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Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION

NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION

MR CHRIS SIDOTI, Commissioner
LADY PEARL LOGAN, Co-Commissioner

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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THE COMMISSIONER: Good morning. Thanks very much for coming. Others that are sitting there, just for the record, we're starting today the sittings in Brisbane of the National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education on Friday, 8 October. Lady Pearl Logan is the Co-Commissioner for Queensland for this inquiry, and I'm Chris Sidoti, the Human Rights Commissioner. Thank you very much for coming along. You're first off today of an action-packed day, I think, with people coming through at a very rapid rate. So thank you very much for coming along. Would you like to introduce yourselves for the record and your association, and then you can go straight into your submission, and we'll have a few questions for you at the end.

MS MAHER: Thank you very much. We really appreciate the opportunity to be here. I apologise for Dr John Roulston, the Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of Queensland, and I'm here in his stead: Lorrie Maher, the Executive Officer, Education Services. A member of our standing education committee, Nigel Fairbairn, I'll let him introduce himself.

MR FAIRBAIRN: Nigel Fairbairn, I'm principal of SCOTS PGC College in Warwick in south-east Queensland.

MS MAHER: As we indicated in the fairly brief submission that was applying to the terms of reference, the association has membership of about 143 schools currently in Queensland, and a significant number of those schools take either hostel or boarding students. Some, like Nigel's school, are actually located in rural areas even if they're not remote, but the students that they have enrolled in their schools frequently come from very far distant places and have special needs, and there is around them, particularly under these terms of reference, that we see and have always maintained that there are special requirements and needs there.

So, Nigel did you wish to - we might just hold it with the terms of reference at the moment just to flesh out a bit the information that we've brought to you already, and if there were questions that you wanted to ask of us we're happy to take those as well.

[Choice; accessibility]

MR FAIRBAIRN: Thank you. Probably, the other issue that should be raised too is that as a body representing independent schools, we believe very, very strongly in the notion of choice; and one of the real concerns we have in working and dealing with people from remote and rural locations is that there is not the same choice available to them to actively obtain education. There are numerous reasons for that, and what we would like to see is the situation being supported by both state and federal governments that would allow children in remote and rural

locations the same choice opportunities as children in larger areas or in more populous areas.

MS MAHER: That, in particular, is aligned to the first term of reference with the availability and accessibility, because often they are accessibility questions particularly when it comes to travel and to the support. Most of our schools have fee reduction schemes where these students, if they're in needy situations, the fees will be reduced, and in some instances, waived altogether. But I suppose programs like the Country Area Program, which is a Commonwealth support program for schools, specifically excludes support from that program for boarding schools, whether the boarding schools are located in rural areas or in metropolitan provincial areas.

I suppose, having worked in the boarding schools myself and being a residential teacher, the young people coming in from the country where, if they've been to a formal school they've been in very small school situations going into a sort of a large boarding situation, they need special nurturing and care, and just even for the language patterns that happen when you're working in a bigger group and cohort. Certainly, the experience with all the motor skills with the sport, music, and things that they haven't had the opportunities with the larger groups before. So that we've argued - one of their fears, I suppose - that those students, the provision of additional support for those children is paramount in getting them out of the educationally disadvantaged area.

Earlier this year - and I did mean to bring to you and I apologise, I'll send to you a copy of the report that came through from a forum that AISQ supported with the Isolated Children's Parents' Association in Queensland; and it was specifically looking at and getting the anecdotal stories out and trying to get the school people and the parents meeting and talking for parents with severely disabled students in rural and remote areas who say that they virtually, particularly for secondary, have no choice except to try and send those children, who need residential care because of disability as well, to a boarding school. The extraordinary lengths they go to fund that and to support that is for some people prohibitive, and so the students don't get secondary schooling eventually.

So Nigel, are you going to take over?

MR FAIRBAIRN: One of the real concerns in regard to students in rural and remote locations is the fact that they don't have access to the added extras that children in larger schools take for granted. There aren't visiting touring drama groups that come through to these children, so these children don't know how to sit in a theatre and watch a live performance. We see situations where children don't have

access to live music and they can't play musical instruments. Because they can't play in team-game situations they don't learn how to be part of a team. Yet, if we read all the current educational theory and educational dreaming that's going on at the present time, the concept of teamwork, the concept of being able to give and take are issues that are at the forefront of what education is seeking to achieve these days.

Because of the lack of access to so many of what we call basic facilities and basic options, when these children do come away - and that's only if their parents can afford to send them away - they are already behind the eight ball. The ones who succeed are the ones who are either driven internally or they've been driven by parents, or they're in an environment which is totally supportive and totally cognisant with the battles that rural and remote children have to fight. We also, I suppose, find ourselves in situations where at primary level many of these children could be travelling two hours, three hours, four hours a day on buses just to get to school. So, by the time they get to upper primary level their perceptions of school become so negative that there is the likelihood that as soon as they reach 15 they will drop out.

I think we've got to be aware of the battles that have to be fought by children and also by their parents in rural and remote locations. That's not to say that it's a disaster because we have many, many happy and many, many well-adjusted children who come to us from rural and remote locations. Indeed, one of my school captains, it takes her 26 hours by bus to get home from school, but she is well-adjusted, she is happy, and she is going to be a success in the world. But there are also people who I've seen over a number of years who really do struggle when it comes to the schooling environment.

Can we move to the next one?

[Distance education; information technology]

MS MAHER: Yes. The second term of reference, which was the quality; I think that probably the areas there that we'd like to bring particularly to your notice are the inter-systemic things that we participate in through the School of Distance Education at Charters Towers, an Edna project, which is fairly light funding - that's Education Network Australia, the Commonwealth IT program. They've been establishing a virtual school in a particular frame of reference; and I know that you'll hear of other endeavours in that way which are bigger and greater later during the morning. But that particular one, which is trying to link and exploit the technology that's out on the properties to ensure that people get quality programs and we're identifying the primary and secondary sources coming through them that way. So that we don't just work at the location of our schools; we do have outreach areas, and we have outreach for the autistic children which crosses the three sectors; and

also for those with speech learning difficulties is another outreach service that starts with us, I guess, but is a joint activity.

I think that it's very difficult for the parents and for small schools to provide the range of curriculum offerings, and that also affects often, or is affected by the quality, the experience of the people who are trying to deliver. That's not to in any way downgrade, but they haven't quite grown into the knowledge and the comfortableness also in the community. So, our association and our schools support strongly any endeavours there to have pre-service teachers go, say, from the University of Southern Queensland, and gradually be accepted as part of a community so that they'll go and stay. But I guess that with the term of reference the biggest problem really is that those students and parents seeking to get particular courses or go to particular levels in the rural and remote areas will look to try and get their students back to a boarding school for the reasons we spoke about in term of reference 1.

Did you have something else?

[Staffing]

MR FAIRBAIRN: Yes. I want to go back to two years ago when I was enrolling a student from a school 500 kilometres from Brisbane in the south-west, where the students entering Year 11 had the choice of six subjects for their senior years of study, and in Queensland you must do six subjects. So there was absolutely no choice. One of the other huge areas of concern is the fact that the majority of our teaching institutions do not prepare teachers for life in rural and remote locations, and indeed there is no incentive for the universities to do so, nor is there any incentive for those graduates to actually apply for preferential purposes for rural and remote locations.

There have been. Last year in Queensland there were the Bid O'Sullivan scholarships that were offered - five of those were offered. One of my students was fortunate enough to win one of those five scholarships. They are offered to students who are prepared to undertake a teaching course and then return to a rural and remote location. So a step has been made in the right direction; but we do have, nationally, a shortage of teachers, that in rural and remote locations it is increasingly impossible to find specialist teachers and maths and science teachers. So the children in these areas are being disadvantaged just by the sheer fact that we can't get the qualified teachers out into these areas.

For the children who are being taught or tutored by their parents, in particular by their mothers at home, many of their mothers don't have any education bar the end of secondary schooling; and as the cycle continues, these are the children who, unfortunately, are

becoming less and less advantaged in comparison with the opportunities that are available to children in larger locations.

The other problem in regard to teaching is that many of the graduates see that if they do their one year or two years bush training they'll be out as soon as possible. So those people don't make a commitment to the local community, and the youth who are very impressionable, if they don't see young teachers making a commitment to the local community, the subliminal message that comes through is, why should we be making commitments? And this is at a time in society where commitment is seen not necessarily to be the right concept.

So I think we really do have to do something about continuing to address the incentives and what we want to do to get young people, or committed - young and committed people out into rural and remote locations and give them the incentives for them to remain in those locations.

[Vocational education and training]

MS MAHER: A couple of the really positive things that are going on that you might like to note, that really do help. We've got a person employed at our association that she previously was from a project with the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations - in Queensland is DETIR, and she's been preparing individual learning packages for the units of competence of the new training packages. So those students, if they are in our schools, particularly the rural students, but also students who aren't in our schools, will be enrolled through the South Queensland Institute of TAFE. So that it gives them greater flexibility and options to do the things that may not be on offer where they are, but also to do beef cattle in the areas that link and help to hold them back with their parents and where they were.

Another area that we see as really positive is the Commonwealth-funded School to Work program, which is the school element; and that was directed initially, primarily, at getting people with dual qualifications. So for the vocational education and training aspects that are really strengthening through the upper secondary, post-compulsory schooling area, you can use people who are trained in their own field and actually nurture them through on a mentoring process, so that they will then have education as well as their vocational qualifications.

Because it doesn't work very well in the short term with bureaucratic requirements and things it works excellently in the independent schools because they're working on a separately incorporated one by one by one, and can actually include those people, so that we have instances and case studies written up of that. I guess that that answers the area of trying to get the qualified people into the

rural areas, because our Board of Teacher Registration has flexed up some of the requirements to incorporate these people in the past, they're still really conditionally registered; whereas the School to Work we see as a really major step forward.

Just probably the third one. Is that with the Indigenous?

MR FAIRBAIRN: Yes.

[Students with disabilities]

MS MAHER: I've already spoken about the disabilities, and we have, probably, a disproportionate number of level 5, level 6, as termed within the guidelines for the Commonwealth Special Education Support programs. They're the severely low-incidence impaired and disabled young people. Our numbers are growing to a disproportionate rate as opposed to the other two sectors mainly because of this care level that they're looking for with the boarding or the hostel facilities. I think that certainly the report that I'll have delivered over here to you during the day - a copy you can read for bedtime reading - it brings out from the parents' end and from the principals of boarding schools the difficulties in meeting that need and demand because it affects the funding issue, doesn't it?

MR FAIRBAIRN: Yes.

MS MAHER: When you have more of a one-to-one situation to help some of these severely impaired young people it affects the formula for funding, ERI; and so that therefore schools are disadvantaged and other students pay more to take the disabled students in. But that's not to say they're not there. We have videos showing some of the great gains that are made particularly in not so much remote, but rural, schools with the disabled young people.

[Indigenous students]

The Indigenous, we've made the point that it's really a major dilemma of whether you hold them in a community school and so that therefore you're trying to maintain cultural aspects and language and have an appropriately modified curriculum and delivery to meet those cultural backgrounds, or whether you move them into a broader integrated context so that they are perhaps getting the best of both worlds. We've got all of those kinds of schools operating, and I guess the one that really is something that we would like to look at, and see more of, is like the Wangetti Education Centre, north of Cairns, where they have contracts with the community people; the contracts are signed by the elders in the community, by the students wishing to come in, and in the main they are post-compulsory age, but the level of education needs to be well down into the compulsory area. So that they tend to be more successful than in some of the other schools where the

church-based schools that are coming into be hostelled or hosted by families within the worshipping community, because those ones don't have that commitment, necessarily, as they come.

We could do a whole day on Indigenous education students and needs, but there are some real success stories out there; not enough. But I think that certainly sometimes we're not reporting the right way of their outcomes and the achievements, and that we're reflecting in a different lens, a different framework, so that every report that I come out of results say in Year 3 tests here that - they're state tests which probably become national. I can rewrite that analysis of that data to show as major steps forward, but not anywhere near where we need to be. Did you just want to take it from there, and perhaps the four recommendations, because I think that we've got about five minutes, and then they've got to take that (indistinct) and get to the next person.

MR FAIRBAIRN: I just make one mention though in regard to Indigenous education, that there are some of our new schools that have been established, whether they be day schools or whether they be day and boarding schools, actually are making a very conscious effort to be aware of the linkages between Indigenous Australia and European Australia, and working towards breaking down barriers that may have existed in the past, so that we can be talking about being one nation rather than there being two nations that for so many years were present here. Schools like Rivermount, over to the south of Brisbane, I think is an example of a school that is working very hard to present a very equal curriculum which represents a very sympathetic portrayal and understanding of the Indigenous cultures and the way that those Indigenous cultures have been affected by European settlement. So our schools, on the whole, are trying very hard to work within both frameworks.

[Staff recruitment and incentives]

We've put forward four recommendations in regard to our paper. The first recommendation is that both federal and state governments should seek a market solution to encourage well-qualified teachers, government employees and professionals to reside in rural and remote locations, and by providing financial and career incentives. This would encourage families to either locate or remain in rural and remote areas.

We can use the example that there is - and it was in the Courier Mail this week - of one town in Queensland which has seven doctors; after the peanut season has finished, at the end of this year, will have three doctors remaining in the town - that's a rural town, it's not even a remote town - because the four families want to relocate to a larger area. So we have towns like Kingaroy which, as I said, are not rural - - -

MS MAHER: They're not remote.

MR FAIRBAIRN: Sorry - are not remote, they're just rural - that are struggling. You just cannot get these professionals out west. It's impossible. I tried to ring someone in Jericho - the phone lines were down - and it took two and a half days for the lines to be reconnected. Now, what would have happened in the case of an emergency?

[Subsidies]

Recommendation 2 is that federal and state governments should provide grants to families in rural and remote locations to enable parents to have freedom of choice; freedom of choice whether they want to send their children to state schools or to non-government schools, and in particular to boarding schools of their choice.

Recommendation number 3: the state government of Queensland should implement a travel scheme to provide two return airfares per year for rural and remote students enabling them to study at boarding school and return home twice per year. This model works very successfully in Western Australia; and together Queensland and Western Australia are really the homes and the areas where boarding schools are an absolute necessity. We as an association can see no reason why the Queensland government shouldn't act upon what is already a successful scheme elsewhere in Australia.

[Information technology]

Recommendation number 4 is that the federal and state governments should provide additional IT funding to all rural and remote schools to compensate for limited resources that are available and to ensure that students in remote areas have access to equipment and services such as virtual schools. We're aware that you can't always get the staff out there, but at least by doing something in regard to IT funding, where once again making a statement and saying, "These people care, these people matter;" if we're not careful we will see, we will continue to see the mass exodus from rural and remote locations as families have no incentive for the sake of their youth to stay out there, and they will move into larger areas.

MS MAHER: Did you have any questions for us, Chris?

THE COMMISSIONER: Many. Pearl, would you like to start?

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: No, you can go first. This is my area, I got.

[Subsidies]

THE COMMISSIONER: Perhaps just one comment on recommendation 3 about the two airfares for boarding schools. It is working partially successfully in Western Australia, but I should also indicate that it's working most discriminatorily in Western Australia. So it will certainly be the subject of recommendations on our behalf in that the scheme is operating to discriminate very severely against students who choose to maintain their education and learning within their own communities. So that there it's actually four airfares, it's one per term return; and any kids who want to travel, for example, from Kununurra to Perth to go to boarding school have four airfares a year, but the kids in Kununurra cannot get any support whatsoever to go to Perth for an excursion. So it discriminates - - -

MS MAHER: So you'd want to see it expanded rather than - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: Certainly, it's obviously a very expensive scheme, but it needs to be applied on the basis of equality so that there is no disincentive, which is what currently applies in Western Australia, against students whose families decide to seek to retain them within their own communities. The isolation of remote students who don't get this benefit because their families decide to educate them in their own communities is extraordinary. So I think we need to be careful to ensure that the extension of equity in this way doesn't discriminate against students that stay at home.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Could I make one comment there. For instance, with DEETYA through the Aborigine and the Indigenous, they have a great number of airfares.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: And this, of course, also reacts badly. But I would recommend, or I would like to suggest to you that the stress rather go on excursions and bringing music and facilities to the remote areas because the children out there have lived with bus travel - and I know air travel would be wonderful - but my personal feeling is we'd be better to get more funding to be able to get the children away on excursions and get those other people back to them. I don't know how you feel about that. That amount of money, I feel, would be - - -

MR FAIRBAIRN: There has to be choice. I can understand what you're saying, but there has to be the availability of choice available to parents.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR FAIRBAIRN: One of the beauties of the airfare situation is that it actually gets the kids home more quickly, allows them to spend more time in their family environment.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Particularly in the peninsula - - -

MR FAIRBAIRN: Absolutely.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: - - - where they should only have to register a car for four months because that's all they can use it; but even their children do get out. But there's no way of getting excursions out.

MR FAIRBAIRN: Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: Just looking at - you mentioned 143 members in your association. I assume that they're scattered through the state. What proportion would be in the more remote areas as distinct from the larger towns like Warwick.

MS MAHER: Very few in remote. The students come from the remote, but the actual schools are rural rather than remote. We have a school at Normanton, we have a school at Biloela, a school at Chinchilla; but you're not really getting right out where - - -

MR FAIRBAIRN: Schools at Mt Isa.

MS MAHER: Yes, Mt Isa, well sometimes they're considered remote and sometimes they're not.

MR FAIRBAIRN: They're not, that's right.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, yes.

MS MAHER: It depends who's drawing the lines. And then like the Wangetti Education Centre, which if you took it geographically is north of Cairns, but they're kind of like a centre, if you like, for the actual communities; but we don't have anywhere near the number of remote schools that the state Education Department does or over the years that Catholic Education have been struggling to maintain.

THE COMMISSIONER: To what extent does your association, for example, seek to work with its members to identify areas of need where there are gaps in the current provision of education, and say, "Well, we'll see if we can fill that need"?

MR FAIRBAIRN: I think we do that already as a consequence of our marketing and the fact that our member schools, whether it be the principals, whether it be the students we draw from, are out in those rural and remote locations on a regular basis. For boarding schools, rural and remote locations are part of our bread and butter; so if we're not out there and aren't able to listen and then help identify what are the needs of those people, we're not doing our job either. We don't see ourselves as wanting to maintain or create a brain drain from these areas. What we're trying to do, in all seriousness, is to: (1) provide parents with choice; (2) be able to provide a service, because we are in very much a service industry, and if we can't service people and be able to service people in the areas that they need servicing, we shouldn't be in that industry.

MS MAHER: And as an association we certainly support all the community development through the Office of Rural Development and things like that; and we acknowledge and participate wherever possible in things that will hold the communities together, because even if the parents choose to send their children into boarding schools still it's the strength of the community that they're coming from and recognition that some parents like me start counting up how many nights sleep the kids are going to ever have at home again when you send them off to secondary, let alone if you send them off to board for primary. But we also are mindful that you can't provide all things to all people; and in the smaller centres and the more remote centres you cannot get the diversity of curriculum offering with equality unless we reorganise and bring students in for summer schools or trimesters so that they actually get the greater experience.

Those young people and their parents believe that the way that they can compete and have doors unlocked is to participate whether it's in state schooling or non-government schooling but in bigger centres. So parents actually - you have the mother and the children often buying second houses to come in, so that you've still dragged from your community in a way, except you've taken the mother as well at that stage. Ways that we can try to work across sector, I think, to provide a quality education for those young people, but a range of options; and I suppose that's what I was referring to with the Country Area Program where I know very successfully some of the Rockhampton boarding schools it was, were used during the summer vacation, under PCAP funding, to bring the young people in for sports and give them that understanding. Because then sometimes they stay or the parents book them into the schools - for other agendas that was not seen to be good; and so that was kind of removed off the agenda.

So I suppose that if we can get more into a not who's got the students and where they're enrolled, but rather how we can share

services to make it better for them would be where we would want to go.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I think we had an example yesterday in Normanton, where the support given by having an independent as well as a state school, and the support to the Indigenous students who were having problems with the perception of whether education is to their advantage, I think it was - that was there, wasn't it. It was illustrated very well.

MS MAHER: Yes. And we actually supported the whole library going in because the reading material at that Christian school in Normanton had been provided by well-meaning church people, so you couldn't level them for intervention for reading strategies. So we've got support and funding, and through the association have actually stocked and trained the librarian and bookmark them on. I mean, the primary school across the road uses them as well; like, they share the resources, which is really important.

[Cross-sectoral collaboration]

THE COMMISSIONER: To what extent does your association, for example, sit down with the Education Department and the Catholic system and work out together how it may be possible to meet the needs of a particular community? Let me give you an example: as you mention, there's a Christian community school in Mt Isa and in Normanton, the Catholic system is very big in Mt Isa, the state system is clearly spread through the area; the people of Doomadgee are looking towards increasing the number of homeland or outstations for their community, and that's going to give rise to obvious educational needs for the kids from the Doomadgee community. I mean, where a community is wanting to change the nature of community life, is there some mechanism by which the three education sectors and the community can sit down and try to work out the most appropriate way of meeting those needs to the kids?

MS MAHER: I suppose Wudgeewudge at Woorabinda out from Rockhampton would be an example of that, where the primary school is a state school; the secondary school, which wasn't viable there from a state perspective, was originally established by nuns from Catholic Education, and then it became very expensive and they were unable to actually provide the staff there, so that they then moved to an independent school - that's independent non-Catholic, because some of our schools are Catholic as well. The students from there actually do some of their vocational education traineeships by working back with the primary school, and we go, and with the whole community, work with the state people and the PCAP people which tend to be being drawn from the state, to make that happen.

We're limited, of course, on what we know about and where we can actually try to make a difference; that's why I referred to the Edna project working out of Charters Towers, because I actually went up and we had one of the independent schools in Charters Towers - the meeting that established that - and I went and briefed all sectors. Coming Out of Coordinating Diversity, a report here in Queensland for compulsory age students to integrate vocational education and academic education - if you wanted to use that word - we still have a rural and remote ongoing inter-systemic meeting to try and see how we can make it better for all students.

So there'd be areas that could be strengthened if we identified what we're actually talking about. Isn't it? That's the crux of it. But our association has supported the rural research unit through JCU since its inception, and we don't sit down and say statement on statement. I guess it's the people too, that most of us have worked in all sectors, so you've got your friends and relatives.

[Indigenous students]

THE COMMISSIONER: You mentioned the disproportionate number of severely disabled kids. How are the proportions of Indigenous kids in the independent sector?

MS MAHER: Probably - well, it's certainly not as great as in those identifying as Indigenous in the state because there are concentrated areas where the state has maintained provision of education. I think we would probably be about the same because of the lower primary numbers in our sector; proportionately we would be about the same I would think, perhaps a bit lower than Catholic education because you get concentrations in urban areas like Inala.

THE COMMISSIONER: In the parish schools.

MS MAHER: Yes, in the parish Catholic schools, yes. But we now have six community schools that are independent, like, they're totally Aboriginal.

THE COMMISSIONER: Right.

MS MAHER: And we provide support to develop and proficiency testing to that we can, on an authentic basis, test the English as a Second Language in those schools, and training, and that's inter-systemic; we just provide it for all sectors.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: There was a move 10, 15 years ago for it to bring many more Indigenous into the boarding schools; and I think - I can't think of the name of the research that was done on it, I could get it

for you - but the feeling was that the children needed to really be driven by a need to go, otherwise they didn't stay and they were very unhappy. So they went back to that; and I'm not quite sure, I haven't followed it through. I was very involved at that stage, but I haven't followed it through.

MR FAIRBAIRN: I think in many times there were the cases that the funding was available for Aboriginal children to go away to boarding school, and they were given a certain amount of pocket money, and it really was almost like the complete handout mentality. I think there were many people, having taught in Charters Towers, who many of the Aboriginal people who actually felt it was almost insulting to be given the handouts and not really being consulted as to whether or not it was what they wanted for their family's education.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: That funding is still there, but I think the thing is now it's a case of trying to encourage - as we were talking yesterday - the children who really felt a need to go, and they were (indistinct)

MS MAHER: So that Shalom's boarding house is full and it's totally Indigenous, and they elected to come in, the young people; I mean, not that it's stable, you still get them moving in and out, but it is a much more positive thing. But, yes, I taught Indigenous students who have been brought in, fingered, and brought to high-fee paying independent schools, and it was absolute disaster.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: They were so unhappy.

MS MAHER: But then, they may have been unhappy where they were too; and it was interesting, one young girl I taught who came down from Murgon from Cherbourg, and she was one of a cohort of about six that stayed. The rest all ran away and went back home again and she stayed. We had great difficulty in trying to find employment for her at the end of Year 10 because of, apparently, her Aboriginality but also because our numeracy and calculating ways had no real meaning for her. Eventually she had to go back, and the inevitable happened, she was raped back where she came from, and she now has had a number of children to a number of fathers.

But the point of the story is that I've kept in touch with her over the years, and I would think that because she was totally disaffected with everybody - her community, the boarding school people - like she just was in no man's land; I would have thought that the last thing she would have wanted was for one of her daughters to actually be on a bursary to go to that school, and when she, through me, sought that, I asked her - I was just truly amazed. She said that what she gained, even in retrospect was far more, and it gave her a start in life, and she's

now completed a community teaching degree and is actually teaching up at Cherbourg. So I suppose we look with different eyes at different times and for different reasons.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I think that bringing them in now, in Cairns, in the northern areas, in Woodley, in Shalom; I think that bringing the children who want to come, giving them and working more on changing their perception, that they themselves feel they want to come, and then going through the - and they are getting very high employment and very high results.

MR FAIRBAIRN: But I think it's like any child who goes to boarding school; if the child - regardless of their creed, their colour, their race - if the child wants to go to boarding school nine times out of 10 it will be a success. If the person is told they are going to boarding school and it's against their will quite often you'll have dismal failures on your hands. And it's the case with many of our Indigenous students that those who want to come away and want to succeed are given the same opportunities as people from non-Indigenous backgrounds.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I would agree with that.

THE COMMISSIONER: Could you mention where the six community schools are?

MS MAHER: Wangetti, that's the one north of Cairns; Shalom, the Brisbane independent school which is now located at Acacia Ridge; there's Woorabinda; Emmanuel, in Cairns, which is coming from Assembly of God; and Normanton - are all receiving Commonwealth funding as community schools.

THE COMMISSIONER: Right; but they're not Aboriginal community schools explicitly though.

MS MAHER: Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: I think Normanton has got non-Aboriginal kids as well.

MS MAHER: Yes. They are allowed to take a certain percentage, and in fact they try to give that.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: A non-Aboriginal can go if they want to go.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I mean, it's for schools, it's for schooling.

MS MAHER: That is actually the - yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: But because of the - - -

MS MAHER: Shalom was established wanting at least 10% non-Indigenous students to try and get a different meeting point; and they've had to walk away from that, so that if they're usually they're usually students of teachers.

THE COMMISSIONER: You mentioned providing to us the material about that school forum, which would be terrific.

MS MAHER: I just sent that over so that we can sit at the back or whatever. We won't interrupt you; but we'll send you over a video of a disability student and also the report.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you. And some information about those Wangetti contracts would be useful too, if you could provide that for us. Thank you both very much.

MS MAHER: Thank you for the opportunity.

THE COMMISSIONER: The Education Department. Thank you very much.

[9.52]

MR McHUGH: Thank you, Commissioner. My name is Bob McHugh, I'm the Assistant Director General of Education Services. The Director General, Terry Moran, has asked myself and my senior colleagues to make this presentation to your inquiry. Basically what we would like to do is to move you through a presentation that demonstrates our commitment to overcoming equity access in isolation. Hence, I will be calling on various colleagues who have particular accountabilities in addressing this issue.

[Demography]

I'd like to give you a broad overview of service provision by Education Queensland, because we are the dominant service provider for education in the state. In particular, I'd like to draw your attention to the 460,000 young people who do attend government schools, in 1,307 schools. Using your definition of "rurality" and "isolation", the great majority of our schools do meet that definition. So much of our service provision in this state could be deemed to be in rural centres, and in isolated areas.

As you can see, 6% of our student enrolment identify as Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander, and there are appropriately 2% or 8,900 students, who have high educational support needs with ascertained disabilities that we're constantly addressing, and 5% of our student enrolment live in families in which a language other than English is spoken at home. So, as you'll appreciate, a very broad, diverse student body, across a range of settings, across a massive state.

[Administration]

As I understand, you've been to places like Boulia and Normanton, and Doomadgee more recently. In 1998 we moved to a district service provision model. This came about after 49 years of a regional structure, we previously had 11 regions. But we moved to a district structure in a serious attempt by the organisation to get services closer to students, and in particular to ensure a greater level of quality and accountability of service provision.

That is principally the role of a district director, who leads each of the 36 district offices. You'll notice there that we have a statement that our district offices are staffed differentially; that was a serious attempt to acknowledge the fact that issues such as distance and isolation do impact upon service delivery. For example, the Mt Isa district has an accountability role for 23 schools, the Torres Strait district for 18 schools, and what we call the Cape and Gulf district, for 23 schools.

If you compare this with a typical metropolitan district office it has an accountability for 36 to 40 schools. So we have built that into our service delivery model. I would like to stress our commitment to the provision of schooling in rural and isolated areas in particular. Unlike some other states, in terms of the provision of public education we do have 120 schools with enrolments of 20 or fewer students, and I do believe that clearly demonstrates our commitment to a level of service provision, the like of which you don't tend to see across other parts of Australia.

The figures speak for themselves. In essence, therefore, about 443 of our 1,307 schools do have a hundred or fewer students. To staff those schools, obviously, is a particular challenge. Unlike some other states we have maintained a statewide transfer system to ensure quality and staffing in all of our schools. We have coupled that with a remote area incentive scheme. This is designed to recognise our employees who provide us with service in rural and isolated communities.

[Teacher incentives]

That comes in the form of a range of benefits that I'll speak to very quickly in a moment. We also couple that with subsidised teacher housing, in an attempt to maintain a level of service provision, and for the past couple of years we have implemented a Cooler Schools program, designed to make our schools far more conducive to learning, but particularly in rural and remote areas. For example, in the 1998-99 financial year we spent \$13.7 million on the Cooler Schools program, and that is rising to \$24.5 million in this current financial year.

To go back to the staffing issue, a teacher at Doomadgee attracts what we call 11 transfer points each year. That typically means that after two years of service that teacher could request, and would be successful in achieving, a transfer out of Doomadgee. If they were to stay a third and a fourth year, our transfer point systems has an incentive-type approach, which would mean that if they were to spend three or four years there, they literally could pick the school on the Sunshine or the Gold Coast.

In fact, we sometimes say they could virtually pick the classroom to continue their teacher career. The Remote Area Incentive Scheme that I mentioned earlier; typically, a teacher at Doomadgee would receive an additional \$5,000 gross per year, plus additional amounts for dependants. We also have incentive benefits that click in; after the teacher remains there for 2.5 years, they receive an additional \$5,000 gross per year. They also received an additional five days per year emergent leave, and they also receive a significant locality allowance. For a single teacher in Doomadgee, that is \$131.90 per fortnight locality allowance.

