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HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION

INQUIRY INTO RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION

MR CHRIS SIDOTI, Commissioner

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Wendy and Ben, do you want to introduce yourselves formally for the tape and then make whatever comments you want to make.

5

DR CRAIK: Okay, thanks. Wendy Craik, Executive Director, National Farmers' Federation.

MR FARGHER: Ben Fargher, Deputy Director, Rural Policy, National Farmers' Federation.

[Rural industry: needs and opportunities]

DR CRAIK: Thanks. Certainly NFF appreciates the opportunity to come here and talk to you about this issue of education. I guess our focus really is on education generally, education and training generally, and we see it as a really critical issue for rural Australia. I suppose an example of the reason we think education is really important is - I was recently at a rural women's leadership course, one of those informal training courses, and I was talking to a young female dairy farmer who'd just left school and I asked her was she going to do any more training, and she said, "No. My dad says I can learn everything I need to know about dairy farming from him."

Now, he may be a wonderful dairy farmer, I'm sure - he's survived at least one round of restructuring - but given that in this day and age people are changing their careers five or six times, you really need lifelong learning. The fact that agriculture in Australia is getting more and more technically focused with things like gene technology, more and more competitive, more globalised and needs to be more responsive to consumer demands, obviously the more skills that people have to cope in this kind of a world, the better.

Australian agriculture obviously has an important role in the economy and our exports are worth 25% of Australia's export income, generating about \$22 billion. We make up 6% of the workforce. And if you add in food processing, that takes up about 32% of the workforce. So it's one of the most important employers in the country. It's very diversified and it's free of subsidisation, and I think it's fair to say and generally acknowledged that Australia's farmers are among the world's most innovative.

They're also very productive, reported increases of 3% a year in the broadacre sector for 20-odd years. Interestingly, although up until recently there has been a decline in the total numbers of people employed in agriculture, in recent times in the semi-skilled and skilled area there seems to be an increasing demand for skills, and the agricultural colleges are finding that they can't meet that demand, and John Chudleigh from the Orange Agricultural College says that there

are 20,000 jobs in agriculture waiting to be filled, and I know that's the experience from other agricultural colleges too, that they can't meet the demand.

5 I think also, contrary to the message that often gets out in the media, there are people in agriculture making a good return. The top 25% in any sector you care to look at, including wool, are often doing very well and getting returns on their investment that anyone in any sector would be pleased to see.

10 But I think one of the things that we're facing in agriculture is we do have an ageing workforce. 46% are over 45, compared with 31% in industry generally. Young people tend to be discouraged from farming, both by their families and by the reporting of farming. Only 15 36% of broadacre farmers made a farm business profit last year, and only 30% of the agricultural workforce has post-school qualifications. The average Australian farmer is 52 years old, with four years of secondary schooling. A new social atlas put out by the Bureau of Rural Sciences shows that the median age of farmers is about 48 but that 20 there are very few farmers younger than 38, so I guess that's a bit of a concern.

The fact that only 30% of the agricultural workforce have post-school qualifications is unfortunate, particularly when you compare it 25 with 50% in industry generally, and your own study, Bush Talks, showed that only 16% of rural students go to university compared with 25% in 1989, so that's a significant drop in a decade. And rural and isolated children's access to higher education is below parity and, compared with other equity groups, this access has declined since 30 1991.

The other issue, and again it was something I know you identified in Bush Talks, was the high drop-out rate in Years 11 and 12 35 of secondary school. For example, in Perth the drop-out rate in Perth schools was 25%, in rural and regional Western Australia 50 to 75%. I think we've seen rural education services decline along with other government and non-government services in health and, while telecommunications has a potential to redress some of that, that 40 revolution is yet to arrive in rural Australia in a way that will make up that shortfall.

As well, of course, rural Australia has been undergoing enormous structural adjustment, and that's not going to change. It's going to continue to do so. And I guess one of the problems is that rural 45 families can't afford to keep their kids at secondary school and then put them through tertiary education, and unemployment is high in rural Australia, particularly with young people, and of course there's this doom and gloom view of rural Australia.

5 However, I think in recent years in agriculture we've seen
agriculture embrace the need for education and training and really
overtly recognise the importance of it, and you might say, "Why?" Well,
I think farmers are trying to make a profit and some work that we
funded showed that farmers undergoing training and education, either
formal or informal, had better financial returns than those who don't.
ABARE produced a paper showing that a trained workforce can reduce
the farmers' costs, and of course a trained workforce, through either
10 course qualifications or recognition of prior learning, really leads to a
credibility and credit with banks, with purchasers, employers and
employees, consumers and competitors. So there are real financial
reasons for training and education.

15 I think the other compelling factor in the farm sector is that the
educational qualifications of farm women led to them being able to
obtain employment, which really provided a lot of the farm income
during those horror years of the late 1980s and early 1990s. So there's
certainly been a much greater focus on education and training in
20 agriculture in recent years, a focus on having industry-driven and
industry-relevant training and education, flexibility in delivery delivered
on site in bite-sized chunks and being timely, but I think for the future
it's pretty clear that we need better linkages between informal training
and formal courses and providers, better links between vocational
25 training and university training, a constant focus on - this is particularly
for agriculture - workplace outcomes, the workplace outcomes industry
wants.

[Income support]

30 And I think in terms of specific issues, in terms of keeping our
students at school and going on to some kind of further training, it's
pretty clear that distance and cost are real negative forces in terms of
people being able to do that, and so we've been trying to push the
government to give a 100% discount on farm business assets for their
35 Youth Allowance. The government currently has 50% on farm business
assets. Their 1996 election policy was a 75% discount. We've been
pushing it to say, "At least go to 75, which was your own policy" - and
also to provide a tertiary access allowance which would be basically a
continuation of the basic boarding allowance they provide to secondary
40 students up to age 16, and we say - it's \$3,500 a year, and there's no
means test and it's only geographical qualifications that would get that,
so at least it's a bit of a help.

[Expectations of rural students]

45 I think there's also a very fundamental issue that needs
addressing, and it came out in that Melbourne University study done for
DETYA on tertiary education and training, and that showed that rural
students don't see the need for tertiary education. Basically to get the

5 jobs that they think they want, they really don't see that there's a need
for it. Now, that might be a kind of defensive response, knowing that
your parents can't afford it, but it also may be, "Well, dad ran the farm
and didn't have a qualification, so why do I need one?" But I think it's
important that we can find a way to imbue the desirability of obtaining
further skills and training, given the likelihood of people changing their
careers, given the world that we're facing, and actually learning and
training are desirable rather than an unnecessary thing to be achieved
in the future in rural Australia. Thank you.

10
THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks very much, Wendy. It provides some
very good arguments about what's happening. That last one first - we'll
start from the perception of what rural students feel they need. I think
it's a very important point, that they're going to have to turn around
15 those kinds of perceptions. What things are the NFF doing to
demonstrate where skills can increase income or demonstrating the
capacity for training to actually make things better for people on farms?

20 **DR CRAIK:** Well, I guess we funded that study that Sue Kilpatrick did
on looking at - I can't remember the precise figure but basically that
farmers who go through training, be it informal or formal training, end
up making more money. So we tried to publicise that widely and that
finding has been picked up and distributed pretty widely. The other
25 area where we provide I guess a fair amount of support is for the Rural
Training Council and their vocational and competency based training,
and they certainly have a number of cameo case studies where they
can show how people undergoing these courses turned their operations
into more successful operations where previously they'd said they don't
need it.

30
Other than that, we haven't really actively - other than talking
about it and speeches and things like that and this sort of forum -
pushed it. It's my view that what we need to (indistinct - identify role
models) rural Australia will actually recognise as credible in this area
35 and get them to go out and put the message - I mean, we can say it,
but when I go out and say it, because I have a few degrees, you know,
"Well, that's all right for you to say."

40 **THE COMMISSIONER:** It's got to be people who have actually come
up through the system in the bush.

DR CRAIK: That's right.

45 **THE COMMISSIONER:** And are doing something.

DR CRAIK: That's right, yes. So I think we could do more there or
encourage the government even to put some money into some kind of

a program where they can fund people to go out to rural Australia and talk to kids in school or whatever it is, to actually get that message out.

[Tertiary education]

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Are there enough places in agricultural colleges to meet the increased demand that could come from such education?

10 **DR CRAIK:** I suspect there probably are. There may need to be some expansion in some areas - contraction in some areas where there aren't that many jobs and expansion in other areas. But when you think we've got the University of Queensland, we've got Sydney University, Orange Agricultural College, Melbourne, Adelaide, they're pretty significant and now they're really trying to articulate much better with TAFE, the vocational sector, so one kind of leads to the other. But
15 there may need to be some kind of refocusing of the skills base so that they're actually training people for what industry wants, not what the providers think is needed.

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Is necessary.

DR CRAIK: Yes, that's right.

25 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Right, and for those 20,000 agricultural jobs that may be there - the principal of Orange you quoted - are those jobs jobs that require higher qualifications?

30 **DR CRAIK:** I think it's a mixture. Some are skilled and some are semi-skilled, so you've got sort of farm managers, you've got salespeople, you've got consultants, and people in marketing and things like that, and you've also got semi-skilled workers in intensive industries like feedlots or piggeries, things like that, so it's a bit of a mixture of skilled and semi-skilled. I would think in many cases TAFE
35 would be the sort of level of qualification you're looking at. In others it's a bit higher than that.

40 But I think it's a whole different skill base, perhaps, from what we were looking at before, because I remember Brian Croser from the Winemakers Federation came and talked to our council one night and he said, "I don't see winemaking as part of agriculture. I see it as part of entertainment." So it's a whole different focus; you know, much of agriculture is a whole different focus.

45 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Do the young people not know that those 20,000 jobs are available, because we talk when we go around the place to kids in schools, and in most places we actually find a very

strong wish to continue living in local communities, but the kids are so pessimistic about what the prospects are in local communities.

5 **DR CRAIK:** Yes. I don't know how much they know about it. I suspect they probably don't. We talk about it, but how much the sort of thing that we say - and we published an article in our magazine Reform, and constantly we talk about it when we go to graduations at agricultural colleges and things, and John Chudleigh, I'm sure, talks about it, and I know the Institute of Land and Food Resources talk about it, but
10 whether that's actually getting to the people who are finishing school and in the first few years, I don't know, or whether you're sort of preaching to the converted a bit. That's the problem. How do you get to the people who really would benefit from knowing this information?

15 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Yes.

DR CRAIK: That's the challenge, and just talking about education isn't terribly sexy .

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Well, talking about future incomes and careers is.

25 **DR CRAIK:** Yes, that's true. I guess my view is, if we could actually make it sound like agriculture was a really great industry to be in - like IT or marketing - if agriculture had that image, I don't think they'd have any problems. I don't think they'd have a lot of the problems that we have now, but there's always doom and gloom.

30 **THE COMMISSIONER:** The perception of where the industry is going.

DR CRAIK: That's right, yes, whereas I think it has great potential.

[Specialist teachers – Agricultural Science]

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** The other thing we're finding around the place is that there's even a shortage of ag science teachers in schools - in secondary schools in many parts of Australia, and in very traditional, strong farming communities, wheat belt areas where there are good economically viable farms - they can't get the teachers to go there. Is that something that you've picked up as well as a problem.
40

DR CRAIK: No, we haven't actually picked that up terribly strongly, except to the extent that we know that there is a view amongst students that doing agriculture is kind of something you do when you can't do anything else. You know, doing agriculture at school or the early years
45 of university is something you do when you can't do anything else. There's a bit of a view of that around, and I don't think that's a fair

comment because agriculture is getting increasingly technical and technologically focused.

5 And I think because of the sort of doom and gloom about rural
and regional Australia, why would people want to invest in that, why
would people want to go out and live out there? When all they ever
hear is negative stories about it, I can imagine people saying, "Why
would I want to go out and live there if all I ever hear is how terrible it
is?" So I think in some ways pointing out the problems - it's got to be
10 done in a way that doesn't totally discourage people in urban Australia
from actually being out there.

I think, too, the other problem we have in Australia now is
because so few people have - because of coastal migration,
15 technological change, a decreasing percentage of people have contact
with people on farms, whereas before everybody had a relative on a
farm and they used to go out and stay on holidays. Well, now it's a very
small percentage - 80% of the population lives within 50 kilometres of
the coast - and so there's really not a good understanding of farming
20 and the farm sector or where food comes from.

Most people's perception of Australian agriculture is based on
what they learnt when they were in the first few years of school, and
that's based on a survey that we had done, and even though they hold
25 farms in high regard, their view of a farmer is still very much an Old
McDonald image, not sort of high-tech things at all, and so there's this
good, rustic person of the earth, salt of the earth sort of person, who's
good-natured and hardworking and all those sorts of things.

30 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Part of the mythology rather than
contemporary.

DR CRAIK: That's right, yes, and trying to turn that around is a
challenge.

35

[Education delivery modes]

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes. We've got a lot of debate brought to us
about putting emphasis on distance education, particularly for kids on
isolated property as against providing allowances for boarding, as
40 against, as a third alternative, smaller secondary colleges more widely
dispersed through country areas. Has the federation got a view on any
of those issues?

DR CRAIK: No. We don't have a specific view on that issue except to
45 the extent that we would see that flexible delivery modes that meet the
requirements of the people would be highly desirable, and if there are
other ways of achieving the same objective, then I would imagine we'd
support that very strongly, and if that's a better way to do it, well, fine,

because as it is now, while many kids can stay home while they do their primary education, many have to leave for secondary and all have to leave really for tertiary these days.

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Yes. It seems there's a lot of support for distance education, and some kids do extremely well on it, but there's both a fear amongst parents that their kids won't do well, particularly at Years 10, 11 and 12 level, and I think also a concern that the less independent students are the ones that have the greatest struggle with distance education. Some of the results with the best students are quite phenomenal - high up on statewide testing, first, second, third places in some subjects for distance ed kids. But I suspect the minority are actually able to achieve that rather than the majority.

15 **DR CRAIK:** Yes, it would be more of a challenge. Yes, I guess it's a matter of really providing options to the extent that this country can afford options, but providing options so that people have some choice about how they can meet those requirements.

20 **[Income support]**

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes. You mentioned as well the change to the Austudy assets test. Again we've had a lot of people comment to us about asset and income tests for the benefits. Are there any other areas besides the 50 to 100% discount?

25 **DR CRAIK:** Just the general complexity of the form, and most people need - I mean, it takes people ages to fill in the form. We've complained about a few other things before, like actual income tests, I think it was, and there were a few anomalies in it, some of which have been fixed up. But a lot of it is just the bureaucracy in the form and getting the thing approved. That's still a general complaint, yes.

30 **THE COMMISSIONER:** People are saying to us with the income side of it, averaging the income over a number of years rather than annual income.

35 **DR CRAIK:** Yes, and there was something about mean income and how they actually calculate income, and it was based on expenditure, and of course a lot of parents have taken loans to put their kids through school so their income is based on the money they're spending, which was a loan from the bank. So they're basically calculated as having a much higher income than they actually have.

40 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Than in fact they've actually got disposable?

45 **DR CRAIK:** Yes, and then there was a curious anomaly where if your son or daughter worked on your neighbour's farm, that didn't count as

part of the income they could earn - the money wouldn't be counted towards your income, but if they worked on your own farm the money they would have earned on your own farm counted against your own income. But that's been fixed up. Obviously neighbours have just swapped their kids for work purposes.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

DR CRAIK: So there are a few things like that which have been fixed up, and it's always going to be difficult for governments, I suppose, to hand out money without proper accountability, but I know a lot of people find it very discouraging in trying to claim for Youth Allowance. We hear about it constantly.

THE COMMISSIONER: So do they give up?

DR CRAIK: I think some do, yes, and then they might be talking to a public servant and trying to get the form filled out and commenting on something - and a comment from one was, when they were discussing the asset level, "Well, sell the farm to put the kids through school." I mean, that sort of thing doesn't help. You can get that sort of thing anywhere, but that sort of approach doesn't - you know, "You've got plenty of assets. Sell the farm to put the kids through school." So that doesn't really help.

And often - and I'm not sure if it happens now, but we certainly used to get complaints about different advice from different people. Constituents would phone up to get advice on how to fill out the form and, again, that doesn't aid the view of them.

[Information technology; telecommunications]

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes. Your comments about high-tech farming are obviously important ones with the changes in technology. A lot of people are saying to us they have great difficulty still with the quality of telephone lines, speed of access, the cost of access. Telstra, on the other hand, seems to be saying that coverage is much better than people say it is, and that there is a very small number of people who actually can't get good access to the Internet at this stage, for example. What sort of things do your members say to you?

DR CRAIK: Well, there's no doubt that telecommunications coverage has improved. The last manual exchange was only removed in 1994, I think it was, from New South Wales, so we've come a long way since then. But we've got figures which I can't recollect off the top of my head, but I have a feeling that something like 25% of people experienced problems with their phone lines - this is just their phone lines in terms of drop-out rates, in terms of - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: It was 25%?

5 **DR CRAIK:** Yes. We have a thousand farmers online. We're running a pilot project on online services to rural Australia and we have a thousand - we might have 1,500 farmers online now, and we were looking at infrastructure, at training courses and what they were interested in content, and so we did a survey. One of the fundamental problems is the infrastructure. People have line drop-out problems, not being able to get repairs. I can actually send you the survey information because it's quite good.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, please. That would be good.

15 **DR CRAIK:** In terms of access to the Internet, I think the access of farm - and again I can send you this information - I think farmers are at about 18% - I think - compared with I think household - businesses in cities about 25 or 30, I think - I think that's the figures. I can send you the figures to be correct. We find the farmers in their online trials spend an average of about 10 hours a month now on the Internet compared with the city average of about seven, so even though they have more problems with line speeds and quality, either they're more determined, I suppose, or they think it's worthwhile.

25 But a lot of people still have line speeds of 2.4 kilobytes, and that takes a hundred seconds to fax an A4 page. So that's pretty frustrating. A lot of people talk about going off and making a cup of tea while you wait for the screen to fill up while you're on the Internet, and then you come back when the tea's made and it's a full page. So there are a lot of problems, and I'll send you the actual statistics. Telstra - there's no doubt it's improved, and we don't argue that, but it's nowhere near as good as sometimes one is led to believe, and I think clearly the problem is - you know, you have these radio concentrated systems out in more remote areas, and if everybody gets on the line you get an extraordinary degree of congestion, so lines drop out.

35 And of course people trying to access the Internet tend to keep the line for longer and obviously that makes other people unable to get on, and so these problems build upon themselves. So I think yes, there's no doubt telecommunications has improved but it's got a long way to go before you'll find people in rural and regional Australia have the same access at the same price - and that's the other issue, price - as in urban Australia.

45 Our Farmwide people contracted out or called tenders to provide 15 points of presence in just 15 different rural Australian locations and they are now providing Internet access for people in those 15 locations at one-fourteenth Telstra's 'bigpond' price, and Telstra was one of the tenderers for that, so our view is it can be done,

it can be done, and competition is what's going to drive the price down and bring up the service level, and so that's what's needed.

5 That's one thing that's needed. The other thing is that customer
service guarantees - in our view there is no reason in this day and age
why taking account of the distance say to fly a part out from say Sydney
to the bush - take that aside, there is no reason why repairing
10 telephones, installing new telephones - those standards can't be the
same nationally across the country. People can do it for televisions, for
other pieces of equipment. Why can't we do it for telephones? So our
view is that the customer service guarantees ought to be standard
across the country, not based on rural or urban - taking account of the
travel time to get there.

15 So I guess we push for three things. One is equitable access to
services at a reasonable price, at an equitable price, and standard
customer service guarantees. Now, there's no doubt the government
has listened, so they're now providing digital data capability through -
they'll be financed through satellite for those people who can't access
20 ISDN - of course the problem with ISDN is that it's outrageously
expensive anyway.

THE COMMISSIONER: Satellite even more so. So the question then is,
25 are these charges going to be passed on to the consumers or - - -

DR CRAIK: Well, there's supposed to be a 50% rebate for the dish and
installation, and again what we're saying is what we need is competitive
offerings out there because there's a mob who's offering them I think in
Sydney at several hundred dollars a dish, whereas some of the early
30 prices I saw for Telstra offerings went up to \$3,000 plus a dollar a
kilometre for dishes out in rural and regional Australia. We've seen
what's happened in long-distance calls. The price has dropped down.

We've seen what's happened in the mobile network, the price
35 has dropped down. So clearly competition is the answer and the trick is
to have the sort of base level safety net in terms of telecommunications,
which is updated every five years, depending on where the standards
are at; so a safety net, but encourage and facilitate competitiveness.
Now, that may mean things like access to Telstra's local loop. The
40 challenge is how to push those things.

THE COMMISSIONER: Does the NFF have a view on what the
universal service obligation should contain?

45 **DR CRAIK:** Our view was that it ought to have high-speed digital data
capability as well as the standard telephone service, so we've been
very pleased when the government has responded in updating it to
64 kilobytes, providing either by satellite or wireless or ISDN. We don't

care on the technology. We're not going to be specific about the technology because that's going to change.

5 So what we're saying is right now it should be 64 kilobytes, which it is, but it needs to be reviewed every few years because technology will move on, and particularly as services are withdrawn and have been withdrawn, telecommunications does provide an opportunity for replacing some of those services - not all of them but some of them - so it's got that opportunity. Plus in terms of commercial opportunities
10 for the farm sector it offers extraordinary benefits when you hear of - you know, Tim Fischer talks about this guy Mick Swips, and you hear of stories where - I heard a story of an orchardist who takes digital photographs of his fruit, he emails that over to somewhere in Asia. They can actually see the fruit as it's ripe, email back an order. He
15 picks the fruit, packs it off, and the money is electronically transferred. Everybody is happy and you've got good cash flow and all those sorts of things, you know. And you've got quality control and you can actually see the fruit.

20 So there are real opportunities for our guys, particularly in relation to Asia, and you hear a few of those sort of stories, so it does offer real possibilities for some people, and in terms of getting information you hear great stories, too. One guy surfing the Net looked up the USDA forecasts on the wheat price, decided to sell his wheat
25 today, his neighbour didn't - he hung onto it - and he got \$20 a tonne better - just by finding out what information is available. So it does offer lots of commercial as well as the service opportunities for rural and regional Australia.

30 **[Vocational education]**

THE COMMISSIONER: The last area I wanted to ask about was the school to work transition issue. In some parts of Australia we've come across a lot of close cooperation between the local schools and local agricultural or growers associations or something. In other parts of the
35 country there's next to none. Is this something that the NFF is encouraging? What role do you see between the local agricultural business people and schools to try and encourage these kinds of developments?

40

[9.32 am]

DR CRAIK: We tend not to get involved ourselves. Some of our member organisations, like the state farm organisations, probably do. We're a federation so we don't actually have farmers as members.
45 Some of the state farm organisations do. The other area I guess that we do provide some support for is the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation. We put in for an application and got some money and we don't actually run it but there's a guy on contract who runs it through

Rural Schools Australia, one of our sort of subsidiaries. They're running a number of projects and sort of work experience things for schoolkids in agriculture, involving the local industry. I think there's one of those in every state.

5

So between some vocational training at school level, which we're encouraging, work experience things - sort of a week or two on a farm - and these Australian Student Traineeship Foundation projects - it's not very major, it's not very big, but at least it's a start, I guess.

10

THE COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you.

[Telecommunications]

DR CRAIK: We'll send you that information on telecommunications because it's actually quite revealing.

15

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, please.

DR CRAIK: Often we get stories of Telstra says there's no problem getting connections but - you know, somebody was trying to hook up. When we were getting these Internet points of presence set up, you know, Telstra would say, "Oh, yes, there's two megabits going into the town," and yet it took months and months and months before the two megabits could actually be translated to someone's - to actually being used.

20

25

THE COMMISSIONER: House or business.

DR CRAIK: Yes. While the backbone might be there, it's actually getting access to it that's the critical issue.

30

THE COMMISSIONER: And at an affordable cost.

DR CRAIK: That's right.

35

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you for the surveys. They'll be really helpful to us. We constantly get told everything's okay, yet people are saying to us it's not.

DR CRAIK: I know, and it's really difficult.

40

THE COMMISSIONER: All right, thank you very much for coming along.

DR CRAIK: Okay.

45

THE COMMISSIONER: Tony and Evan, would you like to first introduce yourselves for the record.

5 **MR GREER:** Tony Greer, First Assistant Secretary, Schools Division, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

DR ARTHUR: Evan Arthur, Assistant Secretary, Literacy and Special Programs Branch, same department.

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks very much. First I'd like to thank the Department for the very full submission you've given us. It's greatly appreciated. I was particularly grateful for your summarising of programs. There are lots of programs and it's a very time-consuming task for us to have to seek them all out and get an understanding of what the content of them is, so your providing that to us is something that we greatly appreciate. Thanks also for the amount of statistical detail you've given us in the appendices, which are also very helpful to us.

15 What I suggest we do is just move through the list of questions that the Commission has given you notice of in relation to matters arising from the submission. Before doing that, though, are there any general comments you wanted to make by way of introduction?

MR GREER: I'd just put on the record an introductory statement, if that was okay.

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Yes, please.

25 **MR GREER:** DETYA welcomes the opportunity to appear at the Canberra public hearing of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's national inquiry into rural and remote education. DETYA agrees that overall the issues identified in the inquiry's terms of reference are appropriate ones to consider regarding access to quality education for children in rural and remote areas.

30 DETYA has recently provided a comprehensive written submission to the Commission, outlining the role of DETYA in the education sector, including an overview of the schools, Indigenous education, vocational education and training, and higher education sectors, and a description of the various programs, grants and educational initiatives provided by DETYA to rural and remote Australia.

[Role of DETYA]

40 Turning to the role of the department, the role of DETYA is to support government's efforts to respond in an integrated and balanced way to the education and training needs of Australians, particularly its young people, to establish a national policy framework for school-level education, post-compulsory education and the transition between education and work; to improve access to education for disadvantaged groups including Indigenous Australians and isolated students, and to coordinate policy in relation to young people.

The educational environment in Australia is one in which primary responsibility rests with the state and territory governments.

5 State and territory governments have the constitutional and major financial responsibility for school education. Within the states and territories, statutory authorities, departments of state and individual schools variously determine policies and practices. Within this environment DETYA works to achieve the Commonwealth government's aims in education through collaboration with state and territory governments and through specific funding measures.

10 The Commonwealth seeks to progress the education agenda through agreement and cooperation between all education sectors in a combined national effort as the most effective way to ensure comprehensive long-term improvement to education in Australia. The national goals for schooling in the 21st century are an excellent example of the significant and comprehensive progress which can be made through collaboration. The national goals for schooling, which were agreed by all ministers at the April 99 meeting of the Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, provide the framework for progressing the Commonwealth equity agenda in schools.

20 In addition to active participation in education fora, DETYA progresses the Commonwealth government's agenda through the provision of supplementary assistance to state and non-government school authorities for recurrent costs of schools and to support improvements to capital infrastructure, particularly for the most educationally disadvantaged students. It also promotes and supports a range of targeted programs for educationally disadvantaged students, including students in rural and remote areas.

30 Funding is also provided to redress the significant gaps between the educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Specific grants and programs provide funding to promote or reinforce issues of particular significance to the Commonwealth. Those programs, however, cannot be effective in isolation as they are only part of a bigger picture to which the states are significant contributors.

40 The new national goals for schooling provide a significant lever for improving educational outcomes for rural and remote students. The new goals specifically state that geographic isolation should not be a barrier to equitable outcomes. Ministers nationally have committed to the development of performance targets linked to the goals, which will monitor student performance. The performance of Indigenous students against the national goal targets will also be specifically reported.

45 The Commonwealth government has indicated that achieving educational equality for Indigenous Australians remains one of the principal educational challenges facing the nation. The government is

currently developing a comprehensive approach that will make significant and measurable progress in closing the gap in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by 2004. The approach will be spearheaded by a national strategy on
5 Indigenous attendance, literacy and numeracy, which the Commonwealth Minister intends to launch later this year. Thank you, Mr Chair.

[National performance indicators]

10 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thank you very much. Perhaps I can just take up that last point first about the commitment to equitable outcomes regardless of geographical isolation. You mentioned the development of benchmarks by the ministers to determine progress towards that
15 objective. Could you tell me a little about where that benchmarking work is up to and the kinds of indicators that will be used and when we're likely to see the list published or agreed?

DR ARTHUR: Certainly. The overall process is being coordinated by a task force chaired by Victoria - by the current secretary of the
20 Department of Education in Victoria. Ministers indicated six priority areas for reporting. They also indicated that reporting should be done so that particular subgroups of achievements can be identified in that process. The details of how it's going is, essentially the overall task force has either commissioned particular subgroups to work on
25 particular subject matter areas or is utilising existing groups to carry out that work. There is a specific group looking at - quote - "subgroups", looking at groups such as students within ESL needs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, rural and remote students, students with disabilities, and one of the major tasks from that group is to try and
30 get agreed definitions.

One of the key things in this overall process is to move from a situation now where people do a certain amount of reporting on where they are with particular groups and particular issues, but it is
35 exceptionally difficult to get a national picture and exceptionally difficult to imply discipline of a national standard or a national expectation - probably more appropriately - across that because of those definitional issues. Ministers have indicated overall that they want to see - I'll get the exact details. I may be able to (indistinct)... If not, I'll provide some
40 information later - early in 2000 for agreements on goals on participation and retention and completion, and also I think on VET in schools.

45 **MR GREER:** VET in schools.

DR ARTHUR: Yes, a slightly longer time-frame for goals on information technology and science - sorry, performance indicators to underpin the existing goals themselves. For any of those things to happen there has

to be progressive agreement on how it is reported, particularly breakdowns in subgroups.

5 There already has been some progress. This initiative is building on what's happened already in the area of literacy and numeracy, which are the first two identified as the area for performance indicators to be developed, and we already have had since April of 98 agreements on what are appropriate national standards for reading and spelling for Year 3 and Year 5.

10 We should have shortly - within a month or so, I would expect - ministerial agreement on standards for numeracy for those years and also for both literacy and numeracy for Year 7. We also have an agreement for ministers to report on that, broken down by students with ESL needs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and by gender. We are currently in a process of working through the detailed measurement issues with some of that. We have almost agreement, I think, to report a little later this year or very early next year on some of the writing elements of that.

