CHAPTER 3

BETTER SCHOOLING FOR GIFTED CHILDREN

3.1 This chapter discusses the various interventions available to improve the schooling of gifted children. The possibilities range on two axes: curriculum design and organisational structures. Curriculum design refers to differentiating the curriculum to meet the special needs of the gifted. Organisational structure refers to the various forms of ability grouping, including accelerating individual children.

3.2 The report includes here discussion of identifying the gifted, since to plan an intervention it is first necessary to decide who it is aimed at. The Committee stresses that the purpose of identification is not to 'label' individuals, but rather to help plan educational programs. Some interventions may be aimed more widely, some more narrowly, according to need. A number of submissions stressed that gifted education approaches can benefit all children. This is taken up at paragraph 3.79. Professor Braggett suggested the following different objectives relating to different target groups:

1. To enrich the lives of *all* students through experiences not gained at home (broadening and enriching).
2. To discover the individual gifts of *all* students and to cultivate them.
3. To develop and satisfy the abilities of students with *high specialised abilities*.
4. To develop further the abilities of *high performers* (the all-rounders). [1]

3.3 All comment about 'identifying' gifted children should be read in this light.

Identifying gifted children

3.4 Means of identifying gifted children include subjective and objective procedures. Subjective procedures are those that rely on judgments from general observation of the child. They may include nomination by teachers, nomination by parents, nomination by self or peers, interviews and community perceptions. Objective procedures include standardized tests of ability and achievement, teacher-made tests, class grades and school records. Most submissions argued that a multi-facetted approach to identification is preferable to relying on one method alone. The main issues are considered below.

Nomination by teachers

3.5 The Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) reports that nomination by teachers is the most used and the least effective method of

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1 Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.18

identifying gifted children. It is the most prone to class, cultural and gender bias when not accompanied by objective procedures:

> As early as 30 years ago Jacobs (1971) found that kindergarten teachers who had received no training or inservice on the characteristics of gifted young children tended to over-estimate the ability of children who were verbally articulate, who were cooperative in class and who sought teacher approval. Seventeen years later, Betts and Neihart (1988) estimated that as many as 90% of children nominated as "gifted" by untrained teachers are likely to be high achieving conformists - teacher pleasers "who often become bored in school but learn to use the system to get by with as little effort as possible" (p. 249). Children identified by teacher nomination alone have generally been found to come from middle class families within the dominant culture (Ciha et al, 1974; Gross, 1993).[2]

3.6 GERRIC stresses that inservice or training in gifted education can significantly increase teachers' effectiveness. However, many of the trait lists published both in gifted education texts and as commercial materials focus on the behavioural traits and characteristics of moderately gifted as opposed to highly gifted students. A further problem is that these lists, with very few exceptions, concentrate on the positive characteristics and ignore the negative behaviours often displayed by gifted children whose schools have failed to make appropriate provision for them. [3]

3.7 Other submitters made similar comments. The Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training saw a need for more education psychologists and guidance officers with training in gifted education. Teachers may misread inappropriate behaviour:

> Another issue pointing to the need for extensive professional development and increased support by educational psychologists is teachers misreading 'inappropriate' behaviour. When a gifted child is unable to work in an allocated group a teacher might incorrectly read the situation as just a behaviour problem and put considerable energy into 'correcting' the child's behaviour. The problem may in fact be that the level of work provided is inappropriate.[4]

3.8 The Committee was told that teachers untrained in this area tend not to distinguish between potential and performance, and tend to miss underachievers, divergent thinkers, visual-spatial learners, and children who mask their ability. The Tasmanian Government commented that the range of approaches for identifying gifted children, and the suitability of the particular approaches in individual cases, are not

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2 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.27

3 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.7,27-28,33

4 Submission 227, Department of Education, Employment and Training [Victoria], p.5 Similarly submission 24, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Queensland, p.3

well known.[5] Professor Braggett stressed the need for teachers to provide an environment in which giftedness can show itself:

> Importantly for many, it is the regular classroom teacher who develops practices that nurture the individual gifts and talents of children, encourages the growth of abilities, and gradually detects (through normal teaching programs) the emergence of individual talents. In this sense, the *initial* identification of talent is not based on standardised testing but rather on the cultivation of individual abilities, the development of skills and strategies, the encouragement and development of confidence and self esteem, and the provision of resources and differentiated programs when children's individual abilities begin to emerge. After this occurs, the teacher may be further assisted by recourse to standardised testing procedures.[6]

3.9 It is particularly concerning that untrained teachers are more likely to see giftedness in well-behaved children of the dominant culture, and less likely to see it in disadvantaged groups. Neglecting the issue militates against the prospects of those who are already disadvantaged.

> Gifted students from low socio-economic areas, rural communities, non-English speaking backgrounds and Koorie communities are less likely to be identified as gifted despite research indicating that giftedness does not respect these boundaries.[7]

3.10 The Committee notes at paragraph 4.59 suggestions that teacher training and professional development relating to gifted education should be taken in four layers of increasing depth. It is suggested that understanding how to identify gifted children belongs in the first layer, which should be done by all teachers.[8] The Committee agrees. The classroom teacher is in the position of the general practitioner, who must be able to recognise symptoms that need more specialised attention. It is essential to train all teachers to recognise gifted children.

Nomination by parents

3.11 Research has consistently shown that parents are significantly more successful than teachers in identifying giftedness in the primary years of school. Although some parents remain surprisingly unaware that their children are developmentally advanced, in most cases the onset of awareness that the child is 'different' occurs in the early childhood years. The Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre suggests that it is not surprising that parents are so much more successful than

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5 Submission 119, Professional Association of Parents and Teachers, p.2. Submission 18, K. Fox, p.2. Submission 60, L. Sword, p.2. Submission 36, Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children, p.2. Submission 75, Government of Tasmania, p.3

6 Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.8

7 Submission 227, Department of Education, Employment and Training [Victoria], p.5. Similarly for example, submission 19, Dr J. Milner Davis, p.2; submission 209, South Australian Government, p.4

8 Submission 103, Dr J. Landvogt, p.5

teachers in identifying giftedness in the early years. It is during the early years of life that cognitive development proceeds most swiftly. By the time the teacher enters the scene, developmental changes have become more gradual.[9]

3.12 Despite this, parents who approach the school to discuss their children's giftedness are very often disbelieved.[10] Many submissions described how parents are often regarded as 'pushy' when they try to advocate for their children:

> I have worked with gifted students of all ages and their families for 9 years. I have found that the parents I have met do not conform to the stereotype of "pushy parent". Rather they tend to underestimate rather than overestimate their children's need for advancement.[11]

> Through research it has been discovered that parents are usually able to identify a child's giftedness. Parents who misjudge their child's ability usually underestimate this ability rather than overestimate it. Yet once a child goes to school, parents who try to indicate to the school that their child may be gifted are often seen as "pushy" parents. Many parents spoken to in the recent GATCA survey have told of teachers not believing the parents' identification, and even of teachers refusing to believe assessments from psychologists.[12]

3.13 Arguably this mistaken response by some teachers may reflect either lack of training or underlying attitudes of denial. It is something that needs to be addressed in professional development for teachers on recognising giftedness.

Tests

3.14 Use of standardised tests to disclose giftedness is controversial. Some criticise tests for being too narrow in focus or culturally biased. The Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) reported that 'the use of objective procedures, such as intelligence testing, to identify intellectually gifted students, or standardized achievement tests to identify students gifted in maths, reading or science, is actively discouraged in several Australian states.'[13] Ms G. Byrne reported that 'many principals and teachers seem dismissive of formal assessments such as the WISC III or Stanford Binet IV, believing rather the child's performance on school-based tests….'

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9 Submission 215, Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, p.28-29

10 Submission 215, Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, p.29. Gross, M.U.M. (1993) *Exceptionally Gifted Children*, London: Routledge.

11 Submission 60, L. Sword, p.3

12 Submission 270, Gifted and Talented Children's Association of WA, p.4

13 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.7

> There is a dire need for in-service training to aid with understanding the difference between achievement testing and tests of intellectual functioning.[14]

3.15 By contrast, most submissions from academic experts support standardised tests as being more objective than methods like teacher nomination. According to the CHIP Foundation, 'as much error as individual intelligence tests may contain, they are far more accurate and useful in the identification process than are group aptitude tests or teacher nominations….'

> Many studies have demonstrated that teachers are inclined to nominate as gifted those children who are striving, conforming high achievers and to discount the possibility that those who are not such "good students" might be gifted in academic potential.' (Whitmore, 1980, p 62) Psychologists persist in supporting individual assessments of ability because for all their inherent problems the assessment provides more accurate data than the alternatives.[15]

3.16 However most who support using tests stress that they should not be used alone, but rather should be one of suite of methods of identification. For example, the Australian Psychological Society affirms that intelligence tests are a valid measure of 'cognitive horsepower', and noted that they are the most reliable single measure predictors of academic and vocational success, but still does not endorse the sole use of intelligence tests as a measure of selecting students for programs of support.[16] GERRIC recommends the use of 'a range of objective and subjective identification procedures, including the use of culture-fair tests of aptitude and ability.'[17] The Association of Independent Schools of Queensland notes that 'the paradigm is shifting slowly from IQ testing to a far broader concept. However, IQ testing may be necessary before some schools will recognise that a child is gifted.' [18]

3.17 Tests may be group tests or individually administered. Individual tests are naturally more time-consuming to administer, but give more reliable results, particularly for underachievers or learning disabled children:

> Formal assessments conducted by registered psychologists surpass achievement tests, nominations, folios, and group tests of abstract reasoning. Group tests, unlike individual instruments, often rely heavily on skills in reading and following directions and as such in their resemblance to achievement tests may not accurately identify all CHIP [children of high

14 Submission 63, G. Byrne, p.5. Similarly submission 41, CHIP Foundation, p.8

15 Submission 41, CHIP Foundation, p.8

16 Submission 115, Australian Psychological Society, p.4

17 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.4

18 Submission 24, Association of Independent Schools of Queensland, p.2

> intellectual potential]. The learning-disabled CHIP, the minority student or the underachiever may all fail to be accurately identified as CHIP.[19]

3.18 Ability testing, as opposed to achievement testing, is essential to catch underachievers or those who do not have the opportunity to show their abilities in class:

> There are some students, however, who do not excel in comparison with their peers because they seek to mask their abilities or have specialised strengths that are not easily tapped in class … For these students, standardised testing is important – sometimes imperative – if their strengths are to be assessed and appropriate provision made. Present day testing seeks to explore a wide array of abilities without concentrating solely on measured IQ.[20]

3.19 Several submissions noted that tests with ceilings that are too low may not show up the profoundly gifted. Off-level testing (that is, using a test designed for an older age group) may be necessary for these children.[21]

3.20 There are concerns that standardised psychological tests are too narrow or culturally biased. Arguably these perceptions arise from the inappropriate use of tests. The Australian Psychological Society commented that 'a poor understanding of what an intelligence test purports to measure, and its subsequent inappropriate use as a selection tool has often drawn criticism inappropriately directed towards the tool, and not its user. Intelligence tests were not designed to be measures of creativity, character, personality, motivation, or other important differences between people … They do however provide valuable information regarding "cognitive horsepower"'.[22] The charge of cultural bias is considered in the next section.

