

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

REVIEW OF
AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT
NUMBER 6, 1993
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLING PROGRAM

Report Number 11 of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

September 1994

RESOLUTION OF APPOINTMENT

On 27 March 1992 the ACT Legislative Assembly established a Standing Committee on Public Accounts with the following terms of reference:

- (1) Examine -
 - (a) the accounts of the receipts and expenditure of the Australian Capital Territory;
 - (b) the financial affairs of authorities of the Australian Capital Territory; and
 - (c) all reports of the Auditor-General which have been laid before the Assembly;
- (2) Report to the Assembly, with such comments as it thinks fit, any items or matters in those accounts, statements and reports, or any circumstances connected with them to which the committee is of the opinion that the attention of the Assembly should be directed; and
- (3) Inquire into any question in connection with the public accounts which is referred to it by the Assembly and to report to the Assembly on that question.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Mr Trevor Kaine MLA (Presiding Member)

Ms Kate Carnell MLA

Ms Annette Ellis MLA

Mrs Ellnor Grassby MLA

Mr Michael Moore MLA (from 25 February 1993)

Secretary: Mr Bill Symington

Assistant Secretary: Ms Judy Starcevich

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends that:

a review be undertaken to assess the type of data currently collected within the ACT education system as well as the method used to collect that data. The review should also provide options for improving the Department's education databases. (Paragraph 3.13)

The Committee recommends that:

when performance indicators for education have been identified by the Commonwealth-State project the Auditor-General utilise these performance indicators in a further review of the ACT Government Schooling Program; and

the Commonwealth-State project be pursued vigorously. (Paragraph 3.15)

The Committee recommends that:

future assessments of the ACT education system take into account qualitative performance measurements to assess the systems' effectiveness. (Paragraph 3.24)

The Committee recommends that:

the Auditor-General conduct a further review of class sizes in its audit of the education system using nationally determined performance indicators to determine a benchmark for standard class sizes. (Paragraph 6.12)

The Committee recommends that:

the review of databases include a review of information collated on class sizes and course types and an assessment of the most feasible way of maintaining accurate records on this facet of the education system. (Paragraph 6.14)

The Committee recommends that:

the Department of Education and Training examine ways of providing schools with additional full time student counsellors. (Paragraph 9.18)

The Committee recommends that:

in addition to approaching the Commonwealth, the ACT should investigate ways of providing more funds for the professional development and review of teachers training from within its own budget. (Paragraph 9.27)

The Committee recommends that

the Department of Education and Training establish an accountability process in the ACT system to assess the quality of teachers and teaching in a systematic way. (Paragraph 9.29)

SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE COMMENTS

The Committee considers that the audit clearly demonstrates the difficulties involved in measuring performance within the education system. (Paragraph 3.11)

The Committee agrees that a major problem with the audit findings was the lack of sufficient databases which could provide accurate information to assess the education system. This was a problem within the ACT education system, as well as at the national level where data was needed for comparative purposes. (Paragraph 3.12)

The Committee also considers that the Commonwealth-State project to determine performance indicators for schools will provide data to facilitate a more efficient assessment of the ACT education system, and that it should be pursued vigorously. (Paragraph 3.14)

The Committee agrees that the audit has focussed on quantitative data at the expense of qualitative measures. (Paragraph 3.22)

The Committee considers that qualitative measures need to be considered to accurately assess the effectiveness of the education system. (Paragraph 3.23)

The Committee recognises that teachers perform extra duties in addition to their face-to-face teaching which adds considerably to their work load. (Paragraph 4.12)

The Committee accepts that the audit has failed to take into account these non-teaching tasks performed by teachers when making its recommendations, but has reached no conclusion on the nature of their impact. It is assumed that in the absence of evidence to the contrary the impact of these tasks is no different in the ACT than they are elsewhere, and that they are inherent to the occupation of teaching. (Paragraph 4.13)

The Committee is not convinced that the Government Schooling Program would benefit from any further centralisation of curriculum development within the Department of Education and Training and away from the schools. It accepts that a school based curriculum system provides a number of benefits that the Audit report has not fully recognised. (Paragraph 5.9)

The Committee considers that, before any further significant action is taken with regard to curriculum development, the results of the review currently being conducted by the Department of Education and Training should be considered and if the concerns expressed by those in the education system have not been addressed a separate review should be undertaken. (Paragraph 5.10)

The Committee accepts that a number of factors influence decisions as to whether or not a particular class will be offered. However, the Committee considers that the issue of what size a class should be before it is established needs to be addressed further. (Paragraph 6.11)

The Committee accepts that once again an inherent problem with identifying and assessing the adequacy and cost effectiveness of class sizes is the lack of sufficient records kept by the Department of Education and Training. It considers that this issue should be examined in the review of data bases of the schooling program it has already recommended. (Paragraph 6.13)

The Committee considers that the issues raised by the Audit concerning teachers salaries are being adequately addressed by the Minister and the Department of Education and Training. However, the Committee is of the view that consideration should be given to extending the separation and replacement scheme to principals and deputy principals. (Paragraph 7.11)

The Committee recognised two main difficulties with the Audit recommendation in regard to the salaries of non-teaching staff. (Paragraph 8.10)

Firstly, the Audit conclusions are open to question because they are, in part, based on comparison with other States. The Committee recognises that the audit has not taken into account the issues of scale and differences in administrative structures between the States. (Paragraph 8.11)

A further problem with the Audit conclusion is that it does not follow from the evidence that non-teaching staff are being paid too much or too little. The Audit acknowledged this in the report. The Audit, nevertheless, presumed that the salaries were high which led it to suggest that reasons should be determined to see why this was so in order that appropriate action could be taken. (Paragraph 8.12)

