



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**Standing Committee on Education, Community Services
and Recreation**

**1999-2000 Annual and Financial Reports of the
Department of Education and Community
Services and Related Agencies**

Report No 7

February 2001

Committee membership

Ms Kerrie Tucker MLA (Chair)

Mr Wayne Berry MLA (Deputy Chair)

Mr Harold Hird MLA

Secretary: Ms Judith Henderson

Resolution of appointment

The following general purpose standing committees be established to inquire into and report on matters referred to it by the Assembly or matters that are considered by the committee to be of concern to the community:

...a Standing Committee on Education, Community Services and Recreation to examine education, schooling, training services, children's, youth and family services and sport and recreation and any other related matter.¹

¹ *Minutes of Proceedings*, No 2, 28 April 1998, pp15-19. Amended 25 November 1999.

1. Background

1.1. On 7 September 2000, the Assembly resolved that:

the annual and financial reports for the financial year 1999-2000 presented to the Assembly pursuant to the *Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 1995* stand referred, on presentation, to the relevant Standing Committee for inquiry and report by the first sitting day in February 2001.

1.2. On 18 October 2000 the Assembly resolved that:

the Standing Committee on Education, Community Services and Recreation inquire into and report on, as part of its inquiry into departmental and financial reports, the Canberra Institute of Technology report and financial statements 1999.

1.3. Pursuant to section 14 of the *Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act (1995)*, the annual report and financial statements for the Department of Education and Community Services for 1999-2000 were tabled in the Assembly on 18 October 2000.

1.4. Pursuant to section 8 of the *Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act (1995)*, the annual report and financial statements for 1999 for the Canberra Institute of Technology were tabled in the Assembly on 9 May 2000.

1.5. Pursuant to the *Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act (1995)* the annual report and financial statements of the ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Board for 1999-2000 were tabled in the Assembly on 5 December 2000.

2. Conduct of the inquiry

2.1. The committee was required to examine the annual and financial reports of the Department of Education and Community Services, the Canberra Institute of Technology and the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Board.

2.2. The committee conducted two public hearings. The first was held on the morning of 16 November 2000, when two community groups appeared, namely the Australian Education Union and the Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools (APFACTS). The committee issued an invitation to community groups to appear in an advertisement placed in *The Canberra Times* and *The Chronicle* in October 2000.

2.3. The second was held from 9.30 am to 5 pm on 20 December 2000, at which the Minister for Education, Mr Stefaniak MLA and departmental officials appeared. Following a ministerial reshuffle Mr Moore MLA assumed responsibility for children's, youth and family services, and community services. Since the administrative arrangements were only gazetted on Monday 18 December 2000, Mr Stefaniak stood in for Mr Moore at the hearing.

2.4. During the hearing on 20 December 2000, the Minister and officials agreed to provide answers to a number of questions that were taken on notice.

2.5. Mr Wood MLA also participated during the hearings.

2.6. The committee wishes to thank the Minister for Education, officials from the Department of Education and Community Services, the Canberra Institute of Technology and the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Board, and representatives from the community groups who appeared. The committee found the hearings most informative.

3. Committee comment

Presentation

3.1. Overall, the committee found all reports to be well set out and generally easy to follow. Having all the Department of Education and Community Services' report in one volume made examination easier.

3.2. The Department of Education and Community Services' report includes its audited financial statements and provides a comprehensive analysis of its key achievements, whole of government issues and annexed reports from the ACT Accreditation and Registration Council, the ACT Vocational Education and Training Authority, the Board of Senior Secondary Studies, the Children's Services Council and the Official Visitor.

3.3. The CIT's report is also in one volume. The report is divided into three main parts, namely: overview of CIT performance; financial statements; and whole of government issues. The CIT's report includes a statement of performance for the year ending 31 December 1999.

3.4. The Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Board's annual report for 1999-2000 is its first report. Since the Board held its first meeting in November 1999 and its first staff were appointed in May 2000, the report covers a limited period of activity. The report includes a report from the Executive Director, an organisational profile, and audited financial statements.

3.5. All reports met all reporting requirements.

3.6. In its report of the 1998-99 annual report for the Department of Education and Community Services the committee noted that at the time of the committee's hearings the annual report for the Department of Education and Community Services for 1998-99 was not on the Internet. The committee notes that while there is reference to the department's 1998-99 annual report on its Internet site, the 1998-99 report is still not available on the Internet and neither is the 1999-2000 annual report. The committee notes that several other ACT Government departments place their annual reports on the Internet and considers that the Department of Education and Community Services

should make its annual report available on the Internet as soon as it is tabled in the Assembly.

Recommendation 1

3.7. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services make its annual report available on the Internet.

