Chapter 5

Teacher Training and Professional Development

5.1 A consistent message delivered to the committee in most major submissions, and in the most persuasive advocacy of witnesses, was the inadequacy of pre-service professional training of teachers in relation to special education, and the poor provision of professional development programs. The committee noted that trainee teachers might never be exposed to the theory and practice of special education even over four years of undergraduate training, and that even when professional development courses were offered there was considerable doubt about their effectiveness given their brevity.

5.2 The committee noted the views of some witnesses which questioned the relevance of mandated special education components within the Bachelor of Education degree. Whatever the validity of this view it has not resulted in the provision of mandated intensive professional development courses conducted for teachers in the early years of their service when the relevance of skills attainment should be evident. Overall, the committee concludes that professional training and development for teachers who now routinely deal with students with a variety of disability needs to be considerably improved.

5.3 The need for improvement arises from the fact of wholehearted community acceptance of the need to bring into mainstream schools students who would once have been separated into special schools or units. The successful implementation of such a policy requires supplementary training of teachers to deal with new classroom demands. While the committee is aware of the diverse pressures applied to schools, to school systems, and to the teaching profession, it nonetheless appears inexplicable that something as fundamental to the operations of the school and the dynamics of the classroom should have been subject for so long to an obvious skills gap and to a virtual training vacuum.

Teacher training

5.4 A looming crisis in the supply of teachers has been predicted for some years, and recent projections of teacher supply and demand have confirmed the likelihood of the serious future teacher shortage predicted in the 2000 Preston Report sponsored by the Australian Council of Deans of Education. The broad findings of an earlier report of the Deans of Education, making similar projections, were endorsed by this committee in its 1998 report into the status of the teaching profession.[1]

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1 Chapter 8, *A Class Act*, Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, March 1998

5.5 The effect of a teacher shortage on the education of students with disabilities is likely to be more significant than on the education of children who have no disabilities. There will be a loss of experienced general and specialist teachers as they reach retiring age. The situation was explained to the committee by a special school principal intending to retire within five years:

> The lack of trained staff is affecting not only specialist schools but all schools. In initial basic teacher training there needs to be quite a large component where young teachers are taught how to manage students with disabilities and impairments, especially students with challenging behaviour. The age population of the teaching work force means that many teachers with expertise who have done quite a bit of university training in special education will be leaving the work force within five years.
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> That will leave an enormous gap in expertise because the training programs for teachers are not currently there across Australia. There is no initial training so teachers come out with no skills.[2]

5.6 By the late 1980s, a number of university programs that had previously provided teacher training and research in this field were experiencing difficulty in sustaining viable levels of student enrolment. In the period from 1987 to 1997, five university teacher training programs closed, and in the same period four out of seven existing teacher education programs related to sensory disabilities closed.[3] Changing priorities for course management and delivery in universities exacerbated this difficulty. Minimum enrolments in both undergraduate and postgraduate programs have risen steadily since that time. The committee sought evidence on the decline in participation in coursework degrees relating to student disabilities. It was told:

> The evidence is in enrolment of students in postgraduate coursework degrees. In the education faculties of some universities, the introduction of full fees for those courses has virtually wiped out their postgraduate courses. That is not true at a university like Sydney, but then Sydney is very different from the others, and when this happens people tend to look around and think, 'Where will I spend my money if I have to spend it.' But when you couple that with the fact that the Department of Education in New South Wales, for example, no longer supports teachers when they enrol in postgraduate coursework degrees, as they used to, you can see that there is a considerable disincentive for teachers to enrol in such degrees.[4]

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2 Mr Peter Symons, member, Australian Education Union, *Hansard*, Melbourne, 13 August 2002, p. 244

3 Associate Professor Greg Leigh, Assistant Chief Executive (Educational Services), Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children*, Hansard*, Sydney, 2 July 2002, p. 16

4 Dr Paul Whiting, Treasurer, Australian Federation of SPELD Associations (AUSPELD)*, Hansard*, Sydney, 2 July 2002, p. 57

5.7 The committee, not surprisingly, found education faculties in universities offering a wide variety of courses. All of them had the capacity to offer course components in special education. Only in New South Wales and Western Australia are such units mandatory.

5.8 The committee asked the NSW Department of Education and Training about its requirements of education faculties in universities in the state. It was told that since 1995, all undergraduate teacher training programs in New South Wales must provide a mandatory component of special education within the training program. The department claimed a contribution to course design, with components being endorsed by the department when they were amended. Any graduate from any of the state's universities which did not have a mandatory component in special education was not employable by the Department of Education and Training.[5] The department repeated its assurance that regular consultation took place between the universities and the department over special education course content, while making the point that universities treated the content in ways they believed to be most appropriate.[6]

5.9 The committee notes these assurances in the light of evidence it received from Dr Paul Whiting, an academic on the staff at the School of Education at the University of Sydney:

> …the New South Wales government said to the University of Sydney and to all of its universities, 'If you do not have an appropriate course, we will not employ your graduates,' which is a pretty strong incentive for a university to comply. But in the last 10 years nobody has looked at the content of those courses; nobody knows what is in them. The first director of special education who was involved in implementing that mandate actually went to and inspected every university to see what was involved in these courses, but it has not been done for 10 years.[7]

5.10 While the committee has no interest in further investigation of these competing claims, it is concerned that faculties of education may, through lack of funding and staffing stringencies, be giving less than the full measure of quality teacher training in special education, and that this trend may not be sufficiently identified by employing authorities.