The Committee concludes that because there is a certain amount of presumption rather than strong evidence behind this recommendation it is unable to support this Audit recommendation. (Paragraph 8.13)

The Committee commends the Department of Education and Training for the support it has given to schools to assist them in the provision of counselling for students. (Paragraph 9.16)

However, the Committee considers that with the increasing pressure placed on schools to deal with student welfare the overall number of students counsellors does not appear to be sufficient and should be increased. (Paragraph 9.17)

The Committee considers that in addition to approaching the Commonwealth, the ACT should investigate ways of providing more funds for the professional development and review of teachers training from within its own budget. (Paragraph 9.26)

The Committee also concurs with the Audit observation that the Department of Education and Training should pursue the goal of regular appraisal for professional growth and accountability. (Paragraph 9.28)

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

1.1 The terms of the resolution under which the Public Accounts Committee was established on 27 March 1992 require it to examine all reports of the Auditor-General which have been laid before the Assembly.

1.2 On 16 September 1993, Auditor-General's Report Number 6, 1993 was presented to the Assembly. The Report, entitled *Government Schooling Program*, presents the results of a review of the effectiveness and efficiency of the management of the ACT Government Schooling Program.

1.3 The audit was conducted under contract by the accounting and consulting firm Arthur Anderson. The audit methodology and content of the report were critically reviewed by Professor Fenton Sharpe from the School of Education, University of New South Wales and the audit was coordinated by Mr Phillip Hextall of the Government Audit Office.

1.4 The object of the audit was to form an opinion as to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the management of the Government Schooling Program provided by the Department of Education and Training.

1.5 The Audit report concluded that the management of the Government Schooling Program has ensured that the services delivered have, in general, been effective, although there were growing pressures that need to be addressed. The main recommendations of the report were that the Department should progressively work towards:

- . increasing overall face-to-face teaching hours;
- . reducing the average salary paid to teachers; and
- . reducing the non-teaching staff average salaries.

Conduct of this inquiry

1.6 In early October 1993 the Committee sought comment from the Minister for Education and Training on the matters raised by the Audit report and also invited the ACT branch of the Australian Education Union (AEU), School Boards and the Council of Parents and Citizens Association to provide comments.

1.7 The Committee received 16 submissions to the inquiry. A list of those individuals and organisations who have provided submissions is at Appendix A.

1.8 Following receipt of submissions the Committee held public hearings on 14 March 1994 and 9 May 1994. At the hearings evidence was taken from representatives of the

Department of Education and Training, ACT Primary Principals Association, ACT High School Principals Association, ACT Secondary College Principals' Association, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association and the ACT Branch of the Australian Education Union.

1.9 A list of those who appeared as witnesses is at Appendix B.

1.10 The Committee recognises that certain recommendations in this report will, if adopted, involve additional financial outlays but in the circumstances in which these matters are raised it considers the associated costs as necessary and acceptable.

2 OVERVIEW OF THE AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

Reaction to the Report

2.1 As indicated in Chapter 1, the Committee received 16 submissions to the inquiry. Given that, with the exception of the Department of Education and Training, all submissions were from school based organisations, it is not surprising that the majority of these were critical of the Audit report and its recommendations.

2.2 The thrust of these criticisms were that: the audit recommendations will serve to undermine and diminish the quality of the education system in the ACT; the teaching profession will be seen as a less attractive career option; the morale of teachers and ancillary staff will be reduced in an increasingly demanding and stressful occupation; and, this will lead to an erosion of the community spirit presently evident in schools.¹

2.3 The Council of Parents and Citizens Associations claimed that there were major problems in the system which the Council had identified but which had been overlooked in the report.

2.4 The AEU advised the Committee that the audit recommendations took no account of a range of industrial, educational and political realities and were of no assistance in terms of a managed approach to budget reduction and the maintenance of the quality of the educational provision in the ACT Government school system².

2.5 However, positive aspects of the ACT education system were strongly supported by the Department of Education and Training, schools and others.

2.6 The AEU advised the Committee that it was pleased to see strong support of the work of teachers contained in the section produced by the educational consultants and noted that the audit found a very high level of satisfaction of parents in the school system, the level of morale, the enjoyment of education by students and so on.³

2.7 The Melrose High School Board noted that the audit accurately identified growing pressures which may affect future effectiveness and that the recommendations were sound when taken in context.⁴

2.8 The Department of Education and Training found the report very useful in its positive comments on the system as a whole. The Department advised the Committee that the Audit provided useful confirmation of the appropriateness of the recent initiatives that have been taken in ACT education such as curriculum frameworks and the targeted separation packages for teaching staff. It also provided a timely reminder to the Department that, given

¹Evatt Primary School Board submission.

²AEU submission.

³Transcript p.73

⁴Melrose High School Board submission.

the financial pressures on the ACT, it must focus on the basic question of how it can deliver quality education within the available resources. In that context, the Department saw the most valuable part of the report being the broad directions it provided rather than the specific detail of particular issues.⁵

2.9 The Minister for Education and Training described the audit as 'a welcome endorsement of the achievements of ACT government schools and teaching staff'. The Minister also noted that overall the audit found the ACT government schooling system to be effective in all areas: leadership and management, curriculum development, teaching and learning environment, partnership between the Department, schools and their community and special needs program.⁶

The Committee's Approach

2.10 The auditor report is an extensive and challenging review of the issues surrounding the ACT schooling system which also provides valuable independent comment on the issues surrounding the system.

2.11 However, while the essential points of the audit, namely teaching hours and salaries, can be quantified mathematically the evidence for the audit conclusions is not as clear cut as suggested by the audit. Evidence taken by the Committee from education practitioners and professionals and the Minister and the Department for Education and Training raised questions which, when pursued by the Committee, suggested that the audit may have drawn unwarranted conclusions on these matters. The evidence also indicated that there was inadequate data to confirm or rebut the audit conclusions.

