

CHAPTER 4

TRAINING TEACHERS TO HANDLE GIFTED CHILDREN

4.1 Teachers need appropriate training to handle gifted children. They need training to identify giftedness, and to differentiate the curriculum suitably, especially in comprehensive classes. Exposure to gifted education issues is important to dispel misconceptions and negative attitudes that arise from lack of training and lack of confidence.

4.2 All submissions from all types of interest groups agreed that teacher training is fundamental, and is not being done well enough at present. Many submissions noted that most newly graduated teachers have little or no training in techniques of teaching gifted children. They contrasted this with the common compulsory units of training in special education (disabilities). There were concerns about the small reach of postgraduate qualifications and the uncertain quality of inservice professional development.

4.3 Professor Braggett summarised developments since the 1988 Senate Select Committee report:

- an initial increase in funds for the professional development of teachers in order to cope more effectively with gifted and talented students and a later reduction in funds, consultancy allocations, and other forms of provision;
- a relatively muted response from most Teacher Education Institutions for an increased emphasis on the pre-service training of teachers concerning the needs of gifted and talented students;
- a positive response from the Graduate Schools of Education in some Australian Universities concerning gifted education; with a corresponding (apparent) lack of concern in others.¹

4.4 According to Professor Start there has been some advance:

In 1970 specific lectures preparing teachers to teach these children did not exist. By 1980, half the teacher training colleges in Australia were giving at least one lecture in the area. By 1990 most tertiary institutions had three or more lectures on the needs of the 'gifted'. Some had established Units for graduate teaching and research such as that established in Melbourne in 1989. By 2000, other universities have followed suit with Professor M. U. M. Gross's very effective Centre at the University of NSW now at the forefront.²

1 Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.5-6

2 Submission 216, Prof. B. Start, p.4

4.5 Others emphasise that a few lectures, though better than nothing, are no substitute for a properly sequenced course. As well, recent advances in preservice training do not reach older teachers. For them, better inservice professional development is needed.

Over the past thirty years, progress has been made. Consolidation is needed. Re-inventing the wheel has to be avoided. Now more fundamental progress has to be made. Advocates quite rightly emphasise what has yet to be done.³

4.6 The following discussion is ordered under headings preservice training; postgraduate training; and inservice professional development. 'Postgraduate training' implies more structured courses operated at the initiative of universities. 'Inservice professional development' implies more *ad hoc* activities which may be operated by universities, but typically are operated at the initiative of education authorities, schools, or others such as gifted education support groups. Many issues apply to both.

Preservice teacher training

The status quo

4.7 According to the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC), 'the considerable majority of teachers currently employed in Australian schools would have had no instruction, or at best less than one hour of instruction, in their preservice training, on how to identify and respond to gifted and talented students.' The situation has improved somewhat since the 1980s but, according to GERRIC, is still far from satisfactory:

At undergraduate level it has become somewhat more common for trainee teachers to have one or two lectures on the identification and education of academically gifted children in their undergraduate education study; however few Schools of Education offer even one entire subject on gifted education in their preservice teacher training programs.... While there has been a pleasing expansion of university coursework offerings and graduate student research in gifted education, particularly over the last seven or eight years, the considerable majority of such courses are offered at Graduate Certificate or Master of Education level, to teachers who have *already completed* their undergraduate teacher training.⁴

4.8 Where units are offered they are mostly optional:

Currently, no university in New South Wales provides a *significant* component on gifted education within the *compulsory core* of its initial teacher training program. Although electives focussing specifically on the education of gifted and talented students are offered in a few teacher

3 Submission 216, Prof. B. Start, p.4

4 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.67-8

training courses, the majority of beginning teachers have virtually no training in how to recognise and cater for the gifted students they will encounter in each year of their teaching career.... Given that trainee teachers can expect to have gifted and talented students in every class they teach during their professional career, it is unfortunate that there is no mandated requirement for their preservice training to include even introductory information on how to identify these students and develop appropriate educational programs for them.⁵

4.9 Many submissions made similar points. The Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA) said:

...it is ASPA's understanding that apart from a few teacher training institutions, the concepts and theory about gifted education are rarely discussed or if they are, it is one lecture/essay or tutorial at best.⁶

4.10 Submissions reported that there are no compulsory preservice gifted education units in Victoria, Queensland, South Australia or Western Australia, and no units at all (compulsory or optional) in Tasmania.⁷ The New South Wales Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children contrasted this with the situation in special education (disabilities):

The majority of universities do not offer gifted education courses as either an elective or mandatory component of preservice teacher training courses. Special Education is however a mandatory requirement.⁸

4.11 In fairness to the universities the Committee notes that such tallies may not adequately describe teaching which is subsumed within other topics. Dr Geake commented:

