantly good work going on in terms of preparing our people.

Ms BIRD—Most of the discussion has answered the variety of questions I had; that just leaves a couple, you will be relieved to hear. I want to explore a bit more a question I had written down about the mentoring during teaching instruction. You mentioned CRTs, which I assume are casual relief teachers. I am a New South Wales person so I have to get my head around the terminology. Are they permanent CRT positions or are they casual work? Do you know what I mean? Are they identified relief teaching positions to a position or are they people who wander from school to school saying, 'I'm available for casual relief; ring me on the day you need me'?

Ms Halliday—Both.

Ms BIRD—What I am concerned about is how you manage those people who come out of teacher education. If you are a mature age—indeed, beyond 21, I would say—and you are in a committed relationship; lots of these things happen, and people will not move areas or whatever to take jobs. A lot of people enter the profession through a number of years of casual teaching.

Mr Ius—That is right.

Ms BIRD—I am wondering how your model works with people in those circumstances.

Ms Halliday—Can we just take it back a step and say that we identified that about 15 per cent of those who are registered with us operate as CRTs. Some of those will be someone in a rural area who may teach three days a year, and others who actually have a career mapped around being a CRT and move across the three sectors regularly.

Ms BIRD—By choice, yes.

Ms Halliday—And we almost became a surrogate parent for that 15 per cent of the profession, because it was clear that there were not the support mechanisms, there were not the PD. At the early stages we sat down and we looked at the issues—we talked to the employer agencies and the brokers, who usually are the feed for those people going into all three sectors. The agencies are used very heavily rather the independent schools employing their own CRTs directly in Victoria.

Ms BIRD—What do you know mean by agencies?

Ms Halliday—They are brokers. It is like the nurses agency where you go in and you say, 'I need a relief teacher.'

Ms BIRD—Okay.

Ms Halliday—So they are very strong networks. They have their own employer bodies for those agencies. So we had a lot of discussions around how we would best manage this group. We had many seminar days where we brought them in and provided a range of support that you would not—but obviously the schools might, or the sectors might—support permanence. We continue to have those discussions. We are in the process of developing a model that it will be best suited for provisional for those people. But it is fair to say that it is in the best interests of the schools, because they rely on CRTs. We now have commitment from schools in the various sectors to look at how they can support regular CRTs, so that is quite a progressive step from where we are sitting.

Mr Ius—It is an increasing trend, at least that we are seeing in Victoria, of agencies coming into the field. They are recruiting teachers and providing that supply of casual relief teachers to schools, so we have a capacity to work with an employer group.

Ms BIRD—Do you know whether that is a common phenomenon across the states?

Mr Ius—I do not know to what extent that is happening across other states, but it is certainly a growing phenomenon in Victoria. And it is not just small agencies; it is actually some of the bigger employment groups that are moving into this field. That give us a capacity to then work with them as employers, because they are obviously interested in developing the skills of their people; so we can work with them in that way.

Ms BIRD—What if I am a beginning teacher—I have just finished my training and I have a three-year-old baby, so I cannot move to wherever they want to offer me a job. I am going to work casually in the local primary schools or high schools. What if I am not registered with an agency—and forgive me: maybe that is so common that it is not a question that is covered? I am trying to get my head around this provisional teacher issue. You are going to say I that am a provisional teacher.

Mr Ius—That is right.

Ms BIRD—What is the step? Do I have to go to a school and say, 'Will you apply a mentor to assess me and get me through this process?'

Ms Halliday—There are some time requirements that you must meet to move through your provisional, for a start. There is some consistency of evidence of meeting the standards that in one way or another has to be acknowledged, but there are people who are in unique and different situations like yourself. We have a level of flexibility in our early stage where we manage those people. We are looking at the various options that we can provide. Our aim is always to be inclusive, to be mindful that there are a diverse range of circumstances for people who are entering the profession and to support them in whatever way we can. Sometimes we will encourage a sector who is using a CRT regularly or a school to do certain things as well.

Ms BIRD—Thank you, I was just wondering how it would work with those people. The only other question I have that has not been covered by discussion so far is about ICT in teacher education. It has come up consistently across the inquiry that there is a real gap between the students and many of the teaching profession in their understanding and use of ICT. You identify also between beginning teachers, students at university and their teacher educators. The one thing that does not often come up—this is broader than your straight brief in registration—is the research or training of teachers in the way an ICT world affects learning, not using the machine but understanding how the common contact with the machine has affected the way children and young people learn.

Some of the frustration that I hear from some of those teachers is almost like they could go and do a course on how to use a computer or on researching on the Internet and such, but they do not really comprehend what that means for learning or how that has affected the learning styles of young people today. I am interested to know whether you have come across research on the issue or had it raised in terms of the standards that you are developing.

Mr Ius—My impression is that that issue is being addressed to different degrees across the universities. There are some programs that we could point to in Victoria where we would see in their course outline and in their course content the very thing that you are talking about—that it is not just about putting students in labs or learning to work in PowerPoint and all that sort of stuff. It is about actively engaging the student in an understanding of how they can build knowledge using ICT.

Ms BIRD—This is the common problem I have. I am talking about the step before that, about the fact that kids go into kindy with a different way of learning because we live in a different world.

Mr Ius—Yes.

Ms BIRD—We happily talk about the diverse challenges of the world and about the fact that kids have got working parents and how that affects their learning styles and all that, but I do not think we are coming to grips with the fact that they live in a technologically different world as well and that that brings in the classroom a different type of learning. So my fear is that we will struggle—we will try to introduce ICT in the classroom and make the classroom reflect the adult world, but we are not understanding the more fundamental issue there. I know it is a very broad question, so I apologise for that.

Ms Newton—It is really difficult because that particular facet of education is changing so quickly. The experiences even of the graduates—and probably even more so, with the mature

graduates—in going through a pre-service teacher education course that is cutting edge are difficult. The experiences of the younger people coming through the education system is that they are picking it up quickly—it is just a way of life to them. So I think that that is a huge question, not only in terms of pre-service teacher education but also in terms of what you already do with your teachers. They are not little models of them coming through school. These younger people are thinking differently. That probably does not answer any questions.

Ms BIRD—I just wondered whether there had been some signs that the old subjects I did, like the theory of learning and so forth, had been updated. I am not so much worried about running ICT courses or whatever, but the old fundamental structural units.

Mr Ius—From what we see of some of the course structures and the course content, I think the answer to that would be yes. There are clearly some courses where, as they have been coming up for a review arrangement, the university takes that opportunity to say, 'Look, we last looked at this four or five years ago. What has happened in the world since then?' It is through those discussions and arrangements that you begin to see that the new knowledge that is emerging around the multiple intelligences and different ways of learning starts to be picked up and brought into the course programs. It is issues probably that we increasingly will start to draw attention to through our arrangements and through our articulating the expectations of what teachers should be able to know and do.

CHAIR—We are running short of time and other committee members have still at some questions. With regard to the reviews that are going to happen around 2007, when qualifications for registration will be reassessed: what sort of professional learning requirements are you going to be placing out in the future? I am thinking particularly in relation to areas such as science, where there are whole new blocks of knowledge coming along that the 50 or 55-year-old science teacher was not exposed to—a whole range of technologies that the young people, who are very computer literate, are going to have to be informed of. How are we going to support teachers in doing that? How do you see perhaps some of those technology based subjects that are differential in professional learning between those and some of the more traditional subjects?

Mr Ius—I suppose we will be introducing the notion of continuous professional development into a requirement for renewal. That is the first thing we can say. That is the direction that we are moving in and that was clearly the intention behind having a renewal process for registration. But that poses a whole range of other questions about people in remote and regional places and how we support them.

CHAIR—That is right. In having had a series of discussions with teachers over the last 12 months about their experiences with professional development, and what sort of continuing professional development arrangements should we be trying to promote going forward, there were three very clear messages that came through in those discussions that we had. One was that we will already do quite a lot of PD. There is a range of professional development that is provided through employers or through other arrangements that teachers are engaged in.

The difficulty that teachers tell us they have is, firstly, understanding the breadth of what is available for them; and, secondly, finding some ways of making judgments about the value of that professional development for them before they go into it. So that is what we have been focused on in terms of doing our work for putting professional development renewal

arrangements in place. Our arrangements, which we are about to talk with teachers later on this year around, are again trying to utilise the standards framework.

In other words, we will try and find a way in which we can use our standards framework as a reference point for teachers to be able to see that they are looking for professional development that builds their knowledge base and increases their understanding of teachers. We are spelling out the matrix of what it is that teachers need to look at to continue to develop in their practice and in their work. We will be looking to find ways in which we can guide teachers around those programs that do that for them and try and find some way in which we can articulate for them the value of those programs. We then are going to suggest that they need to ensure that they look at a balance of professional development across those areas—that is, things that build their knowledge base but also programs that build their practice.

CHAIR—Do you see a different professional learning requirement on a subject-by-subject basis? Obviously, grammar has not changed a lot. Science is changing every minute.

Ms Halliday—Can I take us back a step? We cannot lose the focus that we are a regulatory authority and, first and foremost, reregistration is about the responsibilities of a regulatory authority. While that reregistration process involves some demonstration of ongoing professional development, it also involves an acknowledgement of a new code of ethics and a new code of conduct, which are requirements under the legislation, and a new criminal records check. So it is a bigger picture than the conversation we have just had. That said, it does also have a component of ongoing skill growth and personal development.

We are very mindful of the breadth and depth of what that could look like. Also, there is an onus on the individual as an adult to be mindful of how they develop and what areas of interest they have. Our first port of call, our first reregistration, is an interim one. In the second one, which will be in 2012, we will give people a range of years notice where there is a set of requirements that they must demonstrate and the learning will be in formal and informal time frames. Again, it will not be mandated to be science or physics. It will be about this. We will say, 'This person has an interest in a new method, moving from science to maths,' so their PD will be designed so that there will be a postgraduate course and some other informal stuff around that. It is about the individual determining their future but adhering to a map that aligns our standards, a period of time in both formal and informal professional development and the regulatory. I am very mindful in this conversation that we do have to focus on the fact that we are a regulatory authority. It is a large act, it is broad and we have a range of responsibilities, but they are key.