If you pack that all up, it basically means that a teacher at Doomadgee in multishare accommodation pays about \$18 per week for accommodation in departmental housing. In particular, some of our quick budget highlights that I'd like to bring to your attention to set the scene; as you can see, we have a significant commitment to literacy and numeracy, with the expenditure of about \$114 million. You will see how that impacts on rural and isolated schools and their students in a few minutes.

[Vocational education]

We've invested considerable sums into vocational education and training in our schools. We are on the cusp of a major network learning community that will open up a host of possibilities for students in rural and isolated communities, and the planned expenditure for the current financial year is \$23.5 million. Additionally, \$174 million for our capital program, and I'd like to point out a state allocation of \$4.6 million to support parents with students boarding at schools away from their home.

I'd like to finish my brief presentation just by stating that our current strategic directions are being re-evaluated, where we've embarked on a process called Queensland State Education 20-10, where we're attempting to define where we wish to be in 10 years' time. We've underpinned that with a number of key strategic directions, literacy and numeracy being at the heart of it, coupled with an information technology system that will link our 1,307 schools.

We recognise the importance, both for our communities and for government, about collecting appropriate data about what it is that our students and our schools are achieving. We're grappling with the issue of the virtual classroom, and how we provide vocational education, particularly in rural and remote areas. Obviously, the key to service delivery is your teacher, and one of the challenges that are before us is the notion of supporting teachers, not only to maintain their skills in rural and isolated communities, but to upgrade them, and in particular some special attention to the needs of disadvantaged students.

Commissioners, at this point I'd like to call upon my colleague, Jo Deissel - Jo is the Director of the Teaching and Learning Branch - to speak further to our presentation.

[Curriculum]

MS DEISSEL: Thanks, Bob. My major role as the Director of Teaching and Learning is in the area of curriculum implementation. I'd just like to take you through some of the features that are peculiar to Queensland in relation to that implementation. First of all, to note to you that the development of Queensland school curriculum is the responsibility of two statutory boards, whereas the implementation of the curriculum is the responsibility of each jurisdiction.

The Queensland School Curriculum Council develops syllabuses and coordinates approved statewide assessments of students from preschool to Year 10, whereas the Board of Senior Secondary Schools Studies fulfils a similar role for those students in years 11 and 12. I'd note to you in the development, particularly, of syllabuses, that wide consultation is undertaken by both those authorities, and with the three sectors of schooling, to ensure that we have a comprehensive coverage, but also the cultural and linguistic diversity of Queenslanders are taken into account.

For example, the Queensland School Curriculum Council uses a process of forums, and last year they had a major forum in the area of special education, looking at the issues to do with curriculum development for students with special needs. This year they've implemented, or are currently undertaking one, in relation to rural and remote education. In that process the members of Council and the office staff have visited or held forums in locations such as Longreach,

Rockhampton, Mt Isa, Torres Strait Island, Arukun, Quilpie and Tambo, and it's to actually advise the Council on issues that are related to Council, and test development.

In relation to the implementation of P-10 curriculum, I'd note to you that Education Queensland is in the process of implementing three major curriculum documents. In 1998 we distributed to all state schools the preschool guidelines for curriculum. By the beginning of 2001, it's expected that the guidelines will be fully implemented within all of our state education schools. In the process of support for those, Education Queensland funded accredited professional development opportunities for primary principals, deputy principals and preschool teachers, and the travel-related expenses for all of those for at least one face-to-face presentation related to the core modules in the preschool guidelines.

In addition, we supported the implementation by the 35 districts, in 1998, of education advisers in 35 districts in the area of curriculum preschool to support our schools. In 1994 that continued through 24 districts, maintaining that type of support. This year two new syllabuses, in science and physical education, have been distributed to each state school. Again, we will provide a range of support to the implementation of that for schools. For instance, \$5.052 million has been provided directly to schools to support the introduction of the Years 1-10 science, and health and physical education syllabuses, as well as the preschool guidelines.

Apart from the curriculum support materials that we would provide to schools, we will also develop a CD-ROM-based self-paced training module for teachers of science, and health and physical education, again looking at ways in which we can provide the type of professional development across the diversity of Queensland. Field support staff that are provided to the implementation of syllabuses is made up of - the 36 education districts can appoint up to four educational advisers to support the implementation of a range of priority departmental initiatives, and that's at a cost of about \$8.97 million that we provide.

Two of those educational advisers are specifically dedicated to the curriculum areas that - collaboratively, principals get together and decide on which areas they wish to support at a particular time, and how they wish to do it. Two of them are also what we call local needs advisers, and they work - particularly establish - to support our smaller schools. Particularly with rural and remote schools being smaller than our urban ones, that's an additional support that we provide to them.

[Vocational education]

In relation to post-compulsory education there has been, as you would know, a fundamental change to senior schooling through flexible and multiple pathways. An increased focus on vocational and educational training assists young people's transition from school to work, and supports the provision of a range of options which accommodates the interest and abilities of all students. There is a range of vocational education-related activities in our schools which are integral to implement VET schools programs.

These included structured workplace learning, vocational learning, often instituted in Years 9 and 10 as a preparation for accredited vocational education and training in Years 9 and 10 and linked with career education, and enterprise education. There are a number of key vocational education training pathways that we particularly use, and they are on the screen before you. The school-based apprenticeship and traineeship program allows a full-time student to access recognised training while engaging in paid work as a trainee, or an apprentice.

Typically, students attend four days a week, and attend on and off-the-job training on the fifth day. Generally speaking, at the end of Year 12 they will have acquitted traineeships, or partially completed an apprenticeship. Currently, there are about 2,000 apprenticeships, or trainees, across three schooling sectors, with the vast majority of those in state schools, with the most popular industry areas being engineering, hospitality, business and retail.

Many students access the VET board-developed courses. Five subjects, such as technology studies and hospitality studies, and 10 study area specifications, things such as tourism, marine and aquatic practices, land and animal systems, English communication and trade and business mathematics have been developed with partial or complete qualifications for national training packages embedded in them.

Schools can also offer a VET component of these courses as a stand-alone product, which means students can acquire certain stand-alone training products while registered through the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies. Education Queensland, since 1997, has been leading a national School to Work project in the area of rural and remote education. Basically that is with two other states, I think Northern Territory and New South Wales, where we're looking to develop models of successful practice of vocational education training in schools, and to share that across the state and obviously across our schools, to share good practice.

Types of strategies schools are using in those types of practice models are things such as introducing vertical timetables in P10

schools, with students in Years 8, 9 and 10 in order to form a critical mass of students, introducing enterprise education linked to structured work placements, developing critical partnerships with local industry networks as well as with other government departments, such as the Office of Rural Affairs, etcetera.

I'd like to reiterate some of the things that Bob said about current priorities that we have, in particular in the area of literacy and numeracy, and I'll talk about that in a moment. I've spoken about the syllabus implementation, the vocational and education training. We have major priorities in career guidance, a look at in the future of what is needed in schools in relation to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and new technologies in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, which my colleagues will share with you in the very near future.

[Literacy and numeracy]

As mentioned earlier, the literacy and numeracy is a major priority for us this year, and has been for a number of years, to the tune that we have \$114 million to support P initiatives in state schools. Again, standards are monitored through statewide assessment programs in the Years 3, 5 and 7, and a range of intervention support programs such as Reading Recovery, a Year 2 diagnostic net program, and the employment of support teachers learning difficulties are key to those initiatives, as well as the employment of teacher's aides to provide additional literacy and numeracy support.

Giving an example of one of those, in the Reading Recovery program all of these programs are accessible to rural and remote schools. In 1998, the Reading Recovery program was operating in about 28% of our schools across Queensland. Of the 299 schools, 111 of those were predominantly in rural and remote areas. I'd like to hand over to Gary, who will talk to you on the new technologies.

MR McHUGH: Commissioner, Gary Barnes is the Acting General Manager of our Open Access unit, which as you will see has a particular focus for the provision of curriculum support materials, and moving into the management of new technologies and distance education provision within our schooling system.

[Information technology; distance education]

MR BARNES: Thanks, Bob. Education Queensland, over the last three years, has established the largest wide-area network in the Southern Hemisphere, called EdNet. All schools are now connected to the Internet, and Intranet, via broadband cabling or satellite, at 64 and 128 k bandwidth, depending on the school's size. To date, we've spent in excess of \$39 million in establishing this network. It's critical for us, given the diversity of our state. We are also supporting the rollout of a

Local Area Network within schools, with rural and remote schools being given priority treatment in this area.

To date, we have expended in excess of \$32 million on that particular program. As well as this, we've initiated a three-year program called School in 2001, which was to reduce student computer ratios, and to provide opportunities for all teachers to upskill to a minimal level of competence, so that they could actually use the provisions. Again, to date funds that have gone directly to schools have exceeded \$83 million over the last three years.

Rural and remote communities, of course, have benefited from the flow-on effects, in terms of our rollout of networking. A lot of rural and remote communities have received, ahead of time, digital networks, telephone networks, into their communities. Of course, the telecommunications infrastructure into private residences is still variable, and I think, as the guy who was here from the Association of Independent Schools of Queensland indicated, there are still some parts where that service, as well as things like continuous electricity, are questionable.

We have some real challenges. We need to make sure that our schools have user-friendly access to relevant digitised curriculum resources that all teachers, students and parents, regardless of where they are in this state, can access, using this technology. It's no good spending that amount of money and not being able to deliver core and critical services. We certainly are looking to use, and will need to look to use, that technology to deliver training solutions into those schools, because travel has always been a real concern for those teachers in rural and remote areas.

We will need to use the technology to provide students with greater curriculum choice, in terms of the subjects on offer. We certainly will need to continue addressing the need to upskill our teachers so that they can fully utilise the technology, and certainly we need to look at solutions to deliver into homes of students, rather than just into schools, and, in particular, real-time teaching. Education Queensland is responding to these challenges.

The Open Access unit, which I head up at the moment, has been refocussed so that it will become the primary purchaser, developer and provider of access solutions to digital resources. In the past we had a haphazard approach to doing these things. We're now looking at a concerted and strategic approach. We have spent already half a million dollars on setting up a digital resource centre that will carry resources across a curriculum intranet, free of charge to schools so that they don't have to pay the download fees that they would otherwise on the Internet.

We are establishing, from the beginning of the year 2000 - again at a cost in excess of half a million dollars - a virtual school. 22 schools have been selected, and 17 of these secondary schools are in rural and remote areas. We are looking at delivering subjects that traditionally would not be able to be delivered into these school locations, things such as maths C, economics, Japanese, etcetera. We are planning to establish a similar virtual campus for teachers and leaders, that builds upon some good work that we've already done in the virtual area there.

At the moment we have an Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow school, one of six in the world, based in a suburb in Brisbane. We bring teachers from around the state as far as TI - Thursday Island - and certainly remote areas, Boulia, etcetera, to Brisbane for one week so that they can be immersed and see that technology being used. We also are planning to expand on a significant trial in the (indistinct) area, to deliver into homes of people using telephone teaching, rather than HF radio, which has always been problematic for us because of the variable quality of interaction used when delivering lessons.

Finally, we have just commenced a significant review into distance education provision, because down the track, in the not too distant future, we will need to fully utilise technology to provide better opportunities for those people in remote locations where they can't access a school. If I can just give you a bit of context about distance education; we have, at the moment - and we're recognised as the leader in distance education, and necessarily so, because of the number of students that we access and provide services to - 6,000 students study at the moment in distance education across seven specially formed distance education schools that are situated across the state.

The Open Access unit does develop curriculum materials in all of the KLAs [Key Learning Areas], from Years 1 to 12, and spends at least \$2 million a year on revising those materials and developing new materials. The materials to date have been basically paper-based, and they've been supported by schools as they deliver them through HF radio lessons. The primary audience has always been students and home tutors; that's parents in home locations. We certainly can't all the time revise those things on an annual basis, so appropriately every four to five years we look at revising those materials.

We do have some challenges as far as distance education is concerned. The challenges are these; that with new syllabus documents that Jo has referred to rolling out of the statutory authorities on a fairly regular basis, and with a four to five year time-frame for revising materials, sometimes the time lag is so significant that rural

and remote schools, and sometimes our home tutors, become a little bit annoyed that their students aren't getting the same deal as some of those students in non-rural and remote locations.

So there's a real challenge for us there. Updating paper-based materials is problematic to say the least, and we need to look at doing things better in that regard as well. Making distance education materials - which are superb materials in their paper-based format - more widely available to support, for example, first, second-year teachers in rural and remote schools, is something that we need to do as well.

We do, as I mentioned earlier, need to look at the effectiveness in the long term of continuing student-teacher interaction with HF radio, and we, as do the rest of Australia, need to look at overcoming those problems in rural and remote areas as far as accessing hardware and infrastructure. Issues such as bandwidth and the cost of providing services and the reliability of services are things that are uppermost in our mind. In response to those things, we are and have committed to moving the time-frames forward, by introducing new processes to deliver distance education materials in a shorter time-frame, so that we can take account of changes made to syllabuses as they come out of the statutory authorities.

We are also looking at ways in which we can deliver these materials, utilising the technology to greater effect. We certainly have, as mentioned earlier, begun a process where all new distance education materials will also be digitised, and placed within the digital resource centre so that teachers across the state, and students across the state, can have access to these superb materials. We've also begun a process where existing distance education materials, as well as those new ones that are still relevant, will be digitised as well, and sit within this digital resource centre.

As are Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia, and just more recently New South Wales, we are looking at trialing on-line technologies delivering real-time teaching into home locations, as a second wave, or a second phase to our virtual schooling service pilot. We do have a commitment, and are playing a lead role at a national level, in providing advice to overcome the issues concerning bandwidth cost, and duplication of on-line content.

Finally, as I've already mentioned, we have a commitment in the interim to improving the way in which our teachers in the schools and distance education can deliver to those students via a telephone teaching trial.

[Students with disabilities]

MR McHUGH: Commissioner, I'd like to call upon Peter Blatch. Peter is the Coordinator of what we call the Low Incidence Service. Basically, his focus is service delivery for students with special needs.

MR BLATCH: Morning. Ed Queensland has got a very strong commitment to students with special needs, regardless of their geographic location or the type of school that they attend. By students with special needs, we include those that have disabilities and those with learning difficulties as well as learning disabilities. In line with the intent of the Commonwealth disability legislation, Ed Queensland has an action plan that was formulated in 1997 that clearly articulates where we're going as far as the education provision goes for students with disabilities. This is updated annually.

Students with disabilities comprise about 2% of the total population, and they include students with hearing impairment, vision impairment, intellectual impairment, physical impairment, speech-language impairment, ASD or Autistic Spectrum Disorder, and a combination of those. In addition to that, students with learning difficulties and learning disabilities we believe comprise between 12 and 15% of the total school-age population.

One of the interesting things is that Ed Queensland, unlike other state departments of education, provides services for students with disabilities from the age of birth through to post-schooling, usually round about 18 years. 50% of the students with disabilities population live within an hour and a half of Brisbane, and one of the reasons for that, we believe, is largely due to parent preference, and the fact that many of them may have needed to access very specialised medical technology in the early days.

The Queensland government has got a strong commitment to deinstitutionalisation, and as a consequence of that \$2 million additional funds is being made available to move young children with disabilities out of large institutions and back into their homes, and predominantly most of those students would have come from very remote areas. At present we only have nine students that are still involved in that program.

One of the significant issues is the number of hearing-impaired students that we have. We have a very high incidence of students that have otitis media, or middle ear infection, and the department has put a strong commitment into supporting teachers in community schools, working with otitis media. Students with learning difficulties and learning disabilities are based in every school across the state, and the department has identified a school-based process to identify those students.

The ascertainment process for students with disabilities doesn't look at the medical condition that they have, but relates specifically to the teaching and learning condition, and the best way that these students can be taught in the school that their parents have chosen. Similarly, we have a number of processes that focus on appraisalment that identify whole-of-school responses to working with students with learning difficulties and learning disabilities.

We currently have 1,600 support staff to assist in this area. We have a very strong commitment in the area of rural education, and as my colleague, Gary Barnes, has mentioned, in the seven schools with distance education, we currently have 14 support teachers learning difficulties that look specifically at those needs. In addition to that, at a whole-of-state level we have a further two positions that can provide statewide support, and add additional expertise.

A number of initiatives occur at the school level. In fact, most of the initiatives that are occurring in education occur, of course, at the local school level. One of the requirements that we have mandated is that all students with special needs must have an individual learning plan, and this clearly articulates the direction that the students' learning should be progressing; individual education plans have been developed for students with disabilities, and that these are reviewed every six months, and identify four to six priority goals.

Students with learning difficulties also have individual support plans, which outline the priority areas that the classroom teachers and other specialist staff would be working on, and to assist teachers there's a number of whole-of-state consultants, in addition to the ed advisers that have already been mentioned, to support teachers in developing those strategies. Through a Web site teachers can also access other models of support.

[Staff training – students with disabilities]

Support and training for teachers and for other therapists is very much high on the agenda, and for the last 30 years Education Queensland has been accessing specialised training through the Griffith University. We've moved, in the last nine years, to all of our training being delivered via Open Learning, and self-paced. Perhaps the best example that I can use to demonstrate the support that we're giving to students in rural and remote areas is to talk about a current project working with students with physical impairment.

We have about 3,000 students with physical impairment across the state, and within Australia at this point in time there are no tertiary programs equipping teachers to work specifically with these students. Education Queensland has committed some \$150,000 to develop an open learning and self-paced package that can be used by teachers

and therapists. It's being done in conjunction with Griffith University, who are prepared to accredit this course.

Teachers and therapists are able to access this course at their convenience, and in return Education Queensland pays their tertiary fee, should they seek accreditation, as well as gives them one day a week leave to further their studies. These people enrolled in the course are mentored by the specialist support staff that are available in the local area. In addition, at a whole-of-state level the Low Incidence Support Centre provides responses to students, to their schools and to parents, regarding learning difficulties and disabilities, and to date this year there's been more than 800 requests made to individual schools.

In addition, last year a self-paced skilling kit was put into every government school in the state, giving teachers strategies to work with students with the various areas of disability. Specialised equipment and technology is making an impact on students with special needs, and whilst most information can be accessed through the district - because the numbers of students with disabilities and learning difficulties are exceptionally small in some districts - we've set up across the state a hotline whereby people are able to access the services, again, from the Low Incidence unit regarding specialised equipment and peripheral devices that can be trialed.

A new project that's been identified this year is skilling teachers, 10 in each of our isolated areas, to work specifically with applying technology to the teaching and learning for students with disabilities.

[Other resources – students with disabilities]

Environmental modification is particularly important, and each year the department spends in excess of \$4 million in minor capital works. This is a particularly significant issue, when you consider that many of our smaller schools are in fact built on stilts, and we have increasing numbers of physically impaired students that are required to access those schools.

Teacher aides and therapists are integral to the educational programs for students with special needs. They provide an invaluable resource, but I stress that that's when they're working under the direction of a teacher. Similarly to the skilling kit that was developed for teachers, we also have an accredited teacher aid skilling kit that teacher aides can access via the Open Learning mode, and if required, if they're seeking accreditation, they're able to access that through one of our tertiary courses.

We have a significant number of specialist staff, including therapists and nurses, that are also working at the local level. In

addition to activities that are occurring at the school, we have a number of activities that are occurring at our 36 district levels. We have specialist teachers working in each of the specific impairment areas, we have occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and speech-language pathologists who are providing access to enable students with special needs to get to their school.

One of the priority areas that the whole-of-government has identified is sharing vacant positions, or sharing parts of positions with other government departments, to ensure that we can in fact provide therapists in our more isolated areas. We have 36 principal education officers that coordinate services across the state, and also advise on policy.

At a state level we have an action plan, as I've already mentioned, that clearly articulates the direction that we're going for students with disabilities, and we have a Low Incidence unit with a staff of 90, consisting of teachers, teacher aides and ancillary staff that are available to provide professional development, advice and direct programs to students with special needs. Thank you very much.

MR McHUGH: Commissioner, to round off our presentation, Shane Williams. Shane is a Director, he is currently managing the Students At Risk area, and he'd like to speak about our particular focus for students at risk.

MR WILLIAMS: Thank you, Bob. Good morning, Commissioner.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Morning.

[Students at risk; behaviour management]

MR WILLIAMS: I've placed up on the OHP there what we would see as the students at risk. We identify risk as where students' experience of schooling makes them vulnerable to not completing 12 years of schooling or its equivalent or may not achieve the essential learnings or the knowledge and skills to participate in employment and as active citizens. Some of the factors include low socio-economic circumstances, rurality and remoteness, non-English speaking background, English as a Second Language, pregnancy - sorry, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, pregnancy and similar groups. That's all back to front but that's okay.

Can I just share that? The impact of some of these between education services and community needs can be exacerbated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and for some groups of boys.

Education Queensland is committed to providing proactive and responsive support services which aim to increase the access and equity of education services to students identified at risk and who live in rural and remote communities. The department is responsible for coordinating approximately \$34.7 million in special needs funds. These funds assist schools to provide additional support to students identified at risk, and they assist in the areas of curriculum implementation, teaching learning processes, purchasing materials and equipment, employing personnel and staff professional development and training.

One of the programs is the Priority Country Area Program. The total Education Queensland budget for that is \$3.5 million, and that services 30,000 students located in rural and remote communities. We also have the Literacy Enhancement For Special program School Scheme. The total EQ budget for that is \$11.4 million and in 1999 we serviced 87 schools with \$1.6 million. In the year 2000 we're expanding that, under a new formula, to 152 schools at \$1.3 million.

We have the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program [IESIP], and for that we have a total Education Queensland budget of \$11 million. In rural and remote communities, that services 6,247 children, and that's at a budget of \$2 million.

We also have the English as a Second Language Scheme. The total budget for that is \$8.1 million, and we service 75 non-English speaking background students in rural remote communities, at a cost of \$25,000.

Finally, we also have the Indigenous Language Speaking Students Initiative. That's part of the English as a Second Language Initiative from the Commonwealth. That's a specific one-off initiative, and the Education Queensland budget for that is \$777,600. We service 332 students, and those students are located in the Cape and Gulf communities and the Torres Straits. That specific initiative for Indigenous students is something that we're working actively on, on a national task force, to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speakers of second language as ESL students under the Commonwealth definitions.

Education Queensland, over the last three years, has administered a behaviour management initiative, which is resourced at in excess of \$12 million per annum. This initiative is currently being evaluated. Early findings which indicate the success of the initiative have been measured by the increased capacity of districts, through their behaviour management committees, to develop innovative, proactive and responsive strategies to address the issues of behaviour management. Under the initiative, we have a needs-based resourcing arrangement, where we have in place 300 behaviour management

support staff, and approximately 130 of these staff are located in rural and remote communities. While most of them are behaviour management support teachers, these support staff also include social workers, psychologists, counsellors, guidance officers, youth workers and teacher aides.

Programs under the behaviour management program include providing professional development for these behaviour management staff, as well as the implementation of strategies such as anti-bullying and anti-violence programs; anger management for high support need students; education program development for students at risk of or on suspension or exclusion; liaising with community organisations and parents in providing support for particular groups and sharing information via the Internet on workable solutions to bullying developed by schools.

Under the Queensland Crime Prevention Strategy, the department is involved in a number of joint initiatives with other state government stakeholders, which includes Queensland Police, Queensland Health and Family Services. Each of these help provide on-site support to students, with police officers, nurses and youth workers in schools. For example, in terms of police in schools, we have one in Mount Isa, one in Kalkadoon and in the year 2000 we have a request to place one in the Torres Straits. Nurses, we have one in Mount Isa, one in Kalkadoon, one in Kingaroy, one in Murgon and one in Chinchilla.

Under the behaviour management initiative, we also administer the Rural Alternative program Scheme, and this scheme has an annual budget of \$250,000, to increase access in rural and remote communities to appropriate alternative programs for students at risk or on suspension or exclusion.

[Equity programs – boys]

In the equity programs area, we have a boys' agenda and schooling project. This involves 10 schools brought together in two cluster groups; one in Roma and one in Cairns. The Roma cluster includes Roma State School, Charleville State School and State High School, Durambandi and St George. The Cairns cluster includes Kuranda, Trinity Bay, Wonga Beach, Mossman and Lockhart River.

These schools are encouraged to look at issues related to remoteness and rurality as they intersect with other factors, such as gender, socio-economic status, language and cultural background, disability and giftedness, which impact upon the achievement, participation, attitudes and behaviour of boys and girls in schooling. These schools also consider factors surrounding youth suicide and limited access to youth services. The ultimate outcome is the

development of some workable solutions that we can place and share for dissemination on the Web site.

[Gifted and talented]

Another area is for the gifted and talented students. We have two rural focus schools out there: one, Hattenvale State School; and the other one is Denison State School in Emerald. We provide funds to these schools to assist teachers, to professionally develop and train, to identify and address the needs of students with gifts and talents.

[Indigenous students]

Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their communities is certainly a major proportion of the students at risk area, and we currently, as mentioned, service 28,000 students across Queensland and, in particular, 6,000 of those are located in the rural remote communities.

We have, in 1999, commenced a literacy and numeracy action research project. This is resourced at \$3 million over the next three years, to improve literacy and numeracy skills of students whose first language is not English, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. 20 schools have been identified to participate in this project and 12 of these schools are located in rural and remote communities. Some of these include Doomadgee, Lockhart River, Arukun, Thursday Island, Badu Island, Bamaga, Woorabinda, Yarrabah and Palm Island.

The project recognises that isolation is a factor that disadvantages students in terms of access to resources, professional development of teachers and community support structures. Each participating school in this action research project will be resourced with an additional teacher with skills in second language learning, as well as literacy and numeracy. An annual grant to cover professional development and training, networking and the purchasing of support materials will be resourced to the school.

We're currently involved in a Pasminco Century project. That's a Gulf communities agreement that is just between Pasminco, the mining company, the Queensland government and the native title groups. The major focus of this agreement is the education, training and employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this region. In 1999, Education Queensland has committed 29,000 to support vocational education projects and the three P-10 schools involved in the Pasminco Century project. These include Doomadgee, Mornington Island and Normanton. These funds support program development facilities and teacher accommodation associated with this project.

In Mount Isa we secured grants last year to assist communities across Queensland look at alternative methodologies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who choose not to access schooling. One of our success cases is in Mount Isa, the Kalkadoon Education Alternative program, the key program. The alternative program operates in collaboration with other primary and secondary schools in the Mount Isa area. The program aims to provide a highly supportive and culturally appropriate educational environment for Indigenous students with learning, social and behaviour problems. In 1999, the project has received \$90,000 to support the ongoing employment of staff and programs, focusing on literacy, numeracy, vocational education and training, live schools and school to work transition.

The interesting thing about this program - and it provides a bit of a bus service to assist those school kids in the creek, in the dry riverbed area of Mount Isa, and to provide that access to them. Obviously, that program needs to be further conceptualised at the district base level, on how it can take it forward and encourage further articulation of those kids through the system.

Another one of these special initiatives is the Cooktown Step Ahead project. Step Ahead is a joint initiative between Education Queensland and DETYA, receiving funding in 1999 of approximately \$50,000. The project, which is progressing towards sustainability is a community-based vocational educational and training program operating between the Cooktown State School, local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and local industry. The program targets students identified as at risk, enabling them to undertake specialised literacy and numeracy development and aid QF level 1 training and local industry whilst remaining at the school.

In 1998, the department commenced an initiative called the Croc Rock Eisteddfod initiative. You may have heard about it when you - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: We were there.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: We were there.

MR WILLIAMS: You were there?

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR WILLIAMS: Well, great, because we were the ones who moved into a joint partnership with Queensland Health and Rock Eisteddfod in Sydney, to look at mechanisms that we could use visual arts to contrast

the effects of substance abuse and what have you. I'm so glad you were there, because it's been quite successful. We had the Governor-General and his wife there last year, at the initial opening.

The most important thing about this initiative is that it does focus on community capacity building, and it has that recognition and awareness through private business sectors, government agencies and the Indigenous communities. It's not like your regular rock eisteddfod, it's a Croc Eisteddfod, as you know, and we take in the primary school sector. So that speaks for itself, that one.

[Indigenous staff]

We have, throughout Queensland, 10 officers who are strategically located and titled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Participation Officers. Four of these officers are located in rural and remote communities. These officers identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community training and development needs and coordinate the delivery of appropriate training programs which aim to improve levels of participation of Indigenous people in educational decision-making.

We also employ, across Queensland, 77 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community education counsellors. These are located in secondary schools with large enrolments of Indigenous students. They provide the pastoral care to support the social, cultural and educational needs of these children.

[Indigenous teacher training]

Education Queensland administers a \$1.5 million per annum project, entitled the Remote Area Teacher Education program, RATEP. This is a remote area program which aims to increase the pool of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers available to teach in rural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. RATEP delivers primary teacher education courses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, through a variety of programs, through a mix of video conferencing and distance education, linked with those access via the use of interactive technology. Courses include a Certificate in Education and a Diploma of Education from the Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE, and a Bachelor of Education from James Cook University.

RATEP commenced in the mid 90s with two sites, and today has expanded to 12 sites. 69 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have successfully graduated from this program and are currently teaching within rural and remote communities. The program was reviewed last year, with a view to expanding its course provision into secondary teaching.

[Indigenous programs and policies]

I've spoken about the Indigenous language program. I'll go on to the Cape York partnership plan. This is Education Queensland's response to the directions proposed by Mr Noel Pearson for the future delivery of services in Cape York for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In 1999 the department has committed \$100,000 to this whole of government plan, which includes the appointment of a community officer. This officer has been appointed for a three-year period, to work jointly with Cape York school communities. The expected outcomes include the provision of educational services, which are more responsive to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and communities of the Cape York.

Finally, in 1999 we conducted a review of education and employment within Education Queensland for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The outcomes of that have been quite successful, where we seek to implement a set of new policies and a strategy plan.

One of the key elements of the policies is looking at second language pedagogy, as well as cross-cultural pedagogy, because it was recognised throughout the review that students who were perhaps attending school or not making a decision to articulate on into the secondary arena felt that the programs were not culturally inclusive. The department is responding through providing a policy which will encourage teachers out there to undertake professional development and training based on second language pedagogy and cross-cultural pedagogy.

Secondly, the department is establishing a policy to establish compacts between school communities and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cohort, and so that particular policy is quite innovative, because you have a situation where school principals will be sitting down with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and discussing what they perceive as the essential learnings that are required for them to translate from school into vocational educational training or higher ed. That's quite an innovative policy for Queensland.

I suppose the overall outcome of these policies is to improve the levels of achievement in what we perceive as essential learnings, as well as retention and attendance rates of Indigenous students, to levels comparable to those of non-Indigenous students. This particular review will also build upon initiatives that we currently have in place across Queensland for Indigenous students.

We have the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tertiary Aspirations program. It focuses on 450 gifted and talented Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander students and for two years in a row the Mount Isa district has taken out the trophy each year. I mean, it's just fabulous to see the gifts and talents that are emerging from the rural and remote communities, and it is based primarily on academic achievement.