Most pre-service primary and secondary teacher courses, usually undergraduate bachelor of education degrees or postgraduate diplomas of education, have some component of gifted education within core units such as educational psychology or teaching children with special needs. As there are many competing agendas to be covered in such pre-service core units, the treatment of issues of identification and specific teaching strategies for gifted children can often be necessarily prosaic, with a more detailed

5 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.3, 69

6 Submission 110, Australian Secondary Principals Association, p.8

7 Submission 41, CHIP Foundation, p.5; Submission 30, Queensland Association for Gifted and Talented Children Inc., p.3; Submission 45, Gifted and Talented Childrens Association of South Australia, p.9; Submission 105, Education Department of WA, p.7; Submission 42, Tasmanian Association for the Gifted Inc., p.7

8 Submission 206, New South Wales Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, p.8

presentation of these issues left to elective units which, although popular, are not taken by all pre-service teachers.⁹

4.12 The Committee circularised education faculties asking about their offerings in special education (disabilities) and gifted education. Many replies, where they did not report a compulsory gifted education unit by that name, said that aspects of gifted education are integrated into many units or included in ‘special needs’.¹⁰

4.13 The appropriateness of this is debated. The integrated approach may be the result of a deliberate philosophy of course design. Or it may be a way of disposing of a low priority topic with the least effort.

Should hospitals not have departments of cardiology because the discussion of the heart occurs in the departments of anatomy, biochemistry and surgery?... Dispersing the knowledge and skills from one area to all other areas is a means to eviscerate an unwanted unit, centre, department or even an area.¹¹

4.14 Subsuming gifted education within ‘special needs’ may be justified conceptually, but makes it harder to see whether gifted education is actually being given appropriate attention.

The problem

4.15 The marginal state of teacher training in gifted education is a problem for several reasons. Firstly, it is well established that teachers untrained to identify gifted children do not identify them reliably.

Identification and measurement of Gifted and Talented children is ad hoc and unsatisfactory. This is especially true if there is reliance on identification by teachers, who, without the support of training, cannot accurately differentiate between ‘potential’, ‘performance’ and ‘compliance’.¹²

4.16 In particular, untrained teachers tend to favour well-behaved children of the dominant culture. They tend not to recognise the giftedness of badly behaved children, under-achievers and disadvantaged or minority groups. This makes it likely that already disadvantaged children will be further disadvantaged when the time comes for planning interventions.

9 Submission 5, Dr J. Geake, attachment 1: ‘The report of the Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children: a ten year report card’, *The Australian Journal of Gifted Education*, vo.8 no.1, 1999, p.58

10 For example, Southern Cross University, further information p.49. Murdoch University, further information p.62. University of Tasmania, further information p.67

11 Submission 216, Prof. B. Start, p.11

12 Submission 119, Professional Association of Parents and Teachers, p.2

The nation is continuing to create each year a new cadre of teachers who enter the classroom ill equipped to recognize true cases of need. Research has consistently verified that, in these circumstances, children from the dominant and privileged social groups will be the first to be given some recognition as 'gifted', and those with disadvantage the last. Of particular concern must be aboriginal children, those from isolated families, and children of non-English-speaking background. In addition, many children with learning disabilities or handicaps also possess areas of giftedness which go undiagnosed.¹³

4.17 Secondly, better teacher training is essential to enable teachers better to differentiate the curriculum for gifted children.¹⁴ This is particularly important if these children are to be handled in the mainstream comprehensive classroom.

Special programs within regular schools ... is the most common form of provision in Australia yet is not effective without specific training in gifted education Without specific training, many teachers still make the mistake of providing 'more of the same' work or slightly harder work. Very bright students learn to slow down when their only reward for *good* work is *more* work or *harder* work.¹⁵

4.18 Better curriculum support is also necessary, as discussed in chapter 3.

4.19 Thirdly, training is essential to introduce teachers to research findings and to dispel misconceptions about gifted children, misconceptions which are held because contrary research findings are not widely known.

There is a vast amount of statistical, hard information on these children. There are longitudinal studies. There are statistically accurate and reliable studies about these children, their needs and the success or otherwise of alternative provisions. The problem is that it is just not known. That is as true within universities as it is in education systems and their management.¹⁶

The body of research literature is vast. The uptake by the teaching profession is not.¹⁷

4.20 Fourthly, submissions argued that inadequate training is an important cause of negative attitudes among teachers. Ill-equipped teachers are liable to feel professionally inadequate and resentful:

13 Submission 19, Dr J. Milner-Davis, p.1-2. Similarly for example submission 215, GERRIC, p.7; submission 216, Prof. B. Start, p.10; submission 227, Department of Education, Employment and Training [Victoria], p.5

