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HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION

INQUIRY INTO RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION

MR C. SIDOTI, Commissioner
MR A. JONES, Commissioner

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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5 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** This is the Adelaide hearing of the national inquiry into rural and remote education. I'm Chris Sidoti, the Human Rights Commissioner, and with me is Alby Jones, who is assisting us with the South Australian component of it and we are very pleased to have the assistance of somebody who is a former director-general of education in this state. Thanks a lot, Alby, for helping us here. Bruce, you are first on today. Do you want to introduce yourself and your organisation, your association?

10 **MR LEE:** Thanks very much, yes. My name is Bruce Lee and I'm currently the principal of Houghton Primary and I am currently president of the Small Schools Association of South Australia. I've had about 20 years' experience working in small, country communities and small schools. The association that I represent would cover all small schools with less than 110 students in them across the state of South Australia, so it is really quite an extensive organisation. At this stage the membership of that association is about 135 - I think was the last count.

20 I'm glad to be here today and I would simply like to say that with my experience and also the feedback we've had from members of our association, we'd like to be able to say we think South Australia is in a unique situation as far as small, isolated communities trying to deliver a top-quality education provision for their students is concerned. South Australia has a history of a large number of small towns scattered across its landscape and it really has been one where I think those people who have been teaching in the schools have had to be very resilient to change, and also have had to be highly skilled to be able to overcome the diversity of people they have to work with. Also, the tyranny of distance often works not always in their favour in being able to deliver quality teaching to their kids.

[Staff development]

35 The schools are ones which, at the moment, would still reflect a high mobility of staff and often schools in the country have had a history of having the least experienced teachers man them. This has been, I think, a history throughout South Australia and it's one that tends still to be so. It brings with it some issues in being able to deliver quality learning experiences for kids. The cutbacks that we've seen in this state and also nationally have impacted severely on the training and development opportunities that are available to teachers in the country. The type of structures they are now working under are quite different from what they've had in the past. The essence of that really is one of reduced opportunity and increased burden for teachers to be able to access any training and development they really want to be able to do.

[Transport]

Transport costs for teachers and also for the students is severe and it impacts highly, I think, on teachers being able to deliver quality education to their kids, but it also impacts severely on parents being able to enable their kids to engage in extra activities beyond the school's immediate surrounds. It's becoming an increasing issue as rural poverty has impacted on the country. I'd like to come back to the issue of transport costs and training development and staffing as I go on.

[Curriculum]

In terms of curriculum delivery there are four areas of the curriculum that seem, at this stage, to be most sensitive to the economic downturn they will be facing, and they are namely the arts, phys ed, technology and science. In all four of those areas small schools have been very reliant on being able to work collaboratively with nearby schools to buy in services to support the teaching that's done on their sites, simply because often the small schools don't have the breadth and depth of expertise of staff to be able to deliver those four areas of the curricula. With the cutbacks that we're experiencing and also the changes in the disadvantaged schools program and the Country Areas Program, it's making it increasingly difficult for people to be able to access additional services and provision to be able to support those four curriculum areas in particular.

I've mentioned the uniqueness of South Australia. It's pleasing to see that the state government has a focus on country education. It will be interesting, I think, to see the fruits of those endeavours. It is acknowledged across the state that country education is in desperate need of support if the educational opportunities for our country kids is to not remain one that's disadvantaged. The issue of poverty, as I've mentioned, has been severe and I think it's a continuing issue - the issue of rural isolation needs to be overcome; rural isolation, as I mentioned, for the kids but also for the teachers to be able to access quality T and D [Training and Development].

[School buildings]

I think the other issue, too, that's starting to impact on the quality of learning in country schools is the very nature of the buildings that often characterise country schools. They tend to be very, very old. They're not very suited to modern teaching methods and new curricula delivery. It's putting an impact then on the cost of maintaining these buildings and structures and making them somewhat, I think, friendly to the curriculum needs that we have today.

[Staff incentives]

5 I think the issue of a country incentive is a big one in looking at
children's learning inasmuch as we are finding at the moment that there
is a continuing trend for teachers not to want to go to the country, to
find that to go to small country schools, although it's challenging and
immensely rewarding, is not one that rests well with a lot of people
because of a perception that they will either be professionally or
economically disadvantaged should they go to those particular places.
In terms of the country incentives package the department is working
on, it will be interesting to see just how those particular issues are
10 addressed.

15 The issue of poverty, as I've mentioned, is certainly a big one.
There does seem to be a real need for the department to be able to
access - probably through IT and the use of new IT - quality training
development opportunities for teachers. I think we've got a situation at
the moment where teacher renewal is very much dependent on people
being able to access quality training development provision, but that
does involve severe imposts on personal budget, time and travel. That
needs to be looked at, I think.

20 In terms of country schools, to help meet the educational
provision of children there needs to be some work done on looking at
leadership and giving incentives for people to take up teaching
positions so that we end up with schools that have a highly energised
and skilled workforce. I'd like to look at the issue of Country Areas
25 Program funding, disability provision. I was working on the state
committee of CAP and also regional committees back in the early 90s
and one of the issues that came through very clearly was the ownership
that communities expressed in being involved in the evolving and then
the running of programs run by the Country Areas Program. What it
30 really did there was to enable people to feel this ownership and it really
did enable good collaborative working between schools and districts to
occur. I think that would be one of the strengths and if we could see
that re-energised it would be very desirable.

35 I might leave it there and you might have questions you want to
put to me.

40 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thanks very much, Bruce. You've certainly
covered a wide range of areas. Alby, did you want to ask some
questions first?

45 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** Yes. Does your association cover remote
Aboriginal schools, Amata and so on?

MR LEE: Some of those schools are in our association. We have a
liaison rep who works directly with those schools, but they are a unique
group and they do work directly with country directorate to make sure

their particular needs are being met, but they do get some support from my association.

5 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** Do any of your schools make use of Arbury Park Outdoor School? That is a wonderful experience - if they can.

10 **MR LEE:** Yes, they do. Sites such as that - and getting back to the issue of transport costs and the capacity of people to be able to have their children go to such centres is really a live one, and it's a difficult one. Those centres are few and so they're heavily booked. It's expensive. What we're finding across the state is that the opportunity to enable children to be engaged in exciting collaborative programs with other schools for extension work is very difficult. Transport costs would have to be one of the greatest inhibitors for country kids in moving to places like Arbury Park - which would have to be seen as a wonderful experience. What I'm referring to is that just being able to get on a bus and move 30 or 40 kilometres to the nearest school centre in itself is a huge undertaking in terms of the financial burden that families face given the rural decline we have.

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[Staff incentives]

25 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Bruce, you mentioned this question of incentives - and it's clearly an issue right across the country - what kinds of incentives do you think teachers are looking for both to go to country schools in the first place and then to stay there once they're there? It seems that recruitment and retention are two quite separate issues in this area.

30 **MR LEE:** Yes, they are. Years ago recruitment was, "You've got a job as long as you go to Anna Creek or Penong." But now we want people to go to the country not because they have to but rather because they want to. We are looking then at the issues of having a happy and contented workforce, as well as one that is energised and highly skilled. I think people generally view going to some of the country locations we've got as being an economic disadvantage and professional impediment.

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40 As we move into tenure it is becoming increasingly difficult for people to consider uprooting their families, for example, and saying, "I'll take a chance and take Mimila on the hope and understanding that I might, for example, get a promotion after I've been at Mimila for say, three or four years, or whatever the tenure may be." So there is this fear or apprehension that, "I may make a sacrifice but it may not necessarily give me or my family a great reward."

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To answer your question we'd need to look specifically at remunerating people who want to go to the country, give them a financial incentive that will offset the disintegration of their vehicle after

three years, after they've been on some of the country roads. Also, to give people the opportunity, if they have extended family at bigger centres, of being able to have flights or whatever back to those centres, and to work into the promotion structure a mechanism where at least those people won't lose all should they elect then to move out of places such as Mimila or Penong-Koorabie. You know, they won't simply fall back to their previous upstanding position and feel that they gave it their best shot but it really didn't deliver very much. I personally don't see that there is much else that can be done. I think a financial incentive would be an all-powerful one if it were linked to some professional safeguards.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: What guarantees are there in South Australia at the moment?

MR LEE: There aren't any.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: So there are no arrangements that you get either promotional points or choices - points for choice after a certain number of years?

MR LEE: I was thinking in terms of people in leadership positions, I guess, when I made my previous comments, but in terms of a classroom teacher - and also some leadership positions, too - they would get early closure of school or else there would be some disadvantage points that are allocated against some schools so that you can have special leave with pay for study purposes or whatever after you've been to these particular centres for five years.

I really think, though, those centres are probably the extreme and the criteria needs to be broadened out. If we're looking, for example, at trying to staff people at Warranbie on Central Eyre Peninsula we need to increase the incentive package that would operate there rather than just see the extremes at, say, Mimila or wherever, which are very much, I think, so different that - yes, I think I've covered it.

[9.20 am]

[Staff accommodation]

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Is there an issue about the quality of housing provided for teachers?

MR LEE: I think the issue of housing is a live one. I know the department and government agencies have worked hard on that, but I think there still needs a lot to be done. I think it gets back then to the economic provision that's given teachers in taking up country appointments, inasmuch as rents are often very high if you are going to

5 get a house of good quality. I can recall colleagues who have been there teaching at Whyalla or in the Riverland, for example, and the rents they're paying really are not that much different to what you might be paying in a metropolitan area in some of the better government houses. So rent subsidy is certainly, I think, one of the aspects of financial provision that needs to be looked at.

10 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** You mentioned the issue of cars. Are cars actually provided for any of the staff?

15 **MR LEE:** No, but there's an increasing number of staff who can get access to government cars, but that's very much dependent on your ability to be reasonably close to a local district office or government office, to be able to use a pooled vehicle. So you tend then to find that for many principals or teachers in the country, they're still reliant on using their own vehicles to travel to those centres, if it's convenient to do that. Often, it's probably just better to get in their vehicle and drive yourself to wherever you have to go. But it does work out conveniently for some.

20 **[Student numbers]**

25 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** I noticed in some of the briefing notes I've got that the smallest school in South Australia has got about 11 or 12 students. That's certainly a good deal smaller than in many of the states that we've been to. Is there considered to be a minimum number for viability in South Australia?

30 **MR LEE:** Our department would say that it's very much a school community decision on that, and that numbers of that size would certainly be alarming, and would probably make it difficult for that school to be able to offer a broad and in-depth curricula, although it doesn't always have to be so. But there isn't perceived a minimum size as such, and it is comforting at this stage that the communities are able to work through that as an issue. I would say that if you're looking at numbers like that there are probably very extenuating circumstances. It could be you're looking at schools there like the Penong-Koorabie where the only option is not really busing but it may then be Open Access education. The people are probably making a decision there that better to actually keep a school open and have some social contact with socialisation for their kids, as opposed then to having to revert then to School of the Air or possibly boarding, if they're able to afford that.

45 Most small schools in South Australia tend to be around the 40, 60, 70 mark. It varies - anything right up to 110 would be a definition for a small school.

[Ancillary staff]

COMMISSIONER JONES: The ancillary staff - are you satisfied in the small schools with the ancillary staff that you get?

5 **MR LEE:** I think it's a real concern. The issue of ancillary staff is - the nature of the job is changing dramatically, and often people who have taken up those positions initially as a permanent position have found that the job and person specification for the job that they won say 10 years ago has changed under their feet, so as to speak, and they're now expected to take on the role of financial administrator in the school, which is something that, had they been given the choice of doing that say 10 years ago, they would probably have shied away rather hurriedly.

15 So small schools then find it difficult to be able to get a mobility of SSOs [School Support Officers] in their schools simply because of either the geographic remoteness of the community or it may just be that the position is simply permanent, and the person holds it until he or she wishes to move on. In different situations it has been and is an issue because schools are needing to move significantly towards 20 EDSAS [Education Department School Administration System] accrual accounting, and those that take up Partnerships 21 into global budgets, and that will put an immense pressure on SSOs being able to deliver the financial, admin side of the school effectively, for schools to be able to work under Partnerships 21. So, yes, it is an issue, and it does vary, 25 and in terms of its severity, I'd rate it as quite high.

[Students with disabilities]

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Disability issues in country areas, Bruce, we've indicated in the terms of reference it's one of the particular 30 concerns we've got. Of these small schools in your association, would many of them have kids that have got disabilities, and if so what kinds and what are the support arrangements for them?

35 **MR LEE:** They're varied. You would have children who have got specific learning needs, and because of the geographic isolation the community might be in, the school simply has to make provision to accommodate those particular children. There would be children who would have behaviour problems that would be impacting severely on their learning, and so the school then has to be able to take up that as 40 an issue and work with it. I mentioned the quality and the nature of the buildings. Often, the schools tend to have older buildings. It makes it rather difficult if we're looking at children who have a physical disability that they're able to be catered for effectively, given the fact that there are often steps in the irregularities with surfaces and that type of thing 45 that make it difficult for kids to be accommodated.

So schools I think in the country would find it - and they do find it - difficult and very expensive to meet the needs of those who have got educational learning disabilities or physical disabilities.

5 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Are there particular formulas, student number formulas, that provide teachers or teacher support for kids with disabilities, and what degree of flexibility is there from your experience in the application of those formulas?

10 **MR LEE:** I think in small schools, given the fact that the staffing cohort is generally small, your opportunity for having flexibility with the existing formulas are significantly reduced, and so it often is one where small schools do find it very, very difficult to work with the existing formula satisfactorily.

15 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** How widespread do you think that will be amongst your 135 members?

20 **MR LEE:** I think it's quite widespread, and I think it probably touches on the issue that to have country education in this state by fact of its geographic isolation and the fact that relative to everything else, the numbers are so small, and yet the number of sites are really quite large. The cost per student is extremely high in those particular centres, and it's an impost, I guess, that the geographic layout of this state and the population distribution in the state - it's a difficult one for
25 South Australia. It would probably be easier to have the population concentrated.

30 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** It certainly would be easier. It's the advantage that Victoria has got, I think, that almost no other state can equal. Thank you very much. If there are other things you want to take up with us, feel free to drop us a line at any stage because you have covered a very wide range of issues there in 30 minutes. So thank you very much for coming in.

35 **MR LEE:** Thanks.

40 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** We've got Glennis Crawford and Robert Webb and Lyn Greenfield. Lyn can't come? Thanks for coming in. As I indicated before, Alby Jones, Co-Commissioner for South Australia, and Chris Sidoti, Human Rights Commissioner. Thanks very much for coming in.

[9 28 am]

45 **MR WEBB:** Thank you for the invitation.

COMMISSIONER JONES: If you'd like to introduce yourselves for the record, then go straight into any comments you want to make and we'll ask you a few questions.

5 **MRS CRAWFORD:** Okay. We're from the Isolated Children's Parents' Association [ICPA], which is actually a national based organisation with branches and a state council within each state. I'm the South Australian president of ICPA and Robert Webb is the vice-president of the SA Council. My name is Glennis Crawford.

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MR WEBB: Mine is Robert Webb.

COMMISSIONER JONES: Thank you.

15 **MRS CRAWFORD:** I've never done this before so I guess that - - -

COMMISSIONER JONES: Don't worry; most people haven't. And it's not as scary as it looks.

20 **MR WEBB:** Thank you.

[Technology to support distance education]

25 **MRS CRAWFORD:** Thank you. Because we represent remote and isolated children in education we have some points that we wish to make to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity. One of our first points is that there is a lack of funding for technology for distance education students and this is not only within schools themselves, it's also within the children that are educated in their homes. I'm not talking about home schooling. I'm talking about children who live on remote
30 sheep stations or cattle stations or in a mining camp or whatever.

35 The Education Department had provided some funding for a program to address some of the issues of technology and so the Open Access College, which is the school of distance education in South Australia, went about a plan so that the children in remote locations could have access to computer technology, modem, that sort of thing for their education. Also they went on to write courses, the Open Access College writing distance education courses with that sort of thing in mind. Unfortunately that funding was taken away and it has
40 impacted on the college's technology program that they had. So I'll just leave that as that.

[Country Areas Program]

45 One of the other problems is the lack of funding to rural and remote and isolated children under the Country Areas Program [CAP]. The Commonwealth guidelines for the Country Areas Programs is to improve access and participation in the educational outcome of

students disadvantaged by geographic isolation. The funding comes from the Commonwealth. It's been wonderful for many students in this state.

5 In 1998 the funding arrangements to schools were altered in South Australia and therefore a lot more schools were actually accessing the CAP funding that came to this state, and so that has actually impacted on the geographic isolation factor, I guess. A lot of those schools that actually are now able to access CAP funds, we
10 believe that they should be able to access CAP funds but the amount of money has just shrunk so dramatically to each school and maybe - it is a concern that maybe some of the programs that could occur in some schools could be impacted upon. The CAP funding in this state has a very long-winded history, I might add, but I don't know if Robert wants
15 to say any more about that.

MR WEBB: I think you're probably aware that initially the criteria for accessing that money was only geographic isolation, but now that is not the only factor, and that's our point, that our members were the most
20 geographically-isolated schools and that was how the money was divided out. But now we have schools so close to the capital cities because the equity situation has come into it. So if you are living in an area where poverty is a real factor - and we accept that, but we do accept that if the same amount of money is being given to this state we,
25 the geographically-isolated people, seem to be the ones who have lost our share of the money. That's our point there.

[Parents supporting learning]

MRS CRAWFORD: One of the other issues that concerns us at present is the fact that mothers who are teaching their own children in remote
30 and isolated Australia are not recognised in any financial way. The ICPA as a national body has been trying to get some financial recognition for parents because the situation is getting quite critical, where mothers who are teaching their own children - and not only
35 mothers but a supervisor, and it may be a governess - it's all funded from the family income.

I'd just like to give an example of this. A parent began teaching her child at the beginning of the child's formal education and did so for
40 two years. A personality clash with her child, her own inadequacy of understanding methodology, her time commitment to other roles expected of her as a manager's wife, presented the family with a very unsatisfactory educational situation.

45 There was a decision to employ a suitable governess at great financial expense, and this would not have happened unless there had been some financial generosity from their employer and grandparents of the child. 30 per cent of the family's net income has been allocated

to the employment of a governess so that their child can have a positive, rewarding and good educational outcome. The mother has expressed that it is the most overwhelming and daunting thing she had ever done in teaching her own child.

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MR WEBB: If I could just add, that woman topped Australia when she was studying herself, and she was a law student; but she found it impossible to teach her own child. If I could also just add that some of our members actually cook for as many as 10 men, do their household duties and teach their own children. These are the people that we're representing and they are the only unpaid teachers in the Australian workforce today; and we find that inconceivable that the government hasn't recognised this factor and give them some financial recompense for that and we think it's one of our main issues of inequity.

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[Gifted students; students with disabilities]

MRS CRAWFORD: One of the other problems that we see in South Australia - and I guess this is an Australia-wide thing, too - is early intervention for children who are gifted or with a disability. I know that the federal government in recent budget allocations has increased funding for numeracy and literacy programs in schools but often in remote and isolated areas there are problems with getting children assessed and getting them on to suitable programs.

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I can give an example of a child in the far west of South Australia who has been identified within the school as having a learning disability and has been waiting five terms for assessment; and we see that as a huge problem. That child can't be put on to any special programs or whatever until there is some assessment.

30

MR WEBB: Tying in with that I'd like to say that there are three schools in South Australia which are classed as SHIP [School for High Intellectual Potential] schools and we asked that the Open Access College in Port Augusta be one of those so that they could - I'm sure you realise what SHIP stands for - we asked that Port Augusta School of the Air would be identified as one of those schools, so that could overcome children in small rural schools who could be classed as gifted and talented and they could perhaps have an update and help with their curriculum through the Open Access College. We were very disappointed when the School of the Air in Port Augusta or the Open Access College was not identified as one of those schools, to tie in with the gifted and talented.

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[Tertiary education; income support]

Our next point is tertiary access, which is one of our real concerns. Our members have the lowest participation rate in tertiary of any identifiable group in Australia today and that is because many of our members have already faced enormous boarding school costs, not

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because of the elitism attached to boarding school but because we have no option of the areas that we live in. We must send our children to board somewhere. Why we don't access hostels, which would be cheaper for us in regional areas, is because in South Australia there
5 are very few boarding hostels and the boarding schools are quite often - in Port Augusta or Port Pirie are already booked out and already have long waiting lists. So we have no option but to send our children to Adelaide, which is a very expensive option to us.

10 Then we come to tertiary access. Once again we have no option but to send our children, if we want them to gain tertiary education, once again to Adelaide. The cost of a room in Adelaide is \$80 a week. That's generally accepted. To live on campus is over \$200 a week and there is no consideration whatsoever. And then the
15 government have brought in the actual means test, which for our members is a nightmare.

What we would really be asking therefore, if we could ever get the government to see our point of view, would be a non-means-tested
20 boarding allowance for geographically-isolated students and for rural and remote areas. Not only for remote areas, which is where most of our members come from, but also for rural areas because, as you published in Bush Talks, the people that live in rural Australia are the most uneducated people in the Australian workforce today. So I think it
25 speaks for itself there, but we would ask you to keep considering that, please, for us.

MRS CRAWFORD: There are many parents - they are actually the students themselves when it comes to tertiary - that apply for youth
30 allowance, and many of them aren't able to access. First and foremost they usually get knocked out by the assets test, and believe me you don't need much of an asset to be actually exempted from youth allowance. Of course the actual means test is another aspect of youth allowance, and for many rural families they are not able to pass that. In
35 fact some families have actually paid \$700 or \$800 to get an accountant to fill in the actual means test and then been found to be knocked back on youth allowance. Just the way that some family businesses are structured, it makes the whole process extremely difficult. Somewhere in the youth allowance there needs to be an
40 appropriate exemption for farming and rural businesses.

MR WEBB: Some of our members' children do 40 contact hours a week at university, so that would be 40 hours presumably in your own time which you should study as well, and we would ask how these children
45 are supposed to support themselves or even work part-time when they do a course such as that. We accept that if you're doing a course where you have eight, 10, 15 contact hours a week you should be able

to have a part-time job, but some of the other courses are so many more contact hours.

5 And then the government has said to us that they have helped
us by giving us two years - "If you work for two years you become
exempt from your parents' means." That's all very well but we still ask,
"How do they support themselves in the city unless you have
considerable parental support?" So if you don't have that, even with the
10 two years' working you still have to work part-time and some of the
courses are 40 contact hours a week.

[Transport subsidies]

MRS CRAWFORD: In South Australia the Education Department gives
15.3 cents per kilometre conveyance allowance either to the school
15 gate or to the nearest school bus service for a twice-a-day round trip
provided the school or service is five kilometres from the family home.
That is, a family living 20 kilometres from a school or bus service will be
paid 15.3 cents multiplied by 80; that's \$12.24 a day. This rate has
20 been static since 1993.

These trips are more often than not over unsealed roads, many
of which are not maintained regularly. We believe that this rate should
be more reflective of the real costs in transporting children to school or
to the bus service, the road conditions, the maintenance of a vehicle to
25 safely transport children. And I haven't seen this morning's paper but I
did hear it on the news last night that fuel costs are just increasing
dramatically.

[Technology; telecommunications]

30 One of the other problems that we perceive, particularly with
education - and maybe it can be tied into the lack of funding for
distance education in technology, but this is particularly in
communications - and in South Australia there are many rural and
remote telephone subscribers who are unable to access the Internet,
35 e-mail and things like that because of the slow data rate transmission
and receipt. With education through schools of distance education
using this form of technology to enhance and deliver their courses the
current situation is unacceptable.

40 Telephone communication in some areas is really terrible; and
believe me, I live in one of those areas. Telstra needs to maintain and
upgrade telecommunication infrastructure to uphold its USO [Universal
Service Obligation] to protect rural and remote consumers; and they
need to work towards the provision of greater data speed, whether it be
45 transmission or receipt. Of course Australia Post needs to maintain
and uphold its USG [Universal Service Guarantee] to provide at least a
weekly mail service to all Australians. Robert, you might like to mention
the RASS scheme [Remote Area Service Substitute].

[Postal services to support distance education]

5 **MR WEBB:** The RASS scheme is in total disarray. There was a review
of the RASS scheme announced in May 1998, and this review was to
conclude no later than October 1998. It is now June and there's still no
report. The RASS scheme is currently under threat from bureaucratic
10 interference of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and the Department of
Transport and Regional Services. The changes of regulations by CASA
[Civil Aviation Safety Authority] and an endorsement of the DT&RS
[Department of Transport and Regional Services] put the Southern
Northern Territory mail run in jeopardy in mid-May and when those
15 affected were notified, within days of their mail run being ceased, there
was absolutely nothing that remote and isolated consumers of the
Northern Territory and South Australia were able to do about this
situation, and no alternate method of mail delivery has been offered.

20 This in turn puts Australia Post, USG in breach with no postal
delivery for students of distance education. There appears to have
been a DT and RS shortfall of funding over the past two years which in
turn has affected mail service contractors under RASS. RASS must be
maintained as a federal government responsibility due to cross-border
25 situations that exist, and as in the provisions of the service in the
Northern Church in South Australia. The HF radio system used through
our School of the Air is outmoded and often of poor quality, especially
during the summer months.

30 Although there have been steps to improve quality, there are
many children who are not able to hear and communicate with their
teachers or peers during lessons. This mode of delivery is perceived to
be cost-effective but there are ongoing costs with the supply of
equipment and maintenance.

35 **MRS CRAWFORD:** Another important issue that we see in South
Australia is the bypassing of local schools, and maybe I'll ask you to
talk about that, Robert.

40 **MR WEBB:** This is because of a lack of consistent approach to
bypassing of small local schools. The education departments in the
large cities dictate that we must not bypass our schools, and I would
like to point out that we as people that live in small, isolated and remote
communities, are the greatest supporters of our local schools. This is
45 leading to a mass exodus of families - and I'm only saying this because
it's in the strictest confidence, what I'm saying here today, otherwise we
would not say this - from towns such as [confidential].

When the children get to secondary age people such as stock agents, bank personnel, hospital personnel, school personnel, and it is also leading to people from small properties to set up second homes at an unprecedented rate; the wives living apart from their husbands to educate their children in the cities, and we believe a critical mass element should be taken into account, and of course a suitable selection of subjects taught by qualified personnel. The situation at present is extremely inequitable for people in very small bush schools, and is the cause of much discontent in the communities, but we stress that the critical mass element is the main factor in determining a small school.

I was at a SPERA [Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia] conference last year in Alice Springs, and someone was describing a small rural school as Clare High School with 300 enrolments. I'm talking about a school like [example given] with 12 enrolled in the senior school, and that's from grade 7 to grade 12. That's what I'm classing a small school, and I want to make that quite clear: we're not asking for bypassing en masse for anyone that lives in the country. That is certainly not what we're about, but from the town that I live in and small towns like that, it is a very, very dividing issue, the bypassing. It's an Australian-wide situation, and in South Australia the situation, and in Western Australia, is better than in several other states, but it is of much concern to people that live in these very small, isolated areas that we cannot bypass our local school.

[Assistance for Isolated Children]

Why we're asking for a bypassing is that that will enable us to get the AIC allowance, which is up to \$5000, and we maintain that that would enable any person, whether you live in the town or on a small property, to be able to access a small rural boarding school or a bigger high school, even if it was only 80 K's away, and that would give everyone a much more equitable chance. That's what we maintain. In our areas there are always people who will bypass regardless of how much they have to borrow, but we're asking for the people that cannot do that, and their children are the ones sitting on the park benches in front of the local stores.

MRS CRAWFORD: There are several schools in South Australia, and I think that they've been actually listed - there's about 9 - that actually do have this bypassing. Each child is assessed on its own merits, I guess, but ICPA's policy or ICPA believes that students in senior secondary that have to study, have to study 50% or more of their subjects using distance education, should be able to bypass their local school.

MR WEBB: Also the situation there is at the moment it is in senior secondary, which is only Years 11 and 12, and we would say that it's not only suitable to bypass Year 11 and 12 because they're the two

crucial years of SACE [South Australian Certificate of Education] where you must be able to go at least in Year 10 to have that year when you're living away from home to settle in and decide what subjects you are going to pursue for SACE, because it's a very big thing, of course, for children from remote areas to settle into a new environment, and they must go at least in Year 10, but also it's the critical mass element. Maybe it's even in Year 8 they should go, because we have children that have only one girl, and no girls either side of them. So there's no interaction whatsoever for these children and they're just not achieving.

10

[Itinerant teacher service]

MRS CRAWFORD: In South Australia, servicing those remote students who are learning at home via distance education, there is an itinerant teacher service. I guess the bush is shrinking dramatically, and even in my own area the number of people are basically leaving the bush in droves. The itinerant teacher service has been available for many years now. It must be at least 10 years. Our concern would be that if numbers do shrink, then this service may become obsolete, or the Education Department would see it becoming obsolete. We believe that there always needs to be this service, even if it has to come under some sort of review or structure or whatever. So it's important that that is maintained.

In South Australia, I guess you realise that there has been - the primary industries in South Australia, particularly in cereal-growing areas, wool-growing, and even the cattle industry, to some extent there's been some pretty tough times in the last few years. For example, there has been an area of the state that has applied for exceptional circumstances because of floods, fire, locusts and a very prolonged dry season, and this has been knocked back by the federal government, and although this has been reapplied for again, I believe, it does place huge amounts of stress on families who have to educate their children, and particularly for those who have no choice and have to send their children away for a secondary education or tertiary education.

In many cases, in South Australia, and particularly in pastoral areas, unless you live in a very beautiful area like the Flinders Ranges there's not very many opportunities for diversification into other aspects of making a living, and a lot of this is governed by covenants of the pastoral board. Robert, have you got anything that - - -

[Income support]

MR WEBB: One other point I would just like to bring up for our members is the access in tertiary and the actual means test. One of our case studies here outlines this point, is that we, the parents, have to fill out the forms but then when we ring up the department, they tell us they can't give us the information because it has to go to the children,

although we have to fill out the forms. So they send it to the children in the city, and then it has to be sent back to us in the country and then we have to send it back to the department in the city, and all this is when the children don't have the allowance to continue them to study,
5 which seems to be just - this case study we have here. I mean, the same thing happened to me. I got around it. I was just so annoyed. I got around it, but she obviously didn't get around it, and they did do it to me, because some of our members only get once-weekly mail service.

10 So what I'm trying to say here is that if we have to fill out the form, surely they - they're asking our assets and all the information about us, and only we can provide that, so why can't they give us the information from the department instead of saying it's got to go through our children?

15

[Distance education]

MRS CRAWFORD: Also there has been a few problems with curriculum with distance education. I can't give any really specific details regarding that, but there are many families who are quite
20 unhappy particularly at the higher end of the scale, I should say, of primary education - Year 6 and 7. There are problems with the mathematics and some other aspects of the courses. Because of the area of studies that children are supposed to do - and that's defined by the Education Department - it places a huge amount of stress and
25 strain on families and they don't often have the expertise to be delivering some of these courses.

There are problems with the curriculum where some people, if they do have a slight chance of - or a slight choice, and when I say
30 "slight" they are driving their children miles and miles to access another form of education which would be in a town, and I perceive that there needs to be something that happens there within the curriculum that is delivered through distance education. For example, a lot of the things that - the curriculum needs to recognise geographic isolation. They
35 can't be writing courses that say things like, "Count the number of red cars that go past your front door," and that's what's happening. It's just inappropriate. Some of the curriculum or some of the courses that are being written are quite inappropriate.

40 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thank you very much. If you would like to leave us any written material too, that would be of assistance to us in going through it, if you don't mind. Alby?

[Education funding]

45 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** Most of your problems seem to be centred on the funding. I think I heard you say earlier on the Commonwealth have been very good.

MRS CRAWFORD: The Commonwealth have been very good, like in regard to paying them an accolade towards CAP funding, but because of the Country Areas Program funding. But under that issue with Country Areas Program funding, there are a lot of schools in South Australia accessing that, so that the bucket is the same but more are accessing it. But it's an issue that I guess probably needs to be addressed at a federal level.