2.12 In the absence of appropriate data to allow for true comparisons between the ACT and the States the Committee considers that the audit has not dealt with the issues in sufficient depth. Accordingly, the Committee considers that the Auditor-General should re-examine the schooling program but not before the Department has thoroughly reviewed the information base in areas such as actual teaching hours, class sizes, student/teacher ratios, registered, accredited and non-accredited courses and the actual extent to which these involve teaching staff.

2.13 Elsewhere in this report the Committee expands on and makes recommendations on the specific matters raised by the Auditor-General. The Committee's recommendations include the need for urgent action to review and improve the Department's information base and at this point, the Committee advances a general proposition which is that the Auditor-General revisit the Government schooling program when the Department has sufficient data available to allow for meaningful comparisons to be made with other State educational systems.

⁵Transcript p.102.

⁶Mr Bill Wood, MLA, Minister for Education and Training submission.

3. AUDIT METHODOLOGY

Audit assessment of efficiency

3.1 The Audit assessed 'efficiency' based on whether the use of resources in the Government Schooling Program had been contained to the level reasonably necessary to operate the system at an effective level.⁷

3.2 To measure efficiency the methodology included the identification of appropriate key performance indicators by a Panel of Experts comprised of Executive Directors, Directors of Departmental functions and high schools and primary schools. Subsequent inquiry showed that the data could not be accessed to support them all. A reduced list of performance indicators was then formulated.⁸

3.3 The efficiency indicators used included total costs per student, average teacher salary cost per student, face-to-face teaching hours, students per teacher ratios and average non-teaching staff salaries.

3.4 The efficiency indicators were used to make comparisons with information from other States and Territories so that the major findings on efficiency were based on the use of national averages derived from these State and Territory averages.

Comments on the Audit's assessment of efficiency

3.5 The Secondary College Principals Association advised the Committee that at the college level there was no comparable data across the States. The Association argued that because of the economies of scale and the changes that have taken place to the college system over the past ten years, the ACT colleges would be cheaper per student than the other States. However, the Association stated that there was no way of verifying this other than informally collecting information through discussions with the other States.⁹

3.6 The High School Principals Association objected to the Auditor-General's assumption of the validity of cross-state economic comparison similar to those used by the Commonwealth Grants Commission. The Association argued that the educational priorities of the distinctive Canberra community must also be taken into account.¹⁰

3.7 The Minister for Education and Training told the Committee that national averages used in the audit could not take account of the range in size between the States and Territories as well as the large variations in the structure of State education systems. The Minister noted that the Commonwealth Grants Commission uses a complex and detailed methodology in recognition of the difficulties of inter state comparisons of government services. The Minister noted that when differences in scale are taken into account the average cost per student in the ACT central office was small compared with similar States

⁷Audit Report p.10.

⁸ibid pp.10-11.

⁹Transcript p.64.

¹⁰High School Principals Association submission.

and Territories.¹¹

3.8 The Department of Education and Training informed the Committee that a Commonwealth-State project had been commenced to review and develop performance indicators for a range of government services, including schools. It was agreed at the last Council of Australian Governments meeting that government schools should be given priority. The Department hoped that the outcome of the project will be an agreed set of performance indicators which each State and Territory will be able to use to report on school performance.¹²

3.9 There was also some criticism of the type of data made available as well as the interpretation and use of it. The Secondary Colleges Principals Association, for example, advised the Committee that there was no consultation with the colleges about the interpretation of the information taken off the college databases.¹³

3.10 The Audit itself conceded that:

An unavoidable weakness in this process arose from the limited quantitative available data on student outcomes and the quality of teaching.¹⁴

Committee comment

3.11 The Committee considers that the audit clearly demonstrates the difficulties involved in measuring performance within the education system.

3.12 The Committee agrees that a major problem with the audit findings was the lack of sufficient databases which could provide accurate information to assess the education system. This was a problem within the ACT education system, as well as at the national level where data was needed for comparative purposes.

3.13 The Committee recommends that:

a review be undertaken to assess the type of data currently collected within the ACT education system as well as the method used to collect that data. The review should also provide options for improving the Department's education databases.

3.14 The Committee also considers that the Commonwealth-State project to determine performance indicators for schools will provide data to facilitate a more efficient assessment of the ACT education system, and that it should be pursued vigorously.

¹¹Mr Bill Wood, MLA Minister for Education and Training submission.

¹²Transcript p.85.

¹³Transcript p.61.

¹⁴Audit Report p.1.

3.15 The Committee recommends that:

when performance indicators for education have been identified by the Commonwealth-State project the Auditor-General utilise these performance indicators in a further review of the ACT Government Schooling Program; and

the Commonwealth-State project be pursued vigorously.

Audit assessment of effectiveness

3.16 The Audit assessed 'effectiveness' of the Government Schooling Program on the basis of whether or not the Program was achieving appropriate educational goals.¹⁵

3.17 Two methods were used to assess effectiveness. Firstly, information was gathered through visiting a small number of schools at which meetings with teachers, administrators, students and other interested groups were held. Secondly, the audit team used the Department's School Performance Review and Development (SPRAD) data.¹⁶

Comments on the audit's assessment of effectiveness

3.18 The Minister for Education and Training told the Committee that of the two methods used, the first could not be representative and by its nature would include a degree of anecdotal material. These limitations influenced the extent to which the findings could be used to evaluate total system effectiveness. On the other hand, the Minister stated that the SPRAD process incorporates statistically valid methodology.¹⁷

3.19 The major criticism of the Audit assessment of effectiveness was that it overlooked important qualitative measures of the system's effectiveness.¹⁸

3.20 The Council of Parents and Citizens Associations advised the Committee that the effectiveness of the ACT system was very different from that of other systems in some significant aspects such as retention rates and offers of university admissions which were very much higher than national average.¹⁹

3.21 The Taylor Primary School Board advised the Committee that literary and numeracy rates should also be used as measures of effectiveness.