14 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.37

15 Submission 106, M. McCann, p.9

16 Dr J. Milner Davis, *Hansard*, Sydney 16 July 2001, p.449

17 Submission 39, J. Bailey, p.30

Start (1990) found that in-service and pre-teacher training in gifted education is almost non-existent ... As a result, teachers are leaving our universities ill-equipped to cope with meeting the needs of the gifted students in our classrooms ... Start believes that this leads to a feeling of professional inadequacy and resentment builds up. With such a lack of support, it is hardly surprising that newly trained teachers may have negative attitudes towards the appropriate provision for gifted students.¹⁸

The negative issues associated with discussion about gifted students in a school environment (elitism for example) would be much less of a problem if teachers were informed fully and trained well in the implications of teaching the gifted child.¹⁹

4.21 Research at the University of New England has found that ‘primary preservice teachers generally considered the average student more desirable than the gifted, with a clear preference for students not to be studious...’ Gross and Sleaf argue that university teacher educators have a key role as change agents to amend these negative attitudes:

Dettmer (1986) rightly identified university teacher educators as having a key role to play as change agents. Ideally all teacher educators should be concerned with the appropriate provision in their courses of information about catering for gifted learners, not just those directly involved in gifted education. ‘Gifted education should permeate the whole preservice program as well as being the focus of specific courses...’ (Carrington & Bailey, 2000, p.21).²⁰

4.22 Teachers should benefit from better confidence at handling special needs students:

Many teachers know themselves to lack sufficient skills and confidence to develop fully an outcomes-based approach within their classrooms. They are also aware of their responsibility to provide appropriate learning opportunities and activities to meet the needs of different students wherever possible. They recognise the deficiencies in their skills in identifying students with special needs.²¹

4.23 Submissions argued that the teaching skills needed to handle gifted children will benefit all children. See paragraph 3.79.

18 Submission 113, St Catherine’s School, p.6

19 Submission 110, Australian Secondary Principals Association, p.8

20 M. Gross & B Sleaf, *Literature Review on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, p.73, attachment to Submission 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. N. Carrington & S. Bailey, ‘How do preservice teachers view gifted students? Evidence from a NSW study’, *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education*, vol. 9 no. 1, 2000, p.18-22.

21 Submission 104, Catholic Secondary Principals’ Association, p.2

4.24 Finally, relegating gifted education to elective units means that there is less likely to be the critical mass of trained teachers in the school which is arguably necessary to promote gifted education initiatives most effectively. The Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training noted that there is a correlation between participation in professional development and the school's support for gifted education provisions, and 'where there are three or more teachers trained, provision for gifted students increases significantly. Where five or more teachers are trained the commitment is even higher.'²²

Suggestions

4.25 Submissions argued for mandatory preservice gifted education units. For example, Flinders University argued that teacher education programs should include as core subjects methodology for identifying and teaching gifted children.²³ The Board for Lutheran Schools urged a focus on 'identification, problems of giftedness, programs and program delivery.'²⁴ The Australian Council of State School Organisations saw a need for compulsory preservice and inservice covering the complexity of the incidence and recognition of giftedness, and the design and delivery of programs.²⁵ Many submissions made similar points.²⁶ Many also argued that the Commonwealth should support or mandate this.

The Commonwealth Government has some responsibility for Teacher Training through its financial support of teacher training institutions. The Government should provide funding to assist these institutions to move GAT to the core, rather than have it remain in the optional part of their courses.²⁷

This problem [inadequate preservice training in gifted education] might be addressed by ... legitimate Commonwealth and State pressure on tertiary institutions to include gifted and talented provision in their courses (this is currently done in relation to students with disabilities).²⁸

4.26 However, universities are independent bodies. As a matter of policy the Commonwealth does not attempt to dictate the details of course content. Further comment is at paragraph 4.62.

22 Submission 227, Department of Education, Employment and Training [Victoria], p.10. Similarly submission 116, B. Forbes, p.1; L. Kronborg, *Hansard*, Box Hill, 11 May 2001, p.140

23 Submission 35, Flinders University, p.4

24 Submission 100, Board for Lutheran Schools, p.7

25 Submission 214, Australian Council of State School Organisations, p.7

26 For example, submission 114, Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW, p.3; submission 119, Professional Association of Parents and Teachers, p.2; submission 214, Australian Council of State School Organisations, p.7; submission 270, Gifted and Talented Childrens' Association of WA, p.17

27 Submission 34, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, p.8

28 Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.24

4.27 The Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training suggests that preservice teacher training courses should include at least one compulsory unit on gifted education.²⁹ The New South Wales Department of Education and Training suggested a thirteen week unit.³⁰ The Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre suggested at least 12 hours of compulsory coursework plus at least one elective course which could cover in more depth items such as:

- identification of gifted children among disadvantaged and minority groups;
- curriculum differentiation within specific key learning areas;
- issues in social and emotional development of gifted children;
- teaching gifted children in ability grouped programs; and
- establishing supportive relationships with the parents of gifted children.³¹