20 **[Indigenous education]**
MR GREER: Concurrent with that MCEETYA task force there is a separate task force that ministers agreed to establish in April. That's the MCEETYA task force on Indigenous Education. Coming out of the 25 April MCEETYA meeting ministers agreed for this task force to - for terms of reference to enhance the current performance and monitoring framework of the Commonwealth's Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program - that is the IESIP program - such that nationally we could develop a more consistent set of performance indicators and 30 targets that permit aggregation and development of national reports in relation to Indigenous education.

35 Similarly, another element of the terms of reference for this task force was making the achievement of educational equality for Australia's Indigenous peoples an urgent national property, and there's a frame of specific terms of reference there. The terms of reference of that are at page 98 of our submission. That task force is working very closely with the task force that's looking at targets and KPIs for mainstream initiatives and, where possible, trying to settle on similar 40 outcomes. The reporting framework there is similar; the task force there is to report back to ministers at their first meeting in 2000.

[MCEETYA Task Force on Rural Education]
THE COMMISSIONER: I've heard there's also a MCEETYA task force 45 on rural education.

DR ARTHUR: That's looking at somewhat more detailed activity. It's had its first meeting quite recently. It is not intended, in my

5 understanding, to be an examination across the board of rural issues. It is more intended to look at the examples of good practice, particularly good collaborative practice, analyse what makes those things particularly effective and try and provide some recommendations therefore of what are the good things to follow on a more national basis. So it's more a target approach but certainly an important initiative.

10 **THE COMMISSIONER:** When is that reporting?

DR ARTHUR: I don't know that it has a specific time-frame but normally task forces are required to report back to the next MCEETYA meeting, so it would report back to April next year but I don't think that it has a specific reporting date in terms of completion.

15 **[Indigenous education]**

THE COMMISSIONER: Okay, thanks. Tony, you mentioned as well the announcement the minister will make later in the year on Indigenous education initiatives. About what time-frame is there for that announcement?

20 **MR GREER:** It's a bit flawed at this stage. He was hoping to make that announcement by the end of November, early December, depending upon the readiness of that strategy. There may be some minor slippage in that but we can come back to you with some greater specificity once that's solid in the minister's mind but he has made public that intent as far back as this budget and reinforced that in his address to the MCATSIA council - the Ministerial Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ministers - in July.

30 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Would you like to introduce yourself for the record?

35 **MR BUCKSKIN:** Yes, I'm Peter Buckskin. I'm sorry for being late. I'm the Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Education in DETYA.

THE COMMISSIONER: Could we start working through the submission and the list of questions, if you don't mind. That's probably the most orderly way to get through all the material you've given us. The first set of questions relate to actually Commonwealth funding.

40 **[Country Areas Program]**

DR ARTHUR: Do you want to start with the CAP?

45 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Yes, please. That might be the best place to start, if you can.

DR ARTHUR: Okay. I'll answer both the CAP but I'll also make a couple of more general points. Specifically on the Country Areas Program, it is distributed according to a formula. The formula is based on ABS data. It looks at student numbers in small settlements; that is to say population centres of less than 1000 and less than 5000. It also looks at student remoteness - distances of 100 kilometres, 150 kilometres and more than 150 kilometres from a larger town of 10,000 people - and gives an additional weighting to the more extreme conditions within each category. If you'd like the actual formula with weightings, we can certainly provide that.

So essentially what you have is a formula with a series of factors and weightings between those factors, into which is then fed ABS data, and that then produces a series of factors for the distribution of funding. Those factors can then be applied to the funds that are available. The funding goes to education authorities; that is to say to state governments, Catholic education commissions, associations of independent schools in the various states and territories. The formula works by dividing funding between states and between sectors within states, so at the end of this process you wind up with an allocation of funds to an individual sector within an individual state.

The formula has been in place basically since the start of the program in 1976. It was reviewed in 1996 by the Centre for Strategic Economic Studies at a Victorian university, at the same time as a number of other formulae in the target programs area were reviewed. The conclusion of the review was that the formula itself was basically sound, that the data it was using should be updated and, in company with all of the similar formulae, that we should always use the most recently available census data. However, there was also one refinement - that the formula should concentrate on student data rather than general population data - which changes were made in 1996.

The formula then has - we did it in 1996. The most recently available data was 1991 census data. Since then 1996 census data has become available and in 1999 the ligations were updated using 96 census data; ie exactly the same formula, just fed the most recent data into the formula. The way this program and a number of similar programs work is that the funds are made available to education authorities. The education authorities have discretion then to distribute the funds in accordance with broad Commonwealth guidelines.

Commonwealth guidelines specify the purposes for which the funds are to be used, specify the accountability requirements to satisfy the Commonwealth that the funds have indeed been allocated according to those requirements, and then the education authorities have discretion to allocate the funds, working on the overall philosophy that, so far as possible, it's important to separate out what are sensible

decisions to make at various levels, the assumption being that at a Commonwealth level it makes sense to make strategic decisions about the kinds of areas where you need to have priority for funding.

5 Increasingly we will be moving to making decisions at the central level - by collaboration but still ultimately taken at the Commonwealth level - of what kind of outcomes the funds are intended to achieve, but not attempting to take decisions at that level of - in detail - where or how the funds should be spent, or indeed the methods
10 that should be used to achieve particular outcomes on the basis that those are things which are not well made at a central point.

 Turning to the guidelines themselves, all the guidelines for this program and our other programs are available on the DETYA Web site.
15 They can be found in the school education area under the publications tab.

MR GREER: Chair, if you'd like, there's a copy of the review of the methodology that was conducted back in 96.

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thank you. I must say wherever we went we heard nothing but praise for CAP. It's extremely well received in country areas and is seen as meeting a very great need. There are comments, obviously, about the quantum but that's taken for granted. Do any of the
25 states or territories actually add their own funds to a pool for CAP or do they only administer Commonwealth funds?

DR ARTHUR: I would need to check. I think broadly the funds are the Commonwealth funds but it may well be the case that additional funds
30 are placed in there. Basically we don't know for certain.

THE COMMISSIONER: Right, okay. It seems that the states are able to define themselves what constitutes a country area school for the purposes of the CAP program but there's no Commonwealth definition.
35 One of the comments we received repeatedly in South Australia was that apparently, I think in 1998, the South Australian government redefined eligible schools so that they came close to doubling the number of eligible schools without increasing from their own resources the funding available. Is there any way in which the Commonwealth is
40 following this or do you take this up with the South Australian government?

DR ARTHUR: We do require under our guidelines for authorities to tell us the principles they use to distribute the funds, and also they are
45 required to inform us of the consultation arrangements they undergo. We do not specify the method they should use to allocate the funds, nor do we specify individual schools. The reason for that is that the data that is required to make fine-grain decisions between schools is, in

general terms, not available in a nationally consistent form. If you're talking about the kinds of information that, for example, South Australia uses to do its allocation, that data is not currently available in any national data sets.

5

In any case, it seems to us that decisions at that level are better made at that level. If you try and make a decision as to, within a particular education authority, what is the set of schools which are in greatest need for this form of funding - or indeed other forms of funding that come under targeted programs - that there is simply not a large amount of value-add to attempt to make those decisions centrally. They are simply better made within Commonwealth guidelines.

10

In terms specifically of the South Australian approach, they made a decision to use a mechanism known as a Griffiths Service Access Frame, which is in fact quite a fine-grained mechanism for allocating funds on quite a detailed data set, and that's entirely regarded as a decision which is appropriate for that government to make and justify as to the accuracy of that as an instrument for determining need.

15

20

THE COMMISSIONER: The criticism in South Australia is not the determination of need itself but the definition of what is "country" that apparently is now reaching into the Adelaide Hills in circumstances where very remote schools have had their CAP available funds cut by 50-60% apparently in the last 12 months. The Commonwealth hasn't felt the need to define what a country school is or a country area is for the purpose of the program?

25

30

DR ARTHUR: We use effectively a definition of what kinds of individuals represent factors to be included in a formula. However, our formula does not allow us to identify individual schools. We do not have a mechanism for linking precisely school enrolment to ABS census districts, so we don't have a mechanism ourselves which is nationally consistent for going down to the level of individual schools.

35

THE COMMISSIONER: Is there any restriction on states taking administration money out of the total CAP allocation?

40

DR ARTHUR: There is not a specific restriction on that, no.

THE COMMISSIONER: So essentially they can decide whether to take it and, if so, how much to take?

45

DR ARTHUR: That's within discretion, within the requirement that they have to use the funds for the purposes that are set out in the guidelines. If it became clear to us that their administration usage was being such that there would be a question that they were not allocating

the funds for the purposes for which it's been appropriated, that would be an issue which we could follow up. We do not attempt to apply at the moment any particular formula, largely I think because of our reservations about whether such formulae are actually going to be very helpful in deciding individual circumstances.

[10.25 am]

[Indigenous education funding]

THE COMMISSIONER: Does that apply across the board to funding programs from the Commonwealth to the states?

DR ARTHUR: In general I am not aware of particular restrictions, but I wouldn't be certain that there aren't any in any individual programs and certainly of the targeted programs per se we do not now impose particular requirements, but there may be other programs.

THE COMMISSIONER: This was a particular issue in relation to Aboriginal education funding in the Northern Territory.

DR ARTHUR: That is a different issue. There are two separate issues. One is administration requirements. For example, an educational authority may take the view that rather than distributing funds to individual schools they will provide some resources centrally and there will be costs in running those central resources. That may be called administration funds but it may be an appropriate, entirely sensible use of the funds. The issue in the Northern Territory is a different one. It is an issue of the on-costs that the central agencies in the Northern Territory charge for essentially their costs in the administration of funds, or the general Northern Territory costs, which is a slightly different issue.

MR GREER: The instance in the Northern Territory is specific I think, Mr Chair, to the IESIP program. It's an issue that we have in recent months been pursuing with the Northern Territory administration and in fact we have flagged with that administration that we will be reviewing specifically the on-cost levy of this program as we enter the 2001 to 2004 quadrennium arrangement for IESIP, so from the Commonwealth perspective we clearly have put the Northern Territory administration on notice of our intent in that regard.

I note that the Bob Collins review that was released earlier this week or last week has made specific recommendations to the Northern Territory administration and its Treasury to rescind the decision or the approach that it's taking in relation to IESIP there and, I understand, has observed that the treatment of that particular program is distinguishable in this sense from the treatment of other Commonwealth programs in that territory. This is a matter also that has attracted a good deal of scrutiny and attention through the

parliamentary process and we have given certain undertakings in that context to pursue this to the end.

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** There are no other areas, other programs, CAP or others, where similar issues arise as to IESIP in the Territory?

10 **MR GREER:** Certainly there are other programs in respect of which on-costs are levied, but certainly not to the degree that had been apparent in the Northern Territory. Look, I would need to confirm the figures, but I think when we looked at the average they were capped up to about 10%, I think it might have been.

MR BUCKSKIN: Yes. 12 might be the most.

15 **MR GREER:** Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: In other programs?

20 **MR BUCKSKIN:** In other programs.

MR GREER: In other programs nationally.

25 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Right, and from memory the IESIP NT levy was about 30%.

MR GREER: No, it was 41. I think it was 41% - 41.6%.

[Country Areas Program]

30 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks. Just going back to CAP - we just deviated a little bit from that - I think the question at the bottom of the first page, top of the second, you've answered indirectly: that there is no requirement for proportional distribution that the Commonwealth imposes.

35 **DR ARTHUR:** We do not specify, no.

THE COMMISSIONER: So the funds are calculated on the basis of the formula, then it's entirely up to the state or territory authorities to decide allocations.

40 **DR ARTHUR:** Indeed.

45 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Are there separate processes for government and non-government school allocations or do they go through a single CAP committee? How do they do it, do you know?

DR ARTHUR: It's going to vary. By and large our funds go to the individual education authorities, so they go separately to the education authorities and they distribute it. I don't think - actually, I'm not aware of any instance in a state or territory where there is a combined allocation
5 between the sectors. If so, I'll come back to you and correct that, but I'm not aware of any. As far as we are concerned, the formula operates uniformly across the sectors. The data simply goes in and the result is then the result for the individual sectors.

10 It is certainly the case that there are variations in the approaches between state and state and sector and sector. Some states take quite different approaches to how the funds are distributed. Some, as I understand it, have them on some submission basis, others according to formulae - a wide degree of variation in the distribution
15 practices between the states and territories and the education sectors within the states.

THE COMMISSIONER: The next question was the question of whether individuals can receive CAP funding.

20 **DR ARTHUR:** From the Commonwealth's point of view the funding goes, as we've said, to the education authorities. The funding would normally go to schools. It's certainly possible that particular individuals would benefit from that. I'm not aware of any circumstance where
25 individuals can place submissions before education authorities for funding. It's vaguely possible but I think it's unlikely.

THE COMMISSIONER: Certainly we haven't heard of any circumstances - a bit surprised that, in reading it, there may have been
30 the implication that it was - - -

DR ARTHUR: Yes. If it was an implication, it was an unintended implication of the language.

35 **[Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program]**

THE COMMISSIONER: Looking at IESIP, do the IESIP allocations work in the same way as CAP?

40 **MR BUCKSKIN:** Mr Chairman, the IESIP program is a legislative program and it has two components to it. It has the strategic recurrent assistance based on per capita, and it all depends whether you're a preschool, sector schooling, primary or secondary, or in the VET sector, or you're government or non-government. We then enter into a
45 bilateral agreement and, based on the national school census and, for those new providers, a statutory declaration and then reaffirmed by a school census the following year, we enter into an agreement with you in terms of your allocation.

5 Because when the Howard government first came in they said they didn't want anyone to be disadvantaged by the new arrangements, the new legislation, they had a transitional fund. That is, nobody was to get less than their funding in 1996. So we applied the per capita element and formula and then, on top of that, provided top-up funding to their 96 level, so no-one was disadvantaged, whether you be a government provider or non-government provider. Those state or territory providers, whether you're government or non-government, that, because of their per capita numbers, went over the 96 allocation - we went up to that per capita level of funding. So there are a number of providers, mainly government providers, that actually got major increases, literally \$4-5 million overnight, as a result of this legislative change.

15 There is another component. Once you've applied the per capita funding element, all the money that's left over is what we call strategic results money and it's strategic result recurrent money, where the minister under section 9 of the Act can apply that to any project that furthers the objects of the Act in terms of parity of outcomes for Indigenous Australians, educational outcomes, and that's essentially how it works in a sense.

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** What proportion or what quantity of funds is in that last category of federal ministerial discretion?

MR BUCKSKIN: At the moment I think it's around about 30 - up to \$30 million over the last two years. We'll confirm that.

30 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thank you. And that is just funded directly on a project-by-project basis rather than through the states and territories?

MR BUCKSKIN: Yes. It all depends on the per capita. The growth of the per capita certainly then leaves less money for strategic results projects. It's a capped program at the moment, under budget, and I think it's around about 120-plus dollars attached to it.

40 **THE COMMISSIONER:** So the more Indigenous kids appear in the schools, the less there is for the federal Minister to allocate, is basically how it works.

[Other Indigenous education funding]

45 **MR GREER:** Except that the strategy that the minister has announced and is pushing in relation to Indigenous education is in a sense to emphasise that Indigenous education is a mainstream issue and that it's the mainstream general recurrent and targeted funds of the Commonwealth that ought to be assisting those most disadvantaged. There is no group more disadvantaged educationally in this country

than the Indigenous students and, in that sense, that will be a feature that will be emphasised as we move into the 2001 to 2004 recurrent quadrennium: that Indigenous education is a mainstream issue.

5 The Commonwealth's intent will be reflected in that agreement
to the extent then that we have supplementary funding, which is the
IESIP and IEDA funding. What we're saying there is that that funding is
essentially there to accelerate the momentum in which we can close
those gaps of educational outcomes, and that's a major element of the
10 strategy that the minister is rolling out as part of the recognition that
Indigenous education clearly is an urgent national priority, and that has
largely been acknowledged by all state and territory education
ministers and their departments. There is tremendous goodwill and
cooperation in trying to make some significant and measurable
15 differences over the period of the next quadrennium to 2004.

MR BUCKSKIN: I think it's important to note that the IESIP program is
one of three programs the Commonwealth has for the supplementary,
the other being Abstudy and there being the direct assistance
20 programs, the IEDA programs that Tony just spoke about. They're there
to further those 21 goals of the AEP, which is the policy which auspices
what we do with those three programs across those four major themes
of Indigenous involvement in decision-making, the equality of access
and the equity of participation, and then the equitable and appropriate
25 levels of outcome.

So you bring into that parity of outcomes as with other
Australians and, in line with this government's approach to ensure that
this becomes, for some systems such as the Northern Territory
30 government, core business - because if one in three of your children is
Indigenous, surely it's got to be core business and not supplementary
or something that you do when you've got nothing better to do, in a
sense - and in terms of our response to the Collins review, our minister
has had a major interest in following and plans for making a major
35 response to the Collins review in terms of the 11 recommendations of
that review that have been referred to the Commonwealth for
consideration.

THE COMMISSIONER: The next set of questions actually go on to the
40 Quality Teacher Program. I just wanted to go back in your submission
for a moment if I may, though, to the Assistance for Isolated Children
scheme and funding. The probably major issue that's arisen there is the
question of nearest appropriate school for some of the travel
allowances that are provided.

45

[Country Areas Program – Queensland]

DR ARTHUR: Just before I do that, can I just go back a question and
supply some information: that in fact the CAP funding in Queensland, I

understand, isn't allocated collaboratively across all three sectors. It is one pool in Queensland.

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** It's one pool there, is it?

DR ARTHUR: Yes.

10 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks. Yes, because there's a state - I think they call it PCAP, don't they?

DR ARTHUR: Yes, they do.

15 **THE COMMISSIONER:** A committee in Queensland that covers the whole lot.

DR ARTHUR: Yes.

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** And that committee has government and non-government school representatives, I assume, on it.

DR ARTHUR: That's my understanding, yes.

25 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Do they have a notional break-up of the funds between them or do they compete on a statewide basis across systems?

30 **DR ARTHUR:** Certainly from our point of view they have a funds allocation to the sectoral level. How they then handle those funds, whether they then repool it and redistribute it, I don't know. I would need to investigate.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks very much.

[Assistance for Isolated Children]

35 **DR ARTHUR:** I think you asked a question about the nearest appropriate school.

40 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Yes, the "nearest appropriate school" definition that's used on occasions. There are two issues that have arisen in relation to that. One is one that I was familiar with, and that is the argument of government against non-government schools, where we actually have sometimes complaints coming in in dribs and drabs to the commission about allegations of religious discrimination, because if the nearest appropriate school is a government school and you want to
45 send your kid to a non-government school, particularly a religious denominational school, the assistance is not provided.

5 The second issue is where there are children who want to study some specialty area which is not available at the nearest high school, but that perhaps one or two high schools away that subject may be available as a specialty - particularly, interestingly enough, in the country ag science is not taught at every high school and farmers' children who are interested in doing ag science can't get the assistance to go two high schools away where they're specialising in it.

10 **DR ARTHUR:** Indeed.

THE COMMISSIONER: Have these questions of the definition of "nearest appropriate school" been examined at the Commonwealth level recently?

15 **DR ARTHUR:** There is certainly the issue of the definition of "appropriate" in the AIC guidelines. It's a subject of continual close examination in the Commonwealth, as an issue which is continually brought to our attention, so it receives ongoing scrutiny. The application of the definition is of course by state government
20 departments. The way the guidelines work is that for an application to be approved - and the applications are processed by Centrelink offices, not by DETYA. For that particular element to be satisfied, there has to be a determination by the state government department that the nearest school is not appropriate.

25 The reason for that is perfectly straightforward. It would be, I think - and governments have felt - inappropriate for a Commonwealth government department to make a decision as to whether or not a particular school run by another government was or was not
30 appropriate. The AIC itself is an unusual program in that it does actually sit in an interesting confluence of areas between state government and Commonwealth government responsibilities. State governments have responsibility for education and, with that responsibility, have an obligation, the primary obligation, to deliver our
35 international human rights obligations concerning education and children.

40 The obligation for providing universal free access to schooling is one which is primarily within our constitutional framework to be delivered by state and territory governments, so that the issues about whether or not schools exist in all areas of states and territories and provide appropriate education is primarily, as I say, an issue for state and territory governments. The AIC, however, provides from the Commonwealth level income support payments, which facilitates -
45 it does not obviously in any way dictate, but it facilitates cases where parents may choose to send their children to a school which is not the nearest school. Therefore, as I say, it sits in an interesting intersection between Commonwealth responsibilities and state responsibilities,

drawing on the Commonwealth power to pay income support but dealing with the issue of the universality of appropriate education.

5 Specifically on the definition of "appropriate", the policy guideline is based on the assumption that it is appropriate to step in and pay that form of income support where there is no appropriate education in the sense of fulfilling the basic requirements of education. It is not the intention of the payment to ensure that the education provided is the full education which an individual might desire. It is
10 designed to be responding to certain requirements for an appropriate education in the sense of an education which takes a person through to the completion of secondary school and the acquisition of an appropriate qualification at the end of secondary school. Therefore, the position that's explicit in the guidelines and is based on the underlying
15 policy decision of governments is that where there are particular subjects that a student may wish to take - and educational sciences are addressed often in correspondence to ministers, and a range of other subjects - that is not considered to be something which would justify the payment of a Commonwealth income support payment.
20

THE COMMISSIONER: Are there any subjects that would?

DR ARTHUR: The guidelines contain an overall definition of "appropriate" which essentially goes to that there must be a full range
25 of subjects which allow the acquisition of a secondary certificate, and there are details in the guidelines which I can refer to, but they're not intended, as I say, to deal with circumstances where students wish to take a particular type of subject which may or may not be available. It's not that it's not appropriate for them to do so, but that in that
30 circumstance it's not appropriate to take the further step of providing a Commonwealth income support payment.

THE COMMISSIONER: So if the measure is enabling them to complete secondary school, essentially that means that English is about the only
35 compulsory subject.

DR ARTHUR: Indeed.

THE COMMISSIONER: You see, the other area that was mentioned to
40 us was physics, the increasing numbers of country schools that are unable to teach physics.

DR ARTHUR: Well, the issue really is that they need to be able to
45 complete an appropriate secondary curriculum. It is not for the Commonwealth government to determine what an appropriate secondary curriculum is. Curriculum matters are definitely a state and territory government responsibility in that sense, for the individual

students. The Commonwealth may have some views in a more general policy sense.

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** But the guidelines would prevent a state from saying that, "We think it's appropriate that a child who wants to do agricultural science should be able to do it"?

10 **DR ARTHUR:** Well, I would need to look at the detail of the guidelines in terms of what a state or territory could or could not do. In broad terms, it is up to a state and territory government to determine what is an appropriate secondary curriculum. Were they to say that a particular form of curriculum is appropriate, then that would clearly be something which would need examination. I don't think they're going to say that about agricultural science as a general principle.

15 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Probably not. It's interesting though: it's about the only Commonwealth program I know which is an entitlement program where the discretion for eligibility to the entitlement is handed over to another authority. It puts you in a vulnerable situation.

20 **DR ARTHUR:** It is a very interesting program in that sense, and it is an unusual program in a number of ways, one of which ways is that it's not means-tested. Obviously, the basic boarding allowance element is not means-tested, I should say.

25 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks. I'll move on through the submission if I may.

30 **DR ARTHUR:** Question 3?

[Quality Teacher Program]

THE COMMISSIONER: I think we're at the end of - yes - the question about quality teacher programs.

35 **MR GREER:** Yes, Mr Chair. The guidelines for the implementation of the Quality Teacher Program have not yet been finalised. We have just completed a quite intensive process of national consultations across all states and territories and a number of major regional centres. However, in recognition of the differing needs and priorities between states and territories and between school education sectors in each state and territory, it is intended that the funding will be provided to education authorities in the states and territories on the basis of strategic submissions developed at that state/territory level. It's expected that

40 these submissions or these plans they will be bringing forward will specify which program or target groups are to be addressed and how this will be done.

45

5 The target groups for the program, as was indicated in the budget context, are teachers who completed their initial teacher education 10 years or more ago, casual teachers and teachers re-entering the workforce and, indeed, teachers who teach disadvantaged students, including Indigenous students, rural and remote students and students in urban and disadvantaged schools. It's expected that - well, it's not expected that every submission coming forward from a particular jurisdiction will necessarily cover off every element there, but as I say, the national consultations that have just completed were quite useful and we're in the throes of formalising those guidelines and getting a ministerial sign-off to them as a result of that. I'm happy to table also a copy of the discussion paper or the consultation paper that we used in that national round, if that would be of use.

15

[Cross-sectoral collaboration]

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thank you, yes. The next issue raised in our list is one that came up regularly, and that is cooperation between schools in different systems in a small rural community. The question we asked about is could DETYA use its funding role, but I'd be also keen to know if there are other ways in which DETYA is seeking to influence cooperation between systems.

25 **MR GREER:** Yes, certainly. Resource sharing is encouraged through the use of cross-sectoral committees for many of the programs, certainly in the schools area, and these committees include representatives of all school sectors which identify key projects for collaborative action. For example, under the National School Drug Education Strategy, a proportion of funding is allocated to states and territories on the basis of proposals that are developed and implemented by state coordinating committees; that is, the state government schools representatives, the independents and the Catholics.

35 Likewise, the professional development for our Discovering Democracy program is currently directed through one of these cross-sectoral committee structures. Similarly, the Full Service Schools program distributes funds according to recommendations of cross-sectoral state steering committees, cross-sectoral committees in the Full Service Schools area invite all schools, from government and Catholic and independent sectors, in an identified area to in fact work collaboratively to develop projects and assist students who are at high risk of not completing school.

45 Likewise, one of the models that was contained - or a preferred position that was contained in the consultation paper on the Quality Teaching Program indicated the Commonwealth's preference that that program, too, should operate in a cross-sectoral context such that

representatives of each of the sectors come together and look at how we might be able to get the biggest bang for the dollar in those jurisdictions.

5 Certainly, at the more local level you'll be aware that the government has recently announced the formation of a Youth Action Pathways Task Force, and the terms of reference for that body will be looking closely at how we can provide a more coordinated and cohesive and integrated delivery of services at a more local level.

10 **DR ARTHUR:** And I would suspect that the task force that South Australia is chairing, which we mentioned earlier, will, amongst other things, be considering examples of collaboration at the local level. I'd also note that the programs that Tony went through are all the more recently-created programs that we operate. So clearly we, like others, are having a heightened sensitivity to the importance of collaboration both in those cases at the state level - but through the mechanisms we have discussed - but I think there are a number of other mechanisms that are involved, including some of the initiatives that Minister
15 Anderson's department is pursuing in terms of rural areas: the issue of collaboration across sectors, across agencies and across, indeed, Commonwealth-state boundaries is clearly going to be of increasing
20 interest.

25 The difficulty as always will be to define models of cooperation that are not unique to the local circumstances and to draw out of those models at least principles which can then be used to disseminate in a best practice sense. On that front I'd mention that one of the things in the implementation of the Full Service Schools program that we want to
30 do which already at the state level works cross-sectorally is to examine carefully which projects work, and we have some specific national projects designed to draw out the best-practice examples and disseminate those examples more widely.

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Do you know of any example of a Commonwealth capital grant that has been given to provide a facility to schools across systems?

40 **MR GREER:** Not off memory, because the capital - my understanding - and I'll certainly double-check that, but the legislation provides discrete channelling of funds in the capital area to government and non-government. We have a capital program of some \$300 million per annum, of which about \$215 million is annually pushed through to state government school authorities and about \$85 million, I think it is,
45 through the non-government, and the mechanisms there are somewhat different.

5 Through the non-government area there are block grant
authorities, who look at the allocation of those funds and it's not
inconceivable - and I'll check on this for you - that there may in fact be
projects that are funded through block grant authorities that have, if not
complete cross-sectoral in the sense of government and
non-government, then maybe cross-sectoral within the non-government
sector from the independents, Catholic systemics and non-systemics.

[10.56 am]

10

DR ARTHUR: To respond to the specific line in the question, my view
would be that it would probably be an ineffective mechanism to try and
use the guidelines at the national level for funding programs as the
mechanism for encouraging collaboration. Turning it the other way, it
15 certainly would be important to look at guidelines to make sure there
were no impediments in the guidelines to cooperative things
happening, and that's something which I think would be productive to
look at.

20

But assuming that there are no such impediments, placing
things at the quite remote level of the Commonwealth guideline which
is designed to delegate funds to a sector within a state and use that as
a mechanism for encouraging collaboration I suspect is going to be
inefficient. You are much better off to concentrate on other
25 mechanisms, including discussion, liaison and the kind of contacts that
we regularly have both generally and in individual programs to work
within a philosophy of encouraging collaboration.

30

THE COMMISSIONER: I take your point. The issue I think is one of
impediments, whether there are existing impediments. I appreciate that
more often than not the lack of collaboration arises from theology,
ideologies, systems protection. But certainly one of the issues raised is
the flexibility or inflexibility of funding formulas. For example, we have
seen circumstances where a shared capital infrastructure, whether it is
35 a library or a gymnasium or something, would be possible in a town but
the schools individually are too small to justify the degree of
expenditure.

40

The other area where I have particularly got concerns is that
we constantly get comments made to us that for Years 9 to 12 students,
where there are opportunities for subject choice within curricula, in fact
the numbers of the kids in a school doesn't justify choice, and yet you
may have two high schools in a town that would have double the
numbers if they were prepared to teach one subject in one school and
45 another in the other and swap their kids around. Again it's in these
areas where they say, "Well, neither state nor government schools are
funded to provide subjects for kids from the other system and neither of
us is funded to provide a library for the other system." I don't know to

what extent these comments about financial obstacles are excuses or whether they are actually real impediments that exist in fact.

5 **DR ARTHUR:** Yes, and indeed whether the impediments exist in Commonwealth guidelines or whether they exist in the financial accountabilities of state administrations, or indeed particular schools who have particular accounting requirements.

10 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Certainly not all, obviously, but a number of the problems that exist in rural education could be addressed by closer cooperation between systems without, I think, in any way compromising the integrity of the separate systems approach.

15 **DR ARTHUR:** Indeed.

[Transport funding]

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** The next question was just a short one of home-school transport arrangements. So far as we're aware, except for AIC, there is no Commonwealth role in transport?

DR ARTHUR: That's a short answer - no.

MR GREER: Unless there's anything in the IESIP area.

25 **DR ARTHUR:** That's true.

MR GREER: I know we do provide capital grants there for school buses and things.

30 **MR BUCKSKIN:** Yes. Under IESIP in the capital area we do provide transport, the trip carriers, buses, etcetera, for non-government schools.

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Right. So it's a direct allocation.

MR BUCKSKIN: Direct allocation to that school through their bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth.