Mr SAWFORD—Going back to *Step up, step in, step out*, there were reported a number of criticisms of teacher education in Victoria. I will quickly go through some of them. It said there was:

> ... little consistency across institutions in terms of how they incorporate Victorian Institute of Teaching standards ... significant disquiet regarding the quality and relevance of pre-service ... education ...

The report said there was a lack of practical teaching skills. It was critical of current quality assurance frameworks. There was criticism of the scheduling of university courses just between nine and five and on five days a week. There was criticism of the gaps in the current content of pre-service teacher education in Victoria, criticism of a whole range of issues under classroom

management skills and criticism of the gaps in pre-service education caused by the structure of courses, of the gap in coverage VCAL and VET courses and of inadequate practicums. There were a whole range of criticisms in the practicum area, in the ICT stuff, of the failure of the education faculty to adequately assess a broad range of competences required for teaching results, missed opportunities and so on. There is a lot. Does your institute agree with those criticisms, firstly? If you do, do you have any ability to effect improvements to those?

Ms Halliday—I think you might note that we were named in 40 of the 44 recommendations.

Mr SAWFORD—That is why I am asking the question.

Ms Halliday—I did not see a cheque come with it.

Mr Ius—Whether or not we agree with them is not the question. The issue for us is that we have to work with them to address those issues. That is the challenge for us going forward under the new arrangements that we are putting in place for the accreditation of teacher education programs in Victoria. We will be looking at those issues and addressing them. You will note that those recommendations in some cases talk about things as though they might be across the board—

Mr SAWFORD—Yes.

Mr Ius—and in other cases they talk about things individually for different universities. The issue for us is to work with those guidelines. The government response, and we have been party to the government response, has been that those issues will be picked up in the way we go forward around our new accreditation arrangements in Victoria. We have to sit down with the deans of education in Victoria and address those issues at either a course or university level or across the board. Putting in place ways we can measure and assess some of these things in a mutually agreed way so the basis of it does not get challenged is one key mechanism to address that, as is developing some of the indicators that will allow us to actually judge some of these things in future.

Mr SAWFORD—My last question is a very self-interested question. The report also says:

Many reviews of teacher education have been completed over recent decades, though tangible reforms have been slow.

Does your institute have a view as to why that is the case? There is one contradiction. In the executive summary, in the conclusion and in the introduction, there is almost a defence mechanism of saying the teachers in Victoria are world class et cetera and then they go and belt them all around the ears in the next five or six pages. We are not very good at dealing with criticism in the teaching profession, because teaching is so difficult and so hard. But putting that aside do you have an attitude as to why, with all these reports—many of which have made significant recommendations—the reforms have been slow?

Ms Halliday—Money.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you think it is money?

Mr Ius—There is a range of reasons, I think. Resourcing is always a key issue if you are going to achieve change. Sometimes the reports and recommendations do not assess appropriately the level of resourcing necessary to effect the change. That is one of the issues, not that you always need resourcing to effect the change but in some cases it is necessary. There are issues about how you implement a change, and resourcing may sometimes be missing. The other thing is that, when people try to look back and see whether or not reforms have been made, it is a changing world. What happens in teacher education today is quite different from what was happening four or five years ago and certainly is quite different from what was happening 10 or 20 years ago, when I was going through teacher education programs.

What we see currently in the course content and in some of the arrangements is quite different. If you have that change continually happening, it is gradual, it is incremental; it is not a seismic shift that suddenly happens once every five years. You have set some expectations, things have moved on and you are now in that context trying to assess whether or not those things have been picked up. It is a very difficult thing to do. Teacher education, like many other endeavours of preparing people, is not a straightforward process that you can measure.

Mr SAWFORD—Can we go back to the very beginning when I—

Ms Halliday—Can I just add something there?

Mr SAWFORD—Yes.

Ms Halliday—There is the third component, and it is cultural. The cultural component is about this. Previously never has there been a situation where a university can be mandated to do something. They have been criticised and they sometimes take on board that criticism and do with it what they like, depending. It is reasonable that many of them say: 'Well, you are criticising us. Tell us what you want to do to change it and how we can do a better job.' That level of interest differed, depending on the institution. We are in a very different world now. What they need to do if their graduates are going to get out and get a job is now mandated, courtesy of the input of the profession. That is a real cultural shift.

Mr SAWFORD—Yes.

Ms Halliday—Wisdom demonstrated that they came on board in a hurry. We have been able to progress. We are still an embryonic organisation in many ways, but we have been able to progress with them quite significantly, given the no-man's-land that they were in previously. They were criticised but then nobody said they had to change.

Mr SAWFORD—I agree with Andrew's exposition of what has occurred, but I go back to the original part. There is too much in teacher education. You seem to be confirming that. There is too much in there, and if you keep just squeezing and adding it on, you are diminishing the quality of what is in there. That is just a mathematical reality. I agree with you also that we have drifted all over the place for the last 20 years. I do not think anyone actually knows where they are going. The balance is not there. We are drifting this way, but no-one seems to know why we are drifting this way. No-one seems to be taking a backward picture and sort of saying: 'Well, hang on a minute, this is all synthesized content. Why aren't we doing analytical content? This is all a focus on implicit teaching. Why aren't we balancing with explicit teaching? This is all a

focus on verbal skills. Why aren't we focusing on visual skills?' In other words, the balance does not seem to be there in any of the structures. That is the point that I was getting at. I think *Step up, step in, step out* identified what we as a committee maybe need to take up. I think they got the context right. Their explanation of it may be a little different, but I think they actually got the context right.

Ms Halliday—I think our provisional registration offers some of the balance that you are looking for, because it says that it is okay to get out and enter and that you are not be expected to be perfect. Our provisional says it is okay to take six months to two years, for whatever reasons, to become comfortable with your new environment and the broad set of responsibilities.

Mr SAWFORD—No, that is a time thing. What I am talking about is the structure, the guts of the thing. You look at literature courses or English courses. They are totally focused on synthesized verbal content. There is not a lot of reason in there, not a lot of comprehension in those courses. You take physics and science. It has gone very much verbalised. It is all about expression and whatever. The reason part of it, the analysis part of it, has been diminished. That criticism has been around. Is that part of the problem that we are in? That is why we are drifting one way and not the other way.

Mr BARTLETT—Well said.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—I think we should take our witnesses to lunch, with Hansard.

CHAIR—Yes. We will have to pull it up there. Time is getting away from us. Thank you for appearing before the committee. It has been a very interesting session. We cannot spend any more time on it, but we have a few more questions from the secretariat which we will give to you in writing. I think you have some material to get back to us with. If you could do that as quickly as possible, that would be great.

Mr Ius—We will.

CHAIR—The secretariat will provide you with a proof copy of your evidence as soon as it is available, and a transcript will also be placed upon the parliamentary website. Thank you very much.

Mr Ius—Thank you for the opportunity.

Proceedings suspended from 12.21 pm to 1.05 pm

HARMAN, Professor Elizabeth, Member, Board of Directors, Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee and Vice-Chancellor and President, Victoria University

MULLARVEY, Mr John, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee

CHAIR—I welcome witnesses from the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee. I remind you that the public hearings are recorded by Hansard and a record is made available to the public through the parliament's web site.

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. I invite you to make some introductory remarks.

Prof. Harman—Thank you, Chair. The Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee, which is colloquially known as the AVCC, welcomes the opportunity to take questions and to provide evidence to this inquiry. I will stand back for a moment from the committee itself and give the committee a sense of who I am.

My professional and academic background is in public policy. I have experience in universities in the private sector and in the public sector. I come from a family of teachers—parents, siblings, nieces and the like. Currently, I am the vice-chancellor at Victoria University but I started my academic career at Murdoch and spent five years at Edith Cowan in Western Australia. So the three universities in which I spent the bulk of my academic career have all had teacher education departments, faculties or schools.

Mr SAWFORD—Strong ones too.

Prof. Harman—Good ones; thank you for that. I am now a very new member of the board of the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee but, of course, in my capacity as vice-chancellor over the last two years I have been a member of the broader committee itself. I ask you just to take that background on board as we move through both the evidence I provide to you in my opening comments and any questions you might come to.

Let me begin, first of all, by stating that the importance of teacher education to the Australian community cannot be understated. We, the AVCC, would like to strongly support that ethic. Having effective and compassionate teachers in schools helps children learn not only the curriculum themselves but also the importance of education and lifelong learning. In the education of teachers, universities play a crucial role as they prepare teachers for their own roles as educators.

The AVCC is a peak body that represents 38 of Australia's 39 universities. I had to check with John to establish that the one that is not a participant in the committee at the moment is Notre Dame. The AVCC focuses on national policy issues for universities and is cautious in commenting in detail on issues relating to particular disciplines, but the subject of this inquiry is critical to the nation as the majority of universities in the AVCC have schools, faculties or departments of education. While I am happy, within my ability, to answer any questions you may have relating to any of the terms of reference, we would like to concentrate in this opening statement particularly on the 11th term of reference of the inquiry, which is to examine the adequacy of the funding of teacher training courses by university administrations.

The AVCC wishes to comment on two particular aspects related to the term of reference. Firstly, despite the increases to government funding for education through the Commonwealth Grants Scheme, which we colloquially talk about as CGS, universities still struggle to have the income necessary to resource desirable standards in all courses. In other words, despite some of the increases coming through the CGS we are still struggling. University management has the

responsibility to allocate available funding across all courses to ensure the best use of those funds and the best education outcomes for all students.