4.28 Importantly, even an introductory course has significant benefits:

Research has found that teachers who undertake even an introductory training program in gifted education develop more positive attitudes towards gifted students (Gross, 1994a, 1997a), are significantly more effective in identifying gifted students (Gear, 1978), demonstrate superior teaching skills, and establish more positive classroom climates (Hansen and Feldhusen, 1994).³²

4.29 The Australian Education Union urged ‘the inclusion in teacher education courses of a range of strategies for catering for all abilities and appropriate elements covering the needs of various categories of students such as gifted, disabled etc.’³³

Obstacles

4.30 The crowded curriculum in teacher training is acknowledged. However the Committee agrees with those who argue that this is not an acceptable excuse for inaction. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training commented:

It should be recognised that there are many pressures on the time available in the compulsory core of initial teacher education courses. But the recognition of the special needs of the high ability student is seen to be of vital importance if we are to provide appropriately and equitably for all

29 Submission 227, Department of Education, Employment and Training [Victoria], p.8

30 Submission 273, New South Wales Department of Education and Training, p.30

31 Submission 215, Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, p.71

32 Submission 215, GERRIC, p70. Similarly p.74: ‘Even six hours of inservice can result in a significant improvement in teacher attitudes...’

33 Submission 33, Australian Education Union, p.5

students. The time currently allocated to gifted and talented education in the compulsory core is negligible at best and in most institutions, non-existent.³⁴

4.31 The New South Wales Department of Education and Training argued that cuts to Commonwealth funding for higher education since 1996 has made it harder to provide quality offerings, particularly in disciplines such as education which cannot attract much corporate funding:

These pressures in turn make it increasingly difficult for the full range of student needs to be covered in courses and issues in gifted and talented education are often accorded a low priority.³⁵

4.32 On the other hand, it could be argued that within a course of unchanging total length, curriculum choices should not have major cost implications. The issue is not total funding, but how the education faculties choose to spend their time.

4.33 A larger profile for gifted education in education faculties raises the need for more academics able to teach it. GERRIC comments that the qualifications of academics teaching in this area at present vary considerably:

We do not believe that it is appropriate for an academic teaching a gifted education subject to have no academic qualifications or training in gifted education, or to have had no classroom experience teaching gifted and talented students.³⁶

4.34 In principle, re-allocating some time within a course of unchanged total length should not have major cost implications for universities. However, the need to have suitable specialists on staff raises logistical problems. Dr Milner-Davis quantified the problem:

...it is reliably estimated that there are probably only three fully-credentialed academics in this field in Australia. However, there are forty Schools of Teacher Education, producing eleven thousand graduates each year. If an effective component of preparation in gifted education were to be delivered as a matter of course to every new cohort of students going through each School, another thirty-five specialist academic positions would be needed.... At present, there is probably a national graduating class of three thousand Master of Education graduates annually, and fewer than three hundred doctorates. Only a tiny fraction of these are specializing in gifted education (perhaps five percent or less). The supply is woefully too few... Universities need strong signals of encouragement to train such specialists...³⁷

34 Submission 273, New South Wales Department of Education and Training, p.30

35 Submission 273, New South Wales Department of Education and Training, p.29

36 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.67

37 Submission 19, Dr J. Milner-Davis, p.2

4.35 This raises the question of whether there is sufficient incentive for teachers to take on postgraduate training. This is considered below.

4.36 The Committee agrees that rearranging the balance of offerings within a course of unchanged total length should not have major cost implications for universities. Given that even a small exposure to gifted education can significantly improve things, there is no excuse for inaction. The chief obstacle appears to be outdated attitudes within universities, reflecting attitudes in the community at large.

The key ... is the need to revitalise the university schools of education themselves so that they are teaching current statistically based research and we do not have to keep on debating questions such as whether there are gifted and talented kids or what provisions work best. Those things are answered by current research; it is just that people have not read it. Universities are still churning out generations of teachers who have not been taught this because their own education professors, with greatest respect, are not necessarily up with current research.³⁸

4.37 The Committee considers that consciousness-raising within universities could be a suitable role for the national centre for gifted education which the Committee recommends in chapter 5.

Postgraduate training

4.38 Encouraging postgraduate specialisation in gifted education is important for several reasons. It makes it more likely that in-school gifted education co-ordinators will be appropriately qualified. Submissions noted the bad effects when co-ordinators are untrained and unsupported in the school.³⁹ At a higher level the same applies to regional or head office curriculum support or counselling services. Postgraduate training is necessary to provide the future academics needed to teach undergraduates.