5.11 Dr Whiting had other observations to make in regard to the training of teachers in which components of special education had to be included. Some of the consequences of 'slimmed-down' and 'lean and efficient' training came as a surprise to the committee:

> … now with four-year training for teachers there is no way that we can run the courses that we used to run when we had three-year training for teachers.

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5 Mr Brian Smyth King, op. cit., p. 175

6 ibid., p. 190

7 Dr Paul Whiting, op. cit., p. 100

> We have had to cut courses, in which I have been personally involved. In dealing with children with specific needs, we have had to cut courses in half in terms of the hours that we allow for them, because we have gone to four-year university training, instead of three-year college training. That is very largely a matter of funding: universities cannot pay the staff to do it.[8]

5.12 The committee was later told that so much more was required to be taught in general areas of the B.Ed degree, and that contact hours in the former colleges of advanced education exceeded the current load because lecturers are now expected, in the different environment of the university, to devote more time to research. They are also more expensive to employ in the current university funding regime.

5.13 Despite the fact that the requirements for effective work in special education were not demanding, they were not being met, according to Dr Whiting:

> There is no question that teachers are still not being trained to recognise these learning disabilities. That is all that we ask of teachers: that they are able to recognise a learning disability when they see it and not to confuse it with mental retardation, intellectual disability or misbehaviour.[9]

5.14 The committee regards such comments as a depressing comment on the standards of teacher training courses. Nonetheless, it is mindful of comments it heard from a Queensland academic, who said that while he thought it appropriate to include material on disabilities in undergraduate courses, this might not be related to any practice teaching student teachers might do, and that the main concern for practice and new teachers was classroom management and communication. Undergraduates were not very receptive to instruction about the very high levels of skills required to deal with students with disabilities. The committee assumes that developing such skills is easier to tackle in this area when teachers have gained some general experience in the classroom.[10] The knowledge and skills would then appear to be far more relevant. Alas, the committee received no information on the availability of professional development courses which might effectively extend the theoretical and practical knowledge of experienced teachers.

5.15 The only other state to make undergraduate units in special education compulsory is Western Australia, following the implementation of its Disability Services Plan 1995. All teachers trained in Western Australian universities must complete an educational support unit in their first year of study. The core compulsory units are typically for two hours of lectures and tutorials per week over 14 weeks.[11]

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8 ibid.

9 ibid.

10 Professor John Elkins, Fred and Eleanor Schonell, Special Education Research Centre, University of Queensland*, Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 September 2002, p. 463

11 Submission No. 244, Department of Education, Western Australia, para. 3.7

5.16 One school principal informed the committee of her misgivings about placing students with disabilities in mainstream classes without adequate support. It was claimed that class sizes are too large for their needs, and despite the fact that they are not independent learners, they are forced to be such, as a result of the teacher needing to spend time with other students:

> These students are being placed in classes with teachers who are not trained in [special education]. This is a highly specialised field. Our teachers should not be expected to [have] this knowledge and expertise. Such an expectation devalues the specialist teacher who spends several years studying how to work with students with disabilities and accumulating resources and expertise. Mainstream teachers cannot hope to achieve this. The solution is for the class teacher to attend a day's course on the particular disability. Clearly this is inadequate.[12]

5.17 The vast gap in experience and expertise will be all the more stark because in many cases those retiring will be the last of the comprehensively trained special education teachers. The training programs which produced them were long ago disbanded and skills are no longer taught. A special school principal informed the committee of the implications of this neglect:

> Recently I spoke to a group of exit students at a university and asked 30 of them, 'How many of you expect to be teaching a student with a disability next year?' and no-one put their hand up. I informed them that they would not only have one student with a disability but five or six. The fact that the institution had not even moved in that area to provide those skills was going to cause those teachers frustration. Training is not only for teachers but also for support staff—teacher assistants—as well. Much of the funds that actually go through to schools are paid to the support staff person without any training at all. In actual fact in lots of regular schools that person is the person who delivers the program.[13]

5.18 All areas of disability suffer from a shortage of properly trained teachers. A submission from the parent of a deaf child, who has a strong professional interest in education, has identified a problem for deaf children. He claims that at present a very high number of teachers of the deaf know little or no Auslan, and when faced with a deaf child who does know Auslan, they cannot teach this child.[14] The committee agrees with the submission which calls for efforts to be made to train new teachers of the deaf with the full range of skills required.

5.19 The committee accepts that the basic theoretical and practical knowledge of education to which trainee teachers need to be exposed at university must cover a very broad field, and that the 'overcrowded curriculum' is a particular feature of one year courses like the Diploma in Education. The committee believes, nonetheless, that as

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12 Submission No. 29, Mrs Glenda Parkin, p. 3

13 Mr Peter Symons, op. cit., p. 244

14 Submission No. 234, Mr Richard Taffe, p. 4

the challenge of dealing with students with disabilities, including gifted children with disabilities, is now more commonly recognised, there must be acknowledgment of this in university education courses. The committee believes that what is current practise in new South Wales and Western Australia should be followed in other states and in the territories, and urges education departments and other employing authorities to negotiate with universities on the provision of special education units.