MR WEBB: I guess most of our issues are related to funding because it's so hard for - our criteria is actually to try and access equal access, and that requires more funding for us because we're so far out, and particularly in relation to the tertiary issue. That's a real problem for our members. The federal government feel they have addressed that by what they have done with the youth allowance, that you can take the two years off and you become independent of your family means. But what we're saying is that we still have to pay board, whereas an urban based family don't have to pay board. That's what we're saying, and we're also saying that it's almost impossible for some of our students to work. If you didn't come from a family who could support you to some extent financially, I don't know how you can access tertiary. I just don't know how you can do it.

[Technology to support distance education]

COMMISSIONER JONES: The matter of technology, you seem to think that the School of the Air hasn't kept pace with advanced technology.

MRS CRAWFORD: HF radio is probably one of the oldest forms of technology that we've seen. It's a very old form of technology. I guess part of the problem there is I don't know that HF technology can be improved so that students can actually get a clear voice over the air. There are ways and means that they actually have improved that. They've put in new consoles at School of the Air, which means that if a child is really having difficulty, particularly in the summer months - that's when problems occur there - that they can actually duct in on a phone system as well.

[Technology in schools; clustering]

COMMISSIONER JONES: One of the schools, a small country school in New South Wales that Mr Sidoti visited - and they reported that they had 10 computers in this small school but nowhere to put them and of course no-one to service them. Real problem, isn't it?

MRS CRAWFORD: It certainly is.

COMMISSIONER JONES: I went to a very isolated school, Victoria River Downs, a good many 20 years ago, and I took them script films of Storm Boy, Colin Thiele's Storm Boy, thinking I was doing a great job

for these isolated people, and they said to me, "We've got that on video, of course." I was deflated a bit. So there are some good provisions or facilities in the country and isolated schools.

5 **MR WEBB:** I agree with that. Our school has wonderful facilities. In that relation, it has a lot of technology, but what it can't provide is the peer interaction. When teenagers get to a certain stage they seem to thrive with peer interaction. That's what we don't have. I wouldn't say our school is lacking on anything in relation to technology, and also it's serviced regularly and people know how to use it. My children have
10 come to Adelaide and they are very computer-literate. Even from such an isolated area, they have actually done a foreign language out there up until Year 10 and continued it to Year 12, and also music to conservatory level, all on Open Access. But what they lack is the peer
15 interaction, and they do seem to really need that.

They just become bored if they don't have it, and that's why we would be asking - I'm not complaining - myself, I'm not complaining on behalf of my members from the schools about the lack of technology. It
20 has kept pace, in that particular instance anyway, and I do know that, and I know about the small kindergarten in our town. That also has excellent modern technology, but the trouble with us is in the latter years we just don't have the numbers to make it work. It just doesn't work, and we can't cluster because we're too far away to cluster.

25 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** Congratulate your children from me, will you, for what they've done?

MR WEBB: I'm a determined father as well. But the thing about
30 clustering is that we could perhaps go to Quorn because it's only an hour south of Hawker. But you see some of our members have already travelled an hour to get to Hawker before they would go on to Quorn. So that means they would be two hours either way to get to school, and that's what makes clustering for us almost an impossibility. The parents
35 wouldn't allow it. It's too long on a bus.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Could I go back to your comment about bypassing schools?

40 **MR WEBB:** Yes.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: I must confess, I wasn't able to actually grasp what the point was that you were trying to make with the bypassing. Can you explain that to me?

45 **MR WEBB:** The point I'm trying to make, that we do have various schools in South Australia which we have got through the department and we can bypass, but it's only in Year 11 and 12, and the point I'm

5 making now is that our local school - it's been over a hundred students for a hundred years, but now all of a sudden it's down to almost 50 students, so it needs to be looked at again; that Year 11 and 12 you need to bypass before that stage because you have children that have no peer interaction for years either side.

10 That's our trouble, and why we're asking for the bypassing is so we can access the AIC allowance because that gives everybody that amount of money to make a choice. Other than that, some people who come from wealthier families will bypass regardless, but the other very small minority of students are left behind and what I have found is that the ones who are left behind are left behind. They never complete Year 12.

15 [10.05 am]

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Does that mean then that a school say when it gets to 50 students should be closed?

20 **MR WEBB:** No, it doesn't. It means it should be reclassified.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: As?

25 **MR WEBB:** From R to 12, perhaps from R to 10 or perhaps even from R to 7, depending on what the community decide.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: And then close the higher part of the school, you suggest?

30 **MR WEBB:** Yes, yes, it does, and it is not because of the lack of communication. We have the latest in communications but the children aren't happy there and they're not achieving there. When my children left we still had much bigger classes. That has just happened in our community in the last three or four years - that the school numbers
35 have halved.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: One of the difficulties with bypassing of course is that it encourages - it provides an incentive for people to do that, which means that the critical mass in the school drops even
40 further. So in many respects you have a choice between not bypassing but between closing the school and forcing people to go elsewhere or not allowing bypassing so that the school can maintain its numbers.

45 **MR WEBB:** That's what people have said and that is why I have stressed that the critical mass element is so important. It must be tiny schools and it's only tiny schools that we're asking this for and we're also asking that each case be individually looked at instead of just this criteria which says no bypassing or you can't bypass until you're 11

5 whereas if there is only one child in say grade 9 and no child either
side for two years it just doesn't work. And it is not that we are trying to
undermine the public system and it is not that we want our small
schools to close. It is the last thing we want. I think small schools in
primary are fabulous learning environments and we have had
wonderful teachers and we still do have. But it just doesn't work
because of the lack of peer interaction with mid-year teenage children.
That's what I am stressing.

10 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Glennis, you were saying something
before?

MRS CRAWFORD: I have forgotten.

15 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** That's okay. Can I come back, Robert -
when you say "tiny schools", what would ICPA define as "a tiny school"
for this purpose?

20 **MR WEBB:** We have just had a conference in Katherine about that and
we had a lot of debate about it because that is what I brought up. I was
at the SPERA conference and they were classing Clare as a small rural
high school. We are saying, no. We're saying Hawker is a small rural
high school with 12 - that is from grade 7 to grade 12. That's what we're
classing as a small school. Even we're saying 25 - just approximately
25 something like that - that's what we're classing as a small school.
Certainly not much more than that but a minimum number in the senior
years we would be looking at. We were discussing before some years
ago they were saying 10. We're quite prepared to accept a lot less than
10 but what we're not prepared to say is 12 in the whole senior school.
30 We're saying that doesn't work.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thank you very much.

35 **MR WEBB:** Thank you very much.

MRS CRAWFORD: Thank you, and do you want me to leave this
behind?

40 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Yes, please. You mentioned about saying
these things strictly confidentially. These are public hearings unless
people ask for particular information to be kept confidential. Is there
something in what you said that you have particular concerns about
being public?

45 **MR WEBB:** The case histories. You have got the addresses on there.

MRS CRAWFORD: There is information in here that identifies people.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Okay, but you haven't said that on the record?

5 **MRS CRAWFORD:** No.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Okay. Perhaps we can consider what you have said on the record as being public and any identifying information in your written submission we will ensure remains confidential.

10 **MRS CRAWFORD:** I guess perhaps Robert might like to think that references to [a country school] may be not - - -

15 **MR WEBB:** Yes, if I could just delete that; just that particular one?

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Okay, perhaps - - -

20 **MRS CRAWFORD:** When we talk about [particular schools] or something we are giving examples.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Okay. What we might do for the official record and for the public and the media that's here we will just refer to "a country school" rather than referring to a particular public school.

25 **MR WEBB:** Yes, thank you. That's what I would ask for.

30 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thank you. The representatives of the Department of Education, Training and Employment, would you like to come up and introduce yourselves, please, for the tape and then you can go straight into your submission?

MR HALSEY: I'm John Halsey, executive director, Country Schools and Children's Services.

5 **MS SWEETMAN:** Susan Sweetman, manager support services for the western districts of the metropolitan area and Pirie, Port Augusta and Whyalla.

10 **MR WILLIAMS:** Michael Williams, superintendent of Aboriginal education.

10 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thank you very much.

15 **MR HALSEY:** It's nice to be here. What we thought we would do this morning is in a sense go through the submission that I understand the government has forwarded to you, Commissioner.

15 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Yes, thank you.

20 **MR HALSEY:** Just elaborating on some points there. We have a couple of overhead stencils if it would be appropriate at some stage.

20 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** We have the machine ready to go onto the table if and when you want it.

25 **[Demography of South Australia]**
MR HALSEY: Okay. I have some initial information here that you asked whether we could get it. What I would like to do in the beginning is to just remind you of the context, if I can, for the public record of South Australia in the sense of its demography and its spatial relationship, if you like. Essentially, the state itself is dominated by one capital centre and six regional centres with a maximum of just over 20,000 in population and so we do have very much the issues of distance and critical mass to deal with as you have heard already today.

30 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Yes.

35 **MR HALSEY:** In relation to that what I want to say to you is that just recently the government of this state has acknowledged the fact that there are special demands - if you like, special requirements - of rural and remote areas of South Australia and in fact as a result of a statement to the House late last year in November the Minister for Education essentially established the position or the directorate of country services.

40

45 Very early in the piece what I did as a result of being appointed to this position was to undertake a significant consultation with country South Australia. I visited 29 locations and held, I think it was, 74 different meetings right across the state from the far west to the south, the south-east, as far north as Coober Pedy and basically spoke

to school communities, staff, parents, students, interested business people, local politicians, federal politicians and so on, and asked them one key question and that was, "What do you think needs to happen to improve services and support in country South Australia?"

5

As a result of that quite a lot of information has been gathered; in fact a huge amount of information has been gathered. It is on a Web site and that addresses in the documentation that you have received - and that documentation comes down to I think identifying six key things that provide services in rural and remote areas. I think we have mentioned it but for the record from our perspective let me put it on there: that they are access, staffing, availability and quality of appropriate services, improving outcomes for students, training and development and the unique nature of each individual community. Those half a dozen factors, if you like, are overlaid by these two others that I think wherever you are in country areas are always issues, and they are distance and critical mass. Some of those points I have made there I will come back to later on.

20

One of the interesting things that we have found in country centres in delivering education and children's services is that not much of a shift in the population causes quite a dramatic change in service requirements and service availability. It was interesting to hear the presentation of the last group talking about the bypass rule and the tension that that raises between the desire to maintain a local school and at the same time to want to access and get into a different range of services.

30

Currently in South Australia in the age of 18 years and under we have in our country schools, our rural and remote schools, just over 63,000 students - that was the February 99 census - and they're in schools from as small as less than 20. Our smallest school at this stage is at Salt Creek, south of Meningie, and our largest schools are in the regional centres like Mount Gambier and Whyalla, Port Augusta, places like that.

40

What is happening, as we have seen the change in services in country areas, is that the school or education service and the preschool service almost takes on the single community focus in the town and particularly it is often the last - I was going to use the word "vestige", which sounds a bit dramatic, but the last instance of government service in a country centre. So the intensity of scrutiny which is placed upon that centre and the importance of it is amplified.

45

Given the fact that we're aware that there is a wide range of issues and I have given those six dot points - and it looks like we can do it now. What we were doing here - and the purpose of including this in the submission was we are a state of about 1.4 million, 1.5 million

people and we have just under a million square kilometres and, quite literally, most of us live in that little patch there. So our challenge - as indeed with many other places, but particularly in South Australia - and Western Australia is probably the other one but, there again, as soon
5 as I say that we have got Western Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland probably the three biggest ones but I will focus on our place.

After Adelaide our main population centres are Port Lincoln,
10 which is around about 10,000, Whyalla, Port Augusta, Port Pirie. We then go into the Riverland area, down into the South-East and into Murray Bridge. The rest of the population centres - we're talking about centres of a thousand or less and when I mentioned that small school
15 down here literally on the Coorong, south of Meningie, with about 17 students currently. It's an R to 7 school and the very issue that was raised by the last group is the tension between maintaining that small school, which is inextricably linked to two industries locally - one is the pastoral industry and the other one is national parks. The tension is about sending students to Meningie or down in fact to Kingston,
20 particularly if there is one girl say in Year 7, as an example, or students getting transition into senior secondary.

While I have the map there, we have to support the Country Education Children's Services in South Australia 11 district
25 superintendents. Those district superintendents are responsible in a line management sense for a group of schools and preschools and children's services. The number of schools varies but it's between 25 and 30. We have each of them located in an office with a coordinator supporting them for children's services and schools and
30 some specialist staff. We have one in Port Lincoln, which does basically all of Eyre Peninsula. We have an office in Whyalla. We have an officer based in Port Augusta who does right up to the Far North as far as Mintabie - in the Far North, Coober Pedy, Mintabie.

Our submission refers to the fact that one per cent of the
35 population lives above the 32nd parallel, and that is Marree up on the track up here. We then have another officer in Port Pirie that basically does some of the Flinders Ranges area in here. We have an officer in Kadina at the top of Yorke Peninsula, who does all of Yorke Peninsula.
40 There is an officer based in Clare. There is another officer based in the tip of the Barossa Valley, who does up into the Barossa Valley; an officer does all of the Fleurieu Peninsula and Kangaroo Island. We have another superintendent located at Murray Bridge, and then one in the Riverland at Berri and one in the South-East at Mount Gambier.
45 Each of those people are senior field representatives of the department and, in most instances, they have been principals of schools. They are people of significant experience and qualifications and they work at support schools in country areas and liaise directly with communities.

5 The second thing I was just going to do by way of an overhead
- and I am sorry that this is a little bit jumped around - was that one,
Commissioner, to try and bring together the critical elements that you
find, whenever you go through and you listen to a community meeting,
about "What are your concerns and how do we improve them for
country services?" From my perspective and many others who help me
go through all this information, which is available on the Web, you
seem to get those half a dozen points coming up time and time again:
10 take note of the nature of our local community - we're different from
others. There are things in common but we're different. There they are.
The overriding things which dominate are distance and critical mass.

[Partnerships 21]

15 These other headings in black type around the perimeter are
there for two reasons. One is they represent some central features of a
new program that is being implemented by the department on behalf of
the government in South Australia, called Partnerships 21, which is a
drive for greater involvement in the local community, local
20 management, with a focus on improving learning outcomes for
students. In order to establish that what we're focusing on is improving
the human resource allocations to sites, including improving community
partnerships and government structures, bigger budgets and more
flexibility with budget expenditure; increased accountability, given that;
25 improvements in information technology and improvements in
professional development.

 The reason why we designed this sort of chart or diagram like
this was to say, "These are the things that are required to implement
30 Partnerships 21. These are the essential features that we require to
improve country education" and there is clearly a relationship between
the two. Finally, before returning to the submission, one of the things
that we have established - just for the record that we're aiming to do in
South Australia in terms of service to country regions - is to improve on
35 the decision-making - quicker and better decision-making, reinvigorate
some of the pride and confidence people have in country areas,
increase the options available to them, improve the access to service,
more choice about school options as well as curriculum options, and
overall to try and improve the results profile of students in country
40 areas.

[Outcome comparisons]

 The facts are that in terms of outcomes for country students
they are not the same as for metropolitan based students. This is both
45 in the case of what is known in South Australia as the basic skills
testing for literacy, numeracy, and also for the results of students in
Year 12 at the end of secondary education with the SACE. Overall, the
profile of results is not the same as the profile of results in the

metropolitan area, and that is a concern to someone like myself and to the department, and clearly it is an issue which we have to work on.

[10.24 am]

5

[Strategies to improve outcomes]

Having said that, what I'd like to say is that there are currently three initiatives which have been designed to improve care and education in South Australia. One is, as I've said already, is the establishment of the Country Services Directorate. I've told you something of that and in terms of the extent of the initial consultation work. The Country Services Directorate itself works very very closely with the Metropolitan Services Directorate because there are issues which are unique to metropolitan, issues which are unique to country, but there is a lot in common. What we are trying to avoid is unnecessary duplication and use of resources setting up little bureaucratic structures which serve no-one any real good in the field.

The second big initiative is Partnerships 21 which we've outlined for you in a few pages in the documentation. We see from a country perspective Partnerships 21 having quite significant potential to improve things, particularly in terms of flexibility, resource allocation and greater certainty of planning, because one of the key things underlying Partnerships 21 is a longer time-frame for the allocation of resources; both more resources to local sites, greater flexibility over the use of those resources, new governance structures with parents and communities and more certainty about the planning time line.

The other one that we've recently been able to establish has been through MCEETYA, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. What happened at the last MCEETYA meeting in April was the minister received endorsement from MCEETYA to establish a national task force that we're going to chair, which will report on a range of case studies drawn from around Australia which highlight workable local strategies to improve employment, education and training and children services in remote rural areas, because quite literally of the nexus between each of those. What we're trying to do here is say: given the fact that we've got changing demographics, changing demands of rural communities, new and better delivery modes through IT, the demand still - and I don't think this will go away from wanting high-quality teachers and so on. How do we put it all together? Where is some good practice? How do we describe that and then replicate it where possible?

I won't elaborate any more on the six things we've found time and again out of the issue of going through the consultation process with country districts. One of the things which is a concern - and my colleague Mark here has a particular brief for this as the superintendent

for Aboriginal education - is in fact the issue of the proficiency and literacy and numeracy for Aboriginal students. We have taken that issue very seriously, as you would expect, and what the documentation we've presented to you shows, is some work that Mark and his
5 colleagues have worked through to develop an Aboriginal education plan which is being implemented, resourced and implemented in essentially three types of settings, if I can put it that way, Commissioner, for Aboriginal students. They are schools in the Lands, the Anangu schools in the Pitjantjatjara Lands in the north and north-
10 west of the state, in designated Aboriginal schools, and in - I hesitate to use the word "mainstream" but in all other schools where Aboriginal students attend. That is a very significant impetus or initiative in the department and one which has occupied a fair degree of time and effort by Mark and his team of people.

15

[Distance education; Open Access College; School of the Air]

For the record there is just the statistical information there for you, the number and size of schools and location. I don't think there is any need at this stage to elaborate on that for you. I've given you the
20 range of schools. One thing I would like to spend a couple of minutes on amplifying in terms of provision is the Open Access College. The Open Access College provides education services not only for country schools and remote schools but also for metropolitan schools where schools can't offer all of the curriculum choice that students want to
25 access. One of the interesting issues, as you would realise, in terms of providing educational services, is no matter what your critical mass, how big it is, there's always something someone wants that you can't deliver in a face-to-face way. Of the 883.7 full-time equivalent enrolments at the Open Access College just under 500 of those are
30 country students. So about 500 country students and 400 FTE metropolitan or non-country students, if I can put it that way.

The previous submission spoke about the itinerant teacher service linked with the School of the Air in Port Augusta. Just for the
35 record there are five itinerant teachers who visit each family once per term, and there's a ratio set within that as well. If they've got one child, it's basically a full-day visit, if there are two children they're entitled to more time, and that is seen as a very important face-to-face addition to the School of the Air service plus what we can deliver through Open
40 Access.

[Clustering]

One of the big focuses of providing education in country services is looking at different models, different ways of delivering,
45 given the fact that you've got either small numbers or declining numbers, and you have distance. And you have got the issues of distance not only from large regional centres, but distance in terms of the distance which students travel each day to attend school. I think in

5 this state - and indeed in other places in Australia, but I only speak
about this state - we have developed a number of interesting models
which we are looking at developing further. Again the previous people
spoke about the problem with Hawker and Quorn with its distance in
terms of clustering, and we're going to have a look at that further by
seeing whether in fact we can overcome some of the distance problems
through better use of block timetabling, for example, instead of looking
at it as how do we make two schools operate together on, if you like, a
conventional school basis? Can we in fact change the way in which the
10 schools operate, bearing in mind the nature of the local community. I
think one of the things that Partnerships 21 will provide us with is an
opportunity to look with more flexibility at different ways of coming up
with solutions in country areas.

15 One of our best models, I suppose, is one that goes by the
acronym of MINSEC, which is the Mid-North Secondary Education
Cooperative. It's a cluster of six schools and basically what they do is
work together to improve the range of choice and the viability of choice
for students by bulking up all of their secondary enrolments, moving
20 teachers and indeed students, on some occasions, around the
campuses, and also using local delivery, using technology. That has
been very successful, and indeed some of the results coming out of a
place, for example, Booleroo Centre High, were equal with the best in
the state. One of the benchmarks of that was in the area of
25 mathematics and physics, which are often subjects that many country
schools have a demand to deliver but find difficulty delivering in two
senses: one is in terms of just getting sufficient numbers of students
and also ensuring that we have the teaching expertise to deliver those
subjects. They obviously are delivered by Open Access but if that can
30 be augmented by quality face to face, all the better.

[Vocational education and training]

35 The submission mentions another cooperative cluster involving
a set of schools on Yorke Peninsula, Ardrossan, Port Broughton and
Snowtown. We have got the VET development, which is a very
important area of work - vocational education training - on a series of
schools on the Eyre Peninsula. Just to give you some sense of the
distance, when we're talking about the VET one, which talks about
Cleve, Cowell, Kimba and Lock, we're actually talking about Cowell and
40 Cleve, Kimba and Lock. Cowell to Cleve is about 35-40 Ks, it's about
60 Ks up there, and 70 to 80 Ks across here. Wudinna is another
important area. The interesting thing at Cowell, for example, is that the
school has a really well developed aquaculture program. There is a
very viable oyster industry there.

45 Students study Year 11-12 certificate of education and they do
their VET modules within that. They get their certificate because the
assessment board here recognises that. The school has an oyster

5 lease and they work with the local industry and there is significant employment. In fact I heard a very interesting tale the other day; there is such good growth going on there that if you now don't go for the practice at footy you don't get in the B team as a matter of automatic selection, you've actually got to go to practice. That might sound a bit of an odd little story to put here but it's indicative of the growth in health of that town.

10 But what we're looking at is that's focusing on aquaculture. Cleve has a very important agriculture program based on a farm bequeathed essentially, known as Sims' Farm. It's an operational farm. It offers a certificate in agriculture equivalent to Urrbrae which is the ag school in Adelaide. Lock, we're looking at a range of issues there, including tourism, hospitality and so on, and Kimba. So that sort of
15 nexus there is an important one and one we want to develop further, as indeed we've got others up there with Kimba. In the South-East at Naracoorte, a very important one in VET education with BRL Hardy, a major wine company. The school has its own vineyard, a computer-driven viticulture based program. The students working in
20 VET there with their senior secondary programs and with a major producer of wine. There's another one at Nuriootpa involving fish farming, wine, horseracing industry and so on.

25 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Just before you take the map off, John, could you just show us where this MINSEC area is?

30 **MR HALSEY:** Yes, certainly. MINSEC is - here we are, Gladstone High School, Jamestown, Peterborough, Booleroo Centre, Orroroo and this year Quorn has come in. So it's basically, Commissioner, in that area in there.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: It's a fairly big area.

35 **MR HALSEY:** It's a fairly big area. The Gladstone, Jamestown, Peterborough, Booleroo and Orroroo, that little tight group there, have been going for some time - four or five years, probably longer. Quorn has come in as a result of - I think last year it came in, precipitated I think by two things. One was the model was going well, why don't we expand it? Secondly, as sometimes happens with this, a new principal
40 came in, Jim Lowe, who was a principal at Cowell - interested in how he could increase the range of options for students and away it went.

COMMISSIONER JONES: Has jade mining gone ahead at Cowell?

45 **MR HALSEY:** Jade mining is a big industry. Yes, the jade mining is still - as indeed, Dr Jones, the Cowell electricity company - which is specialising in providing electrical power for remote and isolated communities - is a major local employer and indeed has won significant

contracts in remote areas of Australia. So there are some examples there. The other interesting one is down south of Adelaide here at Strathalbyn, Commissioner. There is a traditional high school there and a primary school.

5

What we have done is in fact linked together - they're not on the map, they're that small - a series of small sites: Langhorne Creek, Milang, Ashbourne Primary School and the town primary school to make in a sense an extended campus operation. There are six sites but they're under the one administration at Strathalbyn and they've got IT connections and so on. What it basically has done is developed a multi-campus school. The distances aren't great, they've got their normal school buses. It's an interesting model in terms of retaining the identity of the local area.

15

As you heard from the previous group, we will do anything to maintain our school but we also want choice, and this is one of the tensions we work with. This model has enabled us to maintain basically the local identity as well as the benefits of scale. That's what we're trying to do.

20

[Rural student accommodation]

In quite a few areas now, particularly given the fact that we're an agency which involves education, training and employment, and the education side is children's services as well, the integration of early childhood services on school sites is seen as a big plus and is something we think needs to be pushed further. There's reference there to the South Australian rural student accommodation program. We spend just over a quarter of a million dollars a year on that, and these hostels - we have four of them - Burra, Cleve, Cowell and Lucindale. Again, if we want a map, Cowell is linked - students come to there for the aquaculture, they go to Cleve for agriculture, the Sims' Farm program, and the other two are Burra in the Mid-North and Lucindale in the South-East. The Burra one serves the students coming in off the stations. It's not the preferred option for everybody but it is an option and it does work.

25

30

35

Just pushing along, very importantly, on page 12 of the submission, Commissioner, is a model or strategy which has taken quite a lot of time to develop. It goes under the title of the Wiltja program and this is connected with schools on the Lands. Woodville High is the main school in Adelaide which provides the educational program whilst students are in the city area. I don't know, Mark, whether you want to say anything about Wiltja, or are you happy just to leave it as it is?

40

45

MR WILLIAMS: I'm happy to leave it as it is.

[Transport]

MR HALSEY: Okay. It's a major accommodation program which took a lot of developing, as you can imagine. It has been strongly endorsed by Elders and it is now running very effectively. The previous people
5 spoke about transport and access. What we've done there is to simply say this is the extent of the transport service to date. I think it's important for the record for you to know that we are currently looking at a major review, or a significant review process involved with transport services, and two things came up during my consultations, both dealing
10 with eligibility for access to school transport services. One was, "How many kilometres do we have to be from the bus station or from school to be eligible?" and, secondly, the number of students required to get a bus service running in an area.

15 **[10.43 am]**

If I take the second point, currently our policy says you need 10 students before a district becomes eligible for a bus. One of the things we are finding is that as numbers decline in rural areas, getting
20 10 students together becomes more and more of a challenge. So we're looking at some new innovative practices to try and improve access of students to schools by transport. At Salt Creek, that school I mentioned previously, we're looking at a trial there moving outside of buses and looking at some form of new transport, people carriers, if you like - I
25 won't mention a product by name but you know what I mean, like a large station wagon - using a combination of an allocation to the school, what the parents would normally be eligible for in terms of a travel allowance, putting those two things together, and looking at some other way of developing a transport service around the community. The
30 facts and figures stand there in terms of allocation and you can see it's a very significant amount of money.

Also the previous group mentioned the business of a country student travelling allowance. One of the latest figures I was able to find
35 suggests we're spending just over \$800,000 a year in providing support to parents. There's also, in terms of students with disabilities in country areas, the fact that we have modified a number of buses to enable students in wheelchairs access, which is always an issue in country areas - a few other things there which I don't think I need to elaborate
40 on.

[Other family support]

Page 14, we pointed to a number of things including RICE, Remote and Isolated Children's Exercise, which focuses on providing
45 support for parents in remote areas. For the record, the latest figure I could find on that was \$168,900 is the budget associated with that. The program enables caregivers to help children with distance education programs as well as providing support to families.

One of the important features of country areas that we have noticed more in recent times is the change not only in the demographics but the change in the wealth base, if you like, over all of country areas, the income distribution. To that end one of the things that happens in this state is there is a program of support which is known as the school card scheme, which on a needs basis - and there are criteria associated with this based on the Commonwealth Family Income Support Scheme whereby parents are eligible to receive support for primary and secondary students.

At the moment 32% of rural students in South Australia receive school card support and that 32% of the total students receiving school card support represents - my best calculation is 40.5% of the total country enrolments. Given that in 1998 - I haven't got the 99 figure for you - \$12.3 million was spent on that, this represents a significant input.

COMMISSIONER JONES: Have you got the metropolitan figure?

MR HALSEY: The metropolitan figure - in total, Dr Jones, in 1998 the department spent \$12.3 million on school card. One-third of that was in the country, so about \$4 million in the country and \$8 million for metropolitan based students. The rates are \$110 per primary student and \$170 per secondary.

[Country Areas Program]

The previous people spoke about the CAP program, and basically the point they were making is it's very valuable, which I would want to endorse. But what's happened recently is that the CAP program, given a lot of pressure from schools and looking at work done in the Northern Territory and elsewhere, we have looked at a different method of distributing the CAP funding. What we've done is provided a wider range of schools to become eligible for that CAP funding, which has meant some decline in others, because the bucket at this stage has essentially remained the same.

Now, one of the recommendations that has been put in this submission is that we look at in fact rejuvenating and increasing the CAP funding with some sort of new rural index, because without question when you go to country areas and you talk about the Country Areas Program and what it's able to do it's highly valued, highly prized.

The other thing I'd just like to point out is that we are through the Country Services Directorate undertaking some initiatives across government to try and improve the impact of our policies and our resourcing, particularly with the Human Services Agency in this state. Our overall budget is about a third of the state disposable income annually. Human Services, from memory, off the top of my head,

spends about 40% of the state's budget, and between us that's a significant amount of revenue going across the state. What I've undertaken recently is to see how we can work together to improve things, particularly in delivering specialist services in country areas -
5 like speech pathology services for examples, assistance with students with disabilities.

I've already elaborated on where the district offices are so I won't go into that again, but I would like to say, as is said on page 15,
10 there seems to be a hierarchy of preference in teaching modes in country area which is strongly paralleled in the city. At all costs we'd like a teacher, then if we can't get a teacher we'll have quality distance education, but our first preference is for a teacher; that is a well-recognised fact of life.

15
[Information Technology]

There's then quite a bit of information on the DECSTEC [a computer technology program strategy] thing. I'll leave you to read that. The important message there is that in terms of country areas there's
20 been very strong advocacy both from people within communities, and certainly by myself and many other colleagues, that we need to make sure that the role out in the country is given priority for the subsidy scheme for purchase of hardware and software; that country schools get not only a fair bite of the cherry but a preferential bite of the cherry;
25 that we do have adequate training and development in there; and that we are moving through to a system whereby the cost of services should be the same as it is for the cost in the metropolitan area so there's not a disadvantage. That's well documented for you I think in there.

30 The only thing I would like to do - on page 17 the submission didn't put in a couple of specifics for you - is we have identified in the country area three schools which are going to provide leadership to a range of schools in country South Australia: one's in the South-East at Kongorong, one in the Far North at Coober Pedy, one on Yorke
35 Peninsula at Edithburgh. These schools, which we're calling global discovery schools, have been given grants, \$45,000 each over three years, and some consultation availability to expert consultants, 50 hours each, to develop programs and leadership which can be shared with others in enhancing on-line delivery teaching and learning
40 for students, and they will share their expertise with others as part of the deal.

[Vocational education]

I've mentioned Open Access College and MINSEC, its role in
45 IT, so I won't go through that again with you. I've also talked about Voc.Ed. [Vocational Education] in some ways. There are some facts and figures there in terms of the amount of funding allocated and, as I've said, our agency and the government sees improving Voc.Ed.

programs as particularly important. Just on that note, one of the recommendations in the submission, Commissioner, is to look at how we can develop a program of support to enable students in country areas to get better access or be assisted with their access to high quality Voc.Ed. placements to improve the industrial base of their skill level.

The wording is more precise than I'm saying at the moment, but basically if I can give you an example - at one of the schools that I mentioned in the MINSEC cluster here at Booleroo, what they are doing is they run a hospitality training program for students, and it's going very well indeed. It reaches a certain level where it would be ideal for the students to have experience in a commercial kitchen or a commercial cookery situation, or indeed a large establishment, in terms of actually producing meals at a rate of knots and serving and distribution and so on. Getting students from those locations into that is a cost factor. Some of the Voc.Ed. funding from the state assists with that, and page 34 puts that recommendation there for you. I think that also would assist in keeping students, an incentive to keep them local, as well as get them the benefits of moving out to the larger centres for that particular aspect of expertise.