Identifying giftedness in disadvantaged groups

3.21 Giftedness exists in all socio-economic groups and ethnic groups. However, it is well established that teachers without training in gifted education issues are more likely to identify as gifted children of the dominant culture, and less likely to see giftedness among disadvantaged and minority groups. Teachers may wrongly believe that giftedness does not exist in these groups. Better teacher training is essential to rectify this.

3.22 Devolution of responsibility for curriculum support and professional development to schools worsens this problem. Negative attitudes at the local level are more likely to be detrimental to disadvantaged children, because they do not have such articulate parents and communities to support them.

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19 Submission 41, CHIP Foundation, p.8

20 Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.8

21 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.24

22 Submission 115, Australian Psychological Society, p.4

> In general … inservice opportunities in gifted education are organised by individual schools from their own funding. This has the unhappy result that schools which do not believe they have gifted students in their population are unlikely to seek inservice in how to identify or cater for these students.[23]

3.23 The schools which wrongly believe that they do not have gifted students are more likely to be those in poorer areas. If they do not have external leadership on matters of professional development and curriculum support, their attitudes can perpetuate themselves, to the detriment of gifted children in their communities. Further comment on the effects of devolution of responsibility to schools is at paragraph 3.123.

3.24 On the alleged cultural bias of tests GERRIC noted that 'there is a significant concern among Australian educators that IQ tests may be biased against children from minority or disadvantaged groups.' However, GERRIC argues that the problem has been inappropriate use of tests, not the validity of tests in principle:

> However, the problem might be better phrased as "tester bias" rather than "test bias". It is completely inappropriate to administer, in English, a verbal IQ test to a child who uses English as her second language and who still thinks in a language other than English. This happens much less frequently nowadays than happened 20 years ago, but teachers, understandably, have long memories for such inappropriate use of testing - a procedure of which many were already wary.[24]

3.25 GERRIC argues that tests can be and should be culturally fair, and that well designed culturally fair tests have proven a valuable tool for identifying disadvantaged gifted populations:

> Individual intelligence tests offer valuable data on the ability of disadvantaged students, since new norms include appropriate samples of minority and low socioeconomic level populations … To ignore good standardized aptitude, achievement and ability indices in the identification process would do more harm than good in identifying high-functioning students within this population. [25]

3.26 Some other procedures for identifying gifted children in disadvantaged or minority groups are:

- community nomination
- 'try-out' approaches

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23 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.74

24 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.22

25 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.23

- identifying peaks of performance in students whose overall academic profile might not otherwise suggest high ability.[26]

3.27 The NSW Department of Education and Training described its procedures to identify for selective schools students 'whose recognition by tests of academic merit may be inaccurate or inappropriate':

> Selection committees for selective high schools and OC [opportunity] classes give consideration to children with sensory or physical disabilities and to children of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background or a language background other than English if there is evidence that the marks are not the most appropriate indicators of ability. The largest program of this kind is for non-English-speaking background students who have been in Australia for less than four years. They are not required to sit the general ability component of the selective high schools tests … students in this category enjoy a success rate equal to applicants from non-government schools and all girls.[27]

3.28 A recent study in New South Wales investigated the under-representation of certain equity target groups in NSW gifted education programs. The target groups were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Arabic speaking background students and Pacific Islander students. The study found that students of the targeted groups and their parents had little knowledge of state gifted and talented provisions such as selective high schools, opportunity classes and the Mentor Links Program. Significantly, the majority of parents and students supported such provisions. It would appear that communities were not informed of available provisions because of school conceptions that the targeted groups would not support these provisions and/or because they felt that students from these groups were not gifted. The study highlighted the need for teacher professional development in both selection techniques and teaching strategies, increased availability of information to parents and enhanced school-community partnerships.

3.29 The NSW Department of Education and Training concludes that development programs for gifted children within those communities is far more effective when done in consultation with the community. The Department has developed programs to help raise awareness within those communities and develop culturally appropriate perspectives on identification and curriculum provision.[28]

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26 Submission 215, Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, p.31-2

27 Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, p.23

28 Submission 206, NSW Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children. Taylor, S.(1998*). Minority Students and gifted and talented programs: Perceptions, Attitudes and Awareness*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sydney, New South Wales. Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, p.22

Early identification

3.30 Submissions noted the need to identify giftedness early. Ms T. Chaloner noted that 'most exceptionally gifted children are referred for assessment because of extreme behavioural problems in the early years…'

> Why is this period particularly important in the case of gifted children? … the socialisation they experience from other children and adults during this critical time, won't usually be socialisation with children who are their intellectual peers, or adults who are used to interacting with gifted children. So the social feedback they get is mostly not likely to be appropriate for them, and quietly, often without anyone noticing anything, they can begin the processes which are seen in older children in the school years - underachieving in order to fit in socially, being confused that they don't seem to fit in, and becoming either anxious or aggressive … [29]

3.31 According to Dr L. Lee there is relatively consistent agreement regarding the need for early identification of and educational intervention for the gifted child:

> The preschool and primary years represent a critical period of time in terms of both cognitive and psychosocial development and during this period *environmental influences play a substantial role* in determining the degree to which development of potential will be maximised …. the early school years are vital in order that gifted/talented children do not lose interest, develop poor work habits and performance, and fail to participate with effort.[30]

3.32 Ms C. Johnson of John Therry Catholic High School pointed out that more focus on early identification would require 'greater transitionary processes between preschool and infants grades.[31] Ms K. Hodge stressed that 'this is not to rob the child of his or her childhood … [however] Some gifted children, and particularly those who are highly gifted, are ready and impatient for academic input …

> These children can find their preschool experiences and their first year at school extremely frustrating if their abilities are not recognised and nurtured.'[32]

3.33 For these reasons submissions criticised interventions which start only in the upper primary years:

> Teachers are not trained to recognise the early signs of giftedness, meaning that many children go to year 4 before they are "discovered" by means of TOLA or SPM testing, which is done to find those children suitable for

29 Submission 230, T. Chaloner, p.32

30 Submission 28, Dr L. Lee, p.2

31 Submission 79, John Therry Catholic High School, p.3

32 Submission 117, K. Hodge, p.2

> PEAC [a year 5,6 and 7 pullout program in Western Australia]. By the time a child is in yr 4 there can be serious problems… [33]

> By this stage, many gifted children are a mess. They do not present well, and are very unlikely to be selected into a gifted program or offered other support. Many others have simply stopped achieving, have "masked" their ability in order to "fit in", or have never learned how to study or take a risk, or accept a challenge, because throughout their primary years, they've always been able to "cruise".[34]

3.34 The Committee notes that the NSW Department of Education and Training is now researching issues to do with the identification of young gifted children.[35]

Conclusions on identifying gifted children

3.35 The Committee agrees with the majority opinion of submitters that a multi-facetted approach to identifying giftedness, including both subjective and objective procedures, is best.

3.36 The Committee agrees with the majority opinion of academic submitters that standardised psychological testing is a valid and useful part of identifying giftedness. It is particularly useful in identifying gifted children among disadvantaged or minority groups, since they are less likely to be recognised by more subjective means such as teacher nomination.

3.37 Better teacher training is essential so that teachers are competent to use the variety of techniques available. The Committee's recommendations on teacher training generally are in chapter 4.

3.38 This training should pay particular attention to the need to identify gifted children who have disadvantages such as low socio-economic status, rural isolation, physical disability or Indigenous background.

Recommendation 4

Training for teachers to identify giftedness should pay particular attention to the need to identify gifted children who have disadvantages such as low socio-economic status, rural isolation, physical disability or Indigenous background.

3.39 Dispute over methods of identifying gifted children is greatly influenced by the question of what the knowledge will be used for. The most typical concern is that selection for special classes or selective schools is based on too narrow a range of

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33 Submission 270, Gifted and Talented Children's Association of Western Australia, p.4

34 Submission 39, J. Bailey, p.27

35 Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, appendix 5

skills, or is based on tests with 'arbitrary' (by implication, unfair) cutoffs.[36] On the other hand it was said that IQ testing is popular when selecting children for a special program 'because it can be a justification for selection'.[37] Presumably this is because an objective test is regarded as fairer in a competitive situation. These points are really about the politics of selected groups more than about the validity of methods of identifying gifted children. Where the practical focus is on enrichment for all children, there are fewer concerns about identifying the gifted. However this does create the risk that the distinctive needs of the gifted, particularly the profoundly gifted, will not be dealt with adequately.

> Identification becomes a major school issue when some students are excluded from school specialised curriculum offerings as a result of testing/identification. This is an issue for selective schools and competition for limited places. However, if a school already has well established curriculum differentiation in all their mainstream classes, students who miss selection for special places may not be too seriously disadvantaged … ASPA regards this part of the debate to be more about school organizational structures and a quality curriculum delivery, than about identification of gifted children per se.[38]

Interventions - general points

3.40 Interventions for gifted children range on two axes: curriculum design and organisational structure. Curriculum design refers to differentiating the curriculum to respond to individual needs. Under 'curriculum differentiation' some submitters included topics such as teaching style and enrichment or extension; others treated 'curriculum' more narrowly as the subject matter taught, and listed the other items separately.