Effectively, as the Chief Executive Officer of a university, I see the whole question of the allocation of resources as being one of the most critical responsibilities I think a vice-chancellor has. In our view it is not sensible to focus too strongly on the particular amounts allocated to particular funding clusters in the CGS framework or to argue that those precise amounts should be spent on that particular discipline. I am putting this point of view with a certain amount of passion, which you can explore in more depth during questioning if you like.

The particular points I make in the first instance relate to why it is not sensible to link the CGS cluster funding relationship right through to universities' budget allocation processes. First of all, the amounts that are in the CGS are based on studies from the late 1980s. I was involved as one of the four consultants that helped to determine the Commonwealth relative funding model in 1990. In my case we drew on data from 1980 costs and expenditures at the four Western Australian universities. Two of the three other consultants had different methodologies and different databases.

I could absolutely swear that I am not at all confident that at that time we got the costs right, let alone the manner in which they were pulled together, and ultimately informed the 1990 relative funding model arrangements. The sense that they had translated accurately through to 2006 in cluster funding arrangements defies logic in my view. Even at that time they were never intended to be as precise as that relationship or the relationship required between CGS funding and our own budget allocations. Therefore it is foolish to assume that each university should spend the same amount on similar courses.

Each of us takes our own particular approaches to the manner in which each discipline is taught and funds are allocated. That applies in the education profession as much as it does in any other discipline. Universities need to be able to use government funding and student payments as deemed most appropriate by the administration of each university and by the governing council, which ultimately determines the budget allocations that I, as a vice-chancellor, put to them as a recommended budget each year. The issue of funding being less than desirable is not, of course, limited to education.

Most areas in the university can point to desirable resources that cannot be provided at the moment within current funding or current income arrangements. As a result, the decision about where to direct funding is best made on the balance of needs and a business case is developed for each course, given the mission of each university and the particular economy and demographic context in which it sits. I say that again with some feeling, coming from a university at the moment which is serving a highly diverse, low socioeconomic and generally disadvantaged set of communities in the western suburbs of Melbourne where participation in school, let alone a university, is low relative to Victorian and national standards.

I would not expect our school or faculty of education to be handling its own resource allocation in the same way as some of the other universities do in a very different context. Vice-chancellors need to have the flexibility to direct funding to courses where it is most needed and not be bound by a formula determined outside the university. The current funding agreements between universities and the Department of Education, Science and Training currently include a

clause specifying that CGS funding cluster for teaching includes certain funds that must be utilised to offset the cost of the teaching practicum.

Universities are using these funds appropriately to increase support for practicums compared to past years. The second issue I want to come to—the first, clearly, was the manner in which we are or could be handicapped by tying funding and the limitations in the funding associated with CGS—is that the decision to declare education as a national priority profession quarantining teacher education from increases in student contributions potentially has had a harmful effect on the quality of education our future teachers are receiving. Again I say this with some passion. The policy intent may have been very good but the outcome has been perverse. Preventing universities from raising student contributions for education students effectively has reduced the amount of total funds that might be available for teacher education by $980 per full time student place in 2006, or almost $50 million annually. We put it at $48 million.

The additional government funding to make up for this just is not sufficient. The relative funding level for education courses has, in fact, dropped from 1.3 to 1.2. In other words, if you take into account what has happened with CGS and with the 25 per cent maximum contribution that can be placed on all other courses except education and nursing, education now receives only 120 per cent of the lowest funded course, whereas previously it was 130 per cent. In fact, if I look at my records I see that is close to the ratio of 1:3.

There is no evidence that holding back the student contribution amounts for education and nursing has increased applications for those courses. It would be better to give universities the capacity to set the charge for these courses such that in combination with government funding they are more able to provide the resources we would all like to see go to teacher education. I have focused on the funding terms of reference as being the one most relevant to the AVCC's interests. I am, however, impressed by the fact that the submissions from individual universities and from the Council of Deans of Education paralleled some of these same comments with respect to funding. I can, of course, provide answers to questions on the specifics of education courses. In general, I would like to leave them to my colleagues as deans of education, but I gave you some sense of my own background in case there were areas that you would like to take up in questions. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR—I noted your comments about universities having the autonomy to set the fees in relation to their own circumstances. With education now sitting at a level of around 1.2, as a rule of thumb where do you think it should sit compared to other subjects?

Prof. Harman—Chair, I could not answer that question easily.

CHAIR—Given what you have said.

Prof. Harman—Given what I have said. In part, based on the experience I had in 1990, we found it very difficult at that time to establish exactly what the costs of each discipline were or are. It is a complex calculus. Individual universities are increasingly getting into the issue of attempting to do activity based costing in order to be able to sheet home, if you like, a more accurate understanding of the current expenditure arrangements. Whether you do that—you have an ideal set of resources committed to any one discipline or profession like education—is another question again because the current expenditure pattern, even if you sheet home the costs,

would be constrained by the way in which those resources have come in through the CGS and through funding arrangements. If you could start with a blank piece of paper you would come up with another number again. I am going to avoid your question other than to say that I think it has to be more than the current situation of a ratio of 1.2. The custom and practice of the last decade or so has been 1.3.

Nothing in the evidence I have seen suggests that the education schools and faculties are in a situation where they can have surpluses at the end of every year. They do not. If I had to cross-subsidise and was in a better position to cross-subsidise within the university at the moment, I would be drawing from my business faculty to put it into education and nursing. As to how far up that took them in relativities, I am going to wait on a new consultancy I have running this year on how we should rethink our allocations. I could not speak for other universities.

CHAIR—I note your comments on funding. That aside, what do you think are the great challenges to teacher education?

Prof. Harman—From my point of view, the next very big one is the relationship with the schools themselves, in the sense that I do not think we are going to solve the vexed and very important issue of the way in which teaching placements for students and experience can be addressed in the future, unless we have that relationship better worked out. I think it works the other way as well. The ability for teachers out in practice to have lifelong learning and to get professional development by working in cooperation with universities means that we need a two-way dialogue going, which allows teachers in practice to have the benefits of ongoing learning with their colleagues in universities and for colleagues in universities to be able to work with teachers in schools to make sure that trainee or pre-service teachers are getting the sort of experience they need in schools.

Everything I am hearing at the moment is that the partnership relationships have to be established. Some universities do that quite well with their local school environment and some do not. The second thing is the cost issue. I understand that the current Commonwealth loading is about 10 per cent related to practicums. With the AEU at the moment developing a case around increasing the amount of money to be related to the practicum, we are going to face an enormous challenge within universities as to whether we are going to be able to cover that in our costs, even if we have a good relationship with schools.

So the whole question of the dialogue and partnership between schools and universities and the manner in which professional development of practising teachers and practised experience for individual students in the universities is a critical one.

CHAIR—I will ask you a question to which we have had a number of answers on the role of some form of compulsion in schools to form partnerships. Do you think there are more innovative ways in which trainee teachers can give back to the schools as a quid pro quo for the mentoring that they would receive from the schools?

Prof. Harman—On the question of compulsion I must admit my personal and professional instincts are opposed to compulsion.

CHAIR—There are two camps in this.

Prof. Harman—Partnerships work best when there is good faith on both sides. It is not something that you are either forced to do or prescripted in the way in which a partnership relationship is developed; it comes out of people who have a like mind sitting down and working out how to get over what often are immense problems and a great deal of logistical difficulties relating to timetabling, costs and incentives. So I would go down the road of compulsion as an extreme last resort. I would much rather see a system which had incentives in place that allowed partnership relationships to be seen as a very good way of operating, the obstacles removed and the incentives put in place.

In relation to the manner in which students might return to a school and to teachers some benefit that compensates for the sort of mentoring and practice experience they are getting, I would hesitate to make any sort of comment on that. I think that the teachers and the schools themselves probably get more benefit, not from the individual students but from a relationship with the university that can provide professional practice, development and shared work on projects—for example, research activities is an illustration—rather than asking a student to provide a return to the teacher or to the school. But, having put that general principle on the table, I think that the deans of education are in a better position, because of their experience across the sector with different arrangements with schools, to be more specific about that point. It is not one I feel entirely comfortable in commenting on.

Mr SAWFORD—I apologise if I missed this earlier but, as you would expect, we have had a lot of varied information that has been given to us by university staff, deans and vice-chancellors as well. Just on the funding issue, I am always confused by the fact that you get this great variance. Some university staff have said to us, 'The administration of some universities regard education as a cash cow and behave accordingly.' Others have said that they use precious money allocated to education to subsidise other more favourable courses. So you get a whole variation of all of this. Then there is being able to set your own fees. Let us deal with the funding issue first. How do you respond to that? In your university do you subsidise education or does education subsidise other courses?

Prof. Harman—Let me answer your specific question. We do not use education to subsidise other courses. If anything, I would like to change the allocation procedure in such a way that we might have education subsidised from elsewhere. The most obvious—in fact, probably the only place—is through the business faculty, which generates considerable surpluses each year on the current way in which our funding model operates. Our funding model, like many other universities, replicates in many ways the old relative funding model and cluster, as it was translated through to the cluster arrangements. We do that almost for two reasons. First, the politics of universities being what they are, faculties and schools can see the clusters coming in with individual prices associated with each discipline and they expect them to be passed on. A whole series of internal politics and arguments have to be undertaken if you try to move clusters. Some universities change the cluster arrangements or change the relative weightings on the margin where they want to give preference to one discipline or profession over another.

In our case I do not think we have any significant shifts. The one question I am going to look at next year is to see whether or not we do so. I could not give you examples of any university that reduces a school, faculty or department cluster arrangement for education coming from the Commonwealth in order to cross-subsidise elsewhere. I would be highly surprised if there were any, for the very reason I have given you: that the relative cluster arrangements, now that the

HECS premium has come in, is dropping for education, but costs in placements and partnership arrangements are rising. So I cannot see how a cross-subsidy from education elsewhere is practical.