Recommendation 10

The committee recommends that all university teacher training courses include a mandatory unit on the education of atypical students (including students with a disability and gifted students), to familiarise trainee teachers with classroom methods appropriate for students across the spectrum of ability.

Professional development

5.20 One recent study of special education has made the observation that, in the short term, professional development is likely to make a more significant contribution to the preparation of class teachers who need to deal with the learning problems of students with disabilities. There is evidence of increased demand for such courses, particularly in the area of behaviour management, which are associated with learning difficulties.[15]

5.21 The balance of effort on providing effective undergraduate training and effective post-graduate professional development was a matter addressed by Professor John Elkin. The committee was told that trainee teachers did not easily grasp concepts about teaching for differences, which meant that much more attention needed to be paid to professional development. Professor Elkin lamented the fact that there was nothing post-registration that required a teacher to demonstrate increased knowledge or skill. The evidence continued:

> That is not to say that lots of professional development does not happen, and a lot of teachers of their own accord go about getting extra knowledge. But the reality is that some things, such as teaching the hard to teach kids, do not make a lot of sense in the undergraduate program. Undergraduate teachers are just not experienced enough; they have not wrestled with these kids enough. One of the things that I argue is that, as it is true in a number of other places in the world and as it is true in other professions in Australia, one's registration ought to be conditional upon meeting some quantum of professional development upgrading.[16]

5.22 It is not surprising that professional development programs are so much sought after by practising teachers. While teachers are sceptical about the value of learning theory, the foundation of teacher training courses, they may understand its

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15 Jenkinson, J., *Special Education: A Matter of Choice*, *Australian Education Review No. 46,* ACER, 2001, p. 106

16 Professor John Elkin, op. cit., p. 461

relevance to practice once they have experienced some hard realities in the classroom. The aim of teacher education, it may be assumed, is to lay down a foundation of theory, the principles of good curriculum, and instil some sound, basic teaching method. Experience will build on this and, in particular, make much more intelligible the connection between theory and practice. We have now agreed that four years is adequate for initial training, with subsequent career-long growth of knowledge and understanding. When asked how long teacher training should be, one witness told the committee:

> You could probably train them for six years! That is what it feels like sometimes when you look at what you would like a teacher to learn. If I could go to my own experience, I was experienced as a science teacher and, when I went to do my school counsellor training course, I can remember looking at the person teaching us about behaviour management and thinking, 'That's where all that psychology falls in. That's how it makes sense in the classroom.' I had had four years of study in psychology but had not related it to my classroom practice until this specialist stood there and said, 'This is what you do.' It clicked and all made sense. Until you have been in front of a class, perhaps, it is very difficult to make sense of it too.[17]

5.23 In the committee's view, this sentiment sums up the reasons why a odd few days each year is an insufficient commitment to a kind of learning which is far more useful and enriching than twice the equivalent number of days in undergraduate teaching units.

5.24 The problem, as the committee found, is that professional development remains an add-on service provided to teachers by school systems which are either reluctant to spend money on it, or which cannot afford to. The difficulty for system administrators is that most often, the outcomes of professional development are difficult to measure. These and other observations made in this section apply generally to professional development, but have particular relevance to the need of teachers dealing with students with disabilities.

5.25 Apart from the state education departments and some other employing authorities, no person addressing the committee in any other capacity had any praise for the efforts put into professional development in the field of special education. The committee places little credence in the assurances of state education officials when they justify the adequacy of current provisions. The committee takes this to mean that the programs are maintained more or less as they have been over a number of years. The committee cannot think of any way in which it can assess, for the purposes of this inquiry, the quality of current professional development programs in the teaching of students with disabilities, and more significantly, it does not believe that state and territory education departments have the capacity or the will to do so either. Raw data may be available in some form, but assessment of quality would be difficult, measured against the ideal model set out below.

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17 Mrs Lynn Booth, *Hansard,* Sydney, 3 July 2002, p. 100

5.26 Even if every teacher entering service had exposure to theory and practice in dealing with students with disabilities as a result of having done a B.Ed course, continuing professional development would still be required to keep these teachers up-to-date and committed to good teaching practice. Interestingly, some research done in 1995 by Dr Chris Forlin showed that as teachers developed experience that were less likely to want to have students with disabilities in their classes.[18] It is generally agreed professional development programs need to focus directly on the real classroom needs of teachers, and teachers themselves must have input into the planning and running of the programs. Research indicates that a number of elements need to be included in courses if they are to be effective. These are summarised in a recent study:

- acknowledgment of participants' fears and anxieties related to students with disabilities and inclusion of students in regular classroom settings;
- the introduction of new skills in areas such as the individualisation of instruction, collaboration and classroom management;
- learning a variety of classroom approaches; the opportunity to observe other teachers working in situations where inclusion is successful;
- opportunities for collaboration between specialists and classroom teachers; and
- opportunities for cooperative teaching between general and special education teachers.[19]

5.27 The committee notes that a great deal of time would need to be invested in any professional development courses which included all these necessary characteristics, and it doubts whether any course currently conducted anywhere would match these criteria.