40 **DR ARTHUR:** I might make a general comment. There is a difference between the overall approaches between the broad range of our activities and the Indigenous education area, and that has to do with constitutional differences. In terms of education of the programs like CAP we are dealing with potentially our power to make payments for particular purposes, whereas with the Indigenous there are some
45 specific responsibilities and there are a number of quite fundamental differences in approach between the two areas.

[Defining equity]

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks. The next questions go to the Adelaide Declaration.

5 **DR ARTHUR:** Yes. The Adelaide Declaration certainly is not the kind of document which has the footnotes referring to the definition section at the back; it is, like many of those documents, a broad statement of purpose, and the words used are used with an assumption that the broad community understanding of the words is the broad
10 understanding of the words. The meaning of words like "socially just" will essentially become apparent as one moves beyond the path of defining performance indicators, defining levels of achievement and defining how one measures those performance indicators.

15 So, no, I would not think we will have a precise understanding now of what is a socially just education; we certainly will have within the context of the Australian community a broad understanding of what we expect the Australian community would assume that means. The content of it will be determined by such things as - when one is
20 particularly dealing with particular subgroups what expectations are put in place for the performance of those groups, and that will be a process we'll work through. In some cases it will make sense to talk in terms of equal outcomes, in other cases it may not.

25 **[Students with disabilities]**

Students with disabilities are a particularly interesting area in terms of how you define them. It's an interesting one where you need to make sure that what you do is appropriate to the group, particularly taking account of the extremely heterogenous nature of that group. For
30 example, in the area of literacy and numeracy, the overall mechanism we are using is a national standard and an expectation that all students will meet that standard. There are going to be some children who will not meet that standard, and you need to find mechanisms within an outcomes framework which will address those students, providing an
35 incentive for a socially just outcome, but also avoiding a situation which leads to stereotyping and stigmatisation.

One possible approach would be to work in terms of improvement over time, but taking into account the extremely
40 heterogenous nature of students with disabilities, that some form of baseline and then targets for improvement over that baseline is one way of looking at it. Another way of looking at it is in terms of reduction of gap. That's by way of example, but in the broad we will define the meaning of "socially just" by the processes of the targets that we set,
45 and with the metering of those targets, and the consultation processes which we will undergo to test those against broad community understandings.

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** I think the target development approach is a very positive one, going back to your comment earlier about the right to education and what concerns we had about the rights of the child. More generally is that they're general statements and we don't have any benchmarking or target-setting at all.

DR ARTHUR: Indeed.

10 **THE COMMISSIONER:** So it's very positive to see that that will occur in the education sector at least.

15 **DR ARTHUR:** Indeed. We do see that as part of a fundamental shift in the Commonwealth approach to equity in schooling. That shift is yet to be fully articulated but certainly seeing it in terms of attempting to specify sensible expectations of all Australian schools and sensible expectations of what Australian schools will deliver to all those students, we increasingly are seeing as being a major driver of the Commonwealth's equity agenda in schools.

20 **[Indigenous education]**

25 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks. The next few sets of questions actually move into a couple of particular areas, and starting with Indigenous education could I ask first the general question: that the objective has been set of eliminating, I think the expression has been "inequitable differences" in outcome by 2004. Is that a realistic objective?

30 **MR GREER:** No. I think what we have said is - certainly from the minister's point of view, he has indicated that he would like to see significant and measurable closure of the outcomes gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous by the end of the next quadrennium which is a bit different to saying we're going to achieve an equitable - or parity by the end of that period but we should be able to demonstrate some measurable closure, some significant closure of those quite major gaps. From the Minister's point of view he has indicated that securing educational equality essentially requires attention to three key features: access, participation and the achievement of equitable and appropriate outcomes.

40 He takes the view that in the past there has been a necessary emphasis on access and participation but in his view an insufficient focus on achieving educational outcomes. And now that we have measures, particularly in the literacy and numeracy area, you've got those benchmarks there and you can in fact see the gaps in the Year 12 retention, something over 70% for students generally, 32% for
45 Indigenous kids. It's across a range of measures that we're hoping to bring a new educational outcomes focus to the negotiations of our next set of quadrennial agreements, both in relation to mainstream funding and in relation to our supplementary funding.

5 What this year's budget did was in fact provide on the
supplementary front funding for a five-year period, which will enable us
to extend the current IESIP triennium into 2000 but importantly then to
align our supplementary IESIP and funding for the period 2001 to 2004
with the same quadrennium for our mainstream quadrennium funding
arrangements which will give us the capacity to leverage one off the
other and try, as I say, and measurably close those gaps over that
period. But that falls a little bit short of actually saying we're going to
10 have equal outcomes at the end of that period.

MR BUCKSKIN: The AEP, as you know, was established in 1989
under the first Hawke government, and clearly they saw a decade
before them to the year 2000 to see whether they could actually
15 achieve this goal. Clearly we've changed, since the introduction of the
policy, from single digit to double digit retention rates; still there is a
widening of the gap. The only reason why in some sense it has closed
is because for non-Indigenous Australians also the retention levels
have dropped, which is why there has been a bit of a closure. So
20 there's still lots of work to be done in terms of achieving that goal. But
we believe that we will be able to make demonstrable, measurable
closures of that gap at a certain percentage level over the next four
years. Certainly parity won't come into it for a whole range of
Australians - we just have to look at the level of literacy and numeracy
25 outcomes that have been identified by the literacy survey.

THE COMMISSIONER: Certainly the achievement of outcomes in
literacy, numeracy and other areas is important when - as is the case,
we find large numbers of Indigenous children completing primary
30 school with at best rudimentary skills in literacy and numeracy. But
there are still access and participation issues as well, particularly in the
area of secondary education in large parts of rural Australia where
there are significant Indigenous populations. Does the Commonwealth
have a view on how secondary education should be provided to these
35 students or is this something that is left entirely to the states?

MR BUCKSKIN: Clearly we identify through these bilateral agreements
areas that we are very much interested in, like preschool education or
secondary access. As Tony pointed out, there has been an increase in
40 access but there's still a significant number of people having no access
to even preschool education, especially in the Northern Territory.
There's a growing number of children who have access to no
secondary education, and I am sure there are literally thousands of
children who are not identified in the system at all, who are not
45 participating in any educational service provided by a government or
non-government provider.

Our bilateral agreements are trying to tackle that, to get them to try to put in place either tracking systems, etcetera, to try to identify where these children are, and to work out the strategies and get them back into the system to identify what level of need there is in terms of preschool education and where there aren't preschool education provisions, and plan to try and address that. It does take some time because you're dealing with state and territory bureaucracies.

THE COMMISSIONER: In the Northern Territory a number of communities that we went to, the people actually used the expression, "Our kids have no right to secondary education." The Territory model is to provide the high schools in the major towns only and have boarding school facilities attached only to high schools in Darwin and Alice, and a small hostel that the kids can't get into in Katherine. The people in the Territory are arguing strongly that if we're going to get secondary education for Aboriginal kids, it needs to be provided on a decentralised model more in the communities or with short-term residential periods. Does the Commonwealth enter that debate? Do you talk to the Territory about how to achieve a right to secondary education for children?

MR GREER: The debate is a live debate, and one would hope, certainly the Commonwealth level as well, that the recent tabling of the Collins report will in fact - and the Territory's response to that, which I understand is to be within a month, will in fact identify what direction we should be moving to in this area. As Peter had mentioned early, Minister Kemp is taking a close personal interest in the Collins report, particularly the 11-odd recommendations in respect of the Commonwealth, but the sea change that generally will have.

MR BUCKSKIN: Clearly in the Northern Territory there's heaps to do. They are clearly the most disadvantaged Indigenous Australians in terms of access in the preschool and secondary areas, and on any indicator as well - and we clearly welcome the Collins review because we think there is now a strategic plan to turn that around, and what we're looking for, I suppose, from the Northern Territory government is, "In our five-year response over a 21-year period that Collins has been talking to us about, what will you immediately you do over the next five years?"

Because - as Tony talked about - our budget this year goes to the year 2004, we think that we will be able to assist them with our current outlay in terms of IESIP and making sure that's targeted to addressing the Collins review. Also what we can do with the direct assistance programs, how better we can actually manage those in terms of the dollars that we provide the Northern Territory, to ensure that they can also address some of the recommendations about preschool education and about secondary access because we actually

have, as you know, a network of field officers attached to this department who work throughout the Northern Territory.

5 We actually do have a lot of anecdotal evidence and
information about what's not occurring in terms of educational access,
and in terms of the quality a lot of children are accessing - in terms of
the quality of teachers, the quality of teacher appointments, the length
of time that teachers spend in communities that are within the schools
is becoming a real issue. It has been identified by Collins as a real
10 issue. He talks about individual schools that literally have had 26 or so
temporary relief teachers through them, or one child having nine
different teachers in a term, things like that. We have some real
difficulties.

15 Through our anecdotal evidence, a lot of our field staff when
they go annually, or every term, to negotiate an ATAS tutorial package
with a school, they're dealing with new people. So in terms of
understanding the profile of the child, you're getting someone new all
the time that doesn't understand the child, doesn't know the child
20 because they've just come into the school that term, so our ability to
ensure that our program is targeted in terms of the learning outcomes
we wish to achieve is hindered somewhat. So the territory really has to
put in place a strategy to ensure that there is a consistent approach,
and a quality approach, to the teacher appointment and the support of
25 teachers while they're there, so that teachers will want to stay because
they believe they can get support to do the teaching which is required.

THE COMMISSIONER: Another issue raised with us by, in fact, some
of the school staff is increased flexibility in school years and
30 timetabling. So for example it was said that in some communities they
find that the attendance rate of Indigenous kids is higher in the wet
season because the kids tend to stay in town and then go bush for the
dry season. Sometimes it's the reverse, that attendance is higher in the
dry season because transport is possible and in the wet it's not. And
35 yet the school is currently inflexible to allow - for example,
concentrating six months worth of schooling and then six months of no
schooling - our schools don't do that. Is the Commonwealth
encouraging the states and territories, and if so, how, to look at more
flexible arrangements on an individual school basis to try and adapt
40 school timetables, school years and calendars to attendance for kids
more successfully?

MR BUCKSKIN: We have monitoring arrangements in place for every
recipient of IESIP between the Northern Territory Education
45 Department that receives a package of around \$10 million. I mean, to
encourage people to teach cultural and linguistic diversity you need to
understand the individual child and the communities which you're
working in. If they have ceremonies or cultural needs which don't fit into

the calendar school year, well, maybe we need to have a look at that, but we don't have the authority under the constitution to direct that, but we ask them to think about those issues. That's going right back again to the individual learner.

5

But if you have so many thousands of children in your school and they're either Aranda or they're Pitjantjatjara or whatever, Warlpiri people, and they have a whole range of different ceremonial duties across different parts of the year - some are common, or there are geographical things like the wet season and dry season - you think one would, as an educational provider, try to cater for that need. I suppose in terms of the access participation they're the issues that we raise all the time; the inability to get better outcomes in terms of the goals that they set, the performance of the code they set, the attendance goal, the access goal - you know attendance and retention and completion goal.

Clearly there are some of those physical factors in the structure of the school year that would impact upon that, because of those cultural or geographical things that impact upon children's ability to attend. They have been ongoing issues I think that we have, certainly with the Northern Territory, but with other states like the North-West of Western Australia, the Kimberley - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: Northern Queensland as well.

25

MR BUCKSKIN: Northern Queensland, Thursday Island, etcetera. They're ongoing questions that we would put forward in terms of looking at those educational outcomes, but that's in a sense all we can do - is to raise it clearly as something that's impacting upon their ability to achieve better educational outcomes.

30

MR GREER: One other dimension of this, as I mentioned earlier, is that the minister will shortly be announcing a literacy, numeracy and attendance strategy. In the context of jurisdictions wishing to participate in that strategy, he shares, I think with Bob Collins, his concern and passion over this issue of attendance, and we will be looking at what leverage we have within the announcement of that new strategy to be looking for greater flexibility and what have you to increase patterns of attendance across schools, not only in the territory but otherwise. But it's not just that strategy. We are currently in the process of conducting a review of our IEDA program which has the ASSPA, the ATAS and VEGAS elements, and we'll be looking at refocusing, getting a sharper focus on those elements again to literacy, numeracy and attendance.

35

40

I have a copy of the discussion paper, which I will leave with you, for that review which has just started, and we will be looking to bring a much sharper focus in how we apply funding and approve projects there: what are the demonstrable links back to literacy,

45

numeracy and, importantly, attendance? Clearly project proponents who are addressing those head-on are going to have - perhaps be more optimistic about Commonwealth funding in this area. So we will be coming at trying to address this issue of attendance in a
5 multidimensional way, not just through the strategy per se but also through our mainstream funding, through our supplementary funding and so forth. It really will be the lever or the focus which we want to try and activate, to get some closure of those gaps by the end of 2004.

10 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Certainly I think a multidimensional approach, as you put it, is necessary and it needs to be a local community approach because factors on attendance or non-attendance will vary so much.

15 **MR GREER:** That's quite apparent in the discussion paper that we'll drop with you. You know, how do we engage parents, communities, elders, to get the kids into school and keep them there? It is that grassroot involvement, and we haven't got that - we haven't got the strategy.

20 **DR ARTHUR:** With an overall framework of what you want to do is specify where you want to get to, not specify how but certainly highlight some elements of good practice, and make sure that you have the mechanisms available so that someone has something like flexibility
25 which works, that that can become known.

THE COMMISSIONER: Queensland has moved a little bit through what they call the cool schools program, which is changing the actual times of the school day but there has been no discussion, except at the local
30 school level, about changing the school year. I thought there may have been industrial reasons for that but it doesn't seem to be the case. It just seems to be that the statewide educational authorities have never got around to looking at it - as best I can guess.

35 **DR ARTHUR:** School years in a purely anecdotal sense have often been the most tightly interested things of - well, the people haven't - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: Well, the teachers say that you can't expect the kids to attend school when they're not in town when school is on. It
40 seems to be self-evident.

MR BUCKSKIN: It's a strong feature in Collins as well.

THE COMMISSIONER: Sorry, I'll just move back to the questions I've
45 actually got on the sheet rather than my interjections. Where are we at?

MR BUCKSKIN: Sorry, in answer to the question, "Is this the test in terms of outcomes, access or a combination of both?" yes, it is. I think it's a combination of a whole range of things because they're just looking at it in terms of educational outcomes under the policy as
5 parity, which is important, but there's a whole range of other areas where they have to report on. It clearly is access, there's attendance, there's retention, there's professional development of staff, there's the employment of Indigenous staff, both at professional and
10 para-professional. So teaching, education, leadership.

In terms of professional development, people have to report on the levels of professional development, and all other people at that professional level or para-professional level have access to - and in relation to Indigenous staff, do they have the same level of access to
15 that professional development? If so, what are the outcomes? What areas is it in - literacy, numeracy, behavioural management? Is it curriculum planning? I mean, there's a whole range of things that people have to report on with professional development.

In terms of the employment of staff, they have to give us a clear set of targets on increasing Indigenous staff across the broad spectrum of professions within the education profession itself, and a culturally-inclusive curriculum in other areas where they have to talk
20 about the introduction of Indigenous studies across the curriculum perspectives, or stand-alone Indigenous studies. Most states and most educational providers are clearly - all the government systems do have a very strong cross-cultural perspectives program, and some have a very specific Indigenous studies program.

There are some states that have Year 12 Senior Assessment Board-type - like the Board of Studies, New South Wales, Aboriginal studies Year 12 programs, in which people will start sitting for exams over the coming weeks. So there's a whole range of other things that educational providers have to report on. That doesn't mean if you're the
25 smallest provider, you don't, or you're the biggest provider - everyone reports on the same categories which I spoke about. They clearly have different targets and different time lines for that.

But every educational provider is approached to enter into a bilateral agreement where they have to report on performance indicators and targets against those particular areas. There's a rigorous assessment in terms of the monitoring of those assessments, and at
40 the end of the year the provider is given a report, in a sense of how you - from our perspective, on how we think you have gone, and things we think you need to change in the near future.
45

THE COMMISSIONER: By "providers", do you mean the state Education Department?

5 **MR BUCKSKIN:** The Education Department. We have over 177 IESIP agreements across a whole range of schools. We have the big 16 which we talk about through the state education authorities, the state TAFEs and the state Catholic systems. Then we enter into a whole range of systems with Lutheran systems, with Anglican systems, with Christian school groups, with a whole range of independent Aboriginal preschools, a whole range of Aboriginal community schools, which I understand you visited when you were in the Kimberley, which are 10 totally funded in a sense by the Commonwealth and strongly supported by IESIP. IESIP clearly isn't supplementary. If you were to withdraw the IESIP funding from those community schools that you visited in the Kimberley, they would cease tomorrow.

15 [11.26 am]

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** The next question looks on four identified areas of continuing disadvantage for Indigenous students, and we ask whether there have been measures initiated to address each of the causes that have been identified.

25 **MR BUCKSKIN:** Yes. This goes on from what I was just talking about; that under our bilateral agreements we do have all those areas which have to look at accommodating students' cultural needs in terms of culturally-inclusive curriculum, which talks about the values and backgrounds. I mean, we really are on about teaching cultural and linguistic diversity, and we really get in, when we're monitoring this, about people demonstrating to us the types of strategies they actually 30 have adopted at the system level to implement some of those culturally-inclusive curriculum issues, about the cross-cultural experiences that you're providing to staff so they have an opportunity to go to cross-cultural training programs that are developed by, we hope, the local community in conjunction with educational systems or their educational provider.

35 We've really talked about access. We know where preschool access is, we know where it's not, and we asked people to extend that and we set targets about extending your preschool access. But you need to understand that preschool education isn't compulsory in lots of 40 states, so therefore you really can't in isolation blame the provider for not increasing it, because there are some parents, as we know, that do not wish to let go of their kids until the compulsory year of schooling because they don't think very much of the educational service which is being provided, or their own personal experiences of it limit them in 45 terms of their understanding of what's being offered to date and therefore they hold back.

5 A lot of parents tell us that they actually don't want to let go of their kid because they're moving into what is really much an assimilationist environment and they like to hang on to their kid to ensure that their culture and the language and family values are being instilled as long as they possibly can before they start being influenced by the dominant society that this kid would go to.

10 In terms of a limited access to services, we have been able to, through IESIP, provide most schools that you visited a whole range of community independent schools. The strength of the AEP is that it is quite diverse, it's very flexible. Once schools have got state registration we can enter into an agreement immediately to provide them with IESIP dollars which in the main is used for the employment of staff and the development of curriculum.

15 In terms of English not being the first language, clearly under the AEP goal 17 talks about the support and the maintenance of Indigenous languages and that's again the strength of the AEP. It is very flexible, and we push that home to a whole range of people where clearly the school or the system that has a whole range of Indigenous languages which are alive and well - and we know they are - we seek strong commitment and clarification on what they are doing in terms of the maintenance of that language and the teaching of that language.

20 In terms of dealing with poverty and ill health, we have entered into a whole range of research under the strategic results projects with the Menzies School of Health, with the Board of Studies in New South Wales about having come up with the educational and teaching strategies of children with otitis media, middle ear infection. We've entered into a major program with Menzies School of Health under the SRP to do a testing of a thousand children in the Northern Territory, and we're very much alarmed with the outcomes of that in terms of where the kids are, in terms of their educational disadvantage, because most of them could not hear. The Collins review also talks about a school where 90% of the children went; did not have an eardrum, and therefore needed auditory equipment. So we're trying to address that.

25 In terms of self-esteem and dealing with wider issues, again we're entering into some research further about that, and clearly involving people like ATSIC, talking with our colleagues in health and aged care, especially with the Office of Indigenous Health, about how they can come on board to address these issues. Dr Kemp is very much interested not in the rhetoric but actually the examples of what you will do in a school. Like, for example, what would we do in that school where there's 900 kids? What could I do? What can I do with those 1,000 kids that have been identified as a problem? What can IESIP do, what can the Commonwealth do, what can our relationship

with Health and Aged Care, with Hearing Australia - a Commonwealth authority?

5 What can we do, and what are we doing, to ensure that we can
look after not just those 1,000 but have a strategy to ensure that all
children that are entering school are tested for hearing and there is an
ongoing maintenance of screening and of effort and that we're
engaging educational authorities to actually have a professional
development program for teachers (1) to identify the problem, but then
10 to teach to that level of disadvantage in the classroom and what type of
equipment do we need.

MR GREER: In responses systemically and responses actually
practically in the classroom - they're the types of discussions and
15 processes we're going through and should be able to be unveiled in the
forthcoming release of the minister's strategy.

THE COMMISSIONER: So these issues of culture and health will be
20 part of the numeracy attendance program?

MR GREER: Yes. They go to the heart of responses.

MR BUCKSKIN: We've spent \$13 million worth of projects that's just
about to report to the Commonwealth, and they've come up with - the
25 coordinating evaluation group that oversaw that work said there were
three major pillars to achieving success. One is the culture, to actually
understand the culture of the school or the culture of the environment in
which these kids learn. There's clearly the participation issue, "If you
don't turn up, you ain't going to learn anything." It doesn't matter how
30 good the culture is. It really is the skill of the teacher and the skill of the
people that are involved in the teaching and learning that's going on,
and if you don't have those three pillars all working together in one,
you're not going to achieve a learning outcome for Indigenous kids.

35 We have concrete examples in remote and rural areas, as well
as urban metropolitan areas, where there are a whole range of projects
which identified a whole range of - what would you call them?

MR GREER: Critical success factors.

40 **MR BUCKSKIN:** Critical success factors - that if you were to replicate
those you would achieve success, and at least 60% or 70% of our SRP
projects under that \$13 million - or \$12.7 million - were spent in the
remote and rural parts of Australia.

45 **MR GREER:** In a sense that's what gives Minister Kemp the confidence
that there can be some significant and measurable closure of these
learning outcome gaps. Of course exercises like the SRP - the strategic

results projects - have demonstrated that there is in fact a critical mass of good teaching practice and other initiatives, that if we can mainstream and sustain that, it can lead to demonstrable success, and he's quite passionate about that.

5

THE COMMISSIONER: The last paragraph on that page refers to the question about equality of outcomes. I think there's an almost exclusive focus on ESL. This is perhaps our interpretation of what you're saying. The reason why we're asking the question is are we accurately describing the thrust of the approach of the department?

10

MR BUCKSKIN: No. My view, Mr Chairman, is no, you're not. I think we need to understand that the ESL approach to address the outcomes is one of many methodologies; a system where a provider can adopt to again address that cultural and linguistic diversity of that child and that particular school. The SRPs look at a whole range of projects, and some of those are cross-sectoral. In the Kimberleys it was the Catholics, the education system and the independent community school sector all working together across nine or 10 sites, looking at ESL students and the types of methodologies that one would adopt to get an Australian standard English outcome.

15

20

There are a whole range of other projects which we clearly have identified that, again, if those critical success factors were a part of teaching practice - and a lot of it just isn't good teaching practice or innovative; it is just normal practice - if you get this, you could probably get success. We think that this (indistinct) good and we describe it as innovative because it is outside the norm that we've experienced. The norm is that Indigenous kids do not reach the benchmark, or they don't reach any standard, and there is expectation that they will not do that.

25

30

So the focus here is that, yes, the government did introduce - and Dr Kemp was our schools minister in the first Howard government - an Indigenous ESL program. Again it was more or less to look at the methodology that's being adopted, the success that clearly I think other people - migrants, etcetera - are achieving under the ESL mainstream program, and to see whether that type of methodology - if you apply the same criteria, would Indigenous Australians achieve the same level of outcome. Why can a kid from China come here and learn to speak and read and write at an okay level after probably a year in this program? We have children 12 years in school or seven years in school where they don't get anywhere. That was really the question he wanted answered, and we tried to do that.

35

40

45

MR GREER: I think the answer here is yes and no - yes, it is an accurate assessment that the Commonwealth's approach to equality is really going to have a strong outcomes focus; no, it's not just going to concentrate on ESL. There'll be a menu or a range of activities, but as

we mentioned earlier there will be an increasing focus on improvement of educational outcomes through the alignment of success factors that we know, that have been demonstrated, that can work in like circumstances, and that's what the Commonwealth, if it is prepared to put, in a blunt sense, its money behind.

DR ARTHUR: The emphasis on ESL I suspect is partly an artefact of the submission construction. The submission is constructed around named programs. There happens to be a named program on ESL. However, that's not intended to provide an appropriate weight in terms of the strategy. The document that will describe overall what the Commonwealth strategy is towards achieving these outcomes is the one that the minister will announce a little later this year.

THE COMMISSIONER: You mentioned there that the question about Indigenous languages is one of the AEP priority areas. I assume the Commonwealth is involved in Indigenous language teaching principally through IESIP. Are there other areas of Commonwealth activity where the Commonwealth is supporting Indigenous language retention in schools, of teaching in schools?

MR BUCKSKIN: The Commonwealth through ATSIC has a community languages program - I forget the acronym or the actual name of the program. It came out of the Australian languages policy where you go into the community and you develop community languages, and when we were at DEETYA we passed that responsibility over to ATSIC because we saw that as very much a community organisation and an Aboriginal community needed to own the development and the revival of languages.

What we try to promote for educational providers is that once that language - and there are literally dozens of these language centres around Australia - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: And some very good ones, too, that I've been in.

MR BUCKSKIN: And some very good ones, yes - is to engage them, that local school or that educational provider, to develop and show some leadership in terms of sponsoring partnerships between that. So the schools, etcetera, can work with those languages that are being revived and developed and getting curriculum writers to put that into some type of syllabus that then can be delivered in a structured way within that local school.

There are a number of schools that you probably saw in the Northern Territory under the government sector that actually have language centres in the school, where they do develop the vernacular

5 as part of the bilingual approach which they had as a policy in the Northern Territory. Again, that bilingual approach is part of the Collins review and they will respond in like. But we have a strong view that to ignore the bilingual methodology is really at your own peril in terms of the way you are going to gain an educational outcome and in terms of your shift to Australian standard English.

10 Clearly international and Australian research has shown that if people are skilled in their first language, they'll transfer into their new language over a much quicker period of time. How you do that, in terms of the methodology that's adopted, is an issue for that provider. I think the Northern Territory department has to have a real close look about the methodology they adopt and what they call a bilingual program.

15 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Is IESIP money used to actually fund some of the language development work within the schools?

20 **MR BUCKSKIN:** I'm sure it would be. We enter into bilateral agreements on outcomes and we actually don't worry about the process. We do get to talk about some of the processes when we think they're not reaching their target, and we ask questions why, and then we talk to the system again in terms of culturally-inclusive curriculum - "You said you were going to maintain the level of Aboriginal languages to do across a number of sites, and introduce them into four others, and why hasn't that occurred, because that was the target that you set?"

30 Then that's how we gather the evidence or our knowledge of what a system is trying to do. We actually don't go in and say, "Here's your \$10 million, and we're going to break that \$10 million up into these 33 projects, and this is what you have to do. It adds up into \$10 million." But clearly I think in the future we're going to take a more keener interest to ensure that that money's driving our literacy, numeracy and attendance outcomes, because we see those as critical foundations for learning.

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** You wouldn't see bilingual education as being contrary to those objectives?

40 **MR BUCKSKIN:** Absolutely not. It's very much teaching the cultural linguistic diversity. If you don't acknowledge that, well, then you're not letting down just an Indigenous kid, you're letting any kid down. I think it's just a foundation of teaching and learning that all educators need to adopt if they're going to be in the classroom.

45 **[Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers]**

THE COMMISSIONER: Aboriginal and Islander education worker is another which is mentioned on 42, yes.

MR BUCKSKIN: That was a pilot program under the - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: AVTS - Australian Vocational Traineeship - - -

5 **MR BUCKSKIN:** - - - Australian Vocational Traineeship Foundation,
and we thought it was very successful. It was one of the most
expensive projects out of that particular program, and we trialed it in, I
think, around about three states - Queensland, South Australia and
10 Western Australia - and part of the agreement for states to come on
board is that they had to pick up the traineeships in their recruitment
processes for Aboriginal and Islander education workers in their state
or territory.

15 One of the good outcomes of this is that the competency
standards that we developed in this program are clearly being
implemented as benchmarks, and have assisted people in terms of new
industrial agreements with their employer because it talked about,
"These are the competencies you've got to have," and it helped people
20 establish a career path for some of these people that came in as a
teacher aide, and I think it legitimised that an Aboriginal and Islander
education worker is just not a teacher assistant or assistant to a
teacher in a science lab or in any classroom. They actually have
specific competencies and skills, counselling, involvement with the
community; some have educational skills today.

25 Some have got degrees and diplomas or certificates, but they
choose to be an educational worker because of the status of the
profession of this group of people in the profession - educational
industry in a sense - and there is in most states now an appropriate
30 industrial award that covers these people, and this work that came out
of that traineeship assisted I think many systems or the three systems
to negotiate better career paths for these people because they
understood the competency and therefore a better deal, and with say
the union when it came to negotiating future industrial arrangements for
35 them.

MR GREER: This was one of a suite of Indigenous AVTS projects that
were commissioned back, I think, in 1993. I recall that most, if not all, of
40 those have been formally evaluated. I'll undertake to chase that up, and
if this was in fact one of those that went through the formal evaluation,
to provide the outcome of that to you.

[Abstudy; Batchelor College]

45 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks. Just a couple of issues about training
of education personnel, more than just education workers as a distinct
category, but particularly assisting education workers and others to
obtain full teaching qualifications. We've received a lot of comment in
different parts of the country about, first, the success of training

programs that have people principally living and working within their own communities and then doing block work, block study in the educational institutions, but also the difficulties involved financially in running that system.

5

One issue raised for example was the limitation on Abstudy trips travel. There's been a reduction in the number of individual journeys that are funded through Abstudy, and there was particular concern in Batchelor College in the Northern Territory that this would mean many people who had participated in the past in Batchelor courses - which I think have been extremely successful in getting trained education workers and teachers - may no longer be able to do that.

10

15

I notice that the funding guidelines, or I think one of the comments made in the submission, talks about exemptions being possible to the limit of six journeys a year where it's considered impossible to operate.

20

MR GREER: I'll ask Peter to follow on. My understanding here was, there were changes to the away-from-base dimension of Abstudy in the 1997 budget context. As a consequence of that some transitional assistance was provided through 1998 to ensure that, notwithstanding that policy change, the numbers - whether there's six visits or what have you - were in fact maintained. Then as a consequence of the Abstudy review and the decision that government took on Abstudy in December 98, it was agreed that there would be a fundamental change in the way we approach the away-from-base or mixed-mode provision under Abstudy, in the sense that much greater flexibility and far less prescription would attach to that.