Committee comment

3.22 The Committee agrees that the audit has focussed on quantitative data at the expense of qualitative measures.

¹⁵Audit Report pp.50-51

¹⁶ibid.

¹⁷Mr Bill Wood, MLA, Minister for Education and Training submission.

¹⁸eg. ACT High School Principals Association; Transcripts p.46.

¹⁹ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations submission.

3.23 The Committee considers that qualitative measures need to be considered to accurately assess the effectiveness of the education system.

3.24 The Committee recommends that:

future assessments of the ACT education system take into account qualitative performance measurements to assess the systems' effectiveness.

4. FACE-TO-FACE TEACHING HOURS

Audit findings

4.1 The Audit found that in the ACT prescribed face-to-face teaching at secondary level was 18 hours per week which represents 27 periods out of a 40 period week faced by students, or 67.5%. In Victoria the comparable percentage is 72%, in NSW 78% and in Queensland 83%.

4.2 The Audit considered that the lower percentage for ACT teachers in comparison to the other States may reflect in part teachers' time involved in school-based curriculum development compared to other States.

4.3 A further contributing factor was the fact that primary school teachers in the ACT have prescribed face-to-face teaching loads of 21.5 hours per week for Level 1 teachers. Based on a standard school day, students have 23 hours 45 minutes contact with teachers per week. This provides 2 hours 15 minutes relief from teaching for a Level 1 teachers compared to NSW teachers who have 2 hours per week relief from face-to-face teaching. This difference, although small, contributes in part to differences in the percentage of Level 2 teachers and curriculum specialist teachers, for example, English as a Second Language (ESL), Languages other than English (LOTE), art and music, with the ACT having higher percentages.²⁰

4.4 The Audit recommended that the Department of Education and Training should progressively work towards increasing overall face-to-face teaching hours.

4.5 The Audit concluded that this could be assisted by centralising curricula development to a greater degree than at present, and increasing student per teacher ratios. The audit also proposed that all current arrangements which result in release from teaching should be reviewed, as well as the overall requirements for face-to-face teaching hours.²¹

Comments on the Audit findings

4.6 A survey undertaken by the AEU found that teachers in the ACT had an average working week of between 48 and 50 hours. This was occasionally exceeded when teachers undertook additional tasks such as student assessment and curriculum development.²²

4.7 The AEU advised the Committee that while the audit identified 18 hours face-to-face teaching in the ACT as the prescribed teaching load, it was in fact up to 18.7 hours per week. However, these hours were frequently exceeded when teachers were involved in drama, sport, music, remedial and other activities which were undertaken on a voluntary basis.²³

²⁰The Audit Report p.28.

²¹Audit Report Chapter 6.

²²AEU submission.

²³ibid.

Based on these figures the AEU considered that increasing face-to-face teaching in the ACT to bring it into line with some of the other States would lead to a situation where the average teacher was working well in excess of a 50 hour week.²⁴

4.8 The Minister for Education and Training noted that the audit did not take into account the preparation and assessment duties of teachers or the 'out of hours' activities which teachers undertake. However, he conceded that the aim must be to maximise the overall amount of face-to-face teaching available to students. In this regard, schools had an obligation to carefully assess the distribution of staff resources such as the number of promotion positions which have a degree of non-teaching duties which a school can support.²⁵

4.9 The Council of Parents and Citizens Associations argued that the audit had failed to acknowledge the benefits of reduced classroom teaching hours in the ACT context. It had also failed to show how the optimum amount of classroom teaching should be determined by simply using education systems whose structure and practices are different to that of the ACT as a benchmark.²⁶

4.10 Related to the issue of non-teaching tasks performed by teachers, the Committee was advised by a number of witnesses that account should be taken of the stress that teachers were continually under. Stress was not only due to the long hours worked but also the need to deal with difficult classroom situations.²⁷

4.11 The Committee was also advised that in the college system teaching was stressful due to the process of continuous assessment within colleges. Students who were interested in using their assessment results for further education and for job seeking expected full assessments to be provided. This placed extra pressure on the teachers to ensure that they provided those assessments.²⁸

Committee comment

4.12 The Committee recognises that teachers perform extra duties in addition to their face-to-face teaching which adds considerably to their work load.

4.13 The Committee accepts that the audit has failed to take into account these non-teaching tasks performed by teachers when making its recommendations, but has reached no conclusion on the nature of their impact. It is assumed that in the absence of evidence to the contrary the impact of these tasks is no different in the ACT than they are elsewhere, and that they are inherent to the occupation of teaching.

²⁴Transcript p.76.

²⁵Mr Bill Wood, MLA, Ministers for Education and Training submission.

²⁶Council of Parents and Citizens Associations submission.

²⁷Transcript p.50.

²⁸Transcript p.63.

5. CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Audit findings

5.1 The Audit concluded that the value of school based curriculum development should be reconsidered. It found that the development of a significant amount of curriculum at school level was time consuming for teachers and considered that there was little reason why all schools in the ACT should not use a similar core curriculum supplemented by some school based courses. The audit observed that a reduction of teachers' time spent on curriculum development could increase the time available for face-to-face teaching.

5.2 The Audit recommended that the continuing emphasis on school based curriculum be reviewed with the objective of making curriculum development more efficient.