3.41 Organisational structure refers to options from forms of ability grouping for the gifted within the comprehensive school (including accelerating individual children) to fully selective schools. The main debate in the inquiry was between those who support some form of ability grouping for the gifted, and those who argue that the gifted should be handled by differentiating the curriculum in the comprehensive classroom.

3.42 In the absence of a changed organisational structure, the focus is on differentiating the curriculum within the comprehensive classroom. But it should be stressed that these are not either-or options. The curriculum needs to be differentiated even in ability grouped settings.

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36 For example, Submission 13, Northern Territory Department of Education, attachment, p.65, reporting concerns about the use of IQ tests. Submission 114, Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW, p.11

37 Submission 24, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Queensland, p.2

38 Submission 110, Australian Secondary Principals' Association, p.5

3.43 APPENDIX 6 (from submission 106, Ms McCann) summarises special programs state by state. It focuses on organisational structure. Some information may be out of date in light of the unstable nature of gifted education programs and the recent cuts that some submissions reported in some states.

Differentiating the curriculum

3.44 Gross and Sleap summarise the elements of a differentiated curriculum for gifted children:

> In order to differentiate curriculum for gifted students, there needs to be modification of the four primary areas of curriculum development: Content; Process; Product; Learning Environment.
>
> **Content:** The content of the curriculum comprises the ideas, concepts and information presented to students. To make this content more appropriate for gifted students, it must be made more complex, more abstract, more varied and organised differently …
>
> **Process:** The process or methodology is the way in which the content is presented to students, and this includes the type of questions asked of them and the mental and physical activities expected of them. For the process to be more appropriate for gifted students, the teacher might modify the level of thinking required, the pace of teaching and the type of approach used.
>
> **Product:** The nature of products expected from gifted students may also be modified to be more appropriate. Products may entail a multitude of formats, all of which require the information or content to be directed towards a specific audience, and to be evaluated by someone other than the developer …
>
> **Learning Environment:** … Maker (1982) described the learning environment for gifted students as needing to:
> - be student-centred rather than teacher-centred
> - encourage independence rather than dependence
> - be open rather than closed
> - be accepting instead of judgmental
> - be complex and abstract rather than simple and concrete
> - permit and encourage high mobility instead of low mobility …
>
> **Summary:** … Work offered to gifted learners should be pitched at a higher level and faster pace than could be mastered by classmates of average ability. Curriculum compacting is an essential element in ensuring that gifted students will not be required to revise repeatedly, with their classmates, material they have already mastered.[39]

39 M. Gross & B Sleap, *Literature Review on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, p.41ff, attachment to Submission 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

3.45 Similarly, the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia suggested the curriculum for gifted children should be differentiated in content, learning processes, outcomes or presentations, learning environment, assessment process, speed and expectations.[40]

Need for a qualitatively different curriculum

3.46 Submissions stressed that a curriculum differentiated for gifted children should be qualitatively different from the normal curriculum, since gifted children differ qualitatively in their cognitive functioning. [41] The curriculum must be developed in response to the learning characteristics of the students. According to Gross and Sleap, three characteristics stand out: the capacity to learn at faster rates; the capacity to find, solve and act on problems more readily; and the capacity to manipulate abstract ideas and make connections:

> Although gifted children differ within each of these points, it is clear that the curriculum for this group of students needs to allow time for in-depth exploration, manipulation of ideas and questions requiring higher order thinking, as well as acceleration when appropriate.[42]

3.47 Ms L. Kelly of the Virtual School for the Gifted argued that such qualitatively different material is not 'offering year 6 curriculum to year 4 students':

> … It is material which will probably never appear in this format in the school curriculum at all because most students will never be able or interested in completing it.[43]

3.48 Dr Geake argued that the learning needs of gifted students can often be catered for by the curriculum designed for average students a year or two older, modified with an emphasis on higher-order learning objectives:

> For example, a 12 year old who thinks mathematically at the level of a 14 year old should be doing 14 year-old level mathematics, and not being made to wait 2 years while her classmates 'catch up'. That is, to be most effective, gifted education needs to be located deliberately within the mainstream curriculum, and not presented as a fringe enrichment activity.[44]

3.49 Dr Geake stressed the need for a 'fulltime differentiated curriculum …. as a central part of their daily school experience.' He and many others contrasted this with

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40 Submission 34, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, p.2

41 Submission 5, Dr J. Geake, p.4

42 M. Gross & B Sleap, *Literature Review on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, p.40, attachment to Submission 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

43 Submission 108, L. Kelly, p.4

44 Submission 5, Dr J. Geake, attachment 4, p.2

occasional enrichment activities.[45] The differing views in evidence about enrichment are now considered.

Enrichment and extension

3.50 There is some confusion over the use of 'enrichment' and 'extension'. Most submissions apparently used them to mean similar things, though some experts distinguish them. Ms McCann described enrichment as 'allowing students to study an area in more breadth or from a wider perspective' and extension as 'allowing students to extend or study an area in more depth'. Similarly Professor Braggett described enrichment as a broadening of cultural experiences, contrasting this with 'extension and depth in line with students' interests for the highly able'.[46]

3.51 Many submissions also place under the heading of 'enrichment' various part-time or out of hours programs such as *Tournament of Minds, Future Problem Solving,* competitions, chess clubs and so on.

3.52 Where extension and enrichment are so distinguished, the implication is that enrichment means something more likely to be suitable for all students, while extension means something addressing the distinctive needs of the gifted for greater depth of learning. For example, Professor Braggett commented:

> In the past there has been considerable emphasis on *enrichment*, particularly in pull-out programs, and a broadening of cultural experiences. This emphasis is often misplaced, however, as cultural enrichment should be the right of all students …. Enrichment for gifted students is not only misunderstood in many educational circles but can be a relatively dangerous concept when seen as a preferred provision for gifted and talented students. Extension and depth in line with students' interests are much more to be preferred.[47]

3.53 On the other hand, Ms McCann argued that 'some combination of extension (allowing students to extend or study an area in more depth), enrichment (allowing students to study an area in more breadth or from a wider perspective), and acceleration (allowing students to move faster through an area of study) appears to be essential to a differentiated program of study.'[48] Other submissions contrasted both extension and enrichment with what they see as the need for a fulltime differentiated curriculum for the gifted.[49] Some of these apparent disagreements may relate more to the use of terms than to the underlying ideas.

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45 Submission 5, Dr J. Geake, p.2

46 Submission 106, M. McCann, p.9. Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.20. Similarly submission 113, L. Stone, p.8: 'Braggett (1994) also talks about extension as a means of deepening the curriculum in contrast to enrichment which is a broadening of the curriculum.'

47 Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.20.

48 Submission 106, M. McCann, p.9

49 For example, submission 5, Dr J. Geake, p.2

Inadequacies of enrichment for the gifted

3.54 Many submissions were concerned at the inadequacies of enrichment activities presented as the gifted education program. For example, Dr McGuigan said:

> That programmes labelled as suitable for 'gifted and talented' students exist in schools is not doubted. What is questioned is the availability and content of those programmes … What is generally presented as suitable work to enhance the education of children of high intellectual potential is often an array of faddish, meaningless trivia - kits, games, problem-solving methods, pseudo-science and pop psychology, curriculum at the lowest level.[50]

3.55 For Professor Start, 'enrichment meets the need of occupying the 'gifted' child while the others in the class catch up. Its logic would suggest that, as a child, Lleyton Hewitt should have been given swimming lessons as he was too far ahead of his age group in the tennis curriculum …

> Enrichment programmes can vary from challenging to time wasting, but their real role is to occupy the 'gifted' child until the class catches up. That avoids our difficulties but we are teaching her/him not to learn. It is a strategy which is favoured by educators with concerns for the group and its social structure.[51]

3.56 Similarly, the Gifted and Talented Children's Association of Western Australia argued that in many cases enrichment takes the form of 'busy work' or irrelevant activities such as games.[52]

3.57 Some see an emerging problem of 'gifted education propaganda':

> This allows schools to claim that they have a Gifted Education Policy by adding the words "and gifted" to their existing education Policy and claiming they "provide" for gifted students because they allow any student to enter the *Tournament of Minds* competition once per year.[53]
>
> Competitions per se are not a substitute for a Gifted programme – so many schools identify their contribution to Gifted programmes as constituting entering *Tournament of minds,* or *Future Problem Solving.* However, neither is intrinsically *Gifted* as such, and certainly doesn't constitute a coherent *programme* in any way.[54]
>
> Even more damaging for parents trying to locate an appropriate school setting is the tendency to write some recognition into the school charter, and

50 Submission 10, Dr K. McGuigan, p.4

51 Submission 216, Prof. B. Start, p.9

52 Submission 270, Gifted and Talented Children's Association of WA, p.14

53 Submission 54, Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, p.4

54 Submission 212, Samaritan Catholic College, p.5

> to do little more than offer a day of, for example, poetry writing, once a term.[55]

3.58 Others stressed that add-on or after hours activities are no substitute for a coherent curriculum in school hours:

> Such programs are costly and prohibitive for low income families … creative and well-designed activities should be available to all within the regular classroom curriculum. While after hours or withdrawal programs offer an opportunity for interaction with like-minded peers, they can but should not be seen as compensatory for stimulating curriculum delivered by well trained classroom teachers.[56]

> The practical lesson for provision is that programs need to involve a sustained long-term approach. One-day workshops or visits to special centres are of little value for gifted children.[57]

3.59 The Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET) commented that much of the extension that is provided appears to be ad hoc, nonsequential and disconnected from the normal classroom curriculum. 'Gifted programs should be well planned, sequential and differentiated. They must be connected to the class curriculum if there is to be a positive and lasting impact on gifted students.'[58]

Enrichment for all is not differentiating the curriculum for the gifted

3.60 The critical comments above relate mainly to ad hoc 'enrichment' as a way of keeping gifted children busy. Another strand of criticism relates to enrichment that is suitable for the whole class. Submissions argued that such enrichment is inevitably unsuitable for the gifted, as it does not address their distinctive learning needs.