Mr SAWFORD—It is on the public record, but I just want to keep with this. If the practicum costs were removed—in other words, the education department was responsible for the practicum costs—how would that help the education faculty? Would that be a significant injection of funds?

Prof. Harman—Do you mean if the department of education carried the cost of the placement instead of the university. It would depend, first of all, on what level it was funded at. It would depend on how that amount was sourced—in other words, if it was taken off the universities and put in the department by reducing our overall amount in order to hand it back to us as a placement.

CHAIR—A likely solution perhaps.

Prof. Harman—A likely solution. It would be neutral in that sense. It would not help us at all.

Mr SAWFORD—What if the current cost was reduced by 50 per cent of what universities pay for practicum and the department took up the other 50 per cent, but not removing from the money—in other words, to try to give an injection of funding into the education faculty?

Prof. Harman—Any injection of funding into the education faculty I can only see as—

Mr SAWFORD—Is that a valid way to do it? God forbid that we might have an enlightened minister for education in Australia. Would they do that?

Prof. Harman—I can only go back I guess to the underlying fundamental of that. If state governments were to provide additional funding into universities generally, let alone into specifically faculties of education, it can only be a good thing.

Mr Mullarvey—Of course, removing the current limit on HECS levels for education nursing adds nearly $1,000 for a full-time student. So it is a big increase in funding to go into the sector.

Prof. Harman—If you see the student potentially as the source of additional funding as well as state governments—and we are arguing the student—I am concerned about the extent to which we are seeing in the system low socioeconomic groups being adversely affected. At the moment there is a trend where we are seeing a smaller proportion of low socioeconomic groups. But there is nothing at the moment in the evidence about the education cap that suggests students are coming in in larger numbers because the course is capped.

Mr SAWFORD—It just seems to me that because of the current way in which practicums are funded it is an impossible equation. It may be that there needs to be a more lateral look at the way in which this is done.

Prof. Harman—That general principle I think I would utterly endorse, without trying to be specific about it.

Mr SAWFORD—But one of the lateral reasons could be that it be attached to the salary of the supervising teacher. It is probably an old idea in some senses that it ought to be the responsibility of the profession to train the new profession. I believe in that. If there has to be a remuneration aspect to all of that, I do not have a problem with that. It may be that the supervising teachers, the people who are available to supervise teachers in schools, ought to have a salary component that deals with supervising students. That then takes that cost. The only people who can meet that cost are the education department. I think that the education department has got out of a lot of responsibility in dealing with teacher education since teachers colleges went off the map. I think it is time that the education department became a real tripartite partner—not just the universities and the school—which I believe they are not at moment. Is that a recommendation that you think is worth pursuing in some way?

Prof. Harman—Informed by the fact that I come from a public policy background, I think it is important to look at every reasonable option. If that is one good option I would support looking at it as one option.

Mr SAWFORD—Have you thought of any others?

Prof. Harman—I could not give you a specific answer on that. Again, I would go back to the deans of education because the extent to which, in the last decade, there has been a genuine attempt in some universities to enter into partnership relationships with schools—Edith Cowan University is one and Victoria University is another—I think the learning that has come out of that experience is something we should all listen to. I do not know enough detail about the manner in which that experience has informed the schools and how they want to operate or could operate most effectively to assist universities in pre-service training but, equally, how the university faculties of education are seeing it. I would not try to second guess that from my knowledge.

Mr SAWFORD—Just on the selection of both mature age and school graduates to come into teacher education, one of the great criticisms—which unfortunately I think is a reality in particular over the last 20 years—is that, if you saw an analysis of where the students into teacher education came from, you would find they are incredibly metropolitan, incredibly middle class and incredibly female. There is nothing wrong with those criteria, but there is a lessening of people from disadvantaged backgrounds, there are not the numbers of people from indigenous and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds that there could be and there is a vastly diminishing quantum of people from provincial and regional areas of Australia. I do not see any university in this country doing anything but make a token response to that challenge.

Prof. Harman—I would have to—

Mr SAWFORD—I know what some of them have said, and some of them have said it on the record, but the evidence does not confirm what they are saying.

Prof. Harman—Can I just take you back then to my own university, Victoria University. Let me find the notes so that I can be authoritative with respect to the admission issue. We are taking in only a very small proportion. We have about 1,000 students, or 1,000 ESOS, in the teacher education area. We are taking in and admitting those students under an admissions strategy that is committed to ensuring we recruit students who reflect the communities they will most likely

go back into to teach. So, under our admissions strategy, we take a very small proportion on the VTAC entry score in Victoria. For that very small proportion they come in at about a 78 or 80 entry. So they are good quality and capable students.

The majority, however, come through a pathway which means that the staff of the faculty are evaluating four diverse backgrounds for a range of different characteristics which will reflect the communities they go back into. In addition, we have structured our curriculum from P to 12 in such a way that we are recruiting more males than on average compared to your comments about the majority of primary teachers coming in from female. In addition, we have a major partnership running with IBM and the Northern Territory government to assist teachers to get experience in Central Australia amongst Indigenous communities. About 30 go a year. It has led to some effective placements of teachers in that area in the Indigenous communities. We set up a teacher-training exercise also in the community of Echuca, which serves in particular Aboriginal students. I would utterly dispute the fact that at least in the instance of my own university there has not been close and effective—

Mr SAWFORD—That was generally, not Victoria.

Prof. Harman—You said you could not find a single university. I would argue that a single university—

Mr SAWFORD—We had Victoria University come to us and they were very impressive in their submission in Melbourne. The figures are not all that dramatic. There is a problem. You acknowledge there is a problem Australia-wide.

Prof. Harman—I think it is an issue Australia-wide and I am delighted if the committee looks at it. I would argue that we are giving it close attention.

Mr SAWFORD—The University of South Australia would argue the same way and maybe there is one in Western Australia that would argue as well. But when you look at the figures that they present you find that they are not as dramatic as the words that come across.

Prof. Harman—I would be delighted if the recognition of what we are doing leads to greater numbers of education places coming to our university and our being able to do more for the national good.

Ms BIRD—I am interested in pursuing this a bit further. I am conscious, as is the university in my seat of Wollongong, that there are alternative pathways and entry points. I know a couple of Indigenous young people in the area who have ended up in teacher training through those alternative pathways. The issue seems to be more keeping them.

Prof. Harman—Yes.

Ms BIRD—I think that is probably where the difference is between what you are describing and what Mr Sawford is acknowledging could be the outputs. Is there, and if not does there need to be, a capacity within funding allocations that allows a greater level of individual support and adjustment to university life for many of those students?

Prof. Harman—If I could come round the table and kiss you on those cheeks I would!

Ms BIRD—I think we should move to allow that!

Prof. Harman—Let me first take the issue of education. At the broad level, as I understand it nationally, retention rates for education are better than average. However, the manner in which that flows through to individual groups—Indigenous, low socioeconomic, culturally and linguistically different—you would have to factor out and have a look at. You may have much more information than I do. For a university like Victoria University, multiculturally we have the most diverse student body in the country. We have more than Western Sydney. We are the most diverse. In addition, we have low socioeconomic. It affects the whole university as well as the school of education.

The point you are making with respect to education I think applies across the board in institutions like ours. I would support you very strongly in the intent that we, as educators, cannot in communities such as the western suburbs of Melbourne do our job for students who come from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds, come from Indigenous communities and are the first in their family to come unless we very give very close and considered attention not only to their access but also to their success as they go through. The first year is critical and the first four weeks are even more critical. At the moment we regional universities get a loading in recognition of some of the additional costs in regional communities. Metropolitan and regional communities, which have particular demographics, that raise the issues you are raising are not being addressed.

Ms BIRD—There is nothing similar to the socioeconomic facilities used for school funding that applies to universities?

Prof. Harman—No. Again you have one of my passion points. This is one that I feel very strongly about right across university funding. I feel that the CGS is not addressing that issue. In schools of education, of course, their ability is handicapped. That is another reason I would like to see—even within my own university we are going to be looking in this review at our own allocation model—which of our disciplines are carrying a disproportionate share of low socioeconomic, Indigenous and culturally and linguistically different. We have to retool some of our support services to meet their needs. If it means cross-subsidising out of those schools and faculties that are not carrying that load, then we will try to do so.

Ms BIRD—Often the challenge for education faculties is that they do not have the same capacities to seek private sector funding partnerships. We were made aware of one in Western Australia, I think, where there was a fairly good research unit that combined some practical work. Was that Monash? I cannot remember, but there was one, something like the Brotherhood of St Lawrence or somebody like that, that had entered a joint funding arrangement with the university. But that is the only one I have seen; there may be others. Is that a challenge for education faculties as well?

Prof. Harman—It is a challenge. It is a challenge in a number of respects. One is that the faculties generally have staff who are research capable, but their real strength lies in their professional experience and practice. They do not, therefore, feature as strongly in traditional university grantsmanship, that is, through ARC or NHMRC applications. They tend to receive

less income through research routes. Similarly, their ability to earn consultancy or commercial income is not as strong. That does not mean to say that they cannot enter into partnerships. It is only as a result of doing the research to make sure that I was able to be as competent as I would like to be in the hearings today that I discovered my own school of education has a very interesting partnership with IBM to help fund some of the computer support assistance they need in the work in Central Australia. That relationship is getting developed more strongly. I was told this morning that we are entering serious discussions with IBM about the manner in which the assistance being given by IBM may be increased in future. I am delighted with that obviously, but—

Ms BIRD—That is very new, is it?

Prof. Harman—As I understand it, the partnership has been in place for some time. As I understand it, both they and we would like to see it increased and formalised. It would be, as you have suggested, probably an exception across the country.