5.28 The committee broadly concurs with the view expressed by the Australian Education Union that the provision of professional development is extremely inadequate throughout education, and that the area of disabilities is no exception.[20] The AEU has urged that professional development include awareness raising courses covering the benefits of inclusion and ways of bringing it about, including components on occupational health and safety, stress management and instruction in physical restraint and other matters to do with difficult students.[21]

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18 Truen, M., van Kraayenoord, C. and Gallaher, K., 'Preservice Education and Professional Development to Teach students with Disabilities', in van Kraayenoord, Elkins *et al*, *Literacy, Numeracy and Students with Disabilities*, vol. 4, Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs 2000, p. 14

19 ibid., p. 17

20 Submission No. 198, Australian Education Union, p. 12

21 ibid.

State programs

5.29 Professional development programs are broadly similar across all states and territories. There has been a trend toward school-based global budgeting, which included provision for teacher release and fees for courses. Regional or district level funding is also available in some states, for instance in South Australia. Up to five days each year is typically allowed for professional development leave, although this varies slightly across systems, and not all teachers would take their full allocation. While teachers in South Australia are obliged to spend five days a year on training because of an award bargain, teachers from Victoria, for instance, are under no such obligation. In that state, each school determines its expenditure priorities based on program and staff development need.[22] Courses are not always mandatory, except in cases where teachers are being introduced to major system-wide curriculum initiatives. Nor do teachers necessarily have the opportunity of attending courses of their choice as they may not be offered.

5.30 Education Queensland has recently instituted locally organised 'staff colleges' to coordinate professional development and take responsibility for contracting instructors and teaching teams. It appears to the committee that this is simply an administrative arrangement that must have existed in some form for many years. In all respects Queensland appears to run its programs in a similar way to other states.

5.31 The committee did not seek lists of courses offered by the various agencies around the country on inclusive or special education. It heard anecdotal evidence of the popularity of courses offered on classroom management issues and dealing with difficult behavioural problems, and considers it unlikely that there would have been a strong demand for courses related to the inclusive curriculum, or that such courses would have been promoted by schools and systems. Certainly, no evidence was presented to suggest any other conclusion. Nor was any evidence presented on the participation rate in professional development programs on inclusive education or any related educational topic. Such information may not exist.

5.32 The Tasmanian submission proposed that the Commonwealth demonstrate a commitment to the education of students with disabilities by providing targeted funding for intensive professional development courses in special education. It also suggested that the Commonwealth provide one-off funding to enable a small number of teachers to be trained to deal with students having low-incidence disabilities.[23]

5.33 University education faculties are key providers of expert instruction for systemic professional development programs. This is despite the fact that academic staff numbers are dropping and some areas of specialisation are without instructors in some states. Education Queensland has submitted that there is evidence of a significant decline in the professional development functions of universities, with

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22 Ms Susan Tait, General Manager, Students and Communities, Victorian Department of Education and Training, *Hansard*, Melbourne, 13 August 2002, p. 318

23 Submission No. 184, Tasmanian Department of Education, p. 17

reduced opportunities for teachers to access courses, and the capacity of universities to offer viable courses.[24] The committee heard in Adelaide that the South Australian Department of Education funds 20 postgraduate certificate places each year at Flinders University.[25]

5.34 In the area of special education there are some shining beacons, and there are doubtless many more outstandingly successful yet unknown and unsung schools of excellence. One of the unfortunate characteristics of education systems is the reluctance of their administrators to give too much praise and recognition to particular schools and school principals least it reflect adversely on the overall standards achieved by the system. Some schools have come to the attention of the committee. It notes that the Mater Dei School at Camden NSW, a special school run for the Wollongong diocese, is currently providing professional development courses for teachers from mainstream schools in the diocese. This involves teachers spending a week at Mater Dei, working with teachers, observing behaviour management programs in action, preparing individual student learning programs and taking part in parent meetings to establish and agree upon learning outcomes for students.[26] This would seem to be an idea worthy of adoption in all systems.

5.35 One submission pointed to the different professional development needs of primary and secondary schools. The committee gained a general impression that, notwithstanding difficulties with early diagnosis of disabilities, primary schools and teachers were probably more successful in dealing with disabilities in the classroom. It could also be argued that in many respects it is easier to handle most forms of disability with pre-adolescent children. Secondary schools are more complex organisations, in which the increased exercise of student choice becomes a part of the learning process. Teaching becomes more specialised, and this has an effect on teacher workloads and priorities. The committee is aware that some designated professional development days for secondary teachers are frequently taken up by systemic programs relating to new curriculum. While the committee is not in the position to comment on this need, it has concerns about the fact that such matters are dealt with at the expense of new teaching method, particularly in dealing with 'difficult to teach' students. It suggests that professional development priorities in the secondary schools may need to be reassessed.