I've mentioned the fact that the Senior Secondary Assessment Board has moved quite a way on its Voc.Ed. accreditation process as part of the completion of secondary education, which is very important, as well as - and I'll use awkward language - a more traditional academic program, which always gets educators into trouble when you use language like that, but I'll use it so we can differentiate it for the moment and I'll be pleased to receive your advice afterwards, Dr Jones, on another set of words.

The other thing that needs to be I think on the record is on page 21 we've listed a number of supports that come out of the Senior Secondary Assessment Board to support country schools. There are a number of challenges that face us, including things like maintaining the supply of teachers with particular expertise - like LOTE [Languages Other Than English]; others are mentioned - technical studies, home economics. It varies from site to site, but the LOTE one is one that always seems to come up fairly frequently, and one of the things that we have done, and we need to do more of, is in fact initiate a program of converting existing teachers over to LOTE teachers, and currently there are 93 teachers involved in this program; 70 of them are in the country. Just recently I met a person on Kangaroo Island, a humanities teacher, pretty interested in Indonesia, has trained to do Indonesian, is teaching Indonesian - there are many others that I could cite but won't - and this is particularly important.

[Staff incentives]

The interesting dilemma we have is we have no general shortage of teachers, even though the press will run various articles saying a shortage is impending. The best advice that I can bring to you from our human resources people is overall we don't have a shortage
5 of teachers; the challenge is finding enough who are willing to go to the country. We have a current incentive scheme which in total costs about \$14 million annually. We've done a major review on the incentive scheme to develop a new package. The agreement on that has not yet
10 been reached, partly because it's tied up in the industrial relations enterprise agreement work, which is currently before the commission in South Australia, and there are varying views as to how incentives ought to be constructed and delivered. On the one hand, people say you've just got to pay people double and they will go and, on the other hand, you've got to be more sophisticated.

15 I know that offering people to be paid double doesn't get people to go to country areas. A classic example - there was a place in the middle of Eyre Peninsula, which is fairly choice compared to some others, and I was being berated about this and they said, "If you paid
20 me double I'd go," and I said, "Well, I'll pay you double. For the argument, I'll pay you double. Will you go?" and they said, "Hang on, hang on." I said, "All I want you to do is to go there for five years, teach in the school and provide a bit of district leadership and we'll double your salary." They said, "What about our kids? What about our family?
25 What about our house in Adelaide? What about, what about?" I said, "Exactly. They're the challenges that we face."

What we're trying to look at, for want of a better term, is a sophisticated mix-and-match matrix, because what we're finding with
30 the changing age profile of teachers, the changing expectations that they have, the changing profile of the leadership, is that what suits one person won't suit another. What's required to get a group of teachers to go and stay in Coober Pedy is going to be different from what it is in Clare. I'm sure you know where those are but the reality of life is there
35 are some people who are excited about going to Coober Pedy; there are many people who are not excited about it, and that's why we have to develop a more sophisticated range of processes.

The other thing we're doing in that line, Commissioner, is
40 working in the university environment, the training environment, the pre-employment environment, to run programs in the University of South Australia, Flinders University, and Adelaide, to present modules and lectures to students about teaching in country areas, the challenges and the opportunities, which includes a significant field
45 placement as part of the package. As a result of that program - Mark, you might correct me if I'm wrong - we were able to recruit seven teachers into the schools on the Lands who really want to be there, because they've been up, they've had prac experience there,

they've seen it, they've integrated it as part of their teaching training, and they see it as a significant professional challenge.

5 There's quite a section in terms of reference 3 on support for
students with disabilities, indigenous children, and so on. At this
juncture, unless there are questions, it's all elaborated there for you -
the resourcing that's put into it, the range of consultancy services
available. The reality is that we've had to think of new ways to get
speech pathology services into remote and isolated areas. We've had
10 to do some outsourcing of psychological assessments in country
schools to make sure that there is an actual service. We've tried to
break down the waiting time. We have looked at consultancy services
based in schools.

15 **[Indigenous education]**

 At page 24, Commissioner, we talk about a range of strategies
for Aboriginal students and the plan for Aboriginal education. It's a very
detailed statement in terms of the goals, the outcome statements, the
strategies that we are endeavouring to employ there, and each of those
20 is being worked on in a very significant way. Two successes I'd just like
to highlight - partly due to Mark's leadership and others - is the role of
Aboriginal coordinators, Aboriginal people who themselves work side
by side with principals of schools in the Lands. They are in a sense
co-equals. They bring the traditional dimension of the community to the
25 school environment, both in understanding traditional ways,
understanding needs of Aboriginal people, and that has worked with a
fairly high level of success. It's not uniformly successful, but it has
worked particularly well and it's a model of delivery and delivery
support that we intend to continue.

30

[Information technology]

 I think apart from that the only other thing I wanted to
emphasise before perhaps questions, if I might, is that we have
included in the paper, in the submission, a series of recommendations -
35 one, as the previous submission talked about, linked to support for
students in rural and remote areas. We did have a program through the
Open Access College of providing support for families with computer
technology.

40

[11 am]

 That is continuing in another form by providing a lease
arrangement and some subsidy support but one really significant thing
that could be done would be rural and remote students having access
45 to laptop computer technology in face-to-face teaching so they can
develop IT skills unequivocally comparable to students in metropolitan
areas.

I suppose a very pointed story that I was told, Commissioner, was of a very determined family living on a station and this parent said to me, "Our" - not just "my" - "Our combined income is just under \$20,000 a year and we love it here and we wouldn't be anywhere else but how do you think I can buy a \$5,000 computer on that? We have to rely on a family and it would be absolutely great if in fact we could have some other sort of thing." They were appreciative of what else we were doing in Open Access but it sort of drove home the point to me that the technology side of things is one that we need to continue to look at.

10

[Vocational education]

I've already mentioned the Voc.Ed.. If we could do something significant about substantially increasing the CAP funding, which is a Commonwealth program, and looking at some ways of using that innovatively, that would be important because, as was said in the previous submission, there is a real tension between keeping students local, keeping families intact, keeping communities viable and providing students access to the arts, sporting events, industry, other opportunities.

20

The other very interesting thing that we could do there, if we thought about it cleverly enough and linked it with something like youth traineeships, because of some of the work we're doing in VET at Cowell and Cleve and elsewhere, one of the aspirations that I have is that we could look at - actually for city based students who are interested in agricultural based programs, instead of always having the drift from country to city we could actually have some turnaround, going from the city back into the country. We've got a boarding facility at Cowell, for example, and one of the things I want to look at and think we could look at through a program such as may derive from one of these two things here is a program that actually does something like that, so that over time you actually contribute to some rejuvenation of country areas. As well as retaining the local population you actually rejuvenate it. I've been told by some that this is a bit idealistic but it's worth a think and it's worth a shot, in my view.

35

A very important one down here in recommendation 5 is that we look at a program which actually augments the existing range of programs for Aboriginal students but focuses on Aboriginal parents, in a sense, as first teachers in the whole area of literacy-numeracy as another dimension of improving the achievement of Aboriginal students by the end of Year 3. We have a range of programs but certainly we could do more.

45

I think nationally based information and promotion strategies aimed at raising the profile of country education and care - currently the MCEETYA is looking at a national recruitment program and sort of giving publicity and promotion and marketing to what it's like to be a

teacher, given the impending teacher shortages we may have in the early 2000s. But I think - one of the things I put up at the beginning - increasing the pride of people in country is important and education is a very powerful vehicle for doing that - education and care services - and
5 I think a national strategy which says, "Yes, the bush is having it tough but it's alive and well and there are some great opportunities out here, some really innovative things that are being done, and we promote it nationally and we're certainly looking at it as a state based thing."

10 Finally, I think we could do a power of good by thinking about setting up a resource centre or a research centre which actually focuses on, unashamedly, country issues and strategies looking at education, care and related services - a centre of excellence, a centre
15 of research that links with other places like the Centre for Lifelong Education, for example, in South Australia - or whatever - that actually raises the profile of country education.

MS SWEETMAN: Could I just make one addition and highlight recommendation 4?

20 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** You can, certainly.

MS SWEETMAN: There's a lot being talked about in terms of the bush and the really remote. What is really important not to overlook, I think,
25 are the regional centres and the larger towns. I'm thinking of Pirie, Whyalla, Port Augusta, Murray Bridge and places like Coober Pedy and Ceduna as well where the services there are diminishing all the time. The population is becoming more complex. I know that there has been, over the last 12 to 18 months, a significant increase in Aboriginal
30 families living in Pirie. The issues in Port Augusta are well documented in the media at least and schools are having to work very hard and very creatively to respond to the needs of the large Aboriginal population in that town. None of that stuff is helped by the diminishing staffing of other agencies, particularly human services.

35 We carry out psychological assessments, or whatever it might be, of kids. The attendance officer comes in, or the behaviour management support staff come in to support the school and it's decided that what this kid needs is some help from CAMHS [Child and
40 Adolescent Mental Health Services] or from FAYS [Family and Youth Services] and community health services. These kids are put so far down the waiting list that no action is taken and so the children aren't coming to school to get any support. They're at risk in that way as well, so if I can just highlight the importance of that recommendation. We do
45 need to work much more effectively together - human services and education. Human services needs to be there in the first instance.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Mark, did you want to add anything?

MR WILLIAMS: No, except to endorse what Mr Halsey and Ms Sweetman have said. From my perspective, I've put a lot of time and effort and energy into improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for Aboriginal children in South Australia, and the construction of the plan for Aboriginal education which will extend over five years, I hope, will provide the outcomes that I'm looking for, Mr Commissioner. There's no doubt that we have an enormous way to go and on current outcomes for our children and students, we're hanging in there but we still have a long way to go. Obviously there are a lot of factors and issues that impact upon the education outcomes for our children.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thanks to all three of you. The submission from the state government has been a terrific assistance to us and we appreciate very much the work that you put into doing it. Alby, have you got a question?

COMMISSIONER JONES: Yes. John, congratulations on your submission. I enjoyed it nearly as much as your presentation on southern right whales. It was very good. Have you got a policy on staffing rural and remote schools. In my day circumstances of course were very different. We used to staff the rural schools, remote schools, first of all and then leave what was left over for the country. Consequently the country got youthful experience. I can even remember meeting John Halsey at Ceduna. They got youthful enthusiasm, rather than experience and set ways among the teachers. Consequently I could say that I saw much more innovation in country schools than I ever saw in metropolitan schools. Have you got a policy of that kind now?

[Staff recruitment and incentives]

MR HALSEY: First of all, there are policies to do with staffing country schools and remote schools. A dimension of the policy is sort of industrial in the sense of an agreement in terms of the enterprise agreement but the fundamental thing that drives the whole policy framework is how do we desire to provide quality teachers that match the requirements of schools wherever, regardless of location? Having said that, what we then have is a policy in terms of the actual mechanism of staffing, of doing on an annual cycle the country and remote areas before doing the metropolitan area. So there's that preferential strategy in place. However, one of the things we find is because in your days, in a sense, Alby, we had - - -

COMMISSIONER JONES: Our own supply.

MR HALSEY: We had our supply and you also had the notion of bonded students. I went to teachers college and the government of the day paid for my training and they said, "Where do you want to go?" and

I wrote down 30 schools and I didn't get one on the list. They said, "You're going there and you're going tomorrow. Is that okay?" I said, "Well, hang on," and they said, "If you don't like it, you'll go tonight," and you went and gave thanks. Now we don't have that, as you know, and what we have, if I can put it diplomatically - in the first wave of allocations people make application for positions and so on. They - someone said it to me - quote - "sweat off". They would rather take a package of metropolitan or near-metropolitan based contracts than accept a permanent position at a place 500 kilometres from Adelaide.

So we have to then overlay that with some incentives. Permanency is a significant incentive but it's not "the" incentive. It's not the incentive that overcomes all barriers and personally, as the executive-director responsible for country services, I don't just want people going into country schools because they're warm and upright. I want them to go there because they want to be there and they're good teachers and they're well qualified.

The policy of country first, both in a time line sense and in an incentive sense in terms of salary, conditions, transfer points and so on is all there but it's still not enough in some instances to get you over the line. But the answer is yes, there is a proactive set of policies for country. Also, under Partnerships 21, what we're looking at is improving the range of school choice selections, which is schools choosing their own staff, but in some areas - and I won't name them but one of the tensions we've got, I think - and we're having to work through in Partnerships 21 or whatever policy framework we have - is how does a school to the west of Ceduna compete with a primary school nestled in the Adelaide Hills 40 kilometres from the centre of Adelaide? Both small, both - quote - "rural", both multiple-grade. It is a really significant challenge for doing that.

Among other things we need a new, more sophisticated mix-and-match model. By "mix and match" I mean it's sort of like a menu based approach in the incentives area. You can say that two people or one person - double if you go 80 kilometres west - or a single salary here. I'd be nearly willing to bet - but I couldn't be quite that brave as a bureaucrat, Dr Jones - that most people would say, "We're not going to do it." It just doesn't seem to work that simply. That tends to be the experience. We need other things.

One very interesting strategy that worked well, which we're looking at improving on, is actually people who express some interest. We take them up and give them a look and then let them come back and reflect on it, and take them up again. We were successful in a couple of places in getting a highly-qualified teacher of Japanese to go to a country area, and she chose it over going to the metropolitan area. One of the key factors was when she went and looked and saw the

professional challenge of the school, met her colleagues, met the people she'd work with, saw the local community and reflected on it, she said, "Yeah, I'd like to be part of that. I don't know whether I'd want to be part of it for all my life but I'd like to be part of it." You can't
5 convey that from a piece of paper. You actually have to put people in situ. That's expensive but it's a strategy we're looking at. We have used it.

[School fees]

10 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** Another matter I'd like to take up with you is the matter of school fees. Have any of your bureaucrats worked out how much it would cost the government if they didn't have this school fee business?

15 **MR HALSEY:** I'm not quite clear on your question, sorry, Dr Jones.

COMMISSIONER JONES: The supposedly voluntary school fees - they used to be.

20 **MR HALSEY:** I see, so what is the parent contribution overall?

COMMISSIONER JONES: Yes.

25 **MR HALSEY:** Yes, there is a figure and I'm happy to put it on the record, providing I can correct it for you. Off the top of my head, the total contribution that comes in from fees and fundraising in schools is in the order of 4.5% to 5% of total budget, which is, from memory, about \$26 million. If I could, commissioner, I'm happy to provide that figure to you.

30 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Yes, please.

35 **MR HALSEY:** But it's of that order and it is a significant component. It's significant in the sense of the disposable nature of it at the site. As you well know, you could pick a high school in a country area and say, "The gross operating cost of this school per year is \$3.6 million," but most of that arrives in terms of full-time equivalent salaries. You don't actually see it as money you can use. Under Partnerships 21 the aim is to increase some of the flexibility over that. When a lot of heat is put on
40 parent funds, part of it is because it is seen as the significantly variable aspect of the resource base of a school.

COMMISSIONER JONES: It horrifies me. I think of school as a happy place.

45 **MR HALSEY:** Most are.

COMMISSIONER JONES: It would appear that debt collectors are likely to go into a school and collect these school fees. Any comment on that?

5 **MR HALSEY:** I make two comments, Commissioner Jones. One is that most schools are happy places; secondly, that the issue of the fee has been one that's been well researched through Crown Law advice and as an absolute last resort most schools totally avoid this by offering -
10 most parents, by the way, want to make a contribution. That's our experience. And most schools circumvent it or ameliorate the problem by having capacity for part-time payment, for school card, and when parents receive the school card there is no capacity to collect any difference between the school card and the basic fee of the school, unless parents want to pay it. So overall we try and deal with it through
15 the process of part-time payment processes and encouragements and so on.

20 There is also - and SAASSO [South Australian Association of State School Organisations] were involved in this - that parents recognise that the parents who do pay also have a view which says there is a sort of a community contribution that we all need to make, and there's a bit of a tension there that needs to be worked through.

25 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** John, we'll get off the Internet if we haven't already yet - I don't know - the consultation report you had, which is terrific, and also the Aboriginal education policy, which we're very keen to have a look at.

30 **MR HALSEY:** Sure.

35 **[Aboriginal schools]**

40 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** I don't know whether you or Michael could give me a bit of advice on where the Aboriginal schools are as distinct from the Anangu schools.

45 **MR HALSEY:** Yes, sure, here we are. If you look in the document - I'll do it on the board for you.

50 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** No, it's all right, if you can just show to me where it is in here. You may be there and I missed it.

55 **MR HALSEY:** It will only take me 30 seconds here, if we just put this up. Our Aboriginal schools - here's Meningie. There's one just outside of Meningie at a place called Raukkan. There's one on the far west coast over here, west of Ceduna, west of Penong, called Yalata. It's in about here. We are building a new school right up in here. I just flew over there the other day and met with the elders here at Oak Valley.

5 Those people on Maralinga Lands who moved out to Yalata or who were relocated - they used to move voluntarily. The new community has developed there. It's around about 200, commissioner - it varies. I was over there the other day and they have a school but this is a new facility there.

MR WILLIAMS: Don't forget Koonibba.

10 **MR HALSEY:** No. There's Koonibba, just outside of Ceduna. There is an Aboriginal school at Koonibba, which was formerly a Lutheran mission many years ago - Koonibba School. In Port Augusta we have Carlton, which is an R to 9 school which has been set up to ease the transition into the high school.

15 **MR WILLIAMS:** Then right up the top of the Flinders Ranges there's Oodnadatta, almost on the border of the Simpson Desert. As you come south down past Lake Eyre there's Marree Aboriginal School and there is an Aboriginal school out at Elizabeth - Auldana Plains.

20 **MR HALSEY:** Wonderful school. Then when you come over to Yorke Peninsula there's Maitland and there's an Aboriginal school at Port Victoria, and Winkie has got a very large Aboriginal enrolment - in the Riverland.

25 **MR WILLIAMS:** Commissioner, there's only what I term eight Aboriginal schools at this stage. There are some probably who should be eligible to be called Aboriginal schools but we haven't resolved that.

30 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Do these schools have Aboriginal coordinators paralleling the principal like the Anangu schools?

MR HALSEY: No.

35 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** That's just the Anangu schools, is it?

MR WILLIAMS: Anangu schools, yes.

[Aboriginal staff]

40 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Okay. I was noticing your attachment to the submission provided some statistical employment of Aboriginal education workers and teachers in the school. There still seems to be a predominance of those people in temporary or part-time positions rather than full-time positions and the numbers overall are relatively small. Is there an Aboriginal employment strategy as part of the
45 education program to encourage fully-qualified Aboriginal teachers into permanent positions within the department?

MR HALSEY: Aboriginal teachers, definitely, yes.

5 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Does the department provide scholarships for Aboriginal people or Aboriginal education workers to upgrade to full teacher qualification?

10 **MR HALSEY:** No, not scholarships, but there's training and development - not scholarships, no.

15 **MR WILLIAMS:** Just recently, the enterprise agreement lifted the wage levels of AEWs [Aboriginal Education Workers] across the state and it took them into an AEW award. The last major change and improvement to that award was 10 years ago and now AEWs are paid very good salaries. Linked to that agreement and that award is a career development path and a training and development path, whereby all AEWs have to participate in a certificate 3 and certificate 4 course that is being delivered by TAFE. Achieving those certificate 3 and 4 levels will mean that AEWs will then be eligible to go through the five steps of their career structure. Most school based AEWs are on around level 1 or level 2.

25 The extremely good AEWs, who have kept up with their training and development, will go to a level 3. When you become a level 4 AEW, you are eligible then to work - if there is a position available - out of the school in our district offices. Then you can go to a level 5 AEW, which then has managerial roles across groups of districts, so there is an excellent career structure there. The training and development is run out of my office and it took us three years to write it and it's now being delivered across the state in various centres. I believe that in a year or so we will have the best-trained AEWs in the nation linked to their salary and conditions that we already have in place.

35 **MR HALSEY:** Mark, did you want to also just say - Commissioner, are you aware of the teacher training program on the Lands?

40 **MR WILLIAMS:** That's currently under review. But that's the - I don't know - ANTEP [Aboriginal National Training Education Program]?

45 **MR HALSEY:** ANTEP program. It's basically linked with the University of South Australia and Aboriginal people in situ on the Lands in a sense delivering teacher training, teacher development, for them.

45 **MR WILLIAMS:** We have that initiative and the other initiative that our premier signed off on last year was that AEW teacher graduates will be eligible for .1 of their time in their first year of teaching to allow them to

access appropriate training and development and release time to develop their skills as classroom teachers. That's now in place and I think it started this year.

5 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** If this isn't in the education program, the one you mentioned that's on the Web - which I haven't seen, I'm sorry - you might give us more information about this. If you wouldn't mind just outlining the teacher training induction programs you've got?

10 **MR HALSEY:** Yes.

MR WILLIAMS: Commissioner, within the Aboriginal Education Plan, there is an outcomes statement that describes that we are to develop and Aboriginal employment strategy within the department and I'm
15 currently working on that.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thank you. We're well over time, I'm afraid. I want to just clarify for my sake the school card scheme that you mentioned. That's just a simple cash grant scheme, is it, that's a \$110
20 and \$170 respectively?

MR HALSEY: Per student.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Per student, so anyone who gets a school card meets the means test in time for that annual grant?
25

MR HALSEY: Yes. It's based on the Commonwealth's Family Support Scheme, yes, that's exactly right.

30 **[Support for students with disabilities]**

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thank you, I was just clarifying that for me. The amount of flexibility that's involved in teacher formulas for disability students, do you have a strict formula that applies right across the state without any allowance for country areas? I notice that there's reference
35 to a 20% loading.

MR HALSEY: Yes. Can you explain that? Susan did that, I think.

40 **MS SWEETMAN:** There is a formula, a mechanism for allocating, that is used statewide and, basically, once a kid gets assessed by a guidance officer or a speech pathologist, then people in the school, as well as disability services, the support staff, meet together to work out what level the child might be, what kind of degree of disability, I suppose, it has, particularly in relation to its capacity to attend school and participate and be successful. They negotiate it and, of course,
45 there is a little bit of give and take there, but they negotiate that basic level and that then converts into a fraction of a salary and then the

school gets an allocation based on the number of students with disabilities and the level that has been attributed to them.

5 When that's calculated, for country schools 20% is added on so
that they do get a loading which is quite minimal because we're talking
about fairly small bits of salary that schools get. Then there are school
services officers' hours, there is ancillary time. That is also allocated
and the way of allocating those hours is not using a formula, but some
10 criteria that are negotiated with principals and they are much more
flexible in a sense. That's where our capacity to top up, taking account
of the complexity of a particular situation, comes in. If a school is
particularly isolated and there is a brand new teacher who has very
little experience working with a particular type of disability, particular
15 type of kid, then there would be provision made through extra SSO
hours to support and that might be for a short term or it might be for a
longer term, it would depend.

 So yes, there is some flexibility, and the other thing, of course, I
probably need to mention is that this is all under review at the moment
20 and we're looking at a different mechanism to allocate resources,
because it is generally accepted that while this is not too bad, it's not
good enough.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: The example that seems to come up in state
25 after state is that you might have a child who needs assistance, say for
30 or 45 minutes a day, but that's spread in five-minute lots every hour
and yet the funding formulas may say that there is an entitlement to a
teacher's aide, or SSO as you call it, of 0.2, whereas to cope with the
child the school needs somebody there right throughout school hours,
30 five days a week. Does that degree of flexibility exist here?

MS SWEETMAN: A child needs to have a very severe disability before
it would get full-time support and it would be as a result of it's going to
do damage to itself or to other kids - and that might be physical
35 damage - or it's a runner and needs absolutely one-on-one all the time
to make sure that the child doesn't run away, or its health might be
such that it needs someone with it all the time to make sure that - a
response is made that you're not going to allow this child to die,
basically, but that's the extreme. Less than that, the time would be
40 much much less, yes, because 406 salaries across 10,000 children is
not very much.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thank you very much. We literally could go
on for hours, but I'm really appreciative of what you've given us. If there
45 are things that crop up in our discussions, we'll come back to you,
John, if we may, and just get some more information.

MR HALSEY: Yes, certainly.

5 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** I'm very grateful for your submission. We are running late, but even so I'll take a break for one minute and 45 seconds, to enable us to get a cup of coffee. Then if the Catholic Education Office can come on straight after that, thank you.

[11.35 am]

10 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Would you like to start just by introducing yourselves, and we can go straight into any comments you want to make.

15 **MS SMITH:** Surely.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: And then Alby and I might have a couple of questions at the end.

20 **MS SMITH:** Indeed.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thank you.

25 **MS SMITH:** I'm Georgina Smith, senior education adviser with Catholic Education Offices here in Adelaide.

MR CIBICH: I'm Peter Cibich. I'm the director of Catholic Education for the diocese of Port Pirie.

30 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thank you.

35 **MS SMITH:** Well, we were delighted, Commissioner, when we received notification early on in the year that you were conducting this inquiry, and we were even more delighted by the 30 September deadline that you gave us for submissions, because we dutifully sent out to all of our schools the fact that we would be organising our submission in the third term, along with principals and parents and the officers of both the Port Pirie diocese and Adelaide.

40 So we don't have our submission done at this particular point, the reason being that our schools were delighted that, for once, something had come out nationally that had such a long time-frame. Our schools, our principals, our officers and our parents associations are working together to come to the Catholic Education Office next
45 week to begin the work of putting together the submission from the South Australian Catholic schools' perspective.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Yes.

MS SMITH: So we were anxious to raise some of the issues that the inquiry notes today, but also we're interested in hearing from you too as to where you would see the results of the inquiry being nested in a federal agenda and, if you like, what was in actual fact the power of the recommendations that may in actual fact come from an inquiry such as this.

10 A couple of things that we probably felt too, is that in relation to the provision of education for country students you've probably heard the same things come up in every state and territory across the country. In preparing also for your work with schools I wondered if you had in actual fact seen this document which came out of the Department of
15 Employment, Education and Training, which was a national snapshot of issues facing students living in rural and geographically isolated areas.

 It comes out under the aegis of the Country Areas Program and one of the extraordinary things about it is that this was written in 1997
20 and, in making a response to the issues that you've raised in this inquiry, not a great deal has changed. I think the issues in relation to money, access, staffing, quality of services in the country and ensuring the equitable distribution of funds, resources and services that are available for students haven't really changed in the past two years, and
25 that some of these issues which are snapshots nationally need to be looked at and considered as they come up rather than constantly reinventing the wheel which regenerates the problem consistently. The issues that we've raised have been around for a significant length of time.

30 Peter and I have decided that in our joint presentation today we will address the issues from a Catholic education perspective that we see coming up and present you with the context within which we operate. Having followed on from John Halsey our context is, of course,
35 quite different to the context of the state government and our scope of schools across the state is not as considerable as the Education Department. So we would like to sort of do a joint presentation and certainly invite questions and interruptions from both yourself and from Dr Jones here, because I think that makes it much more interesting.

40 We also would make a comment in relation to, for example, the Country Areas Program. A point that John made in his submission, is anything that could be done to actually preserve and enhance country areas funding from the federal government would be greatly
45 appreciated. In South Australia we're in receipt of just on \$80,000 for Country Areas Programs which, of course, makes little dent in the issues and resources that schools need to actually offer a full and well-rounded education to the students in our care.

[Country Areas Program]

5 We would also see within our country areas funding at the moment, the move within the Commonwealth for accountability in relation to outcomes which we support, does in actual fact get quite difficult when you're looking at Country Areas Programs because a number of the programs that schools offer are in actual fact social, cultural and to a certain extent now technological, which becomes very difficult to measure in educational outcomes terminology.

10 So whilst we would still want the freedom and the flexibility that the social, cultural and technological issues of country areas allow us to do that, we certainly are having difficulty within making the move now into strict educational outcomes. We find that the Commonwealth is very open to considering the issues of country areas and I would also agree with what the department has said, that the Country Areas Program money is well respected. It's certainly appreciated by the community, both the parents, the school and the students, and anything that could be done to enhance that would be gratefully accepted. In those introductory comments, Commissioner, I'll ask Peter if he would give a context to Catholic education in both the archdiocese of Adelaide and the diocese of Pirie.

25 **MR CIBICH:** Thank you, Georgina. Mr Commissioner, we've prepared a snapshot of the context of Catholic education in South Australia for you.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thank you.

30 **[Catholic education in South Australia]**

MR CIBICH: I think it's important to highlight that, as Georgina has just stated, the Catholic Education Offices of South Australia serve the two diocese. The archdiocese of South Australia certainly is the larger area in terms of population and has fewer country schools. The front page there will highlight that in the archdiocese of South Australia we have eight country schools and, in terms of remoteness, probably wouldn't compare with our colleagues in the department. They stretch from - I guess Yorketown on the Yorke Peninsula is our furthest most isolated Catholic school as far as the archdiocese of South Australia is concerned, and some would argue that perhaps should be located in the diocese of Port Pirie, but that's the mysteries of church boundaries. We have a cluster of schools in the South-East.

45 Our schools tend to be clustered where there is distribution of Catholics in South Australia. There's a strong correlation to the distribution of Catholics in South Australia through the 1800s and where our schools are currently located. So the archdiocese supports eight schools. The diocese of Port Pirie which, if you were to draw a

line approximately across from just north of Clare and you were to follow the River Murray from Morgan and then cut off the Yorke Peninsula at Kadina, through the whole Eyre Peninsula to the territory border, that is the diocese of Port Pirie.

5

Our former bishop, the late Bishop De Campo used to say to people, particularly when he visited Rome, that there are more kangaroos than Catholics in the diocese of Port Pirie. In the diocese of Port Pirie we have, I think, approximately 7,000 students. The Catholic Education Office is located in Port Pirie and our schools there, as you can see on page 2, are in three reasonable clusters which makes it reasonably accessible for a person like me to support those schools. We have four schools in the Mid-North clustered around, I suppose, the regional centre of Port Pirie. But again the other schools are within probably an hour and a half to two hours' drive of Port Pirie. They are much smaller schools and again reflect the distribution of Catholics through that area in the 1800s.

Peterborough was a strong railway town which is now a dying town, and it's very sad to see what has happened to some of these once thriving rural communities. Jamestown is still a very strong rural community in terms of primary industry. Gladstone again suffered from the decline of government services, the railways and there was once a prison there. The provincial towns that John spoke of earlier in his submission, Port Augusta and Whyalla, are extremely important. We have Port Lincoln on the west coast and a cluster of schools in the Riverland, primary schools. In the far north we have Woomera, although whatever Woomera's future will be with the withdrawal of the Americans from Woomera commencing at the beginning of October, and our diocese will be opening a new school at Roxby Downs in the year 2000.

So that provides you with a bit of an overview on Catholic education, how it can be accessed in the archdiocese of Adelaide and the diocese of Port Pirie. Also in the diocese of Port Pirie we have three regional boarding hostels and they are currently located at Crystal Brook. The Crystal Brook hostel which is the former orphanage at Crystal Brook, which was converted by the late Bishop De Campo in about 1984-85 when, I guess, the start of the decline in rural South Australia suddenly meant that families through the Mid-North and the far north found the cost of sending children to the more traditional boarding houses in Adelaide was becoming cost prohibitive. As a result of that, the bishop of Port Pirie established a five-day-a-week boarding hostel at Crystal Brook.

45

It currently has approximately 80 students mainly from Year 8 to Year 12 and those students, predominantly from the Mid-North region stretching through to places like Jamestown, Orroroo,

Peterborough, some students from Roxby Downs and Leigh Creek, are able to attend Catholic secondary education and at the same time go back and be part of their local communities of a weekend. That has been very important to those communities, particularly in the
5 socialisation, the cultural aspects of those communities. They can actually go back and play in their local football team at Orroroo, Jamestown or Peterborough, and that has been very important to the life of those particular communities.

10 We have a relatively new boarding hostel at Caritas College. It houses approximately 30 students and again they predominantly come from Leigh Creek, some from Roxby Downs, quite a number from up the Strzelecki Track, a few from the Oodnadatta Track and, again, it's
15 proving to be more accessible for families to have more regular contact with their students there. Port Lincoln has traditionally had a boarding residence and in recent years it has expanded that to embrace both male and female students. Predominantly it would service the families from the far west coast, stations north of Wudinna out as far as Ceduna and towards the Western Australian border. They can access Catholic
20 education five days a week or seven days at Port Lincoln.