We also have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Career Aspirations Pathways program. I know it's a mouthful but it's a program that looks at encouraging kids to make careful, serious subject selections, from Years 7, 8 and 9, and, understandably, to identify what prerequisites they require, in terms of 11 and 12, to get into university. That program, in itself, has travelled across 29 sites across Queensland and specifically gone into areas like Bamaga, Arukun and Doomadgee, to take the program to the kids, to where the clients are, to say, "Hey, here are some choices." The best thing is that we link up with Queensland Police, the Defence Force, other big employment agencies, and they all jump on a charter flight and fly into these communities. So we certainly make it accessible, the career guidance for Indigenous learners.

We have, across Queensland, a Reconciliation in Schooling project, which is primarily curriculum resources that we've sent out to schools to encourage teachers how to inform their offerings with issues regarding teaching to diversity, teaching to - identifying that within this nation we have Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities, and to promote the key strategic issues from the national reconciliation policy.

We also will continue with our anti-racism strategies we have in Queensland and Under the Skin program, which caters for diversity for both immigrant students as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Those programs will continue. On a national level, we're very much involved in informing the national agenda on racism. I, personally, chair the national agenda on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. The stuff that we take from Queensland, hopefully, will make a significant impact nationally, because Queensland sits at 46% retention of students from Years 8 to 12; much higher than New South Wales, which is 33%. That's it.

MR McHUGH: Thanks for giving us the opportunity to make a presentation, Commissioners. Obviously, in the time that is available, we would be prepared to answer any questions that you might have.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, and thank you for that very full presentation. I should also record my appreciation of the assistance we received from your district office in Mount Isa and the schools that we visited in Western Queensland during this week. Wherever we went, people were extraordinarily generous in their time

and the trouble that they went to to give us the best opportunity to see what was happening in the schools, which was excellent. As I said, thank you for the presentation. We've taken up a full hour in going through it and that's good because it's given us the background. There are many, many questions that we've got so could I just check first, is Bob Rasmussen here yet? You are; okay; thanks. All right.

[10.50 am]

Is Jann Piasecki here? You are as well; good. Thank you. We might, in that case, ask you some questions now, if that's all right, but we may have to place many things on notice. I suppose from our point of view it's easier if we have to get the submission in advance, then we can actually focus on the questions. Pearl, do you want to start with something?

[Administration]

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Seeing that you're finished on your - not that I have more questions for you than the others. I compliment you on what you have achieved in Cairns and the closer areas, and in Mt Isa, in a lot of your initiatives to try and solve some of these problems up towards the islands. As you go into the remoter areas, how are you trying to overcome the problem of lack of staff out in those areas because there's a great lack of staff; and the fact that these people are coming in one at a time, rather than, as you imagined one time, getting them in there together so that they can interact and share their knowledge?

MR WILLIAMS: I suppose the staffing for schools is set on a formula and that's pretty prescriptive. The maintaining or retaining staff up there is obviously an issue for Education Queensland - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: But that's a different problem - that's something - a lot of things come into that. No; the question I was asking is: because of the special problems that you've got in trying to solve the problem of access; getting your children into the schools; non-retention; that's the real thing, isn't it, in those remote areas? I'm congratulating what you're doing in Cairns and all that area, and Mt Isa. I'm talking now of the communities right up through the Peninsula, in the fact that these people are coming in individually, as I understand, rather than coming in collectively and being able to work between themselves and sharing their findings, rather than letting them come in. Have you thought about that?

MR WILLIAMS: I think that would have been one of the outcomes from the review, is what I shared about the community compact agreement - and I hope I'm answering your question - where we actually move into a partnership arrangement across communities with Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander enrolments, and in the rural and remote communities they sit and meet and talk with the school principal and administration; and move into a negotiation on how we can best make this environment support cultural inclusive, etcetera.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: (indistinct) will come together - there's a group of them and this, to me, was a very great lack and I wondered if you were really conscious and thinking along those lines.

THE COMMISSIONER: Perhaps I can actually give you an example: one of the issues raised with us by teachers is that there are a number of different governmental authorities involved that may be involved in assessing the particular needs of students, with very little interchange between them, and they're obvious issues of confidentiality and privacy; but, for example, you may get an individual student who was assessed by the Education Department; assessed by Family Services; assessed by Health Department; and there seemed to be frustration on the part of the teachers and, I think, on the part of the parents, that there was no pulling together with the families of a case plan across disciplines for handling the particular needs of individual children.

MR McHUGH: Commissioners, at the state level we now have a strategic project called Government Service Delivery project. It's headed up by Dr Brian Head, the commissioner for the public service. In essence, it attempts to integrate government service delivery with a particular focus upon rural and isolated communities. To that end, Shane mentioned our own internal review of the education employment opportunities of educational people and also the appointment of a community officer to assist with the development of the Noel Pearson brief for the north of Queensland.

What we see emerging from that - and Shane did mention the notion of community compacts, -is that we need to fundamentally rethink the provision of a range of services, one of which is education, in these communities. To that end, we would believe that over time - and perhaps that's always a moot point - that the model of schooling provision which still remains in those communities, basically an English model of 9.00 to 3.00 so many weeks per year, can be fundamentally altered.

We're looking at ways in which, through notions of community compact school-based management, integrated government service delivery, that some of the issues that you've observed, we've been very conscious of, can be addressed over time because the messages that you heard are very clearly the ones that are being sent back centrally.

[Vocational education]

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: The vocational training starting below 16; coming down into the lower areas and not having to cope with 8, 9 or 10 if they're going through a different pathway.

MR McHUGH: As you'd appreciate, Commissioner, I mean, sometimes we're the victim of the policy settings of the federal government because, for example, the Australian National Training Authority would say that students must be in post-compulsory schooling before they can move into apprenticeships and traineeships; but we're working at a policy level and a strategic level to uncouple those sorts of arrangements, particularly in various communities where that sort of approach would benefit young people immensely.

THE COMMISSIONER: I had a couple of questions on the community schools before we lose Shane, but just on that last point: is it therefore because of ANTA policy that TAFE is not available to under-15s, or is this Commonwealth/state funding problems, or what?

MR McHUGH: A lot of it is to do with federal government policy; in particular, the policy settings through ANTA that fund school initiatives. I'd have to say that in the last 12 months there has been considerable movement on that and we do now have a number of schools who are engaging students who are still within the compulsory years of schooling in vocational education and training programs. Basically, though, we do know we have to uncouple that post-compulsory notion to afford opportunities to many young people who may be in the compulsory years of schooling but, physically, may be aged 17 or 18.

So, I mean, there is a lot of discussion going on at the state level between ourselves and the state department, the Department of Education, Training and Industrial Relations; and also back through the federal arena.

THE COMMISSIONER: In Normanton, the Normanton TAFE has got fantastic facilities; it's got an excellent well-equipped carpentry workshop that hasn't run a course for two years, and an excellent well-equipped metalwork workshop that hasn't run a course for one year. It reminded me of the episode of Yes, Minister, where a brilliant hospital had been constructed at enormous expense but didn't have a single patient because there was no money for it. The school is struggling there to provide any kind of vocational ed training and here's this fantastic facility simply not being used.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: With the Pasmenco project going and the children looking at that, it can't be - with the initiatives and, you know, the excitement that goes with that kind of thing, it can't be even initiated in any of the schools because they're all too young. It just seems so

sad because that would flow down through if they could utilise the facilities that they've got which are incredible, and they had the staff.

THE COMMISSIONER: So is it a federal problem or is it a DETYA problem that 14-year olds can't get access to TAFE courses?

MR McHUGH: Basically, our funding comes largely from the federal government through contract with DETYA, which is the state government authority, where to date there has been these limited sort of opportunities; but projects such as the School to Work Rural Remote projects have been challenging those boundaries and we did do an internal review of vocational education training and one of the recommendations of that review - and there was some work going on about joint ministerial policy statements that I can't elaborate on too much more - should start to address the issue that you're raising.

THE COMMISSIONER: I think I can foreshadow that you'll have strong support from us in that.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes; very.

[Indigenous education]

THE COMMISSIONER: Shane, you mentioned the community compacts partnerships with Indigenous communities. One thing that I've noticed is that there doesn't seem to be perhaps any, or at least not many, Aboriginal community schools, or Indigenous community schools such as are found in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, where there's actually community ownership of the school, with a very high level of community participation. Is there an explicit policy or view from Education Queensland against community schools of that kind? Is the compact approach you're talking about seen as an alternative or is it just another option? I don't know what the history is as to why these schools haven't developed here as they have in other jurisdictions.

MR WILLIAMS: We have an example up in Arukun, where we have moved towards a community school model and what we do have there is what we call a community principal, Gladys Ticungulpa, you might have met - and so, I suppose, we've trialed it. One of the implications has been the clans; the different language groups spoken by the community and the construct of at least five different dialects within that community. So we had to move away from that type of model and look at another model and the mode that we've come up with is a compact agreement, and that is, I suppose, encouraging schools and their communities to formulate a partnership and move forward.

But the other element of the partnership is looking at other government agencies as well. We shared about the Cape York plan with Noel Pearson. That's just one example but, I mean, in the Torres

Strait and other areas we'll look at primary health and what have you, and working in partnership how we can take these communities forward.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: To me that was the important thing. I think the schools are there with more involvement with the community schools and it is starting, and there were quite a number from there but the staffing is so low, mainly because of housing which we'll come to later, that I believe that because one goes at a time there's not enough; that you need a group of people to go to be able to share and to come again.

MR WILLIAMS: It needs to be coordinated.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Coordination is the - - -

MR WILLIAMS: The compact you could see as another - is what the community was saying to us when we did the review; it was we certainly want our kids to participate and achieve within standard Australian English, etcetera, which we call the essential learnings; but, as Bob said, we need to have flexibility with schooling and what have you. So, particularly in those communities, say Arukun, Palm Island or Warrabindah, they're also identified under state government as Dalby communities so therefore they do receive an extra year, specifically for early childhood education; all those specific things that occur in those Dalby communities but they haven't been specifically identified as community schools.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks. Is the policy and strategic planning you mentioned as a result of the review of Indigenous education a public document?

MR WILLIAMS: It will be shortly.

[Students with disabilities]

THE COMMISSIONER: It will be? If you wouldn't mind sending us back all those when they're available if that's all right. I'd be very keen to have a look at them. Specialist support staff certainly came up regularly in our discussions - I guess this goes back to you Bob, more than Shane. Schools mentioned the enormous difficulty involved in actually getting access to specialist support staff guidance officers, for example, that are only in sufficient numbers to come, at most, once or twice a term.

We heard in one instance of the child with the highest level of support need, so I would assume therefore easily identifiable as having great support needs, when assessed it was the highest level; but the

assessment process took three and a half years before it was agreed that the child had the highest level of support need and they said that one of the reasons is because of all the steps that need to be taken and the fact that a guidance officer can only visit once or twice a term, in this case - - -

MR BLATCH: I would be concerned if - I would like to know the details there because certainly we've got mechanisms in place through our district whereby nothing should take that long at all. We can certainly accept that there could be delays but, at the end of the day, we have a whole-of-state support system where if, for a variety of reasons, local services can't be provided at the school or the district, then from the Low Incidence unit support could be provided. So if you'd like to provide details, we could follow that through for you.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes; I can give that to you afterwards. It was at one of the schools we visited where they mentioned this and put it down to the fact that the visits were so irregular they couldn't actually advance the assessment process at an appropriate rate.

[Teacher incentives]

MR McHUGH: I'd have to acknowledge that it is increasingly difficult to attract guidance officers into our service. Previously, we ran programs at universities and people came off line but then they wouldn't serve in rural and isolated communities. So one of the strategies that we have adopted is that people who work in rural and isolated communities, should they wish to become guidance officers through a project managed by HR, they can do their guidance training and we meet costs for time off to be mentored, to work shadow, through a distance education mode, in return for them remaining in the location where they currently are. Would you like to add to that, at all?

MR BLATCH: It's been in operation for about the last eight years. One of the things that we're finding, though, is that people are reluctant to go into the area of guidance.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: One of the things that was raised to us quite a bit is the cost of living which has been documented in those areas, compared with the rest of the state, and the fact that you are offering incentives of so much, that amount of money doesn't really mean a great deal when it's 23 times higher than somewhere else in that general area. The other thing is it probably just moves them into a tax bracket where they lose it all. Do you look at after-tax incentives? I mean, work it out yourself, how much in those areas would they get in an after tax?

So that it's not a case of, "Well, we'll get so much incentive if we stay here"; when they actually find out how much is left in their

pockets - and we have that right across, not only in teachers but in other things, that it's the cost of living, the amount that they have to spend for etcetera; and travel of course, because they've got to fly by air and it's \$1,000 any time they go away, which really takes it all away. So that when they actually get there and they look at "How much have I got left after six months?" there's very little incentive because of the high cost of living; the cost of travel out of there; and the tax in their particular tax bracket.

MR McHUGH: Commissioner, the issue you raise is a vexed one and we spend many hours, year in, year out, attempting to address it. Interestingly, though, there are some other rural and remote locations where you stand in a queue to be appointed there on staff. For example, if you want to teach on Thursday Island, you will have to wait for a few years to be appointed there because it is seen to be an attractive location. So what we've tried to do is the mix of benefits, the Teacher Transfer scheme, where teachers who serve in rural and remote locations generate points for each year of service.

I mean, if you teach in Brisbane, you earned one transfer point per year; if you teach in Normanton, you earn 11 points. Two years gives you 22 points, will get you on to the Sunshine Coast. So that's one of the strategies, to commit to people and say, "You commit to us as an organisation. You go to these locations that otherwise you may not." Transfer points systems is one; the remuneration is an attempt to address it. From memory, we spend in excess of \$8 million in additional remuneration to teachers in these communities and, I suppose, like everything else, unions would like us to certainly pay more; governments make appropriations.

It's the mix of the benefits that we try to strike. I haven't got a simple answer and I'm not fully aware of tax rates but a quick example would be, if there was a teacher up there in their third year of service who had one dependant, they would receive above-award payments - now these are gross amounts, I accept that - 4, 8, 13 - \$13,000 gross above their classified award per annum, plus an additional - for example, if you were in Boulia - \$103.45 per fortnight locality allowance, so there is a range of benefits, including the one that I haven't stressed is the notion of locality allowances.

I empathise with the teachers who speak there. I spent some time in Central Queensland mining towns in the middle of the mining boom in the mid-80s, where tomatoes were then \$5 and \$6 a kilo, and I was a humble principal earning half the plumber who lived next door to me; so I mean, they're vexed issues. In some ways, we're not convinced that simply financial remuneration will - I mean, you could pay people \$100, \$1,000 and they wouldn't go to somewhere - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes; I agree.

MR McHUGH: So it's an attempt to mix the strategies and look after people and say, "Look, you're valued; you've done service for us. The transfer scheme will assure you a preferred location on your return to service in other parts of the state."

[Staff accommodation]

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Over and above the remuneration and the other incentives is housing. I mean, by the time you've taught in 40 degrees and with children who have special problems, to go home and share a house with three people is very difficult. I think the housing should be number 1 priority.

THE COMMISSIONER: If I can just add that before you answer too, I think - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I beg your pardon.

THE COMMISSIONER: No; this is something that we've both thought - and going around nationally, it seemed to be that the housing situation, teachers say, is one of the major reasons why they don't stay.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Or don't go.

THE COMMISSIONER: It is; don't go in the first or, even when they go there, they get their transfer points after two years and the housing is so bad they say "we'll go". The situation seems to be worse in Queensland than elsewhere in the country with teacher housing, and it also seems to be worse for teachers than it is for other Queensland government employees, like police and health workers.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: We looked at the other, just for our own point of view.

MR McHUGH: You're right. In the last financial year we did spend slightly over \$4 million in teacher housing. My colleague, the assistant director-general, resource services, undertook a review and that included going to places in the Cape and Gulf last year; and in the current financial year our budgeted figure for teacher housing has risen from \$4 million to slightly over \$8 million, and we do recognise that that is a significant issue for us over the next few years. On the Capital Works program, I notice here that we intend to build another house in Doomadgee; another house in Mornington Island; another house at Normanton; and various other things.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I was wondering, just a question: there are so many places unfortunately going back with the removal of houses. Housing up there, initially, was made very much by removing houses from the gold fields right out through - and it seemed to be, talking to people who can't sell houses in Mt Isa, that there may be many very good mobile buildings that can be moved, that probably could, in the short term, move up there so that you could get staff. I don't know, I throw it to you - - -

MR McHUGH: You're quite right, Commissioner. In fact, the houses that are going into these communities are kit homes, I believe, manufactured interstate because they are far more cost efficient for us, particularly for us in our capacity to move accommodation round, which is an issue for us because of the changing rural demographics. So, rather than building our own homes, which are incredibly expensive because they're done on the open market, there are companies now emerging who are providing these homes that do have the capacity to be moved.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: There are examples there of a woman who had to move three times in three months because of the teachers moving away, and because there were three males or three females or a married couple, they had to keep sorting them round to be able to have adequate - so she'd moved three times in three months to stay there.

THE COMMISSIONER: I think we'd better move on if you don't mind. There are a lot of things we'd like to come back to you on. Much of what you said also provides interesting inklings, insights into different programs that you're running and I hope that you might provide us with some more details of some of those. One in particular that you mentioned was the national School to Work project where you've done some best practice modelling here in Queensland; if you can tell us a bit more about that with some further documentation, I'd appreciate that. Perhaps, as well, some of the long list of the Indigenous-related programs you mentioned, Shane, in your area. I assume that you'll be supplementing this, in any event, so that - - -

MR McHUGH: Yes; we will. We have that fleshed out for you, Commissioner.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Thank you all for your presentations. Bob Rasmussen, would you like to come on up. Thanks, Bob, I'm sorry to keep you waiting.

MR RASMUSSEN: That's all right. Having sat and listened, I'm going to have to sort of change so you don't get a repetition of - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: I'm sure, since you're Distance Ed, I'm sure there are - - -

MR RASMUSSEN: There are things that have already been said and - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: - - - certain commonalities. We've saved a couple of distance ed questions for you, rather than ask everybody else that you - - -

MR RASMUSSEN: It's a pleasure but I'd be happy to start on teacher housing. I have a daughter living in a house in a coal mining town and when she went back, she'd found the septic system was working back up through the laundry, so it is a vexed question.

THE COMMISSIONER: Could she get somebody from maintenance to look after it?

MR RASMUSSEN: She'd moved out of teacher housing and moved into a mining company house.

THE COMMISSIONER: So that was the only solution?

[Distance education]

MR RASMUSSEN: No; she had moved out for another reason, maybe in confidence I might share with you, but instead of getting supported housing, she's now paying open market price for a mining house. For those who don't know me, my name is Bob Rasmussen. I'm principal of the School of Distance Education. Ours at the moment is the only senior secondary school providing distance educational services across the state and having listened to what you've been discussing, I'm going to make this over into a case study and if I miss anything significant, I'd be happy to answer it.

I was struck by reading the material I received from you by a comment made by a parent from somewhere in Australia that said the choice in distance education was too limited. So I want to talk about choice and choice of school first and in doing that, I'm going to talk about sport. I believe, regardless of where you live, be it in the Cape, the Torres Strait - and we have students throughout there and across Australia and around the world - the issue of choice is critical.

[Sport via distance education]

Let's take the example of sport. If a parent has a perception that by coming into distance education, certainly at our school, that your child could be in the first 11, the first 15, or the school softball team, we've missed the mark because in the type of school I'm running

at the moment with, say, our full-time seniors within Queensland scattered from the Torres Strait to the border, we seldom see them. In fact, I've never seen my whole school in one place. On the other hand, we are capable as a school to deliver sport for individuals and we can cater for gifted and talented kids. For instance, if you were following the gymnastics in Kuala Lumpur, you'd have seen one of our students there; if you went to the swimming you'd find others there.

So we focus on what we can do with the individual and despite the fact that our particular school has over half the enrolments you saw quoted earlier, it is possible to have an individualised focus. If parents, in making a choice about education, if they have that opportunity to choose - and sometimes in rural and remote area, given the economics of the time, choice may not even exist; I'm highly conscious of that - we do know that we can cater for individual activity and what we try to do in the area of sport is to build on our preschool to Year 10 health and physical education activity; to focus as much as possible on things like athletics and swimming.

Swimming is a new area for us but we're building it by working on running travelling swim schools. So I send my physical education teachers throughout the southern parts of the state towards Charleville and up towards Rockhampton, running swim schools, building up towards a swimming carnival later in the year. Our initial carnival was called a Splash and Swim Day. We think this year we might have graduated to be able to reverse the order. On the other hand, it's interesting to note that last year we had a boy who was keen on athletics. We were able to engineer him into the local district team competition. He was selected to go interstate and, eventually, represented Queensland at the school boys and school girls national competition in Canberra.

So there are avenues but there are limitations and the parent having to make a choice needs to acknowledge what those limitations and strengths are. I guess that brings me to the next point I'd like to make from a practising principal's point of view. You really have to look at the students' needs. You have to look at the resources at your disposal - sometimes I think I have an incredible resource and sometimes I wonder what I've got - and try to work with the child in the environment in which you and the child meet. For us, that environment can be incredibly varied.

[Distance education]

It's not just in sport that we can be a very effective deliverer of education for the gifted and talented. For instance, there's a young lad this year who's entering his second year at Juilliard in New York as a violin student. He actually finished senior by external studies with us; external exam with us, with sufficient HAs and VHAs to have a

university entrance if he wanted it locally. So we are able as a school, not only in the sporting area but in the cultural-type areas - particularly dance and music at the moment - to support students who have got a career beginning way before they start work in the traditional age.

Having mentioned the external exam at senior, we also prepare students for internal assessment. That was quite a challenge and no-one believed it could be done. I guess it's worth sharing the story: The first cohort included in that was a boy whose parents worked in a national park in the top half of Cape York - not even the bottom half - and one of the critical things in internal assessment that we had to do was to prove that the assessment could be done, and the supervision was credible; and that the marks that we provided stood up beside the marks from any other states or independent school.

It posed a challenge for the parents because they had to find someone not related to them, or a school or a policeman; or someone who's on that interesting government list of people with standing in communities to supervise. It's interesting to note that now, four or five years down the track, we have successfully graduated four or five cohorts of Year 12s, who have completed their results by internal assessment, as well as continuing preparing students for the external exam. I'll come back to that again, shortly.

The next thing I want to comment on is the point I started with where I had been stimulated to talk about school by the comment about limited choice. You heard Gary speak about the cost and the time it takes to produce materials, so that actually putting something new in place is not as easy as it is in a regular day school, of which I have run three. You can receive a syllabus; you can look at your budget; you can buy the resources; you can identify your teacher or get someone in; and with a bit of luck, in the new year you're in business.

In our case, you have a different process, which I won't go into, but currently for the new cohort of Year 11s in 2000, there will be 25 subjects offered by my school. They will include a significant range of the traditional academic subjects that lead to tertiary entry and a range of, I think, five or six - but I'll give you a copy of my handbook - what we call, subject area specifications [SASs] or, we used to call, board registered subjects. They're sorts of courses that lead not to tertiary entry but usually into the workplace or into related things. So that's the first point I'd like to make about choice. We are offering probably as good a choice as we can.

[Work experience for DE students]

The second point I'd like to make is that the comments I get from students coming into distance education from regular schools is, "I've got a lot of subjects.. The advantage they're seeing but probably

haven't defined for themselves is that, in fact, "I don't have a timetable"; and there aren't these three subjects offered once on that line. So you actually have a reasonably free choice across the full 25. That leads me to talk about another issue: do we go beyond just SASs and board subjects? Yes, we do; within the SASs, there's a requirement for work experience and we do ensure that our senior students have access to it, whether they're doing SASs or board subjects, and I can tell you, up to earlier this week when I had some data pulled out for this purpose, we had had 500 student days of work experience at diverse sites across this state.

I'll share with you two stories which I'd rather you didn't repeat because I think the rules have changed. The biggest challenges I think we received - and we've been doing work experience for in excess of eight years - was the boy who came along and said, "I want to become an airline pilot." That seemed a bit impossible but we discovered there was a company manufacturing light aircraft on the Sunshine Coast and we were able, at that time, to engineer him two weeks work experience with that company. He saw a pile of stuff converted into an aircraft in two weeks ready for test flying.

The second challenge was a girl who said, "My ambition is to be photographer for Dolly." You might know more about what Dolly is than maybe we do and Dolly of course - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: I've got a 15-year old daughter.

MR RASMUSSEN: Well, you'd be well aware. Dolly had their headquarters in Sydney, and she said "I have relations in Sydney", and we managed to engineer her a week's work experience with the photographers on that occasion. I say that to emphasise that we have the capacity and the mechanism to get work experience for students across the state. If you follow my handbook further, you'll also find that we encourage students to participate in TAFE college activity.

I'd love to know about that workplace in Normanton you told me about. I may well have someone who could use it because we encourage students to combine our subjects, delivered from our school site, with subjects they can take up at TAFE, either at a local college or through Distance Education in TAFE, through what is known as Open Learning Institute, or commonly called, OLI. They happen to be just up the road from where my school is. So that's a third area of choice. The fourth area of choice I'd mention is that we encourage students, where it's in their interest, to consider school-based apprenticeships and currently, I think I have 26 apprentices in the school, and I can give you some data on that as well. We encourage them, before they take their apprenticeship, to do some work experience in that area, just as a test.

[Guidance counselling for DE students]

I think the next thing I should talk about is the issue of guidance. I've brought with me some material - and I can see that guidance is an area of interest way beyond mine. What do you do with students who are scattered across Queensland? In fact, if you go to the north-west of the state, you could drive from Longreach to Mt Isa, and east to Hughenden, you might find I've got six senior students; so we've come up with a package deal that we offer these students. I have three guidance - I shouldn't have said that, should I - officers and 4,000-odd students.

We provide information for them through a thing we call the Winners Club, and I'll give you a copy of that if you wish. Normally, that focuses on students in Year 11 and 12, but at the end of the year we draw the Year 10s in; and my guidance officers have produced things like, Year 10: Getting to Know Yourself; Planning to Go to Senior Schooling. That material is provided to the students currently in our school and because the other six schools of distance education don't offer Year 11 and 12, I offer that service to them as well; it's a recruiting program. So if you wish, I'll leave that with you.

In addition to the materials we produce ourselves - I've got in my briefcase and I'll give you if you wish - we use all of the normal, commercially produced materials that go out to students in a regular day school. We're not only concerned with ongoing things through the year; not only concerned with students going from 10 into 11; but also looking at the students moving from 12 into whatever is beyond. If you like, I will leave with you, because it is now a public document, a copy of the school's annual report, and you'll find in there some statistics that may interest you, in terms of how students perform; because actually, in my view, if we're not concerned about learning outcomes, then we might have missed the boat.

[Achievements of DE students]

It would be interesting to take a look just at the students who completed full-time senior with us last year. There were 65; now, I always get these numbers a bit mixed so - 31 of them chose to do a course that combined broad subjects and SASs, and TAFE, and exclude themselves from OP qualifications; and 34 chose to go the other way. Last year was a particularly good year but not outstandingly better than the average since we've had students getting OPs. Three students turned in an OP of 1; two came in with an OP of 2; one came in with an OP of 3; and 19 had 10 or better. I mention that not to blow our trumpet but to point out that, despite all the changes we're hoping to see, we have a system that works effectively, and students who apply themselves can get good results.

[Visits to DE students]

For the students west of Roma, roughly, and north of Gladstone, I've got approximately 60 or 70 at any one time, they have their own 1800 free call number to ensure that we give them some sort of counter-balancing benefit because they can't get to activities that we run in the south-east of the state. I have with me, and I'll leave with you if you wish, our annual travel calendar - it's not a holiday trip unfortunately. It takes teachers currently throughout eastern Australia. At the end of this year, when the new Showman Skilled School opens, we'll retreat north of the border and it will show you a program of contact, face to face with students from Torres Strait to the New South Wales border, and as far west as you can go before you run out of kids, heading towards the Northern Territory. If you wish, I'll leave that one with you.

In the remoter areas we try to have a team of teachers in each of the remoter regions. I still talk about regions because districts don't make as much sense when you're talking to families. For instance, in the next week or so, there will be a team of two teachers working through the area of the western Darling Downs and into the south-west, and they will actually home visit and spend, maybe, a couple of hours with each family and each child; and they will know from our tracking system - which I can illustrate if you wish - on our computer records, what each student's particular needs are.

I should mention also that we don't only deal with families in their homes, we currently have an enrolment of some 1300 school-based students from government and non-government schools, and if you want absolutely specific figures I can get those for you. They are students who are doing one or two subjects, usually with us, where the subject is a requirement for their future needs but is unavailable to them in their local school. It's interesting to look at our records on student achievement over the period that I've been maintaining them, and I have records that go back to the start of the decade, they are among the highest achieving group.

[Achievements of DE students]

There is a problem within all of our areas that some people underestimate themselves or they take on more than they can and, despite the best advice that man or lady might offer them, they will fall by the wayside. I've been monitoring that pretty closely and it's, I would think now, looking at a figure across all classes earlier this week, below the 20% mark. That sounds high but keep in mind that I have a highly transient population as well which add to that. We take on enrolments of students for 16 weeks or longer, usually; and many of those are families who are travellers, usually for vocational-type purposes. Most frequently it's the round Australia dash.

In addition to those, we take on travellers in boats and you could likely run into a BSDE student in most of the marinas on the east coast. In addition to that we also take on board students of Queensland families who are with their parents travelling or temporarily resident overseas. So, when you put all of the transient elements in, the 20% sounds alarming but it shouldn't be.

I might also just go back and pick up a point that's in here if you choose to look for it. It's interesting to compare the course skills results of that same cohort with their OPs, and when you know the course skills were marked on an A, B, C, D, E scale, not one of those fell in the bottom of the scale; they were all A, B, C or D. That probably is a nice reinforcement and if you wish to, I can get you more details, without names, of the spread of performance and different cohorts across the decade. We have been monitoring, as a school, how our students perform in Years 2, with the Year 2 net; and then with the Year 5, Year 6 test, and we've been recording the outcomes of external exams in internal assessment of senior and the Year 10 certificate. If that is of interest to you, we can deal with that.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes; that would be useful, thank you.

[Distance education modes of delivery]

MR RASMUSSEN: By the way, we are currently using - and I suspect that we will continue into the foreseeable future to use - what I call a multi-modal way of delivering. As Gary will have said to you - and we know well because last year I put out 62,000 KGF parcels for students - our primary mode of delivery is in print and that goes back, if you get a chance to look at the video, to the turn of the century. We've added to that audiotape material and videotape material. We have some materials now on CD-ROM. We have through this extension services activity a lot of face-to-face opportunities for teaching and learning.

The school has established its own Web page and I came from a meeting this morning where we were looking at specifically what the school should be doing to gain more of our curriculum materials for student access on to that. As Open Access will tell you, there are problems with what you put on it and copyright is a curse, at least in the eyes of this principal. Our students have, be they home based, overseas travellers or school based, access to a school library, of which I think we can be justifiably proud. It's got something in excess of 300,000 items, most of which never go out on an overnight loan.

Students can search our library catalogue from remote sites, using computer and modem; and despite the fact we are changing the computer system in the library, that facility will be back in place after the change. They can search the catalogue, identify the materials they want, and place request for materials to be sent 24 hours a day. That

caters for the fact that we work across many time zones. Fax and e-mail: some teachers believe they probably shouldn't have come because, in fact, students on the other side of the world, because of the effect of fax and e-mail, can be as demanding as the kid on the street up the road.