> The DOE *Bright Futures: Resource Book* (1996), while purporting to refer to the education "of gifted students", lists many program options, provisions and even identification lists that refer to all students. Classroom enrichment/extension provisions listed on p36-42 are options that are used in schools as part of provision for all students. These are all just good teaching practice and not differentiated curriculum for gifted students.[59]

> In the majority of cases teachers teach to the middle students in the class, and any enrichment activities that are offered are aimed at the top of the average students. Such enrichment is not challenging or appropriate to

55 Submission 67, Dr G. Alsop, p.5

56 Submission 211, Catholic Education Office, p.4

57 Submission 25, Dr J. Watters & Dr C. Diezmann, p.2

58 Submission 227, Department of Education, Employment and Training [Victoria], p.14

59 Submission 54, Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, p.6

> gifted students. Children who are exceptionally or profoundly gifted are even more disadvantaged in this area.[60]
>
> The content, process, product and learning environment should be differentiated to facilitate the provision of material which is more abstract and cognitively complex than students would generally be expected to encounter at the given grade level. It is not enough simply to provide "lateral enrichment" for gifted students - enrichment material set at the usual level for the child's age.[61]

3.61 The Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) argued that, in deciding whether a particular learning opportunity is suitable for all, or for the gifted only, we should ask: would all children want to be involved; could all children participate; and should all children be expected to succeed? 'If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then the curriculum that has been planned for the gifted students is, in fact, not appropriate for them. It is unlikely to offer sufficient challenge.' GERRIC argues that gifted students should be given work beyond the capacity of their age-peers:

> The curriculum presented to gifted students should be pitched at a level of difficulty that the average ability students could not master. It should be presented at a pace which would be too fast for the average ability student to cope with. It should involve a level of complexity and abstract reasoning which average ability students would find too demanding.[62]

3.62 GERRIC argued that it is important not to confuse what is good whole-school enrichment with that which is only appropriate for gifted students.[63]

3.63 These views are in tension with the views of those who emphasise enhancing opportunities for all students. For example, the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales recommended a nation-wide Extension Program which will 'promote learning as an enriching activity for all and will assist in meeting the needs of students requiring work outside or beyond what is available at their school.' Its principles would include 'equitable access for all students without undue reliance on school assessment' and 'recognition of the need to enhance opportunities for all students.'[64] The Australian Council of State School Organisations argued that 'every student, regardless of perceived ability, should be assisted to gain the greatest possible benefit from involvement in any program.'[65]

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60 Submission 270, Gifted and Talented Children's Association of WA, p.14

61 Submission 215, Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, p.38

62 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.36-37

63 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.36-37

64 Submission 114, Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales, p.3

65 Submission 214, Australian Council of State School Organisations, p.3

3.64 In the Committee's view such statements tend to confuse two different aims: enhancing the education of all children; and addressing the distinctive needs of the gifted. These aims are not in conflict, and both should be done. If sometimes the same program can serve both purposes, so much the better: but the evidence was that this is usually not the case. The gifted need a curriculum differentiated in ways that their age-peers will not be able to handle. The Committee agrees with GERRIC that this is not elitist; it is a sound professional response to individual differences in students' capacities to learn.[66]

3.65 Such apparent disagreements are probably to some extent a matter of perceptions. 'Enrichment' implies something desirable that all should have their share of: to speak of 'enrichment for the gifted' arouses egalitarian anxieties. It would perhaps be better to think of interventions for the gifted as 'extension' or 'differentiated curriculum' rather than enrichment. The education of all children should be enriched. The criticisms of enrichment quoted above are not criticisms of enrichment as such: they are criticisms of using ad hoc enrichment on the one hand, or whole-class enrichment on the other, as though it is sufficient to meet the needs of the gifted.

3.66 The Committee agrees that it is important not to confuse good whole-school enrichment with curriculum which is only suitable for gifted students. To give only to the gifted enrichment which would be suitable for all is not appropriate and would understandably arouse resentment:

> For example, if a guest speaker is invited to a school to talk about motivation and achievement, *all* students should be given the opportunity to participate and learn from the experience … By contrast, offering *only* to gifted students enjoyable enrichment material at a level and pace which could be mastered by many or all of their classmates *is* elitist, and, understandably, may lead to resentment and accusations of bias. [67]

3.67 The Committee concludes that there seems to be some confusion in understandings of 'enrichment,' 'extension' and 'differentiated curriculum' and the right role of each in the education of the gifted. The Committee recommends that MCEETYA should develop a strategy to clarify these points and set out goals for differentiating the curriculum for the gifted.

Recommendation 5

MCEETYA should develop a strategy setting out goals for differentiating the curriculum for the gifted.

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66 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.36-37

67 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.36-37

3.68 The Committee recommends at paragraph 5.14 that the Commonwealth should support development of national curriculum materials to support differentiating the curriculum for the gifted.

Difficulties of differentiating the curriculum

3.69 Submissions noted the difficulties of differentiating the curriculum for the gifted. Professor Braggett noted the 'the obvious inability of many teachers to break away from whole-class instruction and to differentiate the curriculum to meet the needs of individual students.'[68] The New South Wales Department of Education and Training argued that 'for profoundly academically gifted students enrichment and extension can only go so far in challenging students.'[69] GERRIC argued that in the mixed ability classroom a truly differentiated curriculum is unlikely to emerge:

> It is … extremely difficult for teachers to differentiate the curriculum for academically gifted students in a classroom setting which generally contains, as early as Year 3, a spread of at least five years in reading, the most important tool of curriculum building.

3.70 As well, the gifted student has little access to others of similar ability, and experiences peer pressure to moderate his/her performance.[70]

3.71 The Australian Education Union and the New South Wales Teachers Federation argued that to tackle these problems priority should go to reducing class sizes across the board and providing more ancillary resources and support staff.[71]

Difficulties of curriculum support

3.72 Differentiating the curriculum for the gifted, particularly if it is to be in the comprehensive classroom, implies the need for more support in the form of curriculum materials, in-school co-ordinators and regional curriculum support officers. Many submissions suggested that school authorities are not doing very well in this regard, although the position probably varies from state to state.

3.73 For example, Professor M. O'Boyle noted that a few State Departments of Education have established special units to provide support for teachers in the schools (e.g., New South Wales and Victoria), but their small size in comparison with the large systems they serve has meant that few schools currently have access to the human and material resources needed.[72] Gross and Sleap report that a number of states fund, or have at some time funded, a statewide Coordinator of Gifted Education. However 'the Coordinators' responsibilities and effectiveness have varied widely

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68 Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.5

69 Submission 273, New South Wales Department of Education and Training, p.9

70 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.39

71 Submission 33, Australian Education Union, p.5. Submission 272, NSW Teachers Federation, p.5

72 Submission 98, Prof. M. O'Boyle, p.3

across states. It has not been uncommon for the State Coordinator to have no academic qualifications or even training in gifted education.'[73] Professor Braggett summarised the trend since 1988:

> • a decline in the funding and provision of services for schools and individual teachers (after an initial increase in some states and territories);
> • a move away from centrally-funded professional development courses on the needs of gifted/talented students and provisions for their needs;
> • the decline in the number of specialised consultants in the area of gifted and talented education;
> • a devolution of responsibility for gifted and talented education to individual schools, usually without an increase in funding or other resources.[74]

3.74 Submissions noted that in-school gifted education co-ordinators are often untrained and inadequately inserviced. Over the last five years, many Australian schools have appointed coordinators, whose responsibilities include inservicing their colleagues in aspects of gifted education and spearheading the development of programs for gifted students in their schools. However a recent survey of coordinators in New South Wales found that in most cases the coordinator was given this responsibility in addition to his or her existing duties, regardless of experience or training in gifted education.

> While 26% of coordinators possessed a postgraduate Certificate of Gifted Education, 47% had no specialist training at all, even at undergraduate level. Indeed, fully 58% had undertaken fewer than 10 days of gifted education inservice (Downey, 1999).

3.75 The study found that about half the respondents were stressed and dissatisfied with their level of performance:

> Coordinators of Gifted Education had low levels of administrative status in terms of time allocation, budget, salary allowance or authority. The two most significant barriers to Coordinator efficiency were inadequate time allocations and unsupportive colleagues. Both were moderately correlated with perceptions of stress and dissatisfaction … These findings are highly congruent with the general workplace literature which shows that giving an employee administrative responsibility without an adequate time allocation in which to carry out the responsibility leads to moderate to high levels of stress and decreased self-perceptions of competency in the job. [75]

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73 M. Gross & B Sleap, *Literature Review on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, p.80, attachment to Submission 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

74 Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.6

75 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.74. Downey, P. (1999), *An analysis of perceived problems facing coordinators of gifted education in NSW independent secondary schools.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of New South Wales..

3.76 The Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET) noted that 'although schools may identify the need for an individual learning plan for a gifted student, they lack the skills to develop and implement it effectively.' DEET has recently developed draft curriculum units for gifted students in English and science, and reported a 'huge response' from teachers interested in trialling them. 'This indicates a strong need for development of this type of material for teachers.' DEET recommended a national professional development strategy to support teachers to gain the skills needed to: develop and implement learning plans for gifted students; identify gifted students from diverse backgrounds; and plan and implement appropriate curriculum.[76] This is taken up in chapter 5.

3.77 A recent New South Wales working party found that there was minimal interaction or sharing of information and resources on gifted education between sectors and among teachers working within the same employing authority.[77] There were suggestions that the Commonwealth should support publication of national gifted education support materials.[78] This is taken up in chapter 5.

3.78 The difficulties of inadequate central or regional curriculum support are related to the trend to devolution of responsibility to schools. This is considered further at paragraph 3.123 below.