25

30

So that in implementing the decisions of the 1998 Abstudy review decision, providers have now been assessed more or less in a dollar value of what their budgets will be for away-from-base assistance; that taken on their 1998 level of funding which included top-ups to keep them at least I think at their 1997 level which was pre-budget. That provision is currently going through the parliament with the Indigenous education bill, which will from January next year provide much greater flexibility to Batchelor College, to other colleges, to determine how many return visits etcetera the particular students will need.

35

40

We will be providing not an ungenerous budget to providers, walking away from a lot of the prescriptive business that characterised the previous guidelines, and giving much more capacity for those colleges to manage that. Do you want to add to that, Peter?

45

MR BUCKSKIN: Yes, I will. Again, Abstudy has got to be seen - the away-from-base activity where you can either have the students come in to the college itself or those lecturers to go out to the site where the students actually live and are enrolled from, is really a mode of
5 delivery, and it should be seen - as well as being supported by the other program that the Commonwealth runs which is ATAS [Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme], and Batchelor College gets a bulk allocation literally in its millions to provide support for some of these students that are enrolled - any student that's enrolled in a course
10 that's having difficulty, and it's up to the college administration when they enrol people to identify those who will be needing additional support to complete that certificate, associate diploma, diploma or degree.

15 Batchelor College has had over two years to revamp their program, to come up to the six trips, 40 days, and clearly they are not satisfied with the level of funding that they've got out of Abstudy but it is based on their 98 income. It's based on the student enrolment that they had. Now, if their student enrolment goes up, they get more money, and
20 I suppose that's all we can do at the moment; is get them to ensure - and as I said, the government allowed them to have literally two years before these arrangements were to come into place and any institution, whether it be Batchelor or any other institution, that sat back and thought that the Commonwealth was going to rescind the 97 decision
25 were kidding themselves and putting their students in deep peril of being unable to achieve courses in which they're enrolled, and they would have done that as an institution; not as a result of the Commonwealth changes, because the Commonwealth gave them, as I said, a number of years - literally two years - to actually get that in
30 place.

Also we've been entering into dialogue with a number of providers, and some providers find this very useful because it is very flexible. You choose the company to which - you don't have to choose
35 Qantas like the Commonwealth, "Do we have to choose Qantas?" "You can go to the cheapest bidder in terms of a charter service in your particular area," rather than go through a specific airline. How you structure your course is up to you. It's much less rigid than it was before, and there are some places like Deakin University, that has lots
40 of people from the Northern Territory, that are finding it really useful and really welcome the changes that we brought in in 1997 because it does provide flexibility.

THE COMMISSIONER: Taking the specific case of Batchelor, if they in
45 fact wanted to maintain the number of occasions in which they brought people in at - I think the level was eight previously - you're saying since they've got the same amount of money they could do that if they wanted to.

MR BUCKSKIN: Yes.

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** There's no impediment for them to do that.

MR BUCKSKIN: But we will not give them any more than six trips, 40 days.

10 **MR GREER:** But if they can achieve economies through structuring their arrangements in other ways or if they can apply those economies or those windfalls for some individuals to go to eight rather than six, we are not being prescriptive about it.

15 **MR BUCKSKIN:** They do provide a whole range of courses to which I think - my personal view, I don't work there - where if you had eight, some could be four, some could be six, some could be eight. It all depends I think on the level of the course - certificate, associate diploma, diploma, because clearly you want to bring people closer to the base - but also I think there is an issue about the types of people
20 that these types of colleges are bringing in. Are they ready for tertiary education in terms of their literacy skills? They have to be careful on who they identify to actually bring in, and to identify, is it best to do that back home on the community? I think there are some fundamental decisions that institutions like Batchelor have to take.

25 **THE COMMISSIONER:** From what you say, though, Batchelor and others have got complete flexibility to use their block grant however they see fit.

30 **MR GREER:** Exactly.

MR BUCKSKIN: Yes, but we will only give them - for anybody - this amount, and clearly if the health certificate requires eight trips and something is four trips, well, you work it out.

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Average it or something.

MR BUCKSKIN: Average it out.

40 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Okay. Does the Commonwealth provide any form of scholarship for full-time study for AEWs to get formal teaching qualifications?

45 **MR BUCKSKIN:** No.

THE COMMISSIONER: There's nothing through DETYA or through ATSIC or any other way?

MR BUCKSKIN: No.

[Aboriginal Education Workers]

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Again just looking at things that impress, in
West Australia the Catholic education system offers, I think, 11 or 12
full-time scholarships every year for AEWs to get tertiary qualifications
and they pay the full salary of the AEWs while they're undertaking
10 full-time study. The view they've taken is that they will have faster and
larger numbers of people qualifying if they give them scholarships,
rather than expecting them to study part-time and work full-time over a
six-year period. As a result they're getting a lot more qualified
Aboriginal teachers in the state system in Western Australia which is
not providing that.

15

MR GREER: A qualification on that. We don't provide that directly.

MR BUCKSKIN: It could be through IESIP, I'm sure.

20 **MR GREER:** This could be funded through IESIP or what have you.

THE COMMISSIONER: They are doing it through IESIP.

25 **MR GREER:** Yes. Directly we don't provide that sort of - - -

DR ARTHUR: And in any case, the point would be that it's obviously
open to an employing authority, any employing authority, to do smart
things, including scholarships, to get people with the skills they need,
and it would seem to be the appropriate level to make those choices.

30

[11.56 am]

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** So if other education authorities wanted to use
their IESIP money for that purpose, so be it. They would be not using it
for another purpose basically.

40 **MR BUCKSKIN:** Yes, I think as long as they're maintaining effort, some
of the effort that they said to us in terms of the targets that they're
setting. Clearly state education systems have a bigger resource than,
say, the Western Australian Catholics have to them, or individual
education providers. So we'd be looking at - with the state government I
think we're looking - with a government provider we would be looking at
that in a pretty close way in terms of analysing what they're doing with
the money.

45

THE COMMISSIONER: The AEWs in the state schools in Western
Australia kept on saying, "Why haven't we got these things?" - because

5 people in the Catholic system are getting qualified in large numbers, and quickly. They've now got the first groups coming through, so they're graduating about a dozen fully qualified Aboriginal teachers every year. Obviously it is causing a great deal of envy by the AEWs working in the state system.

[Indigenous students]

10 If I may stay on scholarships for a moment, the other area where we saw some good things being done - and some need - is providing intensive support for individual Aboriginal students within the school system in quite remote communities. There's a program being run out of Roebourne in Western Australia that's got Hamersley involved in it and the Education Department, where individual students are being identified and there is very close mentoring.

15 Teachers are being paid after-hour tutoring and so forth, the theory being, and I think it's a pretty good theory, that many of these communities don't have any role models at all - within the communities - of completion of secondary education, let alone acquiring tertiary
20 quals. To actually put very intensive support into individual students who can make it is not just an elite high-achiever program, but a community development program because it's providing models - to schools and to communities - that just don't exist. Is the Commonwealth aware of these kinds of programs?

25 **MR BUCKSKIN:** Absolutely. We fund it.

THE COMMISSIONER: You are funding the Roebourne one as well, are you?

30 **MR BUCKSKIN:** That's through the direct assistance program through VEGAS. It's really through the Polly Farmer Foundation. Dr Kemp has visited that program, has met those students and has met those parents but unfortunately, because of flight times - we had to get back here - he
35 couldn't go and visit the learning centre which is in Karratha itself, but he was able to meet the parents and the principals of those schools in his hotel that evening.

40 **MR GREER:** This was in July.

MR BUCKSKIN: Yes, that was his trip there. Clearly that's funded through the VEGAS part in terms of career counselling and giving
45 money there. For the homework centre, that's funded through ATAS, where we pay funding - provide some money to that group to run the homework centre so many days a week and it's clearly a very successful program in terms of engaging families and parents of people. It's a model that Dr Kemp would like to support and replicate.

MR GREER: And has publicly indicated his support.

MR BUCKSKIN: And publicly indicated his support and - - -

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Are there other ones that you know of, besides the Roebourne one at the moment?

MR BUCKSKIN: Not that level of industry support.

10 **THE COMMISSIONER:** I've spoken to Rio Tinto about how I was impressed with it and suggested they might look at it at Kununurra and Weipa as well.

15 **MR BUCKSKIN:** Fitzroy Crossing - the minister is planning to go to Fitzroy Crossing in a week's time, and the Polly Farmer Foundation has indicated they're interested at Fitzroy. I don't think - it's not going to get to Kununurra but - so we'd be talking to people about Rio Tinto. We have been to discussions of the department with Rio Tinto about doing that across the whole range of their industries in rural and remote parts of Australia.
20

Clearly, the Polly Farmer Foundation model is something that we'd like to see replicated. But it is financial; it's mainly input, a lot of money input. You look at the number of children that they're assisting there, and it's only about eight or nine, but clearly all those kids - I mean, within three years having a kid from Roebourne - and you've probably been to the 50 cent hall there and had a discussion; we've met the community there. For a kid to come from that community, to get Year 12 at Karratha High School in a town that probably 20 years ago didn't allow Aboriginal people in, in the first place, I think is quite a marked improvement and what you can actually do if there is goodwill between industry, mining industry and a community - and for EDWA, EDWA's leadership there in providing the teaching and resources and putting a classy principal in terms of the Karratha High School. It's shown that where again the culture is right, you get the participation and you get the skills of the individual, you can actually get a result, and you can do that in the short term.
25
30
35

I understand, as a result of that project, that there are now two children in university studies over the last three years. It's only been going for three years and they're achieving that level of result. But again, that's a really tightly case-managed family and individual student, which again is cost-intensive in human resources, etcetera.
40

45 **THE COMMISSIONER:** It is, but as I said, I see it as warranted for the whole community and not just for the individuals, because of the impact that kids achieving that level of education have on the community as a whole. But it is resource intensive.

5 Do your Outreach workers - you mentioned them and DETYA
workers - will they play a role in actually trying to put together the
package of funding from all these different funding sources, or is it up
to the local community to try and identify potential contributors to the
bucket? It's very hard when you describe it that way - there's money
that's come from Hamersley and there are bits and pieces from different
Commonwealth funds, and EDWA has put in money. Who facilitates
that? In some of the local communities it will get lost - - -

10
MR BUCKSKIN: At the moment, because of our structure, our
education units mainly deliver really one program, which is the direct
assistance program with those three elements of ATAS, ASSPA and
VEGAS. There is a review, as you know - the IEDA program - that
15 might change the way we deliver that, which could free up some of our
time to do some more clearly community development planning work at
the local level. But at the moment they're really project managers - you
know, managing all the ATAS projects and the tutors and ASSPA
committees - considering, you know, we have 3500 of those. We have
20 something like 12,000 tutors on our books. We have something like
700 to 800 VEGAS projects running at any one time through the year.
So for 100-something officers, they're pretty flat out just delivering that
program.

25 Our review, we hope, will make the program more
administratively easy to administer, so we can free up some of those
people to do some of the good work. But they are involved clearly in it,
but they actually don't brokerage the deal. That brokerage of the
dealing is done by our state managers essentially because it gets to be
30 systemic change that we're on about, so we engage our local people,
but it's clearly managed either at a policy level by the business
manager, myself, or the national manager, or the program manager,
Tony, or our state manager.

35 We have agreements with Rio Tinto in terms of doing this work
and we hope to do that with other industries in the future. Clearly the
government's approach to the business now we think will allow that to
occur in a more concrete way than it has in the past.

40 **MR GREER:** We'll table a copy of the discussion paper that is currently
out there at the moment, chair, on the review of IEDA which goes to
some of the points that Peter has been talking about.

45 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks. I think the brokerage role is an
important one because when you have to actually get access to funds
in a half a dozen different pots it becomes very hard for local
communities unless somebody knows where to go.

[Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness]

5 The last question in the Aboriginal area was dealing with the ASSPA program. As we were going around there seemed to be a lot of vagueness on the ground, which is probably not reflected at the central level, about the actual objectives and intended outcomes of the ASSPA program. We're after some more information on that and how it is operating.

10 **MR BUCKSKIN:** It was actually evaluated in 97-98, an internal evaluation by the then DEETYA. Really the findings were that it's probably one of the most successful programs, with the aim to increase parent participation in the schools; at school level it was certainly very very successful. But it has a whole range of other outcomes or goals as well, or objectives, and that clearly is also an increased student
15 awareness and student participation as well. IEU is a lot of work in running workshops with these people and with these committees where they have to put in a strategic plan for the year and acquit the last year's money on a whole range of projects. We then enter into a new agreement for every calendar year, school year.
20

So the findings of the review look successful. It's still being maintained. We'd like to have a clear - under the literacy and numeracy and attendance strategy we want to target parent participation. What does that mean? Should we have more training for parents in
25 understanding what they need to do to enhance learning outcomes for their children, to understand the school? Unfortunately their involvement in, say, from being in an ASSPA community, onto the school council, to the school board - that transition into that was one of the aims, to get them into mainstream decision-making in the school -
30 that hasn't happened at a rate that we'd like it to happen. But that's also clearly understood, because people want to do something with just the Indigenous component; they actually don't want to be involved with the wider school community.

35 But in terms of engaging parents I think it's done that when we have 3,500 plus of these around the nation, and the program seems to be going okay. It's audited on a regular basis, and clearly with a program this size there are some difficulties sometimes with expenditure of dollars but there's been no major concern that has
40 brought us to say undo the program. If anything we want to strengthen it and target it so it does focus on education outcomes and literacy and numeracy and attendance and tell parents, "This is what you have to do. Like, for example, if you want your kid to be literate, read to them, listen to them read. You read, they read, you know. You've got to help
45 them with their homework. Give them a place to do their study."

There are some basic things that we believe need to happen, and clearly our IEU network can, I think, help us brokerage that

understanding with parents and committees, but giving clearly a sharper focus on those learning outcomes, because at the moment a lot of it is just input, intensive without working out, "What is that excursion for? What's it contributing in terms of learning outcomes?"

5

THE COMMISSIONER: Is it possible to get hold of a copy of that evaluation?

MR BUCKSKIN: Yes.

10

MR GREER: Recognising of course, chair, that whilst the evaluation is there, we are looking at - as Peter said - possibly making some changes to ASSPA through this current review that we're undertaking, and with one possibility of splitting it into two elements: one that will concentrate on Indigenous family involvement and the other on support for Indigenous students; again, as part of a strategy to get this focus in a multi-dimensional way to underpin literacy, numeracy and attendance. Our thinking on that is in the discussion paper that I'll table next.

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THE COMMISSIONER: Just in connection with that, one of the things that impressed me in many places that I went was the thriving and obviously exciting nature of schools where there is a high level of Aboriginal involvement and community ownership of the whole process. I know that some of the education departments are debating that but, in view of the AEP and the Commonwealth's initiatives, is it still true to say that the Commonwealth supports strongly a high level of community, Indigenous community involvement in schools' decision-making processes and programs in principally Aboriginal communities?

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MR BUCKSKIN: Absolutely. A strong support of community controlled schools is shown by our minister visiting those - he visited them two years ago, brought them all to Broome to talk to him. Now he - following up on that promise, "I will come to your community one day," he's doing that in a week's time and he's visiting three of those schools, where he'll be sitting down clearly with community leaders, school leaders and seeing first-hand how they themselves have closed the gap quite significantly considering the low base from which they've come in just, say, funding over the last 10 years.

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THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you. There are still some areas I wanted to go through, but I know that we've already taken you over time. Are you okay for a bit longer?

45

MR GREER: Yes, sure.

[Assistance for Isolated Children]

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Is that all right? Perhaps if I just move a bit more quickly than I have done - it's my fault, not yours - through the remaining questions we've got on the list, and there are a couple of other things I wanted to add as well. The first is the issue of income support, details of numbers and the reasons for failure of applications under the Assistance for Isolated Children program.

10 **DR ARTHUR:** The claims are processed by Centrelink. The Centrelink system records the results of the claim but not the reasons, so that in 98 there were 12,979 AIC claims and 592 were not approved. I don't have any details in terms of reasons. I would need to go into individual case files and that would be a difficult task.

15 **MR GREER:** That's less than 5%.

DR ARTHUR: Indeed.

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** There have been many comments made to us about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of existing assets and means tests for children on farming properties.

25 **DR ARTHUR:** Indeed. Overall that's the Department of Family and Community Services who now have responsibility for the application of the actual means test and the other means tests associated with the Youth Allowance. Those issues certainly have all continuously been raised with us when the student assistance issue was with then DEETYA and they certainly continue to be raised with Centrelink, and I attend regularly the ICPA conferences across those issues.

30 **THE COMMISSIONER:** You know what the issues are.

DR ARTHUR: Indeed.

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** The particular question of the farm business assets discount, where the government apparently has committed itself to increasing it from 50 to 70%, is there any indication that you're aware of as to when that increase might occur?

40 **DR ARTHUR:** I'm not aware of that particular issue but that fact we could easily acquire and provide back to you, but at the moment I don't know.

[Telecommunications]

45 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks. The next ones go to telecommunications infrastructure. We're getting constantly the comments that I'm sure you're aware of, too, about the slowness of lines where they exist - - -

DR ARTHUR: Indeed.

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** - - - and the cost of access and so forth. Our question is directed to - really EdNA Online is an excellent program but if people can't afford it, or can't get access to it, it's less useful.

10 **DR ARTHUR:** Yes. We're certainly keenly aware of that. EdNA Online is a Web site so the question really goes to the accessibility of the Internet as a tool rather than that specific Web site. Indeed, it is an issue and one we are keenly aware of. For example, the Commission's background paper on this subject cites its initial input. The EdNA Reference Committee was a Commonwealth-states non-government cross-sector body which the Commonwealth funds and indeed, chairs. So, yes, we are keenly aware of those issues and it remains the case - well, the analysis provided in that submission by the EdNA Reference Committee to the process of establishing a national strategy for the information economy remains broadly accurate in our view. We are certainly - but within governments and also in our cross-sector or coordination role - continuing to focus on that issue.

THE COMMISSIONER: The Commonwealth doesn't directly subsidise Internet costs or servicing - - -

25 **DR ARTHUR:** The Commonwealth does not. However, there is a range of programs operating particularly within state government systems for purchases of connections which have had the effect of providing other access on highly advantageous market terms, or indeed subsidised terms to connectivity. I won't go through it but I'll provide some details we have of that. Also, we commissioned a report to the national bandwidth inquiry established by the Department of Communications, Information and Technology and the Arts. The report was a consultant's report. It doesn't set out departmental policy as such, but that report does contain a fair amount of detail of the current situation around Australia and indeed, on initiatives by education systems to address the issue, and we're happy to provide a copy of the report or point to what can be accessed on the Web.

40 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Right, thanks, that would be good. We're finding such inconsistency across jurisdictions that there are real questions about equality of access issues.

45 **DR ARTHUR:** We certainly agree with that. There are major equity issues for all governments associated with the move to the increasing use of information technology. Rural and remote is one aspect but there are other ones associated with it. Clearly the more that the use of information technology becomes central to the delivery of education and training in Australia, the more there will be equity issues, one of

which is the differential access - in terms of geography - but another aspect will be that those students who are able to go home to an information-rich environment after school will clearly be advantaged from those who do not.

5

THE COMMISSIONER: I think that's right. There are the two issues of access from the school and access from home. In New South Wales, as we understand it, the schools are given grants by the state education department to cover all costs of Internet access. In other states they have to meet it from their own budget. In South Australia if the school hosts a community library, they go in through the library and get it for free because there's a free Internet through community library program, but not a free Internet access through schools. So if they haven't got a community library, they don't.

15

DR ARTHUR: There are certainly a lot of issues there and the issues of whether or not it would be desirable to try and have at least some definition of what a country will regard as acceptable standards of access to information technology is one that is certainly currently being examined.

20

THE COMMISSIONER: Right. That goes to the next question about whether DETYA has got a role in defining universal service obligation.

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DR ARTHUR: In terms of the specifics of the universal service obligation we don't have a formal role on that issue. We certainly have been involved in processes. We made a submission to the initial digital data review. The EdNA Reference Committee made a submission to that review; that recommended public support of school telecommunications costs through the USO, which is a slightly different approach than contained in the current USO.

30

We also made a submission, as I've indicated, to the national bandwidth inquiry. Also we commissioned a consultant's report for that bandwidth inquiry, and that report also has a number of recommendations going to the USO. I might comment that the approach Australia takes towards the USO is quite different from a number of other countries and there are other examples out there of how one might approach that now.

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Obviously it's a matter for government to determine whether or not those approaches are there, but we certainly - through our role in the EdNA Reference Committee - have been involved in bringing to the attention of governments approaches such as the US approach, whereby there is a specific recognition that education is a key component of the society and there is an obligation which works by way of a levy on all persons within a certain definition of being involved in the telecommunications online industry, which leads to creation of a

45

5 fund of money, administered essentially by the Federal
Communications Commission which then is used - via direct subsidies -
for the connection costs of universities, schools, training institutions
through a program of submissions to a company which works to the
FCC.

10 That's a model which is out there in another country, similarly a
federal structure, for subsidising directly the education and training
costs. As I say, it's a matter for government to determine whether or not
this is appropriate in the Australian context, but we certainly have
played a role in making that information available to government.

[Students with disabilities]

15 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks. Special education: we've asked first a
series of questions about the break-up of the Commonwealth money for
children with disabilities.

20 **DR ARTHUR:** Indeed. There are two broad streams to special
education. There is a program - well, overall the program provided
\$105 million in 1999. There are a number of internal subdivisions and I
won't attempt to go through all of it, but I can provide some
documentation which will provide hopefully enough detail and you're
welcome to come back for some more things.

25 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Yes.

30 **DR ARTHUR:** But in broad terms there is funding which goes to
support students with disabilities in school. There is also funding
available to provide services for students with disabilities in non-school
organisations and community groups, some of which does go to
preschool students. Their funding is also divided up. There is a
per capita element of some \$15 million and the remaining funds of
\$90 million are provided in the form of block grants to state and territory
education and non-government education authorities.

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** If you can provide the extra information - - -

40 **DR ARTHUR:** Yes, the extra information. I will have less ability to
provide the detail of the formula because the way in which the fixed
component is divided up is still influenced by a large number of
separate formulae which really I don't think you'd want to get into the
detail of. But the allocation of the actual amounts between state
educational authorities, if you're interested, we can provide that.

45 **THE COMMISSIONER:** The next questions then looks at whether
Commonwealth money actually assists the special schools, special
units directly.

5 **DR ARTHUR:** Yes, it does. The per capita element can be for students who are in mainstream schools with special education facilities. It can be provided to students in special schools and likewise the guidelines for the expenditure of the fixed portion of the funds allows its use for any of those institutions. So consistently with our overall approach, we do not attempt to specify what kind of assistance and what particular kind of setting the funding should be used in, although there is a broad - in concert with general community views - Commonwealth view in support of inclusive approaches to education and special education students.

[Assistance for Isolated Children]

15 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Right, thanks. AIC assistance for students with disabilities: standard rate or - - -

20 **DR ARTHUR:** AIC does not provide an additional amount. To understand that you have to understand what the purpose of the funding is. The funding under AIC is not the funding for the provision of an educational program. That would come through the special education funding that's available - either Commonwealth or indeed state government special education funding. The point of the AIC allowance is to assist with the accommodation costs of a student who has to move away from home to attend an appropriate school.

25
30 Therefore the issue of special education is an eligibility question for that allowance. It's not a question of the amount of the allowance, so that it affects the circumstances in which a student might be eligible - and quite appropriately a more generous eligibility requirement for students with disabilities than for other students, for access to the allowance per se.

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Right, but there is no additional allowance to reflect the additional cost that might be associated with looking after or accommodating a student with disabilities.

40 **DR ARTHUR:** No, because the allowance is either a contribution to a boarding cost or the contribution to maintaining a second home. In both cases it's not really the case that it's intended to - well, there's certainly boarding costs. It is not the case that we're - I would think there are additional costs to the family from that particular approach unless in the highly unlikely situation a school were to charge an additional boarding fee to a student with disabilities. In terms of second home allowance it is meant to be a general contribution to the establishment of a second home, not particularly to facilities within that second home to accommodate a student with disabilities.

[Disability Discrimination Act standards]

THE COMMISSIONER: You referred to the standards task force the department is running.

DR ARTHUR: Indeed.

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THE COMMISSIONER: What's your assessment of progress?

DR ARTHUR: I might actually at this point ask another officer who has detailed involvement with that, to deal with that question.

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THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, thank you. You might like to introduce yourself for the tape first, if you don't mind.

MS PEACOCK: I am Diane Peacock from International Analysis and Evaluation Division. The standards task force is one of our responsibilities. It's been through a fairly difficult process of attempting to develop standards for education. I guess a lot of the difficulty is in terms of the enormous plurality of educational contexts and providers, and training contexts and providers, that would come under the DDA standards for education.

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In 1998 the task force hired a consultant to draft standards. That process was completed by the end of the year and legal opinion from the Chief General Counsel within Attorney-General's Department was sought on the standards. At that point the Chief General Counsel considered them to be - as they were principle-based rather than based on actual practice - at too high a level of generality and not to give sufficient specificity to educational providers, as basically the purpose of having standards is to give clarity to providers as to what counts in terms of meeting the obligations of the DDA.

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So we've been in 1999 - and I've only been working on the matter for the last few months - through I think three or four different drafts, but essentially a major redraft was put to the task force in May. They were very pleased with the way that was developing.

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[12.26 pm]

We then went through another drafting process with a small drafting group and then a meeting of the full task force at the end of July. At that meeting task force members had actually sought the opinions of their Crown Solicitors advising education departments in the states and territories. I think it was the first time that they had seen any draft of the standards and they were, I guess, somewhat concerned about the lack of specificity as they saw it. It seemed to us that they looked at the standards from the point of view of the complaints which had been lodged with HREOC and wanted the standards to provide a complete defence against any complaint mechanisms.

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5 We're now at the stage of convening a meeting which we hope
to go ahead at the beginning of November that will be chaired by the
deputy general counsel from Attorney-General's with Robert Horne,
10 who is my first assistant secretary, alongside. Robert is the chair of the
task force. It will involve a number of task force members, primarily from
the states and territories, and their crown solicitors who have provided
advice. We hope at that meeting to actually work our way through the
15 legal matters that have been raised. The outcome of that, I think, will
indicate to what extent and how quickly we can achieve success in
developing the standards that task force members are prepared to
recommend to their ministers as being appropriate to go out for wider
consultation. I think people are very committed to trying to achieve a
set of standards and we do feel that the legal issues are not
insurmountable. I have a briefing which I think is - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: You can leave with us, thanks.

20 **MS PEACOCK:** Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: Does the draft at present make any particular
provisions for country schools or not distinguish between city and
country?

25 **MS PEACOCK:** No, it doesn't. We would see it that once the draft
standards were enacted through a legal process that then it would be
appropriate for educational institutions and providers to develop a
policy statement which would interpret the standards within their own
particular context. I would see it probably at that point that education
30 systems or providers would look at the implications for rural and remote
contexts.

[MCEETYA Task Force on Staff Recruitment]

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks. On to the rural staff recruitment
question. We've asked about the MCEETYA task force dealing with
teacher recruitment and asked whether there are any provisions or any
work in the task force addressing rural and remote teacher recruitment.

40 **DR ARTHUR:** The short answer is it's not specifically addressed. The
task force is now working under terms of reference that it received at
the April 99 meeting. The terms of reference essentially have to do with
development of materials that might be used by the states and
territories for recruitment activities. The terms of reference refer to them
to:

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Detail the costs and benefits to the states and
territories of collaborating on aspects of developing
national campaign materials. Show how national

campaign materials could be integrated into existing and future state and territory campaigns. Indicate links between the campaign and Commonwealth priorities and indicate the range of costs for each option.

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So the Council is essentially looking at would it be useful to develop some materials which could be used as a template between various states and territories and sharing of promotional materials. The task force is not particularly addressing the detailed issues of recruitments in that that is something which is essentially an education authority responsibility. Each employing authority has a responsibility to make sure that it has a capability to staff its school for the future and to deal with those issues. The task force isn't centrally addressing those issues.

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What it does do is bring together - and it's been agreed they should be annually updated details - the analysis by the various education departments around Australia of the supply-and-demand situation that flowed from a view that the major analysis which appears in the public periodically on this subject is the analysis carried out by the Australian College of Deans, and the view of the employing authorities that some of the assumptions in that were not necessarily ones that they shared, and providing some data from their own sources directly. Their view of the supply-and-demand situation would be a useful contribution to national understanding of the issue.

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[Teacher training]

THE COMMISSIONER: The teacher training programs - if I may ask something there which I meant to raise back in the Indigenous areas relating to it - like the ones at Batchelor or James Cook Uni, where they have essentially people working in their own communities and then coming in for residential blocks, those kinds of programs are much more resource intensive for the universities to run than say a straight bachelor of education course being run on campus residentially. Do the funding formulas for tertiary institutions reflect those additional costs or is it entirely within the discretion of universities as to how they allocate their money and whether or not they provide resources?

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DR ARTHUR: In detail I don't know. My broad understanding is that universities receive block grants on quite general formulae and those grants do not go to questions of detail such as that. They're within the discretion of the institutions.

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THE COMMISSIONER: But is there a role then for DETYA or someone else at the Commonwealth level to encourage or assist universities to establish those kinds of courses that will enable more, particularly Indigenous people but rural people generally I think, to become involved in teacher education programs?

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5 **MR GREER:** There are reviews of teacher education under way at the moment I think in South Australia - certainly in New South Wales - and Gregor Ramsey is doing that. Some of those reviews have had consultations with us at DETYA and we have taken advantage of that to push firmly the whole issue of Indigenous education training in those syllabuses. Where that gets to is another matter.

10 **THE COMMISSIONER:** I know Macquarie University in Sydney is running a B.Teach program for preschool teachers and it's certainly the only one in eastern Australia that I'm aware of and perhaps nationally, focusing specifically on preschool or early childhood and actually allowing the people to work in the community and come in, and it seems to be under some jeopardy at the moment because of funding.

15 **MR GREER:** It's a broader issue in some sense. I think we have some research from the University of Western Sydney which demonstrated out of a national survey that less than half of the institutions providing teacher education actually touched on Aboriginal teaching issues, which is another issue we'll be picking up in the strategy which the minister is closely considering.

20 **MR BUCKSKIN:** But in terms of ensuring higher education is a viable pathway for Indigenous Australians, the Commonwealth still has maintained its higher education special support program.