We have, as a school, made a major commitment to IT and we have been investing in machinery for loan to students with computers, and we've had a major debate over laptops versus PCs, and we've got both. It shows we can't make up our mind, doesn't it? It was interesting to see that, in fact, in the school opinion surveys, it's lack of access to that type of thing that parents of home-based learners or distance education students, be they rural and remote or right here in the city, see as one of the main concerns.

You'll find in our annual report a reference to about 40%, who expressed in the last opinion survey that they either weren't really concerned or they were dissatisfied. So that's a bit over half who were happy and it's a bit under half who either didn't have an opinion or were quite concerned, and the school is trying to address that.

Given all of those options and given if you'd heard me speak in other places, you'd know that one of the concerns I have about distance education is that I think we've abandoned the steel nibbed pen, the ink bottle, and we don't use open reel tape-recorders. One of the interesting challenges, I think - because I think we're at a point of challenge in distance education - is that we've added and added and never abandoned. It's like looking into grandma's cupboard where all the family treasures are kept. One of the things as a school we're trying to do is to identify what things we should retain; what things we should adopt so that, in fact, we do it more efficiently and we don't leave any of our kids out. That's going to be a hard task because people are wedded to paper; they're wedded to their tape-recorders, and it goes on.

The task I believe we have as a school is to identify the circumstances of a student - and we're not always expert at that because you never see some, you only see paper and the photograph - and try to match the resources that we have at our disposal to the circumstances you're working in. If you were to take a look at, say, the teaching of French, and you'll find if you look at our LOTE results, they're actually very good. They tend to be skewed to the top end which is very pleasing. We're teaching French, German, Japanese and Chinese but Chinese only till Year 10.

There's a lot of delivery using net meeting over the Internet on a one-to-one basis and we've got a project that will be working with Gary's group that will allow us one to multipoint trial; and that's quite

important to us. We have within the school too, by the way, a phone capacity that allows us to teleconference without going through a booking and that sort of thing, so we can run small group lessons of, say, five at a time if we need to. We tend to favour flexibility as a school and we tend to work more one-on-one so the student in distance education, if they take the initiative to ring and complement our ringing them, can get a lot of individual attention.

You'll find that when I - I'll leave this one for you, too - there's a number of the skill areas that we teach and I got sick of writing them out every time I spoke with kids and their parents so I've put them in a book form. They're really a series of workshops that talk about planning their day and managing their commitments to school because one of the problems with my particularly isolated students is that, in fact, it's much more attractive looking out the window; to get on the horse and go and help dad; or to go and do whatever they happen to be doing in a mining area, than, at times, to sit down and do school. So one of the challenges that we've got with the kids we see less often is to ensure that working with their home tutor - or their parent usually - and their teacher, the students are kept on task.

You'll find that if you look at the way we currently look at, particularly with that basis in print materials, distance education is a fairly mechanical process but it does produce the goods. For instance, there's a student sitting in Toowoomba, who knows that if they're not able to mail something by today, her dad will meet me halfway to Toowoomba tomorrow or Sunday to ensure the materials are here because it's a crunch time for that Year 12 student. By the way, we had a long association of dealing with behaviour management kids because we were, at one time, the place they all got sent to. There are fewer coming now because of the other initiatives you've heard.

[Distance education student population]

We've had a long association of dealing with young girls who are pregnant and I've got a number of lady teachers who take a very close interest in those girls. We have, probably, a need to share with you the nature of the population we do address: geographically isolated are the traditional clientele but, in fact, over the 20th century, it's grown to become distance or geographically isolated; overseas Queensland families; travellers in Australia, including itinerant workers and currently the side-show kids and circus kids; medical, and there are several hundred children in our school - and they can be in rural and remote or they can be in metropolitan - who are too sick to go to school.

Then we've got an approved category which is a category in which we can accept into distance education: kids who are at risk; and we cater for a large number of home schoolers. I've mentioned secondary school based and within the school we also cater for adults

wishing to return to the schooling system. Currently, the first enrolment group come from rural areas and we've just sent our re-enrolment or new enrolments forms for next year's intake.

I'll mention just two other groups and then I'll wrap it up. We have been involved for a long time, not only with kids who have been excluded from school and sent to us, working with alternative learning centres. For instance, one very close to here is in Albert Park, under the bandstand; another one is in Toowoomba, where the University of Southern Queensland, the mayor of Toowoomba, and the Rotary Club have got together and got a flexi-school, or learning centre, going in the Bell Street mall. Another one is up in South Burnett, where the school and the council, and community groups have come together. We also work, at the moment, with children in detention and adults in correctional centres. We call them our Q groups: Q for quality.

I think I've probably covered most of the things that I particularly wanted to share with you, other than this one here. I'll leave this with you as well and it will show you the numbers of students who are doing work experience and the sorts of jobs they're doing. It's important when you're looking at that, to not see that as a definitive list. One of the things we've been trying to do is to get students in remote areas looking at going back on to the land with their families to take on rural traineeships. We might win one. I'll leave that one with you.

This will give you - but I'd like to take this one back if you like - some idea of trainees and apprentices, and the current expressions of interest. I'd like it back because it's the same side.

THE COMMISSIONER: We can look at that while we're talking.

MR RASMUSSEN: I guess if you're happy, that's basically what I wanted to say.

[Sport]

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Not in order of importance but from the beginning you mentioned sport: I'm going back now to the remote, rather than rural who have access to so many things or the children who do it by choice, not because they have no choice. One of the concerns of parents is to adjust children who have been at home without any of their peers, who have never learned to play; having to adjust to a boarding school situation; or second home situation, living; something like that. They felt the children did need some opportunity to have sport.

I know that in distance schools in the remoter areas, they do have one day where the children come together but the parents felt the

cost of getting children over big areas, they needed more access to sport.

MR RASMUSSEN: I would agree with you and I agree with their concerns about moving into boarding school situation, and there's a problem, as I see it, in some of the boarding schools beginning to disappear from the scene. The problem for me is when I've tried to address the issue of running camps and sports days for kids, way beyond, say, Gladstone, Rockhampton and way beyond Roma, they're scattered hundreds of miles apart - I'll use miles rather than kilometres - and the viability of doing something for them just doesn't exist.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: One of my real concerns is the distance school of education grew out of that remote area - - -

MR RASMUSSEN: Yes; I know.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: - - - and is now being hijacked. It's a necessity but I just feel that, perhaps, what you feel: that there probably should be now a division pushing it back into - you speak, Gladstone, Roma, Toowoomba and - - -

MR RASMUSSEN: I'll tell you why I speak like that - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: No; the reason I say this is, when we started - this is not quite a question - remote Queensland - you've almost used exactly the same terms. They used to use Bundaberg and Roma and we said "There's a big state up there". The need of these people that you are looking after is great and it's wonderful what you have done. It is, as you say, top quality. My question is: should there be a division now because it is getting so big and people are realising the potential of distance education and pushing it back into the remote areas?

MR RASMUSSEN: I wouldn't disagree with you and I'll tell you why: I'll start by saying why I use Roma - because if you know the scene well, as I suspect you do, Charleville operates east to about Roma; and we operate west that far for P-10 or P-12. We operate to about Gladstone, which is south of Rocky, and we used to go up the coast and into Emerald. That's picked up by the Emerald school and then the other schools are scattered through there. Those other schools, as you'd know, operate P to 10. The numbers of students electing to come on to us at the moment as full-timers is very tiny. The number I mentioned in the north-west, I spent a week to see them. Then, one fellow, I drove several hundred kilometres to meet and he was on the other side of the river and I was on this side.

I don't know the answer. I don't know whether the answer is to go and create, say, a far north-west or a northern school of distance education catering for 11 and 12. I suspect we might have an interesting answer in that trial that's going on with virtual school; particularly that sort of thing can switch across to delivery, not just to schools but to homes, and that's what we'd like to see.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I think the distance ed grew out of how it was out there and it's come in here. To go with exactly with what has been developed and, more or less, put some principal under you handling that other, with all of the facilities that have been developed over all these years, that was my question.

MR RASMUSSEN: I have addressed that issue and the problem we come up with is the small numbers we're trying to deal with and that's why you'll find I've actually pushed this so hard. You will find that we do actually get teachers right through to TI, or to the tip of the Cape, depending on when the kids are there. If they're there, we'll go but getting them together in groups - I tried to run an idea with the kids going from 10 to 11 and said, "Look, if I brought a team into the north of the state on the coast " - that's where there were a number of families scattered halfway east of Mt Isa, north of Johnny Clark at Charters Towers - "can we get a place where you can agree to come to?"

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: The cost is so high.

MR RASMUSSEN: The cost is so high and then the starting up time at the beginning of the year is wet, and we've tried that twice, unsuccessfully. Not that I wouldn't like to do it.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: No; I understand.

[Telecommunications]

THE COMMISSIONER: I might just have one question that relates to the HF radio usage in the Charleville telephone trial. There's some concern expressed to us that a movement from HF radio, which is essentially cost free after the equipment is bought, to telephone, which is running costs, would both restrict the operations of distance education providers, who have become much more budget limited, and potentially increase costs for recipients as well. Do you have a view on this?

MR RASMUSSEN: I have a view. I'd better be careful how I say it. My school doesn't have HF radio. The only HF radio we ever had was in a four-wheel drive and we gave up putting it in vehicles because people were always fiddling with the buttons and it wouldn't work. I think the sort of people that you would need to talk to are probably fellows like

John Clark from Charters, who has been engaged with delivery of lessons for HF radio for well over eight years; Karen in Mt Isa; they would have, probably, a better perception than I would have. Given that we didn't have radio in my school and given the need to reach across the state, I think you'd know me well enough to know I've been trying to get telephone.

[11.50 am]

With teleconferencing have been running a budget of about \$120,000 a year, providing student access by 1800 number from areas outside the metropolitan area, and giving a special number, in recent years, to the kids beyond those two marker pegs I have on the ground. The last time I checked it carefully, secondary, we're running up about a \$10,000 a year bill on that, and primary, about a \$5,000 a year bill. So the rest of the bill was generated by us reaching out to kids. That's 15 of about \$100-odd thousand in Reach Out. I'm encouraging some of my teachers - because I can't afford in the budget to say all of them go open slather - to identify classes or groups of kids who could be brought together using our teleconferencing facility.

Coming back to HF and my comment on that: I've done a little tiny bit of teaching over HF radio; I've used HF radio in the vehicle; and I accept the free-to-air bit, and there's a lot for it; but for my particular school's point of view I think what we would be most interested in doing is not going to HF radio but going to something that would allow us to deliver using net meeting-type facilities down a single line into a property or a house or via a satellite to a family on a boat.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: The concern, I think, is extra school (indistinct) you have eight students that you can afford to have one day a week. With a budget it would probably be every second day, so the children would miss out. But the other thing is it's the community, going in meetings in the community and meetings with their cubs, meetings with all the other things, so that the children get a feeling. These children are isolated and don't come to together; but with HF they can come together as a unit.

MR RASMUSSEN: If I can quote John again: John calls it the glue that holds the school together.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: That's correct; I know him well.

MR RASMUSSEN: Yes, I know you do. Yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes. Karen, the same.

MR RASMUSSEN: It really makes - Karen would say the same or very similar words.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Exactly.

MR RASMUSSEN: In our place, the only way to try and get that sense of community is by going vast distances to people.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Their fear was, in exactly the same way as the tape-recorder has been locked away they are afraid that HF will be locked away. There is a great need for teleconferencing, and it can be used to great extent, and e-mail, or this type of thing; but children that have no choice and that are really isolated there's a need to extend the community and bring them all together.

MR RASMUSSEN: I'll tell you the things that we try to do. I put out nine newsletters a year - and I've got two which I'll leave with you - and they cover preschool to Year 12, and include P&C notices, student council information, and a range of other things, including promotion at clubs. But because we don't have that link that you talk about in the other schools we encourage kids to join things like the Duke of Edinburgh Award, get involved with the boy scouts, the girl guides. We're facilitating their joining a group rather than becoming a group within our school; although if you go to my school today you'll find a scout display in the library. So we do that.

We also print - and I'll give you a copy - a full colour paper once a term, and we try to identify and highlight and promote kids and promote staff so that people get to know them. Actually you'll see when you read through here - and if you like I can give you a clustered one of those - promote pushing a lot of people out on the road so that we become not just the voice or a signature on a stamp, but a known face and a real person.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks, Bob.

MR RASMUSSEN: My pleasure.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you for all that material which the Commission staff will delight in carrying back to Sydney.

MR RASMUSSEN: I'll give you that too.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, please; if you've got a submission that's great.

MR RASMUSSEN: Thank you very much for letting me put my two bob's worth.

THE COMMISSIONER: Terrific, thanks. Jann Piasecki, do you want to come up? My apologies for keeping you waiting; I hope you found it interesting.

MS PIASECKI: It was, it was fascinating.

THE COMMISSIONER: I can't say how pleased we are to see you.

MS PIASECKI: Why?

THE COMMISSIONER: It's about the fifth or sixth time that we've had an appointment with someone from the Independent Education Union and you're the first to actually arrive.

MS PIASECKI: Really?

THE COMMISSIONER: So it's an absolute privilege to have you here today.

MS PIASECKI: In Queensland or Australia generally?

THE COMMISSIONER: Three times in Western Australia; once in the Northern Territory; and once in South Australia.

MS PIASECKI: Good; it wasn't us then.

THE COMMISSIONER: Obviously the Queensland branch is extraordinary amongst the IEU various affiliates.

MS PIASECKI: We are. Thank you very much.

THE COMMISSIONER: Off you go, Jann.

MS PIASECKI: Firstly, thank you very much for this opportunity. We are a union that covers 9,000 members in non-government schools in Queensland, and the people that we cover are teachers, school officers, and that includes secretaries and teachers' aides in schools, and also services staff - we've only just recently got coverage of those people - and they are ground staff and boarding house staff, and we have quite a number of boarding schools, so they're quite important to get on board. So now we virtually cover all employees in a non-government school.

[Teacher incentives]

Specifically there are two main areas of concern to our members, and the first involves matters of a professional nature with industrial ramifications, and goes to teacher incentives to work in rural and remote areas; professional development issues; and the retention of teachers in those areas. It was quite interesting to hear the Ed Queensland gentleman that was speaking as I came in talking about those teacher incentives. We'll approach that from a different angle.

As a union of employees it's our role to advocate for better conditions for our teachers, however, as professionals most of our officials are still registered teachers - although not practising, we're paid officials. We're also cognisant of the wider benefits which flow to school communities generally through improving provisions which will retain experienced teachers in rural and remote areas.

Teachers in non-government schools are in the process of negotiating enterprise agreements and benefits and incentives for working in these areas through enterprise bargaining. Negotiations between the union and various employing authorities are occurring on a continual basis with some gains already in place. So schools are into their fourth enterprise agreement, and they've been occurring over the last five, six years. Teachers employed in non-government schools are particularly disadvantaged in terms of incentives offered in order to attract and retain their services. While teachers in the state school system receive attractive cash or non-cash incentives, teachers in non-government currently receive cash incentives only in a limited number of schools in the five Catholic dioceses.

By the way, I have a copy in our submission of those state school incentives, if you needed those because from what the Ed Q guy was saying you weren't aware of what they actually got. The Brisbane Catholic Education Office offers incentives to five rural schools. They're not very far away, but they are considered rural in their aspect: that's Gayndah, Childers, Murgon, Nanango and Kingaroy. For Brisbane that is rural.

The incentives include: priority transfers after three years; full-time continuing status rather than fixed-term contracts, which is very important for teachers because most teachers now are employed on contract, and so that's rather a good incentive; professional development offered across the dioceses, and where twilight seminars are conducted in metropolitan areas these are videoed and distributed to the rural schools; a remote area incentive allowance of \$1,500 for the first and second year of service, and \$2,500 for the third, fourth and fifth years of service, after five years the allowance ceases - it's deemed that they must enjoy staying there so they don't need the incentive to stay there any more. That's the Brisbane Catholic Education.

They receive a kilometre allowance for legitimate approved travel according to the budget allocated and in accordance with VCE and taxation requirements. Accommodation and associated costs are paid when staff in remote area incentives scheme schools are required to remain overnight when attending in-service and professional development. Removal costs are another incentive; they're paid after a period of three years or more, all removal costs will be met; after a period of two years, 50% of the cost; and no costs will be paid for less than one year's service at the school.

The union is currently negotiating provisions for incentives with the other four dioceses - that's Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton and Toowoomba. And our list - our wish list, if you like - includes: double the long service leave entitlement; additional savings guaranteed charge payments; one return airfare to a nominated Queensland centre each year; additional three days leave to travel at the end of the year, or one week extra in the middle of the year; additional release from face-to-face teaching to attract beginning teachers; a study support system for three-year trained teachers to upgrade to four-year trained; relocation expenses; staff mobility benefits between dioceses to encourage movement in the long term, not the short term, between the dioceses; and also recognition of service between the diocese, particularly for sick leave and portability of long service leave, which doesn't exist at the moment.

[Staff accommodation]

Accommodation - and again, I was very interested in what was being said from Ed Q - rental accommodation is extremely scarce or not available; the cost of renting is extremely high; there is no guarantee of a stable period of tenancy; and there is also, in many cases, a requirement to pay rent over the seven-week Christmas vacation to retain the accommodation. Particularly young teachers find that very onerous.

Negotiations have taken place with the state government on the use of surplus government housing; however, after a lengthy period of negotiations there was no guarantee that tenure of the accommodation could be provided. They were quite open to the suggestion of using the government housing, but then said that if any government employee wanted or needed the housing they would take it back over. So there was no guarantee that it would continue on.

[Professional development]

In regard to professional development, the main area of concern is access to quality activities of relevance to the needs of our members. The isolation of rural and remote schools contributes to the difficulties faced by teachers participating in a whole range of

professional development activities. The distances to be travelled, the associated costs of travel, accommodation, teacher release and replacement, and the costs involved in the provision of speakers, lecturers, presenters, venues and meals all contribute to the problem faced by all teachers in rural and remote schools.

The union has identified some possible solutions to the provision of professional development for employees. Targeted funds need to be allocated by federal and state governments. Thinking outside the square in regard to the provision of activities used in technology; allocated funding for replacement staff where colleagues are participating in professional development activities; and a greater say in attendance at relevant activities which are linked to the needs of the teacher identified by the teacher. That seems to be a big issue with our members, that they are provided with professional development but it is not relevant to what they actually need.

[Staff retention]

In regard to teacher retention we believe the quality of educational services is affected by, amongst other things, the quality of teachers employed in rural and remote areas. Not only is it imperative to attract experienced and well qualified teachers into these areas, it's vital to retain them. It's necessary for a number of reasons. By retaining teachers for a number of years in the one school the quality of the educational experience delivered to students is enhanced through continuity of program delivery. Where the staff of the school remains constant over a number of years the overall feeling in the school results in a common purpose and belonging, thus providing an atmosphere where teaching and learning can flourish.

The personal growth of a teacher whose professional life as well as their personal life is constant can only benefit rural and remote schools. Teachers retained for a number of years gain a sense of belonging not only to the school community but the general community. Teachers who constantly change schools are disadvantaged in terms of career development and promotion.

The second main area of concern to the union is that of the quality of technological support for teaching and learning. The issue of equity of access to IT for all teachers, the related occupational health and safety concerns and access to professional development associated with IT have been identified by our members as areas of concern. IT is not a one-off cost, but an ongoing, high demand budget item for hardware technical support and professional development.

The occupational health and safety issues related to stress and frustration brought about by a lack of a whole-school strategic approach to the implementation of issues in an IT program, as well as

the ergonomic issues related to equipment are areas of concern to our members as well. There's particular demand for development of a planned whole-school approach which would maximise the use of resources available and contribute to the learning environment. A planned approach should develop strategies for implementation of IT in terms of an ongoing process built into the infrastructure of the school with appropriate funding.

We, again, would just like to thank the commission for this opportunity. We have a very difficult time in trying to convince our employers of these issues. They have limited budgets, of course, but their priorities are often different to ours. So, thank you very much.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Pearl.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes. I don't think I have any questions. I agree that the retention of teachers, particularly from music and drama, is just so vital in those areas because children become very involved and then suddenly that teacher then moves away and this great gap is left.

MS PIASECKI: It's the lack of continuity.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: It's a lack of continuity; I agree wholeheartedly with your comments.

[Staff accommodation]

THE COMMISSIONER: I think the housing thing is one particular concern that obviously keeps coming up. But given that in a state system where housing is provided it's such a problem, it must be even harder in the non-government system where housing is not provided.

MS PIASECKI: It's absolutely horrendous in some of our areas. Over the last three years it has improved very slightly through the negotiations through the enterprise agreements, the second and third agreement. I can give you examples. About four years ago I was working in Cloncurry, and we had the principal of the school living in a caravan; we had another teacher at the school living with the priest attached to the school. We have many examples of young teachers living in presbyteries or areas attached through the church to the school, which is most unsatisfactory; their lives aren't their own in that case, they're living with their employer virtually.

But, yes, the standard, the quality, the cost, the availability, and that paying the rent over the Christmas vacation is just prohibitive; and to attract young teachers out there now, it's just not happening. They go out, they spend a year at the most, or a term, and then just can't cope,

won't go back. So for the union to try to get these incentives up is most important, and we're struggling. We're turning it around though. I can see a light at the end of the tunnel with it.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: There's a division between remote and rural, isn't it? It's really in the remote that the - I mean, the rural have problems too, but the remote have extreme problems.

MS PIASECKI: Yes. Definitely the remote, the accommodation is the problem and the professional development. Rural tends to have problems with the professional development as well though.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes, I agree.

THE COMMISSIONER: Are there significant numbers of schools that are actually short-staffed?

MS PIASECKI: No.

THE COMMISSIONER: They're not? So they're actually getting people into them.

MS PIASECKI: The class sizes aren't really an issue at the moment for us, which means that the staffing formulas must be working. There isn't the desperation of getting people out there to staff the school, isn't the problem; they go out there but they don't stay there. A graduate from a university course will take a job, and then once they get out there they don't want to stay out there.

THE COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you very much for coming.

MS PIASECKI: Thank you.

THE COMMISSIONER: I guess you're Leo Dunne. I'm sorry to keep you waiting. Would you mind if we kept you waiting for about one more minute, because we've been going continuously since 9 o'clock and it might be good for us to have a stretch before we talk to you. Thanks.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks very much; and I'm sorry again for the wait, but thanks for your patience with us. Would you like to introduce yourself and your organisation, and then you can go straight into the submission.

MR DUNNE: Thank you. My name is Leo Dunne, I'm the Executive Officer for the Parents and Friends Federation, Queensland. Probably, too, it's also important to put in that it's the Catholic school network that I represent.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR DUNNE: I haven't prepared a complete submission, and I'm happy to do that, because I'm not a provider and I was curious as to how I might be able to contribute to or to help the Commission in its inquiries. Certainly, the Federation is committed to doing that in whatever way we can, number 1. I've had some cross connections with Catholic education, and I might comment on that, because that may be of some use as well.

[Rural and remote Catholic education]

For instance, for some years I chaired a remote and rural committee for the Queensland Catholic Education Commission. That role was supposedly to be taken by diocesan authorities. I've never been terribly comfortable with the committee ceasing its operations because it tended to bring together in those earlier days people in boarding schools, people in remote areas, and we always had a representative from the Isolated Children's Parents' Association on that committee. So I personally think that's left something of a vacuum within Catholic education at state commission level. But the Federation is aware of the difficulties that circumstances of isolation bring to people living in those regions; and our schools extend from Quilpie through to St George in the south to Mt Isa and Longreach and to Mossman in the north. So they're not exactly in remote areas, but some of the schools are remote in themselves.

I was visiting Quilpie just recently with a person who hadn't been too familiar with the region when parents were dropping their kids back to school; and he curiously asked them, "How far have you come this morning?" The first mother said, "I live just handy; I only came 70 miles." So after he'd picked his jaw up and realised that isolation and remoteness is something that you really can't understand unless you experience it.

[Boarding; financial assistance]

So from our point of view I was very interested in the material that's come out of your own Commission inquiry. I'd like to touch on a few things that may be of help from a parent network point of view. First of all, we are strong sponsors of boarding schools because it certainly has been a way in which many children from remote and rural settings are able to receive fairly comprehensive education. My understanding from my contact with parents and the ICPA area in particular, of which I've been a lone member almost since they began their operation,

that socialising is an important factor for the children's development, and it's just about impossible to provide that if they remain in isolation.

We've had some tension between ourselves as a Federation and certainly myself in trying to negotiate on behalf of parents who have lived in places like Quilpie for instance, where they depend and have depended on assistance provided to students who come under the understanding of isolation to be able to attend boarding schools. Once a high school - although the 8, 9, 10 - is positioned out there, that aid disappears; they are no longer eligible.

I'd also say that I certainly have taken the case to government over the years that children who live in the towns, small towns like Cloncurry, Quilpie as examples, or Cunnamulla for that matter, towns who are comparatively small centres, but where a school is located, the children of the families living in the town - they might be sons or daughters of railway fettlers or builders or other tradespeople, all the types of people who work on properties - have never been able to attract any assistance. At least people living on properties, because they come under the definition of isolation, are able to achieve some assistance to send their kids away. I think that's pretty unfair. So they're people, I think, who miss an opportunity to benefit by a good education and therefore be able to move themselves in further achievement to another area of life or even to come back to the centres, rural centres, having accomplished a more complete education in a boarding setting.

[Indigenous education]

So the other comment I'd make, I suppose, is that we do experience some rural settings where Aboriginal communities are participating. For instance, Cloncurry has been, I think, a very successful exercise from our point of view where about 50% of the students would be Aboriginal children, and have, I think, been successful because they worked with Aboriginal counsellors who ensured that the children got to school. In going back over a number of years, Thursday Island was mentioned earlier, is usually a fairly attractive setting, and there's been a greater acceptance there of schooling, it's a more confined area.

As a contrast to that, Palm Island is a much more difficult community, and while I think there's some good work being done there, I think there are just different Aboriginal communities and some more positively engaged in education than others. I wouldn't be able to suggest what factors influence that; but certainly there's significant differences. Even places like Cunnamulla and Cloncurry, there's no real comparison between the two Aboriginal communities. So there is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander committee works within Catholic Education and is chaired by Nerida White.

Nerida also works at the Australian Catholic University and attends a number of our Federation meetings; so we have some interaction with that committee, which is the state committee with representatives from each of the dioceses. It keeps us in touch with the issues that they experience or the difficulties they experience, and keeps our committee at least far more aware of what is happening at those diocesan levels. While there's a limited amount of help that can come from the Federation as such, at least it allows us to open our ranks and keep inviting people in so that forms of integration do take place as a result of that.

The work that Nerida is doing at ACU is in itself important because she's working with a unit there to assist young people, young Aboriginal people, who are heading towards teaching roles in the main, or sometimes nursing roles; and many of them might need some bridging assistance to help them deal with the course levels, etcetera.

[Boarding schools]

I'd have to say, with regards to our boarding schools, that also is, I suppose, a cost, but it is an impediment for some of the kids coming in from rural settings. When they move into a boarding school they often find themselves almost needing to do a bridging course to allow them to compete or to even achieve at satisfactory levels with the other students whose background may have been a little less isolated or may even come from bigger centres.

I'd have to support the comments that Jann made in her submission just previously with regards to teacher housing. I've been involved from the Catholic Ed side in looking to improve that housing, particularly for teachers working in Catholic schools; not only teachers, but principals as well. It's just interesting that in, say, the Toowoomba diocese, as an example, in Quilpie, in Cunnamulla, in St George, in Tara, and Roma, and it goes on, they're all women principals. Very demanding because your principal in a school is expected to take a leading social role within the community - and needs to - and they recognise that.

They are often teaching at least 60% of the time or more; they have full school administration; they have to deal with the range of difficulties that occur in being the principal of the school; they are often expected to assist in liturgy and other issues dealing with the presence of the church - in fact, the school there's often the real presence of church in those areas - and they are supposed to stay married at the same time. Quite a difficulty. So we've been - certainly the Federation has been pursuing that issue to try and help bring either more time or some more recognition to the increasingly difficult role that principals play in schools.

I've just touched on a few issues; there may be some areas in which you would want to ask me questions, and I might be able to provide answers.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes. I was interested in the bridging, because to me that is one of the most important things of all for isolated kids or anything that covers the races, but particularly the Indigenous. We noticed the other day in Normanton that your school there was doing a lot and had the capabilities too, there.

MR DUNNE: Yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Perhaps this is something that we should be pushing forward as one way of reaching out, yes.

MR DUNNE: Yes, I think bridging is more of an issue if children come to boarding school at grade 11.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR DUNNE: The gap between grade 10 and grade 11 is almost a class and a half. It's a significant step up. If they've not had a school that's providing lessons of a competitive nature the gap is very great.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Very great.

THE COMMISSIONER: Do any of the schools actually have a bridging course or a summer school for the Year 11 entrants, or something?

MR DUNNE: I don't know that they go to that extent; but I know many of them put special classes in place to try and help the kids meet that gap.

[Indigenous participation]

THE COMMISSIONER: Do you have many Aboriginal parents amongst the P&F membership? Do they actually surface at the statewide level, or mainly active at the local level?

MR DUNNE: We've tried to integrate the state committee, and our state committee, but - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: In small towns I know you do - - -

MR DUNNE: Yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: - - - but probably not so much in - - -

MR DUNNE: It happens locally, it happens locally; it happens easier locally too. What we've satisfied ourselves to continue to do is have representatives of our own meet with their committee and vice versa, so that they're very keen to maintain their own committee structure and I can understand that. That allows them to discuss issues that are common to them and not feel others are intruding that may not understand. So there's some bridging to do between our cultures; we'll keep that going for a while yet, I think. They're more comfortable.

They feel that - for instance, with the commission, the Catholic Education Commission, of which I'm a member, the approach was recently made about having a member of their committee on the commission, and we went through a range of ways in which the committee could be better serviced by the commission and others in Catholic Ed. I think we resolved at this stage many of the issues that will be transition issues to a greater integration of their people into the commission itself and so on.

I think the same thing is going on between the state committee of the Parents and Friends Federation. We've written to them, initially offering membership and seeking membership, and respected the fact that they said, "Look, at this stage, probably it's better that we interact as two committees, and we become, as a Federation, more aware of the kind of structures that exist within their network." So we've done that, and I think that's working fairly well at this stage, and we're trying to travel at the pace that they're comfortable with rather than trying to influence them to comply with what we might think is a better structure, because we don't have any justification for saying that or arguing that.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I think that's right; but if you went to Palm Island as opposed to some of the other communities, I think one of the problems there, as we've said, is there are so many different tribes or tribal; and it's very difficult to bring them together, the less you get, as you would have thought. So this is going to take time and it's going to take a lot of communication, and I think this bridging is very - could have a very significant input in sorting out some of those problems.

MR DUNNE: It's amazing how well students integrate within boarding schools, for instance; even going back years. When I was at Downlands, kids fitted in very comfortably either coming from New Guinea or Australian Aboriginal kids - very small numbers. But St Augustine's now in Cairns would have probably in excess of 80 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the college.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: That's right.