5.36 The additional pressures faced by secondary teachers in accessing professional development courses was explained by an Independent Education Union official to the committee in Melbourne:

> Can I also make the point in relation to professional development for teachers that, as these students with disabilities—particularly the students we have in our school—move up through school and into secondary school, the gap in their learning becomes wider, and it impacts more profoundly on

24 Submission No. 213, Education Queensland, p. 9

25 Ms Patricia Winter, *Hansard*, Adelaide, 9 September 2002, p. 963

26 Submission No. 30, Mater Dei School, p. 6

> secondary teachers than those in the primary school curriculum. Secondary school teachers have a much wider range of students within their classrooms with needs that have to be met within that classroom situation. Also, considering that our secondary system is I think a very top-down system and that we are heading students towards VCE studies, there is a huge range of areas that schools are expected to cover curriculum-wise now and a huge range of areas that teachers have to undertake professional development on to be experts as such in their fields so as to deliver proficient programs to students in schools.[27]

5.37 Finally, should a teacher find time to attend a properly staged and structured professional development program, conducted by expert curriculum practitioners, there is still one important consideration to bear in mind before applying for or accepting a place. It is important to consider whether the focus on inclusive principles and practices conforms to the culture of the school from which the teacher comes. Research from the United States suggests that even when teachers are well-trained in inclusive teaching practice, these concepts and skills are likely to be abandoned in favour of the prevailing attitude in the school.[28] For this reason alone, professional development properly remains a matter for whole-of-school decision, so that time and resources are not wasted on sending teachers to courses facilitating ideas and skills which have no immediate application.

5.38 The committee believes that there is no more important expenditure priority in special education than the task of developing an effective national professional development scheme. The evidence seems to point to the existence of an *ad hoc* arrangement in most states and territories. Much more time is needed for professional development: time not only for method instruction but for mentoring and for reflection. As one school principal told the committee:

> The training available to teachers in schools—and I call it bandaid training—is an hour and a half, two hours or something like that after school. It is usually run by another professional. In actual fact, it is very difficult to resolve a long-term problem with a very short-term training program. You might pick up a couple of good strategies but not get to actually understand the philosophy behind letting a person with an intellectual disability have time to make their decision.[29]

5.39 The committee has heard assurances from the states that a range of courses are on offer to teachers but no evidence of how well they are attended, how seriously schools take advantage of opportunities available, and whether there is much, or any, effort made by schools to have specially tailored courses in handling disabilities run for them. While the committee understands the practical need for school autonomy in making decisions as to professional development requirements, it believes that take-up

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27 Ms Delma Wootherspoon, Victorian Independent Education Union of Australia*, Hansard*, Melbourne, 13 August 2002, p. 237

28 van Kraayenoord, Elkins *et al*., op. cit., p. 8

29 Mr Peter Symons, op. cit., p. 250

rates by individual schools need to be closely monitored by officials at the relevant level. In theory, making schools responsible for their own professional development arrangements should work to the advantage of schools, and allow a more strategic approach to whole-of-school teaching skills programs. Whether or not this is happening is beyond the capacity of this committee to assess.

5.40 The committee notes that the Commonwealth program, *Teachers for the 21st Century—Making the Difference*, may be reaching the end of its funding life. The committee recommends that this program be extended, with augmented funding, but be specifically directed to a national professional development scheme targeted at lifting the performance outcomes of teaching and learning in inclusive education. The committee recommends that the Commonwealth, through MCEETYA, should set some broad guidelines on the duration and structure of courses, and establish an appropriate evaluation process.

Recommendation 11

The committee recommends that the *Teachers for the 21st Century—Making the Difference* program should be extended as a national professional development scheme, with funding augmented to target improved performance outcomes for teaching and learning especially for atypical children in all education settings.

Recommendation 12

The committee also recommends that the Commonwealth, through MCEETYA, should set out broad guidelines on the duration and structure of courses to be implemented through this national professional development scheme, and establish an appropriate evaluation process.

Specialist skill shortages

5.41 The committee has conducted a number of education inquiries in recent years in which it has drawn attention to the training deficit. This is no more evident than in the field of special education where skill shortages will become apparent over the next five years when beneficiaries of the training 'boom' of the 1960s and 1970s are due to retire. School counsellors are in a strong position to understand this problem. One of them told the committee:

> Because of their own training school counsellors are very rarely trained to that level in psychology and they do not have people that they can refer to. Basically in most professional areas you would expect that if people do not have the expertise then they refer to people who do have the expertise. That is part of the Australian Psychological Society's code of conduct; it is part of the Early Childhood Association's recommended practices. Most true professional organisations have that model, but it is very difficult if your school counsellors cannot refer the child to somebody who has the relevant knowledge—just the same as if GPs and psychiatrists cannot refer these

> children to people who can provide and advise on the appropriate treatment. That is the current situation: there is simply no-one to refer them to who has the expertise.[30]

5.42 One bright spot on the training front is in New South Wales, where the committee commends the initiative of the NSW Department of Education and Training in providing postgraduate cadetships in special education for teachers working in or wanting to work in that area. It notes that since 1999, 351 teachers have been trained through this program. Teachers are paid their full salaries while undertaking full-time study. The committee acknowledges that this is expensive, but notes that departmental officials have described the program as 'very valuable'.[31]