25 **MR GREER:** \$20 million, \$21 million.

30 **MR BUCKSKIN:** Yes, about another \$20-plus million to that. It still has a research program which is running into its last year, and a whole range of universities where the issue of teaching is one of the issues they're trying to address. Part of that, a number of those projects which are being supported from the first Howard government, which I think finalised this year, 1999, was the ability for the university to take it up, to sustain that level of work. So we won't know that until the end of I suppose next year - which of those universities took up the projects, which were those key learning centres which were identified around Australia - and maintaining those amongst those five or six institutions.

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** The last points on the letter from Meredith Wilkie are just things that you can provide us with.

40 **DR ARTHUR:** Yes, we've got them here.

45 **[Vocational education]**

THE COMMISSIONER: I just have two very short things, if I may, before we finish up. One is another issue that arose about vocational

education and TAFE-school cooperative endeavours. We were told in Queensland that TAFE courses are not available for under-15 year olds and that this is limiting the capacity of TAFE-school cooperation in vocational education. The people there seem to be unclear as to
5 whether this was a state prohibition, a Commonwealth prohibition or just arising from practice, or what. Does this mean anything to you or do you know anything about it? Is it a national issue or just Queensland?

10 **MR GREER:** Unfortunately our VET rep has just slipped out. We'll certainly take that on for you, chair.

THE COMMISSIONER: Okay, if you wouldn't mind doing that. Clearly the capacity to try and get cooperation across sectors in country areas is critical. If there's a barrier there, we've got some problems. The next
15 one was just whether there's Commonwealth views or policies relating to the charging of fees, and parent contributions in government schools. It's becoming an increasingly significant issue in most states at the moment, so much so that in South Australia there's a suggestion
20 that there will be provision put into the act to make these compulsory fees and debts that can be recoverable through the courts.

DR ARTHUR: There was such provision in the WA Act and I think that's been removed, but it certainly was part of the legislation that the
25 WA government had put forward a year or so ago.

THE COMMISSIONER: Is there a view from the Commonwealth as to what this means in terms of free education?

30 **DR ARTHUR:** I'm not aware of any statements by the Minister on the subject, no.

THE COMMISSIONER: My last question is just a completely general one for you. What do you hope for out of the Rural Summit in the next
35 three days?

DR ARTHUR: I don't think we have a clear view of what the outcome would be; certainly obviously an increasing focus on those issues, and it's important that one of the workshops that's occurring at the Summit
40 is an education workshop at which a number of people will be represented, but we certainly have not gone into it with any preconceptions as to what the outcome might be. I think that, as I understand Minister Anderson's intent, it is that the summit will be an opportunity for a range of key players to talk and come up with
45 whatever they come up with. So I think that very free-form nature of it is part of the minister's intention.

THE COMMISSIONER: There's no departmental priority list of education results that you'd like me to support?

5 **MR GREER:** I think it's an opportunity for the workshop to recognise the range of things that are going on. It would be pleasing, I think, for the summit to get a sense of the government's commitment and DETYA's commitment, particularly on Indigenous education, and its resolve to drive that agenda pretty forcefully. It's a commitment that is certainly driven with a passion from Minister Kemp, endorsed by the Prime Minister, and certainly we're working closely with them to try and implement this.

10 **DR ARTHUR:** My additional comment is that clearly in education, particularly in schools education, if anything is possibly going to occur, it will only happen by the active cooperation of all levels and all sectors. So to the extent that the initiative fosters concentration on cooperative action to achieve results rather than the artificial maintaining of boundaries, it will be highly possible.

15 **THE COMMISSIONER:** I thank the three of you very much for your patience and for all of your assistance with the original submission and the answers and other material you've provided. It's greatly appreciated, particularly the time that you and your support group have given to us this morning. Thank you very much for your assistance.

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(Luncheon adjournment)

30 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Mark, would you like to introduce yourself for the tape and then make whatever comments you'd like.

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MR HOGAN: I'm Mark Hogan. I have the role of Assistant Director and head of the Education Services Division with the Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn. Associated with that position within the Catholic Education Office I'm also a member of our Archdiocese and Catholic Education Commission on whose behalf the CEO put a submission in. I also serve as an archdiocesan representative on the New South Wales Catholic Education Commission and in that capacity I chair the New South Wales Catholic Education Commission Special Education Advisory Committee.

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I also represent the National Catholic Education Commission on separate occasions, mainly dealing in the area of special needs education or special education, and I've had a couple of ministerial appointments to review committees on that basis over time. Our original submission - we had the opportunity to develop, when the terms of reference came out earlier in the year, a very extensive ability to communicate and to consult with all our regional principals' associations and school communities throughout the archdiocese.

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5 Our schools number in excess of 50 in both New South Wales
and ACT, and in particular consultation really focused on our New
South Wales schools. As the original submission pointed out, our New
South Wales schools are schools in large rural city type arenas such as
Goulburn, right to very isolated hamlets such as Batlow in the Snowy
Mountains, a slightly larger population at Lake Cargelligo on the
western fringe of the archdiocese and Eden on the New South
Wales-Victorian border. So geographically it covers a very wide range
10 and a large amount of different climate, environment, and issues to
deal with communications, access to facilities in larger and smaller
regional centres.

15 Having set that sort of context, one of the major points that we
were able to tap into in regard to our submission was the local-level
feeling that school principals, school boards and school staffs have for
the specific needs of rural students, particularly in those schools that
we have which are reasonably remote from our point of view in terms of
the archdiocese and central service provision points. So we feel that
20 our submission covers a lot of those sorts of issues.

25 In regard to notable points, our original submission picked up in
area 5 of section 5 of the paper some of the priority areas that we
would see as needing to be addressed by us continually within the
archdiocese as we provide our services to schools and their
communities. I've had the opportunity in regard to follow-up by the
inquiry in regard to some specific issues emanating from our original
submission, and those things are enumerated in this supplementary
30 submission. So at that point I'd be prepared to talk more specifically
about particular issues; alternatively, anything you want to ask first?

THE COMMISSIONER: No, I'd like you to keep going, if that's all right.

35 **MR HOGAN:** To highlight some of the main ones - and I would like to
focus on four specific instances - the material in the supplementary
letter that came to us after we lodged our submission dealt with the
nature of Commonwealth and state/territory funded projects and our
involvement as an education provider in the non-government sector to
40 utilising our own resources and provisions to augment Commonwealth
funding.

[Commonwealth, State and Territory funding]

45 By and large Commonwealth funding and state or territory
funding that may be directed to particular programs or particular
student needs are insufficient on their own to actually conduct an
effective program. We have to supplement, either directly in terms of
grant money or substitute in kind through personnel services and
contributed services, value-enhanced people resources and material

resources to make things work. From that point of view staffing levels are supplemented from the system to underwrite special education provisions and provisions specifically targeting literacy achievement and acquisition by students, particularly the early years of schooling.

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Also we heavily subsidise our Indigenous students through our programs and that's mainly through the salaried of our two officers within the Catholic Education Office. Those provisions augment the funds that go to those programs that are derived from the Commonwealth through the employment of Aboriginal education workers, for instance, or our special needs resource teachers and also assistance for disabled students.

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[Distance education]

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The other areas in which we believe we've achieved some success in providing educational delivery for students in rural areas was the project that we conducted over a number of years under the national Country Area Program that was in place in the early 1990s. We were able to develop a distance education centre which offered curriculum enhancement and additional courses, particularly to senior secondary and secondary students in those areas where, on their own, they wouldn't be able to staff and resource those learning opportunities. It was unique for us in that we were able to operate in partnership with the New South Wales Department of Education and Training through its network in schools in the western region of our archdiocese.

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We had links between the government schools - central schools particularly; places like Ungarie - with our regional schools in those districts, and they were linked by computer, telephone access, facsimile and, as the program developed over time, new technology such as electronic whiteboards. The telecommunications access through the telephone links was through a voice-point system, so there was real time verbal communication between the teacher in Canberra and the students and their teacher in the various schools.

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The ability for the schools to offer these programs as part of their timetable meant that we had to teach in real time to their timetables as well, so it did involve some cross-sectoral negotiation. It proved to be very popular and very effective. There were a number of classes that graduated over a period of years, particularly in regard to languages such as Indonesian, which they wouldn't have been able to resource through staffing in those isolated areas. Mathematics at school certificate level and also the ability to study some higher school certificate subjects on a limited basis was able to be pursued as well. That included some of the areas of creative arts, not the least of which was art itself in terms of drawing and so on. The electronic whiteboard proved to be quite useful there, and the facsimile machines.

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5 In addressing the ongoing needs of servicing that program with
the gradual drying up of national Country Area Program moneys and
the refocussing of priorities from the government schools sector and
the New South Wales Department of Education and Training's shift
10 towards school based budgetary control, it meant the schools had to
start facing some decisions about how much of their local budget they
could devote to sustaining these programs in collaboration with us. So
over time, in the last two and half or three years of the project, we were
increasingly bearing more of the costs and providing the service on a
15 contract type of basis with the few schools that were left from the
government sector.

15 It eventually reached a point where we couldn't sustain that,
even for our own schools, given the costs of the centre, and that was
the reason for the demise of that program. The ability to supplement
system funds with government program funds couldn't be continued
there. However, we learnt a lot from that and, with the advance of more
20 modern equipment such as videoconferencing, it could one day
become more of an opportunity, particularly with things like data
compression and communications compression. But the initial start-up
costs and then the maintenance costs are still fairly significant.

[Secondary school boys]

25 One of the particular areas that we were keen on focusing on -
and we've noticed this over the last two years and we're developing
some programs now to try out in our schools - is the whole aspect of
gender-specific education, particularly that of rural schoolboys. We
have been addressing areas of concern through the literacy
30 achievement of boys in the early years but we're particularly concerned
about the achievement of secondary-aged schoolboys who have
perhaps had an ongoing pattern of low achievement which for various
reasons hasn't been well diagnosed or well identified.

35 Through our special needs team in the office and also the
development of professional development so that we have specialist
teachers in each school, we are better able to target the needs of those
boys and to develop local programs accordingly. But we still feel we've
got a fair way to go there and there's a great deal of actual research
40 that we require to do, and also to trap the best available research that's
going on in other places.

45 I've identified some specific issues in the supplementary
submission about the education of boys. An ongoing one is their entry
level, whether it be at primary or secondary level, of the sorts of skills
that they need to begin their educational process. There are other more
endemic issues perhaps related to the sort of community within which
they live and that relates to issues such as unemployment, levels of
family income, access to learning resources in the community, whether

there's sufficient library resources for instance, technical and further education for post-secondary, and their own feelings of being self-motivated and having sufficient role models to help motivate them. So we see those as being quite significant.

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The ability of parents also to be able to assist their students through particular parenting skills is one area that we would like to investigate further and that will involve some development of appropriate parent development educational exercises over coming years. Our system of parents and friends associations and school boards are the sorts of avenues with which we see that sort of development occurring at school level, so the school communities have a fair control over what they believe is needed by their own community, rather than simply accepting what's coming from the head office.

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[Cross-sectoral collaboration]

In regard to other areas such as cross-sectoral representation and cooperation, we've had positive experiences in the past with our cooperation with government departments of education, particularly at regional level and district level. Where it becomes a little bit difficult and problematic is at the systemic level where we may be dealing with New South Wales level policies and procedures which in their implementation can sometimes be more restrictive at local level than they need to be, given the desirability of having greater devolution of decision-making at school community level, and also town or city level, even in places such as Goulburn or Wagga and those sorts of areas.

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Some of the benefits that we could get would be the ability to increase economies of scale between the neighbouring Catholic and other non-government schools and government schools; the ability to actually mount courses that have sufficient students to warrant perhaps the sharing of staffing towards making sure there is a specialist teacher in front of the students, even though the students may be made up of different school populations, and as long as we can work through the industrial issues there and the legal issues - perhaps with duty of care and so on - we believe that they would be sustainable in a much smaller community in terms of making it possible which, in isolation, is impossible for one school or the other to do. But it does require some freeing up of the way things are viewed. We might be some way from achieving that, I think.

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[1.56 pm]

[Country Areas Program]

Some of the application of Commonwealth moneys by different systems is another area in which we think we need to be better focused, and this may require some deliberate leadership from the Commonwealth in that area through Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. I'd like to instance the Country Area Program in

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5 regard to that one. It is difficult to apply criteria at state or territory level which is going to be felt equitably at very very small community level in regard to the competing needs of certain communities, vis-a-vis others at a district level, so that some communities may meet the criteria and receive funding, and communities right next door, so to speak, miss out by virtue of an arbitrary criterion that's been applied.

10 That can equate to the number of kilometres from a distance of a centre of some size, or the actual size of the centre. So we may be talking about a town of 10,000 or more, but what that town of 10,000 may be able to offer, depending on how you define their population boundary, may be much less than a highly suburbanised area of 10,000 might be able to provide. So they are the sorts of problems with applying arbitrary criteria to some of the local needs.

15 **[Staff recruitment]**

20 Finally, I think just in terms of our major and high-priority issues, would be the ability of systems - whether they be government or non-government - to attract high-quality staff that is able to teach across a range of areas. Many of these schools do need multiskilled teachers because they cannot offer a sufficient teaching load for a teacher to be able to teach in one key learning area only, or even in two key learning areas. So we face the issue continually of making sure that we have people working with students who have the ability to teach well in a range of areas and that requires skills above and beyond a subject specialist who has then had some training in terms of fronting a class. We are talking about teachers who know how to teach well and can utilise content area with some expertise across a range of curriculum areas.

30 Most of our schools finish at Year 10 level and we only have a few schools who actually go to Years 11 and 12 in our country schools. Even then we may be talking about a senior secondary population of 160 to 200. Again, we don't have that many students that we can afford a range of subject specialities. If there were possibilities of cooperating and collaborating with the neighbouring government schools, we believe we could do a lot more, but there's the usual differences in system, authorities, expectations and accompanying industrial and legal issues that would need to be addressed.

40 We have found that regardless of the amount of professional development we may offer, the ability of schools to actually access professional development depends on the availability of resourcing their replacement and there may not be any casual teachers available in the district at that time. That's a frequent occurrence in places like Taralga, Lake Cargelligo, Batlow and so on. I think I might pause at that point and see if you have any sort of reaction or feedback.

[Cross-sectoral collaboration]

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, lots of things that I'd like to take up with you, if I could, particularly, if I can start with one of your last issues - this question of cooperation between systems. This is an issue that has
5 come up a number of times as we've been going around, most particularly in the two areas that you mentioned - that is, economies of scale to actually do things such as libraries or gymnasiums or something, and then doubling the potential drawing audience to provide more courses, especially for Years 9 to 12 students where the
10 curriculum itself offers subject choice provided the subjects are offered.

I'm pleased to hear your comments that you could see a lot of scope for that. Where do you think the actual difficulties arise in moving from being interested in talking about those kinds of approaches to
15 actually being able to achieve them?

MR HOGAN: What we've found - and this is as much through practical experience as it is through policy level experience - is when you converse with people at grassroots level you're comparing, for
20 instance, the needs in a particular place with a capacity to deliver on those needs. For instance, we had a very small secondary school, that has since closed, but at the time we were involved in some local level action research between our secondary school - which was a Year 7 to 10 in addition to a K to 6 school, so it was a central school setting - it
25 linked with its government central school in the town to run some courses using students from both places.

There was the ability to subsidise the costs to have the teacher in front of the class. It tended to work very well, but then it fell in a hole
30 when that teacher's availability was no longer there, when the teacher was transferred. It was one of those subject areas that needed a specialist and then they couldn't recruit the specialist to replace it, so it sort of lapsed. That was in the days also when there was less devolved authority than there is now, but going with devolved authority is
35 devolved budgeting and if there is also a tendency to shrink the budgets available to the schools, that capacity to be a bit more creative with those funds also diminishes.

We do have favourable experiences in the ACT, for instance, just as a cross-example. We have a shared facility arrangement at the
40 new suburb of Nicholls between our primary school and what was at the time the ACT government primary school in which we shared a major library resource learning centre. We shared carpark and access and playground, and we shared the grounds - the recreational grounds
45 and sporting ovals. That was underpinned by a fair degree of negotiation in the beginning, in the pre-building stages. We were partners in the joint venture. We operate the shared facilities on a management committee approach and it's underwritten by a

memorandum of agreement between the ACT Department of Education and Training and the Catholic Education Commission. So that's how that one operates.

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** That's still there and going, is it?

MR HOGAN: Yes, it's very functional and there are ongoing meetings of the management committee and it's proven to be quite a success, because it is very cost-effective and it also incorporates a good feeling of local community spirit in that developing suburb which transcends sectarian boundaries in many ways.

15 I think, depending on how much goodwill there is, and how much preparation people are prepared to put into sorting the issues out, and subject to there being agreement on legal and industrial issues and any other resourcing issues, it could well prove to be a viable concern for at least a period of time, over a number of years, which would make the whole thing worthwhile in providing provisions for students that they would otherwise not have for that period of time.

20 That's being realistic also, knowing that at some point that may not be able to continue for a variety of reasons, but was a venture that was worth trying and brought with it the benefits that go with cooperation.

25 In other areas, for instance the district administration of Country Area Program funds in New South Wales, we share three districts with the government sector and in each of those we are part of a joint management committee, a joint consultative approach to it, and collaboratively the district priorities and programs are worked out and there is commitment by schools and the two authorities in regard to

30 making those programs work. Very large professional development initiatives are conducted, which includes every teacher. There is no first come, first served basis or no priority given to one sector over the other. I've given two examples of that in the supplementary submission.

35 Some of the other aspects of Country Area Programs which can be funded at a district level also look at the development of resources that the community can share and that applies to both learning resources, databases, local histories and other things like that, as well as cultural exchanges and cultural visits. Where there is a need for

40 in-servicing on new syllabus developments, that is enhanced by things like CAP which enables people to go beyond just the syllabus briefing and actually do more about the teaching and learning side of things. By having more teachers involved in that you get greater insights into what's possible and also the collaboration and some action research

45 amongst the teachers.

THE COMMISSIONER: I'm pleased to hear of those because we haven't heard many examples, I must say, at all where the cooperation

across the systems is actually working. As you say, there are still hard to find many examples, but at least you've got a couple there where it's happening.

5 **MR HOGAN:** Yes. I think one of the biggest things we find is that it's as much an issue of scale and size of the authority as opposed to anything else. For instance, in a self-contained geographical area like the ACT, our collaboration with the ACT department is quite sound. Similarly with
10 the Family Services Bureau, for instance, our ability to service the special needs of students is very cooperative, very harmonious. It's more difficult with a larger state like New South Wales where a tendency for, I suppose, a centralised bureaucracy - which is important in lots of ways - can sometimes override the ability of district office level
15 cooperation because of the bureaucratic demands of procedures and protocols. I think it's a measure as much of size as also the capacity of people to be prepared to collaborate.

THE COMMISSIONER: Though people from the state Education Department in New South Wales said to us they saw no departmental
20 problem with local cooperation; it's more a matter of what was happening locally and getting people interested in it.

MR HOGAN: Yes, that would be true, too. I can think of some places where there wouldn't be any consideration of collaborating for
25 philosophical reasons. While I can appreciate that, I sometimes think it's a loss for the students where those sort of boundaries are there.

THE COMMISSIONER: Your office or diocese straddles two
30 jurisdictions.

MR HOGAN: Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: Are there particular issues that have come up for you and schools or students in trying to operate across borders?
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MR HOGAN: Yes, we actually have to deal with three jurisdictions, when you add the Commonwealth to it. It becomes interesting when the Commonwealth may perhaps have slightly different interpretations for
40 New South Wales and the ACT, depending on government agreements. Yes, it is interesting, and the only way that we can survive psychically as much as emotionally and practically is to try and make sure that we adopt procedures and practices that are going to be understandable in both sectors of our archdiocese.

45 We really do go to some lengths to make sure that our principals, whether they be in New South Wales or ACT, are very aware of the issues facing the archdiocese so there is a common language amongst the principals, and there's a common professional

development language amongst the teachers. We do try to make as much capital as we can out of Commonwealth initiatives so that they can understand that this is part of the glue that binds us together and that where there may be variations through state and territory differences in applying things, that we're able to make sure that the nuancing is there which doesn't detract from the fact that on all other things we're operating from the same set of principles, or the same values position.

One area that we do go to great lengths to try to make sure there's an equitable distribution of funds is in the special education area. In many cases that involves us prioritising towards the New South Wales schools where we devote our system funds, system-generated funds as opposed to the accountable Commonwealth and state-territory funds. We respect the accountability requirements of the Commonwealth and New South Wales and ACT governments in regard to their funding for the students in their sectors, but where we augment for New South Wales schools where we have our isolated students is that we utilise our own system funds to pick that up and to try and build it up to an equitable level across both sectors. Similarly, in the Indigenous education areas, that's where we also focus our attention there.

[State-Territory border]

THE COMMISSIONER: Do you have kids that actually have to cross the border one way or the other to go to school?

MR HOGAN: Both from the point of "have to" and from the other point of view that choose to, yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: Right. Are there any particular funding gaps that they fall into as a result?

MR HOGAN: No, but the gaps would exist in regard to jurisdictional issues. That would partly relate to things like child protection sort of questions and those sorts of things. Where they live has more to do with it than necessarily where instances may occur which need to be followed up. So they are more the sort of things, but I wouldn't put them down to this sort of thing. Where we do have children for instance crossing a state-territory border is in regard to our secondary education. We don't have a secondary school in Queanbeyan, for instance.

THE COMMISSIONER: So they come to Canberra.

MR HOGAN: Yes, so they come to Canberra for that reason. We do have a central school at Yass but for Years 11 and 12 they will access the ACT usually, or would go to the local Yass High School for

Years 11 and 12. That's partly dependent on parental choice and student choice too.

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** When they cross the border there's no difficulty with, say, travel support or subsidies or per capita funding?

10 **MR HOGAN:** No, because whatever else may be needed, in many cases the parents will pick up as part of their own resourcing question, to be able to access that. The parents that do choose to send students from New South Wales into the ACT do face those additional costs up-front, where that may be required as part of their choice, but otherwise the restrictions are fairly minimal, yes.

15 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Correct me if I'm wrong, but there are no schools in the ACT - no country schools in the ACT, they are all in Canberra.

20 **MR HOGAN:** From our point of view we don't have any that we identify as country, but there are some - I think the ACT government does recognise one or two small outposts as being "rural" - in inverted commas - which, for instance, used to have received disadvantaged schools money under the old priority listing of schools. I'm not exactly sure how they approach that one now because since the disadvantaged schools grant moneys have been rolled into the broader literacy and numeracy program funding, the ability to target schools on a disadvantaged basis has been reduced from our point of view, and we've been focusing more on literacy needs across the sector and targeting students instead of schools.

30 We've found that's been more effective, raising the level of students, than resourcing school level activity which may further benefit those students with good literacy skills anyway, and are better able to pick up on the additional resourcing than the students with underdeveloped literacy skills can do.

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[Lake Cargelligo; Indigenous education]

THE COMMISSIONER: Do any of the schools have a large Aboriginal population?

40 **MR HOGAN:** Yes, our school at Lake Cargelligo has in excess of 50% of the student population which is Indigenous. Of that 50% there is probably upwards of about 10 to 15 - 10% of those students may be reasonably itinerant in their attendance which reflects family patterns of movement and seasonal migration for employment and various things.

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THE COMMISSIONER: I missed the figure - was it up to 10% of those?

MR HOGAN: Yes, of that 50. The rest are located as well-established families in the town or in the surrounding district. That school goes from Kindergarten to Year 6 and we've been very fortunate in the level of Commonwealth assistance that we've been able to use in the
5 community and there have been a number of innovative projects there over time, particularly the use of reading recovery and reading intervention techniques. We've had some very noticeable gains in student literacy levels. That's been documented through our Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program accountability statements.
10 That's all based on actual diagnostic information derived from standardised tests as well as teacher moderated instruments.

The Commonwealth has also provided us with assistance in getting a number of innovative projects started, such as an FM
15 community station, which is involving the students and the Indigenous students and their parents and family members in constructing broadcast programs that deliberately target their literacy skills, such as script writing, verbal delivery, comprehension questioning and feedback.
20

We've also been able to develop things like - which we hope to have established by next year - a mobile Indigenous cultural centre which will enable the transport of artefacts and learning materials and curriculum materials to a school-by-school sort of visitation basis for
25 those schools that don't otherwise have good access to Indigenous education programs. It's actually been a successful school from the point of view of really meeting the needs of those students.

THE COMMISSIONER: Have you done any work looking at comparison in attendance or achievement of completion of Year 12? It's only Year 6
30 school, isn't it?

MR HOGAN: Yes, that one is a K to 6.

THE COMMISSIONER: What happens after they leave there then?
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MR HOGAN: After they leave there they go to available government schooling in the area. We don't have any experience of any of our students from St Francis Xavier Primary going as boarders to Catholic
40 schools. They tend not to be able to afford that. Across the archdiocese, though, we have a retention rate of our Indigenous students in excess of 90%.

The Commonwealth is increasingly asking us to raise that level.
45 Our most recent agreement, which was signed in this last week, has increased it to the mid-nineties over the next period of funding. It is an extremely difficult task to maintain a high level of retention and we're particularly focusing on our movement of our students through the

5 secondary years, to senior secondary schooling. That's where those
earlier issues I identified - such as student motivation and appropriate
mentoring and role modelling programs, particularly for boys - becomes
particularly important, and then career and vocational education
training and appropriate counselling for those students for their life
choices.

10 **THE COMMISSIONER:** I think that's all I've got, Mark, thank you. I think
your supplementary submission gives us the answers to all the things
that we were after. Thank you very much.

MR HOGAN: Again, thank you for the opportunity.

15 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks.

MR HOGAN: I might add as a postscript, if you wish I could forward
through our annual report material which goes into a bit more
background depth about some of these things.

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Yes, that would be helpful, thank you.

25 [2.25 pm]

THE COMMISSIONER: Barbara, would you like to introduce yourself
and the organisation and straight into your comments.

30 **MS PRESTON:** Certainly, yes. Thank you. I'm Barbara Preston. For the
equivalent of a little over a day a week I am Executive Officer of the
Australian Council of Deans of Education, ACDE, which is the national
peak organisation representing the deans of faculties of education and
heads of schools of education in Australian universities. So I think
35 every university and some other higher education institutions are
represented in ACDE, other than Australian National University which
does not have a faculty or school of education.

ACDE was formed in 1991 and it grew out of previous existing organisations representing professors of education in universities and the principals of teachers colleges. So it's got quite a long-standing history. I think it is probably, as far as I know, the only national organisation or council of deans in universities which has a secretariat other than the office of the president of the organisation but, still, at only a day and a little a week it's still a very small secretariat.

The ACDE's primary concerns of course are with professional and continuing education of schoolteachers and other educators, TAFE teachers, higher education teachers, educational administrators, also with education research, education policy, consultancies in support of education in Australia and internationally and also research and scholarship and general education, developing understandings of what education is as an enterprise or an activity in society, and what it means philosophically and conceptually as an intellectual discipline, again both in Australia and overseas.

The ACDE is very committed to social justice, democratic principles and the social and cultural development of individuals and organisations. So there's much that we have an interest in that this inquiry is concerned with, but as a national organisation there are several things that I think we'd like to take up in detail, and I certainly understand that quite a few faculties in schools of education have made their own submissions and have been involved in hearings, particularly those in rural areas or serving rural areas, like James Cook University and Charles Sturt, I presume, and probably the University of New England, but I'm not quite sure there, plus the Northern Territory University and others.

[Teacher supply and demand]

One of the areas that ACDE has put a lot of work into in the last few years, and it's the one that I individually and outside my executive officer role have done the commission work for ACDE in teacher supply and demand projections, and I think that is certainly one of the areas of very serious concern. In our submissions we've put in a range of suggestions in dealing with problems of teaching shortfalls in rural and remote areas, and I'm certainly aware that many others have put in specific suggestions and recommendations, and it is an ongoing problem but obviously one that is going to become much much more severe as the overall shortfall in graduate numbers starts hitting.

What hasn't been put in the submission that I think might be worthwhile getting in at this stage is a little bit about the historical origins of those shortfalls. There are a couple of broad general factors across the board. One is the age structure of the teaching workforce in Australia, with a large number of teachers moving towards retirement age. That peak of teachers who were employed particularly in the 70s

but also from the 60s through to the early 80s are now moving through towards retirement age. That peak will hit five to 10 to 15 years as it works its way through, and obviously a large number of replacement teachers will be required. That is one general across-the-board factor.

Another factor that is important for particular short periods of time are changes in course length, structure, changes in school starting age and very particular things that can have a very large impact for one or two years, and then that impact might flow on for another three or four years, but they're little peaks and troughs and I think a very serious one is going to be in Queensland at the secondary level next year because of the introduction of extended graduate programs for secondary teacher education students. So there are only about half the number of secondary graduates in Queensland this year compared to last year or compared to next year because of that extension, and that is going to have a very big impact.

Queensland school authorities I think are aware of that and they're certainly doing quite a lot of their own teacher supply and demand projecting and planning, but I think it is an issue that they really should have been taking on some years ago, and I think that for rural and remote schools in Queensland it will cause a lot of difficulties, and of course if the Queensland school authorities aggressively recruit from elsewhere in the country for teachers that are competent and willing and able to teach in the rural and remote schools, those other states and territories will be losing the staff that they might have otherwise had.

The other matter that is one of the very deep underlying structural problems arises out of what's called the Dawkins Revolution in higher education, and in the late 80s and early 90s a number of universities were amalgamated with what were very large teachers colleges. In New South Wales the teacher education commitment of those institutions generally remained with the amalgamation, and places like University of New England, Newcastle, Wollongong, Sydney University did not strip out their teachers education component. They maintained it. They restructured and changed it but overall in New South Wales the numbers weren't dramatically cut, and my projections generally show that New South Wales will not experience some of the serious problems that for example will occur in Victoria.

In Victoria you had the very large teacher education institutions amalgamated with Melbourne University and with Deakin University and, for reasons to do with internal university priorities and a range of other matters, decisions were made to very largely move out of teacher education, and so what had been the very large teacher education institutions in Victoria - and of course there were a number of others but the major ones that became part of Melbourne University and

Deakin - their teacher education student numbers dissipated for reasons unrelated to supply and demand of teachers.