Ms BIRD—Is there any role you could see for the Commonwealth in facilitating those opportunities? It does not seem to be an area in which business in general looks for opportunities. Do you see the Commonwealth government in a leadership role—I am not even talking direct funding perhaps?

Prof. Harman—The fact that there is a relationship with business through the Business/Higher Education Round Table and other forums means that there are forums in existence where peak bodies in business are talking with the Commonwealth around the issues of tertiary education, advocating this sort of partnership and showing the benchmark good practices that exist already in the country. That is certainly something the Commonwealth could be doing.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Because I am aware of the time, could we just have a very short discussion on what is probably a misnomer in this case—the skills shortage or, rather, the skilled labour shortage and higher education's place in that issue generally? Let me give you an example. In Tasmania we found in the last few years that many of the teachers who have graduated from the university—not all, but many—secure employment in their chosen career, that is, teaching and education, but that, even within that cohort, many are not obtaining employment in their chosen specialisation, that is, the primary and in some cases secondary subject areas that they are particularly passionate about and that they were trained to teach. That is quite a concern. I think it is true and fair to say that there is an oversupply of early childhood teachers. To me it seems really unfair on the taxpayer who has invested in a really substantial course of education and study to prepare someone for work only to find that either they do not get a job or they are employed in another area that they were never really seeking in the first place. Secondly, it is unfair on the person because they have gone into a course in good faith believing that they are needed and that if they are adequately trained or educated they will secure a job. What are your views about this? Perhaps I can ask a follow-up question. How do you see this? Do you acknowledge it as a problem at all?

Prof. Harman—Mr Ferguson, I might have misunderstood you, so forgive me if that is the case and redirect me, in a sense. If you are talking about people who are trained in one area and who might become teachers in order for us to address some of the skills shortages then I think

that there is a very real role for faculties and schools and departments of education. In our own instance we are running a career change program which brings in people from a range of different backgrounds with experience relevant to teacher education and the program puts them in a position where they can go into practice. That has been highly successful program and it is getting a lot of support. I would just like to see the same thing extended more broadly across the country. I think it is very worth while.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—I would too. That is not quite where I am coming from, though.

Prof. Harman—I might have misunderstood you.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—I acknowledge what you say, and that is worth while. I am alluding to the fact that all across Australia, wherever we have been, the employing authorities all say, 'We do not have enough maths and science teachers.' I think that applies also in languages and perhaps some other areas such as ICT. I acknowledge that it is difficult in the first place to get people to study those courses. However, at the same time we are training people with no hope of them receiving employment at the end.

Ms BIRD—Should universities take more account of demand when they offer courses and not only the supply of those who want to do them?

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Should universities be having a more authoritarian role in ensuring that, in practice, they are preparing roughly the same cohort for the workforce demand?

Prof. Harman—I take the general principle that universities absolutely should be responsive to the nature of what is happening in the marketplace. Effectively we enter into a contract with students when we admit them. We promise to graduate them with some really good opportunity, we would hope, given market conditions, for employability and with a set of graduate attributes that place them well in that context. That is a very strong moral commitment as well as the more contractual one I was talking about. So, yes, I think we should be responsive to the marketplace.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—We are not there yet though, are we?

Prof. Harman—We are not entirely there for a couple of reasons. One is that there has been a tendency within universities for courses to come forward as a result of the views of individual academics who construct those curricula and believe that: 'If I am here and I have the specialisation then we will develop courses around this,' and the students—

Ms BIRD—They will come.

Prof. Harman—Yes, they will come—thank you very much, Ms Bird. All of us are rethinking that very strongly in the sense that we are asking academics to come and put forward courses only when they can demonstrate the market and business case that goes alongside the academic case. That is increasingly the part of the approvals process. However, I will put one caveat on it. It is difficult for any government, let alone any university, to pick where the market is going and have the ability, therefore, to forecast out through the time that it takes to set up a course, get it approved, enrol, complete and graduate students and for them to then move into the marketplace.

We would all acknowledge that to have that successful picking of where the market is moving is difficult. ICT is a classic case.

Mr SAWFORD—Thirty years ago they could do it pretty well.

Prof. Harman—Thirty years ago I was an analyst in the Canadian government trying to do exactly that and we could not do it very well.

Mr SAWFORD—Most people who got trained as a teacher got a job permanently.

Prof. Harman—Yes.

CHAIR—We have run out of time.

Mr SAWFORD—Should every university have an education faculty? Would we be better off with fewer universities having more powerful education faculties.

Prof. Harman—I believe in fewer and better.

Mr SAWFORD—You do?

Prof. Harman—Yes.

Mr Mullarvey—I think it is a reasonable point to argue that if we concentrate our resources we will get a better outcome. But, again, I think it comes back to the needs of each individual university. We certainly would not want a situation of having large areas of Australia not having teacher education available.

Mr SAWFORD—A sensible rationalisation is what you are saying, John?

Mr Mullarvey—Correct.

Prof. Harman—At that principle level, except that I would balance it with this point: the partnerships with schools are so important that if you try to agglomerate faculties of education they lose touch with the schools. You cannot rate the relationship with the schools and the confidence that staff and universities can work with principals and teachers in schools. As soon as you become too much of a large bureaucracy you will lose the ability to have that partnership.

CHAIR—Thank you for appearing before the committee today. We may contact you if we require further information. The transcript of evidence will be loaded on the parliamentary website. Thank you very much.

[1.55 pm]

ALTAMORE, Mr Robert, President, Blind Citizens Australia

CURRAN, Mr Michael, Member, National Policy and Development Council, Blind Citizens Australia

KUMUTAT, Ms Lee, Member, National Policy and Development Council, Blind Citizens Australia

MATTIAZZO, Ms Nadia, Executive Officer, Blind Citizens Australia

Evidence from Mr Curran was taken via teleconference—

CHAIR—Thank you for appearing before the committee today. I remind you that the public proceedings are recorded by Hansard and a record is made available to the public through the parliament's website, so all your friends will know exactly what you have said. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that the hearings are legal proceedings of 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. I invite you to make some introductory remarks.

Ms Mattiazzo—Thank you for the privilege of being able to appear at this inquiry. Firstly, we would like to thank the members for inviting Blind Citizens Australia here today. We are grateful for the opportunity to expand on the matters presented in our submission which we consider very important for the welfare of students who are blind or vision impaired. Before providing some background information on the organisation I would like to give a little further introduction to our panel. For convenience, Blind Citizens Australia and its acronym, which is BCA, will be used interchangeably throughout our statement.

As you have already been made aware, Robert Altamore is BCA's current president and works full time as a solicitor for the Australian Government Solicitor's office. Lee Kumutat, as you also know, is currently a member of Blind Citizens Australia's National Policy and Development Council and was a president of BCA's women's branch for four years. She works full time for the privately owned assistive technology company called Quantum Technology as national training and braille products manager. Michael is also, as you know, a member of BCA and a member of our National Policy and Development Council and is also president of BCA's Victorian youth branch.

I would like to make the committee aware that the positions undertaken by Robert, Lee and Michael for BCA are totally voluntary. Over our 30 years history, Blind Citizens Australia, as the peak national advocacy organisation of and for people who are blind or vision impaired, has strived to achieve its mission to achieve equity and equality by our empowerment, by promoting positive community attitudes and by striving for high quality and accessible services which meet our needs. Our membership comprises in excess of 3,000 individual members, branches nationwide and around 15 affiliate organisations.

As outlined in our submission to this inquiry, we assert that braille is the most important literacy tool for early childhood students who are blind or severely vision impaired. Braille reading is the only real way children who are blind or vision impaired can comprehend the fundamentals of the English language. People who rely on audio as their main means of reading fail to receive the instant reinforcement of spelling, grammar and syntax which you only get reading with your eyes or, in our case, your hands. I know of students who have had very little access to braille in school and, as a consequence, they freely admit in their adult life that they struggle with basic literacy skills. Unfortunately, in today's mainstream schools, these students make up the majority of people who are blind or severely vision impaired, and their lack of braille literacy is negatively affecting their future prospects in a profound way.

In the May-June 1996 issue of the internationally respected *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, Dr Ruby Ryles undertook a groundbreaking study in the United States that demonstrated a strong correlation between braille reading and employment. While her findings demonstrate the unacceptable high unemployment rates of people who are blind or vision impaired in the United States, which are comparable to Australia's, Dr Ryles's results found the study's braille reading group had a 44 per cent unemployment rate compared to the print reading group which had a rate of 77 per cent. Bearing these results in mind, with the current federal government's initiatives for the employment of people with disabilities, we believe these findings are significant.

The major way to improve the situation currently facing students who are blind or vision impaired is for our education system, including teacher training institutions, to greatly enhance the supply of specialist braille teachers and to make generalist teachers aware of the importance of braille instruction. Currently, specialist itinerant teachers of braille are in short supply and, when available, have infrequent access to children who are blind or severely vision impaired. While sighted children in the classroom are free to immerse themselves in print, the child who is blind or severely vision impaired must struggle with infrequent access to his or her primary medium of literacy. Inadequately equipped with braille teaching instruction, mainstream teachers are unable to bridge the gap.

The shortage of teachers skilled in braille, particularly in the codes used for music, maths and science, is an area requiring urgent attention from this committee. Very few teacher training university courses have on-campus training modules in braille instruction, while others offer training through distance education. There is also a lack of postgraduate opportunities for teachers to specialise in teaching blind children. We are aware that there is no longer a postgraduate course available for teachers who are interested in further study in the area of vision impairment in Victoria. Consequently, generalist teachers are graduating into an inclusive and challenging classroom environment, profoundly ill-equipped to deal with the literacy needs of students who are blind or severely vision impaired. If this trend continues, the future of braille literacy in the Australian school system will be under very serious threat.