Best practice can help all students

3.79 Submissions argued that best practice in teaching gifted students can benefit all students.

> Teachers/students have realised that by learning about the needs and educational practices of gifted and talented students that they actually increase their teaching skills in regard to all students in their classes.[79]

> Once a teacher is able to meet the needs of the most intellectually advanced students, he or she is a better teacher for *all* students.[80]

3.80 Professor Braggett reported 'a slowly increasing acceptance that the curriculum for gifted and talented students … is useful for all students and forms part of what might be termed *best practice* for all.' This refers to matters such as problem solving strategies and skills; the development of critical thinking skills; the importance of independent research skills; the need to instruct in advanced IT skills. The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia noted that 'some AHISA members … prefer using a differentiated curriculum that can benefit all

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76 Submission 227, Department of Education, Employment and Training [Victoria], p.6-7,11

77 Submission 206, NSW Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, p.10

78 For example, submission 102, Catholic Education South Australia, p.5. Submission 114, Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW, p.4

79 Submission 64, L. Kronborg, p.7

80 Submission 106, M. McCann, p.9

students while catering for the gifted and talented.' A review of the South Australian SHIP schools (otherwise comprehensive high schools with one selected entry high ability class in each year group) found that the benefits for ordinary students were very significant because teachers used the differentiated methodology learned for the SHIP program in all their classes. A recent British report made similar comments.[81] A recent New South Wales report noted that a partly selective model has produced 'outstanding results':

> The part selective model, where a significant selective cohort of students is in partnership with the comprehensive student body, has produced outstanding results. Both sets of students appear to benefit both socially and academically from this arrangement …. A clear implication is that the addition of a selective cohort has a halo effect - lifting the educational expectations of all students.[82]

3.81 There may seem to be inconsistency between these statements and the argument at paragraph 3.60 above that enrichment for all is not the same as, and is no substitute for a fulltime differentiated curriculum for the gifted. The explanation is probably that statements about benefits to all students focus on transferable teaching skills. For example:

> Many of the students attending the special interest schools, but not participating in the special program have benefited by the *expertise of the staff and culture* within the school.[83] [emphasis added]

3.82 However the curriculum must still be differentiated for the gifted in other ways to provide a depth of study suitable to their ability.

Acceleration

3.83 Acceleration involves speeding the student's passage through school by curriculum acceleration within a year level, curriculum compression or compaction, subject acceleration or grade or year skipping. A student may be accelerated in one subject only or across the board. In some examples it involves studying a normal three year curriculum in two years. For example, in South Australia's SHIP program a select entry class within the otherwise comprehensive high school generally completes years 8-10 over two years. Nineteen Victorian high schools allow selected students to

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81 Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.5. Submission 34, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, p.2. Submission 152, J. Lambert, p.3. House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment, *Highly Able Children*, 1999, par.41: 'There is also evidence of a significant association between good provision for the most able in the school and for all the children in the school … First, many of the strategies which work well for able pupils will also benefit other pupils. Second, if the school is providing opportunities intended to identify and challenge the highly able, children are most likely to display their latent abilities.'

82 NSW Department of Education and Training, *Building the Future - an education plan for inner Sydney*, 2001, p.5, appendix 2(b)

83 Submission 45, Gifted and Talented Children's Association of South Australia, p.6.

complete 6 years of curriculum in 5 years.[84] These group examples may also be considered as a form of 'ability grouping', considered further at paragraph 3.95 below. The focus in this section is acceleration of individuals in the comprehensive school.

3.84 Professor Braggett reports, since 1988, 'a greater willingness in some schools (and systems) to modify the school organisation by allowing for accelerated progression or promotion of outstanding students.'[85] However acceleration remains controversial. State education systems have guidelines allowing acceleration under controlled conditions, but submissions reported common resistance at the school level:

> Anecdotal evidence from Association members suggests that although acceleration is theoretically available in all state schools [in NSW], in some schools it simply never occurs as it is perceived as contrary to the school philosophy.[86]

> One technique used with some success (but unfortunately all too seldom) is the acceleration (moving to a higher grade/year level) of children of high intellectual potential. Unfortunately, schools are generally reluctant to use grade acceleration, arguing that it is not advisable to take a child out of his/her chronological year level for academic purposes.[87]

3.85 Systemic acceptance of acceleration varies. For example, the Catholic Education Office in Victoria accepts it; the Catholic Education Office in Tasmania does not.[88] The Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) reports that acceleration is more widely used in New South Wales than elsewhere, for historical reasons:

> The NSW Department of School Education included a special focus on acceleration in its 1991 policy "Strategies for the Education of Gifted and Talented Students" while the NSW Board of Studies (the state curriculum authority) developed a complementary document "Guidelines for the Accelerated Progression of Gifted and Talented Students" adapting the existing international guidelines for Australian use …. These two teacher-friendly documents, combined with the Department of School Education's decision to commit funds over the period 1992-1993 to inservice teachers on the practical use of acceleration for gifted students, ensured acceptance and use of the "new" procedures. Inservicing teachers on new techniques empowers them to use these techniques. It should be noted that teachers in other states, who have not received such inservice, are very much more

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84 Submission 31, Education Queensland, p. 4. Submission 106, M. McCann, p.10. Submission 227, Department of Education, Employment and Training [Victoria], p.9. Submission 56, University High School

85 Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.5

86 Submission 206, NSW Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, p.11

87 Submission 10, Dr K. McGuigan, p.4

88 Submission 211, Catholic Education Office [Victoria], p.5. Submission 96, Catholic Education Office [Tasmania], p.1

> reluctant to accelerate gifted students for fear of causing social or emotional damage or distress to the students.[89]

3.86 The New South Wales Department of Education and Training stressed that acceleration is subject to guidelines which must pay attention to the emotional and social readiness of the student. The number of accelerated students rose steeply from 1992 to stabilise at the 1997 level. Just under one per cent of students in NSW government schools were accelerated in 2000.[90]

3.87 The Australian Education Union opposes acceleration:

> Programs of "accelerated learning" suffer from many of the drawbacks noted above [in relation to segregation]. They assume that learning is a simple sequential progression and ignore developmental and other aspects of learning. They place students in groups which are often physically incompatible, and assume that learning is best carried out in a groups of roughly equal academic ability. This is not the case.[91]

3.88 GERRIC discusses the typical objections to acceleration. Four principal concerns are that accelerated students would lose their academic advantage in later school years; that they would experience difficulties in social and emotional development; that they would lack the physical and emotional maturity to handle the stress of acceleration; and that they would become arrogant or elitist. GERRIC concludes that these fears have no support in research:

> Research in both the United States and Australia (Benbow, 1998; Gross, 1993, 2000) has shown that these fears have little foundation in fact. Indeed thoughtfully planned and carefully monitored acceleration of gifted students results in positive changes to students' academic development and a greater social acceptance by the older students with whom the accelerated students are placed, than by their chronological aged peers (Gross, 1994b, 2000). [92]

3.89 Benbow and Stanley suggest that some objections are caused by unfortunate connotations of 'acceleration':

> The degree to which it is used in schools does not reflect the degree of empirical support in place for this practice. This may be a result in part of the fact that *acceleration* is really a misnomer. Acceleration of talented students is not pushing the child along but responding to an existing

89 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.41

90 Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, p.9

91 Submission 33, Australian Education Union, p.5

92 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.42

> advancement. It is simply deciding that competence rather than age should be the determining factor.[93]

3.90 The benefits of acceleration relate not only to the school curriculum but also to the opportunity to socialise with intellectual peers - an important matter for gifted children.[94] At the same time, it need not mean losing touch with age peers:

> Acceleration may not necessarily imply grade skipping and leaving one's peers. Two students in Year 5, for instance, may remain with their age peers but study Year 6 work in some or all subjects with the teacher's assistance.[95]

3.91 Professor Braggett argued that the research evidence in favour of well-planned acceleration is 'overpowering':

> No matter what form of acceleration is adopted, there are certain safeguards which are imperative. It is helpful if more than one child is involved so as to provide peer support; personal ongoing counselling/advice is required; teachers need counselling as well as students; parents must be meaningfully involved; and the accelerated program should be introduced on a trial basis with the student having the right to withdraw if there is undue stress. If these conditions are met, the research evidence is overpowering: appropriate acceleration usually has highly advantageous outcomes.[96]

3.92 Supporters of acceleration emphasised that guidelines are necessary. GERRIC listed 11 conditions for acceleration, including:

- The student should be achieving above the mean of the grade he or she intends to enter;
- The student should be eager to accelerate;
- The receiving teacher must have a positive attitude towards the acceleration and be prepared to facilitate it;
- There should be a trial period;
- More than one student should be accelerated if possible.[97]

3.93 In the Committee's view there is no reason to doubt the expert evidence that well-planned acceleration is usually beneficial. Negative attitudes to acceleration appear to be based on misconceptions. It is noteworthy that in the research mentioned

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93 C.P. Benbow & J.C. Stanley, 'Inequity in Equity': how "equity" can lead to inequity for high potential students', *Psychology, Public Policy and Law,* vol.2 no.2, 1996, p.275

94 For example, submission 75, Government of Tasmania, p.3. Submission 18, K. Fox, p.5

95 Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.12

96 Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.12

97 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.48

at paragraph 3.88, teachers' attitudes depended on their own experience of acceleration. Those who had experienced it were more positive:

> Southern, Jones & Fiscus (1989) found that teachers who had misgivings about acceleration in general had minimal or no awareness of the research on the effectiveness of acceleration; furthermore they tended to have had no experience in teaching accelerated students. By contrast, respondents to the survey who had actually taught accelerated students, or who were in schools where gifted students had been accelerated, had much more positive attitudes to the use of acceleration.[98]

As with other aspects of gifted education, better teacher training and professional development is needed to correct misconceptions.

3.94 The Committee notes the different approaches to acceleration taken in different states - differences which do not appear to be justified by differences in the local issues involved. The Committee recommends that MCEETYA should develop a more consistent policy encouraging suitable acceleration.

Recommendation 6

The Commonwealth should propose that MCEETYA develop a consistent policy encouraging suitable acceleration for the gifted.

Ability grouping

3.95 The Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) described the possible varieties of ability grouping for the gifted:

- fully selective schools (such as New South Wales selective high schools);
- fulltime self contained selective classes within otherwise comprehensive schools (such as New South Wales primary opportunity classes or South Australia's secondary SHIP classes); sometimes called 'focus classes' or 'focus schools';
- pullout (withdrawal) programs: gifted students are withdrawn from comprehensive classes and grouped together for part of the time (such as Western Australia's upper primary PEAC program);
- subject-specific grouping: gifted children are grouped only for certain subjects;
- cluster grouping: 'between six and ten gifted children are clustered for fulltime instruction within an otherwise mixed-ability classroom';[99]
- the gifted child is retained in a mixed ability class and the teacher is responsible for differentiating the curriculum.[100]

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98 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.42

99 Confusingly, 'cluster grouping' is also sometimes used to mean what is here called pullout groups: for example, Submission 75, Tasmanian Department of Education and the Arts, attachment, par. 7.4.2.