MR DUNNE: They're a pretty important part of that college life; and other boarding schools are similarly carrying - St Pat's in Townsville would carry significant numbers as well.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes, I know that St Augustine's they do - the children are motivated to go there so they really feel they want to be there.

MR DUNNE: Yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: It's surprising how well they integrate - not surprising, but it's quite gratifying, they integrate with the - - -

MR DUNNE: For anybody who has - I'm not sure you've had the opportunity of seeing their band in action.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR DUNNE: That gives great pride.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Their sport, their football, their touch ball.

MR DUNNE: Yes, absolutely.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Hockey.

MR DUNNE: They tell me that competition is greater between the Torres Strait and New Guinea natives and Aboriginals than it is with the white kids - "Don't worry about them; we've got to sort out who's boss in this place." So there's that sort of competition which has been, according to the principal of the school, pretty healthy.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR DUNNE: And it's tended to take away from the kind of black and white issue that had been part of the earlier days of difficulties.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

MR DUNNE: Okay.

THE COMMISSIONER: Any more for you? No? Thanks a lot for coming along, and again my apologies for keeping you waiting.

MR DUNNE: It's no problem. What I am happy to do is just encompass those ideas into a couple of pages.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, it would be very helpful. Thank you. Thanks very much. Thank you for the morning session too.

(Luncheon adjournment)

[1.07 pm]

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks, Larry, for coming. Please introduce yourself for the tape, and then straight into it.

MR LAIKIND: Thank you, commissioner. My name is Larry Laikind, I'm a solicitor at the Welfare Rights Centre in Brisbane, and I'm one of two disability discrimination solicitors in Queensland, the other being Julie Fry who has the area of Mackay north; so she would take the peninsular area. I'm not sure if you've had Julie Fry before.

THE COMMISSIONER: No, we haven't, not in the course of this inquiry. I've met Julie though.

MR LAIKIND: Not in the course of this inquiry. Insofar as my presentation I would like to deal with pretty much isolating myself to special needs, disabled children and the consideration in regional, rural and remote areas, not too much Aborigines and pretty much the areas south of Mackay, out west. I'd just like to preface this in that I have been doing disability discrimination work since the inception of these services, the beginning of 94, and I had a two-year break in between time, at which time I completed a masters degree at Oxford; I had a Commonwealth scholarship. I did very well in law.

[Disability discrimination]

I might say, in terms of education, I've noticed that since I've been back the number of education complaints have been a little bit less than before. It's possibly fourth on my list, after employment, access to premises, goods and services; whereas before it was probably about second. I might note that the legislation, particularly in Queensland - I do, say, three-quarters, 80% of my cases under the state legislation - has resulted in probably two important changes through cases: one being the Dean Hashish case against the Minister of Education, which resulted in a change of the 1989 Education General Provisions Act.

Whereas before, if you were an ordinary student without a disability you could have really unlimited education, but, say, if you were a special needs student, if you wanted to go to a special school, there had to be a special needs student with disabilities, and there couldn't be - have attained the age of 18. So something magical and mystical happened at the age of 18 - they were no longer disabled.

Through bringing particularly the Hashish case that has resulted in the change of that legislation; they removed all references to age; a student irrespective of impairment or disability and irrespective of age is entitled to 12 years state education with an additional three years depending on need. That was one change.

Then another change brought about by the Finn decision and several others - Keller decision - Vanessa Finn getting an interlocutory injunction under the state legislation before I went to Oxford; that resulted in the Moving Ahead program for persons with impairments; eg, there were no post-school options in Queensland prior to 1997, and the result of a few of these cases there's a two-year program which includes education, training, recreation, home care, depending on need. Indeed, I'm giving a lecture later next week to a lot of carers in terms of negligence issues and other things. So those are the two cases which have been quite important as far as my work.

The sorts of issues that primarily come to me in education are integrated education, persons being excluded from education, persons being dismissed, and accommodations for persons in education; mostly in Brisbane, but I have had maybe eight to 10 rural ones. So not all that many at all. I'll discuss some of the problems as far as these in a minute. Those are the main issues anyway.

In terms of some of the things I see; I have complaints against not just Education Queensland, but Catholic Education, the independent schools, also Distance Education. So it was actually interesting to hear what happened, this morning, as far as the programs particularly from Mr Williams and Mr Blatch as far as Education Queensland. I thought those were quite instructive, and indeed I commend a number of the programs they have instituted, so I think that's quite positive. It was good to see them as well - at least hear them, I've only got 2% vision - in that some of these people were against me on the other side in terms of complaints like Jo Deissel from Education Queensland and Bob Rasmussen, and I'm sure if you had people from the independent schools they'd be there, or from even Catholic schools they'd be there as well. So it's interesting hearing their voices in a different context.

[Accessibility]

Now, getting down to some of the things which I've given you, and I suppose I could possibly expand on some of these, things that I notice. I did a recent complaint for a principal in education. He was tetraplegic after a car accident - or partially tetraplegic - and he was out west for a number of years. One of his complaints were dealing with promotion, and the problem was 99% of schools in Queensland could not accommodate his wheelchair. That's a big problem, Queensland high-set schools; it's very much the problem now. I know Education

Queensland is rectifying this, but very slowly. Indeed, many of the new schools are accessible, but not many of the existing ones; and it's really very difficult to put a ramp in a high-set Queensland. I know it's been done before but you wind up snaking around the building if it's a 1-in-14 gradient, and that's quite difficult, quite costly. Anyway, that's one of the problems. I've had some parents with problems with their children in wheelchairs.

[Travel]

Another one, the long distances required to travel not only to remote areas but simply regional and rural areas as well. I recently conciliated a complaint where there was a child in Yeppoon and he had to travel to Mt Morgan but there was problems with Education Queensland and transport, getting him the taxi subsidy he needed, or taxi vouchers, because there was no public transport, and a bus really wasn't suitable in that he has particular behaviour problems. So that is an example of the distance in going from one school to another or one location to another.

[Disability harassment]

Another one would be - and I didn't put this down in the paper, but - instances of bullying, in that isolated communities there may be entrenched attitudinal problems which exist not only in school but outside of school, and they transfer to the children in school; and there have been instances of harassment, disability discrimination and bullying in schools. Not too big a problem; I've had only two or three instances of that.

[Students with disabilities]

Another; in the Rockhampton area, I've got a couple of children who have severe impairments and the parents have actually taken them out of school. They have autism and other things, and they've tried whatever is available there, and there seems to be both a lack of supports and a lack of understanding in the school, and also problems with distance education as far as being able to accommodate the child.

Other examples might be the difficulty in getting a rural school to do an ascertainment in order to get needs. I had a Down syndrome child, fairly high functioning, but the school actually refused to do an ascertainment, and it was only until an external ascertainment that someone could obtain funding. I believe there's something like 3 to 5-thousand dollars funding for a level 5 ascertainment through a combination of Commonwealth - principally Commonwealth, but sometimes state funds if the child is in state education. It varies as far as level 6; it could be anything from \$10-\$20,000 funding, but you have to do the external ascertainment.

Other problems: the failure of schools and teachers to actually recognise particular disabilities like attention deficit disorder, or a failure to know what to do with epilepsy, or a problem with a lack of guidance teachers - and this came out quite clearly this morning during your questioning and also the presentation from - I forget the name of the person that was sitting here - but that is a real problem. Those who have come to me now - I then questioned a number of people and they came from different areas; so there's a different sort of perspective. I've got some parents, some solicitors, a visiting teacher and an ex-regional director of the Human Rights Commission and a community service worker as far as community organisation, to give a different perspective as far as education problems for special needs/disabled children in my particular area of Queensland.

First, I gave a presentation, I was keynote speaker in Ipswich two weeks ago, to the Attention Deficit Disorder Society there; and there was a group of about 40 very distressed mothers. One of them was from Kingaroy, and this came out, or part of it came out anyway, earlier today, in that Kingaroy is not a remote area by any stretch. It's a regional area, I suppose, or possibly rural; but the mother said, "Well, there's no specialist here dealing with attention deficit disorder. There is four to six months' wait until this person comes." This is in there so you don't have to take notes for this bit. That's a problem.

She said there was only one local GP. Now, the person this morning said there were three. I'm not sure if she's in a further remote area of Kingaroy, whether it's in Nanango or something else. So there's only one GP, and this GP doesn't recognise attention deficit disorder. It's a bit like people that don't recognise, say, chronic fatigue syndrome and call it hysterical depression. There is 90% of Queensland's psychiatrists are in this boat.

So the GP doesn't recognise attention deficit disorder, and the school - and there's only one school that's available - and that's another problem, eg, a lack of choice as far as schools - the principal and teacher both say, "Well, there's no problem here, there's no attention deficit disorder, no medical disorder. The problem is that the child is bad and you are bad because you cannot control your bad child." And that's about all. Then she also had other problems as far as the inability of the school to allow medication in terms of Dexamphetamine or Ritalin. These problems occur in other bits from other people that I'll mention a bit. So this is the lady, quite distressed, Kingaroy; I use that as an example of a regional area.

Next; I contacted a solicitor that is a bit like the flying doctor service, except she's the flying solicitor service, going from Toowoomba to Charleville, Quilpie, St George, regional areas like this; and she does a continuous trip all the time, and she has noticed problems in

terms of isolation, a lack of school, inaccessibility of, say, special needs person, and the standard problems as far as a physically impaired student not getting access to a school. But didn't really go in to much because she's a general legalist service and not just an education-type service. She put me on to that lady that I've given you some comments here.

Her name is Patricia Carruthers, and I've included her CV, as far as the work at the back of the page. She works specifically with autism spectrum disorder, which would include the gamut of autism including, (indistinct) syndrome right up to high behavioural problems of autism as well. She would provide five initial visits and then continuing visits depending upon need, and claims to provide a very good service - I've heard some good reports about the work she does. So she would visit the school and also the child in home. She gave, first, a very positive comment - and I have this there - that she does not recommend a family selling their family farm, say their cotton farm in St George, and moving to Brisbane because she says that, generally, at least as far as autism and the work that she does there is really no worse service, by and large no worse service, than one could obtain in Brisbane, which is interesting. So that's a very positive comment.

Then she states that there can be problems, and one of the problems is a school doing, say, only an internal ascertainment rather than an external one because the internal one is a commitment that we can handle things ourselves and ourselves internally, rather than getting people in, doing an external assessment or ascertainment which leads to extra funding and possibly her own services. She cannot have access to her own services unless there's been an external ascertainment, which is interesting. So that's one problem.

Another problem is the mere fact of isolation might mean a very small school, and indeed this morning we've heard that Education Queensland has many, many small schools in remote areas. A problem is that a special needs child may have needs for additional supports and would really benefit by a special unit in an ordinary school. The problem is one may need five to 10 students with disabilities, according to the Education Queensland policy to support the education unit, eg, with the special needs teacher or whatever; and indeed there's a big problem in terms of getting one anyway to a remote area. So if you've got a school with maybe 50 students, and two, three or four special needs students, they probably won't get a unit. In fact, they won't get a unit. That's a problem.

Another one is the non-acceptance of a diagnosis, eg, if there's a high-functioning autism person, they might be quite intelligent but the principal and possibly the teachers fail to recognise that there is a disability, a medical condition; and that's a recurring thing, that's

something which I have experienced and other people have experienced. Anyway, that's Ms Carruthers.

Going on; Jenny Smith is a very lovely lady. You may have had dealings with her in the past. I know that she does some discrimination complaints herself, and I have had things referred to her. One of the matters I can remember before I went to Oxford was a lady - actually an eight-year-old girl with epilepsy who (a) was able to get accommodations of swimming in her school and then there was a problem with the gym - they didn't want her there to do floor exercises even though there was no problems with the epilepsy. It didn't settle until the solicitor who was president of the management committee was kicked off and fired. I can remember that one very well.

Then Ray Vallance would refer a number of complaints, and Jenny Smith and I would do things together. Anyway, Jenny Smith has a number of problems with not only people in Rockhampton but also out west from Rockhampton as far as some remote areas. I didn't ask any particular names, and it really wasn't my purpose to ask names, but she would be happy to discuss these particular ones with you or anybody from the Commission. She had such issues as not only was it necessary for an external ascertainment but an external audit as well to see that funds were actually going to the child. Indeed, I've got two problems where this has happened in Brisbane now; so it's not restricted to remote areas. But accountability in terms of the actual Commonwealth and state funding that goes to the special needs child would be very useful.

[1.25]

Another point is that Education Queensland, in the past year, has developed a disability guidelines policy - it hasn't become legislation but it's a policy - that there is consultation with the parents before any decision is made. I had a matter in Brisbane at the beginning of the year, where, two days before the school year finished, there somebody going to go into inclusive education with level 6 Down syndrome, no consultation, this was taken away and I was able, at the beginning of the year, to have the child included in a very good school with a very receptive principal. The receptive principal is a key in Queensland, because the principal has so much authority to do things. That was a change in policy as of 1997. A receptive principal is a big thing in Queensland, I don't know about the other states, for inclusive education.

That seems to be the problem with Jenny Smith, eg, a lack of consultation, even though it might be against Education Queensland policy, in terms of what to do with the child. Another thing is, if there is a consultation, the parents are often bullied in some instances, and she

gave two, by the principal or the teachers or special needs teachers, into accepting a particular outcome which the parents were probably unwilling to accept.

Another problem appears, that there seems to be some desire to maintain all special schools or to increase the special school number. This may be opposed to a philosophy of integrated education, which, in many instances - I know there are groups, like myself, QPPD, Queensland Parents of Parents with Disabilities, SPELD, which generally - inclusive education is often better because of the peer development with ordinary children. So that can be a problem.

There are also problems in terms of principals, say, not accepting children in the school and not accepting a diagnosis saying that a level 5 ascertainment isn't right, that it should be a level 6 ascertainment, to allow them to shuffle the child off to a special school. I've had two examples of that myself; one in the hinterland of the Gold Coast, Murwillumbah, just last month. So there's that sort of thing, and it's also happening in other areas, like Rockhampton. That's enough for Jenny Smith.

Then some points as far as Ray Vallance, who was the regional director of the Anti Discrimination Commission and Human Rights Commission when there was a joint agreement, joint funding agreement, that the Commonwealth and state legislation would be administered in Queensland, Cairns, Rockhampton and Brisbane. Anyway, Ray sent me something like about 10 complaints in a short period of time. He's sent me a few recently, in that he's now working in education with children with autism and special coordination. He's got some points and some of these are mirrored in some of the other persons, one of which was that there is inadequacy of professional persons to deal with autism spectrum disorder.

Ray said that in Rockhampton there's one specialist that has an understanding; he's booked up eight months to a year in advance. That, I suppose, correlates to Kingaroy, where there are none. I know there are three in Brisbane that I know of; so that seems to be a problem as far as persons who can actually - as far as both medical and possibly other professionals - deal with various medical conditions.

Another is that - and this was mirrored this morning - there appears to be a fragmented approach to deal with the actual needs of the child. There will be some authority in Family Services, some in Housing, Education Queensland, some training and post-development, and there seems to be no coordination linking everything together. Ray says he does a bit of that himself but there are problems as far as no integrated approach to deal with the child's needs. This also is a

fragmented approach after school, in terms of both post-school options and employment.

[Support groups and information for families]

Another problem is that, whereas in Brisbane there may be several groups that a person could get for support, depending on the particular impairment, there are both community centres, service providers, small formally-organised groups and non-formally-organised groups, there may be no group in a remote area and there may be, say, one group, depending on the disability, in, maybe, a regional rural area. That seems to be a problem.

Another problem is the lack of information in terms of what is actually available for parents with children with disabilities. I've had two complaints - well, two inquiries, these actually weren't complaints, two inquiries, fairly recently, where the parents just had no idea that, with an ascertainment, it was possible to get additional services or that there were services that were available before a child went to school in Education Queensland in terms of speech pathology, occupational therapy, depending on the disability, that - who to contact. For independent schools, the contact person is Trish Brady, who's very good in this area, in terms of the ascertainment. What is available in terms of the actual supports that already exist through both Commonwealth and state I know is a problem and Ray has known that to be a problem.

Aside from other things, such as, say, schools wishing to deal with things themselves autonomously, internally, rather than doing an assessment, that was another point raised. That's pretty much all I have for you.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks very much, Larry; very comprehensive, going across a wide range of issues.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I have a question. What is the problem? You very clearly delineated many of the problems but what is the problem with distance education?

MR LAIKIND: With distance education?

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes. What is it?

[Disability and distance education]

MR LAIKIND: I've had a teacher who was refused to be allowed distance education because of her inability to go on camps and stand up, because of her possible requirement for a hysterectomy. That's one thing from the employee perspective.

From the child perspective, there have been questions by two parents with a variety of conditions, autism-based and other behavioural problems, that, simply, distance education isn't working for them; they tried it, it didn't work. In terms of distance education, I haven't really had any other complaints than that, so either it's working fine or I just don't know of the other issues involved.

Those are the only three things that have happened to me, so far as distance education. For the most part, that's been one area that seems to have been either going pretty well or people that are experiencing problems haven't contacted me.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: With distance education on a school it would be difficult but they can get one-to-one - - -

MR LAIKIND: Yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: - - - by attaching to Brisbane.

MR LAIKIND: Yes. I really don't know the full extent of just why it's not working for some of these fairly severely impaired persons, I must admit, in the Rockhampton area.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Just one other point is with the access of wheelchairs.

MR LAIKIND: Yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: In many remote places - not many but a number I know, by using ordinary water, you make a lift, you turn the tap on and it goes up and you turn it off again, and that, in one of these schools, would be the answer, very cheaply and very effectively.

[Wheelchair access]

MR LAIKIND: There are actually a number of fairly cheap solutions as well. One is possibly a part 12 lift of, let's say, Australian Standards, AS35-something or other. I forget the other two numbers but there are a variety; there's a part 12 lift, part 15 lift. You may be aware of these. A part 12 lift costs approximately \$13,000, which is mobile. It can be quite useful in terms of a school, because you can move it from one classroom to the next, and it's good for auditoriums, for events, such as a graduation or something where there's a podium. If it's just a one-floor solution, that's a good solution.

There's also a part 15 lift of the same standard dealing with lifts. The part 15 lift costs about \$13,000, and that's often a caged and

fixed structure. It's a cheap lift, also good for a one-floor scenario. There's a key that operates the part 15 lift but I think there's a couple in the University of Queensland; they have simply left the key in so that they can be used by people without having a second person there.

Those are two solutions which aren't that expensive, which can probably be used in place of a ramp. Ramps are not great if you've got to do more than a six to 10 foot height differential as far as gradient, because you wind up being - have a Hercules requirement to do it if it's too much of a height differential. You may be aware that I was the fellow that did the convention centre matter before I went to England. As such, I have a long-standing association with John Deshon and other persons, so I do lots of access complaints.

Those are two decent solutions as well. Water may be another one, I'm not sure how that would work. I would have to discuss that with John Deshon, but there are a variety of solutions as far as the school situation, I think.

Then, possibly, to sum up, there are a number of things which - accommodations can occur without a great deal of money, such as education as far as the access of what's available, what resources are available, possibly some education, in terms of educating principles, what the disability or disorders are. Indeed, that's what Pat Carruthers does. Perhaps we're moving some attitudinal barriers, dealing with some of the harassment-type issues.

Other things, I can see there being a real problem, and these probably magnify with the greater remoteness, so that - say, a lack of a special unit, I can see that being a problem; a lack of special needs teachers, I can see that being a problem. All of these are problems for the ordinary student; they become magnified for the special needs of the disabled child because they have greater needs, there are less of them and there are certain policies which require more funding from them.

[Discrimination complaints]

THE COMMISSIONER: Just one question, Larry, that's the response from education authorities. When I was Acting Disability Commissioner, I was quite amazed at how education authorities tend to be amongst the most recalcitrant in negotiating and then seem to strike confidential one-off solutions on the eve of hearings. Are you finding any more - I mean, I was pleased to hear about your two examples of things that had resulted in more systemic change - - -

MR LAIKIND: Because those are actual hearings.

THE COMMISSIONER: They went to the full hearing?

MR LAIKIND: The Hashish matter was up to the High Court. It didn't get leave to the High Court because the public interest matter for Queensland was taken away after the legislation changed, two weeks before. That went right the way to the High Court. The Finn one went straight to the Anti-Discrimination Tribunal to get an interim order to keep the child in school. Those were actual hearings.

I have found that Education Queensland and, indeed, the rest, Catholic Education, the independent schools, are very willing to come to some huge conciliation agreements, including integrated education, where I feel that the child possibly would have lost in a hearing. I had a matter very similar to the (indistinct) matter, with a level 6 global developmental delayed child about a year ago. She got integrated education on a one-year trial basis and is doing fine now. She would have lost in a hearing; at least, I think she would have.

One that I dealt with at the Commission, where a lady, through conciliation, was able to get seven children into Catholic education at a better school, at very much reduced fees, with all of the accommodations needed; that result was everything I could have hoped for in a hearing, probably more - a situation where two children with severe impairments were refused entrance by a Catholic school but two or three with lesser impairments, and indeed she had adopted 14 children from all over the world, all with impairments; a bit of a Mother Hubbard story but she was an excellent mother to 13 children.

I must have had 15 to 20 excellent results in conciliation. I find that education is one area that people are very ready to conciliate in but it's not restricted to that. I haven't had a full-on hearing since earlier this year, in the Humphreys matter; I did the rehearing myself in Lismore; I'm waiting on that. Everything has settled.

It might settle at the first stage, let's say, the Anti-Discrimination Commission, or indeed many things might settle after I do formal pleadings at the Anti-Discrimination Tribunal. I do find things settle - or, indeed, at the Industrial Relations Commission, where I do some work. So it's not restricted to education; nearly everything settles.

THE COMMISSIONER: But you find the settlements are good settlements in general?

MR LAIKIND: Say, the settlement I had with the principal was a better result than I could have got from a hearing, because systemic changes were made; such as a change in Education Queensland policy for promotion, so that a person with any sort of disability, if he applies for a promotion and gets it, will be immediately paid on his higher level. This was just two months ago. This was the principal in Beachmere, the

tetraplegic fellow. They will look towards accommodating the school that he has applied for. If that can't be done, they will look to accommodating another school, and, if that can't be done, he remains at that pay level until they do find him an appropriate school in his area, which is accommodating to his impairments.

That result is not just for him. Indeed, he will take part in the changes to disability accommodation policy, and there is separate money aside for him and other persons for this. Because of the nature of a hearing (a) you can't have something that requires constant supervision of the courts and (b) you must have something which applies specifically to this case. He wouldn't have got as much, for both himself and other persons. Sometimes you get this as well. I've got other policy changes as well.

The counter to that is, generally things aren't made public in terms of anything. So you get something confidential. Generally the result is that you get something confidential for that one person - satisfies the family and the child but that's it, it's just confidential. That is a drawback in terms of conciliated agreements.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks very much, Larry, thanks for coming in.

MR LAIKIND: Okay. On to your next ones.

THE COMMISSIONER: The next ones aren't here yet.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Unless they'd be outside.

THE COMMISSIONER: I doubt it. I'd like to turn the tape off for a few minutes. Thanks.

THE COMMISSIONER: Can you just introduce yourself and the organisation for the tape, please?

MR MACKIE: Ian Mackie. I am the President of the Queensland Teachers Union and I'm also the deputy president of the Australian Education Union. I don't represent the Australian Education Union at this time but I represent the interests of its Queensland branch, the Queensland Teachers Union. I've prepared a document, actually, which I'll pass up to you and I'll speak to; two copies.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

MR MACKIE: I envisaged that I'll speak for 10 minutes or so - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: Sounds fine, Ian.

MR MACKIE: - - - and then allow you to ask questions.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, please.

[Retention rates]

MR MACKIE: That's great. I've addressed this paper under the criteria that you asked us to address. I'll just quickly run through these points. With respect to availability and accessibility of primary and secondary schooling in remote parts and rural parts of Queensland, what we find is a situation where the retention rates to Year 10 are quite good, so that's 15 years of age. For compulsory years of schooling, the retention rates are quite good. Beyond that, it's been patchy.

The government has a stated objective of increasing retention rates in post-compulsory years, that's, in this state, Years 11 and 12. We were going quite well but, for various reasons, the retention rates across the state have reduced, and that's of concern to us as a union and concern to the government.

[Secondary schooling availability]

In rural and remote parts of the state, the availability of senior secondary schooling is quite patchy. A lot of students are serviced by distance education.

In some situations where we believe senior secondary offerings should be available, they are not. I have cited three examples there, Doomadgee, Mornington Island and Arukun. There are a number of other similar communities where currently only P-10 schools exist. It's very difficult to access senior secondary education. We've always had serious concerns with an association of parents in this state, the Isolated Children's Parents' Association, because they have, on a number of occasions, discouraged the establishment of senior secondary schools in various locations and they have acted against some schools, tried to close them. The reason for that is related to federal government assistance to allow students to attend boarding school. So if you don't have a school, you can get assistance to send your children to boarding school.

A good example of that at the present time is Agnes Waters, a small coastal town north of Bundaberg, where we believe there should be a secondary school established. There's strong community support

for no school being established because of the government assistance for boarding school placement.

There are some examples where there are large numbers of students who don't actually have any access to school at all. I understand this week you visited Doomadgee. It's my understanding that there are up to - and there are various reports, I don't know how true these are but there are various reports that there are up to 200 students of school age living on out-stations outside of Doomadgee, who have no schooling whatsoever, and it's of serious concern to us.

[Vocational education]

Vocational education in rural and remote areas is problematic. One of the issues that P-10 schools have is, because they don't have a Year 11 and 12 section, they don't have 16 and 17-year-olds naturally enrolled, they have a lot of difficulty in accessing federal or state funds for vocational education. So they might have 16 and 17-year-olds about the town and attending school sporadically. They have a lot of difficulty accessing funds because of those bureaucratic impasses about whether or not they have a Year 11 and 12 grade.

[Technology]

There's been a lot of work put into supporting distance learning, through technology. We're very strongly supportive of those moves. The state government has introduced a proposal, which is in its developmental phase, called The Virtual School, which is using very high-level technology, real-time presentation of lessons via the Internet, which we're strongly supportive of and should be well funded and enhanced.

[Professional development]

Under the section of the quality of educational service, including technological support, one of the most serious concerns we've had for rural and remote education has been the professional isolation of teachers and principals. We've, nationally, led a push to have financial incentives, not only by way of pay but other possibilities for increased access to professional development, rapid career promotion, a whole range of issues we've proposed. We've been very limited in our successes with respect to achieving positive outcomes in that area.

[Staff incentives]

There is a scheme for teachers in this state, called the Remote Area Incentive Scheme but it's my view that it doesn't encourage teachers to serve in rural and remote locations. What does encourage teachers to serve in rural and remote locations in this state are two things. One is what's known colloquially as the promotion trail. You can get faster promotion if you serve in rural and remote locations, but

that's not systematic; it's the nature of increased opportunities. The other is related to a points transfer system. You accrue points, depending on the remoteness of the location, which puts you in a queue for a more favourable location. What that does is make very, very remote locations favourable, because you're almost certain to be returned within a reasonable period of time; two/three years perhaps.

What it has done, though, is create a middle ground of schools which are very unfavourable, and into that group I'd put schools like Monto and Mundubbera and Eidsvold and small rural communities two to three hours from the coast that don't have the same points rating as, say, a school like at Doomadgee or Boulia or places like that that I know you visited. Those schools that you visited this week have a seven-point rating, whereas schools like those I mentioned have a three-point rating. You accrue the points on a per-year basis.

[Staff recruitment and preparation]

We've had very significant difficulties staffing schools in remote locations, particularly for people with specialist qualifications, specialist guidance personnel, people with specific subjects in secondary; of note would be maths and science.

The University of Technology in this state runs a rural internship program which we support strongly. It involves students in their final year of pre-service education being placed in rural locations. Often it's students that come from rural locations. That, in itself, is a touch problematic because, anecdotally, we've detected a reduction in the number of students coming from rural locations considering teaching as a vocation; and that's of concern to us, because if they don't come from rural and remote locations, they're less likely to return.

[Female staff]

I'll just move on to the third issue. The other issues that I've tabled there, you can read and I'm happy to answer questions on them. 73% now of our membership - we cover 96% of people who are eligible to be members of our union. 73% of our membership are women. The placement of women in rural and remote locations has been very problematic. Of course, we would encourage a strong representation of women in rural and remote parts of the state but, unfortunately, issues of housing security, professional isolation, access to child care and community support have made rural and remote placement quite difficult, for self-evident reasons.

The Centre of Leadership Excellence, which is a departmental organisation, has run a work-shadowing program for women in this state. It's been very successful over a period of time, and we strongly support those career development initiatives which involve placement in rural and remote schools.

That leads me to - I'm actually trying to keep this to 10 minutes, so - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: You can keep going. Fine, thanks.

MR MACKIE: - - - you can question me at length. I'm happy to respond. That brings me to, probably, the most serious issue that we face, and that's students with disabilities, Indigenous children, children from ethnic and religious minorities. We focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students probably because of the magnitude of the problem. There are issues of students with disabilities but if I was asked to rank the issues that we face as an organisation, the most significant issue would be issues related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

[Indigenous students]

Noel Pearson, who's a leading Aboriginal activist, has made a significant political issue in this state at recent times of the dysfunctionality, for want of better words, of Aboriginal communities and what that costs in social terms. I think, to capture that, I'll alert you to one fact which I found quite appalling.

Last year, in Gulf and Torres Strait schools, not a single student qualified for tertiary entrance ranking. A student in Year 12 going on to tertiary education in this state gets a ranking from 1 to 25. A student with a ranking of 25 would be very unlikely to gain a tertiary place. The lowest ranking which students gain tertiary placement with would probably be in the ballpark of 16, 17, 18, 19, something like that, depending on the course. We couldn't identify a single student who actually qualified; that means, met the criteria to even get a placement on the ranking. If that doesn't set alarm bells ringing, I don't know what does.

Levels of absenteeism, inappropriateness of the curriculum, the scarcity of teachers with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education expertise, the absolute - I use the word "dysfunctionality" again but the lack of capacity of government departments to coordinate their support for these communities, in my personal view, is a national disgrace, and something needs to be done about that.

The government has announced, in response to the Noel Pearson claims, a review of education in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We strongly support that view. There is a widely-held belief that the offering for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must change and must change dramatically, and we all pay a great social cost for the problems that we see in evidence.

[Students with disabilities]

Moving on then to students with disabilities. The problem with students with disabilities is the low incidence, and when you spread that across rural and remote locations, it becomes very much an individual allocative problem. I think it would be fair to say that this state government has responded well to issues of students with disabilities in rural locations. If you were to combine the problems of Aboriginality and disability, and there are some cases where you see students with reasonably high-level disabilities and multiple disabilities in Aboriginal communities, that's two problems compounding each other; one dealt with reasonably well, the other dealt with poorly, as I've previously mentioned. They can be very, very - well, they bring you to tears, those sorts of situations, because of the situations those children find themselves in.