It is difficult for our organisation to comprehend why this inequality in literacy is still occurring when over the past 20 years important government initiatives and anti-discrimination legislation have been introduced to provide equitable education standards for people with disabilities. The most notable of these initiatives has been the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act, or DDA, in 1992 and the recently passed disability standards for education under this act. These standards, which took 10 years to develop and implement, seek to clarify

the responsibility education providers have to meet in the way that education services are delivered to meet the DDA goals of equality.

In 1998 the Commonwealth released the policy titled *Literacy for all: the challenge for Australian schools*. In the stated goals of this policy, it said:

In March 1997 Commonwealth, State and Territory Education Ministers agreed to a national literacy and numeracy goal:

That every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level.

The Ministers also adopted a sub-goal:

That every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years.

As a result of this initiative the government commissioned a paper entitled 'Literacy, numeracy and students with disabilities'. In the next year the government funded additional research that produced a paper entitled 'Literacy and numeracy acquisition including the role of braille for students in Australia who are blind or vision impaired'. We have included a copy of this document which was circulated to the chair before.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Ms Mattiazzo—Bill Jolley, former executive officer of Blind Citizens Australia, was amongst the expert authors of this paper. So far none of the 16 pertinent recommendations contained in this report has been implemented. In 1999 the state, territory and Australian government ministers of education at the time made a historic commitment to improve Australian schooling within a national framework of cooperation that became known as the Adelaide Declaration on National Goals and Schooling in the Twenty-first Century. Goal 3 of this declaration states that schooling should be socially just, so that 'students' outcomes from schooling are free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination', including disability.

On the international front, the current draft of the United Nations Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with a Disability, which Australia is a party to, asserts under draft article 17, 'Education':

State Parties recognise the right of all persons with disabilities to education.

The article goes on to say:

In realising this right, State Parties shall ensure … the provision of required support, including the specialised training of teachers.

Yet, despite these initiatives mentioned above, students who are blind or vision impaired still cannot access adequate specialist braille instruction in the classroom. The DDA has already been used successfully by blind and severely vision impaired people to receive information in braille. Examples include the 2000 Olympics ticket book, *Maguire v SOCOG* [1999] HREOC No. H 99 115, bank statements and utility bills. Complaints of disability discrimination, students

with disability and/or their legal guardians have been upheld in the court. The most recent case involved the failure to incorporate Auslan into a student's curriculum, *Hurst and Devlin v Education Queensland* [2005] FCA 405 (15 April 2005).

There is no reason why the failure to incorporate braille into a student's curriculum could not form the basis of a complaint. However, it is regrettable that our organisation, which has been advocating braille literacy to government for many years, including the 2002 Senate inquiry into the education of students with disabilities, must pursue adversarial paths to achieve equitable standards in literacy for students who are blind or vision impaired. I will now ask Robert Altamore to conclude our opening statement.

Mr Altamore—Thank you, Nadia. The committee is now aware, through Nadia's statement, of the unacceptable teaching standards that children who are blind or severely vision impaired are forced to tolerate due to the lack of teacher training in braille instruction. In concluding our opening statement, I would like to draw the committee's attention to the print bias in our education system which Blind Citizens Australia argues is one of the fundamental reasons why children who are blind or vision impaired are currently receiving a substandard education in our schools. It is our experience that the community generally has a poor understanding of the impact of inaccessible education practices on students who are blind or vision impaired. Students who are blind struggle to cope with the demands of an education system which is organised around print.

CHAIR—Excuse me, Robert.

Mr Altamore—Yes?

CHAIR—We are going to run short of time and I am sure that the committee would like to go to some questions.

Mr Altamore—Yes.

CHAIR—We have the text of what you are conveying to us here in print. We can go to that in a moment privately, but I have a number of questions I would like to ask and I think a bit of exchange would be useful so that we can continue the process. Would that be acceptable to you?

Mr Altamore—That would be most acceptable.

CHAIR—Thank you. Can I also say to Michael: you can contribute, as you wish to, to the discussion, despite being remote from the conference.

Mr Curran—Yes.

CHAIR—I would like to start by asking about the actual delivery of the service. One of the problems that exists in teacher education at the moment is a very crowded curriculum. There are lots of ideas about what to put in. There are far fewer ideas on what to leave out. The question I pose to you is: how best would teacher educators provide the service to those in need of braille education? Do you see it as something involving a large number of people who get a relatively

limited exposure to braille education, or do you see it as being a field where we should have a smaller number of more specialist teachers who have the skill of teaching braille?

Mr Curran—I could comment here. I think a lot of braille education is very specialist within itself. There are many different braille codes. There is a music code, a maths code and a science code. I think it would be useful to have specialise teachers proficient in the different codes. I do not think it is probably necessary to have every specialist teacher knowing all of the codes. Literacy obviously is very important, and I think all specialist teachers should have a good grip on braille literacy. But when it comes to maths or science of music, I think you would rather people who are specialists in those areas. For instance, it is no use just getting a normal specialist teacher to teach mathematics; you still need someone who has had a degree or past experience with maths before they even try tackling the braille maths code.

CHAIR—Michael, when you use the term of 'specialist teacher', is that a teacher specialist in teaching people with a vision disability, or are you just talking about a teacher who is a specialist in a particular field?

Mr Curran—I am more saying for teaching children with vision impairment.

CHAIR—Okay.

Ms Kumutat—I would like to add something to that. I believe that it is really necessary that classroom teachers have some training in braille and certainly have exposure to it during their training. As you rightly point out, there is a lot to fit into the curriculum and there are a lot of things that specialist teachers—that is, the teachers that go into the mainstream schools and work specifically with the students—must cover as well that are extra to the curriculum. These teachers are also responsible for teaching orientation and mobility—that is, showing the children how to get around the schools. They are also responsible for teaching living skills, doing things like tying their shoelaces—very basic things are also involved for specialist teachers. So I guess it is very difficult when a specialist teacher has to go into a school and also teach and, I guess, almost clear the way for a blind student to have inclusion in a mainstream classroom by having to educate teachers in the use of braille and why it is so important.

I do not know if any of the committee have had experience with braille or seen a braille writer. There can be quite large pieces of equipment and some of them look like they have come out of the Dark Ages. As a result, that can be a barrier to inclusion. So, as I said, it can be quite difficult for the specialist teacher to forge the way for the inclusion of braille.

Mr SAWFORD—In a former life I was a school principal and a president of a principals association in South Australia and in the mid-seventies I was encouraging the mainstreaming of vision impaired and deaf children and physically disabled children into schools .

Ms Mattiazzo—You were before your time.

Mr SAWFORD—You may not think that when I say the next bit. People in the department decided that they would use my school and me as an example of perhaps mainstreaming children. I refused—but I did so because they did not give me the resources that I needed in order to do that properly. I became very unpopular for taking that stance. What happened was

that other schools took on the opportunity and, I think, disadvantaged the current population of the school and the teachers and, in fact, were not honest in terms of mainstreaming those disabled children because they did not have the resources nor the skill nor the specialities.

I think the question that Luke asked is a very important one. Of course we should have teachers who are able to accommodate the needs of vision impaired and blind children, but what is the best way to do that? I have not got a clear picture from you as to how that ought to be done. Is there still a place for specialist blind and vision impaired schools, or is mainstreaming with specialist help the way to go? If that is the way to go, how do you train and get the necessary resources, because there is a crowded curriculum and I think, Lee, you have acknowledged that.

Ms Kumutat—Yes.

Ms Mattiazzo—I think it is a bit of a contentious issue as to whether you have a specialist school or a mainstream school situation. I guess—and this would be my opinion only—that it would be good to have a bit of both, to have the specialist schools as well as the mainstream. I can hear in my mind 40,000 people jumping up and down saying, 'Send everybody out to the mainstream schools.' There are certain instances where being in a specialist school situation can benefit a person.

Speaking from my experience, my primary schooling was done in a specialist school situation, where I felt I had the resources to learn braille appropriately and to participate in everyday activities like games and gym activities and that kind of thing. That was good for the time that it happened, but once I hit the high school time, when I was 12, it was time for me to leave that specialist school setting and go out into my community. That was a huge step for me, because suddenly there were barriers. Suddenly I could not participate in gym activities because: 'You might fall over and hurt yourself so go to the library and sit.' I could not run around the play yard because: 'Oh, my God, she might fall over.' So, personally, I do not know that I can answer that.

Mr SAWFORD—I think you have answered it very well.

Ms Mattiazzo—There needs to be the opportunity for both, I think.

Mr SAWFORD—Yes.

Mr Altamore—If I could supplement this, I had a similar educational experience to Nadia. I think that the way Australian society is moving, the trend will continue for blind people to be educated in integrated settings. The challenge is to set up a regime for training and skilling teachers so that the teachers in the schools can have the supplemental knowledge of specialist blindness teachers to assist the child to acquire literacy skills and then participate in the class and the school activities. I think that is the challenge. Our problem is that that challenge is not being met. We applaud the current push for literacy for Australian children. Our concern is to see that blind and vision impaired children are not left behind and are not forgotten in this push because we are a very small group of people and we will be very easily overlooked unless specific efforts are made on our behalf.

CHAIR—I am just concerned, Robert, at the quality of assistance that can be given by a teacher who does a semester or two in his initial training, who perhaps does not have a vision impaired student for seven years and who then has a vision impaired student in the class. How well equipped is that teacher, who has a recollection of what he learnt those years ago? Is that a good service offered to the child when that teacher may not have had an ongoing contact with vision impaired children and therefore his or her skills in braille may have diminished significantly?

Mr Altamore—That is a very real problem. You have hit the nail on the head. I believe that the solution is that the teacher will have the consciousness and basic knowledge and that what needs to happen then is the teacher needs to be put in touch with a specialist so that he or she can upgrade their knowledge and get the support of the specialist. So the specialist and the teacher who did the training seven years ago are working together for the blind student.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—We have heard from Nadia and Robert—not yet from Lee or Michael—about their schooling. I would like to ask you for a very brief anecdotal opinion. Based on what you have said about your schooling, which sounds like it was pretty happy in the primary years and perhaps less happy in the secondary years, do you think you had a good education? And do you think you had a better education than blind students are currently getting?