COMMISSIONER JONES: Is that a hostel provided by the Catholic Education - - -

25 **MR CIBICH:** Yes.

COMMISSIONER JONES: Separate from the state run - - -

30 **MR CIBICH:** Yes, we have St Josephs at Port Lincoln, set up by the Josephite Sisters, and that has a boarding hostel attached to that as well. That, I suppose, provides the context of how we provide Catholic education. So there are 17 campuses, 15 schools, in the diocese of Port Pirie, and our issues would probably be very similar to those
35 stated in the earlier submission. But I'll allow Georgina to pick up the threads of that.

[Staff recruitment]

40 **MS SMITH:** When we've had discussions, albeit briefly, with schools and principals in our rural area, they certainly come down very strongly on issues that I think you heard virtually from John from the Education Department's perspective. The difficulty of attracting staff to the country is certainly seen as something which causes people difficulty and as we're not responsible within central offices for employment, each
45 school is the employer, I guess it's up to each school to try to make the situation as attractive as possible. But even with the flexibility that self-employment has, there is still that difficulty of attracting experienced, quality teachers to the country. That's the reality.

5 There are situations where also we're aware of the fact that the
University of South Australia has just, in the past two years, conducted
a survey of the qualifications of women in rural and isolated areas and
have found that a large number of farmers' wives were in actual fact
10 people who had two-year qualifications in teacher training. With the
decline in the land as a family income a number of these women, who
previously had lives supporting the farm, are looking to have to go back
to teaching. But because of the increase in base qualifications over that
15 time, from the time they had trained up to now, they were in situations
where their training or their qualifications were inadequate to gain
registration into schools.

15 It's a very interesting survey, and I think probably would be a
reasonably good snapshot of what would be happening in other parts of
the country on a national basis, is the degree of qualification that a
number of people on the land have. It was predominantly women, just
the way the things had happened on that - - -

20 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** I think in some states they haven't got a
registration board.

MS SMITH: They don't have, Alby, yes.

25 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** They all have now, have they?

MS SMITH: No, they don't have. It's only Queensland and South
Australia.

30 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** Yes.

35 **MS SMITH:** But it was because of the registration board looking at
increasing qualifications to four years and the impact of that, that the
University of South Australia took that project on board. They've come
up with some interesting scenarios of qualified women from several
generations ago, with life experiences, needing and wanting to go back
40 into teaching. So I think that question John alluded to, that issue of
retraining, is possibly one to look at because, as we all know from
various inquiries nationally, teaching is a mass profession. So we're not
short of teachers, but we certainly are short of teachers in targeted
areas. The country would be one.

45 But also specifically within the country itself, I think the
shortage in the city of LOTE teachers would be reflected in the country
- Peter, correct me if I'm wrong there - and the shortage also of maths
and physics teachers for students at Year 11 and 12 particularly. Then
of course the increasing need for teachers who have any information
technology basis which is linked to curriculum basis as opposed to just
mere technology. I think those are issues. We offer at this stage no

major incentive for people to go to the country. There are some additional allowances but nothing that was remotely like double the salary.

5 The teacher education faculties in South Australia certainly
insist on a country placement as part of the field experience for
teachers, which I think is really wonderful because it does give people
the chance to have a look at the country, whereas a large number of
10 people are urbanised and they've got no idea of what the country north
of Gepps Cross is. So that is very helpful.

[11.52 am]

15 The issues also that we would be picking up within quality of
education services, I believe that the schools do the very best that they
can but the reality is that we are looking at a retention rate in country
schools which is less than the retention rate of the city. That is alarming
when we have a federal policy which is committed to the notion of
20 lifelong learning, and young people leaving school without appropriate
compulsory qualifications - I think in actual fact means that they start
behind the eight ball from the word go. Access for the students at Year
11 and 12 to a full range of VET options and options within their SACE,
the SSABSA qualification in this state, I think is not as generous as the
25 access that students in the city have. So to a certain extent, rural and
remote students are disadvantaged in the offerings that they have at
Year 11 and 12.

[Professional development]

30 There are excellent services offered by the Open Access
College and excellent courses, but again it's that point of the personal
contact with the teacher who is able to enthuse and excite would be a
first preference to services which are simply offered on-line. We also
would see that in support for professional development programs within
Catholic Education in South Australia. There are many situations where
35 small groups of teachers in schools cluster together to do professional
work together which is of enormous benefit to them, but again the
opportunity to come to the city and discuss things with colleagues in a
broader arena is again restricted by the amount of funds that are
available for travel costs and teacher release costs for people to come
40 down to the city.

45 This is also compounded with federal programs which limit the
amount of support for travel and TRT to 10% of any federal project.
This then means that we are simply unable to be as generous and
fulsome to the country as we would want to be, and that those kind of
barriers in programs, whilst they may have educational accountability
and financial accountability requirements tied into them, do in actual
fact make it very difficult for us to say in a full and generous sense to

country teachers, "You are welcome to be full participants in this activity to the same extent that your metropolitan colleague would be too."

5 **[Information technology]**

Technological support services: I think we would all agree that Internet access is an absolute essential for students and teachers in schools and parents who live in rural and remote area. But I would like to make the distinction between technological support and support of the curriculum which in actual fact engages information technology as a teaching and learning tool, and I would like to ensure, and it would certainly be something that we would be putting in our submission, to make sure that the distinction between technological support as a tool to give people in country areas access to the world, is quite different from the technological support that's needed for effective teaching and learning programs in schools, and I would like to make those distinctions there.

We would be interested in asking of you, Commissioner, as to how you see the recommendations of this particular inquiry being fed in to people who can actually help us make the changes to ensure that our students and our parents are supported as a result of the endeavours that they make into preparing these submissions. So we would like to prevail on you to give us some input there, and we would like to also make the notion that again, there's a great push within Commonwealth programs for collaborative endeavour, and collaboration is something that is done particularly well in South Australia. We had great examples from past days as to how to collaborate effectively, but in actual fact collaboration can take a tremendous amount of effort, and a tremendous amount of work to get to a point that could have been reached quicker, earlier, again, within that context of limited resources.

I heard many years ago the word "collaboration" defined as an unnatural act between two or more unwilling adults, and I think there is some grain of truth in the way in which that could work. We get told or we are requested to have collaborative endeavour, and in this state there is no difficulty in working with our colleagues in the department or in the non-government sector. We enjoy a very good relationship, but in actual fact collaboration sometimes can take resources away from resources that are already limited. So we make a plea for collaboration to be collaboration that can in actual fact factor in the degree of work that it takes to get collaborative effort up and running effectively. Peter, I don't know if you want to add to that too.

45 **MR CIBICH:** Just a couple of issues that I would pick up on that we had sort of identified, and it's summarised just on that last page there because they will be important for inclusions in our final submission.

John mentioned, or I think it was John, mentioned the importance of the provincial areas of South Australia: Whyalla, Port Augusta and Port Pirie, which is at the very heartland of the Port Pirie diocese. In the last, I suppose, 15 to 20 years, each of those provincial centres has gone through significant decline, and as a result of that, I would say, and having lived in all three in my years with both the Education Department and working with Catholic Education, they are very depressed communities.

10 **[School Fees]**

Unemployment, I would suggest, is much higher in these areas than it would be in the majority of metropolitan areas, and with decline in shifts and the way the workforce has been reorganised in those centres, many of those families have been affected by loss of income, and I believe they have a much lower average disposable income than many other families. We find that our Catholic schools are being more generous than having to support families in terms of the level of fee remissions. Our policy of the South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools is no child should ever be deprived of a Catholic education because of financial difficulties.

So schools are finding it an increasing burden to support families in these regional areas; those three, in particular: Wallaroo, Peterborough. The contradiction in our diocese, I believe in the future, is going to be Roxby Downs. As those of you who would be aware, Roxby Downs has the highest level of disposable income, and that in itself is going to be a huge contradiction for our diocese, and we'll have to work through that issue. The isolation factor; isolation places like Woomera and Roxby Downs and the very limited and narrow socialisation opportunities for those children, and that's why I would endorse the comments that have already been expressed about the Country Areas Program.

[Staff recruitment]

We have pockets where it is very difficult to employ staff, and our pockets would be the Iron Triangle, places like Port Augusta and Whyalla. Our principal in Whyalla last year - I forget the actual dollar value, but the principal spent, in trying to attract staff to Whyalla for our St John's College ended up having to advertise internationally and attracted staff from South Africa. So after going through our own internal system advertising nationally in Australia - found that they had to go internationally. So if you start looking at the costs associated with bringing staff to country schools - I must say it was successful and St John's College has attracted I think three teachers from South Africa, so they bring another dimension to our system, but associated with that are the costs, and the cultural differences and also some language difficulties.

We do employ many exit students direct from the teachers colleges. Our system has now in place through an arrangement with the University of South Australia - we have a course through the University of South Australia where we are training students who will be
5 equipped to teach in our Catholic schools. That's an innovation which I think is now 3 years old. That is reducing some of the costs that principals would experience when they first engage exit students. The costs are associated with professional development of these teachers when they first commence their career in places like Woomera,
10 Port Augusta, Port Lincoln.

Port Lincoln is 8 hours by road from Adelaide or 70 minutes' flight, as I think you'll find tomorrow morning. So the cost of a principal to continually fly staff from Port Lincoln to Adelaide for professional
15 development is a cost that we find difficult, as much as for me to fly Wednesday morning, we're meeting with senior executives from our Adelaide office who are helping us plan the new school at Roxby Downs - a \$400 return air fare. I'll fly there in an hour and a quarter and it will take the bishop and myself about 3.5 hours dodging kangaroos
20 driving from Port Pirie. That's the nature of our diocese. We accept that, but it adds the risk factor when you have staff who work a full day. Our colleagues in the department have the same difficulty. You ask them to spend an hour and a half to two hours' travelling after work to a regional centre, whether it be Port Augusta or Whyalla, to attend two
25 hours of professional development in-service and then drive back to their own centre late at night - so the compounding factors there.

[Tertiary education]

Our parents of our Catholic schools in the Pirie diocese would
30 say their access to tertiary education is a concern for them. We are fortunate that the University of South Australia has a campus based in Whyalla but, again, it's the cost associated with that. There was some concern a couple of years ago when it was thought that that actual campus may close. It just seemed to be again - removal of services to
35 people who are living in the country of South Australia. So fortunately the Whyalla campus of the university still exists today, and that it does attract a considerable number of students from the West Coast. Again, if you were to board at that university, the costs of just the residence there - now, I'm going back a couple of years because we did have a
40 daughter there, and I think we were paying \$100 a week just for the residence without the other associated costs of food and whatever else.

The alternative for parents who wish their children to go on to tertiary education is to send their students to the boarding residence in
45 Adelaide. There are quite a number here located in North Adelaide, and you would be aware of the costs of those full-time boarding residences are between \$170 and \$190 per week. So parents find it extremely cost-prohibitive to have their children attend Adelaide for

tertiary education, but it also is the fact that they go away, and that's been historical - we'd be aware of that. They have been leaving the bush and coming to Adelaide since I guess Adam was a boy, to use a colloquialism. But that is a concern, and it is a cost factor which parents
5 in the country are required to carry.

[Learning support services]

The other issues of, I guess the decline in rationalisation of health services, speech pathologists, occupational therapists,
10 psychological and psychiatric services in regional centres means that our people are required to travel to Adelaide for any of those services. When they were available in regional centres, it was very easy for people to access without being inconvenienced. Now, if you are in Whyalla you have to lose - some member of the family would be
15 required to take leave or perhaps even lose pay to bring their children to Adelaide to access those sort of services, and that's a frustration.

[Transport]

The issue of transport: at this stage the arrangement with the Education Department is extremely satisfactory. So our children who
20 can access Catholic education and can be accommodated by a bus which is also picking up children and taking them into the nearest town is a satisfactory one, and we're grateful for that arrangement. But we just also notice that as there has been pressure to rationalise transport
25 to the number of services that the department would be offering its students, not only are they being required much longer periods on buses to get to some of their own centres, we've found that some of our own children are equally spending longer periods of time on buses, and that could exceed an hour one way each day. So that has been a
30 further problem.

[Technology]

Technology is wonderful, and we had an example of that this morning in our own office. I was able to speak to my principal from Port
35 Lincoln via teleconferencing. But the other difficulty associated with that is the technology is not available at the same cost throughout all of South Australia. So we can talk about technology being available, but if I wanted to communicate or the bishop wanted to communicate with families in isolated parts of the west coast of South Australia, we don't
40 have Internet services through that area, and where they are available, they're not at the same cost advantages that we have here in the metropolitan areas. So it is good to talk that, that it's available but it's the cost still of providing it to those remote areas. So I will just add those few points. I'm sure they will come up in your consultation with
45 our people at Port Lincoln and other parts of the west coast that I know you're visiting.

[Literacy support]

MS SMITH: Just actually as an expansion on the issue of services, we have an early years entry assessment for all of our students within the first five terms of them starting school, and it's to ensure that their literacy standards are being tracked and monitored so that we don't get
5 into the situation of young people leaving junior primary years significantly disadvantaged. There are situations where for example children coming into the reception or kindergarten, whatever you would like to call it coming in, are identified after a few months of school as having a speech impediment.

10 We have the money set aside for speech pathology and for that kind of intervention, but the reality is that the schools in the country can't get the speech therapists to be there within a time-frame that allows for remediation to take place and for that little person to begin
15 their learning without necessarily being held back. As we all know, a child in literacy standards and literacy support is like a time bomb ticking away: the quicker you move in, the more advantage that child will be. I think that that's one small example of the kinds of unseen disadvantages that some children are experiencing in their schooling.
20 In those situations there's an identified need that is the money for the service, and the service is just simply not available. I'm sure as you go around the country, especially when you go to Port Lincoln tomorrow, I'm sure there will be lots of other anecdotes that would add no doubt to a sizeable caseload that you have at the moment on that.

25 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thank you very much. Alby?

COMMISSIONER JONES: Could you tell me whether the specialist services from the Education Department are available to you in
30 Port Pirie? One of the things I insisted when I was in the department, that all of our professional development and special service was available to all kinds of schools, not only state department schools.

MR CIBICH: Yes, I can recall those days very well. I don't think it's
35 through a lack of that generosity being extended to us. It's, again, just the availability of the personnel to do the work, and so there has been a diminishment, I guess, in the number of personnel that are available to even support the Education Department schools in each of those regions. So I would find that their workload is so great now - there's
40 fewer of them - that they're not in a position to even be able to offer us some support.

[Teacher training]

COMMISSIONER JONES: I was very interested in your suggestion
45 about the women with two years of training not being able to be registered in teaching at school. I think that's something you ought to take with the registration board, because in country schools pastoral care is an important part, just as much an important part of the

curriculum as teaching them English and language and mathematics, I think.

5 **MS SMITH:** And I think the fact that it's been researched within the university gives it the status and the credibility to explore further as well.

10 **MR CIBICH:** We would like the University of South Australia in Whyalla to look at that. They currently have an early childhood degree course but if that could be extended in the future, it would mean that some of the women who are on the west coast living in those isolated communities on farms could be able to commute on a weekly basis, depending on how the program is structured. The university in Whyalla has been thoughtful in the way it has structured some of its programs
15 so that people can travel to Whyalla, spend an intense three days, and then go back to their community and live. That puts a strain on families but at the same time it has made courses accessible to families.

20 So you will have people who reside in places like Elliston on the far west coast, Poochera, Wudinna, who could come in on a - travel the 3 or 4 hundred kilometres - 400 kilometres to Whyalla, be there Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, have all their workload condensed into that time and then go back to their communities, and then come back the following week. I would like to see the statistics on that but
25 quite a number actually do that. That would be one way that we could help these teachers who are only the old two-year trained people upgrade their qualifications. We have the same problem as the Education Department even getting temporary relieving teachers, particularly in the winter months.

30 They can offer every staffing component or loadings but if the people aren't there that you can employ, we find that in many of our smaller rural schools particularly through the Mid-North and over in the Riverland, the principals are almost teaching full-time at this time of the year, terms 2 and terms 3. There are just not the people there that you
35 can employ. So throwing money at the problem isn't going to provide the instant solution.

40 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** Catherine, is it, on the chapter committee who used to sit with you at the University of South Australia?

MS SMITH: Caroline Mathews.

45 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** Caroline Mathews. She put up a suggestion, and I hope she submitted it to the Commission, of a method of providing in-service education for teachers of rural schools, and I asked her to condense it, cut out the academics in it and send it to the committee. I don't know whether she has done so.

MS SMITH: She would be a useful contact, Caroline Mathews, at the University of South Australia.

5 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** Will you let me know how you get on with your imports from South Africa?

MR CIBICH: In Whyalla, yes, certainly.

10 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** Because we've had people in Port Pirie - I wonder remember one face, Grace Donaldson. She started her teaching in Pirie - didn't want to go there, of course. Nobody wanted to go to Port Pirie and she finished her teaching career 40 years later in Port Pirie. So your people from South Africa might enjoy it there.

15 **MR CIBICH:** We didn't realise language would be such a barrier.

MS SMITH: I can speak about that, as a migrant too.

20 **MR CIBICH:** Yes. I think if we were to pursue that in the future, hopefully we'll find sufficient in our own ranks, but it has been an interesting experience, and the principal from St Johns will probably talk at length about that experience, the cultural differences themselves.

25 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** I had better tell you one example of a good recruit I got. It was a United Kingdom migrant and when I was discussing a point I said, "Coober Pedy is near Lake Eyre." He said, "I'll take that. I'm keen on boating and fishing."

30 **MR CIBICH:** I must say, we see that at Woomera with the Americans with all their huge fishing rods on the top of their car, because they look at the maps and they see the lakes, and of course you talk with them and they - no-one had quite explained to them that they were salt lakes.

35 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Just back to this teacher upgrading. Is it possible for these people to have external studies of some kind, to upgrade from the two to four-year course?

40 **MS SMITH:** It depends what they have done, Commissioner. One of the sticking blocks is the professional studies component, which is by and large the prac teaching part of it, and there's no way or no creative way at the moment for satisfying the professional studies component, and the issue is compounded at the moment with the move to a four-year qualification, and that's where the study had started. I think it's
45 contingent largely on where the university's academic boards will in actual fact take on recognition for prior learning.

5 The universities of South Australia are particularly open and I really do commend them for the work they do in trying to accommodate a very broad range of students. I think it really is contingent on that recognition for prior learning that is given. I suppose because a large part of any upgraded qualifications is based on professional studies it gets a bit difficult, but I think they are working on it and I think it does offer creative options for addressing staffing in rural areas, because 10 these are people who want to live in the country. They probably would be stunning employees as well because they've got the benefit of experience, probably brought up their own family, managed the farm while their partner was doing something else.

15 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** A lot of local knowledge.

MS SMITH: So I think it's a rich, untapped resource at the moment. One of the challenges for anything of this nature is in actual fact to look at where the richness of the resources are, because country 20 communities are rich in so many things and we are giving probably a deficit model in some instances and that's doing a disservice to that energy and creativity and sense of belonging that is so much part of the country.

25 **[Indigenous students]**

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Sure, thanks. I only have one other area I wanted to explore with you and that's the question about Aboriginal involvement in the Catholic school system. I assume this is more of a Port Pirie than an Adelaide diocesan matter. Do you have many 30 Aboriginal students in the schools?

MR CIBICH: Predominantly they fall into clusters in the Riverland. We have a number of Aboriginal families who attend our school at Barmera and we have quite a few at Caritas College in Port Augusta. We have a 35 smaller number in Port Lincoln. Our office has an excellent Indigenous team here that's based out of Thebarton and they provide excellent service to our diocese in particular. We have also employed a number of Aboriginal Education Workers. We have an outstanding young girl employed at Caritas College in Port Augusta and she is doing a 40 wonderful job in attracting other Aboriginal students to Caritas College. It's an area that we are very conscious of and it's an area that we wish to explore further.

45 Part of it goes back again to which church got to the area first. That is very much a South Australian thing. The Lutherans, I suppose, had very much a mortgage on the missions, particularly over on the West Coast, initially in Port Lincoln. I can't comment so much on Port Augusta. Theologically we're closely aligned and so we've worked

at encouraging a number of the elders to look at our Catholic system, particularly in both Port Augusta and Port Lincoln, as being an alternative education they might like to consider. We are working very closely in those areas but we could be doing a better job.

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COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Yes.

MS SMITH: We just recently also launched a South Australian Indigenous education policy which we'd be happy to put as an appendix to our submission as well.

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COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Yes, please, that would be very useful.

MS SMITH: Another issue also in relation to some of the Commonwealth programs that have come out - some of the outcomes are actually increased participation by Aboriginal parents in school decision-making, we are also in the process of draft guidelines for school boards. It's an update of an old one in which we're actually enshrining in schools which have significant numbers of Indigenous students an Indigenous parent as an automatic part of the school board and decision-making. So we'll include both of those drafts in the appendix for you.

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COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Yes. Are you finding that there are any towns where there is both a state school and a Catholic school and one school is tending to become the Aboriginal school and the other school is tending to become the non-Aboriginal school?

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MR CIBICH: No.

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COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: You don't have it here?

MR CIBICH: No, no evidence. It would only be anecdotal and no, I wouldn't say - - -

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COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: It's interesting in some parts of the country that seems to have developed over the last 10 or 15 years and it's not necessarily one system or the other exclusively. In some towns it can be the state school is predominantly black and the Catholic school predominantly white, and in the next town next door it can be the reverse.

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MS SMITH: I think in the areas in which there are the biggest number of Indigenous families - when John put the map up and he was right out on the West Coast and in the Lands - the Education Department was the only provider of education in that area, so it's not competition in that sense.

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5 **MR CIBICH:** And I'm thinking of Port Augusta where we have a fairly close relationship there. Carlton School, which John commented on, has I suppose been entrenched for a long time as a school that has worked very hard in that area. We're trying to get a niche in that market, if you like, by attracting - our school is located on the west side of Port Augusta which doesn't make it - it's the other side of the gulf, that's what it means, so it's depending again on the distribution of the families in Port Augusta. But, no, I wouldn't say that was a significant factor in our state, for us.

15 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thank you very much to both of you. We look forward to receiving the submission - it will be a joint one from the two CEOs?

MS SMITH: Yes, it would. Commissioner, I wonder if you could, in actual fact, advise us as to where this inquiry will go?

20 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Where it all goes, yes. Formally where it goes is to the federal parliament, although we haven't completed our discussions yet about the format things will take - because we don't want to do another 1,000-page report that sits on bookshelves. We're more likely to have a much more focused document that goes to the parliament with information provided in a variety of other formats as well. But that's where we will go primarily with our recommendations.

 We're not restricted only to making recommendations directed to the Commonwealth. We can also make recommendations to the states, territories, private sector, Catholic sector and the world. What we will have to do is go through the material we have and try to identify the key issues. I don't pretend that we can or even should seek to be the last word on this subject, but rather to focus on some of the primary themes that have application across the country.

35 We can't force anybody to do anything in this area and nor should we. We're not the government. But we certainly, I think, can bring to bear a good deal of authority in making our recommendations and encouraging a much more constructive approach to rural education than we have at the moment. As you've said, as everybody who has appeared before us has said, country kids suffer significant educational disadvantage.

MS SMITH: Yes.

45 **MR CIBICH:** Yes.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: It's trying to redress, at least in part, that disadvantage that is our major concern.

MS SMITH: Yes, thank you for that.

MR CIBICH: Thank you.

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COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thank you very much. I'm afraid our timetable is shot to pieces, but I want to ask next for the South Australian Association of State School Organisations. Alby and I are very fit and we're quite happy to go right through lunchtime, but we don't want to necessarily force that on everybody else that is here. First of all, let me apologise to you for the mix-up with your booking. Things seem to have got lost somewhere with one of the key people moving on to another job and so I am sorry, particularly in having you come this morning and then having to ask you to come back. So my apologies.

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MR WOOLACOTT: That's all right.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Would you like to introduce yourselves for the record, and your organisation, and then you can go straight into the submissions.

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MR WOOLACOTT: Yes, Commissioner. Our organisation is the South Australian Association of State School Organisations. We are a group that represents virtually all or nearly all state school councils in South Australia, with just under 600 affiliates. We, of course, being a school council group, represent predominantly the interests of parents, but we like to think that we have the interests of the broad cross-section of the educational community at heart. My name is Mark Woolacott and with me I have Les Smith, who is from Cambrai, and Mike Mumford from Minlaton.

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COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thank you very much.

MR WOOLACOTT: What we'd like to do - and we know you're at the end of a fairly long morning - - -

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COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: No, we're not at the end yet.

MR WOOLACOTT: We would like to present both perhaps a big picture view, as well as some case studies of local examples. Our association actually has had a long interest in the whole issue of rural education and back in - before this but in 1995 we actually did a major survey, of which the results have been compiled and are attached to the submission that we've given you. The thing that still seems to be coming through to us is a consistent one. Even though the first results came from 1995 and we've been talking to groups in recent weeks and months about the current feeling, it doesn't seem as though there has

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been significant progress made as far as at least the opinions of rural people are concerned.

[Telecommunications]

5 It seems, I think, that rural people have got the feeling that they
are becoming increasingly disadvantaged and we've almost got - at a
time when you would expect it to be less disadvantaged that there
seems to be a feeling of greater disadvantage as between rural and
10 urban people. I guess the big picture notion that we would like to put to
the Commission is that in fact at this stage in Australia's development
where technology has probably made significant gains, where
economically we should have some capacity to be able to bridge these
disadvantages, we really do need to have some sort of broad base plan
15 which is going to mean that forever the tyranny of distance, or the
issues that relate or grow out of the current geographical isolation,
should attempt to be overcome.

 I might just say there it seems to us that when we know of some
of the new technological developments with things like PictureTel and
20 others, which we could elaborate on and which are referred to in our
report, with the provision of those sorts of things it would make such a
difference to communities across the nation. We don't see this actually
as being a state issue, but we see it being more as a national federal
issue and we are, of course, aware that the federal government should
25 be considerably better off in the not-too-distant future with its sale of
Telstra of \$16 billion, and it wouldn't seem unreasonable to ask for a
billion or two out of that to be put into a broad program which almost
forever would be able to overcome the sort of disadvantage which
country people currently feel.

30 We see, through the provision of telecommunication links,
perhaps even using satellite-type communication, through the provision
of on-line access at local call costs, through facilities like PictureTel,
which we think would bring almost all students in touch with teaching
35 and being able to both hear and see - not able to smell and touch but
able to hear and see what is actually going on - if those sort of facilities
could be put in it should in fact make a huge difference.

 While we've considered notions like recommending that in fact
40 all students above Year 7 should be, by the state, accommodated in
hostel accommodation elsewhere where they might get larger group
experience, we offset the costs that would be associated with that, and
think of the notion of a PictureTel outfit which might cost, say, \$70,000
to install in the location. But knowing that it's not just going to serve the
45 needs for one year but for at least a few years, it seems to us that the
cost would, in the end, become very efficient and I think would be
effective. So it's that sort of big picture that we would like the
Commission to take note of.

5 The feeling that rural people have is that for quite a long time
they've accepted their role in our society, they have been a major
contributor economically to our society; they feel, I think, they probably
haven't been given due recompense for the contribution they've made
to Australian society. While, for a long time, the strength of our
economy has largely been based on the economic powers of
production, in fact that hasn't been reflected in the way that currently
economic wealth is distributed across the country, and the economic
service which is there.

15 In a sense I think there is an accumulated feeling of the past
that they would like to see reconciled now that new technologies are
available and obviously on the increase and now that there is a
possibility of some sort of lump sum funding that might be available.
Clearly, and associated with this big picture, we still recognise that
schools are going to be necessary right across the country and so we
think there are issues like teacher incentives, in addition to the
technology that we've been speaking of.

20 **[Staff incentives]**

One of the clear problems at the moment is attracting teachers
and maintaining teachers and leaders in school sites in distant areas.
We think there is probably the necessity for a special review into what
sort of teacher incentives - and I've written about it in the submission
I've handed you. It does seem to us that in this day and age when in
fact people's salary packages are largely determined by supply and
demand, that in fact if the supply is not able to be provided then we
really have to reassess what is the salary package and the incentives
that are being built in for people to go and to stay in distant areas and
rural areas.

35 The other issue that I will just touch on before I hand over to my
colleagues is the notion of educational structures. We think we again
perhaps need to take a slightly bigger picture there, too. While there is
no doubt that the parents we've been talking to are saying to us their
goal would be to be able to keep their children at home to the end of
Year 12, we would accept, I think, that there might be some difficulty
with that. But we believe that people ought to be able to keep their
children at home at least to the end of Year 10. As I say, some would
disagree with that statement. They believe I've made too much of a
concession and would wish to argue that they ought to be able to be
kept at home, without being disadvantaged educationally, to the end of
Year 12.

45 However, I think with all the experience of social contact and
sport and all of those sorts of things in school, it is very difficult. But
from that point of view we would think that the notion of some sort of

regional special centres - and I don't mean special in a derogative sense - the notion of the special interest schools that we currently have in the metropolitan area, they should perhaps be provided in certain regional centres across the state and across the nation, but associated with them would clearly have to be suitable accommodation at the appropriate subsidised rate and cost. It seems to our association that in fact if this is the provision that is being made for students from rural areas then they ought to be able to go there without having to pay very much at all to go.

That may seem unrealistic, but city people enjoy those sort of things - able to live at home, at home type of prices. Country people, I think, feel as though they ought to have their education provided in not a lesser fashion, but not exactly having to pay a whole host more to get it. So it's that bigger picture stuff that I think we would like to have at least brought into your thinking as the Commission prepares its report.

I'd like to ask Les and Mike to make some comments about specific local issues and then we're happy to respond to any questions.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thanks.

[Transport]

MR SMITH: One issue that is very relevant for country people is transport, the time and conditions they have to suffer with travel on dusty roads, up to one and a half hours on buses. Buses may service a number of smaller schools so they are picking up primary students as well as secondary students and this creates problems as far as, again, the time that is travelled on those buses.

Safety is a very large issue on buses as far as seat belts and overcrowding. It's possible on some buses that the students have to stand in the aisles in the buses and this raises a lot of occupational health and safety and welfare issues. Seat belts should be mandatory on buses for the protection of the children. The dusty atmosphere, as they travel in the warmer, drier times, can cause massive problems for asthmatics, so I think comfort then becomes an issue where airconditioning or at least filtered air supply and filtered sealed buses to help combat that problem are supplied.

The maintenance of buses is becoming a problem because as country rural areas shrink the service centres are diminishing, so buses have to go to other areas to be serviced and that means they're away from the schools on occasions and cause problems there. Preschool children: many area schools and rural primary schools have on-site kindergartens. Under our current mode of operation these students aren't eligible to travel on school buses so again that presents problems for parents of small children.

5 Currently students within a five-kilometre radius of schools
aren't eligible to travel on the bus unless there is spare room. We had
an example at our school last week where a six-year-old got out of
school a little bit early, she walked 4.8 kilometres home in basically
uninhabited area most of the way. So, you know, there's a danger
there. Communication on buses is a major problem because when
buses break down in remote areas there's nobody there to help if it's of
a major nature and the bus drivers and that have to be able to get in
10 contact to get repairs made.

[Learning support]

15 Area students and rural school students are disadvantaged in
smaller area schools - eg the availability of suitable staff, which is a
problem; IT and computing; access to suitable businesses for VET and
work experience; transport; courier delivery and health. It's hard to
encourage teachers to outlying areas and this puts rural schools at a
disadvantage to metropolitan schools. It's not always the case, but it is
a significant problem.

20 Ancillary services become difficult because special ed,
behaviour management, psychology, dental, hearing impaired - all have
to provide their service over large areas and cause problems for
continuity in the smaller schools. Smaller schools have difficulty in
25 supplying school counsellors because until the student enrolment gets
to a certain level they aren't eligible to have counselling on site. I think
in South Australia it's 200 students enrolled to get a primary counsellor.