[Staff diversity]

Just lastly I was asked to comment on the issue of cultural diversity. The cultural diversity of the teaching population in Queensland is very limited, as is its age diversity. The average age of teachers in Queensland is 42. The standard deviation is quite low; I don't have any accurate data on that but most people are clustered around their late 30s to mid-40s. They're all white and they're all middle class. That's a pretty sweeping statement but, generally speaking, people who are from non-English speaking backgrounds, people from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, people who've done it hard as youngsters and can empathise with the situation that they find when they're teaching are very thin on the ground.

It's my strongly-held belief that changes to the HECS system of payments to families has limited the number of students from low socio-economic backgrounds or non-English speaking backgrounds, contemplating tertiary education. I don't have any empirical evidence to back that up but you often see beginning teachers in new cars that dad has bought. You don't often see teachers from the same sort of social background that I came from, which was pretty poor working class; they don't tend to enter teaching these days. I got there by way of scholarship; those scholarships are no longer available, and poor families don't contemplate the prospect of a \$10, \$20, \$30 thousand debt very well.

[Tertiary access]

For families in rural and remote parts of the state, gaining tertiary placement for their children is all but prohibitive. I can cite plenty of examples of teachers who have two reasonable incomes, are living in rural and remote parts of the state, that find it quite a significant struggle to send one or two children to university in the city. I mean, that's an issue that relates to people actually coming from the bush and going back to the bush to teach.

With that, I'll conclude the remarks and I very much welcome any questions that you have about my experiences. I've visited nearly every school in this state over a long period of time, so I'm pretty familiar with what goes on. Thanks.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Ian. Visiting every school in the state is quite a task.

MR MACKIE: You're not wrong.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I agree with you on this means test for financial assistance, it's wrong. I mean, it's got to be made much more flexible, because you get, as you say, teachers coming in to country schools and their wife has to get a second job and then they means test them out of it; and that happens not only with teachers, right across. I agree with that.

I just make one comment about the Gulf and Cape children not going on to tertiary. I believe, and they're now researching it, there is very poor data on the number of remote and isolated children who do make the grade, and I think this comes because there are so many grade 10 schools in those areas or no schools at all, and they move into boarding schools in Cairns, they move into boarding schools in the Atherton Tablelands, they go south. I take your point, and I've been up there, I agree with you, but I do think that the ones that go through we lose track of, we miss, and it's the ones behind that we realise - and there's a great need for a lot many more but we do have some wonderful successful with Aborigine and Islander and these remote kids do go in through but they don't look as though they've come from that area but they actually do. I'd like to have more talk with you later about that.

MR MACKIE: John Anderson, who was the person asked to head up a group reviewing Gulf and Torres Strait school operation, did a search of the communities to identify families that could identify a child in the family - people who remain in the community, who have, say, an 18-year-old or 17-year-old who actually qualified for a tertiary entrance school. He did that recently and he couldn't find anybody - The Courier Mail did that as well, and they found five. So if you look at the population there - and if the Courier Mail can find five and a departmental person can find none, then I think we're talking handfuls of students, not hundreds.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes, I agree but I was just making that point.

MR MACKIE: Yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR MACKIE: They can fall through the cracks but - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: No, they don't fall through the cracks but they are not - we should do more work, or someone should be making to assist this even better because - I take your point and, I agree with you, there are not enough but some are making it through.

MR MACKIE: Sure.

THE COMMISSIONER: I've got a few things for you, Ian, obviously.

MR MACKIE: Thanks.

[Staff accommodation]

THE COMMISSIONER: The first thing is the incentive question, if we can go to that. It seemed to us, as we went round talking to teachers, that the housing situation is perhaps the gravest disincentive.

MR MACKIE: Because of the quality?

THE COMMISSIONER: The quality - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes, and the maintenance.

THE COMMISSIONER: - - - the maintenance, shared housing arrangements. I mean, I made the comment to the Education Department people this morning and they actually agreed with me, that, having now gone to most states, we've still got Victoria and Tassie to do, but they're the least remote of any of the states - I think the teacher housing here is probably the worst of any place that I've seen. Within Queensland, teacher housing is also worse than other forms of state government housing, such as police and health people.

MR MACKIE: I'll alert you to the history of that. I've worked on the issue of teacher housing for nearly 20 years. Previously, prior to about 1980, there was no housing, and you - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: At all?

MR MACKIE: At all. So you were at the whim of the local community, you boarded, slept on verandahs; those sorts of things. There was principal housing, so the principal of the school was guaranteed housing, but for single teacher housing, married teacher housing, prior

to 1980, it was very, very thin on the ground. There was a bit. If you want it definitively prior to such and such a date, probably in the mid-70s, there was a famous dispute here called the Pasher dispute which related to housing for single teachers. That would have been about 74, I think.

From 74 to about 80, there were modest improvements but just really not much at all. I moved to Blackwater in 1980 and was married. There was no married teacher housing, so we were basically at the whim of the community. We fought hard and, over a period of about four years, we got quite strong commitments to teacher housing. I would say, for about four to six years, our housing was superior to - and there were more numerous stocks of teacher housing through those years.

What happened then was, a lot of the other government departments played catch-up and were given equivalent housing but for that point in time. So houses that were built in the late 80s, early 90s are 10 years old and they're in reasonable conditions. Those that were built 20 years ago are the sort of ones that - 20, 25 years ago, the ones that you've seen, they're in pretty ramshackle condition; there's been very limited maintenance of them, not much by way of upgrading. We cooperated with the department for a sell-off of principal housing. They used to have housing on the Gold Coast, teacher housing on the Gold Coast for principals, so we - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: That's a hardship spot.

MR MACKIE: Yes. We worked with them to sell off about \$10 million worth of housing, and that money was injected into rural and remote locations, but that's the last time there's been any major tranche of money for teacher housing.

The most recent budget is very, very tight but teacher housing is one of the areas where there was quite a substantial improvement. I don't know if the departmental people told you that this morning - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, it's \$4 million to \$8 million, so it's doubled.

MR MACKIE: Yes. They roughly doubled it but \$8 million still won't go a long way, particularly in some locations where housing is - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Half a dozen (indistinct)

MR MACKIE: Yes, and it's quarter of a million dollars per house by the time you grapple with the transport issues. In a lot of ways, when we started campaigning for cash incentives for teachers, we had the issue

of housing pretty much put to bed. Now, we've had modest gains in the area of cash incentives for people to go to those remote locations but housing - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: Is falling back.

MR MACKIE: - - - is dilapidated, and there are quite serious security, health and hygiene issues, maintenance issues, that I've borne witness to, particularly in tropical areas, where there are issues of mosquitoes. There are some quite serious health issues in some of those locations.

THE COMMISSIONER: Is it normal for police and Health Department people to be sharing houses or is this just for the teachers? I was surprised that in these places people basically get arranged in the housing, three or four teachers in a house. One person that we spoke to has been forced to move three times in the last term, as teachers have come and gone and they've had to rearrange the housing to suit gender and other considerations.

MR MACKIE: I actually think I'm aware of the case that you refer to. That wouldn't be normal but there would be a number of cases a year that that's a problem - so there are a lot of stocks. I mean, I don't know off the top of my head how many - the total stocks of teacher housing there are. There might be 4, 5 thousand units of housing, I'm not sure - no, that wouldn't be correct; it wouldn't be that many. I couldn't be quoted on a figure but it's a lot. So some of it works pretty fine, it's good quality housing. But where it's bad, it's really awful. I mean, I think that's a way of describing it.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR MACKIE: The changing nature of the workforce has exacerbated the problem. When I went teaching first, we were all young fit blokes and if we had to doss down four to a house, it didn't bother us, because that was what we were used to. But people are now much older, they're more established, they've got more furniture, their expectations are greater.

THE COMMISSIONER: Might even have kids.

MR MACKIE: Have children. Those sorts of issues the department has not coped with well at all, not coped with well at all. We fought some pretty awful battles over the years. Things like, you know, "The principal has got a four-wheel drive but he's not allowed to use it for other than school business." If he takes the four-wheel drive to - say he's in Boulia, he takes the four-wheel drive to Longreach or if he's in Biddouri and takes the four-wheel drive to Longreach, somebody dobs

him in and we've got a CJC investigation on our hands. Whereas he's got a beat-up old Holden, he can't drive that to Longreach. Those sorts of things, transport and housing are really threshold issues for some of our members.

THE COMMISSIONER: Certainly, the issue of housing was raised with us much more regularly as a more significant issue than the incentive packages, than the dollars. I must say, people were saying that they may go to a place for the incentive package but they don't stay there, because of the housing. So they'll stay for their two years and go; whereas, if the housing were better, they may be inclined to stay three or four.

MR MACKIE: Yes, I think that's true, and it's a threshold issue. As I say, until that's resolved, we're going to have disgruntled people.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Or no people out there.

MR MACKIE: Yes. Well, there's one in - I think you went to Doomadgee.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR MACKIE: There's one in Doomadgee that's full of white ants - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR MACKIE: - - - but we've not been able to resolve that issue, they just leave it there, and it's quite appalling, quite appalling.

THE COMMISSIONER: Apparently - the Education Department said this morning that one new house at Doomadgee is part of the program for this year's \$8 million. I assume it's to replace that particular place.

MR MACKIE: Yes. I think we might get a result there. I had a problem in Mornington Island a while ago, which was just incredible, security problem. You may as well have not locked the house because you could get into it just about any which way, and it took ages to get it resolved, like, almost you've got to threaten to go on strike to get simple things like security screens and the like.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

[Staff diversity]

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: One other thing is, you say, 73% of teachers are women. In today's world with broken families, I mean, I think it's very important for them to have at least one male role - are

there any incentives - because we've often felt that this was necessary - any incentives to attract men back into the teaching force?

MR MACKIE: No, there are none. It's basically - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: We didn't have time this morning. It's something that I feel quite strongly about.

MR MACKIE: There aren't, there aren't any. It's a difficult issue because - I mean, you take my situation, if I raise the issue of more men teaching you get hammered by the - you know, sort of, the left feminist forces say that that's an inappropriate thing to say. But the way we get around that is to say the teaching population should, more adequately, represent the whole population; so it should be more men, there should be more people from non-English speaking backgrounds, there should be more Aboriginal children, there should be people from low socio-economic backgrounds and, you know, rich people. If Lachlan Murdoch wants to come teaching, we'd welcome him.

[Flexible school year]

THE COMMISSIONER: Moving on to the question of attendance which you've raised in this - again, there's a major problem with absenteeism in many places, particularly the Indigenous communities. One of the issues that was raised with us is the question of flexibility, not only of the school day but of the school year. There are some schools that, under the schools program, which, I'm sure you're aware, is working 8.00 till 2.00, rather than the other hours - - -

MR MACKIE: Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: So that I think that there's certainly evidence of greater flexibility being introduced in relation to the day but at the moment there is no flexibility about the school year. It's been said to us that part of the problem with absenteeism is that there are particular times when - it's not that the kids aren't going to school but the kids aren't even in town. In some communities, the reverse of the others, in that in some communities, the wet is when everybody is in town because they can't travel, the roads are cut, and so they're in town at that time of the year and not during the dry. In other communities, it's the reverse; that they're in town during the dry, because they can actually get in and out, but not during the wet.

It was suggested to us that schools may be better to have the flexibility to design the school year around when the kids are there, making allowance for those kinds of seasonal variations or ceremonial responsibilities in Aboriginal communities or other kinds of events, like rodeos and shows in different parts of the country, and particularly

sports festivals. What's the union's attitude towards allowing that greater degree of flexibility in the school year?

MR MACKIE: Absolute frustration, because we've repeatedly proposed the very things you speak about.

THE COMMISSIONER: Right. Okay. Well, it's good to know, because I thought the union might be fixed on - - -

MR MACKIE: The problem is not with us, the problem is with the bureaucracy.

THE COMMISSIONER: Right. Okay. Good.

MR MACKIE: We've repeatedly proposed exactly what you outline, change the holidays, change the length of the week. A lot of communities want to work longer days but Monday to Thursday, and we've just been knocked back on every occasion. The only possibility is to move within the existing parameters, which - about the limit - is to move it to 8.00 to 2.00, which a lot of schools are doing. Some don't have a lunch, work through till lunch and then have no afternoon; and that's possible under the current guidelines but beyond that there is no flexibility whatsoever, and - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: What's the reason for it?

MR MACKIE: Bureaucratic intransigence.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: There's some flexibility in the fact that they start early and finish at 2 o'clock in some rural areas but this business of moving it around the year - - -

MR MACKIE: We track the enrolments of schools very closely because it's an issue that we're very sensitive to. Without naming a school, on Monday of this week there was a school with 13 teachers and 11 students. You've got to wonder what the hell is going on in those sorts of situations. It's just - you know, students' learning is totally disrupted, their amount of time in school is nowhere near what you'd get in a city location, and something has got to be done about it. We're tired of - we actually get blamed quite often, they say, "Well, the union wouldn't tolerate that," but we can produce evidence on numerous occasions where we've actually put the suggestion forward and it's gone nowhere.

THE COMMISSIONER: Even some of the larger towns amongst non-Indigenous communities, where there's a fortnightly RDO [rostered day off], it's said that people leave town, so the kids go.

MR MACKIE: Exactly.

THE COMMISSIONER: It would make more sense to work a nine-day fortnight in those days, recognising that the families are likely to leave town.

MR MACKIE: An issue that you may not be aware of is, actually, the length of the school year in this country is one of the longest in the world. I actually think that is a problem for the status of the teaching profession. We're very closely related to child care, which has a very low status in this community. Now, I don't agree with that, I think child care should have a very high status, but child care is a very low status, and because the school year is so long, we're considered child care workers. In fact, professional educators, because they share the community's low status perception of child care, take umbrage at being perceived as child care workers, which is sort of a bizarre - you know, it's a bit like the pot calling the kettle black in some ways.

Just to give you a feel for it, the school year in this country is between 200 and 205 days long, it's about 203, I think the longest is South Australia, from memory, but the shortest is in France, which is 146. Ireland is about 158. Most other countries are 180, 190. So most other first-world countries have a school year that's substantially shorter than ours.

THE COMMISSIONER: Do they have longer days?

MR MACKIE: There's some flexibility around the days, yes, but I think that issue of the length of the school year, the flexibility of placement of the school year, the input of local decision-making on the structure and nature of the school year - there's just none of that here. If you go to England, different counties have holidays at different times, their days are structured differently, there's a lot of local input into how the school year is structured. We would support that, provided it wasn't modelled to make the year longer and make us more like child care workers.

THE COMMISSIONER: I think that's absolutely fair enough but, I mean, to have the flexibility of longer days and fewer of them, I would have thought, would suit communities, if it gets the kids there. It would probably suit teachers in remote areas too because, in fact, they'd have longer periods to get out of the remote communities and come back to bigger towns. It would probably be welcomed by the tourist industry if more people are moving around, more evenly-spread throughout the year. As you say, all I can see is bureaucratic inflexibility as the reason why it's not happening.

MR MACKIE: Lockhart River and Pompوراaw - Edward River is the name of the community, Pompوراaw is the name of the school. Both of those places put forward proposals for four-day weeks, longer days, and the bureaucratic response was, "If they do it, everyone will want to do it on the Cape."

THE COMMISSIONER: So what?

MR MACKIE: Exactly. So it was stopped in its tracks because of that reason.

THE COMMISSIONER: Okay, I'm glad, Ian, because I had thought that it may have been a union issue about trying to get complete synchronicity right across the system, for some reason that I couldn't understand.

MR MACKIE: The reverse is true.

THE COMMISSIONER: The reverse. Okay. Thanks. Are there any other areas where absenteeism, do you think, could be addressed by other forms of innovative approach from education authorities?

[Vocational education]

MR MACKIE: Well, how long have you got? I think the relevance of the curriculum is something that needs to be addressed, particularly, the issue of the inclusion of vocational education and training subjects in the schools in the post-compulsory years. That area, and skilled to work initiatives, greater liaison with the industry, greater knowledge of teachers of, industry opportunities and, you know, economic sort of possibilities. That whole area, while there have been reviews and there's currently a document that the government is looking at with respect to funding, those models - that whole area is in its infancy and because of high unemployment, I think this is a critical issue because senior secondary schooling is still trying to cast off the shackles of, "It's all about academia."

Academia is good and an academic rigour should be encouraged but it's also cheap. To teach academic subjects, you basically need blackboards and chalk. Beyond that, it's a bit - you know, you'd like computers and stuff but you can get away with teaching applied maths, which is my area, with chalk and blackboard, cheap; large groups, cheap. Whereas, VocEd, you know, TAFE sort of subjects are very expensive, but they're relevant. So what we need is a model that allows a much more relevant curriculum for those students, so they can pick up a bit of academia but also pick up tourism and hospitality, metals, information technology, they can do all those sorts of things, and they're not limited to, "Well, we're really out in the bush

here, so we'll do maths and science and English." I think that's a big issue that would increase attendance because students would see far greater rewards.

[3.35 pm]

[Other curriculum issues]

Rural studies as well - there are some good programs in rural studies but there needs to be a greater emphasis on rural studies. So that's an area - and something that's near and dear to me is - I don't want to harp back to the length of the school year but I think there's a relationship here. I think school should be like an extended family for children. When you go to school you should feel at home. One of the problems that the schools have is because of pressure of work and all those sorts of things. Schools have sort of narrowed their focus to teaching and learning and have tried hard to not focus on welfare sort of issues.

So things like sport and culture and those sort of really important aspects of life, I think are being neglected in the curriculum because of the overemphasis on the three Rs and those sorts of things. Students who might not be a rocket scientist but they might well be another Sidney Nolan or they might well be another Dame Joan Sutherland, or they might run the 100 metres in under 9.8 seconds, whatever the world record is. There doesn't seem to be enough for them in the curriculum so teachers agonise over this. I heard Beazley talk about it recently, you know, talking about the age of teachers and that school sport is out the window because most teachers can barely manage a canter across the paddock.

I think there's a lot in that. My view of school is that - my vision of schooling is that it should be much longer in the day but the school year should be much shorter. So teachers should have a lot of responsibility for, what I call, welfare and cultural, social, physical development issues. Unfortunately, that's not the way our school system has moved.

THE COMMISSIONER: Your mentioning of training in vocational education is something, again, we've picked up constantly. There seems to be a problem in country areas, though, in that TAFE courses are only available for 15 and overs.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: They can't go into TAFE until they're 16, and yet it's the 13, 14, 15, which were just so necessary that the children be given hands-on vocational training.

THE COMMISSIONER: Do you have - the union or you, personally - any views on the school, TAFE interaction?

MR MACKIE: I think the reason there's that bureaucratic impasse is just a financial one. The moment you extend it to 13, 14 and 15-year-olds, it's going to cost you a lot more money.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: It's to do with the fact that they become adults in the professions - - -

MR MACKIE: I think that's an excuse, not a reason.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Fair enough if it is because it seems to me just an excuse, too but that was the excuse given to us.

MR MACKIE: I think it's the excuse, not the reason. The reason, I think, is related to: we've got a certain bucket and if we spread it too thinly, it won't have sufficient impact. We're strongly supportive of the notion that vocational education should be available much lower in the curriculum. For some students - you take Arukun, they only go to grade 10, so they've got to fight tooth and nail to get access to VocEd money, when they shouldn't have to.

A lot of the youngsters who are actually in Year 9 are actually 17 years of age. Some of them, unfortunately, don't even know how old they are which is a comment on the sort of social situation in that particular place. You've got kids with beards in grade 9; boys with beards can't get VocEd money. I mean, what's going on here? So, yes, we would support that.

THE COMMISSIONER: Particularly - I've mentioned this repeatedly because I just couldn't believe it: - that fantastic TAFE at Normanton with excellent facilities; a terrific carpentry workshop that has not had a course for two years; a terrific metal workshop that has not had a course for one year; and there's schools - - -

MR MACKIE: And a town full of kids dying to do it.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: And houses falling down where they need painters and plumbers, and everything else. This is where they'd have ongoing jobs building for the community; real jobs.

MR MACKIE: In this state, we can't even coordinate the state infrastructure, let alone federal money which - TAFE is state infrastructure but the money comes from the feds; federal, state and local community-type money. It's beyond the bureaucrats and I've said, indirectly, to Noel Pearson - you'll see, he's going to rattle the can over all these issues, all this stuff. There needs to be far greater local control, coordination and bright people at a local level - and there's

plenty of them - need to be listened to and that sort of coordination needs to be done locally.

So the mayor of that shire should get up and say, "This is wrong. Something needs to be done about it." The bureaucracy should be responsive to that, or the local progress association or, you know, who knows; somebody at a local level who can identify the problem needs to be listened to; unfortunately they're not. My time's up, is it?

THE COMMISSIONER: I think it's up; yes. I think we've gone a bit over.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Just one question: you fully support distance ed and virtual schools. I just see a problem sometimes with - it's very easy to deliver information into rural communities by technology but I will say that if they need teachers in city schools, they should have teachers in rural schools. You can see a danger of - you have it on distance ed or you have it in your virtual school, now you don't need teachers out there. I think that would be absolutely appalling.

MR MACKIE: I agree with you but - and we've tried to quarantine it to those areas that we know are in dire shortage. To take my example, I'm an applied maths and physics teacher. We're very, very few and far between. Actually, in the city schools, they're shy of physics teachers, so if you want to deliver physics to say, Quilpie, you're just not going to find somebody; it's impossible. So if we can get a physics teacher ensconced in Brisbane, he can deliver to Quilpie and a few other locations with 12 or 13 children in real time. So the teacher is all but there physically, so you can talk to them, live exchange. That's better than having no program and no teacher at all.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I just put to you that I think it's absolutely essential that there be a teacher there to be able to supervise; because you couldn't just say to a group of children of 13 in a city school, "Go in there and we'll put it on video." So I think it's most important because the teachers there are very busy. It's just a point I just felt that - - -

MR MACKIE: I was misunderstanding what you were saying; a teacher to assist the students with their study and the expertise comes down the line.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Absolutely.

MR MACKIE: I agree with you; yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

MR MACKIE: Thank you.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks for coming along and for your time.

MR MACKIE: That's fine.

THE COMMISSIONER: You might be next. Who are you? I'm not sure. How do you do?

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: How do you do.

MR BOLTON: I didn't get your name?

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Pearl Logan.

THE COMMISSIONER: Chris Sidoti. Alan thanks very much - not Alan, Dan.

MR BOLTON: Alan's my boss.

THE COMMISSIONER: Alan's your boss. Thanks very much, Dan, for coming in.

MR BOLTON: I've got some transparencies but it looks like it's not quite as formal as that so it might be better just to present it - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: There are facilities here.

MR BOLTON: I saw that; probably better just to handle it a bit more casually and a bit more informally.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, however you like by way of introduction and then we can have a bit of a chat with you.

[Rural and remote Catholic schools]

MR BOLTON: Dan Bolton is my name and I work for the secretariat to the Queensland Catholic Education Commission. The Queensland Catholic Education Commission is responsible for Catholic education throughout Queensland. It doesn't actually administer any schools. The schools are administered, either by independent Catholic schools or diocesan education authorities and they are fiercely independent and fiercely autonomous, so there's a fairly loose coordination amongst that group of schools and diocese.

In remote areas in Queensland we have 28 schools, 2,531 students. In rural areas we've got 68 schools with 15,812 students, so we're a fairly significant player. Not nearly as significant as Education

Queensland but we do have some schools in fairly isolated and rural locations. In both rural and remote areas we have 951 students that come from an Indigenous background and students that are ascertained at levels 5 and 6, which is a special education category; 245 students, all of remote and rural schools. So that's where we're coming from.

Just a bit of context, as we see it, from Catholic Education. We see that the bush is attempting to adjust to pressures that have resulted from economic rationalism, mainly from government initiatives which are trying to expose Australian industry and agriculture to international competition. This has caused rationalisation in the bush; closure, shrinkage, relocation; and rationalisation of businesses, services, government services; all in an attempt to consolidate operations in the interest of greater efficiency.

This has made living in remote and rural Australia less attractive to a number of people, including teachers and parents of children, and it's also made access to educational services more difficult and all those ancillary services that surround educational services. You've heard this many times today but the fundamental issue is that distances provide a tyranny and a barrier to the provision of educational services and we see it as a social justice issue, the provision of that access.

Just in summary, regarding the context of education in remote and rural Australia. We say the government policy which explicitly or implicitly puts barriers in the way of equitable and affordable access to quality education contributes to a scenario which is, essentially, discriminatory. We do see it as a government initiative which is putting barriers there.

[Staffing]

We'll go on to the issue of staffing. Teachers that you talk to from time to time see living and teaching in geographically and culturally isolated areas - they see it as living in professional and social isolation and they don't want to teach there for the most part. Young and inexperienced teachers form the bulk of the staff in our isolated schools, and while we appreciate that youth brings a certain vitality to education, it is not much of a preparation for dealing with learning difficulties, particularly where cultural differences apply or where learning disabilities apply.

We offer incentives to teachers in rural schools as what are called, RAIS, Remote Area Incentive Scheme. In most cases, our incentives include only an additional bit of funding in the salary package. Sometimes we can supply incentives in the way of accommodation, but in all cases we can't match those that are on offer

from Education Queensland. So we're a bit of a weakened player when it comes to competing for the same small group of teachers who are willing to teach in remote and rural areas. While the competition is not endorsed by either, Education Queensland or by ourselves, in fact it exists.

[Support staff]

The availability for staff for support services, such as support with English as a Second Language; support for learning difficulties; support for a whole range of services is very, very limited. Special staff are sometimes shared between the systems but they're generally hired by Education Queensland and we get them when they're not occupied with Education Queensland, which is very rare indeed. Other specialist services which were available from the Queensland Department of Health are becoming scarcer and scarcer because of the shrinkage and the consolidation of health services in remote and rural communities.

Of particular concern is the lack of suitably qualified teachers with, themselves, an Indigenous background. This means that Indigenous students rarely have the opportunity to experience education opportunities where the teacher can identify with their particular needs from an Indigenous perspective and a cultural perspective. I'm going to skip over travel time and cost because it's a big issue and you've heard it about a million times today and you're getting towards the end of a long day; and I'll skip over geographic and cultural isolation.

[Information technology]

Information technology, which is one of the terms of reference; it's our greatest single opportunity to improve educational delivery to remote and rural Australia. We need improved access which would allow a greater diversity of curriculum materials to be delivered on-line; but in the most isolated areas inadequate telephone linkages, uncertain power supply and the cost of satellite technology prohibits access to information technology, and those are the people that are most in need, the people in places like Barcaldine and Quilpie and some of the most isolated areas.

Catholic schools were not included in a government contract which is referred to as Connect Ed, which supplied on-line communication technology to every government school. We weren't included in that and we haven't the resources available to make every school connect on-line, in terms of communication technology; and we feel that our students are disadvantaged further and further and falling behind. I think the solution to the information technology bugbear is the insurance from government support - insurance of low cost high band with access to on-line communication to all Australians. It's been

suggested for the non-government sector that it be included as a special targeted bucket of money in the capital programs assistance.

[Distance education]

Distance education; we're not a provider of distance education. We're very, very happy with the quality of distance education provided by Education Queensland. We hear from parents who are in fact Catholic parents of children - who may eventually send them to boarding schools - that it is consistently of high standard. There have been a lot of concerns expressed by parents of senior students in the upper secondary schools regarding the provision of vocational education through the distance education mode. The range of subjects offered is not always great and religious education is not provided at all by distance education mode.

[Boarding]

The last thing that I wanted to mention which is peculiar to Catholic schools; because we are in partnership with a number of Catholic boarding schools, the rural downturn, the rural economy, has meant that many parents who formerly would have sent children to boarding schools, are no longer doing so. Rural and remote Australia was the primary clientele of boarding schools up until about 1985. Since that time, we're tending to get many more students from metropolitan areas who come from troubled social and emotional backgrounds. That's what we're seeing in our boarding schools these days, those that have survived. Many of our boarding schools have had to close because the traditional client group just can't afford it any more.

I'll hand you over these notes. There is some additional material there which is stuff that you've probably heard about a hundred times today.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Thanks for your comments.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I don't know actually questions, but just to follow up on the Connect Ed, has there been any breakthrough at all for other - - -

MR BOLTON: I wish there was. No, there hasn't been.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: None at all? It just seemed to me that it was supposed to be available to all. Even with providers in rural areas, there hasn't even been any assistance, as I understand it - - -

MR BOLTON: That would be the case; yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: - - - given to any of them.

MR BOLTON: You mean Internet service providers?

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR BOLTON: Yes; that would be the case.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: That's definitely discriminatory, I think.

[Internet access]

MR BOLTON: It is discriminatory. The rhetoric from the politicians was that all of Queensland students would have access to on-line communication through Connect Ed. We questioned the politicians many times before the initiative and that was always the quotation and we have it on tape and we have it on video. We have it everywhere else but, I mean, there must have been some backsliding following because the cost must have been prohibitive or something; I don't know.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: It was put into all these areas so I really don't know where the breakdown in the bureaucracy came.

MR BOLTON: I don't either because we don't have any schools in any communities where there are not Education Queensland schools. I mean, we have some very isolated schools at Thursday Island and Palm Island, and out west but they're Education Queensland schools.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: That's right, they are BSE. It was delivered there so it just seemed as though the promise was there but it broke down somewhere and, I think, it's definitely very discriminatory.

MR BOLTON: I think it is too.

THE COMMISSIONER: Was it not possible for the Catholic system just to negotiate some add-on contract, even?

MR BOLTON: We're very poor. I'll say that at the outset, we're not a wealthy system at all and we don't have unlimited resources. It's up to schools and schools communities to determine what their priorities are, and it might be the case that an additional support teacher is a higher priority than on-line communication. Those decisions are made at the local level. So the best way I can answer that is to say that they couldn't find the funds in their budgets to do that. Some have, of course; not all schools are without on-line communication.

THE COMMISSIONER: But not through Connect Ed. I mean, I would have thought the Connect Ed contract is just so huge that the add-on costs for an individual school - - -

MR BOLTON: Would seem insignificant.

THE COMMISSIONER: - - - is insignificant, I would have thought.

MR BOLTON: It would seem insignificant.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: The thing is that those children are being denied it and it should be the right of all.

MR BOLTON: The school across the street has got everything that opens and shuts.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: That's right.

[Cross-sectoral co-operation]

THE COMMISSIONER: Your comment about the presence of Catholic schools in communities where there are already government schools, just gives rise in my mind some questions about general coordination across systems, and there are a number of issues, I think, in that that I'd just like to ask you about. One is whether there is, in fact, local coordination that goes on to enable - whether it's shared services or even exchange of teachers or students for particular subjects or particular courses, so that it's possible in smaller communities to actually reach a critical mass for particular programs.

MR BOLTON: I think the closer you get to the point where the real educational curriculum decisions are made - and that's at the school level - you'll find much more coordination, much more sharing, much more mutual planning; it's a (indistinct) issue. That's where the decisions are made and that's where the sharing occurs. The further you get away from that ideal situation, the less, let's say, mutual planning and coordination occurs. In fact, some places, the policy decision is, "These support teachers, or these specialist support teachers, are our teachers and the word is they're not to be shared with other systems." Yet, still at the local level, they are shared, so it does happen a fair bit more than what you would see from the rhetoric.