5.43 The Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Students told the committee that across the country there is a trend towards generic training of both mainstream teachers for special education, and those who intend to specialise. This trend was based on the incorrect assumption that inclusion in mainstreaming created a need for broader based and more generic teacher education. The Institute was opposed to this development because it would not work in the case of children with sensory disabilities. There is, on the contrary, a need for highly specialised, highly technical teacher training to support the needs of such children, especially given the advances in technology in areas such as cochlear implementation and adaptive technologies for children with vision impairment. Funding and infrastructure support for such specialised training need to be improved.[32]

5.44 The Institute reminded the committee of the reason for the likelihood of continued shortages in specialised training:

> In the period from 1987 to 1997, some five university based teacher training programs closed across the country. In 1987, there were seven specialist teacher education programs relating to the education of students with sensory disabilities; in 1997, there were just three. In one of those cases, our program—in affiliation with the University of Newcastle, which is the largest and most comprehensive in the country—is almost entirely supported through the charitable sector. In the case of the other two programs, one program at the University of Melbourne is substantially supported by independent funding, and the other program is wholly included within the university's program.[33]

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30 Mr Robert Buckley, Vice President, Action for Autism, *Hansard*, Canberra, 11 September 2002, p. 617

31 Mr Brian Smyth King, op. cit., p. 175

32 Associate Professor Greg Leigh, Assistant Chief Executive (Educational Services), Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children, *Hansard*, Sydney, 2 July 2002, p. 16

33 ibid.

5.45 The training of specialists receives little encouragement in most states. As the committee was told in relation to the supply of specialists in visual impairment in Victoria:

> One problem in getting teachers of the deaf is getting teachers to do the postgraduate qualification. You have young grads coming out after four years and, with so many jobs now available in mainstream schools where they can get about $40,000 a year, the idea of doing a fifth year as a postgraduate qualification—at the end of which you are not going to get any more money and will have paid an extra year of HECS—is not attractive; there are just no incentives. Additionally, advertised teacher-of-the-deaf jobs are usually for just 12 months. Warrnambool has not been able to get someone to go down there, but they have been only offering a 12-month tenure. Are you really seriously going to attract people down there by just offering a job for 12 months? We have got to look at incentives for getting specialist trained teachers of the deaf into areas of need, particularly in rural and regional areas, and we have got to be creative in finding ways to encourage them to do the training and then to take up jobs.[34]

5.46 Less populous states like Tasmania are particularly affected by the trend away from specialist training. For reasons to do with the static population growth and an ageing population, the demand for specialist education courses in Tasmania has diminished to a point where they have been discontinued, and vacancies where they remain have to be filled from the mainland. There is a destructive spiral evident in the training of specialists. As demand for their services diminishes, so does the capacity and for further training. As a Tasmanian education official explained to the committee:

> One of our problems as a small system is that we simply do not have the numbers to support training people for very specialist fields. We cannot train teachers of the visually impaired or the hearing impaired. We do not train therapists in this state. This is a major issue for us but we accept the fact that there are simply not the numbers to generate the need for those kinds of courses to be available. That is a very big issue for us. We would love to have ways in which we could access specialist training for those kinds of people.[35]

5.47 A brave face is made with the inevitability of needing to introduce more broadly-based courses at university:

> To be fair to the university, one of the main reasons they had to close down one of their courses was that they had very small numbers and it was very difficult for them to do them as separate courses. They have combined them and now they are going to stream through into an education stream. We

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34 Mrs Marilyn Dann, Membership Secretary, Australian Association of Teachers of the Deaf (Victoria), *Hansard*, Melbourne 13 August 2002, p. 295

35 Ms Alison Jacob, *Hansard*, Hobart, 3 September 2002, p. 392

> have to be optimistic in this. We believe we will get some good graduates coming out of it.[36]

5.48 There were complaints that itinerant specialist teachers do not always have the full range of skills that their tasks required. An example was given of the case of itinerant vision teachers, whose basic training could have ranged from kindergarten to HSC maths:

> There is no consistency in their training. They come into the specialist vision training from any background then they work with a child of any age. So you could have a maths trained high school teacher training and teaching a kindergarten student or vice versa: Some of them have no background in technology but are specialists in braille. Some of them have great experience in braille but no experience with low vision. It is a broad range of skills that they are required to have, but no one person can have all those skills—and certainly no one teacher ever does. The problem is that they do not tend to refer to specialists in their areas…So you (can) have a teacher with a background in infants teaching and braille who has no idea about workplace issues, work experience, independence training for teenage vision impaired students—they do not have the background. Some do. Some do well; some do not do well.[37]

5.49 The committee was told that vision impairment was such a low incidence disability that there are not enough teachers going through in each state for many universities to want to run a course; and that there is probably a need for a national initiative for training these teachers, possibly with distance delivery with a residential component.[38] The committee concurs with this view.