4.39 Submissions reported growth in postgraduate training.⁴⁰ For example:

There has been an increase in demand in postgraduate studies in gifted and talented education between 1996-2001. 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.⁴¹

4.40 In many such comments it is unclear whether the submissions are reporting local conditions or Australia-wide trends. The Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) argued that opportunities for teachers to specialise

38 Dr J. Milner Davis, *Hansard*, Sydney 16 July 2001, p.450

39 For example, M. Gross & B. Sleaf, *Literature Review on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, p.75, attachment to Submission 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

40 For example, submission 103, Dr J. Landvogt, p.5; submission 64, L. Kronborg, p.7.

41 Submission 64, L. Kronborg, p.7

in gifted education at postgraduate level have improved in the last 15 years, but the situation is far from satisfactory. Among the 40-odd faculties of education in Australia, Gross and Sleaf list 12 which have some form of postgraduate training in gifted education. GERRIC is concerned that the quality of these programs is variable, and recommended that universities should ensure that academics teaching such subjects are suitably qualified.⁴²

4.41 Other problems are the uneven availability of postgraduate study and the lack of incentive to do it. For example:

Postgraduate studies in gifted education are not available in Western Australia, meaning that any teacher wanting to study gifted education must travel to the Eastern States, at their own expense, or study externally. There is no incentive for teachers to undertake this training.⁴³

4.42 An advisory committee to the New South Wales government has recently noted that the increasing cost of postgraduate education is proving prohibitive to many teachers who would otherwise undertake it.⁴⁴ The New South Wales Department of Education and Training considers that ‘the number of students enrolling in these courses is relatively very small which is a cause for concern.’⁴⁵ Deakin University Faculty of Education commented that ‘the faculty has discontinued its Graduate Certificate of Gifted Education due to lack of enrolments. Graduate Certificates are offered as fee-paying courses.’⁴⁶ GERRIC argued that teachers would be more willing to undertake postgraduate study if, as happens in many overseas countries, they received some financial incentive to upgrade their qualifications:

We recommend that employing authorities give consideration to building recognition of postgraduate study into the salary structure with postgraduate study in the education of gifted and talented students being targeted, at least initially, as an area in which Australia urgently requires teachers with specialist training.⁴⁷

42 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.67,72. M. Gross & B Sleaf, *Literature Review on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, p.84, attachment to Submission 32, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

43 Submission 270, Gifted and Talented Childrens’ Association of WA, p.24

44 NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on the Quality of Teaching, *Identifying the Challenges: Initial and Continuing Teacher Education for the 21st Century*, 1999, quoted in submission 215, Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, p.72. Similarly L. Kronborg, *Hansard*, Box Hill, 11 May 2001, p.142

45 Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, p.30

46 Further information p.61

47 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.73. Similarly submission 67, Dr G. Alsop, p.5: ‘Lacking a clear professional focus, those teachers who commit time and money to a qualification in the CHIP area do not have access to a career path.’

4.43 Others advocated bursaries or HECS exemptions as a way to encourage more postgraduate training.⁴⁸

As gifted education is not a mandated area for certification, the long-term viability of many of these professional development courses [postgraduate certificates, diplomas and masters degrees] is under a cloud with the prospect of the lifting of the HECS quarantine for educational PG awards. Bursaries or similar could partly address the issue of equity of access for teachers.⁴⁹

4.44 In the evidence of this inquiry there is inconsistency between reports of increasing postgraduate study in gifted education, and concerns that the increasing cost of postgraduate study is proving prohibitive to many. This may reflect different local situations in different states or universities. Or it is possible that expansion during the 1990s has reached a high point and is now under threat as a result of university cost-cutting and deregulated postgraduate fees.

4.45 On the other hand, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) argued that the Commonwealth's new Postgraduate Education Loan Scheme (which will provide interest-free loans to postgraduates to meet upfront fees) will encourage postgraduate study.⁵⁰

4.46 The Committee thinks that the effects of postgraduate deregulation on gifted education studies is worth further investigation.

Recommendation 12

The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) should investigate and report on the profile of postgraduate studies in gifted education over the last five years, in particular whether postgraduate funding policies have had detrimental effects on participation in such studies. DETYA should monitor the effect of the new Postgraduate Education Loan Scheme in this regard.

4.47 In any case, in view of the special needs mentioned in this inquiry the Committee thinks it is reasonable that the Commonwealth should provide targeted places to encourage postgraduate studies in gifted education.

Recommendation 13

The Commonwealth should fund targeted postgraduate places for gifted education studies.

48 For example, submission 5, Dr J. Geake, p.5. Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, p.30

49 Submission 5, Dr J. Geake, p.5

50 Submission 32, DETYA, p.10. Innovation and Education Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2001

Inservice professional development

4.48 Although submissions reported increased exposure of undergraduates to gifted education issues since 1988, inservice professional development remains important for an older generation of teachers. It is particularly important in light of the present middle-aged bulge in the demographic profile of the teaching profession.

The third [need] is to address the needs for skills and training for the present generation of schoolteachers and administrators ... the problem is that the average age out there is 46 - and it is going to get only older in the next 10 to 15 years. These are not people who have a great deal of incentive or time to come back and do full-time master's or doctoral research and change, so there have to be ways of getting the training out there in an effective way to bring about a revitalisation of the existing generation of teachers.⁵¹

4.49 Similar issues arise as already mentioned. Professional development is necessary to provide a core of suitably qualified staff at each school.⁵² Professional development is necessary to ensure that teachers are exposed to new research and to classroom strategies for teaching gifted children.