Mr SAWFORD—That is putting you on the spot, isn't it?

Ms Mattiazzo—Yes. I do not know that I could answer the question about what blind students are getting now. I would really rather Lee did that.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Okay.

Ms Mattiazzo—As a trainer she is out there in terms of the students now.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—But do you think you had a good education?

Ms Mattiazzo—I think I was given every opportunity. I think, because I am an inherently strong person, I took those opportunities. There would still be a number of students that attended the school that I did in my primary years who probably would say the opposite.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Okay.

Mr Altamore—Just to supplement, before we go to Michael or Lee, I would suggest that I, through the special school, had a good education in blindness skills but I suffered in terms of my awareness of the sighted community. When I got into the secondary school I had to learn very quickly the ways of sighted students.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Lee?

Ms Kumutat—I was a little bit of an experiment when I went through school. I started my schooling, like Nadia, at a specialist school, up to the age of about eight, and then I went into a mainstream public school. But it is acknowledged that I had all the resources possible thrown at me so that I could do this. I learnt typing by the age of six. I had all my braille skills. I had a lot of orientation and mobility skills and then I went into year 3. I also had at that time what I consider as much support as a child could want. Unfortunately, because I was a child, I probably did not recognise it at the time and did not take the opportunities that I should have. However, when I went into high school I transferred back to a local high school where the support almost stopped.

I was lucky enough that I had momentum by that stage so that I could pretty much manage on my own with the support of other students, mainly. But what I found in that situation, and I know that it is still happening today, is that when I did get a specialist teacher who was fresh out of the specialist teacher training I was actually marking their braille work—and I see that still today for students. You sit there with a pencil and you circle their errors, and you are effectively tutoring them. To me, looking back, that is an unacceptable situation for a student to be in. I know that that is still happening today. So I firmly believe that it is an issue of resourcing. I believe that we need more specialist teachers, not just in braille but in some of the other areas we need to look at, which are orientation, mobility and other areas. I believe they are the issues.

Mr SAWFORD—Lee, on the teacher education person who is being trained, would it be better for them to have a reduced subject content area? If you compare four subjects with eight or 12, what happens when you have 12 against four? Sometimes the specialism needs less activity in other areas if you are going to do it properly.

Ms Mattiazzo—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—I was absolutely amazed when you said to me that you had total braille vocabulary at the age of six. That is just amazing. What is the way to go? Can you see the problem that Luke was putting out, that if you just keep adding on to teacher education it just diminishes what is there?

Ms Mattiazzo—Yes.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—And it would probably be done in a mediocre way.

Mr SAWFORD—Yes, which is what you experienced.

Ms Kumutat—I believe that for the specialist teachers it is an issue of workload—not so much subject areas but workload. Some teachers may have 20 or 30 children on their caseload, so they are driving—and obviously in parts of Western Australia flying—to see children and they may only see a braille-using student twice a term. This is only my personal opinion, though it comes from speaking with lots and lots of teachers, but I think it is an issue of workload. It may be that we look at dividing the specialists a little bit more into, say, teachers who work with children who have low vision and specialise in that area, because that is an entirely different ballgame, and teachers who work with children who are blind. But I personally do not believe that going back to a totally special school model would be in anybody's best interests.

Ms BIRD—Thank you for your presentation. In having a look at your recommendations, I think to some extent what we are doing is hearing from you, which is valuable to have for the record, the challenges of getting an education when you have a vision impairment or blindness. But you have made some very specific recommendations that are relevant to this inquiry. I particularly want to look at whether you are making the point to us that actual numbers of specialist teachers are decreasing. and that there are courses closing and that that is a particular pressure. You make the point that if there is not national leadership on the provision of those courses then universities may just simply, on an individual basis, decide to close them—and before you know it they are all closed. Is that what I understand your concern is with university provision of that training?

Ms Mattiazzo—Yes.

Ms BIRD—In a nutshell, do you want to give us the background of what you know about that—how many courses do run, where they run, and how many have closed?

Ms Mattiazzo—At this stage I can speak for how many there are at the moment that I am aware of. There is Renwick College in New South Wales that has a course for training specialist teachers in vision impairment.

Ms Kumutat—That is right.

Ms BIRD—Are they generally postgraduate education degree people who specialise?

Ms Kumutat—Yes.

Ms Mattiazzo—And that would be, to my knowledge, the only course that I am aware of. There was one coming out of Queensland, I think.

Ms Kumutat—There was, and we are not sure of the status of that. That was based out of Griffith University. We know that there was one run through—was it La Trobe University in Melbourne?

Ms Mattiazzo—Gillian Gale I think was—

Ms Kumutat—It is no longer operating. They were the only three that we are aware of. There are certainly degrees in special education.

Ms BIRD—Yes.

Ms Mattiazzo—But nothing specific—

Ms BIRD—That was for specialised postgraduates.

Ms Mattiazzo—That is right; for vision impairment.

Mr Altamore—The other thing is we are not sure of the situation in South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory but we do not believe that there are the courses there. In

South Australia there is a centre, Townsend House, which is a specialist education facility for blind and vision impaired and deaf-blind children. It has a strong outreach to schools in Adelaide. Other than that, we are not sure there is much in South Australia and Western Australia.

Ms Mattiazzo—But that still is not the provision of a course for teachers.

Ms BIRD—So, leaving aside the crowded curriculum, under the current model, postgraduate students who decide to specialise in becoming a qualified teacher of braille literacy or numeracy, or whatever they may decide, have decreasing options—down to one, basically—to do that.

Ms Mattiazzo—That is right.

Ms Kumutat—We also make the point, and it is a valid one, that a lot of the teachers—and I think this is the same across the board—are in the 45 to 50 age group and we are not seeing young teachers wishing to be specialist teachers in vision impairment.

Ms Mattiazzo—So in 20 years time that will be a huge issue. We may all want to work until we drop, or whatever it is, but in reality, in 20 years time—

Ms Kumutat—We are also seeing that impacting on, in a sense, students' access to information through technology, where you have got sighted children who have access to so much information through technology these days.

Ms BIRD—Can I say to you that they are still complaining with 45-plus teachers who do not understand technology, so you are getting the double whammy, really. That is what you are saying to us.

Ms Kumutat—Exactly, because technology obviously has to go a little bit further to get that into braille for the students. We are seeing that that is not following through. It is still being handled in a kind of double, triple handling type fashion, which is not really necessary any longer. So there are lots of issues.

Ms Mattiazzo—It also means the student throughout their whole education is basically behind the eight ball and is always getting their information two to six months after everybody else and is always still completing their papers at the end of the year when everybody else is on holidays.

Ms BIRD—Yes.

CHAIR—Are there technologies in existence that are not widely available that can either (a) help the blind student to learn braille more quickly or (b) help the teacher learn more quickly or communicate to the student more easily?

Ms Kumutat—Definitely. You see this technology that is in front of you here that Nadia and I are using. Basically all our information is electronic, there has been no printing process and we are reading it in braille. This type of technology is abounding. It is still very expensive, I have to say that up front, simply because it is a niche market. However, we are seeing that the long-

handed way of producing braille for students is still being stuck to, unnecessarily in lots of cases, simply because specialist teachers (a) do not have the adequate training in the technology and (b) are reluctant to take it up.

Mr Altamore—And because of the backlogs in production of braille, our students are not getting braille into their hands as young students and therefore they are not encouraged to read or persist with it. Maybe Michael would like to enlarge on that point.

Mr Curran—One of the points I can make, at least with the technology anyway, is that I think it is almost a confidence thing with blind students. I still remember in grade 2 receiving a 14-volume braille dictionary—

Ms Mattiazzo—That was the pocket size one.

Ms BIRD—And that was the pocket size one?

Ms Mattiazzo—The *Little Oxford*.

Mr Curran—and that is absolutely ridiculous in this day and age when you have all these lovely electronic technologies for braille displays et cetera. I really do think that braille literacy would much improve for blind students if there were easier ways of getting these expensive devices and having people who were able to teach the children how to use them or even just getting the funding to use them. It is easier to carry around a dictionary on your braille display or read a two-volume book or whatever rather than having to carry around all this braille with you. Of course this gets even more important when you get to high school because you have to move around from class to class and you just cannot carry those braille books around with you when there is technology available these days. I have had back problems all my life as well from carrying too many braille books and things like that.

On the point about getting information in braille later than the sighted students get that information, I think that technologies could help there, because it is easier sometimes to get electronic documents and just whack them on your braille display rather than having to wait for all this braille to be embossed onto braille paper.

Ms BIRD—Michael, do you mind if I ask how long you have been out of school?

Mr Curran—I finished year 12 in 2002.

Ms BIRD—Are you studying now?

Mr Curran—Yes, I am doing a Bachelor of Computer Science.

Ms BIRD—And is there a similar thing at the university in terms of the challenges?

Mr Curran—Yes, but I do not really use braille all that much. I guess for that reason alone, because I know it is going to take so long to get a braille book, and also my braille skills are not exactly up to what I would want them to be. I am not a very fast braille reader. I think this is also to do with having had so many braille books and stuff as a young child. I was really quite against

reading because the other sighted students were not using the same books as me. I was carrying around three-volume books; they only these little tiny books with them. I think it is just things like that.

Ms BIRD—Yes. Thanks, Michael.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—If I make a comment which is uninformed you will be able to correct me if I am wrong, but I think the braille system seems to give you independence in that you obviously can read in your own time, at your own pace, you can skip chapters, you can skip to the end, you can go back and check again if you were not paying attention. But it seems at the same time to be an old technology, an old medium, in a digital age. If you want to compare a blind child today with a sighted child, even the sighted child is to a degree turning away from print media on paper. They are tending to read from screens. Now there is an equivalent technology, isn't there, for reading aloud what is the text on screen? I would like to know if that is a realistic future replacement for braille or if braille really is something that you need to have maintained.