5.3 The Audit also stated that if the review of curriculum being conducted by the Department of Education and Training does not address the concerns expressed by those in the education system then a separate review should be undertaken.²⁹

Comments on the Audit findings

5.4 The ACT Secondary College Principals' Association noted that Queensland, with the highest proportion of face-to-face teaching hours, also has school based curriculum development.³⁰

5.5 The Department of Education and Training view on the Audit argument that if more curriculum was developed centrally teachers would spend more time teaching was that the audit had not taken account of the increasing time spent by teachers on pastoral care and for dealing with different needs within their schools.³¹

5.6 The Secondary College Principals' Association advised the Committee that teachers gain a considerable amount of professional development through their involvement in the process of curriculum development. This process kept them in touch with what was happening nationally and internationally in terms of the provision of education.³²

5.7 The Association also noted that the auditor had not mentioned that to introduce into the ACT a NSW type system with its centralised curriculum, external exams and core skills tests would cost an additional \$1.6 million. The Association advised the Committee that the cost of running year 12 in Tasmania which has the lowest retention rate in Australia is \$1 million more than the ACT.³³

²⁹Audit Report pp.60-68.

³⁰ACT Secondary College Principals' Association submission.

³¹Transcript p.10.

³²Transcript pp.57-58.

³³ACT Secondary College Principals' Association submission.

5.8 The Committee was also advised that the vast majority of teacher involvement in school based curriculum development took place outside of the normal school day. It was questionable, therefore, whether a more centralised system would generate any savings.³⁴

Committee comment

5.9 The Committee is not convinced that the Government Schooling Program would benefit from any further centralisation of curriculum development within the Department of Education and Training and away from the schools. It accepts that a school based curriculum system provides a number of benefits that the Audit report has not fully recognised.

5.10 The Committee considers that, before any further significant action is taken with regard to curriculum development, the results of the review currently being conducted by the Department of Education and Training should be considered and if the concerns expressed by those in the education system have not been addressed a separate review should be undertaken.

6. STUDENT PER TEACHER RATIOS

Audit findings

6.1 The Audit found that the ACT had relatively low student per teacher ratios. It concluded that the average amount of face-to-face teaching contributed significantly to the student/teacher ratio which combined contributed to high salary costs.³⁵

6.2 The Audit also found that secondary colleges had the lowest students per teacher ratio because secondary colleges provide a wide variety of courses. These include courses which, although accredited by the Board of Senior Secondary Studies, attract only a small number of students and consequently class sizes are small. Departmental records indicated that there were approximately 300 accredited course classes with 6 or less students and 500 to 600 with student numbers between 7 and 12.

6.3 In addition, the Audit noted that secondary colleges conduct what were termed 'registered' courses which were not accredited by the Board of Secondary Studies. These were courses such as sport, drama, music and remedial needs. Information obtained by the Auditor indicated that there were somewhere in the order of 300 of these registered courses catering for class sizes of less than 12 students.

Comments on the Audit findings

6.4 The Primary Principal's Association advised the Committee that primary schools were noted for having the highest student/teacher ratio 18.5 compared with the Australian average of 15.0. Furthermore, primary schools lacked flexibility in staffing, particularly in traditional schools where many classes had over 30 students.³⁶

6.5 The High School Principals Association advised the Committee that class sizes within high schools were often as high as 32 particularly in core subjects such as English, maths and science. In specialised classes such as industrial arts attempts were made to keep numbers down to around 20 to 26 due to occupational health and safety concerns. However, because science is considered a core subject classes still contained 32 students.³⁷

6.6 The figures used by the Audit on class sizes were disputed by the Secondary College Principals' Association. The Association argued that the figures were unrealistically high and that the 1993 staffing formula did not provide sufficient resources to staff that many classes of that size. It suggested that the high figures quoted could be the result of counting composite classes, evening classes, and classes not covered by a teacher, such as work experience and drama production, as well as classes covered by teachers funded by external organisations.³⁸

6.7 The Department of Education and Training advised the Committee that it had conducted its own review of registered courses. The Department used the records of the

³⁴ Transcript p.63.

³⁵ Audit Report pp.26-29.

³⁶ Primary Principals Association submission.

³⁷ Transcript p.50.

³⁸ Secondary College Principals' Association submission.

accreditation section for semester 1, 1993. The record for each college was examined and the courses were hand counted. The record indicated the line, the teacher or teachers involved in working on that line and the number of students involved. The Department determined whether the classes were offered on the same line and if it was it assumed that they were composite. The absolute total of classes with 12 or fewer enrolments were examined. In the final count the Department reduced the number by the number of composite classes. Then it added to that the number of composite classes which still had less than 12 students. The Department determined that across ACT colleges over 800 courses in the tertiary and accredited areas were being offered with 12 or fewer students.³⁹

6.8 The Department also informed the Committee that its review process had been very complex as it required the counting of 1400 courses. Factors such as the way schools organised themselves in terms of workloads, courses being offered out of hours and units being offered on the same line or as composites also had to be taken into account.⁴⁰ The Department indicated that a better method for collecting the data was needed to provide for greater accuracy and the information could then be placed on the record and be easily accessible.⁴¹

6.9 The Department also conceded that class size depends greatly on the priorities that a school sets including ensuring that students who undertake a course were able to complete that course. This meant that schools often had to maintain smaller class sizes.⁴²

6.10 The Minister for Education and Training advised the Committee that a balance must be struck between the breadth of subject choice and maintaining adequate teaching loads for core subjects. In times of fiscal constraint, this may mean reducing the range of subject choices particularly if small classes are making a significant contribution to costs. Principals are expected to apply their professional judgement in deciding how to structure a school and which classes to retain.⁴³

Committee comment

6.11 The Committee accepts that a number of factors influence decisions as to whether or not a particular class will be offered. However, the Committee considers that the issue of what size a class should be before it is established needs to be addressed further.