The teaching population of Australia is ageing and the majority of practising teachers undertook their pre-service training more than 25 years ago... the majority of currently accepted definitions suggest that 10 to 15 percent of children can be viewed as gifted or talented, and it is now accepted that many academically gifted children underachieve, performing in school at levels far below their true ability. However many teachers who retain the views of giftedness which were prevalent when they entered the profession assume that they will only rarely encounter gifted students, and further assume that such children, where they exist, must be effortless achievers. As a consequence many gifted underachievers go undetected.⁵³

4.50 State education authorities described their efforts on professional development. No information was sufficiently detailed to warrant any state by state critical comparisons. The largest such initiative is probably Victoria's Gifted Education Professional Development Program offered to teachers on a 'train the trainer' model. This won approving comment from the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children.⁵⁴ The New South Wales Department of Education and Training described various professional development initiatives. Other states made

51 Dr J. Milner Davis, *Hansard*, Sydney 16 July 2001, p.450

52 Submission 34, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, p.6

53 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.73

54 Submission 227, Department of Education, Employment and Training [Victoria], p.3. Submission 36, Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children Inc., p.2. Submission 5, Dr J. Geake, attachment 1: 'The report of the Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children: a ten year report card', *The Australian Journal of Gifted Education*, vo.8 no.1, 1999, p.58

brief references to the topic which, reading between the lines, do not hint at any great initiative.⁵⁵

4.51 There was little information on professional development in the Catholic and independent sectors. According to the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) ‘a number of independent schools run occasional conferences.’ The New South Wales Catholic Education Commission stated its priority for professional development, and GERRIC praised an initiative in the Sydney Archdiocese which in the period 1997-1999 gave at least 20 hours of training in gifted education to the entire teaching staff of 16 primary schools.⁵⁶

4.52 Out of school professional development is provided by a variety of non-government support groups such as the various state gifted and talented children’s associations. GERRIC within the University of New South Wales offers ‘seminars, short courses, evening workshops and other inservices initiatives’.⁵⁷ The Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC) noted inservice sessions by (apart from the Department of Education) VAGTC, the CHIP Foundation, the Incorporated Association of Registered Teachers of Victoria, and private consultants.⁵⁸

4.53 The Commonwealth supports professional development generally through the *Teachers for the 21st Century* policy incorporating the Quality Teacher Programme. DETYA advised that over the next three years the Government will provide some \$80 million to lift the quality of teaching through targeted professional development and enhancing professional standards; develop the skills of school leaders; support quality school management; and recognise quality.⁵⁹

4.54 GERRIC summarised the situation nationally:

At this time (2001) there appears to be very little centrally organised teacher inservice in gifted education occurring in the majority of state, independent or Catholic education systems in Australia. There are, of course, pleasing exceptions to this ... In general, however, inservice opportunities in gifted education are organised by individual schools from their own funding.⁶⁰

55 Submission 273, NSW Department of Education and Training, p.13. Submission 31, Education Queensland, p.6. Submission 209, Government of South Australia, p.5 (and see critical comments in submission 45, Gifted and Talented Children’s Association of SA, p.9, and submission 152, J. Lambert). Submission 105, Education Department of Western Australia, p.7. Submission 75, Department of Education [Tasmania], p.2, and comment in submission 42, Tasmanian Association for the Gifted Inc., p.3. Submission 13, Northern Territory Department of Education, attachment: Northern Territory Department of Education, *Student Services Review*, May 2000, p.65

56 Submission 274, NSW Catholic Education Commission, p.5. Submission 215, GERRIC, p.75

57 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.75

58 Submission 36, VAGTC, p.4

59 Submission 32, DETYA, p.9

60 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.74-5

Problems to do with professional development

4.55 Problems to do with insufficient or inadequate professional development echo those already mentioned above for preservice training or postgraduate training. Teachers without training in gifted education are more likely to hold stereotyped views. There is a lack of incentive and recognition for the new skills.