[12.38 pm]

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[Information technology]

Information technology: some schools have excellent facilities
for computing, Internet, PictureTel, etcetera. There's still a significant
shortfall in many rural schools. Telephone lines are not adequate to
35 carry the technology and there is no upgrade in the foreseeable future
to make provision for their use. In our school we have a problem with
power supply. We should have access to 240-volt power at all times
but even though our local electrical authority has boosted our service
up to 250 volts the supply drops to 220 at some times and you've got
40 computers dropping out all the time, creating havoc as far as utilisation
of this sort of thing.

[Subject choices]

45 In the secondary schooling area it's hard to provide an
adequate range of subject choice, but with PictureTel or an Open
Access they become an excellent fall-back system. It has been said, or
I heard it said this morning that peer interaction is a problem. One way
we feel that this can be overcome is that part of the course is done

Open Access, PictureTel, whatever; the other part the students go to a regional centre to get their peer interaction. It's very similar to the old apprenticeship system where you did a certain amount of time on job, a certain amount of time in your teaching situation.

5

Schools in small rural communities don't have the access to businesses to support their work experience and VET training. Delivery of supplies becomes a major problem to schools because a lot of them are not on recognised transport routes and the goods are delivered to a regional centre. It's up to the school to find some method of getting furniture and admin supplies and all that sort of thing back to the school. A lot of the small area schools we're talking about are in fairly isolated areas. Making use of the small rural schools: if we get upgrades in IT and that sort of thing the school can become a community learning centre where adults can participate, using IT links with TAFE and other businesses.

The other issue that's fairly dear to us is parent involvement. Again, in a lot of the rural communities our income base is shrinking and it then becomes a major problem for people to become involved voluntarily in the schools through LAP, LID, serving on school councils, generally volunteering their service to the school. The time and travel that people have to put in to do that is becoming difficult for low-income families to become involved in, and talking with other schools in our area we're seeing a significant drop in people who are willing to become involved within the schools. Thank you. Mike Mumford.

[Education costs for families]

MR MUMFORD: Yes, Mike Mumford. Following on from that and getting into more of the family situation and community situations, I'd like to perhaps put a family example to you and this would actually be - perhaps this paper that I'm submitting is a summary of some more work which will come in before 30 September. Perhaps we'll just start off here. The widening gap to those who have and those who have not is growing and much of this is beyond their control and they simply just can't afford to pay perhaps additional fees and so forth that government schools, or even private schools for that matter, are imposing.

A country family example, and I'm talking here of a scenario of one particular family but it also involves several families which are quite large - husband, wife, five children, low income of around \$28,000 a year gross - and there's many families out in the country areas that are far less than that and really well and truly below the poverty line - they have a house mortgage of up to \$200 a week that they can't seem to get out of because they're locked into some sort of a system, probably sort of an overflow from the high interest rates a few years back. Food cost in the country areas is significantly larger than metropolitan areas,

where you have a far bigger choice; perhaps up to \$150, \$200 a week, especially in a family of this size.

5 Clothing, rates, essential services such as power, phone, and
petrol is actually an essential service for people in the country and
petrol in most of the country areas is around 80-plus cents per litre and
you get no discount. And the need to run two motor vehicles in a
country area, especially in larger families, is a real necessity. In
10 families for example like this one, one partner works, might have to
travel 15, 20 kilometres to work location, therefore needing a vehicle.
The other parent needs to be able to run the children around and to
participate in other community activities as well, otherwise they become
really isolated as a parent.

15 The children probably need music lessons - and they can be
private lessons as well as rehearsals for instrumental music - outside of
school hours. Instrumental music is being taught in the school, but they
still have to travel and sometimes this is 50, 60 kilometres once a week,
and that can be quite a burden for people with low incomes and buying
20 petrol.

 Sporting events in country areas - we know very well that the
government sees this as a necessity to participate for children as part
of their curriculum activities. But even just as a community activity on a
25 social level it's just astronomical, and some children have to actually
travel 100 kilometres per week if they want to participate in a sporting
activity outside of school hours. So again a financial burden to families
who least can afford it.

30 But getting back to this particular family as an example, the
family is eligible for school card but the oldest child can no longer stay
at the country school due to the studies he or she wishes to pursue and
his or her planned career is not being offered as a curriculum and
being taught in the area. So they have to travel away or go away to
35 school. So take the student at the age of 15, just going into Year 11;
leaves the family unit and takes up schooling perhaps some
230 kilometres - or even further, 500 kilometres - away perhaps from
home and their family has to arrange board privately at a cost they can
least afford. The students need to travel to school on public transport -
40 another cost.

 The government school they might be attending has school
fees above the school card, so again they might get \$170 or whatever it
is on school card - as paid by school card - but the fee above that could
45 be another \$150 to \$200. So the family again has to come up with that,
not forgetting that they've got another four children at home who still
need some sort of financial assistance. Uniforms are far more
expensive, and some excursions at city schools where you might send

your child, they're not just down around the local shopping centre, they might be interstate. So again, you know, an added expense.

5 This family is going without to put this child through education
at a cost to the other children, who are just as intelligent but will not be
able to leave home to pursue their careers because there are just no
funds left; the kitty is just drying up. So the number one child gets youth
allowance at 16 but the family will be cut back with family allowance
10 payments but still needs support to support this child financially when
living away from home; and I think it's already been mentioned here
earlier this morning that there's still an added cost.

 And all rural, remote and city children should have the right to
equal education regardless of their financial situation. Education should
15 be made more financially available and assistance be far better than is
presently done, and families should not have to split up to gain this
equal opportunity, especially when they can least afford it.

[Information technology]

20 Information technology: we've probably already touched on that
quite a few times this morning but I really feel it's an urgent priority in
rural and remote areas, and the pressure placed on families to send a
child away is distressing. This is unfair to role modelling a sound,
unified family life, and state and federal governments must harvest the
25 talents of our students to give equal opportunity to enhance
relationships within the family and community they are growing up in.
To point them in the right direction for the beginning of their lives will
surely bring about a better, safe and cooperative society which would
be far less costly to government than handing out bandaids for past
30 unyielding systems.

[Income support]

 Some rights of families and children: as an example, if a child
does well and gets to the higher education standard but the family
35 cannot support the child to continue, this is discrimination. And the
government youth allowance needs to be far more flexible to these
low-income families, and I think that's already possibly been touched
on this morning with some people from the north.

[Vocational education and training]

40 Small businesses in rural areas are declining and because of
that decline schools will have trouble supporting the education
programs such as VET, and even the latest one Partnerships 21, at the
local level and would need to approach large industry in probably city
45 locations to be able to participate in some of those things. So the lack
of information technology providers is another one we touched on. Lack
of coordinated information technology providers is a concern, and this

would be Australia-wide and I can see this coming probably from the federal level, especially with the sale of Telstra.

5 Assistance for families, low incomes, the hardships needs to be assisted, especially in remote areas - and probably not even in remote areas, but even just places not far from the city where they still have problems. There must be equal opportunity for every child to receive an education of quality.

10 Just summarising a little more here, the government must realise we do have young people wanting to stay at school, and especially now with the vocational education and training allowances that are there, and they want to strive for quality of education and live a quality life. However, they need to be given the opportunity to raise
15 themselves from the negatives of life. This can in many cases happen through direct opportunities given by equal education for all. We all know the unemployment and youth suicides. We must grasp and seize upon an opportunity to give equal rights to education to everyone and equality of life.

20 As small business and current farm production goes the way it has over the last decade or so, with less individual farmers, therefore small rural businesses will have to close. Community needs perhaps also comes into this whole education big picture. With amalgamation of
25 rural councils, local identity has decreased. The local identity in communities has decreased because of these amalgamations and small communities and councils rely more on voluntary groups such as progress associations to provide them with information on community needs, even to the point of a council providing a lawn-mower for
30 volunteer groups to mow parklands in their own communities; and this is actually a real thing that's happening.

This again points to a financial burden on the families who can least afford the money and the time to participate. Often it is the same
35 people running the school council, progress association, sporting bodies who are bearing the brunt, and the federal government knows how much voluntary effort is put into running this country and it should be looking very seriously at giving tax relief to people who work tirelessly at keeping their communities going. Local government
40 councils get reimbursed for much of their time and fuel costs; so it should be for volunteers involved in community projects and school councils. And under Partnerships 21 it may be necessary for school councils in some areas and in smaller communities to actually become an incorporated body with a progress association or, as has been
45 looked at in the past, with local government. Thank you.

MR WOOLACOTT: We're happy to respond to your questions, I think.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Alby.

5 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** The gentleman in the centre, would you tell me what area you were telling about when the youngster had to walk four point miles - - -

MR SMITH: Cambrai Area School.

10 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** Cambrai - yes, I know Cambrai.

MR SMITH: Yes.

15 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** 25 years ago the Minister, Hugh Hudson, now dead, and I looked at South Australia and we started some new area schools - Miltaburra and another one near Poochera - and we said, "Now, what we're aiming at is no child need leave home to get matriculation."

20 **MR SMITH:** Yes.

COMMISSIONER JONES: And we thought with better buses, better roads that we would achieve it, and you're telling me now we're nowhere near achieving it.

25 **MR SMITH:** I don't think we're any further down the line than you were when you started, actually. I think there was a period there when things did improve, but in times of budget restraints and that sort of thing I think we always look at, "Well, if we just cut off this area, it's not going to affect very many people, so we won't worry." I don't say this is a
30 normal thing that happens, but it should never happen, a six-year-old child walking that distance, whether by need or whatever. It should not happen.

35 And the same with the seat belts and that sort of thing. We've got some fairly strict occupational health, safety and welfare legislation that operates now and yet here are students travelling in buses for up to an hour and a half a day each way and we're not offering them any form of safety; and that concerns me.

40 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** I think the Education Department has got a pretty good - safety and health unit I think it's called. I don't know whether that's having any impact on that sort of thing.

45 **MR WOOLACOTT:** I'm sure, Dr Jones, that we would of course acknowledge that your initiative of 25 years ago in establishing the area schools is one that we would all be very pleased about today, because in fact those area schools now really I think, sir, make a very

good contribution within the community. However, of course we know that in the last 25 years there have been added diversities that have come into the educational requirement and now of course, instead of the curriculum that you were being involved in at that stage being so much narrower, it's now much broader, therefore very much more difficult for those area schools and others to continue to provide that same breadth.

So we certainly of course commend the sort of initiatives that you took at that time, and other things you did as well. However, we would say things have moved on a bit and of course the achievements of that day probably now need to be matched with new developments and this breadth of curriculum that Les has referred to in that statement. Also of course the declining rural population, I think that's added to it. I heard somebody else here today talk about people wanting to bypass their local school because they feel as though the incentives to go to other schools are there.

In a sense, in one way the fact that anybody leaves their local district to go away has a snowball effect, and I guess what we were trying to argue earlier in this big picture is that we need to create a structure for the sake of rural communities. We think that the health and the welfare of rural communities is very important and there needs to be sufficient incentives so that teachers can go into rural areas. But, too - and I think it is now possible with newer technology - the range of subjects that can be made available can be increased and the quality to which the subjects can be provided can be increased to try and keep far more young adolescents at home, because it's those young adolescents that have a huge difference on the town. That also of course has a huge difference and a huge effect on people who will stay in the town, and it is very much a snowball sort of thing.

I guess what we were wanting to argue as much as anything that we're saying today, that drift away from the country, that drift into metropolitan areas, that needs to be halted. I think that's where the big picture stuff comes in, that we acknowledge and we wanted to put on the record today our concern about the detail like the buses and the students that walk home. But in a sense I think a Commission like yours has got the capacity to come up with a big picture direction that changes the trend within our Australian community, our Australian society, that there does seem to be a drift, a feeling that to get anywhere you have to come to the city.

It would be great if we could develop some structures whereby country people could stay in the country and perhaps even some city people be attracted to the country to do even some parts of their schooling and that we treat ourselves more as an overview of a nation, rather than a series of city-states or whatever of that sort - that's not

quite the right word, but of agglomerations, and that seems to be the way we're going and I think we ought to be aiming now, as we go into the 21st century, to try and reverse that.

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[12.58 pm]

[School fees]

10 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** The question I have is just about the fees, which has come up a number of times. What are the levels of fees that people are actually asked to pay in state schools?

MR WOOLACOTT: Perhaps I can answer that one. Are we talking about primary or secondary - perhaps both?

15 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Yes.

20 **MR WOOLACOTT:** You're probably not aware. In South Australia, first of all, school councils have the right to set a materials and services charge. Depending on the time of the year and what's happened in the Legislative Council, there is usually a regulation which allows the school council to legally recover that charge. The amount that is allowed to be recovered in primary is about \$165 and in secondary, I think, \$216 currently; it's on an index. The school councils can't recover any higher figure than that and therefore they really, legally, can't ask
25 people to pay it. What Mike was referring to, of course, was figures to a school which he knows, a metropolitan school, where the figures are considerably higher, where the council has decided to urge people to pay and where, of course, people like Mike and others feel an obligation to pay.

30
Legally, they can't be asked or enforced to pay more than the \$216, but the upper level ranges go even as high as \$500-\$600 in some secondary state schools. In our view, I'd have to say those figures are too high, but nevertheless there are a number of schools
35 that are in that level - primary not to the same level. While they can't legally be required to pay it, parents feel an obligation, of course, want to help the school and don't want to be helping less than other parents.

40 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** Has your association got an attitude towards school fees?

45 **MR WOOLACOTT:** Yes, Dr Jones, our association takes the view that it is reasonable for the school council to be able to legally recover up to the amount of the level that we've spoken about. We believe that if fees are going to be charged then - bearing in mind the school card system that we have in this state, which of course means that any child who is on school card, their parents can't be forced to pay anything over and above that school card level. We're pleased that under

Partnerships 21, the school card level is being raised to the same figure that I've quoted. So there will be no difference in those schools between the amount that can be legally charged and the amount being provided in school card and we think that's a great initiative.

5

COMMISSIONER JONES: So you believe that free and compulsory education should be allowed to collect fees?

10 **MR WOOLACOTT:** Yes. Can I just say there our view is that tuition is the free part. We'd love to think there would be no fees, but the fact is materials and services that are used in the school - the woodwork, the excursions and all of those sorts of things - cost money. At the moment, the information we have is that across the board, to have no fees or no materials and services charge, then the government contribution in that area would have to increase by about 300% in primary and 400% in secondary and we don't see that as very realistic. We also think, though, that it's not a bad thing for students to know that the books they're working with have had to be paid for by somebody and they're not just a free handout.

20

So while we certainly oppose tuition fees being paid in state schools, we don't oppose students actually having to pay something for the goods they use, the materials they use, the home economics materials they use, those sorts of things, because in a sense, they're buying their property to use at school.

25

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thanks very much, and again my apologies for mucking you around earlier in the morning.

30 **MR WOOLACOTT:** Thank you for giving us that extra half-hour.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: The Murray Lands District Leaders Group is next. Good afternoon. My apologies to you, because I think everything is now well and truly back. Could you just introduce yourself, please, and straight into your comments.

35

MS PATERSON: I'm Sally Paterson, I'm the chairperson of the Murray Lands District Leaders Group. I'm also the principal of Mannum High School. I think you have a copy of our submission.

40

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: We do, thank you.

MS PATERSON: I'm not going to read it, I'll just talk to points. That might give you a chance to catch up a little time. Just so that you're sure - I'm sure Dr Jones understands - but Murray Lands is basically east of the hills and running down to the south of the state. We cover 32 schools of all sorts of varieties, including Aboriginal, small schools,

45

large schools, etcetera. Our smallest school is a school of 11 students at Salt Creek.

5 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** The famous school that we keep hearing about.

[Distance education]

10 **MS PATERSON:** You do, do you? Good. Well, it's a good example, I suppose, of the first fundamental point that we want to make. That is the one that we're assuming that as a society, we accept that people have a right to live where they want to live and from that follows that children have the right to be educated wherever they want to live and, even if you want to live somewhere near Salt Creek, you're entitled to an education, so the 11 students - actually, I think they might be down to 10 now at Salt Creek - are still entitled to their education. That raises the first part of our submission about face-to-face education and distance education.

20 All of our schools in our district access distance education in different ways, some more so than others, and the points that you've heard this morning about improvements to technology are fundamental to improving distance education. That has been an ongoing process anyway and I think we can look forward to further changes as ISDN lines do become accessible throughout the state. The points that were being made by the previous group from SAASSO about the community aspects of schools, I think, are something that we want to emphasise too; that as there are more technological links into schools, then the community can make more use of those for things either related to education or perhaps related to other services.

30 The Catholic Education group, I think, were talking about health services, particularly psychiatric services and psychological services. I think that with telemedicine there is more and more means for people in the country to access those facilities technologically and that could be done through the school, rather than having to actually go to the hospital, which may not have those or there may not be a hospital or a doctor in that town anyway. So I think there are links there with other things: technology and distance education. Our district would like to emphasise particularly the provision of languages other than English.

40 I think there's a great sense of frustration in schools that we never seem to have got the LOTE policy pinned down and a nice neat little plan about what's going to happen with languages other than English. Our suggestion is that there be some fairly hard decisions made about which languages will be fully resourced and that those then become available R to 12 by distance education. Because one of the difficulties you strike with languages other than English is that the student moves from one school to another and suddenly is going from

doing Japanese to doing German and, if you don't have it available by Open Access, then it's not very easy to do.

5 That also reinforces the fact we find, that using Open Access
as a method of delivery, particularly in primary schools, needs
additional resources to support primary-aged children. Whereas
secondary-aged children can be given the responsibility of managing
themselves in the conduct of their telephone lessons or
10 videoconference lessons, primary students generally need support. In
our system at the moment, we don't get a staffing allocation for that.
We really feel that we should. You've heard frequently today, and I'm
sure in other locations, about the support for the curriculum and that
really comes from having teachers with the right and diverse range of
15 skills in country locations or making them more available by using more
technological or transported links of communication.

[Clustering]

I think that cluster models are becoming more and more used. I
know in part of the district that I'm working in we're sharing more with
20 the schools that are within about a 50 to 80 kilometre distance with us
and actually moving teachers and students occasionally across those
distances and sending students to central locations for shared
programs of all sorts. Some of those shared programs are ones that we
do with TAFE and others are ones that we do. For example, we run an
25 alternative program for students who are not successful at school,
particularly middle school-aged children who are still under compulsion,
but are finding it very difficult to actually attend and participate
positively. So we run a central alternative program for those students
and transport the students to that program for a couple of days a week.

30 In our submission, we also address issues around incentives
and special education. I don't think I'll talk too much about those. We
talk about travel and the need for more access to travel. I think all of
our schools would be really supportive of some system where they can
35 have the ability to transport small groups of students, either by car or
by bus. Finally, I suppose the bottom line is that the schools in the
country obviously cost more to run. They do at the moment, but I
suppose what we'd be saying is that they need even more additional
resources to extend and to match the facilities and the services which
40 are offered by metropolitan schools.

It doesn't really seem to matter that, for example, my school is
only 85 kilometres from Adelaide. That still means that our students
don't have access to resources, particularly things like the public library
45 systems, the museums, art galleries. Those sort of public and social
resources are just not available, particularly if you're in a town that
doesn't have easy public transport to major centres or to Adelaide.
South Australia, I think, is one of the states of Australia that is so very

much centred on its capital city. Students feel if they can't access what the students in Adelaide have got, then they really are disadvantaged and all sorts of things that can address that disadvantage cost us money and more money is what we really need, I suppose.

5

I don't feel a need really to say very much more. Unless you'd like to ask me questions, I'll leave the submission there for your perusal.

10

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thanks, and thanks for providing it in advance too, because I did have a chance to go through it beforehand. Alby, have you got some questions?

15

COMMISSIONER JONES: You mentioned about the language problem. You're in Mannum, aren't you?

MS PATERSON: Yes.

20

COMMISSIONER JONES: Do any of your people go to the Saturday morning schools? They run a splendid German Saturday morning school in Adelaide.

25

MS PATERSON: No, none of our students do and I suppose one of the major reasons is that we have an absolutely excellent German teacher at our school; we're very lucky. In fact, Mannum High School is the smallest high school in the state at the moment - we might not exist as a high school for much longer - but we're very fortunate that we have say, for example, five students doing Year 12 German this year, which is more than some of the very much larger high schools. So a lot of it comes down to the quality of teaching, as well as just having the teacher there; it makes a great difference. So we haven't found the need to do that, but again, I think the distance travel is a difficulty, if they were expected to go that way.

30

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COMMISSIONER JONES: Thanks.

[Technology]

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COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Just a couple of things from me. One was you raised in your submission the issue of support for technology which, without doubt, is a major thing.

MS PATERSON: Yes, that is.

45

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: What kind of support do you get at the moment? Does it vary from school to school? Is there a formula?

MS PATERSON: No, there isn't any formula allocation. At the moment, support for technology in government schools comes in the form of a district support officer. We have one person for our 32 schools, so you can imagine that person spends a fair bit of time driving and not
5 actually providing the support. There's one district support officer in each of the districts in the state. That person is meant to be the person who can solve just about every problem you've got and sometimes you have to go through that person before you can actually access a commercial provider of support or repair.

10 We also have within our department a customer service desk, which runs by telephone and can provide some assistance by telephone. But I would have to say that support for keeping computing systems running is one of the most frustrating aspects of schooling at
15 the moment. I have to say that in my personal situation at my school we're very lucky that the deputy principal is highly technologically literate and I also have a very experienced bursar who is not afraid to open up the back of the computer and put the screwdriver in and load a new motherboard or whatever they are - I'm sorry, I'm not that literate, I
20 leave it to them a bit - but in most schools that's not the situation.

In most schools you've got people who are not really able to do that sort of work and they may be then hours away from getting support to do that sort of thing.

25 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** It's sheer good luck if you've got somebody on your staff.

MS PATERSON: That's right, yes.

30 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** I know from bitter personal experience, unless there is somebody in-house, computers can be down more often than they're up.

35 **MS PATERSON:** That's right. Then you're actually ending up with the people who are in-house doing something which really isn't their job, it's not their core job to be doing that. What I was going to say was that our department has made a clear statement that schools are to try and achieve a one to five computer to student ratio and that has been
40 resourced through a program called DECSTEC 2000. The problem that I have and that we have in our district of schools with that project is that, although funds have been provided to subsidise the cost of purchase of computers, it is a subsidy. So you only get the subsidy if you've actually got the money to pay the rest of the cost and a lot of
45 schools haven't got that. So some schools aren't even using the subsidy, and it doesn't really address the ongoing nature of the demands on your finances to maintain that one to five ratio.

We have actually done some financial forward planning, which shows that if we continue to maintain that ratio in our school, we will go bankrupt.

5 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Within how long?

10 **MS PATERSON:** If we actually did it and maintained the quality and number of computers that we need, we'd be bankrupt in three years now. This is now, I suppose, three years down the track since we
15 started spending. If I can just speak for Mannum rather than for the district in this case, we have a school of, at the moment, 140 secondary students. We have about 30 computers in the school. We estimate that we really need to spend about \$15,000 per year - perhaps not every
20 year, but averaged across a period of time - to maintain the quality of the computing equipment, not just for word processing, but also in specialist areas, like in art, media studies, music, tech studies, which because they are relating more and more to computer based industries and workplaces, are expecting students to have that experience at school. That sort of experience has been written into the senior
25 secondary course structures, so you really are disadvantaging students if you can't.

As I was bemoaning to one of my colleagues the other day, it always seems to me that it's the more expensive subjects that are more
25 popular. There seems to be a dislike of reading a book and writing notes and a love of using photographic equipment or something like that. So it is a difficulty, but not just for country schools.

[Students with disabilities]

30 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** The second area where you might just make a comment for me relates to formulas for staffing and support and children with disabilities.

35 **MS PATERSON:** Staffing for students with disabilities or staffing in general?

40 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** No, staffing for the school for students with disabilities. Kids who have got disabilities have got, obviously, special needs, as reflected in additional staffing formulas. To what extent do you find those formulas are adequate? To what extent are they flexible enough to meet the fact that one child with a disability amongst a hundred kids raises problems different from one child with a disability, or five with a disability, among 500 kids?

45 **MS PATERSON:** That's right, yes. The formula is completely inadequate, the allocation that you get. As an example, again at Mannum, we have just one student who is on the highest level of support and others who are on lower levels of support. That one

5 student on the highest level is the only one for whom we actually get a
teacher allocation. The rest of them we get SSO hours. For that
student, we get 0.09 teacher time, which is less than half a day per
week. It's about two hours a week of teacher time to work with a student
who is regarded as needing an intensive level of support. So, in fact,
what that means is that a teacher is able to spend some time helping
other teachers work with the student, plan for the student and that
teacher also works with the SSO to help that person, so provides some
more support for him on a more continuous basis.

10

[1.18 pm]

15 But the teacher level support is completely inadequate and, as
you say, it's in the small school I suppose that those students do stand
out more and you are less able to group them together to maximise the
support which is what happens usually in a larger school. The time for
one student will be actually used with three or four students. I suppose
on the other hand in a small school we have some advantages. We
generally know the students very well, we try to be as flexible as
possible and maximise the benefits that we get from community support
as well.

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25 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** The example that often comes up - and I'm
not sure if you were here earlier today - - -

25

MS PATERSON: Yes.

30 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** This business about a child who might have
35 or 40 minutes worth of teacher support - not teaching but aid needs
- a day may be identified as having therefore even 10% during the
course of the week, but the fact that that's spread five minutes every
hour, 10% of a teacher aide is not going to go very far when you have
really 100% need for the child. Is this a reality for the kinds of schools
that you have in your area?

35

MS PATERSON: Yes.

40 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** I guess that affects kids with physical
disabilities more than kids with learning disabilities?

40

45 **MS PATERSON:** Probably that frequent access, but sometimes some
students with learning disabilities just need that bit of organisational
help, and particularly once you get into that secondary situation where
they might be going into, say, somewhere between six or seven
different lessons in a day, they almost need that bit of organisational
help in each lesson. The reality is that that in most cases comes down
to the individual teacher to ensure that that's done, rather than the
extra support which, as you say, is usually provided in a block of time.

So it's not the most effective way of doing it at all, no. We need much more flexibility in doing that.

5 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** Do you encourage other pupils to help the disabled ones?

MS PATERSON: Yes. Generally we find that works very well; sometimes, depending on the personalities involved, less well. I actually find that the most difficult students to manage in the school are
10 those with psychiatric illnesses, rather than those with either psychological or straight learning difficulties. But once you get into psychiatric situations, it can be very very difficult, particularly when you don't feel as though you've got any experience or knowledge really.

15 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thank you very much. Again, my apologies for keeping you waiting.

MS PATERSON: Thank you for the opportunity. We appreciate it.

20 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Your submission that came early, too, was great. The next participant is Open Access College. Introduce yourself, please, and then we'll get straight into it.

[Distance education]

25 **MS BEAGLEY:** Sure. Marg Beagley, executive principal of the Open Access College South Australia. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity this morning. Briefly, the context of what the Open Access College is: it was established in 91 and took over the role of the South Australian Correspondence School, School of the Air and TAFE, in terms of
30 providing primary and secondary schooling to students across South Australia. They are those students who can't access a local school because of distance, although there may be some other reasons, like medical reasons, itinerancy, and also students who can't access particular subjects at their local school.

35
At the moment we have around 2,000 students enrolled and of those students we have a number of students who are based in country schools. We have students from 110 country schools across the state, 50 metropolitan schools, and those schools include the government,
40 the Catholic and the independent system, and also prisons. Studying from home in terms of remote and isolated we have 120 primary and 24 secondary students. I understand that our Department has in fact provided a written response in relation to the context of South Australia and the current government initiatives.

45 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Yes.

MS BEAGLEY: I've heard some people this morning talk about, I guess, basically that. Recently and in the last 10 years there's certainly been a change demographically in our state, and this has meant an

increased number of students relying on distance education to access curriculum and senior secondary education in particular, but also there certainly has been an increase in the number of secondary students in remote areas that are staying at home on the station to complete
5 secondary schooling and not attend boarding school because of the economic recession.

In a lot of my comments this afternoon I want to focus on really remote students, but I will mention country students as well. Our
10 distance ed services are needed because many country schools find difficulty in staffing particular subject areas - I was going to mention languages other than English as well, but Sally mentioned that earlier - both at primary and secondary level. In fact the majority of our primary school enrolments are in languages other than English and we are able
15 to offer Spanish and Indonesian in primary; and, in secondary, Spanish, Indonesian, German and French. But there is certainly a need across the state for improved access to languages other than English, and also a wide range of subject areas, particularly in senior secondary.
20

For some families in these locations, they would prefer to send their children away to a larger country centre or the metropolitan area, but cannot afford to and are not eligible for the AIC [Assistance for Isolated Children] because of the bypass rules, and I believe they have
25 been brought to your attention as well.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Yes.

MS BEAGLEY: I have just returned on Friday from Katherine Federal Isolated Children's and Parents Association conference, and that was
30 another issue that was raised again there and there was an opportunity to have a presentation from the Commission there, so I assume that's been brought up there as well.

In terms of access to education, I believe that the quality of educational services in distance education that we offer in South Australia is in fact the best in Australia, but the reality is that for some students it's not a suitable methodology. There are still some students who are not motivated when working alone, they have poor
35 organisational skills and low confidence. I guess that in spite of the fact some parents would like to keep their children at home in the local community, sometimes it may not be the best thing for their child. And I guess the AIC allowance has some rules about appropriate education there that may need to be looked at.
40

45 From the college's point of view, one of the issues is about resources being available to develop new curriculum areas, particularly now with the emphasis on vocational education and training and

information technology - there are some other specialist areas like agricultural studies and music, for example - and it actually means that some students cannot access subjects they want to or may need to for a particular career path through distance education because they're not available. To broaden the subject choice is very resource-intensive. That's just basically an issue. It costs a lot of money for distance education and the resources are limited, but as a consequence of that it makes it difficult to sometimes provide the pathways that students require.

In relation to this, when federal funding is available - and the example I use is with the Civic and Citizenship or Understanding Democracy funding that was being provided by the government recently and also for drug education - that's offered to develop curriculum materials, to support students and teachers in schools. You can't use those materials immediately with distance education students, and they do need to be adapted to be appropriate for distance methodology. So it would be useful at the outset that some funding was set aside for the purpose of distance education for those programs, because often by having it happen later it makes the process longer and costs more money.

[Technology]

In terms of technology, access to broadband technology for all country schools in South Australia is in the process of being rolled out, and this will make a significant improvement to distance education students in this state. My concern though is that there are some very isolated Indigenous communities and 95 remote families on stations that will not get terrestrial links. Satellite technology is available and would provide the same access to broadband Internet, and this would enable students increased access to resources. The issue is of course the cost involved with that, and our current government in South Australia isn't in the process of meeting that cost at all.

But we do know that improved both synchronous and asynchronous interaction with teacher and students and the opportunity to participate in videoconference lessons as well as HRF radio and telephone lessons does improve the students' learning outcomes. It improves their attention and their attendance. We've certainly used the Internet for videoconferencing and with remote families on a limited basis, and we've seen those improved outcomes, and certainly in terms of reducing educational isolation.

We're also aware that the Curriculum Corporation and EDNA are proposing significant on-line developments for students in schools, and students in remote communities. If they haven't got access to the actual service, then they're not going to be able to access those programs. So support may be needed from the federal government to

5 make satellite hardware and subsidise the call costs - which currently are very expensive - available so these students can have the opportunity to be IT literate, to be able to access resources, both human in terms of teachers and course ware, to communicate more effectively with their teachers and other students, and to be part of the global village.

10 Certainly in country schools in South Australia, IT support at the local level is an issue. We are fortunate in that we've got a technician in our Port Augusta site, and through using trainees at our city site we've been able to offer a help desk to our remote or home based students. The issue of one to five computers, which is the policy, doesn't work for students studying from home, so special funding is really needed because each home based student needs one
15 workstation per family. That's a much more cost-intensive issue, but in terms of the outcomes and student learning, particularly in South Australia because we have only a small number of remote and isolated families, I believe it's a small investment for a very important access to education.