6.12 The Committee recommends that:

the Auditor-General conduct a further review of class sizes in its audit of the education system using nationally determined performance indicators to determine a benchmark for standard class sizes.

6.13 The Committee accepts that once again an inherent problem with identifying and assessing the adequacy and cost effectiveness of class sizes is the lack of sufficient records

6.13 The Committee accepts that once again an inherent problem with identifying and assessing the adequacy and cost effectiveness of class sizes is the lack of sufficient records kept by the Department of Education and Training. It considers that this issue should be examined in the review of data bases of the schooling program it has already recommended.

6.14 The Committee recommends that:

the review of databases include a review of information collated on class sizes and course types and an assessment of the most feasible way of maintaining accurate records on this facet of the education system.

³⁹Transcript p.86.

⁴⁰Transcript pp.86-89.

⁴¹Transcripts p.90.

⁴²Transcript p.11.

⁴³Mr Bill Wood, MLA, Minister for Education and Training submission.

7. TEACHER SALARIES

Audit findings

7.1 The Audit found that in 1991-92 ACT teaching staff salary costs per student were 8.5% higher than the national average. It also found that average salaries received by ACT teachers in 1991-92 were 7.8% higher than the Australian average.⁴⁵

7.2 The Audit recommended that the Department of Education and Training should progressively work towards reducing the average salary paid to teachers.

7.3 The Audit also found that a higher proportion of ACT teachers were receiving Advanced Skills Teachers (AST) allowance than in the majority of States. It considered that the liberal access to the AST status should be reviewed.

7.4 The ACT has a high proportion of its Level 1 teachers in the upper annual incremental steps of the teachers pay scale. To address this the Audit recommended that redundancies should be considered as a means of altering the current age and length of service teacher profile which has resulted in the majority of Level 1 teachers being paid at the upper annual incremental steps of the teachers' pay scale and a relatively high proportion of teachers occupying promotions positions. The audit also considered that automatic progression by annual increments to higher salaries should be reviewed.⁴⁶

Comments on the Audit findings

7.5 The Secondary Colleges Principals Association advised the Committee that while it accepted average teacher salary costs per student exceed the Australian average, there were departmental policies which exacerbate this in secondary colleges. For example, the department requires staff to spend a considerable period in high schools before they can be appointed to a college. This meant that most teachers were on point five or six on the salary scale by the time they were appointed to a college. The high proportion of advanced skills teachers in secondary colleges also reflected the high proportion of eligible teachers in colleges as a result of departmental policy.⁴⁷

7.6 The Association also rejected the suggestion that teachers should not automatically move through salary increment levels. It advised the Committee that most teachers would pass through any new barriers however they were defined. The Audit suggestion would involve the introduction of a new administration to provide a barrier for a small number of teachers. This would have little cost benefit but would impose an extra workload on those involved.⁴⁸

7.7 Finally, the Association noted that it has been the practice of the department to pay teachers new to the ACT on the basis of their experience. It questioned whether other States

⁴⁵Audit Report pp.28-29.

⁴⁶ibid p.4.

⁴⁷ACT Secondary College Principals' Association submission.

⁴⁸Transcript p.57.

maintained discriminatory practices in not recognising prior experience elsewhere for salary purposes. This would cause average teacher salary costs per student to be higher in the ACT by comparison.⁴⁹

7.8 The Minister for Education and Training stated that the Department was a participant in Federal awards prescribing teacher pay scales. The Minister advised the Committee that the Department had no intention of changing salaries or conditions unless such changes were agreed to in the context of an enterprise bargaining agreement.

7.9 The Minister also advised the Committee that the Department of Education and Training was examining the issue of the high proportion of Level 1 teachers in the upper increment steps as well as the number of teachers in receipt of AST Grade 1 allowance. In particular, a moderation process was being negotiated with the AEU for AST 1 classifications. It was intended that AST 1 teachers would eventually comprise between 30% and 40% of classroom teachers.⁵⁰

7.10 The Minister also stated that the Department had negotiated with the AEU to proceed with a voluntary separation and replacement scheme for teachers. This provided an opportunity to adjust the salary profile of teachers while also providing employment opportunities for local graduates. The AEU advised the Committee that the voluntary redundancy scheme had been an outstanding success. It was estimated that savings would amount to \$10 million by the year 2002. The AEU also stated that it believed that the scheme ought to be extended to principals and deputy principals.⁵¹

Committee comment

7.11 The Committee considers that the issues raised by the Audit concerning teachers salaries are being adequately addressed by the Minister and the Department of Education and Training. However, the Committee is of the view that consideration should be given to extending the separation and replacement scheme to principals and deputy principals.

⁴⁹ACT Secondary College Principals' Association submission.

⁵⁰Mr Bill Wood MLA, Minister for Education and Training submission.

⁵¹Transcript p.74.

8. NON-TEACHING STAFF SALARIES

Audit findings

8.1 The Audit found that non-teaching staff pay scales in all categories in the ACT were higher than the Australian average. It also found that in 1991-92 non-teaching staff salary costs per student were 36.7% higher than the Australian average with only the Northern Territory having higher costs.⁵¹

8.2 The Audit recommended that the Department of Education and Training should progressively work towards reducing non-teaching staff average salaries.