But of course that was going on at the time in the last years of the Cain/Kirner government and certainly the first few years of the Kennett government. There were very large cuts in staffing levels, so Victoria moved from some of the lowest student teacher ratios to about the highest or close to the highest in the country, and that was a reduction in teacher numbers in the order of 4 or 5 thousand over a few years. That sort of impact means that the equivalent of graduates of three or four years were not able to find employment. So that's the sort of order of magnitude.

So in Victoria there were, as I think most people know, very massive surpluses of graduates unable to find employment, and of course a lot of them stayed around or kept their names on lists for a long time, for many years, and maybe there are still some there, except I think they generally would not be available for vacancies as they arise, and for somebody who graduated in 1992 and hasn't done anything other than a small amount of emergency teaching since, I think in the year 2000 a school would probably think twice about employing them unless they've been doing some serious activities to develop their teaching competencies.

So that structural change in Victoria means that the underlying rate of teacher supply, graduate supply, in Victoria has really been cut, and I think the way to best illustrate this is to compare New South Wales and Victoria, and if you look at all the figures on the demand side at the primary level, the number of students in schools, the number of teachers in schools and in my projections the actual number of graduates demanded say in the year 2002, Victoria just sits very close to 70% of New South Wales, 69, 70, 71%.

But if you actually look at the supply side, the number of primary qualified graduates coming out of initial teacher education institutions, Victoria is only around 40% of New South Wales, and that's a very big difference. That shortfall in Victoria, which is being buffered by that hangover of the oversupply during the period of staffing cuts, just cannot be maintained without further fairly serious overall reductions in staffing levels across the board or otherwise very severe shortfalls and, as they've moved out of centralised staffing, it's the hard-to-staff schools that will be the ones that will be most seriously and severely affected, who will be in the weakest market positions.

And of course it won't only be Victorian hard-to-staff schools. It will also say be in the Northern Territory, which has drawn very much from Victorian graduates who haven't been able to find positions in Victoria for their staffing through most of the 90s. Northern Territory has

also drawn from other states where there's been a surplus of supply for particularly metropolitan and the more desirable areas, and so graduates have felt, well, rather than go to the difficult to staff schools in their state, they've gone to the Northern Territory. But if the positions become readily available in the desirable urban and coastal and large regional centres, then those graduates who have made themselves available for the more difficult schools may no longer be available.

I think it's been a difficult problem that I and other people have some difficulty in understanding, why the Australian Council of Deans of Education has had difficulties in convincing the school authorities that a problem is likely to emerge and work sort of collaboratively. Certainly in the recommendations in our reports for many years the number one thing has been for a small organisation with limited resources and a limited mandate, we are saying we think there's going to be a problem.

The ACDE does this work for its own purposes for internal negotiations about student numbers with university administrations and with DETYA, but it's been saying to school authorities, "Look, I think we need to work on this collaboratively to get the best projections possible to try and understand what's likely to happen in the future and to take pre-emptive action."

One of the problems has been I suppose that it's often a story that journalists like to give big headlines to, and for a lot of universities or for a lot of faculties of education that's not a bad thing because a dramatic headline about a looming teacher shortage increases demand for initial teacher education courses and increases the quality of their intake because of that, and that's a positive effect.

But the other side of it is that the school authorities have generally responded fairly negatively to those sorts of headlines, and because they either haven't done their own work or have done work that tends to use extraordinarily conservative parameters, like separation rates of less than 2% when actually if they look down they should be projecting retirement rates of 3% plus the usual resignation rates, they haven't been willing to do the cooperative work, to do the agreed projections, and they've also often - when they have looked at the area - been caught up in teachers' salaries cases, and of course from the teachers unions' point of view they're very keen to make the argument that there's going to be a looming teacher shortage, "Therefore we should have high salaries and excellent conditions to attract more people into teaching", a perfectly reasonable argument but from the employers' point of view they don't want to provide the high salaries and the costly conditions because of their own fiscal constraints and so they feel that they want to put the argument that there is going to be no problem in the future.

It's one of the unfortunate things, given the stripping back in most government school authorities research and data sections, that very often the only time they actually sit down to do work in this area is in preparation of a case against a teacher union salary claim.

So I suppose one of the things that ACDE will be looking for again is how to get a sensible, collaborative, cooperative approach to considering teacher supply-and-demand projections and what to do about the conclusions of them, and certainly with some school authorities we have informally very good working relationships, while at others we don't, and quite often we'll have excellent working relationships with the professional officers actually doing the work, but when it comes to the ministerial or chief executive officer level, the short-term political imperatives comfort zones often come to the fore and then people are locked into positions that they have already taken.

So I think that area is one that really needs some serious resolution and it also needs some serious action, because of course while the school authorities are saying there is going to be no problem in terms of graduate numbers, university vice-chancellors and DETYA will be somewhat resistant to faculties of education and the ACDE nationally saying, "Look, overall we should be increasing numbers in teacher education," because, quite understandably, they feel the school authorities are the ones on the ground who know about these things, and the faculties of education are just interested in expanding their own numbers and their own territory.

So it's an issue that needs grappling with and certainly ACDE is sort of thinking through different ways of trying to make a more constructive approach. I mean, we've tried that in the past but obviously haven't been as successful as we should have been. I think that's the main thing - the teacher supply-and-demand area.

THE COMMISSIONER: Okay. When we met with DETYA before lunch we had a short comment pretty much to the effect, "Well, ACDE are doing these figures and we don't necessarily agree with them." They didn't dispute them but didn't necessarily agree. But why are the projections coming from the state authorities so different? I would have thought that everyone is using the same data.

MS PRESTON: Well, they're not. Probably the most important problem with the state authorities is that they tend to ignore the non-government sector. There's two main problems. One is that they often don't include the non-government sector and, if they do make assumptions about the non-government sector, they don't incorporate its greater rate of growth.

The other major problem is that the state authorities use the DETYA statistics for graduate projections, and I think I've put in here what are the problems with those projections. They misclassify most courses. They're extraordinarily useless data for these sorts of purposes. If you look at the DETYA primary initial teacher education commencing students enrolments or graduate numbers, or the secondary ones, you'll get figures that bear almost no relationship to reality at all. Just one obvious example I've found recently is that their graduate numbers for secondary in South Australia were about 100 a year, when the actual number is well over 260, but because a number of the universities' graduate diplomas of education are classified as post-initial courses, they just don't get included.

And in the next supply-and-demand report that will be ready probably within a month, hopefully sooner, there will be included in that a critique of the teachers supply-and-demand report that was prepared by all the state CEOs, so the CESCEO group, the Council of Chief Executives Officers of State School Systems or something like that, and they prepared it in July or finalised the report in July last year, and then that report was released by MCEETYA in May this year and very widely distributed, and had been used as the basis of DETYA responses to questions since then at estimates committee and DETYA letters to Australian Council of Deans of Education president on these issues, and generally becomes the national authoritative document, and yet that document is very very seriously flawed in lots of ways.

But the central thing is that it has some various projections about demand in the government sector and it has the supply - or figures about current enrolments that are based on those DETYA statistics, including that South Australian one I mentioned, but they in no way draw those together in a comprehensive, coherent way to develop projections.

So where they have towards the end a collection or a series of state summaries, those state summaries arise out of a survey of state and I think some non-government school authorities in early 1998, saying, "What are your current shortfalls and what do you expect for the next few years?" and of course if the state authorities have done no serious work themselves in projections, the person filling in the survey can at best guess, and generally they've said things like, "We have maths and science and various other ESL, whatever, shortfalls in rural and remote areas and some outer suburban areas, you know, just what you'd expect from early last year, and we don't see much change in the situation," and so that then becomes the basis of when you ask questions about what's going to be happening in 2003, 2004.

The secretary of DETYA goes back to what a school authority official has said in filling in a survey in early 1998 based on no serious

research or analytic work, and that's again one of the problems of how documents like that become official government positions about the state of the world. It's not a policy document, it's a document about the state of the world as expected to be in a future period.

THE COMMISSIONER: But at least Queensland and New South Wales admit that the average teaching age or average age of teachers is 46 or 47.

MS PRESTON: Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: So I would have thought that of itself should ring alarm bells for them.

MS PRESTON: Yes. As I said, Queensland certainly in the last four or five months has started to do some really serious work in the area. They had commissioned some Canadians to do some extraordinarily detailed work and actually tracking individual teachers, specialisations, age, career progression, everything else - wonderful stuff - but it was only for the government sector and didn't include supply data, and so in the end you couldn't take it anywhere other than for some very specific staffing sort of policies, and Queensland is now I think looking much more carefully and commissioning research and putting I think very competent professional staff in to work in that area.

And New South Wales has usually kept a reasonably good eye on things. I've had differences with them over the years. We've argued about what separation rates are likely to be in the future, and I think sometimes they might say they ended up being right and I'd say I ended up being right, but then sometimes we would admit that the other was right, but they usually put a bit of an effort into it too.

[Staff recruitment and incentives]

THE COMMISSIONER: So what's needed then to attract young people into teaching and particularly into rural and remote areas?

MS PRESTON: I think two key things: one is actually attracting in people who have lived in those areas and/or want to live in those areas, that that is actually their choice of a place to live, rather than somebody who really wants to live in a metropolitan area or on the north coast and just goes there for the sake of getting up their points or because they've got no other option, and that goes back then of course to the quality of secondary schooling in those areas and the quality of opportunities for and the accessibility of higher education for people in those areas, recognising the greater costs and lower incomes of people in rural and remote areas wanting to go on into higher education, and I think particularly attracting Indigenous teachers is incredibly important

and there have been a number of issues such as the changes in Abstudy that have made that more difficult.

I've got no detailed material at my fingertips but I do understand that there's been some drop-off and certainly a concern that in the future there will be a greater drop-off just with financial difficulties for either families sending young people - school leavers or equivalent - to higher education away from their home, but also the difficulties with a number of the site based teacher education programs that are particularly geared to more mature people with local community responsibilities that they cannot leave.

In that area one of the issues is that those programs are very costly and there is often cross-subsidisation from elsewhere within the faculty or the university to support those programs that may not in the current financial difficulties of education faculties and universities as a whole be able to be sustained; so those issues of attracting people who know and understand and want to live in those areas. And the other one which is really important is actually providing within the initial teacher education program the content but, more importantly, the experience and in-depth personal understanding of what it is like to teach and to live in those schools.

People from the University of New England mentioned to me that a relatively brief in terms of time but still fairly sustained trip for initial teacher education students around Moree and other areas was a really significant factor in breaking down a lot of resistance to actually teaching in those areas, and that was just in terms of a visit and some local activities rather than a sustained teaching experience, and obviously a sustained teaching experience, living in the community, really feeling what it's like to be part of it and to really be working in those schools is very important.

But again, with the best will in the world, it's problems of cost - serious problems of cost for the students because most students these days have part-time jobs that are difficult to leave for the period of practicum, as well as the other costs that might be involved, and for the universities there are costs of supervision and support. So if there can be some way of dealing with those so that the numbers can be there.

[2.56 pm]

THE COMMISSIONER: We actually heard some good examples in South Australia of those kinds of opportunities being provided to tertiary students, final year or second-last year students. So they're picking up on that.

MS PRESTON: Yes, I think the University of South Australia, I expect - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: University of South Australia, yes. With the packages, one of the things that has been said to us regularly that amongst the most important things that teachers look for is reasonable standard of accommodation. That is perhaps even more important than the quantum of the package. They're prepared to put up with substandard accommodation for three years until they get to the top of the incentive program, but to stay they really want to have somewhere that's decent and worthwhile bringing up a family in. Does that come up in the statistical work that you're doing or is this just anecdotal to us?

MS PRESTON: I think it's out there somewhere but I haven't come across that directly. What I am looking at at the moment - and it will be in the ACDE report - is that quite a lot of the American work on what school authorities do there to attract teachers to their hard-to-staff schools. You know, particularly in a state like California there are a lot of parallels with Australia and at this stage I haven't come across anything that I think really stands out as exciting and different but that will certainly be in the final report that we'll send on to you.

THE COMMISSIONER: Right, thanks. I'd be interested to see that. I think there needs to be certainly a greater degree of flexibility in packaging so that you can actually develop a package which meets the aspirations of the incoming teacher. Given the changes in industrial relations for good or ill, at least that possibility is there; there can be much more flexibility in that. But certainly, as I said, we're hearing a lot about this question of housing, so I would be interested if you actually find anything that gives some research validity to what we're being told.

MS PRESTON: Yes.

[Teacher education]

THE COMMISSIONER: The second thing I wanted to ask you about, is you made a passing mention to non-university based education programs - teacher education programs, off-site programs. These are clearly proving extremely important for the training of Indigenous teachers, so there is already, I think, a lot of evidence that that's necessary. We are also getting some comments coming in from non-Indigenous people in country areas saying that, "Those kinds of programs would suit us wonderfully as well." So I think generally there would be support for the kind of programs that are external studies, with bringing people in for short-term blocks, but as you indicated, the costs of that are greater.

MS PRESTON: Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yet DETYA said to us this morning that they don't make any particular provision for those kind of courses, that it's a block grant to the university and then the university decides how they're going to spend it, and if it's more money, so be it, they're prepared to do it or they're not, and increasingly they're not. Would that again be the experience of members of your council?

MS PRESTON: Yes. One of the issues that was raised just in conversation with people from the University of New England, where they have a large distance education graduate diploma in education, is the problem for students of the residential activities. Because they are not possible for some students in terms of cost and just opportunity to get away from wherever they happen to be, they are required, on equal opportunity grounds, to have them voluntary, which then of course means that why would anybody bother to do it unless they wanted to have a working holiday at the university.

So there's the problem there of how you can actually manage the sort of educational pedagogical function that the residential opportunities have provided and have that accessible and valuable for all the students, not just those who have the resources, the time and the inclination to attend them. But certainly the actual site base side of it - to actually say, "Well, if we won't have that at the university, we'll go out to communities" - would be very costly.

Again in some communities you could target - say, "We've got our five, 10, 20 students within a reasonable distance of this community" - but in a normal distance education program they're just scattered all over the state or all over the country, so that sort of model is not really viable, but it certainly is something that could be looked at. Given the difficulties that they're having in sustaining the ones that are targeted to Indigenous communities where there might be a reasonable number of potential students, to actually broaden that out might be fairly difficult.

THE COMMISSIONER: The difficulty in sustainability is because of the cost, not because of the lack of demand. I think the demand is there; the question is whether the money can be provided to run the programs.

MS PRESTON: Yes. Maybe that is an option of what to do when there's a serious need and a focused need of saying, "Let's attract people from these communities into teacher education. Let's look at career mature people in a situation of career change." I know it's just off the top of my head, but somewhere like Bourke or Mt Isa or a reasonably large centre should be able to organise something there. It is possible that

there is something like that operating that I'm not aware of. I know some institutions do have annexes in larger regional centres.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, they even go to larger regional centres and run a short program there, whether they've got an annex there or not. There are some at least who do that. Okay, I think that's probably the things I wanted to ask you about. I think it's pretty well there, Barbara, unless there are other issues you want to touch on.

MS PRESTON: The only other thing I'd like to emphasise is that I think a lot of the issues to do with the nature of courses and meeting the needs out there for different types of numbers and qualities of teachers could be better met within a structure like the sort of accreditation structure that's set out in the report of the standards and guidelines for initial teacher education project with an accreditation structure that involves school authorities and other stakeholders. So I think that's something, if you consider it appropriate, that could be put as a possible way forward as a framework for dealing with some of these issues. I think it would be very useful, because otherwise faculties of education are relatively powerless within universities, and without that extra external structured support, they might have difficulty in sustaining and doing the sort of things that they really know they should be able to do.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much for coming. Thanks for the submission that you sent in advance, and the attachments. There's good material there that we're very pleased to have a good look at.

THE COMMISSIONER: Would you like to introduce yourselves for the tape and then go straight into your comments, Megan.

MS McNICHOLL: Thank you. I'm Megan McNicholl. I'm federal President of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association. I have with me Barbara Lough who is also a federal councillor and New South Wales state President. We'd like to ask permission to deliver our presentation as a joint effort this afternoon and would encourage as much interaction as possible from the audience. So we're going to share this little chat, if that's okay.

THE COMMISSIONER: Of course.

MS McNICHOLL: I am aware of the fact that you have already received a copy of our submission and read that, so you're basically familiar with our issues.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MS McNICHOLL: Just for the benefit of the tape I would just like to reiterate that ICPA is a rural education lobby group which represents families living in remote and isolated parts of Australia. We are an association of more than 3200 members and we have 113 branches across Australia. We have a federal body and we also have a state body in all states except Victoria. The group was formed in 1971 during a severe recession in rural Australia and I guess probably that theme has been a recurring theme throughout our history.

How is education provided for our families? The main delivery modes are small rural and remote schools - the distance education mode of delivery for primary, pre-primary and secondary, and then of course we have students who board away from home for secondary and for tertiary at either school-term hostels or residential schools. Our focus for the presentation this afternoon will be on three main areas; that is, small and remote schools, the distance education and the boarding away from home. Those areas have been highlighted in this submission.

Where to start? Barb, would you like to start with distance ed and walk through that? We can do that together, can we?

[Distance education]

MS LOUGH: Right. The distance education, as you are aware, varies much from state to state in the quality. But the successful distance education, particularly in the primary level, is dependent on a three-way partnership - the student, the teacher and the supervisor, the home supervisor. All three play a vital role. We also have a vital role played by the learning materials production centre or the people who write the material for the distance education students based on the particular state's curriculum.

There are some wonderful things that have come out of distance education, and some students who have done very well. But there are also some problems that occur, and usually it's where there is a breakdown in communication between the students, the supervisor, the school or the student and the supervisor, because that can happen if there's a personality conflict or if perhaps the student has a learning difficulty, or they may be a gifted student and the parent or supervisor just doesn't know how to handle that. It's not always picked up by the distance education teacher in the supervising school because if the work comes back and it's completed on time, they're not sure how long it has taken. If it's a child with a difficulty it might have taken that child three times the expected time. But the expectation is that the work must go back so somehow it's completed. But the frustration that may have occurred between the student and the supervisor is unknown unless

that supervisor communicates to the teacher at the supervising school or the teacher asks.

Sometimes the lesson material needs modifying, and this comes back to the teacher at the distance ed centre, and how closely that partnership is working. If the student isn't handling the work, the supervisor must contact the teacher and tell them. By the same token if the student is bored because they're handling the work so easily, that can cause conflict too, and once again it's up to the teacher and the supervisor to be able to compare notes and work together.

It depends on the state and also the area of the state or territory as to how good the communication is. They may have telephone communication, they may have computer link-up, they may have video trials, which has just occurred in New South Wales.

MS McNICHOLL: They're very successful in Queensland.

MS LOUGH: And Queensland.

MS McNICHOLL: The Charleville School of Distance Education.

MS LOUGH: There are some exciting things happening there. The cost factor comes into it. When it comes to using computers and the Internet it's a wonderful source now for students on distance education but the cost comes into it. Do they use their home computer? Do they have access to local call rates? How easily can they get onto the Internet, and also the expertise of the person using it. In the recent trials at Broken Hill they found the children were very adaptive to the new technology; it was the parents or the supervisor who stood back and really took a back seat. Perhaps you might have some other things you want to add in there, Megan.

[Home tutors]

MS McNICHOLL: Just adding on from Barb's very excellent summary, I think one of the other issues that you'd be very familiar with is, while there have been enormous quantum leaps in the quality of distance education delivery and the quality of the curriculum, inherent with that is the enormous pressure on the home tutor mother. I'm sure you're familiar with the story of mums that are really struggling when it comes to supervising and being confident about delivering the curriculum to their children. We've certainly identified it as the major issue for our organisation, and that is how you go about supporting these mothers.

We acknowledge it is a joint responsibility, obviously, between the schools, the state education systems and, I think, probably the Commonwealth has a role to play in it. The Commonwealth does currently through the AIC scheme acknowledge that distance education

is a legitimate form of access to education through the correspondence allowance, and I guess ICPA at this point in time has been directed by its members to explore the possibility of some sort of support; whether it be financial may be one way. There are various ways of accessing support but there is a strong, I guess, cry from those families who are really struggling financially and who can't afford governesses and who can't afford on-farm help, to look at ways of providing some meaningful and real support to them in their role as teachers. We don't have any ready answers for that at the moment but it's something we believe certainly has to be explored and can't be ignored.

I guess we equate it a little bit like putting a young beginning teacher into a remote school and asking them to deliver the curriculum to three or four grades. It requires a great deal of professional development and I think the system would acknowledge that, and they do that for their teachers to ensure that they can deliver the curricula. I think the analogy is the same for home tutor mums. I was a distance ed kid, my mother taught me from the kitchen. I vaguely remember a few instructions wafting through the scone-making and I probably taught myself via Blackfriars correspondence. But there is no comparison with the curriculum and it requires constant supervision. Certainly in the primary years that is the case. So we have identified that as an ongoing issue and it's something that we can't ignore.

THE COMMISSIONER: Could I just cut in at that point perhaps and ask questions as we go. What kind of support is provided now for - generally mother - the home supervisor? Does the supervisor have regular access to the teacher? Are there kinds of in-service or professional development courses run for them, say when the kids go in for their residential blocks? Are there opportunities then for the home supervisors to have a residential block as well, to go through curriculum issues with them, to raise questions and to provide them with support?

MS LOUGH: At times, yes, when there has been a - well, I'm speaking from the New South Wales system. There have been great changes within the curriculum and where possible they do try to bring the supervisor in, but that's not always possible. A lot of supervisors are working on the family property now, and some of them don't have the literacy skills. The old Blackfriars correspondence has changed dramatically, and there is far more emphasis on literacy skills, even in coping with the distance education materials. One of the comments that I have had from the people who write the distance materials in New South Wales is it's not a system for someone who has no literacy skills, or poor literacy skills.

In the past people have been able to afford governesses to assist. I think if you went to the western areas of New South Wales,

Queensland and other states you would find the same thing: there are very few governesses, mainly because of the cost factor.

THE COMMISSIONER: I think in the past too there used to be three or four families on a property.

MS LOUGH: Yes, that's right.

THE COMMISSIONER: It could be shared but now most properties are worked by a single family.

MS LOUGH: One place around the Bourke area I do know that five families actually support a governess between them. So they have a month at a time that they have governess help. But once again that's at their own expense, there's no recognition by the government at all in any shape or form. The distance education allowance merely allows them to set up their classroom and to purchase necessary materials which are provided free in the government school.

MS McNICHOLL: I think one of the other things that's important for home tutors is the notion of mentoring. I think the VISE program - and you will be speaking to someone from VISE after us, I understand - has actually provided that level of expertise within the home. I know there would be many families who would benefit if that program could be expanded and that there was some form of financial assistance to access those VISE tutors; not in all cases but there would be many mothers who would benefit from that mentoring - access to a mentor on a more than infrequent basis, rather than just once a year until that skill level is developed, is built up.

Even so, classroom teachers need that collegiate support, and I think the notion of networking and bringing home tutors together, using VISE, some sort of financial support for those who really need it to access perhaps some in-house respite care, if that's what they're looking for, so that they can focus on teaching their children through a very intense or busy time in the curriculum, or releasing them from teaching to do what they have to do on the farm.

There are programs - for example, in Queensland there's the remote family care program which offers respite care for families in the home, and specifically for geographically isolated families. They can access that program for up to three weeks a year; if something like that could also be expanded on a national scale, and if families can access it for a bit longer, maybe six weeks a year. There are models out there that I think we can be looking at, and being a little bit flexible and creative - and we're hearing this, I think, during our discussion on rural and remote, that it is time to look at some flexible and creative ways of delivering services that support families, that support teachers, that

improve on the training of teachers, that builds up the skills level of parents, not only distance ed parents but I would suggest parents who have children in small schools. So we have an opportunity to do that, I think - people are trying.

MS LOUGH: Another positive thing, which you've probably heard, is the distance education conference where they bring together the teachers in the school, the supervisors and the curriculum writers. I'm not sure. Does that apply in Queensland as well? I know some other states say that they have problems with their curriculum, but it is a very positive thing, to bring together the service providers because they can then discuss the problems they have. Unfortunately it doesn't get to the ones who are really experiencing the problems. The people who have literacy problems, they're not the ones who attend these conferences, unfortunately. So reaching those people who have very real needs I feel is an urgent consideration, as well as the consideration for home tutors in general.

[Teacher preparation]

MS McNICHOLL: The next area of interest to us is small and remote schools. Of course they're a very treasured part of our community and absolutely integral to the sense of community. We have identified earlier today the issue of teacher training and the need to prepare teachers for the additional roles that they must play in our schools. I'm pleased to say that there are some universities who address that very well, and they're more often than not the regional universities. I also express concern that there is possibly a suggestion among some faculties that as we move to 2010, or to the next millennium, that having to focus on preparation of teachers for rural and remote service may not be as important an issue as we become more dependent on technology for the delivery of education and delivery of the curriculum, which is a real concern to me, and a real concern to our association obviously.

I think there are ways around addressing the preparation of teachers. In Queensland, through the Queensland ICPA and through our branches, we run what we call the host student program where students from the Queensland University of Technology have been targeted in their fourth year, and through CAP we pay their travel fund, cost of travel to our rural and remote schools. And families in the surrounding areas actually host the students for the period of their practicum, as well as the Education Department also working closely with us to identify teacher accommodation that isn't being utilised where we can place these students at almost a peppercorn rent.

I see that as being a very positive way of the community taking responsibility, for initiating that, for reaching out and bridging the gap between the bush and the city because this is definitely targeting

students who are urban based students and saying to them, "Look, come and live with us for four, five or six weeks. Let us show you what our school community is about. Let us show you what it is like to live in a community and then we'll accept what you decide. If you think at the end of your six-week prac our community is a good place to be and our kids are great kids to teach, we think you'll come back. But if it's not your scene, then we accept that, because we accept that not everybody wants to live and work in a rural and remote area."

In the last five years we have put 300 students through that program, and it has had in the south-west area of Queensland a significant impact on the number of first-year graduates who are in fact applying for positions. Along with that of course we accept that most of our teachers are beginning teachers. We have the usual problems of maintaining and retaining teachers for any length of time in our area except local teachers, teachers who have obviously married and live locally. I think that will be the case Australia-wide.

[Professional development]

The professional development issue is again a very important one. That's a challenge, I guess, for the state systems and something the federal ICPA shouldn't comment too much on. But unless there is ongoing and continual professional development and collegiate support for our teachers it becomes a major issue trying to keep them, specially in the remote schools. The other issue of course for students who are attending small and remote schools - and this pertains particularly to the small remote high schools - is the choice of schooling, and whether or not the curriculum that's being delivered is an appropriate curriculum.

[Curriculum]

While we in no way would wish to demean the curriculums that are being offered in many of our schools, the reality is that they do not deliver to some students a real choice when it comes to accessing ongoing and further and higher education. It's a very complex issue. There are all sorts of reasons why the curriculum is not as robust as it might be. That can be linked to teacher availability, teacher retention, numbers of kids in the schools, and some of our schools are very very small, and by sheer demand that will determine the sorts of subjects that are delivered. We are, I guess, anxious that the notion that we can move into virtual schooling and deliver a secondary curriculum via technology is a most inappropriate way of educating children who live in already very isolated communities. It has the potential to isolate us and deskill us even further, rather than enhance our schools. So we'd be very cautious of any move to become dependent on technology.

[Extra-curricula learning opportunities]

I guess in the small school, while it has a close community feel about it, that is a positive but it also can have a negative if there is in fact a lack of peer support and interaction, a lack of opportunity for face-to-face delivery, and inherent in that is the opportunity to express ideas, to share ideas, to challenge ideas, to have new ideas, to have different ideas. In a very small learning community that can be extremely difficult. Then you were looking at the notion of educating the whole student.

We have inherent problems with delivering cultural, sporting and social experiences. While the CAP program has certainly extended and enhanced those experiences, certainly in the primary school level, it is still very limiting in the upper school level, simply because of student numbers. You don't have enough students to put on a musical, you often don't have enough students to have the commitment to develop a school magazine or a school newsletter. There aren't enough students to have a sporting competition, or to have a sporting team. They're the sorts of experiences that are absolutely essential to developing the sorts of life skills that I guess we believe our children need to function not just in their own community but outside of our own communities.

[3.33 pm]

[Country Areas Program]

Again, I refer to the Country Areas Program. We value its uniqueness because it is the only program that currently addresses the notion of geographic isolation. It has identified that there are disadvantages when you are educating children who are geographically isolated. Certainly the other strength of that program has been the community focus. That community focus, in fact, is being lost in some states. I believe that we can look very quickly at what's happened in Queensland, and we have fought very hard in Queensland to maintain an intersystemic community based PCAP, as it's called, system which ensures that the funds are distributed at a community level by the community via community submissions.

The funds do not go directly to the school, and the advantage of that is that you take away the notion that accessing CAP funds is about just getting money to supplement something that already exists in a school program. It's about encouraging, I believe and ICPA believes, communities to think carefully about the sorts of experiences that are important to enhance their children's lives, to take them out of that little goldfish bowl and perhaps either introduce them to an experience outside of their community or perhaps, "Let's import some new ideas into our community. Let's look at who we can bring in to skill or to develop individuals or groups of people."

CAP is predominantly about working with groups of people rather than individuals. It also, I think, has the strength - when you're looking at the community submission process, it's the only process that I know anywhere that brings together teachers, the profession, parents and communities, where they are encouraged or almost have to sit around a table and justify their submission, talk about their idea, right from the implementation stage to the evaluation stage. There is a lot of rhetoric out there about what community participation is really all about. This is the only program that I know that demands a high level of community participation.

That is under threat of being lost. The reason I think that is going to be lost if we don't guard it vigilantly is because when you're trying to evaluate a program how do you quantify the value of community participation? It's an esoteric thing, isn't it? It's something that's very difficult, to say, "Yes, we've got a level of community participation here, tick it six points." It's one of those ongoing things. It's an evolving thing. If you want to evaluate it, you've got to hang around for like 10 or 12 years to really see the benefits of that initial involvement. Barbara, I'll stop there, I've talked for long enough.

MS LOUGH: The emphasis at the moment coming from the Commonwealth is that we need hard, cold data. CAP is not one of those programs that we can provide that hard, cold data easily. Some things you can, but a lot of the programs, as Megan has said, can't be measured in that way and we really must preserve that part of the program because that is part of its uniqueness.

The other thing is that Megan has spoken about what has happened in Queensland. In New South Wales they have changed and there is 80% of the funds which actually go direct to the schools. Where the schools are very knowledgeable about CAP and the teachers and the community are very involved, those funds can be used very successfully. Where you have a number of small schools, one and two-teacher schools within a hundred-kilometre radius, they will work together and they will use those funds that have been allocated to their global budget.