5.50 The committee was also told of parents particular concern about unavailability and inaccessibility of, adaptive technology specialists in education for the visually impaired. Parents were aware that there were IT consultants within the system, but knew nothing about their expertise or availability to work with adaptive technologies. Parents could perceive this to be a lack of understanding on the part of school or system authorities of the importance of skills required by students in relation to their sighted peers.[39]

5.51 The Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Students' submission identifies a need for government support to subsidise the provision of highly specialised and high quality training options in this area. It argues that reliance on generic training in

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36 ibid.

37 Mrs Robyn Dagwell, Team Leader, School Aged Services, Royal Blind Society*, Hansard*, Sydney, 2 July 2002, p. 34

38 Mrs Helen Lunn, Manager, Child and Family Services, Royal Blind Society*, Hansard,* Sydney, 2 July 2002, p. 34

39 Mrs Sandra Johnston, Parent Representative, Royal Blind Society, *Hansard*, Sydney, 2 July 2002, p. 33

special education or training for teachers of children with other disabling conditions cannot be considered as a substitute for such requisite specialised training:

> …appropriately specialised professional training for teachers in these fields is extremely resource intensive with appropriately low-level demand. In order to sustain this provision and to ensure that such quality programming is made available and accessible nationally, there is a need to ensure adequate government support for training initiatives such as the one undertaken by joint venture between the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children and the University of Newcastle. This cooperation has produced Renwick College, a centre for professional training and research in the education of children with sensory disabilities.[40]

5.52 The number of specific university special education programs in the area of sensory disability fell from seven in 1987 to just three in 1997. A response in some other post-graduate special education programs was to offer limited numbers of coursework units in sensory disability within the context of a general special education degree program. National and international experience, however, clearly indicates that the specialist skills required to operate effectively as a teacher of the deaf or teacher of students with vision impairments cannot be adequately covered in the context of a generic special education program.[41]

Rural and regional shortages

5.53 The shortage of specialised education services is particularly acute in non-metropolitan regions. A number of submissions to this effect came from Victoria, which may reflect the higher level of effectiveness of community organisations in that state. The committee considers it unlikely that the regional shortage of specialists is more acute in Victoria than elsewhere.

5.54 One particular case can be highlighted as illustrating the problem of specialisation shortages away from metropolitan areas. An interesting submission on behalf of the South West Hearing Support Group describes the efforts of this organisation to influence the Victorian government to maintain minimum services from a visiting teacher for the deaf to schools in the Warrnambool–Portland region. It was pointed out that the region supported four teachers of the deaf ten years ago, a figure reduced to one in 1999. Recently, the regional Department Education and Training (DET) office had decided to reduce the level of services even further, but could find no specialist willing to work an 11 month contract on a 0.8 workload. Parental pressure on the Minister for Education and Training resulted in the department's decision being overturned.[42]

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40 Submission No. 99, Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Students, p. 13

41 ibid.

42 Submission No. 229, Mr Greg Lee, p. A8 ff

5.55 The committee makes no comment on the merits of decisions made, but a question arises as to why the regional DET assumed that it would be possible to find a specialist teacher prepared to work under the conditions offered. It is likely that the DET office had to make hard decisions about the allocation of scarce resources, especially under new budgeting arrangements. A lesson to be learnt from this may be that non-metropolitan regions require financial support from the centre in order to provide the incentives needed to attract specialists.

5.56 What has been a problem in Warrnambool is also a problem in Wodonga. One submission states that parents in rural areas are often faced with untrained teaching staff, mostly making good attempts at learning about deafness: 'But no amount of kindness can substitute for the necessary specialist language skills required to teach a deaf child to be literate in English. Often the parents are the ones teaching the staff.'[43] The submission continues:

> In country areas, schools advertise for staff and position criteria are usually not met by applicants. Clearly there is a shortage of trained Teachers of the Deaf (TOD) especially in rural areas. Visiting Teachers (V.T.) are required to travel vast distances and expected to know all things about all disabilities. In some cases, children whose first language is Auslan receive visits from VT's who possess minimal signing skills. *If* an interpreter is deemed to be required, one may not be readily found. Moreover, if an interpreter is found they are often untrained and unqualified. By this, I mean that the 'interpreter' may or may not have had any formal training in studying Auslan as a language nor have been formally accredited as an interpreter. Often the interpreter/aid has some 'basic skills' in signing. These signing skills may not even be in Auslan, but some other simple language coding system such as Makaton.[44]

5.57 Wodonga parents need to travel to the Shepparton deaf facility for specialist attention, a distance of around 200 kilometres. It was pointed out to the committee that historical circumstances has lead to a concentration of specialists and services for deaf people in the cities and major regional centres. It is now unacceptable to parents to consider sending their children to boarding schools for the deaf, as they did many years ago and, indeed, these schools no longer exist. It is now expected that deaf children will be educated locally: hence the demand for regional services.[45]

5.58 The committee views sympathetically the points made by parents of children with disabilities living in areas outside metropolitan regions, and again makes the point that if regional cities in such relatively closely settled areas as Wodonga and Warrnambool suffer from such a shortage of specialists, the situation in many other rural centres must be far worse. The committee considers that MCEETYA should

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43 Submission No. 235, Mrs Cristina Taffe, p. 2

44 ibid.