4.56 Some particular problems raised in respect of inservice professional development are:

- There is little consistency either across or within states as to the kinds of professional development which are most effective and who is able to offer such training.⁶¹
- Much commercially provided professional development is a 'quick fix' of debatable quality.⁶²
- 'One-off's [out of school sessions], while they have value, cannot replace a sound, sequential course.'⁶³
- Reliance on locally organised out of hours activities limits the number willing to participate and limits the opportunities for valuable networking.⁶⁴

4.57 Most significantly, voluntary professional development is least likely to reach the teachers who most need it, since the ones with negative attitudes are least likely to volunteer. Devolution of initiative to the local level exacerbates this problem:

In general, however, 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 ... When teachers are required to engage in professional development in their own time, it is possible that the teachers who have most need to enhance their skills will be the least likely to engage in professional inservice. Specifically, teachers who still hold to the outmoded perceptions of gifted students as middle class achievers from the dominant

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

62 Submission 25, Dr J. Watters & Dr C. Diezmann, p.4

63 Submission 36, Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children Inc., p.4. Similarly submission 64, L. Kronborg, p.8

64 Submission 273, New South Wales Department of Education and Training, p.14: 'Focus group discussions with teachers of gifted and talented students conducted by the NSW Department of Education and Training found that the most commonly expressed request was for the opportunity to meet other teachers working with similar students in order to share ideas, strategies and materials ... Teachers also pointed to the difficulty of committing to courses which require all the time commitment to be outside of school hours and saw time release from teaching duties as essential for such training.'

culture are unlikely to want to develop skills through which such students can be recognised and assisted.⁶⁵

4.58 Submissions argued the need for widespread, centrally supported, in-hours professional development. As noted at paragraph 4.28 in respect of preservice training, even a small exposure has significant benefits:

Australian research (Gross, 1997a) has found that even six hours of inservice can result in a significant improvement in teacher attitudes towards gifted and talented children and can reduce teachers' reluctance to develop special programs for these students.⁶⁶

4.59 Dr Landvogt suggested four layers of professional development, from 'general awareness raising for all teachers' to 'expert – teacher mentor and teacher trainer.'⁶⁷ Ms McCann stressed the need to target people in leadership positions:

One of the strengths of this [Victoria's *Bright Futures*] policy is the targeting of personnel in leadership positions, such as school Principals. It is clear that if the senior staff of schools, who usually have decision-making roles, are trained in gifted education, then more informed and insightful decisions will be made ... It would not matter if every teacher in a school is trained in gifted education, if the school organisation and administration blocks the passage of sound policies and practices.⁶⁸

4.60 The more inclusive the concept of giftedness, the more support is likely. This is an example of the political dimension of the definition of giftedness, noted at paragraph 2.66. Professor Braggett suggested:

It appears that money for the professional [inservice] development of teachers in regard to gifted and talented education has either dried up or been diverted to other purposes. Part of the reason for this may have stemmed from attempts to confine gifted education to a small proportion of the school population. Under a more inclusive approach involving all students and all teachers (and including proven best practices), a strong case can be made for the re-introduction and broadening of such professional development courses, preferably at the school level itself and including all teachers.⁶⁹

4.61 Schools and teachers need to be persuaded that the skills involved in teaching gifted children can benefit all students:

65 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.75

66 Submission 215, GERRIC, p.75

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

68 Submission 106, M. McCann, p.13

69 Submission 40, Prof. E. Braggett, p.25

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.⁷⁰

Responsibilities

Preservice training

4.62 Who should be responsible for improving teacher training to handle gifted children? Many submissions suggested that the Commonwealth should somehow mandate gifted education units in teacher training courses – for example, using its influence during university profiles negotiations.⁷¹ However university profiles negotiations concern the broad parameters of funding, such as student and staff statistics, management plans and equity plans. They do not concern the design of individual courses.

4.63 Others suggested targeted grants to universities for gifted education. The Commonwealth does make some targeted grants to universities, though these have been reduced in recent years as more programs have been folded into block operating grants. The Higher Education Innovation Program and the Evaluations and Investigations Program fund special projects. However these do not relate to particular fields of study. Nothing prevents the Commonwealth from making a targeted grant to gifted education, but it would be an unusual measure for such a small field of study.

4.64 State Governments may argue that they too have little influence over the details of university offerings:

State governments have little influence over institutions' internal allocation of funding and employers have limited capacity to influence questions of quantum of training places, or the balance or quality of provision.⁷²

4.65 The Committee does not accept this. The states, as the dominant employer of newly graduated teachers, can effectively dictate to the universities when they decide what qualifications they will demand as prerequisites for employment. Sometimes they do – as for example, in New South Wales where special education content equivalent to a 13 week unit is required for primary teachers.⁷³ Arguably they should do so in relation to special needs (giftedness), if the universities do not deal with this area satisfactorily on their own initiative.

4.66 The universities may say that there is lack of demand for more detailed training about giftedness. Arguably the universities should feel a responsibility to lead change:

70 Submission 106, M. McCann, p.11. Similarly submission 64, L. Kronborg, p.7; submission 152, J. Lambert, p.3

71 Submission 19, Dr. J. Milner Davis, p.2

72 Submission 273, New South Wales Department of Education and Training, p.29

73 NSW Department of School Education, *Qualification Requirements for Classification as a Primary Teacher in the New South Wales Department of School Education*, January 1997, p.3

This [little undergraduate gifted education instruction] is probably due to the “demand” that would control the inclusion of Courses and from experiences with each of these groups over the past 4 years I would say that this “lack of demand” in this area is as a result of general community attitudes ... However, I also believe that as Schools of Education it is partly our responsibility to change these attitudes. When our future teachers are “better informed” then perhaps there will be a “demand” ...⁷⁴

4.67 Be that as it may, in the Committee’s view state education authorities have a fundamental responsibility to ensure that the teachers they employ are suitably qualified to do their jobs. It is their responsibility to force the pace if need be. Mandating a gifted education unit should be seen in this light, and the Committee recommends it. The details would have to be negotiated, and the universities would need a few years to prepare. The recommendation concerns the concept.