3.96 New South Wales also has 'specialist high schools', in which an otherwise comprehensive school includes a group selected for high ability in the specialty. There are five sports high schools, five performing arts high schools, 18 language high schools, one creative arts high school and one marine technology high school. The Sydney Conservatorium of Music High School is fully selective. Similar arrangements exist to some degree in other states. The Victorian College of the Arts has a secondary campus. South Australia has four special interest music centres, one special interest language school and two special interest sports schools. There are several specialist high schools in dance, drama, music and visual arts in Perth.[101]

3.97 Opinions about the merits of ability grouping for the gifted differ. The main arguments put in favour are:

- grouping, by narrowing the spread of ability in the class, makes teaching easier and allows the curriculum to be differentiated more effectively;
- grouping reduces pressure to mask giftedness for the sake of acceptance by the peer group;
- students learn best when they work with students who are at their own level of ability or slightly higher.

3.98 The main arguments put against are:

- grouping may lead to feelings of elitism;
- grouping with other gifted students may lead to loss of self-esteem for those who discover they are no longer the brightest in the class (the 'big fish in little pond effect');
- grouping may make gifted children conceited;
- the best educational outcomes for all students are in a comprehensive class;
- selection for high ability groups is influenced by socio-economic factors; better-off children are more likely to be selected; this perpetuates existing social and economic divisions;
- selective schools, by attracting the brightest students, may lead to 'ghettoisation' of comprehensive schools in the area.[102]

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100 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.53ff

101 Submission 206, NSW Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, p.6. Submission 209, Government of South Australia, p.3. J. Garnaut (Education Department of Western Australia), *Hansard,* Perth, 3 July 2001, p.229

102 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.51-2. Submission 62, Dr B. Murphy, p.4. Submission 33, Australian Education Union, p.3-4. Submission 272, NSW Teachers Federation, p.2. Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, p.31

3.99 GERRIC, with other academic experts who alluded to the question, argued that there is overwhelming research evidence that educational outcomes of the gifted are improved by ability grouping.

> Over the last four decades a substantial body of research has investigated the academic and socio-affective outcomes of a range of programs which have grouped, for the purposes of instruction, students of similar ability and/or achievement in a variety of subject areas … Research consistently shows measurable academic gains for gifted students across all subject areas, particularly when the grouping is fulltime and when, as advised in the previous section on curriculum design, the curriculum is differentiated in pace, depth and academic rigor to match the students' learning characteristics … Research shows that ability grouping improves the achievement of high-ability students, particularly high ability students from minority groups.

3.100 However the curriculum still needs to be differentiated to suit the students' ability - ability grouping is not a substitute for a differentiated curriculum:

> The only form of ability grouping which has little effect is when gifted students are grouped by ability but receive the same curriculum, at the same pace, level and degree of complexity, as they would have received in the regular classroom.[103]

3.101 According to the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 'the research confirms that ability grouping is a very successful strategy in catering for the needs of academically gifted and talented students':

> Ability grouping allows gifted and talented students to develop their knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and values through their interaction (e.g. cooperative learning, group problem solving) with other students of similar ability.[104]

3.102 Mr Imison argued that fulltime grouped classes are strongly supported by research:

> Such [fulltime ability grouped] classes are strongly supported by research and indeed full-time classes and acceleration are the two types of provisions most strongly supported by research yet remain the least used. Arguments against full-time classes refer to the unsupported belief statements that gifted children should learn along with their less able peers; to the claimed role of gifted children in stimulating others in their class; to the claimed benefits of mainstreaming in education - and many other claims.[105]

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103 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.50-51

104 Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, p.32

105 Submission 26, K. Imison, p.2

3.103 The Australian Education Union and the Teachers Federation of New South Wales oppose ability grouping, claiming that the best outcomes for all students are found in comprehensive classes:

> With few exceptions the most effective way of maximising the potential of all students, both individually and collectively, is in a heterogeneous learning environment … Being educated within a context of mixing with a variety of abilities is itself a valuable educative process. Growing up in a segregated environment, such as an academically elite environment, limits the experiences of those students and reduces their capacity to understand and appreciate the circumstances of people from backgrounds unlike their own. This is both socially and in many cases vocationally undesirable. Furthermore, there is considerable evidence that such segregation is considerably influenced by socio-economic background factors, meaning that those children from homes with higher economic and social backgrounds are more likely to be selected. Selection then perpetuates and re-inforces existing social and economic divisions … They [selective classes] are unnecessary, because the balance of evidence does not suggest that it improves educational outcomes either for those "selected" or for those not selected.[106]

> The Federation holds that the most appropriate form of schooling for all students is in a comprehensive school …. The past decade has witnessed an unprecedented increase in the number of selective schools and selective classes within comprehensive schools, yet the available research suggests that they are not increasing the academic performance of these students, their self-esteem or their perceptions of, and ability to function in, the society in which they live.[107]

Ability grouping: social aspects

3.104 GERRIC in its submission answered typical objections to ability grouping point by point. Most of these points relate to social aspects of grouping. The key points are:

> ***Concern***: That ability grouping negatively effects self-concept by stigmatizing those who are in the lower groups.
> ***Response***: This assumes that a school would group all students by ability which is seldom the case. Grouping gifted students together does not require that less able students be likewise grouped. In any case, this argument it is not supported by research. Kennedy (1989) found that children of average and low ability enjoyed having the gifted students withdrawn from the classroom; they then had a chance to shine …
> ***Concern***: The belief that if gifted students are "creamed off" from regular classes, less able children will lose valuable role models from whom they can learn.

106 Submission 33, Australian Education Union, p.4

107 Submission 272, NSW Teachers Federation, p.1

> ***Response***: … Schunk's (1987) research finds that children of average and low ability do not … model on high ability or gifted children; rather, they model on students of roughly similar ability to themselves who have succeeded in what they are trying to do …. Research by Fielder, et al (1992) shows that when gifted students are removed from a class, a new set of able students rises to the top and becomes the "more able " student group within the class.
> ***Concern***: That grouping may segregate students along ethnic and socio-economic lines.
> ***Response***: Where this happens, it is not a function of grouping *per se* but rather of inappropriate identification of gifted students. Strategies which are effective in identifying gifted students from minority and disadvantaged groups have been discussed at length earlier in this document. Again, we would point out that ability grouped programs such as Opportunity Classes and Selective High Schools in New South Wales, which employ objective (test-based) as well as subjective (teacher and parent nomination) selection procedures, enrol students from a wide range of socio-economic and cultural settings.[108]

3.105 The Committee notes that students of non-English-speaking background were 36 per cent of applicants to New South Wales selective schools in 2001, and their rate of success in securing places was twice that of other groups.[109]

3.106 GERRIC discusses at more length the claim that gifted students entering special classes experience a loss of self-esteem through no longer being the brightest in the class. GERRIC concludes that the because of various problems with the research the question has not been answered conclusively; however a recent major Australian study gives no cause for concern.[110] The Committee notes also Dr Betty Murphy's study of the accelerated group program at University High School, Melbourne. The results on social and emotional indicators were very positive and Dr Murphy concluded that 'there seems little doubt that acceleration programs of this model are a very successful way of providing for the special needs of gifted secondary school children.'[111]

3.107 GERRIC suggests that opposition to ability grouping among many teachers may reflect their lack of knowledge about the research results that show its effectiveness. GERRIC suggests that teacher training should introduce teachers to the options.[112]

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108 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.58ff

109 Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, p.21-2

110 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.62ff

111 Submission 62, Dr B. Murphy, p.7

112 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.69

Conclusions on ability grouping and selective schools

3.108 The Committee accepts the predominant evidence that ability grouping is beneficial for the educational outcomes of gifted children. The Committee acknowledges the concerns that such grouping may tend to perpetuate socio-economic divisions. In the Committee's view the solution is not to withhold beneficial interventions from all, but rather to take active steps to ensure that the benefits are available equitably to gifted children of all backgrounds. For example, we note initiatives by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training to better identify gifted children from equity groups.[113]

3.109 It should be emphasised that ability grouping for the gifted is not the same as streaming the whole year group into A,B,C,D… classes. General streaming is no longer fashionable because of perceived detriments to the less able.[114] No submissions to this inquiry suggested that general streaming should be resumed. The varieties of ability grouping for the gifted can be used without any suggestion that the whole year group ought to be streamed.

3.110 Acceptance of ability grouping seems to vary considerably from state to state and according to local attitudes. It seems that the variety of options other that the most controversial one - fully selective schools - are not widely appreciated. The Committee recommends that MCEETYA development a consistent policy supporting the various options for ability grouping.

Recommendation 7

MCEETYA should develop a consistent policy exploring the options for ability grouping and supporting ability grouping as a way of meeting the needs of the gifted, whether in selective or comprehensive schools.

3.111 The Committee acknowledges concerns about the risk that fully selective schools may lead to marginalisation of local comprehensive schools. This is an argument about fully selective schools, not about ability grouping in general. It is hard to see how that argument could apply to selective classes within comprehensive schools. The Committee notes again the evidence at paragraph 3.80 that the presence of selective classes can benefit the whole school. The risk of friction between gifted and other classes is acknowledged, but it can be handled sensitively. For example, Dr Murphy's study of the accelerated group program at University High School, Melbourne, found that 'there were no feelings of elitism after the first few weeks, but this was mostly due to the sensible attitude of the school's teachers, who treated the children in the same way as any other children.'[115] In any case, the Committee

113 Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, p.22

114 Submission 75, Government of Tasmania, attachment, executive summary. Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.5

115 Submission 62, Dr B. Murphy, p.6. Dr B. Murphy, *Hansard*, Box Hill, 11 May 2001, p.149

suggests that this should not be a major issue in comparison with the more serious social problems that affect many schools. The Committee notes that the Australian Education Union (South Australian Branch), while it agreed with the AEU [national office] in opposing selective schools, has no objection to special programs for the gifted within comprehensive schools.[116]

3.112 The New South Wales Department of Education has recently expanded the number of selective schools and opportunity classes, focussing the expansion on areas of low socio-economic status. The Committee notes the argument of the New South Wales Teachers Federation that this expansion has been done in the absence of any clear research findings showing their benefits.[117] On the other hand, it is clear that public selective schools are popular and places are highly sought after: only one fifth of applicants are successful. Many of the unsuccessful applicants leave the public school system.[118]

3.113 The Committee agrees that policy on selective schooling should be based on solid research. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth should propose to MCEETYA that states with selective schools or classes should research the effects and outcomes of selective schooling. This should include investigating both the effect on those selected and the claims about negative effects on comprehensive schools. It should include consideration of how selection procedures can be made to capture gifted children of all social backgrounds, to avoid the charge of middle class bias which is commonly made against selective schools. It should compare the fully selective model and the 'focus class' model (a selective high ability group within an otherwise comprehensive school) on these matters.