But there needs to be a continual emphasis through the education system and also through the community that the value of CAP and how you must find out what is needed for your community, not what you are told - "We will devote it to this particular area because we're missing out there" - there is a great emphasis to put it into literacy funding, because that is a priority of the ministers, also numeracy levels are receiving a lot of recognition at the moment. They are basic things that should be provided within the education system. There are other funds allocated for that. We really feel that CAP addresses other issues as well. We really have to fight to make that known and recognised. If

these issues aren't addressed by the CAP funding they won't be addressed at all.

THE COMMISSIONER: What sorts of issues, Barbara?

MS LOUGH: For example, in the submission, as you would notice, in one of the case studies we had two students who were introduced to music by the CAP program. There were no music teachers in the school but a CAP teacher was provided and both of those students have gone on; one is now in tertiary training up in Queensland and the other one is in Year 12. Both have played at very very high levels with orchestras and are using music now as their - one is going to follow a career in music, the other is using it to supplement their education because that's how they're actually paying their way through university, by teaching other students. They would not have had that opportunity. There was no music training within the family or the community that they could have accessed. So that's a long-reaching effect. It goes back to their primary education.

The same with sporting skills. There are teams of quality sports - that's one of the organisations that goes around and teaches skills. In a small school you don't have enough children to form a team, so how do you learn a team sport? There have been students who have gone on and played professional sports as a result but they couldn't have done it isolated in these small communities. It goes back to this primary level - if these opportunities aren't provided.

The same with writers coming in - that's been a wonderful thing. You would have had writer workshops. Children are meeting an actual author and then their whole English is improved, their literacy skills, because they've suddenly had this burning ambition to write as a result. Seeing new experiences, perhaps in visiting a capital city - they have never seen an escalator, they've never seen a museum. They've seen them on television but it's not the same as going to a museum, going to a zoo for the first time - lifetime experiences that we all know and take for granted; how to catch public transport when there's no such thing as public transport in areas where these people reside.

MS McNICHOLL: I was just going to make a comment. I was just reflecting this morning, listening to the gentlemen this morning talk about the funds that have gone into various programs, I think it's interesting to note that if a bulletin went out Australia-wide about funding being withdrawn from certain programs, the only one that there would be blood on the wattle about would be CAP. Australia-wide there would be - and I've actually used that term in Queensland, and we use it defensively and we say to the minister, "There'll be blood on the wattle if you touch our CAP funding."

But I think there's a message in that because there has been a huge amount of money gone into all sorts of special needs programs for rural schools and the money has been withdrawn over the years, and no-one complains because there's no sense of community ownership over the program. The community isn't even aware that the money has gone into the schools. The teachers are but nobody else is. Here is all this money coming into schools to improve numeracy and literacy skills and we've got wonderful ideas and wonderful theories and wonderful reports, but the local community that you're targeting doesn't have a clue. No-one has gone out of their way to explain to the community why the money has come in.

CAP money doesn't come into the school. The CAP money is there and if you want it you've got to think about why you want it for your school. You draw up a submission, you identify your areas, you put your submission in, you talk to people about it, you justify it, you evaluate it. There is real value - "Don't you dare try and take that money away from me because I've seen some real outcomes for my kids. You can take the literacy and numeracy stuff because really I don't have a clue what that's about." Do you know what I'm saying? People just do not know.

It's all very well for the number-crunchers to say they've sent this money out and the outcomes aren't there. Let's look at why the outcomes aren't there. The outcomes aren't there because the programs are not explained and not translated and not extended in a way at the coalface where the community understand it. This is a partnership between government, the school and the community and we're here to try and improve the literacy skills, the numeracy skills - whatever skills it is - that the program is targeting. But no-one ever knows. They do with CAP and there's that sense of ownership. I think that it's a model that could be very well looked at and used for the distribution of other funds. Why just put it in schools? I'm a teacher. Teachers have great ideas but so do parents and so does the wider community and they want some input into how that money is used.

MS LOUGH: That goes back to your teacher education, showing how the school in a rural community is an integral part of the community and is dependent on the community, and the community depends on it. That's something that you can't emphasise enough. Where that happens and there is the involvement of the teachers with the community it's a successful school, everything goes well. But where there's a division, that's when you start having problems.

MS McNICHOLL: Would you like to do the boarding away from home, seeing you had very little to say, you poor thing.

[Boarding]

MS LOUGH: As Megan said at the start, access can be through boarding schools, school-term hostels, setting up second home or private board. There has been great concern over the future viability of hostels, school-term hostels, and the minister has just announced, as a result of the last MCEETYA meeting, additional emergency funding for hostels that are below 50% capacity at the moment. That is federal funding. I know five of the seven hostels in New South Wales have received funding; 10 hostels in total have received it.

The average boarding fee for 1999 as calculated by the federal council of ICPA - we calculate this figure every year from all the boarding schools, government, non-government and the school-term hostels around Australia - is \$7622. We can't take into consideration the cost of private board because we don't have access to those figures. When the assistance for isolated children was originally brought in, in 1973, it was set at 55% of the average boarding fee because ICPA acknowledges it costs money to keep your children at home, so we have never asked for 100% of the average boarding fee.

Only twice has it come to 55% of that or close to 55% of that average boarding fee. The last time was with this increase up to 3 and a half thousand which was promised - which was a pre-election promise and was brought in in the last budget. ICPA believes that the assistance for isolated children must be linked to the average boarding fee, not to inflation or the CPI, because at the moment that's negative.

Boarding fees certainly don't go down. They only go up. The true cost of boarding takes into consideration other things, other than the cost of living. Teachers' salaries come into consideration. We have a great concern with the changes to the fringe benefits tax, as were announced this year, affecting boarding schools and school-term hostels. We also have great concern with the proposed introduction of the GST on 1 July 2000. Already it's been predicted the boarding fees are due to rise by 5% in 2000. That's not taking into consideration the GST or the changes to the fringe benefits tax. Families simply cannot afford another huge increase in fees.

There are cases where people have delayed sending their children to Year 9 or Year 11 and have struggled either with distance education or travelled long distances. We have one case in New South Wales - with which I'm very familiar - where the children travel two hours a day down the mountain in the morning, and up the mountain in the afternoon, because the family simply cannot afford for that child, or the children to go away before Year 9.

The local high school is very good, but the travelling - and I know children in metropolitan areas travel, but that's by choice; these children have no choice. They come home and it's dark when they

come home. It's dark when they go away. But they also, if they have any subjects after school, can't participate in those. They can't participate in sport or any of the other activities that take place when they're travelling such long distances and there's no public transport.

The boarding allowance in 2000 has been increased along with - we presume it's the CPI increase because the basic boarding allowance is \$3539. If it was 55% it would be \$4192, so there's already a shortfall there, without taking into consideration how the boarding fees will increase by 5% and the effect of the FBT and GST. There is a maximum allowance which is means-tested and that's an additional \$886, but it still doesn't come anywhere near the cost of boarding.

We really feel very strongly about the Assistance for Isolated Children scheme and the boarding allowance being linked to the average boarding fee. Whether it's an average boarding fee that is calculated by DETYA which would be lower than ours because they can take into consideration private board, we would accept that providing that is where the AIC is linked. To link it to the CPI is just not - well, it's a boarding allowance, it's access. We just can't see the logic behind linking it to something such as the CPI.

The second home allowance which is paid for families who decide that they can't afford boarding fees because most boarding fees also incur a tuition fee - in New South Wales there are three government high schools but they couldn't possibly provide all the boarding places. Only two of them take girls. The school-term hostels, if they were filled to capacity still could not take all the students who need to board away from home from rural and isolated areas. So we are dependent on a lot of the non-government schools which have a tuition fee.

In many cases these schools have been subsidising our rural students to keep them at school. They have made allowances where people pay off their fees years after they leave school. They have provided special scholarships, particularly if they are students from a rural area and they cannot access the AIC, because they recognise the real problems that some families face, many families face. But the second home allowance currently is a thousand dollars behind the boarding fee for a student at a boarding institution or boarding facility. But those needs can be just the same. Those people are living away from their principal home to access their education.

There is a cap on that. They will only pay for three students. If there are four students in the family there is no recognition made for that fourth student who is boarding away from home. Usually the mother moves into town to be with the students and then they'll go home at the weekend and do all the jobs on the farm or in the small

business that need doing. So that's a concern for us, that this has fallen well below the normal boarding allowance. The other thing is that tertiary education is a luxury that many families in the bush just simply cannot afford. Over to you, Megan.

MS McNICHOLL: Do you want to do the second page of dot points or do you think you've covered everything there?

[Tertiary education]

MS LOUGH: Well, the first one: many families have faced 20 to 30 years' boarding fees before they embark on tertiary. We did a survey recently of access to tertiary and that was something that came through, the number of years that people have spent paying boarding fees for secondary. Everyone that I went through in New South Wales said they wished their children to have some form of tertiary education. Many of them said they simply could not afford it. What was the situation in Queensland? I think it would have been much the same.

MS McNICHOLL: Yes, it was.

MS LOUGH: I think that was Australia-wide we found that.

MS McNICHOLL: It's really acknowledging that the cost of boarding away is still a huge one, especially for tertiary students, because it's not just the residence; it's not just the cost of accommodation, it's all the other costs - like money to live. At least at boarding school you could rope them in, it's a bit harder. Some students are working and that actually becomes a major issue for rural students because the majority of them have got to work, and work hard to subsidise their tertiary education. I know that's the case for kids in the city, but kids in the city are living at home and doing that - or the majority are. Our kids are living away as well as working and those of them who are doing pretty intensive courses - I've got a daughter who is doing engineering and there's not a lot of spare time, but she's working, too. She is working really hard.

I mean, we will never be eligible for any form of financial assistance and a lot of families accept that they won't be, but I guess I get a bit angry because I'd like to think that Kate could spend a little bit more time studying and she feels it greatly. She knows she has to work and she also knows she'd like to be getting sixes and sevens like her mates who live at home do. But that requires a lot of extra work. She'll pass and she'll probably be a better person for it in the end, but I'm not sure that that is really equitable when we're talking about giving kids real opportunities to reach their full potential at a tertiary level. I'm not suggesting for one moment that they shouldn't - that is also an adult responsibility - but we've also got to acknowledge that university life is pretty full on, pretty intensive - the courses are, the workload is huge.

You also have to acknowledge that students from rural and remote areas who are leaving, for example, rural and remote high schools to access tertiary, are often not well prepared for the rigour of tertiary education. I don't believe the schools are doing that as well as they could be. So when you have got the added pressure of needing to work, needing to learn how to study, learning how to cope with a much more intensive academically rigorous curriculum than they've had to deal with in Year 11 and 12, much more competitive - there are all sorts of things that work against them.

I think it's a very complex issue and it's something that we've got to face up to. I think universities have a big role to play in making sure that students from rural and remote areas are well supported throughout that transition. We may also be having to look at whether we can deliver some of that first-year university study a bit closer to home and then bring them on down to campus a bit later. Maybe we need to be looking at Year 11 and 12, those students who are in Year 11 and 12 - how you go about preparing them for that transition, and do that a little bit more actively.

So along with the financial support there are lots of strategies I think we need to start thinking about creatively, because there's no one reason why students don't participate. We know cost is a big issue but there are other issues, too.

MS LOUGH: GST concerns.

[Assistance for Isolated Children]

MS McNICHOLL: Yes, in terms of AIC the future does hold some concerns for our families inasmuch as the GST is certainly going to impact on the boarding costs, and possibly the tuition costs in schools, and we really still don't know the implications of that; no-one does. The fringe benefits tax certainly has an impact on the residential side of whether it's a hostel or a boarding school. It has the potential to impact on the quality of the staff that schools can employ in those positions. The fringe benefits tax is going to be a deterrent for those I think who want to be residential staff and be good residential staff, because they're going to incur that tax once they identify themselves as being residential staff.

On behalf of ICPA I think that any sort of taxing on what is basically a supportive pastoral care role for students who are no longer living with their families is something that I guess we find difficult to understand and would strongly believe that there should be no fringe benefits tax at all applied for residential care. It is providing a - it's a surrogate parenting role. So you're taxing effectively surrogate parents. I don't believe people who really care about young people would

suggest for one minute that we shouldn't have the very best people in charge of them. I think we've covered that point. Anything else, Barb, on that?

MS LOUGH: The only thing with the food part, once again that's the same situation. These people cannot go home - students can't go home for food. Boarding houses are just providing the same situation that is at home. They have to have their meals. Is that going to incur a GST because of the preparation? We're not sure where this is all coming from or where it's going, but we're trying to make these points known; that they are going to affect our families and our students who have no other alternative. They have to eat. They have to have adequate supervision, and not just adequate; they have to be supervised the way they would be at home. It's essential that these things are taken into consideration. They don't have that parent backing when they're at school.

[Boarding school staff]

MS McNICHOLL: The only other issue I target - and we haven't targeted this here but it's one that has recently come to my attention. I participated and helped run a workshop at the Australian Boarding Staff Association Conference in Queensland this year. They are a group of people who provide intensive and very excellent professional development for their residential staff, whether they're teaching staff or full-time residential staff. One of the issues that I've identified and I'm identifying on their behalf, I guess, is that there needs to be some sort of commitment on the part of the Commonwealth to fund some real training programs for these people, some accredited and recognised and accredited training programs for people who work in school-term hostels and in all forms of residential care.

Boarding institutions have become very complex places. Adolescents have become very complex people. Anyone who has children or has children going through adolescence really appreciates the work that people do. I am extremely grateful - and I'm sure Barbara is - for the quality of people that have been part of my children's lives and who have really guided them, I think, in a way that has complemented very beautifully the value system and the things that we value as parents. There has never been, I guess, an attempt to undermine or to devalue children from rural and remote areas.

But I do know that in both my children's schools, they do put a lot of energy into training their staff and making them very aware of the issues and the sorts of homes and the sorts of experiences that rural and remote students have. I think the notion of some sort of nationally accredited training program that does receive some funding from the Commonwealth is long overdue. Long overdue. I think that's about it.

MS LOUGH: Do you have any questions that you want to ask us?

THE COMMISSIONER: You've been going well.

MS McNICHOLL: We could go on a lot longer but I think you've heard enough.

THE COMMISSIONER: You've actually covered a lot more area in your submission in any event, and that's a really full submission. Thank you very much.

MS McNICHOLL: Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: That's terrific. What part of Queensland are you from, Megan?

MS McNICHOLL: I lived in Mount Isa for 15 years and taught there for many years. I now live near Roma, a property out from Roma - 120 kilometres from Roma.

THE COMMISSIONER: You've actually moved into civilisation in that case.

MS McNICHOLL: Moved to the suburbs, exactly; have moved to the suburbs.

[Distance education; telecommunications]

THE COMMISSIONER: When we were up at Mount Isa recently we were talking to the School of Distance Ed there about the satellite trials. I noticed earlier in your comments you were saying how successful they'd been, but there is a fear amongst the School of Distance Ed people, it seems, that movement to telecommunications rather than radio will in fact impose cost limits well beyond what are there at the moment. Once you've got a radio transmitter you just transmit and it costs nothing, yet if you're going to use satellite, you've got to pay satellite time or Internet time or whatever it might be.

MS LOUGH: Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: They're worried that that might restrict, rather than expand, DE opportunities. What's the ICPA view on use of new technologies?

MS LOUGH: The first thing we emphasise is that there be good two-way voice interaction between student and teacher, but also between students. That's essential. In the trial that they just had recently at Broken Hill they had that interaction by means of a hand

coming up on the computer, but for the teacher to talk to the child, they had to ring the child up and none of the other children could hear the conversation. So that was one thing that they identified as being a problem.

It also does require a lot more preparation on behalf of the teacher - going to satellite and video trials - and it also means - if the materials are modified and it's put on computer it's wonderful, but the cost factor is the big thing, and I think that's prohibitive at this stage unless there is private backing or something like that.

[4.04 pm]

Also when you're preparing something for a video trial there's a lot more comes into the teacher presentation that's essential. The radio contact is something - well, even with that people need experience in speaking over a radio to the children. That comes into the teacher training aspect of it. But there are problems. If they can be worked out, it is a better system, but it's just whether the cost and that really warrants it. We need that vital two-way communication now. It's no good saying we will have this in the future. The students who are there now need help.

MS McNICHOLL: Well, the SCE trial at Charleville actually has that with the telephone - they're using the telephone system. They've got the network of telephones so the children can hear each other all the time, so they can hear the laughing and the carry-on, and that has actually added, the teachers tell us, a wonderful dimension to their on-air lessons, because everybody can hear and the children are interacting with each other, albeit they can't see each other's faces but they can hear the voices and they're interacting and responding to the children's comments.

But if we're really serious about the role that technology is going to play in the future, we've got to be serious about the fact that it's going to cost money, and the only way we're going to get an infrastructure in place is when government and private enterprise decide that they want to be part of rural communities and maybe even relocate some of their key people into rural areas, and once they start doing that there will be a political demand to improve the infrastructure.

At the moment there's no pressure to do that because the numbers aren't there in terms of our population, and I don't believe that just as individuals demand access to technology and to e-commerce and to Internet that it's going to change anything, but if government says, "Look, we have a commitment. We're going to relocate the head office of Landcare or DPI to Roma and we're going to employ people locally, using teleworking to network into our central office," well,

instantly you've got a demand to improve the infrastructure and then improve that last link between the teleworker who might be living on a property at Longreach, working out of the central office to improve the access to that centre.

At this point in time people just cannot get information out in a meaningful way, so the same thing applies to distance ed. It will be okay to beam everything into the house but it means nothing if you can't then respond. Do you know what I mean?

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MS McNICHOLL: There's a missing link in the circle. You'll be able to inundate via the satellite people in the bush with absolutely everything, but they just won't be able to respond, and we don't want that, and that's where we're at at the moment. As simple as that.

THE COMMISSIONER: Another area: what do you see as being the advantages and disadvantages of hostels as against boarding schools?

[Hostel accommodation]

MS McNICHOLL: I think in communities there's a very important symbiosis. Where you have successful hostels you have very good high schools and you have a great partnership between the hostel and the community. The teachers support the hostel, the hostel supports the school, and I certainly have a perfect - if you want to look at a wonderful example where that's happening, Chinchilla in Queensland is a perfect example of where they have an excellent high school with a principal who's been there for a number of years, who is extremely proud of his school, sets very high standards. The community expects a high education standard, and the hostel has been successful and continues to expand.

Then you have other instances where hostels for a short period of time will be very popular and well supported, but it only takes one or two things to go wrong in either the school or the hostel for the old bush grapevine to work, and then suddenly the numbers drop away at the school so the numbers drop away at the hostel. Or something goes wrong at the hostel, the quality of staff, people aren't happy with the supervision or the experiences that their children are having, so they take their children away from the hostel, numbers at the school decline. So I think hostels and I believe that ICPA believes that hostels that are well thought through and well supported by the community are a very important part of providing infrastructure to support rural education.

[Boarding schools]

I think boarding schools have their role to play, but boarding schools support a particular philosophical framework and a particular

education ethos. If you want to access a state school system and you believe that that's an appropriate education for your child in a school that can deliver the curriculum that really meets your kids' needs, you will have a robust and healthy hostel, and I think you'd be able to identify those. Where the hostels are failing you would need to look very closely at what's happening in the school, and I think you'd find the two are very - one depends on the other.

So it's a fairly tenuous relationship, depending on the community, the stability of the community, the stability of the teachers, the turnover of the teachers. It's part of this complex rural education issue. Where you have got robust communities, you have got robust infrastructure.

[Teacher incentives]

THE COMMISSIONER: The turnover of teachers point: I've asked, as you've heard earlier today, people to say what they identify as being the ingredients of a package that will successfully recruit and retain teachers. Has ICPA got any view on this from the contacts that you've had with teachers over many years?

MS McNICHOLL: Can I respond on a Queensland level, having been fairly involved with a number of processes. You'd certainly need a rigorous program, but what we have done in the last three years is we've identified - and the point has been made today - that we need to target students from rural and remote areas and promote teaching as being a worthwhile and valuable profession. We have this year provided the (indistinct) Sullivan teacher scholarships which are scholarships that are worth \$5000 a year and they are granted to students who identify teaching as their preferred number one choice on the QTAC form.

There's a very rigorous academic and selection procedure, and we allocated 10 last year and that will increase each year. We see that as being a positive way of putting teacher education right in the middle of the bush and saying, "Look, these scholarships are there for our best kids who really want to be teachers." So that's one way of looking at teacher retention. I think the other thing is - the pre-service training thing is a huge issue.

As I mentioned before, the host student program and also the internships that I know New South Wales has, and Queensland has certainly had an internship program with the Queensland University of Technology, that exposing teachers in their pre-service years to rural education and the rural experience breaks down that fear of the unknown, a lot of the mists are blown out of the water, and one of the really positive things - and I've had a number of students stay with me as they've taught in our local school - is that they love our kids. They

love teaching bush kids - "They're so polite, they're so interested, they really love me, they follow me everywhere. They think I'm a wonderful person."

Young teachers get that real feeling for what it is - what it might once have been, might not be in the city now, but still is in the bush, of being a valued person. The teachers who love teaching, they find out if you can get involved right from the start you just enjoy it, communicate with the community. They'll support you - "It's great being a teacher. I'm on a pedestal." Now, not many teachers get that feeling in their first and second year of teaching. You're in a big school, you're right at the bottom of the peck order, aren't you? So there's that feeling of worth that I think that program and others like it have gone towards addressing the teacher turnover.

[Teacher retention]

The problem of retaining them for any length of time comes when they're married teachers with young families who really reach the end of their children's primary school education and believe they want their kids educated back in the city, and that in itself sends conflicting messages to the local community about the standard of education, and that's a real issue, and for me it's an issue teachers have got to face up to, too, and the system does, because when you've got teachers in our schools saying, "We want to be transferred out of here by the time our kids get to high school," that's a pretty deficit model.

MS LOUGH: And that would happen across the states, and that's another reason why some teachers are frightened about applying for rural areas; that they will be trapped out there. If they can be given a guarantee that they - well, on the one hand we're asking a guarantee that they can go back into larger settled areas where there are regional high schools, but once again it's giving that message. No teacher with a family approaching secondary education stays in small rural areas.

The other thing is the access to medical services and things like that that have disappeared in the bush. They're fine while they're a single teacher, they're fine when they're first married, but once they start having children it becomes a real concern if they have long distances to travel to get those particular services that they're used to in urban areas.

MS McNICHOLL: And on a domestic front I think access to airconditioned high standard accommodation is certainly an issue, and some of the accommodation that our young teachers have to live in is just terrible. I can't believe that any professional person should be expected to live in cramped, unairconditioned quarters, where the average summer temperature is 42. It's still to me quite unbelievable

that the systems still don't believe that that's their responsibility, to provide - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: Cramped as well as being squashed into shared houses, where they have to have juggling every time a teacher changes. There was one teacher in Doomadgee when we were there who'd had to change rooms, not change house - sometimes it's houses as well - I think three or four times in one term as teachers came and went from the school. I was really quite surprised at how antique the conditions are.

MS McNICHOLL: They are, that's right.

MS LOUGH: Financial remuneration comes into it but it's not as important as the basic living conditions, the flexibility that they need as their family grow and their needs as a family change. That's been one of the biggest concerns. I know we have a lot of young marrieds have come out to our area and that's the first thing. They look at staying four years and then, "We've got to get out of here" or "We've got to get to a larger regional area." It is a huge concern of all professionals, not just teachers.

MS McNICHOLL: And the other issue of course is the one of professional development and ongoing collegial support. That's absolutely crucial for the remote areas, and it does take money, but really the opportunity to bring teachers together face to face across regions, across schools and across districts is probably one of the most valuable things I think you can do for teachers, because they do work in isolation and they don't have people that they can talk to openly and honestly about their concerns about children or how they manage in difficult situations or how they're feeling about themselves as a teacher.

It's a pretty lonely sort of profession, teaching, and I think we have to acknowledge that not just the system but parents, the community, also has a role to play, and I must stress that. I think communities have an enormous role to play in making sure that teachers feel welcomed and are supported and helped to feel as though they belong, because that I guess is a criticism of some teachers in some communities, that they've never had that feeling of belonging, and it's probably a reason why some of them vacate the communities on weekends and don't get involved, which then increases the tension in the community because that teacher doesn't get involved. But communities need to understand why that happens, and look from within, rather than blaming the teacher.

So, again, it's a very complex thing, and that's why I think if you do get teachers out during that pre-service time, and we have really tried in the Queensland program to show our communities warts and

all. I don't think we've tried to say that we're idyllic communities. We've tried to say, "Look, we're eccentric, we're narrow-minded, we're single-minded. We don't suffer fools gladly, but really, come on, we'll try and show you a good time." That's glib, but you know what I mean?

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MS McNICHOLL: We're trying to be honest and say it's hard work. It's hard work for everybody living in a small community. It's not easy. We all have to acknowledge that it requires a great deal of compassion and understanding and a fairly high level of skill to stay, survive and remain sane, and still work together well, and it's something we have to visit. And I value teachers because they are our change agents. Without teachers, lots of things would not happen in our schools. I love our young teachers. They come through like a breath of fresh air.

If you can imagine that in some schools the teacher aide has been there for 42 years. That's really lovely and secure, but it also doesn't introduce to communities new ideas and ways of doing things, and we rely on our young teachers to do that, and I think if we can say to the students, "Look, we just love you being there. Don't pack up and go, just persevere with us. Eventually we'll change. Just stay and show us the way," then I think that's something you can only do in a partnership with the institution, with the students, with the system and with the communities.

[Expectations of rural staff]

MS LOUGH: The other thing that has really come up in the last few years is the role that a lot of teachers are expected - well, not expected, but need to play as a mediator or as a listening ear. With the rural depression in many areas, the only person that someone feels confident to go and speak to in confidence can be the teacher, and that can be very difficult for the young teacher coming out.

There have been cases, as you'd be aware, of rural suicide, particularly in young boys, and I know round our area there's been quite a few, and that's very difficult handling that when you are isolated from other help, and they're things that I don't know how we prepare young people for when they're coming out to isolated areas, but it is another pressure that has been put on them, more so in recent years than ever before. I know when I came out I wouldn't have had those sort of pressures put on me, but you do see young teachers facing those things, and also other Family and Community Service issues that really hadn't surfaced within the school before.

The school has a much larger role to play now, and it's only happening in rural areas now. It happened in city schools before, but there were always people they could call on, but counsellors aren't

really readily accessible to small rural schools. There's always the demand on the larger regional schools or district schools, and this is an area where the teachers do need support.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you both very much.

MS McNICHOLL: Thank you very much.

MS LOUGH: Thank you.

THE COMMISSIONER: A terrific submission, as we have got to meet the state branches as well. We're very grateful for the support the whole inquiry has got from ICPA, I must say. It's been terrific, and thanks for coming along today.

MS McNICHOLL: We thank you most sincerely for your interest.

MS LOUGH: Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: We're fascinated.

MS McNICHOLL: And hopefully we'll look forward to the opportunity for you to reflect on it at our conference.

THE COMMISSIONER: Okay. Thanks, Megan. Thanks, Barbara.

THE COMMISSIONER: You can introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about it.

MS KOSSATZ: My name is Marion Kossatz. I'm a representative for Michael Stock, who is the coordinator and the originator of VISE, Volunteers for Isolated Students Education. In that capacity I go, plus about 250 other people, to children in the outback whose either teacher or parent - sometimes it's the same person - has requested assistance for that child's educational needs. Now, VISE has a database of about 250 people with their teaching skills area, and around Australia there are voluntary coordinators at a regional level, and it's well known through the correspondence schools and schools of the air that a parent who is in need of help with their child's education would go through the School of the Air to the regional coordinator, who would look at the database, find out who has the relevant skills and is available and willing to go to that area during the time that the need is there.

So you might be looking at a Year 10 girl who needs help with physics, chemistry and art. You might have a third-grade child who needs help in basic reading and writing. You might have a mother or the teacher who needs help because the child of 13 or 14 has suddenly decided they hate having a parent as a teacher for some reason. It can be any one of a lot of reasons why a volunteer is called for.

Now, in addition to trained teachers they also have folk on their list who are not teachers, referred to as an angel - it can be either male or female - who generally goes with a teacher but not necessarily, and the angel can be asked to go as a volunteer where there is a need other than straight education. One example on Bathurst Island some years ago, a mother had a three-year-old daughter and then produced triplets. She was desperately in need of support for a few months. Sometimes there is illness in the family, mother goes to hospital for a new baby or any one of a lot of reasons, so that's what the volunteer teachers do.

[Financial support for VISE]

Now, there is no government funding. The Victorian Education Department has I believe still got two teachers whom they pay normal salary and they make their time available a term at a time to be part of this volunteer group, and of course it's a two-way street because a recently qualified, inexperienced teacher who's spent most of their life in the city - if they get a term out in the bush as a volunteer, tied in with a school of the air, Mount Isa, Alice Springs, Katherine, you name it, wherever, it's of enormous benefit to those teachers, and then they can take those skills back with them.

Because the teachers in the database are all retired and on a limited income, it is not supposed to cost them anything. Their fare is provided and it can range from a bus ticket to a share of the petrol if they're taking their own car and it's not too distant, or a plane fare if it's somewhere as far as Darwin or Cairns, those places, and then it's the property or the family - their responsibility to provide accommodation and keep for the teacher. Accommodation can vary from a lovely room in a beautiful homestead to a wacky old caravan or a tent out in the back of the men's quarters or the shearers' quarters. It just depends on what the family can provide, and the volunteers are aware of that and have to be prepared to cope with it.

VISE organisation does receive a lot of support from the Gympie Country Music Muster concert. They are very aware of the value of volunteer teachers and so they do have a fundraiser. McCaffertys and Greyhound buses also - I think they give some sort of subsidised support, and I think Ansett might give some sort of a subsidy in special circumstances. Rotary Clubs and Lions Clubs in those area are also very supportive, but government funding as such

for the organisation just isn't relevant - well, it's just not available, nor has it been sought. Is that enough for a start?

[Volunteer profile and commitment]

THE COMMISSIONER: Quite enough for a start. So all retired people?

MS KOSSATZ: Not every single one. There are some folk who are still teaching and some do take three months' long service leave and they will use six or eight weeks of that time to become a volunteer teacher. Now, because of the expense in getting teachers to these outback stations, the expectation is that the teacher will stay approximately six weeks in any given situation. They've found that that's about what's necessary to provide educational support and confidence to either the parent in the teacher role or the child in the learning role, and then the teacher gives their skills for free during the time they're there.