Recommendation 14

The Commonwealth should propose to MCEETYA that state and territory education authorities should require, as a condition of employment, that newly graduated teachers have at least a semester unit on the special needs of gifted children in their degrees. This should include training in identification of gifted children and the pedagogy of teaching them.

Postgraduate training

4.68 The Committee has commented at paragraph 4.45. In view of the special needs mentioned in this inquiry the Committee thinks it is reasonable that the Commonwealth should provide targeted places to encourage postgraduate studies in gifted education.

Inservice professional development

4.69 Inservice professional development, like preservice training, is fundamentally a responsibility of the employing authorities. It is particularly important in light of the present middle aged bulge in the demographic profile of teachers. In the area of giftedness professional development needs to be systematic and centrally supported to remedy the relative inaction of the past and to remedy unsupportive attitudes which submissions reported among some principals and teachers at the local level. It is not satisfactory to devolve responsibility to individual schools or teachers on a voluntary basis, because a key purpose of the exercise is to raise awareness, and the unaware are unlikely to volunteer. When an issue is important but lacks popular appeal, action needs leadership from above. It is not satisfactory to rely on the professional development activities of outside interest groups such as gifted support groups. These activities, worthy though they are, are small scale in comparison with the need. They can do no more than help fill gaps. They do not absolve the employing authorities of their prime responsibility to maintain a skilled staff.

74 Submission 278, Dr Y. Carnellor, p.1

4.70 The Committee endorses the concept of different layers of professional development, starting with general awareness raising for *all* teachers.⁷⁵ Reading between the lines in the State authorities' comments about professional development, it seems that they are far from achieving this level of outreach.

4.71 The Commonwealth contributes to teachers' professional development through the *Teachers for the 21st Century* policy incorporating the Quality Teacher Programme. This will provide \$74 million over three years. The Committee supports this initiative. However the Committee has a concern that the accompanying documentation, like the National Goals for Schooling, focuses on achieving national benchmarks of literacy and numeracy. It has little to say about helping all children to reach their individual potential.⁷⁶ Paragraphs 2.28 and following above discuss concerns that this focus in the National Goals may discourage paying due attention to the special needs of the gifted. The same concerns apply to *Teachers for the 21st Century*.

4.72 The Committee trusts that this emphasis on national standards for literacy and numeracy is not intended to downplay giftedness. The Committee suggests that it would be reasonable to include a priority relating to gifted children in the program considering the special needs mentioned in this inquiry. This would be in keeping with references to quality and excellence elsewhere in the documentation.

Recommendation 15

The Commonwealth should specify professional development on issues to do with giftedness as a priority in the Quality Teacher Programme.

4.73 There have been concerns that selective schools and selective class groups are unlikely to yield their full benefits if the teachers are untrained in gifted education.⁷⁷ This is often the case in New South Wales, for example, where teachers in opportunity classes and selective high schools are not required to have special training in gifted education, although it may be an essential criterion for promotion positions.⁷⁸ The Committee agrees that there should be a special responsibility to ensure that teachers in these positions are suitably trained.

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

76 The Hon. D. Kemp, *Commonwealth's Commitment to Quality Teachers*, media release 11 September 2000. *Teachers for the 21st Century: Making the Difference*, Dept of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, no date [2000]. The document makes some reference to 'the pursuit of excellence' (p.9), but makes more common references to average standards: for example: 'The baseline challenges facing our schools are... to provide the foundation skills to *all* students in literacy, numeracy...' (p.8); '...enhancing educational outcomes for all students ... measurable goals for literacy and numeracy performance' (p.9); 'agreed student learning outcomes... identify goals, define standards and expectations' (p.11)

77 For example, submission 206, NSW Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, p.10; submission 275, G. Trijbetz, p.1; submission 276, R. & J. Adler, p.2.

78 Submission 206, NSW Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, p.8

Recommendation 16

The Commonwealth should propose to MCEETYA that state and territory education authorities should require that teachers in selective schools and classes have suitable gifted education qualifications. The authorities should ensure that the necessary professional development is available. The Commonwealth should support this through the Quality Teacher Programme.

4.74 In general the Committee comments: if the predominant policy is to deal with gifted children in the mainstream comprehensive classroom, this *increases* the need for all teachers to be trained to handle them. Mainstreaming is not an easy way out.