Recommendation 8

The Commonwealth should propose to MCEETYA that states with selective schools or classes should research the effects and outcomes of selective schooling.

3.114 If it is found that selective schools benefit selective school students, the Committee suggests that remaining concerns about possible negative effects on comprehensive schools should be addressed positively and directly. The goal should be to see whether the benefits of selective schools to their students can be achieved while maintaining a socially and culturally inclusive total public education system which is a force for a fair society free of inherited privilege and rigid class divisions.

3.115 Arguably the right policy is not to withhold the benefits of selective schools from those who could benefit, but rather to affirm the importance of comprehensive schools as well. All schools should be adequately resourced for their needs without

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116 J. Gregory (AEU South Australian Branch), *Hansard*, Adelaide, 5 July 2001, pp315,319

117 Submission 272, NSW Teachers Federation, p.2

118 Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, p.16,22. NSW Department of Education and Training, *Building the Future - an education plan for inner Sydney*, 2001, p.5

suggestion of favouritism. Simplistic media comparisons of selective and comprehensive academic results (such as tertiary entrance scores), which usually seem to reflect badly on comprehensive schools, need to be replaced by a more sophisticated notion of the school's achievement in adding value to the child's education. Education authorities need to have the information systems that make this assessment possible. A comprehensive school in a poorer area which significantly improves the life prospects of academically average poorer children deserves just as much praise as a selective school which achieves the highest results because it took the brightest students. Both types of school may have valid roles in a diverse system.

3.116 The Committee concludes that issues relating to selective schools, and those relating to ability groupings within comprehensive schools, should be argued separately on their merits. All options should be open to improve the education of gifted children.

3.117 The Committee acknowledges the commitment of teacher unions to comprehensive schooling as a principle. In the Committee's view this principle should be able to accommodate ability grouping for the gifted. Arguably this is desirable to affirm that the public education system is both committed to excellence and ready to meet the needs of all children. Several submissions commented that gifted education initiatives can improve perceptions of the quality of the public education system. Others noted that many parents seek out private schools in the hope that they will do better for their gifted children (although the evidence suggested that, on the whole, there is little reason to think that private schools *are* doing better). A recent New South Wales report commented that the 'focus class' is an educationally sound approach which may help to retain in the public system the considerable number of students who turn to private schools when their applications for selective public schools are unsuccessful:

> Demand for academically selective places in the inner city is significant. Five students apply for every place on offer. Many gifted students are unable to gain a place. An estimated 70 per cent of these inner city students leave the government school system as a result. A partially selective model offers an educationally sound solution to the issue of attracting a proportion of this 70 per cent to government schools.[119]

3.118 A clear commitment that the public system is for all, including the gifted, may help stem the flow of the middle class away from public schools.

Other issues

Unstable character of gifted education programs

3.119 Submissions noted the unstable and ad hoc character of many gifted education programs. The Australian Secondary Principals' Association noted that there is wide

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119 NSW Department of Education and Training, *Building the Future - an education plan for inner Sydney*, 2001, p.5

variety in the levels of system support for gifted education across Australia, and irregular, non-recurrent funding models have not helped the smooth acceptance of policy platforms.[120] Mr John Bailey reported a 'significant decline' in the profile and resourcing of gifted education in Western Australia in the last three years.[121] Professor Braggett noted 'the ineffectiveness of policy statements unless they are backed up by practical support and funding.'[122] The CHIP Foundation argued that as long as gifted education options are not mandated in policy documents they will continue to be offered on an ad hoc basis:

> Until these programs are mandated they remain at the whim of supportive personnel and are subject to the vagaries of budgetary restrictions. Experience, and our parents, tells us they are much less likely to be offered in an economically disadvantaged school.[123]

3.120 The Samaritan Catholic College, among others, noted how often a gifted education program depends on one inspirational teacher, and may collapse when that teacher leaves. It is essential to create organisational structures that do not depend on particular individuals:

> It is possible to trace the movement of particular teachers through various schools and the exemplary programmes they had instigated only to see those same programmes having been either downgraded or collapse after their departure. Samaritan Catholic College has been concerned to build into programmes the possibility of continuity by the creation of the position of *Coordinator of Extension Programmes*.[124]

3.121 As well, it is essential that policies should be backed up by the necessary resources. The assumption that new initiatives can be funded from existing resources is probably one reason for the discrepancy between gifted education policies and limited action in practice. The Committee recommends that policies on gifted education should include discussion of the resources implications and the sourcing of the necessary resources.

Recommendation 9

Policies on gifted education should include discussion of the resource implications and the sourcing of the necessary resources.

3.122 Further comment on the cost of gifted education interventions is at paragraph 3.146.

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120 Submission 110, Australian Secondary Principals' Association, p.2

121 Submission 39, J. Bailey, p.10

122 Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.5

123 Submission 41, CHIP Foundation, p.10

124 Submission 212, Samaritan Catholic College, p.3

Effects of devolution of responsibility to schools

3.123 Such problems are made worse by the trend to devolution of responsibility from head offices to districts or schools. Several submissions commented on what they see as the unhealthy power of unsympathetic principals and the lack of effective regional curriculum support. For example, Professor Stan Bailey reported that 'principals' attitudes toward and knowledge of the gifted seem to be important determinants of the extent (if any) and nature of identification and provision within Australian schools.'[125] The Tasmanian Association for the Gifted argued that the Tasmanian Government policy on gifted education has limited effect because 'principals are either unaware of its existence, refuse to acknowledge it or are unable to give effect to it in a particular case…

> There is often an unhealthy level of autonomy exercised by Principals who appear to have little regard for the fact that they operate their schools in a public system where policies and procedures ought to be consistently developed and applied in consultation with the community.[126]

3.124 The Gifted and Talented Children's Association of WA noted that district support staff were commonly untrained in gifted education.[127] The Parents Association for Children of Special Ability criticised the effects of devolution in Victoria:

> The Victorian Government has now changed its position to state that provision for high intelligence children is the responsibility of the "whole school community", that is each school has to work out what to do on their own. There is no trained staff provided, no support materials or counselling for parents or individual cases, no in-service training except for some Professional Development provided in Melbourne and no funding for curriculum development, programs or employment of specialists at schools … Schools tell parents they don't have any money or the trained staff to do anything and the Department says that the schools have all the money they need under their Global Budget and it is the school's choice to do Reading Recovery instead of gifted education.[128]

3.125 Mr John Bailey argued that devolving responsibility for implementing new practices will only work where the practice has popular appeal. Initiatives for gifted children need central leadership to counteract negative local attitudes:

> Some provisions need to be centrally managed and resourced to a much greater extent than others. This is especially true when the provision in question may not have popular appeal … Many people still believe that it is wrong for children to achieve to their potential if that means being 'smarter'

125 Submission 73, Prof. S. Bailey, p.1

126 Submission 42, Tasmanian Association for the Gifted Inc., p.4.

127 Submission 270, Gifted and Talented Children's Association of WA, p.15.

128 Submission 55, Parents Association for Children of Special Ability, p.2

> than someone else … Policy must be well planned and well articulated, it must be systematically implemented and well supported, it must be present throughout the system and must be appropriately resourced. Good leadership at each level in the system is essential…[129]

Issues to do with disadvantaged groups

3.126 The report has already mentioned some issues to do with disadvantaged groups. In particular:

- Gifted children are found in all ethnic and socio-economic groups.
- Teacher training is necessary to identify giftedness, since untrained teachers will tend to see giftedness more in the dominant culture and less in minority groups.
- Objective ability testing is useful to identify gifted children among minority groups to counteract the subjectivity of untrained teachers.

3.127 A further important point is that inadequate provision for the special needs of the gifted will be most detrimental to disadvantaged children, since these children have fewer supports outside the school. Professor Start described the situation:

> Consider two girls of equal intellectual ability. Both are in a school which does not optimise the intellectual potential of high ability girls. One girl is from the well educated parents, with economic means and with an awareness of how the educational system works. She can be helped by that home. It would not be as much as if the school's policy was also supportive but certainly they can offset the apathy or even antipathy [of the school].
>
> The other girl does not have these fall-backs. Her parents do not have the experience of tertiary education and tertiary qualifications. The family income is lower. They cannot provide the educational materials themselves. They do not know their way round the educational system. For this girl, there is little in her home to offset that school policy.
>
> The outcome is that the girl from the enhanced family has a safety net. She may be able to function, albeit in a less than optimal gear. The girl from the deprived family does not have that safety net. She cannot optimise her potential or, sadly, even come close to it, despite her equal potential.
>
> The school which refuses to offer an effective programme for children of high intellectual potential on the grounds of educational and social theories of equality, actually worsens the inequality. Such a policy is counter productive. It penalises most, those children of high intellectual potential who come from disadvantaged homes. Yet these are the children who most need what the school can offer.[130]

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129 Submission 39, J. Bailey, p.14

130 Submission 216, Prof. B. Start, p.12-13

3.128 Professor Braggett raised the issue of underachievement as related to socio-economic distribution:

> The writer has often been disturbed, when visiting schools in lower socio-economic areas, to be told that "one cannot expect to find too many gifted students in this school" … It is apparent, therefore, that some students are educationally disadvantaged by their socio-economic standing and the school they attend. In order to change this cycle, a concerted approach is required in which a total school approach is demanded, one that embraces a wider concept of giftedness and which extends to all students and staff.[131]

3.129 The Northern Territory Association for the Gifted and Talented suggested that support for gifted Indigenous children is critical for Indigenous community development:

> Much research in Indigenous Education focuses on deficits. However, in spite of these deficits, some Indigenous children do succeed academically, and research into how and why these children succeed could inform other areas of research and provision in Indigenous Education. There has been very little research in this area to date.[132]

3.130 According to the New South Wales Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, teachers in low socio-economic areas or where the student population is predominantly from an indigenous or non-English-speaking background still tend to view giftedness as unlikely to occur within these populations.[133] Dr Geake commented:

> I find it bafflingly disappointing that some of the more intransigent opponents of gifted education are those who profess to champion the educational cause of the economically disadvantaged. Gifted children from economically disadvantaged areas are doubly disadvantaged, and their predicament is only exacerbated by those, including teachers, who would deny their very existence.[134]

3.131 The Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA) notes strong anecdotal evidence that schools in lower socio-economic areas do not generally have programs that cater specifically for gifted children.