20 At the Open Access College, each of my teaching staff has a computer on their desk with access to the Internet and e-mail, and they certainly use that on a daily basis, and increasingly so for teaching. The College had to go into a \$200,000 debt to afford that, but we saw it
25 as a priority; not asking more money for the College to do that, we needed to manage that ourselves. But I'm certainly concerned about our students and the access that those students can get.

[Students with disabilities]

30 In terms of students with disability, particularly for remote and isolated students, the access to these services is not always available, not because there aren't resources to provide it but, just like we have difficulty in getting teachers attracted to country locations, we certainly have difficulty in getting other paramedical people there as well, like
35 guidance officers, speech therapists, etcetera. So it's very difficult often to attract the health and educational personnel to these positions. One of the processes for funding for students with disability in South Australia is that there needs to be an assessment by a guidance officer before you can indicate whether the student is eligible for the funding
40 or not, and that's a real issue for us with families in very very distant locations and remote locations.

45 So often a student could go several months before they can be assessed and access the funding. Often then it's very difficult to use the funding appropriately. An example is that we recently had a primary student arrive from Victoria to William Creek Station. That student had cerebral palsy and an intellectual disability and, because they were new into our system, they had to be reassessed. The Victorian

information wasn't sufficient. That student then was entitled to some SSO hours, but in terms of William Creek and providing an appropriate person, there was nobody in the community that was appropriate. That has happened several times, that kind of scenario.

5

The other issue for students with disabilities, I believe, is in terms of the formula that was talked about with the previous speaker. The funding bucket hasn't really increased, and yet what we've got is a significant increase in the number of students accessing it. When the criteria and the bucket was developed, at that time students often left schooling at, say, 15 in this state. Now that policy has changed and students are encouraged to stay at school and complete the SACE, and so we've now got an increased number of students accessing the same bucket.

15

As has been indicated earlier this morning, public education is no longer free in South Australia and there is a widening gap between the rich and the poor. Country and rural communities in South Australia have been significantly affected by the economic recession, and local communities are unable to generate the resources that many metropolitan schools can. This means that many schools in country and rural communities cannot offer comparable facilities, curriculum programs such as sport and arts and technology, as many metropolitan schools can.

25

New plans for global budgeting for South Australian schools is currently being consulted on and will occur for some schools for the year 2000. This may improve the situation, but many country communities are not optimistic about their futures. That's what I'd like to present, and maybe you have some questions.

30

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER JONES: Your school is getting a good reputation around the state, from my contacts. You're going to speak at the Australian College of Education conference, aren't you?

35

MS BEAGLEY: Yes, I am. That's some good feedback, thank you for that. Thanks very much for the opportunity.

40

[Student performance in distance education]

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Don't go yet. I've got a couple of questions for you. Just on that one, the good reputation: has there been work done evaluating the performance of kids that are in distance ed courses as against those who are doing the face-to-face courses?

45

MS BEAGLEY: There's been some work done. I'm conscious of not being 100% specific here, on the basis that one of the things is that we

are there to provide a complementary service to other schools. But I do know that in some schools that study face to face, they study with us, and they also do some local delivery, so nearby schools might use distance education. But the student outcomes were that the majority of students did better in distance education.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Did better?

MS BEAGLEY: We currently have, in terms of our Year 12 results - and there's only one indicator and that's why I want to be cautious, I suppose.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Yes, absolutely.

MS BEAGLEY: In terms of our Year 12 results, our results are above the state average, and I want to be cautious because it's very difficult often in terms of comparing some things. But in country schools they often cannot get people who have been trained in that area and so unfortunately someone may have to teach a subject that they don't feel confident with. In terms of our other indicators that we've got of anecdotal information, there are situations where students are able to continue at school and complete Year 12 schooling where they wouldn't have otherwise been able to, and chronic fatigue syndrome students are a good example of that. They're also a good example of students who need special resources but don't meet the students with disability guidelines.

So certainly the information that we have at the moment is that students can be successful. At the same time there is a small group of students who wouldn't be successful in face-to-face schooling either often, and it does depend. Often there are students who do better at distance ed than face-to-face and vice versa. I'm saying that the information we also have is that technology is being able to be used to support the curriculum, and one of the reasons I feel I can talk about the quality of the education and the service that we provide in South Australia is that we're the only state that has provided telephone lesson support in fact since the 70s, on a weekly basis, which doesn't happen interstate. We're also using Internet conferencing that Tasmania has just started to use at the moment, but most other states don't use it. In some areas they're using what they call telematics on a small scale.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: I know as we've done this work and moved around the place there's a very strong, in fact almost overwhelming priority amongst parents for face-to-face teaching, and yet it does seem that distance education results range from being good to outstanding from place to place. I don't know whether you mob are getting the credit that you deserve in the popular conscienceness for the success you're having.

5 **MS BEAGLEY:** Yes. I suppose I get frustrated about some of the
comments, and I sat in in the country in some of the consultations that
occurred recently in our state. There was a country consultation that
10 occurred, and I downloaded information from the Internet, and I think
some of it's got to do with lack of information and also some of the
selling or marketing of distance education in this state. I guess it's how
people use the resources too, and studying in isolation is very difficult. I
15 think what parents don't understand is that there may be two other
students at their local school - say three students in a class - but if you
study with us, those students are linked with other students elsewhere
so they get a chance to broaden that. If you're studying some subjects
like English or history where you're trying to argue and have opinions
and ideas shared, etcetera, it's a much more stimulating environment
20 conducive to that learning if that is in a bigger group and not only with
one or two students at your local site. It's an ongoing thing in terms of
PR because our community changes every year. It's in the secondary
area where we may only have students that are with us for one year
and then a new lot come along.

[Funding for distance education]

25 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Yes. Two questions only, both brief ones.
Where there are students in a school doing part of a course by
face-to-face teaching and part by distance ed, the impression that I get
is that there's no allowance made for in-school teacher supervision of
distance ed students. Is that across the board?

30 **MS BEAGLEY:** The situation is that schools with small secondary
enrolments are provided with extra resources, called Open Access
tier 2 staffing, for the provision of distance education in their school.
Now, the local community, the principal, can decide whether they use
that extra funding, and I've got a summary of what that is, if you're
interested.

35 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Yes, please.

40 **MS BEAGLEY:** In providing the actual funding for face to face or for
distance education, but there is an expectation that if they use it for
distance education, that they provide some supervision at the local
level, and there's certainly sufficient to do that. Some schools choose
not to do that, not to use that funding for that purpose. I believe there
are resources available, but some schools are putting it in their whole
big bin and not using it for that purpose.

45 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Any material you can give us on that would
be appreciated.

5 **MS BEAGLEY:** How it works is that if a school does enrol with us, they're expected to pay some salary back, so the student isn't counted twice. I've gone through these individual schools, and I know how much is being spent on distance education. I do know that in some schools they're still running classes of one, two, three, four students, and if they actually used distance education then those resources - there would be funding available for supervision. That's the list of schools and the allocation they've got for distance education [tabled].

10 **[Students with disabilities]**

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Okay, thank you. The second question goes to the funding formulas for you at the Open Access College. You've mentioned how students with disabilities who are doing distance ed can get local support for SSOs. Do you also get an enhancement to cover the additional teaching requirements of children with disabilities who are using distance ed?

20 **MS BEAGLEY:** Yes, we do get some, and so we have 1.0 salary to teach students with disabilities. We have some students who are integrated into mainstream classes and others, for various reasons, need to be separated, and because it's distance education - and at the moment we're working a lot in a print based mode - literacy skills are really important and supervision at the other end. So it varies how that staffing is used with individual students.

25 The difficulty is that we feel there are a number of students who are enrolled with us who ought to be entitled to some resource, and they're not counted in that salary because they haven't been assessed - because getting that assessment is a very slow process. We've certainly been having discussions with our local people of how we can speed that process up, I guess. In some cases the support, though, is actually needed at the local level, and for some very remote students that is difficult to provide, clearly.

35 What happens is that those families then choose to move to the metropolitan area often, and that happens in country areas as well as remote areas.

40 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thank you very much. Thanks for that.

MS BEAGLEY: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: We're going to have a break for 15 minutes.

45 (Luncheon adjournment)

[2.20 pm]

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Would you like to introduce yourself, Alan, and your organisation or background for the record and then go straight into any comments you wanted to make.

5

DR BUNDY: Yes, thank you, Chris. I am Alan Bundy. I am university librarian of the University of South Australia. Also in my formal submission, which I have copies of here, I've indicated that my claim to an awareness of the issue about which I wish to speak is the fact that I am the editor of the Directory of Australian Public Libraries and I also have a very keen interest in rural library development in general.

10

I'd also like to table for the Commission a submission from the Australian Library and Information Association and its rural and isolated libraries special interests group, which I received by fax this morning and I've made photocopies of it. I made that group aware of the fact I was speaking to the Commission today and they've also put together a submission which I think very much complements the content of mine, so there in fact are two submissions here and there are five copies of each.

15

20

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thank you very much. Feel free to go ahead and lead us into them.

25

[Public libraries]

DR BUNDY: The substance of my submission is that until 1950 Australia had a very poorly developed public library system. In 1935 it was the subject of very considerable criticism from a Carnegie Commission report known as the Mun-Pitt report, which virtually said Australia has no decent public libraries. At that time Australia was certainly behind many of the other western liberal democracies in term of provision of a free public library service.

30

That particular report referred to real deficiencies in rural areas and reflected on how one might address those, given the difficulties of transportation and distance. There was another report produced in 1947 paid for by the Commonwealth and British Council and ACER called the McColvin report which similarly reflected on the lack of public library development and particularly reflected on the difficulty of servicing rural Australians. As a result of those two reports there was considerable initiatives by the various state governments in terms of legislation from about 1949 onwards which in fact resulted in the development of public library systems in each state and territory which are essentially a partnership between state governments and local government.

35

40

45

Now, a consequence of that is that by my reckoning Australia now has probably one of the 10 best public library systems overall in

the world, which I think is a considerable achievement, so that's a positive. The negative is that the fundamental issue of how rural Australians are serviced with public libraries has been addressed in not such a systematic way. There are considerable variations in availability of library services to rural and remote Australians around the country due to different approaches that have been taken, different policies, and particularly due to the reluctance of local government in many rural areas to actually fund libraries adequately. I refer to that at some length in my submission.

There has never been a comprehensive review of rural public library provision. I have a lot of data available to me because of my editorship of this particular publication here, which I will also lodge with the Commission, which does detail the variations in library provision between the city and the country and it does clearly demonstrate that there are significant variations. 50 years ago one might have argued that those variations were there of necessity because of problems of distance. I think those reasons no longer hold true. There are indications in some places that rural Australians are serviced better with public libraries than in other areas because of initiatives that have been taken by state governments and particularly because a local authority may have decided to actually put more money into their particular libraries.

The reason why this is a national issue is because UNESCO has a public library manifesto which suggests that all national and local governments bear responsibility for ensuring that a country has a good public library system. The reasons why a public library system is important in terms of information access and equality is clearly laid out in that manifesto and I have actually appended the manifesto to my submission for the information of the Commission. That makes it quite clear that the national government has a responsibility. Now the reality in Australia is that the national government has tended to keep very much at arm's length public library development and has left it effectively to the states and local government. That I think is one of the reasons why there are such significant variations around the country.

My particular interest is in the potential of what are called joint-use libraries. Mr Jones will be very familiar with these, because it was during his stewardship of the Education Department in South Australia that South Australia launched on its grand scheme of rural school community libraries - the potential of those libraries to actually improve access to the technology, access to professional staff, access to a wide range of resources, as well as improving library services in schools.

South Australia has over 50 joint-use libraries; most of them are rural libraries. Basically they consist of a public library housed in a

school; some of them are housed in TAFE. Broadly I have demonstrated that they do provide a better service to rural people than do stand-alone public libraries in small communities. They are particularly appropriate for small communities of 3,000 people or less.

5 South Australia managed to achieve this system in part because the Minister at that time had portfolio responsibility for education and also, for a short period of time, libraries. Thus he could mandate that his departmental officials could get together and do something about actually establishing these libraries. The problem with other states, with

10 the exception of Tasmania, which is increasing its number of joint-use libraries because it now has the same situation, is that the Minister with portfolio covers education and libraries, and it makes it much easier to get the bureaucrats to actually see the sense of what's actually being proposed.

15 I'm suggesting that there is a way forward on this. I'm suggesting that electronic connectivity is not the answer to redressing the imbalance in terms of information access between city and rural Australians. There are many public libraries now putting the Internet in,

20 but unfortunately those in the country that are putting it in do not have the professional staff to make best use of the facility on behalf of the communities they serve. I've drawn attention in my submission to the fact that the major deficiencies in rural areas are lack of access points.

25 There are too many Australians now still limited to a mobile library service which calls once every two or three weeks for about two hours. In South Australia there is only one mobile library because people much prefer to actually have a static library which they can actually use, so that's a problem. There may be 200,000 rural

30 Australians that only have a mobile library available to them.

Many of the libraries in country areas are poor physically; their accommodation is second-rate. The vast majority of them do not have any professional or paraprofessional staff. To some extent this has

35 been minimised by the fact that in all states, except Victoria and New South Wales, there is a centralised system of support which does actually overcome some of the problems of not having professional staff. But it still means that rural Australians do not have a library professional they can actually go to if they have a particular information

40 need and have assistance with it. And this is why I've stated quite firmly in my submission that just providing the Internet is not a panacea. Unfortunately it has been perceived in some circles as being a universal panacea, even among so-called educators. There's also a problem that local government may see it as a universal panacea as

45 well when in fact it isn't.

The real reason for the problem in rural areas is that rural local government in some areas has not shifted much from its pre-1950

preoccupation with roads and rubbish. It doesn't see that its most heavily used service is in fact its library. Around Australia over 11 million people use public libraries, and public libraries are by far the most heavily used service provided by local government. But in many parts of Australia the rate revenue which is devoted to a public library may be less than 2%; that's significantly less than it normally is in metropolitan areas.

So I've drawn attention in my submission to the fact that funding is at the base of the problem. It's perceptions also which are at the base of the problem. Therefore I've concluded that if somehow we could develop a national audit or survey of what was really occurring in rural Australia it would be quite salutary in drawing to the attention of the various parties - local government, state government, and perhaps even the national government - how some of these issues could be addressed systematically in the first decade of the next century.

There are solutions to most of these problems. They don't necessarily cost a lot of money but they do involve changes in mind-set at local government level in particular. I think that's probably the thrust of what I've said in my submission. The one from the Australian Library and Information Association does largely complement that but draws particular attention to the fact that networking connectivity is a major issue still in the country in terms of fast access to the Internet. There doesn't seem that there's going to be a rapid solution to this in many parts of rural Australia; no doubt that's been raised as an issue.

[School libraries]

In my submission I've also referred to school libraries, because in general if public libraries are poor in country areas - and in general terms relatively they are poor - school libraries are in a similar situation. Many of them do not have qualified staff. Many of them are under-resourced. And some of them are undoubtedly affected by a mind-set within educational bureaucracies that one doesn't need libraries any more, one doesn't need teacher-librarians; the Internet will provide everything. This is pretty naive thinking, but there is something of a mind-set towards that at the moment, so there has been no systematic attention to addressing some of the deficiencies for school libraries.

If you have school libraries which are poor and the children have nowhere else to go apart from the public library - they don't have a state library to go to, they don't have a university library to go to - they're going to a poor public library as well. So they're affected by the deficiencies of both and that's why I'm strongly suggesting in many areas of Australia putting the two together and consolidating the building. It in fact could be quite an effective way of actually addressing the issue and particularly a way of providing the professional staff that are really needed to actually drive these libraries and make them

integral parts of their communities. The track record in South Australia is largely a successful one in that respect.

[Joint-use libraries]

5 There is an increasing number of joint-use libraries in Australia and currently I am researching them. I have study leave from the university to visit all of them in Australia and New Zealand. The problem with them is that they appear on an ad hoc basis. There's no systematic attention given to whether this would be in fact a good
10 outcome for more rural Australians. My calculation is that there could be easily 400 communities in Australia with populations of 3,000 or less who either do not have a public library at all in terms of a static service point or if they do they have one which is open for only a few hours a week, has no qualified staff, has limited services, limited resources,
15 where a case could be made for some systematic approach to actually developing a joint-use school and community library to service those communities.

20 TAFE is in a similar situation. Any TAFE outlets in country areas are generally deficient, because TAFE has a fairly formidable reputation for not resourcing its libraries properly or depending on the public library. The real problem is if an educational institution library is deficient it places a greater load on the public library. This happens in the city, and public librarians around Australia will report increasing use
25 by primary, secondary and tertiary education students. I know in my own instance I'm quite frequently told by public librarians that my students from the University of South Australia are using public libraries frequently. Now, we counter that by saying we know that members of the public use our library. There's a lot of cross-sectorial use which has been documented to a large extent, but it is very
30 substantial. But of course in country areas the potential for cross-sectorial use is in fact very limited and this must impact on how people develop.

[Information literacy]

35 In terms of information rich, information poor, I think the critical issue is that if in a school you do not have a well-resourced library or learning resource centre, call it what you may, with professionals to work with classroom teachers in developing the information literacy of
40 country students, those students are going to graduate from school with no real sense of how they grapple with the complexities of the information environment in which they're going to find themselves.

45 Again, around the world there are two major issues floating - one following the Delores report on lifelong learning to which I've referred in my submission. Most countries now are saying lifelong learning is the focus for the 21st century. Now, regardless of whether you regard that as a cliché or not there is some meat being put on that

bone I think at this moment in many countries. The other one is information literacy, which has been recognised in a number of Australian government reports using that term and also overseas as something which is a necessary complement to lifelong learning. You
5 can't be a lifelong learner in the 21st century unless you're information literate.

Information literacy is broadly the first key competency described by Meyer in the Meyer report, and effectively it means having
10 an understanding of the need for information and then the capacity to actually identify access, locate, evaluate, and then apply the needed information, and again I've given the definition in my submission in an appendix. I must apologise for the length of my submission but the submission itself runs to about 13 pages but the rest of it is actually
15 appendices to save people from having to chase around unnecessary documentation, so I have put as much detail as I can. That is essentially the situation as I see it. I think things are much better than they were in 1935. There is no doubt about that.

20 [2.35 pm]

I think the problem is there has been no national identification of the deficits, what the consequences are, and how one might address those systematically over say the next decade. I am quite convinced
25 there are various strategies that could be put in place not necessarily costing a lot of money but certainly requiring local government to look seriously at how it funds its libraries in country areas, and I think a national report which drew attention to this could be quite salutary and so I have actually suggested that the Commission might like to consider
30 recommending to the national government some form of consultancy or maybe even an inquiry to actually clearly identify what the issues are because I have only really just sketched them out and I have a fairly good idea of what they are but I think it needs a fair bit of investigation in every state and territory to really tie them down.

35 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thank you very much. I am glad that things are better than they were in 1935. That's encouraging.

DR BUNDY: They didn't really start to improve until about 1950 but, as
40 I say, the positive thing is that Australia does have overall a good public library system. Its major weakness, as in the US and as in Canada, is in the rural areas and it is the same in those countries. It's been clearly identified. I mean, in the US, for example, there are parts of Indiana which do not have any library service at all.

45 **[Mailout library services; role of local government]**

There are very few parts of Australia now which do not have some form of library service but it may be very limited. It's calculated

that 98% of Australians now have access to some form of public library service, which is quite an achievement, given the size of the country, but that 2% is actually quite significant as well, and there are some interesting initiatives which have been undertaken by an Australian library, such as the Broken Hill letterbox service, where they get materials out to people out on the stations. They have just received a significant grant from the Library Council of New South Wales to actually extend that service.

That service, interestingly, crosses state borders, unofficially, but they actually service people in South Australia but there is no financial recognition of that and I think it would be good if a national report was commissioned which actually drew attention to some of the positive things which are going on in country areas as well. As I say, I have visited a large number of country libraries - joint-use and others - over the last few weeks and I will be visiting more in New South Wales, the ACT and Queensland in about three weeks' time and I can actually see the considerable variations in what people actually have available to them and it distresses me. That is so and it is largely because I think local government in particular is not aware of how the world has moved on. Country public librarians report this as a major issue because local councils tend to be dominated by middle-aged males.

The CEOs are still largely males; most of the librarians are female, and they do find there is a fairly patronising attitude towards the development of libraries. This is partly derived from the fact that the cohort, the population, which doesn't make any use of public libraries are in fact middle-aged males and yet those are the decision-makers, so I think it is more than a suggestion that there is a correlation between the two, but again it varies. You can find examples in Australia where you have got a local authority in the country which in fact has been very enterprising and has recognised quite clearly that its library service is the best thing the council actually provides.

That is the case, that the public library - in fact the mayor of Mount Baker here in South Australia in the local paper only two weeks ago said, "We are going to put more money into our library because it is by far the most popular thing the council provides because 60% of the population use it on a regular basis" and there is no agency in Australia where that's true and across the country it is calculated that 11.4 million Australians use public libraries regularly. It is very significant; a very significant contribution to learning, to information, to education, and also importantly to recreation as well.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: As you indicated, we have heard a lot during the course of the inquiry about the Internet and information technology but not a thing about libraries, really, except that individual school

libraries are under-resourced on a place-by-place basis. So thank you very much for putting it in the broader context.

DR BUNDY: Right.

5

COMMISSIONER JONES: How would Pinnaroo fit in as a joint-use library from your experience in quality of service and stock and teacher-librarian?

10

DR BUNDY: Pinnaroo was the very first - - -

COMMISSIONER JONES: That's where we met - - -

[Joint-use library Pinnaroo]

15

DR BUNDY: Yes, that's right. The school community library in South Australia was opened in 1977. That library compared with a library say in Donnybrook in Western Australia would provide much longer opening hours and it also has a qualified teacher-librarian in charge. It also provides Internet access and mediation of Internet access as well and also provides a wider range of outreach services, including to the local nursing home, etcetera.

20

The critical difference is whether you actually have professional staff who can actually drive the library otherwise it becomes essentially a passive lending service. Too many of the public libraries in rural Australia are essentially passive lending services. In terms of quality of stock they are much better than they used to be because they are controlled centrally and they rotate their stock so the stock is refreshed. But they're relatively incapable of doing much more than that.

25

30

One of the problems is that the level of expectation of people in the country is not very high. They are very pleased with what they receive but they don't actually appreciate that they are really entitled to something a bit better. I think some of the older people actually reflect back to the days of the institute libraries, which were only used by 3% of the population and which were referred in 1935 in the Mun-Pitt report as "cemeteries of dead and decaying books" and they were.

35

They were pretty appalling. We don't have that appalling situation any more but we certainly have a situation where much more could be done if people actually realised what needed to be done. So I have seen my task as trying to raise some awareness of what needs to be done. So a joint-use library like Pinnaroo is certainly streets ahead of say the public library in Donnybrook in Western Australia.

40

45

[Professional training]

COMMISSIONER JONES: Have you got a teacher-librarian course at the University of South Australia?

5 **DR BUNDY:** No, we don't any more. That's one of the problems
actually - that library education itself has undertaken a number of
changes because of changes in the universities themselves. And there
is a real concern in South Australia particularly that once the current
10 regime of teacher-librarians retire it will be very difficult to replace them,
so there is a related issue there. I think the issue of getting professional
staff in country areas is an interesting one but it certainly would be
easier to do it now than it was 20 or 30 years ago. 20 or 30 years ago it
would have been difficult to have had small libraries staffed by
15 professional staff but there are courses now available by distance
education and Charles Sturt University in particular has a very large
number of students in country areas and overseas undertaking
professional programs.

COMMISSIONER JONES: Would you like to see a teacher-librarian
20 course re-established at - - -

DR BUNDY: I think there should be one because I think it is going to
catch up with South Australia in due course and it is going to be very
difficult to maintain the momentum of the libraries. I think that was one
25 of the mistakes that was made. I mean, there have been various
mistakes made by educational bureaucracies over the years and I think
that was one of them.

COMMISSIONER JONES: You have probably met some of those
30 people we turned from unclassified teachers into teacher-librarians -
Joan Brewer or Joan Holland then.

DR BUNDY: Yes.

COMMISSIONER JONES: Have you seen what quality they have
35 developed into?

DR BUNDY: Many of them have turned out very well. I mean, some
have been stronger than others but they have been the critical
40 dimension in their community - the quality of the staff. You can see
quite clearly those school community libraries which are dynamic
contributors to the community and those which are less so. But even
the ones that are less so are still much more capable of actually
meeting the total needs of the community than those which have a clerk
45 in charge of them, for example. That is the critical difference. You can
argue that every school in this country has to have a qualified teacher
even if it has only got six students, but you can actually find in

Queensland a library servicing 7,000 people which has an unqualified person trying to run it - providing a basic service.

5 That person would be doing their best but there is some real
limit to that. It is largely because the local authorities may be putting in
only 2% of rate revenue whereas the national average - if there is such
a thing - is probably in the order of 5 or 6%. So it requires the local
authority to in fact increase its contribution from maybe 2-4% to make a
10 quantum difference to the quality of the library. But the real problem
with the local authorities, as I indicated, is that they are not aware of
how deficient their libraries are or what the potential is.

 The state funding authorities, who in fact provide the subsidy,
do have minimum standards but those minimum standards are very
15 much minimum standards and they will not normally communicate with
the local authority and say, "Look, we really think you could be doing a
bit better." So the problem in Australia is that no-one is telling the local
authorities that they really should be doing a bit better and most of
them are quite capable of doing better actually. Many of them will cry
20 poor but the reality is that many of them could. There are some
obviously which would have considerable problems doing better but
there are many of them which could be doing better if they were
actually advised of what was required for them to do so.

25 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** When you talk about no teacher-librarian
courses is that at any university in South Australia or just at the Uni of
South Australia?

30 **DR BUNDY:** No, there are none in South Australia now.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: At all? Right.

DR BUNDY: Which is unfortunate, and it has also occurred in other
states as well, but I mean there is a teacher-librarian course in
35 Queensland, for example. There is variation between the states in
terms of how the Education Department themselves have actually
approached the staffing of school libraries. One of the problems with
local school management is this may in fact exacerbate a tendency
over the last decade to actually minimise resourcing of school libraries
40 and throw money into information technology.

 Libraries themselves are heavy users of information technology
but I have argued in my submission that Australia has been one of
those countries that has had a simplistic view that by throwing money at
45 information technology that somehow you are going to improve
learning. I think a lot of money has been wasted by Australian states -
and federal government as well - in throwing money at information
technology without really working out what the problem is and how it is

going to be addressed, and certainly without the critical staffing inputs that are required to actually make sure it does work properly.

5 I think this is a great pity. The money is there but I think it has been misdirected and I think time will demonstrate that this is the case, as well. Because the critical issue in schools is that many classroom teachers are not really aware of the importance of information and the role of the teacher-librarian is really to work with the classroom teachers in making sure that students, when they graduate, are
10 information literate. This is I think usually not occurring in the country, so the cycle is just being maintained. I think it is a pity and it is quite avoidable, as well.

15 It has occurred also because most state Education Departments have now eliminated their central library support agency. So there are no consultants available to actually tap a principal on the shoulder and say, "Look, perhaps you ought to consider doing this." So rather too much is left to the discretion of individual principals. I think for political reasons, understandably, principals tend to put a priority on
20 having teachers up-front in the classroom to keep classroom sizes down. So it is a short-term response whereas the longer-term response might well be, "Let's restructure the way we actually teach and use resources," It is an irony that all the curricular around Australia now are very much focused on student-centred learning - resource based
25 learning - and yet the very agencies which should be supporting that are tending to be minimised and no more so than in the country, which I think is a great pity.

30 I have referred in my submission to the fact that there are some positive things going on. The State Library of New South Wales, the State Library of Victoria, my own university, have developed various services to rural areas which involve getting documents fast to schools, and this can make a quantum difference to the way students actually regard learning. For example, my university provides a national
35 periodical service of skills, and this means that if a student does a literature search - and they can increasingly do this electronically, but they don't have the resources in a country school - they can request it from us by e-mail or fax and we can get them back within 24 hours. The fact that these students now have got access to this sort of service has
40 made quite a difference, certainly from reports we have had, to the way students approach the use of information for projects.

45 So there are ways and means of doing it but it is not very well coordinated at the moment. I think one of the reasons why a number of schools in country areas don't take more advantage of these types of services is that they don't have a qualified professional to really understand what they're about. So again the cycle unfortunately continues.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thanks very much, Alan, and thanks for the submissions, too, which we will take and read with interest.

5 **DR BUNDY:** Thank you.

[2.57 pm]

10 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** We will resume, and welcome, Barry. Could you introduce yourself for the record, your name and association, then you can go straight into any comments you'd like to make. Alby Jones and I may have a couple of questions for you when you've finished.

15 **MR MORRISON:** Yes, thank you. My name is Barry Morrison. I'm the general secretary of the Association of Non-Government Education Employees which is the name of the South Australian branch of the Independent Education Union of Australia. Our membership extends to
20 some 3,200 teachers and non-teachers in non-government schools throughout the state. Most of those schools are in the metropolitan area, but there are some, as you might be aware, in some of the larger regional districts of the rural areas and, of course, some of our schools in the city do cater for boarders from remote areas. I, myself, have a
25 long history in boarding houses in one specific boys' school - some 27 years of history of dealing with boarders.

[Staff recruitment]

30 Because of our particular association the comments that I make today might be related more specifically to the way that the provision of teachers might affect children in remote areas. To that extent I'd like to make the following comments: we are aware that in country districts in particular there is a problem, a general problem in attracting teachers. It seems that very few teachers emanate originally from rural areas;
35 they're mainly from the city, and it's difficult to encourage them in the non-government school area in particular where there is no area allowance, for example.

40 In particular the schools have some difficulty with the provision of specialist teachers and other specialist services - for example, persons with extended knowledge of information technology. We are also aware that non-government schools in rural areas have difficulty employing special ed teachers who have specific training to care for students with special needs.

45 One problem with all of this is that there is generally a lack of mentoring of young teachers by experienced teachers in rural areas. Unfortunately it tends to be the situation where teachers in country

schools tend to all be less experienced. We believe this also has some restrictions on curriculum, not just the unavailability of specialist teachers that I referred to before, but the difficulty in maintaining consistent curriculum in that there is a tendency for teachers to believe that having served two or three years in the country they are owed employment back in the city. That's very difficult for a school in the country area, for example, to start say a Chinese language course and have students learn for two or three years and then have that course discontinued through lack of a teacher. I'm sure you've heard all these arguments before, sir, but I want to reiterate them.

[Transport]

Some other issues I'd like to raise are of a varying nature, not so specifically related to teachers. One of the difficulties we find for students in rural areas is the transportation costs in having any other social activity with other students of a similar age. One of the key problems is the cost of transportation. That means that there is a lack of social activities - for example, sport, music festivals and other cultural activities. We think it's important that young people be provided with these cultural activities and it's a particular difficulty in rural areas.

[Post secondary education]

We're also aware of the lack of provision of post-secondary education, other than universities. Although we believe that efforts are being made to provide TAFE training in some of the larger regional areas, there are still a lot of children who just simply can't access those. We would like to suggest also that some consideration be given to children from rural areas to have some sort of a staging - that's the best word I can come up with - between completion of secondary education in the rural community and the commencement of a university course in a major centre, particularly a capital city. We think that some of the cultural differences are particularly difficult for young children from rural areas. Talking about cultural differences we think also that is one of the problems of teachers mainly coming from urban centres and going into remote or rural areas and not necessarily understanding the cultural differences there are. We think those cultural differences are a little bit larger than most people would imagine.

[Professional development]

The last comment I would like to make before I respond to any questions you may have, is that the general difficulty the students suffer from is a lack of professional development opportunities for their teachers. Not only are the teachers young and inexperienced, but because of the remoteness and the distances and the costs involved, the provision of professional development for them is very difficult. Those, sir, are the major issues that we see. We have deliberately refrained from talking about children in really remote areas as being not part of our brief and I'm sure there are others who have addressed

these issues more fully. I'm happy to answer any questions that relate to provision of non-government school education in the areas that I've just spoken about.

5 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER JONES: You mentioned the teachers expected, after serving in the country, a term back in the city. Would that apply to your non-government schools? They are not really in systems, except
10 perhaps the Catholic group.