THE COMMISSIONER: What about even jointly providing a specialist teacher to run a subject?

MR BOLTON: That occurs too. We may have schools in quite remote areas where a parent is a physiotherapist, for example, and will work part-time for the Catholic school, and then word of mouth gets around

and the local Education Queensland then shares that teacher. It happens the other way, as well.

THE COMMISSIONER: If you had a small number of kids in each school who wanted to do German and there was somebody in town who taught German, would you have a joint class?

MR BOLTON: That happens in a lot of the secondary schools in rural areas, yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: Then at the higher level where, as you say, it tends to occur less, what I think that we're picking up constantly is that there are small areas where communities are missing out entirely; that obviously it's very expensive to provide education. Perhaps one example is with the development of the homeland or out-station movement for Aboriginal kids. You get many people living and moving about and there is a need there for some more innovative approaches which may even be a mobile teacher who will move between communities.

Given that the Catholic system and the state system - as you say, the Catholic system mainly operates where there are already state schools; is there even talking going on that says, "We might pull out of this area and put our resources into providing one or two mobile teachers to handle out-stations in Doomadgee"? So that, at the macro level, some sort of planning decision is made.

MR BOLTON: Makes sense, doesn't it? We do in fact deliver religious education. A visiting teacher, the flying nun - you might have heard of her - she flies and visits the stations where there are actually - the mainstream curriculum is delivered by distance education mode, and she will do a lot of religious instruction that way. So that's one innovative approach that we've taken to provide for spiritual formation of children, and of families for that matter. We haven't had system-wide talks about rationalisation in terms of, "You do it there and we'll do it there," because our basic philosophy is choice.

We provide an alternative. We provide choice for those parents that want to access a Catholic education and where we exist, we accept enrolments. I don't think we see it as competition so much as just providing an alternative or a choice for parents.

THE COMMISSIONER: Although choice is, you say, a primary principle for the Catholic system, I think an even more fundamental principle - - -

MR BOLTON: Is social justice.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes; and where people have, not only no choice but no school, I would have thought there'd be a higher priority than providing two systems for people that have got access to one already.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I think in this Doomadgee out-station where people are only now - and it's a very new thing - moving away from the main community, more or less to get away from some of the social problems that are arising there, that there might be an opening for probably the department to supply the school and, perhaps, Catholic Ed to move in to do some of the training in those schools. I mean, it could be a new innovation.

MR BOLTON: The nature of Catholic education has changed considerably in the last 50 years, because 50 years ago it was staffed almost exclusively by people with a religious vocation. A religious vocation carries along with it a lot of selfless, voluntary, mission outreach type of activities. Now, we're staffed 99% by lay people and while I say the will is there and the spiritual outreach capacity is still there, they're still not there - they're not going to work for a stipend and they're not going to work for a charity. Some will - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: No; what I was suggesting was, in these small areas that we could see the other day, they were moving, principally, up to Gre Gre and various places. If sufficient of them stay there, there will definitely be a criteria to establish a small school; but because of the nature of it, I wondered if four-wheel drive vehicles or mobile units, that could move about, could be jointly staffed. I didn't mean a lowering of the standards of teaching or teachers - - -

MR BOLTON: It's certainly a possibility.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: - - - I meant a new, innovative approach to these areas where I can see there is a need for Catholic Ed to give a choice. It's going to be something quite new but it's something that could come there.

MR BOLTON: I'll keep my eyes on that; keep my ear to the ground with that situation because it is something that we would very definitely be interested in.

[Community relations]

THE COMMISSIONER: In the communities where Catholic Ed is, as you mentioned, there's a government school as well, are you finding that there is any consistent pattern of decisions by families about which schools they will choose, other than a religious factor? Better to be more specific, rather than beating around the bush. In some parts of

Australia, it appears that local communities are deciding that one school - and it varies which one - is the white school and the other school is the black school. Are you finding that in the dual systems schools in remote areas in Queensland?

MR BOLTON: There's a number of issues and a big can of worms there. I think you're probably right. I think it's a fairly reproducing pattern in a number of small communities. I don't see it so much on Caucasian, Indigenous grounds, as I do perhaps on class grounds. Unfortunately, Catholic schools, because they charge tuition and can make greater demands in terms of wearing uniforms and behaviour standards and so on and so forth - I hate to generalise a lot from this but they're sometimes seen as the school where the wealthy kids go; because it takes a conscious decision to send your child to a Catholic school and that conscious decision implies a whole lot behind that decision: like, you're going to support your children; you're going to ensure that they do their homework; you're going to pay the fees for excursions; and all those sorts of things because you're making - this is a gross generalisation and I'd hate to be quoted on this but there is that perception, I think, by the community and it's just not true. I mean, Catholic schools do waive fees and do offer free education to many kids so, yes, it could be a community perception.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: There are many Catholic schools that collect a lot of these children in and only because of the work done within their community - - -

MR BOLTON: The pastoral approach, yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: - - - to bring these children in. I mean, I know many situations like that. They actually have a much better rapport with the community than the state schools, not because of the quality of the education but the fact that the state school people are moving all the time, whereas the independent school there is supported by a community that's stable.

MR BOLTON: The other thing is that the school is actually the decision-making body and that school includes the whole school community, which is parents and children, teachers and everyone else, simply because we don't have the huge infrastructure - the bureaucracy - which is there as a decision-making body. We don't have that bureaucracy. Some decisions are made at diocesan level but for the most part the important decisions about the educational future of the school is actually made at the school.

That involves a whole consultation process with parents and they're actually part of it, and feel part of those communities, and they never feel shut out. They may voluntarily shut themselves out and

choose not to participate in that decision-making process but it's there if they want it. We do pride ourselves on taking a fairly intensive pastoral approach to the education of children, not to say that Education Queensland schools don't do that as well. I'm very pleased and complimentary of the high standard of education supply by Education Queensland.

The other issue - which you'll hear a lot of the rhetoric from Education Queensland - is about sharing resources and so on and so forth. The big push from Education Queensland, at present, is regaining their market share and you hear that quoted a lot, "We want back our market share because we're losing through leakage to the independent non-Catholic and the Catholic schools." I can understand where they're coming from but if you're on the receiving end of policy decisions which are about not sharing and not mutual planning, and all that sort of thing, it tends to be discriminatory.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: That's coming a lot from the fact that a lot more urban children who make a choice - whereas the ones who have no choice are being means tested out of the education.

MR BOLTON: True.

[Staff incentives and transfers]

THE COMMISSIONER: The last question I had, Dan, just relates to the teacher transfer part of the incentive packages. The teachers, I assume, are employed by the CEOs in each diocese, rather than by individual schools so that means - - -

MR BOLTON: It depends on the school type. For instance, Mt Isa Catholic High, they pay their own teachers.

THE COMMISSIONER: Do they?

MR BOLTON: Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: Are they systemic, though, or are they - - -

MR BOLTON: No, they're non-systemic.

THE COMMISSIONER: Non-systemic; right, okay. Systemic schools work on - - -

MR BOLTON: Systemic schools are paid, yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: So that means you can get transfers, at least, within the diocese. Are there cross diocese and transfer systems, as well?

MR BOLTON: On an informal basis, not a formal basis.

THE COMMISSIONER: So Brisbane could provide a teacher for a couple of years to a remote school in Townsville or Cairns diocese?

MR BOLTON: Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: Does that happen very often?

MR BOLTON: Not as frequently as we'd like. It's kind of funny, you don't hear a lot of whingeing from the teachers in Catholic schools in remote and rural areas about coming to Brisbane, specifically; it's more just coming to the coast. Generally, that can be handled within the diocese.

THE COMMISSIONER: Of course the diocese has bands right across the state in this state.

MR BOLTON: Yes, they go from the coast right to the border with the Northern Territory.

THE COMMISSIONER: New South Wales is not the same diocese and structure so they've had to develop arrangements for formal secondment with guaranteed jobs back, to move, say, from Lismore diocese out to Wilcannia.

MR BOLTON: I think there's an informal arrangement between diocese but there's a formal agreement within the diocese, so intra-diocesan transfers are much more common; but inter-diocesan transfers are not that common. It's a logical step to move but, for instance, Joe Macauley in Rockhampton, he's got a teacher that has spent five years in Longreach, and the teacher says, "Look, I really need to get back to Brisbane because my mother is 75 years old." Joe would intercede - he would ring up David Hutton at the Brisbane office and say, "I've got this teacher; done great service out at Longreach, see if you can put him on." There'd be the flexibility there to do that but it's a more informal thing.

THE COMMISSIONER: It's informal out there. Teachers don't have the guarantee that when they go that they don't necessarily know they can get back.

MR BOLTON: We've only had five years of continuity of long service provision between diocese so we've got a long way to go in terms of - I mean, there's a lot of good rhetoric about social justice in the Catholic church but we don't always treat our employees with the same social justice. We try to do it on the cheap.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks very much.

MR BOLTON: Thank you.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

THE COMMISSIONER: Sir, we'd just like to have a stretch for a couple of minutes before we call you on if that's all right.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Would you like to introduce yourself?

MR McDERMOTT: Yes; Terry McDermott is my name. I'm the Director of Youth Detention Operations within the Department of Family, Youth and Community Care. I'd probably like to table, firstly and formally, Keith Smith's apology, our Director-General; he can't be with us this afternoon. He's been called away to other duties so, firstly that.

THE COMMISSIONER: When you see him please pass on my regards. We worked together back in his New South Wales days.

MR McDERMOTT: I saw him five minutes ago. So, anyway, there we go. Do you want me just to - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, please.

[Education in detention]

MR McDERMOTT: Pull me up if I get over-tangential, I'm sure you will. I guess, firstly, would it be helpful just to paint the picture about youth detention, generally: three youth detention centres in Queensland. We have one in Townsville called Cleveland Youth Detention Centre; we have one in Brisbane, entitled Sir Leslie Wilson Youth Detention Centre; and also one at Wacol, John Oxford Youth Detention Centre. Just quickly, the capacities and functions of those, because it has some relation to education: mostly they're around 50 - the capacity of each facility - that's the resident capacity of those centres, around 50.

The function of Cleveland - and because this is a real relationship for rural and remote areas - it accommodates all male youth from Mackay upwards, and its functions are reception, sentence and remand. It does not take the female youth from north Queensland. Sir Leslie Wilson Youth Detention is primarily remand and a reception

centre for boys; but also it accommodates all the young women from all over Queensland, both in a reception and remand, and sentence function.

John Oxley Youth Detention Centre is basically a sentenced centre or provides a function for sentenced young men and it only receives and accommodates young men. So that's a set-up of our centres. In relation to education, there is a short history to this and it's probably important. Back in about 92, 93 - I didn't have the records before me this afternoon but basically before then, the department itself provided education. We really recruited private practitioners and the department, in relation with these private educationalists, developed protocols and provided education programs.

Subsequent to that, in about 1993, the department was able to negotiate an agreement and a memorandum of understanding with Education Queensland to provide educational services in the youth detention centres. So basically, Education Queensland provide the services. All our schools now are called registered schools. They are schools; they have a status of schools in each of the youth detention centres. Basically, over the years, they still provide literacy and numeracy. That would be the major focus, although of recent times, there's been quite substantial push towards TAFE accreditation, TAFE courses.

This is in concert with the rehabilitation, reintegration program to help kids when they go back into the community, not only to have numeracy skills but have some sort of trade or certificate that helps with their integration, so there has been a substantial push in that way. Basically, in respect to the number of teachers - as I said, they're a registered school - is up to about six full-time teachers in each of the centres. That's made up of principals, teachers, tutors and also teachers' aides. So basically there's around about six full-time teachers in the schools.

The schooling program itself is very well received by the kids; absolutely - you know, we've done a lot of research on it and most very much enjoyed the school program. Just about all kids, despite their ages - and the ages do range mainly from 14 up to about 18 or 19 - almost all kids go to school as part - you know, I realise that kids don't have to go after a certain age but almost all kids choose to go to school because of the worth of the schooling program. Kids, generally, get about between one and three hours of education each day and, as I say, it's focused on those areas.

I suppose one of the - just in terms of introduction history - important things is the infrastructure that we have in the current centres. None of the centres have purpose-built education units so, in

terms of providing a satisfactory education program, we are restricted by the actual infrastructure within the centres; but the Commissioners might know that the government has approved a multi-million dollar program for youth detention that will be completed within the next 18 months, where proper purpose-built infrastructure for both the education programs and the other programs will be built and will place us in a much better position to provide appropriate education without being, sort of, limited by space.

So that's by way of introduction. I'm happy to talk about some of the issues that are placed before remote and rural kids, and kids, generally, with their education if that's the next step. Is that the next step?

THE COMMISSIONER: I think so, yes.

MR McDERMOTT: All right. I guess some of the things that I'm about to say probably would apply to kids whether or not they're from remote, rural, but I'll also talk about the rural kids. I guess that a lot of the kids who do come into detention, whether they be remote or rural, do have major education deficits without doubt. Assessments are done by the Education Department to develop an education program for those young kids. Of course, that program is much determined by the length of stay that the young person might have in detention and that provides some difficulty. Sometimes you don't know because the kids are on remand but an attempt is made to, despite those contextual things, develop a program for the young person.

So the kid enters an education program and all the deficits that may have applied in the community before with the schooling problems, attention is given to those. I think major gains are made, that's the way the Education Department reported to me with these young people. One of the major difficulties, of course, is that when they do go home, for the gains that are made in there within the centres, to have them applied in the teaching situations back home, the problem with continuity that applies.

Another one that, particularly for the Cape kids, the kids from the Cape or the remote areas, a lot of the schooling that we provide here in the major provincial areas are not the Murri way. A lot of the kids like to wander around the classroom and do their own thing and, honestly, it takes a while for the kids to settle, particularly up at Cleveland, in the way that school is conducted. Concessions are made but there's still a learning process and things like that. Further, one of the things we do find that's a problem is sometimes with kids from the Cape community, English as a second language. So that does provide a problem with respect to the young people. We try our best to get around that but that certainly does provide a lot of difficulties.

I think probably they're the main ones. With a little bit of prompting a few more might come to mind but they're, I think, the obvious ones: the settling in; the continuity; and the cultural ways and the habits that the kids bring, as opposed to what usual schooling presents itself.

THE COMMISSIONER: What proportion of the detainees would be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders?

MR McDERMOTT: Up north, I'm happy to say that I did some research only a couple of weeks ago and what I discovered with the Cape, that we had some 40 kids - I'll just give you the figures, you might be interested in them: some 40 kids up at Cleveland; 22 of those came from the Cairns catchment area; 10 of those came from the remote communities; that is the Thursday Island, Arukun, those areas. So that was the proportion for Cleveland and that's probably the best indicator for up north in respect to that. In Brisbane it would be, obviously, different but you don't have the remote kids come to Brisbane; the boys at least, anyway.

[Indigenous staff]

THE COMMISSIONER: Does the Education Department make efforts to ensure that some of the teachers or teachers' aides are Aboriginal?

MR McDERMOTT: Not only that but also that the teachers are right for the place. We've had a lot of discussions about - that we want the best possible teachers for the kids, be they Indigenous or whatever. I can't give you the figures about the north. I rarely go out to the detention centres. I'd probably just by - you know, just anecdotal - I don't have the figures and things like that but just by vision, I don't think there would be a lot in Brisbane; at least a lot of Indigenous teachers in Brisbane. I see those centres much more than I see Cleveland. I mainly see the principal up in Cleveland so I really don't know what the position is up there, Commissioner.

I think, despite that question, the department's push and, I think, Education Queensland has agreed, we've really got to get the right type of teacher for that setting. I think over the years we've gone a long way in that.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: The support for them, not actually teachers - the support from them, there would be a number of Indigenous or other staff within the community - - -

MR McDERMOTT: Yes; I mean, honestly, the program has been turned to us 10 months ago. Previously, the Youth Justice program, or

part of the Youth Justice and Youth Detention, was with another administration other than a government arrangement. Since it's come back to us we have sitting in my area, an Indigenous project worker whose almost sole project is to increase the number of Murri people in Youth Detention, generally, to provide that background support. We ran a major recruitment program in July to increase our Murri numbers in Youth Detention and that is being repeated right now.

We go about advertising in the Koori Mail - that's spelt with a K-land rights - just for the record. We go on 4AAA, the Murri radio; so we're really on about, generally, increasing the numbers of Murri people in Youth Detention to provide that generic support.

[Inter-departmental co-ordination]

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Getting away from that, how do you find the coordination of the various departments? Do they work together? Is it a coordinated approach or do you feel - - -

MR McDERMOTT: That's a challenging question. I think it's improving. I do think it's improving. I've been around for a little bit of time and we feel frustrated by, sometimes, the one-out approach but I think, honestly, there's a lot of forums out striving to get that integration. Mind you, my own personal opinion about striving to get integration: I think a lot of people are committed to the principle of integration but it's not cheap, either, in a sense; although you could say doing one-outers in the long term is not very cost effective.

A lot of times integration means sharing resources with other departments and if you're, sort of, stressed in your own area, sometimes you may put those needs before the integration principle. I mean, that's the way it works and it is much better. We've just created, through the last government, commitment to youth justice services. There are three new pilot services that have been set up around Queensland. This is not an area office response. Previously, kids on probation used to come into an area office and get counselled and things like - now we have youth justice centres which are a sort of accommodation in areas where actual trade skills and education, and a lot of those things are provided to young people.

That's done by several departments working together, not just by the department. DETYA comes in; Education Queensland; committee agencies come in, so really, honestly, it is getting better in what I see, anyway. So I hope that's, circumspectly, answered the question.

[Leaving detention]

THE COMMISSIONER: How does planning go for the post-release and case management in following up the education and training initiatives?

MR McDERMOTT: Post-release, generally, or - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: The post-release generally, of which education training is a part.

MR McDERMOTT: Again, we are trying to do it better. So this is really - I see, not pre-release, post-release.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR McDERMOTT: Post-release, really, is subject to the abilities of the community, that is our area officers and our youth justice centres, to provide the best type of service to the young person who leaves youth detention. I'm able to say, and I think it's been reported in the Ford report and things like that, that the department's area officers are very stressed, in terms of providing services with young people. So, good efforts are made to follow up on the gains that are made but it's not always easy because of the demand the department is faced with and the resources that it's had.

Obviously, now that the Forde inquiry has provided its findings, the government has provided a response, this year we'll get \$10 million extra to provide better services to young people. That will provide something like 70 extra family service officers in the front area office, so I think the continuity of service will be better. It would have to be with those extra staff coming on but I think it's fair to say that it would be stressed up to now.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: The staff will be there, will the resources be?

MR McDERMOTT: I mean, staff are part of the resources, aren't they?

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes, they are but there's other materials.

MR McDERMOTT: I mean, staff is just one component of it. Right at this moment, in the next couple of weeks, the break-up of that first lot of \$10 million is going to be done and it's going to go obviously for staff but it's going to go for extra programs. Particularly, I can say that in youth detention most of the money will go into extra programs in youth detention; but there will be extra programs in the community as well. So I think we'll be better able to do it, than what we had, with more resources and more money.

THE COMMISSIONER: I assume the kids leave with an individual case plan that will identify areas of education and training?

MR McDERMOTT: That's true; they have a case plan generically but also, the Education Department, when it does this successfully with a child, develops an individual education program and plan for that kid, which is then translated into the school or the area that - or relating to the school area that the kid is going back to.

[Vocational education]

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: In vocational training, is that the type of thing that - is there any emphasis put on it?

MR McDERMOTT: What's happening with that, you see, the kids in detention are getting a bit older, actually. The age has gotten older, if you can put it that way, and basically, I think, we've found that with kids going back to the community, it's all right to improve numeracy and literacy, but also if we've got the ability to provide them with some certificate that they have some training, that they will be able to put those to good use. There has been a very heavy emphasis on that in recent years. Currently, we purchase in youth detention, for each centre, some 2500 TAFE hours each year and we're trying to expand it.

So we're trying to give kids some sort of accreditation; some certificate that they can use. Some of the kids have them plastered all over the walls, we just can't keep up with them. Some of the courses that we start off - what we try to do is pick a course - it might only be a two-month course or a three-month course - that either, they can complete in the centre, given their length of sentence; or they can complete when they go home into the area where they go home. So we're trying to do it that way. Some of the courses they start, they can't complete because of the length of sentence but, I think, Youth Detention has gotten a lot better in that area.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Do you advocate TAFE going into those areas? It seemed to me, travelling and living out there - - -

MR McDERMOTT: Right at this moment there's an inter-departmental working party working on that very question, the roles and relationships of DETYA, Education Queensland and ourselves, in providing services within youth detention; right at this very moment. That paper or that research is being done - will precede a cabinet submission about the type of TAFE services that we will require in Youth Detention, and also the roles and responsibilities of the major agencies in relation to that.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I feel that if those TAFE courses were there, originally, there wouldn't be the unemployment or disinterest that would put them into the detention centres in the first place. If you, in your push, can put them there, not only will they help the ones that are

going back but they will supply an interest for the youngsters that are there to make sure that they don't get into strife.

MR McDERMOTT: That's exactly right; yes. We just try and assist them with those skills and education.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: There's a great need for TAFE to get into the vocational track.

MR McDERMOTT: I mean, yes, there is and there is a commitment, as I say, by the Director-General of DETIR, to be involved in this working party. I've been at some meetings and the Director-General of DETIR - although I'm not a member of that. The department is very committed to looking at a best practice model for TAFE-type courses in Youth Detention. It's set up, the terms of reference are set up, and we're proceeding with it. Particularly, with our new infrastructure, we're building quite - I shouldn't say large centre; a 36-bed facility out at Wacol. When that opens in about 18 months' time, we want the best possible TAFE course provided to those kids and this is the background - this working party is the background to that, to have the best practice model with TAFE and Youth Detention.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: In Mt Isa and also in Normanton, there are very well equipped TAFE colleges. There's nobody in there except the equipment and yet they are working out tertiary courses to run for the mines and those kind of people. My feeling was that the crying need was to put the children that are there into those beautiful TAFEs; give them staff; and then train them to do the ongoing jobs of plumbing and painting and carpentry.

MR McDERMOTT: We don't want the infrastructure and no teachers, that's for sure. That's why this working party is being developed. Let me say - I just want to repeat it - the director-general of DETIR, Bob Marsh, is absolutely committed because I've been at the meetings getting those courses up and running. It will be subject to a cabinet submission, obviously, but the commitment is definitely there. I mean, our department really relishes the day that we can have as many courses in those centres as possible.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks very much, Terry. Thanks for coming in.

MR McDERMOTT: Thank you.

[4.40 pm]

THE COMMISSIONER: David, do you want to come up? David, if you'd like to introduce yourself to the tape first and then you can go straight into your comments.

DR McSWAN: My name is David McSwan, I'm Director of the Rural Education Research and Development Centre, which is within the School of Education at James Cook University. The centre has been a specialist organisation in place since 1989. The School of Education, which is now an amalgamation of the former college of advanced education and the university faculty of education, carried out some of the very first programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher education back into the 70s. So we have a very long history of involvement in providing for community dwellers and the folk in western Queensland.

[Limitations of technology]

I provided you with a paper that summarises many of the things I want to say, but I'll direct our attention, if I may, to some of them. Our first point is one that we're all aware of and that schooling remains a significant problem for many families in the west. The cultural and geographic remoteness of these areas continue to be issues. The opportunity, the electronic media, to address these areas in many of our views, would still be an open question. We, to put it simply, would say technology is not the answer; it may be a crutch along the way. But there are now emerging serious limitations to what technology can and will be likely to deliver.

[Vocational education]

The next point I'd make is that we're really very interested in what happens to children when they leave school. That's partly a function of what occurs in school. So we commend strongly the TAFE secondary school integrated curriculum because we see that as a very appropriate bridge for children to enter the workforce or to become mobile as far as higher education is concerned. But there is a key issue with that, and that's, what happens after education and the training opportunity? What does education and training for children in the bush prepare them for? It's one of the chicken and egg questions. Do we have the jobs first and then the training, or the training and the jobs follow? I think we have some directions on that. One of the things I think we'd probably be looking at would be a focus on job creation, a focus on community and an understanding of mobility.

[Staff recruitment and retention]

The next point I'd make is, a continuing problem is attracting and retaining teachers and other professionals in rural areas, rural and isolated areas. In some rural areas there's not a problem; in fact, the professionals may stay too long, but that's a function of the attractiveness of the environment. While the incentive programs that

many of the departments offer are important, many of the research studies point out that they really are not as effective as one might think they would be. We now know that the most effective way to provide teachers and other professionals for rural and remote areas is, in fact, to recruit the trainees from those areas. So programs which look at community-based training and any devices or incentives that can support people to be educated and returned to their community, or alternatively to be trained within their community, we would support as being appropriate. I'll refer to that later with a special program we run at James Cook.

[Role of the school in the community]

I think we now know that schools are vital to rural communities' sustainability. Usually the last social institution to leave a rural community is the school, and when that happens the identity of the community fragments. So, the theme I'd like to stress is that we need - and I believe there are guidelines on this; perhaps not guidelines but directions - we need new ways of valuing a school's role in the community that can provide arguments and evidence to counter the economic rationalist viewpoint. It seems to me that to do that we must, in a sense, shift some of the focus from the school to the community; we must be talking about what the school means to the community. That, of course, links back to the previous point of job creation; healthy communities produce jobs because of confidence and leadership and creativity; "unhealthy" communities lacking in leadership, without what we might call social capital, enter this downward spiral of where nothing works for any of the social institutions.

Might I add that one of the effects of closing schools is not only the decline of the community but also the transfer of costs from the public to the private sector. It's a very neat way for public sector organisations to control their own budgets and charge the private sector.

Of critical importance, in my view - and I think we all, and rural people particularly, understand that when the role of the school is reduced to what everybody would regard as non-viable. I think Queensland education has a superb record in sustaining small schools. I've known of rolls as small as two. My concern is with enrolments up around the 30 to 50, where we're looking at consolidation into a central school and a bussing program; and the education arguments for that are put forward. What's not being put forward is the community arguments; and this refers back to my previous point. I just set that point aside now, and come onto something that talks about the accuracy of statistical data.

[Calculating student retention and tertiary participation]

It's very important that when we deal with issues of access and equity that the statistics can be relied upon because we infer people's behaviour and we construct policy based on statistics frequently. Now, there are at least two areas of concern that I'd like to draw to the Commission's attention about the way data are both gathered and reported. The first is, the tracking of students, especially from rural locations from Years 10 to 11, that is, from the first year beyond compulsory schooling. We have a tendency to lose students between rural schools and urban boarding schools, or urban/suburban high schools where children may stay with friends and relatives or a second home established.

The second point of that is the collecting and reporting of place of origin or home for commencing university and other tertiary students. The details that are being used or being taken now and reported are simply insufficiently accurate for us to say with certainty exactly what is happening in the bush. I was involved earlier this year in a study in Canberra with this, and Prof Western has identified the same issue. So it could change the face of the statistics by having appropriate reporting. I might mention that some of the geographic remote sensing systems and the geographic information systems that are available now, I think, show a great future in that direction; but at the moment there's a problem. Both of these areas, the data are critical when we measure the participation, retention and performance of school and tertiary kids.

The next point I make is that national statistics released earlier this year identified rural and remote children as the most disadvantaged group in Australia with respect to participation in higher education. The report points to the success of various schemes that supported a similar situation in the past of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. It follows from that that programs somewhat similar in nature are now needed to address this new circumstance. Now, that can be accomplished, I believe, in different ways. It could be separate schemes or it could be appropriate structuring of the Youth Allowance scheme; and if we start looking at the income and assessment test that relate particularly to farm families and to business families in western Queensland it's easy to see how folk are screened out.

I might mention that in efforts to increase the participation of country kids from rural areas and remote areas, particularly in the health professions, we have now had a funded program, called the Health Careers Workshops, where we bring 15 to 20 children from remote areas as far as Torres Strait Islands and the small towns into Townsville for a week with the hope, with the idea of introducing them to the diversity of the health professions, and we service their needs into the years ahead. I think this is something that universities need to

address, and that is relevance of what they do to their communities, particularly the regional universities.

[Wheelchair accessibility]

I mention now people with disabilities. We in our Cairns campus have recently had a number of people in wheelchairs. They're either teaching or approaching teaching. We know, and I know you have revealed, the plight of people in rural areas and remote areas, so I won't raise that. What I want to raise is another aspect of that; and that is that for professionals with disabilities to be able to work in rural areas is almost not possible because of problems of access, for instance, wheelchair access in areas that might otherwise be a professional setting for them. So, few of the schools, for instance, are appropriately equipped. Certainly, the department does equip them if a child comes, but, I mean, it's preventing teachers taking appointments, it's preventing a whole range of other people who might otherwise choose to work in rural areas. The broad point is that provisions for disabled and special needs people are not as good and as accessible in rural as in urban areas.

[Literacy and numeracy]

I just mention the next point, the data released in the statewide performance testing in literacy and numeracy in Queensland - this is very recent data of the last three weeks - show that Indigenous rural children's scores were significantly lower than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. In fact, half the level of score; and I detailed it in the paper, so I won't repeat it here. It's interesting that when the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are removed from that sample, the performance of rural children is very close to the state norm, but just a little below. So that when the ATSI rural students' scores were not included in the rural cohort the rural groups scored almost as well.

I think it's very important when we say "almost as well" we're inclined to dismiss that and say, "Well, that's good enough." Now, I believe that until rural children are scoring at least as well as everyone else then it isn't good enough because it's an equity issue embedded somewhere. I note that there are other figures reported in the paper.

Could I say generally that studies - and there are numerous - express general satisfaction with primary schools, both staffed schools, one teacher schools and schools of distance education. There's less satisfaction with secondary schools and with secondary schools of distance education. This, I believe, relates back to a previous point where secondary schooling is seen very much in relation to entering the workforce.

I should have drawn attention in the previous point to the fact that it is very clear that rural Indigenous children need very particular attention in literacy; that's the key area, and I want to return to that when I speak of otitis media.

[First language teaching]

One of the basic human rights is for a child to experience education in their cultural context and in their own first language, and for many children who are Indigenous, non-English speaking migrants or refugees in rural and remote areas, this simply isn't available. Now, what that does is raise the implications for education departments with a provision of teachers for English as a second language. So there's a professional need. I don't think anyone is going to argue that we could provide the education that would be the ultimate, but we can certainly look at how to support teachers in the second language issue. An example is, I understand that there is one ESL teacher for the Gulf and Peninsula which clearly suggests inadequate service. I would stand corrected on that figure because that may have been a hearsay figure.

[Otitis media]

I guess if I could make one single point about the education of Indigenous children, it's the need to attend urgently or 40 years ago to otitis media. The educational implications of otitis media for actually many rural children not exclusively Indigenous, it isn't a respecter of any skin colour or any racial origin - but universities and in-service programs, the department of education's need to attend to making teachers competent in the understanding of the educational procedures and the hearing disabilities of children. We have, in some communities, 100% of children arriving at school having had otitis media, and would, by then, have lifelong hearing damage, and some will have never heard some of the sounds in the English language, which places them at a disadvantage in terms of being able to read and to spell.