8.3 However, the reason why salaries for these categories were markedly higher did not fully emerge in the audit. As a result, the Audit recommended that the reasons should be further identified and appropriate action taken.⁵²

Comments on the Audit findings

8.4 Salary rates for non-teaching staff range between approximately \$19,000 and \$23,000.⁵³

8.5 The AEU noted that Federal awards apply to non-teaching staff salary classifications.⁵⁴ While also making this point, the Minister for Education and Training advised the Committee that any changes to these awards would require agreement from the respective unions in the context of enterprise bargaining. As such, productivity improvements would be included in all enterprise bargaining negotiations.⁵⁵

8.6 Work done by the non-teaching staff was strongly supported in evidence to the Committee and any changes in their pay and conditions were opposed.⁵⁶

8.7 The AEU stated that this group was at the bottom end of the public service pay scale. While non-teaching staff have been less exploited in the ACT than in the other States, the Union expressed disappointment that the consultants had focussed on this group without recognising the quality of the work that they provided.⁵⁷

8.8 The Department advised the Committee that it had not been able to determine why the Audit report had come to its conclusion in relation to non-teaching staff salaries. While the Department believed that this may have been due to the audit taking into account inter-state comparisons it argued that this approach was flawed because it ignored the issue of scale. The Department advised the Committee that the Grants Commission had determined the effect of scale on large and small systems in its 1993 review of general revenue grant

⁵¹ Audit Report pp.30-36.

⁵²ibid p.4.

⁵³Transcript p.75.

⁵⁴ibid p 80.

⁵⁵Mr Bill Wood MLA, Minister for Education and Training submission.

⁵⁶eg. Transcript p.80; Primary Principals Association submission.

⁵⁷Transcript p.75.

relativities. The Commission had shown that the size of the ACT's non-teaching staff was mid-way, if not a little below those of all the other States. This meant that the ACT was approximately the right size in terms of administrative scale.⁵⁹

8.9 The Minister for Education and Training advised the Committee that the comparison of non-teaching staff salaries per student shown in the audit report was an example of where an averaging methodology could be misleading. The Minister argued that this was because per capita comparisons do not take account of differences in administrative structures. The Minister advised the Committee that the ACT contracts out most of its maintenance work and has transferred, on a fee for service basis, salary and personnel functions to the ACT Corporate Services Bureau. The effect of this is that staff in the Department are predominantly in clerical-administrative, specialist support, managerial and project management classifications. The Minister noted that ACT specialist support staff salaries, which are not affected by these arrangements, and other operating costs, to which some salary costs have been transferred, were close to the average for Australia in 1992.⁶⁰

Committee comment

8.10 The Committee recognised two main difficulties with the Audit recommendation in regard to the salaries of non-teaching staff.

8.11 Firstly, the Audit conclusions are open to question because they are, in part, based on comparison with other States. The Committee recognises that the audit has not taken into account the issues of scale and differences in administrative structures between the States.

8.12 A further problem with the Audit conclusion is that it does not follow from the evidence that non-teaching staff are being paid too much or too little. The Audit acknowledged this in the report. The Audit, nevertheless, presumed that the salaries were high which led it to suggest that reasons should be determined to see why this was so in order that appropriate action could be taken.

8.13 The Committee concludes that because there is a certain amount of presumption rather than strong evidence behind this recommendation it is unable to support this Audit recommendation.

⁵⁹Transcript p.5.

⁶⁰Mr Bill Wood MLA, Minister for Education and Training submission.

9. PRESSURES ON FUTURE EFFECTIVENESS

Audit findings

9.1 The Audit identified four growing pressures which might affect the future effectiveness of the ACT education system. They were:

- ongoing resource demands of curriculum development which is presently school based;
- meeting information technology needs;
- meeting professional development needs; and
- growing demand for school counselling services.⁶¹

9.2 Curriculum development has been discussed by the Committee in Chapter 5 above and information technology received only passing comment in evidence given to the Committee. The Committee therefore focuses on the two other pressures identified in the audit, namely school counselling and the professional development of teachers.

School Counselling Services

Audit findings

9.3 The Audit found that there was a growing need for school counsellors due to many factors including increased retention rates of non-academically inclined students.

9.4 The Audit also noted that schools have an enrolment generated entitlement which can lead to the sharing of counsellors. The Department of Education and Training provides a counsellor for each 800 students which compares with 1200 students commonly found in other Australian education systems. The Audit also found that there had been some difficulty in managing the attrition rates of counsellors.⁶²

Comments on the Audit findings

9.5 The Committee was advised that high school teachers and principals were now dealing with societal issues and problems which would not have impinged on schools to the same degree 10 to 15 years ago.⁶³ This put a strain on counselling services provided in the schools.

9.6 The lack of sufficient counselling resources to meet student needs was raised in nearly every submission received by the Committee.

⁶¹Audit Report Section 4 pp.49-85.

⁶²Audit Report p.75.

⁶³Transcript p.40.

9.7 One principal informed the Committee that her school, which was the third largest high school in the ACT had 0.7 of a counsellor. This counsellor was shared with the local primary school which, although advantageous since students proceed to the local high school, overall proved to be an inadequate situation.⁶³

9.8 The Committee was advised by the Council of Parents and Citizens Associations that many counsellors were constantly involved in crisis management because of time constraints rather than working with staff on preventative strategies for students at risk.⁶⁴

9.9 The Secondary College Principals' Association noted that the audit did not recognise the increased demands placed on colleges to provide a greater range of vocational pathways for students. Colleges had been increasingly challenged to address the higher retention rates by developing more and more pathways to work and training. This was reflected in the fact that in 1992 over 1000 students were awarded E (employment) certificates. However, no additional resources have been allocated to colleges to develop these pathways or to develop course frameworks in response to national curriculum initiatives.⁶⁵

9.10 The Department of Education and Training advised the Committee that schools assessed their own needs and the use of their resources and as a part of that flexibility some schools were making a judgement to increase their counselling resources from their mainstream staffing allocations.⁶⁶

9.11 The Department also stated that while it would like to be able to increase the numbers of school counsellors, it was currently reviewing the way in which school counsellors deliver their services to ensure it was done in the most effective way. In particular, the Department planned to bring together behaviour management services and school counselling services. The aim was to integrate these services so that those who worked in behaviour management and those who were counsellors worked together better than they had been doing in the past.⁶⁷

9.12 The Department was also trying to focus specific additional resources to schools. In other words, rather than simply providing a general school counsellor, it was looking at the levels of training and support services that were placed in the schools. For example, itinerant teachers provide counselling for behaviourally disturbed students. If a class contains a difficult student, the itinerant teacher would go into that class, observe how the classroom teacher interacts with the student and suggest ways to improve that interaction. This process had proven to be highly successful.⁶⁸

9.13 The Department also acknowledged that since there was very little flexibility available for primary schools the Department encouraged primary schools to adopt the student's problem as their collective problem to be managed with support from the Department in the ways that the school chose.⁶⁹

⁶³ Transcript pp.51-2.