MR MORRISON: Yes, sir, the non-government schools which are in major rural areas do in fact tend to be Catholic schools and are part of the Catholic system, with very few exceptions. There is a Christian
15 school at Whyalla and a Christian school at Naracoorte and a Lutheran school in Mount Gambier, but beyond that I'm hard pressed to nominate another non-government school in a rural area.

COMMISSIONER JONES: Their professional development, do they
20 make use of the Education Department's facilities for that because that's been one of the features of South Australian professional development available right across the board, state government schools and any other school?

25 **MR MORRISON:** Yes, sir, I think that in rural centres the availability of professional development is something that all schools have been able to participate in. I think the collegiality between non-government and government schools in rural areas is considerably better than it is in the urban areas. Nevertheless, one of the problems with professional
30 development relates to whether the professional development really relates to what the teachers themselves want. There are plenty of professional development providers, but whether it's suitable as the teachers themselves see it, is another question. May I stop to introduce my colleague, Ms Judy Lundberg, who in fact is the association's
35 education officer.

MS LUNDBERG: Hello.

40 **MR MORRISON:** I have to say, sir, that I'm not really aware of any particular professional development activities that have been made universally available, even in larger centres like Mount Gambier. I'm not aware of it. That doesn't mean to say it doesn't happen.

[Staff incentives]

45 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** The question you have mentioned, Barry, about recruitment to country areas and retention in country areas - which I think are two separate issues, but related - is a very difficult

one. We've heard, as we've gone around the country, lots of comments about the package of incentives that is required and I have to say the ingredients of that package seem to be as varied as there are teachers. What's your view on the kinds of incentives that are necessary, first to
5 attract and, second, to retain?

MR MORRISON: I'm strongly of the view that there are two areas. First of all I think there should be zone allowance for just simply living away from home, if you like, type of allowance, or living in a rural area. Not
10 because it's a penalty to live in a rural area, but simply because of the distance from family and friends and the difficulties of having to move home, and in some instances, isolation for young people, young teachers, and the increased rent in some rural centres, believe it or not. That is certainly one of the matters that has been brought to our
15 attention. In fact renting in the country areas is quite often considerably more expensive than renting in the city, perhaps because of the lack of availability of rental space.

On the other side I think the schools themselves in rural areas need assistance and this relates back to the provision of professional development and additional funds to allow teachers to access those centres of professional development. There are in the Catholic system, for example - I was told the other day that there were in excess of
20 50 courses being offered by the Catholic Education Office in its centre in George Street, city. It's very difficult, however, to get teachers from the country areas to attend them. If there is a one-day conference then that teacher will have to be away from the school in all probability at least three days. There is not only the cost of transportation but there is the cost of, in many instances, accommodation as well.
25

30 So I see the funding support in two ways, both to the teachers directly and also to their schools. I don't quite know where the money is going to come from.

35 **[Staff accommodation]**

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: That's another issue. Do the Catholic education authorities provide housing for teachers in country areas?

MR MORRISON: Not that I'm aware. They provide assistance with transportation costs - I mean, removal costs - to some extent depending upon the length of service that the teacher has had prior to the move. I understand that the Catholic system also provides schools in remote areas with some sort of zone allowance to allow for additional costs. It's very difficult, in talking to our members in those areas, to know whether
40 all of that money is passed on or not. I'm sure it would be, but the teachers themselves don't feel that it is. I think that's just a lack of consultation, lack of talk. But whatever it is, it's not enough.
45

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Particularly if housing isn't being provided. In many of the country towns there is significant shortage both of housing generally and of quality housing.

5 **MR MORRISON:** Indeed, yes. I've heard some terrible stories.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: It's been suggested to us a couple of times that even more important than additional income is actually having a suitable house. At least not in South Australia it hasn't been said yet,
10 but certainly in Queensland and Western Australia.

MS LUNDBERG: Certainly if you are in a one-company town and there is commonly rental assistance provided then that makes it very difficult for a Catholic or perhaps Christian school member of staff to afford
15 accommodation because the rates are higher and the quality is not good - what they can afford and the particular neighbourhood they might land in.

MR MORRISON: I think there are difficulties for young, unmarried
20 teachers, too, in perhaps having to find billeting arrangements on farms, where the farm life is a totally new experience for them. I have to say I think that perhaps that comment is depending in part on my own experience from a long, long time ago - but nevertheless I understand that it's true to some extent today, and being forced to live with another
25 family is not always a pleasant life.

MS LUNDBERG: Also certainly if people are married it makes it very difficult go to a country location particularly if the partner can't find work and there's no support there through non-government schools at
30 present to help the partner find work, and if there are children then the support provided by the Catholic Office becomes very minimal. It's fine if you're a single person and you can move fairly cheaply, but if you've got to move a family it's not going to help much. We've had at least one member whose husband then couldn't get a job when they moved and
35 they had a huge income drop, plus high rents.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Caught both ways.

MS LUNDBERG: Caught both ways, yes.
40

[Staff recruitment]

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: The Catholic Education Office officials who spoke to us this morning were very helpful, but there was one issue I didn't have a chance to take up with them, so I might take advantage of
45 your presence. They made a comment that hiring is done by the individual schools.

MR MORRISON: Yes.

5 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** I got the impression this was more than just selecting, it was actually the school was the employer rather than the CEO being the employer. Is that correct?

10 **MR MORRISON:** That is a very political argument, sir, I have to say. I think that the truth of the matter is that it's a devolution exercise. In court proceedings the Catholic Education - if I can use that term in a generalised way - will admit that there are 17 employers. Overwhelmingly though 16 of those employers are single schools, and I name what we might call non-diocesan or independent Catholic schools, and some of the bigger Catholic schools in this state would be say Rostrevor College or Loreto or Sacred Heart College.

15

[3.12 pm]

20 The overwhelming majority of Catholic schools are diocesan schools and clearly the employer is always cited on court papers as the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Adelaide who divests his authority in the Catholic Church Endowment Society which invests its authority in the Catholic director of education. But we have no great difficulty in understanding that there's a devolution of authority to the local schools. Sometimes it's overplayed a little bit, in our view, but we deal with that

25 in our own way.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: To what extent, and this is the purpose of my question, are individual terms and conditions of appointment, employment, therefore, delegated to individual schools to negotiate?

30

MR MORRISON: Well, the situation mainly is that the individual schools are entitled to, within certain set parameters determined with the Catholic Education Office, appoint their own staff. They're not permitted, if I can use that word, to take on new teachers when there are already currently employed teachers who are out of work at a particular school. So there is a bit of movement to and fro in that regard.

40 It's certainly the aim of the Catholic education system to ensure that none of their teachers are made redundant just because a position is not available at a particular school. I understand, however, that they don't have the right of fire without putting that through the central office. So it's a controlled devolutionary package that they have.

45 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Could an individual school though decide to provide housing for a teacher in a rural area, or to double the allowance?

5 **MR MORRISON:** I guess to that extent a Catholic school is entitled to do whatever it likes with its money once it has been allocated by the central authority, within reason. I'm sure that they wouldn't do anything that was not in the best interests of the Catholic education. But if a school wanted to employ more teachers or more non-teachers or provide more professional development, or whatever else it might be, so long as it's not too radical I'm sure that that school would be available to expend its moneys in the way it sees fit.

10 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Subject of course to the award. The award applies minimum conditions - - -

MR MORRISON: Always.

15 **MS LUNDBERG:** How many schools now acquire adjacent properties, and maybe houses, as part of extending (indistinct) or other facilities. They just don't use them for staff housing at present.

20 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** I'm sorry for putting those questions on you. We're horrible for time this morning. It was just terrible. I wanted to ask them and then we were just running out of time and since you're there and we've got a few minutes.

25 **MR MORRISON:** Well, as you can imagine, sir, it does create some problems because there is no way, for example, that we as a union would ever accept that a teacher at a diocesan primary school in the city could be made redundant when there are another 109 schools to which they could be appointed. So it does have its little internal politics. It was an excellent question.

30 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** I mean there's also the issue though of forced transfers or even highly influenced transfers from city to country areas. What would your attitude be to that if they said they'll guarantee system away-employment?

35 **MR MORRISON:** Well, we certainly would never accept a forced transfer to a rural area. We would thoroughly applaud a coerced transfer and conditions which were made genuinely acceptable to the employee so concerned. On the reverse we do believe that the Catholic Education Office does have a responsibility to employ teachers who are coming back from rural areas, perhaps because their spouse has moved back, and we do expect those teachers to be employed.

40 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Yes.

45 **MR MORRISON:** Given that at any time in a system as big as the Catholic system, I understand that at any given time 10 per cent of the

teachers are on approved leave. So there's plenty of flexibility within the system to redeploy teachers.

5 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** My last question about the system is whether there is any degree of transferability between the two diocese in South Australia?

10 **MR MORRISON:** For all intents and purposes we see no difference at all.

15 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Would you argue though that given particularly the Port Pirie diocese has a large number - well, entirely, country schools, the Adelaide archdiocese has few, to take that example, if there were a teacher whose spouse moved back to the city from a school where the teacher was employed in Port Pirie diocese, there would be a claim upon the Adelaide archdiocese for employment in an Adelaide school?

20 **MR MORRISON:** Absolutely. We see little evidence that the Port Pirie diocese acts separately and independently in any way. They really don't provide resources such as the Adelaide diocese does. They seem to be subject to what the Adelaide diocese says in almost all matters that I'm aware of. Having said that, we recognise that there is another diocese but it doesn't really - - -

25 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** To all intents and purposes it acts as one system.

30 **MR MORRISON:** On a scale out of 100 it might be 1.

COMMISSIONER JONES: Wouldn't the Catholic Education Commission have some say about that?

35 **MR MORRISON:** Yes, in the same way that they would say that individual schools are their own employers, in that it's a matter of what it might appear to be in theory as distinct from what it is in practice. It's the Catholic Church Endowment Society representing the archbishop which is, as I understand it, the employer or the employing entity, and I understand that that includes both diocese. I may be wrong, but that's my understanding.

40 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Sure.

45 **MR MORRISON:** Unlike New South Wales where there are what, 11, are there, 11 diocese I understand.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Something like that.

MR MORRISON: Yes, and they are all players in the game - - -

5 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Yes, quite independent. Right, thank you very much.

MR MORRISON: A pleasure. Thank you.

10 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thanks for coming in.

15 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** We've had horrible time problems this morning. We're a few minutes ahead now and I want to try and do that, with your cooperation, so that if we run into problems a bit later we don't muck people around too much. I'm Chris Sidoti, this is Dr Alby Jones, he's the Co-Commissioner for South Australia. Thanks for coming in. Would you like to start with your name and organisation and then you can go straight into any comments you want to make and Alby and I might have some questions for you afterwards.

20

[Students with disabilities]

25 **MS HERBERT:** Certainly, thank you. My name is Annette Herbert. I am the mother of a young woman with multiple disability and complex health and behavioural issues, and I belong to the Inclusive Education Network in both South Australia and nationally; at a national level. The network is auspiced by the National Council on Intellectual Disability.

30 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thank you.

MS HERBERT: By way of introduction in the absence of the Inclusive Education Network, having direct linkages with families who live in rural and remote communities, largely due to the network being in an establishment phase, the methodology for the construction of this submission was a consultation process with disabilities, specific non-government providers whose associations have been established for families by families, namely Parent Advocacy, the Autism Association and the Down Syndrome Society.

35

40 In addition, Disability Action and the Intellectual Disability Services Council also responded to our request for information about the experiences of children with disability who receive their education in rural and remote settings. As a former student of a remote rural school in a time-frame when students with disabilities were not welcomed into schools at all, and having grown up in a community

45 where children with disabilities were sent some 400 miles to institutions

in the city I'm delighted, on behalf of the Inclusive Education Network, to present the finding of our, albeit brief, consultation.

5 Firstly, students with disabilities in rural and remote schools are likely to come up against all the same barriers endured by students with disability in metropolitan communities. These include the common barriers of terrible attitudes and inappropriate expectations, typically too low but equally difficult when too high. School principals are said to have an enormous influence about whether or not students with
10 disability get a fair go at school, and whether or not their care and learning needs are responded to with enthusiasm.

The focus on exceptionality might mean that the fundamentals are ignored. Families know the basics to mean the provision of just the
15 same of everything of which might be available to all other students. Typically this might mean a hook for a bag, desk, a chair on which to sit, inclusion in sharing the weekend news and participation in sports days, excursions, visiting days and school concerts. The value of identifying exceptionality is to signal the need for adaptation or special
20 additional provision, not less or no provision at all.

For example, one of our respondents identified family-school communication as a difficulty. The student in question has limited verbal communication. As a result he's without the means to share with
25 his family the details of his days at school either in a curriculum, learning context or his social experiences. Nor indeed is he able to report any misadventure. Now, the school is reluctant to address the issue, even though the family has simply requested a communication book or a journal or a diary. Isn't it the case that all students in schools
30 have either a diary or a journal? What could be so difficult about a member of school staff making brief notes on a daily basis so that this student has the basis to share his experiences from school with his family?

35 **[Transport]**

Transport: city dwellers who have disability have access, although sometimes limited, to specific transport services. This access includes accessible buses, Access taxis and some community buses. In rural communities transport can be a quite specific barrier, with no
40 provision between the location of a student with disabilities' home and the education setting of either the family's choice or the educator's recommendation. The best option is often out of reach because of lack of accessible transport.

45 **[Access to premises]**

Access to buildings: another barrier between student and school is whether or not the school itself is accessible. One student within a region where there was supposedly a range of options for

5 secondary education had to forgo his first choice because all of the high school classrooms were upstairs and there was no lift. His family thought long and hard about whether or not they would, what they termed, make a fuss, but decided to compromise lest they only achieve a high profile reputation as troublemakers within a region where everybody knows everybody.

10 Each rural school community has its own locality based student catchment area with some provision of transport for students in outlying areas. In these days of what is termed "efficiency and cost cutting" small schools are under threat of closure and bus routes are constantly being redefined. Consequently many students still endure long hours on buses to and from school. This is not easy for any child but most difficult for the student with complex health and behavioural issues, and 15 most difficult for students who struggle for social belonging or who are in particular need of tolerance and special care. Current take-home behaviour management strategies cause rural families extraordinary additional costs if they have to travel long distances to collect the child who has reportedly acted out at school.

20 Parental choice: the Inclusive Education Network upholds, as one of its primary principles, the prerogative of family choice. In pursuit of achieving acceptance, inclusion and avoiding conflict, it may be that families in rural and remote communities are absorbing an enduring regime of compromise. In the scope of our consultation we heard of 25 families having to relocate, of parents leaving work, living apart during the week and making a whole range of family compromises so that a student with disability could access the most appropriate education or schooling of the family's choice. With the relocation comes a fracturing of employment opportunities, the loss of local networks and sometimes 30 the loss of extended family support networks together with the resultant grief.

[Resources]

35 Resources: without exception, respondents to our information-eliciting process queried whether or not students with disability in rural and remote communities are unresourced when compared to their city counterparts. Our respondents then answered the question they had posed by saying that they believed in every form 40 of provision country students receive less. Examples of less provision included poor to no access to curricular adaptation resources; poor, difficult or no access to special equipment and teaching aids including technology and toys.

45 There is a very real potential for change in innovation to pass the rural and remote school right on by. Certainly the family based associations reported that it's very costly for them to provide a service to families and schools in rural and remote communities, both in travel

costs and time. It goes without saying, thus, that less is provided than would be the case in a city setting where the services are based.

[Staff training]

5 Staff training and development: another emphasis of this point
is staff training and development, a phenomena which requires willing
participants and for people to seek it out. It requires an attitude of what
is right and just, of hope and optimism and a belief in optimising the
10 learning opportunities and the development of students with disability,
as well as an inherent belief in the validity of the contributions in social
interactions of those students.

[3.30 pm]

15 Teachers in rural and remote schools may make fewer requests
for staff training than metropolitan teachers and, indeed, they may
make less than they actually need. There is a time delay between
action in the city and action of change in country, which may have been
20 bridged somewhat by technology, but usually there is no such thing as
instant help in the bush. A city counterpart may be able to make a
connection and achieve a quite instant visiting advising service,
whereas in a remote community face-to-face support has to be carefully
planned and may be as rare as once or twice a year. Coupled with this
25 is high staff turnover of young and inexperienced teachers, as well as a
staying put of local ageing teacher populations. It is thought that the
teaching population in rural and remote communities is older on
average than would be the case in metropolitan schools.

[Family support]

30 Family support: as it is for school staff, so it is for families: no
disability-specific information, resources or advice up the road and
around the corner. Families everywhere share the same struggles in
adaptation, that abandonment of everything that we know about the
needs of all children, when we discover that our daughter or son has a
35 disability. With the abandonment of our knowledge goes our
confidence and our sense of competence. Our hearts can be filled with
fear about what the future holds for our child with disability.

40 This fear, of course, is coloured with the impact of what will
happen to our child's brothers and sisters. Will we be able to sustain
our source of income? Will our marital relationships endure? Are the
grandparents and aunts, uncles and neighbours still going to help with
baby-sitting and childminding? What about our friends, what will they
45 think? The difficulties are further exacerbated if the child with disability
has difficult behaviours and, of course, our parenting skills come into
question. The sickly child, of course, has his parents wrapped around
his little finger and is just stacking on an act to get out of going to
school, malingering.

Word travels like wildfire in rural communities, reputations are easily damaged. It takes time for any newcomer to achieve a sense of welcome and belonging, harder still for families who have daughters and sons with special needs. Chances of meeting fellow families in similar circumstances are rare, given smaller population sizes and distances. Thus the sense of isolation endured by every parent of a child with disability is even greater in a rural or remote location. Add to this the fear of achieving a poor reputation which then impacts negatively on the entire family and recognise, of course, the desire for people to remain anonymous about the context of their family and their family experiences.

Further research: the content of this submission by the Inclusive Education Network touches on the fringes of experiences of families in rural and remote communities with respect to early childhood, school and post-secondary education. It is our recommendation that urgent and further research is undertaken to hear first-hand from students with disabilities and their families in rural and remote communities. It should be noted that the scope of our consultation failed to include children with disabilities from Aboriginal families, children with disabilities from particular ethnic backgrounds and children with disabilities in communities where rituals, traditions, mores and culture form key components of community life.

Also absent from the discussion are any of the potential particular attributes of public and private education opportunities in rural and remote communities. In closing, I'm reminded by a contributor to this submission of a discussion we shared a couple of years ago. She said, "Remember when you asked me to identify some of the best practice in inclusive schools? The two schools which immediately came to mind were schools which are isolated and where the school communities are strong, innovative and creative. They held an ethos of doing the best by their own. The students with disability not only belonged in those schools, they made wonderful progress." Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thank you very much. Alby.

COMMISSIONER JONES: That last little bit reminds me of what I've seen of schools with able and disabled children and I think that's a very good thing to give the able student the opportunity to help the disabled student and I think probably that's an advantage to both, the able and the disabled.

MS HERBERT: Sure, indeed. I guess one of the things, Alby, is that today's students in schools, some of them are going to be tomorrow's parents of daughters and sons with disability, so it's a good training ground, isn't it?

COMMISSIONER JONES: Yes, and I think that probably occurs better in rural communities, in my experience.

5 **MS HERBERT:** I wonder if we should assume that that's the case. I mean, I've heard of families relocating to remote areas so that their children must go to the local school because there is no special school, but that certainly gets people in the gate, but whether that gets children with disability embraced and included is another issue altogether.

10 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Have your consultations shown up any particular differences in treatment or support or need between different groups of kids with different types of disability? Do you think there is greater difficulty, say, for kids with physical disability than with behavioural or learning difficulties?

15 **MS HERBERT:** You need to remember that the consultation was extremely limited.

20 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** It was with the service providers, yes.

MS HERBERT: We have a provider here called the Crippled Children's Association, which focuses primarily on children with physical disability and we have another service, a voluntary agency, for children with multiple disability, who were also not included in the consultation. The contributors identified enormous differences in one community to another and also enormous differences between help and attitude from one family to another in the same community, so you know, it's too elementary to be conclusive and we deeply regret the lack of dialogue with the families themselves.

30 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** That's also one of the points you're making to us, that the information is just not there generally. Maybe the networks aren't there for the consultation even.

35 **MS HERBERT:** They may be, but they're not part of our city based culture and, as a mother, what comes out of those direct communications with parents, wherever they are, is enormous unmet need. So in responding to the request of the Commission, we weren't in a position to do the research. So then it was a choice between not making the most of the opportunity or literally doing nothing. But we do urge you to do some rural based research and we thought that interviewing a hundred families of children with special needs across the state would be a great starting place.

40 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** If we could find the money ourselves.

5 **MS HERBERT:** Alternatively, there are special education courses at our universities here. An impact report, probably done about a decade ago, was called 21 South Australian Children and it was about children with disabilities in schools per se. It was some research headed up by a professor of special education and one would think, with the research going on in unis now, that they could target some research to rural communities. Just we put off the too hard, don't we, too often?

10 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thank you very much. Could you leave us with a copy of your comments?

15 **MS HERBERT:** I will leave you the whole paper. I just want to print it out one more time with the headings involved, because they got left till last.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: That's fine, you can send it over to us, if you like, to Sydney office. You've got the address, I assume?

20 **MS HERBERT:** Fabulous, thank you.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thanks very much for coming.

5 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Gwen, you know the system - if you introduce yourself and your organisation and then make your comments.

10 **MS SECOMB:** Thank you very much. I'm Gwen Secomb, the network liaison officer for the South Australian Association of School Parent Clubs. I'll use our acronym SAASPC for the rest of the presentation rather than going through all that.

15 SAASPC is a statewide association of parents interested in students in government schools and preschools. We have three simple but important aims, and they are to promote initiatives and opportunities for parents to participate in education, to encourage parents to become involved in their children's education, to provide information and support on educational matters, and to consult parents on issues relative to the education of their children and their wellbeing at school.

20 SAASPC is a member of the Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc and supports their policy and belief that public education must remain secular and be fully funded by government, and so it's on these premises that we present our interim submission. We'd like to add some more material before we submit it in September, if that is appropriate.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Yes, of course.

30 **[Choice of school]**

35 **MS SECOMB:** In utilising the network we have in this state to access parent opinions. One clear factor stands out above all others and that's choice and, in many cases, the lack of choice. For many parents a desire for a high-quality education for their children is there just the same as if they lived in the city and had access to a wide diversity of educational options, and so we would like to highlight the following issues.

40 Under the heading of Availability and Accessibility of Schooling, in this state the school bus policy produces a form of social engineering whereby students must attend their local government school to be entitled to travel on the government-provided bus service. If there is room, however, students bypassing their local government school and thus exercising choice are allowed free travel to the non-government school in the town serviced by the bus.

45 It is not permissible to bypass the local government school and attend another government school in the next town serviced by that bus

and it is quite permissible to attend a non-government school. Thus, choice is there for those who can pay for private education but not for those who choose the government sector. We have included in the appendices a couple of examples where children are actually
5 bypassing several government schools and going to a more distant private school, and it is a concern that is raised with us on a regular basis.

[Transport]

10 Further frustration is occurring at this time as funding for bus services to schools is being cut in areas where a government school is the only local option. Parents are expected to travel longer distances to access buses and, while this may not seem much of an imposition to the decision-makers, it shows total disregard for family commitment.
15 Concerns have been raised about having to have a second vehicle to provide this transport to be at a more distant bus stop exactly at the time the bus returns to ensure the safety of their children. With demands on all family members to keep the farming business viable, it can be very inconvenient for some to be there exactly when the bus
20 arrives at the bus stop; interesting too that although the Education Department now encompasses children's services, preschool students' attendants cannot assist in the decision-making about the provision of those bus services.

[School and subject choices]

25 Another point that we would like to make about the provision of sites and facilities for students with special needs has seemingly been solved by a policy of integration at the local school, but support for this or even the option of enrolment at a special school does not
30 necessarily make for a high-quality provision that one would expect from a local special school with staffing and facilities to match the needs of those students.

35 At this time all specialist curriculum secondary schools are in the city and do not have the benefit of on-site boarding facilities as the private sector provides. While parents would like to offer these options to their children the lack of boarding facilities and the cost of the private alternative mean that students do not have that access. If parents choose to forgo other aspects of their lifestyle to be able to afford to
40 make the choice, then there is the added pressure on the student to succeed and thus make the investment of limited funds a valuable economic decision. Along with the lack of access to specialist schools comes a lack of access to teaching for specialist areas such as music, and many parents pay for private tutoring out of school hours and just
45 do not have access to teachers in the community.

Smaller enrolments at country schools often mean that curriculum offerings are dependent on teacher availability rather than

students' needs and interests. While Open Access offers a very viable option, some schools do not encourage its use because it is perceived that the costs and impact on other staffing arrangements are not worth the cost. The subsidy available through the Country Areas Program
5 does not match the reality of current fuel prices and the costs of maintaining suitable vehicles for these areas.

The provision of LOTE as a compulsory component of each student's education has also produced many problems. Availability to
10 gain teachers and continuity of teachers is a major problem, along with the problems that occur with transient students. If the language they have studied at their previous site is not offered at this new school, then arrangements, especially for secondary students wishing to
15 complete their SACE requirements, often produce insurmountable obstacles. The secondary curriculum offerings are severely limited by the unavailability of teachers. Unfortunately, in an attempt to remedy this situation, teachers are expected to teach subjects that they have not been trained to teach.

20 Access to tertiary education requirements does not always consider the distances to be travelled to meet the additional entry requirements. We were informed about a student from the South-East who did not receive notification of an audition until it was too late to
25 even travel to the city for the audition. They're the main points that we wish to make in that section.

[Technology]

Then, moving onto the quality of educational services, including
30 technological support services, while Open Access and videoconferencing have much to commend them there are problems associated with the adequate technological infrastructure and service being easily accessible. There's also the assumption that access is
35 readily available for students, completely disregarding the need for the computer to be used as part of the farm business. Some consideration must therefore be given to subsidising the cost of extra computers and access points for these situations.

Also schools report long delays in downloading, for example, a
40 Web page and then finding that the URL cannot be found. It appears that the infrastructure is too slow to download many sites. While modern technology has streamlined office procedures, many employees in this area of the system are part-time employees. Limitations on training and development for such staff have led to the
45 under-utilisation of this technology.

[Learning support]

A common concern both in city and country schools would be the access to support services, the guidance officers, speech

pathologists, and counsellors, with occasional care and respite care providers almost non-accessible in many remote areas. The problems are exacerbated when precious time is lost through long distances to be travelled from one site to another. An initiative that proved most
5 beneficial - and you've already heard Alan Bundy speak about it, but it's one that's an issue that's been brought to the attention of our members because so many of them have access to the community libraries - is that broader provision of library services not serviced by public libraries.

10
Sadly with this innovative provision there needs to be review and ongoing support and, while the present provision is greatly valued by the local communities they serve, it is of great concern that the future does not look secure. Research into this provision highlights the
15 need for continued strong support by both educational and local government administrators to ensure that we do not produce a divided society of information rich and information poor.

[Staffing formulas; NESB students]

20 Under the heading of Support for Indigenous Children and Children from Diverse Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Backgrounds we make two particular points. When support for non-English-speaking background students is provided by the percentage of enrolments above a lower limit criteria, this leads to the minority group being
25 unsupported. Thus, those most in need are being overlooked, and no strategy exists to support schools which find themselves in this situation. With the withdrawal of curriculum officers and a user-pays service it is likely that this situation may be further exacerbated.

30 Often the parents of these students are also unable to access the traditional groups within the school setting to gain that support. Access to interpreters and the provision of bilingual newsletters and school reports, school signage and the like, leave these parents very much on the fringe of the school community, and in some situations the
35 timing of events is not cognisant of the employment needs of this group.

I guess the final point we want to make about choice is that it is very clear that for parents to have access to genuine choice there must
40 be a well-funded public education system, where choice is a real choice, not one made between the poor or the poorer government school, and so it's therefore no surprise that financial constraints relate very closely to choice decisions.

45

[School fees]

As stated earlier in this submission, the cost of choice for a specialist school or non-government boarding facility imposes an

5 additional cost to the family. In article 28.1 it states that primary education must be available free to all. However, this does not presently occur in this state where voluntary fees, pending the will of the government, can become compulsory fees and parents may be taken to court to pay these fees. SAASPC, along with the national parent organisation ACSSO, support a fully-funded public education.

10 There are of course many hidden costs that cannot be readily identified or quantified and they include the cost of students seeking work experience opportunities that include both travel and accommodation, the cost for excursions and the limits imposed by the cost per destination and the number of venues chosen.

15 Present incentives for teachers to choose rural and remote locations do not give due consideration to the extra costs that are involved or the difficulty in accessing training and development. They are most certainly not commensurate with similar employees - eg, mining companies.

20 The provision of the school card in South Australia does not include the added cost for rural and remote students and thus these students are further disadvantaged through lack of financial resources to their family. We have included as part of the appendices - in 1974 our association was lucky to receive Schools Commission funding, and I'm sure Mr Jones would remember that work looking at the needs of
25 country students, and sadly some of those issues have not been resolved. We've also included some literature about ourselves and how we're able to network across the state and some information that we gathered from the National Farmers Federation about improving the rural students' access to tertiary education, so hopefully that will be
30 enough information.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thank you very much.

35 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** Has your association told the government what you feel about the school fees?

MS SECOMB: Most certainly we have.

40 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** You have.

MS SECOMB: Yes, most certainly. It's an issue that - - -

45 **COMMISSIONER JONES:** Yes, well, there was another association here today that rather favoured them.

MS SECOMB: Yes, I know it's a really tricky issue, that we have two associations in - - -

COMMISSIONER JONES: I don't mean I agree with them.

5 **MS SECOMB:** That's right. It is an issue of contention, that they are the only association belonging to ACSSO that do not support that policy of fully-funded public education and with that, the fees.

10 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Is your organisation SAASPC in SAASSO as well, as one of its constituents, or are you two totally separate?

MS SECOMB: No, two separate - - -

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Who are the constituents of SAASSO?

15 **MS SECOMB:** SAASSO is the state management group for school councils, which is the management group in schools.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: I see.

20 **MS SECOMB:** SAASPC is the state body for all parents in schools and preschools, in all other activities that are not necessarily school council. Although in this state there is a requirement under legislation at the moment that where there is a parent group in the school it is known as an affiliated committee and there must be a place for them on
25 the school council and they must be on the finance advisory committee. So there's links in that way.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Just if we stay on this question of fees for a moment, what kinds of fees or charges would you consider to be
30 reasonable for a government school to impose, for what purposes?

MS SECOMB: I guess the background of our association would be that we've supported a fundraising notion in schools, but it would be seen as being for the little extras. You know, it might be that we would like
35 the students to have three excursions instead of two; if they were in a sporting competition or a music competition we might like them to have some extras for those sort of things. It's always been seen as the support for the extra things that are needed, not based on provision that should be provided to every - you know, it should be the right of
40 every child in every school, but for the local community to make a decision about whether they think it's important for the children to have some extra things that are above and beyond what you would normally expect a service to provide for them.

45 [4 pm]

[Choice of school]

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Is there discussion in your association about choices between face-to-face teaching, boarding school and distance education, and where do parents' preferences lie for how, if they're in a remote area, their child is to be educated?

5

MS SECOMB: I guess it's a decision that's very individual because it's made on a lot of grounds. I mean, we highlight the point about the financial constraints that often restrict the decision-making or else, as we've said, you make the decision, you send the child to a boarding school and then there's an expectation that having invested that amount of money that the child will actually produce the results that those parents have in mind.

10

So I guess the financial situation is the big issue. For some families they believe that coming to the city is very useful as a socialising - you know, a sort of important part of one's life experiences, even though you might return to the country, and that certainly was the case with my own husband. But in his time finding board in private homes was pretty easy, and that of course is made much more difficult these days.

15

20

And then of course with the special curriculum schools, if you've got a student who's really very talented in music or languages, then it's a real dilemma for parents to decide - "Well, we have a child" - and often if it's one child in four children you're sort of torn between being fair to all the children but knowing that this child has capabilities that you want to promote and ensure that they have every opportunity, so, yes, there's a lot of conflicting tensions within a family situation to make those decisions.