45 Submission No. 234, Mr Richard Taffe, p. 2

undertake a study of this problem with a view to addressing an overall shortage of specialist educators.

Specialist services to remote areas

5.59 Provision of specialist services to children with disabilities in remote communities poses additional challenges. Reports in submissions concentrated on the provision of specialist services to indigenous remote communities. As discussed briefly in Chapter 5, indigenous communities are the recipients of targeted services in some states. These are subject to the difficulties imposed by distance and isolation, multiplied by the disproportionately high number of individuals affected, and then by cultural difference.

5.60 The submission from the Northern Territory government referred to a recent independent review, *Learning Lessons,* which noted as a starting point that education provision to indigenous communities was a major challenge, with 118 remote schools having 40.05 per cent of the indigenous population enrolled.[46] The delivery of equitable and appropriate services to the disabled in indigenous communities raised the need for even more specialised teacher professional development and specialist services. The high incidence of otitis media was a key resource challenge, compounded by the expense of providing support to remote locations and the irregularity of service provision.[47] A submission reporting the provision of services, or lack of them, to Torres Strait Islanders also mentioned the need to cater for disabilities arising from foetal alcohol syndrome.[48]

5.61 A major issue for these communities is screening for the identification of disability. The South Australian government noted its submission that: 'There is a difficulty in separating broad educational disadvantage issues from cultural and disability specific issues'.[49] Mr Trent Wheeley, a Guidance Officer with Education Queensland located at the Torres Strait, identified two different components in this. On the one hand, under diagnosis was occurring because:

> The burden of proof for intellectual impairment is much greater here due to the perceived inappropriateness of standardised tests of intelligence for this community. This has resulted in a severe under-diagnosis of disability (0.75% vs. 2.45% statewide).[50]

5.62 Meanwhile, there was under diagnosis resulting from language difficulties, caused by continuing difficulties in addition to those of remoteness, subsequent lack of educational opportunities, and follow-up assessment:

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46 Submission No. 222, Northern Territory Government, p. 6

47 See Submission no. 222, Northern Territory Government; No. 37, Deafness Forum of Australia ACT; Submission No. 20, Mr Trent Wheeley.

48 Submission No. 20, Mr Trent Wheeley, p. 1

49 Submission No. 238, South Australian government, p. 11

50 Submission No. 20, op. cit., p. 1

> ESL factors are a major issue especially in the identification of students with Language difficulties. A lack of appropriate testing instruments and of staff who are trained in analysing language usage has resulted in no students across the district being identified as having Speech/Language Disabilities. Remoteness is a large issue especially as students with disabilities reach high school age. There are only two high schools in the district and for students from the other 15 schools this means they will have to board on the mainland or on Thursday Island. Unfortunately there are no boarding facilities that cater for the special needs of students with disabilities. This has caused some parents to refuse to send their children to high school. Additional factors related to remoteness are the excessive cost of flying special education teachers to the students they are expected to be working with and the lack of medical services for the diagnosis of disability. We're yet to have a paediatrician visit this year.[51]

5.63 A basic problem is the shortage of people appropriately qualified to carry out the testing. The Northern Territory government submission, for example, noted that the 'availability of personnel in remote areas who are seen as culturally appropriate is minimal'.[52] One submission remarked that, while there is a larger training budget for professional development for indigenous teachers than for many counterparts in Queensland, it was likely that training for specialist education would be 'quite insignificant'.[53]

5.64 In this regard, the Northern Territory government has implemented programs to boost training for specialist indigenous and remote teachers, as an outcome of the *Learning Lessons* review.[54] The Committee considers that if problems of identification and treatment of disabilities in remote indigenous communities are to be addressed, similar programs should become a focus for relevant state education departments.

Recommendation 13

The committee recommends that MCEETYA undertake a study to identify deficiencies in service provision for students with disabilities in rural, regional and remote areas, as part of a project aimed at addressing the overall shortage of specialist educators.

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51 ibid., p. 1

52 Submission No. 244, op. cit., p. 8

53 Submission No. 20, op. cit., p. 2

54 Submission No. 244, op. cit., p. 9

Conclusions and recommendations

5.65 The committee acknowledges that it is likely that the shortage of specialised teachers is partly due to the changing role of specialists over the past ten years as special schools have closed in line with a more inclusive approach to the teaching of students with disabilities. Specialists are now far more likely to find themselves in an itinerant support role. It has been claimed that the move to inclusive schooling has been resisted by specialists. Many have been trained for classroom work and are said to be less comfortable in the role of consultant.[55]

5.66 Pressure is also added to specialist teachers by questions about how to place traditional concepts of special education in the context of key competencies, a new focus on vocational relevance of the curriculum and quality issues generally. The committee has received no advice on how schools and employing authorities are responding to such tensions, or whether post-graduate university courses training the diminishing number of specialists are taking these trends into account.

Recommendation 14

The committee recommends to MCEETYA that research be undertaken to evaluate the effects of changes in the role and employment conditions of special education teachers, and to assess the adequacy and appropriateness of current specialist consultation models.

55 Jenkinson, op. cit., p. 108