> Analysis of the cultural and social backgrounds of students in specialized classes for the gifted show a distinct skew in favour of some cultural or social groups and the complete absence of others. ASPA notes this as a major concern.

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131 Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.15

132 Submission 38, Northern Territory Association for the Gifted and Talented, p.4

133 Submission 206, New South Wales Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, p.10

134 Submission 5, Dr J. Geake, p.4

3.132 ASPA suggests a need for education authorities at all levels to support the gifted students who are in every school but who are often not recognised. 'This could well be more about supporting the school as well as the students; one often must precede the other.' [135]

3.133 Several submissions noted that opportunity classes and selective schools tend to be in more well-to-do areas; as well, they tend not to be in the country. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training said it is succeeding in identifying giftedness in students of low socio-economic status 'although the influence of socio-economic status on educational attainment is still a potential factor.' Recent expansion of opportunity classes and selective schools in NSW has been concentrated in lower socio-economic areas.[136]

3.134 Several submissions argued that adequate provision for gifted children in the public education system is essential so that provisions will be accessible to lower socio-economic groups. For example, Dr Murphy said:

> One of the most important advantages of programs such as the University High School (UHS) program is that they can be set up in state schools, and because they are in state schools, children of low socio-economic status have the same access as any other child. Many of the children in the UHS program had not been seen as very intelligent by their parents, until teachers suggested that they try for the program.[137]

3.135 Similar considerations apply to subject specialist schools such as performing arts schools and language schools. It is essential that such subjects should be offered with quality in the public school system. To discriminate by class or background in the quality of schooling offered is unacceptable: to discriminate in the range of curriculum offered is also unacceptable. All children should have access to a broad curriculum including humanities and arts as well as more vocational subjects. How this should be most efficiently arranged as between comprehensive provision, specialist centres within comprehensive schools, or fully specialist schools (such as the Sydney Conservatorium of Music High School) is a matter for consideration. The Committee recommends that MCEETYA should investigate the options for wider provision of centres of excellence in the public school system.

Recommendation 10

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135 Submission 110, Australian Secondary Principals' Association, p.5-6

136 For example, submission 41, The CHIP Foundation, p.10; submission 45, Gifted and Talented Children's Association of South Australia, p.7; submission 63, G. Byrne, p.5; submission 206, NSW Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, p.11. Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, p.16-17

137 Submission 62, Dr B. Murphy, p.7. Similarly submission 56, The University High School, p.3. Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, p.iii

MCEETYA should investigate the options for wider provision of centres of excellence in the public school system.

Rural and regional disadvantage

3.136 Several submissions described the problems of rural isolation for gifted children. There may be no choice of schooling, no intellectual peers and no cultural enrichment in the town. Counselling services for families and professional development for teachers are more difficult. There are likely to be no opportunity classes or focus schools within reach.[138] Presumably for this reason, teachers and parents in Hay, NSW, argued strongly that provision for the gifted needs to be made in mainstream schooling:

> Clever kids need to have the option of completing their schooling in their home town, so the programs offered in the country, especially isolated areas such as ours, should match those of larger centres.[139]

3.137 Dr Faulkner and Dr Blanksby of La Trobe University (Bendigo campus) suggested that regional universities could have a role in reducing the isolation of the gifted. Several submissions mentioned the possible use of computer technology and the internet - for on-line mentoring, for example. Ms Bell described the Western Australian Education Department's Academic Talent Program Online initiative, in which two Perth schools deliver an integrated program across two learning areas to isolated gifted students.[140]

3.138 The New South Wales Department of Education and Training reported that small rural schools with composite class situations have been quite successful in catering for the needs of gifted and talented students, who pass seamlessly from one class to the other as required. Rural students make ready use of accelerated progression options and they are strongly represented in HSC extension courses, which are all taken by distance education.[141]

3.139 Submissions made various recommendations for special Commonwealth support for isolated gifted students. Arguably such support would be appropriate for the Commonwealth's Country Areas Program of targeted assistance to schools. However the present guidelines state as the program's objective:

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138 Submission 206, NSW Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, p.12. Submission 45, Gifted and Talented Children's Association of South Australia, p.7. Submission 67, Dr G. Alsop, p.8.

139 Submission 7, Hay submission writing group, p.2

140 Submission 112, Dr M. Faulkner & Dr D Blanksby. Submission 73, Prof. S. Bailey, p.2. Submission 227, Department of Education, Employment and Training [Victoria], p.12. Submission 99, L. Bell

141 Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, p.24

> To contribute to the enhancement of the learning outcomes for students in geographically isolated areas *so that their learning outcomes match those of other students*.[142] [emphasis added]

3.140 The reference to 'matching the outcomes of other students' would appear to exclude the disadvantage suffered by gifted students who may be underachieving in relation to their own potential although their learning outcomes may still be above average. The point is taken up in chapter 5. At paragraph 5.13 the Committee recommends that the guidelines should be amended to make clear that the educational disadvantage of gifted children whose needs are not met is within scope for the program.

The role of universities in gifted education

3.141 The role of universities in supporting gifted education may include enrichment activities for school students; arrangements to allow students to study university subjects concurrently with their secondary studies (which may or may not give credit towards a degree); personal mentoring; and early entry to university.[143]

3.142 Enrichment may include activities for students of all ages, of the sort which other organisations can also conduct; or activities for senior students connecting to the university curriculum. For example, the Committee viewed holiday classes for primary age children at the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, University of New South Wales. Dr Faulkner and Dr Blanksby of La Trobe University Bendigo described a full day program the university conducted in 2000: 'The response … was overwhelming, with families travelling as far as [from] Mildura for the day.' Monash University described its Enhancement Studies Program which allows school students a 'staged introduction to university life.'[144]

3.143 Attitudes to early entry vary. The Tasmanian Department of Education said that arrangements for early entry are 'managed on an individual basis.' According to the CHIP Foundation Victorian universities generally resist enrolling underage students. Professor Braggett commented that early entry to university is permitted 'in some instances', but usually involves mathematics, science and some humanities, and hardly ever professions such as teaching and law.[145]

3.144 Monash University is cautious about early entry, arguing that academic achievement does not guarantee smooth transition to the different lifestyle of the university, and feelings of alienation may result. Professor Braggett noted that for radical acceleration a mentor is usually required. Ms McCann described the supports

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142 Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, *Commonwealth Programmes for Schools - Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines 2001-2004*, p.83

143 Submission 35, Flinders University, pp.1,3. Submission 106, M. McCann, p.11

144 Submission 112, Dr M. Faulkner & Dr D. Blanksby, p.2. Submission 65, L. Kronborg, p.1

145 Submission 75, Government of Tasmania, p.5. Submission 41, CHIP Foundation, p.9. Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.12

that Flinders University provides for young entrants coming from South Australia's SHIP (accelerated group) high school program. According to Adelaide University it cannot be assumed that all universities have the resources to meet the need of gifted children. The South Australian Government argued that issues around fast-tracking of gifted students to university courses should be addressed at national level, particularly in relation to the impact of HECS. In South Australia a program for early entrance to university is a priority from 2001, and planning has been undertaken with Flinders University. However a number of issues remain to be resolved including relating to HECS.[146]

3.145 It appears that the approach of universities to the issues involved is unco-ordinated and varies from one to another. The Committee believes that this is an appropriate matter for national co-ordination.

Recommendation 11

The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, in consultation with school education authorities, should develop a policy providing more flexible university entry and study options for gifted students.

Cost of gifted education programs

3.146 Submissions from gifted support groups urged the need for stable policy and funding for gifted education programs. They did not suggest how much might be necessary. Others are concerned that better provision for the gifted would involve a 'competition for scarce resources' - by implication, a competition with other areas of special need.[147]

3.147 On the other hand, Dr Geake argued that ' mainstreaming the gifted does not require a massive injection of special funding, since the learning needs of gifted students can often be catered for by the curriculum designed for average students a year or two older, modified with an emphasis on higher-order learning objectives.'[148]

3.148 The various forms of ability grouping for the gifted are alternative organisational structures which should not have major cost implications. They depend mostly on the willingness of schools and school systems to use them.

3.149 Certainly there would be significant costs in better professional development for teachers and improved curriculum materials to support differentiating the curriculum in the mainstream classroom. The Committee recommends that the

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146 Submission 65, Monash University, p.2. Submission 40, Prof. E Braggett, p.12. Submission 106, M. McCann, appendix B. Submission 101, Adelaide University, p.1. Submission 209, Government of South Australia, pp.6-7

147 Submission 214, Australian Council of State School Organisations, p.3. Similarly submission 33, Australian Education Union, p.5

148 Submission 5, Dr J. Geake, attachment 4, p.2

Commonwealth should contribute to these (see paragraphs 4.72 and 5.14). However the Committee expects that these costs would be relatively small in context of the whole cost of school education.

3.150 The Committee considers that it is unnecessary and regrettable to think of interventions for the gifted as a competition for resources with other areas of need. The chief need is to train teachers and to change attitudes. The Committee emphasises its view that there is clear evidence that many gifted education interventions can benefit all students.

Conclusions

3.151 The Committee summarises its view of the evidence on schooling of gifted children:

- All teachers need to be trained to identify gifted children, particularly so they will better notice the gifted from disadvantaged groups.
- The curriculum needs to be differentiated for gifted children, and this applies whether teaching is done in an ability grouped setting or in the comprehensive classroom.
- Gifted education programs are particularly needed for gifted children from disadvantaged groups, since these children are least likely to have alternative supports outside the school.
- Gifted education approaches can benefit all children.
- Equity and excellence are not in conflict. The education system should aim for both equity for all and excellence for those who are able.
- Interventions for the gifted should not be regarded as competing for resources with other special needs. The Committee expects their cost would be small in context of the whole education system. The chief need is for professional development for teachers, and differentiated curriculum materials. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth should contribute to these (see paragraphs 4.72 and 5.14).