25

30

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Yes. Do you get much feedback from parents about their views of distance education or Open Access College, as it's now called?

MS SECOMB: I would have to say we have mostly positive responses. I guess there's concerns about not having that face-to-face teaching, the actual teacher with the expertise right there before them. But there also is support for their children having the opportunity to perhaps study a subject or subjects through that system that they wouldn't have otherwise, and that they would then - especially for the Year 11 and 12 for their SACE subjects, they would then be choosing a subject that they perhaps wouldn't be so successful. They then in turn would not receive such a high entry score and probably miss out on tertiary education, so once again it's seen as, "Well, these are the areas that my child wants to study. This is the best option we have at the moment. We really wish there were teachers available." But if that's not available, well, choosing the subject or subjects that are going to produce that best score to get into university is really a big issue.

35

40

45

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Yes. Certainly it's a hard one.

MS SECOMB: Yes.

5

[Distance education]

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: It does seem that parents that are using distance ed are generally supportive of it, from what I've heard.

10 **MS SECOMB:** Yes, and we've had in this state a young lass who did all her Year 12 by distance education and actually topped the state, so, I mean, it is possible to be very successful. And in speaking to parents, what they have found in the sort of long term is that often students who have had to study this way have become very much independent
15 learners. So when they move away, especially from that security of home and family to the city for tertiary education, they are used to managing their time and being independent learners. So that move into tertiary education is not quite as traumatic as a lot of people fear, because they're used to getting themselves organised in that way.

20

[Students with disabilities]

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Yes. Do you get much comment from parents of children with disabilities coming through to the association about the particular problems that they face in country schools or
25 particular needs or views they have?

MS SECOMB: Yes. There was a case some years ago where a little lass was enrolled in a local kindergarten and the school was fully aware that she would be coming - it was in the early days of integration, but the school was fully aware and the discussions had taken place. It
30 wasn't until the child was actually - I think Hannah was towards the end of Year 2 or early in her third year at school that it looked like the toileting facilities were not adequate. There was an issue of her accessing the bus, because while she was small her mother had to be
35 there morning and night and she was lucky that the contract bus driver was happy enough about lifting the wheelchair on and off the bus.

But of course, as she became older and heavier, this became an issue. Eventually a bus with the appropriate lift for her was provided,
40 which also meant that not only could she access school but she could then access excursions that her other class peers were attending. So, yes, quite often there's a lot of parents who are unaware that in the city their children have access to facilities that you take for granted but, because they don't know that other children have them. Sometimes
45 somebody will say, "Well, is that the best you can do?" and they contact us and ask us to follow up with the relevant people within the

department to see if anything can be done to improve the lot, as certainly was the case with this little girl in particular.

5 So, yes, it's an issue. I think it's an issue of not really being fully
aware and not having access to the information to know what they're
entitled to. I think your last speaker made the point that, you know, you
don't want to exacerbate that feeling of being different from other
families in the community, so you don't like to make too big a noise and
too big a fuss. So that's one of the advantages for our association, that
10 we can do the inquiry and it can be us making the noise and not the
particular family in the community. So that's particularly useful to them.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Yes. I think that's all from me. Thank you,
and we look forward to receiving the submission from you when you've
15 got a chance to do it.

MS SECOMB: Thank you. I've given you a copy of the interim at this
stage.

20 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Interim. All right. Thank you.

MS SECOMB: Yes, we can do that, and actually in reading it through
again you will realise what the spell check doesn't pick up in words. So
I'll leave that with you and we'll certainly be forwarding a more detailed
25 submission towards the end of September.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Thanks very much.

MS SECOMB: Thank you very much.

30

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: I'm Chris Sidoti, to introduce myself. Alby
Jones is Co-Commissioner for South Australia. This is all pretty easy.
35 Would you like to introduce yourselves, tell us where you're from, make
whatever comments you want to make, and we might have a chat.

MS BYRNE: Yes. This is Sandy Seymour, who's the chairperson of the
management committee, Independent Advocacy.

40

MS SEYMOUR: Hi.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Sandy.

45 **MS BYRNE:** And Fiona Campbell, who's a management committee
member.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Okay.

MS BYRNE: And I'm the coordinator of Independent Advocacy.

5 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** And you're Robyn Byrne.

10 **MS BYRNE:** And I'm Robyn Byrne, that's right. Initially when I received notification of this inquiry I shoved it aside on my desk, thinking I don't know anything about rural and remote and this is nothing to do with us, and when I was invited last week to speak to you I thought I'd better think about what my relevance is, so I thought about what my personal relevance is to this inquiry. I've got a teaching background and I've taught in rural Tasmania. I've spent most of my working life, however, working in women's services and so I have a considerable perspective on family issues through that. I've spent the last couple of years doing advocacy, and all the advocacy I've done has been on behalf of children in schools.

20 We advocate for a few people in country areas. We don't penetrate very far into rural South Australia, but it includes Gawler and Murray Bridge and most recently Mount Gambier. So I'm not quite sure whether Gawler fits into this. So I've got some direct experience of rural and remote issues, but I'd have to leave remote out, really. But I guess I also in my role do a number of visits to special schools, and I spend quite a lot of time in schools, observing what happens there. I also need to say that Independent Advocacy deals with intellectual disability only.

30 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Yes.

[Students with disabilities]

35 **MS BYRNE:** So in thinking about this, my first thought was the need for advocacy in rural and remote Australia on behalf of children accessing their educational rights and their human rights. The sort of advocacy we do at Independent Advocacy is individual advocacy, it's not parent advocacy and it's not citizen advocacy. Do I need to elaborate on that?

40 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Just a couple of comments, yes. I know what you mean.

45 **MS BYRNE:** Okay. So the advocacy that we do is not about parental choice, because I think parental choices lead to the sort of thinking around bigger is better in relation to these issues that we're talking about today, and because their child is not normal therefore they might not need normal education, that expertise might be the answer. Our view is that you can't fix disability - or that it is too much to ask for

special things because there's already a burden of cost on the community.

5 Our view of advocacy in relation to educational issues is
that it's about children's rights and how to best meet their needs. That
therefore leads us to the issue that the usual provision, plus advocacy,
is what children need, whether they be in Gawler or Lower
Woop Woop. So we do advocacy that acts in the best interests of the
child. We believe that the advocacy that children need is advocacy that
10 has a bit of a clue, so there's expertise around the actual thing that
you're advocating for. So you're not so easily put off by whatever the
dominant thinking might be, or by fears that can be created around that.
For schools therefore to receive the services of an advocate they need
conference call/speaker phone type facilities, they need e-mail facilities
15 and they need to be visitable a couple of times a year.

At the city advocacy service we would find that very difficult to
penetrate the whole of South Australia in that sense. We are exploring
it a little around the sort of Mount Gambier distance, but we don't get
20 any particular funding for that so that's a difficulty. But going back to
education and human rights, we believe that all children have the right
to learn together, that their education setting ought not to be
determined by the having or not having of a disability, that exclusion is
discriminatory and devaluing. I guess in rural and remote settings that
25 might mean being sent away.

The experience of adults who have survived special school
systems is damning so I'm basically presenting an inclusionist
approach. Children don't need to be protected from each other and
30 teachers don't need to be protected from people with disabilities.
Education actually happens in mainstream schools, whereas in special
settings there is very little education and lots of waiting and lots of
personal care being received.

35 Special schools or special settings have a significant majority in
terms of their proportionate staffing related to care, and a minimum
proportion of staffing related to education. My experience is that
programs are not individualised in special schools but sink to the
lowest common denominator. The focus might be on the child's need to
40 communicate so the whole day is spent on everybody's need to
communicate around good morning greetings or how to speak your
name or what the first letter is or something like that.

So in mainstream settings the negotiated curriculum plan
45 process, which might be called IEPs elsewhere, NCPs here, allows for
an optimal individualisation of a program and of assessment. We
believe that the distinction being made at enrolment is discriminatory

versus programming in response to special needs, so that distinctions need to be made about programming, not about placement.

5 The next issue that I've got which I think is a human rights
issue is the right to protection. Generally children have a right to
protection to enable their healthy development. For children with
disability, overprotection diminishes their access to developmental
10 opportunity through reduction in competency challenges and also
protection against neglect in special settings, children actually exposed
to neglect. Overprotection and mothering reduces or increases the
poverty in relation to independence and image issues. Do you want me
to just keep raving on at you like this?

15 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Yes. Rave away.

15 **MS BYRNE:** All right. Arm's length education - and this is assuming
education occurs in specialised settings, it is at a greater distance from
the home. Arm's length education that occurs outside the community
minimises the ownership of the person and detracts from a loving,
20 learning environment, which I believe is where learning occurs, when a
child is loved, and/or has status in their community. And I also wanted
to mention we do advocate for one person in the city who has moved
with their child to the city in order to access services, and that has been
a devastating experience for them. That's part of that sense that you
25 need to go where expertise is if you have a disability.

 In relation to education being compulsory and free, many
children with disabilities don't attend full-time. They're perceived as
having lesser needs in that sense, and I see that as a direct
30 discrimination. There's often special arrangements made around them
and extra costs as a result of that, and that leads me into a discussion
about the cost factor. My understanding is that the multiplication factor
around educating a child with a disability doesn't significantly relate to
the setting, that it costs as much to educate a child with a disability in a
35 special setting as in a mainstream setting.

[5 pm]

40 That's the information that I've received from the Education
Department. But my observation is that more of that money in a special
setting is spent on non-educational things. More is spent on things like
facilities and transport and so on, and less on education, so I see that
as a diminishing too of the rights. That isn't questioned because the
money spent on the education of a child with a disability is more
45 already, and so if less is spent on education it's still perceived as more,
so it becomes less questionable.

5 **MS SEYMOUR:** Also I think the other factor that's not included, when we talk about educating children with disabilities in special schools and mainstream schools, the factor of the rest of the life is never included. If you educate a child purely in a special school, they are very unlikely to get mainstream work or have community. So you actually build into the life of that person a dependence on welfare. But if you educate a child in a mainstream school, they're much more likely to develop literacy and numeracy and then be able at least to participate in the workplace. So you don't create a culture of dependence.

10
15 **MS BYRNE:** Our special facilities increase remoteness, if we're talking about distance being an issue. Then there is the issue of the hierarchy of rights: the right to an education versus your right to a family life or right to life in the community. My view is that your right to live in a community actually supersedes your right to an education if education is something that has a technical perception around the form of it.

20 The facilities for children with profound disabilities - in particular children in groupings that include an age range of five to 14 years is common, so you might have a group of eight children right across those years, and they will all receive approximately the same program. To a lesser extent special facilities in mainstream schools also group children unnaturally across ages, although I've also got something to say about the age appropriateness later. I think if you have got a choice, a natural way is to group according to age, rather than being grouped according to vulnerability and the exclusion that that leads to.

25
30 I think I will just go off the right stuff and into some particular statements about remote and rural education versus city. Many issues of inclusion versus segregation are the same from city to rural, but the increased remoteness can mean a greater ownership within the community of its disabled members, and I would see that as an advantage if you were born with a disability. Rural and remote means an increased emphasis on negotiability and flexibility and creative problem-solving around an individual circumstance because of that greater ownership, and there is less of the city rigidity that comes with systems. Unfortunately, I think, people can see "special" as better or more responsive to need and more individualised, and inviting greater expertise into a situation, so those things being concentrated in larger centres is perceived as better. But I go back to my comment that disability isn't something that you cure.

35
40
45 Inclusion in adult life is directly proportional to successful inclusion in school, which was Sandy's point earlier. Parental effort and participation in schooling is very important around disability because that is where the expertise really lies, not in therapists and different thinking but with the parent's knowledge of particular talents and

particular communication issues and so on. Just talking about purely educationally and purely about inclusion, children do better academically and socially in integrated settings. This is the reading that I have experienced - no teaching or care in a special setting that cannot
5 happen in an ordinary school, and given commitment and support, inclusive education is a more efficient use of educational resources.

In relation to social development, segregation teaches fear and ignorance and breeds prejudice. I have to make these statements, even
10 though they are not specific to this inquiry because they are what we base our thinking on. All children need an education that prepares them for life in the mainstream. Special schools and special units prepare children for life in institutions. The relationships: only inclusion has the potential to build friendship, respect and understanding. I've jumped
15 around in writing my notes in the last couple of hours.

Going back to educational issues in general: education ought to be, or is perceived to be around usefulness, like social and technical competencies, and the impact of segregation on expectations leads to
20 a downgrading of that right. There is a considerable lack regarding talents being celebrated and so on in any of these sort of special settings. My understanding in relation to the term of reference that relates to quality, including technical support services, is that children with disabilities are advantaged by some supports coming into schools,
25 in particular speech therapy, occupational therapy and advocacy.

Consultancies around special resources: in Adelaide here we only have one centre that lends out particular resources to schools, so I don't see that as a particular advantage in rural Australia because it is
30 only one centre and you do most of it over the phone anyway, or via things borrowed back and forth in a library-type sense. But there is a need for consultancy around curriculum modifications. That's something that is available through the Education Department. And schools need computer technology because it doesn't discriminate.

35 Having taught in rural Tasmania, I'm not quite sure what the situation is in rural South Australia. I taught in area schools which is a K to 10-type facility, and children travelled away from their community to matriculation colleges for the 11 to 13. That model is something that
40 in the absence of anything else I would support. In going back to my issue about what education is for, I think prior to matric education is to gain skills in how to learn, to gain learning independence; to gain skills in accessing information; organisation skills in relation to organising information as well as self-organisation, and is best done within the
45 community that one lives in, for there to be natural foundations for that sort of learning and stimulus to that.

I don't believe that the actual facts that we cover in that level of education is the real issue. Once you move into matriculation or that level of education it's more about technical skill, and that's where expertise comes into its own and so on. So I can see that the need to
5 move into bigger centres and broader subject choices and so on are very much specific to matric. I know a few children who go to Yorketown High School and they say, "We don't have as many subject choices" and they use - what's that called, external study - - -

10 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Distance education.

MS BYRNE: - - - for their extra bits. But as long as the hierarchy of education is tied to core subjects give you access and don't deny you that breadth when you reach matric - my perception and the general
15 community perception that I've picked up on of country people - and this is from employers as well as the average person on the street - is that country people are much more multiskilled than city people. So I believe the breadth is there much more naturally - much more skilled and much more competent generally. So I believe that breadth exists
20 within their environment and that that is acknowledged by employers.

I don't know what stimulated this inquiry but I believe that there is a real lack of mentality in the country that if we don't have what the city has - and there is not a lot of valuing and celebrating of what they
25 do, and It's part of this sort of expertise culture, which I think is a real problem in schools. Teachers have the skills that they need to teach anybody via their general education in teaching. They have the skills but they are not necessarily valued, and they haven't been told those things. So considering how much difficulty we have getting children with
30 disabilities accepted into schools in the city, I don't imagine they would be any easier in the country, except for the fact that country communities tend to own their disabled members better. I think that's all I've got to say.

35 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** I might still want to ask you a few questions but that's good. Do the other two of you want to say anything?

MS CAMPBELL: Just my own experience of having a child who has an intellectual disability, who has been in mainstream placement for all of
40 his education. We in his first eight years struggled very much to get a good education for him. It fell apart when, as I said, he was about 8 years old, and the Education Department wanted him to move to a special unit. We were still very strong in that we didn't want that to happen. We wanted him to remain in a mainstream setting. With the
45 help of an advocate he moved into a new school, remained in a mainstream classroom, but his education was much better following that time because there was more of a focus on what this school can do rather than what this child can't do, and it has gone from strength to

strength in the last two and a half years, and he is getting what I consider to be a good education. But not only that, his social and emotional welfare is much better now and his access to peers is better. His friendships are stronger, longer lasting and exist.

5

[Disability discrimination]

COMMISSIONER JONES: You spoke about discrimination against the disabled in schools. I don't think there's any discrimination in schools against the disabled, I think it occurs after schooling.

10

MS SEYMOUR: No, I don't agree with that.

COMMISSIONER JONES: Not consciously, anyhow.

15

MS SEYMOUR: I don't agree with that.

COMMISSIONER JONES: They probably haven't got the resources to look after the disabled properly, but I don't know that there is any conscious discrimination in schools.

20

MS SEYMOUR: I think there's huge discrimination in schools. I grew up as a country kid in South Australia. I lived in Adelaide for a while and my son was born with a disability and we moved to Queensland. It took me two years of fighting against the Queensland Education Department to get Cameron a place in his local school. There was an article in the Australian last week called Doors Wide Shut, and that was certainly the experience we had in Queensland. I became part of the QPBT in Queensland, and the experience that families had in Queensland is you didn't need to advocate for a special school because that was absolutely available. But to go to a mainstream school you needed to know Education Department policy inside out and upside down. You needed to know the Discrimination Act so you would know where you won and where you would lose, and the only place parents win is on enrolment. They lose on everything else under the DDA standards.

25

30

35

MS CAMPBELL: In our situation, when we asked that our son be educated and not baby-sat - which is what was happening, that he was constantly being removed from his classroom and spending time on his own in the principal's office or somewhere other than at his desk in his classroom, and doing things that were seen to be helpful, but out in the garden rather than sitting in the classroom doing his work. When as his parents we questioned what was happening, it escalated into us being kicked out of our school and our son being - - -

40

45

MS BYRNE: Scapegoated.

MS CAMPBELL: Scapegoated, he was. The answer for them was a special class because of the complex needs of the children in the school. So what they were doing was taking my son out of what they considered to be a complex class and placing him into a special unit,
5 which is far more complex, where he was going to be away from his home. He was going to have to move from the Gawler area to Elizabeth to access his education. He would be attending school - they would be taking him down by taxi. He would be getting to school late, he would be leaving early and they did not concede that to be discriminatory in
10 any way. Yet he wasn't accessing school like the other children were accessing school, and that is discriminatory.

[5.15 pm]

MS SEYMOUR: Because we have a dual education system of special and mainstream, kids with disabilities are seen to be aliens, so they seem to need an alien system. There's a basic assumption for all children with disabilities - and I have a child who doesn't talk, and I see that particularly with him - there is an assumption that because he
20 doesn't talk or because he has a disability, he's ineducable. So you start from the bottom line that this child isn't going to learn and there's no expectation for learning.

The special schools that I've seen actually restrict children's movement and restrict their abilities to take risks. They restrict their ability to actually pick up a book and read a reader. Very few special schools that I've visited have any access to maths, science, English. It's almost that that's a foreign concept. Because these kids are seen to be different and alien, they're not seen to need the same as other children.
30 But I believe that all children need to learn to read and write. Schools are where we learn how to be citizens. To be excluded from that as a child means that at 18 when you leave school and then try and go into workplaces, you haven't learnt the key things that you need to make you part of society. So there's that deficit model all your life.

[Expectations of students]

MS BYRNE: One of the issues around that is the issue of expectations, which is well acknowledged as having a huge power in education. So if the expectations are different, then the lowest common denominator is
40 where the child will fall to. Also somehow education is a hierarchical thing, so if you don't get on the first step of the ladder you're not allowed up to the second step and so on. So you go into special units and special facilities and see children learning their name and how to greet, over and over again. Children that don't speak are never going to
45 get on that ladder, so therefore they're not taught the next thing.

I've had an issue with Fiona's son recently about whether he ought to learn long division or not. He's in Year 6 and that traditionally -

Year 6 and 7 - is when you learn long division. Ought you learn long division if you haven't mastered all of these other basic calculation skills? The thing about intellectual disability is difference. People with intellectual disability learn differently, so if we put them on the path of a linear learning process and they have to get through the first step before they're led in the second gate, and all of that sort of thing, they're never going to get there. I think it's your comment that intellectual disability is a disclosure tablet of a school. If a teacher learns or starts to access how to teach a particular child with a disability, all their teaching gets better.

[Discrimination]

Just picking up on your comment about whether there's discrimination or not, I think that there is no intentional discrimination. I think that children in schools naturally don't discriminate. They learn those things and that's why it's very powerful to include children in schools because it leads to adults who don't discriminate, and that's one of the advantages for the other children who are not disabled in the class. Something like 15% of them as adults will either have a disabled child themselves or have a family member, so the cumulative effect is considerable.

I think that teachers, with the very best of intentions, feel ignorant and so think, "This child has special needs. We'll get some special help." A lot of the work that we do is saying, "Well, this child has the same human needs as another child and issues of inclusion actually override the need to gain expertise." Issues of inclusion bring with it richness of education, a richness of environment. An example of that is if you place a child that doesn't speak with seven other children - which is your average number in a special facility - with seven other children who don't speak, you've vastly diminished that child's opportunity to learn through hearing other people speak - not to learn to speak but to learn, just by the sounds of the voices around them and what is being spoken about. The richness of the environment in itself is worth being in.

MS CAMPBELL: We had a situation when my son first started at this new school and it was very much they weren't sure how to go about doing the job that they do each day. One of the things that came up was the children in the class - and it was a Year 5 class, I think, at that stage - were doing a research project and my son can't read, and can write very little. What they did was, because the class had a class set of encyclopaedias that the children used to do their research, when it came time for research in the afternoon, the school service officer or teacher's aide took my son to the library to get him a junior library book because he couldn't read the research material that was in the classroom. But of course she took him to the library and he couldn't read the junior library book either.

I didn't understand the purpose in doing that because what they have now done is they have segregated him from the rest of the class. They're telling everybody else in the class that he can't be a part of what it is that they are doing, instead of him accessing the same books and listening to what the other children are doing. They work in a buddy system in small groups. They do that every day all day in all schools and my son can participate in that very well. I'm sure that he would know more about whales and horseshoe crabs than we would here but because he can't read, they considered that he couldn't participate in that particular part of the activity. That, to me, is discriminatory. It segregates him and if he's not accepted in those settings, then he faces a life of being accepted in most other settings.

MS SEYMOUR: Your comment about discrimination in schools: I don't think it's the children that discriminate against each other. I think it's the adults in the system that discriminate and I think the rhetoric is often very good in policy in departments but I think the practice at a school level often leaves a lot to be desired. A lot of that is because of the fear associated with the unknown, of having a child with a disability in the beginning.

[Integration option]

MS BYRNE: So the policy here in South Australia is supporting parental choice but the mainstream choice is not supported. It is at great cost to a parent.

MS CAMPBELL: It's not offered as an option.

MS BYRNE: It's not even offered but that's what I mean by not being fully supported. Parents are not told that they have this choice and in fact most recently we have gained an exemption from the Act here which allows for children to be diverted at point of enrolment in relation to assessment. So we are talking again about placing children according to disability as opposed to responding to their particular needs within a school.

MS CAMPBELL: Even with schools that have a segregated setting but they're on the same campus as a school - they're a separate class but they work collaboratively with other classes and those kinds of things. I obviously have a real interest in that and I've read up on a lot of things, and one of the things that really struck me in some of the research that I read was a child who was in a class who came to the mainstream class for four lessons a day three times a week, or whatever it was - that they'd send him over and they talked to children and were just talking generally about children in the class.

No child in that class saw this boy as belonging. Everyone saw him as belonging somewhere else "but he comes and sees us a few times a week". They didn't own him, he wasn't owned by the special class that was in the school because they were sent out to other
5 classrooms, so no-one saw him as being "somebody that belongs to us - he's not a part of our group". Although the adults saw that he belonged to this class, the children very clearly saw that he didn't.

[Student support]

10 **MS SEYMOUR:** The other tension, I think, that exists in schools today is that of allocating SSO time to children. I have this real tension because my son doesn't need a lot of support in duty of care. So the department says to me that they will fund up to 10 hours a week in SSO
15 time for duty of care - that's maintaining that he's safe in the school environment - but they will only allocate two hours a week to support him in learning. I see that as back to front. A school is an educational facility, so the school should allocate as much funding to a child in supporting their education as they're prepared to support in SSO time in making sure that they're safe. I see that as a really big tension
20 because it's much better that that child is given that time to be supported to learn so that they can then contribute to community and are in a class where they belong and not withdrawn all the time.

25 That time shouldn't just be used as one to one. We had a saying in Queensland about velcro aides and I see that very much with my son, Cameron. The aide is there so much that she actively reduces his independence - development of independence - and increases his dependence on her. It's not a conscious thing that the school does. It's just a really - they try to do the best they can do but it actually
30 decreases his independence in learning.

MS CAMPBELL: And in contrast to Sandy's experience with advocacy, we have for my son been able to change that culture of velcro aides. In fact the school is working actively to reduce the amount of support that
35 my son needs and is finding ways to support him without an SSO. So the SSO is in the classrooms working with all of the children in the class and in fact removes herself from situations where they - and they test out, they're testing all the time, "Where does this work well?" and so they've been able to reduce the SSO time over a period of time. It does take a long time because he had been cultured to actually be
40 dependent on other people and now we're moving towards independence more and more, and it's working really well but it really does need to change the culture of schools and the way that they perceive the needs of students with disabilities.

45 **MS SEYMOUR:** And the using of the aide's time.

MS CAMPBELL: They're all very capable young people but are being disabled by the system.

[Staff attitudes and skills]

5 **MS BYRNE:** I think part of the reluctance in schools of taking on
children with disabilities is very much about teachers' needs and their
difficulty with embracing new thinking. We get quite a lot of resistance
from unions and education for diversity is something that is well
10 embraced by the community. There's plenty of rhetoric about it, lots of
good thinking, but your average teacher isn't fresh out of teachers
college and has a great resistance to doing anything differently from
what they have done and what they find works for them; not necessarily
what works for the children but what creates a good harmonious
classroom and how they want to deliver the education.

15
One of the forms of education we've come across is
cooperative education whereby children are organised into teams, not
necessarily around age but grouped according to pursuing or
researching a task and where roles are assigned within the group,
20 which allows very strongly for diversity. You might have a
spokesperson, a researcher, a timekeeper, a scribe - all of the
possibilities around whatever the task is, and allowing for particular
talents to be valued within that.

25 For teachers, cooperative education - if it's something they
were taught at teachers college, that's fine, but taking on new ideas
they are very resistant to, so that's why I say it's about their needs and
not about the child's needs. Teachers aren't used to moving with the
population that they are teaching. They're much more inclined to
30 wanting to repeat what they feel confident in, and not getting a lot of
support from their usual supports - that's the Education Department and
their union - about that confidence, about giving them confidence in
what skills they already have.

35 **[5.30 pm]**

I draw a parallel with people from other countries; children
come in without any English. Teachers have managed to embrace
children without English, which is very similar to a child with an
40 intellectual disability, except that the issue falls away over time. They
gain English. But the same sorts of modifications or the same sorts of
needs to educate for diversity exist when you have a child coming in
without language. That is clearly embraced, but the parallel isn't. We
spent a lot of time building teachers' confidence about what they can
45 do. This child needs the same thing as the other children.

MS SEYMOUR: The other huge lack I see in South Australia is the
place where all parents hear a different message. I don't know that I

truly understand why that culture exists in South Australia, but my theory is - because I spent time in Queensland I think Queensland was a state where nothing happened for a very long time. My friends in Queensland told me that their children with intellectual disabilities didn't go to school until 1986, which is very recent history.

Because parents were struggling for their sons and daughters to get an education the catalyst was that parents got together and because they got together at a point in time where there had been a lot of research in the world, they clued into recent thinking very quickly and they got the experts from the world into Queensland to get them towards how they could include their sons and daughters in the state quickly. They sort of did a skip whereas in South Australia there has been a history of social justice and a society that thinks it's very much grounded in social justice and resources existed quite well. So parents didn't have that struggle. I think parents have actually been really divided in hearing that there is more than one way to educate a child with a disability. They have special schools, so they are purely - I think parents are very much saturated in specials better in South Australia and I don't know that it's necessarily the case in other states as much as I see it here.

MS BYRNE: I guess I need to make a point there about parent advocacy versus individual advocacy because we believe that the difference is huge. A parent's need is to provide for the whole family and it is very difficult for a parent to address the particular interests of one child and juggle that against the needs of the whole family. We believe that if we do individual advocacy it benefits the whole family, but it doesn't work in reverse. So advocating for parental choice can certainly move down the path of looking for experts and needing to leave the community and all of those sorts of things. I think our summary position is that belonging in a community is a really important foundation for any education and that it is more powerful than technical expertise and that it's really the foundation of the whole thing. It's a hierarchal greater right.

I forgot at the beginning to differentiate between parent advocacy and individual advocacy. They are very different things and we believe that one does not address the interests of the person with the disability.

MS SEYMOUR: So you need to be very clear that you are there to advocate for the person with the disability, not for the parents. That would be our position time and time again.

MS CAMPBELL: Certainly as a parent I've struggled in those first eight years when Jack did not have an advocate and I struggled very much and made compromises to his education and to his life because I

5 needed to meet the needs of all the family, whereas now it's much easier to look clearly at what his needs are and what needs to be happening for him, because there is an advocate there who is able to look purely at what are his needs and it's not coloured at all by what the family needs.

10 Just one other thing I wanted to say around the rural and remote is that we are now in a Gawler school, but prior to being in the Gawler school we were in a small - I believe it's seen as a country school although it's not very far out of Gawler. One of the issues that I am aware of for teachers in that situation - and I see it much more clearly now - is that when Jack is in this Gawler school there is a lot more support. I guess there are teachers within that school who can see the good things that are happening for my son and how it's possible for this kind of mainstream education to go ahead very successfully, whereas in the smaller school, where you don't have a lot of teachers - and we're in a school that only had three teachers - and you might only have one teacher in that school who has ever had any experience of a student with disability, so they don't have the access to that support.

25 If they're not being told by the Education Department and by the unions that they can do this and they do have the skills for this, then they're never going to get it because they're not going to get it from other teachers. They have their cluster groups and those kinds of things but even with those, they can only access very infrequently, and it's always turn and turn about, so that if you've got three teachers in the school you've only got those teachers accessing something like that maybe once a year if they're lucky. So they need to be getting the message from someone. If the departments aren't doing that they're not going to get the message at all.

35 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** You mentioned that you started to do some advocacy work down Mount Gambier way and Murray Bridge, I think you mentioned as well. What kinds of cases are arising in those areas? Are they the same as what you're doing here in Adelaide?

40 **MS BYRNE:** Yes. For adults it's very much about independent accommodation, work, reasonable opportunities and so on around - yes, normal lifestyle things. In schools it's exactly the same.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Same kind of issue?

45 **MS BYRNE:** Yes, it's about getting in there and then it's about staying there and about everybody not freaking out. The same sort of thing if the child's needs are not being met - there are behavioural issues - and so it's half the life in the principal's office, that sort of thing. But with support we've seen those things fall away. We're talking both about

mild intellectual disability and profound disabilities as well. I advocate across those sorts of things.

5 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thank you very much. Alby, did you have anything else?

COMMISSIONER JONES: No.

10 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** Thank you for coming in and giving us your passion.

MS BYRNE: Thank you for listening.

15 **MS SEYMOUR:** Can I ask what happens to this and where is it going and what is the impact?

20 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** To start off with this gets immediately typed up and will go on our Web site so it's all public information for people who are looking at rural and remote education, of whom there is now quite a legion - will have access to it immediately. We complete the round of hearings a bit later this year, in a couple of months' time, and it will culminate in a number of different things in about April or May next year, including recommendations that will be formulated and directed towards governments and others about things that should be
25 done to ensure for the educational needs of children in rural and remote areas.

MS BYRNE: So increasing advocacy funds.

30 **MS SEYMOUR:** Yes, that's fantastic.

MS BYRNE: We are having a lot of trouble getting out there.

35 **MS SEYMOUR:** Teachers always look for strategies and there is no place they can find them, and resources, and that's a really - teachers need to know there's a place they can go to get some stuff, be it a Web site or whatever.

40 **MS BYRNE:** I'm going to put my hand up about another thing. Quite a number of our referrals for educational advocacy come from the Education Department, so they are actually beginning to learn - and it's only a fairly - - -

45 **COMMISSIONER SIDOTI:** This is a resource available to them.

MS BYRNE: That it works, that it helps them to do those sorts of things.

COMMISSIONER SIDOTI: Okay, thank you very much.

AT 5.40 PM THE MATTER WAS ADJOURNED ACCORDINGLY

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