Suggestions for improvement

Issues arising from suggestions made relating to the 1998-99 annual report of the Department of Education and Community Services

3.8. The committee was pleased to note that several suggestions it made for improvement in its report on the Department of Education and Community Services' 1998-1999 annual report have been incorporated in the 1999-2000 annual report. These include details of members of consultative bodies, details of the number of persons assisted with concessions and type of concession provided, and a note concerning the difference between the Government payment for outputs (GPO) and total cost in the Government School Education output class.

Difference between Government Payment for Outputs (GPO) and total cost

3.9. While the Government agreed to provide a note on how the difference between the GPO and total cost in Government School Education, the committee does not consider that this note is detailed enough.

3.10. The note states:

The reasons for the difference between total cost and GPO are that DECS receives other revenue as well as GPO and funding is not provided for above benchmarked costs (shown as an operating deficit).

3.11. The Government, in its response to the committee's report on the 1998-1999 annual report for the Department of Education and Community Services gives as its reason for not providing more detailed information the fact that agencies are required to provide notes at a total department level but not for each output class as the provision of notes for each output class would significantly increase the volume of the financial statements.

3.12. The committee retains its view expressed in its report on the 1998-99 annual report that more detail should be provided and does not consider that it would increase the volume of the financial statements significantly. Based on the information provided to the committee in response to a question on notice concerning this matter in the 1998-99 annual report, a breakdown of the difference between the GPO and total cost, and how it is represented in each of the outputs for Government School Education would add about two lines to each note. Further, the committee notes that a

breakdown of overhead costs per student is reported in the notes for each output in Government School Education.

Recommendation 2

3.13. The committee recommends that in future annual reports the Department of Education and Community Services include a breakdown of how the difference between GPO and total cost is funded in each output for Government School Education.

Child Health and Development Service (CHADS)

3.14. The Government accepted the committee's recommendation in its report on the 1998-99 annual report, that a quality/effectiveness measure be included for services provided to schools by CHADS and in its response advised that such a measure would be included in the 2000-2001 purchase agreement. The committee has examined the purchase agreement for the Department of Education and Community Services for 2000-2001 and was unable to locate such a performance measure.

Recommendation 3

3.15. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services include a quality/effectiveness measure relating to services provided to schools by CHADS in the 2000-01 purchase agreement.

Issues arising from the 1999-2000 annual report of the Department of Education and Community Services

Page references

3.16. The operating statements, the statement of financial position, and the statement of departmental cashflows are accompanied by 16 pages of notes. While the notes are numbered, the committee would find it easier to refer to the notes if a page number was also included.

Computers in schools

3.17. On page 32 of the annual report of the Department of Education and Community Services reference is made to the improvement in the student to computers ratio. In 1997 for primary schools, the ratio was 13.73:1 and in 1999 it was 4.8:1. This ratio includes teachers' computers because as the Minister advised 'there must be skilled teachers for students' access to computers to be effective. Student access to computers alone is insufficient to guarantee a quality learning outcome'.²

² Minister for Education, response to question on notice, dated 30 January 2001.

3.18. The committee agrees that teachers must be skilled in the use of computers to guarantee a quality learning outcome. However, it considers that by including teachers' computers in the reporting of the student to computer ratios distorts the actual position and promotes a wrong impression. Information provided by the Minister indicates that in 1999, the average ratio excluding teachers' computers was 6.6:1.

3.19. The committee considers that, in future, if reporting on student to computer ratios includes teachers' computers that fact must be made clear.

Funding for non-government schools

3.20. Once again, the committee had difficulty determining the level of funding provided by both the Commonwealth and ACT governments for non-government schools. The Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools (APFACTS) also reported a lack of transparency in the report on this matter.³ The report gives the impression that all that the ACT Government does in relation to non-government schools is to register schools and distribute Territory and Commonwealth grants. The committee considers that the public would find it helpful if more detailed and transparent information was included on the funding arrangements for non-government schools.

Other matters

3.21. This section examines a number of issues raised during the hearings that the committee feels need highlighting.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and the Social and Community Services (SACS) award

3.22. Since the introduction of the SACS award, concerns have been expressed to the committee by the SAAP sector, about the effect of the lack of budget supplementation for the award on their services. Some accommodation services, for example, claim that because they have received no additional funding for several years their capacity to employ sufficient staff to ensure occupational health and safety standards are maintained as well as sufficient staff to provide high levels of service has been severely restricted.

3.23. The committee raised this matter again with the Minister and it appears some relief is in sight. The Minister advised the committee that an additional \$1.5m will be available for SAAP programs from January 2001.⁴ It remains to be seen whether these additional funds meet the need and the committee will continue to monitor the situation.