⁶⁴ Council of Parents and Citizens Association submission.

⁶⁵ ACT Secondary College Principals' Association submission.

⁶⁶ Transcript p.100.

⁶⁷ Transcript p.14.

⁶⁸ Transcript pp.100-101.

⁶⁹ Transcript p.101.

9.14 The Department also used professional development programs to assist mainstream teachers to acquire improved counselling skills. The way these programs were allocated was a matter for the schools to determine how they used their staff.⁷⁰

9.15 The High School Principals' Association advised the Committee that while there was professional development available to provide teachers with student counselling skills some of these courses cover three days. Since teachers get only a half day per person per year this creates problems for teachers who wished to attend these courses. A further difficulty was that schools had to find funds to pay for teachers to attend these courses and in the event may only provide between 50-75% of the fee.⁷¹

Committee comment

9.16 The Committee commends the Department of Education and Training for the support it has given to schools to assist them in the provision of counselling for students.

9.17 However, the Committee considers that with the increasing pressure placed on schools to deal with student welfare the overall number of students counsellors does not appear to be sufficient and should be increased.

9.18 The Committee recommends that:

the Department of Education and Training examine ways of providing schools with additional full time student counsellors.

Teacher Professional Development

Audit findings

9.19 The Audit found that there was concern by teachers across all sub-programs about the delivery of professional development. Concerns expressed included the belief that the present organisation was not supporting the needs of staff and that schools themselves would prefer to take charge of the provision of professional development.

9.20 The Audit also noted that the Department of Education and Training had established a Review Committee on Professional Development which was due to report at the end of June 1993.⁷²

9.21 The Audit also found that there was no accountability process in the ACT system to assess the quality of teachers and teaching in a systematic way. It suggested that the Department of Education and Training should pursue the goal of regular appraisal for professional growth and accountability.

⁷⁰ Transcript p.14.

⁷¹ Transcript p.54.

⁷² Audit Report p.58.

Comments on the Audit findings

9.22 The Department of Education and Training has a professional development section based at the O'Connor Education Centre. Each year this Section offers a range of professional development programs focussing on issues such as curriculum content and management and financial training for principals.⁷³

9.23 In 1990 the Department introduced its Teacher Review and Development Process (TRAD) to identify the developmental needs of teachers. A review of the process was carried out in 1993 to address concerns for greater school involvement including devolving more funds to schools in order to assist teachers to participate in programs that not only address systems priorities and needs but their individual needs in terms of learning. The process is now being redrafted and strengthened.⁷⁴

9.24 The High School Principals Association advised the Committee that the allowance of half a day per teacher per year meant that teachers volunteer their time for professional development. Schools were only able to provide their teachers with professional development at the cost of time volunteered by colleagues. Schools also had to find the funds to assist their teachers to undertake professional development because courses even at the central level within the Department were often costed. The school had to either require teachers to fund themselves or assist them from the school budget.⁷⁵

9.25 The Minister for Education and Training advised the Committee that the Department was currently involved in developing a coordinated ACT wide proposal for extra funding from the Commonwealth to enhance professional development opportunities for staff.⁷⁶

Committee comment

9.26 The Committee considers that in addition to approaching the Commonwealth, the ACT should investigate ways of providing more funds for the professional development and review of teachers training from within its own budget.

9.27 The Committee recommends that:

in addition to approaching the Commonwealth, the ACT should investigate ways of providing more funds for the professional development and review of teachers training from within its own budget.

⁷³Transcript pp.13-14.

⁷⁴Transcript pp. 13-14.


⁷⁵Transcript pp.40-41.

⁷⁶Mr Bill Woods, MLA, Minister for Education and Training submission.

9.28 The Committee also concurs with the Audit observation that the Department of Education and Training should pursue the goal of regular appraisal for professional growth and accountability.

9.29 The Committee recommends that

the Department of Education and Training establish an accountability process in the ACT system to assess the quality of teachers and teaching in a systematic way.



Trevor Kaine MLA
Presiding Member

APPENDIX A

SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Incorporated
ACT High School Principals Association
ACT Primary Principals Association
ACT Secondary College Principals' Association
Australian Education Union (ACT Branch)
Evatt Primary School Board
Gowrie Primary School Board
Hawker College Board
Hughes Primary School Board
Kaleen High School Board
Lynham High School Board
Melrose High School Board
Rivett Primary School Board
Taylor Primary School Board
Weston Primary School Board
Mr Bill Wood MLA, Minister for Education and Training

APPENDIX B

LIST OF WITNESSES

ACT Department of Education and Training
Ms C Vardon
Ms F Hinton
Ms C O'Connor
Mr T Wheeler
ACT Primary Principals Association
Mr C Cameron
Mr N Dilley
Ms J Leeson
ACT High School Principals Association
Ms H Burfitt
Mr E Jolliffe
Mr J Stoddart
Secondary College Principals Association
Mr G Cullen
Mr J Mason
ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association
Ms P Cahir
Mr I Morgan
Australian Education Union (ACT Branch)
Mr C Haggart