Mr Curran—Should I comment on this?

Ms Mattiazzo—We all will.

Mr SAWFORD—Michael had his hand up first!

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—Can I just say that in Tasmania I met with a blind man who attends the TAFE college and he does not use braille at all. He was really onto me to get the TAFE, and they did, to put all of their notes on a computer system. He had a special device which he was able to have read to him. So what are your views, Robert and then Michael?

Mr Altamore—My views on this are that I do not believe braille can be replaced because if you only rely on speech to do your reading you never learn spelling, syntax, grammar, punctuation et cetera. These days, if you want to be a professional person, not only do you need to be able to read material, you need to be able to write it, and write it clearly and accurately. So I do not believe that braille will be replaced.

As to old technology, maybe reliance on paper is old, but, as Lee said, we now have the ability to provide people with electronic braille displays, which means you can get the same document that I have. You can have it on a computer disc, I can have it on a computer disc. We can both put it in our computers and you read with your eyes, I read with the braille display, as Lee and Nadia are doing. But while we are moving into the electronic age, people are still reading on paper. People still want to have their paper documents. People are still printing out their emails. So where it is right that blind people need to read paper braille, they should be able to.

Ms Kumutat—Can I just add something to that very quickly?

CHAIR—Yes, but we are running out of time so we will have to wrap up.

Ms Kumutat—I am sorry. If we were to equate that to: 'You sighted people listen to everything on cassette,' that is basically what we would be doing if we were only using, say, synthetic speech on a computer. We would be asking you not to use a screen but just to listen.

CHAIR—Michael Curran, do you have a view on that?

Mr Curran—Yes. I can say that from using speech on a computer since year 8, so for at least the last eight or so years, my spelling has greatly gone down—well, not exactly gone down, but it has not exactly gone up either because with a lot of new words, especially in computer science or in year 12 English or whatever, I am just not reading them in braille, letter for letter, anymore. I am simply just hearing them as words. So that is a drawback.

Also I want to point out that with a lot of these technologies that have braille displays and things like that you can actually plug them into a computer and instead of hearing the speech that is on the screen you can still view what is on the screen, but as braille. So it is not really an old technology. I think that is almost like saying English writing is an old technology. It is exactly the same.

Mr SAWFORD—Just two questions to clarify what has come up in the session. One is: what is the cost, Nadia and Lee, of those machines you are using?

Ms BIRD—Before you go on with that question, I am very sorry, I have to leave. Thank you for your presentation.

Ms Mattiazzo—Thank you.

Ms Kumutat—Thank you.

Ms Mattiazzo—Mine is slightly more expensive than Lee's, I think because of the size of my braille display. Mine would be around $10,000 to $11,000.

Ms Kumutat—Mine was $7,000.

Mr SAWFORD—So it is quite expensive.

Ms Mattiazzo—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—The other question is to Robert. When you mentioned Townsend House in South Australia as being a centre for vision and hearing impaired and that it has an outreach centre—

Mr Altamore—It does outreach work, I think.

Mr SAWFORD—I have a little knowledge of Townsend House. They seem to be pretty effective in lobbying on behalf of their constituency in terms of the state government. Are there equivalent Townsend Houses with outreach and effective relationships with state governments in other capital cities of Australia?

Ms Mattiazzo—I would say no.

Mr Altamore—I would so no, too.

Ms Mattiazzo—There is one in Victoria that is part of the Vision Australia Foundation that is a school for people who are vision impaired but mostly have other learning difficulties as well and I would say that they are probably not—

Mr Altamore—Not as effective as Townsend House.

Ms Mattiazzo—Yes, they are not as effective as Townsend House—they would like to be—but I think that it is through sheer lack of resources.

Mr SAWFORD—Should the model of Townsend House be replicated in other places in Australia?

Mr Altamore—I would not say exactly replicated, but I think that it is something that is worth looking at as a foundation from which to build a practice.

CHAIR—Okay. We will have to wrap it up there. What I will do, Robert, because you did not get to finish your opening statement, is have the text of your opening statement incorporated in *Hansard*. We will need a resolution of the committee to authorise that.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Sawford**):

That this committee authorises incorporation of the opening statement by Mr Robert Altamore of Blind Citizens Australia in the *Hansard* transcript.

Mr Altamore—*The opening statement read as follows—*

The committee is now aware, through Nadia's statement, of the unacceptable teaching standards that children who are blind or severely vision impaired are forced to tolerate due to the lack of teacher training in braille instruction. In concluding our opening statement, I would like to draw the committee's attention to the print bias in our education system which Blind Citizens Australia argues is one of the fundamental reasons why children who are blind or vision impaired are currently receiving a sub-standard education in our schools.

It is our experience that the community generally has a poor understanding of the impact of inaccessible education practices on students who are blind or vision impaired. Students who are blind struggle to cope with the demands of an education system which is organized around print. This print discrimination we contend is a by-product of the broader ableist assumptions that are deeply rooted in our education system. Ableism, in all its forms, equates to the devaluation of disability in society. With regards to education, ablism, to quote from the spring 2002 edition of the Harvard Educational Review, "sets a curriculum where it is better for a child to walk than roll, speak than sign, read print than read braille, spell independently than use a spell check, and hang out with non-disabled kids as opposed to other disabled kids".

These abliest biases were prevalent most recently in the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy. Blind Citizens Australia entered a submission to this inquiry, which is enclosed in the information we have presented to you today. We also met with the inquiry's chair, Dr. Ken Rowe, during the inquiry's consultative phase. While we are pleased that the final report of the committee titled 'Teaching Reading: Report and Recommendations' was able to acknowledge that, and I

quote, “for those students with hearing or vision impairments, literacy learning typically requires additional support such as Braille books and hearing loops”, we were disappointed that the report offered no specific recommendation supporting this additional support other than more ‘inclusive teaching practices’. Much of the report centered on the very worn reading wars between ‘phonics’ and ‘whole language’ with little regard for people with disabilities.

In all, the final report of the inquiry cited the word disability once in the main text and vision impairment twice. It is also important to note the criteria used in the National Inquiry’s literature review to select research articles included those related to, and I quote, “learning difficulties or learning disabilities such as physical or sensory impairment”. Blind Citizens Australia correctly argues that people who are blind or vision impaired do not have a learning difficulty or a learning disability, it is quite honestly the other way around; the education system is disabling students who are blind or vision impaired because it possess a resource disability that derives from an ablest bias.

In concluding our opening statement, Blind Citizens Australia would like to offer the following recommendations to the committee.

Recommendation 1 . Student teachers, in the first instance, need to acquire a broad understanding during their training on the rights of children to access literacy and how these rights are impeded for children with disabilities due to resource shortages that are wrongly justified under the bias of ableist education standards. Teachers in training must understand that terms such as ‘learning disability or difficulty’ have their origins in ablest standards and possess little regard for a child’s learning potential.

Recommendation 2. With reference to this first recommendation, we call on the committee to address the critical shortage of teachers for students who are blind or vision impaired by making teaching course specialising in vision impairment available nation wide. We are aware that there is no longer a post graduate course available for teachers who are interested in further study in the area of vision impairment in Victoria and teachers who are able to teach students who are blind or vision impaired are reaching retirement age. Courses specialising in vision impairment should teach a common curriculum to ensure that graduates have the same minimum level of core skills in braille to teach students who are blind or vision impaired. We would be pleased to work with the Committee to develop and implement this recommendation.

The following final recommendations 3 to 5 have been informed by a paper authored by Dr. Gillian Gale and Dr. Michael Steer of Renwick College, University of New Castle which was delivered at a 2005 conference of the South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment, commonly know by its acronym ‘SPEVI’. A copy of this paper has been given to each of you in the information pack provided.

Recommendation 3. We call on the committee to develop and implement a National Agenda for the generation of nationally accepted principles and service provision standards for students who are blind or vision impaired which has been employed successfully in the USA through the Instructional Materials Accessibility Act.

Recommendation 4. There is little Australian national level data on a wide variety of matters relating to literacy and innumeracy acquisition by students who are blind or vision impaired. For example, there is relatively little data on comparisons between reading rates between sighted children and children who are blind or vision impaired. We thereby call on the committee to make the recommendation that the Australian Bureau of Statistics work with the relevant education agencies to establish a statistical database on matters relating to literacy and innumeracy acquisition by students who are blind or vision impaired. This database could then be used to establish statistically driven benchmarks to inform the education community on the teaching standards required for students who are blind or vision impaired. Such literacy benchmarks are already established for sighted students.

Recommendation 5. Currently in Australia, there is no national level data on specialist teacher education, including on course content teacher development and subsequent in-service training and award bearing professional development. We thereby call on the committee to make the recommendation that a national database on the prevalence specialist teacher education be established.

In closing, Blind Citizens Australia again thanks the committee for inviting us here today to present our evidence.

That concludes our opening statement.

CHAIR—We also need to authorise the additional information document as a submission.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Ferguson**):

That this committee authorises acceptance of additional information from Blind Citizens Australia as a submission.

CHAIR—Thank you all for appearing before the committee today. We may contact you if we need further information. We really appreciate your time and effort in coming to appear before us and for Michael to join us via telephone. It has really been a very useful exercise for the committee and we wish you well in your endeavours to assist vision impaired people. A transcript of the evidence will be placed upon the parliamentary website. Thank you very much.

Ms Kumutat—Thank you.

Ms Mattiazzo—Thank you.

Mr Altamore—Thank you.

Mr SAWFORD—It was good to have a submission that was in explicit language. We do not always get that.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Sawford**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 2.45 pm