3.24. At the time of completing this inquiry (12 February 2001), the sector advised that while the additional funds were expected, they had not been received. Delays in providing the funds will place these services under unnecessary stress.

³ Uncorrected Proof Transcript, 16 November 2000, pp 1-9.

⁴ Uncorrected Proof Transcript, 20 December 2000, p 27, 28.

3.25. Within the SAAP sector a review is being undertaken of needs, costing and pricing. While the process appears to be very sound, it is not expected to be completed until mid year, which is of concern to the committee.

Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT)

3.26. The committee was pleased to note that the Minister gave the impression that the CIT will not be experiencing further budget cuts.⁵

Autism-specific units

3.27. Concern was expressed to the committee that reductions may be made in 2001, to the level of resources provided in 2000 to the autism-specific unit at Yarralumla Primary School. The committee was assured that the school would retain its two Special Teachers' Assistants in 2001.⁶

Indigenous teachers

3.28. The committee was pleased to note that the Department of Education and Community Services employed two indigenous teachers in 2000 and that a further three have been recruited for 2001.⁷ However, indigenous education continues to be a major concern and the committee believes that there must be clear targets, timeframes and funding to address the issue. It is also imperative that there are strong linkages across all areas of service delivery particularly health.

Students not proceeding from Year 10 to Year 11

3.29. The annual report indicates that 12 per cent of students who completed Year 10 in 1999 did not proceed to Year 11. This amounts to approximately 240 students.⁸ While some may have moved interstate or moved into the private sector, the number is concerning.

3.30. The committee feels this is a significant number of students. We know that early school leaving is an indicator of ongoing social disadvantage. It is therefore important to know how many of these young people are dropping out of education and training completely.

3.31. The Department of Education and Community Services works on a case management basis to address the particular needs of some young people. It also works at a system level to address the needs of low achieving students, for example through the literacy program.⁹

3.32. The committee would like to see the adoption of a more systematic approach to attempts to keep this group in the education system.

⁵ Uncorrected Proof Transcript, 20 December 2000, p 116.

⁶ Uncorrected Proof Transcript, 20 December 2000, p 23.

⁷ Uncorrected Proof Transcript, 20 December 2000, p 108.

⁸ Uncorrected Proof Transcript, 20 December 2000, p 59.

⁹ Uncorrected Proof Transcript, 20 December 2000, p 60.

Secondary college outcomes

3.33. The committee noted that the number of students in ACT Government schools who received a secondary college record in 1999 (824) had increased by 10 per cent from 1998, while 1999 February enrolments only increased by 3.1 per cent over 1998.¹⁰ A Secondary College Record records the units and courses studied during years 11 and 12 up to the time it is requested. It is issued on request to students leaving college during year 11 and before the completion of Year 12. It is also issued if a student completes Year 12 without achieving a Year 12 Certificate or other award. The number of secondary college records issued continues to be of concern to the committee because it indicates a significant number of students are not achieving a satisfactory outcome.

3.34. As with the group of students not proceeding to Year 11, it is important to know how many of the students receiving a Secondary College Record are dropping out of education and training all together.

Recommendation 4

3.35. The committee recommends that the Government collect information on an annual basis on the avenues pursued by early school leavers.

Parentlink

3.36. Parentlink is an integrated support package providing advice, guidance, referral and information for anyone caring for children. It includes a telephone helpline, a web site and information packages. Funding for this program includes some private sponsorship. This is an essential family support service. The committee is concerned that the Government is shifting responsibility for funding essential services to the private sector.

Kerrie Tucker MLA
Chair
12 February 2001

¹⁰ Department of Education and Community Services, *Annual Report 1999-2000*, p 218; Department of Education and Community Services, *Government School Bulletin, February 1999 Census*.

Appendix 1 – Witnesses at public hearings

16 November 2000

For the Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools (APFACTS)

Mr Eric Chalmers President

Mr Clem Dick Vice President

Mr Jim Collins Committee Member

For the Australian Education Union – ACT Branch

Mr Clive Haggard President

Ms Fiona MacGregor Professional Officer

20 December 2000

For the Department of Education and Community Services

Minister Stefaniak

Ms Fran Hinton Chief Executive

Mr Trevor Wheeler Executive Director, Sport and Corporate Resources

Ms Sue Birtles Executive Director, Children's, Youth and Family Services

Mr Jim Coleborne Executive Director, Education and Training

Mr Allan Hird Director, School Programs

Ms Anne Thomas Director, Human Resources

Ms Chris Healy Director, Family Services

For the Canberra Institute of Technology

Minister Stefaniak

Mr Peter Veenker Chief Executive and Director

Mr Aidan O'Leary General Manager, Corporate Services