THE COMMISSIONER: Right, so the minimum stay is six weeks. What would be the maximum stay? Much more than a term?

MS KOSSATZ: Well, I've just come back from five months - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: Five months?

MS KOSSATZ: - - - in the territory, but I was not in one situation for the whole five months. I spent seven weeks at Oenpelli in Arnhem Land, and another seven weeks at Malapunya Springs Station, which is a remote cattle property on the Berkeley Tablelands, and I also spent a month in the Darwin Hospital on another matter. I actually had a fall and severed two tendons in my thumb and had to have that stitched together, and then I needed therapy four days a week for five weeks to make sure that the thumb would actually work. I had to have occupational therapy.

So I did a deal with the administrator of the Darwin Hospital, because I teach computing at the ANU here when I'm in town and not doing other things, and just being in the hospital on a daily basis for nearly three weeks you can't help but see there's people behind a computer tearing their hair, so I wandered off to the administrator and said, "Look, if you'll provide me with some accommodation close by, I'll be a volunteer teacher and teach your staff what they need to know about computers."

After the initial shock wore off, in about three seconds flat the man said, "That sounds like a good idea," so he gave me a VIP doctor's unit a hundred metres from the front door, 20 metres from the swimming pool, and then for the next four weeks I spent every day at the hospital teaching their admin staff, and it ranged from the radiographers to specialists to receptionists to their general admin

people, teaching them whatever they needed to know about using their computers. Sometimes I'd start at 8.00 in the morning and sort of work all day. I only had to fit it around the time that I would need therapy on my hand, so it was good for me to have something to do and I'm well aware that I was of value to the hospital at the same time.

THE COMMISSIONER: So are these people, the regional coordinators first, spread evenly across the country, and then what's the spread of the 250 volunteers?

MS KOSSATZ: I know that Queensland requests more than 200 placements per year. The others are spread reasonably. Western Australia doesn't ask for a lot because in the WA Education Department they have a system of paid tutors, where the department actually - as far as I know, and don't sort of hold me to this; there could be variations in some areas - but I think a tutor would be placed into a property where there is an organisation called the Isolated Children's Parents Association - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: ICPA, yes.

MS KOSSATZ: - - - and the tutor goes there, and I think in some cases the Western Australian Education Department does pay for that under some funding arrangement, so the VISE people, Queensland, Northern Territory, New South Wales, Victoria are the main ones that I know of - I don't think South Australia is involved - and I don't know about the involvement with Tasmania.

Now, with the VISE organisation there's also a group within that 250 who have also done a training program down at Ballarat University, tied in with the National Farmers Federation on their project Internet to the Outback. With the original sale of Telstra, the National Farmers Federation put in a submission to receive funding to provide - their terms - equity of access to communications in remote areas, and so there was a group over a 12-month period who spent time at Ballarat University going through this training program to equip us to go to isolated properties - they must already have a computer; it's not our responsibility to buy them or organise them, but if they've got one already - hook up their computers and set them up for Internet and the email, and then stay with the family three or four days to teach the adults how to use Internet, email and that access, and of course an enormous amount of the success of that depends entirely upon the access to a decent telephone system, and if they haven't got that, well, the whole thing just falls to pieces.

But within the VISE organisation there is a group who are tied in with that Internet to the Outback situation. I was actually booked to go to six properties between Katherine and Nuri Station on the WA

border, but it coincided with the five weeks I had to be in Darwin for therapy on my hand so - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: You missed out.

MS KOSSATZ: - - - you can't be 6 or 8 hundred clicks away.

[5.07 pm]

[Experience at Oenpelli]

THE COMMISSIONER: Sure. When you spent your seven weeks in Oenpelli, what were you actually doing there?

MS KOSSATZ: I was actually teaching four children. They were all white children. Up there they're called balanders. Are you - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MS KOSSATZ: Okay, I was teaching balander children. There was a community school but it was strongly Aboriginal and the parents were well aware that if their children had gone to that school their educational achievements would have been severely limited for all of the obvious reasons. So they had a volunteer there to do it, because they had been in Oenpelli for six years and were packing up to go over to New Guinea. The mother who was running the air services office, packing up the family, number 1 to have a holiday in Europe where they hadn't been, and then number 2, packing up everything to go to this place in the highlands of New Guinea, just couldn't devote six hours a day to teaching four children at the same time. So the time I was in Oenpelli was tied in with children aged from transition, which would be five-year-olds, through to 12 years old in grade 6. That was where I had a fall and chopped my hand. I had to be flown in and out of Darwin because the roads were still under water, and there was no road access in or out.

What I found there for the children themselves - the primary school education that they'd been receiving was well up to the standard that I would have expected each child to have been at, and that's the general term relevant to primary school children who have their schooling through correspondence lessons and School of the Air. The Katherine School of the Air held an in-school and a mini school a couple of times in the year where they would bring 4 or 5 hundred children all in together for social type things, one week sometimes once a year, sometimes once in two years. It would depend entirely on passability of the roads, it would depend on the availability of parents to be able to drive for a day and a half to get the child there, the parents' ability to pay for the family to go. Not all children had that opportunity by any means, and failing that social interaction was just their own very tiny community. Oenpelli has about a thousand people; 800 were

Indigenous, about 200 were balanders. So the children's social and interaction of all sorts, cultural, dance, games, sports, all of that was very limited.

[School of the Air]

Even their School of the Air, on many days it was worse than useless, not because of the School of the Air but because of their radio reception. They would be saying, "Katie here, over" - can't hear a thing, and it was very disappointing for the child when the static is just so bad, they simply cannot hear. It's worse than none at all, and that's fairly common in a lot of areas.

THE COMMISSIONER: Is it? I've actually heard that the School of the Air is actually broadcasting pretty well now, but you find it's pretty common that reception is that bad.

MS KOSSATZ: Yes, I would guess that the majority of people coming to a situation like this would be full of praise and tell the policy-makers the very best that they possibly can for one of two reasons. Number 1 can be that they know the locals work so hard for so long and do such an excellent job that there's no way they will knock them. Number 2, some people have this sort of innate fear that if they don't keep saying good things what is there already will be - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: Taken away.

MS KOSSATZ: It will be said, "Well, it's not working, we'll take it away." So there's an enormous lack of faith in a lot of people in the community. Of course, as a volunteer I'm in the happy situation of I can't be sacked. So I can tell any policy-maker my impressions exactly without fear or favour, being aware that there's no way I will pretend to be a five-minute expert, having had five months' experience in the territory just recently, but I was a volunteer teacher at Hays Creek. There's nothing there but a pub and it's halfway between Katherine and Darwin. I was teaching a 14-year-old boy there three years ago and he had correspondence lessons and didn't use School of the Air at all. I've heard since that for various reasons he's just fallen by the wayside and is now very bad news. His mother seems to be very concerned about him and there doesn't seem to be much they can do at the moment.

So within the limits, primary school, correspondence and School of the Air, when the access to the line is good, can be excellent. There is a tremendous need at secondary level, and that, I feel, is where it's not being addressed, certainly not for children in all circumstances. But looking at the criteria that the Human Rights Commission has sort of put out, it's pie in the sky. There's no way that those sorts of things can be provided to every child according to those human rights criteria.

Children with disabilities: well, just forget it, there's nothing you can do about it.

[Indigenous education]

Indigenous children: the minute you start talking there you've got two very disparate groups - those whose parents have had some sort of an education and insist that their children go to school, feed them all, keep them clean and encourage their children. But then there's the other group who still live in the bush, mostly have bush tucker, and they have the attitude that going to the white person's school is robbing them of their control, their influence over their children, but at the same time they're aware that if their children are ever going to get employment of some sort, they've got to be proficient in the English language, reading and writing skills. There's a lot of ambiguity up there. Obviously you'd know that there's talk about getting rid of the - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: Aboriginal education.

MS KOSSATZ: - - - Aboriginal languages up there. That in theory is a disaster but if you take it through to the logical conclusion: if the children are taught in their own tribal language until they're six or eight, it has obviously got to have an elder or a tribal person in the school somewhere teaching them, and if they're not going to start doing much in English until their second or third grade, and if those children, the vast majority of them, still leave school around about sixth or seventh grade, if they've only had three or four years of learning anything in English in that time, it virtually ensures that they're going to be unemployable, and you'll be up to the fourth or fifth generation of Indigenous people who simply will not be employed.

Looking at the Aboriginal older folk, the teenagers, the young people in those communities - there's two schools. One group are just appalled, shocked, hopeless, because they're losing the influence over their young people, both boys and girls. The young men up there from say 13 to 19, if they're good at Aussie Rules footy, that's fine. But the minute they go into that scene they're into the hard drinking scene; that's the expectation. The minute they're into that scene, they then follow on to the petrol-sniffing scheme, and that's bad news all round. Those boys have no role models. Their brothers, their fathers, their uncles, their grandfathers, many of them have never worked, so a lot of them just put on this big bravado, "We don't work, only the balanders work. Yeah, they can go to work and pay us, we just have sit-down money."

There is a tremendous attitude like that, and of course a lot of the balanders up there are resentful of the Indigenous people who will

just say to them straight out, "Nope. I might come and do a day's work for you if I feel like it but if I don't feel like it, I won't come," and of course they're trying to push these community development projects where they have to come along and if they turn up they get paid and if they don't turn up they don't get paid. That's all very well but if they don't turn up they still have to be given their sit-down money because they've still got a wife and half a dozen children to feed.

On pension day the local community store is just inundated with them all coming in in their either beat-up old vehicles, or their brand-new ones, depending on what their situation is at the moment. They load up with massive quantities of white man's over-processed food, and then at the end of the week all of that has gone and they've got virtually nothing left to live on and the children then are underfed.

[Racial discrimination]

There's a local swimming pool at Oenpelli, a beautiful big pool. It's in theory open to everybody but the process for getting the key to go in and the timing that it's allowed pretty well ensures that the Aboriginal children don't use it. There is a waterfall not far away where they can go and there are no crocodiles, but at the same, from the white people's point of view, the majority of Aboriginal children in Oenpelli have very badly diseased eyes, revolting noses, sores. They spend most of their time playing with very underfed mangy ulcerated dogs, wild pigs, so anybody in their right mind would not want to go swimming with children in that situation.

[Indigenous communities – NT]

The dogs in the town are so bad that I was warned - I was never allowed to go from one house to another after dark. If somebody was asking me to come around to supper because they had fresh barramundi, they would ring and they'd say, "We'll pop around and pick you up," and somebody would always drive me home. It was not safe for a person - anybody - to walk around after dark because the dogs hunted in packs and they had been known to actually munch people up. They hadn't actually killed anybody but they had been known to munch people. So there's an enormous number still of nutrition, economic, employment, attitudinal problems in Oenpelli. A big contrast was Bathurst Island. I spent a day there.

THE COMMISSIONER: In Nguiu.

MS KOSSATZ: I'm sorry?

THE COMMISSIONER: In Nguiu.

MS KOSSATZ: Now, in Oenpelli, say there were 500 houses, 450 of them would have been wrecks. Basically they were the wrong design,

the wrong sort. Aborigines didn't want them in the first place and they saw no point in looking after them. So if they needed a piece of wood they just knocked it out and burnt it, and they lived outside, not inside. So of the 500 houses say 450 would be derelict, vandalised wrecks, but they still lived in them. The difference in Bathurst Island with the Tiwi people, of 500 houses there would be 450 that were well cared for. Their school, their church, their cemetery, their football club were a source of great pride. They have a very big community arts export all around the world, but at the same time Oenpelli has a community arts area there and they also export around the world. They have got a couple of whiteys, a couple of men and a girl being the administrators for that. They export around the world and they are doing an excellent job.

They had a local policeman, Jason somebody or other, who ran the first dawn service on Anzac Day - the first one for about eight years. He did a tremendous job, it was very good. On Bathurst Island they have just recently set up an orchard and market garden situation, and if anybody wants to get paid they have to go and work there, and that's well organised. In Oenpelli there is an attempt to do the same thing but it's still a long way down the track.

When the governments banished all of the missionaries in both places there was immediately a backlash in two ways. The local people and the Aborigines suddenly realised how much they relied on the missionaries for occupation, for their health and for their food because the missionaries organised them into gardens and orchards and fruit. Oenpelli had a big abattoir, they all had fresh meat. That's gone by the board now; there's nothing there now.

So there was a group who realised how much they lost but then there was another group who said, "No, we're not going to grow vegetables, no, we're not going to do anything with fruit. No, we're not going to do anything. That's what the missionaries made us do." So you've got this variation in attitude there.

The church is still very well looked after and the town is very clean in Bathurst Island with the Tiwi people. They are very big on tours but the price they charge - in round figures, \$250 to fly 80 klicks from Darwin to Bathurst Island, run around the island in a bus, damper and billy tea for morning tea and just a light lunch. An equivalent tour from a white run organisation, maximum would be probably 80, 75 - somewhere between 75 and a hundred dollars. But because it's sort of an Indigenous program they can charge what they like.

THE COMMISSIONER: Are they getting the customers?

MS KOSSATZ: Yes, they do because they control it. And if you don't go by that one, there's just no way you can go and visit the Tiwi Islands and see what their things are about. So they do tend to get - but anecdotally everybody on the tour and everybody that I met up there just said it was a complete rip-off in comparison to other tours that were available. But they just classed it as another example of the sort of manipulation which is done by the Indigenous people when it suits them.

There's a lot of folk up there who are very anti straight money going to people who are unemployed. I picked up this attitude not only in Oenpelli but also very strongly out on the Berkeley Tablelands from a large group of people, and it wasn't a racist thing relevant to Indigenous people only. The attitude - say places like Borroloola, Berkeley homestead, Heartbreak - all those folk, the general opinion was that yes, certainly they've got to be cared for but they should be supplied with a voucher system of some sort. The voucher system could be passed over so that they could buy whatever they needed in basic necessities; food, clothing, shoes and all the rest of it - entertainment and so forth. But a voucher would never be valid for either tobacco products nor alcohol. So that if the whites or the Aborigines wanted tobacco or alcohol problems, they would be forced by themselves to go and get a job for cash money to buy alcohol and tobacco products. And there was a fairly strong - no, there was a very strong feeling about cash money being supplied for them to just then go and buy those products.

In the health department up there, an enormous number of the health needs are a direct result of alcohol. Somebody gets drunk, they fall in the fire - they always sort of cook and eat outside. They fall in the fire and get very badly burnt, or they're drunk, fall in, can't get out - there's an enormous number of very bad burns. If that's way in the outback, it means there's a four-wheel drive ambulance to get them in as far as the airport and then there's a plane to fly them to the nearest hospital, and then in and out for treatment. So that's a very expensive exercise.

There are a lot of broken limbs through family violence. It's not just the men that are beating up the women, the women are beating up each other, the women are beating up the men, everybody beats up the kids. There's a lot of domestic violence as a result of alcohol. Of course your tobacco products are the usual things where they've got asthma, emphysema and they're dying of this, that and the other thing. I played assistant to a bush nurse while I was at Oenpelli and we had to take an oxygen bottle out in a four-wheel drive ambulance to this guy who was on an outstation because he was very bad with emphysema and couldn't do anything.

Even the concept of the outstations is a misnomer. I don't know exactly how long ago they were set up, you probably do, but in theory the outstations were set up to get the young people out of the dangerous influences of the towns, get them out into the bush where they could learn their own stories and grow up with their own system of integrity. So the outstations were set up, and there were a lot of them. They couldn't be seen to put up poor quality housing, whether they wanted it or not, so the housing was set up and the generators were supplied, and all of the electricity, the infrastructure, the telephones - all of those were set up. But in many cases the groups who went out there lasted less than six months.

The young women, the young men - "Nothing out here for us" - and they went back into the towns. In some cases the outstations are completely deserted but in other cases there might be one couple, 50s to 60s, or one elder - one man, one woman, living entirely on their own - but the outstation still has to be serviced by a plane once a week at least, or twice a week, just for plain bread, milk or whatever they happen to need. So there's an enormous amount of ATSIC money which is being spent for no real value to anybody; it's not achieving anything.

[Pastoral properties]

THE COMMISSIONER: Can you tell us a bit about the pastoral properties and the families on those?

MS KOSSATZ: I spent time on this pastoral property south-west from Borroloola. The headquarters of the McArthur River rise there. The family - I believe they're the only family who are still the original family running their own commercially viable business. It was set up in the 1920s by the original couple who had 14 children, and five of those who are now between 65 and 75 are still on the property and they're sort of virtual bosses now. Then there's three or four of their children who would be in their mid-30s, who are stock people, cattle people, and then it was their children whom I was teaching during that day.

The day starts around about 4.30 am, regardless of Saturday, Sunday or any other day. There are seven days in the week and they're all the same. Everybody rolls out around about 4.30, quarter to 5. The breakfast bell rings - 5.30 am is breakfast seven days a week. Smoko's at 9.00, lunch is at 12.00, smoko at 3.00, supper at 6.00. Everybody is in bed by half past 7, 8 o'clock. There is television out there. They do have a phone and a fax.

[Internet access]

The phone - I experimented with it due to my knowledge that I'd learnt down at Ballarat on the Internet to the Outback, and I knew that if I tried to use my normal modem at the normal speed I wouldn't have a

hope. So I slowed the modem down to the very minimum and I put up a new connection into Darwin instead of my normal connection down here at Canberra, and yes, I was able to make a connection on the Internet.

I hadn't used it for about a month, so there was about 134 messages in my letterbox and it took one hour and 25 minutes for those messages to be read. Not one of them was long, not one of them had graphics which would be memory hungry and very slow. So that gives you an idea of how very slow access at that level would be. Depending on who your service provider is, some folk pay \$17 an hour.

THE COMMISSIONER: 17?

MS KOSSATZ: 17. And there are others who pay more. My service provider is TPG, Total Peripherals Group, and they are the service provider for this National Farmers Federation project, and they have undertaken to charge rural people no more than anybody in the city. So their charge is \$1 an hour no matter where you are. They also have the advantage of about 75 or more points of presence around Australia. So when I was in Horsham I could dial into Ballarat, when I was in Darwin I could use Darwin. When I was in the Berkeley Tablelands I couldn't get access to Mount Isa, so I still had to have a call to Darwin, and that would be about 6 or 8 hundred clicks, but I think they've just recently put a connection through to either Cloncurry or Mount Isa. So what I'm saying there is that the theory is fine but it's very dependent on the telephone systems.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes. The service provider for the NFF, how many gateways did you say they've got?

MS KOSSATZ: About 70 or 80. Total Peripherals Group, TPG. They're extremely good value. I think they're also the service provider for the Department of Primary Industry, and they do a lot of defence stuff as well, but they've taken on this project for the National Farmers Federation.

[Experience on a pastoral property]

These children that I was teaching in the Tablelands, at the moment there's a little girl who's five, in transition; a sister who was seven. They've got a little brother aged two, and as serious as a judge the family wanted me to stay there for 10 years. They said, "Look, little Joe is two. It will be 10 years before he's 12 and finished primary school and then if we can afford it we'll send him off to boarding school but we need somebody here for the next 12 years." The mother at the age of 31 had had the equivalent of a pacemaker put in her heart, and just had very little strength, very little stamina. It's just incredible - those children were bright, keen, intelligent, tremendous potential kids. But

reading between the lines there's going to be a lot of problems in their growing-up years for any sort of access and equity.

Their parents - or the father and the uncles on the property before them - were taught at home, just correspondence schools, but then they were all sent away to boarding school to Year 11 or 12. One of them has got his own pilot's licence and he's an engineer. One is a vet, one was a chemist of some sort. They have all these backgrounds. One was in administration, one was in accountancy. They all had these background skills but they had come back to be stockmen on the property. They employed about a dozen Aboriginals on the place, on whom you could not depend. Sometimes they'd be there and other times they'd disappear.

We all went off to the Borrooloola show and rodeo, which was a whole new experience, and they knew that of the eight guys that they took to the rodeo none of them would come back at the end of the rodeo, so they didn't even bother about that. About a week after the rodeo finished, one of them went into Borrooloola to fish a couple out of gaol, a couple of them out of the hospital and a few of them out of wherever they happened to be, patched them and sort of brought them back. But being fair, many of the guys hadn't been off the property for six or eight months so when they got out they really let their hair down. Some of them didn't come back at all but it tended to work itself out because they'd sort of pick up a few others who hadn't been there.

The station cook - I think we had three different cooks in the time I was there. It's very difficult to get cooks to stay in these isolated properties - the hours they work, no time off. He was feeding anything from 20 to 40 people per meal, and you'd never know whether there was going to be 20 in or whether there was going to be 40 in, depending on what they were doing out in the paddocks, what they were doing in the stock camps - who was in and out. So plain living conditions were pretty hard.

THE COMMISSIONER: Does the next generation on that property want to stay on the property? I mean, I know they're still young kids but are they seeing their future there or elsewhere?

MS KOSSATZ: Well, these were two girls, and at five and seven.

THE COMMISSIONER: Very young.

MS KOSSATZ: Yes, very young. The men and women that were there in their middle 30s, they saw their future as being on the property, and they were hoping that their children would stay there too. But they were very aware of the difficulties that they were under, and there was a fair bit of underlying bitterness in that if they claimed to have any sort of

Aboriginal blood they would qualify for support of all description. They would get their diesel, they would get generators, they would get machinery. They had 4700 and something or other square kilometres in this one property; it was both sides of the highway, much of it was unfenced.

I went to the trucking yards I think the second weekend I was there and just kept out of the road and watched. They trucked out 780 prime two-year-old bullocks, Brahman stuff, for the live cattle trade to go to Saudi Arabia. They were paid \$1.19 a kilo live weight for top quality bullocks - just incredible. That was at the end of two years.

[5.37 pm]

There was a property next door which had been a profitable property for many years - employed 30 people, turned off good stock, reared horses - and it was claimed by the Aboriginals, bought on their behalf for about 45 million and then staffed by them. Inside 18 months there wasn't a bullock on the place, there wasn't a horse on the place, the windmills didn't work. There hasn't been a bullock sold off the place and it doesn't employ anybody; it's derelict. But they were supplied with generator, they were supplied with all the infrastructure which, if you happen to be a white person up there - just forget it.

THE COMMISSIONER: I saw some material, some estimates done about the amount of the value of the work that VISE volunteers do in a year. It was 2.5 million was the figure that I saw somewhere.

MS KOSSATZ: I don't have those figures with me but it would probably be along - yes, that doesn't surprise me in the least. You see, what we have are people whose skills range from primary school, preschool, high school, tertiary. Another interesting area - one day we were invited to pop over to the property next door and have a visit to the Kiana School. There is actually a Northern Territory government school on the next-door property. Now, next door happened to be about 200 clicks away, 70 kilometres off the main road and seven gates, which doesn't include the grids, but we popped over there for morning tea and met the principal.

Now, the principal there was the assistant dean of the faculty of science in Deakin University, gave all that up and she's now the principal of Kiana School on the Berkeley Tablelands - fascinating person - and I visited the school. I'd say they were about 99% Aboriginal and many of them, the ones that I saw, were older. I sort of guessed they'd be somewhere between 11 and 16, 17, and there were three or four Aboriginal women teaching the girls as well, but they were doing science and they had seven or eight computers sort of set around the room.

Even the whole business of computing is a can of worms because in many cases the person with the authority doesn't have the knowledge to know what's the best buy, and the person who has the knowledge to know what the school needs and is the best buy isn't a policy-maker to decide what we're going to have and, like a lot of businesses, it's toys for the boys and, "Oh well, we'll just get a bigger one and a better one and a faster one," whether it's what they really need or not. Like most schools, there is simply no hardware support in situ, so if there's a glitch of any sort the thing doesn't work, shove it in the cupboard and that's the end of it.

Again it's very dependent on telephone systems. Kiana Station was better off than where I was because they had a satellite phone system and once that all sort of becomes a lot cheaper and more accessible - but there's something out just recently now where they're talking about having Internet access through a mobile telephone. Once all of this - yes, it's coming down all of the time.

THE COMMISSIONER: Satellite phone anyway.

MS KOSSATZ: Yes. Distance is your biggest problem now. The children were taken from the station where we were down to Heartbreak and the teachers from the Katherine School of the Air were doing a patrol right around the Carpentaria group to meet their students but it was sort of a two-hour trip for us to get down there for the children to meet their teacher and then a two-hour trip home again. But their parents are terribly keen to do all they can and help and so forth. So, okay, we're talking about remote and rural communities. Now, this lass is not Meredith, is it?

THE COMMISSIONER: No.

MS KOSSATZ: I'm sorry, I didn't meet you.

MS ITALIANO: It's Teresa.

MS KOSSATZ: Hi, Teresa. I did ring Meredith. Bob Collins has recently - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MS KOSSATZ: Okay, you're aware of that.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MS KOSSATZ: I actually met Bob. I'd met him here in Canberra. I used to be the computer consultant for the Education Department before I retired.

THE COMMISSIONER: ACT or Commonwealth?

MS KOSSATZ: ACT, and set up a training bureau for their adults and sort of a whole pile of things. In that capacity I met Bob Collins when he was the senator down here for Arnhem Land, but I also met him again when I was at Katherine School of the Air for a week. He's recently put out this pretty comprehensive paper relevant to probably everything that you're looking at. In the process of discussing this with various people I've been in touch with Sharon Burrows, who was the president of the AEU, and she was supposed to have faxed me up some info relevant to what they know but, seeing as I've been away from my house on this other business with another group since before 9 o'clock this morning, there could be a mile and a half of fax paper churned off. If there is, is it okay with you if I sort of digest that, rephrase it and then post it off to you?

THE COMMISSIONER: Of course. Send it up to us by email if you like.

MS KOSSATZ: Okay, that's fine. I'll sort that out. Then I also talked to the principal of Kiana School and the principal of the Oenpelli School, both of whom I met while I was up there; told them what I was asked and I just have a horror of being, you know, a five-minute expert after a very limited knowledge up there, and asked them if they had anything they were prepared to offer on the outcomes from their much more extensive experience. So both of them had sort of undertaken - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: That's good.

MS KOSSATZ: So if and when I receive that I'll make sure you get it.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, send it on to us.

[Rural community consultation]

MS KOSSATZ: But you see, this is another example of the general policy of the government. You're not going to like this but that's okay. A government body will have one year, two years, three years to look at something or other and then they'll suddenly sort of think, "Oh yes, we must involve the community," and so they will pay lip service to involving the community by sending out these invitations with sometimes a month, sometimes a fortnight for the community to respond, and they ignore the fact that a community rep is representing an association that might only meet once a month. If you've just missed that meeting and you don't see your members for another month there

is simply no way that you can meet the deadlines by which you've got to have the information in. So that's one of my pet beefs because I'm involved in a whole pile of things.

THE COMMISSIONER: We're okay. We gave everybody seven months' notice.

MS KOSSATZ: Yes, okay. Well, VISE may have had seven months but, okay, I've been away for five months and Mike is just one of the other guys who was doing the Internet to the Outback project. Something has happened and Mike's had to pick up his - and so he just said to me, "Look, I'm desperate. Will you pick this up for me?" and I said, "Yes, that's fine." So this is how it happens.

[Rural and remote funding compared]

But in that same context I've also become aware of a rurally remote school called Jerangle Primary School, which is 85 kilometres from Cooma, and I actually talked to the principal down there. Now, according to the Human Rights definition of a remote school they've got to be 100 kilometres from a town of 10,000 people or some such.

THE COMMISSIONER: That's the DPIE definition but it's certainly rural even if it's not remote. Where you draw the line between the two is pretty irrelevant so far as I'm concerned.

MS KOSSATZ: It's not irrelevant, though, if those kilometres cut your funding.

THE COMMISSIONER: True.

MS KOSSATZ: And that's exactly what's happening down there at this Jerangle School. I've been down to Jerangle. It's out from Cooma in the mountains. There is 30 kilometres of dirt road and when that is subject to snow and to not being graded, and to the mud and the bogs and everything that goes with it - and the farmers with their tractors and the school bus - you can imagine what it's like.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MS KOSSATZ: So those folk who set the criteria for who will or won't get funding, they just look at the numbers and have no idea what they are condemning the local people to. The guy down there is actually making up a submission to see whether he can have his school classified as a special case to get the funding restored. He's got extremely bright children down there - and he would be a man that would know. There is one with sight problems, another one with hearing problems, both of whom get no support of any description, and

would you believe that the New South Wales Education Department's policy is that official cars are not allowed to drive on dirt roads?

Now, whether the intention was to stop all of these dreadful teachers using department cars to go bush bashing, or whatever they do - but that's the policy. They're not allowed to drive on dirt roads, and so that literally wipes this school out from any support from a consultant or an adviser or anybody coming to the school to help them. They get mail three times a week. Now, sometimes that person will have the same thing. Sometimes it will be a special courier delivery but it stays at the courier office in Cooma and nobody is able to go in and pick it up because of the road situation.

This person is forced to buy himself a very expensive four-wheel drive, which he wouldn't normally buy, simply so that (a) he can get in and out, and (b) he can keep his family as safe as possible on those roads during the very bad time. He cannot leave the school before the school closes at 3.00, or whatever it was. By the time he drives from there into Cooma to the courier office to pick up these documents - whatever they are - the office is closed. With these sorts of problems quite often he will get news of something he's supposed to do or to apply for and by the time - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: After it's closed.

[Road access]

MS KOSSATZ: By the time he's got it the applications have closed already. So there is an enormous number of problems that people in remote areas are coping with all of the time. The council doesn't do anything about the road out there. One of the children has a grandfather who's got a grader or a tractor or a blade on the back of his tractor, and so he goes and he grades the road or he ploughs up the snow so the school bus can get through. But what's the situation? That man does it voluntarily; he doesn't get paid. If he has an accident and kills himself, what sort of support would there be for his family? Compensation from anybody? Where's responsibility? You know, the mind boggles at what's going on in these areas.

THE COMMISSIONER: We need to finish up, I'm afraid, Marion. I reckon that you could tell us stories till this time next month. The experiences you've had are just fantastic.

MS KOSSATZ: Is this the sort of information that you guys are needing?

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, it's great - terrific, thank you. And if you get the material in from those three schools, or anything else that you want to send to us, send it to us.

MS KOSSATZ: So what do you have to do now, go and catch a plane and go somewhere?

THE COMMISSIONER: No, I'm in Canberra for the next few days.

MS KOSSATZ: Are you?

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MS KOSSATZ: Okay, I've brought you some paperwork.

THE COMMISSIONER: Okay. I'll be pleased to receive it, thank you.

AT 5.49 PM THE MATTER WAS ADJOURNED ACCORDINGLY