It accounts for, in many cases, absenteeism, behaviour problems, and there's a cluster. I think we need to give much more attention to that; and I can provide evidence of that. We conducted research ourselves and programs on that that clearly showed a staggering improvement by training teachers. But our focus was on teacher aides. We believe - and this comes back to the community theme - that durable programs are those that result in community uptake, and that of course implies some form of leadership. So, we, in our programs, having initially targeted teachers, then focused on teacher aides, and we found our programs to be durable; more than durable, they transferred across communities.

[Remote Area Teacher Education Program]

I mentioned previously the need to train professionals in community settings. We have a program at James Cook called the

Remote Area Teacher Education project. It's now more appropriately thought of as a community-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher education program. The basic structure is that usually mature adults, very frequently teacher aides - again back to the community theme - undertake a TAFE diploma in their community, we then credit that within the university program, and the RATEP students study the same subjects and complete the same core requirements as on-campus B Ed students. We use interactive multimedia, CD-ROM course-ware, the World Wide Web and on-site tutors. We have teleconferences and Web board discussion groups. This is a joint project with communities, with Education Queensland, with TAFE and the university.

Just a little statistic that's worth reporting. RATEP commenced in 1990. To date it has graduated 69 qualified teachers, and that represents 26% of the Indigenous teachers in Queensland. RATEP has a completion rate significantly higher than other Indigenous teacher education programs. Students attribute much of this success to the fact that they can study in their home communities; and I think that is evidence, if we ever need evidence, of a model that talks about community and talks about community development. I think that's the strongest theme. I can see in myself my shift over 15 years of wanting to do things with schools and for schools, now wanting to see communities do things for themselves, and if we can, we help.

I'll conclude with a couple of general points. Government policy permitting mining companies to staff their sites with fly-in, fly-out workforce; I think it's important to see where I think the prime effect is. The prime effect has accelerated the rate of growth of the regional centres. It hasn't immediately affected the small towns. It's a lagged effect on the small towns. Because of the increased dominance of the regional centres the power of aggregation, the agglomeration of attraction that the regional centres then get contributes to the downward spiral. So, it's too - and I think it's too simplistic to say that fly-in, fly-out has a direct effect, except of course local people don't get jobs. It's a big question that one. So this inevitably erodes the social infrastructure contributing to the downward spiral and remote communities in Queensland.

[Rural policy]

The next point is that state and national governments, in my view - and this is a personal opinion - have been remiss in failing to address policy issues relating to rural communities. Perhaps I could give my own opinion more stature by referring back to the conference in 1994, the issues affecting rural communities where Jonathan (indistinct) keynote paper caused a national debate on the issue of rural policy. I think we have, for a long while in Australia, travelled at

the government level, and indeed at the community level, in the belief that what is good for rural industries is good for rural people.

I would challenge that. I think that overlooks a weight of evidence to the contrary and contributes to the neglect and marginalisation of rural residents not directly involved in the rural industry. So the outcome of that, I believe, is the need for a rural community policy at a national level articulated into a state structure, which I believe we'd have to have.

My final point is that equitable resource allocation and the procedures to ensure fair distribution remain difficulties and they often disadvantage rural and remote residents. I've had a lot of association with this right through to supervising doctoral theses, and I would be bold to say that virtually any procedure depending on density and spatial distribution of population will actually generate anomalies and inequities. The core issue in this is access; it's access to education or it's access to any service. So that in a sense rather than measuring rurality or distance - because distance doesn't always express isolation - whether it's schooling or any other service, I believe that a methodology relevant to access equity rather than distance should be adopted at national and state levels by departments and agencies, right through in fact to the Grants Commission. I witness the Griffith Service Access Frame as one model that's a very appropriate approach to that. Thank you for listening.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you for presenting the submission. Are you going along to the Rural Summit? Good, because I think that particularly your - I mean, it's moving beyond education, but critical to it - but the question about a national rural communities policy is one of the things I've become absolutely convinced about, and one of the issues that I want to take up in the same venue in a couple of weeks' time. So if you're pushing it with much greater credibility than I am it would be all the better because I just can't see much improvement until there is that national level commitment to this.

DR McSWAN: I'd have to agree.

THE COMMISSIONER: It's not going to happen.

DR McSWAN: No. I've been at the butt end of some critical comment too by some of the rural industry lobby groups who demonstrate that they have a social policy or a community policy. That is not the way to approach it. Indeed, their policies are ineffectual. I mean, I'm not being critical of those groups. We need them; but we don't need them to be surrogates for rural communities. Rural communities have to be themselves and speak for themselves; they do not have a voice, as I see it, at the moment.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks very much, David, for that. Pearl?

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes, just following up the fly-in, fly-out; it was interesting in Mt Isa the other day, the depression of the grade 10 and 11 in the fact - and their teachers were saying to me that up until your last year, the grade 10 and 11 children were saying, "We will go to do various things and come back here." Now, with the general depression, I suppose, of the parents in not knowing the future with a town that's beginning to die, the children are saying, "We don't want to be here, we want to go away" - and every one of them, I think.

DR McSWAN: I'd agree, and I think it's a downstream effect.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Very much so, yes. It was quite frightening. Actually, the secondary teachers were saying, "I am scared listening to those children saying they don't want to come here."

THE COMMISSIONER: It's one of the few places we've been to where that's happened. Most of the kids say, "We really want to live in this community, if only there were opportunities for us."

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: That was the only town we were in that has this fly-in, fly-out where we have a shrinking community and not an expanding one or a static one. These children all said, "We don't want to come back here." So it was quite frightening, actually, listening to it. The other question I would just raise to you was, in all of the rural schools we were in, one of the biggest problems that the teacher said was, "We have no training to prepare us for a rural community. We come out here and we're on our own. We were a teacher before and now we are a member of the community." I'd like you to comment on that.

[Staff preparation]

DR McSWAN: I would have to agree. I did not include that in the paper.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: No, I noticed that, and I know how dear it is to your heart, and I think it was (indistinct)

DR McSWAN: I did that on the basis that I thought it might have been a little improper for me to promote a personal interest; but I guess it is more than that. We run a specialist degree, a Masters in Education (Rural Education). We also have students - and we've got 40 students in Canada as a matter of fact; but I also teach both in Cairns and Townsville, and it is one of the most and frequently the biggest elective that we teach, on rural education. I have ECE, primary and secondary students; and my dominant theme is about attitudes and values and

communities and community development and leadership and participation. I basically don't talk about education. I'm talking about community building, the role of teachers, the role of community, the links with the "outside" world that teachers can bring and the skills they bring with them, providing it's done in a certain way. I have a particular view on the model that we should be looking for; a sort of a wellness model, not a pathological view.

THE COMMISSIONER: Have you written that up anywhere, David?

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Because there's a great demand for it, because everywhere this was the one thing that - I said to Chris, "Well, this is one thing that is coming through with housing" - two things - "housing and the fact that their teaching degree did not give them any preparation for living in a rural community".

DR McSWAN: Yes, that's it.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: And knowing what is available and is being taught in Cairns and Townsville it seemed to me that this should be brought before this Commission.

DR McSWAN: Thank you. Another thing that we have been focussing on is the notion of well being. That is fundamental to schooling and curriculum, and we've just had a superb masters thesis submitted on that - awarded actually. It addresses the notion of well being for rural communities, and it's a parallel concern to the dilemma of education in rural areas or rural education; when one researches those we get a split in what folk want for their children. I think what we really need to do is in our medical world, our teaching world, our public service, is to define rural interest and service as a specialty. I think it's very important that the rural principal sees themselves as a specialist, not just the ultimate generalist, because it's that capacity to juggle all the balls to deal with the community and to be the fill-in teacher, the groundsman, the bus driver - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: The policeman.

DR McSWAN: - - - the counsellor, the policeman - that is the specialty. It's my view that that's what we should be teaching and we don't - well, I try to - but we don't teach it at university, and I think we should, because if we can teach people to live in community and to be community their professional training fits in naturally.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I feel it should be a unit within teacher training.

DR McSWAN: The responses I get from my students and the evaluations come up continuously saying that this should be a compulsory course, and I actually take the view and I shift the language from rural communities to small communities. So by the end of the semester I have people talking about small-scale living, which in fact it is; rurality, when examined, gets confused with scale and with poverty, and those two issues require a lot of attention to disentangle them.

[Retention data]

THE COMMISSIONER: Can I just clarify a couple of things. You give the warning about the accuracy of statistical data. Is the implication that you think there is in fact an underestimation of the retention of country kids from Year 10 to Year 11 - - -

DR McSWAN: Quite possible.

THE COMMISSIONER: - - - in school to tertiary.

DR McSWAN: Quite possible. And one of the things that's very clear - I did the study myself some years ago - was looking at the performance of children who went to country schools with Year 11 and 12 compared with country schools only to Year 10; and there was a huge difference where it was only to Year 10. It wasn't the same, but it was very close to the same - a few percentage points below when you looked at it - in a small town where Year 12 was available. So the argument goes something like, it's more important to have access than it is to have choice of a range of things like subjects and so on. Now, at the same time universities - and most of the community do not appreciate this - have changed vastly in the way in which they admit students.

So the notion of prerequisites determining a career for a child has changed profoundly in the last 10 years because many of the programs provide in the first year the opportunity for the students to make up any shortfalls and move into the stream they wanted in second and subsequent years. That isn't well known in rural communities. So it leads me to suggest we should be having more schools through to 11 and 12 but actually with a more focused curriculum. So the argument for diversity, while not spurious, is a little misleading.

THE COMMISSIONER: A similar point came up in discussion with the Catholic Education Commission when they were talking about the importance of choice between government and non-government schools, making the point that no choice seemed to be a more severe option than limited choice.

DR McSWAN: Yes. Can I just illustrate that with the effects that we have in our masters course. We teach our Master of Education and

Master of Rural Education domestically and we teach it internationally. The course I structure internationally has no choice; they have to do prescribed subjects, and they have to pay for it. We have had negligible drop-out. We haven't had any student actually withdraw from the course. We've had a couple because of family reasons, like having a baby, have suspended; but our performance locally is awful, and that's a national problem. So I guess what I'm saying is that there is a real benefit in moving to more structured, more group oriented teaching, so that we manage students in cohorts rather than as free-floating radicals.

People feel good if they're part of a group, and so we have been building on that notion, and I think there's a message in that for the schools and communities.

[Remote Area Teacher Education Program]

THE COMMISSIONER: The last question I had just relates to RATEP, which, as you pointed out, is achieving some quite phenomenal results. It seems though that - well, I've put it as a question mark, what it seems - how strong is the support that you're getting from the education systems, government and non-government, in terms of release times, scholarships for RATEP, active steps that will encourage Indigenous teacher aides and others to become involved and therefore qualified through the RATEP program?

DR McSWAN: I'd be guessing. It's not my particular area of expertise; but having been involved with the Department of Education since the early 70s in developing programs like this I can only speak in the most glowing terms of their support, except that it's cyclical, and it depends very much on people and personalities.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Their support; I would just say that I have seen it as very good except that they won't give alternative staff to allow those people to come away to study.

DR McSWAN: No.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: That's where the demand was in the country areas: "If we could get away to do a course, but we can't because there's no-one here to take our place."

DR McSWAN: That's why I think we need to talk about these community-based models which bypasses the need for that.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes. The contrast I've got in mind is that when we were in the Kimberley, Notre Dame University has got a course modelled on yours, and speaks - I'm sure you must know Pat Rhatigan

- glowingly about the RATEP program, but they've actually persuaded the Catholic education system in WA to provide 11, I think it is, full-time scholarships a year, so that teacher aides don't leave their own community except for the block residential periods, that they're not required to work full-time as well as study - the schools have somebody else who goes in and works there. They say that if they can enable - I suppose it's a fast tracking and it's also designed to prevent drop-out - but they were finding that people doing the equivalent course there were finding the pressure of family, school and study too great, and also too daunting to be looking at something that was going to take four to six years.

So, by providing full-time scholarships with full salary during that period, no teaching responsibilities except for the kinds of work placement responsibilities that prac teachers get, was ensuring that they were having virtually 100%, close to it, completion in the minimum time, and now are starting to graduate 11 fully-qualified teachers every year through scholarships.

DR McSWAN: I think that's marvellous. I mean, I wish we were doing it.

THE COMMISSIONER: Right. There's nothing equivalent though in the Catholic or private systems here.

DR McSWAN: I don't know. I simply don't know.

THE COMMISSIONER: Okay.

DR McSWAN: I'm afraid I can't answer that.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks very much, David. We'll break for five minutes.

[5.20]

THE COMMISSIONER: Would you like to introduce yourselves?

MR COSTIGAN: Yes. Good afternoon, Commissioner, Lady Logan. My name is Patrick Costigan. Currently I'm a secondary school practitioner, teaching in Toowoomba. I am making this submission on behalf of the Queensland chapter of the Australian College of Education, where I am the chapter member responsible for isolated members. Also present with this hearing is our chapter president, Mrs Caroline Anderson, who is the principal of Ipswich Girls' Grammar School.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

MR COSTIGAN: Just one housekeeping issue - there is a copy of this submission in your Sydney office.

THE COMMISSIONER: I might have it here, in that case.

MR COSTIGAN: It's rather interesting, before I start, that I think you'll see that the context of this submission will follow and dovetail into what you were talking about just previously. The basic premise - I just - the way I would approach this, I think I'll just read certain parts of the actual submission.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, please.

MR COSTIGAN: Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: You can assume that we'll be going through it ourselves, if you could highlight the main ones for our discussion.

MR COSTIGAN: Yes, that's right, yes. The basic premise underpinning the submission within the parameters defined by the second term of reference is the acknowledgment and acceptance of the educational trinity; that is, the teacher, the child and the parent. The submission appreciates the fact that the inquiry has targeted just one aspect of the trinity but in terms of the total appreciation of current educational thinking, this submission is forwarding - with teacher issues and concerns being the targeted group.

[Support staff; professional development]

The issue of support structures for teachers in isolated situations has always been an item on the agenda of educational systems. Programs and processes, such as PCAP advisory teacher incentives, have been often but these have ebbed and flowed and very little lasting impact has remained in terms of teacher support.

The Queensland chapter of the Australian College of Education is endeavouring to determine the needs of its isolated members and, through the committee member responsible for this clientele, which is myself, a discussion paper has been previously drafted and discussed at chapter level and is now incorporated into this submission.

The issue of the submission is basically professional development for teachers. I have put this together in terms of my perceptions of a classroom practitioner. This submission is aware of the dated references utilised in this formulation, the late 70s and the early 80s. The relevance of this fact reinforces the urgency for the government of the day and educational agencies to act significantly in

the area of rural education, as not only has very little changed during the time-frame as indicated by the literature but also the issues, problems and content cited by the material in this submission is as relevant today as it was during the early 80s.

The situation of our submission - we talk about rural education - has undergone a global renaissance, particularly in the United States, where education authorities have recognised the value of rural schooling and the significant contribution this form of teaching has made and is making to national education. I did my study in this 10 years ago, and at that time, 53% of all Queensland state schools were one and two teacher, but only accounted for 5% of the population. That statistic has changed but I think it reinforces the significant component the rural school is in the Queensland system.

In America, things such as structured inputs, both primary and secondary, establishment of processes for continuous availability of professional development, databanks, continuing research, continuing in-service, regular workshops and residential conferences - that is one method - the American system is coping with the problem you mentioned, Lady Logan, just before, in your travels around the country where teachers are saying, "There's nothing there to help us." David mentioned, in the previous submission, that, even now, educational - tertiary institutions I don't think have yet come up with a significant and appropriate pre-service program for teachers in all schools. I think they have played around with it but I don't think a significant or meaningful program has yet been developed, and I think it comes from the fact that - and this is very much a personal comment because I was involved in the rural schools and small schools - I don't think people have really appreciated the problems and the circumstance of teaching in this sort of environment.

In future education development of the state, some degree of rationalisation would occur. As Johnson argues in 79, the concept of the small school will remain for some time. He talks about the closure of the school, and this is dovetailing into what David was saying previously. It is a fact of life that some small schools will close once the enrolment falls below a viable threshold and the future potential has ceased to exist. Even now, I think, one of the schools I taught in at the Downs, I think he had five students, and the department still kept it open.

When I was in the system, if you fell below, say, a minimum number of 10, that would be it, the school would be closed. I think we are all aware of the importance of the school, how it forms the focal point of the community, and it symbolises the tradition and history of the local area. The effects of the rural decline are evident in many communities across the country and the school, no matter how small, is

often the last remaining symbol of a community's heritage and history. Based on this premise alone, the closure of a school has to be regarded as a severing of a length of this nation's history.

Having established that, we're going to focus now on the basic premise that we've talked about before, the availability of professional development opportunities for teachers in isolated areas; narrowing that down further, looking at what we, as an organisation, as an educational organisation, can do to help our members. At the moment, literature indicates three of the more pressing and fundamental issues that have to be addressed by educational agencies: the lack of a national formal and structured rural education course during pre-service training, we just indicated that; the extent and continuity of appropriate in-service programs during service in rural schools, I think you've alluded to that just recently; and, last, the lack of structured professional development processes available to teachers involved in rural education.

This problem has been acknowledged in the literature and I can just finalise this particular point by a comment from the Department of Rural Education of the National Education Association in America:

Competent and well-qualified teachers, administrators and other professional personnel are equally essential for all children, youth and adults. To obtain such a state, it is prime importance that there be continued re-evaluation of teacher preparation, both pre-service and in-service, focused on the unique aspects of preparing teachers, supervisors and other educational specialists and administrators for rural and rural-related skills. Such evaluation is mandatory in meeting the objectives of quality and quantity education.

Teachers involved in rural education, particularly in their first years, have to undergo a process of redefining their situation, not so much in their role as a teacher but in terms of environmental factors, such as smallness of school and staff, multigrade preparation and planning, unfamiliarity with content of subjects taught, because sometimes you are a secondary school teacher in a high top and they need somebody to teach history in Year 9 and you might have done it when you were a student at school and, where we are, you've just come out of university and you are a trained geographer, social scientist. Right? Well, I suppose history is social science. You're a mathematician and scientist. Right?

So the principal and the deputy look at their program, they need somebody to teach this. You've got to keep three pages ahead of your class. I think everybody can relate to that, has been in this sort of

situation, but I believe and this submission believes that that is a problem and it has to be addressed. So the small - and the unfamiliarity with the content of subjects taught, the culture and professional isolation. In such circumstances, it is essential that appropriate professional development programs be conducted.

Further on, there's more literature indication as to the importance of professional development. I don't think we'll take the Commission's time just by reading through that. It's in the document you have in Sydney. But I think it's important to establish the fact that there is definitely a crying need for teachers, in terms of professional development. What we as an educational organisation - we recognise and acknowledge that members of the College are located in geographical areas that are subject to distance and isolation.

The more populated areas of the eastern seaboard of this state do have well-established and functional regional groups that service the professional needs of its members and assist them to fulfil the aims the objectives of the College of Education. In the recognition and acknowledgment of members isolated in these areas, the chapter aims to initiate and maintain a specific isolated member program which will address the professional needs of members located in these geographical areas. This submission has taken the criterion of isolation as a degree of access to the degree of difficulty and impossibility to access regional group activities.

If I can just deviate from our submission here and explain our make-up in terms of our Queensland chapter, we have various regional groups, geographical regional groups, such as the Brisbane metropolitan, the Darling Downs, Ipswich and West Morton, Peninsula, which is up north, Rockhampton, Townsville; basically those well-populated areas. As a result, because of transfer and other reasons, some of our members are located in areas which do not have access to those regional groups, because the basic vehicle used in professional development within the College is found within the structure of our regional groups.

The first thing the submission would like to do is to just indicate on the enclosed map the location of what we would term our isolated members. We have certain pockets. What I have done, I have indicated with a blue circle the location, the geographical location, of what we would term as isolated members of the Australian College of Education. We have a cluster in the Southern Downs, based on Stanthorpe, but if you know the geography of that part of the state, it's still - it's a little centre and there's no driving force. Even though we say it's close to Toowoomba, there's a component of driving and the difficulty of access and so on.

We have four members there, we have a member at Inglewood, we have two members in Dolby, one member in Chinchilla and we have member out at Charleville. We have - that is Brawina, I think, I haven't got my glasses on, and Monto. It's rather interesting. We have two members located at Gladstone which we'd normally associate as a populated area but because we have no functioning regional group, those members in Bowen and Ayr lack that vehicle for professional development.

We have a cluster here in the coalfields, Emerald, Dysart, Middlemount and Clermont. We have three members in Mount Isa, we have a member at Mossman, a member at Cape Tribulation, we have a member on Mornington Island and we have a member at (indistinct) and they are the members that we are trying to instigate a program which we can be of some assistance - in terms of their professional development.

Now, I'd like to indicate also that, as a College and a functioning state of the College we don't even aim to redress all the needs, the perceived needs of our members, but if we can do something to assist these people located in these areas. We acknowledge the fact that we are members of the College, we acknowledge their isolation and we acknowledge the fact that, as a group of educators, we try to instigate this process of advocacy. We are educational people and we are definitely trying to be of some assistance to the professional needs of these people.

We do talk about various types of isolation, and I think that's fairly self-explanatory from the (indistinct) distribution there. We talk about medium isolation factor, we talk about severe isolation factor, that's Mount Isa, Inglewood and Charleville, and the critical isolation factor of Mornington Island and Bamaga.

Because of the nature of our profession, that is the location as of July of this year. For next year, the change of people, information, there's every likelihood that that particular (indistinct) but if we can look at establishing some sort of process that we can then say, "No matter where these people are, even, say, at Gladstone, we can do something to support these people." I think that's the crying need that we can identify at this current time. People need to be assisted, particularly our young teachers need to be assisted in their educational circumstance.

[Technologies]

The third part of our submission deals with possible problem addresses. Okay, there's a problem. How would we go about addressing these identified problems? Teleconferencing. Right? We are going to maintain a regular semester teleconference with all isolated members. The second point, we're looking at the maximum use

of technology, in terms of having an isolated member's home page, utilising netchat, netwriting and e-mail, of course.

Now, most of those will be used anyway, in terms of their current situation. I'd just like to take this opportunity to say that there were four people out at Charleville 12 months ago, right, actually the night of Princess Di's funeral, because we were - the local president and myself went out to Charleville, and it's rather interesting out at Charleville, the whole place was deserted and everybody was in the five hotels, just looking at the television (indistinct) but we ran a whole Saturday afternoon netchat between four people there, two members and the two members of the executive, and a group of nine people based back here in Toowoomba (indistinct) all done by netchat. I think that is a definite way that we can help these people, but I think it's important that - we can talk about e-mailing, we can talk about the electronic media, the impact of information technology but I do believe that these isolated people do need a personal one-to-one contact, and that's been identified too in the submission.

Another possibility is what we term a mailing program, where we keep these members informed of what is happening in other regional groups. I went through the reports from the various regional groups and listed the various professional development opportunities or activities that were conducted by the groups in Queensland. What we would tend to do is do a similar thing like this, right, inform these people and, even in their isolation, they could see that - look, the Rockhampton group ran a very interesting technology in the classroom. They got some people up from, say, Brisbane, Spectronics, and they ran a very, very interesting, appropriate, worthwhile activity. Maybe these people in their isolation could do a similar sort of thing. It's basically networking.

Let's see where Cairns have done a very interesting thing. They've got some fellow up to talk about minefields of behaviour. Maybe we can utilise that. So it's not only an indication of what can be done but it's contact and networking as well. That will be sent to the Commission, because I haven't quite - I didn't include that in the original document.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, sure.

MR COSTIGAN: That's to indicate the, I suppose, spread and the depth of what goes on in terms of professional development activities in our regional groups.

To do all this, we have to resort to some form of funding. Currently, because of its financial infrastructure, where the College - the Queensland chapter does not have the funds available to

undertake such activities. However, given the limited resources we have got, we will put into place some form of assistance in this coming 12 months, in the academic year of the year 2000.

If I can just finish our submission by just reading our conclusion from the actual document. Australia is characterised by its demographics, particularly in terms of its population distribution and the resulting access. It has become part of the culture of this country and, as such, the problems and issues that such a cultural aspect creates have to be high priority items on government agenda.

This submission argues quite simply that to enhance the learning quality of students in the mode of rural and remote education, it is first necessary to address the needs identification and resulting support of the teachers and principals in their specialised and demanding teacher learning environment. The Queensland chapter of the Australian College of Education acknowledges the corollary that exists between these two components of the original educational trinity indicated in the opening remarks of this document, and has endeavoured, within its financial means, to be proactive in fulfilling certain identified aspects of the college's mission, and I quote, "promoting high standards of educational practice at all levels and in all sectors of education and promoting professional development".

Such support cannot be continued and other strategies implemented, unless specific funding is to be made available to educational agencies. With available funding, efforts can be made to address the whole issue of equity, as applying to rural and remote education. The final page is simply the bibliography of references used in the submission. I'd like to ask, our president, if you'd like to comment or add to any of those things there, Caroline.

MS ANDERSON: I'd just like to endorse the work that Pat has put into this but also to stress the importance that we place on programs such as this. While we're concentrating on where we have acknowledged members of the College, all of the professional development activities that we offer go and are open to everyone who is an educationalist in the region, and - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: You anticipated my question.

MS ANDERSON: And usually that will - our members will invite people who are they in contact with to those particular activities, so that a teleconference would involve not just one member in a particular area but would involve, usually, a whole group of teachers from that area, and that, of course, provides additional support. We certainly are not exclusive to our members, and in fact we encourage the inclusion of other people in the area. I can't stress highly enough the continuing

learning of teachers in our rural communities. We often have very young teachers and beginning teachers.

In a previous submission, I heard discussion of the inclusion of the issues relating to rural education as an important aspect of pre-service training. I think there's a danger of overloading pre-service training with specifics, because it's very important, first of all, to learn the craft of teaching. But when you're actually in a situation and can relate the theory to what is happening, then you need someone to readdress that with you and to address the issues that arise for you; and that's part of the mentoring and professional development that comes from being part of a community of teachers, and you've got to have access to such a thing. So that's one of the important aspects of what we're trying to do in the Australian College of Education.

It's those two things that I think are particularly important. I think that, as we see more young teachers being encouraged to go back into the rural areas, because there is now a particular push for students who come from rural areas to be encouraged to take part of their training in those rural areas - and, obviously, that helps them, because they already understand what they're going to. As that occurs, however, we have to make sure that they're not, "You're from a rural area, you go back there, because you understand it, and you're going to be isolated for the rest of your life in this rural area," or, conversely, that, "We want to get out of here as soon as we can, because this is what we're used to."

We haven't had a breadth of experience and we need to make sure that people understand the value and can make a value to the communities that they go to, by being as well educated in the teaching profession as they can be, and supported in it.

THE COMMISSIONER: Anything to ask Caroline?

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes. In the JCU rural training, they've got a program where they encourage all students, when they come there, to go out through those rural areas looking at it, and then the ones who do choose to do the rural unit - and I wondered if - it would be interesting for you to have a look at that program that they have up there, because it is proving very, very popular. The other thing I would mention is, also run out of there is a rural education research association which has members from New Zealand - actually, countries overseas but New Zealand and Australia mainly, where - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: That's based in Perth in Western Australia?

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: No, it's based very much in Townsville on the JCU, in the constitution. The president and members can be anywhere, and they have - in all states of Australia but it's based there so if you get one that's dying, we can reactivate it. That meets - has met for 10 years, every two months, with the discussion over - by teleconferencing, with the discussion on rural education. That has been meeting for 10 years and every year we are gaining more and more members, so that it's one way of getting information. I mean, one of the difficult things is to get information into all areas but this includes anybody in Australia. I mean, there are universities, there are single people, there are organisations, national - there's all kinds of people. The membership is \$25, and that entitles you to sit in on any of the meetings. I just thought I'd mention it to you because it's one way of getting information, and that's what we tried to do when we set it up.

MR COSTIGAN: I'd just like to take up Caroline's point about those various activities. They are conducted under the auspices of the local regional group of the Australian College but every school in the drawing area is invited.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: That was my question but you answered that.

MR COSTIGAN: Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: Is membership open to any qualified teacher?

MS ANDERSON: There is a length of service to be a full member but then there are also associate members who can be beginning teachers. So you've got to have been teaching five years to be a full member of the College but for the first five years you're what's termed as an associate member, and there are different programs. Each of the regions are developing what they call associate member programs, so that for first-year teachers they've got their support mechanisms.

MR COSTIGAN: Our young member at Bamaga is an associate member.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Everywhere we went, the need for support was crying (indistinct)

MR COSTIGAN: Lady Logan, I wrote my thesis - you talked about 10 years ago. I wrote my - that finished in 1986 and I looked at the perceived consultancy needs of teachers in smaller Catholic primary schools in Queensland, and at that stage nothing was happening, and I wrote that and it sat in a document and it sat on a desk. 10 years - four or five years after this, you know, James Cook started this process, and

that's when I saw that document that came out, this - for schools, and I thought, "Well, I think it's about time we looked at the whole issue." That was my stimulus that was basically my interest for joining the state chapter. It's rather interesting now to see that there is something concrete. See, when I wrote that, there was the parliamentary select inquiry, right, and I think nothing really came out of that, nothing really came out of that.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: There had been four inquiries - the Tomlinson one in Western Australia, the Ahern one - - -

MR COSTIGAN: That's the Ahern one, that's when I was - yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: The Ahern one in Queensland, the Tomlinson one in Western Australia, the Vannerment one in New South Wales and then the senate standing inquiry, and each one cost about a million and a half. I used to think, "How - - -"

MR COSTIGAN: Think what you could do with that money.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: "- - - many children would that educate? How many teachers would that train?" That's why we set up the Rural Education Research and Development Centre. That was why we set it up, so we would have a database, "We'll have information here so that governments - we won't reinvent the wheel every year - - -"

MR COSTIGAN: That's right, that's right, yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: "- - - we'll have the database here," and that's how we started - - -

MS ANDERSON: I attend, every year, the Isolated Children's Parents' Association, and many of the concerns there are about how to support the teachers - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: That's right.

MS ANDERSON: - - - the problems that a rural teacher has in just coping with the administration, let alone the teaching - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: That's right.

MS ANDERSON: - - - and the support that can be given to those teachers in their areas.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: And because you're a teacher in a rural area, you're supposed to be a mediator and a consultant and all kinds of things - - -

MS ANDERSON: Yes, and those are the issues for this - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: - - - because you're a very important person.

MS ANDERSON: Yes, and the recognition that some of the young people coming to those areas - they may come from a rural area but perhaps not quite as isolated as the area they're moving to, so that there are different issues all the time that need to be catered for.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: That's right, yes.

MS ANDERSON: Sometimes, while you do a professional development activity, it's got a heading and it's got a focus, just the opportunity for these teachers to discuss an issue that they have is more important.

MR COSTIGAN: Just to be with another teacher.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR COSTIGAN: Just the physical being with somebody else. They might travel 50 kilometres or something but just to be - and that was a thing that came out in the research that I did, was - I mentioned it before, this one-to-one, you need some sort of sociological dynamic of being able to talk to people.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes, physical support.

MR COSTIGAN: It is, yes. Thank you.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Thank you for coming in from the bush for the day.

MS ANDERSON: I won't repeat that in Ipswich.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.